

London Churches Refugee Fund

Charity number
1121108

Annual Report 2024



Service user Zadeh cooking the weekly lunch at EASE (Ealing and Acton Support Enterprise), one of 44 refugee projects supported by an LCRF grant in 2024.

www.lcrf.org.uk

Letter from our Chair

Dear Friends,

It is my pleasure as the newly elected **Chair of Trustees of LCRF** to say a huge thank you for the hundreds of supporters and churches who continue to give so generously to LCRF. Over the last year the amount donated rose and we were in receipt of a total of £55,470. This enabled us to contribute to 44 different frontline services helping totally destitute asylum seekers. These are among the most vulnerable people in our community, having no recourse to public funds.

I want to pay tribute to our Founding Chair, the **Rev Chris Brice** known to most of you. Chris has worked tirelessly since the charity was founded in 2007, as a driving force in the organisation ensuring that we are well placed to continue to grow. After 18 years, Chris has decided to stand down as Chair, which will free him up to continue fundraising and being an advocate for the charity, using his unique blend of passion and persuasion, and reaching out to churches and Christians wherever he can.

Our **Annual Speakers Event** in 2024, was very kindly hosted this year by Bloomsbury Baptist Church, and featured a passionate keynote address by the **Rev Dr Inderjit Bhogal**, founding Director of the Cities and Churches of Sanctuary movement. 'Sanctuary' was his key message.



*These photos were taken at LCRF's annual **Speaker Event**, held at Bloomsbury Baptist Church in June 2024, with keynote speaker **Rev Dr Inderjit Bhogal**, founding director of the Cities and Churches of Sanctuary movement*

I am very glad to report that the **London Churches Refugee Fund** and **London Churches Network** have amalgamated in 2024 and through our shared values and work we hope to offer you all more support and opportunities for dedicated networking events, to jointly address the challenges faced by all our partner organisations.

Our annual **Carol Singing** outside Highbury and Islington Station and the sale of Christmas Cards and Welcome gifts are key components of our fundraising. Our Christmas cards, both the one based on Cathy Young's painting and the Christmas Rose design by Rozhan from Iran and Ella aged 11 years, have proved as popular as ever.

Regular monthly donations are the backbone of our fundraising strategy, alongside a growing band of 'one-off' donors. It would be wonderful if you were able to continue to spread the word amongst your family, friends, and colleagues in your church or community to become a regular donor, hold a fundraising event, or invite us to speak at your church or community event.

As we continue our work, please keep **LCRF**, our refugee neighbours, and the refugee organisations in your thoughts and prayers.

Yours sincerely,

Simon Loveitt
Chair of LCRF

Who Did We Support in 2024?

In 2024 our Fund received £44,502 in donations. With Gift Aid and the sale of Christmas cards and Welcome Gifts, our total income was £55,470. We were able to make grants of £58,288 (our highest-ever figure) and incurred just £ 1,120 in overheads - half of which related to the printing and distribution of cards. In 2024, we were able to help 44 different organisations listed opposite each with grants of up to £1,000.

Grants are capped by the funds available at the time of the awards. We only rarely reject applications, and normally because these are not felt to contribute directly to the relief of destitution among refugee and asylum seekers in London.

• Where our money came from:

Foundation Donors	£ 19,268
Single donations	£ 19,503
Churches/organisations	£ 4,405
Carol singing collections	£ 1,326
HMRC Gift Aid	£ 8,215
Card/print sales	£ 2,753
Income received this year	£ 55,470

• Where our money went to:

Grants	£ 58,288
Administration	£ 1,120
Cards - printing/postage	£ 646
Total payments for the year	£ 60,054

LCRF bank balance at the start of the year	£ 39,919
LCRF bank balance at the end of the year	£ 35,335

Organisations supported in 2024

Action for Refugees Lewisham (AFRIL)
African Refugee Community
Baobab Centre for Young Survivors in Exile
Babylon Migrants Project
Cartesian Academy
Citizens of the World Choir
CAWS Homeless Project
Cotton Tree Trust
Croydon Refugee Day Centre
Ealing & Acton Support Enterprise
Freedom from Torture
Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group
Globe Community Project
Hackney Doorways
Hackney Migrant Centre
Happy Baby Community
Holy Trinity Church Hounslow
Hope for the Young
Housing Justice
Islington Centre for Refugees and Migrants
Islington Mind
Islington Refugee & Migrant Forum
JCORE
Jesuit Refugee Service
Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network
Life Seekers Aid
London Catholic Worker
New Citizens' Gateway
NNLS Asylum Seekers Drop-in
Notre Dame Refugee Centre
Peaceful Borders
Refugee Council
Refugee & Migrant Forum of Essex & London (RAMFEL)
Room to Heal
St James' Piccadilly
St. Jude and St. Paul's Church Mildmay
St. Martin in the Fields Sunday International Group
Salisbury World Refugee Centre
The Separated Child Foundation
Waging Peace
Waltham Forest Migrant Action
West London Welcome
Women Against Rape
Young Roots

