

# Annual Report 2024/25

A PLACE OF WELCOME, ADVICE  
AND SUPPORT FOR THE MOST  
VULNERABLE.



# Interim Project Manager's Report

While this year has seen Brushstrokes operating under the shadow of an increasingly challenging funding environment for the entire charity sector, we nonetheless continued to sustain the growth in service user numbers which has characterised the last 8 years of activities in Sandwell.

Not only have we been able to sustain the impact and effectiveness of the core services with which we have become synonymous in the community, we have made inroads in developing excellence in newer areas of advice and assistance for the most vulnerable members of that community.

Our NRPF (No Recourse to Public Funds) provision has developed to the point that Local Authorities are now approaching us for training on how to support NRPF clients; our Family Support offer now includes a team of three part-time advisers and its regular activities have reached 46 vulnerable families over the year; and we have developed a singularly effective and supportive approach to assisting Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASCs) as they navigate the complex and sometimes frightening UK asylum seeker pathway.

While the challenges of 2024/25 sadly saw us say goodbye to a number of long-standing colleagues, not least Project Manager David Newall, we have stepped into 2025/26 with the energy and spirit which keeps Brushstrokes alive and fighting to empower our community with every breath we take.

As you will see from the numbers that follow, we excelled in the adversity of 2024/25 and we have already begun to clean ourselves down, consolidate and strengthen for 2025/26.

**Henry Joy**

Interim Project Manager



# Head of Community Projects' Report

Brushstrokes Community Project was founded in 1999, and therefore 2024 marked 25 years of the project supporting people to have more fulfilled lives. From initially serving the local Smethwick community, Brushstrokes now reaches across Sandwell and into Birmingham, Walsall and Dudley. Its breadth of services provides a holistic response to need and fosters both social cohesion and integration.

2024/25 was a tough financial year as grant streams came to an end and new funding was difficult to secure. We were sorry to have to reduce the size of the staff team. We pay particular tribute to Dave Newall, who moved on to a new job at the end of April 2025. Dave was Project Manager of Brushstrokes for 8 years and embedded the ethos of welcoming the stranger. He led Brushstrokes' development to become a key project in the region supporting newly arrived communities.

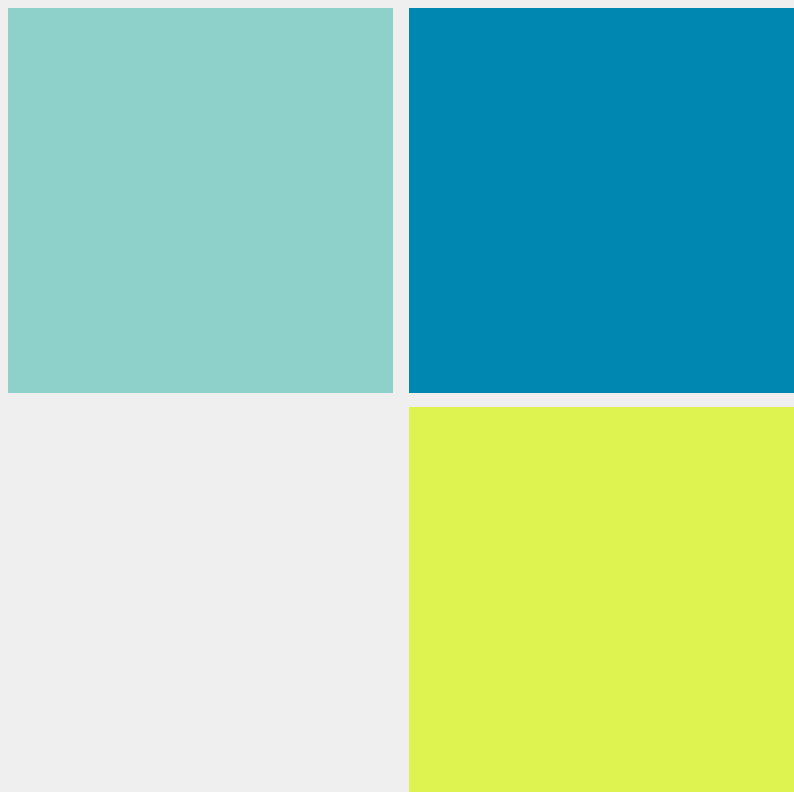
Despite the challenges, this annual report confirms Brushstrokes' success in meeting its strategic outcomes of:

- enhancing the voice of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants,
- reducing crisis,
- improving health and wellbeing, and
- increasing belonging and integration.

We thank our dedicated staff, our committed volunteers, and the many funders and generous donors who enable the work to flourish.

**Shari Brown**

Head of Community Projects,  
Father Hudson's Caritas



# Support in 2024/25



4,867 Service Users.  
An increase of 14%  
on 2023/24



1,782 families supported.  
An increase of 29% on  
2023/24



122 Nationalities



58 Languages



48 Local Authority  
Areas Supported



1,638 Asylum Seekers,  
1,077 Refugees, 519  
Leave To Remain,  
426 EU Settled Status



Financial Outcomes for clients  
this year totalled £1,823,440.  
This is a staggering 94%  
increase on 2023/24





# Volunteers in 24/25



The work of Brushstrokes is simply not possible without our hardworking and generous volunteers. Our volunteers come from both our client community and the local community and they contribute to every aspect of Brushstrokes' work, from advice to foodbank, community café, social events, outreach work, administrative tasks and reception duties.

Additionally, our ESOL classes are predominantly led by volunteer ESOL teachers and we simply could not run our ESOL department without the invaluable contribution of all of our volunteer teachers and classroom assistants.

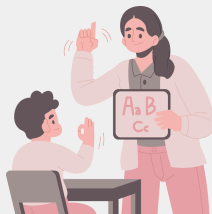
The contribution made by volunteers, when expressed in numbers, is quite overwhelming.



