

2021-2022 ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS



One of our trustees is reunited with his family after being separated from them for 3 years.



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Charity Reg No: 1098058
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Organisational and contact details	2
A Message from our Patrons	4
Vision and Mission	5
Values	6
Chair's Report	7
CEOs' Reports	9
Treasurer's Report	11
Key Outputs	12
Mental Health	13
Fundraising and Communications	14
Corporate Partner	16
Invitation: Corporate Partner 2023	17
Casework Services	18
Resettlement Team	
Reading & Wokingham	20
West Berkshire	21
Drop-in Centre	22
Reading City of Sanctuary	24
Homework Club	26
Trans-National Research	27
Income and Expenditure	28
Donors and Funders	29
Volunteers	31
Appeal – New Office	32
Staff Team	33
Trustees	34
Alice	35
Leave a Gift in your Will	36



With thanks to Sorrell for all her hard work producing this Annual Report



A MESSAGE FROM OUR PATRONS



Lord Alf Dubs



Olivia Graham
Bishop of Reading

This year has been an arduous one for all of us, starting with recovering from the Covid pandemic, then the Afghanistan crisis, the Ukraine crisis and the cost of living rising. Refugee Support Group has responded well and expanded their services to fit the needs of others.

As the views of immigration shift more negatively each year due to media and the government, I will continue to lobby against the Nationality and Borders Bill and the Rwanda flights, which will punish people for seeking protection in this country, and help protect the staff and service users, so we can create a world where everyone is accepted and welcomed.

Small community charities like Refugee Support Group help support vulnerable people and this year has highlighted how essential their work is for refugees across Berkshire. I am proud to be a part of this organisation.

Alf Dubs

Just like last year, it has been a very difficult year for refugees and asylum seekers. The implementation of the Nationality and Borders Bill has created a sense of fear within the refugee community.

Refugee Support Group and City of Sanctuary have worked tirelessly over this last year to help combat this growing fear and give a sense of hope to the community. The work that they do is so vital, especially the support they give for mental health; the need for this support has dramatically increased so I am very proud of RSG for responding to this need so quickly.

My heartfelt thanks and prayers go to all the staff, trustees, and volunteers as well as to every refugee and asylum seeker that they work with and support. I am very proud to be a Patron at RSG, and wish them all the best with their incredible work for the next year.

+Olivia Graham
Bishop of Reading



VISION & MISSION

Our Vision is for an inclusive and supportive society where refugees and asylum seekers are treated with humanity, dignity and respect.

As was our focus last year, we continued our campaigns including Lift the Ban and arguing for Safe Routes as well as campaigning against the Nationality and Borders Bill.



We continue to partner with other organisations, helping to make Berkshire a community that welcomes refugees and asylum seekers and treats them with respect. Some organisations that we partner with include: The Poppy Project; Talking Therapies; and Hempen Farm.



Our Mission is to improve the lives of refugees and asylum seekers through providing support and advice, promoting awareness and facilitating integration into the local community.



Reading City of Sanctuary's sanctuary awards have successfully grown. We now have two churches, three schools and five coffee shops in Reading that have successfully applied for the Sanctuary award. We are waiting to hearing about Reading University's application.

Our casework support service has continued to grow throughout this year, reaching more new clients.

Over the last year we have developed our existing partnerships. We continue to work alongside charities such as Care4Calais and the British Red Cross.



We continue to advocate for asylum seekers living in hotels by partnering with other charities in the Thames Valley area and seeking a fairer and more humane asylum system.



Our Values are central to the work of the RSG and guide the staff and trustees. We will check every year to ensure we are upholding these values which are:

1. That social justice, human dignity and respect as prescribed by the European Convention on Human Rights and by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) must be upheld.

RSG has continued to publicly challenge misrepresentation of the facts and issues facing refugees and asylum seekers in the media.

2. That diversity including race, culture, ability, sexuality, gender, age, religion and other beliefs are beneficial to the community and should be celebrated.

RSG has continued to collaborate with the Alliance for Cohesion and Racial Equality and with borough councils in Berkshire. Reading City of Sanctuary is developing a number of initiatives and is preparing an equalities, diversity and inclusion strategy.

3. That the rights of individuals defined in the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the responsibilities of signatories to that convention should be respected and upheld.

RSG was a signatory to several national campaigns this year and we have protested and lobbied MPs and high government officials in numerous ways about national issues.

4. That working in partnership with other organisations improves effectiveness and spreads understanding.

Thank you to the many organisations across Berkshire with whom we work alongside, in particular Care4Calais who support asylum seekers in hotel accommodation, and Readifood for their ongoing dedication. We would also like to thank The Poppy Project who are supporting pregnant asylum seekers in Berkshire.

5. That maintaining confidentiality in working with those we seek to help is of the greatest importance in generating trust and security.

RSG increased lived experience representation within our staff team, helping us towards the goal of 'nothing about us without us'.

6. That the services and activities of the organisation should be accessible to all people who need them regardless of their individual circumstances.

Whilst we worked hard this year on strengthening internal and external communications across all teams, support activities and services, we recognise we must continue to improve in this area.



CHAIR'S REPORT

April 2021 to March 2022



It was a year that started with a new two-year business plan for the organisation, approved by trustees in April 21. It was the year of unlocking in which we gradually eased out of the operational restrictions necessitated by the Covid pandemic and tried to work out what “normal” was. It was the year in which the Government launched its reform proposals for the asylum system and enshrined them in the Borders Bill which, to the dismay of every refugee-supporting organisation, was passed through parliament. The resulting legislation seeks to judge asylum claims not on the basis of need but according to how claimants arrived in the country. We joined colleagues across the refugee-supporting sector in opposing the legislation, writing to local MPs and publicising the disastrous impact of the legislation on our clients. It was the year of the Afghan refugee crisis. It was the year of the Ukrainian refugee crisis.

Looking back on these major events which have directly impacted on our work I am struck by two things. Firstly, how difficult it is to get your strategy right. Who could have predicted what happened in Afghanistan and Ukraine. Such events urgently demand time and resources, diverting them from existing plans. Secondly, how important it is to develop your strategic thinking as a board of trustees, learning from experience and developing a sharp focus on priorities whilst retaining the flexibility to adjust to new and often unforeseen events. To this end the board signed off two important strategies in the year which sit alongside the business plan mentioned above: a Fundraising Strategy in October and a Marketing and Communications Strategy in February '22. We also held two away days to help with our planning and communication with staff.

Our staff team, employees and volunteers, are amazing. Their professionalism and dedication in the turbulent times described above are the organisation's key assets. Throughout the year we have invited staff to make presentations about their work at our board meetings. Their work can be stressful which is why we have prioritised, during the year in question, support for their wellbeing and mental health.

