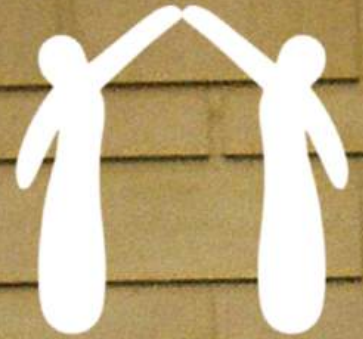


City of Sanctuary Sheffield

2024/25

Annual Report



**SHEFFIELD WELCOMES
REFUGEES**

CITY OF SANCTUARY



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Introduction

Each year at City of Sanctuary Sheffield feels like a journey. As an organisation working in solidarity with people seeking sanctuary, we are impacted by events playing out on the world stage and yet still intimately connected to the individuals in our community most affected by those events.

In a year that has seen upheaval and suffering in so many places across the world, including in our own towns and cities, we are faced with the question of how we collectively engage with this world on fire? With problems that seem insurmountable? Where do we find hope in a world that can seem hopeless?

My personal belief is that we do this by **making hope an active daily practice.**

We respond to all that is around us by making choices and taking actions based on the vision we have for the world, while remaining fully cognisant of the painful current reality of that world. We practice hope as a daily, meditative response to the injustice we see in our communities, in our cities, in our world.

Throughout this report you will see this hope in action across the community. Our collective show of strength, solidarity and action in response to the threat of Rwanda removals and the Far-right riots; our one-of-a-kind redesign and renovation of The Sanctuary; our work to prevent homelessness among our brothers and sisters in the community; our facilitation of the Drop-In and The Sanctuary where, as one of our volunteers says, '*Geographical, linguistic, cultural, ethnic and national boundaries [are] broken, and [people are] no longer alone.*'

These daily actions of hope that we collectively, always collectively, take is our response to a broken world. It remains a privilege to be taking these actions alongside the incredible community of Sheffield and to live out the hope we all have of a city that is safe and welcoming for people seeking sanctuary.

In solidarity,
Tom, Director of City of Sanctuary Sheffield



City of Sanctuary Sheffield's vision is for Sheffield to be a place of safety and welcome for people seeking sanctuary



Build Spaces of Safety and Welcome

We build physical spaces of safety and welcome like The Sanctuary and the Multi-Agency Drop-In, alternatives to the hostile environment that instead centre care, community, and support.

Provide Support and Advice

We provide direct support and advice, helping people navigate a complex asylum system, and work collaboratively to ensure people receive support and justice.

Fight for System Change

We amplify the voices of people seeking sanctuary and fight for long-term systemic change of the asylum system.





The Sanctuary

In December 2024, after six months of community redesign, The Sanctuary reopened its doors and since then, it has once again become a **vital space of activity, support, and care**— now welcoming over 100 people seeking sanctuary on our busiest days.

SAVTE's free and accessible English conversation classes and our free weekly community lunches have returned, creating a strong and vibrant community rooted in shared experience.

The Sanctuary is also a valuable space for the migrant rights community, regularly hosting meetings, workshops and activities. We've also hosted talks, performances and celebrations for citywide events including Migration Matters Festival and the Festival of Debate. We are not only a space for support, but for joy, resistance, knowledge and culture.

The Sanctuary works to address a key barrier faced by people seeking sanctuary that exists due to the complexity, hostility and

"The Sanctuary space sits at the heart of Sheffield just around the bend on Chapel Walk. When I turned the corner and entered the building I was greeted with a room full of energy and warmth; it is a place where you always feel wanted and safe."

Migrants Rights Campaigner

isolation of the asylum system: access to clear, accurate information. We share details about up-to-date support services, events and opportunities and our welcoming team of diverse and skilled reception volunteers helps visitors navigate services and access support. The Sanctuary is a space for belonging, learning, and building collective strength.

Over 60% of our volunteers have lived experience of seeking sanctuary. This peer-to-peer support makes The Sanctuary more trusted and welcoming for others navigating the asylum system and helps create a shared sense of place. A place where everyone contributes and where ownership, belonging and mutual care flourish. Volunteers are not only central to how The Sanctuary runs day to day, they also shape its direction. Through ongoing conversations, feedback, and a team culture that welcomes reflection and change, the space continues to grow in response to the needs and ideas of those who use it.