**101 volunteers in  
2024/25**



**7,061 hours of  
volunteering.**



**462 volunteer led  
ESOL classes**



**At living wage rate,  
that is a contribution  
equal to £86,214**



**35 new volunteers  
in 2024/25. 27 with  
lived experience**

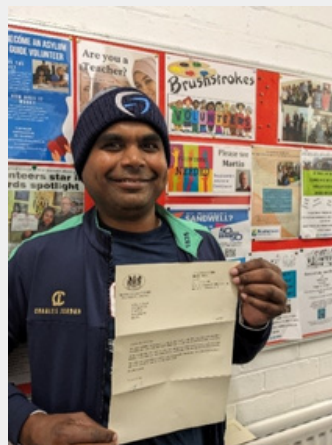


**9 volunteers into  
employment**

# Volunteers in 24/25

Over the year our volunteers accessed a wide variety of training opportunities. Much of the training opportunities were vocational and so enabled volunteers not only to improve their skills but also their chances of employment. These include “Food Safety” training, “Digital Skills” lessons and C.V. writing. Other workshops include “Bike Repairs”, “Healthy Habits Happy Homes”, “Interview Skills” and “Job Search” training. In addition to our newly recruited volunteers this year we have had another nine volunteers from migrant backgrounds gain employment.

In June 2024 We were also pleased to confirm that two of the 24 volunteers from migrant backgrounds were nominated for the West Midlands 50/50 Volunteer awards. This event celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the formation of the West Midlands County and was a celebration of volunteering throughout the area. It was hosted by the Lord Lieutenant Sir John Crabtree CVO OBE who received hundreds of nominations.



Pictured Left: Kabilan Govindan, from India, who volunteers with our Men’s group activities, cricket and football sessions and is one of the fifteen nominated volunteers, holding his personal letter of appreciation from the Lord-Lieutenant , Sir John Crabtree CVO OBE.



Pictured Left: Volunteer Baljinder Kaur receiving her certificate in Information, Advice & Guidance level 2.



# Volunteers in 24/25

August 2024 The Mayor Of Sandwell, Councillor Syeda Khatun MBE, joined our volunteer summer BBQ party and presented volunteers with their certificates. Certificates of appreciation were presented for 1, 5 and 10 Years Voluntary Service with special mentions for Outstanding Volunteers.



# Strategic Outcomes

**1. Greater Voice** – Asylum seekers, refugees and migrants will play an increasing role in the community, actively engaging and raising their collective voice with policy makers, commissioners and service providers in ways that address their needs and aspirations and make a positive contribution to the sustainability and flourishing of the areas where they live.

This year has seen Brushstrokes' service users having increased contact with elected representatives who influence decision-making at a local and national level. This has been through sessions exploring local democracy with local councillors, Jalal Uddin and Ragih Muflihi. This allowed service users to learn how local democracy works, the duties of a councillor, how people can have a voice in matters that affect them, and how they can contribute to their local community and local politics. Significantly, it was also an opportunity for service users to raise issues that affect asylum seekers and refugees living in the local area. A second session, 'An Introduction to the UK Parliament' saw service users receive a presentation by a representative of the UK Parliament Service who explained how the UK Parliament functions, how decisions are made, the role of MPs and other political actors, how laws are made, and how people can take action, have an influence and get their voice heard. This was followed by a busy Question-and-Answer session with the relatively newly elected Member of Parliament, Gurinder Singh Josan, with service users bringing up personal, local, national and international issues. As a consequence of this, asylum seekers have regularly attended the local MP's public surgeries to make them aware of issues regarding their asylum cases.

Service users who are still in the asylum system but with permission to work have secured employment at Brushstrokes. One current member of staff firstly transitioned from a service user to a member of our Service User Panel, and she is now working in the Digital Skills department. Last year, prior to gaining employment with Brushstrokes, her confidence grew as she took on responsibilities such as organising an educational trip to a gurdwara in Smethwick. Another member of the service user panel who has secured refugee status and was previously a volunteer and member of the Service User Group has also gained employment at Brushstrokes as a Peer Support Worker.



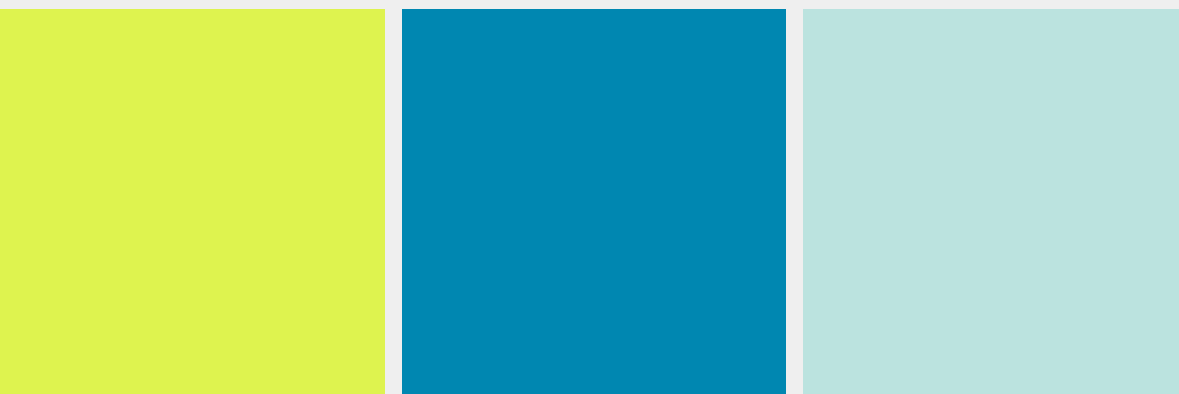
# Greater Voice

Service users have also played a more prominent role in the running of community activities. Rather than solely being participants, this year they have planned and hosted different community activities. These include Kahoot Quizzes about Politics and a Table Tennis Tournament.



