



City of Sanctuary UK Charter 2026-2031

Introduction

City of Sanctuary is building a movement of welcome for people seeking sanctuary across the UK - city by city, community by community, sector by sector. Enabling everyone to have a part to play in building a more welcoming, inclusive and compassionate society.

This Charter has been developed to guide the whole movement. The Charter sets out our vision, values and principles and describes what City of Sanctuary is and what we do.

We expect all those who join the movement to sign up to the Charter, whether they are City of Sanctuary affiliated groups, supporting individuals or organisations, or a member of one of our networks (for example, schools, universities, councils or libraries). We encourage all those joining the movement to work towards our vision in a way which aligns with our values and principles for the networks.



Vision

The UK will be a place of welcome for all - and committed to justice and solidarity for people seeking sanctuary

The purpose of all who join our movement is to contribute to this vision. We will realise our vision when we have created a culture of welcome, compassion and inclusion across every sphere and sector of society, ensuring that wherever people seeking sanctuary go, they will find people who welcome them and understand why they are here.

People seeking sanctuary is our preferred term in most contexts as this focuses on people first as opposed to their immigration status. It emphasises that people are seeking sanctuary (safety and protection), not specifically asylum and so has a broader application.



Our Movement Building Approach

We contribute to a broad, multisector social movement for migrant justice. City of Sanctuary is both part of this larger movement and a movement in its own right.

What Is A Movement?

We define a movement as a loose collection of independent groups and individuals united by a common purpose, with no single leader. Unlike single-issue campaigns, movements persist even as specific issues change. The most successful movements—civil rights, LGBT rights, and women's rights—share key characteristics:

- Large scale
- Multiracial
- Multidimensional
- Multisector
- Multi-issue

Research shows that movement building can change attitudes, practices, and public policy (Hardisty & Bhargava, 2005; McAdam, 1996). These principles guide everything we do.



Our Movement Building Approach

How Does Movement Building Lead To Change?

We believe change can happen through a culmination of:

- Building a strong, widespread movement for migrant justice
- Mobilising everyone in our movement to 'Speak up for Sanctuary'

Together, these shift public narratives and build widespread support for sanctuary.



Our Values

We Centre Lived Experience

We prioritise the direct, personal experiences of individuals who have sought sanctuary in the UK across all areas of our work. Through promoting lived experience leadership and co-production approaches, we commit to shifting the balance of power and decision-making to those with firsthand knowledge.

We demonstrate this commitment through compassionate engagement—going above and beyond to provide support, showing genuine respect, and recognising that authentic relationships require both empathy and action. By honouring real experiences and perspectives, we create a movement that truly represents those it serves.

We Work Collaboratively

We value the transformative impact of working together. Through genuine partnership, open communication, and deepened understanding, we create caring and supportive environments that achieve outcomes beyond what any of us could accomplish alone.

We are committed to building spaces that develop the core competencies essential to our work, foster meaningful engagement, and encourage thoughtful reflection on our collective journey.



Our Values

We Aim To Inspire

We do our best work when driven by a strong sense of purpose and passion for creating a better world. Even when facing significant challenges, we find love and joy in unexpected places, realising how essential hope is to our work.

We strive to be catalysts for positive change, converting adversity into strength rather than allowing it to diminish us. The wisdom and resilience born from struggle flourish through caring for one another, facilitating healing, empowering each other, and celebrating our successes - both large and small - even during our most challenging moments.

We Are Committed to Social & Racial Justice

We recognise our fundamental shared humanity and approach each interaction with kindness and compassion. Our strength lies in honouring every person's equal dignity and worth, especially during times of conflict or challenge.

We acknowledge the systemic injustices that exist and actively commit to countering them through anti-oppressive and anti-racist practices and principles.



Our Values

We Act With Integrity

We uphold the highest standards of honesty and ethical behaviour, ensuring all our actions serve the interests of people seeking sanctuary.

