



*25th Anniversary*

# **Annual Report**

## **2024**

(April 2023 – March 2024)

*'A world where refugees and asylum seekers  
are included, accepted and supported by  
society'*



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## Reference and Administrative Details

Charity name	Bedfordshire Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support (BRASS)
Registered Charity Number	1096874
OISC Number	N200100432
Office address	27b Tavistock Street Bedford, MK40 2RB

### Staff

Brian Cunningham - Coordinator  
Andrea Tulloch - Benefits Adviser, Integration Officer  
Helena Maddock - Immigration & Employment Adviser  
Jon Howton - Finance Officer  
Pat Porter – Office Manager  
Rani Sheemar - Finance Manager  
Sharifullah Dorani - Immigration & Employment Adviser

### Volunteers

Andrea Jones	John Watkins
Anne Shortley	Kathy Mortimer
Brenda Betts	Lindsey Coldwell
Cathy Wood	Liz Turner
Christine Tait	Mahmoud El Sayed
Clare Ball	Michael Barber
Clive Till	Nicola Lindsay
David Thomas	Sabina Billing
Gordon James	Sally Hilliard
Jane Marriott	Sidney Miller
John Esam	Sue Horn
Joanna Clark	

### Trustees

Morris Johns (Chair)	Cathy Moorhouse
Victoria Hilliard (Vice Chair)	James Biggs
Sanja Radic (Secretary)	Jo Tester
Cassandra Howes	

# **Structure, Governance and Management**

## **Governing Document**

BRASS is a registered charity governed by a constitution that was adopted on 1st October 1999 and then revised on 18th September 2002 and 5th March 2003. BRASS is a non-political, voluntary organisation, established for the benefit of refugees and asylum seekers in the County of Bedfordshire to assist in the relief of poverty, hardship or distress.

## **Organisational Structure**

BRASS employs 1 full-time member of staff; a Project Co-ordinator overseeing day to day business. We also employ a number of part time staff; a Benefits Adviser, 2 Immigration Advisers, 2 Employment Advisers, an Integration Officer, a Finance Manager, a Finance Officer and an Office Manager. Staff are supported by a team of dedicated volunteers, making our services excellent value for money. Services are delivered from a town centre, local government owned property leased by BRASS. A board of skilled and experienced trustees drawn from the local community oversee and govern services.

## **Recruitment and Appointment of Trustees**

BRASS recognises that the recruitment and selection of new trustees can strongly influence our future effectiveness. The organisation aims to follow good practice in this field as well as the provisions of our constitution. All BRASS trustees are elected at the Annual General Meeting or are co-opted. When looking to recruit new trustees, the committee will attempt to fill any gaps in skills, knowledge and experience of our current trustees and reflect the diversity of the communities in which we operate. We will use the most appropriate ways of recruiting new trustees, including local networks and advertising. We will prepare role descriptions for trustees, ensure that all potential trustees meet all eligibility criteria and ask all potential trustees about any possible conflicts of interest.

All trustee nominations are presented at the Annual General Meeting or the next Executive Committee. They will then be invited to meet with the chairperson to discuss their nomination and this discussion will be recorded on their nomination paper and then, once accepted, their name and details will be given to the Charity Commission.

## **Relationships with Other Organisations**

BRASS believes that by building capacity through partnership working we can facilitate sustainability of service provision. The work of BRASS complements other services through the co-ordinator's involvement with The New Migration Partnership and the Bedfordshire Advice Forum – local multi-agency forums where issues are raised, information exchanged and partnership solutions explored. BRASS is a key participant in the organisation of the annual Bedford

Refugee Week which holds events to raise awareness of the issues facing refugees and asylum seekers.

BRASS has strong working relationships with local organisations so that individuals can get support from the organisation best placed to provide it. Luton Law Centre has qualified solicitors and case workers who take referrals from BRASS and provide telephone support to BRASS advisers. There is cross referral of clients between BRASS and the Citizens Advice Bureau and the PBIC. BRASS makes referrals to the local MP Mohammad Yasin who helps with representations to the Home Office for specific cases. Referrals are received from the Social Care Team, which is responsible for unaccompanied under-18 asylum seekers, for both advice at the drop-in and English tuition. Community Voluntary Service (CVS) provides a regular supply of enthusiastic and committed volunteers and Bedford Borough Council supports BRASS and contributes to Refugee Week.

BRASS works in partnership with both local and national charities. Advice and support are provided by the Refugee Council, which is the largest refugee agency in the UK. BRASS is a referral organisation for clients requiring provisions via the Bedford Foodbank.

Supporting the local voluntary sector and working towards some financial self-sustainability has become an important part of the organisational ethic.

## **Risk Management**

The main risk again this year has been Covid at the earlier part of the year. We were fully functioning again for most of the year and continue with safety measures such as good air circulation in place.

We ensure that our health and safety policy, safeguarding policy, fire risk assessment and fire safety management plan are regularly reviewed and updated. The building and our services are appropriately insured to safeguard the organisation and volunteers with the tutoring project are subject to DBS checks in order to protect our clients. Our drop-in advice service is regulated by the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) and we are regularly audited.

As with other small charities, BRASS is affected by external factors, particularly in terms of the economy and legal changes affecting asylum seekers and refugees. The economic situation nationally continues to affect fundraising and BRASS has done well to secure a 5 year lottery grant. BRASS continues to seek and secure other grants which allow us to maintain and expand our services. BRASS has had members of staff successfully qualify for OISC level 1. They are supervised by a member of staff qualified to level 2. In addition, it is important for BRASS that we are able to provide volunteers with training and progression in return for their commitment. BRASS is also affected by media coverage of refugees and asylum seekers. This can result in increased interest in helping our clients, but it can also have a negative impact when prejudice against refugees and asylum seekers increases.



Internally, BRASS has a group of committed trustees with skills and experience that can help with the development of the organisation. The National Lottery Community Fund and the Harpur Trust grants provide longer term stability for our staff and the ability to expand the number of staff we employ and therefore the capacity to expand our services. Our success in fundraising also presents some challenges as many trusts will only fund an organisation for a limited time, which means we have to be increasingly proactive in seeking funders. We are fortunate to have a good number of committed volunteers, enabling us to provide reliable and high-quality services beyond our drop-in advice service.

