



SUMMER NEWS LETTER



<https://bristol.cityofsanctuary.org>



info@bristol.cityofsanctuary.org

As we like many charities face difficult times we would like to reiterate how grateful we are to all our members for your continued support. For current or new members, please see our message about membership sign-ups at the end of this newsletter.

'Building a City of Welcome, Safety and Hope'

Credit: Diego Pena, Bristol Refugee Festival



As we near the end of Summer welcome to our latest newsletter. In this edition, we're highlighting some of the projects that Bristol City of Sanctuary has been working on this quarter, including its Refugee Walk, celebrating Refugee week, and the work of Bristol Schools of Sanctuary.

We'll also have an interview with one of our important trustees, Caroline Beatty, who is sadly leaving us later this year. Caroline has spent over 20 years working in the Refugee space throughout Bristol and Gloucestershire and we discuss her career, experiences in the sector, and hopes for the future.



Refugee Festival 6th-21st June 2026



Credit: Diego Pena, Bristol Refugee Festival

What is Refugee Week?

Refugee Week is the world's largest festival celebrating the culture and resilience of Refugees and people seeking Asylum. In Bristol we celebrate for a fortnight in June with activities and events around world Refugee day. Taking inspiration from this year's theme 'courage', speakers and artists performed throughout the festival



Credit: Diego Pena, Bristol Refugee Festival



Credit: Diego Pena, Bristol Refugee Festival



<https://bristol.cityofsanctuary.org>



info@bristol.cityofsanctuary.org



Can you tell us about how you first became involved with BCoS?

In 2002 when I arrived there were only four refugee organisations in the city. I got to know the head of the unit in the health service, Lorraine Ayensu and Sue Nije at Refugee Action, who were both key players. Together, we put out a newsletter, and became concerned that there was no welcome centre at all. So that became the prime aim, followed by language and advice, but the main thing was always 'come in, have a cup of tea, have a meal'.

The idea for City of Sanctuary came from Lorraine, who attended a conference in Scandinavia, where a similar project had begun. So then Bristol became one of the first five in the UK, and it was all about how to get the wider community involved.

What was the inspiration behind you setting up Hill House Retreats?

Opening Hill House up to people was a no-brainer, really. Even after a two day visit I could see the difference it made for people. It's full of trees, it's peaceful, and really quiet. Over and over again, people said 'I can sleep here for the first time. It's really peaceful'. It was obviously worth doing.

An Interview With One Of Our Trustees

Caroline Beatty

Tell us about your time at Bristol Refugee Rights?

There was always quite a strong activist feel about Bristol Refugee Rights (BRR), and we supported members to feel they could go on marches in town to support others who were being detained.

Can you highlight a particular achievement you've worked on with BCoS?

One was the Transport Fund. A member who worked with BCoS at the time would talk to bus drivers to raise awareness and they were so shocked about the transport situation for people without any money. As an idea it made one of the most material differences to people.

How do you feel about the work done by the Schools of Sanctuary team?

I think the whole streams thing is completely brilliant, to bring communities of practice together, and each school has a different set of things it's done, relevant to themselves. While the basic principle in each is learn, embed, share. So each organisation has to show what they've learnt about asylum, they have to embed it in their organisation, and then they have to publicise what they've done.

How does working in BCoS compare to a more frontline refugee organisation?

Front line it is its own world. You're working from the inside of refugee communities out. With City of Sanctuary, you're encouraging organisations and places which don't have a lot of refugee contact to become aware, to include, and bring people in. So both are really important and you need to have both things working well.





Is there a particular encounter which has left a mark on you in your work with refugees?

In the early days we really knew everybody and there was family with two children and a mum who was disabled. One day, they were taken to the women's detention centre. We went to see them, and it was my first time meeting someone in detention. The little boy was so bewildered and scared... that's something I won't ever forget. They eventually got leave to remain, which is often what ultimately happens.

What do you consider the watershed moments in public engagement with refugee issues?

Yes, there's of course little Alan Kurdi, it gets me every time... an extraordinary true image that was massively powerful.

I think that homes for Ukraine was remarkable as well. There was this latent wish to help and the community was coming together. It showed what was possible - they had resources, right to work, a place to live and community straightaway.

How has media exposure shaped public opinion?

They never even mention the reasons people cross the channel, like the lack of safe routes. Nor do they say anything celebratory about refugees and their contribution and value. They could tell such a different story, rather than promoting inaccuracies and stoking division.

Is there a particular challenge or issue which you feel deserves more attention?

Something I think deserves more attention is that refugees often do better when placed in smaller rural communities. Evidence shows that in fact, communities around them become quite involved and that really good relationships form. That happened when people were housed at a remote hotel outside of Bristol. Many people I worked with were anxious that they would be isolated there. But the community rallied around them and it turned out to be a blessing in many ways.

Do you feel that expanding the number of charities to support refugees is the correct approach?

I think the state is important as a check on charities but the charity sector is so important. We need that energy, and we need people both in and outside the statutory system.

What do you anticipate will be the main challenges faced by the sector going forward?

For me it's the challenge from the far right. Bristol city has done absolutely amazingly in terms of responding to things like hotel protests. And there's the counter-protests which is very hopeful. But I think it can be important to counter-protest in a way which is positive, through lightness and singing rather than shouting.





Sanctuary Walk

The Sanctuary Walk highlighted Bristol's complex history, visiting places that serve as a reminder of its connection to the transatlantic slave trade, whilst also celebrating those who rose up against injustice historically, and who continue that legacy by fighting for the rights of Refugees and Asylum Seekers today.



The walk emphasised the importance of continuing to interrogate the impacts of British Imperialism, but also Bristol's long connection with those fleeing persecution.

It began at Lord Mayor's Chapel, which is associated with Protestants forced into exile from France. The group then moved on to Park Street, where walkers saw the Banksy Mural.

From there, they discussed the Georgian House Museum, originally built for a plantation owner. The building's grandeur is a stark reminder of the vast wealth generated through slavery.



On the Harbourside we saw the monument to the Cabots whose journeys opened up Transatlantic Trade and at the MShed remembered the activism embedded in Bristol's history.

These were just some of the many steps taken along the route. Walkers would also visit sites in Bristol's College Green, the Harbourside Area and Queen's Square, before finishing at St Mary's Redcliffe Church and the Sanctuary Garden.





Schools of Sanctuary

Awards Celebration
30th June 2026

To close out the year, Bristol Schools of Sanctuary held their inaugural Awards Celebration on the 30th of June. The event is an opportunity to celebrate schools, nurseries and colleges who have committed to creating welcoming, inclusive environments to ensure that children and their families who are seeking sanctuary feel safe and valued.

The event also welcomed a number of speakers, including Hannah Woodhouse, Executive Director of Children and Education at Bristol City Council, and The Right Honourable Lord Mayor of Bristol, Councillor Yasin Mohamud, himself a former refugee, who shared his experiences and presented this year's awards.

The event also hosted a number of partner organisations, including The Bell Foundation, the International Rescue Committee (Healing Classrooms), Aid Box Community, Borderlands, Bridges for Communities, Unique Voice and the Bristol Refugee Festival. This information will give Schools a range of resources, and support for children and families seeking sanctuary.



The Right Honourable Lord Mayor of Bristol, Councillor Yasin Mohamud



Zaid Hilal, a musician and oud player from Palestine, who was visiting the UK on tour, accompanied by Bristol jazz musician and trumpeter David Mowat.

