

BIRMINGHAM COMMUNITY HOSTING NETWORK

Annual Report 2021-2022



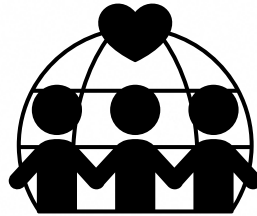
“No one needs to say anything, you can just see how happy everyone is, everyone is smiles”



2021- 2022 IN NUMBERS



348
nights of accommodation
to people who would
have otherwise been
destitute



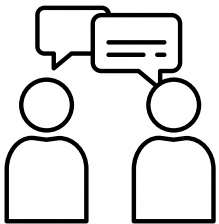
25
school or nursery places
secured for asylum seeking
children



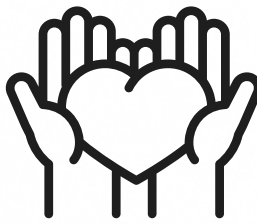
17
young refugees
matched with volunteer
befrienders



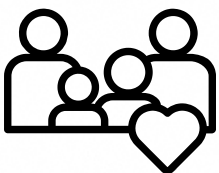
35
people offered advocacy
support from our family
fun session



21
young refugees
offered one to one
advocacy support



43
number of volunteers



322
number of visitors to
our family fun sessions



25
asylum seekers attended
our football coaching
sessions



27
families accessed our
family fun sessions



44
young people attended well
being day trips

THE BIRCH TEAM

Staff



David Hirst
Refugee and Migrant
Support Practitioner
(Hosting Network)
(0.3 FTE)
Left July 2021



Joy Robinson
Refugee and Migrant
Support Practitioner
(Family Befriending)
(0.5 FTE)



Steph Neville
Refugee and Migrant
Support Practitioner
(Family Fun Sessions &
Hosting Network)
(0.4 FTE)



Libbs Packer
Refugee and Migrant
Support Practitioner
(Family Fun Sessions)
(0.2 FTE)



Helen Hibberd
Development Worker
(0.2 FTE)
Started Oct 2021



Alison Tinker
Refugee and Migrant
Support Practitioner
(Refugee Outreach
Project)
(0.4 FTE)
Started May 2022

Trustees

Almamy Taal
Resigned May 2022

Andy Jolly
Resigned May 2022

Chris Benfield

Katherine Green

Kamila Khan
Started May 2022

Emma Hawthorne
Started May 2022

Volunteers

Birch Network could not function without our amazing volunteer team, we are so grateful to our wide network of volunteers who give so much time and effort to the people we support. We want to thank each and every one!

Family Befriending

Huge thank you to all our befriending volunteers who have welcomed and supported so many young refugees into their homes, families and lives. And to all those who have supported us with outings and day trips.

Family Fun Sessions

Huge thanks to all the volunteers who have supported the families we work with, welcoming them to our sessions, playing with the children, chatting to parents and helping to run English conversation classes. Thanks also to volunteers for making the gorgeous activity bags which have enabled us make welcome packs.

Hosting

Huge thanks to our hosting families who have welcomed our guests into their homes, supported them through very difficult transition periods and continue to offer support.

Our volunteers

Many thanks to our other volunteers who have helped support our work in a range of different ways: Jane Thakoordin for Christmas card and t-shirt designs. Sue Bell, who does an amazing job of tracking our finances, book keeping and helps us prepare our accounts for inspection. Thanks to Birch Network founder Lizzy Bell for her work assisting with fundraising and last year's annual report. Thanks to Tom Ledger for website support and developing our online Christmas shop. Thanks also to Ray Jellicoe, who independently examines our accounts.

Thanks also to Bharat Karavadra, who assists us with our website and emails.

ABOUT US

Here at BIRCH we offer support and friendship to people seeking sanctuary who are on the periphery of society. We focus on three main groups: those with no recourse to public funds who are experiencing destitution, young people who arrived in the country as unaccompanied asylum seeking children, and newly arrived asylum seeking families living in temporary accommodation.

VISION

Birmingham is a welcoming city where residents stand in solidarity with people seeking sanctuary, increasing resilience and wellbeing.

MISSION

BIRCH Network improves the lives of vulnerable refugees and migrants by relieving destitution and improving wellbeing through increased resilience.

AIMS

To provide accommodation, practical and emotional support to vulnerable asylum seekers, including those who are destitute, through the creation of a network of community hosts and befrienders.

To contribute to community cohesion by providing opportunities for asylum seekers to form friendships with other West Midlands residents.