The organisation has a policy to hold financial reserves of six months, a level which we have now achieved and exceeded.





## **Message from the Chair of Trustees**

Dear Friends,

It is with immense pride and gratitude that I present this year's Chairman of the Trustees Report. This past year has been both challenging and inspiring, with continued global upheaval driving more people to seek refuge, safety, and dignity. Thanks to your unwavering support, we have been able to extend a hand of compassion to refugees facing unimaginable hardships.

### **Achievements and Impact**

Our mission remains steadfast: to provide essential services and support for refugees and asylum seekers through their transition into our community. Over the past year, we have witnessed the impact of our collective efforts in several key areas:



#### **1. Emergency Assistance and Relief**

The ongoing global conflicts, especially in regions such as the Middle East, Africa, and Eastern Europe, have led to a significant increase in the number of displaced individuals. As many refugees needing immediate relief are familiar with BRASS, they approached us in the first place, we then directed them to appropriate organisations, offering essentials such as food, clothing, and temporary shelter.

#### **2. Integration and Education Programmes**

One of the cornerstones of our work has been helping refugees integrate into the local community. Our English language and skills training programmes have been pivotal in this regard. We are proud to report that 64 clients attended English and life skill courses enabling them to find employment or continue their education. This year, we helped 254 individuals, eager to contribute to the country that welcomed them, with employment matters.

BRASS continued to help the refugees settle in Bedford, partly by introducing them to other parts of their newly adopted country, like a trip to the seaside in Hunstanton. It never ceases to amaze me to watch their reaction to encountering the sea, sometimes for the first time ever in their lives; with what wonder and awe they behold the mighty expanse of wild waves. As part of the familiarisation effort, BRASS organised three coach trips, one boat trip and of course a Christmas Party.

#### **3. Advocacy and Community Awareness**

Beyond direct support, we have also played a crucial role in advocating for refugees' rights and raising awareness about their struggles, including

many events like a football tournament during Refugee Week. These initiatives have fostered greater understanding and solidarity within our wider community, as well as influencing local policies to be more inclusive and supportive of refugee populations.

## **Financial Overview**

I am pleased to report that despite economic pressures, our financial position remains strong. This year, we raised £190,919 through a combination of public donations, government grants, and partnerships with local businesses and foundations. We have continued to steward these funds responsibly, ensuring that over 87% of our income directly supports our core programmes and services. I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to all donors and funders whose generosity makes our work possible.

## **Looking Ahead**

The needs of refugees are growing, and as an organisation, we must continue to adapt and expand our services. Our strategic priorities for the coming year include:

- **Strengthening Volunteer Engagement:** Volunteers remain the lifeblood of our organisation. Next year, we will aim to provide training programmes whenever practical to empower our volunteers with the tools and knowledge needed to serve refugees even more effectively.
- **Ensure the effective and transparent use of resources.** We realise that times are hard, and donations are limited, so we pledge to ensure the maximum use of resources.

## **Conclusion**

None of the achievements outlined above would have been possible without the tireless efforts of our dedicated staff, volunteers, and trustees. I would like to personally thank each and every one of you for your commitment to this cause. Your compassion, generosity, and hard work have changed lives and offered hope to those in desperate circumstances.

Our work, however, is far from over. As we look toward the future, we remain committed to building a welcoming, inclusive community where refugees can thrive, contribute, and find peace.

Thank you for standing with us in solidarity and for your continued support.

Sincerely,

***Morris Johns, Chair of Trustees***

## Co-ordinator's Report

The biggest event and news this year is our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary party in Russell Park.

BRASS started in St Luke's church which was on nearby St Peters Street. The reason it started there was because the church itself was started by refugees itself many centuries ago. They were fleeing religious persecution in Moravia in Eastern Europe.



Many refugees were coming to Bedford in 1998 from Afghanistan, and refugees also came following the breakup of Yugoslavia. The Vicar of the church thought we should do something so they had a summer barbecue in the church grounds and invited all who were interested. BRASS grew from that day. It was a few years before we became a registered charity. The church has since closed (it is now the Quarry Theatre) and we moved to our current location at 27b Tavistock Street though the theatre still displays details of the history of the building. Indeed I remember our 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary party there. I hope many of you made it. There were well over 100 of us in attendance.

Another big happening near Bedford was the opening of the Asylum Hotel in Sharnbrook. There were a few "antis" at first but myself and others went and gave talks to people in the village, a few of our volunteers live there. We are particularly grateful for Paolo at St Peters church who gathered a large group of around 40 locals who I and other charities spoke to and gave out a lot of our myth busting leaflets.

When it was realised it would be for families a lot of people rallied around and have now formed the very active Sharnbrook Support Group. They need to come under the umbrella of a registered charity to be able to visit the residents on site, which BRASS was very pleased to provide and we do all their safeguarding checks, over 50 now I think and they are happily helping the residents with visits, clothes and toys. We have also done 3 of our coach trips for the residents.

We have also done coach trips for our other clients, Hunstanton beach popular as ever, will let Andrea tell you more about our social activities and had a very busy Refugee Week this year with our usual market stall and myth busting leaflets and our football tournament was the busiest ever with 11 teams including 4 refugee teams! We are also talking to Sports England about more regular football coaching in the future.

So we march into the future with our expanded drop in advice, English tutoring and social activities. Can't believe I have been here 15 years. Hope one day there will be a 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary!

***Brian Cunningham, BRASS Co-ordinator***

# Service Updates

## Drop-in Report

For all of this reporting year, our drop-ins were open on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Like the previous years, we continued to solve clients' matters through telephone appointments if they could not attend. We supported our clients with various matters, including immigration, benefits, employment, (social) housing, utility bills, debts, professional driving theory licence, taxi/private hire driver applications, Uber Eats/Just Eat driver applications, and school/nursery. Because of the demand, we will continue to open three days a week.

As my colleague, Helena Maddock, elaborates, our Employment Project has made significant strides this year. We successfully registered over 70 new clients and facilitated their participation in a variety of courses. We also created or improved CVs for most of them, enhancing their employability.

