

Conversation Club Leeds Trustees' Report

Year to 31st March 2024

REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER: 1189217

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

TRUSTEES:

DOROTHY READ (CHAIRPERSON)

SUSAN CLOUGH

MARGARET CLIFF

1. 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.

2. OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

Our objectives are to provide a welcoming place for asylum seekers and refugees so that they can:

- practise speaking English with native speakers;
- socialise with people from their own and other nationalities;
- learn about British culture;
- access signposting to services that can help them with their many problems.

3. ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

This year has been one of opportunities but also big challenges, for a variety of reasons.

Meetings have continued once a week at both venues throughout the past year, in the city centre at Mill Hill Chapel and at The Holbeck Social Club. We closed only for one session, which was Boxing Day.

The Mill Hill session is still much busier than Holbeck, with a focus on English conversation in informal groups, and signposting guests to statutory services and other charities to help with their many problems. The sessions have been held in the church, due to the Priestley Hall being unavailable.

The Holbeck session, while smaller and quieter, has a special focus on craftwork and creativity, which many guests enjoy.

3.1 Opportunities

We were fortunate to have the opportunity to work with several outside organisations which provided varied and stimulating alternative activities; for example a stone-walling day arranged by Nidderdale AONB; a coppicing day at a farm in North Yorkshire, and a day with our friends at Fell Edge Farm near Addingham, where we took a large group of guests and volunteers.

Other opportunities came through applying for and obtaining larger amounts of funding. This was necessary to buy more basic items such as bus tickets, because the number of attendees rose gradually during the year. We also decided to try to provide much-needed items such as phones and laptops, also gym memberships and access to swimming pools. We accessed specific funding for these, which became very popular with the younger men.

Funds for local family outings were also obtained, and several local trips were undertaken for mothers with school-age children.

We have taken advantage of events organised by local arts organisations and theatres, including free tickets for guests to Opera North and Playhouse performances, one of which was a concert organised to celebrate Refugee Week.

We have introduced guests to the local libraries, the Art Gallery and museums and to events such as the 'Bands in the Park' concerts. Varying numbers of guests signed up to these events, but they are invariably enjoyed and appreciated by those who attend.

3.2 Challenges

Several things occurred at around the same time last autumn / winter to create a challenging situation, namely:

- the cancellation of the 50% discount on bus tickets;
- a big rise in the number of attendees over the winter and spring, from about 60 per session to over 100;
- the realisation that we couldn't keep pace with the needs of guests for items we were trying to provide, and the fact that some new guests seemed to be attending solely to access them;
- the need to start giving cash reimbursements to those living in outlying hotels where our bus tickets weren't valid;
- a sudden rise in the number of new refugees given leave to remain in the UK, who had nowhere to live – desperate, homeless people asking for help became a normal part of the sessions.

We managed to negotiate an extension to the 50% bus ticket discount till the end of the financial year, 31st March, which helped to lessen the impact until next year.

Towards the end of the year, we made the difficult decision to stop providing free items such as phones and laptops, and also stopped recruiting guests to the gym scheme, although those already enrolled would be allowed to carry on with their membership until the funding was used up.

We are hoping that these measures will curb some of the increase in numbers attending, and enable us to go back to our original goal of providing English practice, friendship and a welcoming space.

Another difficult moment came in March, with the realisation that the number of guests had become too large for the space inside Mill Hill Chapel. Having enquired about hiring the Chapel's Priestley Hall as an extra space but found this was not possible, we began to look for a different venue for the Thursday session, and at the end of March made plans for a 4-week trial at Wheeler Hall, Leeds Cathedral, to start on 18th April.

Sadly, we have had to acknowledge that we have outgrown our first and 'spiritual' home. We owe everyone at Mill Hill Chapel an enormous debt of gratitude for providing a safe and welcoming city-centre space for our guests for over eight years, especially Reverend Jo James, the admin team Emma and Raj, and the Trustees. Without their vision and generosity, we wouldn't be here today. Mill Hill will always be a special place for us.

4. FINANCIAL REVIEW

One of the main features of the finances this year is that we have applied for and received much more funding than in previous years, totalling over £17,000.

We have also instituted a Hardship Fund, to which 10% of all donated income is transferred, to help guests who need urgent small amounts of money.

General Income £24,591

Hardship Fund £1,226

Restricted Funds £2,500

Total Income £28,317

Total Expenditure £20,690

Total income exceeded expenditure for the year 2023/24 by £6,255

Funds carried forward to 2024/25 amounted to:

General Funds £12,751

Hardship Fund £229

Restricted Funds £1,143

Total Funds £14,123

5. SIGNIFICANT EVENTS APRIL 2023 – MARCH 2024

Events and outings

Fell Edge Farm, 'On the Edge Festival' 30th April 2023

A group of 50+ guests and volunteers were welcomed once again by our friends at Fell Edge Farm near Addingham for a full day of activities, food and discussion designed specifically to entertain and involve asylum seekers and refugees.



