

Charity Number 1183558

Southampton and Winchester Visitors Group

**Report and Financial Statements
For the year ended 31st August 2024**

Address	Southampton and Winchester Visitors Group PO Box 1615, Southampton SO17 3WF Email: info@swvg-refugees.org.uk Web: www.swvg-refugees.org.uk
Patrons	Miriam Margolyes, OBE John Pilkington Dr. Shirley Firth
Trustees	Chair: Mark Courtice (resigned 16 October 2024) Vice Chair: Catherine Hartley Treasurer: David Robertson (appointed 4 December 2023) Co-ordinator: Claudia Glyn Jeyatharshan Vettivel Judith Evans (appointed 4 December 2023) Katie Gearing (appointed 4 December 2023) Khalid Omer (appointed 4 December 2023) Sue Jessup (appointed 4 December 2023) Andrew Taylor (appointed 31 March 2024) David Smith (resigned 4 December 2023) William Brook-Hart (resigned 4 December 2023) Paul Munns (resigned 2 September 2023)
Secretary	Lea Hayes
Administrator	David Rees
Bankers	HSBC Bank Plc, 19 Minster Street, Salisbury SP1 1TE
Independent Examiner	Peter Casson FCA

Southampton and Winchester Visitors Group

The Trustees present their report and the financial statements for the year ended 31 August 2024.

Formation

The charity was formed as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation to take over the activities and assets and liabilities of the unincorporated charity of the same name. It was registered with the Charity Commission on 29 May 2019.

Governance and management

The Trustee Board comprises a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 12 members elected at each Annual General Meeting. Trustees who held office during the year are listed on page 2.

The Board meets every six weeks and is supported by a number of sub-committees which report to the Trustees.

Aims and objectives

The main objects of the Group as set out in its constitution are:

For the relief of need, hardship and distress in the United Kingdom amongst refugees, people seeking asylum and other immigrants by providing such charitable assistance as the Trustees think fit, including providing such persons with advice, assistance, representation, counselling, in matters such as money, debts, welfare, benefits, housing, health, asylum, immigration, education, training and employment.

Focus of our work

The Group is a volunteer led charity whose members work with people seeking asylum and refugees mainly living in Southampton. Our work includes providing English and other teaching, and providing one-to-one support for individual people, who are assigned a trained visitor who meets with them regularly to provide friendship and practical help. We support approximately 200 people in government accommodation, who are resident either in a local hotel or in shared houses. We provide well-being support through social and cultural activities. We have also funded the provision of gym access, phones, as well as laptops and data to some of the students.

SWVG operates a weekly drop-in centre at the Avenue Multicultural Centre (AMC) in Southampton United Reform Church (URC), which it previously ran in conjunction with CLEAR and Avenue St Andrews URC. AMC is a very popular drop-in centre, which runs every Friday morning for those seeking asylum. We staff a help desk with a small number of experienced volunteers providing information and signposting.

We also work in partnership with SCRATCH, where a number of people volunteer, with New Forest National Park, where we run visits in conjunction with the rangers, and with John Hansard Gallery, MAST Studios, Sea City Museum and Southampton City Libraries for our culture project. We also have links to Refugee Action and Together with Refugees and are members of NACCOM and Hampshire and Isle of Wight Strategic Migration Group.

Review of the year

Our core work, namely the provision of support to those seeking asylum and newly given Leave To Remain continued. We have supported many young men placed in two hotels in Southampton (though one closed this year). The Home Office introduced room-sharing in hotels so the overall numbers we support have not fallen significantly.

The drop-in centre at AMC continued in operation and welcomes more than 150 people each week. Some 20-30 people per week access our help desks (many on a repeat basis), receiving a variety of support, including assistance with finding solicitors. During the year the number of individual refugees and people seeking asylum we saw at the help desk was over 250.

The drop-in at AMC had been under threat as the partners found it difficult to continue to manage it. SWVG Trustees took on sole responsibility for it this year and devised management systems to ensure smooth running. A wider range of partners are welcomed to join in on a regular basis, including the City Library, the Medaille Trust

supporting people who have been trafficked, and the Refugee Employability Programme. As well as a specific help desk for accommodation matters and school placements, a further desk is dedicated to managing the laptop scheme, gym memberships and the bike scheme, and another to finding volunteer opportunities for those seeking asylum.

Our management of AMC has enabled us to increase the involvement of those seeking asylum and refugees in running the Centre. The team running the Friday morning sessions now includes a large proportion of people with lived experience, offering them a chance to volunteer. We have also introduced hot soup cooked by volunteers who are seeking asylum.