We have two immigration Advisors, Helena Maddock and Sharifullah Dorani. They continued to assist hundreds of clients with their immigration matters, including helping clients create a UKVI (Home Office) account to access their eVisa; eVisas were much more in demand this reporting year because the Home Office is developing a digital immigration system. This means that the Home Office will replace physical documents, mainly Biometric Resident Permits/Cards (all of which will expire on 31 December 2024), with an online record of immigration status. We also have Andrea Tulloch who, as well as being our Integration Officer, gives benefit advice.

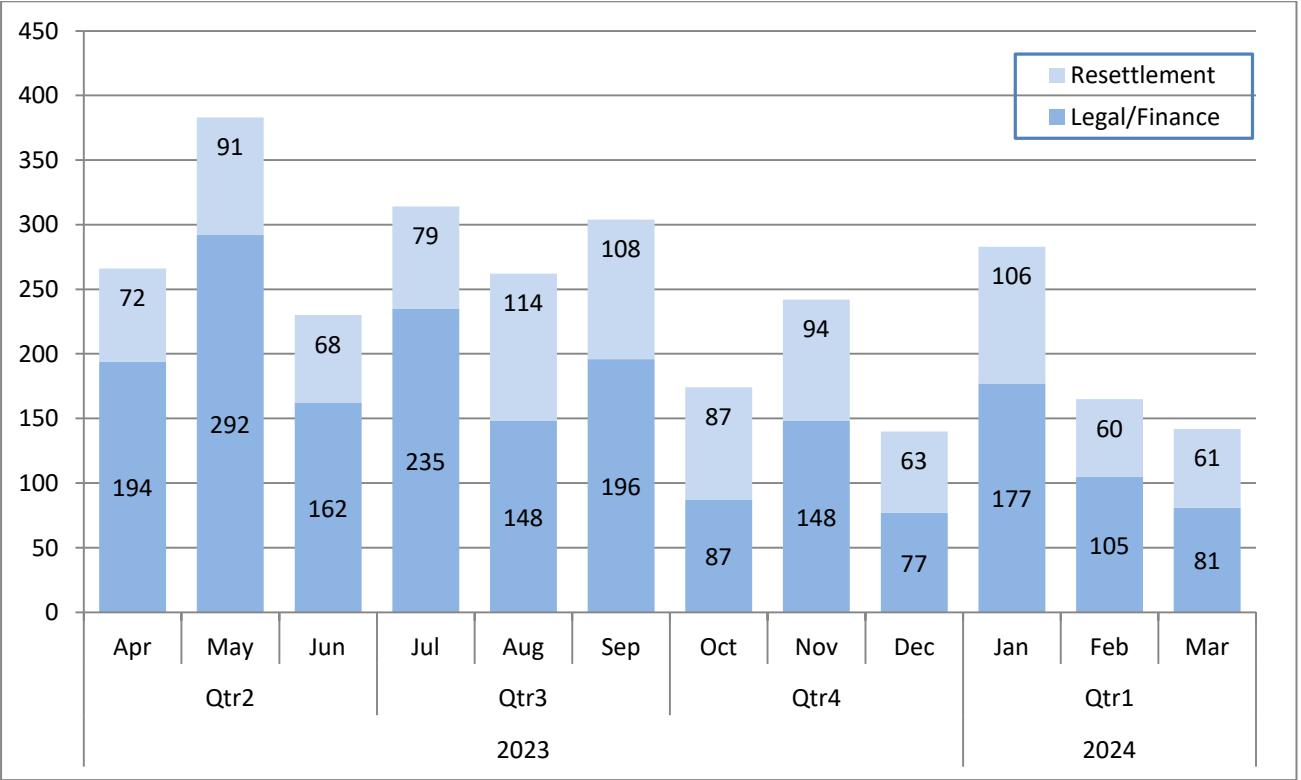
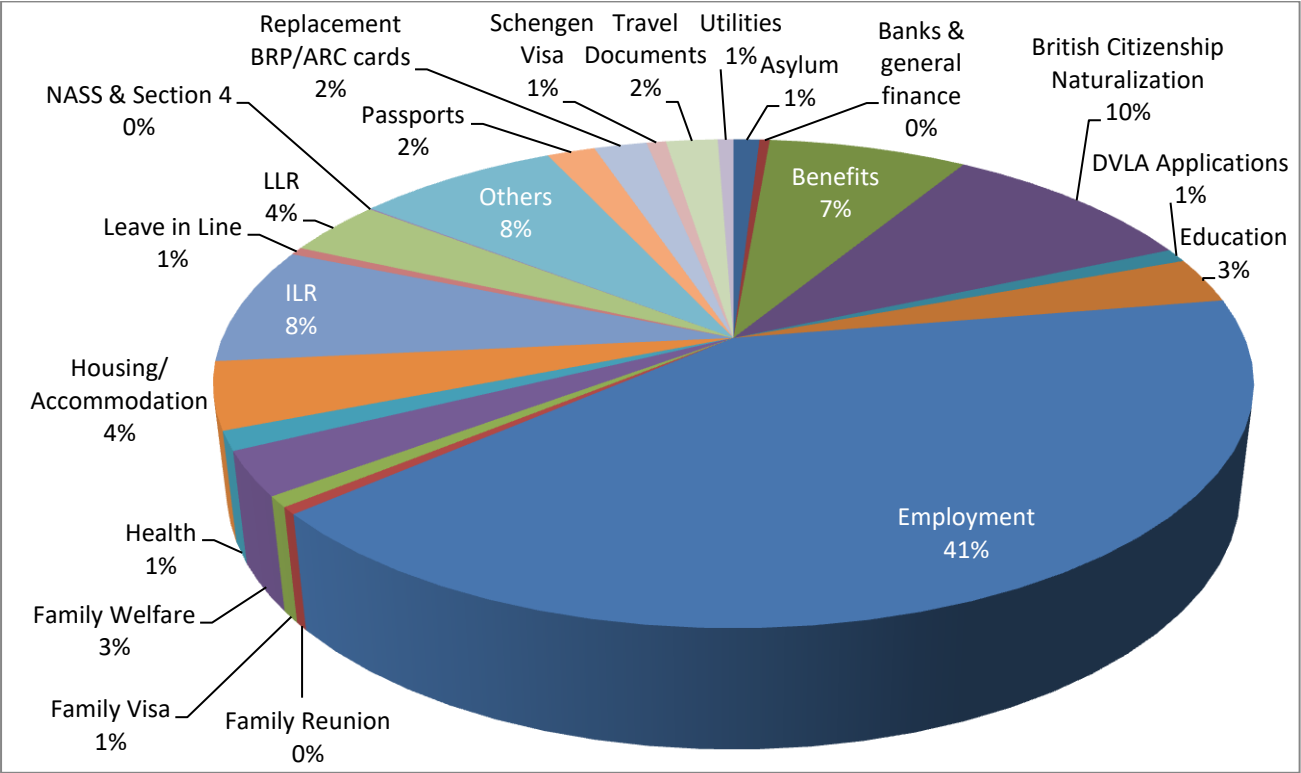
Our advisors continued to offer a comprehensive approach when it comes to immigration matters: they help our clients fill in the application form, book a UKVCAS appointment, and sort out their supporting documents.

