

Annual Report 2014-2015

HERE FOR SAFETY



ABOUT THE WELSH REFUGEE COUNCIL

The Welsh Refugee Council is a Wales-based charity, committed to protecting the human rights of asylum seekers and refugees in Wales. For over 25 years we have been speaking out on behalf of those who fled persecution, conflict and oppression.

We empower asylum seekers and refugees to build and secure futures in Wales and help create a society where respect and equality for all are paramount.

Together with our partners, we strive to

- **evidence our effectiveness to stakeholders;**
- **positively influence perceptions of asylum and migration in Wales;**
- **ensure that the needs of asylum seekers and refugees in Wales are met and;**
- **encourage and facilitate the active participation of asylum seekers and refugees.**

A FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIR

This year's annual report sets out the diversity of ways that Welsh Refugee Council supported refugees and asylum seekers in Wales last year, and the impact this had on people's lives.

Having fled war and persecution, many refugees and asylum seekers are extremely vulnerable and need support to access basic rights and services. This can be particularly acute at certain stages. In response to this, WRC supported women seeking asylum through specialist legal advice and assistance and the Hardship Fund supported people at risk of or experiencing destitution. Our Move On services helped people to navigate the complex housing, welfare and health systems once they had gained refugee status. Support at this stage prevents people falling through the net and needing for more costly interventions down the line.

Welsh Refugee Council also looks beyond the basics to support people to rebuild meaningful lives here in Wales; lives where they are able to participate and contribute fully to wider society. Our play schemes improved young children's wellbeing, helping them come to terms with their experiences and grow in confidence. Our English language courses enable refugees and asylum seekers to gain basic communications skills needed to work, make friends and live independently.

But Welsh Refugee Council is not only about working with refugees and asylum seekers. Our work with individuals and communities right across Wales is equally important. You will read about our work with politicians and decision-makers. We also look for positive opportunities for Welsh citizens to learn why people fleeing war and persecution need sanctuary and the contribution refugees have made, and will continue to make, to Welsh society.

It has been a privilege for me to Chair the Welsh Refugee Council again this year. It's inspiring to see the commitment of staff and volunteers as well as our many partners and supporters. This makes the organisation well placed to continue to respond to increasing demand for our services.



Anna Nicholl
Chair

OVERVIEW OF 2014-2015

The Welsh Refugee Council has delivered a wide range of projects to meet the needs of refugees and asylum seekers in Wales this year. Along with the continuation of our important work to support refugees to secure sustainable and stable housing solutions and our provision of holistic support, we also introduced an exciting new range of projects to support refugees and asylum seekers reach their potential through language, education and sport.

Here are some of the ways that we delivered our pledge to empower and protect those fleeing persecution, conflict and oppression this year:

MOVE-ON

Our Move-On service provides individual advice and support to those who have gained status to remain in the UK, enabling them to start the process of building a new life in Wales. Our holistic work enables refugees to access suitable and secure housing which meets their individual and family circumstances.

8

Classes per week

ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

We support the active participation of refugees and asylum seekers through a range of ambitious and creative initiatives. This year we have continued to develop our ESOL provision, delivering 8 classes per week for learners of English from beginners to conversational. This paves the way for the learners to live full and meaningful lives in the UK, accessing employment and education opportunities and strive towards independence.

229

children accessed our play sessions in 2014-2015

SAFETY AND PLAY

Many migrant families experience poverty and destitution and it is not unusual for children arriving with their families seeking refuge to demonstrate signs of trauma from their experiences. We work closely with our partners Displaced People in Action - DPiA, Cardiff's Trinity Centre

and Newport's Sanctuary Project to deliver exciting interactive sessions for some of Wales' most disadvantaged families. Our specialist play development and support services help to identify behavioural issues in children, help them to manage the emotional strain of claiming asylum and develop their learning potential. We also deliver a specialist legal advice and assistance project to support women seeking asylum and work to prevent homelessness and destitution through hardship support.

146

play sessions 146 play sessions in Cardiff and Newport for asylum-seeking children and their families

INFLUENCING

We gather information and expertise from the frontline to push for informed and consistent refugee policy that reflects the reality of migration and protects those at risk. A few highlights of 2014-2015 include our work with partners BAWSO and Welsh Women's Aid to coordinate a Welsh response to the Home Office's Domestic Violence guidance and our contribution to the national response to this guidance.

We also facilitated the active participation of 3 young women and a young man at a Welsh Labour Party conference to promote migrant voices within the political sphere.

