



*Welcome the Stranger*

# Annual Review

For the year ending 30th September 2021

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***The vision of BEACON is that the Bradford district becomes 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***

# INTRODUCTION FROM BEACON'S CHAIR OF TRUSTEES

***“Problems are not resolved and coexistence improved by building walls higher, but by joining forces to care for others.”***

Pope Francis

Over the last twelve months, the challenges faced by people seeking asylum in the UK have increased. The tragic drownings in the Channel seek to emphasise the risks desperate people seeking asylum must take. With so few legal routes to safety, they have no alternative. The situation in Afghanistan has forced thousands of people to flee persecution, reminding us of so many others, out of the public gaze, yet in a similar position. The proposals in the Nationality and Borders Bill, should they become law, will have devastating consequences for people seeking sanctuary here.

It is within this context that BEACON has continued to fulfil its charitable objectives.

## **Relieving Hardship**

BEACON's McKenzie Friends, Hosting and CHAT projects have continued. Our committed volunteers are the backbone of BEACON, so despite Covid restrictions, we're proud to have recruited and trained new volunteers. The CHAT English Club has expanded to include various social activities. We have received funding from the Local Authority for the first time, to undertake a piece of work as part of the Next Steps Accommodation Project. This ensured that those people seeking asylum within the Covid 19 'Everyone In' scheme were able to access move on accommodation when the scheme ended.

## **Raising Awareness**

BEACON hears many heart-breaking stories. Life threatening journeys to safety are made by desperate people, in fear of their lives, with no other option. So, we've sought to counter

the 'hostile environment' by continuing to support the Lift the Ban campaign and joining the Together with Refugees, Families Together and Hands Up for Our Health coalitions. We've featured in a short film commissioned by the University of Bradford as part of their 'Unify Festival' and contributed to the consultation process for the Nationality and Borders Bill by making a submission, as a relevant organisation, in the process. Our experience is that a wide range of people and organisations do want to join forces to care for people seeking asylum who arrive in the UK and here in Bradford.

## **Increasing Capacity**

As you read our Annual Report, you will see what BEACON, with a small staff team and committed band of volunteers, has achieved. However, we are conscious that many needs have gone unmet. With increased capacity, we could do even more! We're grateful for the support of the Enhance programme which has enabled us to work with an external consultant to create an organisational strategy and business plan. We're excited to be working on our fundraising strategy to ensure that the necessary financial resources are available for the changes we seek to make. We hope to be able to achieve even more!

I would like to say 'thank you' to our many volunteers, board of trustees, staff team, funders and all who support us with their commitment and prayers. You all play a part as we seek to 'Welcome the Stranger' here at BEACON.

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



# REFLECTIONS FROM BEACON'S TEAM LEADER

**Another year has passed, and it has once again been a challenging one for us all. Our work this year has demanded much from us all in the way of resilience and yet we recognise how much more challenging life has been for those we work with.**

We were deeply concerned at the situation which unfolded in Afghanistan this year and reminded of the importance of our work for all who seek safety and protection. In the same vein, the proposals we see outlined in the Nationality and Borders Bill are of grave concern for the future of people seeking asylum. Nevertheless, despite these concerns and the ongoing pandemic, we are pleased to report that our activities this year have continued to have significant impact on the lives of the people using our services, during a year of ongoing uncertainty.

Whilst our Hosting project was paused for much of the year due to delayed Home Office evictions and the 'Everyone In' scheme offering provision that would not ordinarily be available, other areas of work grew and developed. We were selected by the local authority to receive a grant to support people within the Everyone In programme, we set up a digital legal advice surgery which has greatly enhanced the outcomes of the McKenzie Friends project, and our CHAT project expanded to offer a wider range of activities, including yoga, cooking and wellbeing walks, to keep people socially connected.

The year started on a high with the launch of the digital legal advice surgery in partnership with Fisher Stone solicitors – an initiative which has revitalised the McKenzie Friends project in a context of scarcity of quality legal advice available in our area. We are immensely grateful for a Respond and Adapt grant received from a network of funders

known as Migration Exchange which enabled us to set this project up and run it efficiently and safely throughout the year. This funding also opened up a host of opportunities to access support and training in other areas, including wellbeing, anti-racism, governance and fundraising which have proved essential in our organisational development during the past year.

