

City of Sanctuary Sheffield

Impact Report 2021/22



**"This is a home for
people from all countries
and we know we are
welcome here."**

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Introduction

Our vision at City of Sanctuary Sheffield is a city that is safe and welcoming for all people seeking sanctuary.

This year we have continued to fight for the change we need to make this happen. Change for the individuals we work alongside and change to the system within which they are forced to exist.

We believe that there are many ways to do this and they must all be utilised.

As you read this report you will see what we have done to:

- **create alternative spaces** that stand as a **beacon of hope** in a hostile environment;
- **walk alongside individuals** as they journey through the asylum system, **advocating for their rights** and **challenging institutions** to improve their working practices and policies;
- **build networks and coalitions that are strong, diverse**, and can bring about the change we must see.

As we go about this work we speak of justice and joy. Justice for all people seeking sanctuary and maintaining joy in the face of injustice, itself a radical act.

Thank you to everyone who has supported our work and to all those working in the movement to bring about change for people seeking sanctuary. It is a collective effort and we couldn't do it without you.

Magid, Tom, Craig and the City of Sanctuary Sheffield Team



Our Work 2021/22



The Sanctuary Redesign: "Before it was good, now it is perfect."

SPRING Project: "I can say their doors are always open for helping people who needed it."



The Sanctuary: "The Sanctuary is a home for people from all countries and we know we are welcome here."

The Drop-in: "The Drop-in provides a crucial opportunity for face-to-face support for people."



Volunteering: "I feel I am progressing and I am more positive and comfortable in my life."

City-wide work and advocacy: "It's so impressive that COSS has managed to build and sustain such an informed and informative network"



Connections and Outreach Teams: "This is the first time I've been asked how I'm doing in a long time..."

Expert by Experience Group: "I am lucky and proud to be part of EbE team; I feel like I have something important to share and to talk about."





The Sanctuary Redesign

Tom Martin

"Before it was good, now it is perfect"

Between January and September 2021, we conducted an innovative and thoughtful redesign of the entire ground floor of The Sanctuary using emergent processes from the field of social architecture. This involved an iterative design process with a feedback loop of research and action. We gathered user stories, like the one below, from hundreds of people; used these to highlight needs and came up with design interventions to meet these.

The whole process was a truly collaborative venture. We worked alongside architects Louis Pohl and Studio White Haus with additional support and expertise from both Universities, trauma-informed working experts, and people with lived experience of seeking sanctuary. The iterative nature of the process means that this work continues as the community uses and responds to the new space.



As a... refugee

I want... a space that is immediately welcoming when I walk into it; a space that makes me know 'You are welcome here'.

So that... I know this space is different from the hostile environment and I have hope about the future.

Our vision for The Sanctuary is a place that is safe, welcoming, beautiful, and joyful - this redesign is a huge step in that direction.





Sheffield Project for Refugee Integration and Growth (SPRING)

Blessan Babu

"City of Sanctuary is really helpful and kind. I can say their doors are always open for helping people who needed it. They are the best place to go and get a hand of help."

SPRING is a collaboration of six organisations helping refugees settle into the local community. SPRING supports new refugees to access housing, benefits, education, employment, and mental health support.

In our work for SPRING, City of Sanctuary Sheffield has:

- supported over 1500 new refugees since January 2019
- supported 441 individuals since April 2021
- conducted over 50 hrs of interpreted advocacy phone calls in 30 in different languages
- written to MPs on many occasions to challenge decisions and stand up for refugee rights
- prevented multiple homelessness cases
- made multiple referrals to food banks, Baby Basics and the Red Cross hardship funds
- become a key part of support for Ukrainian refugees arriving in Sheffield

Partnership working

Working in partnership is one of the key highlights of last year. It allows us to stand in solidarity with people seeking sanctuary and brings fundamental changes in the system. For example, we have advocated for SCC to call back refugees rather than them waiting for 1.5 hours on the phone. We have also advocated for an increase in council workers supporting people seeking sanctuary and, through this advocacy and intervention, we have hugely reduced the number of homeless cases.

Volunteering

One of the strengths of SPRING is the diversity of volunteers, including people with lived experience. Volunteering at SPRING has given volunteers the opportunity to learn more about the system, how to intervene impactfully and how to stand in solidarity with people seeking sanctuary.



Case study: Car-boot to a safe home, challenging a hostile system

A and H are two brothers who came to the UK to seek sanctuary, and both received their refugee status last year. H has been diagnosed with severe mental health problems and has faced neglect and severe digital exclusion. Because of the pandemic, they were not able to access the housing solution provided by the council and had been living in a car boot for three months. According to one of the mental health case workers, an NHS mental health team raised this issue to the council but they were getting nowhere. SPRING began to explore it with the help of some proactive volunteers. Through gathering information, effective partnership working and ongoing intervention and advocacy, SPRING managed to support these vulnerable brothers to secure accommodation in a housing solution hospitable to those with language, health, culture, and digital accessibility difficulties.



