

## Durham City of Sanctuary

### Annual Report 2019

Durham City of Sanctuary, a member of the national Cities of Sanctuary, came into being in response to the decision by Durham County Council to participate in the government-funded scheme to receive and support a number of Syrian refugees in the region. Durham City of Sanctuary has now completed its second year as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). This has been another challenging year, as we have welcomed in two further groups of families, into three new locations across County Durham, so the geographical spread of our activities has expanded yet further. Progress has been made with providing the training requested by our dedicated volunteers and we have just received very positive feedback from the first cohort, but there are still some gaps in overall support and cultural awareness raising which volunteers have highlighted. Some new volunteers have joined us from local residents, so we hope to stabilize the balance of temporary (mostly student) and longer-term volunteers, to ease the level of responsibility shouldered by some. We now have some very active refugee volunteers from the earlier cohorts and some of the more recent arrivals, who are embedded in one or more communities, which transforms what is possible, but also need to find new ways and spaces to organize some of our activities in the light of rising numbers. Volunteers continue to identify new needs as refugees settle and children grow, so new initiatives are emerging which require organisation, funding and commitment. Language acquisition continues to be a struggle for some, employability is still a major priority and suitable mental health provision a lack that has been picked up at regional level by both governmental and ngo partners but to date without solutions.

#### Our Objects:

To advance education, relieve financial hardship and distress amongst asylum-seekers and those granted refugee status in Durham, and to educate the public about the issues relating to refugees and asylum-seekers, in particular but not exclusively by:

- a) Promoting the inclusion, integration and welfare of refugees and asylum-seekers, by encouraging a public commitment to becoming a place of welcome and safety through the provision of information, advice and support as shall be thought fit;
- b) Encouraging, supporting and liaising with Durham County Council, other service providers, local communities and voluntary, community and faith organisations in welcoming and assisting refugees and asylum-seekers; and
- c) Providing accurate and up to date information to the local community on the situation of local refugees and asylum seekers and to publicise and celebrate their contribution to their local communities, and to UK society and culture, and to challenge hostility and discrimination against them.

Objects (a), (b) and (c) have been addressed significantly, in part through building a positive, enduring relationship with DCC and with key voluntary groups who have also committed their support to refugees in the region.

Objects (a) and (c) are most developed in the areas of supplementing Council support and information for the refugees themselves, both directly and through signposting, including to faith and wider cultural communities. The goal of helping to build a culture of welcome in the region is ongoing, including promoting events run by DCoS and others which aim to de-mythify and de-stigmatize, and/or celebrate the rich cultural contribution of, asylum seekers and refugees in the region.

Wherever possible, refugees we are supporting participate voluntarily in the organisation and delivery of events and speak from their own experience, directly or with the aid of interpreters.

Examples include Taste of Syria events, usually organized now by refugees with the support of DCoS and an autonomous group of affiliated students ('Durham for Refugees') still attended by a broad public, including a cross-section of the refugee families themselves. The families prepare authentic Syrian dishes and organize Syrian music and dancing; one often reads the poetry she now writes in English.

We continue to enjoy a broad based membership and wider support, including entrepreneurs, community groups, University staff and students, writers, artists, and individual residents from a number of different towns and villages. Durham County is geographically broad and population widely dispersed, so continuing to build engagement is important to us.

Object (b) has been achieved through careful relationship-building and key contributions from our Muslim members, but also thanks to the goodwill of the DCC team, faith organisations and voluntary organisations, such as the Diverse Women's Group. City of Sanctuary has joined the existing voluntary coordination of essential arrival packs and complemented it with special gift packs for children and adults. We host the initial welcome events for new arrivals in congenial surroundings with Syrian food and supply volunteer interpreters, organized by a bilingual volunteer, from our membership to supplement the DCC provision. We also contribute to a carefully timed follow-up event where new arrivals meet with the families from the previous group, to benefit from their experience. Feedback from the refugee families has been very positive and this kind of welcome is still unique and cited as particularly good practice in Council meetings across the North East and nationally.

Objects (a) and (b) have been further pursued through a range of initiatives. These include collaboration with other voluntary groups to establish conversation groups, with social, intercultural and linguistic aims. These now dovetail with the formal ESOL programme. A student member arranges bilingual student volunteers to support the ESOL classes themselves while bilingual members try to ensure at least one interpreter at each conversation group. As refugees gain confidence in English, some are taking on interpreting roles both in the groups and during visits from key workers in their homes, at medical appointments etc.

The conversation groups have enabled some very welcome and productive informal befriending but some of our members are looking at establishing a one-to-one mentoring programme to meet the needs that have emerged. A reading scheme for refugees who are finding English particularly challenging is in the early stages of scoping by a very active volunteer.

