

Swindon City of Sanctuary



Annual Report

May 2024 – April 2025

Swindon City of Sanctuary Registered Charity 1177624

HEADLINES

This year was one of continued growth and impact for us. With a settled team of four staff members, we had the opportunity to promote welcome and inclusion across Swindon with greater reach and focus.

The support of our incredible volunteers and Trustees, dedicating over **500** hours of volunteering, was invaluable and enabled us to continue expanding our work. Our Sectors and Awards Coordinator led the way in promoting our values by working across **3** different sectors in Swindon, with **6** organisations working towards Sanctuary Awards.

Our Schools' Coordinator continued to generate opportunities for Swindon schools to grow, learn, and embed welcome for all. Across the year, we delivered **20** CPD sessions in schools, connecting with **26** schools, and supported staff in embedding sanctuary values into everyday learning. We said farewell to our wonderful FABs Coordinator, who leaves a lasting impact through their work supporting schools to embed literacy and participation for multilingual children and their families. FAB boxes are now being used in **16** Swindon schools.

The changing, turbulent landscape for people seeking sanctuary in Swindon meant that after **7** years, we said goodbye to the We're Open community evenings. We reflected on the many years of shared community, friendships, and connections fostered there. We are incredibly grateful to our brilliant volunteers, without whom this project would not have been possible. We are pleased that We're Open Families continues to grow, offering a welcoming, creative space for families with young children and recorded **703** visits this year alongside many collaborative sessions with other Swindon organisations.

This year again, we saw a rise in negative media coverage and far-right action, creating challenges and barriers to promoting welcome. In response, we increased our campaigning, both locally and nationally, including issues such as the Bibby Stockholm and the Rwanda Scheme, and worked with MPs, Councillors, schools, and community members to highlight acts of welcome and the rights of people seeking sanctuary. Despite these challenges, the response from Swindon's community remained overwhelmingly positive, with more schools, organisations, and businesses wanting to collaborate and champion our values.

"Welcome" remains our word of the year. This year, like every year, welcome is the thread that weaves throughout all our work; we focused on supporting other organisations to embed this within their work too.

As we reflect on the year, we are grateful to everyone who continually supported and embraced Swindon City of Sanctuary. To all those who work to create welcome, make space for all, and speak up for sanctuary, we thank you for being part of this journey.

Looking Ahead

As we move into 2025–26, we aim to build on this year's successes by deepening our work in schools, expanding our awards work into multiple new sectors, and focusing on projects that strengthen our community partnerships. We plan to explore new ways to amplify the voices of people with lived experience of seeking sanctuary, embed welcome in additional sectors, and continue responding to emerging challenges in a supportive and inclusive way. Our focus remains on creating meaningful connections, fostering understanding, and ensuring that everyone in Swindon feels valued, supported, and heard.

OUR YEAR IN NUMBERS

6

Organisations
working towards
Sanctuary Awards

100+

Events in the
community

703

Visits to We're
Open Families

175

Visits to
We're Open

6

Creative collabortions
with Swindon
organisations

20

CPD sessions
in schools

200

People with lived
experience involved
with our work

500+

Hours of
volunteering

16

schools using FAB
Fusion boxes with
multilinugal
students

23

Schools directly
connected with
our work

2

Campaigns promoting
the rights of people
seeking sanctuary

7

Volunteers with
lived experience of
seeking sanctuary
or migration

TRUSTEES' NOTE

It's been another year of change and as we remain hugely grateful to our funders who enable us to undertake our work, and to the wonderful people of our local community in Swindon who encourage and support our work, it's quite clear that what we do is now more necessary than ever. With the rise in far-right hatred, global instability, and war and the mass displacement of people due to conflict, it is important that people who arrive and live in Swindon are warmly welcomed here.

We have taken significant strides this year to expand our impact. A key focus has been creating spaces where the community feels welcomed. We're Open Families continues to grow, providing opportunities for families to meet, build support networks, and decrease isolation. Our Sectors of Sanctuary continues to grow. Increasingly, organisations are reaching out to promote welcome and positive change within their work.

As the political narrative around seeking sanctuary and migration continues to polarise, we remain committed to working with all members of our local community, including MPs and Councillors from across the political spectrum, to ensure Swindon remains a safe, welcoming, and inclusive place.

We would like to thank the National Lottery Community Fund for their ongoing support and guidance, as well as Swindon and Wiltshire Community Foundation, South Swindon Parish Council, Co-op Communities Fund, Respond & Adapt, Postcode Local Trust, Nationwide and Magic Little Grants for their invaluable funding contributions.



OUR CHARITABLE OBJECTS

Swindon City of Sanctuary is a registered charity (with CIO status) in Swindon, we seek to build a culture of welcome, inclusion and support for everyone in Swindon, with a focus on people who are seeking sanctuary from war and persecution.

Our work focuses on celebrating our diverse town. We do this by bringing people and organisations together, raising awareness and campaigning for fairness and inclusivity.

Our Charitable Objects are:

- To advance the education of the public in general, especially in Swindon, about the issues relating to refugees and those seeking asylum.
- To provide, or assist in the provision of, facilities and activities for recreation or other leisure time occupations, in the interests of social welfare, with the object of improving the conditions of life of those persons who have need of such facilities
- The promotion of equality and diversity for the public benefit, by promoting activities to foster understanding and engagement between people from diverse backgrounds
- The prevention and relief of poverty



OUR VALUES

Trust:

We understand that those we support and collaborate with deserve and expect our trustworthiness in the ways we work and the decisions we take. We are open and approachable and take safeguarding seriously in personal and confidential matters.

Inclusive:

Being inclusive is essential in our work and for us this means we begin with consideration and care in each individual encounter. We support each person with lived experience of seeking sanctuary in a consultative, empowering and respectful way, showing encouragement and patience. We actively and equally value the contribution that all of our staff, volunteers, trustees and those who benefit make and involve them meaningfully in decisions about our work.

Objective:

Our kindness is not lessened by our objectivity and clarity, which are important in the way that we conduct our work internally and externally. We are non-judgmental, fair and focused. We ensure to work ethically in all we do and who we work with, as well as considering our environmental impact as a charity.

Informed:

Across our organisation we stay informed and knowledgeable of the circumstances and laws affecting people with lived experience of seeking sanctuary, and the issues around hate crime locally. We use our knowledge and awareness proactively to challenge preconceptions, to share knowledge across Swindon and to help create better understanding between us all.

Inspirational:

We use our creativity and innovation to make our expressions, our connections and our outreach work as educational and inspirational as they can be. We hope to inspire others to actively help make Swindon a welcoming place for all who live here. We believe in generous leadership and that the best work relies on different experiences and perspectives. We seek out the best ideas, wherever they come from.

Positive & Committed:

We are strongly committed to work, educate and campaign in a responsible, coordinated and strategic way. We aim to focus on the positive, overcoming challenges and hostility by finding common ground. We respond with activities that bring our community together and enable us to listen and learn from each other, in order to break down stereotypes and resentment driven by fear.