On the Front Line – Case Studies from the projects we help

When Action for Refugees in Lewisham (AFRIL)’s caseworkers first met the S family, all six members were sharing a double room. *The parents had no income to purchase nutritious food for their children because a Home Office error had caused their Aspen card to be blocked, so they could not access the asylum support they were entitled to. This resulted in their five year old daughter becoming malnourished, and health visitors and doctors in A&E confirming that the parents needed to purchase healthy food. Thanks to an LCRF grant, AFRIL were able to provide an emergency payment to purchase nutritious food that the children were able to eat and enjoy. Meanwhile AFRIL worked to resolve the ASPEN card issues, to ensure the family received their asylum support income, and supported them to access suitable asylum accommodation in London while they waited for the result of their asylum claim.*

Without the provision of the emergency payment, the health consequences for the children would have been severe. In addition, knowing that they could put food on the table for their children relieved a significant amount of stress and anxiety for the parents, meaning that they the energy and capacity to engage with their AFRIL caseworker to resolve their income and housing issues.



Refugee administrative support and English classes at EASE (Ealing and Acton Support Enterprise)



The Co-ordinator of Croydon Refugee Day Centre (CRDC) first met D and her younger daughter J at an outreach session at their asylum hostel, not long after they entered the country. *It took two more weeks before she met R, her teenage daughter, who was struggling with anxiety over leaving their hostel room, after traumatic experiences in her country of origin.*

CRDC supported D with school applications for both children. J received a primary school place quickly, and CRDC helped with school uniform and essential clothing. When it became clear that R would not receive a school place for several months, CRDC arranged a referral to a specialist programme for out of school girls with English as a second language, and supported R with introductions, suitable clothing and travel costs.

R later said “Me and my mother was very worried about getting a (school) place. Then we met the CRDC Co-ordinator. I was nervous at first because I don’t know what a school is like, because I have never been to one. Then she put me in (specialist provision) which helped me in this problem. It improved my English and maths, and I became more confident. They also took us to many famous places in London and made us do different activities which was so good”.

On the Front Line – Case Studies from the projects we help

When O came to the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS UK) he had been moving around different places in the UK after having missed a Home Office deadline to appeal his initial refusal because of slow internet connections in his local library. “I spent two months with no phone, and no access to the internet, two months of total isolation and disconnection.” Without internet, O found himself disconnected from everything, from the Home Office, from legal advice, from English classes, from his GP, and from family and friends.

Thanks to a grant from LCRF, JRS UK were able to give O vouchers for mobile credit and internet data. “The vouchers are special for me. They allow me to keep in touch with my family and my friends, and my solicitor. I use the data to access my college course, for doing my homework, for sending emails and booking essential appointments.”

Two young refugees had been sleeping outside Limehouse station before they came to Hackney Night Shelter (HNS). They were very anxious, both being young women from Eritrea who were sticking together for safety. They stayed with HNS for about two months until their benefits came through, and HNS could support them to move into a women’s project in Islington. During this time HNS used some of their LCRF grant to cover their essential travel costs. The young women were extremely grateful.



Providing a weekly hot lunch at EASE

A and his sister D, from Sudan, spent many months travelling to get to a safe place. They came to the African Refugee Community (ARC) after seeking asylum, needing support to get a lawyer, and to register with a GP and college. One of ARC’s volunteers worked closely with them, providing emotional support as well as advocacy. They had no money or warm clothes, but the volunteer worked with social services and statutory and voluntary agencies to provide them with basic items to survive. ARC assisted them with food, vouchers to buy clothes and shoes, and phone and travel cards.

Today they have been granted asylum and have decent accommodation. They go to college, and have started engaging with life in different communities. According to ARC, “they feel safe, loved, and are doing their best to rebuild their future. Without your financial support, I do not think they could have made it.”

*Monthly vigil held outside the
Home Office, remembering
refugees who have died seeking
safety and asylum from war,
oppression and famine*



Refugees and asylum seekers: the UK and the world in 2024

The UNHCR reported record levels of forced displacement in 2024 with nearly 123 million people forced to flee their homes due to conflict and persecution by the end of June. Conflicts in Palestine, Sudan, Ukraine and DRC, to name just a few, fed into the numbers of people seeking safety.

