

City of Sanctuary Sheffield

Annual Report

2022/23



'a unique place
in this world'

Contents



- 2 - Introduction
- 3 - Our Work 2022/23
- 4 - The Sanctuary
- 5 - The Drop-In
- 7 - Communications and Campaigning
- 8 - SPRING
- 10 - Experts by Experience
- 11 - The Sanctuary Redesign Update
- 13 - Volunteering
- 14 - Organisational Wellbeing
- 15 - Page of Thanks



Introduction: Our hope



In a constantly changing world our hope remains the same – for Sheffield to be a place of **safety** and **welcome** for people seeking sanctuary.

In this report you will see a snapshot of what we have done in the last year as we work towards this vision. You will see how we have both walked alongside people seeking sanctuary as they navigate the system and how we have fought to change that system.

It is work that is **varied, complex, and inspiring**. It is also work that is often done against the prevailing societal winds and we have seen much in the system of asylum and refuge this year that must be challenged.

Yet, in spite of this, we all go forward in the knowledge that there are many people around us who hold onto the same vision and that between us there is power to build the change we want to see.

Together we will continue to work with resilience and joy, standing strong in the constantly shifting sands and finding cause for celebration along the way.

What we do over the years will change but what we hope for will not.

With love,

Tom and Magid



Our work 2022/23



The Sanctuary

'The Sanctuary is like my father's house.'



The Drop-In

'I can tell from all the people who come to The Drop-In how valuable it is.'



Communications and Campaigning

'One finger cannot support anything that is very heavy, but five fingers are more powerful.'



SPRING Project

'It is because of support that I have continued to improve my life.'



Experts by Experience Team

'We always leave our meetings feeling more confident.'



The Sanctuary Redesign

'The Sanctuary is like hope in Sheffield.'



Volunteering

'It really feels like a unique place in this world.'



Organisational Wellbeing

'Every time we sit down and share a meal - we're resisting the hostile environment'



The Sanctuary



'The Sanctuary is like my father's house'

Sanctuary visitor

The Sanctuary continues to thrive as **'a unique place in the world'**. Over **90 people per day** visit The Sanctuary during its opening hours to attend English classes, take part in creative and social activities, use the IT, or simply relax with a cup of tea.

The space is facilitated by our brilliant volunteers, in collaboration with a range of organisations working alongside people seeking sanctuary. This year we have seen existing partnerships go from strength to strength and welcomed new organisations into the space. SAVTE have expanded their offer of English classes to suit all levels, Open Kitchen now serve over 100 people at their community lunch and Side by Side have established a new women's drama and wellbeing group. We are particularly pleased that The Sanctuary is now open on a Friday for women-only activities including English conversation, drama, and LGBTQ+ support.



Case study

T came to the UK in 2022 from Iran. She first came to the Sanctuary to attend SAVTE beginner English classes. Although she initially struggled with confidence and meeting new people, after a few months T enquired about volunteering at the Sanctuary. She now volunteers at our clothes bank at our weekly Drop-in and in The Sanctuary kitchen. Her confidence and English skills have increased hugely, and she recently told staff **'I am very happy to be in The Sanctuary, you have become like family and my main friends. I feel happy when I can help people here'**.

The Drop-In



'I can tell from all the people who come to the Drop-In how valuable it is.'

Drop-In volunteer

Now more than ever, the multi-agency Drop-In is an essential space for people seeking sanctuary **to access information and support to navigate life in the UK**. People seeking sanctuary are often failed by systems that should support them. The Drop-In exists to challenge this; ensuring that people seeking sanctuary have access to what they are entitled to and are able to pursue their lives in the UK.

To this end the Drop-In brings together a **huge range of organisations** working alongside refugees and people seeking asylum every week. The space is facilitated by our volunteers who **welcome over 100 people each week**, direct them to the support they need, and offer additional support through our health and wellbeing desk, our foodbank desk, our clothes bank, and our hairdressers.

This year we have been pleased to welcome a number of new partners to the Drop-In, including Sheffield United Football Club, Sheffield City Council, Sexual Health Sheffield, South Yorkshire Refugee Law and Justice and Open Kitchen, who serve a very popular hot meal once a month.

