



**Leicester
City of Sanctuary**

Committed to creating a 'culture of welcome' for
asylum seekers & refugees in our city and county

ANNUAL REPORT 2016-2017



LEICESTER CITY OF SANCTUARY CHAIR'S REPORT 2016-2017

This has been a year when the activity of Leicester City of Sanctuary has greatly increased. This is largely, but not entirely due to the People's Project Lottery Grant of £50,000. The balance of this Report will tell of what we have been able to do through this injection of additional support, but as Chair, I want to pay my personal tribute to our coordinator team, our project leaders, our volunteers and the many others who have both made this possible, and delivered so well against what we set out to do. So thank you to Mick Walker, Jenny Westmoreland and Shali Bullough, supported by Tarjinder Gill as Finance Officer, as well as to our many other volunteer helpers and activity leaders.

Last year's AGM approved, in principle, the appointment of Mike Alexander as Treasurer at Trustee level, and I am pleased to note that in June, Mike formally took up that role. He has brought a depth of experience to this and to other matters from his work in the NHS which has greatly helped us. We had been especially concerned to bring renewed rigour into our financial procedures and reporting this year, not least as we are now managing larger sums of grant income, and I am glad to be able to report that robust systems are now in place, with a Finance Officer working to clarified policy guidelines approved by the trustee body as a whole.

The 2016 AGM also approved a revised Constitution looking to convert LCoS into a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), something that had been asked for the previous year. Unfortunately, on further investigation it has emerged that the process for converting an unincorporated charity into a CIO is more complex, and requires the setting up of a CIO that is a new charity with its own charity number. This means we will bring back proposals to this current year's AGM to complete the job. The new CIO will have the identical Constitution to that voted on last year and a trustee body in full continuity with the present one.

Whilst Coordinators, Project Leaders and others deliver on a weekly basis, Trustees meet quarterly, and are charged with

holding a strategic view of the organisation. This year we have, in fact, met 6 times (in June, September, December, February, March and April), not least because we have been working hard to take a view about succession strategy, as Mick Walker indicated his wish to stand down in May 2017 as lead coordinator. In a full day meeting in December we discussed options for the future, and in the new year a consultation document was issued outlining some options for change. These were well received by most respondents, and to ensure objectivity Trustees also invited Voluntary Action Leicestershire (VAL) to offer further, independent advice. This will be reported on further at the AGM.

We have also taken the opportunity this year to review some of our policies, and have approved updated versions of policies on Financial Management, Safeguarding, Health and Safety, Equal Opportunities, Confidentiality and Data Protection and Complaints. The Volunteer Handbook is also under review.

Finally, I need to report that in April two trustees offered their resignations prior to the AGM. I wish to record our thanks for their service to Rob Blow (trustee since May 2015) and also to Pam Inder, who although she only took on the role of Trustee in May 2015, is a founder member of LCoS, and served as its Chair (under a former constitution) and also as Coordinator. Many people owe an immense amount to Pam's work throughout Leicester City of Sanctuary, and we wish her well as she steps back from some of her responsibilities.

I would also like to record my own thanks to the other trustees who have steered us through an eventful year, when much has been achieved, much more discussed, and which hopefully has set the tone for continued supportive and successful work with those who come to our city and county seeking sanctuary.

Pete Hobson – Chair of Trustees 2016-17

The full Trustee body for 2016-17:

Mike Alexander (Treasurer - from 1 June 2016)

Rob Blow (to 8 April 2017)

Pete Hobson (Chair)

Pam Inder (to 8 April 2017)

Sam Javid

Annie Merton (Vice-Chair)

Golden Ngwenya

John Ssekindu



CO-ORDINATOR'S REPORT

STEPPING STONES

Last May, after a well organised and concerted campaign, we were delighted to be awarded £50,000 Lottery funding for our project 'Stepping Stones'. Now, twelve months later, we can reflect on what the money has enable us to do:

- We have worked with **43** different organisations over the year, many of them new to us. Our range of activity has expanded.
- Our **12** trips out have included Skegness, Billesdon, BBC Radio Leicester, Phoenix Cinema and canal trips partly paid for by Leicester Novus Rotary.
- **4** activities have been run and organised by asylum seekers and refugees: cooking, mendhi, table tennis, beauty & make-up. They have also been involved languages to others, including Spanish and Arabic, and helping us run craft activities for children.