The increase in global displacement is reflected in the UK picture, with 84,000 applications for asylum. At least 76 people died trying to cross the English Channel including a number of children. Despite the increase in applications, the backlog in the asylum system fell, but the percentage of grants of refugee status at first instance fell from around 75% in 2023, to just over 50%, and the backlog in the appeals system increased considerably.

This was a year of two halves in many ways, with a change of government following the general election in July. The few months of 2024 saw a continuation of refugee homelessness issues caused in part by the increases in grants of refugee status through the Streamlined Asylum Process at the end of 2023.

London Councils reported finding 311 refugees sleeping rough in January following eviction from asylum support accommodation and found that overall rough sleeping among refugees and asylum seekers in London had increased by 234% in a four month period.

The Conservative government continued to move asylum seekers to the Bibby Stockholm despite concerns being raised by many organisations and by whistleblowers among the barge's staff who said that the men were treated "like cattle", and noted a sharp deterioration in the mental health of many of those held onboard.

The Safety of Rwanda Act 2024 came into force in April, essentially asserting that Rwanda was a "safe third country" and constraining the ability of the courts to otherwise, and disapplying the powers of the European Court of Human Rights to stop removals. The then Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, pledged in his election campaign that if he were re-elected, removals to Rwanda would commence immediately.

The incoming Labour government announced shortly after their election that no further people would be moved to the Bibby Stockholm and that the barge would be decommissioned. However, they have continued to house people at Wethersfield Asylum Centre, a former RAF airfield which has been described by locals as "Stalag Wethersfield" due to the poor conditions.

The new government swiftly introduced the Illegal Migration Act 2023 (Amendment) Regulations 2024, which abolished the duty on the Secretary of State to remove from the UK anyone who had entered the country illegally, and removed from the Illegal Migration Act the provisions which prevented any person who had entered illegally from ever obtaining any kind of leave in the UK, which had effectively prevented large numbers of asylum applications from being processed. The government also indicated their intention to repeal the Safety of Rwanda Act.

*Poster from the
monthly vigil
held outside the
Home Office*



Refugees and asylum seekers: the UK and the world in 2024

In November 2024 it was announced that from February 2025, those who had entered the UK under the various Ukrainian schemes would be able to apply for a further leave to remain in the UK. However, the extension will be for only 18 months and it was again asserted that the leave granted will not count towards settlement in the UK.

Towards the end of the year, the Home Office, as part of its transition from a physical system of immigration documents to an electronic system (known as the eVisa system) stopped issuing Biometric Residence Permits to people granted refugee status. The resultant issues in obtaining evidence of status which would enable people to find employment and accommodation, open bank accounts or claim welfare benefits, led in part to an announcement of a temporary extension of the move on period from asylum accommodation for newly-granted refugees from 28 days notice to 56 days notice for a trial period to be reviewed in June 2025. The move was broadly welcomed by refugee and homelessness organisations although calls continue to make the change permanent.

The government also announced late last year a consultation on increasing fees for legal aid in immigration and asylum matters. It is hoped that this may lead to action which will stop the haemorrhaging of legal aid representatives out of the asylum and immigration system which has led to over 50% of those in the asylum system being without legal representation for their application.

Despite some changes for the better, the asylum system is still rife with delays and a lack of adequate support which leaves applicants facing long waits for decisions in near destitution. This is a recipe for mental and physical health issues which are endemic among those seeking asylum. LCRF continues to support those organisations which seek to alleviate suffering and poverty among those seeking asylum and refugees, recognising that we are all beloved of God and should be treated as such.

We are desperately short of doctors and cannot wait the several years it takes to train new doctors or for them to gain experience. Many of the refugees have worked in agriculture all their lives and we urgently need agricultural workers for our farms. Others bring other skills and experience we urgently need to turn around our economy. Accepting refugees is a win for the UK and the communities that host them, not only for the refugee. By providing them with the right to work, to health, and to education, refugees can start building new lives here in the UK. The faster they can integrate into the labour force, the faster they can become productive members of society and contribute to the UK.

Nationally, the refugee organisations are advocating for a good humane asylum policy, compliant with our international obligations and common humanity as well as human rights. These include:

- Uphold access to the asylum system by considering all claims, no matter how someone arrives in the UK.
- Expand existing safe routes, such as family reunion, and pilot new ones, such as humanitarian visas.
- Roll out a more efficient process for making asylum decisions so that decisions are made swiftly and are right the first time
- Safe homes and by Providing the right support people need while waiting for an asylum decision, and after a decision, to recover and rebuild their lives.
- Improve support in the UK for refugees and people seeking asylum so they can engage effectively with the process, and for those who stay, integrate and contribute to society.

written by Bethan Lant, our newest *LCRF Trustee*



LCRF trustee meeting,
held at our base
in Shoreditch

Trustee Review of the Year

The work of LCRF continued apace during 2024, under the guidance our committed group of trustees, each bringing different gifts to the organisation.

