

Impact Report

2023/24



Welsh Refugee Council is the
beginning of the end of the trauma



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Croeso Welcome

Since 1990, the Welsh Refugee Council has been a vital lifeline for sanctuary seekers and refugees, helping them rebuild their lives with dignity and hope here in Wales. From our community hubs in Cardiff, Newport, Swansea, and Wrexham, we offer a broad range of essential services—from housing support and English language classes to skills training, volunteering opportunities, and expert guidance through the complex immigration system. We ensure that people can access healthcare, mental health support, legal advice, and services like food banks when they need them most.

Our impact reaches even further thanks to strong partnerships with community organisations, voluntary groups, and public bodies across Wales. Working together, we make every pound count, creating real change in people's lives. Your support helps us break the cycle of isolation, empowering sanctuary seekers and refugees with the knowledge and confidence to take control of their futures. It also enables individuals to find their voices and speak up on the issues that shape their lives.

Thank you for being part of our journey and enabling those seeking sanctuary to rebuild their lives.

OUR VISION

Working together to create a Wales where sanctuary seekers and refugees are welcomed, respected, and empowered.



MISSION

We improve the lives of sanctuary seekers and refugees through specialist support and influencing policy and practice.

VALUES

Brave. We are bold, innovative, and we take action.

Diverse. We recognise the strengths we each bring, and each other's uniqueness.

Croeso/Welcome. We create environments that engage and welcome.

Influential. We empower people to tell their stories and use our data to lift narratives.

Collaborative. We recognise the importance of working in partnership and building each other's capacity.

Message from CEO

This past year has been nothing short of extraordinary, filled with hurdles that tested our strength.

In May 2023, we tackled the difficult reality of the Widening of Dispersal without any extra funding. We explored how this affects the Move On process and worked hard to ensure those newly granted refugees wouldn't be left unsupported.

June brought a moment of celebration as we won the Garfield Weston Award! Alongside this recognition, we received a year of mentoring to strengthen our governance. It's been a fantastic opportunity to grow and learn.

Over the summer, we stepped into the media spotlight with a series of TV and radio campaigns. We challenged the damaging Rwanda plan and worked to highlight solutions that prevent scapegoating and encourage greater understanding of refugees' experiences.

October was unforgettable. We were named Organisation of the Year at the WCVA Welsh Charity Awards. For a charity that is both deeply rooted in frontline work and dedicated to influencing change, this recognition was a moment of pride. It was a heartfelt thank-you to our incredible staff and volunteers, whose commitment and passion drive everything we do.

Then, in November, we found ourselves at Buckingham Palace, invited to meet the King and Queen. We brought a mix of staff and volunteers, and the evening was magical. One volunteer told us how honoured they felt to have an opportunity to talk with the King. It was a tear-jerking moment and a reminder of how far we've come together.

As we welcomed in the new year, and 2024, we worked with our partner, Migrant Help, to spread our wings and support newly granted refugees facing eviction in England. It was a bittersweet moment—joyous because refugees had reached safety, but daunting due to the harsh 28-day limit to find a home.

In March 2024, our beloved Play Project faced the risk of closure as funding from BBC Children in Need ended. But, in a beautiful turn of events, an incredible philanthropist stepped in, securing another year of funding. It was a reminder of how fragile even the most impactful work can be and how important it is to keep building relationships with funders, partners, and new supporters.

One of the highlights for me was how we prioritised the wellbeing of our staff. We launched an independent wellbeing helpline, giving everyone access to counselling and support when they needed it most. Our Senior Leadership Team also trained as Mental Health First Aiders, helping to create a culture where we can openly talk about the emotional pressures of our work.

As we look ahead, we brace ourselves for the continued impact of hostile policies while holding onto hope. Our goal remains the same: to break down barriers to integration so that everyone can thrive and live their best lives.

This past year has been a testament to resilience, kindness, and the power of working together. Here's to continuing this journey with courage and compassion.

Andrea Cleaver
CEO



The Journey of a Sanctuary Seeker

Arrive in the UK and claim asylum.



95%

Have no money. Offered Home Office (HO) **INITIAL ACCOMMODATION.**

Initial accommodation is on a **no choice basis**, likely a hotel. Should be for 4 weeks maximum, often a lot longer.

8%

Are sent to Wales.

£49

A sanctuary seeker (SS) lives on £49 per week.

WRC provides referrals to local food banks.



WRC supports with:

- Accommodation issues
- Accessing health care
- Signposting to mental health support
- Sharing advice and information
- Advocating for rights
- Applying for further HO support
- Accessing education
- Offering emotional support and wellbeing checks
- Provide information on Legal Aid

Then moved again to **DISPERSED ACCOMMODATION** most likely a house share, which can be anywhere in Wales.

WRC support with:

- Finding a home
- Opening a bank account
- Registering with GPs/Dentist
- Applying for universal credit
- Applying for integration loans
- Registering for a driving licence
- Setting up student finance
- Exploring Welsh Government grants
- Giving advice on family reunion
- Supporting DAF applications
- Processing travel documents
- Translating materials
- Registering for a National Insurance card

Those who get a positive decision, get an **eviction notice** from HO accommodation and **28 days to leave.**



Wait for a HO decision, **which can take years.** During this waiting period, the majority of **SS aren't able to work.**

Those in social/rented sector are more likely to face evictions:

- Non-compliance with tenancy agreement: friends move in
- Lack of peer networks for support or housing guarantor
- Lack of financial resilience/savings from SS journey
- Poor budgeting skills/cooking skills
- More likely to be facing trauma

After 5 years they can apply for indefinite leave to remain (ilm) for 1 year
Then after 1 year can apply to be a British citizen which costs £1,630
Most can't afford this so apply to extend ilm which is free

WRC provides daily English classes.
50%: don't speak any or low levels of English.

