

# ANNUAL REVIEW

2022-2023



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*“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**

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# BEACON'S VISION

*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.*

All BEACON's activities are unpinned by our vision. In challenging circumstances, we have continued to offer hospitality, generous welcome and compassionate support to people seeking sanctuary in our district. In the face of the hostile environment, which seeks to misrepresent and dehumanise vulnerable people seeking sanctuary, the need to affirm and nurture communities of hospitality and welcome is a present and urgent task. A task to which BEACON volunteers, staff and trustees have been committed for almost 20 years.

## The harsh reality

The situation for people seeking sanctuary in the UK is bleak. In addition to the Nationality & Borders Act (2022), the Illegal Migration Act came into effect in July 2023. Unless they arrive in the UK by 'legal routes', people seeking sanctuary, will never be granted leave to remain, have a right to work or seek family reunion. Even though the Supreme Court has ruled the Rwanda scheme unlawful, traumatised people are still living under the threat of deportation. The Illegal Migration Act was promoted as a way 'to stop the boats' however, it's reach is much wider. It contains changes that will affect nearly all those seeking sanctuary, covering removals, immigration detention, inadmissibility and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. All this even though there are very few safe, legal routes to safety. No legal routes exist for people to enter the UK to claim asylum.

People seeking sanctuary continue to risk their lives. In the year ending June 30th 2023 there were 91,918 applications for asylum in the UK. 46% of those applicants had crossed the English Channel in small boats. The majority of those making that perilous journey came

from just five countries: Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Eritrea and Syria. The backlog of people waiting for a decision on their asylum claim continues to rise as at 24th August 2023 there were 175,457 with 67,870 who had been waiting over 12 months (source Migration Yorkshire). Each of these statistics is a person whose life is on hold, with no choice of accommodation and a weekly allowance of £47.39 to cover food, clothing, toiletries, and travel. If you're given accommodation where meals are provided, then you receive only £9.58 per week.

## BEACON, Bradford – from vision to action

In September 2023, Bradford had some 1,309 individuals living in dispersed accommodation (source: Migration Yorkshire). Over the past year, BEACON has supported 169 individuals, an incredible achievement for our fifteen volunteers, and four part-time staff members. As you will read in our project reports, the support BEACON volunteers have given has enhanced the lives of all the individuals concerned. They have experienced warmth and hospitality, not hostility.

BEACON was proud to partner with Right to Remain to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Right to Remain Toolkit (<https://righttoremain.org.uk/the-toolkit-returns-to-bradford/>). With scarce Legal Aid and Immigration Lawyers, the ground-breaking self-help resource, the online Toolkit, was born at the start of the hostile environment policy.

In 2003 the National Coalition of Anti Deportation Campaigns (as they were then known) began developing its first Campaigning Toolkit. It consisted of a booklet to help readers understand the UK's asylum and immigration system and to provide tools to campaign

for the right to remain. NCADC called upon allies across the country to provide feedback and evaluation. One such organisation was BEACON, whose McKenzie Friends volunteers helped shape the online toolkit in its current form. It continues to be an invaluable resource for both people seeking sanctuary and those who support them.

## Thank you!

Despite 2022/23 being a particularly challenging year, volunteers, staff and trustees have continued to give of their time, care and skills in their commitment to support some of the most vulnerable people in our communities. Thank you!

When Will Sutcliffe, who had established and managed the Hosting Project on a voluntary basis, resigned BEACON had planned to recruit a paid coordinator. Unfortunately, this had to be put on hold. We are immensely grateful to Will for his fifteen years supporting both hosts and guests.

In April 2023, Amanda Labbett, who had been BEACON's finance and admin worker since 2016, successfully applied for a new post. This enabled her to work much nearer home. Over the years, Amanda had developed her role playing a crucial part in the smooth running of BEACON.