The Sanctuary

Anna Aitken

"For so long we have had to stay in our homes with no support or chance to meet people. The Sanctuary is a home for people from all countries and we know we are welcome here."

The Sanctuary is a beacon of hope that challenges the environment people seeking sanctuary are forced to exist. Since re-opening its doors in October 2021, it has provided social space where hundreds of people seeking sanctuary in Sheffield feel safe and listened to. The Sanctuary is now open four days a week with a range of social and English-based activities including Conversation Club, a crafting group, a popular community meal cooked by Sanctuary volunteers, job clubs, and computer classes.

We work with partners across the city to offer engaging, inclusive and accessible activities. These include SAVTE, Open Kitchen, Side by Side Theatre, Sheffield University, New Beginnings, Chilypep and Hope School of English. The space also hosts many community groups including migrant LGBTQI+ advocacy groups and a youth group for young unaccompanied asylum seekers among others.

This work is facilitated by groups of dedicated volunteers who work in the kitchen, welcome people at reception, and support new visitors to socialise and participate in the activities on offer.

Case study: A place of safety

Y is originally from Sudan and has been coming to the Sanctuary to socialise and practice English since it re-opened in October 2021. He says 'this is a great place where refugees and asylum seekers can get help, relax and meet new people. I enjoy coming here to do the classes like English or drawing and meet new people. I look forward to coming every week and also because I live on my own. When I'm here I feel relaxed and safe and I want to thank everyone who is working here for what they are doing for us.'



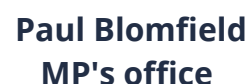


The Drop-in

Anna Aitken

"The Drop-in provides a crucial opportunity for face-to-face support for people who struggle to access services via other routes. This has been essential post-pandemic for re-connecting communities and getting people the help they need. The fact that it is in the city centre makes it even more accessible and inclusive."

The weekly Drop-in at Victoria Hall brings together organisations supporting people seeking sanctuary into one welcoming and accessible space. The Drop-in is facilitated by City of Sanctuary Sheffield staff and volunteers, who ensure visitors are greeted, listened to and signposted to the right organisation for their needs.



The Drop-in welcomes on average 50 people per session and provides an essential opportunity for people with complex needs to receive in-person support from expert organisations. By bringing partners together in the same space, it also allows organisations to share information and collaborate to better meet the needs of people seeking sanctuary.

Case study: Triaging need for a quick response

T came to Drop-in in distress as he had been informed by his solicitor that he was not eligible for asylum support. This would have made him homeless and destitute. After speaking with a CoSS reception volunteer, he was taken to see British Red Cross who supported him to appeal the decision on the same day and he was subsequently granted asylum support. He was then supported by a volunteer to speak with the New Beginnings project who have since helped him to enrol in English classes at Rotherham College.





Volunteering

Alexi Dimond

“Doing different volunteering activities has helped me learn new different things, find myself better, build my character, improve my knowledge and gain experiences, and feel I am progressing and I am more positive and comfortable in my life.”

CoSS’ amazing volunteer team has had a challenging and successful year. During the pandemic volunteers remained engaged, supporting people seeking sanctuary remotely before returning to The Sanctuary and Drop-In from July 2021 when we first reopened. We have restored dedicated teams of volunteers working on the SPRING Project, The Drop-In, The Sanctuary, and back-office activities. This year we held our first volunteer team review and also launched our Experts by Experience Team, drawn from volunteers with lived experience of seeking sanctuary.

2021-22 has been another strong year for volunteer recruitment with 62 volunteers (and 7 student placements) successfully inducted over 10 sessions. We currently have around **75 volunteers; 25% have lived experience of seeking sanctuary, while 45% have migrated to the UK.**



Volunteer Training and Development

Over the course of the year CoSS held more than 20 volunteer training sessions, delivered internally and by partner organisations which were attended by 132 people including staff.

Topics included:

SPRING Project induction and additional training	Sanctuary and Drop-In training	Trauma informed working
Introduction to the asylum process	Mental health awareness	Volunteer support sessions delivered by trained clinical psychologists
Lamplight database training	Shelter housing training	

Volunteers regularly use this experience to attain employment. We have a mailing list advertising opportunities in the sector; and volunteers, including those with lived experience of seeking sanctuary, have progressed to roles in City of Sanctuary Leicester, Ashiana, and a refugee support role at Sheffield City Council among others.





Volunteering

Alexi Dimond

"As a volunteer I can learn new things by sharing my culture and learning from other members culture and experiences."



Case study: Setting down roots in a new environment

"When I arrived in Sheffield my situation was difficult (financially, mentally, physically). I just tried to keep my flexibility and adaptability to make it better, particularly in a new environment.