WRC promote volunteering opportunities to build confidence and gain skills.

WRC education and employment support help with re-qualifying and paying for courses.



If notified of a **negative decision**, most have the right to appeal until they become appeal rights exhausted.

If they are refused...

Get evicted with **21 days notice but in some cases only 7.**

With new evidence they may be able to submit a fresh claim.

Likely to be homeless while gathering information and funds for a new claim.

WRC provide emergency hardship support and referrals to other destitution support services

Wales Sanctuary Service

You are not alone

Nid ydych ar eich pen eich hun

Sanctuary seekers arrive in Wales fleeing conflict, persecution, and violence. While reaching safety is a relief, adjusting to a new country brings immense challenges. The Wales Sanctuary Service (WSS) provides critical support to help people navigate the increasingly complex UK asylum system.

In 2022–23, WSS faced mounting challenges, including a growing asylum backlog and a strained housing system. In 2023–24, these issues worsened due to the UK government’s controversial asylum policies, particularly the Rwanda deportation plan. Though legally delayed, the plan created widespread fear, discouraging many from seeking help and leaving others trapped in limbo as claims stalled. This uncertainty heightened anxiety and increased reliance on services like WSS.

As the system failed those it should protect, WSS expanded efforts to:

Offer information about rights, entitlements, and next steps on the journey to sanctuary.

Offer trauma-informed emotional support to counter fear and instability.

Secure housing and essentials amid worsening shortages and a cost-of-living crisis.

The political climate in 2023–24 further marginalised sanctuary seekers. Policies like the Illegal Migration Act extended delays, amplifying fear and stress. These policies not only strain the asylum system but place immense pressure on organisations like ours to bridge the gap. While demand for our services has risen, the resources to meet this demand remain limited.

WSS is more than a support service — it’s a critical intervention. Beyond meeting urgent needs, we help individuals rebuild their lives and contribute to their communities.

In 2024–25, we call on policymakers, local authorities, and the public to recognise the harm caused by policies that delay justice and create fear. Investing in fair, humane asylum processes and supporting services like WSS is essential to ensuring sanctuary seekers in Wales are treated with dignity and respect.

Even in a turbulent system, WSS remains a lifeline — proving that hope and support can prevail.

1,365
SUPPORTED SANCTUARY SEEKERS

326
CHILD DEPENDENTS

89
COUNTRIES

61
LANGUAGES



9,114
SUPPORT SESSIONS

“

I was scared, but I knew the Welsh Refugee Council would help and keep me safe.

”



Play Project

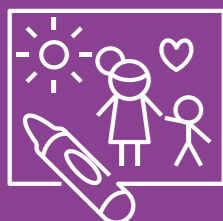
The gift of a childhood
Rhodd plentyndod

SUPPORTED



170 PARENTS
286 CHILDREN

DISTRIBUTED RESOURCES



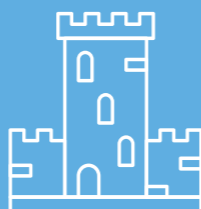
72 BOOKSTART PACKS
75 ACTIVITY/CRAFT PACKS
122 BILINGUAL STORYBOOKS
709 TOYS



331

REFERRALS

MADE TO OTHER AGENCIES FOR
ADDITIONAL SUPPORT



31

DAYS OUT

FOCUSED ON LEARNING
AND EXPERIENCING WELSH
CULTURE



121

PLAY SESSIONS
DELIVERED IN FAMILY
LANGUAGES.



The UK asylum system remains ill-equipped to address the specific needs of children seeking sanctuary. For too many families, their experiences navigating asylum claims, resettlement, and financial hardship are defined by neglect rather than support. The Play Project exists to bridge this gap, ensuring that children’s wellbeing is prioritised and their futures protected.

While 2022–23 was already a difficult year for children in the asylum system, the situation worsened in 2023–24. The ongoing housing crisis, compounded by the rising cost of living, placed these families in extreme poverty. More families faced homelessness or were forced into temporary accommodation, often located far from essential services like the Play Project. For these children, this meant longer journeys and greater isolation, adding to the emotional and physical toll of displacement.

Children arriving in the UK carry the weight of fleeing violence, war, and trauma. Yet, their needs are consistently overlooked in policymaking. While adult sanctuary seekers’ challenges are increasingly recognised, children remain underrepresented in both data and discussions. Without targeted support like the Play Project, sanctuary seeking children face risks to their mental health and long-term development which UK poverty metrics fail to capture.

The Play Project isn’t just a service, it’s a critical intervention. It provides a safe space where children can find stability and begin the healing process. Through play, they rediscover joy, express themselves, and build friendships, countering the isolation of being in a new, unfamiliar country. Activities range from exploring nature to creative workshops, fostering confidence and emotional resilience. These moments offer a sense of belonging that’s otherwise missing in their day-to-day lives.