Amanda generously offered to stay in post until an appointment was made to help with the transition. Due to unforeseen circumstances, Amanda stayed with us until October! Typical of Amanda's commitment to BEACON and the people we support. She has worked tirelessly for BEACON over so many years, helping to manage the move, with Touchstone, to new premises and the expansion of the staff team. We will miss her and wish her well in her new post.

Katy Armitstead, our Team Leader, began sick leave in May. Sadly, this has turned out to be long term. We wish her well in her recovery. As a consequence of the Team Leader's absence, various planned developments have been put on hold.

A big thank you goes to all our staff team for their commitment to BEACON – both our service users and volunteers – to ensure that the charity continues to make people seeking

asylum welcome, are given support to access legal advice and empowered on their journey to independence and integration.

## Welcome!

Staff - in September we were pleased to appoint Celia Hickson, a wealth of experience, including administration in the voluntary sector, as our Finance and Administration Officer.

Trustees - over the past year, we have been encouraged by the strengthening of our trustee board. In January 2023 **Martin Lewis** joined the trustee board as treasurer – a qualified accountant and experienced Head of Internal Audit and Risk Management with Not-for-profit, financial services (retail banking, investment management, insurance), Big 4 Accounting Firm, public sector and higher education experience.

In September 2023 **Lisa Ceesay** joined us, bringing her lived experience of the asylum system. She is a public health professional with a proven record implementing, monitoring and supervising community public health activities. At present Lisa is working for Bradford Council as a Refugee & New Communities Integration Officer.

And **Karen Thornton**, assistant professor, University of Bradford, successfully applied to join the trustee board. She is programme leader for the BA Film and Television Production at the University of Bradford and has worked with communities who don't have access to technology to tell their own stories, in their own words. In addition to working in a University of Sanctuary, Karen has been involved with Bradford Schools of Sanctuary.

## Hope and hospitality

As always, I want to say 'thank you' to all who give BEACON their time, energy, and expertise: our many volunteers, personal donors, staff team, board of our trustees and funders. As we move into the coming year, you are offering hope and hospitality to those who need us.

## Sarah Jemison

Chair of Trustees



**TOGETHER WITH REFUGEES**

# McKENZIE FRIENDS

## Access to justice

Firstly, thanks to our fantastic team of volunteers who, despite everything, keep going to help bridge the widening gap that prevents migrants accessing justice.

Volunteers have supported more than 82 people this year, 46 cases carried over from the previous year and a further 36 new cases. The main countries of origin are Iraq (25%), Iran, Ethiopia, Sudan and Pakistan.

We supported 17 to find legal representation, this includes support for people who needed to submit an appeal to the First Tier Tribunal. Eight people made fresh submissions. Nine people, who we supported, received their Leave to Remain.

We help people gather evidence to make fresh submissions and to find solicitors. Volunteers are making greater use of the initiative set up by the law firm, Clifford Chance, where pro bono solicitors provide up to date country information, often very specific to the person we are supporting. These reports help to make the case to a solicitor who can then access legal aid to commission further expert reports.

We work closely with Bevan Wellbeing Centre and Abigail Housing to make sure that people are accessing as much help as possible.

This year some of the people we work with have lost their solicitor at appeal stage, so we have supported them with the electronic appeals process, contacting the courts and again supporting people to navigate the appeals process without a legal representative. We continue to help with Exceptional Case Funding applications, which reduces the workload on solicitors.

### Volunteers

Volunteer recruitment has been made more flexible and we have a rolling programme of training. We currently have 14 volunteers, including three new people who have been made very welcome and engaged quickly with our work.

### Events and Training

We have also been invited to join training organised by Refugee Action, St Augustine's and Migration Yorkshire.

A highlight - we partnered with Right to Remain to celebrate the Tenth Anniversary of their 'Tool Kit', which is aimed at providing people seeking asylum, knowledge and understanding of the process. Over 20 different organisations were represented, and more than 50 participants attended.