We were pleased that our sponsored walk was able to go ahead during Refugee Week this summer, a longstanding tradition and opportunity to raise awareness of and funds towards our work, not to mention a social opportunity for BEACON staff, trustees, volunteers, supporters and users to come together after months of social isolation and lockdown.

Our work on diversity and inclusion has developed as we continue to understand more about how we can learn and change. Comprehensive anti-racism training for charity leaders delivered by brap, a leading charity in the area of equality and diversity, was a fundamental foundation for us to build on and together with Abigail Housing we plan to co-host additional training for people within our respective organisations in the coming year. We acknowledge that there is much more work to be done and that this is an ongoing process, however we have started the journey and are fully committed to staying on the path.

Another area of development for us this year has been taking more time to listen to and involve the people we work with in shaping the work we do and working towards ensuring people with lived experience of seeking asylum are fully involved in all aspects of BEACON. We are working to improve mechanisms for feedback from people who use our services and in March we

were selected to be part of a national pilot programme facilitated by Refugee Action along with 7 other organisations across the UK to work on setting up Experts by Experience groups. This was an invaluable experience, and we plan to grow and consolidate this work in the coming year.

We have also been instrumental in setting up an online Single Point of Access system for people seeking asylum and refugees in Bradford as part of a steering group made up of local organisations. The new BRASH system (Bradford Refugee Asylum Services Hub) enables a streamlined and efficient pathway for people to access relevant services in a timely manner.

An additional key development for us this year came in the form of support secured through the Enhance programme funded by Lloyds Bank Foundation to work with an external consultant to undertake a strategic review of BEACON. This was followed by the development of a comprehensive future strategy to consolidate and enhance our work to cater for increased demand to meet the evolving needs of people seeking asylum. We hope to implement our plans in the coming year. Exciting times!

As we look to the year ahead, we see both challenge and hope. Despite the increasingly hostile legislative changes, increased numbers of people needing support and ever competitive challenges of funding our work, we will continue to stand together with people seeking asylum, whatever the year brings. Thank you to everyone who supported us this year – we couldn't do our work without you!

**Katy Armitstead**  
Team Leader



Unify Festival 2021



Launch of Walking Together 2021 sponsored walk



Finale of Walking Together 2021 sponsored walk

# HOSTING

## PREVENTING DESTITUTION

### What a year!

For a large part of it, no hosting took place, as the situation for those we seek to help was significantly helped by two factors: the first was that the Home Office were forced to suspend evictions of asylum seekers whose cases had been refused; the second was Bradford Council's decision to wholeheartedly participate in the government's 'Everyone In' scheme, whereby all rough sleepers, including those with No Recourse to Public Funds, were offered accommodation and support. BEACON played a key role in offering support to people in the scheme who were seeking asylum (see page 10 for more on this).

We continued to stay abreast of the situation as it developed, meeting frequently with members of the NACCOM network to stay connected with other organisations doing similar work, and worked with other local organisations to coordinate a system for providing information to people who would at some point be facing eviction, to let them know of our support as early as possible.

Evictions were inevitably restarted, and the project reopened with additional safety measures in place, as our amazing hosts became available again and referrals begin to trickle through.

We were reminded on several occasions during the year of the value of the project, as we received the fantastic news that four people supported by us in previous years had at last been granted Leave to Remain in the UK. Without the kindness, compassion and generosity of our hosts when their guests were battling to prepare and submit fresh asylum claims, they would very likely remain destitute – or worse.



**4** former guests granted  
Leave to Remain in the UK!



**Former host Jackie at the finish line of the London marathon raising funds for BEACON**

# MCKENZIE FRIENDS

## ACCESS TO JUSTICE

**The McKenzie Friends project continued to offer legal advocacy and support to people seeking protection who were without hope and without legal representation. As expected, this year has been quite different from last year. Whilst we were able to return to some level of in-person support, we have retained some remote operations. This has unexpectedly brought many advantages and enabled us to develop new skills as a team.**

Referrals have increased substantially from 29 last year to 46 this year. This is in part due to the Home Office recommencing its decision-making process as well as due to improved pathways between organisations supporting destitute people who need help with asylum issues.

