

# NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY OF SANCTUARY



City of Sanctuary

## TRUSTEES ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE PERIOD October 2020 – September 2021



Northumberland County of Sanctuary (NCOS)  
Registered Charity No. 1185663



a group of

City of Sanctuary

Contact details:

<https://northumberland.cityofsanctuary.org/>

Secretary: [benh.ncos@yahoo.com](mailto:benh.ncos@yahoo.com)

# NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY OF SANCTUARY



City of Sanctuary

## TRUSTEES ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE PERIOD October 2020 – September 2021

**Abbreviations:** NCoS. = Northumberland County of Sanctuary; PSA = Person(s) seeking asylum; LTR = people with leave to remain; SU = service user; RC = Red Cross. LE = Language Expert; NCC = Northumberland County Council; CoS = City of Sanctuary.

**NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY OF SANCTUARY (NCoS)** was founded in December 2016 and registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) whose only voting members are its charity trustees, in November 2019. NCoS is governed by a Charity Commission Foundation Model Constitution. It is a Group of the national organisation City of Sanctuary.

### **OBJECTS.**

1. The promotion of social inclusion for the public benefit among people who are refugees and asylum seekers, (including convention refugees, refugee communities, people with leave to remain, asylum seekers and ex-detainees), socially excluded on the grounds of their social and economic position, by promoting and/or co-ordinating services and facilities to assist them to adapt within a new community.
2. The relief of financial hardship among asylum seekers and refugees living or working in Northumberland by acting as an umbrella and resource for local refugee support services,
3. The advancement of the education of the public in general about the issues relating to refugees and those seeking asylum and human rights.
4. The promotion of equality and diversity for the public benefit by promoting activities to foster understanding and good relations between the general public and people seeking sanctuary.

### **FROM THE CHAIR.**

On October 1st 2021 we reached our fifth anniversary as Northumberland County of Sanctuary (NCo S).

The fact that this very significant anniversary passed by almost unnoticed, perhaps demonstrates that we have had a very busy year.

Perhaps the most joyous events have been when some very long-standing friends, who have been seeking asylum for almost as long as NCoS has been in existence, gained Leave to Remain. Others who have been here almost as long, are still waiting, and we will always be with them, supporting them. We will always support everyone, no matter when you arrived.

As the world continues to tackle Covid, this has been a difficult year. Thankfully we have started a few smaller meetings in Blyth and Ashington and we have continued with the weekly text, translated and sent to some language groups. We have funded cycling proficiency, football, cricket, some trips out and we ended with a superb International Social in Ashington, where the local MP declared everyone very welcome.

We also know that some people have faced intolerable racism, abuse, vandalism and threatening behaviour. We refuse to put up with this disgraceful, criminal behaviour and have regularly called upon our friends in the Police for assistance. Our efforts to challenge racism and support community integration received some good TV coverage this Autumn.

More than 100 people are now attending College in Ashington and Newcastle and many children are doing very well at school. This year we began being part of the Digital Inclusion programme and now more than 60 people have been given free tablets. This programme is due to continue for two more years.

Our good friend Lilian from Red Cross has been ill and in hospital and away from her work and we have missed her very much, even though her colleagues are working hard to fill the gaps. We wish Lilian well – and hope she enjoys very much better health in future.

Unfortunately, we have had to deal with one personnel issue and an ongoing case where we seem to be the victims of a malicious attempt to smear NCoS and undermine our reputation. A police investigation is ongoing.

This is my last report as Chair of NCoS as I am standing down from my role as Chair in December. I won't be going very far away, but I think it appropriate to record that this is some of the best work I have ever been involved in, with some of the finest people I have ever met.

I wish you all well.



Hilton Dawson

## COVID

Restrictions and lockdown have severely hampered our activity, in common with many similar organisations. We continued, as last year, with essential meetings on Zoom, which has been a great help, but the problem is the loss of the dynamics of face to face meetings. Body language is largely lost, as is quick fire debate, for two examples. Networking, even in small groups, goes by the board, so suggestions and matters of

importance are not taken up and are left hanging. We do owe many thanks for the way people on the Executive Committee kept going and, when it became possible, rescued the momentum.

