



**Shropshire
Supports
Refugees**
SHROPSHIRE SUPPORTS REFUGEES
**Annual Report
2023**



Our Year 2023

2023 has been a year of change and of balance; between the increasing need for fast reaction and quick decisions, and the building of firm foundations for the future.

In 2023, on top of our continued work, we received two new Asylum hotels in the county and welcomed nearly 300 people with clothes, Sim cards, ESOL and activities support.

We also received 8 families arriving in Shropshire from Afghanistan, and supported the dispersal project happening on an army base where at least 250 people are staying at any one time.

Alongside all of this, we shut down the not-for-profit CIC and started to run fully from our charity CIO.

We relocated to a welcoming new hub but also lost space when having to leave our donations unit.

We said goodbye to two support workers but employed two more whose positive impact has quickly been felt.

What a year!



We strive to maintain relationships with our past cohorts particularly when new people arrive. We are mindful of longer-term integration needs so all are included in offers of support and opportunities through our WhatsApp groups and Facebook.



Syrians

We are so pleased to see so many of the Syrian ladies still coming in every week for English classes and every other week for a coffee morning. We never thought we would see them socialising in public spaces so we are very proud that they want to spend time in the support hub.

We now have a prayer room which makes it easier for people who pray five times a day, you will see Arabic coffee on our shelves and we look forward to celebrating Eid with them. The Syrian ladies are using their initiative to look for ways to bring their delicious food to the public; as always, we will do our best to support.

We have seen many Syrian families with their citizenships and they are now proud citizens of the UK.



Ukrainians

Supporting Ukrainian refugees was another focus of ours in 2023 as we tried to develop the support networks that their friends and families would have been back home.

2022 was about helping people to get set up in their new homes, get into work, education and learning English, dealing with the emergencies that urgent evacuation brought, and the complexities of resettlement.

2023 has been much more about holding space for people whilst the reality of the situation dawns on them. Our staff have been assisting Ukrainian service users with everything from utilities to education, help to get into working, emotional and well-being support and activities for the children. We have created a space that we hope they feel comfortable in and a team of Ukrainian staff waiting to help support them in any way that they need. We hope they get a sense of belonging and a place to come where they feel at home.

Working closely with Shropshire Council's housing team our staff are proud that they have assisted over 75 families to find homes of their own in Shropshire and some outside of the county.

Originally thinking this was only going to be for a couple of months, Ukrainians find themselves here almost 2 years later, treading water, and not knowing where to put their roots down.



Каме. 10 мкс

ALL

WILL

HEAL



We have focused on trying to help the people who are still struggling to get into work because of language or any other barriers.

Creating specialist English classes for doctors and medics, funded by the Wynn Foundation to buy specialist books.

Business level English classes put on for those who need a little bit of extra help to break into the workplace.

Children's activities weekly to ensure they have time with children from their own country, as well as integrating into schools.

As time has gone on mental health has suffered, but being able to come together, for English classes, for food and arts, poetry and writing classes has eased their stress.

Out of some of our projects there has developed some beautiful creative works of art, including exhibitions and galleries, Christmas cards, pickles and delicious foods, choirs and dance troupes, nail artists, hairdressers and masseurs.

A beautiful film 'Women' about strong Ukrainian women coming to live in Shrewsbury was made by Lora Arkhyenko. This empowering piece has already attracted national and international attention and that we are supporting Lora to manage the acclaim it is receiving.

And a song about peace was recorded during the workshop collaboration between The Hive and SSR. The words were written by one of our staff and a beautiful video created to support it.

In just a few weeks it had reached nearly 3,000 people. Who knows where that song will take us in 2024.

THE JONES!
I WOULD LIKE TO INVITE YOU TO ATTEND
A PREMIER SCREENING OF THE DOCUMENTARY FILM

WOMEN

Director Lora Arkhyenko

Sunday, January 7th, 2024
12:30 PM

Old Market Hall
The Square
Shrewsbury
Shropshire
SY1 1LH

Please RSVP by 22.12.23
to confirm your attendance



Asylum hotels and army bases

We have had the pleasure of assisting the Ukrainians to settle and we were pleased to be in a position to do the same with the asylum hotels. We embraced the challenges that the asylum system brings with it, upskilled our team and warmly welcomed the three hotels as they opened each time, packed with people desperately wanting to escape war, poverty, and persecution.