Advocacy

Hosting Network

Family Befriending

Family Fun Sessions

Outreach activities

THE YEAR IN CONTEXT

As restrictions relating to the COVID 19 pandemic lifted we were able to restart a lot of our activities throughout the year. In fact we grew as an organisation and have been able to develop our services and respond to the needs that we witness. Staff remained on part furlough for some of the year but most were back on their full hours by the Autumn.

In April 2021 we celebrated Birch Network turning 10 years old and promoted some of our achievements over the last decade via social media, reflecting on our successes and developments! It feels like support and advice agencies for migrants and refugees are needed now more than ever, sadly.



During the summer we said goodbye to David Hirst, who had been involved with Birch for over five years and was involved with all of our projects at some point. David was a fantastic employee who helped to continue and develop our work and we wish him well for the future. Steph Neville, one of our existing employees, took over as our hosting network coordinator and undertook the task of getting the hosting network set up again.

In October we recruited Helen Hibberd as our new part-time development worker, a new role for Birch, which aims to focus on fundraising, staff supervision, project development and improving systems for monitoring and reporting. This has helped put us in a strong position to ensure we are able to fundraise and continue to run and develop our service.

All of our projects have adapted to the post-pandemic environment, which has seen a huge number of asylum seekers being housed in hotel accommodation for longer and longer periods. Hotels are wholly inadequate for accommodating asylum seekers, many of whom are experiencing trauma and mental anguish, and we started to do more advocacy and outreach work to the residents living in these hotels. This culminated in a decision to employ a new worker to help develop a new outreach project to enable us to offer more activities to help reduce isolation and offer welcome to newly arrived asylum seekers in Birmingham, and in May 2022 we appointed Alison Tinker to run our new project. We also participated in a report coordinated by Asylum Matters - 'In a place like prison: voices from institutional asylum accommodation' - which interviewed a variety of residents in hotel accommodation and clearly demonstrated how this type of accommodation is very negative for everyone living there, and that refugees need to be settled in local communities. We also joined the Together With Refugees coalition, which is calling for a better approach to supporting refugees that is fair, kind and more effective, and we have participated in many of the campaign activities and signed their petitions.



All of this work is set against a backdrop of growing hostility and persecution towards refugees and migrants. The 'anti-refugee' Bill aims to criminalise refugees who are trying to seek safety, and to develop large scale detention centres which are known to be detrimental to asylum seekers' physical and mental health and are often in locations with very limited access to legal advice, as well as the development of the scheme to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda which runs contrary to the UK commitments to offer safety to those seeking asylum. The year also saw many refugees coming from Afghanistan and Ukraine which helped to raise public awareness of refugees and a strong community response to help those arriving, but this is set against a backdrop of increasing hostility towards migrants from the Government. This year has created so much fear and anxiety and we will continue to do as much as we can to support migrants and refugees in Birmingham and the West Midlands.

THE HOSTING NETWORK

The pandemic continued to have an impact on the operational ability of our hosting network from April 2021 to end of March 2022. Our previous hosting coordinator, David Hirst, left in August 2020 and was replaced by Steph Neville, who is also one of our coordinators for our Family Fun Sessions.



Once in post our new hosting coordinator's main task was to get the hosting network restarted again. This meant reconnecting with previous hosting volunteers, many of whom were no longer in a position to host, and recruiting new hosts. Recruiting hosts can be challenging as we are asking for a big commitment and we have to spend time training them, checking their suitability, visiting their property and conducting DBS checks etc. During this period our coordinator was able to recruit four new host families and two previous families agreed to continue hosting.

We were then able to approach referral agencies to let them know that we were able to receive referrals to the hosting network again. We were already hosting one individual whose long-term hosting placement came to an end at the end of February 2022 when she was able to access asylum support. Our hosting coordinator and the volunteer host helped facilitate the move-on, communicating with the referral agency, the home office and the accommodation provider, and offering the guest considerable support through this transition period.

Initially referrals to the project were very slow, this was mostly due to backlogs in the asylum system, which meant that asylum seekers were not getting decisions made on their claims so there were fewer asylum seekers being refused and made destitute. This is somewhat positive, but also means that asylum seekers are in limbo longer, which can feel very distressing and often people are housed in hotels which are not suitable for extended periods of time.

“

There are insufficient adjectives to describe how fantastic you are (and the lovely hosts for Birch). There are also insufficient ways of saying thank you but thank you.

