

Conversation Club Leeds Trustees' Report

Year to 31st March 2025



REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER: 1189217

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

TRUSTEES:

DOROTHY READ (CHAIR)

MARGARET CLIFF

SUSAN CLOUGH

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

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

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

STRUCTURE AND MANAGEMENT

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

Trustees are recruited from current active volunteers by personal contact. 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) with a slightly different name - Conversation Club Leeds - on 1st April 2020.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

This year has been a challenging one for Conversation Club.

One of the biggest challenges has been the amount of homelessness among new refugees granted leave to remain in the UK. What should be a joyful time became a nightmare for many as they found the help that the local authority could give was very limited. The winter months were particularly hard. Volunteers were sometimes

left trying to find accommodation in the private-rented sector for guests who spoke little English, and who had no choice but to sleep on the street in sometimes freezing conditions. Our volunteers had no experience in this field, but felt they had to try to do something to help. We attempted to signpost guests to other agencies, only to find that they, too, were overwhelmed.

We have continued to provide weekly meetings for our asylum seeker and refugee guests throughout the past year, at two venues - one at the Holbeck Social Club on Tuesday afternoons, the other one in the city centre on Thursday afternoons.

However, as mentioned in last year's Annual Report, it became apparent in Spring 2024 that we had outgrown our original 'home' at Mill Hill Chapel due to increasing guest numbers, and we needed a new city centre venue.

After a successful four-week trial at Wheeler Hall, Leeds Cathedral in April / May 2024, we moved there permanently on 25th July. The only downside to this otherwise very successful arrangement is that we now have to pay hire fees for our city centre venue, which we have never previously done.

The Holbeck session has always been quieter and less crowded than the city centre session, and this has continued to be the case. Around 20 -25 guests attend the Holbeck meeting each week, some of them obviously preferring the quieter atmosphere, which is focused on craft as well as English.

Last summer, riots broke out all over England, particularly aimed at hotels housing asylum seekers, due to false information posted on social media following the murders of three young girls. This was clearly an unsettling time for many of our guests. To try to reassure them, we invited the Community Integration Police Officer to a Wheeler Hall session, during which he met and chatted to many of our guests. This was an invaluable opportunity for service-users to understand that the British police force is very different from some in their own countries.

In early Spring this year, the number of attendees again increased, and it became obvious that it was becoming unmanageable. For several weeks, there was a large crowd waiting outside the doors because we could only let in the maximum number

allowed for fire safety. Most weeks, 100 people were turning up, with some being turned away.

The trustees called a consultation meeting of all volunteers, which took place on 26th March 2025. Many volunteers attended for a whole morning, producing a number of innovative ideas. It was decided to:

- reduce attendance numbers by splitting guests into two groups, and allowing each group to attend the Wheeler Hall sessions only fortnightly, not weekly;
- introduce a Club Card system to facilitate this;
- return to our core mission of simply providing English practice and a social space, and to stop the (occasional) supply of goods such as phones and laptops, which some guests were clearly attending for.

To facilitate these new ideas, it was decided that Conversation Club would close for two weeks in April 2025, and reopen with the new system in May. The outcome will be described in the next Annual Report.

Events and outings

We organised guests to attend established Leeds events such as the West Indian Carnival in August, 'Light Nights' in October, and Beeston Festival in May.



In Refugee Week, June 2024, small groups of guests went to events at Roxby Gardens and the 'Mega Conversation Cafe' organised by Leeds Playhouse for refugees and asylum seekers.

Trips

One of the highlights of our year is the outing to Fell Edge Farm, near Addingham, which this time was in April. We always receive a warm welcome and the facilities

there - painting, music, craft work, homemade food - are put at our disposal. Walking with our hosts in the open countryside, with views across Wharfedale, is a welcome change from city life. It is always a moment of peace for our guests.

The biggest outing this year was a day trip to Scarborough, taking 25 guests. All of them loved being by the sea and playing beach games. The feedback was totally positive.



We obtained specific funding to take groups on small local trips during the winter months, particularly those with families, during school holidays. Everyone enjoyed the places we visited - Haworth, Kirkstall Abbey House Museum, Bradford Media Museum and Leeds Industrial Museum - and learned something about Britain's history.

