



2025 IMPACT



OUR REFLECTIONS

City of Sanctuary UK, the umbrella organisation for the City of Sanctuary movement, works to grow and sustain welcome, support and opportunity for people seeking sanctuary across the UK. This report shares some of the highlights from a year of collective action and progress.

This year the movement has continued to grow in strength, reach and impact, despite significant challenges. The summer of 2025 saw renewed rioting, with racialised communities increasingly targeted, along with the organisations who support them - City of Sanctuary UK was the subject of a concerted misinformation campaign. In this context, the commitment and resilience shown by our networks has been more important than ever.

In 2025, membership of City of Sanctuary UK grew to 1,560 organisations, a 22% increase on the previous year.

At the same time, 225 organisations across the UK received the Sanctuary Award—a 35% increase on 2024—demonstrating a growing commitment from institutions to create welcoming, inclusive spaces for people seeking sanctuary.

The impact of the Sanctuary Award continues to be significant across sectors. 95% of schools report growth in staff professional understanding of the challenges faced by people seeking sanctuary, while 100% of universities report increased staff awareness of forced migration and the experiences of people seeking sanctuary. All councils involved report engaging in co-production with people with lived experience to help shape their work. Together, these outcomes show how the Sanctuary Award is strengthening understanding and embedding more inclusive and collaborative practices across institutions.

Siân Summers-Rees, Chief Officer

WE ARE BUILDING A MOVEMENT OF WELCOME



A MOVEMENT OF WELCOME

Wherever we come from, everyone has a right to feel safe. That's why, city by city and community by community, we are building a more welcoming UK for people forced to flee their homes.

Our approach focuses on four key areas: promoting lived experience leadership and co-production; supporting and strengthening our affiliated groups; embedding welcome within mainstream statutory and voluntary institutions through Sanctuary programmes and awards; and amplifying a positive narrative of sanctuary to shift public discourse. Through our work with schools, councils, universities, libraries, and other institutions, people seeking sanctuary encounter understanding, compassion, and real opportunities to thrive. Together, these networks create a tapestry of support, dignity, and genuine welcome across the country.

From small acts of kindness to large-scale political change, this inclusive movement is helping build a fairer, kinder, and more just society—for everyone.



Photo: City of Sanctuary UK conference

OUR IMPACT

Support & build capacity of groups



12,421

People supported by frontline services

65%

of groups have lived experience leadership, ensuring that important decisions are shaped by the communities most affected.

Embed welcome within institutions



705

Sanctuary Awarded organisations

35%

increase in the number of awards granted compared with 2024, demonstrating a growing commitment to pursuing welcome.

Promote lived experience leadership



96

Engaged and Active Sanctuary Ambassadors

63%

Feel supported to take on leadership opportunities, demonstrating meaningful contribution to the sector

Amplify a positive narrative of sanctuary



935

Uses of our narrative change resources

71%

of people who undertook Speak Up training found it very useful, reinforcing the importance of supporting people to confidently address misinformation

NARRATIVE CHANGE



At City of Sanctuary, our narrative shift work challenges harmful stereotypes and amplifies positive stories about people seeking sanctuary. Through Speak Up for Sanctuary, we give people the tools and confidence to speak up for refugee rights, build welcoming communities, and turn compassion into action. This programme is central to our goal of shifting public attitudes, countering hate speech, and mobilising people to speak up for sanctuary.



Photo: City of Sanctuary 2025 conference

SANCTUARY AWARDS

We all have a part to play in building a more welcoming, inclusive and compassionate society, and our Sanctuary Awards programme is key to getting more mainstream organisations involved.

The awards programme encourages, supports and recognises organisations to excel in supporting people seeking sanctuary. Lasting 3 years, the award is evaluated by a panel including someone with lived experience of seeking sanctuary (often a Sanctuary Ambassador), an expert in their field, and a local community representative.

100% of awarded institutions have implemented policy changes that create more welcoming and supportive environments for people seeking sanctuary, demonstrating real impact and change.



Photo: Newcastle United, Football Club of Sanctuary

SANCTUARY AWARDS

Each award represents an organisation embedding policies, practices and cultures of welcome – contributing to wider systems change across sectors

705

Total Awarded Organisations

225

Awards given in 2025

35%

Increase in awards given from 2024

48

Awarded Arts Organisations

30

Awarded Colleges

30

Awarded Faiths Organisations

567

Awarded Libraries

34

Awarded Local Authorities

451

Awarded Schools

52

Awarded Universities

A man with a beard and dark hair, wearing a brown jacket, looks upwards with a slight smile. He is being filmed by a cameraman from behind. The cameraman is wearing a black cap and glasses, and is operating a professional video camera mounted on a gimbal. The camera's LCD screen shows a live view of the man being filmed. The background is a light-colored building with a wooden door. The overall scene is outdoors.