Referral agency

”

As word spread about the project we started to receive referrals again. Referrals to the hosting network include asylum seekers who are evicted when their initial claim is refused and are subsequently evicted from Home Office funded accommodation, and domestic violence survivors who are waiting for spaces in women's refuges or to submit an immigration application to make them eligible for asylum support. We also work with trafficking victims, who are being referred into the national referral mechanism which provides advice, support, and accommodation for those who have been trafficked. Often these people need somewhere to stay whilst they are being referred and assessed and are not eligible for publicly funded accommodation. Everyone who we host and accept a referral for has a 'move on' plan – usually they will be making a fresh claim for asylum or another type of immigration application which will make them eligible to move into asylum support accommodation or a women's refuge/accommodation for trafficking victims.

From Sept 2021 to March 2022 we hosted three individuals, one was our existing long term guest and there were a further two individuals. One was an asylum seeker who some of our hosts hosted for a weekend while awaiting his asylum support accommodation and another guest was referred by Women's Aid, we hosted this woman for three weeks before she became eligible for benefits and was then moved back into supported accommodation.

The Homes for Ukrainians hosting scheme was also announced in March 2022 and our coordinator attended a lot of meetings and discussions about the implications and concerns about the scheme. We decided that we would support any of our current hosts who wished to join these schemes, in addition to our ongoing scheme. We have supported two of our host families to host Ukrainian families (a total of six individuals) and they are in the process of helping them apply for benefits/schools, sort out essential provisions etc.

Since March we have been very busy with referrals and have gone on to host several more cases. Our hosting scheme remains extremely valuable to destitute migrants. Our guests are taken out of destitution and provided with a warm, safe roof over their head, in the welcoming environment of a volunteer's home. As such our beneficiaries benefit from increased wellbeing, resilience and social networks during a challenging period in their lives. We continue to help those who struggle with the mental anguish that being a 'refused' asylum seeker or becoming destitute entails. Birch Network strives to help those who have received poor legal advice during their initial claim and will continue to champion on behalf of those who seek a place of safety while they try to rebuild their lives. We work closely with our referral partners to ensure that they are supported to make new immigration claims and we offer support and casework to each individual to enable them to do this. Our hosts also offer emotional and practical support to their guests and help to improve the well being, mental health and resilience of the person we are supporting



The total number of nights accommodation provided for someone that would have otherwise been destitute was 348

“ Infinite thanks to you, we are very happy to know you. It really is a blessing to know you ”

Hosted Guest (Translated from French)



15,651 nights of accommodation since 2011

FAMILY BEFRIENDING

The Family Befriending Project matches unaccompanied young refugees (16-25 years) who are feeling unsupported, isolated and excluded with trained volunteer families who are willing to offer ongoing support and friendship.

This year the scope of the project really expanded and our befriending coordinator started offering a lot more one on one advocacy work to young refugees who were being referred to the project, as well as young refugees we were encountering through our outreach work in hotels or directly from other residents living in the hotels who were concerned about other young refugees they were living with.

Our project had been running in various ways during the pandemic via texts, WhatsApp and Zoom, as well as garden meetings and walks in the park etc. As restrictions eased it was a big relief to be able to offer the young people we support a full service and for our volunteers to be able to welcome them into their homes again. We also felt able to offer more group outings and this has been a really valuable addition to our service. It enables us to offer respite and well being days to a wider range of young people than we could previously.



17 young refugees supported by befrienders

Between April 2021 and March 2022, 17 young people were supported by befrienders (ten new cases and seven matches from previous 18 months). Additionally a further 25 young people were supported face to face with support and advice connecting them to community support. This meant that our project coordinator actively supported 43 young refugees new to the project during this period.



21 young refugees supported with one-to-one advocacy



"Thank you so much for supporting me, you have helped me a lot"

Young person after finding accommodation



"Now I feel there are people who care about me"

Young person who was recently befriended



"I am happy to do something for someone"

Young person after a volunteering session

Our befriending coordinator also organised nine wellbeing days catering for a total of 44 young people (some people went to more than one event). These included trips to Shropshire, Wales, Warwickshire farm, and Manor House Wroxhall. We have also supported other organisations with trips to trampoline parks, football events and welcome events for newly arrived young people seeking refuge.



Sharing a communally cooked meal at a volunteers
Manor House

Our coordinator spent extended periods with nine young people in crisis, they have benefitted from one to one sessions (usually long walks in country parks) where they have been able to open up about the trauma they have experienced in the past and their fears about the future. In most cases, we were able to go on to identify services that have helped them move forward and some have gone on to be matched with befrienders or linked with other community groups and included in wellbeing days.



"It was my birthday, We had a small party, they are so kindness and so amazing, they made my birthday so special for the first time."

