



'Welcome the stranger'

Annual Report

For the Year to 30th September 2015



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INTRODUCTION

This is an inspirational report outlining an excellent year of work. Beacon, you clearly live up to the vision and challenge of your name. You are indeed a light to illuminate pathways and directions for us all. You are well blessed with good and faithful workers, volunteers and supporters.

In the current circumstances your work is more urgent and important than ever, and will become more so as we go into the next couple of decades.

We are in the midst of a forced migration crisis of unprecedented proportions. Up to 6,000 people are arriving in Europe every day as I write these words in October 2015. There have been 500,000 arrivals in the Mediterranean so far this year.

Huge numbers of people are dying en-route on sea or in deserts. On 24th August 2015 the number of documented deaths for this year was 3,279 compared with 2,081 in 2014. Without safe and legal routes refugees turn to smugglers who have found a lucrative and scandalous illegal trade and make money out of other people's plight.

The situation is complex and requires a complex and united response locally, nationally, and internationally. The work of local groups like Beacon, working with initiatives like City of Sanctuary shows we can all do something.

Faith communities can play their part to build cultures of welcome, hospitality, sanctuary and safety for refugees. We can



work together in interfaith collaboration, for example, to encourage each Church, Gurdwara, Mandir, Mosque, Synagogue and Vihara to offer sanctuary to one refugee family until they can stand on their own feet. This would challenge our Government to show a more realistic and compassionate response.

This is the essence of holiness and what it is to love your neighbour as yourself, and to “welcome the stranger as yourself”.

Bradford is a city enriched by confluence and congregations of people of different streams, journeys, backgrounds, flows, a place of meeting, mingling, encounter and engagement. It is a place of weaving and growing together in relationships of mutual respect and trust – a brilliant multi-faith, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural city. It is Bradford, a place of building bridges, not walls. You are a City of Sanctuary, a beacon city, a light to others.

**Inderjit Bhogal
October 2015**

CHAIR OF BEACON REPORT

Rita Armitage



Geoff, Rita & Lizzie outside Kala Sangam on 26th September.

26th September 2015 - a memorable date - when we celebrated the 10th Anniversary of BEACON.

A decade or so ago a small group began to meet, to listen to the stories of those seeking sanctuary in Bradford. Since then we've walked alongside several hundred asylum seekers: many were given hope when someone believed their story; they did not feel so alone.

Some stories and words of appreciation are included in this bumper Annual Report. We hope they capture the excitement and joy of the day held at Kala Sangam.

As plans were made we had no idea there would be an international crisis, as European countries struggled to respond to a huge influx of refugees. Politicians debate how to manage the flow; secure borders; impose quotas. Responses vary from country to country and sometimes from day to day! BEACON joins in the debate, focusing on the distinctive plight of asylum seekers, consoled that there is increasing interest in our work.

As Chair of BEACON it was my privilege and pleasure to welcome those who gathered to celebrate, and to say a huge THANK YOU, which I reiterate.

- To Touchstone, where our office is based. Touchstone staff and volunteers played a significant part in establishing BEACON and continue to be supportive.
- We are indebted to individuals, churches, local organisations and Charitable Trusts which offer financial support, enabling us to continue and develop our services.
- We acknowledge the commitment of willing volunteers who generously give time to establish and develop projects offering practical and moral support, offering hope in heart rending situations.
- Thank you to our Coordinator Lizzie who worked tirelessly preparing for our special day, shouldering significant responsibility. She follows in the footsteps of Judy, Laura, Kezia and Daniel, and our CHAT workers, Fiona and Eleanor. Each of them brought distinctive gifts, all of them have helped to make BEACON what it is today.
- The Lord Mayor, Councillor Joanne Dodds attended and offered Civic Greetings. Bradford has a long tradition of 'welcoming the stranger'. City leaders have responded in a positive way since Bradford became a dispersal city some years ago. We acknowledge the continuing positive attitude.

Many people said how much they enjoyed the day, meeting old friends and making new ones, inspired by the passionate words of Rev. Dr. Inderjit Bhogal, hearing from Project and Church leaders, delighted by entertainers and the plentiful, tasty food!

The celebration provided welcome affirmation and strengthened our resolve. We shall not rest on our laurels but pledge to continue to develop BEACON.

Rita Armitage



Our celebratory dance

'The energy and sheer commitment of some of our older volunteers was staggering. [...] They seemed to relish the challenge, excitement and wealth of new relationships that Asylum Seekers had to offer them. [...] BEACON was soon feeding rich spiritual resources into Bradford churches as Asylum Seekers shared their stories and songs. [...] As the original Chair of Beacon, I salute those who have sustained and developed the work over the second five years and the witness they continue to offer to the churches and to the city.'

