



**Annual Report 2022/23**

**United Nations of Sandwell -  
providing welcome for all**



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FATHER  
**Hudson's**  
Care

Charity no 234216



INFANT  
JESUS  
SISTERS

Charity no 512992

Parish of St Philip Neri



ARCHDIOCESE of BIRMINGHAM

Charity no. 272581



The Sisters of Our Lady of  
Charity of the Good  
Shepherd  
Charity no. 1163502

# Chair's Report

In my 8th year as Chair of the Brushstrokes Management Committee I continue to be in awe of the commitment and hard work of the Brushstrokes staff and volunteer team. We have welcomed many new members to the team this year, still ensuring that our mission to welcome the stranger and to love one another as Christ loves you, remains strong and central to the work that we do.

As a key provider of holistic support to asylum seekers, refugees, migrants, and the local community, and covering Sandwell, West Birmingham and Dudley, our services continue to be in high demand. Over the last 12 months we have reached and supported a staggering number of individuals and families, not only at our centre in Smethwick but through outreach to the hotels and at satellite venues in Smethwick, Dudley and West Birmingham including St Chad's Sanctuary. The need has continued to grow with international conflicts in Ukraine and Sudan, the cost-of-living increases, and shortages in housing and statutory services, among many other issues; Brushstrokes has had to continue to adapt and grow. New services have included projects in health, refugee resettlement, social activities, ESOL, employment support, digital skills, and immigration advice. These not only help those in crisis but provide individuals with the information and support they need to settle and build their lives here in the UK. I have been particularly struck by the increasing numbers of homeless individuals and families presenting at the centre and the increasing number of large families and those with small children who depend on our food and practical donations.

We would not have been able to do all of this without working with other local groups, partners, and networks. We are committed to working with others to make an impact and to fill the gaps. We rely on being part of the regional charity, Father Hudson's Care, and our partners, funders, and supporters to have the resources and tools we need to deliver our work. I thank them for their continued support including the sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, The Infant Jesus Sisters, St Phillips of Neri Parish, Sandwell Council, the NHS, Sandwell Consortium and the many charitable trusts and grant giving organisations that support us.

**Joanne Watters**  
**Brushstrokes Chairperson**  
**Head of Community Projects – Father Hudson's Care**

# Project Manager's Report

This year we have worked with a others at a local and regional level to respond to increased asylum seekers dispersal and contingency hotel use; resettlement of Afghan refugees; The crisis in Ukraine and new routes to resettlement including the Homes for Ukraine Scheme ; Increased volumes of homelessness and destitution for those with No Recourse to Public Funds and refugees receiving a positive decision who had been accommodation by UKVI in Sandwell, through improved triage and volunteer recruitment and training.

As an organisation and community, we daily face the challenge of how we will respond to the needs of those with whom we share a common humanity but who for various reasons have been forced to leave their life in another country and sought to settle or be resettled in the UK. The rhetoric around immigration has continued to oscillate between urgent airlifts and special programmes for some individuals and calls for a halt to all who seek to claim asylum in the UK in the current system. What is hard to comprehend is that we have people from the same nation, who have experienced the same levels of trauma and upheaval , being given vastly different rights and levels of support, some are termed guests others branded as illegal immigrants.

The changes in policy affecting EU nationals capacity to claim benefits and secure housing linked to the EU Settlement scheme ; the new Immigration Act which creates a two-tier system for refugees, with more limited leave to remain in the UK and entitlements for those who come through non-formal resettlement scheme; the impact of the cost of living crisis on families from new communities who already experienced significantly lower income than the general population, have created additional needs for advice and support over the past 12 months and continue to do so.

Our refugee resettlement work has expanded, we have developed new health initiatives, continued to build our Language and digital skills provision, and formed new partnerships bringing much needs advice and support to areas where there have been long standing gaps.

I am proud of the way , often in partnership with others , we have been able to respond to the new challenges around asylum dispersal, migration , homelessness, the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and the re-energising of work to secure Sanctuary status for Sandwell has progressed this year. Seeing individuals from new communities coming through to volunteer, securing their status and move into employment has been one of the most touching experiences this year impacting the whole team.

Recently a colleague joked that we are like the United Nations (A member of staff, Lukano, did leave us this year to go and work for the UN in Africa so he may have a point), I think he meant this as a compliment and as I reflect on the diversity and talent we are fortunate to draw on from volunteers, staff and service users I see that the United Nations of Sandwell are making welcome, hospitality, safety and settling a reality for so many. It was a huge honour last year to be nominated for the National Diversity Awards as an organisation in recognition of the way we approach our work with others. The following citation captures what we strive to be,

**'I have visited Brushstrokes several times and each time have been incredibly impressed by the range of services offered and the powerful commitment of staff and volunteers alike. It is a place that welcomes everyone and provides a place where not only they can find support but also empowers people to develop the skills they need. Many come to seek support and then go on to help support one another. It is a place bussing with energy, with hope and with determination.'**

In the face of an increasingly hostile environment around migration it is the act of welcome , at a local level, that communicates most strongly to the community and the powers that be that refugees are welcome and that we are not part of the collective 'them' used to justify such acts as the removal of peoples right to claim asylum. Perhaps if we started to see others as neighbours and people as a gift not a burden, things could change.

Sandwell has faced challenges around migration before, and as this year has shown, there is a resolve and a commitment to support those newcomers in our midst , the new energy to secure Sanctuary status for the Borough reinforces this.

“ When we forget our history and cannot imagine a changed world, we cannot act with hope to bring that into existence. Hope ignites action when the struggle for justice exposes intolerable gaps between the two worlds” (E Chambers 2018)

That those who have been shown welcome become part of the cycle of welcome in Sandwell, West Birmingham and beyond say much about the ethos we strive to maintain at Brushstrokes , in unity is strength and we are the richer for sharing our time and tasks with others. Each day I see the 'welcome of strangers' extended to new arrivals , building trust, providing reassurance, inviting people to be part of a community of hope. It is also heartening to see the commitment of so many other organisations in Sandwell to work together for the benefit of all residents be they migrant or not. Migration should not be treated as a 'stranger' thing, othering sections of society will never lead to a safer , more cohesive, and caring society.

I want to thank all who have supported and been part of our work this year, you have made all this possible and I hope that we will continue to play our part in standing with and courageously welcoming our new friends who are refugee, asylum seekers and newcomers in this area in the year ahead.

**Dave Newall**  
**Project Manager**  
**Brushstrokes community project**

# Brushstrokes Support in 2022 / 23



This year we supported 3398 service users.  
This represents a 36% increase in service users from 2021/22  
5711 individuals benefited from our help.



We supported 1378 families up from 1086 in 2021/22



51% of service users were male and 49% female



Individuals came from 122 different nationalities. Afghan, British, Indian, Iranian, and Romanian were the most common nationalities for new service users this year.



We supported individuals from 53 local authority areas  
66% lived in Sandwell , 25% in Birmingham and 4% in Dudley



23% of service users were EU nationals  
23% were asylum seekers & 16% were refugees



61 different languages spoken by our service users. English, Arabic, Kurdish, Punjabi, Farsi, and Romanian were the most common languages.



£1,145,333 financial gains for service users this year.



# Highlights for 2022/23

**1. We supported 3398 individuals (5711 beneficiaries) from 122 different nationalities living in 53 different local authority areas this year.**

## **2. Volunteer contribution**

Without our volunteers our work would be impossible at the end of this year:

- 72 active volunteers
- 101 individuals who have volunteered through 2022/23
- 32 new volunteers
- 21 of these have lived experience of migration
- 14 volunteers moved into employment and 3 into further education
- 5867 hours of volunteering provided
- Equivalent to a financial contribution of £82000 this year

## **3. Developing English Language and Digital skills**

We returned to face-to-face provision for our community based English Language courses this year, with new courses in Winson Green, Smethwick Library and West Bromwich. We ran 25 classes a week from pre-entry to entry level 3 . Our 4 Occupational English Test (OET) and 1 IELTS class continue to be funded through the partnership with Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust and an additional IELTS course, for Sandwell residents, was funded through Sandwell Language Network.

- 193 ESOL students
- 72 OET and IELTS students
- 2 IELTS and 4 OET courses running this year
- 8 OET passes since April 2022
- New family ESOL class
- 14 volunteer teachers and teaching assistants
- 56 individuals received digital skills support



One of our quarterly volunteers meetings



(Family learning - Music for ESOL session)

#### **4. Meeting practical needs**

We have continued to see the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on individuals and families this year will increased demand for food and clothing as household bills increased and incomes remained static. The demand for baby milk during the past quarter of the month saw a huge spike in requests. We are grateful for the many donations and support from our volunteers in helping us continue to meet these practical needs.

- 10523 provisions of food
- 1111 provisions of clothing
- 28 baby packs
- 335 provisions of baby equipment
- 640 provisions of household goods
- 316 deliveries of food
- 350 Christmas presents provided at 2 Christmas parties
- 236 provisions of baby milk

#### **5. Responding to refugee resettlement**

We have worked with Sandwell Council in delivering support to Afghan refugees, working with hosts and guests in the Homes for Ukraine scheme and in delivery of the Refugee Transitions Outcome Framework (RTOF) pilot. Through the provision of orientation, support with benefits, housing, employment, and the development of a personalised integration plan Brushstrokes is helping individuals settle in Sandwell. We now have a comprehensive model for refugee resettlement which is used across all our resettlement projects.

- 82 Afghans supported in contingency hotel
- 14 Afghan (ARAP) households supported in the community
- 29 Ukrainians households supported through the Homes for Ukraine Scheme
- 101 refugees supported under RTOF
- 96 non RTOF refugees supported to make the transition from asylum support to settlement





(Brushstrokes resources room)

## 6. Providing information, advice, and advocacy

Brushstrokes was able to support several organisations this year through the provision of advice in their premises, the number of outreach venues expanded from two in 2021/22 to eight this year including three sites in West Birmingham, two in Sandwell and one in Halesowen.

- Home Office funding secured to continue the delivery of EU Settlement Scheme advice this year until June 2023.
- Work with Sandwell Council to deliver specialist advice and support to individuals and hosts under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.
- Funding secured to increase access to free Immigration advice in Sandwell and enable an expansion of provision into Dudley.
- Health funding has enabled us to develop services that address health inequalities in Sandwell and Birmingham, increasing understanding of the NHS and access to health services.
- Our employment support service has expanded, working with refugees, EU nationals, residents, and projects to focus on individuals who are 50+.
- In partnership with the Refugee and Migrant Centre we have been able to expand the provision of Immigration Advice in Dudley and support the development of new immigration advisers within our organisation.
- Our early action project has informed our response to the advice and support needs of asylum seekers in local contingency hotels.
- We have continued to build on our strong referral pathways in Sandwell ensuring that those who require specialist Immigration, EU Settlement, Housing and Benefits advice or individuals with No Recourse to Public Funds are able to access to help they require.
- 278 referrals from Sandwell organisations this year a 50% increase on 2021/22 with a large proportion from the Children's Trust, NHS organisations and Sandwell's Housing team.
- 229 welfare calls were made to vulnerable service users.
- 4350+ enquiries and cases worked this year ( 32% increase on 2021/22)

- 700+ nationals assisted with EU settlement scheme advice through our EUSS partnership with EWAcic
- 197 new refugees supported
- 348 households provided with specialist housing advice through our Safe and Secure in Sandwell housing Project
- 665 individuals received immigration advice
- 380 individuals accessed employment support
- 120 individuals attended our Orientation sessions, which provide new arrivals with information on local services. West Midlands Police, Health, Libraries, SAFL and other community organisations share about the services they provide, how they can be accessed and give individuals the opportunity to ask questions.

## 7. Reducing health inequalities

Brushstrokes continues to play an active role in developing local responses to the health needs of new arrivals, whether refugees coming via different government resettlement schemes, continuing to support the NRPF TB pathway, ensuring migrant women's experience of maternity care is understood by the NHS or seeking to develop mental health and wellbeing services for new arrivals. Our work on migrant health has become a core element of Brushstrokes Holistic offer to new communities this year.

