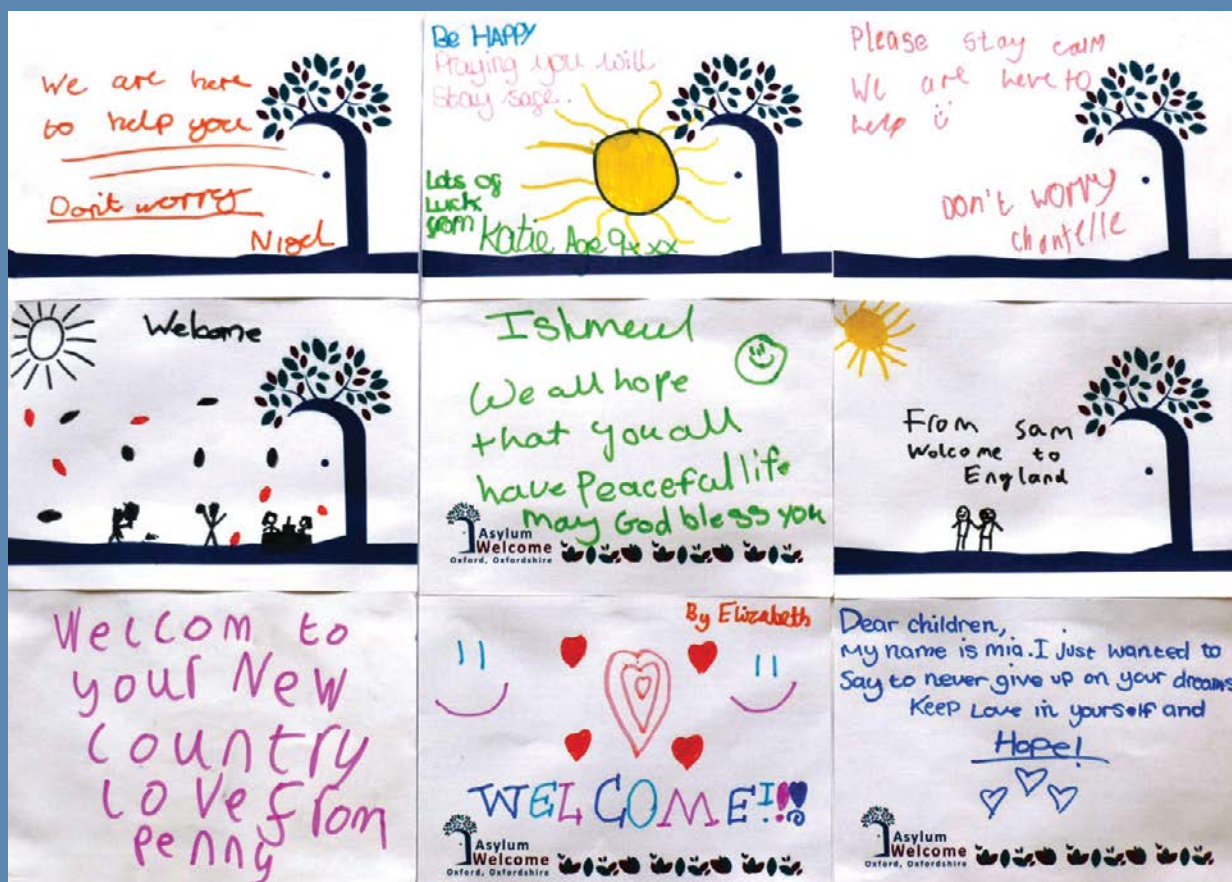


Annual Review 2015/16

How we welcomed asylum seekers, refugees and detainees



How others see us

To get an independent view of what we do, we surveyed our partner organisations. The results were very positive, with many warm comments about the importance of our work and the way in which we carry it out. Here is a small selection:

A beacon organisation

Ferocious commitment

Impressive volunteer base

A good knowledge base and good links to other services

Meets needs of people excluded from mainstream

Openness and good collaboration

One-stop destination – reassurance and safeguarding for isolated people

Great work with young clients

Hugely valued by unaccompanied children

A source of expert knowledge and advice on immigration matters

Can't underestimate the importance of Asylum Welcome in Oxford. Nowhere else for so many people to turn – absolutely vital

Well known and respected voice on detention

Relaxed, professional, reliable, trustworthy

'Difficulty getting hold of people' was the main criticism – a reflection of how busy we are. As a result we are aiming to extend the hours that we have volunteers answering phones.