Once again, we were able to support hundreds of clients this reporting year. This would not have been possible without the invaluable support of our volunteers and Social Work placement students. Their dedication and hard work played a crucial role, and BRASS is deeply appreciative of their contribution.

***Sharifullah Dorani, Immigration and Employment Adviser***



Drop-in Enquiries 2023-2024



## **Employment Project**

We continued to support our many employment clients for the duration of the project which ended in October 2023. We greatly exceeded our targets again. We then started a new contract to provide employment support until the end of March 2024.

The new project was called Employability for Overseas Nationals (EON) and in five months we registered nearly 40 clients on this project. We had a particular emphasis on helping people into Adult Social Care but also continued to help with IELTS courses, getting qualifications recognised by ENIC, providing business advice through MENTA and providing general employment help and advice.

Our clients have been very grateful for our support, in the words of one client: "I wanted to take a moment to express my deepest gratitude for your unwavering support and invaluable assistance. Your guidance has made a significant difference in my journey, and I am truly grateful for your kindness".

***Helena Maddock, Immigration and Employment Adviser***

## **Integration**

In April a group of clients went to Stanwick Lakes and enjoyed walking, the wild life and the scenery followed by a picnic. June was a busy month as we arranged for the Sharnbrook Hotel residents to go to Wicksteed Park, then the Rotary Club paid for our clients to cruise the River Ouse and have lunch on board the John Bunyan Boat.

During Refugee Week we held our annual 5 a side football tournament in Russell Park there were 11 teams which is the largest number of teams we have had so far. The teams were organised by Lindsey Cauldwell who did a fantastic job, she was helped by Mohamed an asylum seeker who was sponsored by Bedfordshire FA to complete his Referee Training Course.

In July we celebrated 25 years of BRASS in conjunction with Athena Housing (who look after young unaccompanied asylum seekers and often refer them to us for English tuition and social events) by having a picnic in the park and we were joined by some of the residents from the Sharnbrook Hotel which was a fun packed day for everyone. The year was rounded off with our annual trip to Hunstanton and ended with our Christmas Party which was held at St Peters De Merton.

***Andrea Tullock, Integration Officer***

# Objectives and Activities

## Vision

A world where refugees and asylum seekers are included, accepted and supported by society.

## Mission Statement

BRASS is an established charity working to empower, inform and support refugees and asylum seekers and to protect rights with an aim to develop independence and involvement in UK society.

## Strategic Objectives 2020-2024

The trustees have reviewed BRASS' strategic objectives and made some changes. These objectives form the basis for planning our activities over four years. We plan to use these to inform annual targets to ensure we remain focussed on our strategic objectives.

- 1) Sustainable development of BRASS as an organisation to serve the interests and needs of refugees and asylum seekers and their families.
- 2) To enhance the ability of refugees and asylum seekers to understand and navigate UK procedures, processes and systems and promoting change to create a fairer system.
- 3) Provide opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers to increase independence, integration and confidence through learning and social activities.
- 4) Encourage participation of refugees and asylum seekers in the development and management of BRASS.
- 5) To build partnerships with other agencies, to cross refer clients, share information and campaign for the welfare of refugees and asylum seekers locally and nationally.
- 6) To inform and educate the community of Bedford and foster relationships between refugees and asylum seekers and the wider community.

## Services

BRASS currently offers three drop-in advice sessions staffed by volunteers and BRASS staff - on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, 10am-2pm, with fewer sessions conducted via telephone than in the earlier months of the year. These are accredited by the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) to give immigration advice. Through funding by the National Lottery Community Fund and the East of England LGA, BRASS employs a specialist benefits adviser, 2 employment advisers and 2 immigration advisers. We also support the



Refugee Legal Assistance project run by the University of Bedfordshire on its Luton Campus on Tuesday evenings during term time, which specialises in refugee family reunions. The project has, over recent years, supported over 55 families.

This year we had an asylum hotel open in Sharnbrook near Bedford.

We helped start a Sharnbrook Support Group which now has around 45 local members who help the residents in many ways. We continue to assist the group by allowing them access to the hotel under the BRASS umbrella and we oversee DBS checks and safeguarding, as we do for all our tutors.

Our tutoring programme matches volunteer tutors with refugees and asylum seekers who want to learn or improve their English language skills. This service is offered in the community, at the BRASS offices and online. BRASS provides small group tuition in numeracy and preparing for the Life in the UK test

Our allotment plot continues to be worked by client volunteers. Our popular annual summer trip to the seaside (Hunstanton) and our coach trip to Wicksteed Park for clients were oversubscribed.

BRASS plays a leading role in Refugee Week each year, organising a variety of events to promote refugee issues. This year's events revolved around raising awareness via our market stall with The Higgins, myth-busting leaflets, suggested reading lists and art installations at St Paul's Church.

