

ANNUAL REVIEW

2021-2022



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INTRODUCTION

from BEACON's Chair of Trustees

'In a world where you can be anything, be kind.'

BEACON strives to be kind, offering welcome and support to people seeking sanctuary in our district. Kindness is also expressed through raising awareness of the difficult situation refugees find themselves in. The need for kindness and hospitality, in an increasingly hostile environment, is greater than ever. I hope that as you read the BEACON annual review, you will be inspired by the way kindness has been expressed.

Present context!

This year has seen the introduction of the Nationality & Borders Act which allows for the "differential treatment of refugees" depending on their mode of arrival, including limiting length of leave, family reunion rights and conditions for settlement.

Yet desperate people continue to risk their lives, with many crossing the English Channel in small boats. According to Home Office figures published in September 2022, over half of the top 10 nationalities applying for asylum have a grant rate above 80% (Iran 82%, Afghanistan 98%, Syria 98%, Eritrea 98%, and Sudan 87%). These figures speak for themselves!

At September 2022, Bradford had some 1,342 individuals living in Home Office accommodation (hotels and housing) (source: Migration Yorkshire). These are people living with not only the trauma of fleeing violence and persecution but also an uncertain future and now, for some, the fear of being flown to Rwanda.

Inspiration

Through the **Together with Refugees** coalition of which BEACON is a member, I came across the comments of Sabir Zazai OBE, who came

to the UK in search of asylum. He says, *'the community welcomed me and the society invested in me for which I am grateful and today I am proud to lead Scottish Refugee Council, Scotland's national refugee agency. I used my own lived experience to help shape the sectors response to the Nationality and Borders Bill. I am privileged to chair the 'Asylum Reform Initiative' and the over 400 members strong 'Together with Refugees', working with people from a cross section of society to ask for a more humane, effective and efficient asylum system. Sabir, on receiving his OBE, goes on, 'every person arriving here also has so much to contribute. We must truly welcome them, celebrate them as equal citizens and invest in their potential. Every refugee has a powerful story of courage, resilience and hope; and every refugee and the people that welcome them deserve an OBE!'*

Goodbyes and thank yous

Sadly, we have said several goodbyes during the year. We thank Roland Clark, for his careful and conscientious oversight of BEACON's finances over the past seven years and wish him well in his new ventures. Thank you also to Andrew Howorth and Aimee Nyembo for their dedicated commitment as BEACON trustees. Thank you to Alice Sizeland our CHAT Coordinator; we wish her every success in her new post.

And as always, I would like to say 'thank you' to our many volunteers, board of trustees, staff team, funders and all who support BEACON with their commitment and prayers. You all deserve an OBE!

Sarah Jemison

Chair of Trustees



TOGETHER WITH REFUGEES

REFLECTIONS

from BEACON's Team Leader

Our vision 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.

It has been another challenging year for many reasons. No sooner did it seem like the pandemic was largely behind us and a level of stability could ensue, than we witnessed the devastation of the war in Ukraine, and the resulting wave of refugees. Politically, we saw the passing of the Nationality and Borders Act, with the threat of deportation to Rwanda weighing heavy on the minds of many. Numbers arriving in the UK soared this year, and we have seen numbers accommodated in Bradford rise considerably. Whilst there was great public sympathy towards refugees when the Ukraine crisis took hold, the media continues to devalue the plight of people seeking asylum and hostility remains high.

Despite the turmoil playing out on the international stage, BEACON has continued to offer welcome and support to those who have fled their countries seeking safety and sanctuary, thanks to our dedicated team of staff and volunteers: opening homes to offer shelter and warmth, providing access to legal support to navigate an increasingly complex system, and offering opportunities to learn English & enjoy social activities.

We were granted additional support from the Lloyds Bank Foundation to work with a fundraising consultant to refine our financial monitoring procedures and develop a fundraising strategy, which we hope will enable us to secure funding to realise our future development plans.

Our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion was progressed, with anti-racism training for our staff and volunteers delivered by 'brap', an organisation specialising in equality and diversity training, which we commissioned

and co-hosted in partnership with Abigail Housing, to ensure this approach is embedded in our work. We also hosted training on working with people who identify as LGBTQI+ which was delivered by Rainbow Migration and attended by professionals from across the UK. We have diversified our volunteer base and undertaken a full review of skills and diversity within our board of trustees, in order to shape our future recruitment plans to ensure we are inclusive and representative as an organisation. Similarly, we took steps to set up a user involvement group, carried out consultations with users in relation to future strategy & planning and recruited people with lived experience to our employment recruitment & selection panels.