One of the major successes has been the introduction of a fully funded digital legal advice service in partnership with Fisher Stone solicitors based in Halifax. This means we now have a simple pathway for all referrals to access high-quality, expert and honest legal advice (with an interpreter if needed), with 35 legal advice sessions facilitated over the year, and 19 people being taken on by one of the legal advisors to submit a fresh claim with Legal Aid, which is almost double the amount of people we were able to support to find a solicitor last year. Despite their huge workloads, we're eternally grateful to the wonderful team at Fisher Stone (Karin, Ruth and Alice) for the time afforded to our clients.

The grant we received to set up the service also enabled us to purchase a laptop which has proved invaluable in enabling us to respond to ad-hoc requests, for example facilitating remote appeal hearings and interviews with experts involved in drafting specialist reports in support of fresh claims. We adapted our comprehensive training package and took on 4 new volunteers and have expanded our knowledge in areas such as human trafficking, with volunteers making referrals into the National Referral Mechanism and putting their training to good use to make a number of successful applications for Exceptional Case Funding for cases outside of the scope of legal aid. We connected with other local organisations to increase awareness of local services to meet the ever more complex needs of our clients, particularly in the areas of crisis and mental health support. We also accessed ongoing training from TACTIC Immigration and Asylum Training Consultancy, in the areas of credibility in asylum claims and a refresher course on approaches to fresh claims.

The hard work of the team paid off as we heard that 5 individuals we had supported to access legal representation went on to be granted Leave to Remain. This was a direct result of the perseverance of our volunteers and the high standard of Fresh Submissions. Thanks to the work of the McKenzie Friends volunteers, we are able to provide a flexible and supportive service developing expertise and evolving to adapt to the needs of some very vulnerable people.

  
**59**

People seeking asylum  
supported by McKenzie Friends

  
**35**

Legal advice sessions provided

  
**3**

Supported to attend  
appeal hearings

  
**24**

Supported to find legal  
representation

  
**5**

Granted Leave to Remain in the UK



*Working with BEACON is an enjoyable and beneficial project which has enabled us to increase our capacity to take on preparing further submissions for asylum seekers who have had a refusal on their claim, an essential part of our work that we can find it difficult to commit resources to. We look forward to continuing working with BEACON in the coming year*

Karin Oliver, Director of Fisher Stone solicitors

*“The McKenzie Friends have played such a crucial role. It’s a critical time when you need support, and they actually take time to understand your case and to help you find the best way forward. I think this is a really good service. It comes very highly praised by me.”*

***“McKenzie Friends provides a unique service both to our service users and to the solicitors who take on their cases. Solicitors do not get legal aid for any pastoral work, or to accompany clients to the Home Office or courts for instance.***

***As we are not qualified to give legal advice, the partnership with Fisher Stone is incredibly useful to us and our clients, many of whom have been taken on by them either straight away or after work we have done to help provide further evidence.***

***What most refused asylum seekers need more than anything is a successful fresh claim and we have helped achieve quite a few of these. This is job satisfaction!”***

Ann Sargent, McKenzie Friends volunteer

### **Khaled's story\***

Khaled was a traumatised and vulnerable young man from Afghanistan. He had witnessed extreme violence; his family had been killed by the Taliban and he was now at risk himself so had fled the country. He had arrived in the UK as an unaccompanied minor aged 15. By the time he was referred to us his mental health was markedly poor, he suffered with PTSD, and was experiencing night terrors & suicidal thoughts as a result of his traumatic life experiences.