- New project funded by West Birmingham ICB project addressing health inequalities – providing health information, advice and ESOL in West Birmingham
- Piloting of a new Inclusion Health worker role
- Understanding the NHS sessions delivered to 150+ individuals
- Weekly Music Therapy sessions delivered by Nordorff-Robbins are helping individuals maintain positive mental health



(One of the guided canal walks for our Women's group)



- Monthly Blood Borne Virus Screening clinics at Brushstrokes
- Covid vaccine sessions and Flu immunisation uptake sessions organised
- Monthly Blood pressure checks running with our local Pharmacy on site since January 2023
- Service users engaged with the Maternity Voice Partnership
- We are using the '5 ways to wellbeing' to measure the impact of our work on mental wellbeing delivered via the Sandwell Health Inequalities Programme using walks, arts, gardening , sport, and craft projects to promote wellbeing
- Training community researchers to complete a study on migrant women's experience of maternity care
- Development of translated information and explanatory videos on health conditions in conjunction with Public Health

## 8. Community development

This year has seen the continued development and expansion of social and community activities. We are proud of the collaborative space that we have been able to create and the willingness of outside organisations and community members to work alongside us in the provision of arts, health, social and community activities for new arrivals.

- Brushspokes bike project has provided 73 bikes this year in addition to 'learn to ride' classes and regular bike maintenance workshops where people are learning skills to maintain their bike themselves.
- Our welcome Wednesday sessions continue to provide space for new arrivals and residents to meet and socialise
- Our men's and women's groups have continued to grow and undertaken a range of activities which have improved individual health and wellbeing
- Our Monthly film nights with Black Country touring as creating social space for community members to see films from around the world.
- We held welcome meals for Afghan and Ukrainian arrivals and Iftar meals at Brushstrokes and the Contingency Hotel.
- Trips to the Black Country Museum and Cadbury's world for our Afghan and Ukrainian service users.



Service users taking part in a Hate crime awareness session

## 9. Promoting service user voice



Our service user panel meets monthly with active representation on our management committee. Panel members have been involved in recruitment for several key posts this year and contributed to the development of our business strategy and Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion action plan.

- Service users have increased their confidence to be able to share their experience and response to changes in immigration policy speaking on local and national media platforms.
- Service users shared their experience with several commissioners from the Commission for the Integration of Refugees and two of our panel contributed to the West Midlands Commission hearing in November 2022.
- Continued support for the development of Borough of Sanctuary and ensuring service user priorities are fed into the development of the groups action plan.
- Service users have engaged with Elected Members sharing their experience and learning about local democracy.
- Presentations from service users at the Sandwell Health Inequalities Project Launch event and the Sandwell Language Network LGC awards panel session.
- Training of service users to become community research practitioners increasing their skills and confidence and ensuring the voice of those new communities where language and culture may present barriers to traditional research can be captured. Service users have been involved in the Empowering Cities Research on housing and Migrant Maternity research this year.

## 10. Partnership and influence

This year saw the development of new partnerships, greater joint work for our service users at Brushstrokes centre that has expanded access to social and community activities for individuals and continued focus on research and social policy.

- We regularly respond to the Insight Hub surveys looking at the impact of current immigration policy and practice on the communities we work with.
- Through the development of further community researchers, we are contributing to studies on migrant women's experience of housing and maternity care. Working with the University of Birmingham, we have worked with students on a review of the Refugee Transitions Outcome Framework and a study on approaches to health inequalities.

- Nomination for the National Diversity Awards – community group category 2022.
- Working with Sandwell Council and EWAcicwe have helped develop a coordinated response to the Homes for Ukraine Scheme , ensuring guests and hosts in the scheme receive support to access education, ESOL, employment , orientation, and housing advice.
- Working with the Newbegin Trust and St Chads we are providing access to ESOL for families and specialist advice on immigration, asylum support, benefits, and health services.
- We continue to identify and share the learning from the Refugee Transitions Outcome Project with other local authorities, DHLUC and delivery partners.
- New partnership with the Refugee and Migrant Centre, Hope Projects and Stoke, Norths staffs and Stafford Citizens Advice has created the West Midlands Immigration Network and has enabled us to develop a new Immigration advice service for people in Dudley.
- We have continued this year to deliver advice on EU Settlement to individuals within Birmingham and the Black Country in partnership with EWAcic.
- Brushstrokes plays an active role in Sandwell Consortium and continues to help inform the development of Sandwell Language Network; Sandwell Health Inequalities Programme , Migration Policy, and Practice Health working group ; the Early Action Partnership; WMCA NRPF homelessness working group; Sandwell Homelessness Partnership ; West Midlands LA Afghan hotel best practice group; Sandwell's NRPF TB pathway.
- Delivery of training on EU settlement, No Recourse to Public Funds, Immigration and Health entitlement.
- Coordinating Sandwell Immigration Practitioners network to support immigration advisers in the Borough.
- Delivery with our community researchers on the Empowering Cities research into migrant women's experience of housing , a transnational project with Universities in Germany, Sweden , Keele, and Birmingham.

**'Brushstrokes are a valued partner. They work tirelessly and with great warmth good humour and heart to support newcomers to settle well. Brushstrokes immediate response is always to find ways in which they can help – particularly challenging during COVID lockdowns. They are now supporting Afghan refugees in the hotels in Sandwell and helping welcome Ukrainian refugees. Brushstrokes work with people to enable them to help themselves. They are a driving force behind the work to make Sandwell and Borough of Sanctuary and they understand how to work well in partnership with other voluntary groups as well as statutory bodies.'**



# Progress on our priorities for 2022/23

## 1. Coming out of the pandemic we ensure our services remain resourced, accessible, and responsive to the needs of new and emerging communities in Sandwell , West Birmingham, and the Black Country

### Complete and ongoing

Brushstrokes has a clear appointment and referral process in place, operating on an appointment only basis, advice and support is available Monday to Saturday at our main office. We have sustained our housing advice outreach at Ileys , our monthly EUSS clinics in Lye , continued with outreach and home visiting for vulnerable clients and established new advice sessions in Wednesbury, Winson Green, Central Birmingham, West Bromwich and an immigration clinic in Halesowen.

Through our digital skills support we are enabling individuals to build confidence to manage online applications and requests for support. Our ESOL provision has returned to face-to-face classes, and we have expanded our service into West Birmingham. We have responded to the needs of those in contingency hotels and Ukrainian arrivals developing advice, health support and integration work with these groups. Through work with our Service User panel and consultation with users our social and community activity program has been developed in response to their needs.

We have continued to demonstrate this year the capacity to respond and adapt our service provision to the changing patterns of migration and the needs of our service users. Our response to the arrival of Ukrainian Refugees and the needs of asylum seekers in hotel accommodation are just two examples of this.



## 2. Embed the principles of early action across the project, focusing on reducing crisis

### Partially complete and ongoing

Our advice provision for those in the asylum process follows a clearly defined early action approach. Through orientation sessions , individual and group asylum guide sessions and regular advice provision at the contingency hotel, individuals have greater understanding of the asylum process and what they need to do once a decision has been made on their claim.

The development of an inclusion health model of work at the hotel, centre and in community venues is helping raise awareness of health services, successfully promoted the uptake of the Pharmacy 1st scheme and increased understanding of the benefits of vaccination and screening. Members of our service user panel, men's, and women's group, are taking responsibility for the planning and deliver of sessions, engaging directly with service providers and highlighting their experience and aspirations for health and wellbeing services. Having several of our OET/IELTS learners come into paid roles in the organisation has helped increase the effectiveness of our wider health work.

As an organisation we are seeking to respond to the impact of new issues such as the 'Streamlined asylum process', No Recourse to Public Funds and the volume of homeless on the day presentations through the lens of Early Action. Our Safe and secure in Sandwell project provided information sessions on tenants' rights and responsibilities, giving participants the understanding and capacity to take action themselves to address housing crisis. Proactive engagement on housing options and rights with new refugees has been completed this year to prevent them falling into housing crisis once current support ends.

### **3. Working with the service user panel to increase engagement of service users and commissioners, playing an active role in reviewing , evaluation and informing the planning of new services both internally and externally**

#### **Complete and ongoing**

Our service user panel has grown its membership this year and has played an active role in our management committee , fed into our business strategy development and equality, diversity, and inclusion action plan. They have played in led role in several NHS consultations and several members have been able to share their experience as part of the Commission for the Integration of Refugees . Members have participated in the Maternity Voice Partnership , shared experiences of maternity care with midwifery leads and spoken to providers and commissioners of health care and English Language provision at a local level. Several of our panel members have been involved in the national Experts by Experience work that is part of the Explore Adapt Renew programme lead by Refugee Action.

### **4. Continue to share best practice, build, and engage in partnerships that can respond to issues faced by new communities in Sandwell and West Birmingham**

#### **Complete**

Brushstrokes has been able to share our model of refugee integration at Sandwell Homelessness Partnership and with cabinet members and as part of the Explore Adapt Renew project. Our approach to refugee integration and the benefits of our holistic model of outreach and support to those in the asylum system has been discussed with the Commission for the Integration of Refugees and as part of ongoing regional work on the Refugee Transitions Outcome Framework.

Our work on No Recourse to Public Funds has been shared within West Midlands Combined Authorities NRPF Homelessness task group and at a regional workshop. The response to health needs of individuals at hotels and the partnership approach to those with TB who have no recourse to public funds was fed into the regional Migration Policy and Practice health sub-group.

We have been able to develop and share the work on Inclusion Health and migrant health and wellbeing, informing partnership funding bids for migrant health and wellbeing projects. Our learning and approach to asylum early action within the Explore Adapt and Renew project and with local organisations working with asylum seekers and refugees.

## **5. Secure additional larger multi-year funding streams for the future sustainability of the project**

### **Complete and ongoing**

Despite the challenging funding environment, we have secured funding for our work on immigration, health, and No Recourse to Public Funds for the benefit of Sandwell residents. We value the support and partnership approach to responding to the needs of recent migrants by Sandwell Council.

Further funding from Nationwide Community Foundation has enabled us to maintain our specialist housing advice service for a further 2 years.

Working with the Refugee and Migrant Centre, Hope Projects and Stoke and North Staffs Citizens Advice we were able to secure 2 ½ years funding to expand Immigration advice provision and develop a new service in Dudley.

Support to respond to the cost-of-living crisis, enabling us to provide more digital skills support, ESOL , employment support and connection into volunteering opportunities has been funded by the National Lottery for the next two years.

As active members of Sandwell Consortium we were delighted to see the success of several funding bids to develop work to engage individuals in health, digital skills, employment, community activities and to address the cost-of-living crisis. Being part of the consortium has led to several new projects and helped make several posts more sustainable. Work is ongoing to look at larger multi-year funding streams continues.

## **6. Increase ESOL and language provision to address the lack of local capacity through volunteer recruitment, training, and development of online resources**

### **Partially Complete and ongoing**

Brushstrokes continues to play a key role in Sandwell Language Network (SLN) and has been able to increase provision this year in Sandwell. Volunteers have benefited from training provided via WMSMP ESOL network and SLN in addition to in house training days delivered by our ESOL and Learning Coordinator.

Funding from the National Lottery, Irwin Mitchell Charitable Trust and West Birmingham ICB has supported development of additional ESOL classes, helping us to deliver a new family learning class which includes a monthly music for ESOL session, two new courses in West Birmingham and one for asylum seekers in contingency accommodation. We have seen an additional 50 learners benefit from ESOL provision this year.

Online resources have been developed and are regularly used by our ESOL, IELTS and OET learners. Learners who need additional support with digital skills are benefiting from referral into our digital skills project. Through SLN funding an additional IELTS course for those who require IELTS but who are not health professionals has been delivered, increasing individuals' opportunities to enter employment in their career or progress to further academic study.

**7. Respond to the impact of poverty and costs of living crisis through increased capacity to provide employment support, digital skills, financial capability sessions, benefits advice, and food/ non-food resources.**

**Complete and ongoing**

We have ensured a greater focus on assessment for those coming for food, enabling individuals to maximise their income through accessing benefits or grants or addressing other barriers linked to their immigration status which leave them at this point with no recourse to public funds. We have expanded our employment support to 4 members of staff and our digital skills team to provide greater assistance to those who are able to work but struggle to access the labour market.

We are grateful to those organisations and trusts who provide support for our food provision, with the impact of rising food and fuel charges we have seen an increased demand for food . The costs to ensure we have sufficient suppliers of fresh fruit and vegetables for service users have increased significantly in the past 5 months. Partnership work with Citizens Advice and other colleagues in addressing budgeting and financial capability is ongoing and the new Cost of Living Project will help address some of this need along with support being provided through the Multiply project for those who are in work and struggling. We are grateful to Sandwell Consortium for the additional welfare benefits advice session provided at Brushstrokes each week.