We recognise that integrity requires continuous growth—acknowledging our missteps with humility, embracing accountability, and demonstrating our commitment to learn and evolve.

Through transparent processes and consistent principles, we build trust with our communities and partners, creating a foundation for meaningful change.



Our Values

We expect the movement to work towards our vision in a way which is grounded in justice and that is both anti-oppressive and anti-racist.

Why values matter

Values influence the distribution of power. To improve welcome for all, we must reshape the values that determine who holds power and who is excluded.



Our commitment to justice

We challenge the social and political structures that exclude people of colour from institutions and opportunities. This means:

- Confronting existing power dynamics
- Recognising the colonial legacy-many seeking sanctuary come from regions where resources were extracted and economies reshaped to benefit imperial powers
- Being vocal about these historical and ongoing injustices

The foundation of our vision

Without shifting the balance of power, we cannot achieve our vision. Like successful social movements before us, we must commit to being both anti-oppressive and anti-racist in all our work.

Our values keep this commitment at the forefront of everything we do.

Why 'Welcome for All?'

A vision that unites

Successful movements need a widely shared, persuasive vision. 'Welcome for all' does exactly that—it re-envisiona a better world for everyone and bridges divisions in our communities.

When we welcome people seeking sanctuary, everyone benefits: Policies that welcome a child seeking sanctuary into a school automatically improve the welcome for every new child at that school. This principle applies across all settings.

How welcome creates change:

Welcoming communities shift public attitudes by:

- Facilitating social contact between people
- Raising awareness
- Mobilising people to speak up for sanctuary

The results: stronger, connected communities, better understanding, new friendships, and less fear of the 'other.'

Welcome *and* justice

'Welcome for all' must be paired with our commitment to justice for people seeking sanctuary. This means having policies and practices that enable people seeking sanctuary to thrive in safe, connected and welcoming communities

Recognising diverse experiences

People seeking sanctuary are not a monolithic group. They have intersecting identities -race, gender, class, sexuality, legal status - that create unique experiences of discrimination or privilege. Our approach recognises this complexity.

City of Sanctuary UK

City of Sanctuary UK is a registered charity and umbrella organisation working to build a UK-wide movement of welcome. Despite a small team, it delivers significant impact through its unique and collaborative approach. It coordinates and supports networks of individuals and organisations, creating the infrastructure that turns ideas into action and drives change across the movement.

These networks form the movement's ecosystem. The organisation also runs UK-wide events and initiatives, develops training and resources, promotes good communication and best practice, and raises the profile of City of Sanctuary across the UK.



Organisation Mission and Strategic Objectives

We are building a movement of welcome across the UK, through working towards the following strategic objectives:

- Promote lived experience leadership and co-production approaches**
- Support and build capacity of our network of affiliated groups and partnership working with welcoming organisations**
- Embed welcome within mainstream statutory and voluntary institutions through streams of sanctuary programmes and awards**
- Amplify a positive narrative of sanctuary, raise awareness and shift public narrative through mobilising people to speak up for sanctuary**

Affiliated Groups

City of Sanctuary affiliated groups work to make their city, town, village or region a welcoming place of sanctuary. They stand in solidarity with people seeking sanctuary, mobilise others to offer welcome, and tailor their approach to local needs.

While collaboration is essential, each area is unique and develops its own bespoke approach, supported by guidance in the Affiliate Group Handbook. This flexibility is necessary for grassroots movement building to flourish.

These groups are independent and can adopt whatever governance structure suits them, provided they have a governing document. Some are charities, some are networks with a lead organisation, and others are small community groups.

All affiliated groups commit to the City of Sanctuary vision, values and principles, and agree to follow the terms and conditions set out in the handbook.