## **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

The governance of NCoS is in the hands of the trustees. However, early on, after NCoS was registered as a charity, the trustees set up the Executive Committee, with the membership being the trustees and others appointed by them. It was given executive powers, except for those responsibilities which could not be devolved from the trustee body. It is 13 strong and it is a pleasure to report that 5 members of this body are either people seeking asylum or with leave to remain. The Committee has met nearly every month and these meetings have proved essential for the welfare of the way NCoS has worked. A momentous decision taken was, when restriction easing made it possible, to hold an Away Day.

### **AWAY DAY 2, 14<sup>th</sup> June 2021, held in St. Cuthbert's Church Hall, Blyth.**

**The purpose** was to assess where we are and plan our direction. It was superb to be in each other's presence again. In one respect, the day was a long postponed follow up to **Away Day 1** which was held in September 2019, but since then so much water has passed under the bridge that much thinking again had become very necessary. It was more than worth the effort, producing results that are life changing for NCoS.

**Analysis.** We undertook a **A SWOT** (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis, which showed up much that was good, but faced us with how much more needs to be done in the face of the growing numbers of people seeking asylum in the area. We were still a bunch of volunteers with limited time and abilities ("radical pensioners" someone called us) and we were faced, starkly, with the question of how we should develop if we are to meet our objectives and be of real and comprehensive service..

**To be a Funded and Employing Organisation, with premises**, was the conclusion. It is difficult to talk here without using outworn, overused phrases, but to describe this as a *sea change* is appropriate, and the result means embarking on a complex, exploratory voyage, the final destination of which will not be reached until people seeking asylum are no more, because they have no need to fly from their own countries.

## **FOLLOW UP.**

**The Executive met**, in person, on the 5<sup>th</sup> July. It was agreed to accept the offer of a skilled and experienced volunteer to raise funds for:

- Rental of premises.
- To employ:
  - A project coordinator.
  - A family and children worker.
  - An administrator.

It was made clear that the process would take some time and final confirmation or refusal will, probably, not be known until spring 2022. The submissions were all completed and submitted over the following two months.

NCoS needs to record how grateful we are to Ken Cochrane, who has undertaken the fundraising. It is a huge piece of work.

### **AWAY DAY 3, 28<sup>th</sup> October 2021, held at The Round House, Ashington.**

This was to have been the follow up to the July day, with two parts. A consideration of how the funding will affect the way NCoS functions, together with a look at the immediate pressures upon us. However, the agenda was thrown out of kilter by the Chair's announcement that he is to resign as Chair at the end of the year.. We therefore spent the first half of the meeting working on the process of appointing a new Chair and how we should function in the mean time. The role and qualities needed for filling it were discussed.

#### **It was agreed that:**

The appointment is made by the trustees, but not necessarily out of the existing trustees. We should advertise the role and search advice through contacts. A small group are to draw up the role description, person specification and the appointment process. After agreement by the trustees, this should be put into action.

People present recorded their very great appreciation of Hilton Dawson's time as Chair.

We then spent time planning the AGM and looking at the present functioning of NCoS and how that may be improved.

### **STATISTICS**

At the end of August, NCoS was in touch with 315 people in Northumberland, most of whom are people seeking asylum, though some have leave to remain and have stayed in the area. They are concentrated in Ashington and Blyth, but are also scattered in smaller towns around, with one family in Haltwhistle. The number includes 70 children and people from 29 different countries.

### **ACTIVITIES.**

**Towards meeting the Objects and the needs, felt and expressed by these people, NCoS is active in the following ways:**

**Asylum advice, through the Red Cross.** This is really our key activity, to ensure that those seeking asylum receive qualified advice and assistance with the process. Two trustees are trained by the Red Cross (one, in fact, is also employed by them) to register people arriving with the RC and ensure that they are able to contact the organisation when necessary. New arrivals are also given information about NCoS and, provided it is their wish, their contact details and countries of origin are registered confidentially with the Chair. The RC regional office in Newcastle has a



case worker responsible for NCoS referrals. It is an enormously valuable partnership. Hilton mentions in his report that one of our trustees, Lilian, who has had responsibility for RC contact has been ill. We have missed her greatly, but we must also show our gratitude to Linda, also a trustee, who has held the work together. Most of the advice has to be by telephone, though some is by video link, with interpretation available.