Welcome

During the year 2015-16 Asylum Welcome has been very successful in rising to the challenges of a fast-changing external environment – increased public attention, the arrival of Syrian refugees and new Immigration Act.

We have also seen an increase in the numbers of people approaching our services for help and we have dealt with some distressing and complex cases, in part due to a harsher policy landscape and a reduction in statutory services.

As the need increases, Asylum Welcome's qualities shine through. The organisation is doing an amazing job in all directions. In a survey to gain feedback from external agencies we are described as 'a beacon organisation'. Despite the pressures on staff and volunteers and the pain for some of our clients, there is a buzz about Asylum Welcome – it is a cheerful, positive, energetic and purposeful place.

An increase in activities and in the number of volunteers has meant we are 'tripping over each other' in our main office and we continue to rent additional space in other buildings. Our aspiration for the years ahead is to get all our services under one roof.

But for now, our 'Welcome Centre' increasingly feels like a lived-in space – comfortable, welcoming and easy to spend time in. A small but meaningful touch – there are always fresh flowers in our centre, initially provided from the garden of our volunteer Joka, but after she passed away, other volunteers continue the tradition in her memory.

Asylum Welcome has always been the local community's response to refugees. The local community can feel very proud of what has been achieved together in the last year, and of our shared commitment for the future.

"As the need increases, Asylum Welcome's qualities shine through..."



Kate
Kate Smart
Director



Bob
Bob Wilkes
Chair of Trustees

Asylum Welcome welcomes asylum seekers, refugees and detainees who have fled persecution and danger in their own countries and seek refuge in Oxford and Oxfordshire.

Asylum Welcome's broad range of practical, supportive services and activities are responsive to the needs of asylum seekers, refugees and detainees. These activities are carried out and sustained by a thriving community of volunteers, members, donors, staff and trustees, with an increasing involvement of refugee staff and volunteers to deliver services.

Oxford responds

2015-16 saw an outpouring of public sympathy towards refugees. Asylum Welcome responded effectively to a huge increase in requests for information, offers of help, media enquiries and invitations to speak at events.

At the spontaneous 'Refugees Welcome' mass rally in early September in central Oxford, Asylum Welcome was well represented, and helped ensure that refugees were represented too. Director Kate Smart and former trustee and refugee Dr Qadeer addressed the crowd and scores of members and volunteers from Asylum Welcome participated.

Asylum Welcome saw increased public and political recognition of our expertise and credibility. We hosted a visit from leader of the Green Party Natalie Bennett and we attended a meeting in London with the Minister for Syrian Refugees.

We strengthened links with faith groups, including meeting members of the Oxford Synagogue and participating in a conference of churches at Ripon College, Cuddesdon.

Online, our social media followers rose substantially. With the help of Goodthinking Communications, we created a smart new website – it reflects our values, explains our services and recognises our volunteers and partners.

Media coverage of our work included the Oxford Mail, the Oxfordshire Guardian, BBC South, Radio Oxford, ITV Meridian, the Guardian newspaper and Sky News.

We continued our commitment to support refugees in raising their voices in public (for example we supported one refugee to be part of a film made by the charity Aspire) but we needed to exercise discretion in response to sustained press interest in the arrival of Syrian families, whose privacy we wished to protect.



'Refugees Welcome' mass rally in early September in central Oxford



Green Party leader Natalie Bennett visited Asylum Welcome in 2015



Resettling Syrians

The government asked local authorities to accept relocated Syrians from refugee camps. Asylum Welcome worked closely with Oxford City Council and with West Oxfordshire District Council to welcome these vulnerable families.

We marshalled volunteers and donations to kit out houses, we met families at the airport and using qualified interpreters we ran a programme of induction sessions, arranged visits to register with key agencies and gave English lessons. We produced an information pack in English and Arabic. We have succeeded in our aim of introducing them to local amenities and communities, imparting a spirit of hopeful optimism about their new life.

There has been an increase in Syrians arriving spontaneously in Oxford. We helped some of these individuals to make arrangements for their young families to join them from Syria.

We have encouraged the growing Oxford Syrian community to develop group activities – ranging from a Facebook group to days out for the children.

We are encouraging other refugee communities to strengthen their networks: for example, we provided the local Sudanese Community group with a place to meet at weekends.