My thanks go to the board of trustees who have steered the organisation through this very full-on year and to the Chief Executive, Nick Harborne, whose co-operative approach to working with trustees is admirable. It is a year in which we grew considerably in terms of income and staff numbers. We can take some pride in the fact that funders see us as an organisation that is worthy of their investment. However, at the risk of ending on a sombre note, we must also acknowledge that this growth is a manifestation of the growth of the global refugee crisis. It is not going away and we must continue to build a strong and resilient Refugee Support Group to take on the challenges.

Mike Martin MBE Chair

Sanctuary Strikers

Sanctuary Strikers Football Club are Berkshire's only refugee football club.

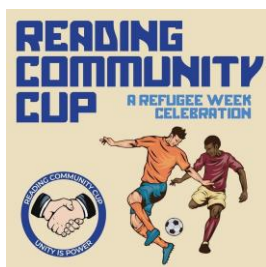
Started in 2017 by a former client/volunteer, the club aims to promote integration by bringing together refugees and non-refugees to play football in the spirit of unity.

Establishing the team was an ambitious effort and we are incredibly grateful to everyone who has helped fund Sanctuary Strikers including The FA's Grow The Game fund, AKG and Adam Moss and AKM Geoconsulting.

Sanctuary Strikers have played together for five seasons and currently play in Division 3, Reading & District Sunday League. Our Home Ground is Palmer Park.

To celebrate Refugee Week, they ran a very successful Reading Community Cup tournament, which we hope will be an annual event.

A big thank you to Joe and Tomson who put so much of their time into running what is quite a unique and special team.





CEOs' REPORTS



This year I have found my job increasingly frustrating. The demand for RSG's support is growing: the more people we try and help, the more funding we need to find, and the bigger the job gets, but the less time I seem to get to meet the very people I need to talk to the most. Our service users. This is important for a few reasons: Post-Covid, we all need to make personal contact again. This is especially important when people have been isolated. Also, as a white male CEO, how can I possibly know and comprehend what services and support refugees and asylum seekers need unless I talk with people, listen, try to understand, and encourage people to help us contribute to the running of RSG? The flip side of the coin is that I know we can't do everything – we get so little core funding, so all our core services depend on us generating fundraising income, just as we are feeling the effects of the rise in the cost of living as we enter a recession. Managing the expectations of the users of our services in a hostile environment was a challenge. It looks like this will be a hostile recession.

Volunteers have expectations too, and we are dependent on them. If we don't listen to our volunteers and what their thoughts and needs are, we risk alienating them. Covid interrupted and changed many of our programmes, and our relationship with our volunteers suffered. One of our challenges in the year ahead is to rebuild and strengthen all our communication channels with our service users and volunteers. A strength of RSG is that two trustees and 25% of our staff team have lived experience. Our Deputy CEO's lived experience is essential in ensuring operational decision-making is well grounded and reflective of the community we serve, so overall, RSG's governance, strategic direction, daily operations and support services at RSG are informed by our service users' voices where possible and appropriate.

However, the refugee voice is terribly ignored nationally and here in Berkshire. Dispersed asylum seekers living in hotels and independent houses have no real voice and face delays in processing applications, barriers to health care and education, and massive challenges to their mental health.



CEO REPORTS



I am proud that RSG is taking small steps in a long journey towards becoming a user-led organisation, fully aware many people are not being heard in the wider refugee community. Campaigning on this and other issues is a priority for RSG, so this year we created a part-time advocacy officer post. We are also proud to be part of the Thames Valley Immigration Alliance, bringing together four charities to increase our reach and effectiveness. We are now stronger together in our challenge and fight against the hostile environment facing refugees and asylum seekers in Berkshire.

Finally, thank you, again, to our volunteers, our staff team, our trustees and our supporters. Many owe you all a debt of thanks for your dedication and compassion.

Nick Harborne CEO

Having worked in various roles at RSG for many years, I have gained a great understanding of our client group and their needs. My new role as the Deputy CEO has given me the opportunity to draw from my experience to make effective choices and changes within the charity to ensure a sustainable future for both clients and the organisation. The RSG team has worked hard to always better the service and respond to the ever-growing needs of asylum seekers and refugees in our community.

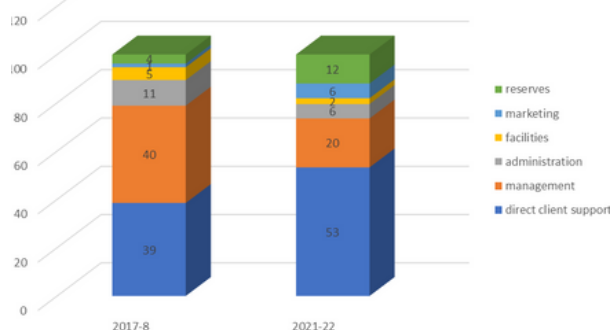
It is the client stories – their journeys, their hope, seeing families and children flourishing that makes everyone at RSG proud to make a positive difference to these families. It is a great feeling when we hear a family gets the right to stay in the UK after years, as well as the moments when I meet clients and their children after a while and see how well they have grown and adapted to living in a new place. I cannot put into words how I feel during these moments but the one word that comes to mind is proud, especially of all the staff at RSG for their determination and hard work which has helped these families in building their new lives in the UK.

Flora Roshi Dep CEO



TREASURER'S REPORT

use of each £1 of income - 2017-8 to 2021-22



The COVID-19 pandemic continued to have an effect but the most significant impact on the year was the influx of refugees and asylum seekers from Afghanistan. By the end of March 2022 18 families of varying sizes had arrived in Reading and West Berkshire from Afghanistan with more expected in the new year.

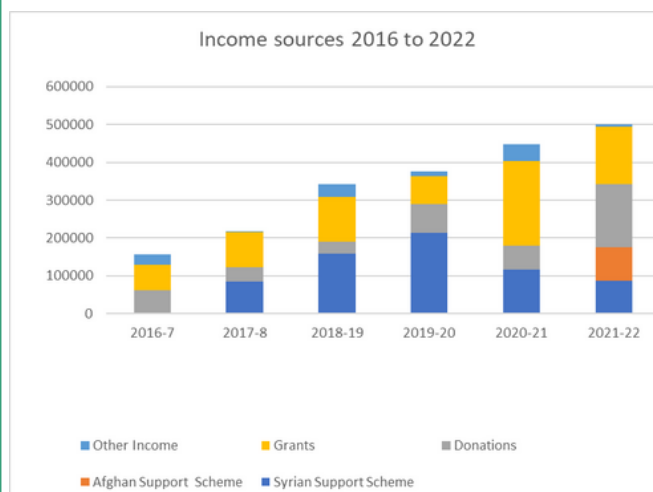
This has resulted in both a significant increase in cash inflows from advance invoicing and an equally significant increase in staff resources need to welcome, accommodate and support the families. An intensive recruitment exercise resulted in additional support staff being added to the teams.

