



# City of Sanctuary Sheffield

## Creating a Culture of Welcome

### Core Services Grant Annual Impact Report 2017-18

#### 1. Introduction

City of Sanctuary Sheffield receives a 'Core Service' grant from the City Council to support the delivery and development of the Victoria Hall drop-in, and some of our awareness raising work in the city. It also supports our work in implementing the recommendations of the 2016 research into asylum needs.

The past year has been marked by significant change for City of Sanctuary Sheffield (COSS). The acquisition of a new premises – The Sanctuary - to develop as a place of welcome has had a number of knock-on effects for the organisation and the way we manage our resources. One key change has been the appointment of a new member of staff, whose role includes managing the multi-agency drop-in at Victoria Hall, which takes up a large proportion of our City Council grant.

Meanwhile, we have continued to facilitate the Refugee & Migrant Forum, and to implement the findings of the 2016 Review of Asylum Needs. Also, the combined tasks of managing The Sanctuary and the multi-agency drop-in have led to a comprehensive overhaul of our volunteer management.

In this report we aim to show how our work, in collaboration with partners such as ASSIST, Citizens' Advice, British Red Cross and Voluntary Action Sheffield, has helped to keep asylum seekers and refugees safe and well, and accessing the advice and support they need to lead independent and meaningful lives.

#### 1. Successful delivery and development of the Victoria Hall Drop-in that meets and responds to the needs of Asylum Seekers

City of Sanctuary Sheffield has continued to manage the smooth running of the weekly drop-in at Victoria Hall. During the year 2017-18 a total of 1,297 unique individuals attended the drop-in, comprising 3,957 separate visits.

The drop-in is truly a wraparound support service for asylum seekers and refugees in the city. We have eleven separate organisations attending, to provide different elements of support. Based upon need and feedback, we have extended the opening times of the drop in allowing partner organisations to spend more time with clients.

Funding for our Health Access for Refugees Project (HARP) has come to an end. However, the success of the HARP project has enabled us to continue the health and wellbeing work with our trained volunteers, developing it further to include a health consultation focus group with asylum seekers and refugees. For example, we are holding two of these in May 2018, to get feedback on refugees' experience of the NHS.

At the beginning of the reporting year, Dr Lucy Maiblin conducted an evaluation of the Drop-in, consulting service users and providers. The research found a high level of satisfaction with the current provision. Asylum seekers said the main benefits were that it provided practical help with their problems, where previously all doors had been closed, and also social connections that helped to improve their sense of wellbeing. For example, one commented: *"Before I came here I didn't think anyone would help me but when I came here I was happy because people would help me. It was difficult to find anyone to help me until I came here"*. Many described waiting all week for Wednesdays so that they could go and meet others in the same situation.

Agencies attending the drop-in were consistently positive about the added value of being able to attend the drop-in. For example, one Red Cross employee commented that the drop-in *"allows us to work in partnership with other organisations to obtain the best outcomes for our beneficiaries. It also enables a seamless referral system. The drop-in allows us to support people in crisis by providing destitution provisions and dealing with emergencies, as well as being able to book follow up appointments so that we can provide more targeted, in depth holistic advice to those who need it"*.

A copy of Dr Maiblin's report is available on request.



The drop-in provides a vital service for asylum seekers and refugees, especially those newly arrived in the city. The Drop-in's ability to deal with a range of issues around homelessness, destitution, health and well-being takes the pressure off already over-stretched local services. Our work around destitution helps to keep vulnerable people safe, relatively healthy and off the streets.

As the year drew to a close we were informed by Migrant Help that they would be reducing their attendance from weekly to fortnightly. This was announced with little or no consultation and will increase pressure on other services to support those clients.

At the same time the housing provider G4S approached us to discuss the possibility of having a presence at the drop in, to receive complaints about asylum seeker housing and relating services.

Two new groups that support LGBT+ people - LASS (Lesbian Asylum Seekers Sheffield) and the Gay Asylum Seeker Forum Sheffield (GAFS) for gay and transgender men have been welcomed to the Drop-in, where they have a desk offering support and advice.

### **Case Study**

A pregnant woman from Nigeria arrived at our drop in, in a state of distress. She asked for help as she was homeless and destitute with no support. She had asked another African woman in the street for help. She was taken to Immigration at Vulcan House and they referred her to us. It transpired that she had been a victim of trafficking, she has been deceived and held captive for sexual exploitation for several months from which she had managed to escape.

We were able to give the woman a drink and food and help her access the Salvation Army by getting her support under the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). We also got her an emergency appointment with a community midwife as she was in pain and discomfort.

As a result of our help she is now safe in a refuge supported under the NRM and able to access medical and maternity care.

### **Statistics**

The total number of individuals accessing the Drop-in during 2017/18 was **1297**, and between them they accounted for **3,957** visits. Attendances on any given week ranged from a maximum of 216 to a minimum of 79, though the usual range was usually 100-140 per week.

Most attendees – between 20-45 per week - were seen by British Red Cross or ASSIST.

Migrant Help saw between 9-21 a week, while Citizens' Advice saw 8-14 each week. Up to 21 a week were seen by a solicitor. Around 35 people accessed the clothes bank each week. The overwhelming number of attendees were aged between 18-60, and three-quarters were male.

Throughout the year, most of those seen by agencies at the Drop-in had arrived in the country in the last 4-5 years. A significant number arrived between 2001-2011, and 26 before 2000. A little over half of those surveyed were asylum seekers in Home Office accommodation, and around a quarter were homeless, either staying with friends and family, in a night shelter, or sleeping rough.