SECTORS AND AWARDS

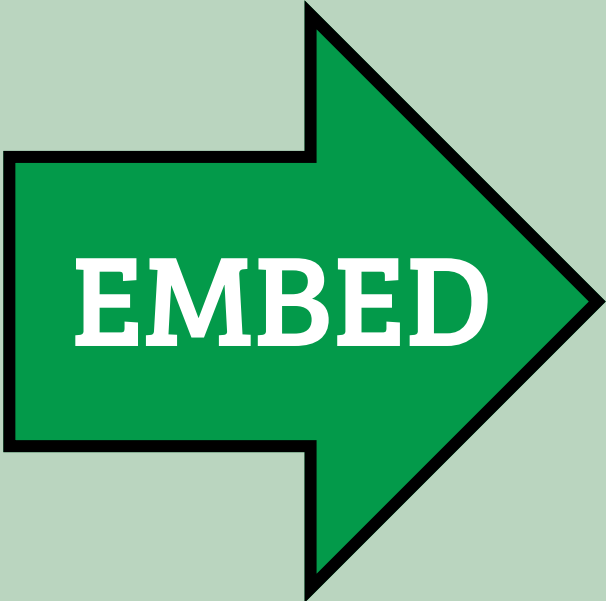
People seeking sanctuary experience high levels of hate crime, racism and prejudice which can lead to people feeling isolated within their communities. To combat this, we work to bring people and organisations together to raise awareness and increase understanding about seeking sanctuary and migration.

One of the ways we do this is through our Sanctuary Awards programme, where we collaborate with organisations to promote welcome and sanctuary within their contexts. The Sectors of Sanctuary Awards are awareness raising programmes that give a platform to the voices of people seeking sanctuary so that they can be heard by those who might otherwise never hear them.

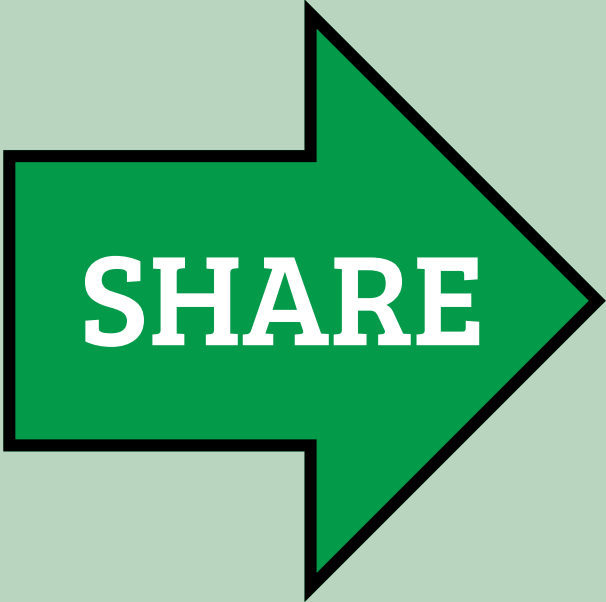
The awards are grounded in three core principles: Learn, Embed, and Share.



We encourage individuals and organisations to learn about the experiences and challenges faced by those seeking sanctuary. This involves deepening understanding, dismantling stereotypes, and fostering empathy.

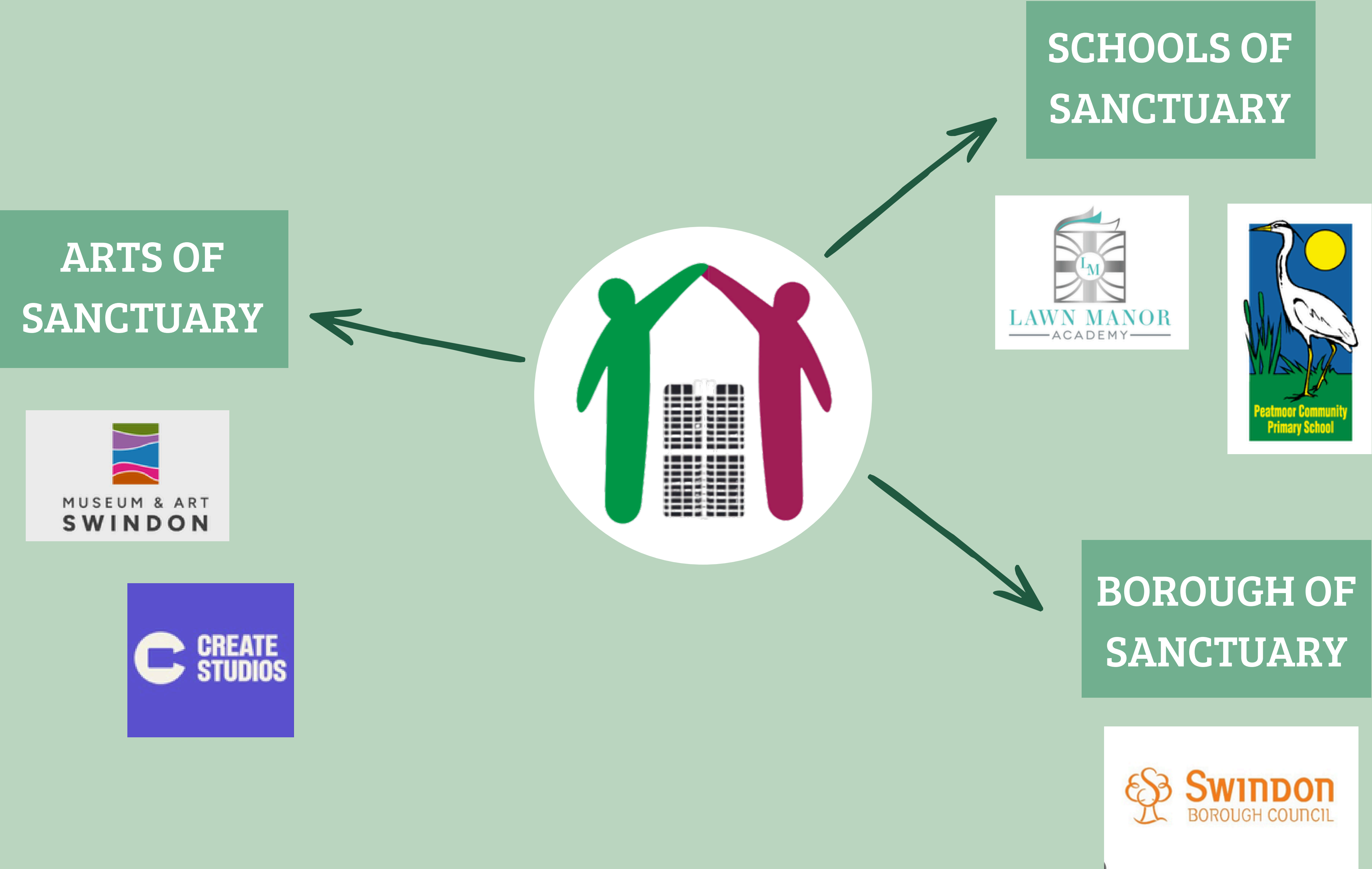


We work to embed practices that support people seeking sanctuary in every aspect of our community, from housing and education to health and employment.



