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Supporting People  
Building Hope  
Transforming Lives

# Annual Report 2016-2017



Noddir gan  
**Lywodraeth Cymru**  
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# Welcome and Introduction

## Welcome to the Welsh Refugee Council's Annual Report for 2016-2017

The year 2016 has been an exciting time for the Welsh Refugee Council. We have learnt a lot and continue to learn as we focus on defending the rights of people moving through the UK's asylum process. The report sets out our activities for the year and highlights our key successes and achievements. It also highlights the the work of our dedicated and hardworking staff and volunteers who provide the much-needed

advocacy, advice and support services offered to people sent to Wales as part of their asylum journey.

We thank you for reading this report and hope it will help foster better informed, positive opinions about people seeking asylum and refugees in Wales, the asylum journey and sanctuary seeking in Wales.



# About Welsh Refugee Council

Welsh Refugee Council is a Wales-based charity committed to protecting the rights of people seeking asylum and refugees (RASs) in Wales and improving the treatment of and prospects for them. We are the Welsh Government's lead national support service agency for people seeking asylum and refugees in Wales. For almost 30 years, we have been working with and empowering people seeking asylum.

## Our Mission

To improve the lives of asylum seekers and refugees in Wales through the delivery of specialist support and influence on policy and practice.

and refugees who are here in Wales seeking safety and the development of new lives post asylum.

As well as providing practical specialist advice and support to people who have experienced persecution, conflict, and various forms of injustice and abuse, we also provide opportunities for people to share their experiences, have their voices heard and influence policy and practice.

## Our Vision

To create a Wales where refugees are welcomed and have access to protection, safety and dignity.



## Our Services

**Advice & casework:** providing much needed advice and support to people moving through the asylum process.

**Move-On advice and casework:** supporting people granted status following an asylum claim to transition to independent living as refugees.

**Women's paralegal service:** providing paralegal advice, support and referrals to vulnerable women and their families.

**Children's Play Development:** to help children address the trauma of fleeing persecution through the provision of safe play and learning spaces.

**Education and Training:** providing interactive learning opportunities to people seeking asylum and refugees from beginners to advanced Welsh & English language classes,

as well as opportunities to learn about accessing employment and education.

**Migration services:** to increase access to information about migration to stakeholders in Wales through a range of products such as Legal and Policy Briefings, analyses of quantitative data on migration in Wales, the provision of training, the development of local strategic frameworks on migration and an information enquiry email line.

**Influencing:** speaking out to ensure that policy and practice meet the needs of people seeking asylum and refugees in Wales, through policy briefings, consultations and partnership working.

**Partnership:** working with over 80 organisations across Wales and the UK to ensure that the needs and rights of people seeking asylum and refugees are met throughout the entire asylum journey.

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## Our Staff

We have 31 members of staff and over 20 volunteers who provide the services outlined above. We are a team of passionate professionals committed to making a difference to the lives of people seeking sanctuary in Wales.

## Our Core Value

Our core value is to promote the right to seek asylum as outlined in the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. We believe that it is our humanitarian duty to actively support people who are forced to flee their homelands in search of their basic human rights.

## Our Key Messages

People claim asylum because of being forced to flee their home country due to persecution, war and torture. Having made a claim for asylum in the UK, people are sent to Wales by the UK government under the dispersal scheme whilst their asylum claim is being considered. Whilst awaiting a decision on their asylum claim, as well as post asylum claim, people should be afforded all necessary human rights protections.

People's skills and talents should be recognised, alongside the economic and cultural contributions that people can make to communities and the nation of Wales.



# Welcome from our Chief Executive

2016 – 2017 has been as a year of growth, achievements and challenges for the Welsh Refugee Council as we focused on both consolidating and expanding much needed services for people seeking asylum and refugees in Wales. People continue to face significant challenges to making an asylum claim and accessing services. Motivated by these challenges, we remain resolute in our commitment to bridge current gaps and unmet needs in service provision.

We were successful in maintaining current programmes of work and in building on our partnership working with many sister organisations in the sector.

As a human rights-based organisation, we strongly believe in holistic service provision that meets the needs of asylum seekers and refugees as detailed in this impact report.

Forging ahead as one of the leading voices on asylum in Wales, we will continue to advocate, campaign and join forces with other organisations to develop and maintain a strong voice that defends and promotes the rights to sanctuary and safety for people moving through the asylum process in Wales.

