



Refugee Support Group

RSG Annual Report AND FINANCIAL STATEMENT March 2023 – April 2024



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Glossary:

ARC – Application Registration Card

BRP – Biometric Residence Permit

UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

ECHR - European Convention on Human Rights

ARAP - Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy

ARCS - Afghanistan Citizen's Resettlement Scheme

ESOL - English for Speakers of Other Languages

ASPEN card - Asylum Support Enablement Card

ABOUT RSG



RSG was set up in 1990 to support refugees from the Bosnian war. Over the years we have expanded our services to support all refugees and asylum seekers who are living in Berkshire. We give free holistic and immigration advice and run a safe social drop-in three times a week alongside a befriending service and a homework club for the children of refugees and asylum seekers. We also support those on the UK Resettlement Schemes; and have a dedicated team to support with those clients depending on which scheme they are on.

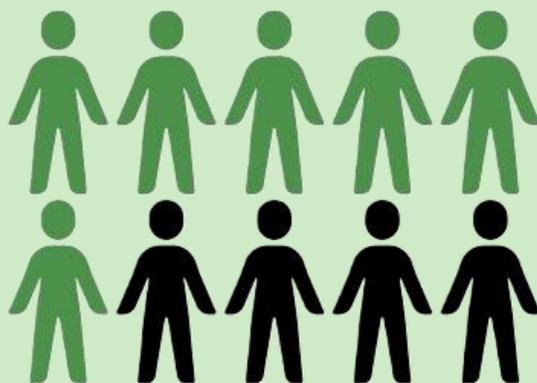
Our mission is to improve the lives of refugees and asylum seekers through advice and support which promotes awareness and integration into our community. Our vision is to make Berkshire a supporting and inclusive society which embraces refugees and asylum seekers with humanity respect and dignity.

We believe that diversity is beneficial in our community and should be celebrated. We continue to spread the awareness of refugees and the barriers they face in our society, through our campaigns and advocacy. We believe that the social justice, human dignity and respect as prescribed by the European Convention on Human Rights and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) must be upheld. We believe that all individuals deserve the opportunity to access our services despite their circumstances.

~ Nick Harborne, CEO

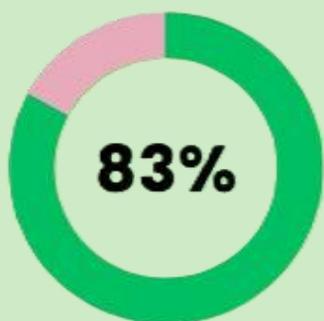


WHY IS OUR SUPPORT NEEDED?

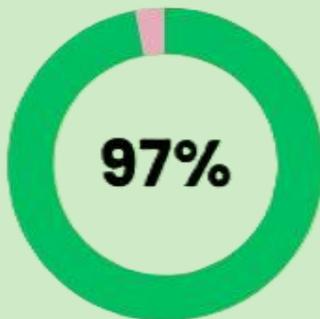


60% of asylum seekers wait longer than 6 months for a decision on their asylum claim

Asylum seekers in temporary accommodation receive £8 a week



Say that asylum support is not enough to cover the cost of living.



Asylum seekers face difficulties buying clothing and essentials.



Asylum seekers and refugees feel less lonely because of RSG

I am so grateful for the incredible support provided by RSG. I have been supported by them for over a year and they are a beacon of hope for my family. They go above and beyond their responsibilities to ensure that we felt welcomed and settled. They helped us find a home and got everything ready for us. They provide not just practical assistance but also emotional support. **RSG's incredible dedication and support has made a significant difference in our lives.** Being away from our relatives was so difficult but RSG became our family in this new country. I will never forget their support and care; they have been there in our most difficult moments. Thank you for being our pillar of strength and making our journey in this new country a positive and hopeful experience.



WHAT DO WE DO?

WHAT DOES RSG DO?
What are the services offered?

CASEWORK

Supports refugees and asylum seekers with holistic and legal issues, from NHS issues to requesting permission to work.

DROP-IN

We run 3 drop-in sessions each week focusing on English, socialising and community. Our service users enjoy having a safe space to visit each week.

BEFRIENDING

This service partners a refugee with a volunteer who meets with them regularly and support them with everyday tasks.

HOMEWORK CLUB

Offers a space for refugee children to be partnered with a sixth form student and be supported with their homework and English language.

