



'Welcome the stranger'

Annual Report

For the year to September 30th 2016



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CHAIR OF BEACON REPORT

Rita Armitage

Can it really be only one year since we celebrated the 10th Anniversary of BEACON with the joyful day at Kala Sangam? What a year it has been. Against the background of the continuing refugee crisis in Europe many politicians find themselves in conflict with voters as the concern to secure borders and reduce immigration threatens any compassionate response and willingness to receive those fleeing their homelands in search of peace and security.

Here in the U.K., fierce debates and divisive campaigning last spring led to a shocking increase in racist abuse. Refugees and asylum seekers are amongst those affected. Will Sutcliffe shared the story of a young man from Iran who has been granted 'leave to remain'. How relieved he had been that his story was believed and the threat of removal to Iran, where he faced persecution, was lifted. Sadly, his sense of security and peace of mind was shattered by all the stories of rejection he was hearing, with the familiar taunt 'Go back where you came from!' He no longer felt safe. 'Shall I be sent back' he asked Will, greatly in need of reassurance.



Guests at our 10th anniversary celebration 2015

BEACON continues to respond, to offer reassurance and practical support. We are in a period of transition following the recent Review – see Sarah Jemison's report. I retire as Chair at the 2016 AGM when we shall also appoint a new Treasurer and Secretary. I wish them, the staff and all the volunteers well, confident the future work is safe in their hands.

'As a country we seem to be going through a very difficult period. But for refugees and asylum seekers in particular it is extremely hard. The work of BEACON is as important as it has ever been [...] We'd like to send encouragement to all staff volunteers and asylum seekers.'

**Lynda Duttine,
The Lyndal Tree Foundation**

BEACON REVIEW 2016

Sarah Jemison (Vice Chair)

How are we doing? Could we be better?

These were the questions that prompted a review process, which included three key strands: strategic, operational and governance. The review was facilitated by Ian Owers, Independent Voluntary Sector Consultant. Ian's wide experience of faith and community organisations was invaluable in helping us grapple with the issues facing us.

- We assessed our current situation and the changing context, both local and global, in which BEACON is operating.
- We reviewed our objectives and progress in relation to our mission – being very conscious that our awareness raising commitment is so vitally important in the present climate.
- We began to identify areas of change – a post review task group has been appointed to further this to an agreed time frame.

Of course, we needed to assess the procedures and resources that will be needed to implement our plans – the task group is working on developing the business plan.

The questions were timely. After years of commitment and contributions, several long standing Trustees felt it was time to retire. New Trustees and staff were joining BEACON and the developments taking place are only possible because of firm foundations already laid.

Our gratitude to long-standing trustees who are retiring this year:

Rita, (Chair 2008-2016)

For your commitment to BEACON's work expressed through your strategic mind, organisational skills and attention to detail. Thank you.

Jackie, Roy and Joe

For navigating charitable status, looking after the money and keeping our focus on the needs of asylum seekers. Thank you.

Awais

For your caring and wise words, Thank you.

BEACON

COORDINATOR REPORT



Walk for Justice 2016 - Bradford Cathedral

BEACON has had another busy year with lots of positive developments! We welcome our new Admin Assistant Amanda Labbett whose support in the office is thus far invaluable and who is already playing a vital role in our finance administration.

The annual Walk for Justice attracted attention in the local press and was launched by Bishop Toby Howarth of Bradford and the Lord Mayor Councillor Geoff Reid (the first Chair of BEACON). We have been out and about throughout the year: at the Saltaire Peace Fair, at Bradford Refugee Week family festival, at a Hope not Hate event, visiting projects in the region and beyond to strengthen our partnership working, attending national gatherings and conferences and speaking at local churches and groups to raise awareness of the issues facing asylum seekers. We launched our new website: making it easier to share news with supporters and volunteers. We are pleased that our volunteer base continues to strengthen, and as ever appreciate the vital role they play in delivering our services to asylum seekers.

Lizzie Lowenstein
(BEACON Coordinator)



The Lord Mayor & Bishop of Bradford launch our Walk for Justice



Walk for Justice

HOSTING PROJECT

Will Sutcliffe, Hosting Coordinator



During the past 12 months the project has supported seven women asylum seekers who, without the kindness and generosity and our amazing volunteer host households, would have been homeless and at very real risk.

At present we have **five active hosting households** as well as **three** who are available to provide **short-term 'relief'** hosting. **62 guests** have been hosted over the past **8 years (44 women and 17 men)**.