With growing challenges and the dangerous impact of anti-refugee rhetoric, far-right extreme views, and anti-human narratives, the reality of settling in the UK has become darker.

Thank goodness that in Shropshire we were inundated with offers of support as always, outnumbering the negative comments on social media, and the negative activities around the hotels.

A huge fundraising campaign ensued and we managed to raise around £17,000 most of which was spent on buying people a second set of warm clothes, proper shoes, instead of flip-flops and welcome items, such as earplugs, eye masks, notepads, and pens and SIM cards.

Warm clothes and prayer mats were donated from a mosque and TVs, DVD players and sports equipment were installed in the one hotel.

Determined to try to ease the mental health of the men and families in those hotels, we arranged two sports mornings in collaboration with numerous sporting providers, clubs, groups and centres. This welcoming act set the scene for how we like to do things in Shropshire and gave the strong message that whilst they were with us, they were going to be treated with respect and dignity.

From these mornings grew a relationship with Chris Child, a recently retired CEO from a charity that focuses on getting people active. Thanks to Chris, some of our staff and the goodwill of the sports providers and funders, we were able to enable access to regular sports activities, such as cricket, football, tennis, running clubs, walking groups, and boxing, we now have a professional boxer in the county who has been taken under the wing of a local club, and the individual opportunities are too many to name.



Community cohesion in Telford

As always, our second mission is to facilitate the active involvement of local groups, churches, mosques, and education opportunities.

With the arrival of two asylum hotels in Telford and then 17 families in Cosford, we were very worried about how we were going to be able to stretch our support to an area where we didn't have a base and in an area where we had very little contacts.

We needn't have worried because with a few social media posts, we were soon on track meeting with one person at a time who opened up their door.

To date, we have helped initiate activities running in the community through All Saints Church, Wellington, the Tennis Centre, Telford, AFC, the House of Prayer and CTS in Wellington, the Children Society based in Wellington, the Alston community centre, weekly football at Telford College run by a gentleman from All Saints Church, Wellington swimming baths, Parklane Community Centre and in 2024, we look forward to working closely with Lilleshall Sports Centre.

For the family hotel we were able to provide weekly arts and crafts activities for the children and women, and weekly English classes for the adults.

We are looking forward to increasing the activities in the hotels and in the community in 2024



Hong Kong, BNO

In 2023 we enjoyed getting to know the Hong Kongers in the county a little bit more.

All of them are here under slightly different circumstances, but we were very pleased when they agreed to come together to celebrate some of their annual celebrations.

With help from two of the cohort, and with the funding from the West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership, we were able to put on a sociable boat trip for the Dragon boat races, a dumpling making workshop, and for the harvest moon festival, we brought them together to make moon cakes!

Who knew they were so delicious?

With the help of two HK teachers, we were able to run two HK children's cultural classes, a chance for them to help the children not to forget about the culture or how to write in Cantonese.

People took part in the Refugee week activities, and we ran some successful tea parties at the hub.

We look forward to getting to know the families further in 2024, with our new Hong Kong support worker in place.





Refugee Week



Awareness Raising

Alongside direct support, it's vital for smooth integration that we continue to raise awareness through our preferred platforms; Refugee Week and City of Sanctuary.



We focused Refugee Week largely around a day in the square, where we brought together refugees and people seeking asylum, who wanted to share their stories and culture.

At the tail end of a beautiful six-week poetry workshop run by national playwright, Hattie Edwards, a number of people from all over the world came together to deliver poetry that they had created.



Andy McKeown, a long-standing supporter of our work delivered a unique experience with a 'light buggy' that enabled people from every country to write harmless graffiti on the ancient walls of Shropshire buildings. We were able to capture videos and pictures of some beautiful heartfelt messages written about their experiences of seeking refuge that really touched attendees.