Young person



Young people having fun on a well being day out

By expanding our advocacy service, our coordinator has supported:

- three young people to successfully get their true age back, and is in the process of supporting another young man
- four homeless young people to get accommodation and three to be moved to more suitable accommodation
- six young people with their education and employment (help with applying to college, understanding full range of options, writing CVs, supplying additional learning materials, assisting in search for jobs and assisting with job and work experience applications)
- three young people to get specialist help in respect of their mental health
- six young people to progress immigration claims where solicitors had left or failed to stay within reasonable timescales
- two separated brothers to be reunited and to spend Christmas together
- eight young people to integrate with other community groups
- four young people to actively engage in volunteering
- informed and enabled three young people to get their benefit entitlements
- five young people to develop their talents (art, music and sport)

“Honestly Joy the pleasure was all ours, as a family we’re agreed that we are more than happy to host this regularly and it was just so lovely, both James and I were only gutted we didn’t get to spend more time talking- what an amazing bunch of people”

Volunteer family from the Manor House

“I have family here now, they care much for me, they worry about me, I worry about them, this is family, it makes me very happy.”

Befriended young person

case study

“Hello, I’m Ramar”

Last year during the last few months of lockdown Birch received a message from an unknown person just saying ‘Hello. I’m Ramar’ It is not unusual to receive similar messages and when we respond, we often find someone desperately trying to reach out for support. This was certainly the case for Ramar!

Several messages later and with the help of Google translate we learnt that in his mid teens Ramar had fled war and embarked on a long, very dangerous journey where he had been exploited and left with many physical and mental scars. The final part of his journey involved battling in freezing conditions across the English Channel and then being confronted by Immigration Officials who dismissed a very important part of Ramar’s identity, his age.

Having been deprived of a normal childhood, it soon dawned on Ramar that after arriving on British soil, further years were swiftly snatched from him when he was given a random year of birth several years older than his seventeen years. As a result, he was housed in adult initial accommodation with no support. Traumatized and desperately sad, he spent day after day alone in his room, he eventually got hold of details of a number of charities and sent out messages with the few English words that he knew ... ‘Hello, I’m Ramar’.

After a few failed attempts to meet up, Ramar eventually found the courage to come out of his initial accommodation and meet up with me. Over the months, trust has built up and together we have identified support to meet his outstanding needs. This includes medical help, enrolment on college courses, clothes, a good solicitor who is now fighting to get his true age reinstated and most importantly care and emotional support.

As Ramar has grown in confidence we have been able to introduce him to other young people like himself and he has enjoyed playing games, sharing food and chatting with them. He also has now been matched with family befrienders and gets on well with all members of the family, enjoying days out with them, games, walks and lots of opportunities to learn English and feel welcome and valued.

The process of challenging unlawful age assessments is unfortunately often long and drawn out but we all believe that it is well worth fighting for and in the meantime Birch and our dedicated volunteers are trying to give Ramar some of the support that he has been denied. Recently he looks so much happier.

(Ramar is an alias)



Ramar at the beach with his befriending family

FAMILY FUN SESSIONS

At the start of April 2021 our family fun sessions were still very restricted by the pandemic. During April, Steph, one of the coordinators, was still running Zoom sessions with some of the families we had contact with, which included making chocolate crispy cakes - there were some smiling faces at this session! We also continued to deliver activity packs to families who were living in hotels, as and when we were able to get information about who was staying there.

We were really concerned about how isolated the families were, stuck in hotels with no outside space, so as soon as restrictions on meeting outdoors lifted we decided to run the sessions outside and our first Picnic and Play sessions started in May 2021. The first session was a success and two mums and four children from the hotel came to the park which was within walking distance of their hotel and immediately invited another mum. The families were so thrilled to be in the outside space and we were able to show them local parks which they could access for free and they soon started walking to the parks daily to give everyone some fresh air and enjoy the green spaces and playgrounds.

“ You’ve made my day,
literally ”

Mum from the Picnic and Play sessions



Drawing outside at our picnic and play sessions



Paddling in the stream at our Picnic and Play sessions



Playing in the sand at Martineau Gardens

We continued to run the Picnic and Play sessions until August and also managed to run some day trips with the families. In July we took several families to Martineau gardens, a local community garden, and they had a great time playing in the sand pit, exploring the woods and generally running around in a beautiful green space. In August, we took some families and young refugees (9 adults and 16 children) on a farm visit and treated them to a delicious Kurdish cooked meal.