**Digital Inclusion.** NCoS is part of this new initiative, sponsored by the North of Tyne Combined Authority in partnership with Action Foundation. Its aim is to enable PSA who have been in UK for 6 months to become digitally literate. Each trainee is provided with a tablet and three months of data; trainers are selected and trained, as many as can be, from the asylum / refugee community. This has been eagerly used, with training being done both on line and in groups, where possible.

**English Language Learning.** This was started again as soon as possible. PSA who have been in the country at least 6 months are able to enrol for ESOL classes at Northumberland College and great numbers of people take advantage of this opportunity. The College is very helpful in many ways and we are most grateful to them. For our part, we make sure that people know of the opportunity. People who have been here less than 6 months have 2 options. Some go to the LET (learn English together) scheme, which is sponsored by the a group of churches, in close cooperation with NCoS. Others attend pre college ESOL at the charity Being Woman.

**Communication by Language Group.** Instigated when lockdown prevented drop-ins, this scheme has proved most useful, and has continued even as drop-ins have started again. With their agreement, service users are assigned to a language group, each having a coordinator and language expert. Each week the Chair writes a text giving information to the group members, which is translated into the relevant language. As well as events, the text includes information about how to contact help in time of need.

**Drop-ins** have started again in Blyth and Ashington. A new feature here has been an arrangement to use space at the Ashington Full Circle Food Project, a most marvellous charity. The events here have specialised in learning about aspects of living and working which have been asked for by participants and have been, as far as possible, PSA led.

**The Women's Group** in Ashington is meeting again and providing valuable friendship and learning opportunities. It has recently opened up to be a drop-in for men, as well, partly because many women were unable to come because the time now clashes with college classes and partly because of the drop-in needs felt by young men.

**Community Activity.** Various initiatives are being taken by PSA to be more part of the community. One that has been most striking has been by a group who undertook to clear litter and tidy up in Woodhorn.

**Sports.** It has been possible to help fund people, especially youngsters, with sports equipment and club fees. Football is a great way to integrate and, in Blyth, some people have contributed spectacularly to cricket teams.

**Events.** Since lockdown ended, it has been possible to run two trips out, to a farm and a small holding, both run by wonderfully warm and welcoming people, who gave the visitors a great time.

The main event of the year was the International Day, held at the Full Circle. With food and music and conversation, this brought together a large number of people, both PSA and from the community, to enjoy music, dancing and international food, provided by participants, and, of course, conversation. We are enormously grateful to Sarah at Full Circle for all she did to make this such a memorable day.

**Clothing and household goods.** NCoS has continued to receive and give these necessities as opportunity affords.

**Schools and further education.** A strong liaison has been built with the Northumberland County Council (NCC) education department to ensure that all a/s children of school age are given places. Many good stories about how well the children have settled in school and how well they perform have come from the teachers. We have also spent time working on the possibilities of university places for PSA and continue to do so, searching for scholarships (PSA cannot get university loans). As mentioned above, Northumberland College is very helpful, both with ESOL and other learning possibilities.

**Schools of Sanctuary** is a programme sponsored by City of Sanctuary. In Northumberland Ian Luke is leading the challenge for schools to be awarded Schools of Sanctuary status. He writes:

**“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”**

### **Nelson Mandela**

Schools of Sanctuary is a growing network, nationwide, of more than 300 primary and secondary schools all committed to supporting the thousands of young people seeking sanctuary in the UK, creating a culture of welcome and inclusion whilst raising awareness of the issues faced by refugees and asylum seekers.

Northumberland currently have four Schools of Sanctuary: Central Primary upper and lower school and Bothal Primary lower and upper school. With one other schools about to be awarded soon, the future looks bright for Northumberland.