The Sanctuary Case study

A volunteer with lived experience of seeking asylum

The Sanctuary is a place in Sheffield that is a center for people to be together, get to know each other, and also get support with the problems they are facing. The best part of this place is the “welcoming space” where people sit for hours, drinking tea and coffee, and talking to each other. I had never heard of such a title before.

But we have been welcomed here and experience togetherness again. We told each other our life stories, we felt a sense of identification and sympathy, and this storytelling melted the ice in our relationships, narrowed our distance and brought us closer together. Geographical, linguistic, cultural, ethnic and national boundaries were broken, and we were no longer alone. Now you could smile again.

Case study

A volunteer with lived experience of seeking sanctuary and former SAVTE student at The Sanctuary

I first visited the Sanctuary in May 2023. I couldn't speak English, but I got talking to one of the English teachers from SAVTE who was giving information to people at the reception about conversation classes. I was so nervous, but I registered for English classes and started coming every Tuesday.

The Sanctuary felt like home very quickly, I found people who could speak the same languages as me, and this helped build my confidence. Through coming here, I also really improved my English and I've made a lot of good friends from different backgrounds.

I'm now a regular volunteer at the Sanctuary, and I'm also volunteering at the Hallamshire Hospital as a welcome volunteer. In the future, I am hoping to train to be a nurse or a support worker.

The Sanctuary is a very helpful place for people who don't have family here. They can come here and feel that this place is their second home. It's not just me, I know a lot of people feel this way.



The Sanctuary Redevelopment

How we use space has the power to transform the world. At a time when hostility and exclusion continue to shape national policy, The Sanctuary stands as a living example of what's possible when we build with—not for—those most impacted. It is a space for resistance and rest, of collective power and community care.

Over the past year, The Sanctuary has undergone the most recent iteration of its community led development and has **evolved into a vibrant, beautiful space which can better hold Sheffield's community of people seeking sanctuary.**

This iteration started with deep research, rooted in the everyday experiences of people using the space and a process of deep consultation with sanctuary seekers, volunteers, staff and partner organisations. This feedback was then actioned by social architects to ensure that we've created a space that truly reflects and responds to the needs of the people who share it.

User stories to guide the redevelopment

As a... person seeking asylum/refugee
I want... to see some interesting rugs, but not too many
So that... because young people don't have rugs. They represent the Mums house, who has rugs. Iraq with yellows and browns. Pinks and other things. White and black, yellow black one.

As a... volunteer with lived experience of seeking sanctuary
I want... the space to be better organised
So that... people are not misdirected to the wrong places and it feels welcoming. People connect with others, learn about cultures, increase their knowledge, and be supported to find solutions.

As a... person seeking asylum/refugee
I want... somewhere to take my children that is not home, where there are activities to keep both me and my family busy
So that... I have a space that I want to be in, which feels like it is mine, and which I feel safe and relaxed in using. So that I have an alternative place to be to where I live, which does not always feel safe and can feel boring and confining

The Sanctuary Redevelopment

Following a six-month closure for building works, The Sanctuary reopened in early 2025, rebuilt not just with tiles and paint, but with the ideas, needs, and hopes of those who use it. Key improvements include:

- A more welcoming and accessible layout
- Kitchen renovation which better facilitates our weekly community meals and increases our capacity for other community groups to use this resource
- Improved bathroom and prayer facilities
- Colourful and robust tiles, paint and furnishings that reflect the vibrancy and diversity of our community
- Improving the working environment upstairs for the community of organisations working alongside those seeking sanctuary and making our meeting rooms more confidential, comforting and safe for people seeking sanctuary

