



City of Sanctuary

Working to create a culture welcome for asylum seekers and refugees in the city and county of Leicester

Registered Charity number 1138017

Annual Report 2013 – 2014

This was the year Nelson Mandela died, commemorated by local people in the park that bears his name, Leicester City were promoted to the Premier League, and Leicester unfortunately lost its bid to be the city of culture. It was also the year in which the number of asylum seekers dispersed to Leicester increased by a third. Total figures to date are 829. Thankfully our funding from a variety of grants and individual donations has also increased and we have been fortunate enough to receive £15,000 for capital expenditure (from the Clothworkers Foundation and the Co-operative Society) to support the equipment and facilities at the drop-in. Another £5,000 was received from Santander for bus fares to the drop-in, and £1,500 was secured from the Lush Charity Pot to kick-start a new welcome and orientation project, “Hello Leicester”, for newly dispersed asylum seekers to help them settle and integrate by connecting them to services and community groups. A further £3,000 from the British Red Cross Refugee Services has supported us to develop English classes. This has also been the year when we began to use a quality improvement tool - PQASSO to self-assess in order to improve our efficiency and professionalism. Another key achievement has been the engagement of the city council to pass a motion opposing government policy on the destitution of asylum seekers and agreeing to join the [Still Human Still Here](#) coalition. We will build on this work over the coming year. This year we supported Loughborough to become a Town of Sanctuary – thus extending the welcome to those across the East Midlands who have to attend the East Midlands Reporting Centre. It was also a year of detention and deportation for more than one of our drop-in users, in addition to good news for some who gained refugee status.

The Drop-in Centre.

The centre continues to thrive. Last year we reported that we averaged 60 clients a week – now it is nearer 80 and one or two weeks we have had nearly 100. This has meant that we have had to increase the number of lunches we provide and the amount we pay out in bus fares has also gone up, particularly as the fares themselves have also risen. Since opening in May 2011, 906 people have attended, of which 207 registered their country as UK and 103 who did not register their country.

A grant from the Clothworkers’ Foundation has meant that we were able to replace our elderly laptops with ten new ones, and to acquire five new sewing machines. We also plan to purchase musical instruments and other items with the remainder of the grant – these purchases have been delayed because of the need for additional secure storage. However, at the time of writing, the Booth Hall is being equipped with new cupboards, carpet and sofas, paid for in part with some of the Clothworkers’ money plus a grant from the East Midlands

Co-operative Society. St Martin's House and some of the other user groups have also contributed. We hope to move back into our revamped premises on May 29th but in the short term we shall hold the drop-in in the grand surroundings of the Great Hall – we are grateful to SMH for making this possible. With the closure of Refugee Action and the introduction of Migrant Help we now find that more and more of our clients are coming to us with problems and we are considering having a special weekly 'case-work drop-in' on another day of the week, to support advocacy and problem solving. The centre is now very much the heart of LCoS and though it is our most expensive project, we feel it is enormously worthwhile.

Sewing and Craft Group (meeting during the drop-in session).

The group began the year finishing off the patch-work cushions that had been commissioned by the Red Cross. We followed this up by completing a number of small items (cushion covers, shopping bags, and peg holders) which we hope to offer for sale during Refugee Week or other times when we are promoting LCoS. Recently we have been making aprons, which has been one of our most popular projects. The 5 new sewing machines are easier to use, as they are all the same make and, of course, they are not breaking down the way the older machines did. Enda Dean joined us as volunteer during the year and has made a great contribution to the group. Enda has talents in a wide range of crafts and our clients have enjoyed having the opportunity to make a range of seasonal cards, Modge Podge and other small decorative items. This has greatly increased the number of clients participating in craft activities. Terri Wills, a keen and skilled patchworker has also joined our group of supporters and this helps to ensure that we are able to offer an activity on most weeks. If you have a sewing or craft activity you could share, the group would be happy to help you do this.

The New Evidence Search Team – NEST

The team works with referred asylum seekers to gather evidence for a new submission. This project started late summer 2011 and we now have a team of members numbering 31, with a great variety of skills and experience. We have just taken our 99th referral – around 80 have been completed and closed. Thanks to Bessie and Pam for this important project.

English classes

Our grant from the British Red Cross and support from a well-qualified and highly experienced volunteer (Catriona) who has helped us to develop more English classes aimed at asylum seekers, particularly those who on arrival, are unable to attend Leicester College, due to the 6 month residence requirement. We have had eight volunteers involved in the teaching of English and three regular classes including a woman only class which has provided the space for developing the women specific language and confidence. A new class at an advanced level is due to start in June and we have had a total of 35 asylum seekers benefit and several have move on to Leicester College.

