



# City of Sanctuary Sheffield

## Creating a Culture of Welcome

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### Sheffield City Council Core Service Grant – Annual Impact report 2018-19

This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of City of Sanctuary Sheffield's (COSS) 3-year Core Service Grant from Sheffield City Council, which contributes to our work helping asylum seekers and refugees access advice and support in Sheffield. In 2018-19 we received £38,070 towards our core costs to support COSS key services and functions in the city. This report provides an overview of our work in 2018-19, and the positive impact we have made on the lives of asylum seekers and refugees across the city

### The Sanctuary

COSS has made great strides over the past year, with local MP Paul Blomfield cutting the ribbon at the official launch of The Sanctuary on Chapel Walk in the city centre. The Sanctuary was established in response to the recommendations laid out in the 2016 Review of Asylum Needs which identified the need for a 'one stop shop' for advice and support, and a social centre where people seeking sanctuary could relax and socialise. This space was endorsed by a public vote that brought in nearly £50,000 from the National Lottery's People's Projects.

Between **50-70 individuals** visit The Sanctuary **everyday**

The Sanctuary is regarded as a safe haven by users. It provides a welcoming space for individuals to relax and socialize whilst being able to access key services and support. We are developing a team of volunteers trained to deal with the basic problems people need help with. These might be assistance in interpreting letters from the Home Office or trying to contact their housing provider about a faulty tap. We also have IT equipment that users can access.

As a hub of services for refugees and asylum seekers, The Sanctuary continues to host vital advice sessions delivered by key partners who between them see 40-80 people a week:

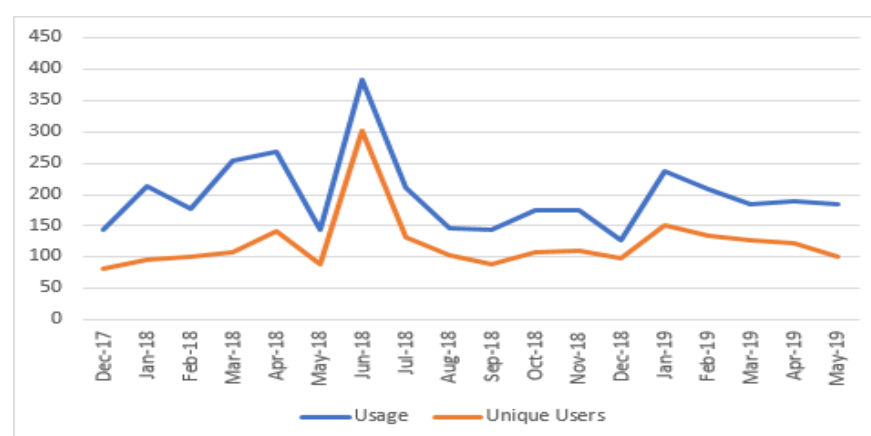
- British Red Cross (BRC)
- Citizens' Advice Sheffield (CAS)
- S Yorkshire Refugee Law & Justice (SYRLJ)
- Sheffield City Council's 'Move-On' (LAASLO) worker - part of a pilot scheme to make sure newly granted refugees get all the help they need to live independently after they come off asylum support.

**SPRING (Sheffield Project for Refugee Integration & Growth) Project** - our 'hub' approach was central to us successfully securing two-year funding from the EU to establish the. Together with funded partners: Voluntary Action Sheffield (VAS), SAVTE (English teaching), CAS, Sheffield Council and the mental health charity Solace the project will help refugees make the transition to settled life in the UK. We will have staff in The Sanctuary on hand five days a week to direct refugees to appropriate advice and support.

The project addresses a key gap in provision highlighted by the 2016 Review of Asylum Needs, ie. Navigating a path from supported accommodation to independent living. Along with an additional bit of funding from the City Council the project funding has also enabled us to purchase additional laptops to support refugees access employment, training and work experience opportunities. This is a requirement of the rolling out of Universal Credit and we hope will prevent refugees fall into the 'sanctions' trap.

**Community & social events** - Tuesday is a popular day at The Sanctuary when Open Kitchen Social Club offer a free lunch. We also host a range of meetings, training and events for refugees and asylum seekers by organisations including the Workers Education Association (WEA), Sheffield University, UNHCR & the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, among others. Whilst we aspire to do further building work, a partial refurbishment of the basement in The Sanctuary has enabled us to hold a range of community and social events including a weekly sewing club, music group and celebrations for Christmas and Eid. The Sanctuary's window display area has showcased the work of local organisations including ASSIST, Ashiana and Migration Matters Festival and provided information about Windrush, International Women's Day, the Roma community and others. A spot check counted people stopping to view the displays at a rate of one a minute.