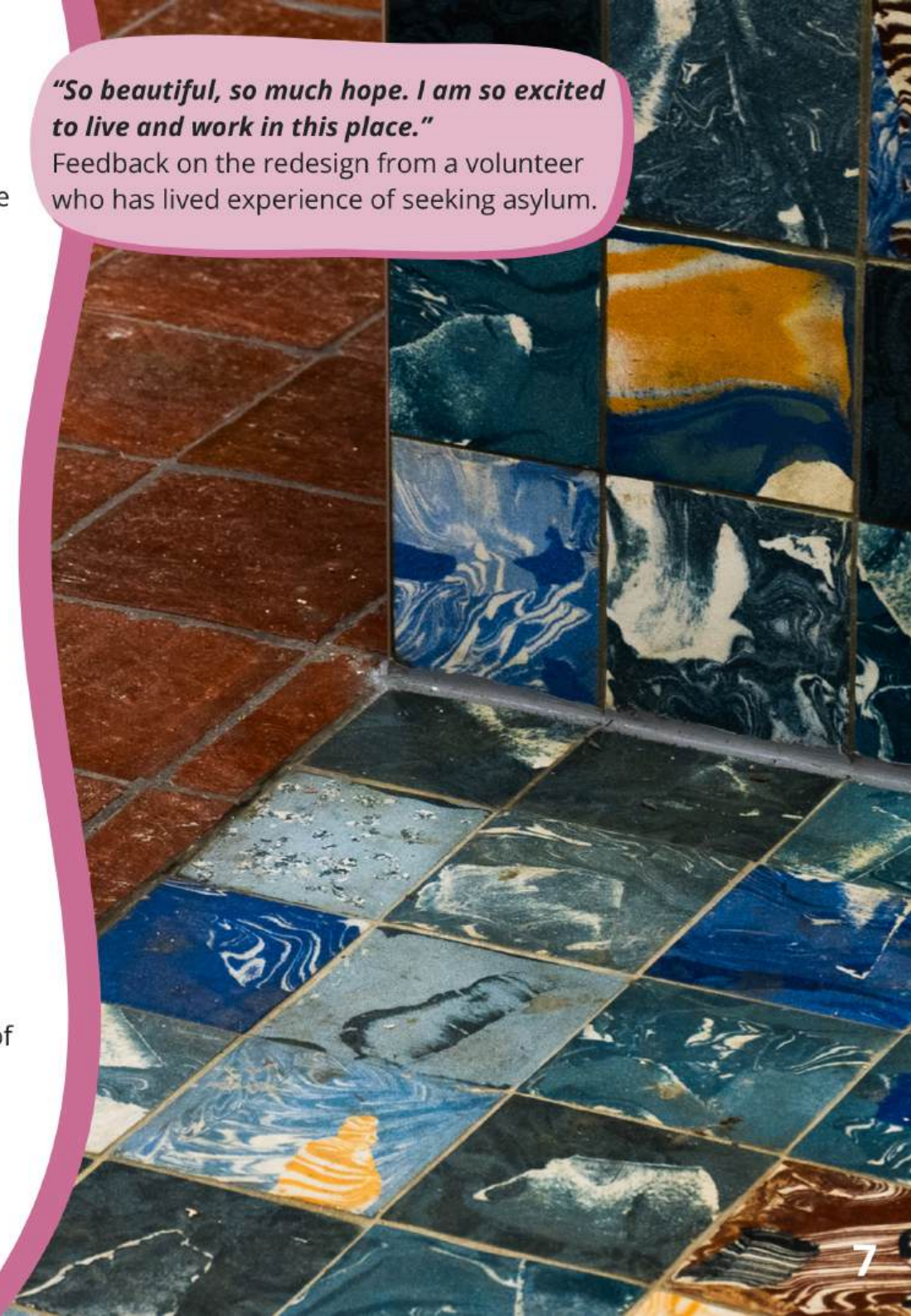
We reopened The Sanctuary with a joyful community celebration—featuring live music, crafts and a shared Iftar meal. It was a celebration of resilience and collaboration, offering a powerful space to reweave and strengthen the threads of our community.

Now, as we enter the process of ‘enacting’ or living in the space, we are embedding new practices that reflect what we have learned and that resist falling patterns identified as unhelpful or damaging before the redesign. This ongoing work ensures we are more resilient in the face of ongoing change and the fluctuating outside world.

This year's journey shows that spaces of sanctuary - when nurtured through care and co-creation - are not just possible, they are essential. This beautiful space is part of the foundations for a more just and welcoming world.

“So beautiful, so much hope. I am so excited to live and work in this place.”

Feedback on the redesign from a volunteer who has lived experience of seeking asylum.





The Drop-In

The Multi-Agency Drop-In continues to be a lifeline in the heart of the city. It is an accessible, welcoming space where people seeking sanctuary can find vital support, advice and community.

