



Welsh Refugee Council



Impact Report
2021-2022

Croeso/ Welcome

About us

Our vision is to create a Wales where sanctuary seekers and refugees are welcomed, respected, and have access to protection, safety, and dignity.

Our mission is to improve the lives of sanctuary seekers and refugees by delivering specialist advice and practical support and speaking out to positively influence public perception.

Our values

We champion human rights, equality, and diversity.

We empower and promote the voices of sanctuary seekers and refugees.

We are a strong, independent voice that demonstrates leadership, builds capacity, and works collaboratively.

We exemplify organisational excellence in service delivery, staff development and governance.

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Foreword



I am proud to present this report that demonstrates a year of significant achievements in the face of real challenges.

We developed new ways of supporting asylum seekers and refugees as Wales emerged from the Covid Pandemic, delivering 5,700 sessions to clients speaking over 40 different languages from 50 nationalities. Our support is often at moments of crisis, helping people to overcome challenges relating to housing, finance, health, education, and employment. Special thanks to our caseworkers for their tireless work and dedication.

Our income grew significantly to £1,627,719, with important contributions from Welsh Government and 20 charitable foundations and companies. We joined forces with England and Scottish Refugee Councils for the Times Christmas Appeal, resulting in £104,000 unrestricted income, and an improved public profile.

We responded quickly to the opportunity to provide free bus and rail tickets for asylum seekers through a £250,000 grant from Welsh Government,

running a 3-month pilot in partnership with Oasis and EYST. We worked in partnership with BAWSO and Race Council Cymru to launch and deliver the Global Majority Fund. Together we gave out grants to Black, Asian, and Ethnic Communities across Wales and empowered grass root charity leaders.

The growing support and funding entrusted to the Welsh Refugee Council shows recognition of our effectiveness and our reputation for delivering and exceeding targets. We are known for our expertise in providing specialist advice, our understanding of the needs of asylum seekers and refugees, our collaborations with partners and leading role in the sector.

We were awarded the nationally recognised Trusted Charity quality mark following an extensive external audit of our policies, management practice and governance.

Our strength is our diversity, and our staff, volunteers and clients are at the heart of our work. We are committed to involving refugees and asylum seekers in the design and operation of our services and are actively recruiting people with lived experience to the Board.

It's a delight to see people flourish and our resettlement projects; Education and Employability Project, Play, ESOL, and Volunteering continue to go from strength to strength.

Finally, I would like to recognise the exceptional contribution of Andrea Cleaver's leadership, together with the commitment of our Senior Management Team, dedicated staff and volunteers and strategic direction from trustees.

Harry Iles
Chair - Welsh Refugee Council

Asylum Support

Wales Sanctuary Service (Asylum Rights Programme)

3305 sessions to **700** clients from over **50** countries

Partners: DPIA, EYST, BAWSO, Asylum Justice, and TGP Cymru

“The kindness and support shown to me from the caseworkers has been amazing, they have made me feel more safe and secure.”
- Karin

Navigating the complex asylum system is often a time of worry, and isolation for many a sanctuary seeker. With most correspondence from the Home Office being in English and using technical legal terminology - just understanding

the next step is often confusing.

Unfortunately, we see too many people falling through cracks in the asylum system and demand for our service remains high.

Sanctuary seekers are at risk of becoming homeless, living in poor or unsafe conditions, and struggling to access the limited support they are entitled to. Together with our partners our expert caseworkers listen to people’s concerns and guide them through their options.

This year, the addition of a No Recourse to Public Funds Caseworker has increased our collective expertise, skill and understanding as a team.

We were delighted that we secured funding from Welsh Government to continue this vital work for a further five years. This allows us and our partners to maintain and develop our reputation for expert casework for sanctuary seekers across Wales.



Navigating Asylum Partnership

73 Sanctuary Seekers supported

Partners: Refugee Action and Comic Relief

The Navigating Asylum Project, also known as Asylum Guides, continued training people with lived experience of the asylum system to support clients through their own journey.

Our online launch event was attended by over 50 people from across Wales and promoted the work of the project to key partners across the country.

Even in the face of challenges resulting from the legacy of the pandemic and lockdown restrictions, the team worked tirelessly to improve relations with key stakeholders and increase referral rates to the programme.