'I work for FareShare Midlands, just one of the local partners Brushstrokes work with to facilitate the support they provide their local community. Brushstrokes do an incredible job offering a range of services to asylum seekers and refugees. They are passionate about their cause and provide an invaluable service to those in need of support in Sandwell. We are proud to work alongside them....'

In the next 12 months we hope to have developed a larger pool of volunteer advisers who can assist with benefits, budgeting, and digital skills support.



(Service users at one of the SHIP arts and crafts sessions)

# Brushstrokes Objectives for 2023- 24

Develop a new strategy to plan direction for the next 3 years.

Secure additional funding for core Brushstrokes services and posts.

Respond to the impact of poverty and cost of living crisis through early action, increased outreach, the provision of targeted employment and digital skills support, budgeting and benefits advice and the provision of practical support.

Deliver a consistent approach to refugee integration, which places service users at the centre and ensures refugees feel safe, settle into accommodation, education and employment and build stronger connections to their neighbourhood / Sandwell.

Promote and play an active role in partnership responses to migration, poverty, No Recourse to Public Funds, homelessness and social exclusion at a local and regional level through the sharing of resources, best practice, co-location and the active inclusion of those with lived experience in service development.

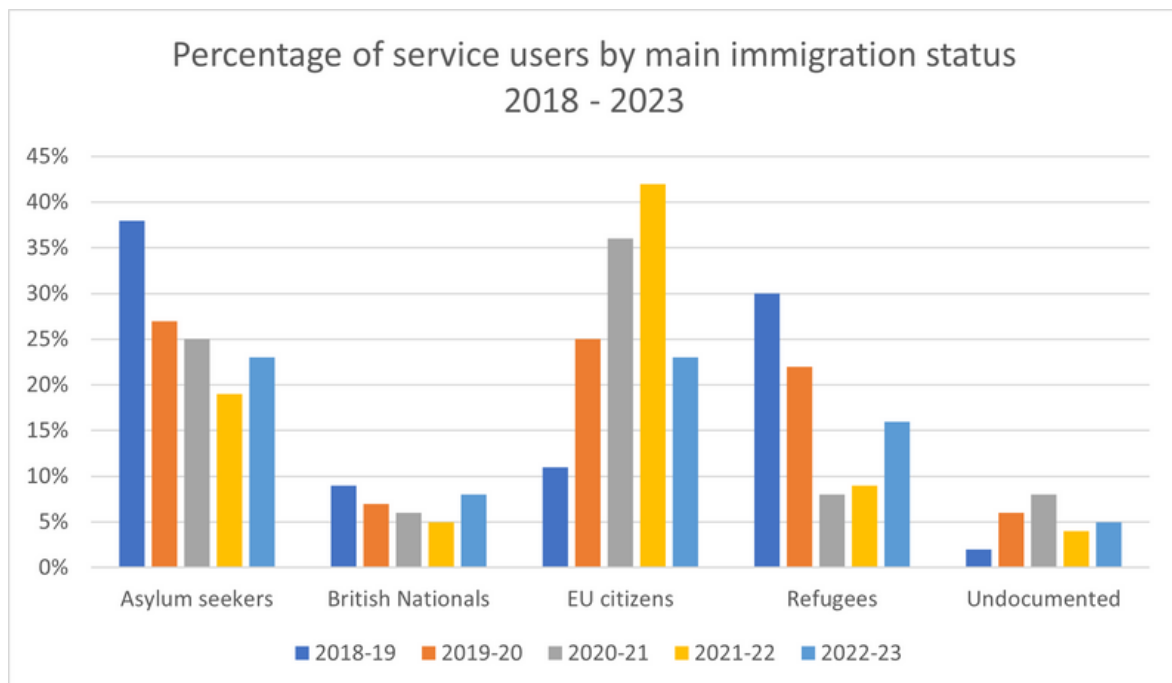
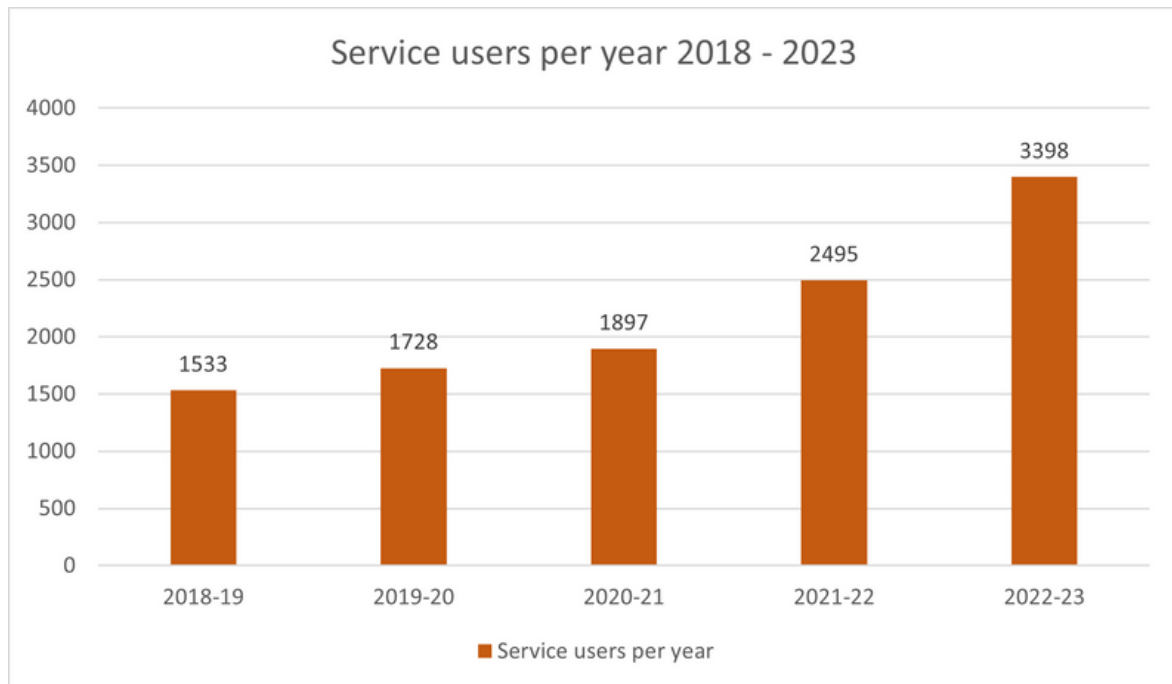
Support, promote and enable those with lived experience of migration to engage with and inform those responsible for the development of local, regional and national policy and service delivery of their aspirations and needs in ways that are meaningful and lead to long term change.

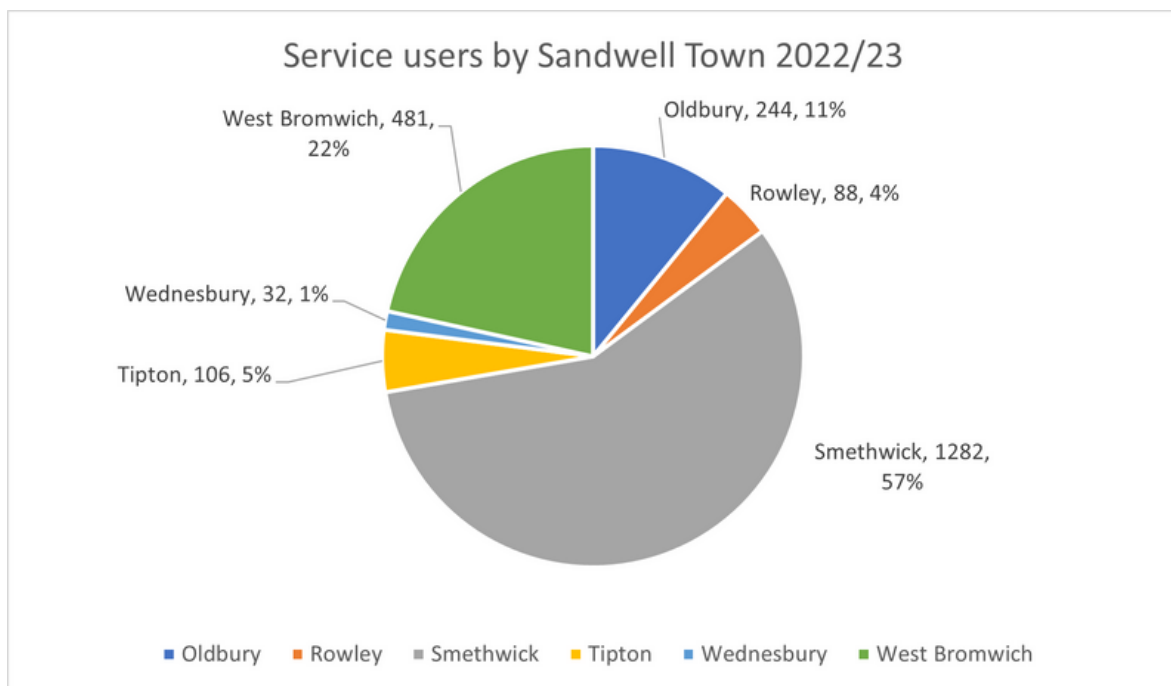
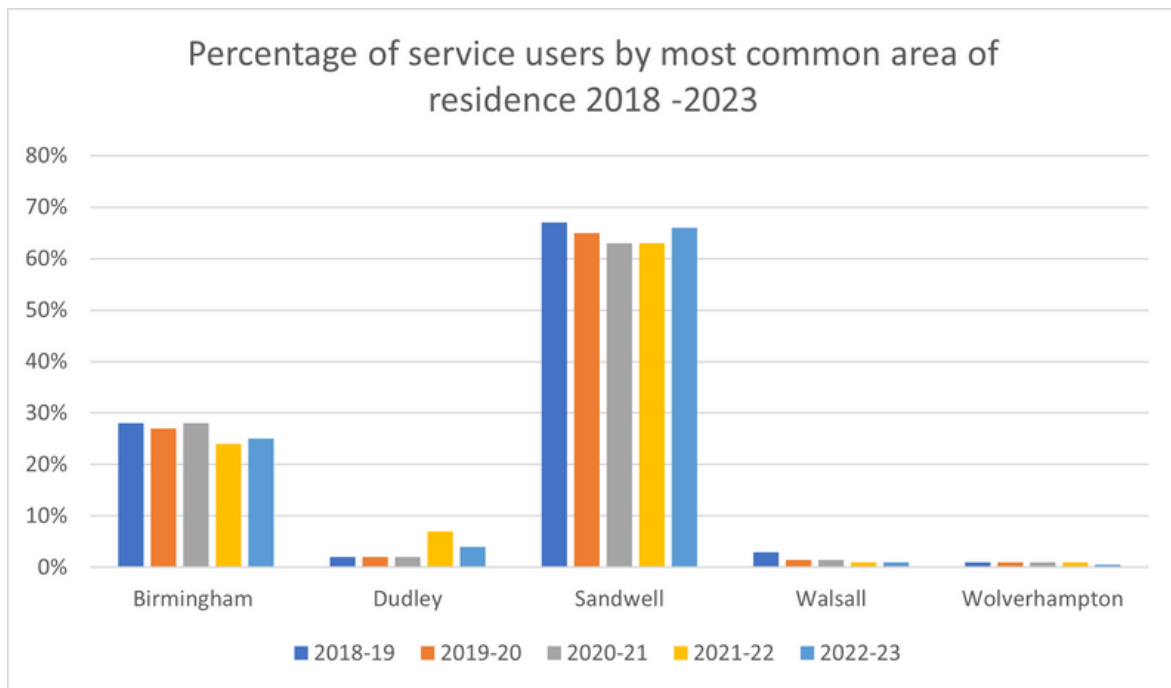
Sustain and develop an integrated service that informs and empowers individuals to prevent them falling into crisis as a result of insecure immigration status, unemployment, destitution and homelessness.

Embed an inclusion health approach into our work, ensuring individuals understand and access the health and wellbeing services and preventative care they require.



# Service user data 2022/23





# English Language Provision

Language plays an essential role for navigating life in the UK, increasing the ability to settle, deal with everyday tasks we often take for granted and to progress into education, employment, and training. The demand for ESOL has continued to exceed capacity locally and those recent arrivals in the asylum system, those without current ARC cards and women with young children have been particularly affected.

We moved back to face to face classes this year, there is still one online conversation class. Brushstrokes continues to offer learners the opportunity to complete accredited ESOL via the English-Speaking Board.