I would like to say thank you to the all our staff, volunteers, board members, supporters and partners who I am proud to say are as committed to the cause as ever and who continue to demonstrate skill, dedication and passion. It is a pleasure to work with you all and I look forward to ongoing, fruitful working relationships to accomplish even more than before.

**Salah Mohamed**  
Chief Executive



## Foreword from our Chair

The past year has been one of growth for the organisation which has helped both secure the Welsh Refugee Council's position as the leading organisation within the sector here in Wales and its future sustainability.

WRC has secured funding for a Welsh Government funded Asylum Rights Programme which, working in partnership with 6 other specialist organisations, will ensure that people seeking asylum and refugees know their rights and are supported through the asylum process and that professionals working with asylum seekers and refugees better understand their needs. It also aims to inform and influence public opinion about the needs and rights of people seeking asylum and about the positive contribution that the people we help can make to life in Wales.

A Big Lottery Fund grant has enabled the organisation to employ vital additional staff to strengthen organisational infrastructure, which in turn, translates into improved experiences for those people using WRC services.

An Arts Council Cymru funded programme is providing opportunities for people from a refugee and asylum seeker background to develop and showcase their creative skills through a programme of artist-led workshops and training delivered in partnership with major arts institutions. From September 2017 and in the four dispersal cities of Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham, a series of workshops will lead to the creation of a performance and an exhibition for a variety of venues within and around Refugee Week 2018 (17-23 June).

Existing, long standing services continue to provide outstanding support to people using our services: our Move-On service, our Women's Paralegal service which helps those women who have experienced gender-based trauma, our ESOL classes that assist in integration and employability, our BBC Children in Need funded family support sessions and our Local Authority funded Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation schemes.

I would also like to mention the contribution made those in the organisation who are not in the front-line of service

delivery, but who nonetheless work tirelessly to create the conditions in which people seeking sanctuary can enjoy their rights in Wales. Our Policy and Communications team strive to improve the provision of public services, influence political debate and work with other refugee organisations to effect change. Our Senior Management team, overseen by our CEO Salah Mohamed, ensure the financial stability, sustainability and health of the organisation.

I have been the Chair for just over a year and would like to acknowledge the work of our trustee board, many of whom joined the board last year. Their knowledge, experience and expertise has supported the organisation in a multitude of ways. I am very grateful for the support given both to me and the organisation.

I continue to be awed and humbled by the expertise and commitment shown by the hard-working staff and volunteers of the Welsh Refugee Council in all their endeavours and it is a privilege to know and work with them.

**Maureen Gower**  
Chair of the Board of Trustees

# One Year of Transforming Lives



at 33 Refugee Week Wales events



new all Wales, multi-agency partnership



advice and support sessions



toy donations



asylum seekers supported



refugees in housing support and accommodation



in education and training



families from Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Programme supported



outdoor trips for children



policy briefings



hardship donations made



partners and collaborators



summer school participants



play sessions



people supported



policy briefing on Hate Crime amongst the refugee population



people with gender-based issues supported



visits to our website



cross party-political hustings



donations made



contacted us via [wrc.wales](http://wrc.wales)



children at play support sessions



*"I started missing my family and wondered what I would do now. I came to Welsh Refugee Council and they help me" - ZG*

## Support for Asylum Seekers

When Home Office funded asylum advocacy support services were withdrawn in 2014, people seeking asylum were left to navigate their way through a challenging and disorienting asylum process.

At Welsh Refugee Council, as part of our Equality and Inclusion (2014-2017) grant from Welsh Government, we provided limited, **volunteer-based advocacy and advice**

**support in Cardiff and Newport to 450 people in the asylum process.** This support included facilitating access to legal advice, to providing small sums of money and clothing for people experiencing destitution in partnership with the British Red Cross, and access to other specialist services such as ESOL, mental health and victim support referrals, all providing a lifeline to people who need it.

211

families

156

women

55

men



## Women's Paralegal Support Worker

Asylum seeking women may not always seek asylum due to war, conflict or torture. Many have experienced forced marriage, rape, human trafficking or domestic violence; gender-based issues, which are more complex to base an asylum case upon.