Apart from giving asylum seekers to organise things for themselves, 'Stepping Stones' has increased LCOS's engagement with the local community. Two indicators of this are the increased number of communications we are getting on a daily basis and the number of requests to visit us, not least from local and national media.

Managing this size of grant (we have other grants to manage at the same time) has required us to be more professional with our financial and administrative arrangements.

Accounting for a number of funding sources is not easy – bus fares and meals, for example, come out of more than one budget and we are obliged to keep accurate records.

We are looking to sustain and develop the activities and projects which have worked best. Yes, we need the grants to do that and we have submitted 8 applications over recent months.



CREATIVE WRITING

This project offered a creative response to the growing refugee crisis and featured professional writer Jess Green and facilitator Alex Plasatis, both from Writing East Midlands. Working with volunteer translators from the drop-in, the team delivered a 12 week creative writing project which attracted 50 people in total from a wide variety of nationalities.

Despite initial scepticism about how well such an idea could work with people who struggle with English, the will to try something new triumphed and some of the poetry and prose produced was very immediate and powerful. This project was a huge success and don't want it to be a 'one off'.

COOKING PROJECT

This year people have had the opportunity to teach others how to prepare a meal from their own country. More recently the focus has been on developing cooking skills, using ingredients one might get from a food bank. Participants work in teams and have to come up with a meal idea using the food items they have been given.

The resulting dishes are judged by Linton, our celebrated drop-in chef. We are grateful to Soft Touch and the Red Cross for their support for this project and there is potential to develop it. Again, this is a project with a lot more mileage.

LCOS FOOTBALL TEAM

Thanks to the tireless efforts of Phil Hardy, the volunteer who set up the team, we now have around 35 regular players. Leicester City Football Club has provided amazing support, including coaching sessions, kit and a visit to King Power Stadium to watch a match. During a recent tournament organised by LCFC our players beat a team from Hull 3-1.

WORKING WITH THE RED CROSS

We have built a strong working relationship with the Red Cross over the last twelve months. RC workers attend the weekly drop-in. They offer courses to improve future prospects for employment (Life Skills and CV preparation) and have distributed questionnaires to help us evaluate what we do. Two LCOS volunteers now have paid employment at the Red Cross.

THE DROP-IN

The Wednesday drop-in at Holy Cross continues to be the major focus for LCOS in terms of numbers. Attendance hovers around 100 and funding from Stepping Stones enabled us to arrange a number of sessions within and alongside it such as activities for children and adults, table tennis, First Aid, well being courses, mendhi, head massage...

Visitors to the drop-in include the World Church Mission, Leicester Quakers, The Guardian, The High Sheriff of Leicestershire, Mayor Peter Soulsby and Liz Kendall M.P.

The drop-in has welcomed 158 new asylum seekers over the last year.

We need to say a huge thank you to the volunteers, most of them asylum seekers and refugees, who make it happen every week. This includes our kitchen team, the people who handle the bus fares and those who set out and put away the furniture.

Holy Cross continue to be very supportive, allowing us to store and use the tables for our table tennis activity and also helping us with extra space. We are grateful to them for accommodating us and have now formalised our agreement with them. We look forward to a good partnership moving forward.

THURSDAY IN BOOTH HALL

The computer class and sewing class continue to operate on Thursday afternoons to thanks to the time put by more of our volunteers. Both activities remain popular. We thank St.Martins for continuing to give us the space to operate this Thursday session and the English class on Wednesday mornings.