We aim to share positive stories of sanctuary, celebrating contributions made by people seeking sanctuary and amplifying their voices.

SECTORS AND AWARDS



SECTORS AND AWARDS

This year, we worked in three sectors:

BOROUGH OF SANCTUARY

In September, the Swindon Borough Council Cabinet voted to start the process of becoming a Borough of Sanctuary.

What does this mean in practice?

- ➡ It's a formal awards process that recognises and rewards good practice and progress in promoting welcome.
- ➡ It recognises a borough-wide commitment, signalling to people seeking sanctuary that Swindon is a place where they will find safety, opportunity, and community.
- ➡ It promotes a whole council approach to embedding 'welcome' and 'sanctuary' in the services they offer.
- ➡ It's also an opportunity to work in partnership with other councils and boroughs across the UK who share similar values.

Swindon Borough Council's Borough of Sanctuary steering group has this year organised two forums addressing key challenges such as health, housing, and community for people seeking sanctuary. These forums have sparked vital conversations and led to practical steps toward improving the experience for people seeking sanctuary in Swindon, through the teams that support them and to make Swindon a more welcoming place. We commend Swindon Borough Council's ongoing commitment to promoting welcome and setting an example for other communities to follow.

ARTS OF SANCTUARY

The Arts play a vital role in creating a culture of welcome, challenging the status quo, and shaping the kind of society we hope to live in. Art and creativity can inspire new ways of thinking and feeling, helping ordinary people understand the realities for those making difficult journeys. Arts Stream of Sanctuary is all about celebrating the arts organisations working with people seeking sanctuary, telling stories of migration, and bringing communities together.

Create Studios continue to pave the way as the first Swindon Arts organisation to gain their award. This year, Create Studios worked towards the final stages of obtaining their award with their application showcasing their incredible and impactful community projects and work. This process included developing a panel to appraise the award – a process filled with collaborative working and making space to hear about the experiences within the arts from people with lived experience of seeking sanctuary. Swindon Museum and Art Gallery pledged to become Swindon's first Museum of Sanctuary, and we are excited to see this process take place.

Our Sectors work has been made possible by an award from the National Lottery Community Fund.

SCHOOLS OF SANCTUARY

Our work in schools continued to be one of our greatest successes and has grown from strength to strength - it's been a busy year for our Swindon Schools of Sanctuary!

Throughout the year, we continued to work closely with **17** primary and **6** secondary schools to support them in embedding the values of welcome, belonging and safety. Our Schools' Coordinator supported Royal Wootton Bassett Academy and East Wichel Primary School in preparing their formal applications, helping to embed sanctuary values throughout their school communities. The applications are progressing well and we hope to see these schools and more become Schools of Sanctuary next year.

Our established Schools of Sanctuary continued to lead by example, with Lawn Manor Academy hosting their fourth annual Celebration of Welcomes event. This year saw another inspiring evening, bringing together students, staff, families, and members of the wider community. More than **40** new Welcome Ambassadors took on roles as changemakers in their schools, promoting welcome, belonging and friendship. This work reflects the ongoing growth and commitment across Swindon's schools to promoting welcome and community.

Our other School of Sanctuary, Peatmoor Primary School, were also busy. Along with some staff support, the Welcoming Committee moved into action. Inspired by ideas developed following the Voices of Welcome Conference in November 2023, they began shaping and activating their 2024-25 Welcome Campaign.

In November, Welcome Ambassadors from Lawn Manor Academy and members of the Welcoming Committee from Peatmoor Primary School presented more details about their Welcome Campaigns and other aspects of their role, at a regional meeting of SENDCos in Swindon. A brilliant opportunity for young changemakers to have their voices heard and their actions applauded.

26 schools received our Swindon Schools of Sanctuary Network News Updates throughout the year, keeping them connected and informed about activities, resources, and opportunities to participate in the wider network. We welcome schools to work with us in many different capacities, not just through our Schools of Sanctuary Awards programme.

Our Schools' Coordinator delivered CPD for school staff through termly Network meetings and through specific schools' requests. Our Schools' work has been developed with excellent guidance from, and in close collaboration with, the Schools of Sanctuary UK Network.



Schools working towards School of Sanctuary Award



Schools directly connected with our work



Swindon schools receiving updates on our work

WE'RE OPEN FAMILIES

We're Open Families continued to grow as a welcoming space for Swindon families to connect, share culture, and language, and take part in playful, creative learning. Swindon has a large population of families who have migrated here and are looking to make connections and build a community, so with this in mind, the sessions focus on bringing families together through literacy-focused activities, themed crafts, stories, and songs from around the world. With more than 15 languages spoken at We're Open Families, children and families add life to our sessions by sharing tales, traditions, and music from their homes.

This year we collaborated with even more organisations wanting to meet with families to hear their thoughts, offer signposts to services, and make connections with communities in Swindon. Collaborations focused on health, including Swindon Borough Council Oral Health providing essential guidance on children's oral health and hygiene, and educational, artistic, hands-on sessions with local author Kate Claxton and Swindon Museum and Art Gallery.

Across the year, we delivered 25 sessions, welcoming 703 total visits, including 361 children and 342 parents and carers. Families have become regular attendees, forming friendships and building confidence through shared creativity and expression.



Sessions delivered



Visits to We're Open Families



Collaborative sessions



Languages spoken at the sessions

Before attending, I was unsure where to meet families. Now I feel more settled, confident, and connected in Swindon.



WE'RE OPEN COMMUNITY EVENING - A FOND FAREWELL

After seven wonderful years, we made the difficult decision to end our We're Open community evenings in December. We're Open's purpose was for those who attend to feel welcomed, to decrease the isolation and loneliness felt by many, and create a community where those who are new to Swindon feel able to build a life here. Over the years, the project provided a safe, warm, and inclusive space where visitors could enjoy activities, music, and food without the financial strain that these activities often have. We're Open offered practical relief alongside companionship and community.

Changes in Swindon, including the closure of several hotels, meant attendance was lower in recent years, yet the project continued to offer meaningful connections and support to all who came through its doors. This year we ran 34 evening sessions with 179 visits made possible by 306 hours of volunteer support.

We're Open offered a unique opportunity to bring together people seeking sanctuary and local residents, helping to overcome negative perceptions and foster understanding. By creating a space to interact, connect, and share experiences, We're Open built a community and encouraged conversations about what unites us, in a safe and welcoming environment. We fondly remember food lovingly prepared and shared, open mic nights with music and dancing from around the globe, powerful spoken word and poetry, shared stories with local MPs and Mayors and many wonderful and lasting friendships made.

We are incredibly grateful to our brilliant volunteers, without whom this project would not have been possible.

“We're open has been a place for me to come when I want to see friends. Everyone is kind and welcoming!”