Drawing of her new home in Oxford by one of the Syrian children who arrived on the resettlement scheme



We organised a trip for Syrian families to the Oxford University Museum of Natural History



The Sudanese community group meets regularly at Asylum Welcome's offices

"Now my life can begin again"

Syrian refugee, helped by Asylum Welcome

Increased demand

Throughout the year, we faced the challenge of more people approaching all of our services, combined with the impact of tougher policies and reductions in government and voluntary services. Despite increased pressures, we continued to provide an effective and caring response to the needs of asylum seekers, refugees and detainees.

Food service

We continue to accept generous donations of fresh food from the Oxford Food Bank and packaged food from a range of organisations and individuals – especially at harvest-time. Demand for food increased and, after careful thought, we ended the system of unlimited access to fresh food. It is now only available to those most in need. Weekly lunches continue to be well attended and provide a great spread of freshly cooked food, making use of surplus from the food deliveries as well as bought items. There has been an increase in the variety of dishes as the 'lunch team' has been joined by new volunteers and clients offering to take turns in cooking. Take-away boxes are popular and so wastage is at almost zero – it all goes!



Legal rights support

Many asylum seekers are confused by the legal system and need it explained, find it difficult to maintain regular contact with their lawyer, or they have no lawyer and need help to secure one. Our staff and volunteers help, drawing as needed on our Legal Rights Support Fund. The fund also pays for the translation of documentary evidence, administrative fees charged by the Home Office and the courts to release documents or submit applications to attend hearings and interviews.

We have seen an increase in the frequency that rejected asylum seekers are required to attend Eaton House Reporting Centre in London. We have paid thousands of pounds for bus fares to London to ensure that all appointments are kept. In a few cases we have also paid travel costs to enable family reunion, especially for those with relatives in refugee camps.

Key uses of the Legal Rights Support Fund:

- obtaining an expert opinion on a case
- submitting a fresh claim
- requesting an extension of *Leave to Remain*
- making an application for citizenship
- making an application for family reunion
- mounting a legal challenge to the refusal of welfare benefits.

Adult and family advice service

This service has dealt with a very wide range of issues, but homelessness has been the main focus. We produced an information pack for volunteer advisors on available homeless services, and a shorter leaflet for our homeless clients.

On average, three different issues were dealt with per client visit, but help in finding secure accommodation is key to resolving other issues: for example, improved health and the ability to take up educational and employment opportunities.

Our volunteers help destitute asylum seekers to make applications for *Asylum Support* payments and accommodation. Over the last year, Home Office criteria for applications has tightened significantly: most cases we dealt with were refused at the initial stage and we needed to submit further information, chase up applications and make hardship payments from our funds. Destitute Asylum Support applicants are now waiting a minimum of six weeks, often considerably longer.

For refugees granted *Leave to Remain*, getting independent accommodation in Oxford is very difficult as private housing rents are higher than housing benefit rates, and many landlords will not take housing benefit tenants. The local Housing Department will help to house people in the city if they have a local connection but people with *Leave to Remain* find it difficult to prove a local connection because of the long periods they have spent homeless, or the lack of an employment record. Some refugees have been offered housing away from Oxford, even though they are employed here.

Dealing with rejected asylum seekers with *No Recourse to Public Funds* is the most difficult part of our work. These people are often homeless and in some cases they suffer from various health conditions. 2015 saw the closure of Oxford's only free hostel for refused asylum seekers: St Francis House. We relied on help from other day centres, OXSPOT, Crisis Skylight and the City of Sanctuary Host Oxford scheme to reduce their suffering, and are very grateful for their support.

Although in recent years Asylum Welcome has tightened its criteria for making hardship payments, this year saw a marked increase in well-founded requests. We would like to thank both an anonymous donor and the Red Cross for funding this. These payments have been absolutely essential in the prevention of suffering.



In response to increased demand, in early 2016 staff decided to extend opening hours and the service is now open from 9.30am to 4pm three days a week. There are plans to add a fourth day for both appointments and a telephone service. Asylum Welcome maintained its OISC registration to provide immigration advice (level one) during 2015-16 and has plans to increase the number of OISC registered advisers later in 2016.

"Asylum Welcome pointed me in the right direction and will assist me further if needed. They're giving the best advice they could"

Education service

The team of education volunteers successfully referred asylum seekers and refugees to free or affordable courses. We continued to pay for bus passes to help them to attend these courses and, when available, clients were offered a recycled bicycle as a cheaper way to get to college. Clients were also encouraged to take advantage of IT support offered at Asylum Welcome by expert volunteer Jean-Luc.

