

MERSEYSIDE REFUGEE SUPPORT NETWORK

ANNUAL REPORT & ACCOUNTS TO 31ST MARCH 2025



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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)
- C. Dersch (Independent)
- H. Gray (Independent)
- J. Luff (Independent) - *Treasurer*
- S. Newall (Independent)
- E. Roberts (Asylum Link Merseyside)
- S. Semoff (Independent) - *Chair*
- M. Taher (Independent)

THE TEAM - SESSIONAL & SUPPORT COLLEAGUES AND VOLUNTEERS:

- S. Roberts – Director/Case Management
- A. Ahmed – Interpreting/Casework/Community Health Champion
- M. Tooghchi – Finance/Monitoring
- M. Rahimpour – Trainee Interpreting/Casework
- E. Walsh – Integration/Development casework

Thanks to the numerous and talented volunteers who have supported our work in 2024-25:

Araya; Clare; Di; Elhadi; Margaret; Mike; Jules, Ludo, Erin, Sarah, Mohammed.

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 2024-MARCH 2025

This Annual Report & Accounts for the financial year 2024-25 demonstrates the hard work and continuing developments in the past year. Now in the Charity's 23rd year of supporting refugees and other sanctuary seekers in the Liverpool City Region and beyond, we are preparing the final stage in our transition to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). The small but important strategic change demonstrates our core values and commitments to the refugees and sanctuary seekers we support, as well as our team and the wider Network members and associates across the Merseyside refugee and asylum support sector.

The Annual Report provides an important opportunity to reflect on the past financial year and assess how the charity worked to meet its charitable aims and objectives, as required by the Charity Commission.

We continued to experience exceptional demand for our work, and have provided to help mitigate an ever-changing refugee immigration landscape as well as coping with the political and media pressures of hostility, exacerbated by the threat of the far-right riots during the summer of 2024.

In spite of the ongoing impact of the backlog clearance, rising homelessness and the pressures of an increasingly anti-immigration environment, we have resolutely continued to support the wellbeing and integration of our clients through our combined actions of: crisis support; integration casework; health & wellbeing projects and; awareness raising/myth busting work, in balance with our network role and partnership ethos.

We continue to build our sessional and volunteer team, strengthening the charity for strategic growth and sustainability.

Context

The overall objects of Merseyside Refugee Support Network (MRSN), as updated in October 2024 are - *The relief of persons who are refugees or asylum seekers in Merseyside by providing practical support and advocacy and bringing together different groups concerned with their welfare to network, share information and improve awareness of the issues impacting on refugees and people seeking asylum.*

In meeting our aims, we provide a combination of networking and information sharing services, supported through the email newsgroup and Network and or thematic meetings. We previously also managed a directory of refugee and asylum support agencies and diaspora groups. This was removed from the website in August 2024 due to far-right riots and threats on the charity.

Over the past 20+ years, we have also offered “relief” through crisis, advocacy and integration casework support with refugee clients moving-on from the asylum system, including help with applications for housing and housing needs assessments; benefit applications and appeals, 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 23rd Annual Report.

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

Per previous reports, it cannot go unsaid that various 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 (in fact, for 2024 it was 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 activities and connecting people.

Our *Fact 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.
https://mrsnliverpool.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/facts_not_fiction_trifold-leaflet_2025a.jpg

In other work, we continue to service the Liverpool City of Sanctuary group communications and support other groups with thematic applications for City of Sanctuary award status.

Our Work

During 2024-2025 our casework was as busy as the previous financial year, in excess of 475 clients in the reporting year. A further 237 one-off advice/information sessions were given and 260+ external advice requests, referrals and other information enquiries were dealt with for local, regional and national VCSE organisations and statutory services.

Key nationalities of the refugee people seeking our support included: Sudan; Yemen; Kuwait; Iran; Eritrea; Afghanistan, Syria and Ethiopia.

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 health and wellbeing awareness and accessibility projects, both with the Public Health Community Champions programme and others in partnership with Asylum Link and ICB 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/Hepatitis screening and Stop Smoking.

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 @Asylum Link and other activities run @ActionAsylum have all provided important and purposeful activity and wellbeing incentives for hundreds of clients over the year.

The impact of the ongoing "backlog" asylum clearance continued with significant homelessness and destitution presentations for those not in priority need or for others for whom the system had failed.

