

Loughborough Town of Sanctuary Annual report. September 2025

A year seems to have flashed by since our last AGM and as ever, challenges have been tackled with determination. Our work probably brings smiles, laughter, frustration, and anxiety in equal measure and we sometimes observe national developments in dismay. But at a time when the wider narrative towards immigration seems to be increasingly hostile, our work seems ever more important, as is our hope to make a positive difference in our locality to the lives of asylum seekers and refugees. Two of the refugees who regularly attend our English language sessions commented recently that 'all English people are very kind' (!) Whilst we might find ourselves wishing that were true, we do hope at least to introduce a little compassion, friendship and also practical and moral support to those who reach our shores seeking safety.

First and foremost, having succeeded in our bid to access a Lottery Fund grant, we welcome our new Volunteer Co-ordinator.

The remit of our work is constantly wider and more complex and we are delighted to welcome Leigh to this demanding role. Read her report below.



“Our volunteers
are not paid –
not because they
are worthless –
but because they
are priceless.”

Anon

Volunteer Coordinator Report.

My name is Leigh Adams, I joined Loughborough Town of Sanctuary in June 2025 as the National Lottery funded Volunteer Coordinator, having previously been involved on the committee and as a volunteer. My background is in psychiatric nursing and latterly in hospitality.

The role is constantly developing, as it is the first funded post we have at Loughborough Town of Sanctuary, with many lessons learnt I as move forward in the post.

I have had the pleasure of working with established volunteers with a wealth of knowledge, experience and commitment to develop, around need, activities, access to relevant community resources and build relationships with service users in Loughborough.

We have a fabulous group of volunteers and are constantly recruiting for all areas, a central database of volunteers is being collated by me, and any new volunteers will be contacted and onboarded as soon as possible after they approach the charity.

At the hotel which houses single women, families and their children we have set up a weekly activity session for the children to play and create alongside their parents. The session is going very well with lots

of positive outcomes for all involved. We are also providing an ad hoc 'Orientation to Loughborough' walk for new arrivals at the hotel.

At the other hotel, I, alongside the established team of Sarah Jones from LPT and Peter Cantle (volunteer) attend the Thursday coffee morning. This session provides social contact with the service users along with signposting to relevant community resources, help with accessing GP and dental services, explaining processes for their asylum claims.

The charity has been providing shoes, clothes and SIM cards for the service users at one hotel and SIM cards for the service users at the other. The SIM cards are currently being provided by Good Things Foundation and are an essential lifeline for communicating with family, friends and accessing online services.

We are always looking for donations of clothes and old phones as the population at the hotels is ever changing with service users particularly single men, being moved to dispersal accommodation quickly.

Inclusion into our local community.

Networking with local groups and organisations continues across all our work, as does our membership of Charnwood Asylum Seekers and Refugees Network.

We are very grateful for the welcome and support of John Storer Charnwood, Fearon Hall, Equality Action, Healthwatch Leic, Grub Club, Loughborough Leisure Centre, URC church, Salvation Army, Loughborough College, Loughborough University, Baca, Care4Calais, Migrant Help, The HUB project, Loughborough Well-being Centre, All Saints with Holy Trinity Church and The Flagstaff Family of Churches in Ashby and surrounding villages.

It is also very rewarding to see how many asylum seekers and refugees are keen to 'give back' to the community that has supported them. We often see them volunteering within our own organisation and in the wider Loughborough community, including in various roles at John Storer house, Fearon Hall, the Loughborough Transitions Community Allotment, The British Heart Foundation charity shop, our own English conversation sessions, cooking sessions and more besides.

Many of these reports exemplify the huge importance of this aspect of our work, especially given increasingly negative disinformation about immigration circulating on social media.

Here's a message that was sent to Paul, our 'Meet and Greet Coordinator from Damalie, who has been in Loughborough since last year studying for her Masters degree in Nottingham. She has not only volunteered with Meet and Greet but also with the shopping/cooking sessions: - *" I would like to express my gratitude to LToS for the opportunity they offer the community and myself to be able to serve in this very crucial way and meet other community members through it. It has been an encouraging experience. Regards, Damalie.*

Meeting and Greeting

Our original 'meeting and greeting' outside the immigration office continues, with ongoing changes and challenges, often now with asylum seekers from local hotels called to attend meetings in Loughborough. Our experienced support teams, including help from at least one of 'our own' previous asylum seekers (now given Leave to Remain) continue to provide much needed support both to asylum seekers and to those who come to support them. In the current very hostile political climate, this is ever more needed and much appreciated.

English Conversation sessions.

These sessions continue and numbers are currently high, keeping all our volunteers busily occupied week on week! Those attending include people at various stages of integration into British society, including those with official refugee status. A very positive development is that several asylum seekers who have excellent English, some of whom have experience of teaching prior to their arrival in the UK, have themselves become volunteer 'tutors'! Up until the summer break, we were well supported by University students including a young woman whose family came as refugees. Her family now have Leave to Remain, and our young volunteer is currently studying for 'A' levels. Such support is very much appreciated - particularly, of course by the younger attendees - and needless to say, this 'giving back' of support - from those previously supported - is most encouraging.