The families were so grateful to be able to explore local outside spaces after being trapped all together in one room for so many months!

In September we restarted the Family Fun Sessions back in Christ Church hall in Selly Park and were happy to be able to offer a wide range of activities and play opportunities for the children, as well as a relaxing and welcoming space for the parents.

Between April 2021 and March 2022, we were visited by 322 visitors to either our Picnic and Play or Family Fun sessions, this included 27 families (35 adults and 62 children).

Historically we have only worked with families to our sessions for a very short period of time as they were only housed in hotels for six weeks. Now, with backlogs in the asylum support system and a lack of move on accommodation, many families are stuck in the hotels for much longer periods, often for over six months. In response to this, our team has increased the amount of advocacy support they provide to the families. A lot of this work involves helping the children to apply for school places. We are very fortunate to have a growing number of schools of sanctuary in Birmingham and we have developed good relationships with several local schools (some are schools of sanctuary), which has resulted in us finding school and nursery places for 25 children.



“ I am happy, because I see my kids happy, really, this, it is enough ”

Parent at a Family Fun session

“I keep telling my kids even when you are grown up, you will never forget this day”

Parent at the farm visit

We also helped all of these children source school clothes and referred a further 19 individuals to St Chads Sanctuary for clothes and essential hygiene products. Many children were assisted with initial travel costs until these came through from the council and our staff helped the children to get to school for their first days, when it was not a very local school (mostly secondary schools). We have also been working with the schools and Asylum Matters to try to raise concerns about the condition of the hotel accommodation - many families have reported bed bugs and there are numerous complaints about the inadequacy of the food provided.

35 individuals were also offered additional advocacy support which ranged from helping register with dentists, getting HC1 forms, information sharing, signposting and liaison with other professionals.

“ They loved it so much and are so excited. Thank you so much ”

Parent whose child had just started school

In July 2021 following discussions with our staff about the needs of residents in some of the hotels in Birmingham, Refugee Support Europe have once a month started attending the hotel which accommodates most of the families to provide clothes, provisions and fresh fruit to the residents. This has had a really positive impact on the residents.

OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

From July 2021 the use of hotels in the West Midlands to accommodate asylum seekers expanded significantly, and delays in processing asylum support claims meant that many asylum seekers are forced to live in the hotels for longer and longer periods. Birmingham currently houses over 1000 asylum seekers in hotels.

Our staff were increasingly concerned for the single adults in the hotels, who have very little financial support (approx £8 a week to live on) and were suffering because of how isolated and bored they felt. We were also coming across young people in hotels who had not been correctly age assessed and were therefore not getting the support they needed. Additionally we also came across some individuals who were not getting any support. Our staff and some volunteers started reaching out more to the residents in these hotels to try to offer some support and link with various agencies local to them. In May 2022 we were able to start a new project aimed specifically at single adult asylum seekers living in hotels, following a very generous community donation. This project has developed extremely well and we are now offering volunteer run English conversation classes in two hotels, a sewing machine share scheme, one-to-one support for a number of extremely vulnerable individuals, as well as escorting over 30 individuals to various community events. We hope to be able to expand and build on this work.

Prior to starting the new project we were able to offer some outreach activities via our existing staff, volunteers and trustees. This included days trips to local farms, visits to trampoline parks, attending football matches of local teams. We were also able to run a 4 week coaching session for 25 men living in a hotel in Castle Bromwich. More recently we have been supporting a group of men to train and run in their local park runs, and are fortunate to have partnered with Coopah Running, which is a digital running coach scheme.

Below are some photos from our outreach activities:



PARTNERSHIPS

In carrying out our activities during this very difficult year we have worked with and been supported by a variety of individuals and organisations. We are grateful for their hard work and professionalism.

- ASIRT
- Asylum Matters
- Baobab Women's Project
- Black Country Women's Aid
- Birmingham Schools of Sanctuary
- Birmingham City of Sanctuary
- British Red Cross
- Christ Church Selly Park
- Coopah
- Dispossessed Collective
- Fircroft College of Adult Education
- Hope Projects
- Migrant Help
- NACCOM - The No Accommodation Network
- MTF Coaching Academy CIC
- The Kensington Hotel
- Refugee Action - Birmingham
- Refugee & Migrant Centre - Birmingham
- Refugee Support Europe
- St Chad's Sanctuary
- Women's Aid

DONORS

Between April 2021 – March 2022, grants were gratefully received from the following trusts and funds:

- The Allen Lane Foundation
- The Archer Trust
- Baron Davenport's Charity
- The Cole Charitable Trust
- The David East Fund - Heart of England Community Foundation
- The Grantham Yorke Trust
- The George Henry Collins Charity
- The Hilden Charitable Fund
- The Joseph Hopkins & Henry James Sayer Charity
- MSN Fund

We are also extremely grateful to all the individuals and other community organisations that support our work, including: All Saints Church Kings Heath, Mohini Howard, Jonathan Collinson, Mark Torrance and Sara Willott, Nick Bell, Dr Asha Rogers and Andrew Packer.