Our relationships with partner agencies in Bradford remain strong and have enabled us to work together to support those who need our help. We end the year with plans for a local sector review & planning day to ensure we are able to meet the needs of the increasing numbers arriving in Bradford, both in the immediate term, as well as creating the infrastructure to respond quickly and with agility as a sector to future changes in the longer term.

We find ourselves in unpredictable times at the end of the year, with exponential numbers of people stuck in a broken system and ongoing uncertainty in relation to the government's future plans. Despite this context of apprehension and a rapidly changing political arena, the BEACON team will continue to stand in solidarity and hope with those who need us as we move into the coming year.

Katy Armitstead

Team Leader

HOSTING

Preventing destitution



Once again this year, we have received wonderful news from past guests who have at last been granted Leave to Remain in the UK. Of the 74 who have been hosted since the project began 14 years ago, we know that over half have now achieved this – and suspect that more with whom we have sadly lost touch, will have done also. It's worth remembering that, without the kindness and generosity of our amazing hosts, some of these people would have been forced to return to the warzones from which they fled, or endured years of destitution and exploitation in the UK.

This has, however, been another difficult and unusual year for the project. At the time of writing there are currently 117,400 outstanding applications relating to 143,377 people awaiting an initial decision from the Home Office on their asylum claim, almost 3 times more than the number of applications awaiting an initial decision at the end of 2019 (source: Home Office, September 2022). This, combined with difficulties related to the closure of the key local destitution drop-in for people seeking asylum from which we have received the majority of our referrals over the years, means that, along with other local and national frontline services, referrals to the project have been very low. Understandably, two host households have opted to host Ukrainians via the government's scheme.

The Home Office has however recently appointed over 800 new asylum case workers to address both this backlog, and the very high number of new applications. Along with other members of the Destitution Concern Bradford network, we are seeking ways to re-establish a local drop-in for people seeking asylum and

refugees.

Despite the above, we recruited a new household who welcomed their first guest this year, and our hosts collectively facilitated over 500 safe nights of accommodation during the year. This is far more than just 'B&B'; as the project works to ensure that progress is made on guests' legal cases, facilitates access to healthcare, provides bus passes, encourages and supports people into volunteering placements, English and other classes, and so much more.

We have also been able to share our hosting expertise and experience with potential new hosts looking to host Ukrainians through the Leeds diocese parish network and we continue to be active members of the NACCOM network, receiving and providing mutual support as part of a national community of organisations preventing destitution amongst refugees, people seeking asylum and migrants with no recourse to public funds (NRPF).

531

safe and
secure
nights of
sleep
provided!

CHAT

Conversation and connection

This has been a really positive year as we have finally been able to fully transition back into meeting regularly in person and benefit from much-needed real-life interaction!

After opening the CHAT class back up towards the end of last year after the pandemic had forced many of our activities online, great efforts have been made to take full advantage of our rediscovered freedoms, with several trips taking place throughout the year. The fantastic People and the DALES facilitated 2 trips to the Yorkshire Dales – one to Keasden Head Farm where students got chance to see the farm animals & learn about farming practices, and a beautiful walk in Oxenber Woods above Austwick to see the bluebells in full bloom in the Springtime. Other local trips included an evening at the theatre courtesy of Leeds Playhouse, a visit to the National Science and Media Museum, local parks, and the villages of Saltaire and Thornton, often with a café pit stop for coffee and cake thrown in for good measure.

We've also been able to offer additional activities including online cooking classes with professional chef Sonia Sandhu at the beginning of the year, as well as gardening sessions courtesy of the fantastic Horton Community Farm. Some students also took the opportunity to show off their dance skills, appearing in a locally produced film aiming to promote unity and reconciliation entitled 'Dishta Gina Bradford style'.

Refugee Week saw opportunities for students to see the globally renowned 'Little Amal' visit Bradford, with some students also taking on the challenge of our 10+ mile sponsored walk, whilst others opted for a gentler walk round the Bradford Refugee Week exhibition trail.

Thanks to a partnership run by Bradford Volunteer Centre and Bradford City of Sanctuary, we were pleased to host a useful workshop for students on how to access volunteering opportunities, a much-needed resource to help give purpose and meaning when life can be so challenging.

Lesson themes throughout the year were shaped using student feedback and have been far ranging, from practical activities such as a trip to join the local library and learn about resources available, to cultural topics including Bradford's successful bid for City of Culture 2025, and much more besides.

