LCoS AGM Report for the Year 2024/25

Trustee body

Your trustees following last year's AGM were Pete Hobson, Anne Senior, Sarah Jones, Peter Williamson, Jessamyn Witthaus and Sherri Wong. During the course of the year advertising and interviewing has brought us two further names to put forward: Sultana Taib and Pooja Shah. Over the years LCoS has seen a steady turn-over of trustees, and we learn each time to work together as a newly blending team. But our constitution, passed in 2017, states that no trustee can serve more than 3 consecutive 3-year terms without at least a one-year break. By next AGM it will be 9 years that I have been chair of this charity in this incarnation of its life.

Staffing

A year ago we had just taken payment of the initial tranche of our 5-year Reaching Communities Lottery grant and were anticipating the new possibilities it raised for us in securing a clear staff team to lead the work done by our many and crucial volunteers.

We all now know that we were successful in recruiting Hafsa Mitha to our first ever full-time Chief Officer post. She started in January and has already brought her own distinctive gifts and talents and experience to bear on the work – we are very fortunate to have found her! Shortly afterwards Omid Lohoni left us as project officer, but we moved speedily and recruited Mohammad Alsayed in his place, starting in April and he too has settled in well, with a distinctive contribution, not least borne of his own lived experience. Thankfully Alex Jakeman remains in post as our ever-reliable Finance and Admin officer as he has for the past 7 years.

Last year I thanked Maggie Edgington, who had covered a key staffing gap as one-day a week interim Operations Lead for longer than any of us had anticipated, alongside her role as volunteer for work with families and children. Maggie decided it was also the time for her to move on, which she did after the summer families activity programme completed, and I'd like to thank her again for all she has given to LCoS in various capacities over at least the past 9 years.

Funding our work

We have just completed our Year One report to the Lottery on what's been achieved to date (funding began in October 2024). Our bid was calculated to cover 40% of anticipated costs and requires us to raise the balance in various ways and we have had a very positive year in respect of successful grants applications since then –

bringing in some £42k of new grant money in that period alongside other income sources, against a target of £30k a year over the period. And you will see from our annual accounts to 31 March presented to the AGM that we had a net gain on assets of £9k over the 12-month period. The not so good news is that regular giving from members and supporters remains a relatively small element of our finances – although one-off donations of various sorts are holding up well.

What have we done?

Achievements Summary (October 2024 – September 2025)

Introduction

The first year of the "From Sanctuary to Settlement" project, funded through the Reaching Communities Grant, has been a period of significant progress for Leicester City of Sanctuary. The grant supported us to deliver our "Preparation for Life in the UK" programme. The programme successfully delivered a wide range of educational, social, health, and wellbeing initiatives supporting refugees and asylum seekers (RAS) to rebuild their lives, develop their skills, and find belonging in their new community.

Over the course of the year, the project directly supported **457** individuals, helping people seeking sanctuary in Leicester to gain independence, develop confidence, improve wellbeing, and strengthen community connections. The hub continues to be a source of support for those seeking sanctuary in Leicester.

Overall Achievement

• We supported **457** service users over the course of the year (October 24 - September 25).

• We delivered a broad and inclusive range of activities that directly contributed to learning, wellbeing (mental and physical), and sense of belonging and community.

• We supported people to gain more confidence, enhance their wellbeing, and find a sense of belonging within the community.

Programme Highlights

English Language & Education

• **170** participants completed beginners ESOL classes, building the confidence to progress to formal ESOL classes with local colleges

• We established a structured learning pathway in partnership with the University of Leicester and Leicester College, developing confidence and supporting access to education.

• We improved access and confidence through library orientation visits, supporting participants to use computers and access online ESOL resources.

> *"Language is my freedom. If I can speak and understand, I don't have to rely on anyone else to tell my story."*

Community & Social Activities

• **477** people attended the weekly drop-in hub, taking part in social, creative, and wellbeing activities.

• Our volunteers provided opportunities for connection, social interaction and language development.

• **125** participants engaged in creative arts and crafts sessions, promoting relaxation and self-expression.

• **131** people joined orientation trips to museums, libraries, and the local fire station, helping them explore the city and find places where they're welcome.



Family & Health Support

• **76** participants (9 families) attended family play sessions, learning about child development and accessing local health resources.

• Collaboration with NHS partners led to positive changes in maternity and health services for asylum seekers.

• **163** people joined health and wellbeing sessions, including women's health, tuberculosis awareness, and exercise classes.

• **136** participants took part in physical activity sessions with Leicester City in the Community.

• Launched a Walking Group in partnership with SUSTRANS, promoting physical activity and local orientation.

• Partnered with a local optician to provide on-site sight tests and free glasses to those in need.



Employability & Life Skills

• **138** participants attended life skills sessions, covering topics such as employment, housing, and energy management.

• **64** people completed employability sessions with TWIN Employment, supporting preparation for job seeking and building confidence.

• 2 housing sessions were delivered, with over **70** attendees in total, providing information about how to navigate the housing process, steps to follow once granted leave to remain and referrals to local partners for practical support for those made homeless.



Impact and Outcomes

As part of an independent evaluation of our work, participants reported increased confidence, sense of belonging, and improved wellbeing. Many described feeling ‘at home’ and ‘part of a family’ within the City of Sanctuary community. The hub provided a trusted, safe space that helped people recover a sense of purpose, dignity, and hope while integrating into local life and preparing for life in the UK. Service users and volunteers shared feedback with friendship, learning, and mutual support as central to their experience.

> ***“The soul feels comfortable in this place because of the people in it.”***

Partnerships

• Strong collaboration with Leicester City in the Community, University of Leicester, Leicester College, British Red Cross, The Race Equality Centre, De Montfort University, After 18,

• Worked with both Leicester University health, and NHS health teams to share vital health information and support asylum-seeking individuals and families.

• Signposting and referral to other charities including Red Cross, Open Hands, TREC and After 18 to ensure joined-up support and avoid duplication of services.

Organisation changes

• Recruited the charity's first full-time Chief Officer (Jan 2025), enhancing leadership and operational capacity.

• Strengthened the volunteer base with new recruits in arts, English support, and wellbeing roles

• Established the Sanctuary Ambassadors group to embed lived experience in programme design and delivery.

Key Learnings

• The drop-in hub remains a vital first step for newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers.

• Service-user involvement in the development of projects such as a 'Welcome Pack', enhances accessibility and ownership.

• Language and translation volunteers are crucial for inclusion and engagement.

• Ongoing dialogue through the Sanctuary Ambassadors group is shaping a more community-led approach to strategy and delivery.

"It means to me having a purpose - to come here and help people. I'm called to help people. Coming here, and being with everyone, is one of the ways to see true kindness. It means family."
Godwin

"It brought me a lot of happiness. It's understanding that most problems I go through are the same as others, especially when we are vulnerable. I learnt here that we are all human and I felt comfortable and accommodated. It means that I am not alone. It made me feel at home. They opened a new page in my life."
Dickson

"I like helping people. I took my book out and was helping people learn new English words. I think it doesn't matter that we are all from different places in the world. What matters is that we are helping each other and wherever we go, we have to help each other."
Annabelle

"I like helping here. It makes me happy. I am in a team together with lots of different people."
Araz