Evening sessions



Visits to We're Open



Hours of volunteering



FAMILY ACTIVITY BOXES (FABs)

Our FAB Fusion boxes continue to support welcome and inclusion in the community within Swindon Schools. FAB are designed to support teaching staff in their spoken and written literacy work with children from multilingual families, who are proficient in their home languages but new to English. FABs provide a free, high-quality resource that supports literacy and encourages conversations about welcome, home, journeys of migration and celebrating cultural diversity, especially important in a climate where many children and families feel isolated.

This year we officially launched FAB Fusion at a brilliant community event. Our FABs Coordinator introduced the project through her own experience as a primary school teacher and parent with lived experience of migration from Syria fleeing conflict and destruction followed by her hopes for FABs impact: to see multilingual families new to English connecting with their children's schools; for multilingual children to see and hear that their languages matter; for multilingual learners and their English-speaking peers to play, read and learn together through supportive small group intervention in their classrooms.

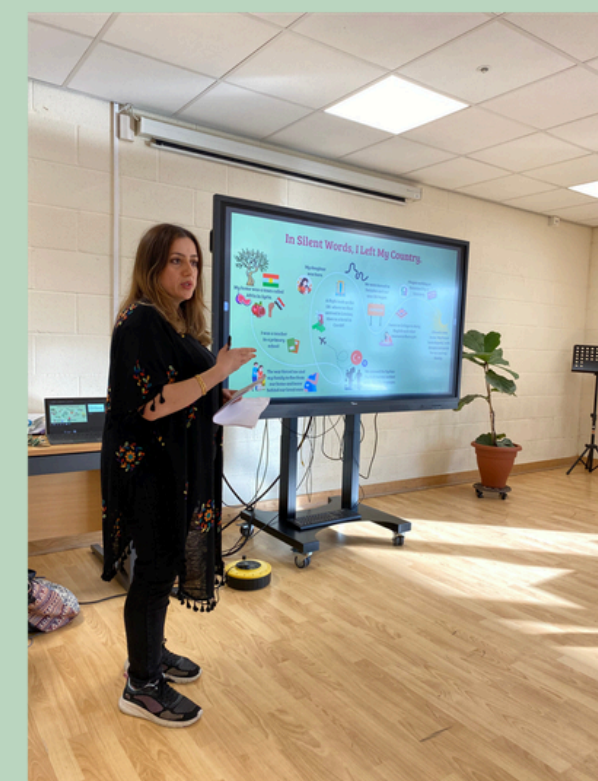
The event contained an inspiring interview, by Swindon children's writer Kate Claxton, with fellow children's writer, Wendy Meddour, whose books, Lubna and Pebble, The Friendship Bench and Sunny and the Birds, feature in some of our FAB Fusion boxes.

Opening the box, and then the bags to discover what's inside, is a great way to engage curious children – and adults! What a wonderful collection of quality resources to bring children together.

FABs have reached over 2000 people across 16 Swindon schools. We held 18 sessions in schools working with over 100 teaching staff to support them in using the boxes with children. Each box was adapted based on the school's needs, ensuring the most common languages spoken in that school community were included in the multilingual resources and books. The leadership of our FABs Coordinator helped children, teachers, and families connect deeply with the materials and inspired teachers to engage further with embedding welcome in their schools. We also used the boxes with families attending our We're Open Families sessions.

FABs show that well-designed, accessible resources can make a real difference. When children are able to explore stories in their home languages, they gain confidence and a sense of belonging.

This work has been made possible by an award from Postcode Local Trust, a grant-giving charity funded entirely by players of People's Postcode Lottery.



SPEAK UP FOR SANCTUARY

As a campaigning and awareness-raising organisation, education of the community remained at the forefront of our work. With the rise in negative and divisive rhetoric surrounding the experiences of people seeking sanctuary, it was more important than ever to speak up for sanctuary and to call others to do the same. We used email and social media campaigns to keep the community updated on current events such as the scrapping of the Rwanda Scheme, and closure of Bibby Stockholm.

In response to far-right action this summer, we engaged with local and regional media to highlight positive examples of welcome and community cohesion in Swindon. We shared a public statement condemning the violence and promoting acts of welcome. The statement was picked up by Wiltshire Greatest Hits Radio and other media outlets, reaching tens of thousands of listeners and showcasing constructive ways for individuals and organisations to respond to negativity.

This year we made a deliberate decision to use our voice to lead with positivity, setting clear boundaries with media: we highlighted campaigns for the rights of people seeking sanctuary, shared examples of community welcome, and condemned racist or bigoted narratives, while refraining from commenting on divisive political debates or incidents that could put others at risk. This meant that our community heard about seeking sanctuary in an informative, clear, and positive way.

We also continued to see welcome embedded systemically through our awards work. Swindon Borough Council is making strong progress towards its Borough of Sanctuary award including holding public forums to consult with partners and residents, raise awareness, and share achievements across the town. These forums combined advocacy, media engagement, and strategic partnership with local government. Connections like these help us to stand up and call for everyone to be involved in building a culture of welcome across Swindon.

Bibby Stockholm to close



RWANDA SCHEME SCRAPPED



Write to your MP

Speak from the heart and tell them exactly
why this unfair law doesn't represent you.

People fleeing war and persecution
deserve protection not punishment.

Ask them to represent you and your
community by standing up against this
new law.



IN THE COMMUNITY

Our work focuses on awareness raising and education of the community around the experience of people seeking sanctuary in Swindon. Throughout the year, we met with members of the community in different settings to promote welcome and foster discussions about why diversity is so important.

Refugee Week 2024

Refugee Week is an important moment for us to celebrate the contribution of people seeking sanctuary in the UK and promote better understanding of why people seek sanctuary. It's an opportunity to create a programme of arts, cultural and educational events and activities that embody that year's theme. With Our Home as this year's theme, we led a series of events, open to all who wanted to join. The first included opportunities for the public to get creative and participate; 'What Makes a Home' children's storytelling and craft event where local author Kate Claxton read *Sunny and the Birds*, by Wendy Meddour and led a crafting session where children and their families made homes with words of welcome and love on them. Create Studios created a wonderful video showcasing Refugee Week events which can be viewed here [ADD](#)

We're Open focused on music and shared conversations; we held a food and games night which ended with songs from around the world. It was a fantastic week filled with celebration, awareness raising and joy. "Everybody should love each other, that is home for me."

Celebration of Welcomes– Lawn Manor Academy

For a fourth year running, Lawn Manor Academy hosted Swindon's Celebration of Welcomes evening in Refugee Week. The audience of invited VIPs in the community, family, friends and staff were treated to brilliant dance, music and poetry performances from Lawn Manor Academy students. There was a delicious array of world food tasters too, representing the exciting cultural diversity of Lawn Manor Academy. A small exhibition introduced Swindon City of Sanctuary and featured School of Sanctuary work and FAB Boxes.



CONNECTIONS IN EDUCATION

We have continued to strengthen and expand our connections within the education sector in Swindon, working with schools and educational professionals to embed welcome into everyday practice.