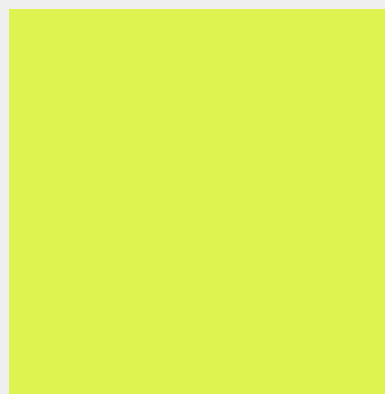
Local education provider, Fircroft College, based in Selly Oak, Birmingham, has been very keen to hear the voice of Brushstrokes' service users. They have previously offered a course (Free Thinking) aimed at asylum seekers and refugees and their specific needs. Through input from Brushstrokes' service users, this programme, (now called 'Transitions') has evolved to be even more tailored to the changing needs of asylum seekers and refugees living in the West Midlands. It is valuable to see how external organisations have responded to the input of our community.

Service Users have been supported in accessing wider educational opportunities. Historically, accessing clear and accurate information about how to apply for further and higher education is a challenge, so having information sessions at Brushstrokes (which consisted of a presentation, activities and a Question-and-Answer session) provided by the organisation, Refugee Education UK has been of valuable assistance. Following this session, several service users have received support from our REUK contacts who have supported service users to apply for opportunities at further and higher education level.



# Greater Voice

There are particular projects in place at Brushstrokes in which asylum seekers have played an increasingly important role and taken on greater responsibilities. This has allowed these projects to become more embedded in what we do as an organisation and allowed us to provide even greater support to the local community. The Brushspokes Bike Project, which provides second-hand bikes, a monthly bike repair service and community bike rides, has given asylum seekers and refugees the opportunity to develop a range of skills and has changed the power shift from them being recipients of help to now be actors of support to their new community. Service users who have previously benefitted from attending cycle maintenance courses at Brushstrokes are now using these skills to repair bikes for a variety of community members. Those who are of a less mechanical nature, have been equally valuable to the project, using their administrative, organisational and hosting skills at activities such as our busy Bike Giveaways. It has been really rewarding to see one of our asylum seeker service users work alongside the Sustrans mechanic at one of the community Dr Bike sessions, which allowed him to exhibit the repair skills he has developed at Brushstrokes. He was very proud of his contributions at this public event.



# Greater Voice

Through the community bike ride element of the project, which has included bike rides to Walsall Arboretum, Wolverhampton Art Gallery, Birmingham's Cannon Hill Park and the Ikon Gallery in Brindley Place, asylum seekers have explored their local community and engaged with people with whom they would not necessarily rub shoulders. In a similar fashion, the weekly Wellbeing Walks which Brushstrokes offers alongside The Active Wellbeing Society has given asylum seekers and refugees the chance to meet new members of the community who do not necessarily engage with Brushstrokes' activities and get to know new areas of their neighbourhood.



Asylum seekers and refugees have been very active in various focus groups, such as the Sandwell Council's Men's Mental Health Focus Group which took place at Brushstrokes and included many members of our Men's Group. We have worked with new communities, such as the Latin American community, to support their needs, which can differ to that of other immigrant groups. The Latin American community has been brought together to participate in family-oriented picnics at Sandwell Valley Park, Christmas celebrations at Brushstrokes and trips to the Black Country Living Museum. We have also facilitated focus groups in partnership with local universities to gather the experiences of the Latin American community with respect to accessing health care. This was a valuable opportunity to express the difficulties that they have faced in engaging with healthcare in the UK.

Members of the Service User Panel, which meets monthly and endeavours to reflect the composition of our service user community, have participated fully in national programmes to amplify the voice of asylum seekers and refugees. Examples of this include two members completing the Emerging Leaders Programme run by Refugee Action. This allowed them to travel across the country to participate in workshops with fellow refugees and activities. The workshops sought to develop leadership and communication. Other valuable engagement in courses has included the IMIX media training course in Walsall, which was a response to members' wishes to learn how to interact with different forms of media and how to articulate their migration story. On a similar note, Service User Panel members have had greater involvement in local community meetings such as the Smethwick Public Health Network meetings and the Sandwell Networkers Group. Through these meetings, they have successfully used their public speaking skills, and this has been a boost to their confidence.



# Greater Voice

Orientation sessions have taken place at Brushstrokes, which are targeted at asylum seekers and refugees who are new to the area. These sessions seek to support asylum seekers to settle into their new surroundings and to introduce them to services that can be vital to their integration. Contributors to the well-attended sessions included West Midlands Police, NHS, Migrant Help, Fircroft College, Sandwell libraries, Journey LGBT+ and other local community organisations.



Our community projects are generously funded by the following organisations.



**LOTTERY FUNDED**



**Sandwell**  
Metropolitan Borough Council



**SANDWELL  
Consortium**



**Welcome  
Group  
Halesowen**



**SHIP**  
Sandwell Health  
Inequalities Programme



# Greater Voice

## *Case Study* *Community Volunteer*

Kabilan has become an increasingly integral part of the Brushstrokes community. The development of his confidence and how he has undertaken more responsibilities at Brushstrokes has been impressive to say the least.

Kabilan had been uprooted from another region of the UK and moved to accommodation in Smethwick. His initial involvement with Brushstrokes was at the Orientation Session in September 2023 and what leapt out to him was a photo and reference to the Men's Group's trip to a cricket match at Edgbaston.

Since then, Kabilan got involved with the men's group activities, and it wasn't long until he became a volunteer for Brushstrokes, helping with administrative tasks at the busy football sessions. His friendly disposition contributed to people feeling welcome at these weekly sessions and he chatted with service users about the other forms of support provided by Brushstrokes.

