



**Trustees' Annual Report  
1 January to 31 December 2023**

**Welcome Group Halesowen**

**Charity registration number: 1168507**

## Welcome Group Halesowen

### Trustees' annual report for the year ended 31 December 2023

Charity registration number: 1168507

Registered address: Owen House, rear of Lifecentral Church  
Little Cornbow  
HALESOWEN  
West Midlands  
B63 3AJ

Email address: [welcomegrouphalesowen@gmail.com](mailto:welcomegrouphalesowen@gmail.com)

Website: [www.welcomegrouphalesowen.org.uk](http://www.welcomegrouphalesowen.org.uk)

### Trustees and officers

Trustee name	Office (if any)	Dates acted if not for whole year
Clare Neville	Chair	
Mike Gower	Vice Chair	
Dilys Ward	Secretary	
Andrew Harwood	Project Manager	
Lynn Gower		
Moirra McNulty		
Freda Parkes		
Helen Bryan		
Anthony Lau		
Lynn Poulton		From 24.07.23

### Structure, governance and management

Type of governing document Constitution, adopted 12<sup>th</sup> May 2016

How the charity is constituted Unincorporated association

Trustee selection methods Trustees are appointed or reappointed annually at the Annual General Meeting held between March and May

### Objectives and Activities

#### The objectives of the charity as set out in its constitution are:

- (1) The promotion of social inclusion for the public benefit among people who are refugees and asylum seekers and their dependents living with them, residing (temporarily or permanently) in Halesowen and the surrounding areas, who are socially excluded on the grounds of their social and economic position, by providing social and recreational facilities and events involving the local community.
- (2) The relief of poverty, the promotion of physical and mental health and the advancement of education of asylum seekers and refugees and their dependents living with them in Halesowen and the surrounding areas through the provision of information, guidance and support.

## **The main activities in relation to those purposes for the public benefit:**

The charity seeks to alleviate social isolation and financial exclusion of vulnerable asylum seekers and refugees, providing a safe weekly drop-in, telephone support and deliveries to people across Dudley, Sandwell and the west of Birmingham. Offering friendship, refreshments, empathy, mutual support, guidance, signposting, financial help, foodbank access, clothes, baby supplies, household goods and free SIM cards. We work in partnership with Brushstrokes Community Project to provide advice on asylum support and immigration matters. We have two drop-in sessions, on Monday mornings and afternoons, during school term-time. Our sessions are free, and we pay the bus fares of asylum seekers and those with refugee status to enable them to attend. We have toys and activities for pre-school children.

The trustees meet regularly throughout the year to plan and organise activities that ensure the charity complies with its stated purposes for the public benefit according to the Charity Commission's guidance.

## **Our vision:**

Welcoming and helping asylum seekers and refugees

## **Our values**

- Welcome all asylum seekers and refugees who come to us for help
- Embrace each person with respect and acceptance and without judgement
- Provide a place of safety and hope and facilitate mutual support
- Recognise that each individual has emotional, social, practical and spiritual needs

## **Achievements and Performance**

We have continued to be what we were set up to be, a welcoming place, a place of sanctuary and hospitality for Asylum Seekers and Refugees. A place for them to feel they are not alone, a place of friendship and support. Through our presence we are pushing back against the hostility and intolerance communicated by many politicians and the media. I hope we are a little bit of light shining in the darkness. So, we want to concentrate as much as possible on the positives of 2023.

As a group we are blessed with positive and enriching links with other organisations, churches and groups, including a local Catholic primary school. Different staff join us as volunteers each week. The parents and children have contributed on so many occasions with uniforms, shoes, toys, cash donations and gifts. The children have offered our members wonderful hospitality serving afternoon tea both at their school and at our meeting. And what a joy it is to be entertained by them.

We are also grateful to the Society of St Vincent de Paul (SVP) at our local Catholic church. Their generous support has enabled asylum seekers in our group to receive supermarket vouchers on three separate occasions during the year, a much-appreciated boost at each holiday time. They have also given us access to a fund which has enabled some of those who have received Leave to Remain to be given an electrical appliance. A wonderful opportunity for those trying to equip a home for the first time in UK.

