

Dear Members and Friends,

Thank you all for your support this year, whatever form it took. I am writing this to reflect on a year full of paradoxes - more hate incidents but a greater coming-together; more pessimism but signs of greater hope; bleak events - but some wonderful memories throughout the year.

We at City of Sanctuary thank **Rosemary Bishop**, who put our financial structures together and has managed them since with an unfailing sense of duty. I wrote to her: *"I want to also thank you for the robust systems that you have set up since you took over the finances in early 2022. It is clear that this has been a very effective learning experience for all of us and I am personally very grateful for the way you have developed and managed the systems in place. I believe that we must be one of the financially best-managed voluntary organisations in Lichfield!"*

Rosemary - we wish you the best for your future.

In Rosemary's place as Administrative Officer, we welcome **Liudmyla Trots**. Luda has been a member pretty well since she arrived here three or so years ago. She is an experienced accountant and has spent several months learning about - and coping with - the different systems we have here. She is now ready to take over and will start her new post - initially for 8 hours a week - on 1st January. In future, when you deal with our 'admin@' email address, it will be Luda receiving and replying.

Our steadfast founder and trustee, **Warren Bardsley**, has stood down as chair after seeing us through a tricky period of transition. He will, I am happy to report, continue as a trustee, at least until our next AGM. The Board has elected **Kirsty Jones** as its new chair. Kirsty will have two vice-chairs: **Ihor Shpykuliak**, an experienced trustee with us, and **Sophie Allen**, who works with our partner in events, the Lichfield Garrick Theatre. We also welcome **David Melhuish** and **Hennadii Driahniev** to the Board. David lives locally and is also a trustee at Curborough Community Centre - another local organisation we work closely with. Hennadii will be known to many of you as a publisher and retailer of books. He is now running weekly martial arts lessons for young people at Curborough as part of our Activities offer. **Alp Tageen Turani** remains as a one of our most experienced trustees - congratulations to him and Shabnam on their second child born in the summer! And we look forward to **Neil Kemp** returning to the Board in January now he has finished his regular work as ESOL trainer - and welcome to **Julia Wright** who is taking over his class from him.

Thanks as always, too, to our Action Group, which has been so admirably led by **Pam Tomlinson** and continues to increase and widen its membership. We are delighted to see an increase in participation from members of our Hong Kong community and from the Masjid.

We have had some major events this year. Our annual summer picnic and games took place at Middleton Hall again - thanks as usual to **Sam Kirman** and her volunteers for their hospitality. The Choir of Sanctuary sang at this year's Lichfield City Council Carol Concert at the Guildhall. Thanks too to **Cathy Lamb** for all her work with them.

And hurrah for the project "*Language to Live and Work in Lichfield*"! This is a major happening with ESOL classes, familiarisation events, speaking clubs and a range of other activities for adults and children - a Saturday club, Art Workshops, Martial Arts for youngsters and trips and visits. The project leader is **Ira Komazova**, ably supported by **Luba Rodionova** and **Veronika Shchetynina** and a host of teachers, leaders and helpers. This is our most ambitious project to date, funded by Shropshire & Staffordshire Community Foundation and supported by Wade Street Church, Curborough Community Centre and Lichfield District Council. It has touched some 250 lives so far, including participants and beneficiaries from Ukraine, Afghanistan, Hong Kong, Egypt, Turkey, Syria, Bangladesh . . . and more! We believe this may be a unique project within our area.

Do come and join us if you want to see what's happening. We can always do with more volunteers - and it's fun!

The project has much in common, in its breadth and depth of engagement, with our next big one-off event - "Look Who's Here Too!" Yes, the ultimate in richness and diversity of experience will be returning to The Garrick Theatre on Sunday, 10th May at 11.00am. Book your stall or your event now - and put it in your diary, everyone.

So we and our beneficiaries continue to flourish as best we can in these challenging days. Remember, we exist, not only to support refugees and other minorities, but also to promote "**equality and diversity for the public benefit**". We have been distressed to record an increasing number of racist and hate incidents in Lichfield - and sorry not to see them condemned by our councillors from County, District, Town and City.

In the 6th century BCE (yes, really!), Solon the Athenian lawmaker, was asked, "*Which city is the best governed?*"

He replied, "*The city where those who have not been wronged show themselves just as ready to punish the offender as those who have been*".

Let those be our watchwords.

Merry Christmas - and a much better new year.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'Nigel Gann', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Secretary, Lichfield District City of Sanctuary