

Conversation Club Leeds

Trustees' Report

Year to 31st March 2022

REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER: 1189217

ADDRESS: 16 BEECH GROVE, GARFORTH, LEEDS, LS25 1EG

TRUSTEES:

DOROTHY READ (CHAIRPERSON)

WAQAS SAAD SHAKIR AL BAJJARI

ELIZABETH MARY CATHERINE THOMAS

STRUCTURE AND MANAGEMENT

The organisation's activities are carried out exclusively by volunteers. Overall management and co-ordination are carried out by the trustees. There are no employees.

Trustees are recruited by personal contact and recommendation. The organisation seeks to recruit additional trustees so as to increase their number to above the minimum of three required by its constitution.

The Conversation Club, founded as an Unincorporated Association in 2016, became a registered charity (a CIO) - Conversation Club Leeds - on 1st April 2020.

OBJECTIVES

The organisation exists for the promotion of social inclusion for the public benefit among people who are refugees and asylum seekers who are socially excluded on the grounds of their social and economic position, by providing: (1) education and training in the English language and in vocational skills; (2) social and recreational facilities and events involving the local community.

ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The year to March 2022 was a challenging one, perhaps even more so than the previous year of pandemic lockdowns and severe restrictions.

Although things started opening up, the constant changes in infection rates and official guidance made it difficult to decide when to open face-to-face meetings again, our first priority of course being to keep guests safe.

But here we are in May 2022, with currently two weekly guest meetings a week, having just celebrated our 6th anniversary.

Guest meetings

The Holbeck

In April 2021, we took the tentative step of opening up again with weekly face to face meetings on Tuesdays at The Holbeck. One year on, in April 2022, we celebrated our 1st anniversary. Over the whole 12 month period, thanks to the commitment of volunteers, we only closed for one week during the Christmas holidays.

At first, meetings were on a very small scale in order to comply with covid regulations, but we gradually increased our numbers, bearing hygiene, Covid testing and social distancing guidelines in mind. We also encouraged guests to get the vaccine and provided packs of tests. When covid cases were on the rise again around Christmas and New Year, we continued to meet by moving to the model of outdoor gatherings for a few weeks; walks around Holbeck Moor with a hot drink afterwards, using the facilities at The Holbeck.

The location of the venue, with its outside space and nearby green areas, offered flexibility. As the weather improved, we could sit outside and therefore were able to relax our approach to the number of people invited. By August, attendance was up to an average of 10 attendees per week and rose to 15 + in the autumn months as word got around. The largest number achieved, just before Christmas, was 23.

The content of the meeting was very informal at first, simply chatting and catching up with guests, but with increasing numbers, we gradually moved to a more structured approach with a planned language based activity, such as a quiz or a discussion topic. This year, 2022/23, we've expanded our repertoire to include exciting craft activities and in May, three music and language workshops led by Nicky Bray. Attendance has risen to a weekly average of 16+.

Our connection with The Holbeck has also enabled us to benefit from a football initiative launched by Leeds United Foundation. Two coaches have come along each week and gradually built a small football team from amongst our guests. Football kit has also been provided.

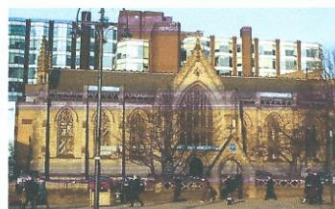
Many thanks are owed to the *Slung Low* team, who run The Holbeck, for allowing us to be based on the premises in exchange for a modest monthly donation. Looking to the future, *Slung Low* is seeking new premises in Holbeck and have invited us to follow them if we wish.



Mill Hill Chapel

After the first Covid lockdown period, we were hoping to start Thursday meetings again in September 2021, in our old home in the hall at Mill Hill Chapel. However, this was delayed due to rapidly rising case numbers and deaths across the country, due to the virus Delta variant.

We were able to reopen on 2nd December, with hand sanitisation, mask-wearing and social-distancing measures in place. However, the Priestley Hall was not now available to us, the church trustees having had no choice but to hire it out to regular users in order to recoup considerable funds lost during the pandemic. We started using the Chapel building itself, which while not ideally suited to large interactive group meetings, nevertheless has the same warm and welcoming atmosphere, where guests obviously feel at home.