Sonia, our ESOL and Learning coordinator, has piloted a series of assessment days throughout the year as a way working with our volunteer teachers. Our last session in February assessed 50 individuals and because of the increased frequency of assessments we were able to place 31 learners into classes. This change in approach is helping reduce waiting times for ESOL and helps fill in space in classes where people have moved onto college or out of the area.

We are incredibly fortunate to have such a dedicated team of volunteers and sessional teaching staff who have helped increase the provision of ESOL to 25 classes a week and enabled an extra 50 individuals to benefit from free ESOL this year.

Brushstrokes community-based provision provides individuals with the capacity to learn English whilst developing individuals understanding of health and UK culture in an environment that encouraged connections with others from different countries of origin. That much of our provision is delivered by a team of dedicated trained volunteers remains unique and has contributed to the development of Sandwell Language Network.

We have placed additional focus this year on literacy skills for our foundation learners.

November saw the launch of family learning, was set-up in response to a need of several mothers who cannot attend ESOL class in person due to childcare issues. The class takes place once a week on Zoom. The students first topic, as decided by them was health. The health unit worksheets were posted out to the students to enable them to catch up if they miss a lesson and follow along easily at home. The work is also posted on Padlet. Two of the students who attend the class have been supplied with donated laptops from Brushstrokes. In addition to their online class, the ladies are also able to meet once a month for an in person, Music and ESOL session, one of the outcomes from these sessions includes the class writing their own inclusive song. The lack of childcare for ESOL classes presents a significant barrier for many women from new communities so the online provision has been a real help to this group. We have also been able to run two classes with creche provision in Winson green as part of our West Birmingham Health inequalities work.

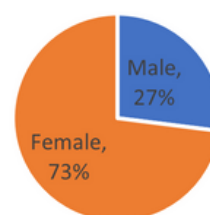
These sessions have increased the vocabulary and confidence of learners to be able to talk with GPs and health professionals about their health needs, make appointments for themselves and increased their confidence. The proportion of ESOL learners who are male increased this year due in the main to increased classes catering for single asylum seekers in Contingency hotel accommodation. However, at 73%, women still account for most of our learners.

Teachers have accessed a range of training opportunities this year including sessions from NATECLA ( National Association for teaching English and Community Languages) including sessions on teaching mixed ability ESOL groups, teaching online and using digital tools and trauma informed ESOL for Refugees.

| Level      | Number of students |
|------------|--------------------|
| Foundation | 26                 |
| Pre-entry  | 64                 |
| Entry 1    | 40                 |
| Entry 2    | 32                 |
| Entry 3    | 31                 |
| Total      | 193                |

At the end of March, we were thrilled to be asked to take part in a promotional video for Sandwell Language Network (SLN). The network currently funds two ESOL courses and one IELTS course and we have been a delivery partner since 2019. The network was shortlisted as a finalist for a prestigious local government award and one of our students was part of a presentation to the decision-making panel , demonstrating wonderfully the impact and confidence that our ESOL provision has given her.

ESOL learners by Gender 2022/23



**AH is a 20-year-old male, Asylum seeker from Chad. He lives in shared asylum accommodation. When he came to the UK in July 2021, he could not speak or understand English. He did not go to school in Chad and cannot read and write in his first language – Chadian Arabic.**

**H came to Brushstrokes in January 2022 for resources support and then immigration advice. He**

**joined the Foundation class in April 2022. Attended English class for 12 weeks from April to July**

**2022. The class he attended was a new class, funded by SLN.**

**He currently attends SLN funded class at Smethwick Library 4 hours per week. With 70% attendance and strong determination and commitment to learning. He currently attends Matthew Boulton College alongside Brushstrokes English provision. He has improved confidence and progressed from Foundation learner to currently Entry 1, two levels higher. He says , 'My English now is good I am happy'**

# Specialist language provision for migrant health professionals



IELTS – International English Language Testing System(Academic English)

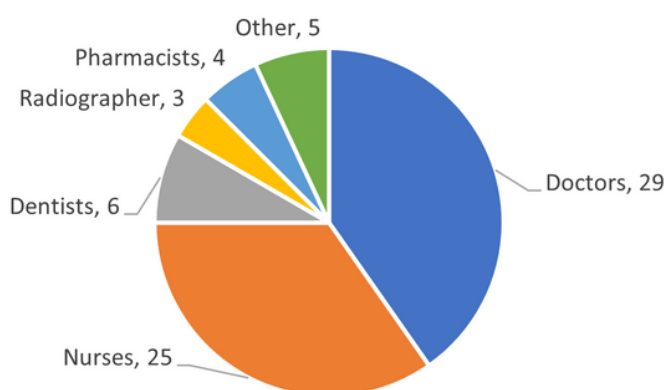
OET – Occupational English Test (for doctors and nurses from overseas)

Brushstrokes remains unique in being a community project that provides free OET/ IELTS classes for health professionals in partnership with our local NHS Trust. This year we have continued to provide 4 OET courses and 1 IELTS through this partnership. The flexibility and additional support provided as part of the community-based provision is enabling health professionals to gain the confidence and improve their scores to return to work in the health sector. Courses continue to be provided online through 3 experienced sessional teaching staff oversee by Dominic our IELTS and OET coordinator. The team are developing a range of on-line resources to support learning and have held several mock test sessions throughout the year to help individuals prepare for examinations.

This year we had 72 students involved across our 6 courses , with 52 individuals studying OET and 20 on IELTS. 67% of our learners are female 33% male.

Due to the nature of our course and our student demographic individual attendance will always be inconsistent. It is vital that lack of attendance is not punished and that students feel that a period of absence does not preclude them from the course, as this will likely have a detrimental effect on student engagement. Many students already suffer from anxiety, lack of confidence and stress and this course needs to present itself as a safe and consistent space. Students who are absent for extended periods of time without notice are contacted to ascertain a reason for absence and offer a solution (e.g., changing their class times.) As previously mentioned, we have had positive results to this effect with students returning after periods of absence. Because our course is online, and our expected attendance rate is 50-75% per class we can afford to be generous with our class sizes.

Learners by profession on IELTS + OET courses





Hala's case highlights the benefits of our approach to learners through this provision.

Hala (a nurse) came to the very first IELTS assessments in 2017. She failed to score in reading and writing and only scored 2 for listening. She had some time out to have a baby and struggled with face-to-face classes because of childcare. She switched to OET in 2019 and has continued to make progress. She recently scored 27 for her listening so she's pretty close to a pass grade there and has been able to pass the writing task in previous assignments. So, it seems she's been able to pass every sub-test apart from listening in practice. For someone like Hala who began her learning journey with very low level of English, OET is a tough path. She's made great improvement over the last 3 years considering her starting level. OET is the equivalent of a ESOL Level 2 or CEFR C1 so to go from Entry 2 (A2) to that level in three years is a massive achievement.

This year we have also been able to run an additional IELTS course for Sandwell residents as part of Sandwell Language Network provision. One of our learners featured on the promotional video for the LGC award the network was shortlisted for.

Sana provided the following feedback on her studies with Brushstrokes,

**In order to be a dentist in the UK I needed to work on my English lessons were expensive and I really begin to lose hope, however, after finding the Sandwell Language Network I have had quality English lessons for free and I have now achieved the results I need in all my mock exams. This have given me so much confidence moving forward. I now have the opportunity to fulfil my career right here in Sandwell. Sana**

The following students from our SLN IELTS class have volunteered their time to help as language assistants for the ESOL lessons at Brushstrokes: Sana Alvarez, Anya Shamsula, Ali Alroomi and Salvador Garcia. Several of our students come from an educational background so it's great to see them have an opportunity to use their skills and support other learners who are just at the beginning of their language journey. This is another great example of those who have been welcomed in turn welcoming others.

**I came to Europe after the troubles I had in my own country. Of course, they would not welcome me with flowers. I have to overcome some things on myself. Sometimes I felt very lonely here. Especially not being able to speak the language is a very difficult situation. It is very important to support people like me in this regard. I have attended many German and English language courses in the last two years. I can say this is best one. They encourage me and give opportunities to improve my English. Receiving not only medical support but also language support was extraordinary. I will be grateful all my life for this uncountable support. Dr M Kaya**

# Resources

Practical support remains a cornerstone of our work, through the provision of food, baby milk, baby packs and equipment, household goods and clothing, the most basic needs of individuals and families in need are met. The last quarter of the year saw a further upsurge in the demand for food surge again in the face of increased cost of food and utilities, with over 1000 provisions of food are being provided each month.

Our food provision is primarily open to migrants: asylum seekers, refugees, EU citizens and those visitors on VISAs with no recourse to public funds (NRPF). Local residents also access our food service; however, we have an agreement with the local Trussell Trust foodbank and are a referral agency for them. Clients with NRPF and in the asylum system will be supported with food for as long as or as often as they need. Those who are awaiting benefits can continue receiving food support until their Universal Credit is received.

We also complete benefit checks for those who are in receipt of benefits but still struggling. With the cost of living rising rapidly, we have already experienced an increase in new clients, and only foresee this rapidly increasing over coming months. We have continued to do deliveries for a small number of vulnerable clients who have been unable to travel to our centre due to illness, disability, or complex family circumstances.



Non-food resources are open to anyone who need them. Local health visitors, hospitals and midwifery teams regularly refer clients to us for baby pack and baby equipment. Local residents as well as migrant service users can access our resources room for clothing, household items and soft furnishings every 3 months, or seasonally. Emergency bags are also made up for babies that may grow more rapidly!

We are extremely grateful for the support of individuals, local schools, the faith community, and local businesses in helping us meet the needs of our service users. Through their generosity we have been able to provide additional basic items for families fasting during Ramadan and provide food for Iftar meals at Brushstrokes and at the Contingency Hotel. Donations from Lightwoods House volunteer group and Our lady and St Hubert's provided Easter packs for children.

During harvest we received great support from local schools we visited St John Bosco, West Brom, St Matthew's Smethwick, and Our Lady of the Wayside, Solihull to speak with pupils in assemblies/liturgies we talked about work of the resources team and the increase in users due to cost-of-living crisis. We also received from St George's Parish, Edgbaston, St Phillip's School and church, Smethwick, Victoria House day Nursery, Smethwick. Over Christmas we were able to hold two parties for families and provide over 350 presents to children from families we are working with.

Tom, our new resources coordinator has been able to set up an additional four collections from local stores this year and continues to work identifying other opportunities. The team have also been fortunate to be able to attend several parents' evenings at local schools to share information on the work of Brushstrokes and offer advice and support.

## Summer food project

With funding from Western Power, we were able to provide additional food for our families with children during the holiday period. This is to allow for the fact that the children would be home during the day, and not able to access free school meals and snacks at school. The additional costs would have been difficult for our families to manage. We provided a checking system for families with school age children to make sure they were receiving their Free School Meal vouchers during the holidays.



The food that we were able to provide went to all families, not just those entitled to free school meals – some children are too young to attend school and so do not qualify, others struggle to qualify if their children are at high school/in secondary education.

Alongside this, we offered 5 family cooking sessions and a total of 25 families did participate and thoroughly enjoyed making a range of foods including pizza, chickpea curry and stuffed vegetables. Parents were to accompany their children, but the idea was that the food was prepared by the children, using commonly included ingredients from our weekly food parcels.



Feedback was complimentary with many of the families stating that they would like to have these activities repeated in other holiday times.

While food was cooking, children took part in art activities relating to meals and foods that are special or important both culturally, as a family and as an individual.