Due to my other work commitments I have not been able to take advantage of a number of offers from the public that came in at the height of the 'Refugee Crisis'. The wonderful news, however, is that Henriette Howarth is about to join the project to work alongside me in a voluntary capacity. Now we shall be able to follow up some of these and hopefully see the project expand. As always, we are in particular need of households able to take men.



Refugee Week food 2016

Whilst public sympathy and offers of all kinds of practical help have been very high, the wider political situation continues to make our work both more necessary and also more difficult. We are very concerned at the potential impact of some very regressive elements of the new Immigration Act which will be gradually enacted in the coming year.

McKENZIE FRIENDS

Eithne Dodwell (Chair of McKenzie Friends)
& Lizzie Lowenstein (BEACON Coordinator)

We continue to support asylum seekers who have nowhere else to turn and are facing the legal system alone. Whilst we are not able to meet their urgent need of legal advice we can walk alongside them and be a vital resource for practical and emotional support. The combination of continuing pressure on legal aid solicitors, reduction in the number of judges sitting and the Boxing Day floods at the Home Office in Leeds have increased mistakes and delays throughout the system.

Partly as a result of this, our case load increases as more cases arrive but fewer are resolved. We were forced to close to new referrals in late March, and only had the capacity to re-open after 5 months in September. Despite this closure for almost half the year we have opened 57 cases and referrals, 1 more than 2014-15. We can assume that the total number for this year would have been significantly higher should we have remained open all year. We continue to develop positive partnerships with local agencies: 19 out of 57 referrals came from local Red Cross refugee services who specialise in destitution case-work.

The determination of our volunteers proves very effective—sticking with long-term cases which others have deemed hopeless has got amazing results, with 2 individuals we helped for several years being granted leave to remain after being taken on by solicitors. 2 more were granted leave to remain following close collaboration for almost 2 years between a former solicitor and the hard-working McKenzie Friend.

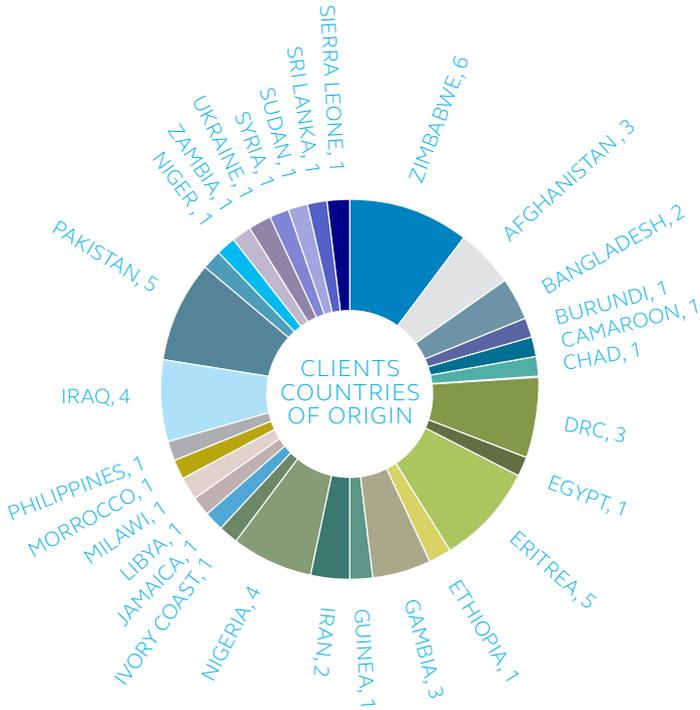
There is increasing concern that individuals providing immigration advice for a fee are

avoiding regulation by purportedly acting as 'paid' McKenzie Friends. This has led to the regulating body of immigration advice services (OISC) conducting a consultation into the role of McKenzie friends. We met with the Senior Judge in Residence at Phoenix House to discuss our role at hearings, which led to a useful review of our procedures. For example: we are using a new method of supporting clients to write their witness statements, if necessary in their own languages, to be read out and interpreted in court. This gives them more direct communication with the judge, although it makes our urgent need for trained interpreters greater.

There is demonstrable need for our project: a shocking 12.9% of all asylum-related appeals at the First Tier Tribunal were unrepresented. That's more than 1 in 10 who may have benefited from a McKenzie Friend. Another Tribunal report shows that only 22% of unrepresented appeals were allowed which demonstrates how vital quality legal support and advice is.

'This week I was contacted by two people who work with torture victims, many of whom have no representative. They've found there's just nobody to refer them to in the area because the local legal reps have no capacity at all, and there's nothing else until London. There is definitely a real need to increase the availability of advice and representation.'