The Drop-In remains **a crucial space for people seeking sanctuary in Sheffield and those working alongside them.**



The Drop-In



Case study

Drop-In volunteer AK said "I have found volunteering at the Drop-In to be a really positive experience. All the staff and volunteers are incredibly friendly and treat each other with respect and gratitude. I have found it particularly inspiring that the Drop-In feels like a project led by a team including people with direct asylum/refugee experience. I can tell from all the people who come to drop in how valuable it is. There are obviously also challenging situations that you come across but all the team pull together and try to work out solutions so you feel very supported"



Communications and Campaigning



'One finger cannot support anything that is very heavy, but five fingers are more powerful'

Our vision, of a city that is safe and welcoming for people seeking sanctuary, is not possible in the current system of asylum and refuge. So, **we have to work towards change in that system.**

This is work we all engage in – at The Sanctuary and The Drop-In we build alternative spaces that model the world we want to see; SPRING humanises and advocates for new refugees as they navigate the transition; and our volunteer programme lifts up people with lived experience and provides a family away from home.

And this year we have begun to further strengthen this work – building capacity so that we can engage in **long term and strategic work to change the system and better communicate our vision of hope and welcome across the city.**



“

Melinda Mo Martinez – Advocacy and System Change Coordinator

I really believe in the power of working together. For this reason, I will be focusing my work on developing strategic coalitions and partnerships with different organisations, faith and community groups to see how we can work together to create a fairer and dignified system for people seeking sanctuary in the UK.

“

Annie Feetham - Communications and Fundraising Officer

My role is to develop and deliver communications that support the work of City of Sanctuary Sheffield, working to share our vision of safety and welcome across Sheffield. I will share communications that support our community and challenges the negative language and hostile narratives that exist in the mainstream media today.

Sheffield Project for Refugee Integration and Growth (SPRING)



'City of Sanctuary gave me joy. I felt like giving up a lot. It is only because of the support from them that I have continued to improve my life.'

SPRING is a collaboration of six organisations helping refugees settle into the local community. It supports new refugees to open a bank account and access housing, benefits, and healthcare. Once these urgent needs have been addressed, SPRING supports individuals with their longer-term integration and empowerment through education, employment, mental health support and more.

In 2022/2023, the SPRING team at City of Sanctuary Sheffield has:

- Supported more than 680 newly recognised refugees
- Played an integral role in welcoming 450 Ukrainian refugees to Sheffield
- Supported more people than ever before to access essential services like food banks, hardship funds and Baby Basics
- Given out more than 100 SIM cards to help lift people out of digital poverty
- Developed strong partnerships to minimise homeless cases.
- 'Stopped the clock' on multiple eviction cases and challenged many systemic injustices.
- Provided volunteering for many people with lived experience of seeking sanctuary. We have 15 regular volunteers, 7 of whom have lived experience of seeking sanctuary. In total the SPRING team can speak 9 different languages!



Sheffield Project for Refugee Integration and Growth (SPRING)



Case study: a hand up, not a hand out

M came to SPRING in 2022. He was a newly granted refugee but had not yet received his BRP card. Without this, he could not apply for a bank account, housing, benefits, or a job. **He was at risk of becoming homeless, feeling especially vulnerable due to his mental health issues and lack of English language**, and the Local Authority seemed unsympathetic to his situation.

A dedicated SPRING volunteer worked with M to escalate his case and supported him to access emergency accommodation whilst his case was being looked into. We communicated regularly with M to ensure he fully understood the process and gathered the evidence he needed to support his application. When M secured an appointment for his BRP card, a vital document, we helped him to prepare and went with him as an advocate and supporter. After months of complex casework, M received his BRP card. The empathetic and empowering support he received brought him hope and security when he felt most vulnerable. Since receiving his BRP, M has managed to secure his accommodation, improve his language and communication skills, and is **feeling positive about the future**.

Experts by Experience Team



'We always leave our meetings feeling more confident as well as having tools to help us manage our daily life and stresses and build friendships.'