The number of people seeking asylum in NASS accommodation who receive regular and individual support from a Visitor has dropped over the year, to eight, after more people received positive decisions about their asylum claims. The help desk enables us to support greater numbers of people (many of whom we see on a regular basis). The Visitor relationship is now used for those with complex needs. However, a considerable number of people who received Leave To Remain still need support to transition into independence. Finding accommodation is the most pressing problem. We cannot give precise figures for those who received a positive decision over the year because we do not see all the residents in hotels and houses but we estimate up to 30% of our support is targeted at post Leave to Remain.

We ran a separate help desk at the second hotel during the year until the end of March, when the hotel was closed by the Home Office and its residents were moved to the remaining hotel or elsewhere in the country.

Whilst we have seen some fast decisions, too many people still have to wait years to have their asylum claim assessed. A lack of legal support is a key issue nowadays. There are not enough immigration solicitors who work for Legal Aid and many people seeking asylum now have to attend their substantive interview or even an appeal hearing without prior discussion with a solicitor.

It is increasingly difficult for those accommodated in hotels where sharing rooms is the norm nowadays, which inevitably leads to a rise in mental health issues and occasionally aggressive behaviour, because there are not enough support facilities. We have actively been involved in arranging and regularly attending a group including Migrant Help, the local authority, the Police and the Home Office to support Clearsprings and the residents to monitor the problems.

English teaching

Around 70 students are currently receiving English lessons, either one-to-one or in a small group, though the numbers fluctuate across the year due to frequent movement in and out of the hotel. Over 120 more have attended lessons during the past year, including from the hotel that closed in February. About 36 teachers are currently teaching at least one student.

We run 2 conversation groups (one in partnership with Southampton Library). This can involve up to 30 people each week.

We have had donations of text books and exercise books, and have purchased more when necessary.

Data and IT

We have continued, on a smaller scale than before, with the scheme to lend laptops to people learning English, and to provide 22 people (currently down to three) with mobile data packages for online learning. A new initiative has supported people to buy their own laptop by making a regular contribution to pay off the cost of the machine. Our IT and data schemes have also benefited housemates including family members.

Volunteers and contracted staff

We currently have around 100 active volunteers and continue to receive applications from potential volunteers. Our training activity has now been refreshed and is carried out in person. The Trustees have been grateful to note that the volunteer group now includes people with lived experience of the asylum system. Our two part time contracted staff continue to provide essential support services.

Campaigning

The Campaigning Group supports national campaigns that call for a humane asylum system and we oppose policies which persecute people who claim asylum. We encourage members to raise the issues with their MPs and

local councils and we speak at local groups and forums. We think it's important for politicians to talk to people who have lived experience of asylum.

Refugee Week in June is a special time to celebrate the cultures and capabilities that refugees and other people who have sought sanctuary bring to our local communities. Together with many local organisations and community groups, we organised a series of events including drama, films, music, dance, a stall, artwork and a parade in the centre of Southampton. This improves the links between many local cultural groups who came to showcase their positive contributions to the city. We are grateful for the support of Southampton City Council, Go! Southampton representing the business community and City of Sanctuary Southampton. We are also most grateful to those people with lived experience who gave radio and TV interviews.

In preparation, we involved 8 local schools with upwards of 1,600 local schoolchildren in discussion sessions meeting people who are refugees; the children also created amazing works of art in response to this year's theme of our home.

Following on from this, Southampton City Council has reaffirmed its commitment to being a City of Sanctuary. We are grateful to the Leader of the Council and the Lord Mayor for hosting a reception and for inviting SWVG's Chair and two refugees to speak at this event.

Wellbeing and Activities

We provide activities to support wellbeing, including 160 people joining trips to the New Forest and Bournemouth Beach, working on our allotment, cooking meals, providing and repairing bikes, enabling volunteering opportunities, and organising cultural activities, including theatre trips (85 attendances at 9 shows),

Cooking for Friends Saturday evening events and associated fundraising dinners have been introduced this year with great success. The issue of food is an important one for residents of the hotel as they do not have the opportunity to cook, nor to eat food from home. We developed a scheme that involves two of the hotel residents acting as chefs on a Saturday evening. They invite up to six friends to eat with them. This has led to a regular sharing of food and good fun, and the scheme runs every Saturday evening (subject to venue availability). All the chefs are required to undertake basic food hygiene to Level 1, providing a useful qualification for their CVs. Five of the chefs have moved on to Level 2.