RESETTLEMENT

Supports refugees from Afghanistan, Syria and Ukraine on resettlement programs. They support with integration and life in the UK.

WHY DO WE DO IT?

We believe that every person has the right to seek sanctuary and has the right to be shown dignity and humanity.

In 2024, 58% of service users were found to be below the UK average for wellbeing, this was a decrease from the previous year. This is an indication of the work that RSG does, and how vital and beneficial it is on our service user's mental health.

Our staff team all deeply care about refugees and asylum seekers and understand that whilst this job is difficult it also very rewarding, and they want to support as many people as possible.

Our staff team, make hundreds of cups of tea for our service users, knowing that this little act of kindness can go a long way. They cheer with our client when they receive good news and are a shoulder to cry on when the news is bad. Almost all staff surveyed spoke about the thing they look forward to most at work is seeing their colleagues and helping service users.



Positive responses from our clients during our in-house wellbeing survey

OUR SERVICES - RESETTLEMENT



In West Berkshire, we have supported 72 individuals, 33% are new families that have arrived. We have started wrap around support for 5 new families.

One of the biggest concern with new families was how rural their accommodation was, we supported the clients with getting bicycles. Many families came with expectations of the support they would receive, we pride ourselves on empowering our clients. Once these expectation differences had been addressed, our families understood our role and were grateful for the support.

We have supported several families into paid employment. Each child has been encouraged and supported within their schools. We partnered with EduCafe and West Berkshire Action for Refugees and Berkshire School of English, now all our families attend ESOL classes.

We worked to destigmatise mental health within the community. A young mother in one of the new families that arrived had severe mental health issues. The family didn't want to see the GP, they were worried about their reputation within their community and culture. We encouraged and supported her to see the GP and the mental health support team, as a result her mental health improved significantly.

In Reading, we have supported 21 Afghan families under ARAP/ARCS scheme and two families under the UNCHR Resettlement Scheme. During this year, many families completed their 2-year support.

This year our families focused on employment, we supported with CV writing, job searching and applications.

One of the biggest barriers faced was language. We partnered befrienders with the ladies to support and improve their conversational English. We encouraged the Afghan ladies to attend English classes, with some of the ladies progressing to college classes. Our team linked with national training organisations, and we have been encouraging our families to attend these training opportunities.

We are still part of the maternity and sanctuary seeking programme to support and help mum's to be. Our team even saw a couple of new babies arrive this year too, with one baby being named after one of team members because of the support she gave them during and after the birth.

We have continued with our wellbeing programme and hosted our annual Eid parties. We organised school holiday activities and camps for the children, alongside a weekly women's coffee group.

OUR SERVICES - UKRAINE

Ukrainian resettlement is now supporting 160 Ukrainians on Homes For Ukraine scheme and 15 Ukrainians on Family Scheme.

We have provided support on a wide range of issues including immigration and visa related issues. Other areas that we have provided support is through mental health referrals and support, dental care, benefits application and support in the job seeking process. While the overall objectives were to continue support integration and understanding information about life in the UK, many new families continue to arrive with their immediate needs for basic information and signposting to various organisations. The main challenge we faced was rematching and follow-on accommodation. There was a lack of knowledge and information on the next step of the process of our families, this caused tension and stress for our families as they had to quickly find affordable and available accommodation. Most of our clients are now enrolled with ESOL classes as well as English for Grannies, Conversational kitchen and Talk & Tea to improve their language skills. Almost half of the Ukrainians have found employment.

We have continued with our volunteer led wellbeing workshops for this year, including canoeing and rock climbing. We also organised an Easter and Christmas party at the Atrium, the volunteers organised a jazz concert held at Greyfriars church.

FG and her 13-year-old daughter were living in a host family and spoke very limited English. In late 2023, their hosting agreement was coming to an end, and they were offered a rental property after frantic searching. However, there was a big delay in their housing benefit allowance due to Universal Credit and HMRC storing incorrect information on their income. We supported this family by advocating for them to HMRC and Universal Credit, this allowed the family's needs and assistance to be heard. This advocacy and support work took over five months to achieve mandatory reconsideration. HMRC and Universal Credit overturned their original decision, and the family received compensation. The family have now settled the outstanding rent they owed; the 13-year-old daughter is excelling at her school, and FG has now found a job that she feels content with. FG has repeatedly informed us at how grateful she is for our support during these difficult months.