Thanks also to everyone who responded to our facebook appeals for request for equipment and donations - these made a real difference to those who we support.

We would also like to thank all of the customers who made purchases from our first Christmas shop, we raised almost £900! We are very grateful for this support.

FINANCIAL REVIEW 21-22

	£	£	£		£	£
	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Restricted funds - Specific	Designated Funds	Expenditure	Totals
INCOME						
Funds received	18361	27479	1215	9700		56755
Bank interest	0	0			0	0
Total Income						56755
EXPENDITURE						
Family Fun Sessions						
Staff Salary Costs					10324	
Equip & Materials					419	
Refreshments					111	
Asylum Seeker Travel & Subsistence					56	
Staff Stationery/Phone					57	
Office Rent					152	
Venue Hire					1953	
Other - insurance/sundries					1036	
Family Fun Total						14108
Family Befriending Project						
Staff Salary Costs inc expenses					16049	
Staff Travel & Subsistence					887	
Volunteer Travel & Subsistence					57	
Wellbeing activities					333	
Asylum Seeker Travel & Subsistence					142	
Staff Stationery/Phone					72	
Reimbursement - Asylum Seeker Payments					945	
Hardship Payments					66	
UASC Expenses					54	
Other - insurance/sundries					1036	
Family Befriending Total						19641
Hosting Network						
Staff Salary Costs inc expenses					5547	
Volunteer Travel & Subsistence					14	
Equip & Materials					125	
Staff Stationery/Phone					15	
Office Rent					152	
Other - insurance/sundries					1036	
Hosting Network Total						6889
Development Worker						
Staff Salary Costs					2751	
Fundraising activities					299	
Staff Stationery/Phone					212	
Sundries					33	
Development worker Total						3295
Total Expenditure						44130
Net of Income/Expenditure						12625
Funds brought forward from previous period						33743
Funds carried forward to next period	14484	22184		9700		46368

FINANCIAL REVIEW 21-22

Income 2021-22

2020/21 B/F		33742.93
Charitable Trust Grant Funding		Sub-total
Allen Lane Foundation	2,500.00	
Archer Trust	1,000.00	
Baron Davenport's funding	1,000.00	
MSN Fund	5,000.00	
Cole Charitable Trust	1,000.00	
George Henry Collins Charity	1,000.00	
Grantham Yorke Trust	5,000.00	
Hilden Charitable	5,000.00	
David East Fund	2,000.00	
Joseph Hopkins Charity	1,000.00	
National Lottery Awards for All	9,950.00	
<i>Trusts/Funds subtotal</i>		34,450.00
M Howard	250.00	
All Saints Church	80.00	
Standing orders	1,070.00	
HMRC Charities GIFT AID	362.10	
Community donations	2,835.64	
Anonymous Community Donation	11,000.00	
<i>Community donations subtotal</i>		15,597.74
Fundraising Activities		
Christmas shop sales	873.59	
Govt. Furlough Scheme payments		
HMRC Job Retention Scheme Grant	4,528.53	
Funding reimbursed to refugee		
Sandwell College	1,215.00	
Total income excluding B/F	56,664.86	
Total income including B/F	90,407.79	



Trustees' Annual Report for the period

April 2021 To March 2022

Birmingham Community Hosting Network

Also known as BIRCH Network

Address; 204 Scott House, The Custard Factory, Gibb Street, ~~Deritend~~, Birmingham, B9 4AA

Charity registration number: 1151763

Trustees:

**Chris Benfield
Katherine Green
Kamilla Khalid
Emma Hawthorne**

Independent Examiner:

Ray Jellicoe

Trustees Report:

Objectives and Activities

Objectives as set out in the constitution:

The relief of financial hardship amongst those seeking asylum in the United Kingdom or who are refugees, and who reside in the West Midlands.

To preserve and protect the physical and mental health of those awaiting and those granted refugee status and their dependents.

Activities:

- Community hosting network for destitute refugees and migrants
- Befriending and advocacy support for separated young [refugees](#)
- Sessional activities and support for newly arrived asylum seeking [families](#)
- Outreach support to newly arrived asylum seekers living in hotel accommodation

Trustee's Responsibilities in Relation to the Financial Statements.