Alongside this, Kabilan, was always ready to lend a hand with setting up sessions such as the film evenings and Welcome Wednesday. Other members of staff at Brushstrokes were impressed by Kabilan's eagerness and diligence, and often requested his support at activities, such as Employment Fairs to assist the Employment Team.

Kabilan became a key member of the Service User Panel and has provided valuable input due to his experience as an asylum seeker in the UK for over eight years.

Kabilan's confidence was increasing week by week, and he jumped at the opportunity of running sessions of cricket for the local community, which was a response to requests from the service user community.

From June 2024, Kabilan ran weekly cricket sessions on Tuesdays, 3-5pm at Victoria Park, Smethwick. As a lead up to this Kabilan was busy designing adverts for the sessions, promoting the activity to the local community, engaging with other cricket organisations (such as Staffordshire County Cricket Club) and purchasing equipment. With a limited budget and reliance on the cricket facilities at the local park, Kabilan's resourcefulness shone through.

He has utilised donations of cricket equipment from the community and engaged with local councillors to improve the cricket facilities at Victoria Park. He first brought up the issue of the neglected cricket nets to the local councillors at the Local Democracy Talk at Brushstrokes. This was followed up by an email to the councillors who had attended the Local Democracy Talk. Pleasingly, this led to the refurbishment of the cricket net, which delighted Kabilan as well as the rest of the local cricketing community.

Alongside this, Kabilan joined Thursday training sessions at the local Smethwick Cricket Club, which gave him another group of friends, and he has gone on to represent them as well as a team that he played for prior to moving to the West Midlands. Kabilan has also led groups of service users to watch professional cricket matches at Edgbaston, where he is in his element. The cricket sessions have been a real success, particularly as they have involved asylum seekers living in local hotels and they have hit everyone for six! Brushstrokes is very fortunate to have someone such as Kabilan on their team.

*Communities Team*

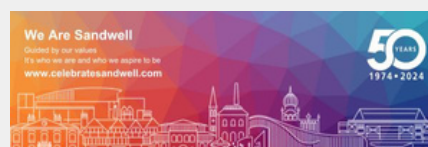
**2. Reduced crisis** - Asylum seekers, refugees and migrants are able to take early action themselves, through the provision of information, advice and advocacy that prevents them falling into crisis or to seek early help when faced with homelessness, destitution, unemployment or poor health.

The most common form of crisis we see in our clients is the very real threat of destitution. This is typified by the frequent inability of the most vulnerable members of our community to feed themselves and their families. Food bank usage in the UK has risen by 51% over the past five years and is now two and a half times higher than it was a decade ago. Competition for food surpluses is at its highest ever level and users are more and more commonly in receipt of Universal Credit support or in employment. It is estimated that 15% of food bank users last year came from households where at least one adult is in work. This makes our provision of an NRPF only foodbank even more crucial with NRPF clients not being eligible for government food vouchers and often unable to access mainstream foodbanks.



**In 2024/25 we supported  
5992 individuals with food  
parcels. These represented  
total beneficiaries of 15,854**

Our food bank provision is generously supported by the 29<sup>th</sup> May Foundation, Parish of St. Philip Neri, the Parish of St Joseph and St Ethelrada, the Passionists, the Sisters of our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, many individual donors and the below organisations, to whom we express our sincere thanks.



# Reduced Crisis

Non-food support parcels are equally as crucial to our clients and we open this resource to all of our clients as even those who do find themselves in receipt of benefits can struggle. They may, for example, find themselves placed into their first post-asylum property and have nothing in the way of furniture, linen, cooking basics, etc. Or they may just find that they are struggling to buy winter clothes for their family.



**In 2024/25 we supported  
3626 individuals with clothes  
and household resources**



**In 2024/25 we supported  
137 families with baby packs**

Non-food resource provision is generously supported by our local schools, the Parish of St. Philip Neri, The Parish of St Joseph and St Ethelrada, The Passionists, The Sisters of our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, many individual donors and the below organisations, to whom we express our sincere thanks.





# Reduced Crisis

In 2024/25 we have additionally had access to the Glasspool Flexible Frontline Fund which can be used to purchase new household goods, furniture, and other services such as driving lessons, emergency repairs and food and fuel vouchers for households in poverty with grants available of up to £750 per household.



**In 2024/25 we supported 45 vulnerable households with Glasspool grants totalling £18,557.**

We can't talk about material support without talking about Christmas and 2024/25 was our busiest ever.

**We provided 2000+ gifts to 704 children** last Christmas. This was only possible because of our very generous and supportive community. We had a never-before-seen level of support this year for presents, food and clothing. Throughout the whole of December, we were busy collecting sorting and receiving donations at our centre. We need to explicitly thank the incredible level of support and generosity from Dunelm, Barratt's Homes, St. John Bosco Catholic Academy, St. Matthew's C of E Primary School, King's Community Centre, Sewa Day, the Black Country National Literacy Trust, and Oxygen Finance.

So many other individuals in our community came together and ensured the Sandwell families we support had a Merry Christmas.

We had multiple parties for all of our different groups within Brushstrokes. The support from all staff, volunteers and neighbours was essential for these to be as successful as they were.