Within this reporting period, our specialist paralegal advice and support worker provided support and advice to **211 people** with gender-based issues, ensuring that their issues were disclosed and presented robustly at their asylum interviews to remove any unfair conditions that hindered their chances of a fair decision.

\*NRPF: No recourse to public funds (NRPF) is a condition imposed on someone due to their immigration status.





*"My life is better, and I feel like they care for people like us and we do need care. I think WRC do this because they care and the fact that you are here asking me means you care. At least you are asking" - BC*

## Moving On - Housing and Accommodation Support for Refugees

Refugees are at a transitional stage of their lives as a new journey of uncertainty begins. With a positive decision on their asylum claim from the Home Office, they must learn how to "remain" in the UK, utilising their knowledge, education, culture and experiences to best effect. It can be challenging and for many, homelessness and destitution become a real threat.

Our Refugee Move On service works extensively on a one-to-one basis to help people to secure their basic needs of accommodation, health and accessing their rights and entitlements. The service is person-centred and rights-based. During the year, **we held 7,859 sessions and helped 3,027 people** navigate their way from asylum support to independent living.



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*"I come to class to improve my English language, also because I didn't find a chance to join the Cardiff and Vale College. The classes give me new chances to speak also to learn new vocabulary" - MN*

*"I like the instructors and the way who to teach us in friendly environment" - ST*

# Education and Learning

On a weekly basis, people seeking asylum and refugees come through our doors seeking to improve their English language in order to aid integration and when they gain permission to work, improve access to the labour market. Our Education and Training programme includes interactive English for Speakers of Other Languages – ESOL teaching sessions held in Cardiff, ESOL classes for women only, employment focused workshops and networking opportunities between people seeking asylum, refugees and educational stakeholders.

During the year, there were **1,216 instances where people accessed the services**, peaking at 373 people during the months of July and September 2016.

In March 2017, **57 participants secured a six-week Summer School placement, thanks to a grant from the Pears Foundation**, in partnership with Cardiff University Widening Participation project.

thewaterloofoundation\*



*"This is our special place, no one really talks about their case here, it's just you and your baby having fun. Just like a home, playing and singing. I love it" - SH*

# Supporting Children and Young People

Around the world, millions of people flee war and disasters each year, many of them are children. During the year, the play development project saw **1,110 children benefiting from 124 play sessions, 10 outdoor trips and 225 toy donations**. Many of the children have experienced traumatic events and suffered loss. They generally live in the shadows of the stress that the asylum system places on their family, living in temporary accommodation, having

to move several times and having little or no access to play spaces. Welsh Refugee Council's small team of two play development workers deliver play support and development sessions to children and young people living within the asylum system in partnership with Trinity Centre in Cardiff and the Gap Centre in Newport. The children get to play and learn freely, express themselves without fear and develop social skills that are vital to their future development.





*"Please commit to giving Wales a destitution fund so that people like me do not have to suffer in Wales".*  
- NS

# Influencing

As part of our influencing and advocacy work, we created opportunities to give people seeking asylum and refugees a voice about policy, service standards and issues that impact on their ability to integrate and feel welcome in Wales. At the heart of this work in 2016 - 2017, was the development of a Refugee Coalition for Wales. Formed by the Welsh Refugee Council and Oxfam in 2015, the Coalition is a partnership of refugee agencies seeking to influence public policy on issues affecting people from an asylum seeker and refugee background.

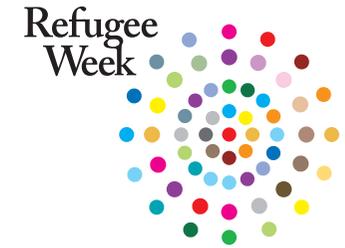
In April 2016, we brought cross-party politicians together at a husting in Wrexham. We secured party political commitments to take steps to make Wales a Nation of Sanctuary. Naser Sakka, a Syrian refugee gave a short and moving

testimony from his time living in Cardiff, homeless, without money, food or support. He asked, "please commit to giving Wales a destitution fund so that people like me do not have to suffer in Wales". We continue to push for policy and practice changes to ensure Wales becomes the Nation of Sanctuary we aspire to be.