OUR SERVICES - CASEWORK

The casework team supported 427 service users.

25% of the issues that we dealt with was regarding client's asylum claim, we supported 32 clients to prepare for their asylum claim. We saw an increase in refused asylum claims and supported 11 appeal-related matters. We continued to support clients with indefinite leave to remain application and handled 17 issues related to it.

We helped clients with 49 documentation issues, this was the main immigration applications completed. These included applying for travel documents and ARC cards, replacing lost/stolen BRP cards, updating incorrect information. A lack of documentation can have a huge, long-lasting effect on our clients' lives, it leads to delays in opening bank accounts, accessing welfare benefits, finding houses and jobs.

Holistically, we handled 18 issues with clients in receipt of asylum support, revolving around issues with the accommodation and food, wishes to be moved into dispersal accommodation, and delays in ASPEN card payments. We saw asylum seekers moved from closing initial accommodation with no control of where they are placed and limited forewarning.

Casework saw an increase in clients requesting support and our team did not have the capacity to meet this demand. This led to referrals being paused twice in this year. Equally impactful on casework capacity was that cases were becoming more complex. Client now come with multiple issues at once requiring legal and holistic casework.

One of the biggest challenges we faced was the lack of housing for new refugees. Those who qualify for priority housing with the council are being moved to different places with limited choice. Clients who do not qualify for council priority, were told to move to places like Leeds to find accommodation. This client group was mainly able-bodied young men without children.

However, a sanctuary shelter was set up in Reading. Hopefully giving them more time to find a job, apply for universal credit and get a bank account beyond the typical 28 days.

Immigration Applications Completed:

- 6 fee waivers
- 4 time limit routes
- 3 further leave to remain
- 2 family reunion outside the rules



69 POSITIVE OUTCOMES*:

- 15 leave to remain granted
- 9 indefinite leave to remain granted
- 5 ARC cards received
- 4 permission to work requests granted
- 4 dispersal requests accepted

*Since June 2023.

OUR SERVICES

DROP-IN & CIT OF SANCTUARY

We had 98 people attend our Christmas Party where we handed out presents, hung up decorations and ate lots of food. In April 2023, we hosted our first Eid party, where our clients brought in food and drinks and there was lots of dancing and music. These celebrations were a wonderful chance for our clients to relax and they were all positively received.

The sexual health nurses from the Royal Berkshire Hospital visited our Monday drop-ins during February, giving our clients an opportunity to be tested and discuss their sexual health with a nurse.

One challenge we faced at the drop-in was the lack of access to legal advice, legal aid firms were our top signposts that we handed out most weeks.

Our clients struggle when they receive letters that they cannot understand. Our volunteers would patiently go through each letter with our clients and help them to understand what it is written and any further actions they need to take.

We partnered with several different organisations who would attend our drop-ins, such as Together for Mental Health and Reading Borough Council Housing Team.

Befriending has made 18 new matches, there were roughly 40 individuals that used the befriending service over the year. Our befriending pairs focus on practicing English through practical activities, such as buying tickets, and ordering in shops. Their knowledge in finding jobs and writing CVs has encouraged our service users to break into different roles. Our volunteers' invaluable emotional support builds long-lasting connections and trust.

This year we have awarded a number of different organisations with sanctuary status. The University of Reading were awarded as a university of sanctuary. Reading Borough Council are continuing to work on their application. Rank and File and Newbury Library were both awarded sanctuary status this year.

Our volunteers continued to run our talk and tea on a Saturday. Client found this engaging and supportive and enjoyed being able to meet people for a coffee and chat about what is happening.

AB, in her late 50s, arrived from Afghanistan in 2021. She has never received a formal education and couldn't speak English when she first started coming to our Wednesday drop-in for English classes. Now a regular attendee, she's one of our best students. She's able to have conversations, read signs, and go shopping. The English classes have greatly improved her independence and social life.