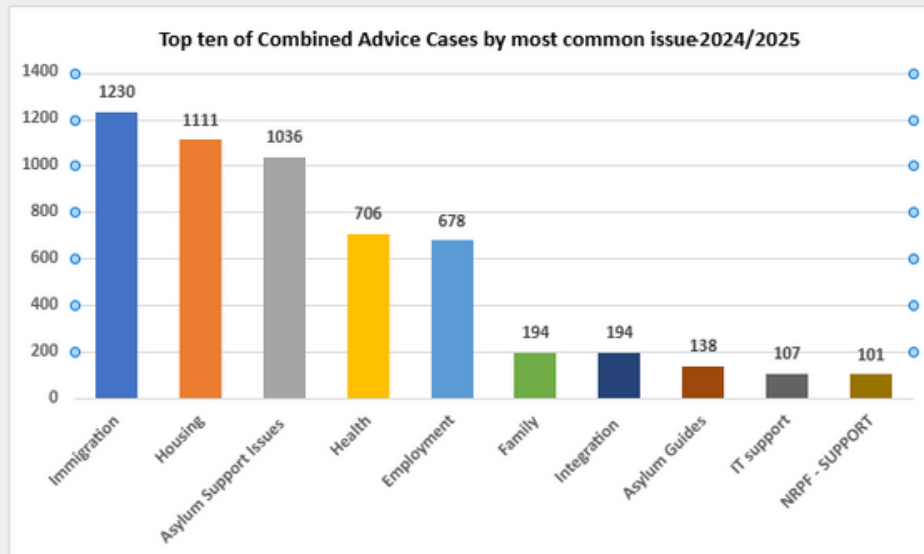




# Reduced Crisis

Our advice provision continues to sit at the heart of everything we do, enabling and empowering our clients to take real control of their lives from stabilising their immigration or housing status, to claiming the appropriate benefits to which they are entitled, right through to employment.

Brushstrokes completed 6,420 advice cases in this period with the top ten listed in the table below.



Immigration became our busiest service in 2024/25 as thousands of statuses were cast into uncertainty towards the end of our previous government's term. Housing issues also continue to dominate and many of the 1,111 cases from this year would have been from the 533 new refugee cases we took on in 2024/25.

The 1,036 asylum support issues predominantly came from our work in the 4 contingency hotels we supported in this period in Sandwell and in Birmingham.

Our advice work this year was funded by continued grant support from the organisations below, to whom we offer the gratitude of a more resilient community.



**LOTTERY FUNDED**



**SANDWELL  
Consortium**



**Sandwell**  
Metropolitan Borough Council



**Birmingham  
City Council**

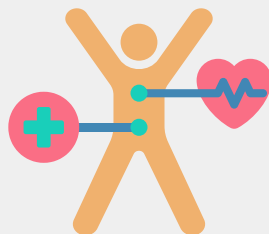
# Strategic Outcomes

**3. Better Health** – The health and wellbeing of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants improves and health inequalities are reduced as a result of increased understanding of NHS services, self-care, improved accessibility and a responsive local health service.

Our health team continue to perform the crucial role of addressing the health needs of our client population, especially those new arrivals to the UK who have followed unofficial routes into the UK and often present with health issues not usually associated with life in the UK.

This year our health team delivered many activities, 1-2-1 and group sessions and workshops to support asylum seekers, refugees, migrant and vulnerable people in our community. These activities were delivered at Brushstrokes and at the contingency hotels in Sandwell and Birmingham accommodating asylum seekers. All our activities and support aim to tackle health inequality in terms of:

- lack of access such as restricted access due to migration status, language barriers or lack of understanding of the health system.
- Inequality linked to experience of migration such as mental health (torture or trauma), pre-existing health conditions, and the high risk of communicable diseases uncommon in the UK.



## Our 1-2-1 Support

Mainly delivered at the contingency hotels where our outreach team are based 2 days a week in each hotel.

We support the asylum seekers there with:

- Health information 1-2-1 session about how to access the health services such as GPs, urgent treatment centres, Pharmacy 1<sup>st</sup> scheme, calling 111 or 999, dentists, sexual health clinics and other screenings.
- Applications for HC2 Certificate.
- Advocacy and referrals to other health services.
- Referrals to different social activities and volunteering opportunities.
- Referrals for mental health counselling sessions (talking therapy sessions).
- Organising initial dental screening at the hotels.

# Better Health



## Group Sessions

These sessions and workshops were delivered at Brushstrokes and the contingency hotels:

- Understanding the NHS
- 5 Ways to Wellbeing
- T.B. screening sessions
- Measles sessions
- Sexual health & hygiene
- Healthy diet & exercise
- Long-term health conditions
- Cancer Awareness workshops
- Art for Wellbeing workshops



As a result, our clients have become more aware of how the health system works. When they struggle to make an appointment with their GP, they use other health services for example Pharmacy 1st scheme service, calling 111 or walk-in-centres. This furthermore helps NHS capacity and cost-effectiveness by reducing unnecessary use of A&E hospital departments. They also received a lot of information about different health conditions, which help raise awareness, and increases protection and early diagnosis.

# Better Health

## An example of our inclusive health literature

**5 Ways to Wellbeing:**

- 1. Connect with other people**  
Connecting improves our sense of belonging and self-worth.
- 2. Be physically active**  
Being active improves mood, increases energy and self-confidence.
- 3. Give to others**  
Acts of kindness can increase our sense of purpose and life satisfaction.
- 4. Pay attention to the present moment (Mindfulness)**  
Noticing helps to calm the mind, enjoy life more and understand ourselves better.
- 5. Learn new skills**  
Learning new skills can give a sense of achievement and boost confidence.