Sanctuary Programmes

We are building a movement of welcome by supporting mainstream sectors of society to embed solidarity, compassion and inclusion in their work. We call each sector we engage with a 'Stream of Sanctuary programme', bringing together interested parties, including people seeking sanctuary, to collaborate. Through shared learning about the asylum system, promoting inclusive practice, and exchanging ideas and resources, each Stream works to spread a culture of welcome throughout its sector.

We invite organisations and individuals - such as schools, local authorities, and universities - to join their sector network for the Streams of Sanctuary programmes, working towards our vision in line with City of Sanctuary values and principles.

UK-wide networks, such as Universities of Sanctuary, Schools of Sanctuary and the Local Authority Network, are supported by City of Sanctuary UK staff and steering groups. City of Sanctuary UK and the steering groups offer guidance and support, but they do not create, implement, or decide institutional policies or procedures. Local or regional networks may also be coordinated by affiliated City of Sanctuary groups.



Sanctuary Awards

Organisations that fall within a City of Sanctuary UK Stream of Sanctuary programme may wish to apply for a Sanctuary Award. Organisations that fall outside the specific stream may still be able to apply for an award through their local City of Sanctuary group using the generic minimum criteria.

The Sanctuary Award provides organisations like schools, local authorities, and universities a framework to ensure people seeking sanctuary are met with understanding, compassion, and empowering opportunities. It also helps organisations to improve accessibility and contribute to building better connected communities. The process is fully led by the applicant, working with local organisations and people with lived experience. The framework simply helps them review and improve existing services.



Sanctuary Awards

The award has no influence on who comes to the UK or where people are placed—those decisions are made by the UK government.

The award process varies slightly by sector, with specific minimum criteria that must be met, supported by extensive resources. Awards must be renewed every three years. Awards are assessed by a panel that always includes someone with lived experience. This formal process recognises and celebrates good practice within each sector and encourages other organisations to follow suit.

For all awards, applicants must demonstrate that they have done the following:

1) Learn: find out what it means to be seeking sanctuary; and be actively involved in awareness raising.

2) Embed: take positive action to make welcome and inclusion part of the values of your organisation or community, to support people seeking sanctuary, and to include them in your activities.

3) Share your vision and achievements: let others know about the positive contribution people seeking sanctuary make to our society and the benefits of a welcoming culture to everyone.



Supporters

In recent years our movement has grown, and we want to recognise all supporters and organisations that engage with us.

We aim to collaborate and add value to existing efforts to welcome people seeking sanctuary, working in partnership with migrant justice groups and other organisations across different sectors.

A key development has been the creation of Sanctuary Partnership forums, which enable councils, people with lived experience, and supporting organisations to co-produce policy and practice. These forums have strengthened local infrastructure, fostering greater collaboration and empowering people with lived experience.

