



# BEACON

ANNUAL REVIEW 2023-2024



**TOGETHER WITH REFUGEES**

## OUR HOME<sup>1</sup>

### Chair's Report

#### Bradford

We want Bradford be a place where everyone can proudly say “Bradford is Our Home. Here we are safe to enjoy the company of family and friends. Our needs are met. We are able to grow and flourish. We are respected and treated fairly. Our skills are valued. We are able to support ourselves, our families and contribute to the good of our community.”

Sadly, we're not quite there yet.

However, as you read this report, you will see how, during the past year, BEACON has continued to play a significant, part in the transformation process. We continue to ‘punch well above our weight’!

#### The bigger picture

Following the change of government in July, the still uncertain future for people seeking sanctuary in the UK, looks more hopeful. The traumatising, unlawful Rwanda scheme has been scrapped. There is a promise to reform resettlement routes and to clear the asylum backlog, which now includes all those who were formerly prevented from claiming protection in the UK by the Illegal Migration Act. These changes are welcome!

However, BEACON is well aware of shortcomings in the government's promise to ‘restore order to the asylum system so that

it operates swiftly, firmly and fairly.’ So, as one of 300 organisations supporting people seeking asylum in our communities<sup>2</sup> we wrote to the Prime Minister with a blueprint for a compassionate and just refugee protection system. This included - a commitment to ruling out offshore processing of asylum claims, resolving the legal aid crisis ensuring access to good legal advice and restoring the right to work for people seeking asylum so people can rebuild their lives in dignity and contribute to the UK economy.

#### Our local context

In September 2024, Bradford was ‘home’ to some 1,614 individuals living in dispersed accommodation<sup>3</sup>. This is approximately 20% of those seeking sanctuary in our Yorkshire and Humber region. Over the past year, BEACON's committed and caring volunteers and staff have supported 169 individuals, through our CHAT (English language support) and McKenzie Friends (legal support) projects. We are proud of the positive impact this support has had on the lives of those individuals and the volunteers who supported them.

BEACON has continued, in partnership with other Bradford based agencies, to contribute to the weekly drop in, ‘Your Space’, hosted at Bevan Wellbeing and to develop a monthly programme, ‘Bradford Community – Learning Together’ for volunteers and staff working in the refugee and asylum sector.

To people seeking sanctuary, BEACON has continued to raise awareness of asylum issues in various ways: through delivering presentations to churches and other organisations across the Bradford District; online campaigning;

<sup>1</sup> Our Home – theme of Refugee Week 2024.

<sup>2</sup> <https://asylumatters.org/2024/07/08/joint-public-letter-to-the-incoming-prime-minister/>

<sup>3</sup> Source: Migration Yorkshire

participating in the 'Great Get Together' during Refugee Week; and through our annual sponsored 'Walk of Welcome' which this year highlighted some of the places in Bradford which seek to make it a welcoming and safe home to those seeking sanctuary.

## Challenge and change

In April, we appointed Jenny Ramsden as BEACON's Interim Team Leader as sadly, our Team Leader, Katy Armitstead continued on long term sick leave. Jenny quickly and flexibly took on the varied tasks of the role. We are so grateful for the way she has brought stability and support to the staff team, trustees and volunteers. At the same time gently encouraging new ideas.

In the summer, BEACON down sized a little. Still within Touchstone, we now have two smaller offices, allowing for more flexibility and privacy, especially for the needs of the McKenzie Friends volunteers and their clients.

Throughout the year, we have been challenged to recruit sufficient volunteers to meet the increasing needs of those seeking BEACON's support. We are grateful to the University of Bradford, who produced a video for us which included interviews with some of our present volunteers, highlighting the rewards and fulfilment volunteering brings.

BEACON began the year with a challenging budget. But as you will see in the treasurer's report, our fund raising exceeded our expectations. Thank you to all who contributed to the success.

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 trustees, supporters and funders. You are all helping to create Bradford, our home!

## Sarah Jemison

Chair of Trustees



Sarah and Jenny with Wan Abdullah from 'Sanctuary Got Talent'

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*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.*

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# McKENZIE FRIENDS

## Access to justice

Over the last year the McKenzie Friends staff and volunteers have had some great results. In the past twelve months we received 51 referrals, and our McKenzie Friends volunteers are currently working with 40 people seeking asylum. The majority of the clients we have been working over the past year have been from Iraq (18%) with other nationalities reflecting the situation internationally with five people each from Ethiopia, Sudan, Eritrea and Afghanistan. A number of people from Nigeria and Pakistan have also come to seek support; it is particularly hard to help young men from these countries, especially in current times when there is such limited access to legal aid solicitors.