In 2023–24, the rising costs of transport and accommodation created new barriers for families accessing the project. Recognising this, we stepped in to cover transportation costs, ensuring no child was forgotten. Despite the logistical challenges, families continued to attend, valuing the project as a rare place where children could simply be children.

Our work depends on collaboration. To sustain and expand the Play Project, we need the backing of policymakers, community members, and donors. In a political climate that increasingly scrutinises and restricts support for asylum seekers, it’s vital to stand firm in advocating for these children’s rights and wellbeing. Every contribution—be it time, resources, or funding—helps ensure no child seeking sanctuary is left behind.

“

Being here is the best feeling in the world.

K, age 5

”



ESOL

Finding your voice Dod o hyd i'ch llais

At the Welsh Refugee Council, we know that learning English is a fundamental step towards integration. It empowers sanctuary seekers to navigate life in Wales, access work opportunities, and actively participate in their communities. Our ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) project focuses on providing practical and accessible language education to meet these needs.

Last year, we ran four weekly online ESOL classes, allowing learners to join from anywhere in Wales. These sessions proved effective, with high rates of participation and the introduction of attendance certificates, offering students a sense of progress. This year has seen significant changes. While online classes remain vital, we've expanded to offer face-to-face sessions, giving learners a chance to build skills and community in person. Twelve students are now regularly attending these classes, rebuilding confidence and forging connections in their new environment.

A unique part of our approach is offering informal, bitesize learning sessions alongside other projects. Through initiatives like the Play Project, parents can attend short language sessions while their children are cared for, removing barriers such as childcare and rigid schedules.

This year's shift toward more hybrid learning options reflects the evolving needs of sanctuary seekers. The demand for accessible, high-quality ESOL has grown, influenced by tightening UK immigration policies and increasing economic pressures on refugee families. At the Welsh Refugee Council, we're committed to adapting, ensuring that everyone who comes to Wales has the tools to succeed and integrate into Welsh society, no matter what their starting point.

“ I am really enjoying learning English here, it's fun and helps me each day. ”



175+

LEARNING SESSIONS
DELIVERED ONLINE



RESTARTED FACE TO FACE LESSONS
IN OUR CARDIFF OFFICE

2



RECRUITED 2 NEW ESOL TEACHERS

Volunteering

Building connections

Cysylltiadau adeiladu



DELIVERING SUPPORT IN

15+

COMMUNITY LANGUAGES

SINCE 2019



FORMER VOLUNTEERS HIRED AS STAFF

“

Volunteering with the Welsh Refugee Council has been a life-changing experience for me.

”

Volunteers are the heartbeat of the Welsh Refugee Council’s mission. In 2022–23, volunteers played a crucial role in helping us meet the increased demand for services, from casework and ESOL teaching to marketing and skills training. This year, we’ve expanded volunteer opportunities even further, particularly in specialised roles like ESOL teachers and casework assistants, enabling us to better support sanctuary seekers facing a more challenging political landscape in the UK.

Volunteers contributed to key events like Sanctuary in the Senedd, advocating for policies that protect sanctuary seekers’ rights in Wales, and the Nation of Sanctuary Awards, which celebrated the achievements of sanctuary seekers and refugees. These events wouldn’t have been possible without the skills and dedication of our volunteers. This year, as the political and economic pressures have intensified, volunteers have continued to play an essential role in making sure our services are effective and that sanctuary seekers have the support they need to rebuild their lives.

For many sanctuary seekers, volunteering provides essential structure and a sense of purpose during long waits without the right to work. In 2023–24, we’ve significantly increased the number of volunteer roles across our departments, giving individuals the opportunity to build skills, gain experience, and restore their self-worth. While we’ve seen great success in volunteer recruitment, particularly for roles that require specific expertise, balancing demand with availability remains a challenge. However, through changing the ways in which we coordinate volunteering and increasing flexibility, we’ve created a system that benefits both our volunteers and the people we serve.

The Boost Project, in partnership with The Wallich, has been another key initiative. Since April 2023, the project has supported 12 clients from countries including Iran, Sudan, Syria, Algeria, Pakistan, and Jordan. In addition to providing one-on-one support sessions, we have run ESOL classes for eight volunteers, which also acted as a social hub, fostering community connections. This collaboration, supported by the National Lottery and local partners such as St. Giles and Women’s Aid, has helped participants develop their skills and gain confidence.

Although the team faced some challenges, including difficulty engaging some recruits, the Boost Project has made significant strides in improving clients’ social, emotional, and language skills, helping them build a path toward greater independence.

Despite the increased political challenges faced by refugees and sanctuary seekers in the UK, our volunteers have been essential in ensuring that we can provide the services, training, and opportunities that are critical to helping people integrate and thrive in their new communities.



Move On Project

New beginnings and new challenges
Dechrau newydd a heriau newydd

The Move On Project has been a vital service in 2023–24 to help newly recognised refugees transition from asylum to Leave to Remain status. While this legal recognition is a milestone, it triggers a 28-day window during which refugees must leave asylum accommodation, secure housing, and establish a means of supporting themselves. This year, systemic inefficiencies, and political shifts, including delays in issuing Biometric Residence Permits (BRPs), created additional barriers, leaving many at risk of homelessness and destitution.