OUR SERVICES

Homework Club & Sanctuary Strikers

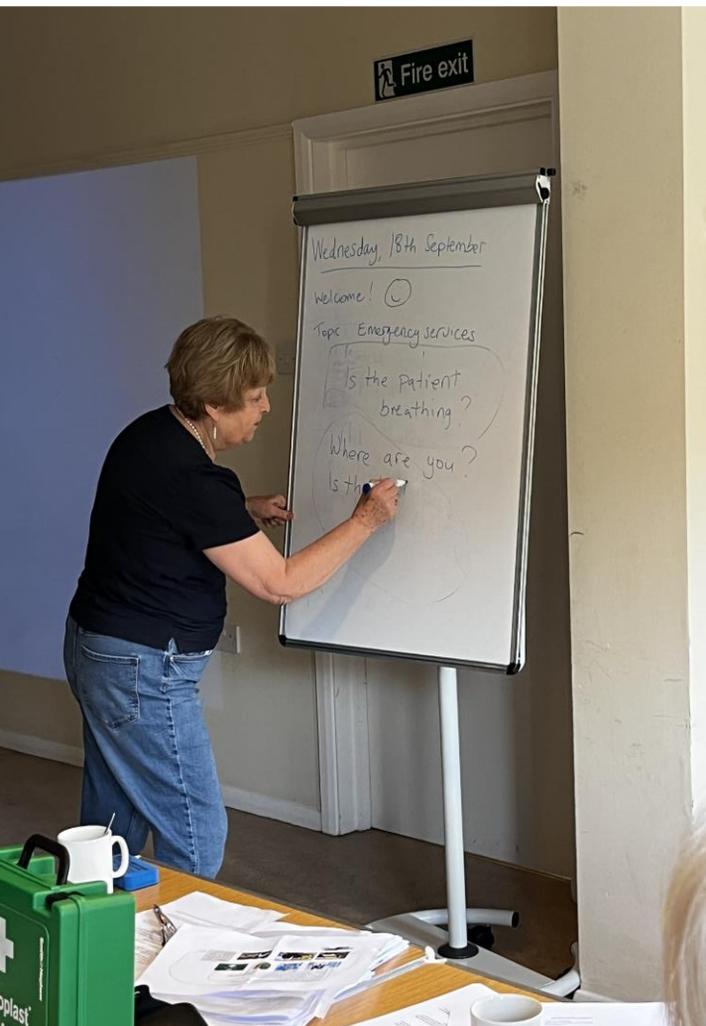
We currently support 17 children from 11 families; each session has an average attendance of 11 children.

Since 2012, RSG has been running a homework club for children of asylum seeker and refugee families in partnership with Abbey School and Kendrick School.

The homework club gives children an opportunity to receive one-to-one support boosting their confidence and enabling them to feel at ease in their school environment.

The sessions are run by pupils in year 11 and 12 within the two schools. It has also enabled the children to take part in sporting activities organised by Reading School.

Transportation to the schools is a challenge, many of the families that attend are on asylum support and cannot afford the bus fare each week. Currently there are 4 volunteers who over-see the homework club; however, we are hoping to recruit for more volunteering support in the future.



Our football team, Sanctuary Strikers, continue to play and compete against other teams. Our club aims to promote integration and unity between refugees and non-refugees through the sport and love of football.

We are Berkshire's only refugee football club and currently have lots of people interested in joining our team.

We are currently playing in the 3rd Division as well as in the Reading and District Sunday League.

Our current home ground is Palmer Park, making it easy and accessible to refugees and asylum seekers. We enjoy travelling to play against other teams, helping our players to experience and get to know the wider community.

Over the last year we have hosted our third annual Reading Community Cup which many people across Reading joined including the University of Reading, Mayor of Reading, Councillors and other dignitaries.

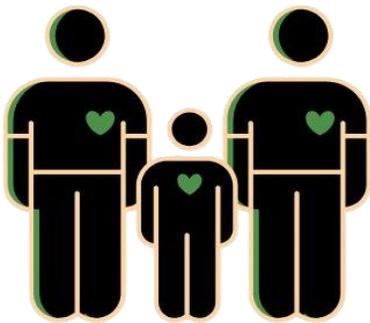
It has taken a considerable amount of time and effort to create this team, and we are so grateful for everyone who has helped organise and fund the sanctuary Strikes.

INTERESTING FACTS:



Top 5 countries clients came from:

1. Afghanistan
2. Iran
3. Sudan
4. Eritrea
5. Syria



Our three Resettlement Teams supported 211 families.