Being a recognised School of Sanctuary is no different than being a school. The only difference is making it stand out more in its community. Engaging the community with the school is nothing new but many schools do not celebrate this. Schools are the hub of any community and are special because they are central to that community, it is the one place where nearly everyone in that community must be a part of. But most schools do not celebrate this in a way that shows everyone.

The Schools of Sanctuary award is only awarded to schools that celebrate difference outwardly and involve everyone in a child's family, giving them the opportunity to engage with others in their community.

These schools are Breaking down barriers that stop communities thriving and letting that community know the truths behind the myths.

**Bicycle Training.** As PSA have acquired bicycles, we have been able, through some generous donations, to recommend them to Cycle with Jan, for coaching on cycling safely in Britain.

## **ACTIVITY OF A MORE GENERAL SORT.**

Much of what goes on cannot really be categorised. We are, at present, an entirely voluntary organisation and much is done by so many people helping in many ways. All who “work” with NCoS are registered on a list of volunteers and are DBS checked. Among us and between us we pick up things that need doing in a variety of ways, especially people’s needs. We can learn our shortcomings, too, and the need to develop our work. This knowledge is often brought to the Executive Committee, and is developed over time. Befriending is one very important aspect. This goes on informally. However, we have been in conversation with the West End Refugee Service (WERS) about understanding the excellent befriending service they run, and would like to put something similar into practice ourselves. A project was produced and funding applied for. Unfortunately we were not successful this time, so we shall continue to look to other sources.

**Support is given to SUs** within our resources as needs become clear, but especially prominent in the memory are times of crisis. Racist or xenophobic racist incidents (see below) are one example.

**Racist and xenophobic incidents.** By and large, our service users lead peaceful lives in our area and have good neighbourly relations. However, it is sad to say that nastiness ( a stronger word is often needed) does take place. Most incidents are verbal, but frightening, especially for families with young children, but there have been occasions of smashed windows and paint daubing, too. Some of these incidents are one off, but there have been time when trouble has gone on day after day. The Police and the housing provider, Mears, have been very cooperative, on some occasions moving people to different addresses, known to be peaceful. We must stress, however, that these problems are the exception rather than the rule. There are plenty of people who are very positive about their new neighbours.

## **OUR NEW WEBSITE.**

<https://northumberland.cityofsanctuary.org>. Try it, it’s good. It is designed and maintained by one of our Service Users, to whom we are very grateful.

## **VOLUNTEERS.**

**At present, everyone active with NCoS is a volunteer.** There are no paid staff.



NCoS continues to have an excellent corps of volunteers. As the drop-ins have begun again they have been active here but also in many other ways. Simply being around is one of them, so meeting casually and finding time to talk. This has led, for example, to two young men being taken on by a fine cricket club. From time to time we get asked for help when a PSA is relocated to our area from somewhere far away. Volunteers will welcome and help these newcomers to know what is available. There are also people helping in financial administration and funding, and one volunteer who is doing a superb job on statistics.

When, rather than if, we develop and have a paid Coordinator, NCoS will still depend for its effectiveness on the work of volunteers.

All volunteers are registered with our volunteer coordinator and are DBS checked.

## **RELATIONS WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS.**

We are part of the Northumberland County Council's coordinating body, and value this and the help available.

We ask advice from other groups working in the sector, particularly locally, and are grateful to Action Foundation, WERS and NERS for great cooperation and friendship. We have looked farther afield at times, as well.

Ian Lavery, the MP for Wansbeck has been very helpful indeed.

**NCoS is a member of City of Sanctuary.** This is a nationwide organisation, whose members are independent groups or individuals who subscribe to CoS aim, which is to create welcome, everywhere in the UK, for people seeking asylum, and for those granted leave to remain. It is very helpful in keeping us informed and in bringing us together with other CoS members in the North East.

Through CoS we subscribe to **Asylum Matters**, which keeps us up dated on a huge amount of activity in the refugee charity sector and makes us aware of government policy, and more. It is important and more than useful.

## **GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT..**

**NCoS** is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation whose only voting members are the trustees. It is governed by Constitution based on the Charity Commission's Foundation Model.