Rev Geoff Reid, former Chair of BEACON

'BEACON's has continued to stand up for some of the most vulnerable people seeking asylum in Bradford, changing many hearts and minds along the way. We are proud to have worked with BEACON, an incredible charity which has made a huge contribution towards creating a culture of welcome towards people seeking protection in Bradford.'

Emma Williams, Chief Executive of Student Action for Refugees and manager of the Regional Asylum Activist Project

OPPORTUNITIES AT BEACON - CAN YOU HELP?



The Opportunities Board at our 10th Anniversary celebrations gave details of the various ways in which interested people could get involved and help us.

These include receiving and circulating information to local churches and other community groups, attending and publicising local meetings and events to raise BEACON's profile, enthusing others about the work of BEACON, volunteering on one of BEACON's projects, offering different forms of voluntary management support, helping us to campaign on asylum issues, organising fundraising and publicity events, or becoming a BEACON Trustee.

We are thinking more creatively about how to use people's time wisely. Our emphasis is on finding people with relevant skills, or time to spare, and a passion for helping asylum seekers. Then we work out how to integrate them into BEACON in such a way that they can make a big difference by doing what they're best at.

Though it's early days we're already seeing the benefits of this new approach!

So if you're reading this and think you'd like to get involved and make a difference to asylum seekers who desperately need support, get in touch with us and we'll create an arrangement that works for you.



Guests at our 10th Anniversary Celebration.



Thought provoking discussions on 26th September.

MCKENZIE FRIENDS REPORT

Eithne Dodwell, Chair of McKenzie Friends



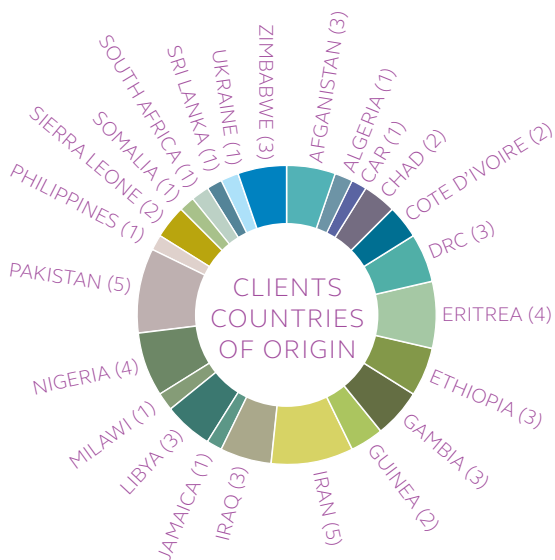
We continue to witness the impact of the increasingly punishing cutbacks in the asylum system on our clients.

Reductions in asylum support rates have pushed more families seeking asylum further below the poverty line, forcing them to the doors of over stretched services such as the Red Cross and local food banks. Cuts to the Immigration and Asylum Tribunal services have meant our clients are waiting up to six months for their hearings, where it used to be two. The emotional and financial implications of these delays are huge: as well as the increased costs of extended periods of time on asylum support, there are possible complications during hearings as claimants have longer mull over complex chains of events and recall becomes less and less clear.

This year we have had two appeals granted, and one case accepted for Judicial Review, after the Home Office was found to have inserted 'not' after the main verb in two key sentences. McKenzie Friends meetings this year have seen some interesting discussions as to what counts as 'success'. Since the vast majority of our clients have not qualified for Legal Aid, we count persuading a lawyer or 'legal support' organisation, to take on a client, as a success. In many ways, however, our most important role is to help our clients

understand their position and what they need to do to get leave to remain. This could be gathering documentary evidence of, for example, when and why Al Qu'aeeda or Boko Haram came looking for them. Typically these documents have to be obtained and sent to England by relatives, who our client is terrified of incriminating. Should they arrive, accredited translations are obligatory, at c£70 per page. A greater understanding of their situation put clients back in the driving seat of their lives, slightly less at the mercy of apparently arbitrary events. We believe this one-to-one time our volunteers can offer goes some way to getting their case back on track as clients can feel supported and encouraged.

Of the total of 56 clients we have worked with in 2014-2015, we had 47 new referrals (an increase of 31% on 2013-2014) and continued to work with 9 clients from 2013/4. As the demand for our work has increased, so too has the complexity. The range of reasons for referrals includes, but is not limited to: accompanying to Embassy visits (2 clients), support with applications and decisions at the First Tier Tribunal (20), applications and decisions at the Upper Tier Tribunal (10), support with a Fresh Claims, including gathering evidence, making further submissions and refusals (14) and ongoing general support (3).



This year 2 of our clients were granted leave to remain, 9 were taken on by a solicitor and 2 considered Assisted Voluntary Return.

We are carrying over 21 clients into 2015-2016. Some clients do not respond to further contact, and some we are unable to assist further.