This influx of unexpected income resulted in an operating surplus for the year of £59,996, which was substantially better than budget, and has provided ongoing income streams for 2022-23 that will help ensure our financial stability in that year.

Expenditure naturally increased due to the need for additional support staff but management, administration and overhead costs were contained satisfactorily.

In terms of income streams it is clear that income from the Syrian support scheme will dwindle and whilst the Afghan support funding has provided a substantial bridge to

compensate for this, fundraising activity in all its forms will be a priority in future months and years.



Increased financial efficiency and control, assigning resources primarily to productive activities has resulted in an increased value for money for our funders across the board, whilst maintaining a healthy additional increase in reserves.

Jon Linley, RSG Treasurer



KEY OUTPUTS

Key Outputs 2022 (2021)

TOP 8 COUNTRIES

Afghanistan	Eritrea	Syria
Pakistan	Sudan	Iran
Zimbabwe	Somalia	

Casework support

Two-thirds of our service users were male, and our support was varied, OISC* enquiries were generally about settlement applications, failed asylum submissions and Leave to Remain based on private circumstances. Support was also given for problems with the granting of permission to land (section 4), the provision of cash and accommodation (section 95) and the certificates necessary for health costs (HC2). In all, we dealt with almost **700 client enquiries**.

Drop-in Centre

We held **87 drop-in sessions** with English conversation classes. Unhappily Covid prevented us having more, and also meant that we had to suspend our job club. But attendances, **over 800**, were higher than last year, but still down from 2019 numbers.

Volunteering

Almost a hundred volunteers helped regularly. This dedicated effort resulted in more than **8,000 hours** of donated time, valued over **£100,000***.

Food parcels

Working in partnership with Readifood we distributed **3,129 food parcels**.

Reading City of Sanctuary pop-up English classes

We have given some **1,500 hours** of one-to-one support to more than **50 clients**.

User involvement

We conducted two user feedback and one Mental Health Wellbeing surveys in the year. The results are elsewhere in this report.

Diversity

Two trustees and four staff members have **lived refugee experience**.

BAMER* communities comprise almost half our staff.

Two-thirds of our staff are female, one-third male.

*<https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/dvc376/index.html>

*Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee

*Office of Immigration Services Commissioner

[Click to watch
'Fragments'](https://refugeesupportgroup.org.uk/fragments/)

<https://refugeesupportgroup.org.uk/fragments/>



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MENTAL HEALTH

Every year we conduct an internationally recognised wellbeing survey* across our service user community to ensure that our policies and services support our community's needs. This year has been disappointing.

Levels of wellbeing are lower than in the past. Both we and our service users have had all the uncertainties and complications of the pandemic and the stresses of trying to return to normal pre-Covid conditions.

2022 (2021) Results:

56.1% (52.6%) of RSG service users were found to be below the UK average for wellbeing – an increase of 3.5% from last year.

21.6% (17.9%) of RSG service users were found to be below the score of 40 for the NHS low wellbeing threshold – an increase of 3.7%

65.9% (76.1%) had satisfaction with RSG support during Covid-19 – a decrease of 10.2%.

65.9% (74.6%) had satisfaction with support and services from RSG – a decrease of 8.7%

In particular, these difficulties led to a feeling amongst our refugee clients that we were letting them down – they felt we should have been doing more. Mental health in the refugee and asylum seeker communities is stained with the often terrible experiences they are escaping from and the well-known hardships of the journey, and that history leads to vulnerability.

What are we doing about it?

Government and local support for asylum seekers is underfunded and often ineffective. Isolation in hotels and dispersed accommodation adds to the health problems.

We are engaging with advocacy strategies at national and local levels. More particularly we are working with Berkshire Healthcare Trust to employ a mental health care coordinator tasked with managing and strengthening cross sector understanding of mental health needs of the refugee community, leading to establishing more effective referral pathways.

Forbury Gardens

It is RSG's belief that earlier and coordinated mental health intervention and support would have prevented the tragedy in Forbury Gardens in June 2020. RSG will strive to share our experiences and to contribute to the national 'lessons learned' enquiry and reporting process.

*<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/using>



FUNDRAISING & COMMUNICATIONS

It has been another incredibly challenging year. The Covid pandemic, cost of living crisis, Afghanistan crisis and now the war in Ukraine have all been deeply difficult for the charity and have all had an impact on our fundraising. Despite these many challenges, I am pleased to report that we have continued to overachieve, reaching more people than ever, and increasing our income thanks to you, our supporters across Berkshire.

Covid continued to impact our events, cancelling our Gospel Carols Service for a second year and forcing us to hold our Refugee Week events online, both of which cost us financially. Virgin Money Giving also closed unexpectedly, causing us many headaches and lost regular donations.



While the Afghanistan crisis and then the war in Ukraine both brought large numbers of refugees to Berkshire, stretching our services further, both led to a huge upsurge in public support. The many offers of support, donations, and people fundraising for us as a result have been a heart-warming reminder of the best of humanity.



We have achieved a massive amount this year. We were charity partner for Reading's biggest festive event, the Reading Santa Run, that saw over 1,000 Santas running around Reading town centre. We smashed our previous record with The Big Give, raising £12,000 in seven days thanks to so much public support.



Our most ambitious Refugee Week to date was a massive success, with widespread support for many events including online film screenings, online workshops and a football tournament. We also marked the big week with our first Seven Day Challenge, which saw many people across Berkshire doing small acts each day during Refugee Week to help refugees in Berkshire.

There was no shortage of supporters taking on challenges to raise money this year, including Ride Across Britain, London Landmarks Half Marathon, Reading Half, and someone cycling from Newbury to Paris on their exercise bike! Supporters also organised numerous fundraising events including everything from cricket days, art exhibitions, yoga brunches and sales of cakes, jewellery and paintings.



FUNDRAISING & COMMUNICATIONS

ONE-OFF AND TOTAL DONATED INCOME



We raised more unrestricted income this year than ever before, **increasing monthly regular donations by 32% and one-off donations by 42%**. This is particularly important as demand for our services continues to grow apace. Every penny we receive means we can do more to help refugees here in Berkshire, so we're eternally grateful to you, our brilliant supporters.

This year was the third and final year of our partnership with Deloitte Reading. We are immensely grateful for their wide-ranging support during this difficult year. They have donated laptops and furniture, fundraised and donated money, volunteered and provided a bespoke training programme for staff. They have also helped us develop an Impact Report to better tell the story of our work helping refugees in Berkshire and we would like to extend a special thank you to Dan and Charlene.