McKenzie friends have had many positive outcomes over the past year - 13 people seeking asylum that we supported have been given Leave to Remain in the UK; determination played its part in securing solicitors for 10 of our clients; and 6 people that we have found solicitors for have now lodged their Further Submissions.

The following summaries illustrate the bigger picture and show how lengthy the process is.

### Zayaan's\* Story

Zayaan\* was referred to McKenzie Friends in October 2020. McKenzie Friends gathered and collated documents and reports and found him a solicitor. After a year, in February '22, the solicitor put in Further Submissions. These were refused but were resubmitted in October 2022. Finally, another sixteen months later, in February '24, Zayaan was awarded Leave to Remain.

### Amina's\* Story

Another case study involves a woman, Amina\*. Amina has three children: one child is British; of her other two children one is under 18 and one is over 18. After a long wait Amina's asylum claim was submitted. Amina then had to wait more than a year for her claim to be granted - but it was only granted for her and two of her children - her older child's was

refused. To leave children in limbo in this way means to deprive them of opportunity and does nothing for our society as a whole.

### Kwame's\* Story

Another case that McKenzie Friends took on in 2021 further demonstrates the length of time that people seeking asylum are having to wait whilst their cases are assessed. It took us a year to get a solicitor for Kwame\*, in part because of their mental ill health and dependency on alcohol. Once we found him a solicitor, it then took the solicitor a further 20 months to prepare the Further Submissions. However, there was a positive outcome - we were surprised to get a positive home office decision only eight months later.

From these examples it is easier to see the type of support offered by our volunteers, over a long period of time.

Access to legal aid solicitors is at crisis point. While we are relieved that the current government have scrapped the Rwanda scheme, decisions on asylum cases made by the home office are slowing down, and it's also being reported that more negative decisions are being seen. This in turn creates the problem of appeals, as there are not many solicitors taking on appeals, and some solicitors are dropping their clients prior to lodging an appeal.

This puts a huge strain on the community voluntary sector to deal with the fall out, especially around destitution, poor physical and mental health.

In other news we have recruited 3 new volunteers and played a key role in the development of the 'Your Space' drop in hosted at Bevan Wellbeing - a weekly multi-agency drop-in service that offers advice and information for people seeking sanctuary. We have continued to work with the working group that put together the bid for the 'Your Space' drop in to develop 'Bradford Community - Learning Together' - a monthly programme of networking, training and information open to all staff and volunteers in the sector in Bradford, which is a positive development.

\*not their real names

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# WALK OF WELCOME

## Annual Sponsored Walk

This year our annual sponsored 'Walk of Welcome' was inspired by the Refugee Week theme for 2024 – 'Our Home'. Our route took us around Bradford providing opportunities to visit some of the inspiring places of welcome in our city which seek to make Bradford a welcoming and safe Home to those seeking sanctuary.

Our walkers gathered in Centenary Square, where Sofia Buncy DL sent us on our way with some beautiful words of welcome. We then visited The Anchor Project at St Clements Church, Barkerend; The Al Mahdi Mosque off Otley Road; The Millside Centre on Grattan Road; Touchstone; The Landmark Centre at All Saints Church in Little Horton Green, and Bradford African Community, based at the Quaker Meeting House on Russell Street. We were delighted that the Bradford Women for Peace joined us at the conclusion of our walk to weave a 'Web of Solidarity' with us all.

At each venue we received a warm welcome and the opportunity to learn about the services they offer to people seeking asylum and refugees. One of our walkers said afterwards: "The BEACON walk, through little-known parts of central Bradford, was akin to turning over stones on a featureless beach and finding a jewel beneath each one. We received warm welcomes from people of all faiths and none, ready to open their hearts to us. A wonderful experience." And another walker said: "It was such a joy to feel human courage and commitment in action all along the route".

With huge thanks to all those who made our 'Walk of Welcome' such a wonderful and heartwarming experience.



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# CHAT

## Conversation and connection

CHAT is a well-established community conversation class that has been attended by 105 people from 22 different nations in the past twelve months. One of the strengths of the class is the broad mix of people from different backgrounds with a variety of first languages that attend, they share their experiences together, encourage and learn from one another.