**Urgent Help:**  
Samaritans: 116 123 (24 / 7)  
24 / 7 Black Country Urgent Mental Health Helpline  
Call 0800 008 6516 or text 07860 025 281

**Brushstrokes Community Project**  
253 High Street, Smethwick, B3 6BNJ  
0121 565 2234  
info@brushstrokesandwell.org.uk

**MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS**  
A GUIDE TO TRUSTED MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING RESOURCES IN THE UK & SANDWELL

**At Brushstrokes Community Project, we understand that mental health and wellbeing are important parts of a healthy life. In today's busy world, it is important to have good information and support, whether you are dealing with stress and anxiety or just want to feel better overall. To help our participants, we created this guide with trusted online resources in the UK. This guide gives useful tools to manage mental health and wellbeing. Our goal is to give people the knowledge and support they need to live healthier and more balanced lives.**

**HEALTH TEAM**

**10. Talking Therapies Plus**  
The Talking Therapies Plus service offers support for mental health and well-being in Sandwell. Their services include:  
➤ Managing anxiety, depression, and stress.  
➤ Providing access to therapy and self-help.  
➤ Offering support for individuals in underserved communities.  
The service provides resources such as:  
➤ Free therapy via phone, video, or in person.  
➤ Multilingual support.  
➤ Additional services like employment help.

**11. WDH Sandwell**  
Wider determinants of health (WDH) are a range of social, environmental and economic factors which impact directly on people's physical and mental health and well-being. Many services are delivered across Sandwell which address some of these issues and help to support people who are in need:  
➤ Healthy body, healthy mind.  
➤ Sound relaxation session.  
➤ Health, wellness and work project.  
➤ Housing, benefits, energy efficiency.  
➤ Advice and welfare rights.  
➤ Employment support.  
➤ Women's wellbeing.  
➤ Get advice.

**Conclusion**  
Taking care of your mental health and wellbeing is a continuous process. At Brushstrokes, we offer different activities for both men and women to support mental health and wellbeing. Whether you need help now or want long-term advice to stay balanced, we provide trusted UK resources and community programs. These give you the guidance, tools, and information to manage your mental and physical health. Explore these resources and our activities, and feel free to ask for help whenever you need it.

**By using these resources, you can improve your mental health and wellbeing, helping you live a more balanced and happy life.**

**3. Mental Health Foundation - Wellbeing and Self-Care**  
The Mental Health Foundation works to improve mental health in the country. Their wellbeing section gives helpful tips on:  
➤ Managing stress.  
➤ Practising mindfulness.  
➤ Staying active.  
They also offer resources about:  
➤ Good sleep habits.  
➤ Healthy eating.  
➤ Building positive relationships, which all help you feel better overall.

**4. EveryMind Matters**  
NHS Campaign for Mental Health and Wellbeing  
EveryMind Matters is a program supported by the NHS to help people take care of their mental health. Their website has tools and personal plans to improve mental wellbeing, offering help for common issues like:  
➤ Stress.  
➤ Anxiety.  
➤ Sleep problems.  
It also talks about daily habits that can make you feel better, like:  
➤ Mindfulness.  
➤ Exercise.  
➤ Positive thinking.

**5. The Calm App - Meditation and Sleep**  
Calm is a mindfulness and meditation app like Headspace. It provides guided meditation sessions, breathing exercises, and sleep stories to help improve your mental wellbeing. Calm focuses on:  
➤ Reducing stress.  
➤ Managing anxiety.  
➤ Helping you sleep better.  
All of which are important for a healthy and balanced life.

**6. One You - Health and Wellbeing Support**  
One You is a public health campaign by Public Health England that helps adults make healthier choices. Their website has tools to improve mental and physical health, like:  
➤ Quitting smoking.  
➤ Managing stress.  
➤ Eating better.  
➤ Being more active.  
They also offer free health apps to help you track and reach your health goals.

**7. Wellbeing and Work - Mental Health at Work**  
If you're having trouble with mental health and wellbeing at work, Mental Health at Work, created by Mind, offers support and resources. It talks about:  
➤ Managing stress.  
➤ Balancing work and life.  
➤ How to discuss mental health at work.  
The site also has case studies and toolkits for both employees and employers.

**1. NHS (National Health Service) - Mental Health and Wellbeing Services**  
The NHS website is a trusted source for health information in the UK. Their mental health and wellbeing section gives advice on:  
➤ How to improve mental health.  
➤ Reduce stress.  
➤ Find local services.  
The NHS offers many resources, like:  
➤ Mindfulness exercises.  
➤ Tips for better sleep.  
➤ Help with both mental and physical health.  
NHS Mental Health and Wellbeing  
https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/

**2. Mind - Mental Health and Wellbeing**  
Mind not only supports mental health but also helps with overall wellbeing. They give practical advice to help you keep balance in your life. Their resources include:  
➤ Information on exercise.  
➤ Healthy eating.  
➤ Mental health.  
They also offer tips on:  
➤ Mindfulness.  
➤ Being strong in difficult times.  
➤ Creating healthy habits to feel better mentally.  
Infoline: 0300 123 3393  
https://www.mind.org.uk

**8. Healthy Sandwell**  
The Healthy Sandwell website is a trusted resource for health and well-being in the Sandwell area. Their services and programs provide advice on:  
➤ Maintaining a healthy body.  
➤ Improving mental well-being.  
➤ Accessing local health resources.  
The website offers many resources, such as:  
➤ Support for physical activities and fitness.  
➤ Dietary and nutrition advice.  
➤ Mental health support services and activities tailored to various age groups.  
Tel: 0121 569 5100  
https://www.healthysandwell.co.uk/

**9. Sanctuary Hubs across the Black Country**  
The Sanctuary Hubs across the Black Country provide a safe and supportive space for individuals experiencing emotional distress. They offer advice on:  
➤ Managing mental health crises.  
➤ Reducing stress and anxiety.  
➤ Accessing local services.  
The hubs provide resources like:  
➤ Immediate mental health support.  
➤ A safe space for those in need.  
➤ Assistance outside of regular hours.




Our health work this year was funded by continued grant support from the organisations below, to whom we offer the gratitude of a healthier community.





**4. Increased Belonging** - Refugees and migrants develop strong connections and a sense of belonging to the local community as a result of an effective integration support that enables them to feel safe, secure accommodation, access education and training, gain employment and reach a place of financial stability.