Volunteer tutors come from varied backgrounds and experience and bring different talents to the role, so we have evolved a flexible approach which allows each of us to teach in our own style, incorporating grammar teaching, games, challenges and even songs and poems! The teaching can include well-known musical hall songs like *Daisy, Daisy*, simplified versions of classics like *Sense and Sensibility*, competitive grammar games involving enthusiastic rounds of applause, or bingo and board games with a linguistic twist! Whatever the approach, it often involves a great deal of laughter and the refreshment break allows us to teach that most important of English skills: how to make a proper cup of tea! As before, friendships develop, and support of different kinds is often offered. Several of our 'students' have been helped to find college places and/or volunteer roles in the community or help to approach advice and support from the relevant 'experts'.

Last, but not least we are very happy to welcome new volunteers!

Loughborough Transitions Community Allotment.

At Loughborough Transitions community allotment we always need extra help...so we are always pleased to work with asylum seekers. Kingsley was a great help until he was moved by the Home Office. (See photo!) Now we are helped by 3 more!!

The "Leisure Centre Sanctuary" scheme.

This scheme completed at the end of August and has been well used, especially by those asylum seekers who are single.

Jean Anderson and Mo met with new recruits on a Monday evening, signed them up and then they were given a brief induction in the gym by Steph Buckley...understanding they could attend twice a week before 5pm. It was difficult to keep track of numbers as ASs were moved on so quickly.

.. some only attending once or twice before they were moved on by the Home Office.

Attending the gym has definitely improved people's mental health. One young woman approached us to say the leisure centre had saved her mental health. And then we hear similar from the men, a number of whom came directly from the Bibby Stockholm ship and others moved overnight when rioters attacked asylum seekers resident in a Tamworth hotel.

The leisure centre staff, and in particular Stephanie Buckley and Jack, have been very welcoming and we are most grateful for the support and cooperation. Stephanie has provided a very comprehensive and positive report on the programme for our funders, Charnwood Council, which we fully endorse.

During the programme the individuals improved their physical and mental health..reducing anxiety and depression. The individuals have explained that this program has been a stress relief and one of the biggest impacts has been the social connection the individuals are now feeling as part of a community which encourages connections among participants, fostering a sense of belonging. We hope to continue this programme beyond 2025 as it has delivered long-term health benefits and healthy behaviours which will encourage lifelong habits that contribute to ongoing well-being and overall improvements in physical and mental health.

We are delighted to have been awarded a further grant. Many thanks to Steph Day and Charnwood Council. A number of improvements will be made to the current scheme which we hope to start again in October.

Tuesday Activity Sessions at one of the hotels.

Here's a glimpse into the fun provided for some of the children we have the pleasure of meeting at our regular activity sessions. This would not happen without our volunteers. It only requires a couple of hours on a Tuesday afternoon.

PLEASE contact us if you'd like to be involved. 😊



MORE THANKS: -

Many thanks to Gisela from Leicester Outdoor Pursuits Centre for delivering these eagerly awaited backpacks and rucksacks – and to Folk Folk for their fundraising concerts.



 presents Tom Kitching and Marit Fält with 'Where There's Brass'	Licensed Bar & Samosas Profits from the evening go to Loughborough Town of Sanctuary A FolkFolk Community event Want to join our cooperative? See folkfolk.uk for more info
All Saints Parish Church, Loughborough Stonely Row, LE11 1UX Tuesday 6 th May 2025 – 7.30 pm	
Tickets £10 online or £12 on the door	bit.ly/folkfolk-tk-mf

 presents Jocelyn Pettit & Ellen Gira on North American fiddle and cello	Licensed Bar & Samosas Profits from the evening go to Loughborough Town of Sanctuary A FolkFolk Community event Want to join our cooperative? See folkfolk.uk for more info
All Saints Parish Church, Loughborough Stonely Row, LE11 1UX Tuesday 20 th May 2025 – 7.30 pm	
Tickets £13 online or £15 on the door	bit.ly/folkfolk-jp-eg

Folk Folk is a **not-for-profit community cooperative** aiming to foster a sense of community amongst local music lovers and bring world class folk musicians to the heart of Charnwood. You can find out more about them, their events and their **membership offer** at folkfolk.uk.

Large Grant received!

We are delighted to receive a considerable grant from the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace <https://www.csjp.org/> Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace. This is going to assist us with cooking sessions, which we hold weekly for the asylum seekers and also to fund food vouchers for those who have to travel from the cities to the Immigration Reporting Centre.

We remember fondly Sister Bridgetta and her friends who supported us in the early days of LToS before moving away from the area.

A HUGE THANK YOU TO YOU ALL. ❤️



Many thanks also to **United Reformed Church** who provide us with their kitchen for free on a weekly basis during term times enabling our very popular cooking sessions to take place.

And to the Grub Club at URC Church Loughborough for their holiday activities and food.