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Dry stone walling, Nidderdale, June 2023



Lime Tree Farm coppicing day, Nidderdale, July 2023



Beeston Festival, July 2023



Cross Flatts Park was transformed into a happy place of music, entertainment, children's activities and food from many cultures.

Some of our younger guests enjoyed meeting the animals.

Thwaite Mills, October 23

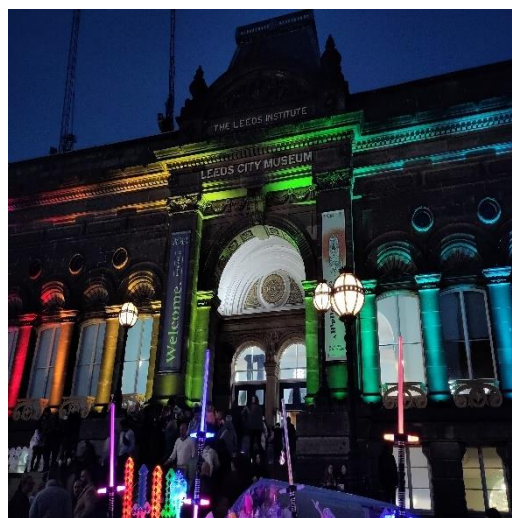
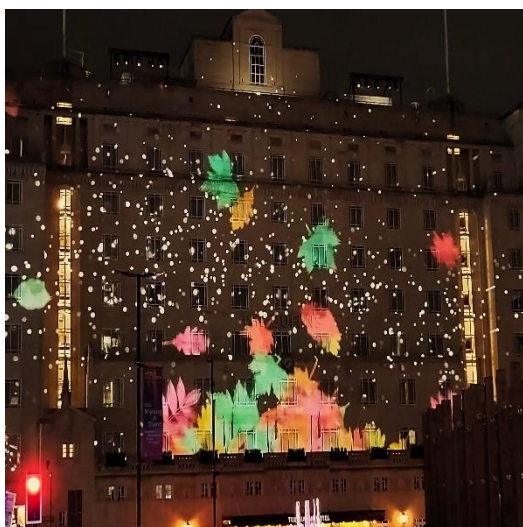
A sunny day's walk, picnic and visit to the watermill and mill owner's house, with 25 asylum seekers, 2 local councillors and volunteers.

Guests found it extremely interesting to experience the 'living history' of Leeds' industrial heritage.



Leeds Light Night

An amazing spectacle enjoyed by guests and volunteers alike



Singing and Pancake Day at the Tuesday Holbeck meeting



Haworth Parsonage and village

A day trip was also made to Haworth during February half-term, enjoyed by all and which delighted one of our teenage guests who was studying 'Jane Eyre' for GCSE.

Our musician friend Sarah Stead and her colleague Matty ran a six-week beginner recorder course from October to December, with 10 guests and volunteers joining in enthusiastically. This was the first time some of them had ever played a musical instrument.

Duncan Marwick from Threadbear Theatre ran a weekly course on mime performance, which some of our guests participated in and thoroughly enjoyed. It was a great way for people who don't speak each other's languages to get together and be creative. It culminated in a very impressive and amusing performance at the 'On the Edge Festival' at Fell Edge Farm at the end of April. Duncan also supported some of our refugee guests who are looking for jobs through his work with 'Better Working Futures'.

Other trips have included Abbey House Museum, Kirkstall; Leeds Museums' Discovery Centre, and a city-centre 'Sound Walk'.

A walking group has been started by one of the volunteers and is continuing to attract members.

A Summer Party for guests introduced the concept of a ceilidh, with traditional British and Irish music and dancing, which generated much enjoyment along with some bemusement.

Last but not least, the Christmas party for guests was a joyful occasion, with music, traditional festive food, dishes from other cultures, gifts for all, and the odd elf or two in attendance. A great afternoon was had by all.

6. ORGANISATIONS WE HAVE WORKED WITH THIS YEAR

Conversation Club volunteers have been fortunate to work with many different organisations over the past year, and we are grateful for the support and learning we have gained from these relationships.

- LASSN (Leeds Asylum Seeker Support Network)
- RETAS (Refugee Education Training Advice Service)
- British Red Cross
- Fell Edge Farm
- Nidderdale AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)
- Leeds City Council Housing Dept
- Leeds City of Sanctuary
- WYDAN (West Yorkshire Destitute Asylum Network) (Night Shelter)
- Holbeck Community Transport

7. FUNDERS

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support we have received over the past year from our funders, without whose generosity we simply would not be able to function in the way that we do.