We are also immensely excited to welcome Porterhouse Medical and First Intuition as new charity partners this year.

I am proud to have written our first Communications Strategy this year (with special thanks to Sam Lee for her support), an ambitious plan to reach more people in Berkshire and build on this year's successes. These successes include **national press coverage with BBC, ITV, The Times and LBC, along with regular coverage with the local press**. We've increased our social media presence across all channels and we have grown our Supporter Newsletter list by **73%** and seen monthly website visits soar **269%**.

We have been proud of the level of support we've had for our campaigns this year, including Lift The Ban, Together With Refugees, Close The Barracks, and the campaign and protests to fight the incoming Nationality and Borders Bill.

While the future looks to be even tougher for people seeking sanctuary, I am heartened by the growing public support from people wanting the UK to be a kinder, more welcoming and humane place. Together we can continue to fight to make Berkshire a place of sanctuary for refugees.



CORPORATE PARTNER



As the third and final year of our three-year partnership with Deloitte Reading comes to an end, it's a time to reflect on just how much we've achieved together in that time. In the three years they have:

- Helped us develop a professional business case for buying a property
- Helped us redevelop our website
- Designed a professional impact report for us
- Helped us develop IT solutions to help people during Covid
- Hosted countless events from a welcome party for Afghan refugees to staff training and our AGM
- Helped furnish our expanded offices that allowed hybrid working throughout Covid
- Providing 70 laptops that have given clients internet access and helped children do their homework
- Deloitte staff volunteered and befriended our clients and helped them improve their English and mental health
- Donated gifts to the people we support including welcome packs, Christmas presents and Easter eggs
- Helped us by pledging to The Big Give which raised over £4,000 in two years
- Raised over £70,000 helping fund our frontline services through challenging times.

A special thanks to Deloitte Reading: you made the partnership a success: - Charlene McNeil (never says no), Lucy, Alicia, Dan Barlow, for his support that made everything possible, Juliet Wardle for organising everything and Jess Reddy and the 5 Million Futures Team for all their exciting opportunities. Indeed, thank you to everyone that works at Deloitte Reading who have volunteered, donated, joined us at events, and helped to spread the word about RSG to friends, family and colleagues. Please don't stop! We'd like to thank, too, Neil, Tony and Bob who raised over £6,000 punishing their legs and backsides cycling the entire length of the UK from Land's End to John 'O Groats.

The three years have been a challenge: COVID-19, Afghanistan, Ukraine, the cost-of-living crisis, and Rwanda deportations have been tough for everyone, tough for us as an organisation and unbelievably tough for the people we support. Deloitte stood by us. We're sad to see this partnership end, but we are so much better off because of it.



Thank you!



**CORPORATE
PARTNER 2022-25**

Your **logo** here!

Invitation – make RSG your charity partner

Refugee Support Group has had an amazing three years working with Deloitte.

We firmly believe it was a two – way partnership, and there are many benefits to be gained for a corporate partner.

What we offer:

- An opportunity for your staff to learn about and better understand international events and how they impact on us all, here in Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham. We are happy to give speeches. We have some clients who are motivated and willing to share their stories and testimonies.
- An opportunity for your staff to engage in activities and events in support of a longstanding local Berkshire charity who support a very disadvantaged part of our Reading community.
- Volunteering and befriending opportunities with full training and support.
- An opportunity for a large corporate organisation to make a local difference in the town they live and work in.

What we ask of you:

- Preferably a three-year partnership. This gives us time to turn meaningful plans into action.
- We would like to address your staff team and ask for support through Give As You Earn
- We would like you to extend your professional skills and experience and help us in areas like business planning, planning against cyber attacks, organisational digital development, EDI policy development, and impact reporting. We currently need help to finish an IT skills training and job search website specifically aimed at the refugee community.
- We have an ambitious project to fund and buy our own refugee centre (see page 32). Any help you can bring to the table would be welcomed.
- We would love to hear your ideas and thoughts on what you feel you could do to help.

Please contact nick@rrsg.org.uk



CASEWORK SERVICE

Client ZZ: undocumented migrant living in the UK in fear for over 17 years of being deported. The client received from the Home Office a decision of notice to deport. He approached us and we supported him in an application to the Home Office under compelling and extenuating circumstances and under Articles 3 and 8 of the ECHR. He was granted 10 years leave to remain.

Over the last 12 months we have seen a substantial increase in the number of clients needing support due to the risk of facing destitution and a sharp increase in the number of clients approaching our services due to being street homeless.

The overall feedback from clients continues to include a frustration with accessibility to Migrant Help and the long waiting times for responses to applications under section 4 and section 95. Positively, we are currently in discussions with Migrant Help to bring an in-house Migrant Help advisor to support our clients and provide a tangible place to meet with a Migrant Help advisor.

88% of service users came from 9 countries
29% of users were aged between 25-34 years old
An increase of support for clients by 27.6%

In the last year we have set up an in-house clinic with Talking Therapies, with a qualified counsellor attending RSG offices once a month to provide support with one-to-one appointments offered to our service users. The project has received considerable positive feedback from the service users, in line with our wish to be supporting clients, in line with our holistic approach in supporting our clients.

The impact we have had overall in helping clients includes their getting and maintaining housing and reporting unsafe and unsatisfactory conditions to their housing providers. We have also helped pregnant refugees and asylum seekers with access to appropriate services.

Client PP and family approached our services after being refused support from legal aid firms and private firms due to the costs involved in making an application to the Home Office. The family were struggling financially and had no way of raising the funds for solicitors and Home Office fees. We supported the family in raising funds. Client PP was granted settlement and will be able to look forward to obtaining British citizenship.



CASEWORK SERVICE

We have helped many clients apply for indefinite leave to remain under the settlement route, and we have a 100% success rate with the Home Office. This means that the applicants' status is recognised in the UK. We have received and accepted clients' biometric residence permits and travel documents for their applications and set up with the Post Office a dedicated service for that.

In collaboration with the Home Office we ran a unique clinic called the Navigator Project for those clients whose cases involved exceptional circumstances. Our in-house solicitor filtered and assessed eligibility for all clients. The programme is currently on hold, given the Ukraine and Afghan crises.

Over the last 12 months we have had repeated disturbing reports from clients accommodated in the contingency hotels. The accommodation is unsafe and unclean, and this has a serious effect on the clients' medical conditions and their access to all the needs of daily life.

We have also been trying to find ways to improve the language barriers that we face. One of the recent ways has been through our use of the Pocket talk device which has been proven to help us communicate with clients effectively, especially where clients have arrived at our offices impromptu.