Over the past year, 1,790 people have accessed support at the Drop-In, making a total of 4,795 visits. Each week, between 90 and 130 people come through the doors, many **navigating the complex, intersecting challenges of the asylum system**, from legal processes and housing to healthcare and destitution. Some come for urgent support, others return to connect with community in a space of care and solidarity. This year, the Drop-In has brought together 19 partner organisations, including the Red Cross, Citizens Advice Sheffield, and Abtissam Mohamed MP's office, to offer a comprehensive range of joined up, expert support in one place.

We've responded to changes in government policy, such as the introduction of the E-visa system, by working with Migrant Help to provide up-to-date advice and guidance. We have also partnered with Sexual Health Sheffield to provide STI screening, which is breaking down barriers to accessing healthcare and has had a positive uptake from communities across Sheffield.

The Drop-In couldn't run without our incredible team of 51 volunteers, over 75% of whom have lived experience of the asylum system. Their compassion, skill and commitment shape the Drop-In each week. Their feedback continues to improve how the Drop-In runs. This year's changes include improvements to our free clothes bank and the process by which we issue food vouchers. We've also expanded our interpreting team. 20 volunteer interpreters now support the Drop-In, collectively speaking 8 different community languages. In partnership with ASSIST, we've delivered specialist training to support this group of highly skilled volunteers, ensuring we can continue offering trauma-informed and culturally grounded support in visitors' own languages.



The Drop-In

Looking ahead, we're working closely with our Experts by Experience team to host regular feedback sessions with Drop-In visitors. These sessions will create a safe space for people to shape how the Drop-In evolves, because this is a space that belongs to the community, and it should grow with them.

Case study

Person Seeking Asylum who attends the Multi-Agency Drop-In

I first came to Drop-in in 2022. The first thing that made me feel welcome was speaking to City of Sanctuary volunteers who were from my community and spoke the same language. I was able to ask questions and get information about what services were available.

After that first time, I came to the Drop-in more regularly, sometimes to get advice about my situation, and sometimes to see my friends and meet new people in a friendly place. Sometimes they serve lunch there, and you can always get a cup of tea or coffee and speak to someone you know. There are so many new things to understand about living in the UK, it's good to know that I can always come to Victoria Hall if I have a question.

In future, I would like to volunteer with City of Sanctuary so that I can find work when I get my status. I have spoken to the barbers who do free haircuts at Drop-in, they say it is a great place to practice their skills and help them find paid work. Maybe I will join them soon. I am inspired to see people from my community giving back and helping others.





Sheffield Project for Refugee INtegration and Growth



SPRING is a citywide partnership supporting newly granted refugees to settle into the local community.



SPRING is a unique collaboration of six organisations, working alongside a network of over 70 partner organisations, to **best support the complex and urgent needs people face after receiving refugee status.**

This year, we:

- Supported 728 newly granted refugees to begin their journey with SPRING
- Provided longer term integration support to 316 existing clients
- Delivered 2,989 one on one support meetings
- Made 2,398 referrals to other organisations and services

SPRING empowers newly granted refugees to navigate the critical first steps after receiving their refugee status and build safe, fulfilling and happy lives in Sheffield. We provide trauma-informed, person-centered support which is grounded in dignity and care.

Over 70% of City of Sanctuary Sheffield's SPRING volunteer team have lived experience of the asylum system. **This peer-led approach builds trust and ensures support is empathetic, culturally responsive and delivered in many languages.** The knowledge, energy, and dedication of this team is one of the key reasons our work is so impactful.

Our support covers a broad range of complex needs—from securing ID, benefits and healthcare, to supporting access to education, housing, and employment. In the face of an ongoing housing crisis, we worked closely with partners (including Sheffield Council, NOMAD, Sheffield College, the NHS, Refugees at Home and DWP) to prevent homelessness and address urgent housing needs.

Sheffield Project for Refugee INtegration and Growth

SPRING supports individuals to access emergency accommodation, escalates urgent housing issues, and prevents evictions from asylum housing. This includes helping people access essentials like food, SIM cards, and furniture, often making the difference between crisis and stability.

Beyond direct support, we are **committed to challenging the systemic barriers newly granted refugees face**. Through casework and storytelling, we continue to raise awareness of the injustices within the asylum and housing systems, while also advocating for long-term, citywide solutions. This year we saw a significant policy shift with the Home Office doubling the 'move on' period for newly granted refugees from 28 to 56 days. This evidence-based policy change reflects some of what we have been campaigning towards for a long time, and we urge the government to ensure it becomes a permanent change and to extend this commitment beyond June 2025.



