



*Welcome the Stranger*

# Annual Report

For the year ending 30th September 2020

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# INTRODUCTION FROM BEACON'S CHAIR OF TRUSTEES

**“Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.”**

## **Arundhati Roy**

BEACON's vision is of a hospitable community, where people seeking asylum and refugees are welcome, enjoy access to justice and fair treatment, and are supported on their journey to independence and integration. This is our vision of another world.

This has been a year like no other. It began with our usual stall at the Saltaire Peace & Crafts Fair, a fantastic fundraising jazz night at Kirkgate Community Centre and plans for adapting our well-established Walk for Justice. Our CHAT Phoenix House and CHAT Conversation Club projects were benefiting from the skills, energy and enthusiasm that the newly appointed Alice Sizeland brought.

When lockdown hit, changes were made to ensure that our projects continued safely. With the exception of CHAT Phoenix House, BEACON activities remained open. Sadly, changes to the way the courts now operate meant that the resumption of the CHAT Phoenix House project has not been possible. CHAT has been a much-valued part of BEACON from its beginnings. Initially meeting at Thornbury Methodist Church, the project has been sustained by a faithful team of volunteers who have served 1000's of cups of tea and offered words of reassurance and support to countless anxious tribunal attendees. With a heavy heart we say goodbye to the project for now and express a huge thank you to all who have contributed to it over the last 15 years. Thank you so much one and all!

As always, BEACON's McKenzie Friend volunteers have been busy supporting those without access to legal representation. Almost half of people's claims for asylum in the UK are rejected. It's really hard to provide the evidence required to be granted protection and initial Home Office decision-making remains poor. In the year ending June 2020, 53% of initial decisions resulted in a grant of asylum or other form of protection. 45% of appeals were upheld - the highest it has been in the last decade, so many refugees rely on the courts to provide them with the protection they need.

The McKenzie Friends volunteers help vulnerable people seeking asylum to access legal advice and gather the evidence they need, so increasing the likelihood of a successful outcome. The project has been further enhanced by working closely with local solicitors.

Throughout lockdown and Covid-19 restrictions, BEACON's dedicated team of staff, volunteers and trustees have adapted to new ways of working, as we seek to realise our vision for our city and district.

My grateful thanks go out to all who have supported BEACON with their time, funds and prayers.

## **Sarah Jemison** **Chair of Trustees**

<sup>1</sup>[www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/information/refugee-asylum-facts/the-truth-about-asylum](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/information/refugee-asylum-facts/the-truth-about-asylum)



# REFLECTIONS FROM BEACON'S TEAM LEADER

**This year has challenged us all like no other. And yet it has also stretched and shaped BEACON's work and challenged us in many positive ways. 2020 also marks BEACON's 15-year anniversary and we are pleased to have been able to support many thousands of people seeking asylum since the charity began its work in 2005.**

The year started on a positive note, and luckily, we were able to host fundraising events including a Coffee & Carols event and an extremely well-attended jazz night, before the world changed beyond recognition and we were confined to our homes.

As the pandemic took hold in March, we successfully adapted our services to continue safely and remotely to meet the needs of those seeking asylum in Bradford. It goes without saying that this was only possible due to the hard work, resilience and commitment of our staff and volunteers, who have worked incredibly hard, despite changes and ongoing challenges in their own lives. Sadly, the CHAT Phoenix House project welcoming people seeking asylum in the waiting was unable to continue.

We have continued to support and raise awareness of the campaign to 'Lift the Ban' on the right to work for those seeking asylum, and BEACON was featured as a case study in a national activism pack for our work in raising awareness on the issue.

The pandemic has also enhanced our partnership working this year – both locally with other agencies supporting people seeking asylum and nationally through our NACCOM membership and through networks set up by national charities such as Refugee Action.

These partnerships have greatly enhanced our work through the sharing of good practice and access to specialist advice. We were also really pleased that towards the end of the year we secured funding from Refugee Action's Respond & Adapt grant programme to set up a remote digital legal advice surgery in partnership with Fisher Stone solicitors. We have also continued to raise awareness of the changing needs of people seeking asylum since the pandemic began, through the delivery of online talks and presentations to local groups.

Like many institutions across the globe, events in summer also forced us to reflect on the issue of diversity & inclusion in our work. A volunteer-led workshop on 'white privilege' and further learning about 'unconscious bias' mark the beginnings of work to be done in ensuring we are an open and inclusive organisation.