22

events for Refugee Week Wales

In addition, we help to promote positive perceptions of migration. Refugee Week Wales has become a staple event of Wales' annual cultural events and promotes awareness and understanding of the issues affecting those who have sought refuge in Wales.

Our contact sessions were accessed

5719

times in 2014-2015

Through the Move-On service we helped

264

newly granted refugees and their families to secure long-term accommodation

Over **300**

individual learners helped to learn English in 2014-2015

69

toy deliveries and

130

presents at Christmas to the most disadvantaged families

15000

engaged with Refugee Week online

HOUSING NEW REFUGEES

When an asylum seeker has been granted leave to remain he or she faces the daunting challenge of finding a new home and source of income to sustain themselves and their families. The 28-day time limit to vacate the temporary accommodation provided by the Home Office along with the rapid end of the nominal financial support provided to asylum seekers often makes this transition a difficult one. When these challenges are coupled with a limited knowledge of rights and entitlements and the experience of living in an unfamiliar country, many new refugees encounter obstacles and complications which place them at risk during the transitional process. Our Move-On service provides individual advice and support to minimise these challenges and to give people a better start at the process of rebuilding their lives in Wales.

This year we supported **1513** people through **5719** contact sessions. The advice sessions are delivered by highly skilled advice workers and volunteers and help sanctuary seekers move towards independence and to lead prosperous lives in their new country.

MEET "ZALFA"

"Zalfa" is a single parent of 5 children who was granted refugee status. Unsure of what to do next, she contacted one of our advisers.

"Zalfa" and her family were supported by the adviser as they adjusted to their new lives in Wales. The adviser's help meant that "Zalfa" was able to access her entitlements and ensure her family had enough money for their essential outgoings and that she was able to focus on getting her young family into education.

"Zalfa" was assisted in finding temporary housing accommodation when the Home Office provision ended, access to healthcare, ESOL classes, and setting up a bank account whilst awaiting the outcome of her claim for Asylum.

The family felt much safer throughout this transition thanks to our support. Our holistic and supportive service helps new arrivals to peacefully settle into their new homes and communities and to overcome the obstacles that often arise when trying to access essential services and housing, helping to prevent homelessness and destitution.



ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

ENGLISH FOR SECOND OR OTHER LANGUAGES - ESOL

This year we have continued to develop our ESOL provision. In 2014-2015, we delivered **5** ESOL classes per week to asylum seekers and refugees at our Cardiff office.

This exciting and important initiative was delivered with the support of **9** volunteer teachers and student teachers. As part of their undergraduate degree, students at the University of South Wales were offered a unique opportunity to teach refugees and asylum seekers and earn a valuable TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) certificate.

During the year over **300** people attended these sessions with top nationalities from Eritrea, Iran, Syria and Sudan.

Ellie Johnston, **20**, from Blackwood, is studying BA (Hons) English, said of the experience:

"The students are passionate and eager to learn... This is my favourite part of my degree, it is a lot of work but very rewarding."

CONVERSATION GROUP

We also run a weekly conversation group in collaboration with Cardiff Library at our Cardiff offices. During the year, **77** people attended, with the majority being of Sri Lankan, Iranian, Sudanese, Palestinian, and Kurdish origin.

VOLUNTEERING

Our service provision would not be possible without the hard work of our valued volunteers, who play a major role in the delivery of our service to asylum seekers and refugees in Wales. In 2014, we had a total of **30** volunteers, of which **14** were new to the organisation.

We very much appreciate the hard work and dedication of all of our volunteers, and we would like to say thank you to all of those who supported us this year. You have truly made a difference to our work and the lives of the sanctuary seekers coming through our doors.

Thank you!



SAFETY AND PLAY

SUPPORTING WOMEN ASYLUM SEEKERS

The Welsh Refugee Council delivers specialist paralegal advice and support to women asylum seekers who have experienced violence prior to their arrival in the UK. This is a vital service that gives women the essential support they need to talk through their experiences with a skilled professional and where appropriate, assist them to use their account to ensure they are able to submit a complete asylum claim reflective of the risks facing them in their country of origin.

This year we supported 116 women through 79 initial advice sessions, of which 46 received full legal advice and support.

OUR LANDMARK VICTORY IN THE HIGH COURT

On the 26th of March 2015, our paralegal worked closely with Michael McGarvey of McGarvey Immigration and Asylum Practitioners (MGIAP) achieved a landmark victory in the High Court which sets an important precedent for victims of trafficking.

