

# MERSEYSIDE REFUGEE SUPPORT NETWORK

## ANNUAL REPORT & ACCOUNTS TO 31ST MARCH 2024

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Registered Charity No 1093033

Liverpool City of  
Sanctuary 

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## GOVERNANCE

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

- S. Buaye (Independent) - appointed 29.2.2024
- C. Dersch (Independent)
- H. Gray (Independent) - *Chair*
- J. Luff (Independent) - *Treasurer*
- S. Newall (Independent) – appointed 29.2.2024
- E. Roberts (Asylum Link Merseyside)
- H. Santamera (Independent) – resigned 30.1.2024
- S. Semoff (Independent)
- M. Taher (Independent)

### THE TEAM - SESSIONAL & SUPPORT COLLEAGUES AND VOLUNTEERS:

- S. Roberts – Director/Case Manager
- A. Ahmed – Integration, Interpreter Caseworker/Community Health Champion
- M. Lucas – Integration Caseworker
- E. Melling – Integration & Wellbeing Caseworker

Thanks to the numerous and talented volunteers who have supported our work from April 2023-March 2024 and ongoing, in particular:

Abdul; Araya; Ashkan; Clare; Di; Elhadi; Maryam and Mike.

## MEMBERSHIP POLICY

The Network seeks to establish, through its Membership Policy, two principles. The first is that the Network supports the local refugee and asylum support sector members and wider network partners in order to support the needs of our collective service users. The second is that we continue to work in partnership with the public and private sector partners to support the accessibility for service users to their provision, and to address issues when they arise.

Membership of the Network represents your/your organisation's good will and intent to support the work of the charity, its members and membership organisations through the principles of partnership working and a Community of Practice to enable shared learning, problem solving and information sharing.

Full membership is open to any interested organisation or individual making an application to the Network 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 2023-MARCH 2024

This Annual Report & Accounts for the financial year 2023-24 demonstrates how our work has continued and developed over the last year and, in celebration of the Charity's 22<sup>nd</sup> year of supporting refugees and other sanctuary seekers in the Liverpool City Region and beyond. Moreover, it represents the continuing benefits of the Network and support for the member organisations of the local refugee and asylum support sector.

Each year, our annual report provides an important opportunity to reflect on the past financial year and assess how the charity worked to meet its core charitable aims and objectives, as required by the Charity Commission.

We experienced an exceptionally busy working year, leading to an upscaling of our refugee crisis and integration casework to meet increasing demand. In addition, we have continued with our health & wellbeing support projects and awareness raising/myth busting work. We have consolidated our staff and volunteer teams strengthening the charity and its onward strategic growth and sustainability.

### Context

The overall aim of Merseyside Refugee Support Network (MRSN) includes *"the relief of refugees or asylum seekers in Merseyside.."* and, as a Network, 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 Network and or thematic meetings.

Over the past 19+ years, we have also offered "relief" through integration casework support with refugee clients moving-on from the asylum stream benefits and housing systems, as well as other integration matters such as employability skills, access to education and language support and, access to and engagement with health and wellbeing projects and 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. As in

previous years, these relationships have continued to develop and have been enhanced as the need for cross-agency working and complex casework has never been so demanding in our working world.

We are delighted in this context to present our 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Report.

The numbers of people fleeing war and persecution, seeking sanctuary across the UK and Europe has not abated and our service is constantly working to keep resources in place to help new refugees granted leave to remain and, in the years beyond, to support their onward integration journey.

It cannot go unsaid that certain politicians, press and media outlets continue to regularly conflate the facts around immigration and reinforce the “hostile environment”. On too many occasions lies have been told to the public along with the use of derogatory language and misinformation. This is seen most notably in the perception that the proportion of people seeking asylum is a significant element of overall UK immigration (which it is not, in fact it is less than 5%), popularising phrases such as “illegal migrants” and “stop the boats.” (The principles of the Geneva Convention do not seek to demonise anyone seeking sanctuary or their methods of escape). Our work to raise awareness and understanding, therefore, continues through our daily advocacy casework, regular information sharing, networking and connecting people.