Whilst the political and social context facing people seeking asylum looks increasingly bleak, we look ahead to the coming year with renewed optimism and hope, that we can develop and adapt further to change the narrative, offer much-needed welcome, hospitality and practical support to those who have faced multiple losses and trauma in a bid for sanctuary and protection.

A huge thanks to all who have supported BEACON's work in this most challenging of years!

**Katy Armitstead**  
Team Leader

# LIFT THE BAN

Lift The Ban



BEACON's annual stall at the Saltaire Peace and Crafts Fair, November 2020



BEACON volunteers enjoy a 'lockdown quiz' in Volunteer Week 2020



University of Leeds medical students visit CHAT English Club, March 2020

# HOSTING PROJECT

## PREVENTING DESTITUTION



**Once again this has been a year of both immense joys and intense challenges.**

As across the whole world, so this has been a strange and often difficult year for the Hosting Project, with the lowest number of people hosted / days of accommodation provided for several years. This does not reflect any reduction in the numbers seeking asylum, or those receiving negative decisions on their cases, but rather the impact of government policy as a response to COVID.

Nationally the Home Office, on public health grounds, has been forced to suspend evictions of those in asylum accommodation who receive negative decisions. Locally Bradford Council has fully participated in the government's 'Everyone In' scheme, designed to prevent rough sleeping during the pandemic. This means that the majority of those we would normally be seeking to support are not yet facing destitution, however, there is real concern nationally among the network of hosting and housing projects about our ability to meet the demand when this log jam breaks.

Whilst demand for accommodation has been low due to the virus, so the number of hosts able to take guests has reduced as some have needed to withdraw due to the need to 'shield'.

On a positive note, despite the many challenges the pandemic brought, our wonderful hosts prevented hundreds of nights without shelter by providing safe accommodation for:

**4 guests**

for a total of **812 nights!**

Guests came from **Iraq, Afghanistan, Eritrea and Somalia**

### **STOP PRESS!**

*As this report was being completed, we received a phone call from 'S', a young, very traumatised African woman, who was hosted for over two years by one of our wonderful hosts in 2015 - 2017. After a wait of 8 years and 3 months, she has just heard that she has been granted Leave to Remain in the UK and is now planning to build a new life here in Bradford!*

# MCKENZIE FRIENDS

## ACCESS TO JUSTICE

**Despite being a strange year for all of us, the McKenzie Friends project has produced some really encouraging outcomes and carried on operating throughout the whole of the pandemic, thanks to the valued commitment and resilience of our volunteers, who rose to the huge challenge of transitioning to a largely remote service. We were sad, however, to say goodbye to long-standing volunteer, Mick Shaw, who was with us for over eight years. We will miss both his expertise and his humour!**

Referrals into the project reduced with the arrival of the pandemic, as many local drop-ins closed down, Home Office decision-making stopped, the courts were closed, and many solicitors were furloughed. However, as society adapted to a 'new normal' and began to open up again, our work picked up and we were as busy as ever.

We have benefited greatly from network and partnership working this year. Our membership of Refugee Action's 'Community of Practice', a network of Yorkshire & Humberside-based advice-giving charities and solicitors, has improved referral mechanisms and enabled us to share good practice, form connections and access support with difficult cases. Destitution Concern Bradford has proved to be a valuable multi-agency network, meeting more frequently since the pandemic took hold offering peer support, information sharing, coordinated action and a forum for feeding our concerns relating to the impact of COVID-19 on our clients into strategic local and regional meetings.

Prior to the pandemic, our partnership with IBSA Legal to deliver an advice surgery enabled ten individuals to access legal advice on their asylum case. We subsequently secured a Migration Exchange Respond & Adapt grant towards the end of the year to adapt our service to offer a digital legal advice project which will operate in partnership with Fisher Stone solicitors. Pre-lockdown, we also hosted a much-needed training course on preparing for detention delivered by Right to Remain, which was attended by multiple local agencies.

Our work continues to counteract the many injustices faced by people seeking asylum in the UK and we celebrate the commitment, compassion and sheer determination of the McKenzie Friends volunteers. Despite everything the project is well-placed for the coming year. The need for legal advice for those who have received a negative decision on an asylum claim is growing week on week and we are recruiting new volunteers to help meet this need. We also look forward to reaping the rewards of our new legal advice surgery. We recently heard that a family we have supported who have lived with uncertainty and worry about their future for over a decade have now finally been granted Leave to Remain, which makes all our hard work worthwhile! Read on to hear their story...