"Artifa" escaped persecution in Eritrea only to be trafficked to Saudi Arabia, where she was forced into slavery. Six months later she escaped and fled to the UK, where she submitted an asylum claim in July 2009. "Artifa's" waited five years for a decision on her claim, which was refused in the first instance and she was denied legal aid.

Our paralegal appealed the decision to refuse her legal aid and worked with Michael McGarvey and Deighton Pierce Glynn (DPG), to lodge a second appeal to recognise "Artifa" as a victim of trafficking. The team successfully appealed the original decision and it was determined that "Artifa" was to be considered a victim of trafficking. The Court explained that as "Artifa's" Article 4 (prohibition of slavery and forced labour) rights had been breached, she was entitled to legal aid.

The High Court Judge determined that new guidance would be issued detailing how women like Artifa should be assessed as a victim of trafficking.

PLAY DEVELOPMENT FOR CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES:

We offer specialist play development and support services for asylum-seeking children and their families to help them identify and address trauma. In partnership with Displaced People in Action (DPiA), Trinity Centre in Cardiff and the Sanctuary Project in Newport we provide

- Three weekly play sessions for asylum-seeking children and their families in Cardiff and Newport.
- Regular outings, day trips, and arts and crafts groups.
- Distribution of toys and baby equipment.



MEET JOSEPH

Joseph is 5 years old and along with his younger sister and baby brother, he has joined our playgroup following a move from Swansea. His mother explained that Joseph was very wary of new places, often cross and tearful and had been refusing to let her out of his sight. He likes playing alone, prefers routine and felt a responsibility to "look after" his mum

Our play worker spent time with Joseph encouraging him to participate in rhyme time, taking turns in games, helping out at snack time and encouraging others to tidy. The result of this was Joseph's social skills improved within a safe and understanding environment where he was able to have fun but feel secure and in control.

INFLUENCING

An integral aspect of our work is ensuring that the voices of refugees and asylum seekers are heard by policy makers.

2014-2015 saw some significant successes for our policy work, some particular highlights include:

- Our continuing engagement with the Welsh Government secured the renewal of the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Action Plan. We will work hard in 2015-16 to ensure that the experiences and needs of sanctuary seekers are met through this framework.
- Conversations with over fifty asylum seekers and refugees informed on our submission to the Welsh Government's Independent Advisory Board on Hate Crime, 67% reported experiences of hate incidences and crime with no reports of a positive response from support services. One asylum seeker from the ESOL focus group said "it's because we are foreign and are immigrants". Recommendations from the report have gone into the Welsh Government's Hate Crime Delivery Plan and are being considered by the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty.
- We continue to ask the Welsh Government and Home Office for a Guardianship, submitted an outline of the advocacy needs of migrant children to inform on the Social Services Wellbeing Act and organise a roundtable to learn from the Scottish model as well as raising the issues the Minister.
- We worked closely with BAWSO and Welsh Women's Aid to provide submissions for the consultation on the Home Office's guidance document 'Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme'. This work instigated a conversation to develop a local protocol for asylum seekers who have disclosed experiences of domestic violence. We also raised this in the NASF Equalities Sub Group where the Home Office stated that they found our requests for amendments reasonable. We worked with the Violence Against Women action group to lobby for amendments to the bill to incorporate the disproportionate impact on women and girls. The newly appointed Minister for Public Services Leighton Andrews told the Communities, Equalities and Local Government Committee:

"The Welsh Government recognises that gender-based violence has a disproportionate impact on women and girls. I have spoken to the First Minister about this issue, and I can confirm today that we intend to introduce a government amendment at stage two to add a new section to the bill, probably entitled 'violence against women and girls.'
(Leighton Andrews quoted in the South Wales Evening Post)

PROMOTING POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

In collaboration with the Welsh children's policy group we facilitated the active participation of three young women and a young man at a Welsh Labour party conference. This took migrant voices directly to politicians.

MEDIA

We continue to develop our relationship with the media working with journalists from all sections of Welsh media to promote fair and accurate news and information about sanctuary seekers in Wales. Here are our main representations:

- At the start of the migration activities in the Mediterranean, we contributed to a BBC Radio Wales programme providing an understanding of the reasons people leave their countries and challenged negative public comments about sanctuary seekers in Wales.
- We asked the Home Office and Welsh Government to do more to protect lone asylum seeking children on a BBC Wales online article: Children Asylum Seekers are at great risk.
- We contributed to an online news article for the Cardiffian, "Insight into the lives of Cardiff's asylum seekers and refugees" which explored what it means to be a refugee in Cardiff.
- We contributed to the Abergavenny Methodist Church bi-annual magazine with an article about our work, new objectives and about people's experience in the asylum system.
- We produced and contributed to Wales Online news article on Disparity in the Dispersal System of Asylum Seekers.
- Refugee Week Wales 2014 made the headlines on ITV Wales news at 6 pm and was promoted on Radio Cardiff and Newport City Radio with a live discussion that informed and encourage support for sanctuary seekers in Wales.