Expert by Experience Team Member

The EbE team is a team of **9 people with lived experience of seeking sanctuary and migration to the UK**. Led by Dr Ibtissam Al-Farah, the team is embedded in City of Sanctuary Sheffield to **inform the organisation's work and co-lead in developing strategies, services, and policies**. The team's aim is to increase the participation and agency of people with lived experience of seeking sanctuary in decision-making and leadership of the organisation, while also developing transferable skills and knowledge to enable them to take up leadership opportunities in the sector, or elsewhere.

This year EbE team members have:

- Contributed to the development of CoSS's strategy, policies and services
- Supported in all recruitments that have taken place
- Attended training and workshops to improve their skills and knowledge
- Participated in events and conferences to raise awareness of the experiences and challenges faced by people seeking sanctuary
- Sat on the decision-making panel for Sheffield College's College of Sanctuary award in April 2022
- Been invited to be on the decision-making panel for the University of Sanctuary award

Case study

P, a volunteer member of the EbE team wanted to develop his skills in public speaking. He was given the opportunity to be supported by the team coordinator on a presentation and public speaking and was then invited to deliver talks at different events. This experience helped him to develop his confidence and skills, and he has since delivered talks at several other events, including at the The University of Sheffield and Sheffield Cathedral on refugee and asylum issues. Through his involvement in the EbE team, he has built his network and developed new opportunities for himself.



The Sanctuary Redesign



'The Sanctuary is like hope in Sheffield. I walk past, think of the stories, and it gives me hope.'

Our vision for The Sanctuary is for it to be a place that is safe, welcoming, beautiful, and joyful. In the redesign we listened closely to the community we work alongside, gathering their user stories, and, a year in, we can see the impact that this redesign has had.

User Stories	Impact
<p>As a... person seeking asylum/refugee I want... a space which I have contributed to/helped to make decisions about So that... I can feel ownership of the space</p>	<p>We see time and again, people entering as 'users' of the space and then getting involved in the work. The design of our ground floor and the atmosphere created makes this transition 'like crossing a stream, instead of fording a river'.</p>
<p>As a... CoSS staff member/volunteer I want... different activities to have their own space So that... I and asylum seekers/refugees can experience The Sanctuary as busy/energetic and not chaotic</p>	<p>There is now far more space for activities to run. The redesign has opened up a number of spaces with different capacities and consequently the number of activities has grown beautifully.</p>
<p>As a... CoSS staff member/volunteer I want... an office that works for us and partners So that... we can work together more efficiently, engage in self-care, and set boundaries</p>	<p>The Sanctuary is also home to 6 organisations working alongside people seeking sanctuary. The redesign has allowed staff to work in a more sustained and resilient way in this ever-changing movement.</p>
<p>As a... person seeking asylum/refugee I want... access to a quieter area in which I can pray/speak with CoSS staff/volunteers So that... I can meet my spiritual needs whilst accessing the Sanctuary</p>	<p>In the redesign we bought in a 'calm hub' and delineated the space in a trauma-informed way. Since the reopening people are regularly using the space to sit, relax, pray and find peace.</p>



This is an iterative process. Challenges remain and the development is ongoing. Yet, after an intensive redesign and year 'living' in this space we have clearly seen the transformative effect that thoughtful spatial design and careful 'enacting' of a space can have.

The Sanctuary Redesign



Case Study

S came to Sheffield in Summer 2021, just before The Sanctuary reopened, and was guided to the space by the Refugee Council. Since first coming to The Sanctuary S has made a huge contribution to the space. His hope is to be an artist and he fills the window with beautiful paintings. He helped decide on colours for our Calm Hub and then, along with another volunteer, helped paint the Calm Hub.

S says that even if I am lonely in my head, when I come into The Sanctuary, I feel relaxed in my body; that The Sanctuary is like a family. S also says The Sanctuary is like his home and that he will keep helping us develop and evolve the space to make it more beautiful and more welcoming.



Volunteering



'It really feels like a unique place in this world.'

The volunteer team continues to go from strength to strength. This year we have been focusing on team building through volunteer socials and improving our offer for volunteers with lived experience of seeking sanctuary in Sheffield.

Our volunteer team now has just shy of 100 active volunteers over eight teams:



The Sanctuary team



The Experts by Experience team



The SPRING Project team



The Drop-In team



The Interpreter team



The Open Kitchen Meal team



The Crafting for Wellbeing Group

And nearly half of these volunteers have experience of seeking sanctuary, a significant increase since last year.