### Current climate

The Red Cross recently published a report, 'State of the Nation', using public data that showed the following:

- ▶ The asylum backlog is 175,457, the highest recorded and a 450 per cent increase in the last five years.
- ▶ In 2014, nearly 9 in 10 people who applied for asylum received a decision within six months. At the end of 2022, just over 1 in 10 did. In June 2023, 80% of the people in the asylum backlog had been waiting more than six months for an initial decision.
- ▶ There has been a significant decrease in the numbers of people seeking asylum accessing legal aid.

### The Future

BEACON's McKenzie Friends have adapted and supported the destitute and unrepresented people seeking sanctuary for nearly 20 years. We are really fortunate to have all our committed volunteers, trustee supporters and grant funders.

MFs will continue to do what we do but, with a shortage of legal aid, we need to consider the best way to use the huge potential we have in our volunteers. This includes whether or not we should be looking to take the much-mentioned steps needed to register as an advice-giving organisation; thus expanding the work we do to ensure that as many people in Bradford can get the help they need.



### Of the Bradford celebration, Right to Remain said

*“It felt congruous to be back in Bradford, partnering once more with BEACON, to celebrate 10 years of the Toolkit with organisations and groups supporting people seeking asylum in this region.”*

## Our work is highly valued

### Support and guidance

“We wanted to thank you (MF’s) for all the support you have given this past year with helping our clients. At least three of our clients have sourced legal representation or have felt supported and not alone due to the help and support you provide. As you are aware with the current climate legal aid immigration solicitors at present are few or nonexistent. Without your service our service users would be at a loss. It is such a stressful time for them when claiming asylum. The added worry of not having legal representation is quite distressing for clients, who a lot of the time, have already been through trauma. I cannot thank you (MF’s) enough for being there offering support and guidance to find legal representation and supporting them through their journey”.

**Sharon Ludbrook Salvation Army  
Specialist Support Worker**

### Credibility

“I said he had been believed in court when he gave evidence in T’s case. On the application of current caselaw their case succeeded on Humanitarian Grounds

BEACON were aware of K’s credibility with the courts and the caselaw that could be used in this case. All I did was put it in”

**Ms Caroline Wilson-Brown  
Solicitor, Asylum and Immigration Supervisor**

**Citizens Advice Bradford & Airedale and  
Bradford Law Centre**

## Ahmed's\* Story

We first met Ahmed in October 2019. He was 43 years old, ethnically Turkmen, from the Kurdistan region of Iraq. He had claimed asylum in 2005 so had been living in the UK for 14 years with no positive outcome on his asylum case. He had spent long periods in destitution and was entirely reliant on assistance from members of the local Kurdish community.

Ahmed's case was taken up by two McKenzie Friends, one being a retired GP, and this latter fact became key in terms of pursuing the case. Ahmed presented to us as extremely mentally ill, unable to communicate and with evidence of self-harm.

Our first priority was to help Ahmed find assistance with his living situation as the severity of his mental illness meant that he was no longer able to rely on the goodwill of friends. However, not long after we met him, Ahmed attempted to take his own life and was sectioned.

On release from hospital, with our intervention, Bradford Council's asylum support team found Ahmed housing. Meanwhile, we trawled through his papers so that we could present his case to a solicitor. The process was slow, held up by the pandemic and the shortage of legal representatives. Eventually, the excellent solicitor at Bradford Citizens Advice agreed to take his case. She commissioned an expert report from a psychiatrist. Our retired GP was able to assist the solicitor with the time-consuming process of accessing medical records.

A fresh claim was submitted in January 2022 and after waiting more than a year Ahmed was finally granted humanitarian protection in March 2023, 18 years after his arrival here and three and a half years from his first encounter with McKenzie Friends. Of course, we were delighted by the news. However, for Ahmed the years of poverty and despair have left him with such severe mental illness that he remains in need of constant support. He is a casualty of our hostile system. McKenzie Friends were key in helping Ahmed to procure status here, but his life of difficulties continues, alongside many of our own citizens who cannot access housing and sufficient mental health support.