We increased the awareness of policymakers and practitioners of hate crime experiences and documented the experiences of violence against women and girls by sanctuary seekers. We also secure funding to raise awareness of hate crime amongst the refugee population and worked with local partners to influence protocols for reporting domestic violence for women and girls who are seeking asylum. We produced a multi-lingual hate crime information booklet

that specifically draws on the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees in Wales.

In partnership with the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) we secured funding from Welsh Government to develop an online migration information portal on our website to provide expert information about the needs, services and learning opportunities for organisations working to support sanctuary seekers in Wales. The portal produced legal and policy briefings, quantitative data analysis on migration in Wales, provided training, worked in partnership with two Local Authorities to explore local strategic frameworks on migration and hosted an enquiry line for migration related queries.



# Partnership & Volunteering

## Our Partnerships

Supporting asylum seekers and refugees in Wales has its own challenges and it would not be possible without the support of our 80 strong partners and collaborators including Asylum Justice, BAWSO, British Red Cross, Displaced People in Action, EYST, Just Across in Wrexham, Oasis Cardiff, Oxfam Cymru, Trinity Centre, The Sanctuary Project, University of South Wales. Partnership working helps ensure that the needs of asylum seekers and refugees are met throughout their entire asylum journey and that the sector remains strong, resilient and responsive.

### Refugee Week Wales

Operated in partnership and collaboration, Refugee Week Wales programme of arts and performance is delivered by community and third sector organisations in Wales who help raise awareness of the issues of migration and celebration the vital contributions asylum seekers and refugees bring to Wales. This year, approximately 1,000 people attended 33 events which took place across the cities in Wales and many felt that the event helped change the perception of Welsh public about the positive contributions of asylum seekers and refugees in Wales.

*"I left with the feeling that if we all helped one another, the world would be better" – RWW event participant*

### Asylum Rights Programme

A highlight and demonstration of our commitment to partnership working was the acquisition of the Welsh Government's contract for asylum support. In January 2017, Welsh Refugee Council led and was awarded the 3-year Welsh Government contract to provide asylum seeker and refugee services across Wales. The Asylum Rights Programme (ARP) is a partnership between Asylum Justice, EYST, BAWSO, Tros Gynnal Plan, City of Sanctuary and Displaced People in Action. It has been in operation from April 2017 and has been providing specialist services to deliver practical support, advice, advocacy and information to sanctuary seekers in Wales.

This partnership means that Wales has a pan-Wales approach to asylum support providing and a wider range of support to people.

## Volunteering

Volunteering continues to be a pivotal aspect of the development and delivery of our services. A total of 23 volunteers provided essential time and support to the work of the organisation and included casework support, event organisation and administration support. Many of our volunteers have moved on into employment or are now members of staff and we continue to develop and recruit new volunteers who have become much needed support to the Welsh Refugee Council's team.

## Donations and Hardship Support

This year we raised £10,550 for the hardship fund and made payments of £10,521 to people who really needed it. 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.

We also received £15,630 in individual donations in support of the work of the Welsh Refugee Council and clothing, food parcels, gifts and volunteer time to help meet the needs of people seeking asylum in Wales. Thank you.

6,067

visits to wrc.wales

2,966

views of information  
related to working with us

1,545

contacts from the public

387

people viewed the  
asylum seeker and  
refugee services page

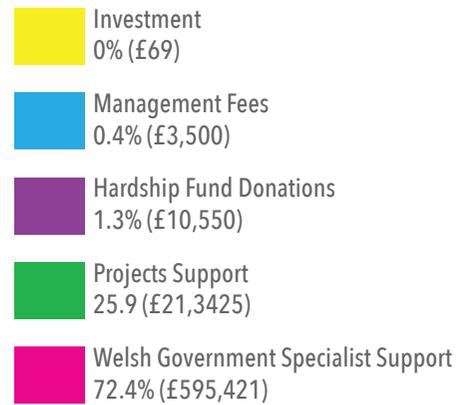
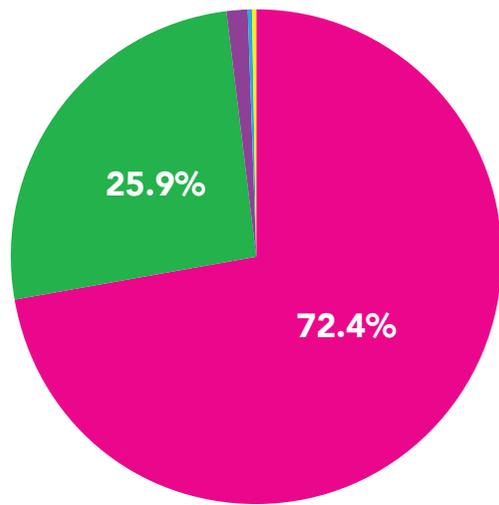