Supporting Teaching Colleagues through CPD

Our Schools' team ran **20** CPD sessions (Workshops and Meetings) over the course of the year. These Workshops and Meetings enabled colleagues attending to disseminate the information gained to the wider school community.

In July 2024, we contributed three workshop sessions to a whole staff CPD day at Royal Wootton Bassett Academy; the theme: Students who may face some sort of disadvantage in their education. 40% of the teaching staff attended our workshops which focused on exploring the experiences faced in schools by multilingual learners - especially those with lived experience of forced migration. In April 2025, we led the first of two whole staff CPD sessions at East Wichel Primary School, to introduce focuses for their School of Sanctuary Award.

In March 2024, our Schools of Sanctuary Team was again invited to make a short update, at the regional PSHE Leads Network meeting in June, about how schools could become a School of Sanctuary, and to highlight our top three suggested resources around addressing discrimination in schools. The theme: Managing Hurtful Behaviour and Bullying, Abuse and Discrimination.

Links within the Borough

We attended numerous forums run by Swindon Borough Council where we look to be a voice for the charity sector, and ensure a focus remains on children and families who are new to the UK schooling system. These forums included Swindon Skills Strategy, where we offered guidance on inclusion, and Swindon Learning Together Partnership meetings, where the focus was Higher Education and Raising Aspirations.



Headteachers' Annual Conference

Schools' Coordinator and FAB Fusion Co-ordinator ran a stall at this event. Broadening Swindon City of Sanctuary's reach and visibility was a key priority of the day. Our stall invited conference delegates to find out about our work with Swindon schools and in the wider community and to see how our new Family Activity Boxes project, FAB Fusion, could support teaching staff in their work with multilingual learners and their monolingual peers. The Conference was attended by **100+** delegates; throughout the day, approximately **50%** of delegates stopped to talk with us. More than 10 delegates signed up to be kept in touch with our work. Subsequently, following the launch of the FAB Fusion Project in October 2024, **15** schools signed up to borrow FAB Fusion boxes.

CONNECTIONS IN EDUCATION

We have continued to strengthen and expand our connections within the education sector in Swindon, working with schools and educational professionals to embed welcome into everyday practice.

SEND Leaders Conference

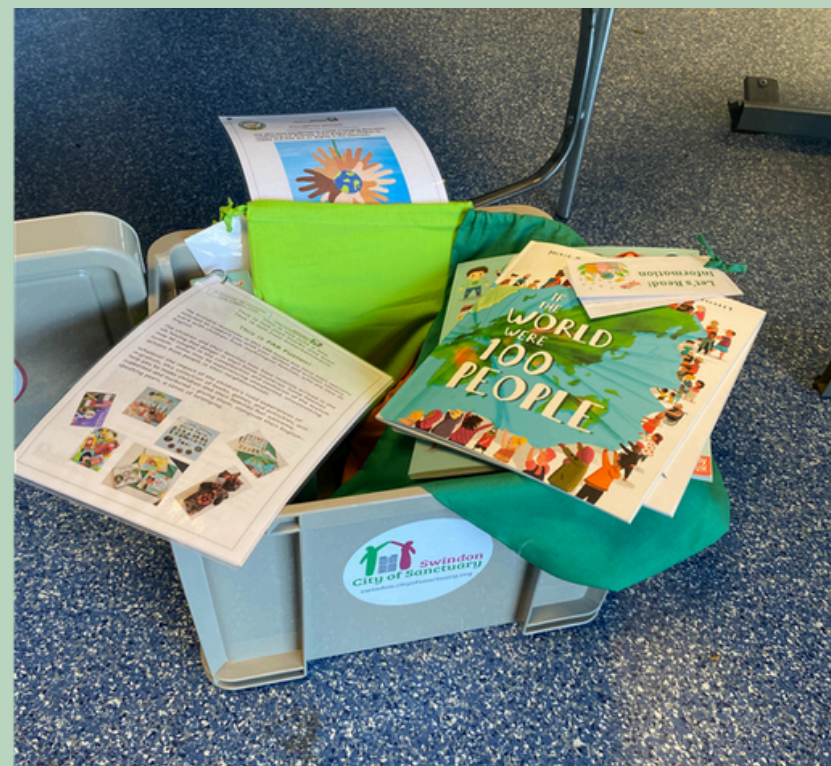
In June 2024, we had a great opportunity to showcase our FAB Fusion resources at the SEND Leaders' Conference. Emphasising how the resources in the FAB Fusion boxes could support schools - especially with their work on social inclusion and language and literacy development for multilingual learners and their families.

SEND Network Meeting

In November 2024, 10 Welcome Ambassadors from Peatmoor Primary School and Lawn Manor Academy joined us at Swindon's SEND Network meeting where they spoke to over 100 teaching staff and professionals about the importance of welcome. It was a fantastic event and an opportunity for young changemakers to share why it is so important that young people are included in decision-making.

Refugee Week 2024

In 2024, we connected with six schools leading up to, and during, Refugee Week 17th-24th June. Following a workshop of ideas led by Schools' Coordinator in March 2024, each of the schools followed their own projects around the RW theme of Our Home. These included, poetry and art competitions, assemblies and PSHE lessons. Some of this work was shared at the successful and moving Celebration of Welcomes event hosted by Lawn Manor Academy and attended by over 100 guests.



FAB Fusion Boxes

Our Family Activity Boxes, officially launched in October 2024, by December reached 16 schools and over 2,000 children and families, supporting literacy development and inclusion for multilingual learners. We provided 18 information and support sessions in Schools to ensure staff could get the most out of the resources.



CREATIVE CONNECTIONS

This year, our creative projects continued to provide meaningful opportunities for people seeking sanctuary to engage, express themselves, and connect with the Swindon community.

Story Sacks Project

Based on the successful work of Neil Griffiths' Story Sacks in schools, we reached out to Swindon Borough Council's Warm Welcome team to develop StorySacks a project focusing on dual-language literacy. In January 2025, we began plans for a project where people seeking sanctuary would create crafts, toys, and traditional clothing linked to a dual language story book with plans for resources to be made to support learning. During March and April 2025, we held three of the planned five workshops with over **15** Afghan and Ukrainian women making traditional clothing and crafts! The development of the project will see participants and their families supported in their enjoyment of reading and playing using English and building confidence and connections as a group. The project is supported by involvement from local author Kate Claxton, and Swindon Museum and Art Gallery - with plans built in to involve Swindon's National Literacy Strategy's Lead.

Kahaani Project

In April 2025, we began discussions with Create Studios to collaborate with developing teaching and learning resources for the Kahaani Project, which will feature migration stories from **50** people with South Asian heritage who have made their homes in the South-west of England. Swindon City of Sanctuary, in collaboration with teaching colleagues, planned to produce teaching resources to accompany a documentary film to be used in up to **50** schools in the South-west region, with plans for nationwide access via Schools of Sanctuary UK. We are excited to be a part of this incredible project and to see it progress.