Later in the year, just in time for Christmas, we were invited to hold an exhibition at the Theatre Severn. We quickly invited a number of people to submit their work who had already sent us photographs of the town and Shropshire. We printed them, and it was beautifully curated by Lora.



The previously mentioned collaborative song 'All Will Heal', made by members of our Hub alongside The Hive, and the film 'Women' that we hope will continue to take the country by storm, both showcase the creative ways Shropshire Supports Refugees has worked to raise awareness.

society action service
business volunteerism honor change love skills
communities nonprofit vibrant senior program
volunteers
build service connections volunteer
hope diverse
700 hours dedicated by
volunteers in 2023
celebrate
community
prepareness
traditional emergency
landsOn
friends



We could not do all the extraordinary things we achieve without our amazing bunch of volunteers. From supporting deliveries of much needed clothing, handing out Christmas presents and preparing Welcome hampers they are an integral part of our team



Exciting changes

2023 was also another year of extraordinary change and growth as we were supported to move into our new home in Mardol, Shrewsbury, helped by the local authority.



We sadly lost our Donations Hub which brought dignity and comfort to so many people for the past two years. To be able to choose your own clothes, for us to be able to store furniture, toys and food for people in need was a gift that we were eternally grateful for, but we are now missing desperately.

2024 will be about trying to find another solution for donations.

We finally closed down the CIC and became a fully-fledged charity. There was a lot of work behind the scenes, and the back of house team worked their socks off, making sure the move both into the new venue, and to a CIO was successful, safe and compliant to the charity commission requirements.

The funding team worked hard behind the scenes to ensure that we have money to do all these things that we have mentioned, and the challenge will go forwards into the New Year.

The local media were as always supportive and invited me to regularly comment on activities and progress, giving our charity a higher profile.

We were very grateful to receive two Mayors Awards yet again, this time, seeing them going into the hands of the staff, and volunteers as well, was extremely satisfying.

The guidance and support of our trustees through this period of change has been instrumental in driving our mission forward and making a meaningful impact in the lives of those people we support.



In 2023 we achieved.....

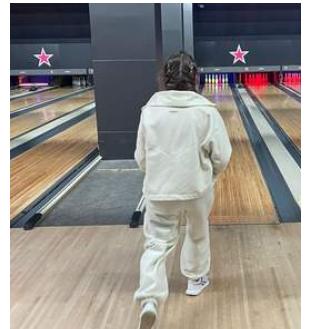
Over 1,000 people helped face to face
102 advice and training sessions delivered

600 hours of ESOL delivered

148 therapy sessions held

112 Statements of Comparability issued

Over 100 activities coordinated



Our CEO

I was invited to do lots of talks in 2023, speaking to mental health professionals and local authority teams, podcasts, national conferences and parish magazines.

I have really felt that the plight of refugees and asylum seekers has been heard and people want to support.

I was very proud to showcase our model and what we have done here in Shropshire County at a national conference in Manchester.

The invitations keep coming, and I shall show up whenever I can.



I delivered a talk to the criminology Department of Keele University at the beginning of the year, and as a result of that the head of department managed to find funding to create a study on our model in Shropshire.

The study is halfway through, and we are very much looking forward to seeing the results and learning from them.

Having the privilege of being able to nurture Shropshire Supports Refugees into what it is today, and now having people want to hear about it.

This is how we will spread the love and grow what we do.

Amanda Jones
CEO
Shropshire Supports Refugees



thank you!



BRIGHTSTAR

West Midlands Strategic
Migration Partnership

Novuna[®]



CITY OF SANCTUARY
A W A R D
WELCOMING ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

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FOOD HUB

 **Storage King**

 **SHREWSBURY
BUSINESS
IMPROVEMENT
DISTRICT**

 **Landau**
changing lives creating futures



A  **IS**
COUNSELLING &
ISVA SERVICES

We are a
Living Wage
Employer

enable
supported employment services

Energize 
Active Partnership
Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin

 **Shropshire
Cycle Hub**

 **Shropshire
Council**

 **COMMUNITY
FUND**

 **Shrewsbury
Town Council**

 **National
Trust**