Above all, we have been able to continue to provide a safe and welcoming space for people of all abilities to practise English and socialise with others. Not only is this an opportunity to improve English making navigating life in the UK that much easier, but crucially, it has a major impact on wellbeing & self-esteem through the laughter and connection that is very much part and parcel of the CHAT group.



56

people
benefited from
CHAT group
activities
this year!

"I will never forget this moment spent together laughing, eating and seeing this beautiful, wonderful green place."

**CHAT student,
following trip to Saltaire**



"Today was an amazing day, an amazing place and an extraordinary group!"

"Thank you so much for planning this trip, we had a lovely day"

**CHAT students, following a trip to
Austwick, Yorkshire Dales**

Feedback from students

100% of students said they enjoyed coming to the class

80% of students said they were satisfied with the learning material

"Thank you so much. I am so happy when I come to this class!"

"I like this class because there are many people, activities and trips."

"I like the amount of fun we have in CHAT class!"

"I like going on the trips because it makes me happy and I enjoy seeing new places."

MCKENZIE FRIENDS

Access to justice

McKenzie Friends supported 60 people this year. In the first half of the year referrals were high but then dropped off significantly in summer, as we saw Home Office decision making slow down, before levelling off at the year end. Many of our referrals this year were complex cases and we increasingly saw people coming to us who were experiencing multiple disadvantage including problems with mental health and substance misuse. We can only imagine the traumas they have faced.

As a result of a reduction in larger face-to-face drop-in services in Bradford, we experienced an increase in self-referrals, with people contacting us with a wider range of needs. As the backlog of people in the system continues to grow, we find people are coming to us for assistance with finding solicitors for their initial asylum claim. There has also been a rise in the number of people seeking help with Article 8 humanitarian protection claims (right to private and family life) which are not funded by Legal Aid. We have completed several Exceptional Case Funding applications and as a result of our interventions, cases are being taken on by local solicitors.

Our partnership with Fisher Stone Solicitors continued throughout the year, with the provision of 16 legal advice sessions. At the year end, we had supported 27 people to find legal representation and heard that 12 people we supported had been granted Leave to Remain – fantastic news! Many of these have been from the Afghan community who have faced long waits and appalling treatment since their arrival in the UK.

Earlier in the year we trained and recruited 7 new volunteers to respond to increased demand. Our new recruits are doing well and are already making a great contribution to the

team. As part of the training, we incorporated a visit to Phoenix House tribunal centre, where the number of appeals being heard each day has been cut to half. The impact on those waiting for an appeal is obvious – even longer waiting times.

Very sadly, we lost a longstanding McKenzie Friend volunteer Jackie Coutts, who passed away in March. Jackie helped countless people over the years and her infectious laugh, passion for justice and candid approach to supporting people seeking asylum will be greatly missed. She will be remembered fondly by all at BEACON. As post-pandemic life brought changes for many this year, we also said goodbye and thank you to Les Goldman and Mac Price, who both stood down as volunteers and are missed for their care and patience.

As we move into very uncertain times and the impact of the Nationality and Borders Act becomes clearer, we are already noticing changes in the way new claims are being dealt with. Changes to rights of appeal for some fresh claims and the application of the ‘inadmissible’ category will certainly impact the work of our project. Together with a massive reduction in Legal Aid solicitors, it is becoming a perfect storm.

The national and local sector of asylum and refugee agencies is working well to support each other and the people we work with. We are paying close attention to changes ‘on the ground’ and seeking advice & guidance to ensure that we focus our energies where we can have the greatest impact in the coming year.

60

people
supported
by
McKenzie
Friends

27

supported to
find legal
representation

12

currently awaiting
decisions
on fresh
asylum
claims

16

legal advice
sessions
provided

12

granted Leave
to Remain
in the UK



Our work is highly valued by legal professionals

"It has been a pleasure to work with all of you over the years, the service provided through your volunteering is hugely important and from our perspective has a tangible effect on outcomes and client wellbeing. Thank you all for your hard work".

**Jack Dingley, Solicitor,
Ison Harrison**

Volunteer voices

"I value the work I do at BEACON as it gives me some sense of agency in what seems to be an increasingly alienated and dysfunctional system. I appreciate the contact I have with people seeking asylum and recognise the hardships and difficulties they face that BEACON can go some way to ameliorating".