PROMOTING POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS OF MIGRATION

Refugee Week Wales continue to develop as a staple event of Wales's annual cultural events. The event took place from 16th -21st, June 2014. It included 22 artistic performances, expressions and educational awareness events, from asylum seekers, refugees and the local Welsh community. The theme "Education and Young People - Our Shared Future" focused on highlighting the experiences of young asylum seekers and refugees. The opening event took place at the Senedd and was sponsored by the then Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty - Jeff Cuthbert.

Labour MP for Cardiff Central (then Parliamentary candidate for Cardiff Central), Jo Stevens commented:

"If I am elected in May, I can assure you that I will do my utmost to ensure more awareness of the problems refugees and asylum seekers have and are facing and that a much more equitable and humane process, particularly for children and young adults, must be achieved."

A WORD FROM OUR CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, SALAH MOHAMED

2015 has seen unprecedented numbers of migrants and asylum seekers seek sanctuary in Europe. The Syrian conflict shows no sign of receding and after four years of war, there is no political or diplomatic breakthrough in sight. With political instability continuing to plague many countries across the Middle East, Africa and Asia the significant movement of people experienced by Europe in recent years looks set only to continue. The dramatic unfolding of the emergency can truly be described as the worst humanitarian crisis of our time and has shone a light on the urgency of developing coherent and robust mechanisms at the European, national and regional level to ensure that we do not fail anyone in need of our protection.

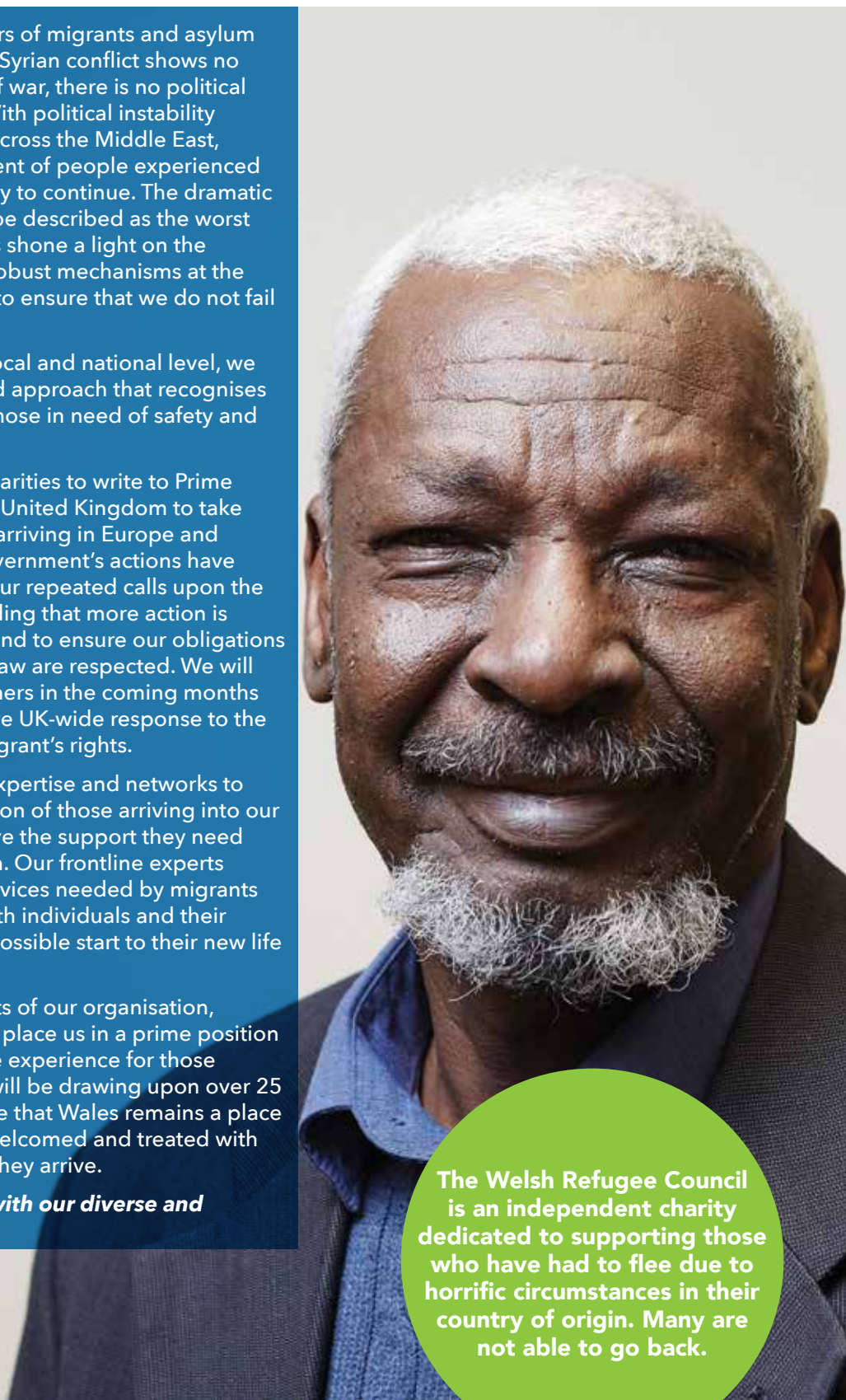
In order to effectively respond at the local and national level, we are in desperate need of a coordinated approach that recognises and respects the rights and needs of those in need of safety and protection.

