MANCHESTER REFUGEE SUPPORT NETWORK

ANNUAL REPORT 2024/2025



mrsn
Manchester Refugee Support Network

LETTER FROM OUR MANAGER

Manchester Refugee Support Network delivered vital services to over 2,000 refugees and people seeking asylum in Manchester this year, including advice, housing, integration support and peer-led training. Our dedicated team provided specialist immigration guidance, helped hundreds facing homelessness, and ran arts and wellbeing activities in local asylum hotels.

We strengthened lived-experience leadership, built new partnerships, and responded to rising community need despite financial pressures. Thanks to all staff, volunteers and supporters, we continue to stand with those seeking safety and opportunity in Manchester.

Financially, this year has been challenging, with expenditure exceeding income and a reduction in total funds, reflecting both ambition and growing need (net income -£41,342). Yet our progress would not be possible without the continued support of partners, funders, volunteers, and—most importantly—the resilience and leadership of our refugee community itself.

Looking ahead, we remain committed to collaborative working, improving access to housing and employment, and amplifying the voices of those with lived experience. We thank everyone who has contributed to our mission and look forward to another year of standing together in support, education, and empowerment for all refugees and asylum seekers in Manchester.

Belay Keshay



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OUR AIMS



SUPPORT

To support refugees to access services and opportunities on an equal basis, in order to prevent all forms of poverty and allow individuals to fulfil their potential.



EDUCATE

To educate refugees and asylum seekers on their rights and responsibilities as active citizens, and contribute to positive media representation of refugees.



EMPOWER

To empower refugees to establish strong community organisations and provide platforms for them to represent the needs and aspirations of their communities.

OUR OBJECTIVES

1. To advance education and relieve financial hardship amongst those seeking asylum and those granted refugee status particularly by the provision of legal and other advice.
2. To support and promote the physical and mental health of asylum seekers, refugees and their dependents.
3. To advance the education and training of those granted refugee status and their dependents in need thereof so as to advance them in life and assist them to adapt within a new community.
4. To advance the education and knowledge of the public in general about the issues relating to refugees and those seeking asylum.
5. The provision of facilities for recreation or other leisure time occupation with the object of improving the conditions of life of those persons who have need of such facilities by reason of their age. race, gender, religion, infirmity or disablement, financial hardship or social and economic circumstances.
6. To relieve the effects of financial poverty on refugees and asylum seekers through the provision of temporary accommodation.

GENERAL REFUGEE ADVICE

Charlotte continued to coordinate General Refugee Advice, with Birhanemeskel was supporting as Refugee Advice Worker. They have continued to provide high quality support through their drop ins and appointments. Unfortunately we have said goodbye to Charlotte but she hopes to continue to volunteer with MRSN in the future. Sophie has taken on Charlotte's role as interim General Refugee Advice coordinator on Mondays. We also now have Angel supportig from RIS, acting as Employability service case worker on Mondays which as been an important addition.

This service continues to be be extremely busy, particularly with the refugee homelessness ever increasing in Manchester and MRSN being only of the only refugee-focused services that do drop in services for these issues.



> I am not sure what I would have done without MRSN - where would I have gone? Thank you so much to MRSN for their hard work.

FEEDBACK FROM OUR CLIENTS THIS YEAR

989 INDIVIDUAL CLIENTS WERE SUPPORTED

1586 CASES WERE OPENED

92
CASES OPENED TO ACCESS UNIVERSAL CREDIT SUPPORT

72
CASES OF RELATING TO ACCESSING COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT

49
CASES OPENED TO SUPPORT PASSPORT AND TRAVEL DOCUMENT APPLICATIONS

154
APPLICATIONS FOR EVISAS & BRP CARDS

221
CASES TO SUPPORT WITH ACCESS TO HOUSING

24
CASES OPENED TO SUPPORT BANKING AND CREDIT

28
CASES TO SUPPORT WITH ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

41
CASES OF SUPPORTING ACCESS TO CHILD BENEFITS

93
CASES TO SUPPORT MANCHESTER MOVE APPLICATIONS

42
CASES RELATING TO ACCESSING EDUCATION

224
CASES SUPPORTING UTILITY BILLS

50
PROVISIONAL LICENSES CASES

IMMIGRATION ADVICE

> What MRSN has done for my life is never to be forgotten - I thank God everyday for this help.