Activities

A small group of dedicated volunteers led walks around Leeds and further afield, to give guests an idea of the area they live in and an experience of the countryside. Walks were organised in various locations: from Menston to Ilkley, over the moors; along Meanwood Beck; along Leeds-Liverpool Canal, including Rodley Nature Reserve; from Roundhay Park to Shadwell; Otley Chevin. These were very much enjoyed by guests.

A number of guests, accompanied by our volunteers, joined Leeds City Council volunteers in outdoor activities, including conservation work at Breary Marsh and tree planting at Bramley Park, Tanfield Park (Yeadon) and Otley Quarry (the Chevin). Guests appreciated working alongside local people to make environmental improvements.



A small number of guests went swimming and to the gym at Leeds CC Active centres, making use of assigned funds remaining from 2023-24.

Theatre trips

Conversation Club is part of a network of local charities linked to Opera North and the Playhouse, so we are able to obtain free tickets for some performances. Some guests took advantage of these, seeing varied performances such as Syrian and Indian music, jazz, family events and the Playhouse Christmas production, 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe', which was described as 'amazing'.

Other events



In January, Conversation Club received an official visit from the Lord Mayor of Leeds, Councillor Abigail Marshall Katung. As a previous migrant herself, and the first elected councillor from Africa to hold the office, Cllr Katung understands guests' problems, and spoke empathetically to almost every person in the room.

Also in January, volunteers enjoyed a social gathering at the home of one of the Trustees - a rare time to relax together.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

This year we have been fortunate in receiving over £22,700 in grants, thanks mainly to the efforts of one volunteer, assisted at times by others.

The Hardship Fund continues to be a vital source of small emergency funds for volunteers to use for guests in dire need, particularly those who are destitute. We have bought shoes when necessary in the winter for those wearing only flip-flops, and once or twice provided overnight accommodation when temperatures were sub-zero. This fund is supplied with 10% of all non-restricted grant funding.

Summary (See p. 10 for full accounts)

<i>General Income</i>	<i>£25,180.92</i>
<i>Hardship Fund</i>	<i>£818.99</i>
<i>Restricted Funds</i>	<i>£1,770.00</i>
<i>Total Income</i>	<i>£27,769.91</i>
<i>Total Expenditure</i>	<i>£31,064.93</i>

Total expenditure exceeded income for the year 2024/25 by £3295.02

Opening funds £14,122.67

Deficit this year £3295.02

Funds carried forward to 2025/26 amounted to: £10,827.65

By far the largest expenditure item is bus fares, to enable guests to attend the sessions.

ORGANISATIONS WE HAVE WORKED WITH THIS YEAR

Conversation Club is fortunate to have links with many varied organisations in Leeds and beyond. These include professional and statutory organisations, and other charities. We are grateful for the support, knowledge and experience that these organisations have provided so generously over the past year.

They include:

LASSN (Leeds Asylum Seeker Support Network), Leeds

RETAS (Refugee Education Training Advice Service), Leeds

PAFRAS (Positive Action for Refugees & Asylum Seekers), Leeds

British Red Cross, West Yorkshire

Leeds City Council Housing Dept

Leeds City of Sanctuary

Fell Edge Farm, Addingham

WYDAN (West Yorkshire Destitute Asylum Network - Night Shelter)

Holbeck Community Transport

Opera North

Leeds Playhouse

Leeds Migration Partnership

FUNDERS

The Trustees gratefully acknowledge the generous financial support we have received from several funding organisations. This has made an incredible difference to the work we have been able to do. Quite simply, without this vital assistance, Conversation Club would be unable to function.

Grants were received during the period from:

Leeds City Council Asylum Support Fund

Wharfedale Foundation

Brelms Trust

Leeds Quakers

MICE Fund (Leeds City Councillors)

Marsh Charitable Trust

Sir George Martin Trust

THANKS

I am indebted to many people who have helped to support me and the other Trustees over the last year.

These include individuals working for the organisations mentioned above, who always respond when help is required by giving time or advice or sometimes sympathy.