Sheffield Project for Refugee INtegration and Growth

Case study

A woman who was made homeless after receiving her refugee status

My name is R. I am 25 years old. I came from Eritrea due to the civil war. My journey was marked by violence. In Libya, I was sexually assaulted by smugglers.

I came to Sheffield at the beginning of 2025. After I got refugee status, they told me I had to leave my home. The council classified me as "non-priority" for housing, leaving me with nowhere to go. I had no place to go. For two nights, I was homeless on the streets. Destitute.

City of Sanctuary stepped in as a family. They provided immediate refuge and support through safe places to stay, in people's homes and in hotels. After that, SPRING helped me too. They worked with the council, the Salvation Army, my GP, to find me somewhere to live. They told people I am vulnerable and need support. They kept helping until we found a good place.

Now, I have safe housing and am starting college. I am grateful to SPRING and City of Sanctuary. I am happy to have a place like City of Sanctuary. They offered me a future when I had nothing.





"I felt inspired that I had the opportunity to be in the same room as some powerful people and to have my voice heard in a way that I could never have imagined."
A volunteer with lived experience of seeking asylum

Advocacy and Systems Change

Despite a change in government, the hostile environment continues. Hostile policies and inflammatory rhetoric continue to make life increasingly difficult for people seeking sanctuary. **The asylum system is designed to isolate and dehumanise, so our work must both support those forced to navigate it and fight to transform it.**

Advocacy

We continued to visit the hotels where people seeking asylum are being housed; listening, supporting, and taking action.

Holding over 260 individual meetings with people seeking asylum in the hotels, we've supported people living through unsafe conditions and complex issues, escalating urgent cases to the Home Office, Sheffield City Council, and MEARS (the accommodation provider). We have halted evictions and transfers that ignore urgent medical and safeguarding needs, reunited families, secured healthcare and enabled survivors of violence to find safety and build communities. Our work begins with the basics, safe housing, healthcare and mental health support, and then extends to training, volunteering,

and community leadership. There is no migrant justice without migrants.

We challenge systemic failures at the highest levels, leading on regional and national collaboration across the sector. This year, we submitted a report in collaboration with SYMAAG to the Home Affairs Committee on the state of asylum accommodation in Sheffield. It detailed unsafe housing, low-quality and sometimes unsafe food, on-site surveillance, safeguarding concerns and lack of action to resolve such failures. The report, which included case studies and experiences we collected from people directly affected, stands as a testament to the experiences of the community and has since been published by the Committee.

Following on from an event exploring alternatives to private asylum contracts – that we co-organised with University of Sheffield's Migration Research Group- we are now working on developing a local alternative. We aim for this to be ready for 2029, when the current contracts are due to end and powers will be devolved to local authorities.



Advocacy and System Change

Campaigning

City of Sanctuary Sheffield's work is **grounded in the needs and leadership of people seeking sanctuary**. This year, we supported over 45 women living in asylum accommodation to become powerful community leaders. They've spoken, and performed a theatre piece they created, at events across the city and met with local MPs to raise the urgent issues facing people seeking sanctuary. This number reflects not only the strength of these women, but also the cruelty of the asylum dispersal system, which removes people from communities just as they begin to find stability and connection. Time and again, women who've grown in confidence, built trusting relationships, and stepped up to lead have been forced to leave Sheffield suddenly. Their power, despite and against this system, remains vital to our work and our collective fight for justice.

Our campaigning is directly informed by our advocacy work and is currently focused on three key areas:

Lift the Ban: Give People Seeking Asylum the Right to Work

We have continued to build power leading a Sheffield coalition of 40+ organisations and joined the national campaign at Parliament to demand change. We've organised and attended many community events that bring people together to learn, resist and celebrate, such as our International Women's Day evening which was full of food, music and powerful conversations.

Free Bus Travel for People Seeking Asylum

In collaboration with Change Lab students, we've continued to build a powerful campaign demanding safe, accessible movement across the city. Public and political support continues to build.

Advocacy and System Change

Legal Advice and Representation

Collaboratively, with ASSIST and South Yorkshire Refugee Law and Justice, we are leading a project to enhance the quality and accessibility of legal immigration advice and representation. We have successfully secured funding to improve this work in the city and build a nation leading immigration advice sector. There is a long way to go, but this is a vital start.