“[My Asylum Guide] gave me information on where to go if I have an issue with the Home Office. She also gave me confidence to go to the police if there are any severe issues that need reporting. Before, I felt scared of the police and now I don’t so much because I understand my rights.”

Transport Project

1000+ adults and children from **62** countries given free public transport tickets

Partners: Oasis and EYST

In January 2022 we launched a 3-month pilot project to provide sanctuary seekers in Wales with access to free public transport. This project was funded by Welsh Government.

“It has been a lifeline.”

“We have been able to enjoy ourselves as a family.”

Sanctuary seekers live on limited means and public transport is usually financially inaccessible. This project was a huge hit for people,

enabling access to days out, legal, and medical appointments, community activities, educational centres, and volunteering. It reduced isolation and

enabled people to have a wider world to explore.

Our project staff often found that arranging a transport ticket, would lead to wider conversations about wellbeing and we provided numerous referrals to support services. Our clients reported an overall improvement to their mental health and wellbeing showing just how much of an impact access to free transport can make.

We used our insights to influence political support for continued access to free transport, with our CEO speaking in Scottish parliament about the benefits of this scheme. Member of the Welsh Senedd, Sioned Williams also raised the scheme in the Senedd.

Resettlement

Move On

1,296 newly granted applicants and their families assisted

2,232 face-to-face sessions

4,623 telephone and email follow ups

218 referrals to partner services



The WRC Move On team

Newly granted refugees get just 28 days to plan their move on from the asylum accommodation before they face eviction. This leaves people highly vulnerable to unemployment, homelessness, and extreme poverty.

“Given my issues, I approached the Welsh Refugee Council a couple of times, and I am pleased to say that I was provided with the best service.”

“I would like to pass on my special thanks to my caseworker who offered me the best advice patiently and would also like to extend my appreciation to the rest of the move on team and the manager as they always assist and welcome service users.”

This year we worked hard to develop the support we offer to people and their families across Wales as part of our Move On service.

We helped newly granted refugees to access employment, education, and housing support, with the aim of reducing stress and uncertainty. Through in-person, online and telephone sessions we advised people of their rights, options and how to access available support.

Through strengthened partnerships, our team has gained skill, experience and greater understanding and our network has benefitted greatly from mutual learning. This enables us to provide the best possible service keeping vulnerable people from being turned out on the streets or facing destitution.

Housing and Homelessness Project

226 refugees supported

This year we have worked hard with local authorities, Cardiff Housing Options, and other support organisations to help people find housing and avoid finding themselves out on the streets. We have established monthly meetings to tackle challenges people are commonly facing. Our work focused on removing barriers that were increasing the likelihood of people becoming homeless and increasing people's understanding and awareness of available options, particularly when it comes to private rental services.

Through our work, 47 refugees have been able to access private rental accommodation and a further 160 have accessed Cardiff Council housing services.

" I and the children have finally moved into our new house and the children are happy and speak highly well of the Refugee Council. Thanking you for everything and more."

Rhondda Cynon Taff local authority resettlement project

5 Afghan families supported



This year we have continued to do everything we can to help make Wales a Nation of Sanctuary for those fleeing war, conflict, and instability, including individuals and families affected by the ongoing crisis in Afghanistan. With the collaboration of Rhondda Cynon Taff local authority, we have been able to support five Afghan families in their relocation to Wales.

Education and Employability

216 clients supported directly

1,375 advice sessions

37 Employability workshops

2 IKEA UPPNA workshops

A major focus of our employability and education work has been developing the Employability Workshops. We listened to those with lived experience and expanded subjects like work culture in Wales, wages and taxes, and employment rights. Together with Unity in Diversity we offered two-day employability events in Swansea and Denbighshire.

It was a pleasure to be involved in the Wales launch of the IKEA UPPNA programme which places refugees in work. IKEA are leading the way with their innovative approach to provide refugees with a secure and supportive working environment.

16 UPPNA participants have benefited from WRC's Employability Workshops and, as of April 2022, 9 refugees have been offered permanent contracts at the

" I was hesitant and had doubts regarding my confidence and lack of skills but your encouragement and support made me feel more comfortable and confident to apply for the job that I want."**"** Rajaa (Iraq)

IKEA Cardiff store.

We have also assisted refugees with CVs, job applications, access to ESOL courses and widened our network to include partners such as Careers Wales, Job Centre Plus, Cardiff Into Work, Cardiff & Vale College, Wales Strategic Migration Partnership (WLGA) and Welsh Government. Our aim is to grow this much needed area of support.