They are:

- Allen Lane Foundation
- Sir George Martin Trust
- Leeds City Council Asylum Dispersal Fund
- MICE Funds (Leeds councillors)
- The Wharfedale Foundation
- The Brelms Trust
- Leeds Community Foundation Microgrants Fund
- Unity in Poverty Action

8. THANKS

Finally, I would like to thank the amazing group of volunteers who spend so much of their time and put so much effort into making Conversation Club work - those who come to the guest meetings every week and simply get stuck in helping guests, and those who work behind the scenes doing all manner of routine jobs, organising events, or applying for vital funds.

I would like to thank especially the two other trustees, Sue and Margaret, who just keep on working, and on whom I rely a huge amount. Also Colin, who has worked tirelessly on funding applications and successfully obtained all the funds he has applied for this year - quite a feat!

Also huge thanks to Phil, our treasurer, who produces regular monthly and annual accounts and is a great support to me, never seeming to be fazed by any question I may ask him, however strange.

But without the whole team working together, Conversation Club simply wouldn't exist, and our guests' lives would, I believe, be a little less colourful and a little harder to bear.

Thank you to one and all.

Dot Read
Chair

18th July 2024

ACCOUNTS FOR

1st APRIL 2023 TO 31st MARCH 2024

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT

	GENERAL FUNDS TOTAL	HARDSHIP FUND	LEEDS MICRO COM FOUNDATION RESTRICTED	TOTAL FUNDS
INCOME				
Donations	6,434.65			6,434.65
Grants	14,535.00		2,500.00	17,035.00
MICE donations	1,275.00			1,275.00
Just Giving	2,010.91	250.00	0.00	2,260.91
Events (net)	303.00			303.00
Bank Interest	18.23			18.23
Gift Aid tax rebate	990.61			990.61
TOTAL INCOME	25,567.40	250.00	2,500.00	28,317.40
Transfer to Hardship Fund	(975.74)	975.74	0.00	0.00
NET INCOME	24,591.66	1,225.74	2,500.00	28,317.40
EXPENDITURE				
Phone top-ups	910.00			910.00
Bank charges	60.00			60.00
Bus tickets usage	9,796.35			9,796.35
Bus and Train fares	1,869.00			1,869.00
Healthy Eating	724.35			724.35
Holbeck	1,100.00			1,100.00
Priestley Hall	125.71			125.71
Insurance	285.63			285.63
Website Cost	72.20			72.20
Theatre events	450.00			450.00
Mobile Phones	165.00			165.00
Microgrant (sports and outings)	0.00		1,356.64	1,356.64
Miscellaneous costs	1,903.86	977.35	0.00	2,881.21
Trustees Training	156.00			156.00
Volunteer expenses	0.00	20.00	0.00	20.00
Winter party	502.30			502.30
Just Giving	216.00			216.00
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	18,336.40	997.35	1,356.64	20,690.39
SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)	6,255.26	228.39	1,143.36	7,627.01
<u>BALANCE SHEET</u>				
at 31st MARCH 2024				
OPENING FUNDS	6,495.66			
SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)	6,255.26			
GENERAL FUNDS TOTAL	12,750.92			
RESTRICTED FUND - LEEDS MICRO GRANT	1,143.36			
EARMARKED FUNDS - HARDSHIP FUND	228.39			
TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD	14,122.67			
Represented by:				
STOCK OF BUS TICKETS	8,921.25			
CASH IN HAND	66.64			
CURRENT ACCOUNT BALANCE	9,046.37			
	18,034.26			
LESS CREDITORS	(3,911.59)			
	14,122.67			

Independent examiners report to the trustees of Conversation Club Leeds

I report to the charity trustees on my examination of the accounts of the charity for the year ended 31st of March 2024.

Responsibilities and basis of the report

As the charity's trustees you all 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 charity's accounts carried out under section 145 of the 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

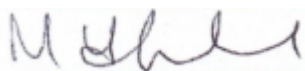
I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination, which give me cause to believe that, in any material respect:

- the accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 130 of the Charities Act, or
- the accounts did not accord with the accounting records.

The accounts I reviewed provided greater detail than that required for the form and content of the account set out in the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008. I have not considered whether the accounts give a "true and fair view" as this is not a matter considered as part of an independent examination.

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Signed



Date

26th April 2024

Name

Matthew A Thornfield

Address

20 Moss Gardens, Leeds, LS17 7BH

Qualification or body

Previous member of the Association of Corporate Treasurers