## **Public Benefit**

BRASS provides a range of services to support refugees and asylum seekers in the Bedford community and further afield. Free immigration advice is in short supply in this area and without the service provided by BRASS through phone and appointment advice sessions, many refugees and asylum seekers would be left to tackle the often complex immigration system alone. Advice is also provided on a range of resettlement issues including employment, housing, education and benefits. This advice enables our clients to better integrate into society and to learn to manage their own affairs independently.

For those who want to improve their English, BRASS' tutoring project matches volunteer tutors with clients. This relationship can often provide improved self-confidence and support with other aspects of integration. We also run classes for those wishing to improve their numeracy and those preparing for the Life in the UK test. The BRASS allotment provides a sense of community to clients, as well as offering asylum seekers (who are not allowed to work) activities to fill their time as well as fresh produce to take home.

BRASS is working to inform and educate the public on issues around immigration and asylum. Asylum seekers are a stigmatised group and through our work with Refugee Week and our coordinator giving talks to groups in the Bedford area, we are encouraging the public to look differently at refugees and asylum seekers and to see the positive contribution they make to our society.

# **Achievements and Performance**

## **Progress towards Strategic Objectives 2020-2024**

We have measured our progress on our previous strategic objectives as the review took place at the end of the reporting year.

### **Sustainable development of BRASS as an organisation to serve the interests and needs of refugees and asylum seekers.**

BRASS' advice sessions, our core service, is provided mainly in person with face to face meetings with clients with appropriate Covid measures in place. We also continue to provide specialist benefits advice. Our English Language project has been boosted by the appointment of an Integration Officer to run the tuition service.

The BRASS allotment continues to offer benefit to clients.

### **To enhance the ability of refugees and asylum seekers to understand UK procedures, processes and systems.**

The UK immigration system can be confusing even for those of us who deal with it on a regular basis, so navigating it can be near impossible for those who are new to the country and may have limited English. Through our OISC registered drop-in immigration advice sessions, BRASS helps refugees and asylum seekers to deal with these complex systems. Advice is also provided around other non-immigration issues such as housing, employment and finance to aid integration. We are able to provide specialist advice through our immigration advisers, employment advisers and benefits adviser. Our popular English language tuition also gives refugees and asylum seekers the skills to better navigate British systems and our classes in numeracy and preparing for the Life in the UK test also aid integration.

### **Increasing independence and confidence through learning and social activities.**

Our tuition project provides one-to-one/group tuition to those who wish to improve their English, numeracy and preparing for the Life in the UK test. It is hoped that this will enable them to become more independent and better able to integrate into society. Our allotment provides a place for our clients to relax, meet new people and grow their own food.

**To raise awareness in wider society of issues faced by refugees and asylum seekers.**

BRASS is always heavily involved with activities in Bedford celebrating Refugee Week. Myth busting leaflets are given out to members of the public and events are held at various venues around the town including a very popular football tournament and fun day in one of Bedford's public parks. We also had a publicity raising market stall where we distributed myth busting leaflets. BRASS' coordinator gives talks to local groups and the feedback forms completed at the end of these talks indicate that perceptions of refugees and asylum seekers have been changed by what they have heard. We regularly publish positive stories about our clients and information about refugees and the asylum system on our website and Facebook page.

**Encourage participation of refugees and asylum seekers in the development and management of BRASS.**

BRASS continually encourages clients and former clients to become involved in BRASS, whether through attending groups and activities, becoming a volunteer or joining the committee. A former client is now on our committee and some of our volunteers have previously used our services. We have also provided social work placements to a number of students, some of whom are from a refugee background.

**To build partnerships with other agencies, to cross refer clients, share information and campaign on behalf of the wellbeing of refugees and asylum seekers locally and nationally.**

BRASS works with other agencies in a variety of ways. BRASS works with many local charities and networks. Our coordinator is the Chair of The New Migration Partnership and is on the steering group of the Bedford Advice Forum – local multi-agency forums where issues are raised, information exchanged and partnership solutions explored. BRASS is a key participant in the organisation of the annual Bedford Refugee Week which holds events to raise awareness of the issues facing refugees and asylum seekers.

Referrals are received from Children's Services which is responsible for unaccompanied asylum seekers under the age of 18. The Community Voluntary Service (CVS) provides a regular supply of enthusiastic and committed volunteers and the Charity continues to receive invaluable support from the Bedford Borough.

BRASS has been very involved with Refugee Week in Bedford for many years. The aim of Refugee Week is to raise awareness of the issues faced by refugees and asylum seekers and the positive contributions they make to British society. Covid has had a serious effect upon the level of engagement in the past but we are back working with the local community in terms of giving talks to various groups in the Bedford area to change perceptions of these issues and gathering feedback from those who attend to assess changing attitudes.

## **Fundraising activities**

We would like to thank the following organisations from whom we have received grants over the past years

The National Lottery Community Fund  
Harpur Trust  
Wixamtree Trust  
The Beds and Luton Community Foundation  
The Garfield Weston Foundation  
Bedfordshire Charitable Trust

Panacea Charitable Trust  
Beatrice Laing Trust  
East of England LGA  
WW4R1  
Lottery Awards for All

We would also like to thank all of the individual donors who support BRASS through one off and regular donations.

BRASS would like to thank Karen Mayoh for her wonderful work fundraising for over 15 years and we welcome Rosia Curtis our new fundraiser.

## **Future Plans and the challenges ahead**

Our services have been steadily resuming this year as we came out of Covid. We are now helping clients in numbers higher than pre Covid.

We have obtained a new five year grant with the National Lottery to help with our long term stability and continue to work other local funders.

BRASS will continue to prioritise the needs of our clients by providing good quality, reliable services. In order to safeguard BRASS and ensure that our vital services continue to be available, we will work to ensure good governance to maintain stability. BRASS is fortunate to be in a secure financial position, with more than 6 months of reserves. There are bound to be other challenges ahead, but we are confident that BRASS is well placed to face them.





## Getting Involved with BRASS

Volunteers are often needed for our drop-in, English tutoring and social events.

If you are interested in becoming involved with BRASS as a volunteer, please contact Co-ordinator Brian Cunningham on 01234 211381 (mobile 07541 644989) or [brian@brass27b.org](mailto:brian@brass27b.org). For further information on any of our work, please check our website [www.brassbedford.org.uk](http://www.brassbedford.org.uk) and Facebook page [www.facebook.com/brassbedford](http://www.facebook.com/brassbedford).