Weekly drop-ins run in several locations, but the Durham one remains the most popular and provides a helpful focus for new arrivals while other activities are being set up. We pay bus fares to enable attendance from any of our locations.

We have also supported transport to Eid celebrations, parties and craft making for children and adults, organized by DCoS volunteers, and the recent City of Light celebration for asylum seekers in Newcastle.

DCoS also participates in a number of Arts based projects which have been very highly valued by refugees. A brief sample includes:

### **Stories of Sanctuary**

Stories of Sanctuary is a community songwriting project bringing those seeking sanctuary together with others living in County Durham through exploring stories of sanctuary past and present. The songs have been co-written by singer-songwriter Sam Slatcher with participants from the workshops in the summer of 2018 in the city of Durham, UK. Members of Durham City of Sanctuary acquired a central role in developing, leading and promoting (social media, promotional videos) the project as well as all concerts. The project contributed towards the creation of a shared musical community that explores memories, ideas and hopes around sanctuary, solidarity and belonging. In August 2019, Stories of Sanctuary visited the International Festival of Glass in Stourbridge and Leicester Cathedral as part of the Journeys Festival.

The idea for the tour came when the choir were invited to perform their songs in the Houses of Parliament, at City of Sanctuary's national event Sanctuary in Parliament in November 2018. Over Christmas 2018, the group of 20 raised £5500 online (and a further £2000 offline) through a successful crowdfunding campaign to enable them to tour this year. The choir have also professionally [recorded an album](#) with Arts Council funding.

**Website:** <https://samslatcher.bandcamp.com/album/stories-of-sanctuary>

### **Digital Storytelling**

Led by media organisation *Digital Voice*, 'Digital Storytelling in Durham' invited a group of newly arrived Durham City of Sanctuary members to share their stories through digital storytelling. The project included a total of ten sessions that were structured around their English language skills and needs, offering new skills in communication, IT, media literacy and information finding. Participants chose to tell their own stories through text, drawings, photos, animation, audio and video. They used iPads and recording equipment to bring their stories to life. Story ideas can come from many sources such as personal and family experiences, connections to

other cultures, people, places or events. The project culminated in a final screening and celebration event inviting participants to share their work with their families and local community.

**Website:** <http://digitalvoice.org.uk/projects/detail/digital-storytelling-in-durham>

### **Syrian Culture: A Celebratory Portrait of a Community**

Durham City of Sanctuary member student Sophie Nimmins organised a photographic exhibition exploring and celebrating the heritage of the Syrian families currently residing across County Durham. The documentary exhibition engaged with the daily lives of the Syria refugees, seeking to challenge and counteract dominant visual representations as found in mass-media. Through engaging with universal themes of family, celebration and culture, the exhibition highlighted new narratives that underline our shared humanity and offer a more empathetic and welcoming response.

### **Taste of Syria**

Durham City of Sanctuary families and volunteers, in collaboration with Durham University student society 'Durham for Refugees', have organised a series of events celebrating Syrian culture, food and music. These included a delicious all-you-can-eat buffet cooked by the Syrian families in Durham. Events have included guest speakers from international organisations including Doctors Without Borders, serving as both a fundraising and raising-awareness opportunity.

### **General DCOS activities:**

**Tutoring:** DCoS volunteers work with teenagers and adults in order to support a range of needs (driving practice and preparation for theory exam, official letters, sign-posting to support for legal documents, transport/accompanying to medical appointments).

**Befriending:** DCoS members have befriended families and individuals and been involved in organising day trips to destinations requested by the families. Such trips have offered the opportunity to visit museums, parks and to experience many facets of British culture and introduce people to new cities.

**Training:** DCoS hosted the North East Regional Cities of Sanctuary meeting in June 2019 and the first cohort of Politics in Sanctuary in September 2019, both in St Aidan's College. Sanctuary in Politics is a free training programme with the aim of supporting people seeking sanctuary (refugees and asylum seekers) to engage in the UK political system, the media, public speaking, awareness raising, campaigning and advocacy. The training aims to equip a new generation of leaders to become 'sanctuary ambassadors' within the City of Sanctuary network and the wider sanctuary movement and raise the refugee voice.

Fundraising: DCoS also supported Sam Slatcher in bringing Margaret Fingerhut [www.margaretfingerhut.co.uk/durham](http://www.margaretfingerhut.co.uk/durham) to perform a Piano Recital in Durham Cathedral as part of a national tour in support of asylum seekers and refugees. The concert brought in £1000 for DCoS and further raised awareness about the situation of Syrian, Iraqi and Sudanese refugees in the region.

We end with the good news that a number of refugees have gained employment, several have undertaken internships and the first young people have set off for University. December 2019 will end with our first refugee wedding celebration.