The top five countries for those attending the Drop-in were Iran (294), Sudan (259), Eritrea (226), Iraq (167) and Syria (117). The most common language was Arabic, spoken by 600, followed by Farsi (191) and Kurdish (183).

## **2. Supporting a Successful Refugee & Migrant Forum**

The Refugee and Migrant Forum has met every month over the past year, with attendance varying from 15-20 members. Participants come from the main asylum and refugee supporting groups in the city, as well as Sheffield and Hallam Universities, G4S, arts, therapeutic and cultural projects, and campaigning organisations such as Asylum Matters and South Yorkshire Migrant and Asylum Action Group (SYMAAG).

The Forum continues to be a place where members raise issues about the way Government or other policies are impacting people on the ground. An example this year has been the practice of enforced room sharing amongst supported asylum seekers by G4S. This was shown to have a detrimental impact on individual well-being, and following representations, the City Council has now outlawed the practice in Sheffield. Asylum Matters appealed for evidence of G4S staff using body-worn cameras, when compiling a report for a Government Select Committee.

Other issues that have been taken forward to the Council's Cohesion and Migration Partnership Group include the threatened impact of the 2016 Immigration Act, and the effects

of changes to the charging regime for health care. Both led to research being launched within the Council. Asylum Matters appealed for evidence of G4S staff using body-worn cameras, when compiling a report for a Government Select Committee.

### **Case Study:**

One significant achievement of the Forum is the 'Asylum Journey', a web-based resource that allows service providers to search for resources available to asylum seekers and refugees at different stages of their 'journey' from arrival to settlement. This began as an attempt to map services in the city, and identify gaps. Representatives of different support groups and service providers attended special meetings to list all the services available. These were then laid out initially in crude paper format, along a time-line with different headings for service areas such as 'education', 'housing' etc.

A group of 'techies' volunteered to turn this rather unwieldy paper exercise into an interactive, web-based resource, and following extensive consultation and input from a core group including COSS, ASSIST and VAS, this is now ready for its formal launch at the official opening of The Sanctuary on 20<sup>th</sup> April.

New groups such as LASS (Lesbian Asylum Seekers Sheffield) and the Gay Asylum Seeker Forum Sheffield (GAFS) for gay and transgender men have been welcomed to the Forum, and contribute to its extensive reach and impact.

### **3. Recommendations of the Refugee Needs Review are delivered**



Following the publication of the Needs Review a steering group comprising ASSIST, Citizens Advice, British Red Cross, South Yorkshire Refugee Law & Justice, Voluntary Action Sheffield and individual asylum seekers continued to meet to take forward its recommendations. One of the Review's key proposals was the creation of a 'one stop shop' cum social space for asylum seekers and refugees. Notably, this has been achieved in the acquisition of The Sanctuary.

The lease of the building in Chapel Walk was made possible following a tremendous public appeal that raised more than £70,000 in a matter of weeks. This allowed COSS to fund the initial fitting out of the premises, a year's rent and salary of a part-time Manager.

COSS moved into the building in July 2017 and by the beginning of January the Red Cross and Citizens' Advice started seeing clients for pre-booked consultations in the revamped cubicles on the first floor. Asylum seekers and refugees have also started using the ground floor for social space, access to computers and occasional meetings and events. South Yorkshire Refugee Law & Justice moved their office from Victoria Hall to The Sanctuary, and in May 2018 a new City Council officer will be based in the building to assist refugees with 'move-on' support.

As well as the Centre Manager, COSS also appointed a part time consultant to assist with funding applications to secure The Sanctuary's long term sustainability. We have been

monitoring usage and recording the nature of inquiries from individuals using the building. This, along with some of the other gaps identified in the Needs Review, will be the subject of a meeting of the reconvened steering group in June.

### **Case Study**

'Mohammed' is a 47 year old refugee man from Africa. He came to The Sanctuary, feeling very anxious about a letter and form he had received regarding his benefits. This carried an imminent deadline for action, and he was unable to access help elsewhere (CAB) in the given timeframe.

With the aid of a volunteer interpreter we were able to help 'Mohammed' to complete the form and answer the questions. We explained how to return the completed form. 'Mohammed' returned a couple of weeks later to say that they had received the form and his benefits had continued.

Had 'Mohammed' not got the help at the right time and his benefits had been suspended, it would have affected his housing and council tax benefit and left him destitute without money for food.

#### **4. Volunteers are well supported for their roles**

As mentioned above, developments at The Sanctuary have required a comprehensive review of our approach to volunteers. Whereas previously our volunteer cohort was restricted largely to our Welcome Project, and the multi-agency drop-in on a Wednesday, we now require a team of volunteers to help staff our work at The Sanctuary four or more days a week.

We have been extremely fortunate to benefit from an offer by Voluntary Action Sheffield to place a trainee admin worker at the Sanctuary two days a week, who is helping us professionalise our approach to volunteering. At the same time, our acquisition of The Sanctuary has prompted a fresh wave of interest from people wanting to volunteer with us.

In addition, new rules around data protection mean we are having to review old procedures and update current records. So the arrival of Christine Chiramboth, on loan from VAS, has been particularly timely. We are now beginning to make progress towards achieving the VAS Volunteer Quality Mark.

We have asked all volunteers, old and new, to complete a new registration form and provide references that we are in the process of following up. We have also updated our role descriptions, and advertised these at the VAS Volunteering Fair in February.