Charity Registration Number: 1096874

**BEDFORDSHIRE REFUGEE AND ASYLUM SEEKER SUPPORT  
(BRASS)**

TRUSTEES REPORT AND ACCOUNTS  
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

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## LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

**CHARITY NAME:** Bedfordshire Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support

OTHER NAME CHARITY IS KNOWN BY: BRASS

REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER: 1096874

**CHARITY'S PRINCIPAL ADDRESS:**

27B Tavistock Street  
Bedford  
MK40 2RB

**NAMES OF THE CHARITY TRUSTEES WHO MANAGE THE CHARITY**

Victoria Hilliard – Vice Chair  
Cathy Moorhouse - Left 31st March 2024  
Morris Johns – Chair  
Sanja Radic – Secretary  
James Biggs  
Cass Howes  
Jo Tester

**PROJECT CO-ORDINATOR**

Brian Cunningham

**BANKERS**

RBS  
Bedford Branch  
15-19 Mill Street  
Bedford  
MK40 3EU

Main current account held since May 2021 :-

The Co-operative Bank  
Delf House  
Skelmersdale  
WN8 6WT

# **REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES**

## **REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024**

The Trustees of the charity present their report together with the financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2024, prepared in accordance with the Charities Act 2011 and the Accounting and Reporting by Charities Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP 2005).

From April 2023 to March 2024 finance meetings and Trustee meetings were held quarterly, attended by the Chair, Committee members and staff.

BRASS employs a Project Co-ordinator to oversee day to day business and to provide specialist advice, and a part-time Benefits Adviser, Employment Adviser, Integration Officer, Immigration Adviser, Finance Manager, Finance Officer and Office Manager. Much of the charity's work is undertaken by a team of dedicated volunteers.

## **OBJECTIVES AND REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES**

The charity is an established non-political, voluntary organisation working to empower, inform and support refugees and asylum seekers and their families, protect their rights and enable them to develop their independence and involvement in UK society. Specifically the charity was established for the benefit of refugees and asylum seekers in the County of Bedfordshire to assist in the relief of poverty, hardship or distress. Services are delivered from a local government owned property in Bedford town centre which is leased by BRASS.

BRASS continues to have strong working relationships with local organisations providing advice so that individuals can get support from the organisations best placed to offer it. Luton Law Centre and Luton law firms have qualified solicitors and case workers who take referrals from BRASS and provide telephone support to BRASS advisors. BRASS also works with the University of Bedfordshire Law Department to assist refugees with family reunification applications. BRASS works with the Citizens Advice Bureau to cross refer clients and makes referrals to the local MP who, in specific cases, helps with representations to the Home Office.

Referrals are received from Children's Services which is responsible for unaccompanied asylum seekers under the age of 18. The Community Voluntary Service (CVS) provides a regular supply of enthusiastic and committed volunteers and the Charity continues to receive invaluable support from the Bedford Borough Council.

BRASS works in partnership with both local and national charities. Advice and support are provided by the Refugee Council, which is the largest refugee agency in the UK, and Migrant Help. We are also a registered referrer for Bedford Food Bank.

BRASS seeks to support the local voluntary sector and work towards financial self-sustainability. It leases its offices in Bedford town centre.

BRASS is focused on working in partnership with other organisations to share knowledge and skills, prevent duplication, maximise effectiveness, cut costs and share facilities. On behalf of the Trustees of BRASS I can confirm that in carrying out our financial review we have considered and complied with our duty to have due regard to the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit.

## **REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES (CONT'D...)**

### **ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE**

During the last financial year BRASS has supported over 600 clients. We seek to support our client group's changing needs; the changes to the Benefits system and ever increasing complexity of immigration applications has increased demands for our services. BRASS now receives funding from the National Lottery Community Fund and will provide specialist advice through a Complex Caseworker for immigration matters and a Benefits Advisor. We also receive funding from East of England Local Government Association for employment advice. We are able to provide additional social activities through our Integration Officer whose costs are also funded by the Harpur Trust.

We continue attending to our advice sessions three times a week. We also offer appointments with our Benefits Adviser worker and our Immigration Adviser where we feel the need is urgent or needs to be addressed in person.

Our social activities this year have greatly increased and there were three additional coach trips for the residents of the Sharnbrook asylum hotel. We have supported the setting up the Sharnbrook Support Group. Members of the group are able to visit the residents under the BRASS umbrella and we carry out their DBS and references checks in accordance to our safeguarding Policy.

### **FINANCIAL REVIEW**

As in previous years, BRASS is very fortunate to have received funding from various different sources this year.

The National Lottery Community Fund continues to fund our Co-ordinator, along with other posts and other running costs for five years.

The Harpur Trust continues its support by helping to fund our Finance Manager, Finance Officer and Integration Officer salary costs. BRASS has been able to utilise funding from the East of England Local Government Association to support employment advice. Money has been used to fund a part-time Benefits Adviser.

We thank Wixamtree Trust for its continued ongoing support for funding. Also we would like to thank Gale Trust, 29th May 1961 Charitable Trust and the Panacea Charitable Trust.

Total Incoming Resources during the financial year were £190,919. This has been used to provide funding to cover all our existing posts which are all filled and other direct costs and overheads. We are delighted to say that the Lottery continues to fund us and that this funding is for five years. Now that we have successfully secured this funding we now have more time to concentrate on putting in other bids. We are asking for funding over more than one year as we have done in the past. We are awaiting outcome of some of these new bids and are planning others early in the new financial year.

Costs increased this year by 10.39% to £175,573 mainly due to an increase in weekly hours for some staff. The increase in staff hours was mainly to support the growing needs of the increasing number of refugees coming into the country.

## REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES (CONT'D...)

### FINANCIAL REVIEW RESERVES POLICY

BRASS reserves as 31st March 2024 were £109,925. Of these funds £39,892 were restricted funds, the remaining £70,033 were unrestricted funds. The Trustee Board has established a policy whereby it aims to maintain sufficient unrestricted funds not invested in tangible fixed assets and not required to meet future budgeted expenditure, being the "free reserves", to support the future growth of the charity and provide reserves for dealing with possible contingencies such as short-term cessation of project activity or redundancy.