Case study

A volunteer with lived experience of seeking asylum

I'm a campaigner from the City of Sanctuary Sheffield. I joined City of Sanctuary Sheffield's System Change and Advocacy team because I came to this country seeking safety. Unfortunately, after I arrived, I had to face another terrible journey called "the asylum process". This system breaks your dignity. Many of us come to this country with skills and knowledge. However, if our asylum case take longer, sometimes even 20 years, it will be very difficult to get a job because of the long time and also, because we lost our confidence.

I'm fighting to Lift the Ban because I have experienced the impact of this awful policy on my life. I have felt the hunger here. I have never experienced that in my country. We are there, at the hotel, sitting all day without any activities, thinking about our past, our families, our children. We can't afford to pay for the bus ticket to go to the GP or get some support in the city centre.

I'm now a refugee but I will continue fighting to win this campaign. This is not only for me. This is for the people who will come. I don't want for them to suffer what I have suffered.





"We feel scared, it's stressful, we get scared moving in the streets, we don't feel safe where we are. We are finding it difficult to survive here. We represent all asylum seekers. We should be able to move in society with confidence and safety we don't get in our home countries. We want the authorities to assure us that we are safe. We want freedom."

Women seeking asylum who shared their experiences at our emergency community meeting amid ongoing far-right riots

Trigger Events: Turning Crisis into Action

You can never predict when a crisis will hit, but you can prepare the ground—the relationships, the infrastructure, the shared values—so that when it does, your response is rooted in solidarity, mutual care, and resistance.

This year, two major trigger events shook our community: the sharp rise in detentions and threats of forced removals to Rwanda in March 2024, and the far-right riots targeting asylum accommodation and people of color in August.

In both moments, City of Sanctuary Sheffield stepped into **our role as a trusted and experienced convener, organiser, and advocate**. We acted quickly, holding space for shared pain and anger, amplifying the voices of those most affected, and mobilising people across the city toward collective action.

Resisting Rwanda Removals

When detentions began in March, we responded in less than 24 hours. In collaboration with South Yorkshire Refugee Law and Justice we shared urgent, accurate legal information with our community. We also coordinated an emergency community meeting to process what was happening, find strength in community, and plan a collective response.

We helped equip people with knowledge and practical tools, and we ensured that people with lived experience were supported to speak out safely and powerfully. This was a moment of fear and uncertainty, but together, we turned it into connection and clarity.



Trigger Events: Turning Crisis into Action

Responding to Racist Riots

When far-right riots erupted in Rotherham, we co-led the city's response.

In the days following the violence, with the threat of more far-right actions high and reports of attacks facing our community daily in Sheffield, we brought over 200 people together in a powerful gathering of solidarity and resistance. We created space for people seeking sanctuary to share their experiences, to speak from pain but also from power, and to be heard, ensuring this meeting was trauma-informed and empowering.

Together, we developed a clear and coordinated set of actions: from buddying systems to protect people at immediate risk of violence, to long-term city-wide organising strategies that confront the root causes of hate. We offered the people of Sheffield practical and meaningful ways to respond, both in the immediate aftermath and in the ongoing work of building a safer, more welcoming city.

Our ability to respond so quickly and effectively was only possible because of the **trust, organising infrastructure, and cross-sector relationships we've built over many years**. The gathering brought together a powerful and rare coalition: people with lived experience, grassroots organisers, trade unions, charities, councillors, and all of Sheffield's MPs. This speaks to what it means to be rooted in community and the depth of trust and influence City of Sanctuary Sheffield has built.

We also led the way in public messaging, naming the harm, condemning the violence and sharing our clear vision for a better world.

Counter-intuitively, it is often in moments of crisis that our mission becomes most visible. These moments create opportunities: to come together, to clarify what matters, and to push for the systemic change we urgently need.

We will continue to be there - before, during and after the crises - not just reacting, but organising, learning, and building something stronger in their wake.



Psychology Team

The Psychology team is a group of qualified Clinical Psychologists and a Psychotherapist, all working voluntarily within City of Sanctuary Sheffield. Psychology can play a powerful role in supporting the resilience of small organisations, applying psychological theories to address real-world challenges. Through reflective practice, the psychological input can strengthen team dynamics and foster adaptive thinking.