Family XY came to the UK 5 years ago under the Syrian Resettlement Scheme. Their limited (5 years) Leave to Remain came to an end and that ended the support under the resettlement scheme as well. The family approached the casework team - initially we helped them applying for Indefinite Leave to Remain set (P) but whilst waiting for the decision they struggled with receiving their Personal Independence Payment and carer allowance. The DWP stopped payment due to the fact that the limited Leave to remain application had expired, despite the application being made in time. This was unlawful and procedurally incorrect. After several contacts with the DWP advocating on behalf of the rights of the family, DWP confirmed that they would backdate the payments once they receive the new ILRs. The ILR applications were successful. Persistence with calling the HMRC/DWP resulted in the family finally receiving the backdated the payments

A big thank you to Bronte and Hussam who have gone over and above what is expected of them this year. They tirelessly worked to make the service into what it is now; without your work we wouldn't have been able to run the casework service!

Mahmuna Hasnath, OISC Casework Team Manager



Reading & Wokingham Resettlement Team



The families are receiving intensive support for a year as commissioned by the Local Authority. Our aim is to support the clients to become as independent as possible by the end of this time. The **Reading Afghan Resettlement Team** have been supporting 18 families in Reading since October 2021. At least one adult has a good level of English in 16 of the families. We help in all aspects of life including bills, schools, medical and dental appointments.

All clients are attending English classes and many of the women are enjoying sewing classes, five clients have gained employment, four have applied for Masters programmes at the University of Reading and one woman has signed up for a leisure class at Reading College. Many of the men are pursuing obtaining their driving licences with a view to employment.

Our wellbeing programme includes a women's coffee and chat club and nature walks planned for autumn as well as a day trip to Henley-on-Thames. We have seen a whirlwind of emotions on the journey with the families as they tell their stories and of the people left behind and their hopes for the future. There was a day when we found out a Reading dentist was taking on NHS patients, it was a whole team effort to get everyone registered. Many cups of tea have been made and boxes of tissues used up. We are part of a maternity and sanctuary seeking programme with Royal Berkshire hospital and are currently applying for Holidays, Activities and Food Programme support for holiday activities for the children in the families.

Our challenges have been the language barrier and access to interpreters, childcare while accessing English classes, cultural differences, managing expectations, wider knowledge of the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy scheme, liaising with Southern Electric and Southern Housing, supporting the clients with their mental health, access to dentists, debt management.

Wokingham

In Wokingham, 3 families reached the end of the 5 years support scheme. We helped them apply for their indefinite leave to remain. We are confident that they are now ready to continue with their life in UK independently.

Family A came with a view to settling in London. They were convinced they wanted to be there. However, they have realised there are many positive aspects to living in Reading, their son is doing well in school and mum has started work. Dad is working with a big company. They weighed up their financial situation and decided to stay in Reading. Their situation has many challenges but their journey to a positive and fulfilling life in the UK is underway.

Soha Hafez, Reading Resettlement Support Manager



West Berkshire Resettlement Team



The West Berkshire Afghan Resettlement Team has been supporting six Afghan families and six Syrian families since October 2021, totaling 50 individuals. We are also contracted to support 44 Afghan families in hotels, totalling 211 individuals.

The support we provide in hotels is wide-ranging and holistic. It includes offering the essentials at arrival – providing clothing vouchers and SIM cards; connecting with social workers for assessment; liaising with Community Furniture Project to supply bikes, push chairs and wheelchairs – to integration support in explaining the emergency services and GP registration; referral to Talking Therapies sessions at RSG; applying for bank accounts and benefits; sorting out issues relating to ASPEN Cards, UC and ChB; offering support enrolling for ESOL classes and following up on any issues; completing school application forms and facilitating communication between parents and schools; liaising with the Home Office and families about their housing needs and concerns. We have also referred families to Family Hub, liaised with Help for Heroes and Forces Employment Charity, and arranged activities over the summer for children living in hotels.

Some of our main challenges are finding houses for the bigger families in hotels to move into, navigating the complicated education and benefits systems, arranging activities for the children over school holidays, and dealing with last-minute changes to arrival dates.

One of our clients arrived in the UK as a child with family issues such that she had to manage the household and take care of herself. She started secondary school and faced serious challenges with language difficulties and experienced loneliness, isolation, and a sense of lack of belonging. Four years on with frequent and regular support from the West Berkshire team, she has grown into a thriving young woman. Having passed her GCSE English and Maths, she is doing well in a Level 2 professional course at college and working part-time to earn spending money. Daily proving herself, this young lady is proud, positive and appreciative – and we are very proud of her.

**Samera Abba-Mjid, West Berkshire Resettlement
Support Manager**



DROP-IN CENTRE

Virtual Monday/Wednesday drop-in:

As a result of the pandemic, we have had a mixture of in person and digital drop-in sessions. This came as a result of client feedback, where having both in person and digital catered for a range of needs. Some clients found it difficult online because it was hard to interact without gestures particularly when learning English, whereas several clients were not ready to come indoors yet. From August 2021 onwards, attendance during the virtual Wednesday drop-in declined. It may be due to data exclusion or clients finding it difficult to interact online

because of language barriers. Several clients were also now attending ESOL classes at around the same time.

Client A has increased her self-confidence through the online drop-in, but she was feeling nervous about socialising after a year of lockdowns because severely lacked confidence. She could speak very few words of English but through drop-in encouragement is now able to start writing in English. Since we have been able to open the in-person drop-in and run a weekly walk, talk and tea service meeting outdoors. She now orders her own drink at the café weekly practising her English and helps pack away the drop in. She makes sure everyone has a hot drink, showing huge improvements in her confidence as she is now happy to chat with new people.

Clients attending the drop-in centre have stated that both drop-ins have supported them enormously with both practical and personal outcomes, including tech support with laptops, tablets, housing and benefit advice, referral for food parcels, and or medical support.

They have also reported significant improvement in their English-speaking skills, and their understanding of English culture and resources available to them in Reading and the surrounding area.

We have partnered with the Citizens Advice Bureau to hold talks on how to save money on energy bills, also with several specialist speakers from refugee backgrounds to talk and inspire our service users that life in Reading can become as integrated and successful as the service users would like it to be.

Clients have reported big increases in confidence, and connectedness to a wider community that has countered isolation and been consistent both during and after the terrible effects of Covid 19

Client 1 without our support would not have been able to pass his driving test and qualify for a delivery driving job. The next step in supporting him is to help him attain his citizenship.



DROP-IN CENTRE



Monday drop-in:

The in-person Monday drop-in sessions in the RISC Hall have continued to be a Covid safe environment with clients, staff and volunteers still required to wear face coverings to minimise the risk of transmitting the virus as some clients are vulnerable or not vaccinated. It is a safe, warm, and welcoming environment for clients to access support, make friends and improve their English language skills.