Approved by the Trustees and signed on their behalf by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Johns', followed by a period.

Morris Johns, Chair

Date: 17th October 2024

## **INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REPORT TO THE TRUSTEES OF BEDFORDSHIRE REFUGEE AND ASYLUM SEEKER SUPPORT**

I report on the financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31 March 2024 as set out on pages 7 to 12

This report is made solely to the charity's trustees, as a body, in accordance with section 145 of the Charities Act 2011 ('the 2011 Act'). My work has been undertaken so that I might state to the charity's trustees those matters I am required to state to them in this report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, I do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the charity and the charity's trustees as a body, for my work, for this report, or for the opinions I have formed.

### **Respective responsibilities of trustees and examiner**

The charity's trustees are responsible for the preparation of financial statements. The charity's trustees consider that an audit is not required for this year under Section 144(2) of the 2011 Act and that an independent examination is needed.

It is my responsibility to:

- \* examine the financial statements under section 145 of the 2011 Act;
- \* to follow the procedures laid down in the General Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the 2011 Act; and
- \* to state whether particular matters have come to my attention.

### **Basis of independent examiner's report**

My examination was carried out in accordance with the General Directions given by the Charity Commission. An examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the financial statements presented with those records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the financial statements and seeking explanations from you as trustees concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit, and consequently no opinion is given as to whether the financial statements present a 'true and fair view' and the report is limited to those matters set out in the statement below.

### **Independent examiner's statement**

In connection with my examination, no matter has come to my attention:

1) which gives me reasonable cause to believe that in any material respect the requirements:

- \* to keep accounting records in accordance with section 130 of the 2011 Act; and
- \* to prepare financial statements which accord with the accounting records and comply with the accounting requirements of the 2011 Act;

have not been met; or

2) to which, in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the financial statements to be reached.



John Esam  
Mayfield Lodge  
1 Main Road,  
Biddenham  
MK40 4BB

Dated: 17th October 2024

## STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES AS OF 31ST MARCH 2024

Incoming Resources	Note	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total 2024 £	Total 2023 £
Grants receivable	3	35,000	146,156	181,156	98,182
Donations and other fund raising activities	3	3,117	2,971	6,088	40,644
Investment income		375	0	375	114
Other income		3,300	0	3,300	3,318
<b>Total Incoming Resources</b>		<b>41,792</b>	<b>149,127</b>	<b>190,919</b>	<b>142,258</b>
<b>Resources Expended</b>					
Costs of generating funds		7,300	2,000	9,300	9,450
Charitable activities		16,424	149,810	166,234	155,258
Governance costs		39	0	39	572
<b>Total Resources Expended</b>	4	<b>23,763</b>	<b>151,810</b>	<b>175,573</b>	<b>165,280</b>
<b>Net Incoming/ (Outgoing) Resources</b>		<b>18,029</b>	<b>(2,683)</b>	<b>15,346</b>	<b>(23,022)</b>
Funds brought forward		47,004	47,575	94,579	117,601
Transfers between funds		5,000	(5,000)	0	0
<b>Funds carried forward</b>		<b>70,033</b>	<b>39,892</b>	<b>109,925</b>	<b>94,579</b>

All of the charity's activities derive from continuing operations during the above two periods.

## BALANCE SHEET AT 31 MARCH 2024

	Note	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total 2024 £	Total 2023 £
<b>Fixed Assets</b>					
Tangible assets	5	1,107	160	1,267	930
<b>Current Assets</b>					
Debtors and Prepayments	6	10,000	20,316	30,316	21,910
Cash and Bank in hand		58,926	26,990	85,916	82,667
<b>Total Current Assets</b>		<b>68,926</b>	<b>47,306</b>	<b>116,232</b>	<b>104,577</b>
<b>Creditors Amounts falling due within one year</b>	7	0	7,574	7,574	10,928
<b>Net Current Assets</b>		<b>68,926</b>	<b>39,732</b>	<b>108,658</b>	<b>93,649</b>
<b>Net Assets</b>		<b>70,033</b>	<b>39,892</b>	<b>109,925</b>	<b>94,579</b>
<b>Funds of the Charity</b>					
Unrestricted funds	10	68,151	0	68,151	46,091
Restricted funds	10	0	39,732	39,732	46,721
Unrestricted & Restricted capital reserve		1,107	160	1,267	930
Designated funds		775	0	775	837
<b>Total funds</b>		<b>70,033</b>	<b>39,892</b>	<b>109,925</b>	<b>94,579</b>

### Trustees' responsibilities

The trustees acknowledge their responsibility in complying with the requirements of the Charity Commission and confirm that the accounts have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities (SORP 2005) and Charities Act 2011.

Approved by the trustees and signed on their behalf by:

  
.....

Name: Morris Johns      Dated: 17th October 2024



# NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

## 1. Accounting Policies

### Statement of compliance

The financial statements have been prepared on the basis of historic cost and in accordance with the applicable United Kingdom Reporting Standards, the Charities Act 2011 and the Accounting and Reporting by Charities Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP 2005).

### Basis of Preparation

As permitted by SORP 2005 the trustees have adapted the heading used to describe Incoming Resources and Resources Expended within the Statement of Financial Activities when presenting the results for the year.

### INCOMING RESOURCES

Incoming resources are recognised when received or receivable by the charity. Income is derived from fund raising activities and donations. Grants are recognised on receipt or award unless, in the judgement of the trustees, conditions attached to the grant make it improbable that they will be received.

### RESTRICTED FUNDS

Restricted funds are to be used for a specific purpose as laid down by the donor. Expenditure which meets these criteria is identified against the fund.

### UNRESTRICTED FUNDS

Unrestricted funds are incoming resources received or receivable generated for charitable purposes and available for use at the discretion of the trustees in furtherance of the general objectives of the charity and have not been designated for other purposes.