## **TRUSTEES**

Wendy Bond  
Hilton Dawson (Chair)  
Zara Galaeva  
Ben Hopkinson (Secretary)  
Anne Lowrie (to march 2021)  
Anne Murray (to April 2021)  
Lilian Nelson

John Stenhouse  
Linda Tooby  
Murtala Touray

The Constitution states: *“Apart from the first charity trustees, every trustee must be appointed for a term of three years by a resolution passed at a properly convened meeting of the charity trustees.*

*In selecting individuals for appointment as charity trustees the charity trustees must have regard to the skills, knowledge and experience needed for the effective administration of the charity.”*

The maximum number of trustees is twelve.

The officers of the charity are Chair, Secretary and Treasurer. They are appointed at a meeting of the trustees. Apart from the Chair, the other officers do not have to be trustees.

### **Management.**

**NCoS** is managed through meetings of the Executive Committee, which includes all trustees and other people whom the trustees appoint, up to a maximum of four non trustees. The committee was established in November 2019 and has executive powers. Should there be a dispute which cannot be solved by other means, the solution is decided by the trustees. The Committee meets as necessary, usually once a month.

### **Policies.**

**Policies** NCoS has policies covering: Code of Conduct; Confidentiality; Cycling; DBS checking; Equality and Diversity; Financial Control; Grievance; Health and Safety and Safeguarding. These have all been approved and updated. They may be seen on request to the Secretary.

**THANK YOU.** NCoS is very, very grateful for all the help it has received since its inauguration. Much of this has been financial, both private giving and from trusts and organisations, without which NCoS could not have continued. However, much else has come in voluntary, sometimes unsought and unexpected, help from people who have raised funds or provided help in all sorts of ways, which has made a tremendous difference to our effectiveness. Very few names have been mentioned in compiling this report, because there are so many who deserve to be mentioned and it would not be fair to leave anyone out.

# **THANK YOU ALL VERY MUCH INDEED**



## **City of Sanctuary**

# Northumberland County of Sanctuary

Registered Charity no: 1185663

## Financial Statements for the period ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021

### Income & Expenditure Account 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020 to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021

	2021	2020
<b>Income</b>		
Restricted Funds		
● Donations	£5,075	£221
● Grants	<u>£1,100</u>	<u>£5,284</u>
	£6,175	£5,505
Unrestricted		
● Donations	£6,534	£4,446
● Other Income	<u>£710</u>	<u>-</u>
	£7,244	<u>£4,446</u>

<b>Total Income Received</b>	£13,419	£9,971
<b>Expenditure</b>		
Charitable Activities - Restricted	£4,883	£619
Charitable Activities	<u>£4,162</u>	<u>£2,829</u>
<b>Total Expenditure Incurred</b>	£9,045	£3,448
<b>Net Result for the Year</b>		
● <b>Restricted</b>	£1,292	£4,886
● <b>Unrestricted</b>	<u>£3,082</u>	<u>£1,637</u>
	<u>£4,374</u>	<u>£6,523</u>

# Balance Sheet

## as at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021

	2021	2020
<b>Current Assets</b>		
Cash at Bank	<u>£10,897</u>	<u>£6,523</u>
<b>Funds of the Charity</b>		
Restricted Funds	£6,518	£4,886
Unrestricted Funds	<u>£4,379</u>	<u>£1,637</u>
<b>Total Funds</b>	<u>£10,897</u>	<u>£6,523</u>

**Restricted Funds** as at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021 comprise:

- Service User Visits	£1,500
- Shoe Fund	£2,515
- Women's Group	£ 904
- Rise Sports Fund	£ 891
- Emergencies Fund	<u>£ 348</u>
	<u>£6,518</u>



# Independent Examiner's Report

I have examined the accounts of the charity for the year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021 as set out on pages 1 and 2 above and the supporting documents on which the accounts are based.

I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in the course of my examination which would give me cause to believe in any material respect that  
proper accounting records have not been kept  
these financial statements do not accord with those records  
the Trustees have not met their obligations in respect of financial record keeping.

I have no other concerns in connection with the examination of these accounts to which attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of these financial statements to be reached.

Philip Angier  
Lovaine House  
Percy Terrace  
Alnwick

**10<sup>th</sup> December 2021**