I found out about City of Sanctuary Sheffield by searching on the internet and applied to volunteer. I wanted to volunteer to improve my communication skills and expand my knowledge and improve my experience. I feel positive and comfortable volunteering and have progressed: I've learnt fundamental information about CoSS and about boundaries. I've learnt how to find myself as a volunteer and how to do my role.

Doing different volunteering activities has helped me learn new different things, find myself better, build my character, improve my knowledge and gain experiences and feel I am progressing and I am more positive and comfortable in my life."



City Wide Work and Advocacy

Tom Martin

“It's so impressive that COSS has managed to build and sustain such an informed and informative network”

This year we have continued our key leadership role in the city; chairing fortnightly meetings of over 40 service providers; advocating for the rights of people seeking sanctuary; raising up their voices and challenging the injustices of the asylum system on both an individual and systemic level.

This year we:

- Galvanized city-wide support for all refugees during both the fall of Afghanistan and the war in Ukraine.
- Successfully lobbied for SCC to make a public stance against the Nationality and Borders Bill
- Supported many local and national campaigns for justice including Lift the Ban, Justice for Simba, and numerous ongoing challenges to the Nationality and Borders Bill.
- Were instrumental in ensuring a community resettlement programme, Steel City Welcome, was accepted by Sheffield City Council.
- Individually advocated for many people seeking asylum and new refugees to access to the support they are entitled to, preventing homelessness and destitution.
- Facilitated the Asylum Journey, a vital resource for many organisations in the city.
- Worked tirelessly to help partner organisations and large institutions better understand the needs of people seeking sanctuary and escalated priority issues neglected by key institutions.



The Connections and Outreach Teams



"This is the first time I've been asked how I'm doing in a long time..."

The Connection Team

The Connections Team was established during the summer of 2020 in order to promote mental wellbeing among isolated sanctuary seekers in the city. Volunteers were given training by a qualified psychologist before being paired with sanctuary seekers ("connectees") and encouraged make regular contact in order to offer emotional and practical support. This work was vital in the height of the pandemic and remained incredibly important as lockdowns came and went. **From January to July 2021 approximately 356 calls were made by the Connections team to sanctuary seekers.**

The Outreach Team

As services re-opened post-lockdowns the Connections Team transitioned to the "Outreach Team", which began in September 2021. The Outreach Team called 28 people over three months until late November 2021. During these calls, volunteers offered information about services that had opened up again recently and supported clients with any queries (e.g. local services, urgent services etc). Each call began with a compassionate "check-in" with the person. One sanctuary seeker, when asked how they were, said "this is the first time I've been asked that in a long time...", explaining that services typically ask what they want rather than how they are.

Case study: A reassuring presence

Volunteer N was partnered with sanctuary seeker F in June 2020. Sanctuary seeker F was a mother with a young child, who felt isolated and trapped in their house during the pandemic. After being paired together N and F spoke on the phone once a week as well as meeting up for socially distanced walks in person. N supported F with a number of practical issues, ranging from supporting with access to medical and voluntary sector services, to sourcing a pram for the baby. Volunteer N also offered emotional support, discussing the challenges of the lockdowns, F's hopes and fears for their upcoming Home Office interview, and concerns about her baby's health. Volunteer N stated "I tried to help her focus on the long term rather than the short term, which is very tough for her right now" and "I think I reassured her and our chats were always very warm". N reported that by May 2021, F was "doing good", and had been able to attend her HO interview.





The Experts by Experience Team

Ibtissam Al Farah

"I am lucky and proud to be part of Experts by Experience team; I feel like I have something important to share and to talk about."

The Expert by Experience (EbE) Team is a new and exciting part of our work aimed at increasing the participation of people with lived experience of seeking sanctuary in decision making and leadership of the organisation.

It was established by Ibtissam Al Farah and Alexi Dimond, working with the director and trustees, and with the help of a 4-month incubation hub facilitated by Refugee Action. The team is now up and running and is made up of 8 members who meet fortnightly. They are embedded in City of Sanctuary Sheffield, inform our work, and co-lead us in developing strategies, services and policies.

This year the team has:

- Led on the adjustment of a number of vital policies including HR and volunteering policies
- Developed their knowledge of the organisation and the sector
- Attended training on emergency first aid, developing SMART goals and SWOT analysis, health and safety, policy development and presentation skills.
- Shared best practice at the annual City of Sanctuary AGM and through the team coordinator's role on the Yorkshire and Humber-wide Refugee Integration Forum.
- Supported Sheffield College to become a college of Sanctuary
- Held a number of socials together



Case Study: Something important to share

"I am lucky and proud to be part of EbE team. EbE team provide me with some facilities and supports regularly. I attend the meetings every month, I feel comfortable, listen to and respected during the meetings. I feel like I have something important to share and to talk about. EbE team helping me to develop my communication and presentation skills and improve my knowledge about the services and opportunities. I can also learn new things from EBE team by sharing my culture and learning from other members culture and experiences."