FEEDBACK FROM OUR CLIENTS THIS YEAR

851 INDIVIDUAL CLIENTS WERE SUPPORTED

1115 CASES WERE OPENED

157
CASES OPENED FOR EVISA APPLICATIONS

169
CASES TO SUPPORT WITH CITIZENSHIP APPLICATIONS

225
CASES TO SUPPORT WITH PASSPORT & TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

357
CASES TO SUPPORT REFUGEES STAYING IN THE UK

Alex and Bridget continute to manage the Immigration Advice service with the help of staff and volunteers. Bridget passed her level 2 Immigration exam in November last year, which means she is now able to do more complex immigration applications, particularly private and family life applications, which we are seeing a lot of at the drop in. It is also helpful to have a deeper understanding of these applications for refused asylum seekers who now have a family life in the UK, as a potential other route to being granted status. We also held our volunteer training day in March - which was a great success.



40
CASES TO SUPPORT FEE WAIVER APPLICATIONS

20
CASES TO SUPPORT ASYLUM SEEKERS

47
CASES TO SUPPORT BRP CARDS

44
INDEFINITE LEAVE TO REMAIN APPLICATIONS

IMMIGRATION ADVICE

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ASYLUM SUPPORT PROJECT

Kira has been leading on the Asylum drop in service on Mondays, with our new member of staff Dervla, as Bridget works on complex cases. There has been a massive increase in asylum appeals so the team has been very busy. Kira has also passed her IAA Level 2 qualification and is currently working towards her IAA Level 3. Brigdet has been working with Asylum Aid on complex cases and has managed to help a refused Sudanese asylum seeker be granted humanitarian protection. She is still waiting to hear about the decision from 2 other complex cases she is working on.

918 CASES TO SUPPORT ASYLUM SEEKERS

517 INDIVIDUALS SUPPORTED

53 CASES FOR ACCESSING GOVERNMENT ASYLUM SUPPORT

191 CASES TO SUPPORT ASYLUM SEEKERS STAYING IN THE UK

89 ASYLUM SEEKERS WERE SUPPORTED TO LODGE AN APPEAL

28 CASES TO SUPPORT ACCOMMODATION/HOUSING

270 CASES TO SUPPORT ACCESSING LEGAL ADVICE

17 CHILD ASYLUM SEEKERS SUPPORTED

CASE STUDY: FAHMI'S STORY

When Fahmi first arrived in the UK, he had fled unimaginable danger in his home country, hoping to find safety. Instead, he was kidnapped upon arrival and forced into domestic servitude. Trapped in a house, he was not allowed to leave and was made to cook, clean, and do everything for the people who controlled him. When he became seriously ill and asked to see a doctor, they refused. Eventually, he found the strength to escape — only to be detained for three months by immigration authorities.

For six years, Fahmi lived in the UK with no help or support from any organisation. Isolated and traumatised, he was recently refused asylum, and his mental health was at breaking point. That's when he found MRSN.
Through MRSN, Fahmi was introduced to Bridget, a specialist caseworker who immediately began helping him with compassion and expertise. She supported him through a new claim as a victim of modern slavery and worked tirelessly to secure his refugee status.

Now, Fahmi is beginning to rebuild. He is receiving specialist trauma therapy from Freedom from Torture and has recently started attending college, taking steps toward a more stable and independent future.

Reflecting on his journey, Fahmi says:
"I'm feeling much happier – before, I felt very bad, but now I feel happy, and this is all down to Miss Bridget and MRSN."

Fahmi's story is a powerful reminder of how critical it is to reach survivors of exploitation — even years after they arrive — and how the right support at the right time can change everything.

REFUGEE INTEGRATION SERVICE

Our Refugee Integration Service, led by Sophie and Angel, provides vital, long term one-to-one support for newly granted refugees as they navigate life after asylum. This period is often overwhelming, and Sophie, Angel and Tamador have been working tirelessly on complex cases, helping people access the services and stability they need. One of the most urgent challenges is housing. Many individuals are made homeless or face the risk of homelessness shortly after receiving their refugee status, due to the sudden loss of asylum accommodation and the difficulty of securing housing with limited income and support. We're excited to welcome Angel into a new role supporting clients around employment and job readiness as part of RIS. And looking ahead, Sophie will soon begin working in asylum hotels, contributing to a cross-organisational initiative aimed at reducing homelessness among refugees in Manchester.

Through advocacy, casework, and compassionate guidance, the team supports clients with housing applications, benefits, employment, healthcare, and more — ensuring that newly recognised refugees are not left behind.