During the winter of 2023, the scale of the challenge became even more apparent. As the UK government sought to “clear the backlog” of asylum cases, decisions spiked to 500 per day, triggering the move-on period for record numbers of refugees. This surge caused our Move On Project to see double the number of clients compared to the same period last year. The demand exposed significant gaps in resources and the urgent need for additional support to meet the escalating pressure.

In response, our team worked intensively to help clients navigate this critical period, assisting with applications for benefits, securing housing, and opening bank accounts. Collaboration with partners like Migrant Help was essential in tackling new complexities introduced by the Illegal Migration Act, which has further complicated the move-on process for many refugees.

Despite our efforts, the increased demand has stretched our capacity to its limits. To adapt, we’ve strengthened partnerships, streamlined referrals, and relied on volunteer support to ensure no refugee is left behind. However, these measures alone are not enough to meet the growing demand. Over the next 12 months we will continue to champion equitable funding for the Wales Move On Project, advocating for the resources needed to sustain and expand these critical services.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to helping refugees in Wales overcome these obstacles, providing the support they need to achieve stability and independence.



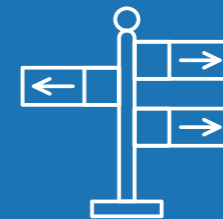
1,939

NEW APPLICANTS & FAMILIES HELPED

SUPPORTED CLIENTS IN

26 

DIFFERENT LANGUAGES



9,314

ADVICE & GUIDANCE SESSIONS DELIVERED

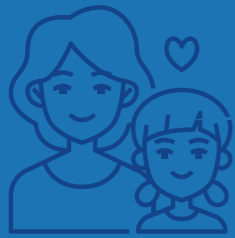


WRC gave us the tools and confidence we needed to rebuild our lives in the UK. Without their support, we don't know where we would be today.



Ukraine Project

Resilience
Cydnertedd



600+

INDIVIDUALS & FAMILIES SUPPORTED

28

INFLUENCING SESSIONS

12

COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS



1,300

ADVICE AND GUIDANCE SESSIONS IN UKRAINIAN, RUSSIAN, AND ENGLISH



The Ukraine Project, launched in response to the 2022 invasion, has grown into a vital lifeline for thousands of people seeking safety and a fresh start. Originally an expansion of the Wales Sanctuary Service, it quickly adapted to meet the urgent and overwhelming needs of Ukrainians arriving in the UK. With unprecedented levels of support from the Welsh Government and local authority teams, we provided critical services during one of the most challenging periods in recent history. Behind each number is a deeply human story—families torn apart by war, lives disrupted, and a desperate search for stability.

By 2023/24, the situation had shifted. While over 1,500 Ukrainians continued to need support, the challenges they faced had evolved. The initial emergency response gave way to more complex resettlement issues, shaped by the ongoing UK housing and cost of living crises. Many families were stuck in temporary accommodation, leading to significant mental health impacts. Securing permanent housing became a priority, despite the pressure on an overstretched housing market. A significant achievement this year was the closure of the Welcome Centre Estate, following successful efforts to help many families settle into permanent homes.

The broader housing crisis has made this work even harder. Rental prices surged by up to 10% in some regions, creating additional barriers to finding suitable, affordable homes. This year, the Welsh Government extended funding for the Ukraine Project, recognising the growing need for these services and the challenges still ahead.

Two years after the invasion, the focus has shifted to long-term integration. Families who were initially focused on survival are now working to rebuild their futures — securing jobs, accessing education, and adapting to life in Wales. While some have made strides, many still face barriers such as language difficulties, mental health challenges, and limited access to essential services. The complexity of cases continues to grow, particularly around long-term housing and mental health support.

Looking forward, the challenges are far from over. As the war continues, more families are likely to seek refuge in the UK, further straining resources. The housing crisis remains a significant obstacle, demanding sustained collaboration and innovative solutions. Despite these difficulties, the Ukraine Project has built strong partnerships with local governments, funders, and communities, laying the groundwork for enduring, positive change.



After years stuck in temporary accommodation, we finally got support with a bond and one month's rent. The people who helped us to move on were so good.



Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Authority Resettlement Project

Families supported
Cefnogi teuluoedd

PROVIDED 1-2-1 SUPPORT TO

15+

FAMILIES IN THE RCT REGION

384

SUPPORT SESSIONS DELIVERED



SUPPORTED VULNERABLE FAMILIES AT DOCTOR'S APPOINTMENTS AND ADVOCATED FOR THEIR NEEDS

The Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) Local Authority Resettlement Project has remained a critical service in 2023–24, providing essential support for families rebuilding their lives after fleeing conflict, trauma, or severe hardship. While the scheme ensures housing, it also addresses the ongoing challenges families face as they adapt to life in the UK.

Compared to 2022–23, the past year has seen more complex cases, particularly involving individuals with disabilities and those recovering from severe trauma. The role of our caseworkers has been vital in helping families navigate the bureaucratic maze of systems. These challenges are compounded by systemic pressures, including delays in accessing healthcare and benefits that have been exacerbated by the UK's strained welfare system.

