



Schools of Sanctuary

500 Words Competition

The Award Ceremony also featured presentations from the 3 winners of Bristol Schools of Sanctuary's 500 words competition. Based on the theme of 'courage' for Refugee Week 2026, these winners were just some of the many creative and moving depictions of courage produced by students from our sanctuary schools.

My name is nervous
My name is sad
My name is bored
My name is confused
My name is worried
My name is impatient
My name is tired
My name is scared
My name is embarrassed
My name is disappointed
My name is frustrated
My name is annoyed
My name is not
refugee.

Courage
Do I have it in me
To defend myself
Against my supposed enemies?
Must I take in
All the mean words they say,
Carry all the pain?
I can't imagine
Me? Standing up against them?
Never.
I just don't have
That courage in me.
My mama wants me to be bold,
Doesn't want all that timidity in me,
But deep down
I know I can never be
Who she wants me to be—
The bold, confident girl.
Even if I tried,
My whole life
I've been the victim.
You can't just switch
From hurting
To defending.
But would it hurt
Just to try it once?
Forget all the consequences.
Go in with all that hurt.
I'm not the type
To take risks,
But I am curious
To see what happens
When I finally use
The courage in me.
Look up at my opponent,
Look them in the eye.
They're human just like me.
I couldn't care less anymore.
Finally,
I'm gonna use
That courage in me.
A message to my enemies:
You don't have to be this way.
We can be friends.
You don't have to fight me.
Treat each other with love.
Lead with courage, not hatred.
But if you choose
To be my enemy,
Be careful—
Because I finally found
That courage in me.





Schools of Sanctuary

500 Words Competition

”

Matvii's story

BOOM! BANG! CRASH! That's what I woke up to. My dad was shouting to me to pack my bag. I could only take one with my most precious belongings. I knew it; the day had come I had to leave...

I didn't want to leave Ukraine, it's where I was born, it's where my home was. My friend, Artem had to leave four months ago. I didn't have anyone to play with at school, and I've missed him so much.

I thought the day couldn't get any worse; but then my dad told me he couldn't come with us. My eyes filled with tears, but I held them back trying to look brave. I was distraught! I couldn't leave him, could I? I have three older sisters and one older brother, but I'd say I'm the closest to dad. We've been on so many trips and amazing adventures together.

We had to walk for miles; my eyes were turning red and I kept nearly falling asleep, I was so tired. All the Ukrainian refugees had to walk in a long line on a track through the countryside which had been made for us. Finally, we ended up in Warsaw, Poland. Everything was different than in Ukraine I thought it would be similar as the two countries were next to each other, but it wasn't.

The only reason I was glad to be there was because there was no fighting. Then my mum told me and my siblings that we would have to take a humongous ship to England where we would be safe. I was scared and happy at the same time as there would be no more fighting, but I wouldn't be at home with my dad.

Everything was huge on the ship, it made me feel tiny and I knew I didn't belong. I asked my mum how long we'd be on the ship for, and she said two days and seven hours precisely.

Whilst we were on the ship, I saw a tiny girl crying. She was about two years old and with her family. They all looked starving, but I knew I only had a tiny bit of food left. Eventually, I plucked up the courage to go and play with her. Her mum explained to me that she was starving, they had no food left and she'd lost her favourite toy. I remembered that I had a toy in my bag and a tiny bit of food, so I gave it to her. I thought to myself, "even if I'm ten, I can still make a difference to her life".

After a few weeks of being in England and living in a refugee camp I started at school. Even though I knew barely any English I tried my very best. I told mum one evening that I already missed dad and our family, and I wanted to go back home. I thought to myself, I also hope Ukraine win this terrible, tragic war...

“





Bus Travel Campaign

Diana Rix, Campaign Lead

Over the past six months, Bristol City of Sanctuary has been building momentum on a campaign to improve access to services for people seeking asylum. We've been growing a group of campaigners - people with lived experience and allies - working together to make change happen across Bristol and the surrounding area.

Our initial focus is the campaign for free bus travel for people seeking sanctuary. Since March 2026, we've grown our campaigner group and strengthened support for this campaign through events, letter writing, and training sessions. We've joined forces with a local foodbank, pushing together for access to bus travel for anyone in the area for whom the cost of travel is a barrier to meeting their everyday needs.

It's a long road, but we've already had some real successes along the way, and we're continuing to build awareness and push for change.





New Member Organisations:



Bristol Libraries Service

Received Library of Sanctuary Award

19th August 2026



We are excited to announce that the Bristol Libraries Service is the first in the south-west to become an accredited Library of Sanctuary. This recognition reflects the important work of the library service to welcome and support those seeking sanctuary in the city.



Events & Activities

As well as providing new arrivals with library visits and tours across its 26 hubs, the library service provides an array of family and business support. ESOL conversation clubs, craft activities, story times, cultural events and author talks are just some of the work done to support refugees and asylum seekers. In terms of outreach, the service has also created after-school clubs at hotels where families are living, demonstrating the empathy and dedication displayed by library staff.



<https://bristol.cityofsanctuary.org>



info@bristol.cityofsanctuary.org



Opportunities and Resources

RUN THE BATH HALF AND FUNDRAISE FOR CITY OF SANCTUARY UK!

Take on the Bath Half 2027 and support City of Sanctuary UK. Heavily discounted charity places are available in return for fundraising to help build a movement of welcome for people seeking sanctuary. Find out more:

<https://runforcharity.com/charity-eventhub/city-of-sanctuary-uk/all-events>

Further Resources and Opportunities to Get Involved Linked on Our Website

Sanctuary in Arts Opportunities:
<https://bristol.cityofsanctuary.org/2026/05/28/sanctuary-in-arts-opportunity>

Resources for Refugees and Asylum Seekers:
<https://bristol.cityofsanctuary.org/bristol-organisations>

Bristol Youth Folk

bristol_youth_folk

We are Bristol Youth Folk, a voluntary group running morris dance, folk song and craft workshops for children ages 6-17. We also perform at and hold cultural and community events.

Part of our aim is to make folk culture accessible to everyone, and share our traditions freely. We already offer up to fully subsidised spaces to our workshops and ceilidhs, and would love to extend this offer to children from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds.

We can also offer free workshops to community groups from these backgrounds - we can work with organisers to ensure the event is suitable, but in principle we would hold an hour workshop, suitable for all ages and involving simple traditional dances. All leaders are experienced and hold DBS checks. Unfortunately, we do not have the resources to pay for translation at the moment. We do also offer workshops in a paid capacity to schools and larger organisations.



<https://bristol.cityofsanctuary.org>



info@bristol.cityofsanctuary.org



Get Involved

Join our AGM - further details to be released soon

We encourage you to attend our upcoming AGM on the afternoon of the 12th November, location to be announced soon. By attending you will have the opportunity to hear about the work BCoS have been doing over the past year. If you've signed up to become a member, you will also be able to ask questions and vote on any motions brought.

Membership Sign-Ups

If you haven't already, please make sure you're signed up as a member with us. Everyone who receives a newsletter will have been sent a new membership form to fill in - this is just because we're currently formalising our membership process, so even if you think you're already a member, please fill the form in so you can be notified of all our events.

Please also consider making a regular or one-off donation, we are a small charity that receives limits unrestricted funding so donations are incredibly important to the work we do. You can donate via our website, via the Gift Aid form or contact us if you wish to set-up a standing payment.