436

CASES OPENED IN 2024/2025

171

INDIVIDUAL CLIENTS SUPPORTED IN 2024/25

138 CASES RELATED TO SUPPORT WITH HOUSING

33 CASES RELATED TO MANCHESTER MOVE

20 CASES SUPPORTING WITH BENEFITS, GRANTS AND LOANS

13 CASES SUPPORTING WITH IMMIGRATION ISSUES

34 CASES SUPPORTING WITH UNIVERSAL CREDIT

15 CASES SUPPORTING EVICTED NEW REFUGEES

4 CASES SUPPORTING WITH ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

8 CASES RELATED TO ACCESS TO EDUCATION

SHARED ROUTES PROJECT

SR delivered successfully 5 training courses, one of them as a face-to-face course, compressed to 2 days which increased the training's accessibility. The training continued to immensely benefit our service users as feedback showed. We kept including our service user in the design and delivery of our work. We held a review workshop on our activities with our evaluator and service user and based on SUs' suggestion we're now holding in-person network meetings with our peer navigators. We also started a new partnership with Oxfam with many volunteer opportunities which can be tailored as needed. Led by Randa, and ably supported by Chefena and Kashif, we continued delivering impactful peer-led training. After 7 years of success, we are now working hard on a new National Lottery funding bid to ensure we can keep this vital work going.

We are overjoyed by our service users' feedback how much our training and support into volunteering helped them to connect locally and opened opportunities for their personal and professional development.

78 PEER NAVIGATORS COMPLETED THE TRAINING THIS YEAR

60 PEER NAVIGATORS PLACED IN VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

93% PEER NAVIGATORS REPORTED INCREASED CONFIDENCE FOLLOWING TRAINING.

82% PEER NAVIGATORS KNOW MORE WAYS TO TAKE PART IN WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THEIR LOCAL AREA

"After taking this training, I understood the value of volunteering and its positive impact to the community. Also, how volunteering could enhance the chances of an individual getting a job and have a good reference."

QUOTE FROM PEER NAVIGATOR





100% PEER NAVIGATORS REPORTED IMPROVED SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

100% PEER NAVIGATORS REPORTED IMPROVED KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF UK AGENCIES

"I didn't know there were many volunteer opportunities in my local council but after this opportunity I learnt how to apply for these opportunities that I am passionate about. Thank you."

QUOTE FROM PEER NAVIGATOR

"I now know the British culture and communication at work which will enable me to excel in my voluntary work and even future career. I am confident to go out there and look for voluntary role. In fact, Shared Routes referred me to Oxfam and I am called for an induction soon. I am very happy and excited. This wouldn't have happened if it was not for attending this training program. I want to thank all the mentors for their precious time. I am very thankful and happy about this training."

QUOTE FROM PEER NAVIGATOR

HOTEL PROJECT

Led by Jennifer, MRSN's Asylum Hotel Project supports residents across four hotels in Greater Manchester. The project provides ESOL classes, wellbeing and arts activities, and organises clothing donations to help reduce isolation and improve quality of life for asylum seekers in temporary accommodation.

25 SINGLE FEMALE ASYLUM SEEKERS SUPPORTED

15 VOLUNTEERS SUPPORT THE ESOL PROJECT EVERY WEEK

52 ESOL CLASSES DELIVERED

50 FAMILIES SUPPORTED

100 MALE ASYLUM SEEKERS SUPPORTED

40 ARTS AND CRAFTS SESSIONS

30 KIDS MUSIC ACTIVITY SESSIONS

MRSN delivers ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes for adult male asylum seekers, providing a safe and supportive environment to build language skills, confidence, and connection. These classes help reduce isolation and empower participants to engage more fully with their communities and the asylum process.



MRSN has partnered with Band on the Wall to deliver engaging music activities for children living in asylum hotels across Greater Manchester. These sessions offer a creative outlet for young asylum seekers, helping to boost confidence, reduce stress, and bring moments of joy during a challenging time.

Through singing, rhythm, and hands-on music-making, children are able to express themselves, connect with others, and simply be children — even in uncertain surroundings. This partnership brings the power of music directly into hotel settings, supporting wellbeing and belonging through creativity.

As mentioned before, Sophie will soon be taking on a new role within the asylum hotel project, where she will support a city-wide partnership effort focused on preventing homelessness among newly granted refugees in Manchester. Her involvement will strengthen our collaborative approach to ensuring no one is left without support during this critical transition.

EXPERT BY EXPERIENCE

In 2024–2025, the group significantly expanded its external engagement, forging impactful partnerships with key regional bodies. Collaborations with the Regional Strategic Migration Partnership (RSMP) and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) have enabled Experts by Experience (EbE) members to provide valuable lived experience input into the Step Change and Work and Skills programmes, both aimed at enhancing refugee integration in Greater Manchester.

The group's involvement in the co-design of the Kompasi referral platform, launched in May 2024, marked a major milestone. Three EbE members worked alongside CAST and the funder DISRUPT from inception to delivery. Additionally, five members contributed to discussions with Manchester City Council in its journey toward becoming a Council of Sanctuary, including active participation in a stakeholder event on 25th June 2024.