Service users tell us,

**"It would be difficult to manage without coming to Brushstrokes. The food is good because it is fresh, and I can cook immediately."**

**"Thank you. You always remember us. We are part of your family, and you are in ours. Everyone is always so happy and smile. You know our names. My children like to see you."**

**"As an asylum seeker I am unable to manage all my expenses. You are very helpful. The food I have is very helpful as I have to pay travel expenses for college, study fees and for my children. The food I receive is a top-up for our cupboards. We are very grateful when there are fridge items and I know that I will get healthy food from here."**

# Advice - Housing , Benefits, NRPF, Immigration , EUSS

We have been able to expand our advice provision this year through additional staff, volunteers, and funding for new projects. We have continued to operate on an appointment only basis supported by a triage system to ensure urgent cases are prioritised. Advice is available at our centre Mondays to Saturdays and through outreach and home visiting in Sandwell. This year saw the continuation of our weekly housing advice sessions at Ileys Community Association in Smethwick and our EU settlement clinic in Lye. Additional advice services are being provided this year at the following venues:

- Immigration advice at Halesowen Welcome (Monthly) and at Benson Road Community Hub (Weekly)
- Benefits, health and generalist advice at Benson Road Community Hub, Oasis Foundry and asylum support , health, and immigration at St Chads Sanctuary (Weekly)
- Health, Asylum support, Asylum guides advice at the Contingency Hotel (Twice a week)

**During this year we have worked on 4364 advice cases.**

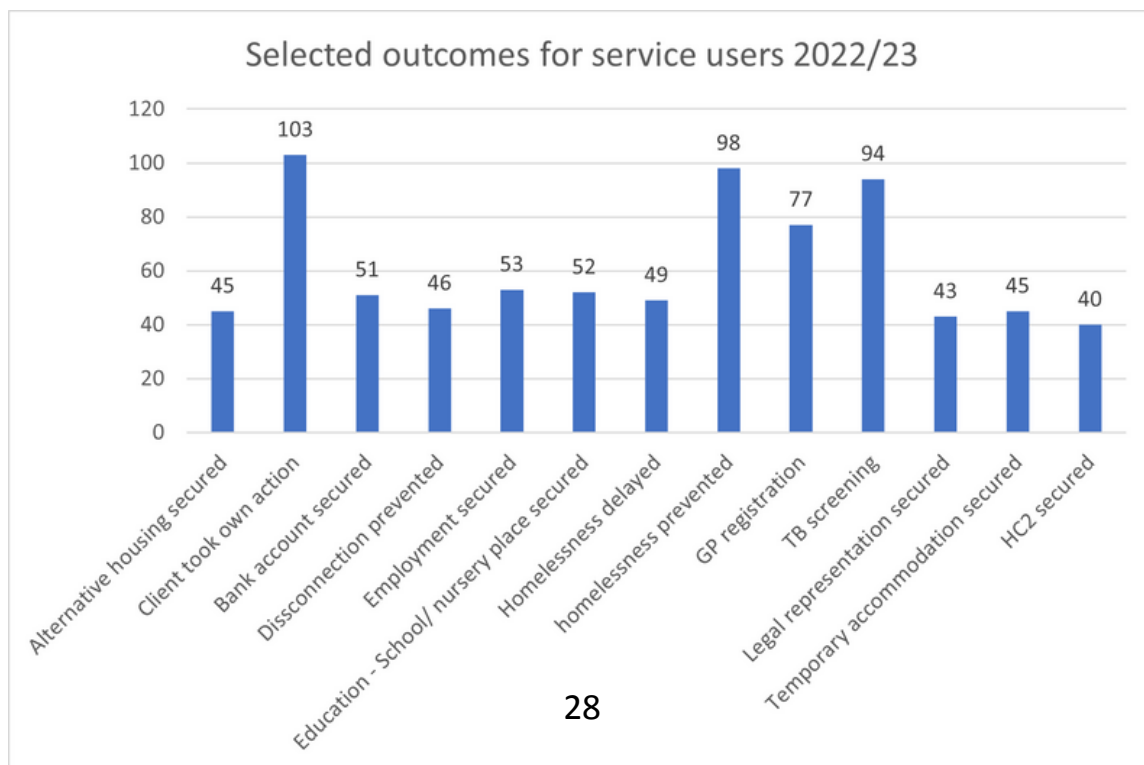
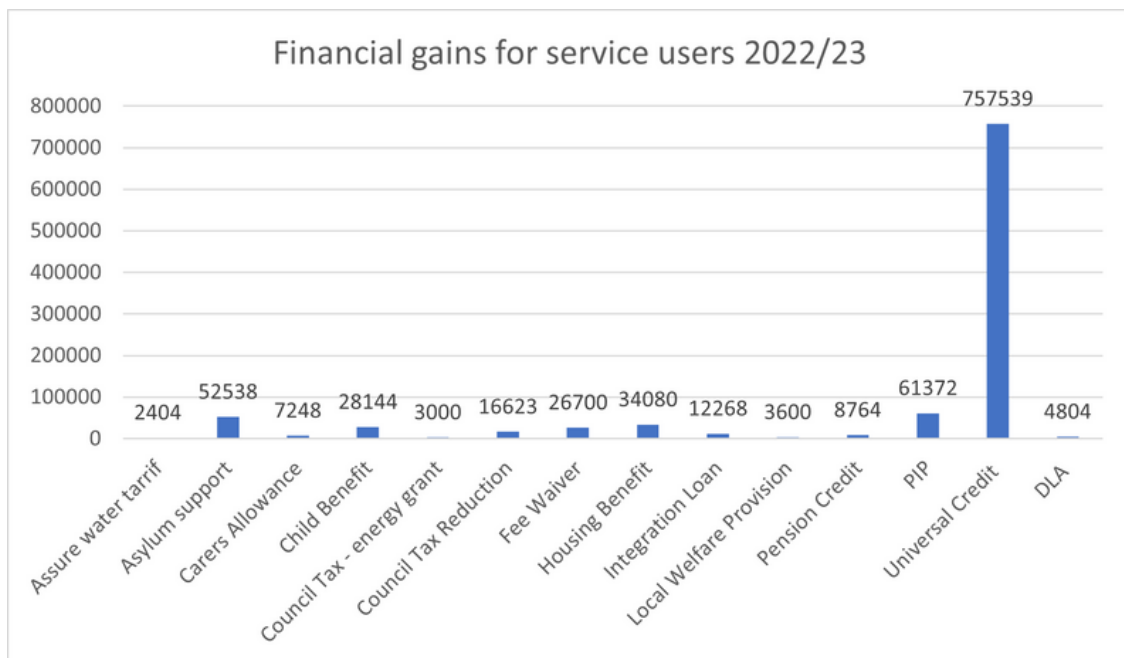
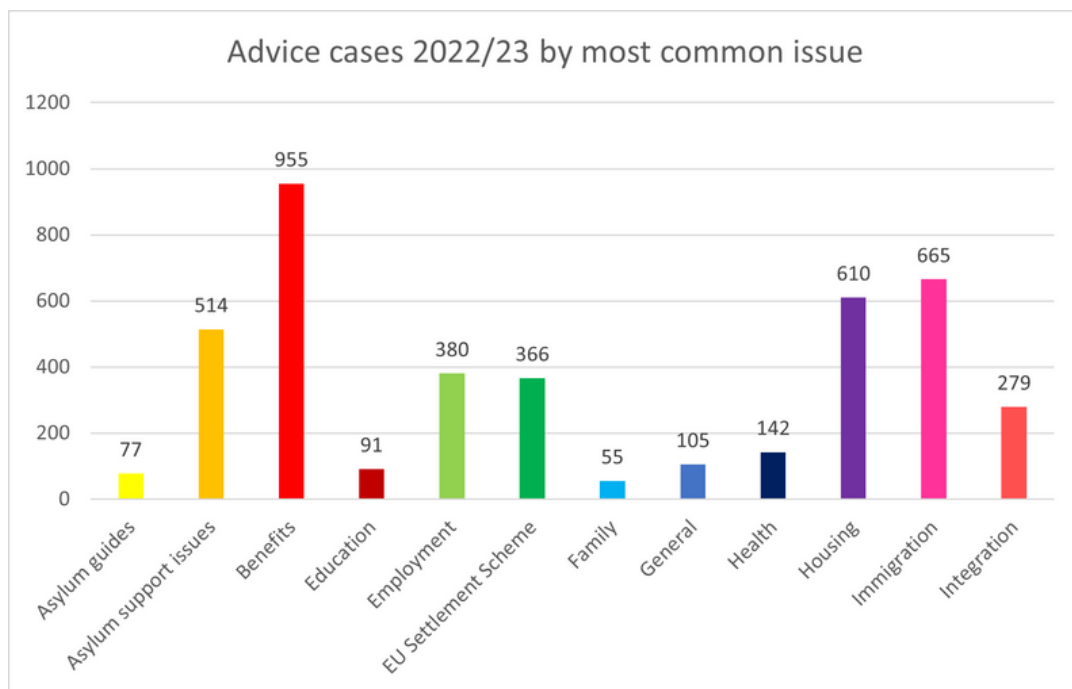
**Total financial gains for service users in 2022/23 were £1,019,084**

The most common advice requests continue to be for Benefits, Immigration, Housing and homelessness, asylum support , employment, and EU Settlement. The volume of direct referrals into the service have increased significantly this year, this is helping ensure people with urgent issues can be prioritised and directed to the most appropriate advice team. We appreciate the strong referral pathways which are established in Sandwell and the level of joint working with other agencies to ensure outcomes are achieved for our most vulnerable residents.

The graphic below illustrates the range of advice Brushstrokes provides across the area we serve.







# Employment support

This has been another growth area for Brushstrokes in the past 12 months, with a team of 4 advisers now supporting refugees, EU nationals, those with NRPF who have permission to work and local residents to gain the skills and confidence to move into employment. Throughout the year there has been a strong focus on supporting refugees in the ARAP, RTOF and Homes for Ukraine schemes with tailored advice and access to training. We also delivered on the Black Country 50+ scheme as part of Sandwell Consortium. Referrals from Job Centre Plus remain high as do the demands for support with digital skills.

Having seen 53 individuals move into employment is a real success this year and testament to the dedication and leadership of Abdikarim and his team.

Within the RTOF project we had 76 lived employment cases at the end of March 2023. One of the benefits from this project is the additional funding to pay for specialist training and equivalency of qualifications for individuals. There has also been a requirement to provide individuals with 20 hrs volunteer placements and the team has worked hard with our volunteer coordinator as well as several external organisations to build the capacity for volunteering for new refugees.

One of the significant barriers to employment many of our client's face is lack of English language, making it difficult to pass certain courses or get through initial recruitment exercises. To this end we have developed a 12-week ESOL for employment course for a group of our refugees, which focuses on employability and language acquisition most relevant for work.

Our relationship with DWP colleagues and our local job centre is strong, and we held our first jobs fair at Brushstrokes in October. There were 45 participants and ten employers and training providers at the event.

Many clients were enrolled to training with nearest assessment day/information day starting on 17th November. Other clients attended inductions and further interviews.

The following case study illustrates some of the challenges our support has been able to address.

**The client is in their 50's came to the UK with a family Visa in 2019. The family lives in Sandwell in private rented accommodation. After arrival, the client struggled due to emergence of the Covid 19 pandemic. In late 2020, client started working in a cleaning job which they had to leave due to irregular working patterns.**

**The client does not have access to public funds due to their immigration status and being long-term unemployed left the family with a financial hardship. The client contacted Brushstrokes for resources such as food and clothing. They were referred to our Employment support for help with job search and other employability skills.**

**We have provided employment support for the client based on their needs and requirements, helped the client to identify their barriers to employment and developed together with the client the necessary strategies to overcome these barriers. They needed support with their job search, understand the requirements in the British labour market in addition to digital skills. They also faced other challenges including care for school aged children and reliance on public transport. These challenges limited the clients' ability to widen the area for job search and looking for jobs where public transport could be used to commute**

We supported the client with job search, job applications, created a tailored CV and registered with several employment platforms, advised them to widen their job search scope including how to employ their hobby for cooking in their job search and emphasise this skill and passion for food.

The client attended a couple of interviews for which we provided interview training and preparation especially online interviews. Invitations to interviews has had major positive impact on the client's self-confidence and motivation.

The client secured part-time employment with an employer within a walking distance from their home. We provided in-work support to the client as they were required to complete a number of online training and induction courses after they started working.

Feedback - "I really appreciate Brushstrokes staff's efforts and the support they have provided me; I could not have done this without them."



Jobs Fair with DWP at Brushstrokes November 2022



# **Immigration and EU settlement Scheme**

The demand for immigration advice has continued to increase with higher levels of dispersal, the introduction of the streamlined asylum process, advice for recent refugee arrivals and individuals with no recourse to public funds.

We continue to operate on an appointment only basis at the centre but have been able to set up a weekly immigration drop-in clinic in Winson Green and a monthly clinic in Halesowen. We are developing additional services in Dudley in partnership with the Refugee and Migrant Centre and through funding from the Justice Together Initiative.

The team continue to support Sandwell's immigration practitioners network providing updates on caselaw, training and support to advisers in other organisations. The new Justice Together Initiative project aims to increase the number of level 1 and level 2 OISC trained advisers at Brushstrokes and developing new referral pathways with a wider range of organisations who work with asylum seekers and refugees within the area we serve. Strong referral pathways between Sandwell Council, Sandwell Children's Trust and the TB service ensure that those who require specialist immigration advice can access this whilst statutory services complete their assessment and provide interim support.