Unfortunately, our meetings at Mill Hill had to stop again on 16th December, due this time the steep rise in cases of the Omicron variant, both nationally and locally.



Over the next few weeks, we offered short walks around the city centre, seeing places of interest, with usually just a few guests braving the cold. Jo James kindly let us use the facilities in the chapel to make hot drinks, which were served outside or in the church porch.

Meetings restarted again on 24th February, and have continued since then.

At first there were very low numbers of guests, sometimes only three or four, and once or twice more volunteers than guests, despite emails and WhatsApp messages being sent every week. But gradually the numbers increased, and now there are usually between 15 and 25 guests each week.

We are providing basic English support, mainly conversation, with some learning of everyday vocabulary, and some reading / writing practice of simple words and phrases.

Recently we spent the session taking a group of 15 guests on a guided tour of Leeds City Library to see the many different services provided, and interest groups available. Several of them became library members on this visit.

We owe a debt of gratitude to the Rev Jo James and the trustees of Mill Hill Chapel for generously allowing Conversation Club to use the chapel free of charge for our meetings.

Significant events 2021-22

1st July - Nicky Bray of *Musicultural Conversations* gave a musical performance to guests at the Holbeck meeting via Zoom.



16th August - a group of guests and volunteers visited Fell Edge Farm in Addingham, together with guests from LEDAS (Leeds Destitute Asylum Seeker Support), and participated in art sessions and a walk up the nearby fell.

19th August - we ran our last online meeting. We had run these since the beginning of the pandemic, and although

they never replaced face-to-face meetings as a viable alternative, for a few guests they were a lifeline to combat isolation.

18th September - Beeston Festival. A group of volunteers and guests attended this lively, mainly South Asian festival in Beeston Park.



14/15 October - Leeds Light Nights. Two groups of volunteers, on two consecutive nights, took parties of guests around the spectacular light displays in the city centre.

22 October - The 'Orange Hearts' Campaign was a nationwide campaign to raise awareness of the Nationality & Borders Bill going through Parliament, which would have a severe negative impact on many asylum seekers. Volunteers encouraged guests to make orange hearts as a sign of solidarity, and then along with staff from *Asylum Matters* and *Mafwa Theatre* they led the Leeds public protest outside Mill Hill Chapel which was attended by the Lord Mayor, plus the Council Leader and Deputy Leader.



17th November - an Indian cookery demonstration and lunch by one of our guests was held at *Open Source Arts* in Kirkstall, a great success we hope to repeat.

Christmas 2021 - Conversation Club meetings continued throughout the Christmas period at Mill Hill Chapel, so our mainly Muslim guests still had somewhere to meet when much else was closed.

9th Feb 2022 - A recruitment drive for new volunteers was launched, as numbers had fallen to around 10 during the pandemic. This was very successful, resulting in over 20 applicants, of whom about 12 now attend meetings at varying regular intervals. They are already a great asset, very enthusiastic and engaging well with guests.

30th March 2022 - website launch. We were very pleased to launch our first website, which thanks to our designer Clare Bryden of Websites Ahoy!, has received many positive comments for its vibrant look and comprehensive content. This will make it easier for people to access information about us, and to keep our guests and volunteers informed.



Organisations we have worked with during the year

Opera North - Conversation Club guests have taken advantage of free tickets supplied to asylum seekers, to attend various concerts, including jazz, Middle Eastern music, and a children's orchestral concert. In March, planning started for an upcoming 'International Lullaby Project' to collect recordings of traditional lullabies around the world, from guests and volunteers.

Open Source Arts - hire of facilities for a cookery demonstration by a guest.

Fell Edge farm - welcomed us on a day trip for guests in the Dales.

Leeds City Libraries - explanatory tour for guests.

Refugee Council - we attended meetings organised to help asylum seekers in hotels.

Cafe4Calais - charity providing clothes and other practical help, also campaigning on behalf of asylum seekers.

Together with Refugees - Conversation Club is a member of this campaigning group

Choirs: Holbeck Choir, Harmony Choir, Asmarina Voices

Asylum Matters - local campaigning and awareness-raising organisation, which we have worked with several times.

Leeds United Foundation, with *Active Leeds* – football club at the Holbeck.

Allotments group at Woodhouse Moor.