### Paid Employees

The charity employs a Project Co-ordinator, a part-time Finance Manager, a part-time Finance Assistant, a part-time Office Manager, a part-time Benefits Advisor, a part-time Integration Officer and two Immigration Advisors (both of these staff also work as part-time Employment Advisors). These posts are funded through restricted grants.

### Trustee Expenses

There were no payments or reimbursements made to any trustees during the financial year.

### Fixed Assets

Assets with a useful life of more than two years are capitalised at cost and depreciated over their useful life. Depreciation on computer equipment is charged at 33% on a straight line basis.

Fixed Assets funded by capital grants are capitalised and a restricted capital reserve created. The reserve is reduced by the depreciation charge.

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024 (CONT'D...)

### 2. Property & Operating Leases

i) Operating Lease Commitments - Nil.

ii) The annual commitment for the land and buildings lease amounts to £9,688 (£10,059 in 2022/23) where the term remaining is between one and five years. There are no further lease commitments. Rent charges have increased for the current year.

### 3. Income from Grants, Donations and Legacies:

	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total 2024	Total 2023
	£	£	£	£
Donations from other charities, companies	35,000	115,975	150,975	98,182
Donations from trusts, individuals and similar	3,492	33,152	36,644	40,644
	<b>38,492</b>	<b>149,127</b>	<b>187,619</b>	<b>138,826</b>

### 4. Resources Expended

	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total 2024	Total 2023
	£	£	£	£
Staff payroll costs	0	130,722	130,722	115,174
Volunteer expenses & training	494	0	494	394
Staff travel & training	1,313	0	1,313	840
Social worker	1,720	0	1,720	2,549
Rent, rates & insurance (Note 2)	1,294	8,886	10,180	13,135
IT, telephone & internet	0	4,561	4,561	4,824
Utilities, cleaning & maintenance.	(514)	0	(514)	4,204
Stationery, printing & postage	1,604	0	1,604	1,943
Publications & subscriptions	912	0	912	309
Web & promotional costs	50	0	50	179
Client outings & welfare costs	62	3,430	3,492	2,587
Depreciation	630	693	1,323	1,335
Governance costs	39	0	39	572
Other expenses	16,159	3,518	19,677	17,235
Total	<b>23,763</b>	<b>151,810</b>	<b>175,573</b>	<b>165,280</b>

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024 (CONT'D...)

5. Fixed Assets	Computer Equipment
<b>Cost</b>	£
At 1 April 2023	14,871
Additions	<u>1,661</u>
At 31 March 2024	<u>16,532</u>
<b>Depreciation</b>	
At 1 April 2023	13,941
Charge for year	<u>1,324</u>
At 31 March 2024	<u>15,265</u>
<b>Net Book Value</b>	
At 31 March 2023	<u>930</u>
At 31 March 2024	<u><u>1,267</u></u>

6. Debtors and prepayments due within one year	2024	2023
	£	£
Debtors	0	0
Prepayments and accrued income	<u>30,316</u>	<u>21,910</u>
	<u><u>30,316</u></u>	<u><u>21,910</u></u>

7. Creditors and accruals due within one year	2024	2023
	£	£
Creditors	30	30
Deferred income	0	0
Accruals	<u>7,544</u>	<u>10,898</u>
	<u><u>7,574</u></u>	<u><u>10,928</u></u>

8. Staff Costs	2024	2023
	£	£
Gross wages	121,366	107,042
Employers National Insurance costs	8,535	6,745
Employers National Insurance rebate	(5,000)	(5,000)
Pension costs	<u>5,821</u>	<u>6,387</u>
	<u><u>130,722</u></u>	<u><u>115,174</u></u>

During the year BRASS employed; one full-time employee and six part-time employees.  
No employee earned more than £60,000.

# NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024 (CONT'D...)

## 9. Restricted Income Funds as at March 31 2024

Fund Name	Purpose and restriction
BIG Lottery (i)	The project is partly funding the following posts - the Co-ordinator, the Office Manager, Benefits Adviser and the Complicated Caseworker.
BIG Lottery (i) (a)	The project has also received lottery funding to support beneficiary events this year in the sum of £9,850.
Harpur Trust (ii)	A further two year grant was awarded by Harpur Trust to support the part of the salary costs of the part-time posts of the Finance Manager & Finance Assistant, as well as the Integration Officer salary costs. Final instalment of this grant to be paid on completion of the end of grant report due August 2024.
EELGA (iii)	These restricted funds are funding the Employment Support work.
Beds & Luton Community Fund	During the current year this money has funded overheads such as rent.
Panacea Trust	This money has funded part of the welfare worker and immigration worker posts, application is pending to The Panacea Trust for additional funding.
Beds Charitable Trust	This £5,000 was previously treated as restricted funding. Only recently it came to light the money was to be used for unrestricted purposes. Therefore the money was transferred to unrestricted funds.

## 10. Movement of Major Funds

Fund Names	Balance at 1st April 2023 £	Incoming resources £	Outgoing resources £	Transfers £	Balance at 31st March 2024 £
Other	47,004	41,792	(23,763)	5,000	70,033
<b>Unrestricted Funds</b>	<b>47,004</b>	<b>41,792</b>	<b>(23,763)</b>	<b>5,000</b>	<b>70,033</b>
EELGA (iii)	23,942	40,500	(34,857)	0	29,585
Bedford & Luton Community Fund	0	10,000	(7,622)	0	2,378
Beds Charitable Trust	5,000	0	0	(5,000)	0
Big Lottery (i)	0	65,625	(65,625)	0	0
Big Lottery (i) (a)	0	9,850	(3,430)	0	6,420
Harpur Trust (ii)	5,926	20,180	(28,209)	0	(2,103)
Panacea Trust	10,103	-	(11,373)	0	(1,270)
Small restricted grants	1,750	2,972	0	0	4,722
	46,721	149,127	(151,116)	(5,000)	39,732
Restricted capital reserve	854	0	(694)	0	160
<b>Restricted Funds</b>	<b>47,575</b>	<b>149,127</b>	<b>(151,810)</b>	<b>(5,000)</b>	<b>39,892</b>
<b>Total Funds</b>	<b>94,579</b>	<b>190,919</b>	<b>(175,573)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>109,925</b>