Specialist support and advice for EU nationals who require assistance with late applications for pre-settled or settled status or post decision support was funded by the Home Office for the past 12 months. Numbers of vulnerable individuals requiring support for late applications have exceeded our expectations and the project will continue to run until June 2023. Through this project we have been able to sustain a monthly outreach clinic for EU nationals in Lye.

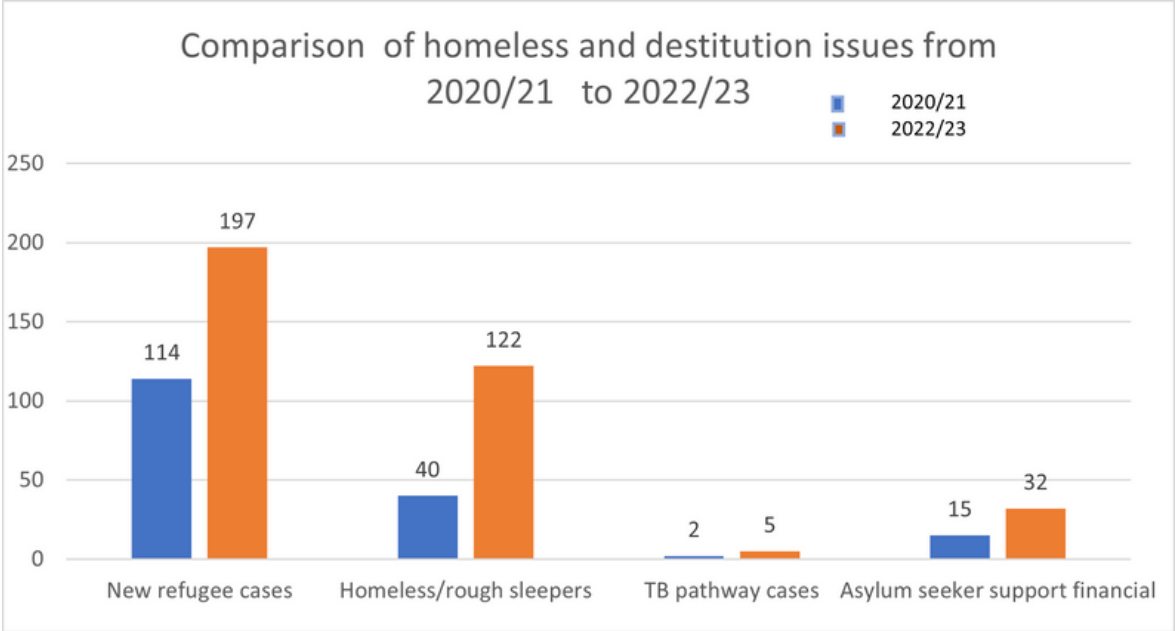
## **Housing and homelessness**

Through our Safe and Sound in Sandwell Project , funded by Nationwide, and the support of the Passionists we have provided specialist housing information and advice and destitution support to an increasing number of individuals and families this year.

As the chart below highlights, we have seen an increasing flow of people presenting to us in housing crisis, many of whom have no recourse to public funds, have been victims of domestic abuse or who have pre-settled status and are not eligible for welfare benefits. During lockdown the options for people who were homeless on the day to present to local authorities were limited, through increasing awareness of the specialist support we can provide and the impact of immigration status on individuals entitlements to support we are seen as the place to present in crisis.

We have worked with several housing mentors, started to build relationships with local landlords and delivered 7 community information sessions on housing rights and responsibilities to almost 120 individuals this year. In addition, this has been a resource to our Afghan , Ukrainian and RTOF team in working with their clients on housing options.

The provision of information on tenants’ rights is part of our early action approach, enabling people to understand and act where they can on basic housing issues with the knowledge that they can come to brushstrokes for support and advocacy if required. This advice is helping to address issues with disrepair and ensuring matters do not escalate thus preventing potential homelessness.



“We lost our home when friends kicked me and my children out and I could not find a place to go or sleep. I came to Brushstrokes Sandwell for help, they made a homeless application to the council, but the council they refused to help me and my children and took us out to the street, so I had no way but to return to you in the Brushstrokes to help me, and indeed I found help and assistance My children and I stayed in your office until ten o'clock at night, during which time Hawar and manager made many calls to solve my problem until they took me to the place where I am now. The help did not stop, but you delivered support and food 14 to me and my children. You called me to ask about my situation and needs. Now I am waiting for my children to be admitted to school with your support and secure more permanent accommodation. Thank you”

“Hi just wanted to give some feedback. You’ve been brilliant in helping me and met all my needs. You were understanding, didn’t rush me and listened to me. I am very grateful for all your help. I would like to thank you for all your help with housing and to leave my feedback. I was homeless a few weeks ago, now I have a place for living and my life has become much better. Thank you as well for all your help with documents. I hope to get your help in the future too. The work you do is priceless.”

### **Service user feedback :**

**“Hi just wanted to give some feedback. You’ve been brilliant in helping me and met all my needs. You were understanding, didn't rush me and listened to me. I am very grateful for all your help.**

**I would like to thank you for all your help with housing and to leave my feedback. I was homeless a few weeks ago, now I have a place for living and my life has become much better. Thank you as well for all your help with documents. I hope to get your help in the future too. The work you do is priceless.”**

## **Asylum early action**

Brushstrokes is one of seven organisations in the Explore Adapt Renew project that continues to develop and deliver an early action approach to the advice and support needs of those in the asylum process. The focus on the project this year has been on asylum early action advice , sustained outreach orientation sessions, provision and expansion of our asylum guides project and our post decision support for refugees and those refused in the asylum system.

Developing our service user panel and migrant voice within our project is part of the work under the 'shifting power' workstream. Several of the panel have been involved with the National Experts by experience group, completed training on community leadership, engaged with the media and presented asylum seeker and migrant concerns and aspirations to service providers and commissioners.

A final element of early action involves work to promote early action within the wider ecosystem of concerned with advice and support for refugees , asylum seekers and migrants. This included the development of responses to contingency hotels, promotion of asylum guides and new partnerships with Halesowen Welcome and St Chads in the development of specialist advice provision. We are hoping to support one of the organisations with an early action pilot project this year.

- 9 trained asylum guides
- 44 new service users supported by an asylum guide
- 494 new asylum seekers provided with advice
- 597 outreach visits to asylum accommodation

### **Asylum Guide case study**

**The client left Sudan due to the conflict within the country. He faced many difficulties because of the gangs within his area who were insisting that he join their fight. This caused the client a lot of distress and he worried about what they would do to him since he refused to join them. The client struggled to survive as his refusal to fight caused many difficulties in finding work which led to having no finances for necessities. The client met with an asylum guide who supported the client in understanding the asylum process and the stage in which he was within his own asylum case. The client was guided in preparing for this substantive interview and his expectations of the substantive interview were managed. We had practice interview sessions with the client so that he could familiarise himself with the way in which the interview would be held. He had his substantive interview and was subsequently granted Indefinite leave to Remain in March 2023 and is currently receiving support from our refugee resettlement team.**

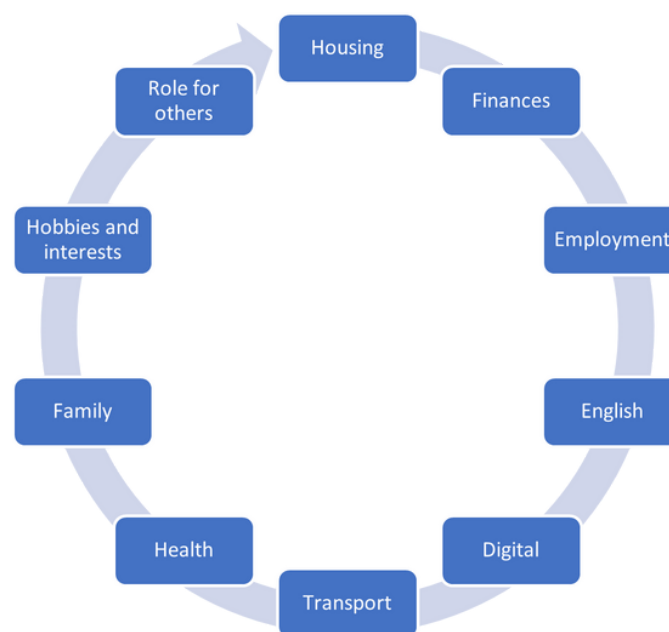
# Refugee Resettlement

We have been able to develop a consistent approach to refugee integration working across our Afghan, Ukrainian and the RTOF cohorts. Our personalised refugee integration plan , outlined in the adjacent diagram , shows the areas where we are working with individual to agree achievable goals that for them would make integration meaningful for them. With all projects we have tied the provision of advice and wrap around support to help set up and sustain tenancies with employment support, ESOL and digital skills.

We are making use of some of the Home Office Indicators of integration to measure the outcomes of this work.

Our work with the Homes for Ukraine project includes coordination of monthly Hosts meetings, providing updates, support and creating opportunity for hosts to share their learning and make connections with each other.

Brushstrokes has been able to play a lead role in the coordination of refugee integration work in Sandwell, drawing together agencies to address the needs of asylum seekers in the contingency hotel and Afghans in the Bridging hotel.



(Brushstrokes Refugee Integration model)

This year saw us provide support for hosts and Guests who came to the UK via the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. Brushstrokes is working with Sandwell Council and EWAcic to ensure access to education, employment, and training, ESOL and move on support for guests in the scheme. A new element of our work has been to seek to support hosts in the process, coordinating regular hosts meetings and developing a several social activities, such as trips to the Black Country Museum, Cadburys World and a welcome event for Hosts and Guests at our centre to help individuals build connections, share experiences, and support each other. Our RTOF work has exceeded its targets for onboarding refugees into the scheme, with 101 individuals on the programme, we have been delighted that 38 are now in permanent accommodation, 15 have completed training courses and 10 are in full time work.



Housing remains the major challenge within all our refugee projects, we are working with Sandwell Council and some private landlords to try and develop some alternative solutions and with our refugee service users to help them understand their rights and responsibilities with private sector housing.

| Project           | Cases | Housed | Training completed | Employment secured |
|-------------------|-------|--------|--------------------|--------------------|
| ARAP              | 14    | 14     | 2                  | 8                  |
| Homes for Ukraine | 28    | 5      | 1                  | 5                  |
| RTOF              | 101   | 38     | 15                 | 10                 |



# Improving Health and reducing health inequalities

Through the delivery of the Sandwell Health Inequalities Programme (SHIP), West Birmingham Health Inequalities project and focused work on the Health Inclusion at the contingency Hotel and Bridging Hotel we have been able to increase the understanding and access to Health services for those who use our service.

The SHIP project's focus has been the delivery of activities that promote positive mental health and wellbeing, women's and maternal health for our women's group and increasing awareness of new arrivals of NHS services and how to use them appropriately. Sessions have included arts and crafts, cooking, gardening, canal walks, mehndi and focused discussions with midwives and public health professionals.



A new project in West Birmingham has focused on reducing health inequalities in new communities. We have been delivering a range of health information sessions, assisting with GP registration, and addressing advice issues linked to benefits, education, housing, and immigration that are impacting on individual's health and wellbeing. New partnerships have been developed with the Newbigin Trust, Oasis Foundry and St Chads to deliver this work and through funding from the Integrated Care Board we have been able to establish 2 ESOL classes that have a strong health focus.

Brushstrokes team has been able to play a central role in the Health for Hotels Group, the Migrant Mental Health working group, a regional Migrant Health task group coordinated by Migration Policy and Practice, the Maternity Voice Partnership, Sandwell's NRPF TB pathway, facilitating a monthly Blood Born Virus screening clinic, COVID vaccination pop up sessions and the development of a monthly Blood pressure clinic with our local pharmacy.

The development of an Inclusion Health worker post has been central to increased uptake of services for those at the contingency hotel, the promotion of the Pharmacy 1st scheme and increased delivery of understanding the NHS sessions and those on Latent TB. With diverse staff team we have been able to support the translation and sharing of information on health conditions and encourage uptake of services.

Regular information sessions are run at the hotel by the Inclusion Health Worker, Mansour Masoud. Understanding the NHS sessions are run across all our projects including the SHIP and West Birmingham ICB Health Inequalities projects. The sessions outline the different levels of service people can access if they have a health concern, emphasising the need to use the correct service for a particular query: self-care, Pharmacy, GP, 111, A&E/999.