The Monday drop-in is also a platform to inform clients of local services, events, and opportunities. The Reading Rotary Club donated four laptops to use in the drop-in and they have proved to be very popular. They are used for learning English, playing games, to access emails or for research purposes.

As well as providing practical support, the drop-in is a community and staff and volunteers have held events to celebrate Black History Month, Valentine's Day and Christmas, giving clients some respite and a chance to relax and have fun.

Clients have also been able to gain Ofqual recognised qualifications from participating in an Arts Council funded theatre and film project in which they wrote, devised and performed their own short plays for film. This was premiered as an online event in June, with all participants involved in a live Q&A with host BBC Radio 3 Fiona Talkington. The premiere event has reached over 2.2K people in countries from all around the world, and the short films will be a valuable resource for education and building awareness of specific issues highlighted by the service users that are often faced in isolation or potentially stigmatised.

Six clients have made films and a podcast detailing their stories, which they have found empowering, and it has helped them to progress in a wide range of soft skills which will be applicable to wider life. The podcast will be used to go into schools, and three of the service users would like to further develop their performances to tour in schools to educate the younger generation about the situations many asylum seekers and refugees face.

A recent survey showed that 69% said their English had improved from attending the Monday drop-in, 84% said they had made friends and most importantly 100% of clients said they feel supported when they attended the Monday drop-in.

Kushinga Hare, Drop-In Coordinator



Befriending Services

Though at the core of the befriending sits informal language practice and building practical skills, we take a lot of care to equip our befrienders to be advocates for the people they support. Befrienders undergo initial training on the asylum system, so they have a solid understanding of the challenges sanctuary seekers experience in the UK. Over the year we have delivered nearly 1500 hours of support via our Befriending programme, averaging between 30 and 50 active pairs. They have helped with informal language support, signing up to amenities such as the library and other wellbeing classes, emotional support, visits to the GP and hospitals, and so much more!

CASE STUDY - M and his befriender have been meeting for about a year and have become very close friends. The befriender has visited M*** in hospital following an injury. He has also accompanied him to his appeal hearing following which refugee status was granted. They cook for one another and have met other family members. They are now working on employability skills.***

Welcoming Activities

Though inevitably the Covid pandemic had an impact on our ability to run our usual events, towards the end of the year we began planning and running our face-to-face activities: such as our Atrium meet ups, Saturday meet ups and art activities. For our Atrium events we established weekly meetings for befrienders, which organically evolved to include a meet up for all sanctuary seekers including new arrivals from Ukraine.

In March 2022 we requested nominations for the Alice Driver Award, having changed the process to make it more open and transparent. We gave awards to 5 women who have contributed to the Sanctuary Movement and began planning for the celebration event.

Sanctuary Awards

Gardens of Sanctuary

After going through the Sanctuary Award assessment (including members of the national CoS team) we were able to designate Hempen Farm and their 'Growing Solidarity' project as a 'Garden of Sanctuary'. As a result, the farm has the right policies in place to welcome sanctuary seekers every Tuesday where they have an opportunity to eat, grow, meditate, and spend time in nature. The Farm have trained volunteer drivers to enable access to the farm.



Churches of Sanctuary

We established a group of five Churches interested in going through the Award and being recognised as Churches of Sanctuary. As a result of our work the churches have initiated activities for sanctuary seekers such as the Atrium sessions on Fridays, college starter packs, craft activities etc.

Reading University of Sanctuary

A draft application for Reading University has been reviewed by the RCoS Advisory Group. Though there are still some areas for development the application is largely positive, and a formal assessment is imminent. In the meantime, the University Sanctuary Activities have been running including but not limited to: Sanctuary Scholarships, Cafes of Sanctuary, and Architecture Dept Project 'Home'.

Art Stream

Art Venues play an important part of ensuring wellbeing for people stuck in the asylum system. We have run a session for 6 art venues to encourage them to be recognised as places of sanctuary and plan regular meetings of the group. The idea is to create an annual programme of arts activities for 22/23. The group will meet quarterly to collaborate and encourage one another through the sanctuary award process.

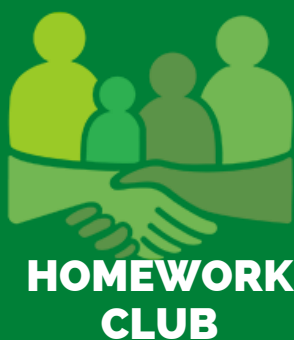
Reading Borough Council

Reading Borough Council is considered an awarded member of the CoS Local Authority Network. The Afghan and Ukrainian humanitarian crises have meant that the focus has rightly been on the immediate needs of sanctuary seekers, but we do hope that in the latter part of 2022 we will be able to support the council through the formal award.

Maternity Stream

Some initial conversations have begun with the Royal Berkshire NHS Trust on Maternity Services. They were impressed with the Maternity Resource Pack and excited to begin elevating services to improve outcomes of sanctuary seeking mums.

Maggie Filipova-Rivers, RCoS Coordinator



Homework club restarted in November 2020 after pausing temporarily due to lockdown restrictions. RSG have supported 12 children of RSG clients through virtual one-to-one homework support calls on Zoom. These calls happened weekly, but stopped during the school holidays. There was a total of 61 sessions over this period, totalling 61 hours of support via homework club. We were able to successfully support these 12 children through a group of nine volunteers who were keen to provide virtual support to our clients in times of lockdown and Covid-19.

These volunteers were led by one of the RSG team, Lottie, who sent weekly Zoom link reminders to clients and volunteers. This worked extremely well, as time management was a challenge with clients (for many reasons including technology and Wi-Fi issues and other commitments in after-school-hours) and because she was able to engage personally with all clients to ensure trust and gain their honest feedback. After each weekly session, she checked back with all volunteers on an individual basis, to ensure their one-to-one call had gone smoothly with no safeguarding issues.

Challenges faced during this period were solely technological and Wi-Fi based. The UK Covid-19 lockdowns further isolated out client group, meaning access to our online services was tricky. RSG worked to minimize this technology gap, by working in partnership with Reading Voluntary Action to create referrals for broadband, laptops, and tablets. This directly helped the homework club this year, with one mother stating, 'thank you for saving me and my son from no contact with anyone we feel so lucky, thank you.'

In the feedback we collected from clients, all reported an increase in their child's confidence because of their paired support and that they felt supported by Lottie. All the children said they felt comfortable with their volunteer. All the volunteers said they felt supported and guided in the one-to-one calling. Lastly, the feedback emphasised the importance of technology during the pandemic and contact with clients in an unfamiliar education system was welcomed by all parents and made them feel secure in their child's progress outside the classroom.