Our team continued to provide one-to-one English lessons for those unable to access a mainstream course. There was an increase in requests for one-to-one teaching, partly due to government withdrawal of funding from free courses. In response to this unmet need, the team began to plan provision of in-house beginners' classes for the first time, in partnership with the Ethnic Minority Business School (EMBS).

Detainee Support service

We made contact with as many detainees as possible. Volunteer visitors went to Campsfield House Immigration Removal Centre at least once a week to meet new detainees and assess their needs. They dealt with immediate concerns, making appointments for regular visiting, and bringing information back to the Asylum Welcome office where other volunteers could help to resolve bigger problems.

We worked hard on a variety of urgent concerns for detainees – dealing with practical issues like collecting their belongings, helping to translate documents, arranging for family visits, contacting doctors and lawyers, paying for travel to tribunals, paying for mobile phone charges and providing small amounts of 'pocket money' for those being removed from the UK.

Asylum Welcome's Adult Service Co-ordinator has regularly attended the Campsfield managers' stakeholder meetings, sharing our experiences and concerns in a thoughtful way. Topics raised include: treatment of detainees who claim to have been tortured, access to health services, the care of suicide risks, and access to legal advice. We worked closely with the Welfare Team at Campsfield and are grateful that they took time to visit our offices for a discussion with our volunteers.

Courses provided by:

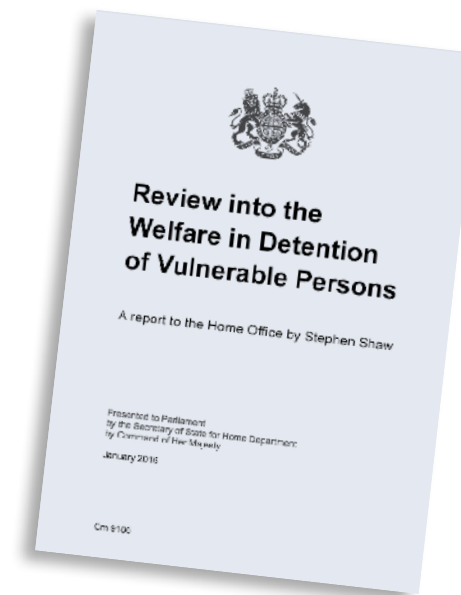
- EMBS
- Crisis Skylight
- Kheiron School of English
- City of Oxford College
- Abingdon & Witney College
- FELLOW
- LEA
- Ruskin College
- Refugee Resource
- Tandem
- Jacari
- Family Learning



Policy advocacy

Asylum Welcome wrote papers setting out our main concerns about the Immigration Bill and proposed changes to *Asylum Support*, and we raised these concerns with local MPs. Pressure of other work prevented us from getting more involved in lobbying for fairer policies in the Immigration Bill.

After a series of very concerning reports about detention in 2014-15 the Home Office announced an independent inquiry conducted by Stephen Shaw. Asylum Welcome worked hard to produce a submission based on information from detainees at Campsfield with the result that our evidence was repeatedly cited in the ground-breaking Shaw Report on the treatment of vulnerable people in detention.



Youth service

Our weekly youth club continues to thrive, with an average attendance of 30 each week. Young people tell us that they enjoy being able to meet others and to be able to ask for help. Strong bonds have been formed between young people on the enjoyable summer outings, which include swimming, ice-skating, picnics and cinema trips.

We chair regular, well attended inter-agency meetings for professionals in Oxfordshire who work with unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

After turning 18, young people need our help to find somewhere to live, and to pursue legal claims to remain in the UK. Our Youth Co-ordinator attended the Immigration and Asylum Tribunal as a character witness for young refugees appealing against the Home Office's decision to refuse to extend their *Discretionary Leave*. We are grateful to Host Oxford for providing emergency beds for destitute young people. We also supported young people with travel, seeking support for mental health, accessing education and getting employment. We continue to meet every newly arrived unaccompanied child in Oxfordshire through the Orientation Programme run by the Children's Society. Many undergo age assessments and we support young people who maintain that they should have been assessed to be a child not an adult.



Rising to the challenge

This last year has seen an unprecedented increase in demand for our services.
Here is a snapshot of just *some* of the many ways we have risen to this challenge...