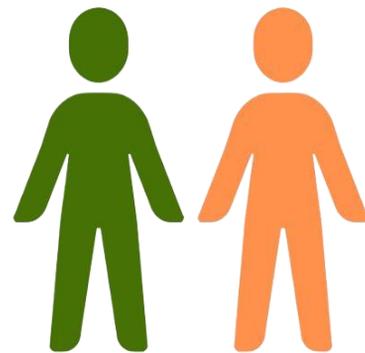


Our 7 drop-in volunteers have given 1,394 hours



92%

Clients are satisfied with the work that RSG provide.



1,143 people attended the Monday Drop-In
482 people attended the Wednesday Drop-In

The casework team dealt with 427 client. Totaling 1,706 hours.



CLIENT TESTINOMIES

YOUR PRESENCE AND
DEDICATION TO YOUR
WORK HAS BEEN A
SOURCE OF COMFORT
AND ENCOURAGEMENT.

I WOULD LIKE TO
THANK YOU FOR YOUR
TIRELESS EFFORTS
AND UNWAVERING
SUPPORT.

YOUR COMMITMENT,
KINDNESS AND
WISDOM HAVE
PROVIDED ME
REASSURANCE AND
ASSISTANCE

I FEEL THAT YOU ARE
LIKE MY FAMILY AT
RSG. YOU HELP ME
WHEN EVERYBODY
ELSE TURNED ME
AWAY.

OUR STAFF, TRUSTEES & VOLUNTEERS

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.

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!

An immense thank you to our trustees who support with the governance and leadership of RSG. We are very grateful for your support and insight with the running of the organisation.



FUNDRAISING

This year we received 16 new monthly donors, joining our sanctuary supporter group. We organised approximately 13 different fundraising events throughout the year, these included tasting events, charity quizzes, Hygge feasts and choir concerts.

We hit our £16,000 target during the big-give Christmas challenge; everyone that donated in previous years donated again this year alongside many new supporters. This year, we found that our core supporters did not falter in their donations and support of the organisation. At our Christmas Carol Concert event, we had over 450 people attending and the Reading Gospel Choir performing. Everyone was impressed with the speakers and the amazing music, and we raised approximately £6,000.

Despite the economic environment and negative media regarding refugees; we saw a monthly increase of regular and one-off donations. We started a series of stories on our newsletter and social media focusing on the people behind the numbers. This gave a voice to the clients who were involved and highlighted the need for donations to support their journey. The negativity within the press and media, was a real struggle to break through, however, each month we were blown away by our supporters and donators proudly and loudly supporting the work we do.

One of our challenges is our lack of resources. We were lucky enough to have an intern from Reading University who created some wonderful marketing assets. Not only did she create the marketing assets, but we also focused on creating school packs and school presentations. This allowed us to attend assemblies and promote our work to the younger generation. We are hoping that these school packs and assembly presentations will help Berkshire schools to get involved in Refugee Week in 2024.

RSG were named the Mayor's charity of the year, meaning, this ended in May 2024 and from it we raised £6,120. Being the Mayor's charity meant that they hosted our 30th anniversary event and attended many of our events. He was even the leader for our Reading Half Marathon team.



GRANTS



We raised a total of £239,122 in grant income. This was a decrease of 9% from last year, however the funding environment across the UK has become increasingly competitive with funds consistently receiving many more applications than they can support. We recruited a part-time Grants Fundraiser to focus resources on increasing the income we secure through grants. We had 9 successful grants and applied for roughly 20 grants.

One of the biggest grants we received was from the Earley Charity for £40,300, this covered core costs including staff training and supervision, office equipment, travel fund for clients and resources for activities. We were advised to put together a 'wish list' of items. The trustees agreed to grant us all but one of the items on the list. This was the biggest trustee-led grant that the Earley Trust have ever made reflecting that across the board of trustees there is a recognition of the value of RSG and the work we do.

Reading Borough Council (RBC) granted us £75,444 to provide integration support for Ukrainian refugees arriving in Reading. Our success in delivering support for this group has led to RBC continuing this support in 2024-25 and committing to another grant of approximately £75,000. RBC granted us a further £100,000 to continue providing immigration advice to asylum seekers and refugees in Reading and to meet the increasing demand for casework.

We received £35,752.00 from the CAF Keystone Fund to build organisational capacity and resilience. We will use this funding to improve our monitoring and evaluation processes, the digital skills of our staff team, and streamline how data is collected across RSG.