One standout case involved a family of three, all with disabilities, who fled exploitation and systemic neglect in their home country. Upon arrival, they faced significant barriers in accessing Universal Credit, healthcare, and suitable housing. WRC caseworkers provided direct support: they attended appointments, guided them through the benefits process, and offered emotional reassurance during a time of immense uncertainty. This intensive intervention not only helped the family stabilise but also empowered them to move forward with confidence in their new environment.

Cases like these illustrate the growing need for hands-on support. The difference that caseworker involvement makes cannot be overstated, as their presence often determines whether families can successfully navigate an overburdened system. Without this critical support, vulnerable families risk falling through the cracks.

The challenges this year also reflect broader systemic issues. The UK's cost of living crisis and increasing strain on public services have made resettlement more difficult. Local authorities and partner agencies, including the WRC, have had to stretch limited resources to meet the rising complexity of needs.

Looking forward, strengthening coordination between local authorities, healthcare providers, and supporting charities is essential to address these challenges. Embedding caseworkers more deeply into resettlement frameworks could ensure families receive consistent, compassionate, and timely assistance. The WRC remains committed to advocating for these improvements and ensuring that resettlement pathways are as effective and inclusive as possible.



“

The support the WRC provided has helped families to gain a sense of control, independence and a sense of belonging.

”

Janine Thomas, RCT Resettlement Manager.

Housing and Homelessness Project

A place to call home

Lle i alw cartref

This year, our Housing and Homelessness Project has faced significant challenges, but it has also been a period of growth and meaningful impact. In August 2023, we were thrilled to secure renewed funding, ensuring we could continue delivering vital support to those in need. However, the increased pace of Home Office decision-making has placed immense pressure on our services, especially as the move on period was drastically reduced from 28 days to just seven. This shift has intensified the demand for swift and effective support, and we rose to meet that challenge head-on.

As the project has matured, we've refined our data collection and tracking methods, enabling us to measure our impact more effectively and deliver on funder objectives. This has allowed us to provide targeted and timely support to individuals most at risk of homelessness.

At the start of 2024, J was granted refugee status in Swansea, only to face an eviction notice from the Home Office that same month. Seeking new opportunities, J moved to Cardiff, unaware that the local authority could not offer support due to his lack of local connection. With homelessness looming, a friend referred him to the Welsh Refugee Council.

The team jumped into action and supported J to arrange property viewings, help liaise with landlords, and reviewed the rental agreement to ensure it met his needs. Thanks to the project, J was housed in just one week and is no longer at risk of destitution.

Stories like J's illustrate the life-changing difference we make. We provide not just immediate housing solutions but also restore hope and dignity at a time when it is needed most.



When I came to Cardiff and the local authority refused to support me, I feared ending up on the streets. I was helpless and regretted coming here. However, WRC helped me secure a roof over my head. Without their support, I would have been homeless.



14

HOUSING FORUMS
ACROSS WALES

38%

INCREASE IN CASEWORK

617

CLIENTS SUPPORTED
WITH HOUSING ISSUES

75+

PARTNER
STAKEHOLDERS FOR
COMMUNITY COHESION

470+

ADVICE & GUIDANCE
SESSIONS

Education and Employability

A bright future

Dyfodol disglair



SUPPORTED

424

CLIENTS

FROM

54

DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

(+23% VS LAST REPORTING PERIOD)

43

DIFFERENT LANGUAGES SPOKEN

77



EMPLOYABILITY WORKSHOPS AND PARTNERED WITH ADMIRAL, IKEA, AND PWC FOR INTENSIVE SPECIALISED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMES



2,226

SUPPORT SESSIONS
EMAIL, PHONE, VIDEO, IN PERSON
(+33% VS LAST REPORTING PERIOD)



This year, the Education and Employability Project has worked hard to help refugees and sanctuary seekers overcome barriers to building better futures. While 2022/23 saw steady progress, 2023/24 brought new challenges, particularly with the increased arrival of refugees from Ukraine. The demand for services has surged, requiring significant adaptation to maintain the quality and accessibility of our support.

A key achievement was the continuation of the UPPNÄ programme in partnership with IKEA. Through this initiative, 20 refugees received tailored employability support, and nine members of the group secured permanent jobs. This outcome highlights both the determination of those we support and the effectiveness of targeted advice in addressing barriers to employment.

To meet the rise in demand this year, we doubled the number of employability workshops. These covered essential skills like CV writing, interview preparation, and job applications, ensuring more people could access the help they needed. To manage the increased workload, we introduced a new administrative system, enabling us to offer sector-specific advice, promote job vacancies, and connect clients with relevant training and volunteering opportunities.

There have been inspiring individual successes too. A young man from Pakistan, who arrived under the family reunion scheme, faced immediate setbacks when he was denied a college place due to his age and lack of GCSEs. With our help, he successfully reapplied and is now pursuing A levels, bringing him closer to his educational goals. Similarly, a volunteer with WRC enhanced his CV and received job application coaching from our team, which helped him secure a customer support role at Legal and General. Stories like this show how personalised support can make a real difference.

The increased demand for services in 2023–24 has been driven not only by the Ukrainian refugee crisis, but also by delays in asylum claim processing and restrictive policies like the Rwanda plan, which have left many sanctuary seekers in prolonged uncertainty. These challenges have underscored the importance of accessible pathways to education and employment as a source of stability and hope.