## The story of Family P

Family P were referred to McKenzie Friends in 2012 by the British Red Cross. The family of three, had arrived in the UK many years earlier after fleeing their home country in fear of persecution, and had been awaiting a decision on an asylum claim for several years. It had recently become apparent that the asylum claim they had instructed their solicitor to submit had never reached the Home Office. Their child was 17 years at the time and there was urgency about submitting an application before she turned 18.

With the support of McKenzie Friends volunteers, a solicitor took on the child's case and was able to secure Discretionary Leave to Remain a year later in 2013. The focus now turned to the parents of the P family. Further applications were made, and refused, and further historical complications came to light which the solicitor made attempts to challenge and escalate, but in 2015, the point came when he felt he could do no more for the family. The parents were without status and forced to rely on support from their child.

McKenzie Friends volunteers subsequently found a solicitor from Bankfield Heath to take on the case. He applied for discretionary leave under Article 8 (right to family life), for the parents. This was refused, and the family were left feeling hopeless and scared that they may be removed from the UK and separated from their daughter.

After this further setback, a meeting was arranged between the family and the Home Office Immigration Team at the offices of their local MP, following which a new solicitor took on the case.

Further refusals and submissions ensued. By this time, it was 2019, 7 years on from when we took the initial referral. BEACON had just set up a legal advice surgery offering access to legal advice from Bradford-based law firm, IBSA Legal. Family P were booked in for an appointment.

A fresh pair of eyes on the case and an empathetic solicitor, and the decision was made that fresh submissions should be made for asylum as well as the right to family life. An expert report was commissioned, and the fresh evidence was submitted.

Not surprisingly, the Home Office responded with a refusal of the fresh claim, but this was a huge blow to the family. An appeal was made, and the family attended a hearing at Phoenix House in November 2020. After an anxious wait, the family finally received the news that the judge accepted the claim and granted Refugee status in December 2020!

***"The McKenzie Friends are just wonderful. I have no words to describe you; we're just so thankful for you. You've always been there for us. I don't want to think about what situation we might be in now, had it not been for your support."***

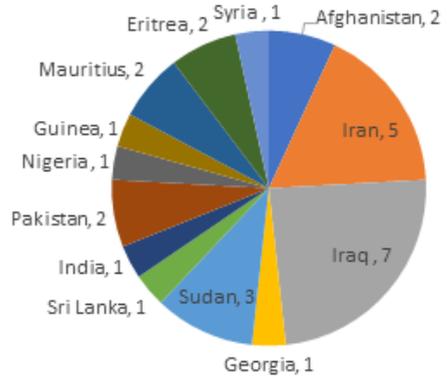
**Mr P, supported by McKenzie Friends**



The Band Upstairs performing at the McKenzie Friends jazz night, February 2020



## New Referrals by Country of Origin



### Outcomes for our clients this year:

-  **48** people seeking asylum supported by McKenzie Friends
-  **3** granted Leave to Remain in the UK
-  **3** accompanied to appeal hearings or Home Office interviews
-  **11** supported to find a solicitor
-  **9** currently awaiting decisions on fresh asylum claims

# CHAT PHOENIX HOUSE

## SUPPORT AT COURT



Sadly, 2020 was a year when circumstances beyond our control led to the closure of the CHAT Phoenix House project. Temporarily on pause when the pandemic began as the court itself had closed its doors, we remained in close contact with staff at Phoenix House about when and whether we may be able to restart our provision of support and refreshments for people seeking asylum in the waiting room.

The tribunal hearing centre reopened in July, however procedures were very different and new guidance on social distancing and safety had of course been put in place.

This regrettably meant that it would no longer be possible to have a presence in the waiting room as we had done most weeks for almost 15 years! We're honoured to have been able to meet and greet so many incredible people over the years and are thankful that our volunteers have been able to offer warm drinks, tasty snacks and a comforting presence at a time when many have been feeling desperately anxious as they await what can often turn out to be one of the most significant events in their lives.

We thank Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service for allowing us to deliver this support for so many years, all the court staff for making us so welcome, project coordinator Alice Sizeland and all those before her who have managed this project and of course, our wonderful volunteers for all their hard work & dedication.

On a positive note, it seems that the streamlined processes in the tribunal centre mean that many will be spared a long and anxious wait as they are taken straight into the court room upon arrival to have their hearing straight away.