In January 2016, we were one of 27 charities to write to Prime Minister David Cameron to call for the United Kingdom to take a proportionate share of the refugees arriving in Europe and expressing concern that the British government's actions have been inadequate so far. This sustains our repeated calls upon the government throughout 2015 demanding that more action is taken to protect those seeking safety and to ensure our obligations towards refugees under international law are respected. We will continue to work closely with our partners in the coming months to advocate for a coherent and effective UK-wide response to the refugee crisis and the protection of migrant's rights.

In Wales, we will continue to use our expertise and networks to inform and shape the country's reception of those arriving into our communities to ensure that they receive the support they need and are made to feel part of the region. Our frontline experts will continue to deliver the support services needed by migrants arriving into Wales, working closely with individuals and their families to ensure they have the best possible start to their new life living within our nation.

The diverse activities and achievements of our organisation, and our great ambitions for the future, place us in a prime position to contribute to and shape the refugee experience for those arriving into Wales for the better. We will be drawing upon over 25 years of specialist experience to ensure that Wales remains a place where people seeking sanctuary are welcomed and treated with respect and dignity from the day that they arrive.

We hope that you will get involved with our diverse and valuable work.



The Welsh Refugee Council is an independent charity dedicated to supporting those who have had to flee due to horrific circumstances in their country of origin. Many are not able to go back.

LOOKING AHEAD...

MIGRATION INFORMATION PROJECT

The Welsh Refugee Council and the Centre of Migration Policy and Society (COMPAS) at Oxford University were awarded a Welsh Government contract to develop Strategic Migration Services in Wales.

The project aims to engage with the Welsh Government and stakeholders across Wales to increase access to information on migration in Wales.

Briefings, meetings and training will aim to increase stakeholders understanding of migration. We will also work in partnership with four local authorities to identify good practice and develop a strategic framework on migration to improve the wellbeing of communities, keep children and adults safe from harm and harness the economic benefits of migration. There will be four key stages to the project:

1. Consultation with stakeholders, to identify migrants' and stakeholders needs across Wales
2. Production of an online resource including a series of thematic policy briefings, migration trends report, and a toolkit on supporting migrant children
3. Production of four local strategies on migration
4. Development and delivery of training programmes and an expert adviser on migration policy and practice

The project team is a consortium from COMPAS and the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford and the policy and communications team at the Welsh Refugee Council. We have recently recruited a Policy Officer to support the delivery of the project.

WOMEN GET ACTIVE

In the coming year we will be running a 12-month pilot programme for female asylum seekers and refugees that aims to:

- Increase fitness through the delivery of a specialist exercise programme to **32** women in Cardiff
- Increase participation in sports in Wales of asylum seekers and refugees through building links with organisations like Sports Cardiff as well as local sports clubs
- Increase understanding of the barriers that female asylum seekers and refugees face to access sport

Participants will be women who typically have been excluded from or unable to access physical exercise either for cultural, economic, or religious reasons. The pilot will, therefore, offer a scaffolded programme to ensure that participants build a foundation of fitness in a safe and appropriate manner combined with high-quality training and information. Starting with floor-based, low-impact exercises, such as yoga and pilates, participants will build strength, balance, flexibility, and overall improved proprioception. This would then progress to more cardiovascular exercises, a walking programme, with the final step as a running programme.