But mainly I am grateful to the thirty or so volunteers who make Conversation Club what it is - a wonderful place to be, hopefully for our guests, but also for the volunteer team too. Of course, we don't always see eye-to-eye, but that's where ideas are sparked and differences become irrelevant. Many thanks to all of you.

And my special thanks to the two other trustees who have been a mutual support system for the past year, Margaret Cliff and Sue Clough. Without both of them, none of it would have been possible.

Dot Read

Chair, Conversation Club Leeds

Registered Charity No 1189217

<https://ccleeds.com/>

8th September 2025

CONVERSATION CLUB LEEDS

ACCOUNTS FOR

YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2025

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT

	GENERAL FUNDS TOTAL	HARDSHIP FUND	LEEDS CF MICROGRANT and MICE RESTRICTED	TOTAL FUNDS
INCOME				
Donations	4,824.38			4,824.38
Grants	20,935.00		1,770.00	22,705.00
Just Giving	205.24			205.24
Events (net)	0.00			0.00
Bank Interest	11.54			11.54
Gift Aid tax rebate	23.75			23.75
TOTAL INCOME	25,999.91	0.00	1,770.00	27,769.91
Transfer to Hardship Fund	(818.99)	818.99	0.00	0.00
NET INCOME	25,180.92	818.99	1,770.00	27,769.91
EXPENDITURE				
Phone top-ups	725.00			725.00
Bank charges	60.00			60.00
Bus tickets usage	16,224.70		273.15	16,497.85
Bus and Train fares	3,165.48			3,165.48
Food	239.61			239.61
Holbeck	1,200.00			1,200.00
Priestley Hall	1,000.00			1,000.00
Wheeler Hall	3,370.00			3,370.00
Insurance	776.89			776.89
Trips	937.06			937.06
MICE-funded activities	0.00		808.52	808.52
Correction of prior year error	(1,225.00)		1,225.00	0.00
Microgrant (sports and outings)	0.00		140.97	140.97
Miscellaneous costs	814.30	550.61		1,364.91
Mobile phone repair	30.00			30.00
Volunteer expenses	38.00			38.00
Music sessions	200.00			200.00
Website maintenance	80.00			80.00
Postage and Stationery	214.64			214.64
Just Giving	216.00			216.00
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	28,066.68	550.61	2,447.64	31,064.93
SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)	(2,885.76)	268.38	(677.64)	(3,295.02)
<u>BALANCE SHEET</u>				
at 31ST MARCH 2025				
OPENING FUNDS	12,750.92	228.39	1,143.36	14,122.67
SURPLUS/(DEFICIT) THIS YEAR	(2,885.76)	268.38	(677.64)	3,295.02
TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD	9,865.16	496.77	465.72	10,827.65

Represented by:

STOCK OF BUS TICKETS First WY
STOCK OF BUS TICKETS Metro
CASH IN HAND
CURRENT ACCOUNT BALANCE

4,172.00
1,406.40
81.64
5,197.61
10,857.65
30.00
10,827.65

LESS CREDITORS



Section A

Independent Examiner's Report

Report to the trustees

Charity Name
Conversation Club Leeds

On accounts for the year
ended

31st March 2025

Charity no
(if any)

1189217

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of the above charity ("the Trust") for the year ended **31/03/2025**.

Responsibilities and
basis of report

As the charity's trustees, 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 Trust'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 which gives 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; or
- the accounts did not comply with the applicable requirements concerning the form and content of accounts set out in the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 other than any requirement that the accounts give a 'true and fair' view which 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:

29/7/25

Name:

MATTHEW ADAM THORNFELD

Relevant professional
qualification(s) or body
(if any):

PREVIOUS ASSOCIATE MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATION
OF CORPORATE TREASURERS

Address:

20 MOSS GARDENS, LEEDS, LS17 7BH

Section B**Disclosure**

Only complete if the examiner needs to highlight material matters of concern (see CC32, Independent examination of charity accounts: directions and guidance for examiners).

Give here brief details of any items that the examiner wishes to disclose.

NONE