Khaled was referred to McKenzie Friends for legal support and to the Hosting project for accommodation. He was swiftly moved into a volunteer host household close to the city and subsequently linked in with the CHAT club, supported to access a bike, laptop, clothes & footwear, and a volunteer placement to learn construction skills. Although clearly still traumatised, his mental health & wellbeing improved markedly during this time. He was allocated two McKenzie Friends volunteers who provided support to access legal advice, arranged travel and accompanied him to London to meet with a psychiatrist who

produced a report for a new asylum claim. Along with further evidence obtained with support from the volunteers, the solicitor was able to access Legal Aid to submit a fresh asylum claim and Khaled was supported to apply for Section 4 accommodation.

A few months later in March 2021, we had a phone call from an ecstatic Khaled to tell us the amazing news that the wait was over, and he had been granted Leave to Remain to start his new life free from fear here in the UK.

\* Name has been changed

***“I am so very grateful for this opportunity. Since I came to BEACON, my luck has really changed”***

**CHAT continued online for most of the year, providing a weekly safe space for volunteers and students to grow their already trusted and friendly relationships. A massive thank you to the volunteers who continued to support students week in week out during another difficult year – the online classes wouldn't have been able to function without their fantastic support!**

The greatest highlight has been being able to develop and grow the CHAT club throughout the year, despite the setbacks caused by the pandemic. The class developed to offer monthly online cooking classes, a 6-week beginner yoga course and short walks around some of Bradford's beautiful parks, Bradford Cathedral and Little Germany. In a time where social isolation was very significant, this brought everyone closer together and helped with supporting physical and mental wellbeing.

The online CHAT Club provided a sense of routine and stability for a core group of students during the difficult winter lockdown. It allowed for one-to-one English practice and the opportunity to get to know students on a deeper level. Online classes enabled people to introduce some of their family members, and to show photographs and artwork they had created at home. Furthermore, it was an opportunity to connect with and reach a wider community of people seeking asylum and refugees from places such as Halifax, Manchester and Sheffield. Topics discussed throughout the year included family, mental health, fitness and providing translations for government restrictions and lockdown information. We also created a WhatsApp group for all students, a super way to keep in touch, share photos, information and provide a couple of laughs through the week.

Our monthly online cooking classes started in February 2021 following a very successful pilot in November 2020. Bradford chef, Sonia Sandhu creates delicious recipes for people to sign up and cook along together online. The class is free, and ingredients are delivered to participants' homes beforehand – a great way to engage new students and chat to them face-to-face from a safe distance. The class has proved to be a real hit, with recipes including a spicy bean chilli, okra curry, chocolate and hazelnut brownies, and vegan spaghetti bolognese. Delicious! To celebrate coming out of lockdown and enjoy a little of the British summer we held a picnic in Lister Park for all the cooking class participants – the rain stayed away, and we managed a couple of games of cricket and frisbee with the homemade treat of Sonia's cherry chocolate cake.

We also had the delight of congratulating a longstanding student on finally receiving his British Citizenship – a joyous day! Another student was reunited with his family, and they have been granted Leave to Remain, as have a couple of other students in the class. Great news to hear!

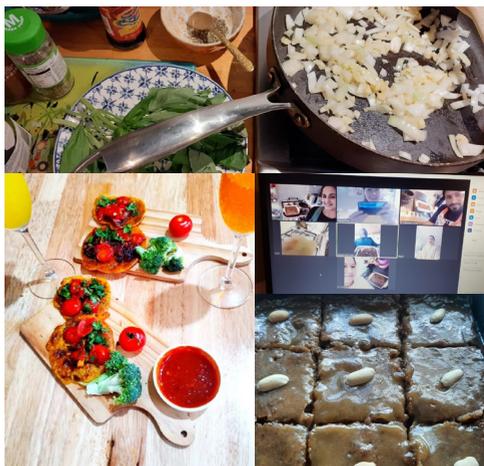
Despite a difficult year for many reasons, the students, and volunteers remained positive and are continuing into the new year with success. The class reopened in person in August 2021 with additional safety precautions in place. Numbers have swelled and it has been so lovely to see old and new students return. It is also comforting to know we are prepared for any future changes should we need to return to online classes depending on whatever this year brings.