Another strength is our incredible group of faithful volunteers who are committed to attending the class and making the experience as rewarding as possible for our participants.

In the past 12 months we have made some new connections in the local community and strengthened some established ones. We worked with the 'Together Cafe' project at the University of Bradford to help the University improve their connections with groups in the local community. Through this, we were connected with the BReaThe project (Building Resilience Through Heritage) who visited our class twice to help participants explore landmarks and sites of interest from their home countries using VR.

We welcomed Rachael Dodgson from UK Parliament who led a session to help our participants learn about how the UK is governed and ways that they can have their say in local politics. And the Green Doctors provided a helpful session on ways to keep our homes warm and well insulated. We have also maintained our positive relationship with Inclusive Volunteering Bradford and District, who have been able to support some of our participants into volunteering positions as well as providing us with a new volunteer.

At CHAT, we try to provide our participants with opportunities to explore the local community as well as visit places they may not have the chance to go to and this year has been no exception. We attended interactive workshops at the University of Bradford and Displace Yourself Theatre, we visited the library and obtained library cards, and we ventured

further afield to enjoy a sunny day in Skipton exploring the woods and canal. 34 participants have attended at least one of these trips.

We asked the participants what they enjoy about the class, and these are some of their comments: 'I like talking and learning new words.' 'I like speaking together.' 'Get to know people from different cultures and the volunteers help me a lot in developing my language.' 'Volunteers friendly interaction with students.' 'Everything I like in the class, activities, games teaching, volunteers help.'

When we asked them how we could improve the class, the most common request was for more classes during the week!



105

people  
benefited from  
CHAT group  
activities  
this year!

from

22

different  
nations!



Skipton Trip and Visiting the University and grounds

# INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

## Treasurer's Report

As we entered our 2023-24 financial year, the Trustees knew that we had significant fundraising challenges ahead having used surplus balances in the previous year to fund a large proportion of our work. With the assistance of an external consultant, who identified potential grant funding opportunities and helped prepare grant applications, we succeeded in raising more than £71,000 from funders. Nearly a half of these grants were given for specific purposes (restricted funds). Not all of these were spent in the year, which has meant we have carried forward a balance of unspent restricted funds into 2024-25 amounting to nearly £17,500.

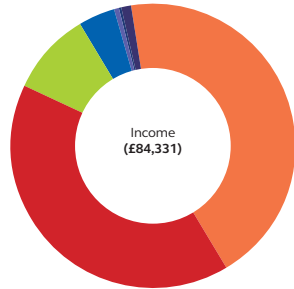
We have also benefitted from the continued generosity of donors with more than £11,000 having been donated to BEACON by individuals and by faith groups. I give many thanks to all our donors for their continued support.

The success of our fundraising and the generosity of our donors has also meant that we were able to carry forward a surplus of unrestricted funds (free reserves) of a little more than £52,500 into 2024-25.

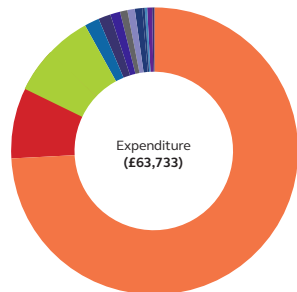
The largest item of our expenditure is our staffing costs. We are extremely lucky to employ a small team of dedicated staff who are committed to BEACON's vision and purpose. Without them we would not function and would not be able to provide the services that we do. Elsewhere in this report are the details of the achievements of our McKenzie Friends and CHAT projects so I do not intend repeating them here. But suffice it to say, those achievements would not be possible without the hard work of our staffing team and the volunteers who work, for no financial recompense, alongside them. Thank you all.

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



- £37,000 Grants - restricted
- £34,400 Grants - unrestricted
- £7,915 Individual donations
- £3,458 Faith Group Donations
- £1,164 Other income
- £872 Gift Aid
- £855 Bank interest



- £44,340 Staffing costs
- £6,690 Rent
- £5,353 Project costs
- £2,000 Fundraising
- £1,158 IT Costs
- £990 Office Expenses
- £726 Independent examination
- £672 Governance
- £600 Insurance
- £385 Subscriptions
- £362 Traingng
- £264 Volunteer expenses
- £193 Publicity and funding

## 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

## CONTACT DETAILS

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