Since records began in October 2014 until closure of the project on 12th March 2020, our friendly team of dedicated volunteers welcomed **over 3,000 groups and individuals** with cases to be heard and served just short of **10,000 hot drinks!**

*"It was a great service which was appreciated by many appellants, I'm sure. The volunteers were always such a cheerful presence, & actually made me feel much more at ease in my early days as a tribunal advocate."*

Caroline Wilson-Brown, Legal Aid  
Immigration Solicitor, Bradford Law Centre/  
CAB

*"I just want to say a big thank you to the CHAT team for delivering this service not only to court users but also to our staff!"*

Zara Ali, Team Leader, Phoenix House IAC

**Former volunteer Chris Hayward reflects on his experience with CHAT Phoenix House:**

“It was a privilege to be part of the CHAT team throughout several years. Encounter brought us into contact with women, men and teenagers (the great majority adult men and male teenagers) from a wide variety of countries, each person with their hope to be able to stay in the UK. Some countries of origin featured very frequently (there were some changes in those over the years). It was quite rare to come across somebody from a nation not usually associated with refugees or asylum seekers.

The vision to offer, alongside tea or coffee, a friendly face and an expression of care and warmth - and of interest where that seemed to be welcome - along with the facility to ‘signpost’ those attending the Court to helpful organisations in their town of residence (mostly across the breadth of UK’s ‘middle north’), was usually well received. Hopefully, this encounter and experience, amidst the fearfulness and anxiety (often palpably obvious and extreme) of those waiting to go into Court, encouraged and strengthened in some way. From time to time, we would be told something of a person’s story. This would often be pretty grim, compounded by the story of the horrendous journey, often overland and sometimes exceeding an entire year, that had been negotiated to get to the UK at all.

We can only hope and pray that our momentary and modest communication of friendship and interest has eased a little the often tortuous asylum-seeking quest of some of those alongside whom CHAT volunteers have given a little of their time over the years. None of us can ever judge the worth of those many one-off encounters which we were privileged to have had, sometimes costly to ourselves as volunteers, as we encountered fellow citizens of our one world for whom their place of birth and national belonging had become for them, for whatever reason, a place of threat and insecurity, the prospect of remaining in their homeland, intolerable.

We applaud the vision and commitment of those, largely I believe from the Thornbury Methodist church across the way from Phoenix House, who were in the vanguard of setting up the CHAT project back in 2005.”

# CHAT ENGLISH CLUB

## CONVERSATION AND CONNECTION

**This year's CHAT English Club activities have brought a diverse and varied outlook on global topics, including politics, the environment, health, festivals, food, and much more. These themed lessons have been supported by the wonderful group of volunteers that always provide a welcoming and friendly environment to the class and have continued to do so by adapting to classes online and by phone during lockdown and under Covid-19 restrictions. They have remained incredibly dedicated and caring throughout the year- thank you.**

Highlights of the year include going to the pantomime to watch 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs' at the Alhambra Theatre in Bradford – a truly festive experience which students thoroughly enjoyed, a culinary class for Pancake Day where students made and decorated their own pancakes (despite not having a non-stick pan, they tasted exactly how they were supposed to, but a collective decision was made to go for the “abstract” look!) One particularly memorable class focused on the British election system, with groups forming their own political parties, discussing and finalising party policies, and after presentation to the other groups, a democratic vote was carried out using our very own ballot box. The room was tense when the votes were being counted, however, cheer filled the room when The Peace Party was declared winner.

As we went into lockdown, CHAT English Club moved online and now provides activities and conversation for up to 27 people seeking asylum, refugees and others, via email and Zoom. The lack of face-to-face communication has been difficult and left some feeling lonely and socially isolated.

To address this, we have organised socially distanced walks in Lister park and Peel park in small groups of 6, when restrictions allowed. Students have thanked us and are keen to see more.

*“I enjoyed the walks very much because in this time you need a little something to do and it was a great experience. It is also good for people who have stress or depression, and people with low self-esteem. I learnt a lot about the park and I really enjoyed it. Thank you.”*

CHAT English Club student

We celebrated positive news with two students who were granted Leave to Remain and another who began working in the community, furthering their integration to life in the UK.

Despite most of the year being difficult for so many, the CHAT English Club remains impactful and relevant by bringing people to together and offering a safe environment not just to improve English, but a space to share their thoughts and stories. The importance of being able to speak freely and without discrimination will always remain at the heart of CHAT whether it is online, over the phone, or face-to-face with a smile, a hot drink and a biscuit...