Festival of Tomorrow

We're Open Families joined with local artist Jo Beal and Festival of Tomorrow for a nature-inspired stitching project where families stitched endangered and vulnerable species of flowers in Wiltshire – the fly orchid, helleborine and cornflower. Over two workshops, seven families crafted and created the finished canvas. It was a fantastic experience to learn more about nature in Wiltshire and new crafting skills. The finished canvases were displayed in the Carriage Works for the community to appreciate.



Swindon Museum and Art Gallery

Swindon Museum and Art Gallery joined us at We're Open Families for a series of engaging and educational sessions tailored to museum exhibitions. The sessions included learning about Wiltshire's fossils, using clay to make their own to take home, watercolour artwork of Swindon's famous Gharial, and more with a brilliant turnout at each event.

These projects helped participants gain confidence, build connections, and contribute creatively and we thank all the creative professionals and organisations who worked with and supported us this year.

PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE DRIVING CHANGE

At Swindon City of Sanctuary, we believe that representation matters and that the voices of people with lived experience should shape our work. Over **200** people with lived experience have been actively involved this year through volunteering, co-production, and attending events, helping ensure our projects are welcoming, relevant, and impactful.

Having team members and volunteers with lived experience of seeking sanctuary and migration means as an organisation, we reflect the vibrant community we live and work in. With over **10** languages spoken by those at Swindon City of Sanctuary including Arabic, Kurdish, Turkish, and Yoruba language skills, we are able to reach new communities, increase trust and attendance at our events, helping those we work with see themselves reflected and feel included.

A highlight this year was the StorySacks Project, which welcomed **15** people seeking sanctuary from Afghanistan and Ukraine to take part in crafting and learning together. We saw We're Open Families grow from strength to strength in its second year by listening to feedback from families who have migrated to Swindon on what would be helpful to them. Using their feedback, we have had more organisations join to signpost to services, share information about life in Swindon and provide support. By putting lived experience at the heart of our work, we are building stronger, more connected, and welcoming communities across Swindon

200

People with lived experience involved with SCoS work

5

Projects delivered for people with lived experience of seeking sanctuary and migration



WE COULDN'T DO THIS WITHOUT YOU

Our volunteers are at the heart of the charity, we simply could not do what we do without them. Our team of **25** volunteers support at our community events, with Sectors of Sanctuary work and at networking events. All new volunteers take part in training before attending sessions. Our training provides a safe space to talk about language, rights and the politics of migration. Volunteers are given advice on how to approach negative narratives and conversations about migration and seeking sanctuary. We ensure we have the highest standards of safeguarding, health and safety, and hygiene.

This year, volunteers worked on a variety of projects: supporting our community events, organising and delivering FAB boxes; exploring opportunities to collaborate with other organisations. We cannot thank our wonderful volunteers enough – their compassion, empathy and desire to promote welcome inspires us every day!



500+

Hours of
volunteering

25

Volunteers

6

Volunteers with
lived experience
of migration

1

Volunteer with
lived experience of
seeking sanctuary

I volunteer because it's an opportunity to show people seeking sanctuary that they are welcome in Swindon.

IN THE NEWS

It was a busy year for us in the local and national media. We are grateful that the majority of coverage we received, was positive and in support of our work. Not only has this coverage aided in highlighting our work and promoting welcome, but it has also contributed to increasing awareness around the issues faced by people seeking sanctuary in Swindon.

BBC - <https://feeds.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c93q162e7vwo>

Swindon Borough Council -

[https://www.swindon.gov.uk/news/article/1134/swindon comes together to make town more welcoming for refugees](https://www.swindon.gov.uk/news/article/1134/swindon%20comes%20together%20to%20make%20town%20more%20welcoming%20for%20refugees)

Swindon Link - <https://swindonlink.com/news/borough-of-sanctuary/>

Greatest Hits Radio -

<https://hellorayo.co.uk/greatest-hits/swindon/news/swindon-city-of-sanctuary-deeply-shocked-southport>

Swindon Advertiser - <https://www.swindonadvertiser.co.uk/news/25125423.swindon-people-learning-english-new-programme/>

While we have been lucky to experience overwhelmingly positive support for our work, negative comments and opinions shared online show that we still have a substantial journey ahead in order to ensure that all feel welcome. We do not let a small minority of negative voices impact our work or sway our vision, but these instances highlight the need for our work to continue in the current divisive political landscape. We will continue to bridge divides and continue to encourage the community to support people seeking sanctuary.



THANK YOU

Our work relies on the generous support from donors and grants. We want to extend a heartfelt thank you to all who help us plan for the future through monthly direct debits, and to local organisations including Wanborough Farmer's Market Community Café who raised much needed funds through their support.

We are continually grateful that the funding from the National Lottery Community Fund grant, now in its fourth year, allows us to carry on with our work.

A special thank you to the charitable funds and trusts outlined in the financial statement - without your support, we simply would not be able to achieve all the incredible things listed in our report.

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

	2023-2024	2024-2025
Income	63,479	67,244
Expenditure	97,194	93,005
Major Funders	2023-2024	2024-2025
National Lottery Community Fund	33,898	61,442

	2023-2024	2024-2025
Wages	81,535	73,618
Other Operating Leases	-	-
Office Rent & Room Hire	7,443	7,400
Insurance	379	348
Telephone	1,122	1,407
Computers & software	469	254
Postage and Stationery	-	-
Sundry expenses	5,073	5,575
Accountancy fees	780	660

*N.B. whilst a deficit is shown as at the year end date, our quarterly core funding is due and this was received shortly after 30 April 2025 (£14.5k & further funding received in July 2025)

Report of the Trustees and
Unaudited Financial Statements For The Year Ended 30 April 2025
for
Swindon City of Sanctuary

Swindon City of Sanctuary
Contents of the Financial Statements
For year ended 30 April 2025

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Swindon City of Sanctuary
Report of the Trustees
For year ended 30 April 2025

The Trustees are pleased to present their annual report together with the financial statements of the charity for the year ended 30 April 2025.

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the accounting policies set out on page nine of the attached financial statements and comply with the charity's trust deed, the Charities Act 2011, regulations applicable to that Act, and Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102), effective from accounting periods commencing 1st January 2015 or later.

REFERENCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS

Registered Charity number

1177624

Principal address

Voluntary Action Swindon
1 John Street
Swindon
Wiltshire
SN1 1RT

Trustees

S Juul (Interim Chair) – appointed Feb 2025
I Howard
S Juul (Treasurer)
M Lubanda
A Alrazi – appointed Aug 2024
J Lavery – appointed Dec 2024
B Jackson – appointed April 2025
R Newman – resigned May 2024
C Bennett – resigned July 2024
J Vertannes – appointed Chair Apr 2024, resigned Feb 2025
V Vicente – appointed April 2024, resigned Nov 2024
T Harland – appointed Aug 2024, resigned Feb 2025
P Sepulveda – appointed Sept 2024, resigned Mar 2025

Swindon City of Sanctuary
Report of the Trustees
For year ended 30 April 2025

It is recognised that we have encountered significant changes within the Board during this financial year. These changes are reflective of the nationwide challenge of filling Board roles and individual/personal circumstances impacting the ability to continue as a Trustee.