ESOL

People who migrate to Wales bring with them an array of skills and abilities that have the potential to enrich our communities and economies alike. To enable these individuals to reach their full potential, access justice and integrate into Welsh society, a thorough grasp of the English language is essential. They must, therefore, have access to the necessary language classes to support and guide them in their learning.

At our Cardiff office, the Welsh Refugee Council provides ESOL classes from beginner to upper-intermediate level. Asylum seekers and refugees are welcome to join the class at any stage.

REFUGEE WEEK

This year's Refugee Week was a huge success, reaching thousands and promoting engagement and understanding of issues affecting refugees and asylum seekers. We hope to go even further in the coming year, delivering an even bigger and better Refugee Week to deliver our objectives:

- To create and deliver positive and educational programmes that highlight the contributions of refugees and asylum seekers in Wales;
- To create a platform for discussion of the issues faced by refugees;
- To support Refugee Community Organisations to host cultural and artistic activities that encourage community cohesion and;
- To work with the media to challenge the stereotypes surrounding asylum seekers and refugees.



THANK YOU

We are very appreciative of all the help and support given by individuals, community groups, members who give generously to support our hardship fund and destitution work. This year we raised £11,777 for the hardship fund and made payments of £9,820 to people who really needed it. We also received £3,766 in individual donations in support of the work of the Welsh Refugee Council. This is on top of the clothing, food parcel, gifts and time given to sanctuary seekers in Wales

We are privileged to have such great staff members whose passion and dedication make a huge difference to the lives of refugees and asylum seekers every day.

A great big thank you to everyone who have supported us in 2014-2015 and we look forward to even greater success in the coming year!

OUR BOARD

Anna Nicholl
Chair

Maureen Gower
Vice Chair

Mohamed Field
Treasurer

Ann-Marie Harkin

Antoine Azangisa

Caron Jennings

Claire Cunliffe

Denebo Wario

Nicolas Webb

Phillip Cole

Stephen Brooks

Themba Moyo



FINANCIAL INFORMATION

INCOME 2014/2015

RESTRICTED GRANT INCOME

Welsh Government	632,873
BBC Children In Need	£28,554
Comic Relief	£37,989
Lloyds TSB	£3,400
Hardship Fund Donations	£11,777

UNRESTRICTED GRANT INCOME

Grant WCVA	£3,560
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UNRESTRICTED FUND (OTHER)

Subscriptions & Donations	£3,996
Interest Received	£344
Exit Costs	£58,152
Refugee & Asylum Assistance Funding	£79,066
Management Fees	£18,743
Sundry Income	£2,198
TOTAL INCOME	£610,652

ANALYSIS OF CHARITABLE EXPENDITURE

Pre Status Expenditure	£134,075
Refugee Status Expenditure	£268,965
Influencing Policy & Campaign	£211,999
Governance	£133
	£615,172
Net Movement In Funds	-£4,521
Funds Brought Forward	£249,942
Funds Carried Forward	£245,421

Thanks to our Funders and Donors

BBC Children in Need

Comic Relief

Lloyds Banking Group Community Fund

WCVA

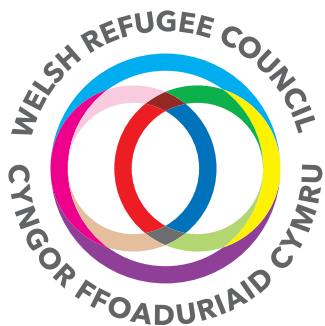
Welsh Government

All our donors and fundraisers in 2014-2015

The Welsh Refugee Council is an independent charity dedicated to supporting those who have had to flee their home due to horrific situations.

HERE'S HOW YOU CAN REACH US TO BE INVOLVED OR SUPPORT OUR SERVICES...

- Please consider fundraising for or donating to the Welsh Refugee Council. More information is available at www.justgiving.com/welshrefugeecouncil or by contacting Communications Officer Althea Collymore - althea@wrc.wales
- Consider volunteering with us: volunteer@wrc.wales
- Like or Follow us on Facebook and Twitter
- To find out more about our current work go to our website www.wrc.wales



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