The Psychology team supports staff and volunteer wellbeing through:

- Staff wellbeing sessions and away days, designed to strengthen team resilience.
- The introduction of reflective practice, creating space for open dialogue, shared learning, and emotional processing. This will be expanded to embed resilience at the core of how we work together.

- Ongoing regular volunteer support sessions, offering a safe, facilitated space for volunteers to share their experiences and thoughts, helping them to feel heard, supported, and confident in their roles.

The team also works to ensure that psychological principles **shape City of Sanctuary Sheffield's services and environments to better support people seeking sanctuary**. In early 2024, the team conducted a significant community consultation about the redesign of The Sanctuary, interviewing 55 people who use the space—including sanctuary seekers, staff, volunteers, and partner organisations—to ensure design interventions were psychologically-informed and met actual needs. We worked to ensure that trauma-informed principles of safety, collaboration and empowerment were embedded in the redesign, creating a more welcoming and supportive environment for all.

"The research conducted by the Psychology team was the foundation of every change we made in our latest redesign of The Sanctuary. It grounded the work in the needs of the community and everything you now see at The Sanctuary grew from it."

Tom Martin, Director of City of Sanctuary Sheffield



"It was such a brilliant and engaging session. The team got so much out of it and were buzzing afterwards about how brilliant it was."

IMIX, a UK charity that supports organisations to shift public attitudes on migration

Psychology Team

As well as working within City of Sanctuary Sheffield, the Psychology team have delivered training on trauma-informed working and boundaries to partner organisations such as SAVTE and IMIX. We believe that **strengthening the wider sector strengthens us all** and that support for people seeking sanctuary will be most effective when underpinned by care and reflection.

We continue to offer co-produced training to Sheffield University's Talking Therapies program, sharing the lived realities of seeking asylum with those training in mental health support. We also delivered training to Clinical Psychology doctorate students about the role of psychology in the voluntary sector, helping to inspire the next generation of psychologists to offer their skills in settings that often otherwise lack access to psychological expertise.

The team is currently undertaking a service evaluation project exploring the barriers and facilitators to accessing mental health services for those seeking sanctuary. The project aims to understand how services can be accessible, inclusive and responsive to the needs of refugees and people seeking asylum.

The team is also supporting a project with Freedom from Torture, working to establish an independent facility for medico-legal reports that will assist local lawyers representing asylum applications. Currently no organised facility exists, so this is a vital development for Sheffield and the surrounding region.



"One of my greatest opportunities and chances was to get acquainted with City of Sanctuary Sheffield and start volunteering there. A place where I came back to life."

Volunteer with lived experience of seeking asylum

Volunteering

Volunteers remain central to all of the work we do at City of Sanctuary Sheffield. **With over 100 active volunteers, working across nine core teams, over 60% of whom have lived experience of seeking sanctuary.**



It is their skills, care and commitment that make our work possible—enabling us to provide vital support and fight for change with and for people seeking sanctuary in Sheffield.

The strength and resilience of our volunteer team was especially evident during the temporary closure of The Sanctuary for

redevelopment. The Sanctuary is a vital space not only where our volunteers do so much of their work, but also as a place for connection and community. Despite the disruption, volunteers remained patient and dedicated, continuing their work from alternative spaces, contributing to the move itself, and providing thoughtful input that shaped the redesign process.

Since returning to The Sanctuary, we have prioritised volunteer support and development. Key developments include:

- Restarting regular volunteer wellbeing sessions
- Launching a monthly volunteer brunch, generously supported by a local Sheffield restaurant
- Offering tailored one-to-one check-ins to hear feedback, discuss wellbeing, and support personal goals and progress
- Building a program of training opportunities, both internal and external

This work is a key part of how we support and sustain our volunteer team and honour the enormous contributions they make.

Volunteering

We recognise the powerful role volunteering plays in people's lives, especially for people within the asylum system who are currently banned from working. Volunteering provides purpose, reduces isolation, supports mental health and creates opportunities for personal growth, such as learning new skills and building confidence. Looking ahead, we are excited to continue to build on this with more support and development opportunities, as well as more moments for shared joy and community.

Case Study

M's journey from volunteer into further employment

I remember when I first came to Sheffield with no one I knew. It was Covid time and I wasn't familiar with the place until one of our housing manager advised me to search for volunteering and that's when I came to know of City of Sanctuary and I applied.

The experience at City of Sanctuary was good. It made me feel at home.