Highlights from the year include:

- the launch of the Drop-In and The Sanctuary interpreter team
- the progression of one of our volunteers with lived experience of seeking sanctuary into paid employment as the SPRING Project support worker
- supporting volunteers with lived experience to gain skills, knowledge and improve agency through regular internal and external training
- a visit to the Town Hall to meet the Lord Mayor and an exquisite volunteer trip to Bridlington
- Many social events including a pizza and table tennis night, a film night, a bring-and-share lunch, and Christmas meal for over 60 people at Kurdistan Restaurant

Volunteers are the bedrock of much of our work and their skill and dedication hugely amplifies what we are able to do together.



Case study: a unique place in the world

'The time I spend in the Sanctuary each Tuesday afternoon is really important for me, and I hugely value the connections I've made and continue to make with people there. When I enquired about volunteering a year ago, I had no idea that this was what I'd be doing each week, playing unorthodox versions of Scrabble!

I was also reminded that of course there are volunteer roles in City of Sanctuary that aren't applicable to me as a person born in the UK; that's an interesting turnaround from the rest of our usual white privilege, which absolutely needs applauding.

It really feels a unique place in this world"

Organisational Wellbeing

Dr Helen Wigglesworth, Clinical Psychologist



'Every time we sit down and share a meal, or a laugh, or a smile, every time we connect - we're resisting the hostile environment'

The volunteers and staff at City of Sanctuary Sheffield **work on a daily basis with people who have experienced trauma in the past, and continue to be traumatized by policies related to asylum seeking** (Jannesari et al., 2022). The situations which the team work in each day, and the narratives which they encounter, all carry the risk of compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma, and the re-traumatisation of staff and volunteers with lived experience.

Over the past three years, the CoSS team have worked hard to build resilience within the organisation, in the face of hostile and ever-changing policies and systems. This has taken the form of a **"joyful resistance"**. Staff and volunteers have found that **taking the time to work on our own wellbeing has been crucial** in ensuring that we have the resilience, and capacity, to support others in a boundaried and compassionate way.

This work has included:

- Staff wellbeing sessions
- A focus on well-being and connection within team away days
- Re-grouping as a team – regularly re-visiting our vision, and collaboratively setting our organisational goals
- Group supervision sessions for volunteers, facilitated by psychologists
- Access to external counselling
- The presence of trained and trainee psychologists within the team - attending team meetings and events, and volunteering at the Sanctuary one day a week
- Psychology consultation during the redesign to make the Sanctuary a "trauma-informed" space
- Training for both staff and volunteers around boundaries, mental health, and trauma-informed practice

This work has an impact. A "Support Needs Analysis" from 2020 identified challenges such as maintaining boundaries and the Sanctuary environment feeling "chaotic". Recently, staff fed back that they now had "support for the emotionality of the work" and that projects were being "set up safely". The third sector is often "full gas all the time", but staff felt positively that engaging with psychology input has enabled CoSS to have "space for thoughtfulness and reflection". Practically, while staff burnout has increased across sectors following the pandemic (Peters et al., 2022), the CoSS staff team has not experienced turnover or staff sickness related to stress or burnout. **We will continue to unashamedly focus on organisational health and wellbeing of staff and volunteers as we work towards our vision.**



Page of thanks and celebration



Dear volunteers, staff, funders and our entire City of Sanctuary Sheffield community,

We are thrilled to share our annual impact report with you and wanted to take a moment to express our **deepest appreciation for everything you have done to support our work**. This report is a testament to your hard work, dedication, and commitment to realising our shared vision.

We are incredibly grateful to our volunteers, who have given their time and skills so generously and without whom so many of our projects could not function. We are equally thankful to our staff, whose tireless efforts have been inspirational. We also want to express our gratitude to our funders and our supporters, whose generosity and belief in the work facilitates it all.

To each and every one of you who has contributed to our work this year – thank you! We are proud to work alongside you as we continue to strive to make Sheffield a **safe** and **welcoming** city for all those seeking sanctuary.



Gina Clayton Memorial Fund



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