## Our Media work

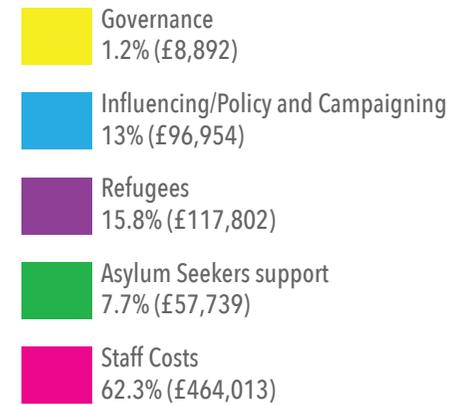
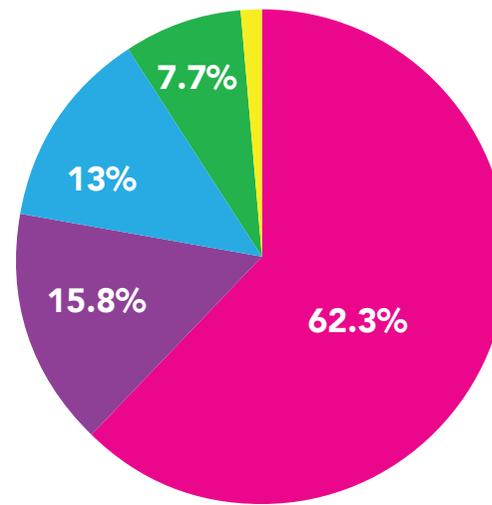
We continue to work with and build upon our relationships with the Welsh media. We provide statistics about asylum seekers and refugees in Wales, their lived experiences and we play a critical role in highlighting positives stories, as well as the challenges people face as they move through the asylum process. Over the course of this year, we worked with the BBC, ITV, Wales Online, South Wales Argus and

Radio Cardiff. Our largest audience was at a live discussion on BBC World News, sharing a positive message about the high level of skills, education and abilities sanctuary seekers bring to Wales. Over the year, we made 9 media representations with asylum seekers and refugees who shared their lived experiences about the asylum process with the Welsh media and public.

## Income



## Expenditure



# Money Matters



## Board of Trustees

- ▶ Maureen Gower - Chair
- ▶ Harry Iles - Vice Chair
- ▶ Naveeda Morgan - Treasurer
- ▶ Alison Dunnett
- ▶ Andrea Cleaver
- ▶ Brian Gibbons
- ▶ Catherine McKeag
- ▶ Gaynor Jones
- ▶ Nick Webb
- ▶ Nicole Williams
- ▶ Themba Moyo

## Get Involved

We are proud of our 27 years working with and empowering people seeking asylum and refugees in Wales as they seek safety and develop new lives in our country. We are a dedicated, hardworking team and always welcome new volunteers, partners and supporters.

To find out more call **02920 489800** or email us on **fundraising@wrc.wales**

1. Donate to any one of our valuable services, or donate food items, clothing, toys, toiletries or sanitary wear for people facing destitution.
2. Volunteer with us.
3. Become a member of the Welsh Refugee Council to receive updates about the sector and WRC's events and activities.
4. Join our Facebook and Twitter pages or subscribe to our YouTube channel.



# A great big thank you to:

- ▶ Sanctuary seekers who use our services and support our work.
- ▶ Funders investing in asylum support initiatives in Wales.
- ▶ Individuals, groups and organisations who work tirelessly to create a welcoming Wales, raise awareness, fundraise and host events.
- ▶ Service providers who work tirelessly providing quality services to sanctuary seekers and work in partnership across the sector to improve service provision and access to rights.
- ▶ Media bodies in Wales who give sanctuary seekers a voice on radio, print and online.
- ▶ Social media supporters who follow, share our tweets and promote our work on Facebook.

Thank you for all your invaluable support.

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 City of Sanctuary



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Arts Council of Wales