A significant part of the work we do to help our guests involves signposting to relevant agencies and helping them with online applications, telephone follow-up or other information needs relating to a wide range of issues, from legal advice to housing and health problems. In doing this, we have gradually expanded the range of organisations with which we are connected – in Leeds and beyond – and with whom we share news and projects.

Funders

We submitted several applications for funding during the year, and were successful in obtaining funds from the following:

The Brelms Trust CIO - £4,500

Wade's Charity - £2,500

Wharfedale Foundation - £500

We extend our sincere thanks to these organisations for their support. Without these funds, Conversation Club would not be able to continue.

Our annual accounts 2021 – 2022 are available as a separate document.

Thanks

A huge 'Thank You' is due to the wonderful team of volunteers at Conversation Club, without whom it simply couldn't function.

Throughout the pandemic lockdowns they faithfully attended weekly online meetings to keep things going, and when face-to-face guest meetings started again they duly turned up, cheerful and enthusiastic, to take up where they had left off two years before - only now they were running two meetings a week, instead of one.

Some also performed extra tasks such as applying for funding, taking meeting minutes, organising walks, cultural events and allotment visits. And perhaps most importantly, keeping in touch with guests by phone or text, consequently helping to solve many different problems for

our guests raised by the pandemic, e.g. closure of services, access to food banks etc. This was all generously done in their own time, without complaint.

I would like to thank particularly my two fellow trustees, Liz Thomas and Waqas Al Bajjari who, as well as performing general volunteer duties, have worked hard attending trustee meetings, helping to make decisions and providing me with unstinting support. Their efforts have been invaluable in keeping Conversation Club afloat during this challenging time of emerging from the pandemic.

Dot Read

Chair.

19th May 2022



CONVERSATION CLUB LEEDS
ACCOUNTS FOR 1ST APRIL 2021 TO 31ST MARCH 2022

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT

	TOTAL	Unrestricted The Belms Trust COO	Unrestricted Wharfedale Funds	Unrestricted Uthoose Funds	Unrestricted General Funds	Grail Restricted Data top-ups and fares	Wades Restricted Bus fares/ equipment	PREVIOUS YEAR TOTALS
INCOME								
Donations	1,646.52				1,646.52			0.00
Events	136.74				136.74			35.00
Grants	7,500.00	4,500.00	500.00				2,500.00	8,700.00
TOTAL INCOME	9,283.26	4,500.00	500.00	0.00	1,783.26	0.00	2,500.00	8,735.00
EXPENDITURE								
Phone top-ups	5,752.99	982.99				4,770.00		2,635.00
Bank charges	96.00				96.00			0.00
Zoom	71.95				71.95			142.86
Bus fares and tickets usage	1,947.70	1,717.70				230.00		151.50
Holbeck	1,000.00				1,000.00			0.00
Holbeck food	109.77		109.77					0.00
Holbeck activities	43.20		43.20					0.00
Insurance	271.53				271.53			0.00
Food for Park event	34.00			34.00				0.00
Wheeler Hall rent	62.50			62.50				0.00
Website Cost	1,137.22	967.87		169.35				0.00
Miscellaneous costs	143.68		143.68					599.69
Just Giving	90.00				90.00			0.00
Uthoose expenditure	176.92			176.92				0.00
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	10,937.46	3,731.06	500.00	176.92	1,529.48	5,000.00	0.00	3,529.05
SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)	(1,654.20)	768.94	0.00	(176.92)	253.78	(5,000.00)	2,500.00	5,205.95
BALANCE SHEET at 31ST MARCH 2022								
OPENING FUNDS	10,916.03				300.00	5,000.00		5,710.08
SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)	(1,654.20)	768.94	0.00	(176.92)	253.78	(5,000.00)	2,500.00	5,205.95
CLOSING FUNDS	9,261.83	768.94	0.00	123.08	5,869.81	0.00	2,500.00	10,916.03
Represented by:								
STOCK OF BUS TICKETS	1,444.40							2,047.00
PETTY CASH	153.65							397.20
CURRENT ACCOUNT BALANCE	7,663.78							8,471.83
	9,261.83							10,916.03

SIGNED:

TP Lawler
T.P. LAWLER

D.M. READ CHAIR
T.P. LAWLER TREASURER

DATE: 17th September 2022