**Richard Tassell,
McKenzie Friends volunteer**

"Fisher Stone Solicitors continues to value our relationship with the staff and volunteers at BEACON. In a climate where legal aid provision is so stretched and many people are left without any legal representation at all, it is reassuring to see the team at BEACON step in and support those seeking sanctuary where they can. For us as a legal firm, the support of the McKenzie Friends project has enabled us to take on fresh claim work that we otherwise would not have capacity for, as the volunteers have done the leg work in terms of gathering paperwork, and new evidence where possible. BEACON staff and volunteers have also helped to facilitate appointments with particularly vulnerable clients, by offering a space to meet, a lift to our offices in Halifax, or mutual support, so that appointments can go ahead as smoothly as possible. We look forward to working again with BEACON in the new year".

**Alice Garrod, Senior Legal Caseworker,
Fisher Stone Solicitors**

Wahid's story*

Wahid arrived in the UK in 2008 at the age of fifteen. His age was 'assessed' as 17 so he only enjoyed a year of being treated as a child. Youth services looked after him and he told us he was happier than at any time in his life.

Then, once he officially became 18, his asylum claim was refused, and he was sent back to Afghanistan in 2010. He went to his sister's, the only place he knew, and was not well received as she knew his presence would put her family at risk. Almost immediately they were attacked by the Taliban and Wahid was shot while fleeing. He began the arduous and lengthy journey back to the UK. Neither the Home Office nor the courts believed he was in danger in Afghanistan, in spite of the visible gunshot wound.

He was rescued by a British Pakistani landlord who let him live rent-free in a tiny room for years. Wahid was too anxious and depressed to leave the room except when taken out by his friend, who took him to the Red Cross and from there to McKenzie Friends.

After much initial work and support from McKenzie Friends volunteers, together with caseworkers at Manuel Bravo charity in Leeds, we eventually found him an excellent solicitor and Wahid was referred to a specialist psychiatrist in London. McKenzie Friends volunteers arranged the journey and accompanied him to London, door to door. Professor Katona's report, combined with new case law, enabled Wahid's grant of refugee status in May 2022. This was a great relief as another young Afghan man with a similar history, the same solicitor and psychiatrist, whose fresh claim was submitted at the same time, received his grant of status over a year earlier. But that's the way the Home Office rolls...

Given that for years, extreme anxiety had brought his life to a standstill, we were astonished to find that only a few weeks after Bradford Council helped him negotiate the job centre, Wahid was working, and pushing the job centre to help him find a better job, confident as anything! He is now applying for a travel document. We don't think he would have got there without McKenzie Friends.

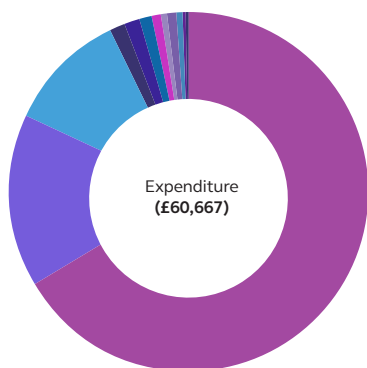
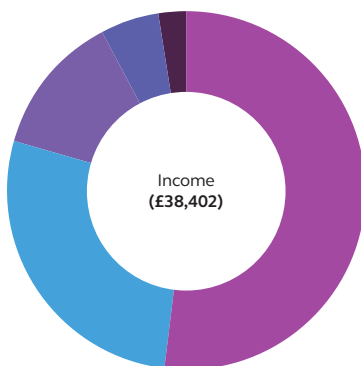
* Name has been changed

"We got stuck in pursuing our case. We approached BEACON who are so wonderful – they are the ones who came to our aid. They sorted things out for us. We had support from the McKenzie Friends volunteers who were so fantastic. They managed to find us legal representation, and not only that, we finally got our status because of BEACON, after many long years in limbo. We are finally free!"

**Couple supported by
McKenzie Friends**

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

- £20,000 Grants
- £10,541 Individual donations
- £4,887 Faith group donations
- £2,098 Other donations
- £876 Sponsored walk



- £40,414 Staffing costs
- £9,389 Project costs
- £6,603 Rent
- £796 Office costs
- £793 Insurance
- £655 Training
- £586 IT costs
- £397 Subscriptions
- £390 Independent examination
- £317 Governance costs
- £298 Volunteer expenses
- £24 Publicity and fundraising
- £5 Other expenses

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 2021/2022.

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 are available

Make a donation

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

Fundraise - and have fun!

From a personal challenge such as running a race 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 or contact us at beacon@beaconbradford.org or on 07419 990578. We look forward to hearing from you!







“Charities like BEACON are the lifeblood of society. They are there for the long haul, and never give up, despite circumstances. Without them the UK would be a much poorer place. They are well worth your support!”

Dave Smith, founder of the Boaz Trust and the NACCOM network

BEACON
(Bradford Ecumenical Asylum Concern)

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