The success of this scheme has led to a spin-off series of fundraising dinners which raise about £1,000 a time. These are important not just because of money but also as an advertisement and celebration of community and shared values, with singing and dancing as well as a very varied menu.

Reporting Support

At the end of April, the government announced that they would use the regular asylum bail reporting sessions to detain those they wished to remove to Rwanda. This caused great distress and fear. It also inspired a coalition of local activists to set up a reporting support team. SWVG provides the underpinning organisation behind this work, collaborating with various others including Stand Up to Racism Southampton and Southampton Action.

We aim to build on these positive relationships in Southampton, Winchester and neighbouring towns, to improve the lives of refugees and people seeking asylum.

Awards and achievements

SWVG was awarded a Solent University Civic Charter Impact Award. Students at Solent University were inspired and helped by SWVG volunteers to support people seeking asylum in a variety of ways.

Hampshire Football Association (FA) Award. A Hampshire FA Foundation Award is awarded for a contribution to one of Hampshire FA Foundation's three key pillars: Disability Football, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, and/or Community Coaching. SWVG and St Peter's Church, Winchester, were joint recipients of this award for the 2023/24 season.

A proud moment for SWVG was the award of British citizenship to Tharshan Vettivel, one of our Trustees with lived experience. Tharshan works tirelessly for SWVG and we are delighted that he has been fully embraced by our country.

Finance

Receipts for the year were £118,637 and payments were £85,938 producing a surplus of £32,699. This surplus included receiving £11,238 when we became the lead for AMC and took over the administration during the year; this has been placed in a designated fund. The remaining surplus was principally due to the closure of the Hostel in 2023 and replacement projects not yet being established. The trustees plan for 2025 includes establishing new projects for those we support and purchasing some one off items to improve the service we offer.

Receipts-Grants

Grants from charitable trusts amounted to £54,614. We are most grateful for a further grant from the Tolkien Trust of £22,000 which covers a significant part of our support costs.

We are also grateful for an anonymous institutional grant of £10,000, a £7,500 grant from the Garfield Weston Trust and £1,500 from St Claire and St Francis Parochial Parish Council.

We have also received a grant of £5,000 from the Hilden Trust and £2,000 from the Misselbrook Trust.

We also gratefully acknowledge continuing support from the One Per Cent scheme which amounted to £5,297.

Details of grants received are set out on page 10 of this report.

Receipts-Other income

We acknowledge the financial donation from the Girdlers Trust £2,750. We are also grateful for the donations we have received from churches, other organisations and many individuals who have continued to support us in difficult circumstances.

Payments. With the closure of the hostel, costs for accommodation and subsistence for destitute asylum seekers was £4,484 (2023 £37,343). Taking on the AMC drop-in has meant an increase in our costs for this year (2024 £6,262/2023 £2,135). In the 2022/2023 annual report and accounts the Group's share of AMC costs, £2,135, were included in "Other office and admin costs". With the Group taking on the management of AMC the costs of AMC are reported under "Social activities". The comparative figures have been adjusted to reflect the change in accounting testament of AMC. A shift in our spending pattern means more has been invested this year in social activities to improve well-being, including the Eating with Friends initiative, gym memberships and the bike project (2024 £16,028/2023 £12,301). We have provided an expanded English teaching programme including face to face teaching, internet access and books, this has cost £7,409 in the year. The increase in new residents at the hotels and newcomers to the city has meant more investment in mobile phones and sim cards. (2024 £9,634/2023 £3,257)

We continue to manage administration expenses tightly, however, cost inflation and the need to enhance our on-line presence has meant we have spent more on websites this year than previously, £3,493 (2023 £2,762)

Our contracted staff costs have been impacted by inflation, additionally, we have had a change of secretary this year and the need to have a hand over and train our new secretary meant we incurred some extra cost.

Emergency Response Fund

This fund was created in 2021 and now stands at £15,000.

AMC Designated Fund

This fund has been created this year from the funds received relating to the running of AMC.

Reserves

The Trustees have agreed that the value of unrestricted reserves should be in the region of £55,000 representing approximately 6 months normal expenditure plus a provision for three months for contracted staff costs. Unrestricted reserves at 31 August, excluding the Emergency Response Fund and AMC fund, were £85,464.



This report was approved by the Trustees on 21 October 2024 and signed on their behalf by Catherine Hartley (Vice Chair).