Despite these pressures, we are proud of what we have achieved this year. By adapting and innovating, we continue to provide refugees and sanctuary seekers across Wales with the tools they need to overcome obstacles and build meaningful futures. The resilience of our clients and team alike ensures that we remain committed to breaking down barriers and creating opportunities, no matter what challenges lie ahead.

“ The project has been hugely beneficial, not only for the refugees but also for us. We’ve been amazed by their resilience and determination, and have seen their confidence grow immensely. The diversity they bring has enriched our workplace. ”

Sanctuary Coalition Cymru

Amplifying voices
Ymhelaethu ar leisiau

This year, the Engage to Change project made significant strides in ensuring sanctuary seekers and refugees (SS&R) in Wales were heard and valued. Unlike last year, where the focus was on foundational efforts, 2023/24 emphasised real-world impact, expanded partnerships, and breaking down systemic barriers.

A key highlight was the Coalition supporting the launch of the Welcome Ticket pilot scheme, which supported 16,000 refugees with free or subsidised travel. This initiative addressed a critical issue — many SS&R individuals face isolation due to financial and logistical barriers to transport. The Welcome Ticket exemplified how co-production can create practical solutions. By working closely with coalition members and the Welsh Government, we ensured SS&R individuals accessed essential services while remaining connected to their communities.

Training remained a core focus, equipping individuals to shape their futures. Two hate crime workshops trained coalition members to tackle bias at the grassroots level. Media training sessions helped those with lived experience become advocates, preparing them to take the spotlight at major events like Sanctuary in the Senedd. The pilot co-production workshop with the VOICES network went further, showing how direct involvement of SS&R individuals in policymaking could set a new standard for inclusive governance.

Advocacy efforts were strengthened by Sanctuary in the Senedd, held in December 2023. Representatives from 12 local authorities heard powerful testimonies on housing, education, and employment challenges. These stories demonstrated the urgent need for policy reform and the value of lived experience in shaping better systems.

This year wasn't without its challenges. Recruiting a new coordinator mid-year was difficult. Yet, collaboration with over 60 organisations and support from funders like Community Foundation Wales, Cardiff Council and Sport Wales ensured momentum was maintained. The growing network strengthened our collective impact, bridging gaps between local services and national policy initiatives.

Looking forward, we plan to help shape Phase 2 of the Welcome Ticket scheme, especially as asylum dispersal areas grow across Wales. Additionally, we will look to strengthen engagement with grassroots organisations to ensure SS&R individuals in even the most rural areas receive support.

“Hearing from lived experience speakers was the most impactful part of Sanctuary in the Senedd. The courage and progression of sanctuary seekers, sharing their stories in a safe space, provided valuable insights into how we can improve support systems.”



Refugee Week Wales

Cohesive communities
Cymunedau cydlynol

Refugee Week 2023 was a key opportunity to highlight the contributions and resilience of sanctuary seekers and refugees in Wales. Building on the groundwork of 2022/23, this year focused on scaling community engagement and amplifying the voices of those with lived experience in public discussions.

The success of Refugee Week relied on collaboration with over 20 organisations, including Cardiff City FC, the Sherman Theatre, and the BBC National Orchestra. Together, these partnerships delivered a wide range of events, from art workshops to sports tournaments, ensuring more inclusive celebrations. Compared to last year, 2023/24 saw increased participation from cultural institutions and stronger efforts to connect refugees with wider Welsh communities.

A standout event was the Cardiff City FC tournament, where football teams from refugee groups and local communities competed. It demonstrated how sport can unite people while raising awareness of refugee causes. The Sherman Theatre hosted several impactful events, including the Festival of Sanctuary and the Shout!/Bloedd! showcase, providing platforms for refugee artists to share their stories.



The Welsh Refugee Council played a critical role in ensuring refugee voices were central to the week. Working with groups like the VOICES Network, we collected stories of lived experience to inform events and secure coverage in national media. This deliberate focus on narratives ensured the public heard directly from refugees, putting their experiences at the forefront of the news coverage. One unique addition this year was the drumming and percussion workshop led by the BBC National Orchestra at the Wales Millennium Centre. Participants praised its interactive format, which created a joyful, hands-on experience. These types of events reflected a commitment to diversifying engagement opportunities beyond traditional cultural showcases.

Public figures such as Hamed Amiri and Charlotte Church helped amplify Refugee Week's message, bringing visibility to the celebration. Their involvement, combined with more diverse activities and stronger partnerships, marked a shift from previous years toward broader outreach and advocacy.

Refugee Week 2023 reinforced the importance of collaborative, community-led initiatives. Moving forward, the challenge remains to maintain this momentum amidst political pressures such as tightening asylum policies and growing public misconceptions about refugees.

”

Refugee Week is my favourite week of the year!

”



DELIVERED

28+

MEDIA ENGAGEMENTS ACROSS
TV, PRINT, AND RADIO

BBC S4C

BBC radio wales itv

WORKED WITH MAJOR NEWS OUTLETS



PROVIDED EXPERT
INFORMATION AND
ADVOCACY ON ISSUES
RANGING FROM HOUSING TO
UK SUPREME COURT RULINGS

Influencing and Awareness Raising

Sharing knowledge
Rhannu gwybodaeth

In 2023–24, the Welsh Refugee Council significantly expanded its efforts to influence public perceptions and raise awareness about the challenges faced by sanctuary seekers and refugees. Compared to 2022/23, this year saw a stronger focus on media engagement and advocacy on high-profile issues, reflecting the changing political and social landscape in the UK.