SPECIAL THANKS:

- Berkshire Community Fund-City of Sanctuary**
- RBC Closing the Gap Grant**
- Asylum Welcome (Justice Together)**
- NACCOM**
- Reading University Intern Grant**
- Reading University Sanctuary Strikers**
- Refugee Action EAR Digital**
- AB Charitable Trust**
- Geoff Herrington Fund**
- Berkshire West Mental Health Inequalities Community Grant Scheme**
- Earley Charity**
- Berkshire Community Foundation**
- Surviving Winter Fund**
- Reading Borough Council small Grants**
- Reading borough Council Ukrainian Support**

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.

CHAIR OF TRUSTEES

The number one concern of any board of trustees is financial sustainability and in the 2023/24 year there was an ever-increasing focus on this issue at the Refugee Support Group. In the wake of Covid and with continuing austerity and a cost-of-living crisis we struggled to meet fund raising targets. By the end of the year, we were looking at serious expenditure reduction measures that would become necessary if we continued to eat into our reserves. This was about the board thinking ahead and planning in tough times for local charities. It is strategic planning that gets you through such times and we were, and remain, confident about the future of the organisation.

At the forefront of our thinking is that we have a talented and professional staff team led by a Chief Executive who always has their welfare in mind. Refugee work is challenging and difficult. Our staff achieve marvellous things, and our goal is to both protect and grow this life changing work. As I write, nearly halfway into the following year, we have had some heartening and significant fundraising success. We will build on it.

Our trustee board awayday, held in December, resulted in a strategy to build the board in size and diversity while we consider moving to a system of governance that makes more use of sub committees and working groups.

Finally, the year saw the departure of three trustees: Jon Linley, Emily Lloyd and Simon Price. My thanks to them for their selfless contributions. We also welcomed Doon Lovett as a new trustee.

~ Mike Martin, Chair of Trustees



ALICE DRIVER

13 DEC 1990 – 6 JAN 2019



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

Alice Driver



www.refugeesupportgroup.org.uk/donate



FINANCIAL REPORT

Unaudited Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2024

REFUGEE SUPPORT GROUP

LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Trustees	Mr Mike Martin MBE Ms Fiona Zeneli Mrs Emily Lloyd Prof. Mary Richardson Mr Thabo Makuyana Ms Samantha Lee	Chair Treasurer
13/04/2022		Appointed
12/10/2022	Ms Sarah Seddon	Appointed
	Mr Simon Price Mrs Emma Broomfield Mr Patrick Ismond Mr Richard Hanson-James Mr Jon Linley Mrs Charlene Wattley	Appointed 14/12/22022 Resigned 21/04/2022 Resigned 21/10/2022 Resigned 16/11/2022 Resigned 18/05/2023 Resigned 24/09/2023
Chief Executive Officer Deputy CEO	Mr Nick Harborne Ms Flora Roshi	
Charity number	1098058	
Company number	04515238	
Principal address and Registered Office	First Floor, R.I.S.C 35-39 London Street Reading Berkshire RG1 4PS	
Independent examiner	Rachel Eden ACMA Curious Lounge, 1st Floor, Pinnacle Building Tudor Road Reading Berkshire RG1 1NH	
Bankers	The Co-operative Bank 13 New Road Oxford OX1 1LG	MetroBank One Southampton Row London WC1B 5HA



FINANCIAL REPORT

For the year ending 31st March 2024

	2024 £	2023 £
Income Resources		
Contract income	271,498	303,181
Grants donations	352,345	263,176
Legacies	-	-
Other Income	15,745	3,863
Total Income,	639,588	570,220
Expenditure		
Wages and salaries	453,492	471,416
Staff training and development	5,404	6,870
Freelance and consultancy	39,080	48,149
Volunteer costs	1,433	5,367
Cost of delivering services	68,833	28,545
Administration costs	45,245	29,014
Publicity and marketing	-	3,481
Meetings and events	837	305
Travel and subsistence	1,390	5,184
Funding Costs	12,479	-
Membership and subscriptions	-	1,277
Premises	27,704	24,565
IT & Communication	13,739	-
Office equipment	-	-
Professional fees	3,161	3,148
Depreciation	1,954	1,313
Total Expenditure	674,751	628,634
Net income / (expenditure)	-35,163	-58,414

LEGACY APPEALS

GIVE THE NEXT GENERATION OF REFUGEES A LIFELINE BY LEAVING A GIFT IN YOUR WILL

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.



barrettandco
solicitors