Play Project

131 play sessions

130 doorstep/outreach visits

179 referrals for families in need of extra support

938 toys, **271** activity packs, **88**

books and **79** Bookstart packs given to children



We provided children with opportunities to make friends, share toys, and engage in activities, while parents received support and assistance from our team.

We are most proud of the seemingly small yet meaningful moments that showed the differences we were able to make in the lives of the children who joined us during our play sessions. These moments showed we have helped children to gain confidence, make friends, and develop new skills. We are so proud that children keep wanting to join us again, with parents often telling us how excited they were when told where they were going that day.

We faced several challenges, including building up the confidence of families to re-join sessions once pandemic restrictions had been eased.

Despite these challenges, we were able to provide a consistent and stable environment for families.

Through our partnerships with Mudiad Meithrin, Ti a Fi with Vikki, Trinity Aurora Collective and Arts Mundi we provided baby massage and yoga sessions, Welsh language lessons, and arts and craft sessions with visiting artists. We also took the children on visits to places in Cardiff such as Global Gardens, Parc Play, and the National Museum of Wales.

We were honoured to take part in the Lullaby Project this year, which involved a wonderful musician, Stacy, joining us over 6 weeks and encouraging mothers and children to create music and songs about child and motherhood experiences. This led up to a concert at St David's Hall and a CD of beautiful music.



"Thank you so much, we come here and it is a place for all of us. They love to come here."

Volunteering

Our exceptional volunteers make us who we are.

We have 40 active volunteers which contribute their skills in Cardiff, Swansea, Newport, and Wrexham. They have provided invaluable help in our triage and casework teams, in ESOL classes, for our playgroup, and with our communications, social media and policy work.

It has been a privilege to see our volunteering programme play a crucial role in helping people into jobs within the Welsh Refugee Council and beyond. A quarter of our staff have joined us via this route.

We continue to receive more volunteering applications than we can provide the opportunities and support for, which shows just how much people want

to help with our work supporting people to rebuild their lives in Wales. Our volunteers have expressed how much they love being part of our team and the work we do.

“ When I help people, it makes me happy. Even more because I am not earning money. If I get a job, I would still like to volunteer a day a week because I love it here. People go ‘over and above’ to help people... I have learnt a lot very quickly. It has been a very good experience.”

Migrant Help project

330 people referred to Migrant Help Caseworker

“ I am very grateful from the service you provided me. Every time I receive the pension credit money, I pray for you. I also tell all my family that all this is because of your amazing help. Thank you very much without you I wouldn't have been able to do anything.”

The Move On period after a sanctuary seeker has been granted refugee status is one of the most challenging times and there is a high risk of people ending up on the streets without any support or information about what to do next. Over the past year we have been able to give immediate advice on available housing, financial and education services to people referred to us from Migrant Help.

One of the main challenges we faced was ensuring people were reaching us as soon as possible so we worked with the Migrant Health team to speed up referral times.

Engagement

Global Majority Fund Project

Grantees: 29 Community groups

Partners: Race Council Cymru and Bawso

We were proud to be one of the organisations involved in delivering Comic Relief's Global Majority Fund project, in partnership with Race Council Cymru and Bawso. The funding was awarded to 29 Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic led organisations across Wales to support individuals and communities affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Projects included mental and physical well-being support, food parcels, information and advice services, leadership and vocational skills training, and hate crime awareness workshops.

Despite challenges in connecting with grantees who had full-time jobs, the project successfully

supported community members through ongoing support and networking events, including a face-to-face networking event that allowed group leaders to exchange contact information and led to the creation of a directory shared with all community groups.

Overall, the project successfully provided much-needed support to vulnerable communities impacted by the pandemic and showed the importance of funding and networking opportunities for BAME-led organisations.

Hate Crime Awareness

9 sessions with **44** people

Our hate crime awareness sessions were held online by ongoing pandemic restrictions. To meet this challenge, we created a more streamlined way of collecting contact details of potential participants. We also created a play led by refugees playing out scenarios of hate crime and how to respond, introduced language-specific events and used WhatsApp groups to increase outreach.