Over the past year, we delivered 28 media engagements across television, radio, and print. Working with major outlets such as the BBC, ITV Wales, S4C, and Radio Wales, we ensured that the voices of refugees and our expert perspectives reached a wide audience. Key topics included the UK Supreme Court rulings on the Rwanda plan and the Stradey Park Hotel protests in Llanelli, both of which highlighted growing hostility and the urgent need for accurate, balanced narratives.

Our team provided expert commentary on housing challenges, asylum processing delays, and the broader implications of UK government policies. These contributions helped shape public discourse, offering critical insights at a time when misinformation often dominates headlines.

This year, we also focused on community-level awareness sessions, engaging over 300 participants, including employees at Admiral and local authority representatives. While these sessions continued in 2023–24, our expanded media presence amplified our impact, reaching far beyond individual audiences to challenge misconceptions on a national scale.

One of our core messages remains that education is a powerful tool for dismantling stigma. By addressing misinformation and encouraging dialogue, we aim to shift attitudes and reduce prejudice. Feedback from media appearances and training sessions consistently shows that accurate information and lived experiences can transform perspectives, fostering empathy and reducing fear.

Looking ahead, we aim to build on this progress by strengthening partnerships with Welsh organisations and leveraging our media expertise. As asylum dispersal expands across Wales, our commitment is to ensure accurate information reaches all corners of society, helping to create a more welcoming environment for those seeking refuge.



Every organisation should have this as mandatory training; There is so much misinformation out there — this training cuts through all the noise and really helped me understand how I can help to make it easier for them.



Special projects

Warmth in Winter Cynhesrwydd yn y gaeaf

Partner: National Grid



This year, we supported 268 adults and children to stay warm during the winter months, representing a 79% increase from last year. Among those we helped, 20% were single parents, and 30% were children.

Sanctuary seekers and refugees face real risks during the cold winter months, where inadequate warmth can lead to serious health issues. This year, our Warmth in Winter project has provided crucial support in the face of the ongoing UK cost of living crisis, which has left many struggling to meet basic needs.

Our warm packs included over 95 duvets and 197 electric blankets, all designed to help families keep their homes warm and reduce their energy costs.

We also connected clients with other organisations that provide additional support.

Thanks to our caseworkers and triage team, we were able to reach the most vulnerable and isolated members of our community. Additionally, we provided guidance on fuel poverty in community languages such as Ukrainian, Arabic, Kurdish, Sorani, and Farsi.

This project not only delivers warmth but also helps safeguard the health and well-being of those who need it most during the harsh winter months.



Brewing Belonging Cynhyrchu Perthyn

Partner: Sparrow Coffee House



This year, we were reminded of the impact small acts of kindness can have.

Sparrow Coffee House, just five minutes from our office, noticed that very few sanctuary seekers or refugees were visiting. After a conversation with us, they realised financial barriers — like No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) — could be the reason. Together, we came up with a simple solution: Sparrow's pay-it-forward scheme.

This allows customers to donate free drinks by filling loyalty cards, which Sparrow generously donated to us for our clients.

Sanctuary seekers can also walk into the café and ask for a coffee — no questions asked. Initially, the staff were unsure about how to communicate with non-English speakers and worried about getting orders wrong. But with some help from Google Translate, those concerns quickly disappeared. As it turns out, coffee is a universal language!

So far, this initiative has helped over 100 sanctuary seekers, demonstrating how small, thoughtful actions can break down barriers and create a more inclusive community. Sparrow Coffee House has shown that everyone deserves to feel welcome and supported, and we're proud to work with them to make that happen.

Connecting Communities Cysylltu Cymunedau

Partner: National Databank and Good Things Foundation



In today's world, being online is essential for almost everything — from staying connected with family to accessing services and job opportunities. But for sanctuary seekers living on just £49.18 a week, paying for phone data is often out of reach. This year, the situation became even more challenging when Clearsprings, a housing provider contracted by the Home Office, removed all internet access from their properties. As a result, many found themselves isolated and unable to access vital resources.

That's where the National Databank comes in. Run by the Good Things Foundation, the Databank helps organisations like ours provide free SIM cards to those in need.

This initiative has been a lifeline for many sanctuary seekers, who depend on their phones to contact loved ones, access their Home Office portal, communicate with caseworkers, and pursue education and employment opportunities.

At our Cardiff and Newport hubs, we're proud to be part of this project. As 'digital hubs', we not only distribute SIM cards but also offer essential support to help clients navigate the digital world. We assist them with setting up their devices and show them how to use online resources for education, job searches, and skills-building.

Each month, we support 61 individuals with data and have distributed over 100 SIM cards since our partnership began. With digital access becoming increasingly critical, we're committed to working with the Good Things Foundation to ensure sanctuary seekers in Wales aren't left disconnected and can build a better future.

Fundraising

Building a Sustainable Future

Adeiladu Dyfodol Cynaliadwy

In 2023–24, the Business Development team ensured the Welsh Refugee Council's financial stability and growth amid intense funding challenges. Collaborating with over 50 stakeholders and funders, we secured income from 33 sources—critical in a sector facing increasing competition and chronic underfunding.