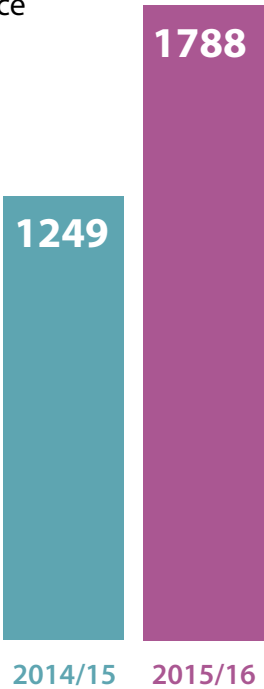
@
600
e-newsletters
opened
(293 in 2014/15)

3681
Twitter followers
(2530 in 2014/15)



Top twenty reasons asylum seekers and refugees visited our advice services

- Help to access support as an asylum seeker
- Confused about asylum status/process
- Needing accommodation (person with status)
- Difficulty in accessing mainstream benefits
- Can't afford travel to college or interview
- Wants to improve English
- Difficulty in accessing legal advice
- Needing accommodation (asylum seeker)
- Help to gather supporting documents
- Literacy issues – needs help with documents/forms
- Can't afford travel to Home Office appointment/tribunal hearing
- Help with citizenship or passport application
- Needing food
- Help with tracing family/contact/reunion
- Seeking college course or training
- Mentally unwell
- Physically unwell
- Seeking employment
- Problems with landlord or property
- Needing school/childcare



New projects

New aspects to our existing services were added in response to the needs of asylum seekers, refugees and detainees.

Volunteer medical visitor team

We now ensure that any detainee who tells us that they have a health problem sees a volunteer visitor who is a qualified doctor. This makes it easier for us to advocate with the Campsfield authorities to address health concerns and make appropriate referrals to specialist agencies such as Medical Justice, Freedom from Torture and The Helen Bamber Foundation.

Legal workshop for unaccompanied young people

For the first time we ran a legal workshop for young people at our youth club, thanks to solicitors from London-based Coram Children's Legal Centre. They gave the young people a general understanding of the legal processes that affect them and they also gave some advice to individuals.

Football

We are working with Oxford MIND to provide football coaching and we enthusiastically accepted free tickets for Oxford United matches.

Breakfasts

When the number of homeless and destitute people using our services increased, we started to provide breakfasts, which have proved popular.

Conversation classes

Some volunteers set up weekly conversation classes to practice English – a relaxed and popular way to develop language proficiency.

Music workshops

Local music group *The Confluence Collective* started fortnightly workshops to improvise and share tunes from around the world. Beautiful music has been made!



A new conversation class began



New music workshops started up



Recycling bikes continues

Working with others

We could not achieve as much as we do without our many partners. Here are some examples:

Our ties with the Red Cross have been strengthened by their generous funding of our food bank and hardship payments, and through meetings to prepare for the Syrian resettlement.

We regularly attended meetings facilitated by Medical Justice to review the treatment of detainees.

Asylum Welcome worked closely with the Children's Society to maximise the benefit for young refugees. Some asylum seekers and refugees were referred for specialist counselling at Refugee Resource.

Oxford City Council drew upon Asylum Welcome's experience and expertise to respond to the growing needs of refugees locally, and in planning for the Syrian resettlement programme. Asylum Welcome has had a central role in frequent co-ordination meetings throughout the year and has been part of the development of the council's refugee action plan.

We have increased our participation in national networks such as the Refugee Children's Consortium, the Destitution Forum and the Association of Visitors to Immigration Detainees. Asylum Welcome continues to be a member of Advice UK.



Working in partnership at public events...