We continue to work in effective partnership with a range of local agencies, taking referrals from around 20 partner organisations, with the majority coming from the British Red Cross. More detailed statistics are available on request from the BEACON coordinator.

“The rebels killed my sister and forced me to carry ammunition for them in my school bag. Now the government think I am a rebel. I can’t go back.”

“I was forced into marriage at the age of 12. My husband’s family have influence so the police will not protect me. I can’t go back.”

These are some of the things I have heard as a BEACON volunteer. It’s hard to hear these kinds of stories, but also often inspiring to hear the survivors’ hope and determination.

Volunteering with BEACON it’s a privilege to be able to offer a little hospitality and a listening ear to people who need this so much.’

Heather Grinter
 CHAT & McKenzie Friend Volunteer and Member of the BEACON Executive, September 2015

CHAT REPORT

Lizzie Lowenstein, CHAT Coordinator



CHAT English Conversation Club

CHAT English Conversation Club has developed considerably in 2014-2015. Students receive support in developing their confidence in spoken English at our weekly sessions and take part in practical and fun English conversation activities.

Alongside our regular English lessons we put on some special activities to broaden students' knowledge and use of English: we went to Bradford Industrial Museum (February), a community allotment run by BCEP (April) and had a summer picnic (July). We have had a workshop from the Volunteer Centre about getting involved in the local community (May), and made some wonderful paintings for Bradford Refugee Week art exhibition (May/June).

Since March attendance has risen significantly, from an average of 11 to an average of 18, peaking at 28 in mid-May. We are open to all non-native speakers, however the majority of our new students are asylum seekers, and therefore the demand on our funded bus fare has increased dramatically. The continued need for our project is demonstrated by regular attendance and the increase in numbers.



CHAT English Summer picnic.

Many thanks also to all the long-term and new volunteers for continuing to make the group a warm and welcoming place and to Thornbury Methodist Church for their continued support.

'Many students are developing about this class so that please please continue [...] thanks for helping [...] thanks Bradford, Good luck!'

CHAT English student, June 2015



Art workshop, May 2015.

CHAT Phoenix House

CHAT Phoenix House has seen a number of changes this year – including our name, as we are no longer known as CHAT Court! The project continues to be very well received by court users, all down to the work of a team of dedicated volunteers. However, the number of people waiting for their hearings has dramatically decreased. Cuts from the Home Office mean the capacity of the Tribunal has been reduced: the number of judges sitting each day has reduced from 5 to 2 - 3 and appeal rights in all immigration cases has been cut from 17 to 5, meaning some cases which used to be heard at Phoenix House (such as visit visas) are now no longer eligible for appeals. We will continue to play our important role at Phoenix House and hope that circumstances will soon change. This year we served 1145 hot drinks and supported around 200 asylum seekers from countries as diverse as Milawi, Iran, Pakistan and Yemen. Our amazing volunteers continue to serve free tea, coffee and biscuits to all those attending Phoenix House with a warm smile and friendly chat – a welcome needed now more than ever!

'Before I came to the UK I used to speak English sometimes as I worked at international company [...] Since I came to the UK I shocked as I found myself unable to communicate and understand local accents and some people's pronunciation, then I started attending CHAT English club, I met there very helpful, polite and kind people who helped me and others to improve our language, increase our self-confidence and also helped with some cultural information. All that by smooth and funny learning methods.

As one result, I was able to get a professional job in three months of getting the work permit, as I had enough self-confidence to have a detailed interview.

Former CHAT English student, September 2015, now working as an engineer in Manchester.

'Thank you and god bless you for the work that you do. A smile, a tea and biscuits, goes an extremely long way in my view.

It was a pleasure to meet with you this morning and the work that you do is priceless.'

A barrister attending a hearing at Phoenix House, November 2014.

HOSTING PROJECT

Will Sutcliffe, Hosting Coordinator



To date 58 people (41 women and 17 men) have been hosted by volunteer host households since October 2008. After a quiet year in 2013/4, we had the huge encouragement of approving 4 more households early in 2015 – 3 for longer term and one for ‘relief’ hosting.

In an ever more restrictive environment, it is encouraging that our guests are still managing to obtain legal representation to submit fresh asylum claims and that the majority are succeeding in re-establishing Home Office (‘Section 4’) housing and support. We are very concerned however at the implications of the Immigration Act 2015 and proposals to speed up the deportation of asylum seekers once their initial claims have been refused. The Hosting Project proves that, given sufficient time and support, a very significant proportion of these can gather the evidence they need to demonstrate credible asylum claims.