Art classes

Refugee artist, Ali Agayev, has continued to run six-week courses in landscape and portrait art classes bringing together asylum seekers and members of the host community to learn alongside each other. We are grateful for Ali's talents and enthusiasm, which has provided a welcome therapeutic activity and pleasure for many asylum seekers. Some excellent work as a result of these classes has been on display in the Booth Hall.

Bicycle Loan Scheme

A [full evaluation](#) was carried out on our cycle loan scheme in partnership with Bikes4All which ended in April last year and the report is now on the website. The project has continued in a limited form due to lack of grant funding and a suitable partner to work with. We have allocated 10 fully serviced bicycles, which we have received as donations. We also were able to access training for several asylum seekers to repair and maintain cycles on loan and now run a monthly maintenance workshop which keeps asylum seekers 'on the road' by means of general maintenance and, in some cases, quite extensive repairs. We now have a new partnership with Community Cycles social enterprise and are applying for grants to help continue and expand our loan scheme with referrals from The British Red Cross. Thank you to Michael Tully for keeping this project going, which increases the mobility of asylum seekers in Leicester and provides for freedom and improved well-being.

Outings and other activities

Thanks to Julie and Sue, we have had a number of very successful trips, during the past year; most were local and one was further afield. Our annual visit to the Seaside is by far our most popular, with over 40 people travelling by coach on a Saturday in August and having a great day out despite the dodgy weather. Mablethorpe has a lovely sandy beach, although only a few brave souls stuck a toe in the water as it was cold, wet and windy. We preferred to eat our sandwiches without sand in them, so we found a bench on the prom. The trip to Twycross Zoo in September was also much appreciated, especially by families with children. Seventeen people travelled by coach to Foxton Locks last November and had a great day out, looking round the museum, enjoying a short boat trip on the canal and a very informative tour of the site led by one of the museum curators. Children and adults had a great time opening the locks for a barge which happened to be travelling through the top locks during our tour. Last July and again this April trips organised by Christina to the Sacred Heart Convent in Rearsby, with hospitality provided by the nuns and walks in the local countryside led by Christina, were much enjoyed by smaller groups of Asylum Seekers who travelled there and back by local bus. Nearly 40 drop-in users were treated to a wonderful dance, music and art performance at the Curve: "[A Journey of Unbelonging](#)" by a group of Refugees provided by ArtReach as a thank you for our part in their [Journeys to Leicester](#) project. For many, this was their first visit to a theatre and the excitement was palpable. This was followed by a successful LCoS fundraiser at the Exchange bar with [Baran](#) a blend of Iranian folk and Turkish musicians and enjoyed by all. A group of 5 asylum seekers were taken to see Refugee Boy at the Nottingham Playhouse at the end of March and all were moved to see a story which resonated with their own experiences, told to such a wide audience.

Appealing4

Since the last AGM, we have asked for and received a considerable variety of items of need for our asylum seekers, thanks to the continuing generosity of all our supporters. We still don't have storage for items, but we have had a great response to our appeals and are grateful to stalwart Indira, who takes requests, emails them to supporters, drives, collects and delivers important gifts from bedding or kettles to baby clothes and toys to all those who put in a request. Delivering also enables Indira to see how some of the asylum seekers are managing and to find out what else they might need. The number of requests can vary from one or two one month, to about twenty another month. Thanks to supporters for passing on requests to friends, churches and other groups, we usually receive enough baby equipment

and clothes. We can assure you that all the things you donate so generously are much appreciated by the recipients.

Hello Leicester

We are pleased to have Alison Birch who has considerable experience, to kick-start a new project to welcome newly dispersed asylum seekers, help them to orientate to Leicester and connect them to local services and community groups. We will shortly be recruiting volunteers (including asylum seekers themselves) for this important and rewarding work.

Awareness raising

We continue to offer free talks and training opportunities to community groups and the statutory sector. We delivered more than 20 awareness raising sessions to students at Leicester College in the Hairdressing, Health & Beauty and Media departments. The latter led to an offer by graphics design students to redesign our publicity leaflets and design a poster and banner. We also provided a short training session to learning support staff at the college. We plan to deliver a training session to a social services team and a physiotherapy team in June. We have also engaged with Sir Clive Loader the Police and Crime Commissioner for Leicestershire who is interested in working with us to produce and distribute a myth busting leaflet on asylum seekers and refugees.

In addition talks have been given to church groups and multi faith networks, the Secular Society, the Sunday Assembly, the Deaf Society and a group of Swedish Visitors. Thanks to the asylum seekers who supported these events with their own stories. We ran stalls at the Botanic Gardens open day and the "Our Leicester" day in the market during August bank holiday weekend where we also made contact with many other voluntary organisations. An awareness raising display was set up in the Central Library plus several other libraries during and after refugee week. We plan to develop the display in the form of pull up banners, each challenging a myth about asylum seekers, in partnership with others including the city council. We have had a couple of supportive articles in the Leicester Mercury and a few interviews with Radio Leicester. We knew that we had "arrived", when Radio Leicester telephoned us offering to send us a car to our offices for comments on the publication of the Home Affairs Select committee report on the asylum process chaired by Keith Vaz. Needless to say we have no offices, but gave an interview and our comments were repeated on the news throughout the day.