**Barrister and academic,
October 2016**



At 30th September we had:

23 open cases

This year we had:

35 new referrals

23 cases carried over from last year

30 different countries

57 referrals

Reasons for referral:

55% of referrals were for appeals

30% of referrals were for fresh claims

15% of referrals were for other areas of support

Below are the known outcomes.

Unfortunately it is not always possible to know what happens to all our clients

2 were granted leave to remain

1 chose to return to country of origin

4 required no further action

10 found a solicitor or other legal support

23 cases are carrying over into next year

CHAT PHOENIX HOUSE REPORT

Heather Grinter (Trustee of BEACON)



Change is what we encounter at every session of CHAT at Phoenix House. All the people waiting for asylum hearings have made the big decision to leave their home, often after traumatic events, and try to make a new home in the UK. They all face a very uncertain future, and it is our privilege as volunteers to offer a brief welcome and perhaps be able to show that they are valued as people here and now.

CHAT itself has also changed during the year. Lizzie continued to organise CHAT Phoenix House in her compassionate and efficient way until the end of May when she reduced her hours. Since then I have been keeping the rota going. For much of the year the waiting room has been fairly quiet, though our presence has always been welcomed, including by the court staff, interpreters etc. As they predicted, numbers have gone up in September, with up to 12 different immigration cases being heard. We have spoken to at least 250 asylum seekers from various countries not much in the news, such as Guinea and Albania, as well as places we sadly hear of everyday, such as Syria and Iraq. We are sometimes also able to give information to asylum seekers now living in, for example, Sheffield or Liverpool, about agencies local to them who help asylum seekers and refugees.

Since 1st October 2015 we were at Phoenix on **106 mornings** and served **1655 hot drinks** – a **45% increase** on 2014-15!

The service is free to all, however many who are able choose to donate: we **raised £534.49** in donations which makes a big difference to BEACON.

A very big Thank You to all volunteers and special thanks to Betty Thompson who was very soon back to buying the tea, biscuits, etc after a nasty accident in the summer. We are able to run CHAT on almost all Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays. One of the medium term objectives of BEACON following its review is to extend our services to Thursdays and Fridays as well.

'I sat with a LASSN volunteer, who was awaiting her hearing at the Immigration Tribunal in Bradford. We were greeted by two lovely volunteers from CHAT who plied us and everyone else here with tea and custard creams. They light up the waiting area with their cheerfulness and compassion.'

Jon Beech, Director of Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network, October 2016

CHAT ENGLISH CLUB REPORT

Mandy Oates (CHAT English Club Coordinator)
& Lizzie Lowenstein



CHAT English Club Trip to Bradford Industrial Museum



CHAT English Club trip to Malham

CHAT English Club continued to run successfully in 2015-16 with a number of significant changes. The venue changed to our office building, near the city centre. We got a warm reception from Touchstone. We thank Thornbury Methodist Church for hosting us until March 2016.

We are very pleased that Mandy Oates, an experienced local teacher, has taken over the running of the group after Lizzie's responsibilities changed. Thanks must go to the volunteers who ran the group between May and July. Mandy's enthusiasm and ability shows great promise and she has already delivered very well received sessions! These are structured and interactive, designed for students to have as much 'surface area' of talk as possible in an unpressurised environment, either 1:1 or in a small group.

Given the wide range of proficiency and confidence within the group, the session is based on a theme rather than on a technical aspect of language. Using visual resources as stimuli, the language issues emerge and volunteers can support a student or small group in correcting, developing and improving their English on a bespoke basis. The volunteers are very skilled, sensitive and adaptable in the way they work with students, and full of initiative.

Mandy's plans for the group include: trips to local places of interest; compiling an up-to-date map of English classes/sessions across the city to share with other organisations and learners and increasing attendance from asylum seekers, particularly women.

An average of **12 students attended each week** and a survey showed **all students 'liked' or 'really liked' the group**. Between January 2015 and June 2016 we registered **84 students of which 57 were asylum seekers, 14 were refugees.**

'my mind is fresh now'
a CHAT English Student after our trip to Malham, May 2016

TREASURER'S REPORT

Roland Clark

Please see insert for this year's accounts.

I was honoured when I was asked to be Treasurer of BEACON.

We have developed the financial capacity of the charity and we have been working on the plans both operational and financial for the future of the organisation. I look forward with optimism to securing BEACON's future work.



CHAT English Club trip to Keasden Head Farm



'Welcome the stranger'

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