FREE ENGLISH CLASSES

Our collaboration with Leicester University's English Language Teaching Unit has made a huge difference this year. The Unit now puts on six ESOL classes per week spread over three days, with provision for those at Beginners, Intermediate and Advanced levels. Volunteers are there to help out. Thanks to Phil Horspool and Aleks Palanac for co-ordinating all this.

De Montfort University now also provides classes. Neve Shalom Synagogue has their own class every week and the Wednesday women's class at St. Martins has a regular clientele.

NEW EVIDENCE SEARCH TEAM (NEST)

The team has had another busy year, working on more than 30 asylum cases. Our case workers, all volunteers, help clients by suggesting documents that they should obtain in support of their claims, doing background research on particular countries or sometimes just taking the time to listen to a client's story.

Our work to become regulated by the OISC (Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner) is continuing and we hope to achieve regulated status during the coming year. We are grateful to James Conyers from Refugee Action for his help in preparing the application documents.

We were able to recruit new volunteers from De Montfort University and the University of Leicester Legal Society Pro Bono group.

NEST monthly meetings benefit greatly from the experience and knowledge of Piotr Kuhniewicz from the Red Cross. He also leads training sessions for new case workers.

A big thank you to Bessie Hayes, Michael Tully and Sheila Brucciani, longstanding volunteers, who stepped down this year. Equally we need to thank Mark Wilkinson, NEST co-ordinator, and his deputy, Sherri Wong, for managing the scheme.



APPEALING

The monthly appeal for all kinds of items, from microwaves to cricket gear, continues to produce the goods. A recent request for an electric drill managed to produce two and we were offered more than one wheelchair when we were looking for one. Maggie Edgington, the co-ordinator, thanks everybody who has responded to our e-mails.

SHOPPING BUDDY SCHEME

We have found it hard to recruit shopping partners and have decided to put the scheme on hold. We are advising asylum seekers to bring shopping vouchers or gift cards to the drop-in where we will do our best to cash them if the sums are manageable.

THE BIKE SCHEME

Since it started running the scheme has distributed over two hundred refurbished bikes to asylum seekers. We decided to revamp the scheme so that our funding could go further. The new arrangement allows for basic refurbishment, kindly carried out by a community group of volunteers, a free helmet, lights and a lock that we provide. 15 bikes went out in March, distributed to the most needy as identified by the Red Cross. The police have offered to provide bikes.



DONATIONS

Apart from gifts of cash, on which we rely heavily, this year has seen a big increase in donations of clothes, food and toiletries. We do not have storage facilities so we prefer to give manageable amounts out every week at the drop in. This has worked well.

VOLUNTEERS

This has been a successful year for the recruitment and retention of volunteers. The new online system for applications and references has streamlined the application process.

The number of volunteers has averaged 90 people, with most being involved in the drop-in, NEST and the ESOL classes. Bi-monthly volunteer meetings are now taking place at the drop-in and a meeting for all volunteers is being planned for after the AGM.

SANCTUARY AWARDS

Glebelands Primary School became the first local school to gain the School of Sanctuary award for their commitment to celebrating the contribution of asylum seekers and refugees. Other schools are showing an interest in gaining similar recognition. The award is a national initiative.

The ArtReach Journeys Festival, in which Leicester City of Sanctuary has participated as a partner, is also seeking a Sanctuary Award – the process is under way as this annual report is being put together.

MEANWHILE...

- 26,000 asylum cases remain unresolved nationally, each representing a person or people effectively in a state of limbo. In Leicester we have people who have been waiting ten years and more
- The government has quietly announced that those applying for permanent residency face 'safe country review' after five years limited leave to remain. This represents thousands of cases.
- Thousands of people continue to die in the Mediterranean... Thousands more are living in appalling conditions in Greece and elsewhere... Hungary is forcing all asylum seekers to move to detention centres... Sixty million refugees worldwide and the numbers are growing...



FINALLY

Many thanks to our volunteers, members and supporters who continue to make our operation possible and to asylum seekers and refugees who show enormous resilience.

Mick Walker - Co-ordinator LCOS