

MERSEYSIDE REFUGEE SUPPORT NETWORK

ANNUAL REPORT & ACCOUNTS TO 31ST MARCH 2021



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Registered Charity No 1093033

**Merseyside Refugee
Support Network**
Registered Charity No 1093033



City of Sanctuary,
Liverpool

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GOVERNANCE

The following have served the Network as Trustees during the year:

- Carmel Dersch (Independent)
- Harriet Gray (Independent)
- Lynn Learman (Independent) - *Treasurer*
- Jan Luff (Independent) - *Chair*
- Nick McLaughlin – South Liverpool CAB
- Ewan Roberts (Asylum Link Merseyside)
- Mohammed Taher (Independent/MerseyCare)
- Helene Santamera (Independent)

THE TEAM - SESSIONAL & SUPPORT COLLEAGUES AND VOLUNTEERS:

- S. Roberts – MRSN Operations/Projects Manager
- M. McAdam – MRSN Senior Refugee Advocacy Officer/Project Coordinator
- A. Ahmed – MRSN Refugee Advocacy Officer

Thanks to the numerous volunteers who have supported our work from April 2020-March 2021 and ongoing.

MEMBERSHIP POLICY

The Network seeks to establish, through its Membership Policy, two principles. The first is that the Network has to remain firmly in the ownership of voluntary organisations. The second is that we have benefited enormously and intend to continue doing so from the involvement of public and private sector partners.

Membership of the Network represents your good will and intention to support the work of the charity and its members through the principles of partnership working and information sharing.

Full membership is open to any interested organisation or individual making an application to the Network and whose application is accepted.

Full members are able to vote at meetings and to nominate a person to stand for election as a Trustee.

TRUSTEES' REPORT APRIL 2020-MARCH 2021

When we presented our previous annual report and accounts in January 2021, by Zoom, we were reflecting on the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic across the refugee and asylum support sector and beyond. This annual report and accounts for the financial year 2020-21 captures how things progressed, how we responded and how we supported our clients and colleagues across the Network. Little did we know that Covid (omicron variant) would still be very much with us for this AGM.

Each year, our annual report presents an important opportunity to reflect on the past (financial) year and as a means to assess how the charity has continued to work to meet its core charitable aims and objectives, as required by the Charity Commission. It goes without saying that we had a very busy and challenging year as our work and working practices had to be entirely restructured in order to keep supporting our vulnerable refugee clients through: remote working; WhatsApp; email; text; VOIP phone, especially in periods of enforced lockdowns whilst following government legislation and face to face when guidelines allowed.

Context

The overall aim of Merseyside Refugee Support Network (MRSN) includes the relief of refugees or asylum seekers in Merseyside and, as a Network, we also work to bring together local and regional organisations concerned with their welfare, to share information and good practice, discuss and address issues across the sector.

In meeting our aims, we provide a combination of networking and information sharing services, supported through the email newsgroup, directories of refugee and asylum support agencies and, in normal times, regular Network meetings.

Over the past 15+ years, we have also offered "relief" through casework support with refugee clients moving-on from the asylum support system. The biggest need is met through our advocacy casework to help clients access and cope with the mainstream benefits and housing systems, as well as other integration matters such as accessing employment support, education, language support and health services.

The shared asylum/refugee "sanctuary hub" at St Anne's continues to enable MRSN to work in close partnership and provide reciprocal asylum and refugee client support and signposting in a very effective way with colleagues from Asylum Link Merseyside (ALM) and Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit (GMIAU).

As ever, we continue to maintain and develop our close working relationships with Network Members to collectively help and support our vulnerable refugee and asylum-seeking clients, as well as each other. During the past year these relationships have developed and been enhanced as the need for cross-agency working and complex casework has significantly increased.

We are delighted in this context to present our 19th Annual Report, as we approach our Charity's formal 20th birthday later in 2022.

As per previous reports, the numbers of people fleeing war and persecution and seeking sanctuary across UK and Europe has not abated and our service is constantly trying to keep resources in place to help new refugees when they are granted leave to remain and in the years beyond to support their onward integration journey. By summer 2021 the plight of the Afghan people very much brought the spotlight back to the reasons people flee their homelands.

Our work

On an annual basis, and resource dependent, MRSN works with between 350-500 individual refugees and their families. During 2020-21 our numbers were somewhat lower at 250+ clients, which reflects the fact that for long periods there was little decision making or movement of new refugees through the system due to the pandemic. Our casework included crisis support; applications and follow up on benefits applications; housing referrals and application; family reunion arrival and integration support; DV client support; homelessness support; reporting of unfit housing conditions; help with repayment of Home Office support and or referral to counselling and health services. In addition, our ESF funded work has also focussed on building skills and confidence to help clients understand their rights and entitlements, to remove barriers to employment through job seeking skills, digital literacy and language support.

During the period, however, our casework took longer and became increasingly complex as a result of the pandemic and other local factors.

Our advocacy, wellbeing and integration support casework is not limited in time or scope, and our work has been extended and enhanced through various grants which have spanned accounting years –John Moores Foundation; European Union ERASMUS + (Create Opportunities); European Social Fund (Refugee Integration/Employability project) and the Allan Lane Foundation.

During the pandemic, we had the amazing additional support of various local and national funders including: Support Asylum Seekers (SAS)/Churches Together in Merseyside; Charities Aid Foundation (CAF); PH Holt Foundation; LCR Cares; LCVS/Liverpool CCG and the Barrow Cadbury Trust.