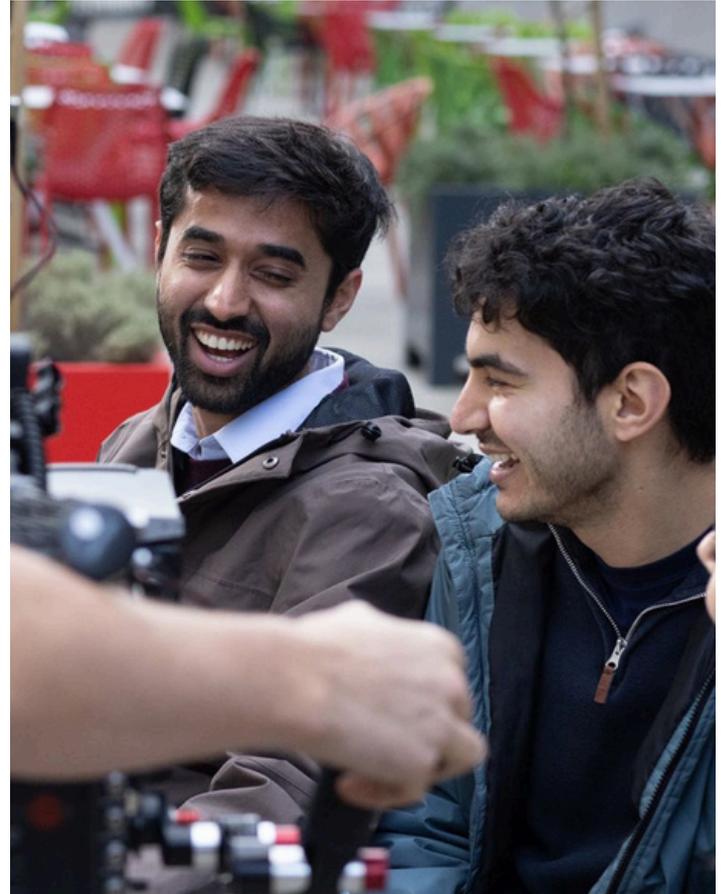


Sanctuary Ambassador Network

The Sanctuary Ambassador Network is a vibrant, inclusive and creative team, passionate about building a culture of welcome and advocating for change.

Ambassadors participate in streams and awards work, social media, sharing of stories through the media, awareness raising opportunities and support for sector wide campaigns.

They also help shape City of Sanctuary's work by contributing to the Experts by Experience Advisory Group and participating in streams steering groups.



Experts by Experience Advisory Group



People who are seeking sanctuary are at the heart of what City of Sanctuary is all about and their voices and experiences are central to shaping the work of City of Sanctuary.

The purpose of the Advisory Group is to provide a mechanism for people seeking sanctuary to inform and influence City of Sanctuary work at all levels. Advisory Group members are nominated from the Sanctuary Ambassador Network and are also invited to trustees meetings by rotation.



Principles for City of Sanctuary

We encourage our networks to work towards our vision in a way which aligns with the following principles. These principles are supported by academic studies (Masters and Osborn, 2011) and include the components of a successful movement.

Communicate a positive vision of welcome for all, speak up for sanctuary and celebrate the contribution of people seeking sanctuary, as well as the welcome offered in local communities

Promote understanding of migration and racial justice, especially enabling the voices of people with lived experience to be heard directly



Ensure people seeking sanctuary are at the centre of everything we do, including in decision making, co-production processes and leadership

Create opportunities for connections, friendships and solidarity with people seeking sanctuary

Commit to collaborative working and network development across the City of Sanctuary movement, and with other social justice movements where possible

Our Pathway to Change

City of Sanctuary UK: What We Do

Objective 1

Promote lived experience leadership and co-production approaches

Objective 2

Embed welcome within mainstream, statutory and voluntary institutions via Sanctuary programmes and awards

Objective 3

Support and build capacity of our network of affiliated groups and partnership working with welcoming organisations

Objective 4

Amplify a positive narrative of sanctuary, raise awareness and shift public attitudes by mobilising people to speak up for sanctuary

Outcomes

People seeking sanctuary build skills, confidence and knowledge.

People seeking sanctuary have increased leadership and engagement opportunities.

Co-production is mainstreamed and embedded within the movement.

Institutions improve their policy, practice & provision for people seeking sanctuary.

Positive attitudinal change within institutions.

City of Sanctuary groups are strengthened & have increased capacity.

Anti-racism is prioritised and embedded across our networks.

People seeking sanctuary feel supported and welcomed.

Movement members speak up for sanctuary: conversations/campaigns

Movement members are better connected/collaborate more.

A positive human centred narrative about migration and asylum in the UK.

Mission: Build City of Sanctuary Movement for Welcome

Movement Impact

Shift in narrative and public attitudes leading to widespread public support for sanctuary

Movement Impact

People seeking sanctuary have opportunities and are supported to thrive in safe, connected and welcoming communities

Movement Impact

Changes in policy and legislation improving welcome for all, but particularly for people seeking sanctuary

Vision: The UK will be a place of welcome for all - and committed to justice and solidarity for people seeking sanctuary