We do anticipate a settling down period this year with an Interim Chair appointed Feb 2025 who has been Trustee/Treasurer for the last 4 years working closely alongside the experienced Charity Manager currently in post driving the charity objectives.

We are actively seeking a new Chairperson and Trustees. At the point of completing our annual report, we have recruited an additional Trustee and the board sits with reasonable comfort at six members, with a wide range of skillsets and experience.

Bankers

Metro
One Southampton Row
London
WC1B 5HA

Coop Plc
PO Box 250
Skelmersdale
WN8 6WT

Swindon City of Sanctuary
Report of the Trustees
For year ended 30 April 2025

STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Governing document

The charity is controlled by its governing document dated 6th March 2018 and constitutes a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO).

Recruitment and appointment of new trustees

Trustees are generally volunteers although some are contacted and recruited through other charitable organisations.

New trustees are requested to provide details of their key skills and competencies, which are used to complete a skills matrix for the entire board; this serves to inform training plans and to identify how best to deploy their skills in the service of the charity, and to identify skills gaps across the board. The charity holds strategy days and various workshops to inform trustees in respect of their roles.

Organisational structure

The trustees are ultimately responsible for the policies, activities and assets of the charity. They meet regularly to review developments with regards to the charity, its activities and to make any important decisions. When necessary, the trustees seek advice and support from the charity's professional advisers.

Risk management

In line with the requirement for trustees to undertake a risk assessment exercise and report on the same in their annual report, the trustees have looked at the risks. The trustees have identified five main areas where risks may occur and considered how they might mitigate against them:

Governance and management risk looks at the risk the charity might suffer from the lack of direction, the skills and training of the trustees and the good use of its funds.

- **Operational risk** looks at the risk inherent in the charity's activities including continuity of staff, lack of a disaster recovery policy, etc.
- **Financial risk** includes those arising as a result of poor budgetary control, inappropriate spending, poor accounting, etc.
- **Reputational risk** looks at the possible damage to the charity's reputation, through association with unsuitable charities, or with inappropriate activity.
- **Laws, regulations, external and environmental risk** looks at the effects of government policies and the consequences of non-compliance with the laws and regulations.

Having assessed the major risks to which the charity is exposed, in particular to its finances, the trustees believe that by monitoring reserve levels, by ensuring that controls exist over the key

financial systems, and by examining the operational and business risks faced by the charity, they have established effective systems to mitigate those risks.

Swindon City of Sanctuary
Report of the Trustees
For year ended 30 April 2025

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

Objectives and aims

- To advance the education of the public in general, especially in Swindon, about the issues relating to refugees and those seeking asylum;
- To provide or assist in the provision of facilities and activities for recreation or other leisure time occupations in the interests of social welfare with the object of improving the conditions of life of those persons who have need of such facilities;
- The promotion of equality and diversity for the public benefit by promoting activities to foster understanding and engagement between people from diverse backgrounds; and
- The prevention and relief of poverty amongst those granted refugee status and those seeking asylum in Swindon.

Public Benefit

In setting the charity's objectives and planning its activities the trustees have given careful consideration to the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Reserves policy

The trustees will maintain adequate reserves to cover grant commitments and budgeted costs for the current financial year and maintain an appropriate budget for future years to cover longer term grant commitments.

Financial Summary

Income for the year was £67,244 (2024 £63,479). Expenditure amounted to £93,005 (2023 £97,194). As a result, for the year ended 30th April 2025 there was a deficit of £25,761 (2024 deficit £33,715) *

**N.B. whilst a deficit is shown as at the year end date, our quarterly core funding is due and this was received shortly after 30 April 2025 (£14.5k & further funding received in July 2025)*

Swindon City of Sanctuary
Report of the Trustees
For year ended 30 April 2025

STATEMENT OF TRUSTEES' RESPONSIBILITIES

The trustees are responsible for preparing the trustees' 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 trustees to prepare accounts for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charity and of the income and expenditure of the charity for that period. In preparing these financial statements, the trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102);
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable United Kingdom Accounting Standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the accounts; and
- prepare the accounts on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in operation.

The trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Charities Act 2011, applicable Charity (Accounts and Reports) Regulations and the provisions of the charity's trust deed. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

ON BEHALF OF THE BOARD:

S Juul (Interim Chair)

Date: 31st December 2025

Swindon City of Sanctuary
Statement of Financial Activities
For year ended 30 April 2025

	Note s	Unrestrict ed Fund	Restrict ed Fund	2025 Total Fund	2024 Total Fund
INCOME AND ENDOWMENTS FROM					
Donations and legacies		1,201	66,042	67,244	63,479
Total		<u>1,201</u>	<u>66,042</u>	<u>67,244</u>	<u>63,479</u>
EXPENDITURE ON					
Charitable Activities					
Support for Sanctuary seekers		2,159	90,846	93,005	97,194
NET INCOME		<u>(958)</u>	<u>(24,803)</u>	<u>(25,761)</u>	<u>(33,715)</u>
RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS					
Total Funds brought forward		<u>1,757</u>	<u>32,753</u>	<u>34,510</u>	<u>68,225</u>
TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD		<u>800</u>	<u>7,950</u>	<u>8,749</u>	<u>34,510</u>

Swindon City of Sanctuary
Balance Sheet
As at 30 April 2025

	Notes	Unrestricted Fund	Restricted Fund	2025 Total Fund	2024 Total Fund
FIXED ASSETS					
Tangible assets:		-	-	-	-
TOTAL FIXED ASSETS		<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
CURRENT ASSETS					
Debtors:		-	-	-	-
Cash at bank:		800	7,950	8,749	34,510
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS		<u>800</u>	<u>7,950</u>	<u>8,749</u>	<u>34,510</u>
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year:		-	-	-	-
NET CURRENT ASSETS		<u>800</u>	<u>7,950</u>	<u>8,749</u>	<u>34,510</u>
Creditors: amounts falling due after one year:		-	-	-	-
TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES		<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
FUNDS					
	6 & 7				
Unrestricted Funds				800	1,757
Restricted Funds				7,950	32,753
TOTAL FUNDS				<u>8,749</u>	<u>34,510</u>

The financial statements were approved by the Board of Trustees on 26/11/2025 and were signed on its behalf by:

S Juul (Interim Chair)

1. Accounting policies

Basis of preparation

The accounts have been prepared under the historical cost convention in accordance with the Charities SORP (FRS 102) 'Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015)', Financial Reporting Standard 102 'The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland' and the Companies Act 2006.

Income

All income is recognised in the Statement of Financial Activities once the charity has entitlement to the funds, it is probable that the income will be received and the amount can be measured reliably.

Expenditure

Liabilities are recognised as expenditure as soon as there is a legal or constructive obligation committing the charity to that expenditure, it is probable that a transfer of economic benefits will be required in settlement and the amount of the obligation can be measured reliably. Expenditure is accounted for on an accruals basis and has been classified under headings that aggregate all cost related to the category. Where costs cannot be directly attributed to particular headings, they have been allocated to activities on a basis consistent with the use of resources.