**The Asylum Journey** – this is a key web-based resource for service providers, support workers and others in the city who want to know what support is available for people in Sheffield at different stages of the asylum journey. Developed by a group of 'techy' volunteers in 2016-17 and maintained by COSS, ASSIST and VAS volunteers since then, we are delighted to report that we have secured 12 months funding for a part-time paid worker to develop and maintain the resource and co-ordinate the volunteer effort that keeps it he information up-to-date. Online access and unique users of this online resource are shown below:



## Sanctuary Case Studies

**FS**, a heavily pregnant African woman presented at The Sanctuary distressed, tearful and frightened. She had been in a trafficking situation and had managed to escape. She was street homeless and had up till then received no medical attention. We were able to contact the Salvation Army who support victims of trafficking and get her into a supported safe house. We also arranged an urgent midwife appointment to give her and her baby a health check.

**KT** came to The Sanctuary in a distressed state on 23 December, after being told he was going to be homeless on Christmas Eve. KT has complex health issues and we were able to make an appeal for him to challenge the HO decision to evict him. We liaised with his GP to provide medical evidence so that he could stay in his accommodation based on his medical condition. We have been able to refer KT to one of our partner agencies to review his asylum case. This prevented KT from becoming street homeless in the middle of winter, when most services would have been closed and his medical conditions would have seriously deteriorated. "How you have been with me has been wonderful, you have helped me so much, I can never forget how you helped me, I am so grateful to you."

**AAM** was brought to us by a friend asking for help. He is a vulnerable man who has a disability and is unable to communicate with others, leaving him isolated and lonely. We were able to get him moved to Sheffield, where he has support from people in his own community. We were able to find him a solicitor and register him with a GP. We contacted the LA disability access team who helped get him some assisted technology to keep him safe in his accommodation. We are applying for funding to source some one-to-one support in helping him to communicate with others for the first time.

The Ahmeds, a family of six from Syria were granted leave to remain and sought help from The Sanctuary after receiving letters confirming termination of support. Initially the father was assessed by CoSS and saw the LAASLO worker who helped him to open a bank account, begin an application for Universal Credit and get the family rehoused. The family then came in together once they had received their BRP (residence) cards and the mother was referred for 1-1 SAVTE classes at home. Subsequently the father returned to The Sanctuary to see CAS as there was an amendment that needed to be made on the family's Universal Credit claim. He also enquired about a solicitor to obtain travel documents, and CoSS staff directed him to a solicitor who was able to obtain the documents in time for them to travel this summer.

"Rosie", a young woman of African origin who received her leave to remain was in danger of becoming destitute when her support ended. She saw the LAASLO worker who arranged for her to be rehoused in supported accommodation due to her age. He helped her open a bank account and start a claim for Universal Credit. Rosie has also accessed support from New Beginnings attending the job club at The Sanctuary.

*“Mathew” of Middle Eastern origin, a refugee who had problems with his private landlord, saw the LAASLO worker and CAS, who were able to help get him rehoused. He also accessed the New Beginnings project for help with employment, education (he has since started a course), and volunteering. Mathew has now been to a Volunteer Induction session at the Sanctuary and has enrolled with the WEA to begin volunteering as an interpreter in order to help refugees and asylum seekers.*

## Multi-agency Drop-in

**1,284 people** accessed the weekly drop-in at Victoria Hall in **2018-19**

The Drop-in, which is run every Tuesday, is an essential element in the model of holistic support that aims to catch people before their problems turn into crises. Our role as coordinator of the Drop-in is key; COSS provides reception, registration and triage services to support the smooth delivery of the Drop-in. We also deliver a number of services for users alongside partner agencies:

### COSS SERVICES AT THE DROP IN:

The **Welcome Project** meets and greets newly dispersed asylum seekers when they attend for their initial medical check at the central health clinic. As a city that prides itself on welcoming asylum seekers and refugees, we are able to promote services, share information and answer any questions people may have. We give information on how to find us at the Drop-in and The Sanctuary, other drop in services, how to access English and conversation groups and other activities available in the city.

**Health & Well-being service** provides help with GP registration and obtaining HC2 certificates to access free medical and dental treatment. Since Migrant Help have reduced their attendance at the Drop-in, this desk has picked up many of the enquiries around people not receiving their weekly asylum support money and problems with the ARC and ASPEN cards.