It made me get immense experience by helping people in need of help. It made me feel a sense of belonging, that am not alone, there are people out there who are like me. It also helped me create more friends and thus the loneliness life I was living as an Asylum seeker before. My confidence grew over time that I was volunteering with City of Sanctuary which has played a key role while searching jobs.

I am currently a care assistant and I would say if it wasn't for City of Sanctuary I wouldn't be where I am today. I would surely say City of Sanctuary has been my backbone.





Experts by Experience Team

Our EbE team is made up of between 6 and 8 people who have lived experience of seeking sanctuary and migration. Embedded within City of Sanctuary Sheffield, they co-lead in developing our strategies, services, and policies.

This year EbE team members have:

- Produced a report on the far-right riots of Summer 2024, sharing powerful lived experience insights on safety, belonging, and the response of sanctuary-supporting organisations.
- Shaped City of Sanctuary Sheffield's service delivery and policy through regular input and review.
- Participated in all recruitment processes, offering valuable feedback and insights.
- Actively engaged as members of the Hallam University of Sanctuary Steering Group including collaborating with Sheffield Hallam Staff Race Equity Network to mark International Migrants Day and delivering a lecture for Sheffield Hallam MA students titled 'A World Where Refugees Are Welcomed'.
- Served on School and Church of Sanctuary assessment panels, helping guide local communities to embed sanctuary values into their work.
- Supported the regional strategic Refugee Integration Forum.

By **centering lived experience in the decision-making and leadership of City of Sanctuary Sheffield, our work reflects the real needs and priorities of people seeking sanctuary** and has a far greater impact. This year, we have welcomed new members to the EbE team, bringing in more diverse perspectives and experiences, while supporting more people seeking sanctuary to develop transferable skills and knowledge that will enable them to take up leadership opportunities within the sector, or elsewhere.



Experts by Experience Team

Case study

Z's journey with City of Sanctuary Sheffield as a person with lived experience of seeking asylum

My journey with City of Sanctuary Sheffield began in 2020, when I volunteered as an interpreter and joined the SPRING project team. During the challenging period of the COVID-19 pandemic, this role gave me a renewed sense of purpose. Supporting people seeking sanctuary during such a critical time was deeply fulfilling, and being part of a welcoming, diverse community lifted my spirits.

In 2023, I took a significant step by completing training to become a member of the Experts by Experience team. This was a transformative milestone in my journey. As an EbE member, I was given the opportunity to engage in shaping the organisation's direction by participating in policy reviews, contributing to strategic discussions, and ensuring that the voices of those with lived experience are heard and valued in decision-making processes. This experience has not only empowered me personally but has strengthened my belief in the importance of lived experience leadership in creating lasting change.



Organisational Wellbeing and Culture

At CoSS we believe that fostering a healthy and resilient organisational culture is the bedrock of our work. It ensures we have the most impact and is **liberating for individuals engaged in the struggle**, especially those with lived experience of the asylum system or migration.

This is deep work that we have been building over many years and involves:

- Strengthening The Sanctuary so we have a strong and resilient space from which to do our work
- Building in organisational structures that help remove bias and an overreliance on individual goodwill, supporting people to feel psychologically safe
- Committing to and delivering high-quality line management so that staff feel safe and supported while liberating them to deliver for the community we are working alongside
- Centering care and wellbeing with the help of the Psychology team to ensure that staff and volunteers are well and psychologically safe at work

Our organisational health and resilience keeps us here for the long term, alongside people seeking sanctuary, collectively fighting for a better world.

Page of Thanks

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the incredible community that surrounds and supports City of Sanctuary Sheffield. This year, we've faced complex challenges and made bold changes. Through it all, the strength and generosity of our community have carried us.

To our volunteers and staff: thank you for your commitment, care and skills. Your dedication makes our work possible. To our partners across Sheffield and beyond: thank you for standing with us in solidarity and shared purpose.

To our supporters and funders: your generosity and belief in our vision sustains us. This year's Sanctuary redesign fundraiser stands as a reaffirmation of our shared values and the collective care Sheffield has for people seeking sanctuary. Without your generous donations and support our work would not have been possible.

Sheffield has shown that together we are strong. Together, we are building a city that is safer and more welcoming for people seeking sanctuary. A city that centers dignity, justice and joy. To everyone who has contributed to our work this year, thank you. We are proud to be in community with you.



City of Sanctuary Sheffield