Refugee Week Wales

200+ people attended

27+ events across Wales registered

15 participating organisations

18,000+ social media impressions on WRC platforms alone

5+ schools participated

2 fundraising events with approximately

£2,600 raised in support of refugees

The theme for this year's Refugee Week Wales, was 'We Cannot Walk Alone', inspired by a quote from Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream' speech, in which he explains that the struggle for rights and respect transcends race. The theme celebrates our well-being and our interconnectedness.

We worked with the African Community Centre, Cardiff Council, Cardiff

Library, Churches in Wales, Oasis Cardiff, and the Trinity Centre to offer a range of events including storytelling, poetry, and personal reflections on the experiences of seeking sanctuary. Most of our events were held online due to ongoing effects of the pandemic and related restrictions.

We aim to attract funding for next year's Refugee Week, to help us expand participation and reach.

Wales Bright Future Forums

We collaborated with leadership development organisation, ella Forums, and continued to empower refugees through training in leadership skills and career development.

Project members attended forums to learn how to overcome the issues that impede their progress. The forums provided opportunities for refugees to gain knowledge and meet senior members of different organisations. Through peer learning and expert coaching, they improved their personal development and presentation skills.

We were proud to see the development of trust and support among members, which enabled them to become referees for each other on job

applications. The connections formed between participants is a testament to the success of this project.

We look forward to continue making a positive impact on the lives of people living and working in Wales.

"Thank you very much for chairing and facilitating such a great project, I have really learnt a lot."

Influencing

Race Equality Consultation

54 sanctuary seekers and refugees engaged

In summer 2021, we received a small pot of funding from Welsh Government to engage sanctuary seekers and refugees on the Race Equality Action Plan.

At the start we knew the task would be difficult - policy engagement is often seen as a dry subject. We felt that a different approach was needed. We asked people to come forward and share their experience of racism. 54 people took part over a series of small group workshops.

We broke the Plan down into bite size chunks and outlined what it was trying to achieve in four areas: housing and accommodation, jobs and income, health and social care and education. We asked participants whether the new plan would have mitigated their

experience and if Welsh Government were on the right track.

"We need a detailed plan including which agencies and government departments should be involved and how they work together to achieve equality in accessing affordable housing".

The results were fed back to Welsh Government and helped to create the launch of the Wales Equality Action Plan.

"I suffered racism in my country, I do not want my children to experience the same thing here".

Influencing key stakeholders



Jane Hutt - Minister for Social Justice

A key part of our work is to influence stakeholders and elected officials, to enact more humane policies for asylum seekers and refugees.

During our engagement events we ensured people with lived experience could share their

experiences, so politicians can hear directly from those effected.

During this period, we met with the following stakeholders:

- Natasha Asghar (July 2021)
- Ruth Jones MP (September 2021)
- Geraint Davies, MP Swansea West (September 2021)
- Jo Stevens, MP Cardiff Central (November 2021)
- Jenny Rathbone, MS Cardiff Central (December 2021)
- Jane Hutt - Minister for Social Justice (January 2022)

Campaigning



[View our videos at www.youtube.com/@WelshrefugeecouncilOrgUk.](https://www.youtube.com/@WelshrefugeecouncilOrgUk)

In the past year, we continued to advocate for the rights of asylum seekers and refugees.

In October 2021, we organized a public meeting to increase awareness of the Nationality and Borders Bill and its potential impact. Following this, in November, we launched a public campaign against the bill, which included a petition signed by 1012 people and a viral video that gained 539,000 impressions on Twitter alone.

In February 2022, we launched our support for people from Ukraine and worked to fill in the gaps in government information through a series of public meetings. In March, we pressed the Welsh Government to recognise the need for Ukrainian refugees. The talks culminated in

funding for a Ukraine Service project plan that Welsh government invited us to submit. In the same month, our CEO made further appeals for urgent Government support for Ukrainian refugees and proper safeguarding measures across multiple channels, including BBC Radio Wales and The Times.

We also partnered with Refugee Action and empowered people with lived experience to share their stories. Lastly, in March 2022, we collaborated with Together with Refugees to illuminate Cardiff Castle in orange and bring attention to the plight of refugees.

Myth busting workshops

20 online workshops

250 people engaged

75% reported more positive views of refugees and sanctuary seekers

We saw an increased interest in our myth busting workshops this year, as organisations such as the Peoples Ombudsman, Capital Law, Football Association Wales, University of South Wales and Wildlife Trust, improved and developed their equality, diversity and inclusion staff training.