#### Future Planning:

1. Continue to build our membership across the County to encourage local initiatives around building a culture of welcome and help to prepare a positive community reception for new arrivals and others.
2. Extend and develop the volunteer training, embedding wherever possible the suggestions from the first cohort of volunteers.
3. Develop the range of cultural and social activities and trips
4. Evaluate the projects and scope further ones.
5. Undertake a second mapping exercise of refugee skills and goals, to help focus our activities.

SFF December 2019

**Durham City of Sanctuary Statement of Financial Activity, April 2019**

|  | Unrestricted funds (UF) | Restricted Funds (RF) | Endowment Funds | Total Fund |
|--|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|------------|
|  | £                       | £                     | £               | £          |
| <b>Income &amp; Endowments:</b>  |                         |                       |                 |            |
| Donations (UF: subs & donations)(RF: DCC grants for conversation classes, transport & ESOL overh         | 3724.16                 | 17520.00              | 0.00            | 21244.16   |
| earned from charitable activities  | 0.00                    | 0.00                  | 0.00            | 0.00       |
| earned from other activities (fashion show, Syrian evening, concert)                                     | 6387.03                 | 0.00                  | 0.00            | 6387.03    |
| investment & other income  | 0.00                    | 0.00                  | 0.00            | 0.00       |
| total  | 10111.19                | 17520.00              | 0.00            | 27631.19   |
| <b>Expenditure:</b>  |                         |                       |                 |            |
| cost of raising funds  | 0.00                    | 0.00                  | 0.00            | 0.00       |
| expenditure on charitable activity (UF: cultural visits, gifts)(RF: conversation class supplies, transpo | 4074.44                 | 4921.72               | 0.00            | 8996.16    |
| other expenditure (DBS checks, insurance)  | 378.48                  | 0.00                  | 0.00            | 378.48     |
| total  | 4452.92                 | 4921.72               | 0.00            | 9374.64    |
| Net incoming resources before investment gains   | 0.00                    | 0.00                  | 0.00            | 0.00       |
| Net gains / losses on investments  | 0.00                    | 0.00                  | 0.00            | 0.00       |
| Net incoming resources   | 0.00                    | 0.00                  | 0.00            | 0.00       |
| Transfer between funds   |                         |                       |                 |            |
| (15% of UF for long term expenditure in agreement with Trustees decision)                                | 1516.68                 | 0.00                  | 0.00            | 1516.68    |
| Other recognised gains / losses  | 0.00                    | 0.00                  | 0.00            | 0.00       |
| Gains / losses on revaluations of fixed assets   | 0.00                    | 0.00                  | 0.00            | 0.00       |
| Other gains  | 0.00                    | 0.00                  | 0.00            | 0.00       |
| Reconciliation of funds  | 4141.59                 | 12598.28              | 0.00            | 16739.87   |
| Totals brought forward   | -4006.57                | 1207.01               | 0.00            | -2799.56   |
| Totals carried forward   | 135.02                  | 13805.29              | 0.00            | 13940.31   |

**Durham City of Sanctuary**

**Income and Expenditure for the year ended 30 April 2019**

|  |                     |                     |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Balance at Bank as at 1 May 2018</b>    |                     | <b>2384</b>         |
| <b>Subscriptions and Donations</b>         |                     | <b><u>25323</u></b> |
|  |                     | <b>27707</b>        |
| <b>Expenditure</b>                         |                     |                     |
| <b>IELTS Exam Fees</b>                     | <b>700</b>          |                     |
| <b>Transport and Travelling Expenses</b>   | <b>1496</b>         |                     |
| <b>Daycare for Storytelling Project</b>    | <b>912</b>          |                     |
| <b>Xmas Party and Gift Bags</b>            | <b>298</b>          |                     |
| <b>Rents</b>                               | <b>3365</b>         |                     |
| <b>Accountants Fees</b>                    | <b>25</b>           |                     |
| <b>Conversation Group Supplies</b>         | <b>78</b>           |                     |
| <b>Insurance</b>                           | <b>228</b>          |                     |
| <b>DBS Checks</b>                          | <b>105</b>          |                     |
| <b>Bank Charges</b>                        | <b>22</b>           |                     |
| <b>Printing and Stationery</b>             | <b>231</b>          |                     |
| <b>NA Refreshments etc</b>                 | <b>233</b>          |                     |
| <b>Float for Dropin</b>                    | <b>105</b>          |                     |
| <b>Sundry Expenditure</b>                  | <b>130</b>          |                     |
| <b>Balance at Bank as at 30 April 2019</b> | <b><u>19779</u></b> | <b><u>27707</u></b> |

The above Income and Expenditure Account has been prepared and audited from the accounting records and represents a true and fair view of the financial position of the Charity for the year ended 30 April 2019.

**James Connolly**

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**Accountants and Tax Advisors**