The *Facts Not Fiction* publication remains an organic document, which we update regularly, to raise awareness and share factual information to the wider public and communities of Merseyside and beyond.

We continue to also service the Liverpool City of Sanctuary group communications and the amazing work within the Schools of Sanctuary in Liverpool and the wider LCR. We are also delighted by the commitment from City of Liverpool College in its work to become a College of Sanctuary.

## Our Work

During 2023-2024 our casework continued to grow, now in excess of 500 clients annually. A further 171 one-off advice/information sessions and 300+ external advice requests, referrals and other information enquiries were provided.

Key nationalities of refugees seeking our support include: Sudan; Yemen; Kuwait; Iran; Eritrea; Afghanistan.

Our core casework included crisis intervention, destitution and wider integration support – including applications and follow up on welfare benefits; housing referrals and applications; family reunion arrival and integration support; DV/DA support; referral to counselling/therapeutic services. Our in-house health and wellbeing awareness and accessibility projects, both with Community Champions programme and others in partnership with Asylum Link included adult and child vaccine and immunisation awareness; women’s health;

cancer awareness; blood pressure checks and healthy heart awareness; mental health awareness; access to dental health and liver /Hep C screening.

Offering 1-2-1 advocacy and practical casework, supports the psycho-education needs of clients diagnosed or experiencing symptoms of depression, stress and anxiety disorders and PTSD. In house and external referrals to social and physical activities (Women's ESOL @MRSN or gardening; choir; music therapy and bike rides @ALM and other activities run @ActionAsylum have all provided important and purposeful activity and wellbeing incentives for hundreds of clients.

By August 2023 the "everyday" refugee support landscape dramatically shifted when we first experienced the increase in refugee homelessness and destitution, as the government started to clear their "asylum backlog".

Decisions were being made in bulk and the local, regional and national housing systems came to breaking point. In any previous year, we had not seen more than a handful of street homeless cases amongst our recently granted refugee cohort. Changes in government interpretation of rules led some folk being given 7 days or less to apply for benefits and housing, an impossible task and immediately leading to destitution amongst newly granted refugees. We also witnessed issues with local authorities not applying their statutory housing duty, which led us to closer working with legal housing professionals to appeal and challenge more and more cases of housing need across the city region.

The local, regional and national networks collectively found their voice, challenged the government's actions as well as the local and regional housing and homeless services on their legal responsibilities, accuracy of data reporting and delayed actions - a picture emerged of many statutory services failing or not fit for purpose. In the background, there was a risk that refugees would be blamed as the cause of national failures in housing services rather than the lack of investment in social housing.

In over 25+ years, no-one in the sector had experienced anything like this. The press picked up on this too and sought our comments and perceptions of the escalating refugee homelessness crisis.

- The Guardian – various national reports, followed by a video documentary @MRSN
- Liverpool Echo – local/regional report
- Big Issue – national report
- RTE – Ireland

BBC News, ITV News and Le Monde also sought our comments and experience on the issues.

The services at MRSN have been developed and sustained thanks to new and existing grants or commissions from Lloyds Bank Foundation; Big Lottery Awards for All; PH Holt Foundation; Liverpool Council - Public Health; Former Liverpool CCG; Merseycare NHS - Liferooms; SAS/CTMR.

Our integration and advocacy support work has been extended and enhanced through various grants and donations which often span accounting years. In addition to those funders named above, we have had amazing additional support from public donations. Together with existing project funds and programmes we were able to:

- Increase our staff hours and recruit to new or vacant roles for casework, finance and management.
- Provide emergency cash grants (via SAS/CTMR and other donations) as well as commission food store supplies (via ALM).
- Continue to support clients with integration and employability skills.
- Provide insight into refugee community access and engagement with health services.
- Continue to develop our data capture and evaluation systems and trial of the Integration Star.
- Regularly share information across the Network with MRSN members, partners and City of Sanctuary partners (n=500 recipients)
- Respond to wider calls for client support, information and advice locally, regionally and nationally.

We continue to work hard as a Charity organisation and Network, highlighting the ongoing need to change hearts and minds and address media myth and hype. We have also helped different refugee diaspora communities reaching out for help, as well as helping to connect statutory services to various refugee cultural communities.