The charity trustees are responsible for preparing an annual report and financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice). The law applicable to charities in England and Wales requires the charity trustees to prepare financial statements for each year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs and of the incoming resources and application of resources of the charity for that period. The trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy ~~any~~ any time the financial position of the charity and to enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Charities Act 1993, the charity (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 and the provisions of the trust deed. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

Summary of main achievements

This year was a busy year, following the pandemic, with many projects finally being able to restart properly. Our hosting project slowly opened and whilst referrals were slow initially, the project soon started hosting destitute migrants and our coordinator was able to recruit some fantastic new volunteers. We also started some new relationships with referral agencies and have been happy to work with Women's Aid South Birmingham to help some of their domestic violence survivors.

Our family befriending project was also very busy and our coordinator has been engaged in more one to one advocacy and support, as well as linking isolation young refugees with welcoming volunteers in Birmingham and the West Midlands. We have also been able to offer more day trips and well-being activities.

The family fun sessions really picked up in the Autumn, following a summer of picnic and play sessions. We started seeing families coming on a longer-term basis and as such, have

been more involved in helping asylum seeking children find school places. We have also offered increased advocacy support and were able to start English Conversation Classes.

Following the increase of the use of hotel accommodation and the number of asylum seekers being accommodated in them in Birmingham and across the West Midlands. We were keen to develop more outreach work to offer more support to these residents. Our staff were conscious that we were not able to offer as much support to adults single me. Fortunately, following a large unrestricted donation, we will advertise and recruit for a new outreach worker in the following financial year.

The recruitment of our new Development Worker in October 2022 was in response to the need for more fundraising work and a clearer fundraising strategy, as well as improved staff support and liaison between staff and trustees. Our new worker has already secured some strong funding, as reflected in our [accounts](#) and enabled us to build up our reserves. We hope to be able to continue this position into the next financial year.

Structure Governance and Management

Nature of Governing document

The charity is operated under the rules of its constitution adopted on 5th Feb 2013.

Financial Review

Birmingham Community Hosting (BIRCH) Network has a generous pool of local and regional charitable trusts and funders, as well as support from the National Lottery and good support from individual, and community funders. BIRCH raised £34,450.00 from charitable trusts and foundations and £15,687.74 from community donations, we raised £873.59 in sales from our first Christmas shop. We also received £4,528.53 towards staff salaries under the Government's furlough scheme. £37,978.53 was restricted funding for specific projects, and £17,561.33 was unrestricted community donations, most of which went into our reserves or was designated for the new outreach project for the following financial year. We also received £1,215.00 payment for a young refugee who didn't have a bank account and this sum was paid back to him.

At the end of the financial year, we had a surplus of £46368. Out of these funds £14848 was designated to reserves (accounting for three months of operating costs), £9,700 was designated to cover the costs of starting the new outreach project and £22184 was carried forward and designated to the projects that the funding was restricted to.

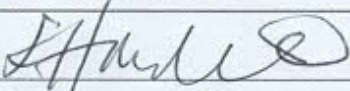
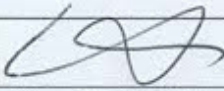
Reserves policy

Our reserves policy states that we should hold three months operating costs in reserves.

Declarations

The trustees declare that they have approved the trustees' report above.

Signed on behalf of the charity's trustees

Signature(s)		
Full name(s)	EMMA HAWTHORNE	CHRISTOPHER BENFIELD
Position (eg Secretary, Chair, etc)	CHAIR	TREASURER
Date	28.01.23	



Report to the trustees/
members of

Birmingham Community Hosting Network

On accounts for the year
ended

31st March 2022

Charity no
(if any)

1151763

Set out on pages

1 + 2

(remember to include the page numbers of additional sheets)

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of the above charity ("the Trust") for the year ended DD / MM / YYYY.

Responsibilities and basis
of report

As the charity's trustees, you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ("the Act").

I report in respect of my examination of the Trust's accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination, I have followed all the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

Independent examiner's
statement

[The charity's gross income exceeded £250,000 and I am qualified to undertake the examination by being a qualified member of [insert name of applicable listed body]]. Delete [] if not applicable.

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination (other than that disclosed below *) which gives me cause to believe that in, any material respect:

- the accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 130 of the Charities Act; or
- the accounts did not accord with the accounting records; or
- the accounts did not comply with the applicable requirements concerning the form and content of accounts set out in the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 other than any requirement that the accounts give a 'true and fair' view which is not a matter considered as part of an independent examination.