Those attending are asked to evaluate their knowledge of the NHS system at the start of the session and then again at the end.

To date, there have been 15 sessions with over 150 participants. Feedback is consistently appreciative and service users have commented:

"It has been really amazing session with a lot of new and very useful information about how to navigate through the health system in the UK."

"The Pharmacy First scheme will save me time and I will be able to access the health service more."

"I am in this area for many years, and even me I have no idea about this scheme. It is fantastic!"

"I had got appointment with GP after 3 days for my son to treat his ear, but now I am gonna take him to the pharmacy too."

Running alongside this, Mansour has been able to deliver information regarding signs and symptoms of Long Covid and identify pathways for self-referral for those attending.

"I have been unwell for so long time. I am going to ask my GP to refer me to Birmingham and Solihull Long Covid service."

Through onsite provision at the hotel, we have been able to encourage involvement in several activities aimed at reducing isolation and increasing wellbeing . In March - 83 residents attended an event we organised with SERCO and Kaleidoscope for Ramadan including food, music and dancing. 15 members of staff from the hotel, Brushstrokes and Serco celebrated the Iftar meal with them.



# Volunteering

Our work would be impossible with time invested by our volunteers. We are fortunate that so many individuals are willing to step forward and help to provide a welcome to those who come to Brushstrokes each week for help and support. It is hugely significant this year that most new volunteers have come from migrant backgrounds, enriching our work with language, culture and the understanding born from lived experience of migration. What has also been a huge step is the number of volunteers who having gained experience with us have moved into paid employment. Of our current 43 members of staff 20 had been volunteers before moving into paid roles.

As a project the opportunity to invest in volunteer training and development and ensuring individuals understand and experience our ethos of welcome is hugely important and increasingly so as the employment market has become more challenging. In addition to volunteers the project continues to benefit from student placements from the Columban Lay Missionaries ; St Mary's Seminary, Oscott ; Manresa House, Jesuit Novitiate, Harborne ; St Pauls School for Girls ; University College Birmingham; Sandwell College and the University of Birmingham. Our research student placements have undertaken valuable projects this year looking at the impact of the Refugee Transitions Outcome Project on housing outcomes and Health inequalities work for our service users.



Our annual volunteer summer BBQ was a fantastic opportunity to celebrate with and thank our volunteers for their contribution to Brushstrokes for the previous year. We welcomed the Mayor of Sandwell to the event and presented long service awards to several of the team.





Through our new volunteer rep, Helen Netherway, and the quarterly volunteers' meetings the voice and views of volunteers can feed into Brushstrokes management committee. As a group volunteer have contributed to our Equality and Diversity Action plan and the development of our new 3-year strategy.

**101 volunteers over the year**

**74 active volunteers at the end of March 2023**

**31 new volunteers of whom 21 were from migrant background**

**5867 hours of volunteering this year – equates to economic value (Using CAVA calc of average hourly rate of £14 ph (2017 figure)) to over £82,000**

The following feedback from several of the team this year highlights the difference volunteering makes.



"In the period I was struggling I met Brushstrokes, their warm support helped me to get better stick to the life, and even I got the chance to be part of their services. With the courage and support I gained in Brushstrokes; I am strongly stepping on the ladders of the life in the UK. I will be missing Brushstrokes, and willing to be one of the supporters of Brushstrokes asap, spiritually, and financially..." Ozgur Emek

"Before joining the Brushstrokes, I did not know anybody in my neighbourhood, and I did not have the friends. After joining the Brushstrokes as a volunteer, I got friends and have good impact on my mental health. I got the work experience in the community and afterwards I got a job in the same community which boost my confidence. I really appreciate Brushstrokes Community Project.

Qurrat

Please know that my time at Brushstrokes was a significant part of my journey and opened my eyes to the practical implications of migration policy in this country. Seeing you serve your community inspired me in the work I am currently doing in Nechells. I'm in the middle of my second semester teaching ESOL and exploring avenues for developing new literacy work among migrants and local Brits who can't read and write.

Aura(Research Student)



Pictured Left to Right Catering  
Volunteers:  
Ann, Nian, Funke, Sophia, Alwina, Asha,  
and volunteer coordinator Martin  
McNally

The community café continues to provide a place of welcome for over 40 individuals a week. Run by Martin and a team of dedicated volunteers it provided a regular space for people to connect with others, have a healthy meal, benefit from our Music Therapy sessions and occasional information sessions from outside agencies creates. It is still a beacon of what a community of care could look like.

## Developing Community

The value of community development to the project can be seen in the increased range of activities designed and developed with our service users this year and the wide range of organisations who are engaged with us. Our Brushspokes bike project has provided 73 reconditioned cycles to individuals this year enabling many asylum seekers and new refugees the capacity to travel more easily while improving their health and wellbeing. A learn to cycle bike project funded by Cycling UK taught 28 people to ride a bike and provided a donated bike at the end of the session. Partnership with Cycle Confident over January to March provided weekly bike maintenance workshops, helping individuals to develop the skills and confidence to keep their bike safe and road worthy. Led cycle rides to the Old Print Works and Cannon Hill Park have also proved popular with service users.

The weekly games zone has morphed into 'Welcome Wednesdays' where the opportunity to meet, play games and socialise continues to be enjoyed by a core group of service users, especially those in the asylum support system.



Our bi-monthly orientation sessions for new arrivals have brought together representatives from the Police, Health service, Fire service, Adult Education, Migrant Help , Library services and other voluntary and community sector organisations to provide a brief overview of their service and give people the chance to ask questions.

Several successful film evenings have been run with Black Country Touring , our service user panel have made suggestions of films that often have positive migrant stories and reflect some of the countries of origin and cultures our service users come from.

Through our men's and women's group a range of arts, gardening, cooking, craft , yoga, and football sessions have run through the year. These regular activities are improving health and wellbeing, creating the opportunity to learn and share new skills and helping make new connections that reduce people's sense of isolation.

We are grateful for the support of the following organisations over the past 12 months : Canals and rivers Trust, Fircroft College , West Midlands Fire Service , Bearwood Community Hub, Code your Future, Black country Touring, Benson Community Project, SAFL, West Smethwick Enterprise.



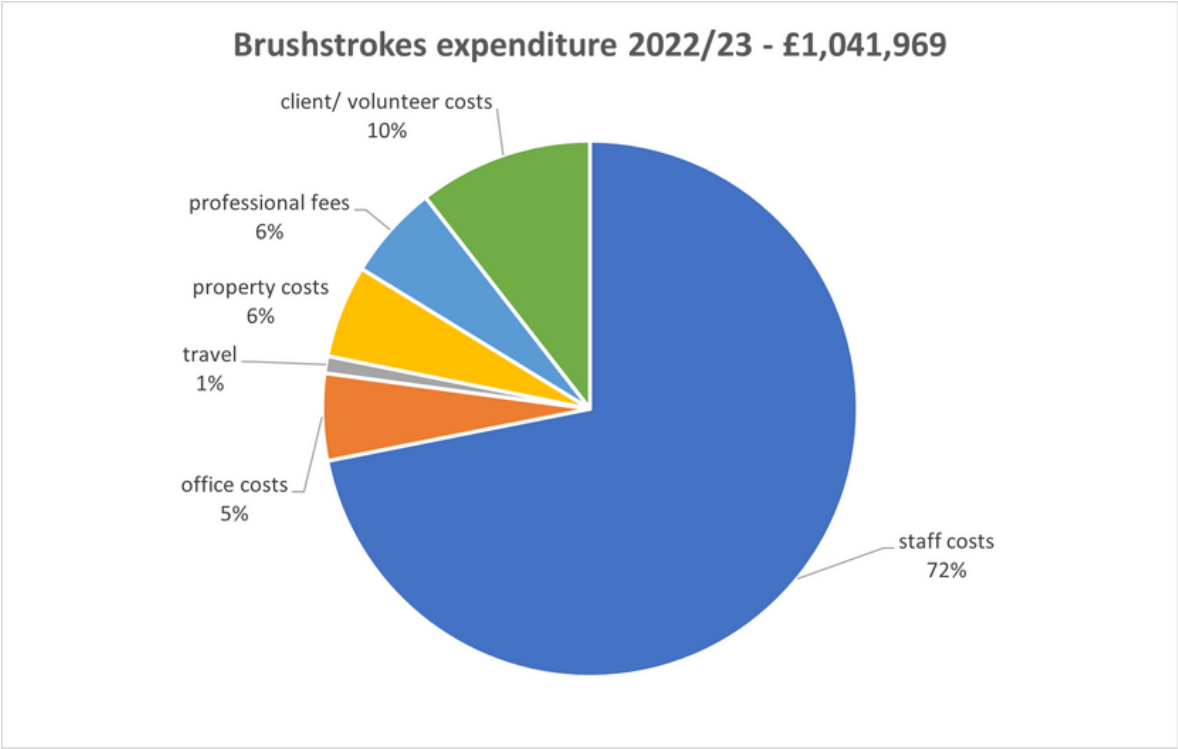
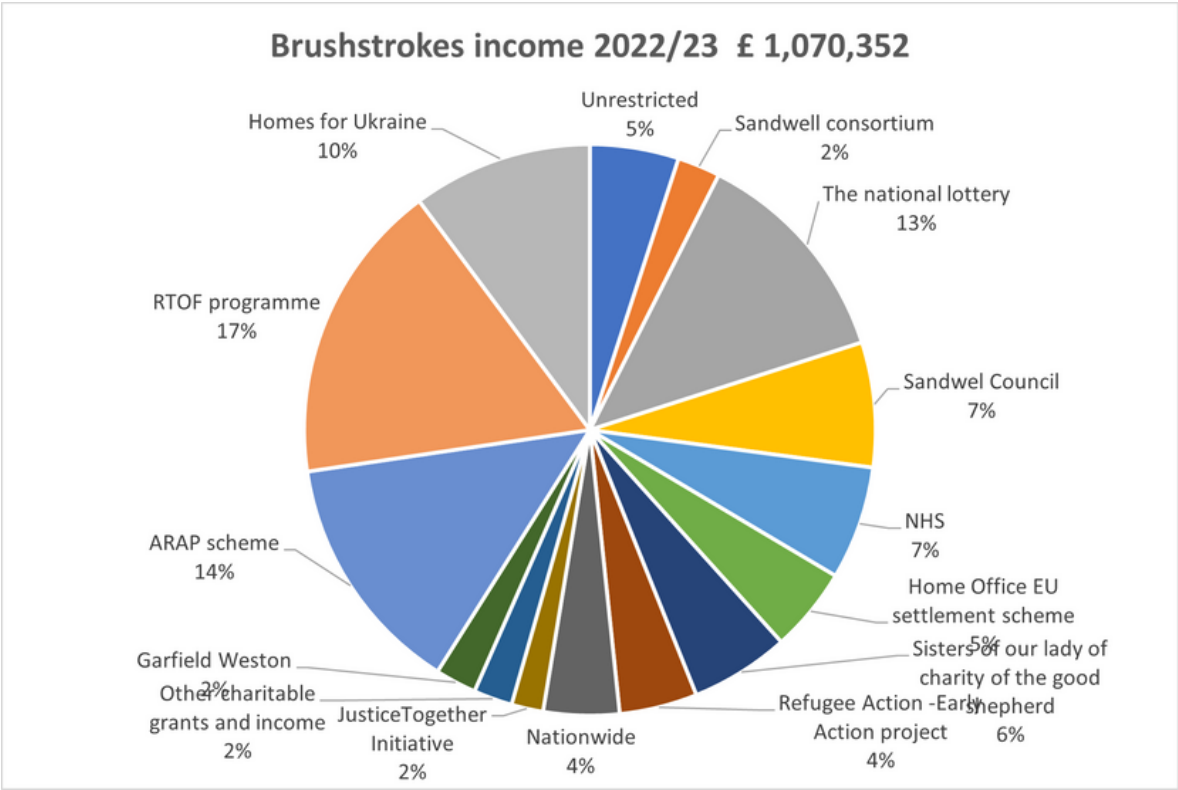
## Service user panel

Our active service user panel has continued to evolve this year with new members coming on and replacing those who have moved out of the area. The group plays an active role in Brushstrokes management committee, presents at our orientation days, are involved in recruitment, and contributed to a range of consultations on issue such as Hate Crime, NHS interpreting and the NHS local plan this year.