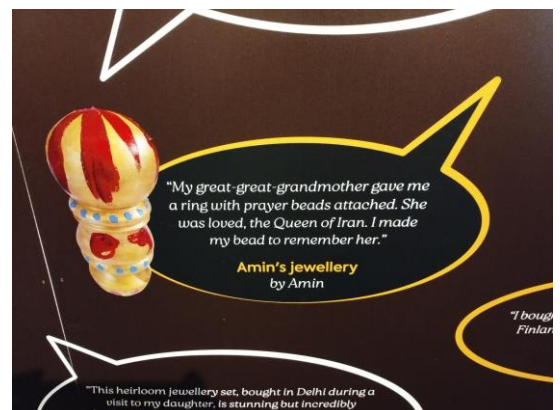
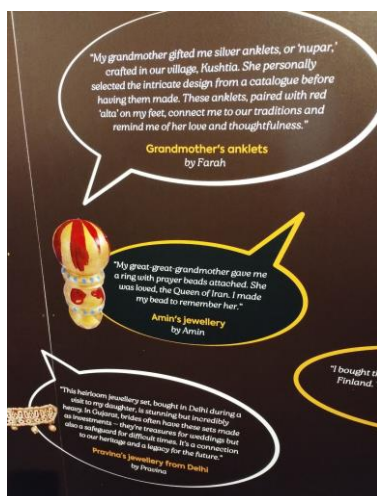
THANKS ALSO to the HUB project in Loughborough who support our asylum seekers in different ways such as clothing, luggage, baby equipment and a place to rest and take a drink. As we do not have any premises please send any suitable donations to them.

And to Loughborough's Asylum seekers and refugees, who bring so much to our vibrant community:

ASYLUM SEEKERS contribute to a local project:

Thank you, Alison and Liz, for the invitation to the opening of My Jewellery, My Story at Charnwood Museum - you both must be very proud of the outcome.

We were very pleased to see some work and quotes from a few asylum seekers based in Loughborough. 😊



ENCOURAGING LOCAL NEWS:

'Football Welcomes'

In one of our earliest projects, volunteers from Loughborough Town of Sanctuary, did some brilliant work to provide opportunities for asylum seekers and refugees to play football. Since then, we like to think that some of the early seeds that were sown have borne fruit and the baton has been passed on to larger organisations. Thanks to Joe McSharry, Community Coordinator (Football Welcomes and Charnwood Lead)

Leicester City in the Community deliver a programme called "Football Welcomes" which uses football as a tool to engage and support refugees and people seeking asylum.

In 2023 Leicester City in the Community began working in partnership with Loughborough Students Union to support adults in Loughborough through their Football for All programme. Alongside student volunteers they have delivered weekly football sessions at the university over the last couple of years, as well as hosting regional football tournaments from around the Midlands.

The impact of this work has been significant and they are grateful for the partnerships that have made this work.

2024/25 Overview

- We've engaged 60 + refugees and people seeking asylum in Loughborough
- We've worked with participants from 20+ different nations
- We've delivered 35 + sessions in Loughborough plus special events.

In addition, a group were taken to a tournament in Derby for Refugee Week in June and also one of our participants was funded a Level 1 coaching qualification.

Recognition for Loughborough University.

Loughborough University has been recognised as a University of Sanctuary thanks to its efforts to go 'above and beyond' in providing a welcoming environment for refugees and those seeking asylum. This status has been awarded by City of Sanctuary, a charity that works with groups, organisations and individuals across every area and every sector in the UK to promote inclusivity, solidarity and compassion for those seeking sanctuary.

And finally, here's a poem by campaigner and Sanctuary Ambassador Malka Al-Haddad- City of Sanctuary, who attended a Loughborough Town of Sanctuary AGM about 10-12 years ago.

The Power In Us

by Malka Al-Haddad

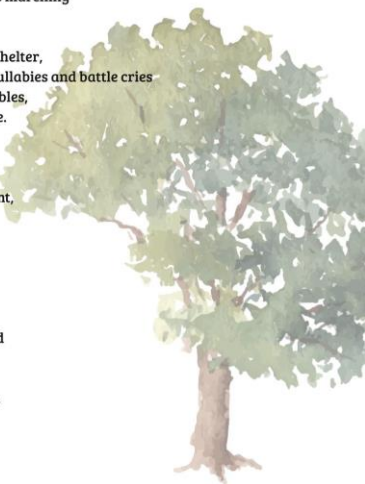
We are not lightning
But the storm that follows.
A thousand footsteps marching
in rhythms of hope.

We are each other's shelter,
voices stitched into lullabies and battle cries
When one of us stumbles,
a hundred hands rise.

But power isn't loud
until it needs to be-
but it's always present,
quiet as breath,
mighty as memory

We are the roots
under cities
the echo of
ancestors in the wind

Together -
we don't just survive.
We build.
We bloom.
We begin again



MANY THANKS TO EVERYONE INVOLVED WITH Loughborough Town of Sanctuary! Be inspired by that poem – and if you want to volunteer or find out more, please contact LTOS@loughborough.cityofsanctuary.org