\*not his real name

## S's story

S is Ethiopian and a member of the minority Qimnant tribe. He left Ethiopia four years ago after going into hiding following the arrest, detention and disappearance of his brothers and father by the authorities. The arrests and detention were linked to their alleged activism on behalf of their tribe who, it is recorded, have been seeking rights of representation for their tribal group.

S spent time in Italy, Germany and briefly Sweden before arriving in the UK. His claim for asylum had been rejected in Italy and Germany.

S was referred to BEACON as his case seemed intractable. Jointly working with a MF volunteer, he was encouraged and supported to seek further evidence from his mother and remaining family in Ethiopia.

S was hosted with two families. This gave S stability, and he was able to move on to Abigail Housing. He had established contact with an Ethiopian Church Leeds which gave him invaluable contact with Amharic speakers and connections to his traditions.

With more encouragement and support, S was able to obtain new evidence which was sent by his mother from Ethiopia. This included a court document seeking S's arrest and a certificate validating his identity from a local elder. An experienced immigration lawyer was able, with the support of a country expert, to submit a fresh claim on S's behalf. The outcome for S is awaited.

BEACON's MF volunteers had succeeded in their aim to support S obtain legal representation.

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# CHAT

## Conversation and connection

The class has grown from strength to strength this year. It has been a privilege to welcome participants from twenty-two different nations through our doors and there is always a wonderful atmosphere in the room as participants talk and laugh and share experiences and cultures together.

We have enjoyed welcoming visitors to the class from various organisations. We have continued our connection with Volunteering Bradford and are proud of our participants who are now regularly volunteering for different organisations in Bradford. We enjoyed a mindful craft session making lavender bags with the Hive Bradford where we discovered lots about the participants' creative skills and we also had a visit from Leeds-based Playback Theatre Company who showed us their improvisational skills and taught us some fun games.

We've also managed to get out and about in the local community and beyond. We went on a trip to the library and helped participants to get library cards then popped to a local cafe; we spent a wet but educational morning at Horton Community Farm where participants loved learning about British plants and flowers. We have visited museums and galleries, including Cartwright Hall and Cliffe Castle Museum where we also enjoyed the lovely parks and cafés. We had a special time in Saltaire where we were welcomed for a traditional afternoon tea in the home of two of our priceless volunteers and visited the surrounding area, including the river.

For Refugee Week, the students planned a bring and share picnic at Horton Park. The sun shone for us and we enjoyed some beautiful home-made food while chatting and relaxing in the sunshine.

Early in the year, we asked students what they would like to talk about during our time together and, thanks to their feedback, we have chatted about all sorts of topics ranging from culture and festivals to health and well-being and, of course, we have talked a lot about food.

Although students come and go, we have been encouraged by a core group of regular attendees who often invite friends and new arrivals to come and check us out. The class is a safe and welcoming space where participants treat one another with respect and kindness.

We are thankful that CHAT feels like more than an English class, it is a place to build confidence and self-esteem, to make new friends and connect with old ones.



85

people  
benefited from  
CHAT group  
activities  
this year!





### CHAT ENGLISH CLASS

*When one student got moved to another city, she told us “I miss you so much, you are my second family”.*

*Another student messaged after her first visit to our class saying “Thank you very much for today. I really needed a group to talk to and make new friends.”*



### APRIL 2023 TRIP TO SALTAIRE

*“Thank you for organising this trip. I really enjoyed it”*

*“Nice trip. Short, meaningful and enjoyable trip.... Thank you”*

## REFUGEE WEEK 2023 - HORTON PARK BRING AND SHARE PICNIC

*"Thank you for all those wonderful types of food. They are delicious."*



## CHAT QUOTE – HORTON COMMUNITY FARM APRIL 2023

*“Today we spent a great time with you. Big respect and admiration for all the staff and volunteers, we are proud of you”*

*“Thank you very much, it was a really nice time”*



## HOSTING Preventing destitution

This is a brief report only as, following my request to the trustees to stand down from my role as volunteer Project Coordinator after 15 years, we closed the project to new referrals at the start of the financial year.