With the Step Change programme extended through to September 2028, Phase 2 now focuses on expanding EbE representation across all 10 Greater Manchester boroughs. Since October 2024, membership has grown from 9 to 16 individuals, now representing 7 boroughs, with recruitment ongoing.

Two key work strands have emerged: First, strengthening collaboration with other lived experience groups across the region—building on a 2022 mapping exercise—and second, advancing advocacy efforts to shape campaign priorities around the pressing issues affecting refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants within the city region.

7 MEMBERS HAVE JOINED THE EBE GROUP SINCE 2024

16 MEMBERS OF THE EBE GROUP OVERALL

3 EBE GROUP MEMBERS INVOLVED IN KOMPASI CO-DESIGN

5 EBE MEMBERS INVOLVED IN MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL DISCUSSIONS

7 MANCHESTER BOROUGHS REPRESENTED

4 YEARS EXTENSION OF THE STEP CHANGE PROGRAMME

HEALTH AND WELLBEING



The Refugee Health and Well-Being project was established to provide vital support to refugees and asylum seekers, ensuring they have the opportunity to live healthier, more fulfilling lives. Recognising the unique challenges faced by people forced to flee their homes—such as trauma, isolation, and barriers to accessing healthcare—this initiative seeks to address both physical and emotional well-being in a holistic way.

Through the project, MRSN delivers a wide range of activities and tailored support. This includes regular physical exercise and football sessions that promote fitness, teamwork, and social connection. In addition, one-to-one support is offered to individuals who need guidance navigating health systems, understanding their rights, or accessing essential care. A variety of workshops are organised on healthy living, nutrition, and self-care, while yoga sessions provide both physical benefits and a calming space for relaxation and mental balance.

Beyond these structured activities, the project also helps participants engage in volunteering opportunities, join support groups, and connect with others in the community. This not only strengthens their health and resilience but also combats loneliness and fosters a sense of belonging.

During the reporting period, the Refugee Health and Well-Being project supported around 60 refugees and asylum seekers each week. Feedback from participants shows that:

- Over **80%** reported feeling more confident in managing their own health and accessing services.
- Many participants experienced **reduced levels of stress and anxiety**, particularly through yoga and group support activities.
- A significant number reported **forming new friendships and social networks**, which helped to reduce isolation and build community connections.
- Several individuals have gone on to volunteer within MRSN or in the wider community, demonstrating **increased confidence and a stronger sense of purpose.**
- By combining practical assistance with social and emotional support, the project is making a real difference—helping individuals to rebuild their lives with dignity, improved health, greater resilience, and stronger community ties.



OUR FUNDERS

- AB Charitable Trust
- Access To Justice Foundation
- Forever Manchester
- GMCA
- Henry Smith
- Lloyds Bank Foundation
- MACC
- Manchester City Council
- National Lottery Community Fund
- Newby Trust
- Refugee Action
- Sported
- Sport England
- The Bulldog Trust
- The Tudor Trust



OUR PARTNERS

- ACM
- Asylum Aid
- Asylum Matters
- Bately Law Solicitors
- Boaz Trust
- British Red Cross
- Care4Calais
- Caritas
- CAST
- Chorlton Refugee Aid
- Citizen's Advice Bureau
- City of Sanctuary
- Cornerstones
- DISRUPT
- Emerge/touchwood
- ESOL Manchester
- Flow Max Group
- Freedom From Torture
- Greater Manchester Combines Authority
- Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit
- Growing together Levenshulme
- Home in Manchester
- IAS
- Manchester BME Network
- Manchester City Council
- Manchester Metropolitan University
- Manchester Urban Diggers
- Maz Linford
- Migrant Help
- Nathan Dale Gardners
- Nazarene Theological College
- NIA Centre
- NRPF
- One Manchester
- Precision Dentist Clinic
- PRIDES
- Princess Butcher
- Project 17
- Projekts
- Rainbow Haven
- Refugee Action
- Refugee Aid
- Refugees at Home
- Regional Strategic Migration Partnership
- Revive
- Salvation Army
- SASCA
- Save the Children
- Shelter
- St James Church
- Street League
- The Little Sri Lankan
- The Mustard Tree
- The Woolf Institute
- UKIL
- Women's Aid
- Peak Distriction National Champions



FINANCIAL REVIEW

INCOME: £474,413

GIFTS AND DONATIONS: £11,537
CHARITABLE INCOME: £462,206
OTHER INCOME: £670

EXPENDITURE: ££515,755

RAISING FUNDS: £180
CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES: £515,575

NET INCOME: -£41,342
TOTAL FUNDS AT START OF YEAR: £518,542
TOTAL FUNDS AT END OF YEAR: £477,200