Members of the service user panel are actively getting involved in life at Brushstrokes, for instance - Esther & Qurrat have presented at Orientation and Voice sessions to promote the group, Ethel spoke to the Commission for Integration of Refugees , Funke has benefitted from a course run by Refugee Action, Angie (Asylum Guides) and Anita (Community Café) are regular volunteers.

The group continue to highlight issues which are affecting asylum seekers and refugees such as access to ESOL for those who lack ARC cards, housing standings, home Office decision-making timescales and the impact of the asylum process on mental health. As a group they responded to the recent call for evidence from the Commission for Integration of Refugees





Brushstrokes Community project is part of Father Hudson's Care who provide central support services including HR, fundraising and Finance. These central costs are in addition to the direct project costs above and funded through FHC fundraising.

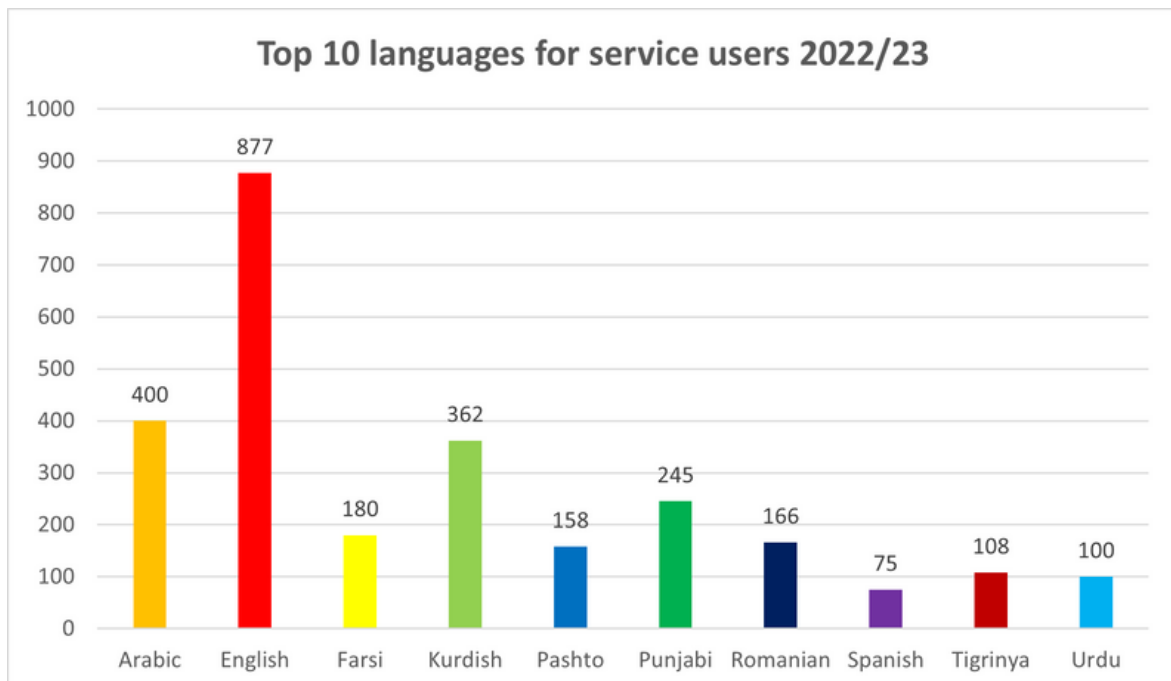
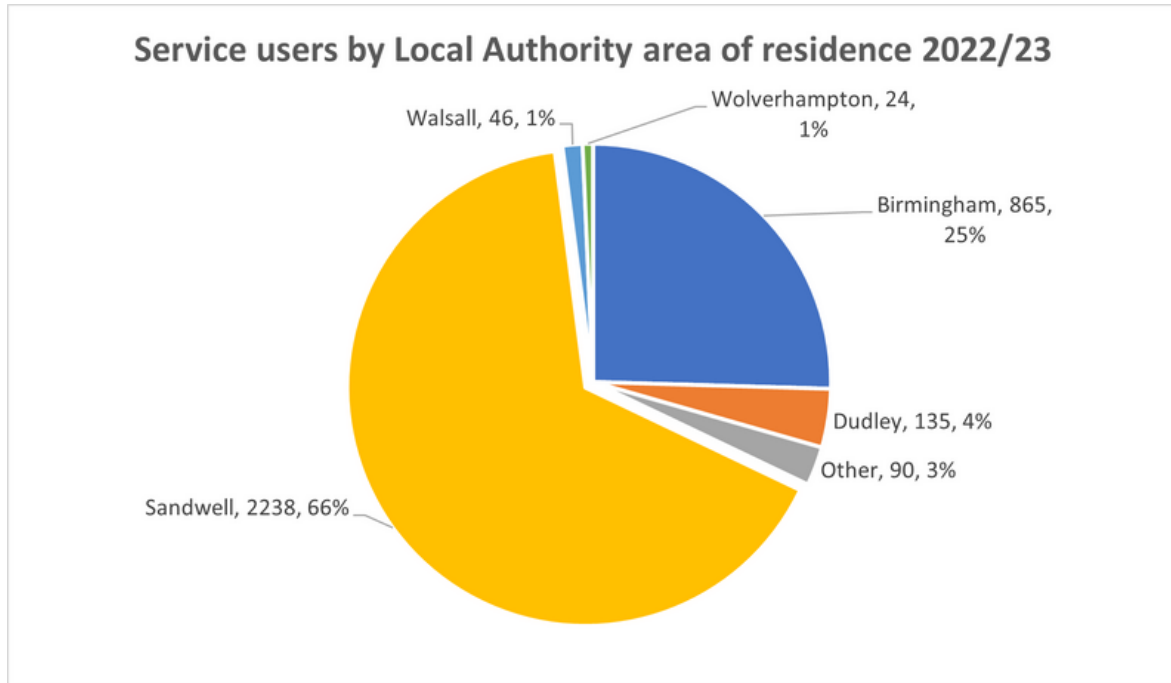
# Funders

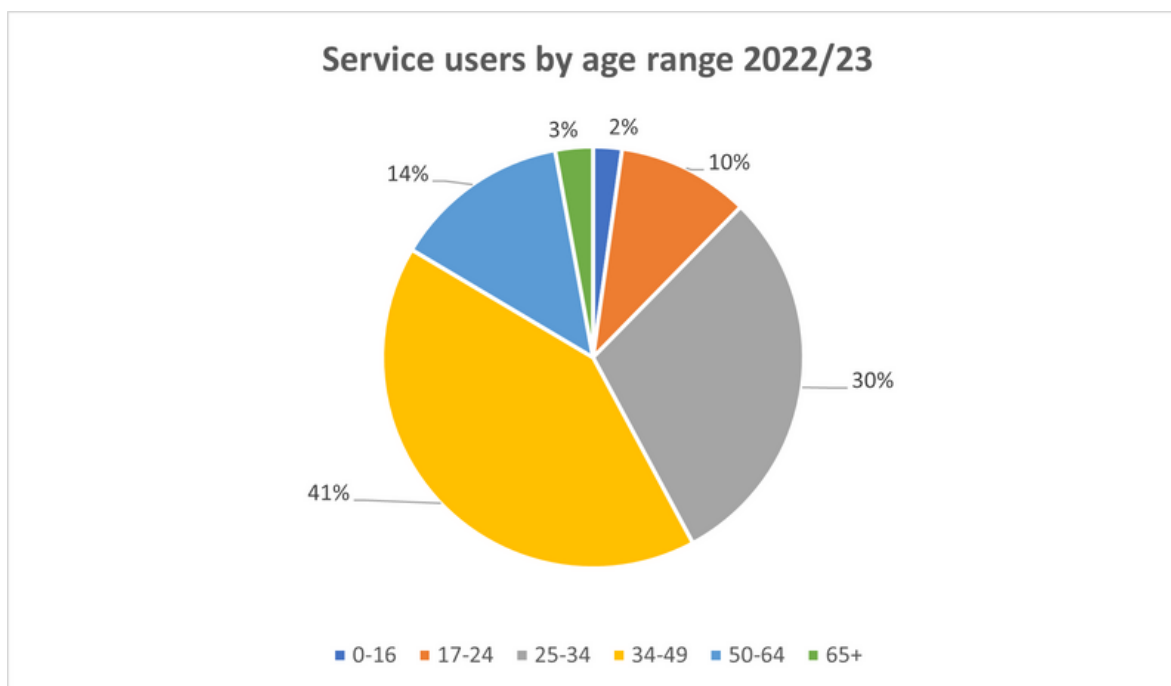
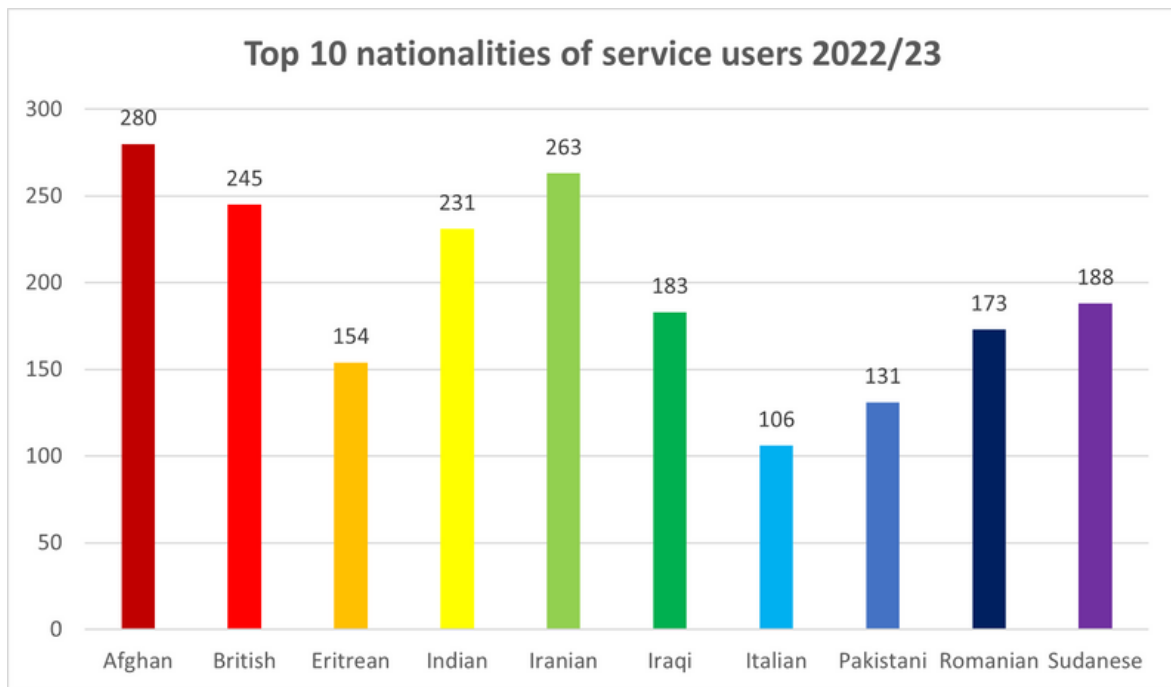
**Brushstrokes would not have been able to deliver our range of services this year without the support of our funders. We would like to express our thanks to the following :**

- The 29th of May charitable trust
- Aldi- Neighbourly Fund
- Asda foundation
- The Charlotte Marshall Charitable Trust
- Community Matters National Grid Fund
- Cycling UK
- The Garfield Weston Foundation
- The Grantham Yorke Charity
- The Grimmitt Trust
- Harborne Parish Lands Charity
- The Home Office
- The Infant Jesus Sisters
- Irwin Mitchell Charitable Trust
- The Joseph Hopkins Charity
- Justice Together Initiative
- Keele University
- The National Lottery -Awards for All and Reaching Communities
- Nationwide Community Foundation
- Parish of St Philip Neri
- The Passionists
- Refugee Action
- Sandwell Consortium
- Sandwell Council
- Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust
- The Sisters of our lady of charity of the good shepherd
- West Birmingham ICB
- Western Power Distribution

# Appendix

## Demographic information







If you would like further information about Brushstrokes, would like to volunteer or support our work in any way please contact us at:

[info@brushstrokessandwell.org.uk](mailto:info@brushstrokessandwell.org.uk)

Call us on 0121 565 2234

Or call in at 253 High Street, Smethwick, B66 3NJ

Our office opening hours are Monday – Friday 9 a.m to 3 p.m.

If you would like any further information about this report, please contact Dave Newall project manager : [david@brushstrokessandwell.org.uk](mailto:david@brushstrokessandwell.org.uk)