Together with existing funds and programmes these funds enabled us:

- to offer additional staff hours to meet the service demand for refugee advocacy casework

- to provide emergency cash grants, food supplies (via ALM) + volunteer shoppers/clothing and or mobile phone/data support to a value of £7075.00
- to enable clients emergency access to support and services via a Covid-safe "zoom-room"
- to continue to support clients with integration and employability skills
- to provide regular and translated information on staying Covid-safe, following government guidelines, encouraging testing and sharing information on vaccines
- to provide insight into refugee community access to health services and Covid support
- to provide at-home therapy gardening kits to vulnerable clients via Faiths for Change.
- to support developmental costs for our data monitoring systems
- to progress the development of our website www.mrsnliverpool.org.uk
- to regularly share information across the Network with Members and City of Sanctuary partner (n=500 recipients)
- to respond to wider calls for client support, information and advice locally, regionally and nationally (n=127 outside agency requests)

We continue to work hard as an organisation and Network - to highlight the ongoing need to change hearts and minds and address media myth and hype, hence we have continued to work on updates to our Fact Not Fiction publication (now in its 15th year of circulation) thanks to contributory funds via Our Liverpool. The updated edition has been circulated widely and with a splendid set of new artwork thanks to children and young people from across Merseyside who entered our joint art competition with EMTAS in May 2021.

Furthermore, we continue to administer Liverpool City of Sanctuary group and the Liverpool Schools of Sanctuary groups. During the year we are delighted to have supported Liverpool Theatres and City College in their applications for Sanctuary status.

Widening our reach and maintaining partnership arrangements is crucial in the support work we offer to both clients and sector colleagues alike. Although many across the local refugee and asylum support sector were remote working for long periods of time, it often felt as if we had found new ways of supporting each other and checking-in on each other more than ever before and long may that continue.

The trustees meet as a minimum on a quarterly basis to oversee the governance and administration of the Network and to discuss and respond to matters of urgent concern that are directly affecting refugees and asylum seekers, which are then shared and developed through the normal pre-Covid Network meetings.

As another period of Covid restrictions subsides, we will be seeking to follow through our plans to become an incorporated charity as soon as possible.

All of our work fulfils our charitable objectives and once again we are so grateful to our grant funders who trust in our work, our experience and ethics.

The summary "Receipt and Payment" accounts at page 9 have been approved through external and independent examination and are attached with this Annual Report.

RESERVES POLICY STATEMENT

Reserves are unrestricted funds that are freely available to spend in relation to the charity's purposes. At MRSN we build up reserves through donations, training, events and other income or grants which are received, without restriction. These funds have been recorded as "general funds – unrestricted" within our accounts summary.

The receipts and payment accounts which are prepared for the annual return to the Charity Commission show all income received and whether this is restricted per funder or unrestricted donations and income in each financial year.

Unrestricted reserves may contribute to the future sustainability of the charity, although these will not be built up to excessive levels, it is our intention, in line with good practice and governance to achieve 3 months equivalent in running costs.

This policy and its effectiveness will be reviewed and developed on an annual basis.

RECEIPT AND PAYMENT ACCOUNTS 2020-2021

MERSEYSIDE REFUGEE SUPPORT NETWORK
Receipts and Payments Accounts 2020-21
Year ending 31st March 2021
HSBC ACCOUNT

Merseyside Refugee Support Network
 Registered Charity No 1093033



#	Project	Income/Funder/Donor	£ B/F	£ Income	£ Exp	£ Balance
Unrestricted Funds/Donations						
1	General Funds	MISC	6922.72	13660	-3214.26	17368.46
Sub Total:			6922.72	13660	-3214.26	17368.46
Restricted Funds/Grants						
6	JOHN MOORES FOUNDATION	CLOSED	2400	0	-2400	0
7	NEW_SAS client support	SAS	0	4350	-3325	1025
8	NEW ERASMUS - CREATE OPPORTUNITIES	ERASMUS + (Bialystok)	6282.65	0	0	6282.65
9	CoS RESIDUAL GRANT	CoS Central	125.59	0	0	125.59
10	NEW ESF 19/20	ESF/WEA	1403.54	6912.5	-8385.6	-69.56
11	L'POOL WELCOMES RESIDUAL FUND	MRSN	549.19	0	-450	99.19
12	ALLEN LANE FOUNDATION	ALLEN LANE	6162.5	0	-1672	4490.5
13	PH HOLT	PH HOLT	0	6510	-3851.5	2658.5
14	CAF - Covid support	CLOSED	0	5610	-5610	0
15	ALM/Our Liverpool	ALM	0	2800	0	2800
16	LCR CARES	CLOSED	0	7720	-7720	0
17	BARROW CADBURY - Covid support	Barrow Cadbury	0	16400	-15395.98	1004.02
Sub Total:			16923.47	50302.5	-48810.08	18415.89
Balances Per Bank Statement: To 31.3.21			£ 23846.19	63962.5	-52024.34	35784.35

I have independently examined these accounts and they are consistent with the books and records kept by Merseyside Refugee Support Network

Name: Benjamin Gray

Signed:

Date: 21/01/2022



European Union
European Social Fund



APPROVED BY MRSN TRUSTEES ON:

28/01/2022