Southampton and Winchester Visitors Group

Independent Examiner's report to the Trustees

I report to the Trustees on my examination of the accounts of Southampton and Winchester Visitors Group (the Group) for the year ended 31 August 2024.

Responsibilities and basis of report

As the Trustees of the Group 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 Group'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 Group 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.



Peter Casson FCA

29th October 2024
13 Skylark Road
Trumpington
Cambridge
CB2 9AQ

Southampton and Winchester Visitors Group

Accounts for the year ended 31st August 2024

Receipts and payments

	2024			2023
	Unrestricted	Restricted	Total	Total
	£	£	£	
RECEIPTS				
Donations from organisations	17,095	2,000	19,095	8,367
Donations from individuals including gift aid	21,459		21,459	36,281
Grants from charitable trusts	53,297	1,317	54,614	54,466
Proceeds of fund-raising events	9,368		9,368	8,365
AMC receipt	11,238		11,238	0
Interest	2,863		2,863	1,554
Total receipts	115,320	3,317	118,637	109,033
PAYMENTS				
Client-facing activities				
Campaigning	0	1,152	1,152	4,193
Visitors' travel and other expenses	3,281		3,281	3,365
Professional fees	0		0	1,966
Accommodation and subsistence	4,484		4,484	37,343
Travel	6,262		6,262	6,360
English teaching	7,409		7,409	9,341
Mobile phones	9,634		9,634	3,257
Social activities (inc AMC & EWF)	22,290		22,290	14,436
Other	2,861	350	3,211	2,874
Total payments to or for clients	56,221	1,502	57,723	83,135
Communications	142		142	551
Salaries	20,324		20,324	17,212
Fund-raising costs	318		318	216
Training	558		558	182
Insurance	848		848	616
Website	3,493		3,493	2,762
Other office and admin costs	2,532		2,532	3,121
Total administration expenses	28,215	0	28,215	24,660
Total payments	84,436	1,502	85,938	107,795
Net excess of receipts over payments for the year	30,884	1,815	32,699	1,238
Balance brought forward	80,818	1,110	81,928	80,690
Balance carried forward	111,702	2,925	114,627	81,928

Southampton and Winchester Visitors Group

Accounts for the year ended 31st August 2024

Statement of assets and liabilities at 31 August 2024

	01.09.23	Received	Paid	31.08.24
	£	£	£	£
CASH FUNDS				
Unrestricted Funds				
General Unrestricted Funds	65,818	104,082	84,436	85,464
Emergency Response Fund	15,000			15,000
AMC Designated Fund		11,238		11,238
Total Unrestricted Funds	80,818	115,320	84,436	111,702
Restricted Funds				
Legal Justice Fund	760			760
Bike project	350		350	0
Campaigning	0	3,317	1,152	2,165
Total Restricted Funds	1,110	3,317	1,502	2,925
Total Funds	81,928	118,637	85,938	114,627
Represented by:			31.08.24	31.08.23
			£	£
HSBC current account			15,827	13,128
Nationwide Building Society			28,000	14,000
Redwood Bank			70,000	54,000
Float for expenses			800	800
Total Funds			114,627	81,928
Debtors				
Tax on gift aid donations			1,193	1,657
Other debtors			482	533
			1,675	2,190
Creditors				
For expenses			1,199	432
			1,199	432



Signed for and on behalf of the Trustees on 21 October 2024 by Catherine Hartley (Vice Chair)

Southampton and Winchester Visitors Group

Accounts for the year ended 31st August 2024

Notes :

Grants	2024			2023
	Unrestricted	Restricted	Total	Total
The Tolkien trust	22,000		22,000	20,000
Anonymous	10,000		10,000	10,000
Garfield Weston Foundation	7,500		7,500	0
One Per Cent Scheme	5,297		5,297	4,496
Knight Charitable Trust			0	300
Hilden Trust	5,000		5,000	0
St Clare and St Francis Trust	1,500		1,500	1,500
Misselbrook Trust	2,000		2,000	0
Girdlers Trust	0		0	1,600
The French Huguenot Church - social activities		0	0	5,000
The National Lottery - subsistence and teaching		0	0	6,492
Winchester City Council - teaching, social etc		0	0	1,360
Energise Me - football		0	0	1,218
Southampton City Council - Refugee Week		1,317	1,317	2,500
	53,297	1,317	54,614	54,466

TRUSTEE EXPENSES

Expenses reimbursed to trustees during the period amounted to £824 (2023 £1,028).