A total of **61** different individuals benefited from the various CHAT activities available this year. Participants came from a variety of countries as far-reaching as **China, South Sudan, El Salvador, Kuwait, and Iran.**

*“Thank you for this cooking class because with lockdown I feel alone at home and with this class I have new friends. I really enjoyed it. I learnt a new and delicious food and I want to participate in this class again. The quality and training on Zoom were excellent. Thank you all.”*

*Running monthly virtual cooking classes with BEACON has been fantastic! As well as contributing to a more varied diet of healthy and seasonal dishes, the social aspect of the class has been important throughout periods of social restrictions during the pandemic - the class is relaxed and allows time for everyone to chat and catch up, practising their English language skills all whilst cooking dinner for themselves or with their family. We have all got to know each other quite well and really enjoyed a picnic in Lister Park over the summer where I met participants for the first time in person after many months of Zooming! The classes are a real highlight in my work, as they are such fun with enthusiastic participants who I look forward to seeing each month.*

Sonia Sandhu, Bradford-based chef



A selection of the delights created at the monthly cooking class!



Ingredients (serves 2, vegan, can be made gluten free with gluten free spaghetti and gluten free soy sauce, walnuts can be omitted if nut free)  
 200g button or chestnut mushrooms, chopped finely  
 70g brown lentils  
 70g walnuts, roughly chopped  
 1 medium onion, diced  
 4 large cloves garlic, chopped  
 300g tomato passata  
 1 tbsp soy sauce  
 1 tsp paprika  
 2 tsp mixed Italian herbs  
 120g spaghetti  
 Salt  
 Pepper  
 Olive oil  
 Optional - fresh basil

*Thank you  
 Sonia, Alice and  
 BEACON*

Some creative feedback from a grateful cooking class participant

# NEXT STEPS

## SUPPORT TO MOVE ON

**We were pleased that the government provided additional accommodation at the height of the pandemic to people at risk of rough sleeping including those without recourse to public funds as part of the 'Everyone In' initiative. We were delighted to receive some funding from the local authority as part of the Next Steps Accommodation Programme to work with those in the scheme who were seeking asylum.**

Audrey Smith who also occupies the role of McKenzie Friends Coordinator at BEACON, was appointed to the role as Project Coordinator. The work we undertook involved offering holistic support and assistance to ensure the needs of these individuals were met and ultimately to secure options for moving on into other accommodation once the scheme sadly yet inevitably came to an end.

The individuals we supported were experiencing extremely challenging situations and had multiple & complex needs including complicated asylum cases. Ensuring people had all the help they needed involved the provision of intensive support and working together with a range of services. Regular meetings were held between agencies offering support and collaborative relationships with mainstream homelessness and specialist support services were forged. Key partners we worked with included the Salvation Army who offer much-needed support to people experiencing homelessness, the British Red Cross who provided destitution payments and support with asylum support applications, CGL who offered valuable support to people who were tragically suffering with substance misuse,

and charities committed to preventing destitution including Hope Housing, Abigail Housing and Humankind, who were able to ensure a roof was kept over the heads of the people we were working with once the scheme ended.

A key aspect of support was securing access to legal advice in order to determine subsequent options open to those in the scheme. Building on expertise, knowledge and connections gained through her role as McKenzie Friends Coordinator, Audrey was able to secure a solicitor to take on the cases of 8 people in the scheme.

At the start of the project, each person in the scheme was facing destitution and life on the streets. Thanks to Audrey's hard work, patience, persistence, all 10 individuals in the scheme were supported to access accommodation and so were prevented from experiencing destitution when the programme closed.

***"I cannot express how profound my gratitude is towards you. You have changed my life. Before, I had no future, and I didn't know that there were people that cared about anything other than their own affairs. Because of you, I now know there are people in the world who have compassion, understanding, passion and kindness. I feel like a tree that has finally been able to blossom."***

# COMMENT FROM BEACON'S TREASURER

**This year has been a challenging one, but as our figures show, we have come through and are able to plan ahead and continue the work of which we are so proud.**

In particular, the generosity of our funders has ensured that cash flow has been maintained during the course of the pandemic. Funders have been understanding about the need for the charity to have flexibility in the use of its funds coupled with certainty of income. Many thanks are due to all our donors.