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

* Please delete the words in the brackets if they do not apply.

Signed:

R. J. M. Micae

Date:

16 Jan 2023

Name:

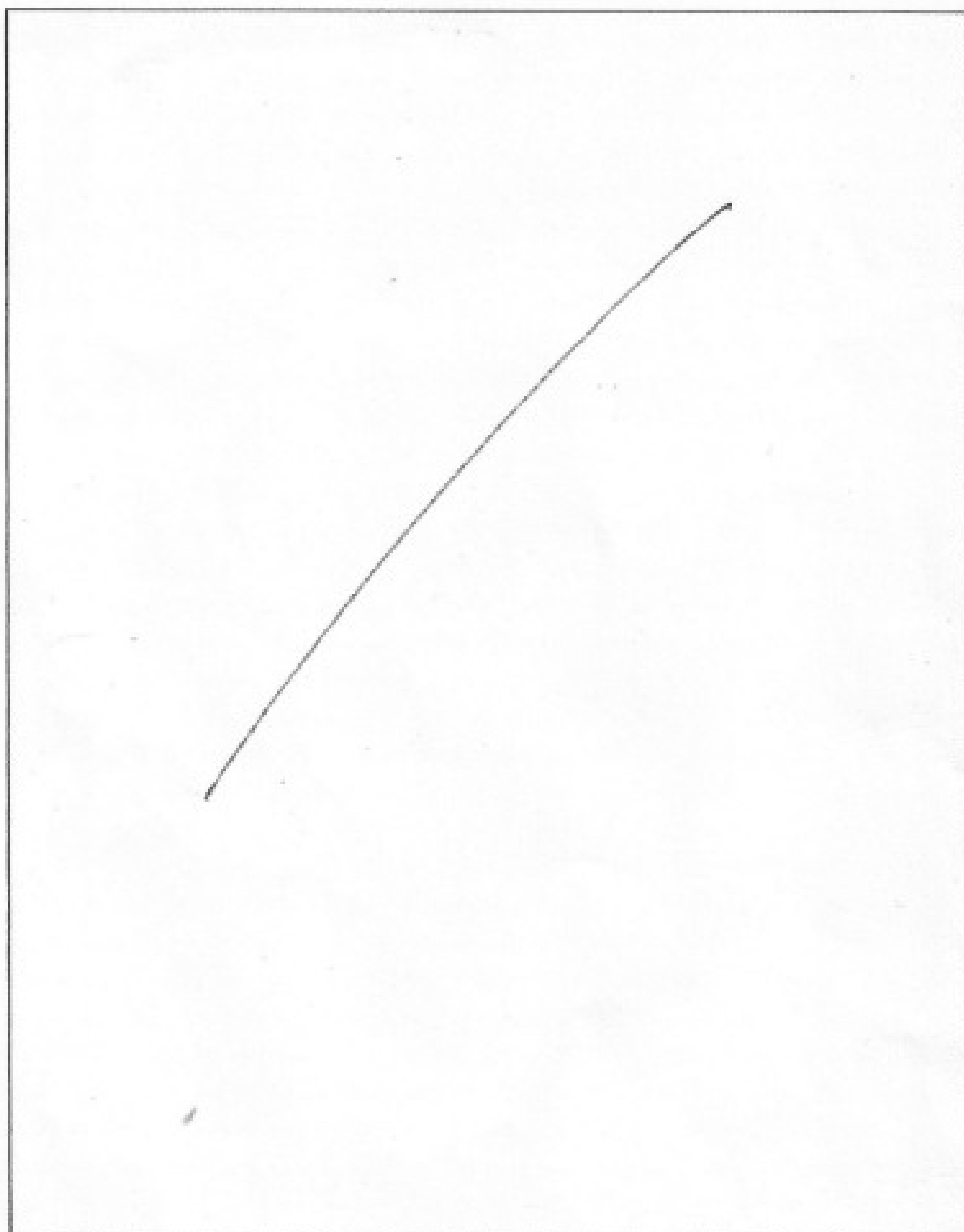
Relevant professional
qualification(s) or body (if
any):

Address:

104 Lyttelton Road
Birmingham
B33 8BT

Only complete if the examiner needs to highlight material matters of concern (see CC32, Independent examination of charity accounts: directions and guidance for examiners).

Give here brief details of any items that the examiner wishes to disclose.





Charity registration 1151763



www.birchnetwork.org



birchnetwork@gmail.com



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