At the time of writing, we have been inundated with offers from the public of spare rooms in response to the current ‘Refugee Crisis’. We are therefore seriously looking at how we may be able to expand the project beyond the current capacity of its part time volunteer coordinator. It has been encouraging too to see the project recognized in the national media, including The Guardian and The Sunday Times – and look out for the Christmas issue of Woman and Home magazine!

‘It must be so hard to be a guest in someone’s house, coping with the host’s unknown rules, and strange ways. My cooking has improved, and my tolerance for X Factor has increased. Moreover, I have been inspired by the resilient, lively women I have met, who have faced enormous challenges back home, yet do not complain about their difficult circumstances in the UK, and have great hope for the future.’

One of BEACON’s first hosts

‘On arrival in the UK, I knew that I was nobody here, had no one, and knew nothing [...] It was almost impossible without any help and understanding of the society around me and it got even more difficult when I lost my shelter and support from the Home Office soon after when I was told that I have no proof for my story. [...] After sometimes of searching for help, I found a small charity in Bradford called ‘BEACON’ [...] they helped me to find a place to live. This was a small room in shared house. That room not only became a room to live, but also a place to learn, to think to restart and a starting point to be a better person [...] I got a Master degree with merit in Arts and found a good job afterward. I am married and happy now, expecting my first baby in October and looking forward to what life has put forward in front of my family and I.’

One of BEACON’s first hosted guests

TREASURER'S REPORT 2015

Roy Howarth

Once again, a heartfelt 'Thank you' to all those individuals, churches and charitable groups who continue to support the work of BEACON.

We have ended this financial year in an improved financial position. This is due to continued generosity and hard work of our team who have been successful in securing grants and other external funding. In a difficult financial climate, these successes are to be celebrated.

Our sixth 'Walk for Justice' this year was raised vital funds and helped raise awareness of the plight of asylum seekers. Thank you to all involved in this event – whether as organisers, participants or generous sponsors.

This year has been a special one for BEACON as it marks our 10th anniversary. The celebration was an amazing success financially as, thanks to grants and exceptionally generous donations, the costs were covered all but for a few pounds!

In the next financial year, BEACON must continue to secure long term funding as well as maintaining the generous support of donors.



BEACON's Walk for Justice 2010-2015.

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT AS AT 30.09.15

Income and Expenditure Account as at 30.09.15

INCOME			EXPENDITURE		
BEACON General			BEACON General		
Donations	Churches	1487	Salaries		11863
	Other (Gift Aid)	1169	Rent		5280
	Lyndal Tree	6000	Expenses		3153
	Brelms Trust	3000	Insurance		286
	Allen Lane	2500	Printing		360
	WY Meth	10000	Training		575
	Bfd Council	250			
	Baildon Runne	750			
	Individuals	6572			
	Sponsored walk	1894			
CHAT PHOENIX HOUSE			CHAT PHOENIX HOUSE		
Donations	Individuals	314	Rent		25
	Thornbury Methodist	310	Salaries		537
	L&T Bramall Foundation	4000	Expenses		212
			Insurance		202
CHAT ENGLISH CLUB			CHAT ENGLISH CLUB		
	Individuals	0	Salaries		3720
	Evan Cornish	5000	Expenses		2854
	Leeds RAG	500	Rent		1380
			Insurance		202
HOSTING			HOSTING		
Donations	Individuals	385	Expenses		2973
	Souter Trust	3000	Insurance		202
McKENZIE FRIENDS			McKENZIE FRIENDS		
Donations	Individuals	90	Rent		960
			Salaries		3720
			Expenses		1450
			Insurance		202
			Income over Expend		7065
		<u>47221</u>			<u>47221</u>

Balance Sheet

Income over Expenditure Brought Forward	27034	Cash at Bank	34078
Income over Expenditure	7065	Cash in Hand	21
	<u>34099</u>		<u>34099</u>



CONTACT US

**For all enquiries regarding
BEACON's work, referrals or
volunteering opportunities
please contact:**

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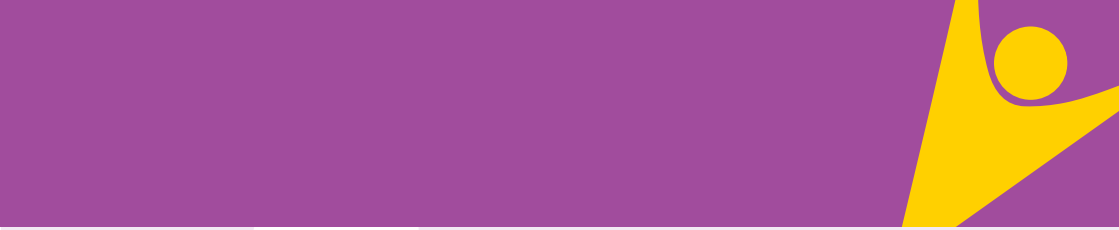
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