This funding enabled us to support nearly 4,000 sanctuary seekers and refugees, helping them access essential services like housing, legal advice, and healthcare. This represents a significant increase in reach compared to 2022/23, highlighting the impact of robust financial planning on our ability to deliver life-changing support.

However, the asylum sector remains chronically underfunded, with increasing competition for limited resources. As more organisations vie for the same funding, the challenge of financial sustainability is ever-present. Despite these obstacles, our team remains committed to creating innovative funding opportunities, strengthening relationships with partners, and adapting to the evolving needs of sanctuary seekers in Wales. Our focus remains on ensuring that no one seeking refuge is left without the support they need.

Your support makes this possible.

The work we do wouldn't be possible without the generosity of our funders and supporters. Every contribution, no matter the size, helps provide life-changing services to people at their most vulnerable. With your help, we can continue to offer a lifeline to those who need it most and make sure they have the opportunity to rebuild their lives in safety and with dignity.

“ We recognise that refugees and sanctuary seekers are one of society's most vulnerable and overlooked groups. The MCF and South Wales Freemasons are proud to support the Play Project, as it aligns well with our aim of reducing inequalities and giving children the best start in life. ”



WORKED WITH



50+

STAKEHOLDERS

SECURED FUNDING FROM

33



DIFFERENT FUNDERS

SECURED

£1,617,613

INCOME

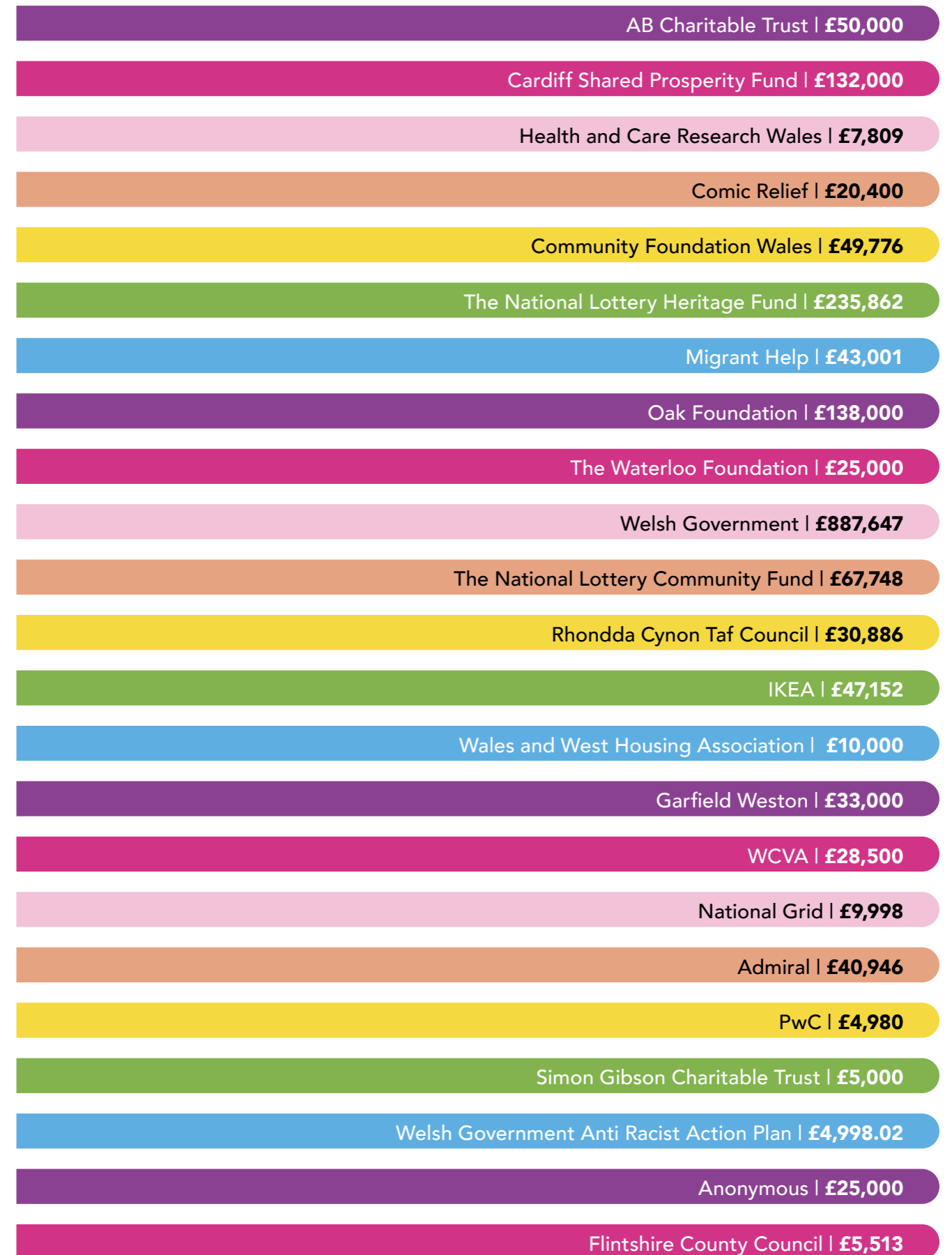


INCREASED OUR UNRESTRICTED DONATIONS

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Thank you!



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