... and from our offices



association of visitors to
immigration detainees

advice UK

Medical Justice
working for health rights for detainees

Refugee Children's Consortium

The Children's
Society
making childhood better

www.oxford.gov.uk
OXFORD
CITY
COUNCIL

Refugee
Resource

Our funders

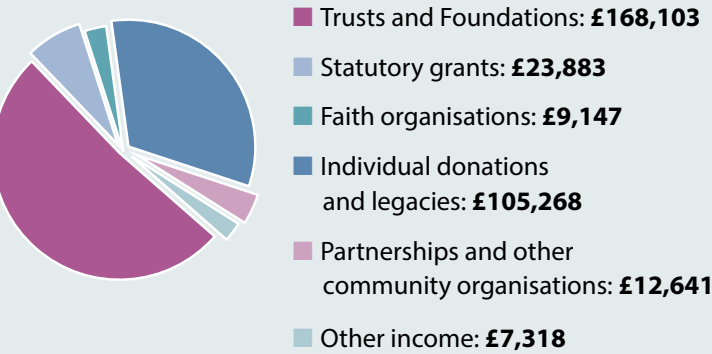
Asylum Welcome is immensely fortunate to receive financial support from a wide range of sources, including Trusts and Foundations, local authorities, faith and community groups, university colleges and hundreds of generous individuals. In 2015-16 our income rose due to the high level of public concern for refugees and our involvement in the Syrian resettlement programme. This sustained us through an exceptional time and has enabled us to develop our services, increase the hours of some staff, grow our reserves and carry income forward to the year ahead.

We are thankful to have received important grants and donations from the following, some of whom have supported us for a long time and are also supporting us in the year ahead:

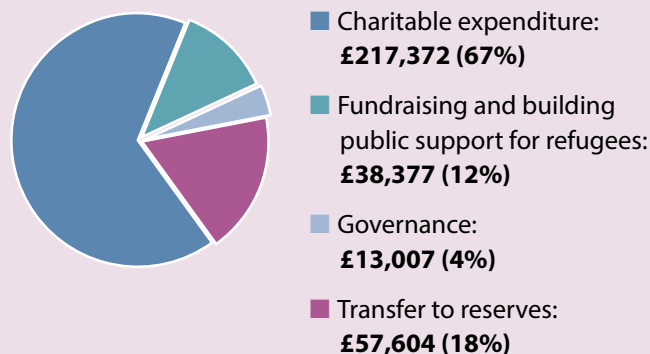
A B Charitable Trust	J Paul Getty Jnr Charitable Trust	Oxford Quakers
Advice Services Transition Fund	Jill Franklin Trust	Port Meadow Capital Management
ARM Trust	Key2 Futures	Red Cross
AW60 Fund	Lady Margaret Hall	St Clares College
Balliol College	Leigh Trust	St Michaels and All Saints Charity
Beatrice Laing Trust	Lincoln College	St Michaels Summertown
D G Montefiore Charitable Trust	Mactaggart Third Fund	Souldern Trust
Esmee Fairbairn Foundation	Marsh Christian Trust	Swan Mountain Trust
Henry Smith Charity	Northwick Trust	The Cooperative
Hilden Charitable Fund	Odin Charitable Trust	The Tolkien Trust
Hilliard Charitable Trust	Oxford City Council	29th May 1961 Charitable Trust
Holy Trinity Church Headington	Oxfordshire Community Foundation	Two Way Trust
Quarry PCC	Oxford Diocese	Westhill Endowment
John Ackroyd Charitable Trust	Oxford Gene Technology	And those who wish to remain anonymous

We are humbled and motivated by all the support we have received.

2015-16 income: £326,360



How our income is used



The transfer to reserves means that we have been able to grow our reserves from £58,000 in March 2015 to £116,000 in March 2016. This gives us more security in the year ahead. Further details of our accounts are published on the website of the Charity Commission, as Asylum Welcome charity number 1092265.

Our volunteers

Thank you all!

Abraham	Cedric	Haki	Jeff	Marian	Roger
Adam	Charlotta	Hannah S	Jim	Marianna	Rosemary S
Alan Je	Charlotte	Hannah J	Jo	Marilyn	Rosemary G
Alex W	Chinwe	Hannah R	John G	Marina	Rosie
Alex Ja	Chris P	Harpreet	John P	Mary	Saam
Alison W	Chris M	Hayley	John W	Mary Beth	Sally D
Alison M	Chris	Helena	Jonathan C	Maxine	Sally We
Amina	Clara	Henrice	Jonathan W	Melanie	Sally Wi
Andrew	Dai	Hilda	Joy	Melanie	Sarah W
Angel	Daphne	Hoonie	Judy	Mercedes	Sarah H
Angela	David	Howard	Julian	Michael	Sarah E
Angus	Dewan	Hugh	Karina	Miranda	Serena
Ann	Diana	Huw	Kate	Modar	Shevin
Anna E	Diletta	Ian	Kathryn	Molly	Shida
Anna L	Dylan	Inez	Kathy	Nabeela	Simon
Anne	Elin	Isabelle	Kristiana	Nancy	Sophie
Annelies	Elizabeth	James	Kristie	Natasha S	Sulaiman
Arta	Elsbeth	Jamie	Kristin	Natasha G	Susila
Ash	Emilia	Jan P	Laura	Nav	Sylvia B
Audrey H	Emma	Jan M	Lauren	Nteri	Sylvia P
Audrey S	Esther	Jan S	Livi	Pam	Tim
Aziz	Evelyne	Jane Mu	Liz	Pat	Tina
Belinda	Ewa	Jane Mn	Lizie	Peter	Tom P
Bob	Farzin	Jane R	Lorna	Peyman	Tom W
Caritas	Gary	Janet M	Maggie	Prue	Tony T
Caroline M	Genny	Janet H	Maja	Rachel C	Tony B
Caroline B	Gill B	Javier	Marcus	Rachel D	Tony S
Catherine	Gill T	Jean	Marguerite	Renee	Valeria
Catriona	Ginny	Jean-Luc	Maria	Robert	Varsha
					Ville