**Clothes Bank** - As well as public donations our partnership with Sheffield Donations for Refugees has ensured we have a regular supply/refresh of clothes.

**Barbers** – volunteers providing free haircuts



**221**  
Accessed  
Welcome Project



**431**  
Received Health &  
Well-being support



**1,479**  
Received clothes



**447**  
Free hair cuts

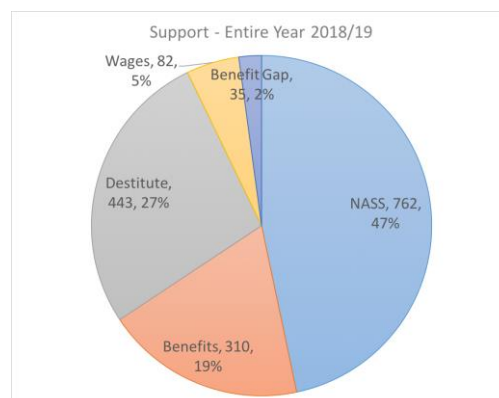
## PARTNER SERVICES AT THE DROP IN:

- **ASSIST** provided accommodation and support to **643** destitute (refused) asylum seekers.
- **Sheffield Citizen's Advice** provided financial and immigration advice to **390** individuals.
- **Red Cross** provided advice and support for **563** asylum seekers and refugees.
- **Solicitors** assessed people for possible fresh asylum claims and provided asylum advice to **211** individuals.
- **Migrant Help** supported **171** asylum seekers with issues around their accommodation and support.

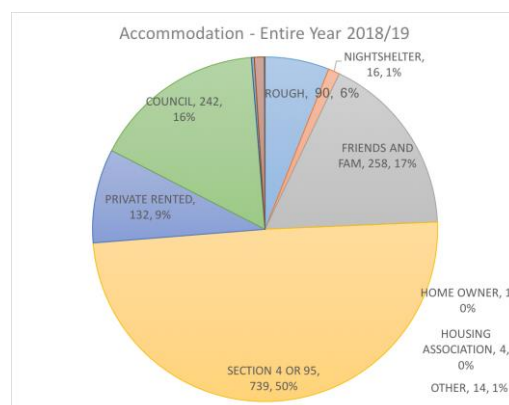
In 2018-19 we also have welcomed new information desks to the Drop-in such as Early Asylum Support project (EAS) whose volunteers help people prepare for their asylum interviews. We also have a direct line of communication to members of Parliament via Jason Reed, assistant to Paul Blomfield, who fields enquiries for all the Sheffield MPs, and the Rainbow Hub provides support and information for our LGBTQ+ clients. These new information desks join our existing regular attendees - New Beginnings (Refugee volunteering) and Sexual Health services.

The most common countries of origin for users of the drop in were Iran (278), followed by Eritrea (209), Sudan (202), Iraq (201), Syria (126), and Afghanistan (78).

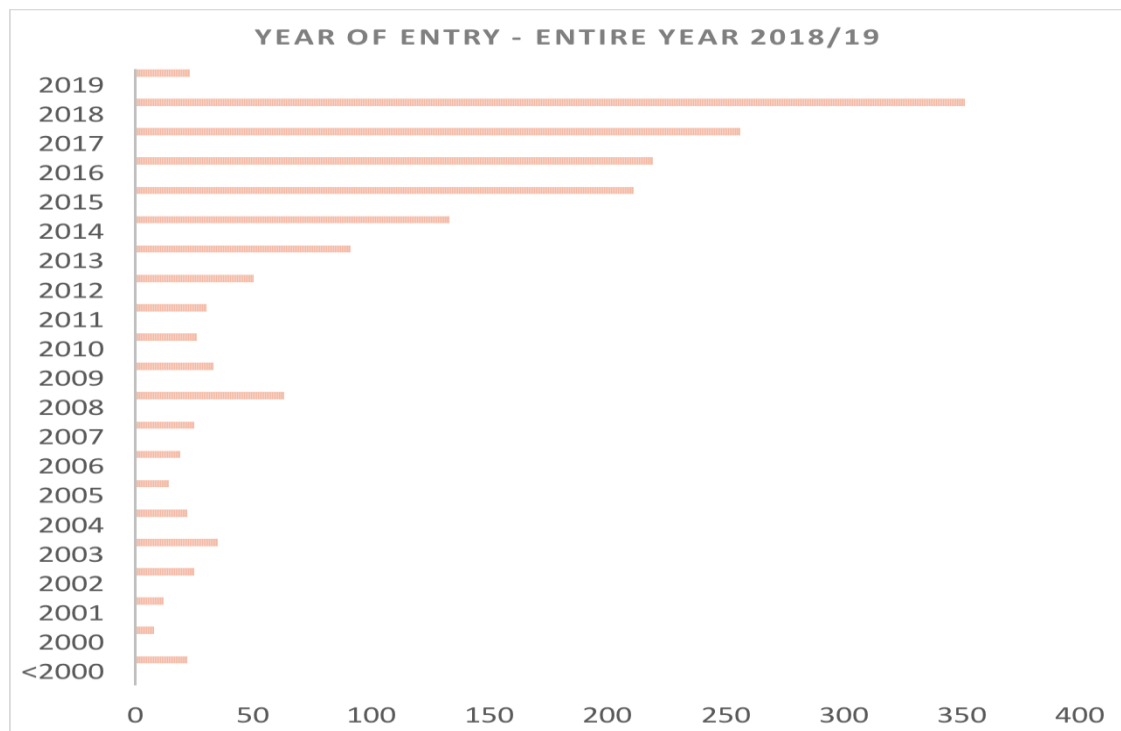
The largest proportion of people attending the drop-in are asylum seekers awaiting a decision on their claim, supported by national asylum support (NASS); just over a quarter have had their asylum application rejected and are destitute; a smaller proportion are refugees on benefit, and a few are in work.