Shopping buddies

This project supports asylum seekers on Section 4 support which provides their £36 weekly benefit in the form of an Azure (debit) card which can only be used in the 4 major supermarkets and Boots. It allows volunteers to shop with an Azure card holder and then pay them in cash so that they can access local cheaper shops, the market or charity stores, repair shoes, get a haircut and maintain dignity.

The project is running well and we currently have twelve pairs of shopping partners. We have recently had an upsurge in interest from asylum seekers, with the result that we now have a short waiting list for volunteer partners and are seeking volunteers to help with this on a monthly basis.

Meanwhile the voucher exchange scheme is also very popular and is particularly helpful in bridging the gap for those asylum seekers waiting for a shopping partner. We expect this

scheme to grow due to the fact that the Red Cross are now issuing Asda vouchers and are running short of funds to help destitute asylum seekers attend the East Midlands Reporting Centre.

Quality improvement (PQASSO)

PQASSO (Programme of Quality Assessment for Small Organisations) by the Charity Evaluation Scheme has provided us with a useful tool for reflection and action on 12 identified areas.

The PQASSO team (Mary Campbell, Mick Walker and Christina Mottram) began work in November 2013 and selected three key areas for self-assessment: Planning, Governance and Managing People. The assessment has engaged trustees, steering group members and volunteers as well as asylum seekers and enabled them to identify several areas for improvement, and an action plan was produced for each area. Some of the Leicester City of Sanctuary procedures are being written down, so that we can easily pass this information on to new volunteers in a new induction pack. We have also been writing down the tasks that get done by volunteers so that we can be more flexible in how we share out responsibilities. By the end of May most of the work on these three areas should be complete. We now have policies on Confidentiality, a Code of Conduct and a Volunteer Policy – all of which will provide us with support and greater professionalism. The PQASSO team are particularly looking at how we make sure we have good arrangements for health and safety, risk assessments, and how our Steering Group relates to our trustees. The proposal for a revised structure for management and governance has arisen from this work.

Assessments on the next three areas (Leadership and Management, User-Centred Service, Learning and Development) is now complete but actions for improvement won't start until the first three are complete, so that we can use what we have learned from the first three to help us to complete the next ones.

Administration

We still operate without paid staff and administration is managed by a group of volunteers (special thanks to Aimee Packwood) who regularly check our email account, post to Facebook and Twitter, add stories to the website, and develop our database of volunteers and users. Tomorrow Together have moved their office from St Martins House and no longer field phone calls or take post. Once the Booth Hall is refurbished with adequate storage we will buy a printer which will help with copying etc.

Conclusion and looking forward

It has been a joy and privilege to be the chair of Leicester City of Sanctuary and I could not have done this without the support of asylum seekers, trustees, members of the steering group and all the volunteers. We are an entirely voluntary organisation and if it was not for the dedication and enthusiasm of our committed volunteers we would not have achieved so much. Volunteers have made LCoS what it is, from a single act of kindness to larger regular and time demanding activities. **A big thank you** to all our volunteers and especially to those who have led projects and coordinated larger pieces of work and turned up week after week to ensure that our activities run smoothly. We have enjoyed and very much appreciated the help of Amélie Romat from France, who came over especially to work with us for 6 months. We also thank all of our supporters for their donations and good will and are grateful to our partners who have helped with advice and support for asylum seekers and refugees in many

different ways. These include the British Red Cross Refugee Services, Refugee Action, The Race Equality Centre, Open Hands, The Welcome Project, Leicester Aids Support Services, The LGBT Centre, ASSIST and many others. We are especially grateful to St Martin's House and the Diocese for their continued support and provision of free premises from which we deliver most of our work. We also thank our funders and grant making charitable trusts without whose support we could not run the drop-in and other projects so successfully.

It is with sadness that I give up my role as chair but I can assure you that I will remain as an active volunteer with LCoS and will support the growth of future projects and the consolidation of existing ones. There is still much potential in developing through the arts (working with The Curve and The Phoenix), health and other statutory services, schools and Leicester College, faith groups and community groups as well as with the City Council itself. Our Hello Leicester project has potential to link with new groups and services as volunteers identify the needs and passions of those we meet and help to settle. Our ultimate aim is to reach deep into the mainstream and ensure a welcome across all services, groups, spaces and places in Leicester.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Colleen Molloy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The letter "C" is large and loops around the start of the name. The "y" at the end has a long, elegant tail that loops back under the name.

Colleen Molloy (outgoing Chair May 19th 2014)

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