Thanks to our volunteers with lived experience as sanctuary seekers, we were able to share stories shining a light on the reality of their experience. We aimed to create a non-judgemental space in which people could engage and ask questions to help them gain a better understanding and break down the damaging myths and lies about people who are forced to leave their homes.

With more support for our volunteers, especially mental health support, we can continue to provide an opportunity for connection and greater understanding within the communities taking in new sanctuary seekers.

"Very moving workshop to the extent, I switched my camera off and had a cry at one point. Am left wondering what we can do now to make a difference?"

Governance

Gaining the Trusted Charity Quality Mark this year was an important achievement for us.

We reviewed our work, practices, and progress against 11 key areas such as leadership and governance, financial management, and assessing outcomes and impact. Our staff, volunteers, and trustees participated in the process, and we submitted a significant amount of evidence.

The external assessment by the Trusted Charity Team involved reviewing documentation and interviewing staff, volunteers, and trustees.

During the process, various policies and practices were updated and carried out, for example the creation of an induction program for new staff, the update of the staff handbook, reflection exercises on what works and areas for improvement, and conducting internal satisfaction surveys. All these have made our organisation operate more effectively and efficiently.

Finance and income

Income generation and fundraising



Our income grew from £1,346,632 to £1,627,719. Our proudest achievement has been the work we did with the English and Scottish Refugee Councils for the Times Christmas appeal, which raised £104,000 unrestricted income and gained greater positive awareness of the experience of refugees in the UK.

Our wonderful community fundraisers made us smile with pride - we particularly loved seeing Clwb Ifor Bach turned into a gig fest fundraiser for the evening.

We are thankful to the following funders who make it possible for us to continue to work towards making Wales a Nation of Sanctuary for those in need of refuge and support.

“ I chose Welsh Refugee Council because I feel like we, as a country, do not do enough to help people fleeing from war zones. I found their team helpful and thought they helped a bunch by sharing social media posts and generally being nice.”

Louis Jugessur

Grants received:

- Welsh Government 673,025
- Comic Relief 17,515
- BBC Children in Need 31,942
- AB Charitable Trust 20,000
- The National Lottery Community Fund 139,689
- Lloyds Bank Foundation 25,000
- Oak Foundation 100,854
- Refugee Action 20,975
- Community Foundation in Wales 15,000
- Migration Exchange 45,000
- Screwfix 5,000
- National Emergency Trust 40,385
- WCVA Third Sector Partnership Scheme 54,052
- Award for All 9,882
- Postcode Lottery 18,896
- Race Council Cymru 10,000
- Moondance Foundation 25,000
- WCVA Covid 5,409
- Gwent TNLCF 1,167
- CAF Project 124,298
- DWP Kickstart 10,564
- Garfield Weston 34,000
- IKEA 15,000

We have received a number of in-kind donations, and would like to thank Kings Church, and Jesus Cares for their regular food parcels, Cathays Methodist Church and Toybox Project for their toy donations.



Ariennir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Funded by
Welsh Government



A future look by our CEO



We work in a volatile and often unpredictable environment. I won't ever forget hearing anguished families not knowing if they would see their loved ones in Afghanistan again or seeing the invasion of Ukraine unfold in Europe.

This next year will see vital work supporting those from Ukraine, and Afghanistan build new lives in Wales. We are proud we stepped up and supported people in their time of crisis and will continue to do so in 2022/3.

Our strength is our passion, diversity, and adaptability. We await the implementation of the Nationality and Borders Act with great concern about the operational impact it will have on people's lives. The political recourse around the Act, and the language used to describe sanctuary seekers is harmful, arbitrary, and incorrect. Much still needs to be done to raise awareness of the need for resettlement routes and the rights of those in need of protection.

We want to grow our education and employment project enabling people to flourish, and our work supporting people into homes. A roof, and skills development are essential components to feelings of safety and pride. With your support we can move forwards for a brighter future. Diolch yn fawr.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Andrea Cleaver'.

Andrea Cleaver



Welsh Refugee Council

Cyngor Ffoaduriaid Cymru

Empowering asylum seekers and refugees to build new futures in Wales.

Galluogi ceiswyr lloches a ffoaduriaid i adeiladu dyfodol newydd yng Nghymru.

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