Another positive development in 2023 is Brushstrokes Community Project generously enabling one of their immigration advisers to be at our group one day each month since February. This has enabled many of our members to move forward with their asylum claims, several of whom had been stuck in limbo for many years. The Refugee & Migrant Centre (RMC) opening a

centre in Dudley has also benefited our members. It is another place we can signpost people to, to receive skilled support and advice locally.

Our first ever website [www.welcomegrouphalesowen.org.uk](http://www.welcomegrouphalesowen.org.uk) was launched on 3<sup>rd</sup> May. The website helps to showcase our services, helps our fundraising efforts and makes information about the group more widely available.

Our ongoing challenge is being able to respond to all the diverse ways our members need to be supported. Being an asylum Seeker or refugee in the UK, contrary to media reports, is a very difficult life. Many are lonely and isolated, struggle with English, the way our systems work, with living in poverty, and poor housing. We find our support is needed in so many areas of their lives.

Because the services we provide are hard to find, people are hearing of us or being recommended to us, as a place that offers help. This is our challenge. How do we manage to offer the support needed, to the ever-increasing number of people seeking our help?

By the summer of 2023, our financial situation was precarious. Our numbers were growing week by week, we were overspending our budget and as trustees we knew we could not continue as we had been. Welcoming anyone who attends, providing our services to anyone who arrived at our door, was becoming unsustainable, both financially and practically. It was decided we needed to put in place a catchment area, and for the first time for many years we faced the possibility of turning away people wishing to join us.

However, during the Autumn our financial position transformed, so many people responded to our need. Individuals, and particularly local churches, heard of our predicament and responded generously. It was so uplifting to know people in Halesowen valued our work so much. We also had successful funding bids that helped secure our position. Once again, we were on track with our budget.

However, capacity issues had not eased. Despite putting in place the catchment area, more and more people were seeking out our services. Our numbers were still too high for us to sustain and as a group we were stretched to our limits. Turning away people in need is very difficult and it takes a physical and emotional toll on our volunteers. It contradicts our reason for existence. However, we remained hopeful our measures would soon result in more manageable numbers.

We are also grateful to OM for enabling our project manager to work tirelessly on our behalf through his ministry with them. We want to thank our more than 30 dedicated volunteers for the commitment and love they all give to Welcome Group.

#### **Statistical achievements:**

- At the end of the year we had 178 registered members, with 236 children, and in 2023 engaged with a total of 331 adult service users from 43 countries. 164 people used our services for the first time.
- To put these numbers in perspective, we saw a one third increase in the number of people we helped compared to 2022 and our membership rose by one fifth.
- 54% of those we helped are from just 5 countries: Eritrea, Albania, Syria, Iraq and Nigeria.
- Half are asylum seekers and half have refugee status. About 12 of the asylum seekers had been refused asylum with no recourse to public funds and were thus vulnerable.

- 36 of our asylum seeker families and singles from 14 countries were granted refugee status (leave to remain) after being in the UK for an average of 6 years. This higher than usual number of positive decisions was partially due to the Home Office target to clear a backlog of 92,000 legacy asylum cases (made prior to Nationality & Border Act in June 2022).
- Attendance at Monday sessions massively increased from 50-55 adults at the start of the year to 75-80 in the autumn, bringing more pre-school children too.
- Our Christmas party saw an all-time record Monday attendance of 124 adults and 33 mostly pre-school children. We enjoyed a delicious hot international buffet meal, were entertained by a ukulele band and were able to give out donated new toys and gifts to 219 children of our members.
- Weekly referrals to foodbanks increased from an average of 6 to 10 each week.
- Many newer asylum seekers continued to be housed initially in hotels. In the autumn, 15 of our asylum seekers were living in hotels with basic meals provided.
- We continued to distribute free Vodafone SIM cards with generous data, calls and texts, giving out 312 SIM cards.
- Supermarket gift cards, funded by SVP were also given out to asylum seeker families and single people, 70 at Easter, 83 in the summer and 77 at Christmas.
- In October we partnered with Dudley Public Health in distributing 167 toothbrush packs to children and adults. Each pack contained a toothbrush and toothpaste.
- In November, with so many people granted asylum and needing to move on we made an appeal for suitcases and travel bags receiving about 40 in the following few weeks.
- We continue to issue monthly baby supplies, occasional toiletries and sanitary products, pass on donated goods, clothes and appliances. We have also been able to purchase small appliances and school uniforms among other items. More than 150 deliveries to homes took place, including Christmas gifts, supermarket vouchers and small furniture items.