Unfortunately, after the summer holidays Homework Club could not restart due to the uncertainty of the pandemic. However, talks are going ahead with Queen Anne's School to restart the Homework Club in person which would be a great step forward.

Client H received one-to-one support for 32 weeks, she arrived from Turkey to join her family in September 2020, so her confidence in an English school was severely lacking. This year we have completed many homework tasks together, helped her email her teachers and guided her with her GCSE options. We have finished the year with her passing all her year 9 tests and she said, 'without you I do not believe I could do it, you help me to know I can do it, thank you!'

Emma Conway, Homework Club Coordinator



TRANS-NATIONAL RESEARCH



Care is what makes us human. There are many ways in which care is understood and many ways in which care is given. This project looks at those variations in migrant communities across generations and across nations. The project involves universities and groups similar to RSG from England, France, Spain and Sweden. In Reading, as well as working with RSG, the research team are working with Reading Community Learning Centre (RCLC).

The research team record the stories, experiences and reflections of families with caring responsibilities who have settled here either willingly or involuntarily, seeking sanctuary. The outstanding feature of the project is that the interviewers are drawn from the communities that will be the focus of the study. Language and cultural barriers will not be at the forefront. RSG recruited three community research assistants for the project earlier this year. The communities in Reading that have been identified to be part of the project are: Hong Kong Chinese, Indian, Libyan, Nepalese, Sudanese, Zimbabwean. The research team has adopted very much a “bottom up” approach to the detailing of the project outline and process: we learn and adapt together.

Since then, the main emphasis has been on the extensive training provided by the university research team and needed to carry out effective and sensitive interviews. Great emphasis is put on the need to ensure the anonymity of the interviewed families and the importance of confidentiality. At the time of writing, families have been identified and some have been interviewed. The next stage will be to analyse the information provided by these interviews and that will be done by the university research team.

The wider project outcomes are anticipated as helping professionals (academics, policy-makers, support-organisations) understand more about the experiences of transnational families with care needs and the barriers to support that they face. For RSG the benefit of being part of this project is that the information found will help us to lobby the various local governmental and non-governmental institutions with which RSG is involved. Another benefit is the experience and track-record of being involved with an international research project and the University of Reading as well as closer ties with the Reading Learning Community Centre, already a significant network partner.



Alison McQuity, Project Coordinator



INCOME & EXPENDITURE

For the year ending 31st March 2022

	2022 £	2021 £
Income Resources		
Contract income	238,985	115,899
Grants, donations	317,464	287,700
Legacies	5,843	25,000
Other Income	1,330	18,383
Total Income	563,622	446,982
Expenditure		
Wages and salaries	339,859	258,171
Staff training and development	7,090	2,665
Freelance and consultancy	22,565	8,496
Volunteer costs	2,035	443
Cost of delivering services	87,417	36,631
Administration costs	22,283	10,391
Publicity and marketing	1,404	411
Meetings and events	29	35
Travel and subsistence	1,808	2,502
Membership and subscriptions	623	1,230
Premises	17,143	13,674
Office equipment	744	2,439
Professional fees	618	634
Depreciation	8	819
Total Expenditure	503,626	338,541
Net income / (expenditure)	59,996	108,441



PARTNERS & FUNDERS

SPECIAL THANKS

Grants and significant donations

Grants

- Arts Council England – Fragments + Jubilee Fund
- Berkshire Community Foundation
- Deloitte Digital Connect
- Englefield Charitable Trust – Mental Health (Good Exchange)
- Geoff Herrington Foundation- for youth activities
- Justice Together Foundation - Thames Valley Immigration Alliance
- Lloyds Bank Foundation
- NHS Berks West Clinical Commissioning Group - mental health
- Reading Borough Council - Small Grants + RBC Restart Fund
- Respond and Adapt Programme (Migration Exchange/ NACCOM / Refugee Action)
- The Good Exchange – Mental Health
- The Greenham Trust - client clothes
- The Henry Denman and Agneta Mary Cook Charity
- The Sara & Michael Scanlon Trust
- Vodafone Charities Connected – sim cards

Donations

- Adam Moss and AKM Geoconsulting
- Amicus
- Berkshire Nurses and Relief In Sickness Trust
- Deloitte Reading and Deloitte 5 Million Futures Team (Corporate Partnership)
- Ian Korner
- Invesco
- Lucy Zeal
- Newbury Quakers
- Osborne Clarke Charitable Fund
- Pangbourne Rotary Club
- Peter and Liz Driver
- Petr Sadilek
- R S Brownless Charitable Trust
- Reading Catenian Circle
- Reading Dispensary Trust
- Reading Family Church
- Reading Labour Councillors

As always, whilst we have tried our best to include an acknowledgement to everyone who supports us. We are sorry if we have inadvertently missed someone. Please do let us know and we will correct the situation immediately.



PARTNERS & FUNDERS

SPECIAL THANKS

Grants and significant donations

Donations continued

- Reading Quakers
- Reading Rotary Club
- Rotary Club of Reading Matins
- Rotary Club of Reading Maiden
- Rotary Club of Reading Thames
- Rotary Club of Reading Abbey
- St John The Baptist, Crowthorne
- St. Mary Magdalen Church, Tilehurst
- Statistics for Sustainable Development
- The Donnington Hospital Trust
- The Carnation Trust
- Tilehurst Methodist Wesley Guild

Legacy and In Memory Gifts

In memory of Mark Barratt, Tom Palmer, Louis Barratt

Honourable Mentions – Wider Support

- Abbey School
- Barkham Hookers
- Barret & Co Solicitors
- Berkshire Cricket Foundation
- Compass Recovery College
- Diana and James Brooks, Will Fitch and friends
- Emma Caren,
- First Intuition (Corporate Partnership)
- Healthwatch Reading
- Kairos Reading
- Leslee Barron, Mary Chambers and Alina
- Linzi Blakely, Freddie Burger and friends
- London Legal Support Trust
- Oxford Road Primary (RG)
- Pocketalk
- Porterhouse Medical (Corporate Partnership)
- Queen Anne's School (RG)
- Reading Biscuit Factory
- Reading Family Aid

Statutory Partners

- Reading Borough Council
- West Berkshire Council
- Wokingham Borough Council
- Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board

- Reading Film Theatre
- Reading Red Balloon
- Rupert House School (Henley)
- South Street Arts Centre
- The Grumpy Goat
- Wokingham Film Society

Click to [watch "It's not about the statues" by Thabo Makuyana.](#)



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

As always, whilst we have tried our best to include an acknowledgement to everyone who supports us. We are sorry if we have inadvertently missed someone. Please do let us know and we will correct the situation immediately.