This year, we registered **78 different students** with the CHAT English Club from **20 different countries**, with an **average class participation of 15 students**. The most common country of origin was Sudan, followed by Iran, Iraq, and Yemen. More recently registered students came from El Salvador and Kurdish Iran.



CHAT English Club students and volunteers enjoy a trip to the panto



Fun, food and games at the CHAT English Club Christmas party



Students tucked into pancakes on Shrove Tuesday



# COMMENT FROM BEACON'S TREASURER

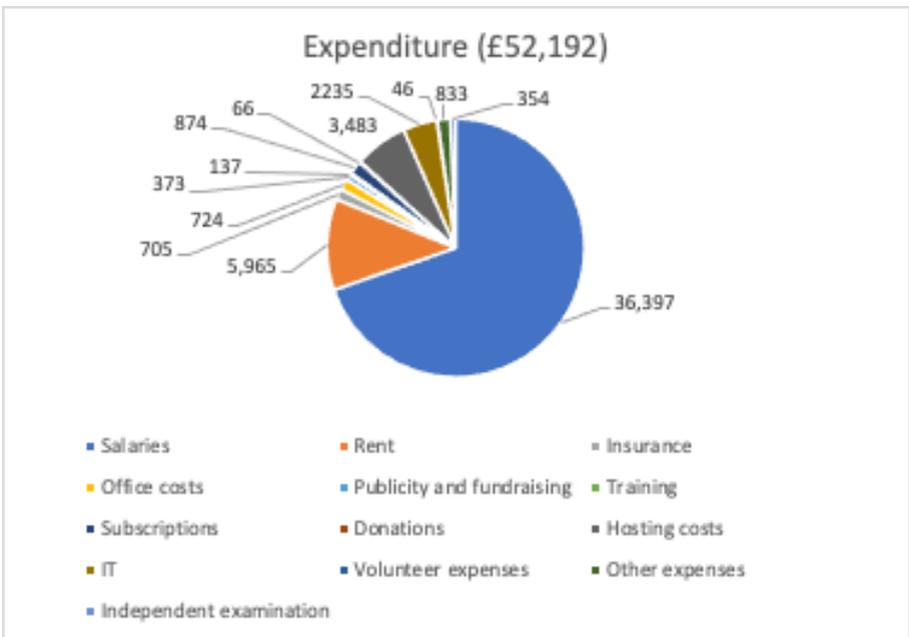
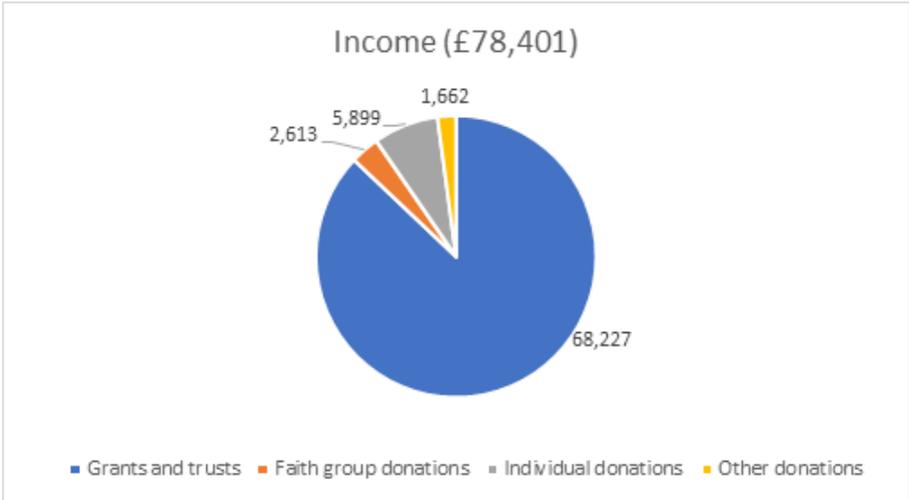
**Any set of Financial Statements reflect, in numbers, the story of what has happened in the year. Ours reflect the hard work of everyone at BEACON, and the careful monitoring and control of costs. Also, the generosity of our donors both now and in the past shouts loudly out of the pages.**

Special thanks are due to our donors who have demonstrated tremendous understanding, generosity and flexibility in the amount, timing and use of their grants and donations. This has enabled our service provision to continue at a high level during these worrying times.

I want to say a special thanks to our Admin/ Finance team who have worked so hard and diligently on our financial management and income generation.

**Roland Clark  
Treasurer**

# INCOME AND EXPENDITURE



A full set of examined accounts is available on request



*Welcome the Stranger*

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