An important change during this year was the election of Simon Loveitt as our new Chair of Trustees. This has been planned for some time and has allowed Chris Brice to finally step down from the role, after brilliantly leading us right since the inception of LCRF nearly twenty years ago. Simon now brings us huge experience in the christian and community sector, particularly from working within the United Reformed Church.

We also welcomed Bethan Lant as a new trustee, bringing us further key skills, particularly from within the refugee sector. It now feels as though our Board of Trustees, with members old and new, is well prepared to face fresh challenges that are face all small charities like us in this changing world.

We continue to have the excellent assistance of valued volunteers: Palissa Ose-Owusu, looking after our social media and Clement and Anita Francis, who have used their technical skills to ensure that our communications and website are kept up to date. We so appreciate all they do as they keep LCRF technologically up to date in these increasingly digital times.

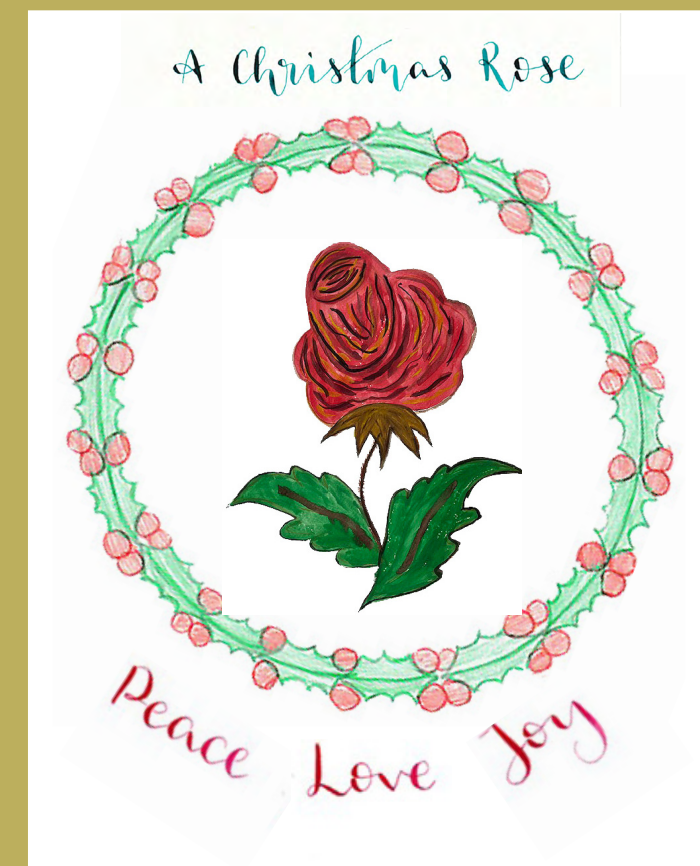
LCRF Trustees:

Simon Loveitt (chair), Stella Jeffrey (secretary), Chris Brice,
Robina Rafferty, Gillian Dare, Matthew Lloyd, Bethan Lant
Treasurer: Dave Bond

As we have no paid staff, all that we do is dependent on our trustees and volunteers. The job of arranging the two rounds of grant applications has been ably organised as usual by trustees Gillian Dare and Robina Rafferty. Our Secetary Stella Jeffrey has kept excellent and accurate minutes throughout the year. Our Honorary Treasurer, Dave Bond, has continued to provide us with clear and accurate accounts and facilitated prompt payments to the groups that we have been able to support.

Our 2024 Speaker Meeting on the theme 'Church of Sanctuary' was held to a lively audience at the Bloomsbury Baptist Church in early June, with the Reverend Simon Woodman very kindly hosting us within his beautiful and superbly equipped building.

A major part of the fundraising undertaken by the trustees is the sale of Christmas cards and welcome gifts, which all successfully sold out this year. We were once again pleased to offer a card using a lovely painting once again by the acclaimed artist Cathy Young and a second one by Rozhan, an Iranian refugee in London. Thank you to both artists!



The central rose image was painted by artist Rozhan from Iran for one of our two 2024 LCRF Christmas cards. Rozhan says: "I love art. I love flowers and nature". The holly wreath was drawn by Ella (aged 11 yrs).

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Another of our regular public events is LCRF's annual carol-singing gathering, which this year took place on Friday 6 December at Highbury & Islington Station forecourt. This time we were graced with warmer weather than last year's arctic conditions, and enjoyed the support of both children coming home from school, passers by, evening commuters and even Arsenal football fans heading off for an evening match!



LCRF Carol Singing
December 2024 - Highbury & Islington tube station