I'd like to support Asylum Welcome

I would like to donate: £

MY DETAILS

Name:	
Address:	
Postcode:	
Email:	
Telephone:	
Date:	

I'd like to support Asylum Welcome regularly by standing order:

Please speak to your bank, and give them our bank details:

Asylum Welcome – Co-operative Bank plc, Salford M5 2QP
Account number: 65026773 Sort code: 08-92-50

I'd like to be a member of Asylum Welcome:

Membership is free, simply tick to show you agree with the following statement:

☐ I subscribe to Asylum Welcome's vision for asylum seekers, refugees and detainees:

- they feel welcome, respected and understood as members of a caring community
- they live in dignity with hope for the future: they can exercise their rights and have their cases fairly considered,
- they can access services to meet their needs, and have opportunities to develop and share their talents.

As a member of Asylum Welcome I will do what I can to achieve this vision, to promote these values, and to support Asylum Welcome's activities as a donor, volunteer, fundraiser or advocate.

I'd like Asylum Welcome to claim Gift Aid on my donation:

giftaid it

Please treat as Gift Aid donations all qualifying gifts of money made ☐ today ☐ in the past 4 years ☐ in the future *(Please tick all boxes you wish to apply)*. I confirm I have paid or will pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax for each tax year (6 April to 5 April) that is at least equal to the amount of tax that all the charities or Community Amateur Sports Clubs that I donate to will reclaim on my gifts for that tax year. I understand that other taxes such as VAT and Council Tax do not qualify. I understand the charity will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I give on or after 6 April 2008.

Signature _____

Thank you very much!

Please return this form to: Asylum Welcome, Unit 7, Newtec Place, Magdalen Road, Oxford OX4 1RE



Patron:
Professor Uwe Kitzinger CBE

Members:
Our membership grew to 275 members.

Trustees (at 31.03.16):
Very Revd. Bob Wilkes, *Chair*
Marcus Thompson MBE
Deputy Chair and then Chair
Belinda Coote
Dr. Melanie Griffiths
Professor Roger Zetter
John Wilcox, *Treasurer*
Peter Kilgariff
Company Secretary
Gill Tischler
Tony Tomblin

Trustees who retired during the year:
Renee de Louw, John Coffin,
John Prangle, Wyon Stansfeld,
Judy Boon

Kate Smart
Director
Fiona McKenzie
Finance Manager
Camille Baziadoly
Fundraising and Development Manager
Almas Farzi
Adult Services Manager
Helena Cullen
Youth Service Co-ordinator
Mary Beth Oakley, *Syrian Resettlement Co-ordinator*
Rachel Wiggans
Volunteer Co-ordinator
Hafiz Ladell, *Office Manager*

Staff who moved on during the year:
Joanna Crowther, Judy Potts,
Beverly Sharma

Company Secretary who retired during the year:
Olive Gearing



Huge thanks to Alex Betts, Director of Refugee Studies Centre, who ran the 2015 London Marathon, raising over £2000 for Asylum Welcome.

If you have a fundraising idea we'd love to hear from you!



Asylum Welcome

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Magdalen Road, Oxford, OX4 1RE

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Email: office@asylum-welcome.org

www.asylum-welcome.org

@AsylumWelcome

Front cover: messages of support from Oxfordshire school children.
Photos by Asylum Welcome staff and volunteers .

Design: www.goodthinkingcommunications.net

Asylum Welcome is a registered charity, number 1092265, and company, number 4361627.