The Financial Statements contained within the examined accounts show the year in numbers, but I feel it is important to recognise that they are also a reflection of the hard work of those at BEACON who show all due diligence in our financial management, careful monitoring and control of costs, and in income generation.

**Roland Clark**  
Treasurer



Bradford walking tour

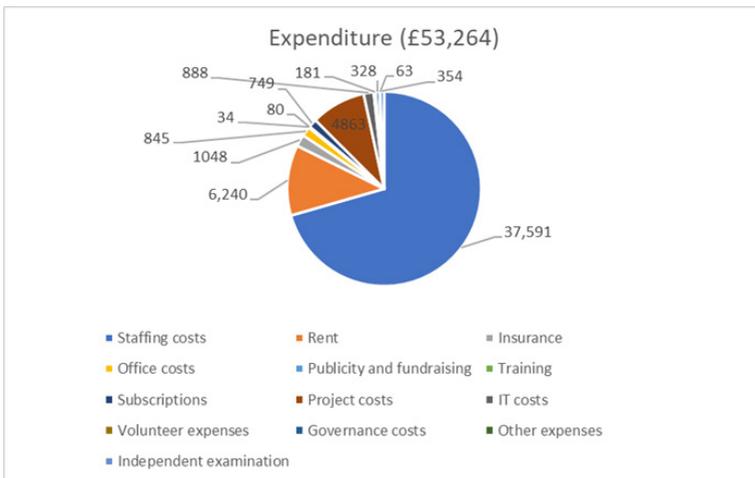
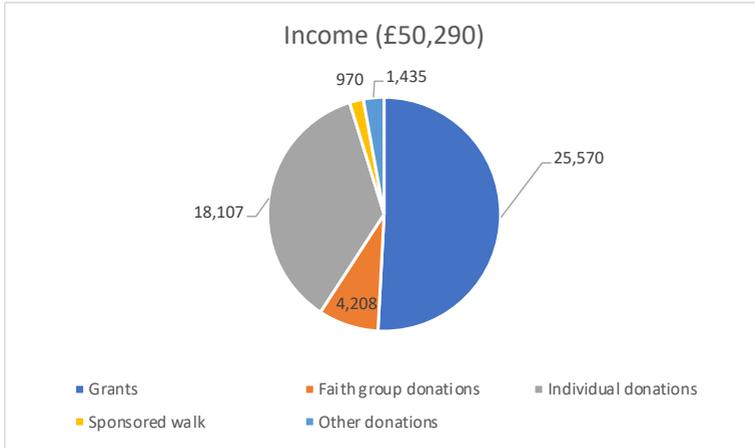


Picnic in the park



Pre-lockdown walk

# INCOME AND EXPENDITURE



Thank you to everyone who supported us financially over the past year. It's thanks to your help that we have been able to help so many people seeking asylum in Bradford in 2020/2021.

# HOW YOU CAN HELP



## **Become a volunteer**

Make a direct difference to the life of someone seeking asylum - get in touch to find out more about what roles we have available



## **Make a donation**

Every little helps and can go a long way to help people seeking asylum – contact us about making a one-off donation or setting up a regular donation to help us on an ongoing basis



## **Fundraise - and have fun!**

From a personal challenge such as running a marathon or giving up chocolate, to holding a coffee morning or a quiz night, we'd love to hear from you!



## **Help us raise awareness**

We can always use help to spread the word about the challenges faced by people seeking asylum – get in touch if you're interested in awareness raising



## **Join our mailing list**

Sign up to receive our newsletter and keep up to date with our work and activities



## **Become a member of BEACON**

As a BEACON member, you can show your support for our vision and objectives and vote at our Annual General Meeting

**For further information, please see our web site  
[www.beaconbradford.org](http://www.beaconbradford.org) or contact us at [beacon@beaconbradford.org](mailto:beacon@beaconbradford.org)  
or on 07419 990578. We look forward to hearing from you!**

***“Those who have desperation as the  
only way – they will find some help at  
BEACON”***



*Welcome the Stranger*

## Contact us:

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