WELCOME CHANGES EVERYTHING

[Watch our film](#)



SANCTUARY AMBASSADOR NETWORK

Since 2017, our Sanctuary in Politics course has supported people seeking sanctuary to engage with the UK political system, campaigning and the media. Graduates can become Sanctuary Ambassadors. Ambassadors contribute to campaigns and communications, sit on Sanctuary award panels and may join our Experts by Experience Advisory Group, shaping the organisation's direction. Half of our trustee board were Ambassadors initially.

96

Sanctuary Ambassadors

61%

Undertook Training & Development

2

Sanctuary in Politics Courses in 2025

55%

Involved with Award Assessments

63%

Feel supported to take leadership opportunities

97%

Feel they have contributed to this movement of welcome



Photo: Sanctuary in Politics London 2025 cohort

CITY OF SANCTUARY GROUPS



Photo: Northampton City of Sanctuary

At the start of 2025, there were more than 100 City of Sanctuary groups across the UK. During the year, we introduced a formal affiliation process to strengthen the quality and integrity of our network and protect the City of Sanctuary name and copyright. So far, 70 groups have completed the process, with more still working through it, so the final number of affiliated groups is pending. 8 new groups formed in 2025.

This year, 38 groups delivered 403 training sessions on topics from safeguarding to resisting the far right. We ran a further 36 trainings attended by 3,667 people, helping ensure groups are connected, supported and well informed.

53 groups take part in local migration forums, including 15 that serve as Chair. They bring community expertise and lived experience into decision-making spaces, strengthening local coordination and helping keep the focus on practical outcomes for people seeking sanctuary while addressing power imbalances.

2025: GROUPS

12,421
People

Supported
with
frontline
activities

2213
Volunteers

65%

Have lived
Experience
leadership

4634

Support
Sessions

2610

Social
Activities

443

Awareness
Raising Events

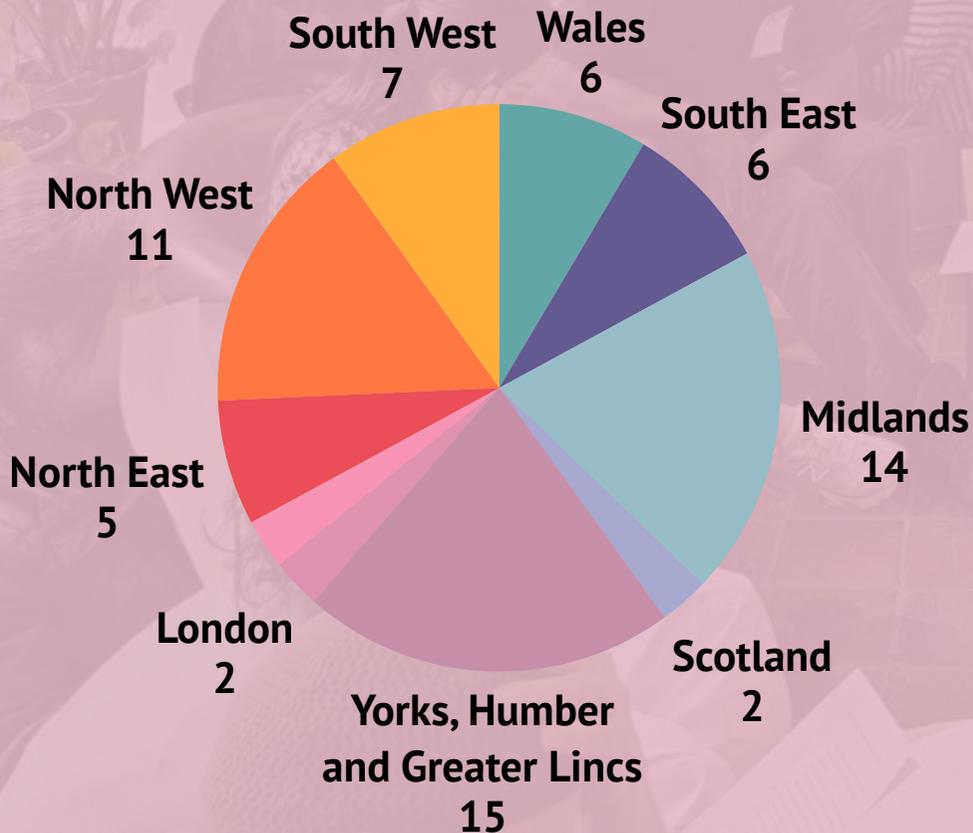
403

Training
sessions
delivered

53

Involved with
local migration
forums - 15
chair/
coordinate

Locations of affiliated groups:



Successes: Refugee Week involvement and public engagement, strengthened partnerships, and growth in lived experience leadership

Challenges: Political hostility, funding insecurity, and volunteer recruitment

LOCAL AUTHORITY NETWORK

The Local Authority Network supports councils to embed welcome and inclusion within their policy and practice. 76 councils are now formally part of the network, with engagement across 183 councils through 124 1:1 sessions. In total, 91 councils have passed motions committing to work with us. We now have 34 awarded Local Authorities, including 14 of London's 32 boroughs.