**VOLUNTEERS
2021-2022**

Our volunteers and supporters

are the unsung heroes at RSG. We wouldn't be able to run RSG without the incredible support of our volunteers, supporters and friends. Thank you for standing by RSG throughout this year!

Drop-In and Admin

Arsalan Marina Martin Colin Belinda Michael Merry Margaret Francis Naomi Lottie Emma Sorrel

Fundraising and Events

Thank you to everyone who took part or volunteered at any of our events this year!

RCoS & Befriending

Anthony Egan, Elaine Edge, Samantha Earle, Sharifah Anom Bintis, Amy May, Abigail Hammond, Marc Edwards, Hilary Withey, Barakah Sarwar, Florraine Lilly Gray, Zhiying Zhou, Jasmin Fraser, Sophia Hameed, Sally Cornacchia, Emily Maybanks, Rhian Willis, Lucy Erratt, Molly Podbury, Matthew Bywater, Amna Malik, Hannah Tolson, Philippa McGuigan, Paula Kirsten de Wet, Ugo Marsili, Eric Moyse, Chloe Elizabeth Smart, Kushinga Hare, Hannah Catherine Mortimer, Oscar Thomas Barnes, Helen Andreou, Hazel Davies, Neil Wildman, Mohammed Abdalla, Jane Louise Flower, Jenny Gordon, Sergio Gallego-Schmid, Amanda Jennings, Claire MacIntyre, Penelope Jane Grayson, Elizabeth Bailey, Joanna Hanson, Loraine McQueen Fletcher, Kiska Harrop, Andrea Leonelli, Laiba Ather, Rohin Sharma, Imogen Eddings, Selina Whiteley, Regina Maria Conibera, Teresa Jane Waring, Eithne Sarson, Ian Finlayson, Martin Ashford, Michael Prewett, Alysia Kwan, Andrew Linnell, Graham Bates, Hilary Pierce, Naomi Iliff, Colin Campbell

RcoS Advisory Group

Lorraine Briffitt Suleyman Munir Charlotte Purchas
Martin Mikhail Victor Koroma Alice Mpofu-Coles
Colin Campbell





APPEAL

NEW OFFICE

RSG is excited to announce a long term plan to buy our own office and refugee centre.

Refugee Support Group has been supporting refugees in Reading for nearly thirty years. Our services now extend across Berkshire. We have been working in West Berkshire and Wokingham for six years. Unfortunately, we suspect our

services will be needed for another 30 years at least.

We have been very fortunate to have had long and happy history with our offices based at RISC on London Street but over recent years we have grown and our services have developed.

First and foremost, we need to offer refugees and asylum seekers a safe space where we can hold our drop-ins **every day**, ideally with a small café and perhaps a kitchen. We need facilities that can accommodate disabled members of staff, volunteers and service users. We need to create a place where people can come to socialise, to learn, to get help advice and support, but overall a place that is theirs, where they can feel safe. We are open to sharing this office with other charities who may also looking for a more stable and sustainable future, all of whom will support the most marginalised and disadvantaged people in Berkshire. Together, we can be more efficient and stronger.

We have drawn up a business case. We know we would like the office to be located within a mile of Reading Station. We know we will need a minimum of £500,000 as a deposit. Big plans, that will take time. And we have started fundraising. We have set aside two legacy donations and have the promise of further financial assistance and interest free loans from one of our supports.

Should you feel you would like to be part of

what will become a fantastic legacy for RSG and for Berkshire, if you could make a substantial capital contribution, if you could fundraise for us, if you have a suitable property or land that might be available, or skills & connections that may help us, please contact nick@rrsg.org.uk

Be part of the next 30 years in the history of the Refugee Support Group.





STAFF TEAM 2021-2022

A big thank you to the fantastic staff team who go above and beyond what is expected of them! RSG wouldn't be the organisation it is, without the dedication, support and compassion from our staff.

Abiodun Popoola
Alison McQuity
Arsalan San-Ahmed
Bronte Makepeace
Emma Conway
Flora Roshi
Hadil Tamim
Hari Reed
Hussam Allahham
Kushinga Hare

Mahmuna Hasnath
Maria Baker
Nick Harborne
Oscar Manjengwa
Samira Abbas Majid
Shady Hagag
Soha Hafez
Sorrel Bulpitt
Tatiana Miller
Tony Cornwell

Goodbye, good luck and thank you to: Lottie, Jude, Adrian





TRUSTEES 2021-2022



Mr Mike Martin MBE
Chair of Trustees



Dr Mary Richardson
Deputy Chair



Ms Emily Cantrell
Lead for Fundraising



Mr Richard Hanson-James
Business, Property and
Campaigning



Mr Thabo Makuyana
Lived Experience &
Lead for Activism



Mr Patrick Ismond
Lead for Diversity,
Inclusion and Equality



Mr Jon Linley
Treasurer



Ms Fiona Zeneli
Lived Experience &
Lead for Project
Management



Ms Charlene Wattley
Lead for Safeguarding



Sam Lee
Lead for
Marketing

Thank you to trustees
who stepped down
this year:

Faraj Ali Alajeeli

Ram Kosozi

Emma Broomfield

Linda Stacey



*“Try to be good to each other, all of you.
Be brave, and be the kindest
human beings you can be.”*

Alice Driver

13th Dec 1990 – June 6th 2019

www.refugeesupportgroup.org.uk/donate

Note:

All personal details of individuals mentioned in case studies have been changed
to protect people's anonymity and confidentiality.

We have consent to publish pictures from those who feature in them.

GIVE THE NEXT GENERATION OF REFUGEES A LIFELINE

Writing a Will lays out exactly what you want to leave your friends and family. Without one, intestacy laws decide who gets what from your estate.

Writing a Will ensures your loved ones are looked after and can also help the causes you hold dear to continue transforming lives long into the future

Remembering Refugee Support Group in your Will can give hope to the next generation of refugees in Berkshire. We've spent over 25 years helping refugees in Berkshire, and our aim is to be here for refugees long into the future.

Each year HUNDREDS of refugees need our support in Berkshire, and that number continues to grow.

Leaving a gift in your will can help us continue successful programmes like our Drop-In Centre that helps refugees to feel less isolated and improve their mental health.

It could fund our football team that lets refugees make friends through sport, or our Homework Club that aids children to achieve their potential at school.

A Legacy gift could even enable us to create new projects that will touch people's lives in new ways and help them to succeed

We are proud to be partnered with **Barrett & Co solicitors** to offer discounted Will services to our supporters! Please get in touch to request a referral.



LEAVE A LEGACY IN YOUR WILL