## Financial Review

### Financial position at end of year

Cash at bank on 31/12/2023 was £18,438 in unrestricted funds. This is a healthy position to end the year on, but we are facing increasing demand on our services and the need to continually replenish our funds through funding applications to trusts and donations. Trustees have an agreed reserves policy to cover 2 months operational costs in the event of a loss of income and to meet any unforeseen expenditure that may occur.

## Declaration

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

**Signature:** *Clare Neville*

**Full name and position:** Clare Neville  
Chair

**Date:** 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2024

**Welcome Group Halesowen****Registered Charity Number 1168507****Receipts and Payments Account for the Year Ended 31st December 2023**

	2023		2022	
Receipts	£	£	£	£
<b>Donations over £500</b>				
National Lottery Fund	9,900		9,700	
Halas Parochial Church Council	3,318		5,727	
Grimmitt Trust	3,000		-	
Hilden Charitable Foundation	3,000		-	
HEF Graham Griffiths Fund	2,300		-	
Edward Cadbury Grant	1,000		-	
Life Central Church	915		-	
Stourbridge Quakers	600		600	
All Churches Trust	-		4,900	
Heart of England Community Fund	-		2,000	
Churches Together in Halesowen	-		830	
Asda Foundation	-		760	
<b>Sub total</b>		<b>24,033</b>		<b>24,517</b>
<b>Other donations up to £500</b>		<b>4,346</b>		<b>3,180</b>
<b>Total Receipts</b>		<b>28,379</b>		<b>27,697</b>
<b>Payments</b>				
Cost of Charitable activities				
Supporting asylum seekers and refugees	22,350		20,838	
Drop in centre and sundry running costs	2,324		2,099	
<b>Total Payments</b>		<b>24,674</b>		<b>22,937</b>
<b>Surplus</b>		<b>3,705</b>		<b>4,760</b>
<b>Add Funds in Hand 1st January 2023</b>		<b>17,581</b>		<b>12,821</b>
<b>Funds in Hand 31st December 2023</b>		<b>21,286</b>		<b>17,581</b>

**Statement of Assets and Liabilities as at 31st December 2023**

	2023	2022
<b>Current Assets</b>		
Cash at Bank	20,776	16,900
Petty Cash	510	681
<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>21,286</b>	<b>17,581</b>
<b>Represented by:</b>		
<b>General Fund</b>	18,438	15,806
<b>Ring Fenced Donations</b>	2,848	1,775
<b>Total Funds</b>	<b>21,286</b>	<b>17,581</b>

Approved by trustees on 02/09/2024 and signed on their behalf

C. E. Neville

*CE Neville*

Chair

K. Sables

*K Sables*

Treasurer

**Independent Examiner's report to the trustees of the Welcome Group Halesowen**  
**Registered Charity Number 1168507**

**Receipts and Payments Account for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023 and**  
**Statement of Assets and Liabilities as at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023**

**Responsibilities and basis of report**

I report to the trustees on my examination of the attached accounts.

As the charity trustees of the Trust 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**

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

1. accounting records were not kept in respect of the Trust as required by section 130 of the Act; or
2. the accounts do not accord with those records.

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.

Signed: *Mike Weaver*

Name: Michael Weaver

Relevant professional qualification or membership of professional bodies (if any):

Chartered Public Finance Accountant

Address: Nine Acres, Uffmoor Lane, Halesowen, West Midlands B63 1DL

Date: 5th September 2024