Brushstrokes is first and foremost a place of welcome. While advice work and destitution support represent the “big ticket” outcomes that support our clients with the essentials of a home, a job, secure immigration status and financial security, the sense of truly belonging in a community comes about through the softer outcome work that we do. These softer outcomes are no less important to our clients’ wellbeing and are the elements that allow our clients to live truly richer lives.

 <b>SOCIAL ACTIVITIES SCHEDULE</b> SPRING 2025	
<b>MONDAYS 9:30 - 11AM</b> <b>CONVERSATION CAFÉ - ENGLISH LANGUAGE PRACTICE</b> BRUSHSTROKES HALL	
<b>MONDAYS 11AM - 1PM</b> <b>WOMEN'S GROUP - DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES EACH WEEK</b> BRUSHSTROKES HALL	
<b>MONDAYS 4:30 - 6PM</b> <b>FOOTBALL SESSION</b> HADLEY STADIUM, WILSON ROAD, SMETHWICK, B66 4NL	
<b>TUESDAYS 9:30 - 10:30AM</b> <b>SWIMMING SESSION FOR WOMEN</b> SMETHWICK AQUATICS CENTRE, B67 5QT	
<b>THIRD TUESDAY OF EACH MONTH 12 - 4 PM</b> <b>CYCLE REPAIR SESSION</b> BRUSHSTROKES HALL / CAR PARK	
<b>WEDNESDAYS 2- 4 PM</b> <b>MEN'S GROUP GARDENING &amp; NATURE WORKSHOPS</b> BRUSHSTROKES GARDEN AREA / HALL	
<b>WEDNESDAYS 5- 7 PM</b> <b>WELCOME WEDNESDAY TABLE TENNIS, CHESS, TEA &amp; COFFEE, CHAT</b> BRUSHSTROKES HALL	
<b>THURSDAYS 3 - 4:30 PM</b> <b>VOLLEYBALL</b> WINDMILL COMMUNITY CENTRE, SMETHWICK, B66 3DX	
<b>FRIDAY 10-11 AM</b> <b>WELLBEING WALK</b> BRUSHSTROKES RECEPTION (MEETING POINT)	
<b>FRIDAY 12 - 1PM</b> <b>COMMUNITY LUNCH (FREE)</b> BRUSHSTROKES HALL	
<b>FIRST FRIDAY OF EACH MONTH 6PM</b> <b>FILM EVENING (FREE)</b> BRUSHSTROKES HALL	
BRUSHSTROKES, 253 HIGH STREET, SMETHWICK, B66 3NJ - 07827 258680	

# Increased Belonging

Our weekly social activities represent a wide and inclusive mix of social, practical, sporting and cultural activities. These also bring together people from all over the world, a great example of encouraging social cohesion in modern Britain.



**In 2024/25 104 women participated in the Women's Group**



**In 2024/25 60 clients a week participated in weekly football sessions at Hadley Stadium**



**17 women a week had free swimming lessons**



**Across 12 bicycle maintenance sessions, we repaired 92 bicycles and gave away 72 bicycles**

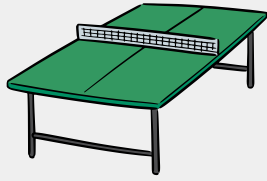


**Men's Group activities engaged 58 men over the year in cookery, crafts and gardening**



**Our weekly Stay and Play attracted 15-20 parents with young children every week**

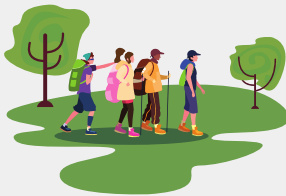
# Increased Belonging



Over the year, 72 clients  
attended Welcome  
Wednesday games nights



Volleyball sessions  
attracted 6 clients a week



At least 10 clients a week  
took part in the weekly  
Wellbeing Walk

## MOVIE NIGHT

Monthly film nights attracted  
between 25 and 50 people  
per session

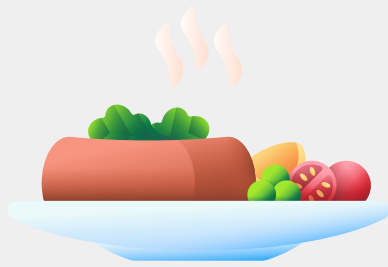
Thanks to the many funders and delivery partners who make our  
activity work possible.





# Increased Belonging

Friday's Community Café continues to be our bridge between the local, settled community and our migrant population. Providing a free hot meal once a week to anybody from our community, it is a vibrant, diverse and truly welcoming offer, inspiring solidarity and friendship across cultural borders. It is delivered almost entirely by a volunteer team and the majority of the food comes from donations.



In 2024/25 the community café served 2137 hot meals

Food donations this year came from many generous neighbours and the following organisations.



# Increased Belonging

Friday also plays host to our music therapy sessions, delivered in partnership with the lovely folks at Nordoff-Robbins. These are a combination of individual therapy sessions, group work sessions and staff support sessions.



This year, we also hosted Oya Sambatica, a samba drumming group who led a drumming session for a group of asylum seekers and refugees. One of these, a former UASC who first came to Brushstrokes in a state of extreme vulnerability, has gone on to become a full time member of the Oya troupe.



**5. Empowered resilience** - Refugees and Migrants standard of living improves as they access the language classes, advice, education, training and employment support that values and enhances their skills, helps them secure meaningful employment and provides the resources to deal with the impact of the cost of living crisis.

Employment remains a pinnacle outcome for our clients, because it is usually the culmination of all of the other areas of advice we have provided as employment simply cannot be come by without stable accommodation status, settled housing and usually a period with benefits support. Employment casework usually involves several practice interviews as we will have to look at skills and education, CV building and interview skills.