People seeking asylum are given accommodation under a provision called 'Section 95'. This includes housing and the equivalent of £5 a day for food and other living expenses. If their asylum claim is turned down but they are unable to return to their country, they are given the same amount of support, but known as 'Section 4'.



The next chart shows how long service users have been in the country:



### **Drop-in Case Studies**

**Mr D** is a frequent user of our drop in services who needed help with several issues. These included family reunion, benefits, children not in education, understanding correspondence from the Local Authority, amongst others.

The British Red Cross were able to assist him with progressing reuniting member of his family, Citizens Advice Service were able to provide him with the expertise around his benefit issues, ensuring he received his benefits and provided follow up appointments at the Sanctuary. Our health and wellbeing desk were able to provide support around explaining correspondence and getting his children registered into school.

This illustrates how the Drop-in and now Sanctuary typically provide a unique one stop shop and wrap around services for the needs of our clients.

**Miss P**, an asylum seeker had been referred to the hospital by her GP for tests. She had received a large bill from the hospital which she had no means of paying. Our health & wellbeing desk were able to speak directly to the hospital charging team and advocate on behalf of Miss P getting the bill put on hold until such time that her circumstances changed, at which point would be reviewed. Miss P was reassured and was able to continue with her treatment.



## *Refugee & Migrant Forum*

We have continued to facilitate monthly meetings of the Refugee & Migrant Forum, attended by 18 individuals on average from a range of groups and institutions such as BRC, ASSIST, Hallam University, VAS, Buzz Sheffield, SYMAAG, Migration Yorkshire etc. The Cabinet Member attended on at least two occasions.

The Forum feeds information up to the City Council's Cohesion & Migration Partnership Group, which may take them forward to the Cohesion & Migration Strategy Group. One such issue was that of refugee families being housed in unsuitable B&B accommodation. This was taken up with Members who have acknowledged it as an issue, and are working on finding alternatives.

The Forum provided space for a representative from MHCLG to explain a new initiative for the Ministry to gain insights about the workings and impact of the asylum system as it plays out on the ground. This gave rise to a heated debate amongst partners, and despite reservations most agreed to take part in a consultation event that was held in March 2019.

Attendees say the Forum is a valuable opportunity to network and to make sure their projects are complementing and not duplicating work of others. The Migration Matters festival is an example of something that grew out of the Forum, collecting ideas, venues and contributions that have helped make it such a success, with the 2019 festival extending to nine days of events.

## **Volunteer Development**

The majority of our services are staffed by volunteers; we couldn't deliver our work without them. We began the year with around 19 volunteers and now have 28 contributing an incredible volunteer dividend to the organisation of:



In 2018-19 we focused on updating our volunteer management procedures and policies. We collaborated with ASSIST on some training sessions, and provided a weekly meal at The Sanctuary for our volunteers where they are encouraged to feed back about their experiences. They have also informed our future planning, for example advising against a proposal to introduce a nominal charge for the clothes bank.

Looking forward into 2019-20 we will be looking to apply for accreditation from Investors in Volunteers.