Our combined advocacy casework, wellbeing, integration and refugee community support services and projects are not limited in time or scope. We work with clients until they feel able or empowered to move-on themselves.

Widening our reach and maintaining partnership arrangements is crucial in the support work we offer to both clients and sector colleagues alike.

The MRSN trustees meet as a minimum on a quarterly basis to oversee the governance and administration of the Charity and to discuss and respond to matters of urgent concern that are directly affecting refugees and asylum seekers.



At time of writing, we can report that our updated charitable objects have been approved by the Charity Commission and we continue our goal to take forward the work to incorporate the charity as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation as soon as possible, and as previously discussed.

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

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

## RESERVES POLICY STATEMENT

The Trustees recognise that the MRSN reserves should be used appropriately and with due diligence to maintain the sustainability of the charity.

During the period, for many reasons we have been highly fortunate in receiving new and significant donations from the public. Increasingly funders are also offering unrestricted grants for the delivery of the charitable activities

Some reserves are deemed to be free and "unrestricted" and used for general purposes in delivery of the work of the charity, governance costs and other compliance expenditure (such as insurances, official registration costs etc), including 4-6 month buffer to meet financial commitments and obligations and/or contracts should the charity have to close.

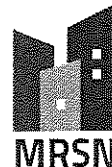
Certain donations and grants have been specifically assigned as "designated project funds" to ensure service delivery for casework and Network functions, in the spirit of the grants or donations given.

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, unrestricted donations and income or designated funds for the financial year.

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

# RECEIPT AND PAYMENT ACCOUNTS 2023-2024

**MERSEYSIDE REFUGEE SUPPORT NETWORK**  
**Receipts and Payments Accounts 2023-24**  
**Year ending 31st March 2024**  
**HSBC ACCOUNT**



#	Project	Income/Funder/Donor	£ B/F	£ Income	£ Exp	£ Balance
	<b>Unrestricted Reserves/Donations</b>					
1	General - unrestricted/non designated	Various	43,331.74	4,055.10	6,931.53	40,455.31
	<b>Designated Funds</b>					
1a	General - designated project funds					
	<i>inc. Lloyds Bank Foundation yr2, inc. C Cerkett Trust</i>	Various	36,100.50	0.00	17,057.39	19,043.11
1b	Online donations - inc homeless funds	Various	0.00	10,197.43	2,720.50	7,476.93
		<b>Sub Total:</b>	<b>79,432.24</b>	<b>14,252.53</b>	<b>26,709.42</b>	<b>66,975.35</b>
	<b>Restricted Funds/Grants</b>					
7	NEW_SAS client support	SAS	3,675.00	1,920.00	3,475.00	2,120.00
15	CLOSED_Our Liverpool	closed	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
18	LCC Community Champions	LCC	4,454.52	18,750.00	21,583.99	1,620.53
19	WEA_ESF 22	closed	-0.10	0.10	0.00	0.00
20	LCCG_Health and Wellbeing with ALM	CCG_LCVS	-7.05	3,000.00	2,894.71	98.24
22	MPCC_LCC Community Cohesion	MPCC/LCC	0.00	3,000.00	3,000.00	0.00
23	Merseycare/Liferooms 23/24	Liferooms	0.00	39,911.80	18,461.22	21,450.58
24	Awards for All(Big Lottery 2024)	A4A	0.00	20,000.00	0.00	20,000.00
25	PH Holt new	PH Holt	0.00	10,000.00	0.00	10,000.00
		<b>Sub Total:</b>	<b>8,122.37</b>	<b>96,581.90</b>	<b>49,414.92</b>	<b>55,289.35</b>
	<b>Balances Per Bank Statement to 31.3.2024</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>87,554.61</b>	<b>110,834.43</b>	<b>76,124.34</b>	<b>122,264.70</b>

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

Mr B. Gray

Signed:

Date: 27/01/25



EMILY SPURRELL  
 MERSEYSIDE POLICE  
 & CRIME COMMISSIONER

**P. H. HOLT**  
 FOUNDATION