Taxation

The charity is exempt from corporation tax on its charitable activities.

Fund accounting

Unrestricted funds can be used in accordance with the charitable objectives at the discretion of the trustees.

Restricted funds can only be used for particular restricted purposes within the objectives of the charity. Restrictions arise when specified by the donor or when funds are raised for particular restricted purposes.

Further explanation of the nature and purpose of each fund is included in the notes to the financial statements.

Hire purchase and leasing commitments

Rentals paid under operating leases are charged to the Income & Expense Account on a straight line basis over the period of the lease.

2. TRUSTEES' REMUNERATION AND BENEFITS

There were no Trustees' remuneration or other benefits for the year ended 30 April 2025 nor for the year ended 30 April 2024.

Trustees' expenses

There were no Trustees' expenses paid for the year ended 30 April 2025 nor for the year ended 31 April 2024.

3. STAFF

The average monthly number of employees during the year was as follows:

	2025	2024
Administration	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>

There were 5 employees as at the year end date

No employees received emoluments in excess of £60,000

4. LOANS

	2025 £	2024 £
Amounts falling due within one year:		
Bank overdraft	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>

Swindon City of Sanctuary
Notes to the Accounts
For year ended 30 April 2025

5. MOVEMENT IN FUNDS

	O/Balance Total Fund	Incoming resources	Resources expensed	C/Balance Total Fund
UNRESTRICTED				
General Fund	1,757	1,201	(2,159)	800
	<u>1,757</u>	<u>1,201</u>	<u>(2,159)</u>	<u>800</u>
RESTRICTED FUNDS				
We're Open	842	0	(761)	81
Postcode National Trust	12,914	0	(12,914)	0
Refugee Week	1,649	0	(1,649)	0
Wiltshire Community	0	4,600	(2,173)	2,427
National Community Lottery Foundation	12,130	61,442	(71,099)	2,473
School of Sanctuary	188	0	(188)	0
South Swindon Parish Council	668	0	(668)	0
Coop Community Fund	284	0	(284)	0
Respond & Adapt	0	0	0	0
People Local Trust	0	0	0	0
Local Giving Grant	115	0	(115)	0
Magic Little Grant	421	0	(232)	189
Nationwide	3,544	0	(764)	2,780
	<u>32,753</u>	<u>66,042</u>	<u>(90,846)</u>	<u>7,950</u>
TOTAL FUNDS	<u>34,510</u>	<u>67,244</u>	<u>(93,005)</u>	<u>8,749</u>

6. RESTRICTED FUNDS

The charity operates the following restricted funds;

- a) **National Community Lottery Funding** – NCLF Funds provided to cover core costs of the charity's employees, the Charity Manager, Stream Co-ordinator, Schools Co-ordinator and Volunteer Co-ordinator
- b) **People Local Trust** – Fab Fusion project and Co-ordinator role
- c) **Wiltshire Community Foundation / We're open** - Funds to cover rent and drinks for a weekly social including We're Open Families
- d) **Magic Little Grant** – Fab Extension and resources
- e) **Local Giving** – small donations giving by the public, unrestricted
- f) **Nationwide** -additional funds to cover rent, refreshment for our We're Open events including We're open families

Detailed Income & Expense Account
For year ended 30 April 2025

	2025	2024
	£	£
INCOME AND ENDOWMENTS FROM		
Gifts	-	-
Donations	67,244	63,479
	<u>67,244</u>	<u>63,479</u>
EXPENDITURE ON		
Charitable Activities:		
Wages	73,618	81,535
Office Expenses	790	393
Office Rent & Room Hire	7,400	7,443
Insurance	348	379
Telephone	1,407	1,122
Computers & software	254	469
Postage and Stationery	-	-
Bank Fees	50	-
Sundry expenses	5,575	5,073
	<u>89,442</u>	<u>96,414</u>
Legal and professional costs:		
Accountancy fees	660	780
	<u>660</u>	<u>780</u>
	<u>(22,858)</u>	<u>(33,715)</u>

INDEPENDENT REVIEW

An Independent review of these financial statements has taken place**.

**REPORT TO BE INSERTED ONCE COMPLETE (AFTER BOARD APPROVAL)

To the Trustee of Swindon City of Sanctuary

As requested by the Trustees of SCOS I have conducted a review of the financial statements for year ending 30th April 2025. As noted in previous reviews this process is intended to identify any possible financial irregularities or misrepresentation, rather than being a formal audit in accordance with the UK Auditing Standards.

Governance and Policy

I have reviewed this year's minutes of the Board meetings, which are currently held every two months, together with the Annual Report. I have noted there has been a constitutional amendment extending the maximum tenure of the trustees to nine years.

The minutes of the Board meetings show that the trustees are committed to strengthening good governance by seeking guidance and support from Voluntary Action Swindon, and by taking steps to address a financial conflict of interest.

During this financial year the Charity had 4 employees: the Charity Manager, the Schools Co-ordinator, the Fab (Family Activity Boxes) Co-ordinator (until January) and a support role across the projects. Serena has previously mentioned that safeguarding and training are provided to the staff and volunteers, and this is confirmed within the Annual Report.

Financial safeguards are in place with the requirement for two signatories on bank transactions and monthly Financial Committee meetings to monitor income and expenditure. Expenses are approved by a trustee, and large amounts of expenditure are agreed by the Board. During the year the trustees have continued to update the Financial Control Policy which is now nearing completion.

Financial Report

I have received the Financial Statements for 2025, together with the Transactions Analysis spreadsheet, all relevant bank statements and a sample of invoices and receipts.

Using this information I have verified that the bank transactions were accurately recorded onto the spreadsheet and, as far as I could tell, allocated to the correct grant and accounts categories. I also checked that the year-end bank balance reconciled with the financial statements and was correctly reflected in the Statement of Financial Activities. The previous access issues with the Co-operative Bank have now been fully resolved.

I have recommended a small number of minor amendments and cosmetic changes, but nothing came to my attention that would indicate any fraudulent activity or deliberate misconduct.

Conclusion

After informing Serena of my findings, I am pleased to report that my review did not reveal any evidence of financial misrepresentation or fraudulent activity. The financial statements accurately reflect the Charity's financial position, and I found no issues for concern regarding the governance of the Charity.



Signed: Elizabeth Hesketh

Tel: 07720 885388

Email: lizkhesketh@gmail.com

Dated: 22/02/2026

I would like to thank the Trustees of SCOS for inviting me to review the financial statements, and to Serena for her support and for providing the necessary documents. I am pleased to support the trustees of this charity, which is very much needed, particularly in today's politically divisive climate. If you have any queries regarding this review, please feel free to contact me using the details above.

My experience with bookkeeping and accounting began when my husband started his own consultancy business, which then led to my involvement in treasury roles for my children's primary and secondary school PTAs. Since retiring I have volunteered as trustee and treasurer for two charities, Vision 4 Youth and The Yateley Society.