76

Network
Members

34

Awarded
Members

10

Awards in
2025

100%

Councils
engaging with
co-production

4

Thematic
network
meetings for
Council
Officers/staff

524

Attendees of
Events &
Trainings

Photo: City of Sanctuary Co-Production conference

CASE STUDY: COLCHESTER COUNCIL



In 2025, Colchester City Council achieved the Local Authority of Sanctuary award in recognition of its commitment to fostering a culture of welcome, inclusion and practical support for people seeking sanctuary.

The accolade highlights the council's work with its Resettlement Team and local partners – including RAMA, Essex Integration, African Families in the UK and the Bangladeshi Women's Association – to help newcomers settle, access services and contribute to community life. Initiatives such as Homes for Ukraine and support for Afghan families, alongside community solidarity events, demonstrate how the council has embedded welcome and inclusion across services and through strong partnership working.

Colchester's achievement shows how local authorities can turn policy commitment into meaningful, coordinated action that benefits both people seeking sanctuary and the wider community.

SCHOOLS & COLLEGES OF SANCTUARY

Our Schools and Colleges of Sanctuary programmes continue to embed welcome across education settings. 93% of schools have reviewed their policies and practice to strengthen inclusion and support, and 90% have reported learners becoming more empathetic towards others with a further 88% reporting increased learner wellbeing.

1166

Network
Members

481

Awarded
Members

157

Awards in
2025

93%

Of awarded
schools report
strengthened
culture of
inclusion and
belonging

80%

Of awarded
colleges report
improved staff
expertise

268

Attendees of
Events &
Trainings

My super power
is...
I speak lots of
languages.

UNIVERSITIES OF SANCTUARY

52 of 160 UK universities now hold the University of Sanctuary award. 75% of awarded institutions report changes to policy and practice, and all report positive growth in staff awareness of forced migration and the experiences of people seeking sanctuary. 75% also report a strengthened culture of inclusion and belonging.

81

Network
Members

52

Awarded
Members

19

Awards in
2025

54

No. of new
sanctuary
scholarships
per year

75%

Of awarded
universities
report increased
understanding
amongst
students

100%

Of awarded
universities
report growth
in staff
understanding

Photo: Manchester Uni running science workshops for refugee children across Greater Manchester.

CASE STUDY: QUEENS UNIVERSITY BELFAST

In May 2025, during its 180th anniversary year, Queen's University Belfast became the first University of Sanctuary in Northern Ireland, recognised for its commitment to supporting people seeking sanctuary. The university has introduced dedicated Sanctuary Scholarships, created new pathways into higher education, and built stronger connections with local refugee communities. Its work also includes support for academics at risk, student-led refugee solidarity initiatives, and public engagement programmes that raise awareness and build a more welcoming campus culture.



Photo: Queens University Belfast award ceremony

MATERNITY



This programme works to improve awareness and support for refugee families across maternity services. In 2025, two organisations achieved the Maternity of Sanctuary award: Project Mama Bristol and University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire – while Happy Baby Community, Amma Birth Companions and Newham Nurture were all successfully reaccredited.

8

Awarded Members including 3 NHS trusts

5

Awards in 2025

**EVERYONE
WELCOME**

**proud to be
a space of
sanctuary**

ARTS & LIBRARIES NETWORKS OF SANCTUARY

The Arts and Libraries networks continue to be among the most active and committed within the sanctuary networks, with 48 awarded arts organisations and 33 awarded library services representing 567 individual libraries. Our network meet-ups were particularly inspiring, fostering expertise-sharing and resilience in the face of far-right threats.

124

Network Members

81

Awarded Members

567

Individual awarded libraries

25

Awards in 2025

26%

Growth in network members

13

Arts & Libraries events



Photo: Theatres of Sanctuary Network in Norwich

JOIN THE MOVEMENT

1

Join the movement - any organisation, institution, community group or individual can join the City of Sanctuary movement.

3

Volunteer - from teaching English to lobbying your MP, there are many ways to support your local group.

5

Donate - even a small donation will go a long way in growing these networks of welcome.

2

Speak up for Sanctuary - use our resources and start having impactful conversations about refugee rights

4

Welcome at work - we can help you to encourage your workplace to embed solidarity, compassion and inclusion.

6

Get up to date - sign up to our newsletter and follow us on social media.

THANK YOU!

Our little team would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to all our supporters who have chipped into our fundraisers, bought our merch and help us plan for the future through monthly direct debits. We would like to say a very special thank you to the following charitable funds and trusts - without your support, we simply would not have been able to achieve all the incredible things listed in this impact report. Thank you!



CITY BRIDGE FOUNDATION



LLOYDS BANK FOUNDATION
England & Wales



GALE CHARITABLE TRUST



Photo: Sanctuary in the Senedd

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