Just one ‘legacy’ guest continued to be hosted until, after nine months with two wonderful host households, he was able to move on in happy circumstances in July.

Given the healthy state of the charity’s reserves at the beginning of our financial year, the trustees made the decision to create a part-time funded post and this was advertised. Very disappointingly however, a significant and unexpected loss of anticipated funding income meant that we had to withdraw the advert

before an appointment was made. The project has therefore been suspended since, pending identification of new funding. This in turn has been severely impacted by the long-term sickness of our wonderful Team Leader.

This has been particularly disappointing as, with the Home Office’s efforts to drastically reduce the record backlog in asylum decisions (currently over 175,000), the incidence of homelessness among those who have received negative decisions has significantly increased.

On a positive note, we have continued to receive periodic news of ex-guests who have eventually been granted Leave to Remain in the UK and are now rebuilding their lives.

**Will Sutcliffe**

# REFUGEE WEEK

‘Walk of Welcome’



## The Lord Mayor sends us on our way!

In a departure from the pattern of the past 13 years, in 2023 we chose a new theme and route for our annual sponsored awareness-raising walk, focusing on BEACON's vision that 'Bradford district becomes a hospitable community where people seeking asylum and refugees are welcome'.

Instead of the usual route following the canal to Kirkstall, we visited 9 amazing venues around the city centre known for offering a warm welcome and vital support services to asylum seekers and refugees. Starting in City Park, the route included the Al Mahdi Mosque in BD3, the SHINE project in BD5, the Schools of Sanctuary Refugee Week children's art exhibition at the Trapezium gallery and ended at Horton Community Farm.

We were bowled over by the generosity of each, learned about the services they offer, drank their tea – and made use of their facilities!

# INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

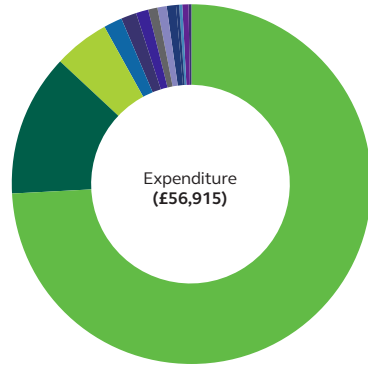
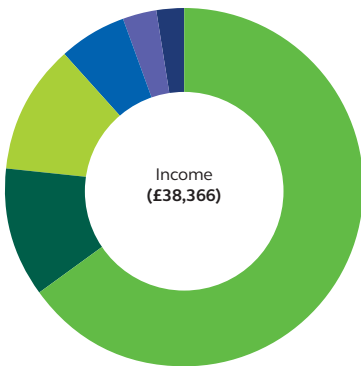
## Treasurer's Report

As we emerged from the constraints of the Covid pandemic, this year has been a challenging one. Despite this, we were able to plan ahead and purposefully used surplus reserves to enable us to continue the work of which we are so proud.

In particular, the continued generosity of our funders has ensured that cash flow was maintained enabling a steady use of reserves. 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.

### Martin Lewis - Treasurer



£25,000 Grants

£4,505 Faith group donations

£4,477 Individual donations

£2,348 Events

£1,164 Other donations

£872 Gift Aid

£40,414 Staffing costs

£6,842 Rent

£2,719 Project costs

£985 Office costs

£796 Governance costs

£591 Insurance

£456 Subscriptions

£420 Independent examination

£415 IT costs

£216 Publicity and fundraising

£165 Other expenses

£199 Volunteer expenses

£105 Training



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# 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](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!**



**BEACON**  
**(Bradford Ecumenical Asylum Concern)**

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