The local, regional and national networks collectively raised their voice to advocate and challenge 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. In the background, there continues to be a risk that refugees are being 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 per last year and sought our comments and perceptions of the issues of refugee homelessness including.

- The Guardian – followed up on previous national report
- Liverpool Echo – local/regional follow up report
- Big Issue – Awarded MRSN as one of their "Change Makers 2025"

Following the threat of a far-right attack on our charity and our hosts Asylum Link in August 2024, we had to shut the centre for a 4-6 week period in summer 2024 to ensure our clients, volunteers, sessional staff and the local church and residential community were kept safe.

The power of the Liverpool community support and local and national TV News coverage (BBC Newsnight; Liverpool Echo and ITV Granada Reports) brought a crowd of over 1000 supporters to protect our work and our place of work – our “peace line” became a street filled with peace and hope. Many people felt this became a turning point in quelling the ongoing threat of the summer riots. In the months following we were invited to meet the then Home Secretary, Yvette Cooper at Spellow Lane Library re-opening event and the Lord Chancellor.

The services offered through MRSN have been developed and sustained to meet client requests and needs and this continues to be possible thanks to new and existing support and/or grants from:

Lloyds Bank Foundation; Big Lottery Awards for All; PH Holt Foundation; The Fore; Liverpool Council - Public Health and Our Liverpool; LCVS/ICB (in partnership with Asylum Link); SAS/CTMR; NW Housing; and, an anonymous grant funder.

Our integration and advocacy support work has been extended and enhanced through these 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 sessional team hours and recruit to new or vacant sessional roles to increase our capacity for refugee client move-on casework.
- Increase our opportunities for people with lived experience.
- Provide emergency cash grants (via SAS/CTMR and other donations) as well as commission food store supplies (via ALM).
- Provide emergency accommodation for street homeless clients without other options.
- 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 Outcome 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 anti-immigration 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 current caseload has already doubled during 2025.

We have started the process to register with the Immigration Advice Authority and we are in the final administration stages of preparing to submit an application to incorporate the charity as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, 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 2024-2025

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 further significant donations from the public and a grant from an anonymous funder. Increasingly a number of funders are also offering unrestricted grants for the delivery of the charitable activities. As such, 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 a 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, crisis support 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 are reviewed and developed on an annual basis.

RECEIPT AND PAYMENT ACCOUNTS 2024-2025

MERSEYSIDE REFUGEE SUPPORT NETWORK

Receipts and Payments Accounts 2024-2025 HSBC ACCOUNT
Year to 31st March 2025



#	Project	Income/Funder/Donor	£ B/F	£ Income	£ Exp	£ Balance
	Unrestricted Reserves/Donations					
1	General - unrestricted/non designated	VARIOUS	40,455.31	6,972.58	12,042.94	35,384.95
	Designated Funds					
1a	General - designated project funds (Grants/income awarded for the work of the charity)	VARIOUS	19,043.11	25,427.92	4,844.86	39,626.17
1b	Online donations - inc homeless funds	VARIOUS	7,476.93	3,035.00	3,036.54	7,475.39
		Sub Total:	66,975.35	35,435.50	19,924.34	82,486.51
	Restricted Funds/Grants					
7	NEW_SAS client support	SAS	2,120.00	4,535.00	6,636.90	18.10
18	LCC Community Champions ROLL ON	LCC	1,620.53	30,000.00	4,264.75	27,355.78
20	LCCG_Health and Wellbeing with ALM	ALM +	98.24	6,000.00	1,355.12	4,743.12
23	Merseycare/Liferooms 23/24	Liferooms	21,450.58	0.00	21,450.58	0.00
24	Awards for All(Big Lottery 2024)	A4A	20,000.00	5.76	20,005.76	0.00
25	PH Holt new	PH Holt	10,000.00	0.00	10,000.00	0.00
26	NW Housing	NW Housing	0.00	400.00	400.00	0.00
27	The Fore	The Fore	0.00	15,000.00	4,260.75	10,739.25
28	Our Liverpool_Fact not Fiction	LCC	0.00	4,850.00	0.00	4,850.00
		Sub Total:	55,289.35	60,790.76	68,373.86	47,706.25
	Balances Per Bank Statement to 31.3.2025	£	122,264.70	96,226.26	88,298.20	130,192.76

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

Mr B. Gray, ACCA

Signed:

Date: 13/01/26