**In 2024/25 we supported 82 clients into employment**

Our educational offerings are often the key to unlocking potential employment. In 24/25 we continued to deliver a bursting timetable of ESOL classes, covering Foundation level, all the way up to Pre-Entry 3, beyond which students are ready to enrol onto college courses. Our ESOL offer continues to be predominantly delivered by a team of passionate, dedicated and committed volunteer teachers, to whom we owe a debt of gratitude.



**In 2024/25 we delivered 4033 ESOL student sessions, 6049 hours of learning**



# Empowered Resilience

Equally crucial to many of our clients is Digital Skills learning, as digital literacy levels can be low or non-existent for many of our most vulnerable clients. As of December 2024, the Home Office phased out physical BRP (Biometric Resident's Permit) cards with all visa information being migrated to the online e-visa portal, meaning that all refugees and migrants need to be sufficiently computer literate to access their visas for any ID purposes, be that employment, opening bank accounts, Universal Credit claims, etc. Our continued ability to provide digital skills training has therefore become of paramount importance to our service users.



In 2024/25 we delivered 980 digital skills student sessions, 1470 hours of e-learning

Developing digital skills is just important in allowing our clients to integrate into society, living normal lives in the digital age in the UK. Our classes cover everything from the very basics of email and word-processing to online shopping and the use of everyday apps like Google Maps and social media.

Our educational work this year was funded by continued grant support from the organisations below, to whom we offer the gratitude of a better connected community.



# Empowered Resilience

Our two managed houses continue to prove that supported accommodation in the context of effectively settling and integrating refugees can be singularly effective.

At Nicolas Barré House, our male accommodation in Willenhall, Walsall, we have now supported 9 males through their initial settlement into the community. Of those 9, 6 are in steady employment, 8 are studying English and 4 studying vocational courses at college, 1 has gone on to a university place in Bristol studying sound engineering and a further one is applying for a university place this year.

The residents have also become very close to the Parish of St. John Henry Newman, who own the house and made it available as a refugee support accommodation and arranged the blessing from the Archbishop of Birmingham, Bernard Longley.



The parish also continue to provide much appreciated pastoral support, matching the residents up with community befrienders and arranging regular social outings for the tenants, including golf, darts, table-tennis tournaments and an introduction to the culinary delight of fish and chips!



# Empowered Resilience

Sophia House, our vulnerable women's accommodation in Northfield also continues to prove the effectiveness of truly supported housing. Over the last year it has been home to three women from different continents, all having found themselves in need of a secure and supported environment which would allow them the time and space to settle, regroup and to forge ahead into new lives.

In that time one of the residents has graduated from her studies to become a Social Worker and moved on to a full time job with a neighbouring local authority.

Another has rediscovered some peace after fleeing her former home, which remains a war zone. She became a regular volunteer with the local Catholic parish, enjoyed taking over the tending of the garden at Sophia House and was eventually successful in finding a housing association property in Sandwell.



Our work in Sophia House would not be possible without the generosity and support of the sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, to whom we offer our sincere thanks.

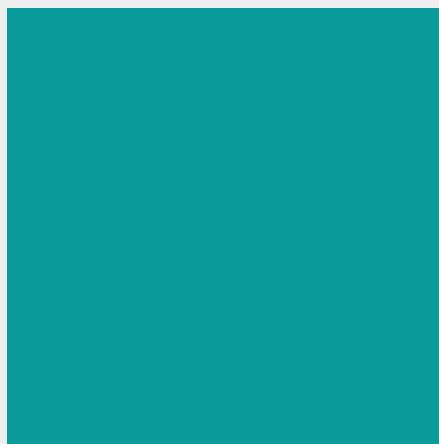
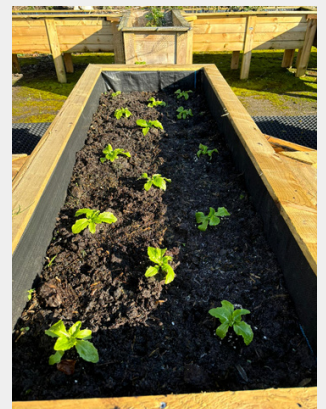




# Empowered Resilience

Our award winning Community Allotment grew significantly in 2024/25, with a grant from the WMCA Green Grants/Heart of England Community Fund allowing us to quadruple the size of the allotment space, adding 30 planters, 2 40 sq ft poly-tunnels to allow all year growing, a shed, benches, seeds, plants and tools to sustain the project for a further year.

Not only does the allotment allow us to grow fresh fruit and veg for use in the foodbank and the community café, it also provides a great outdoor volunteering opportunity for our clients. Asylum seekers in contingency hotel accommodation particularly benefit from this, as their accommodation is cramped and they have limited access to green space. The allotment work can also provide a clear sense of purpose for those unable to work, allowing them to participate in something which they can later incorporate into their CVs.



West Midlands  
Combined Authority

# Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

At a time when the principles of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion are being challenged by populist narratives, Brushstrokes is proud to be a standard bearer for these very human values.

Our very strength comes from the beautiful diversity of not only our client community, but our workforce, with almost 2/3 of our staff having lived experience of the asylum/refugee/migrant journey into the UK making them experts by experience in their respective fields.

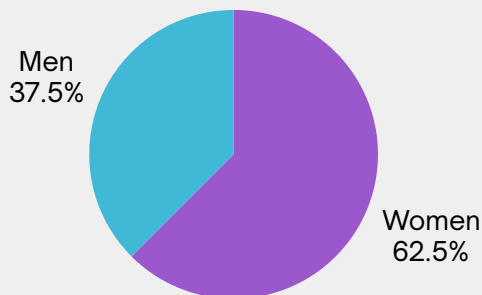
This gives us a very strong grounding in our work embedding the principles of multi-faith community, multi-culturalism and non-judgement in our clients understanding of life in the UK.



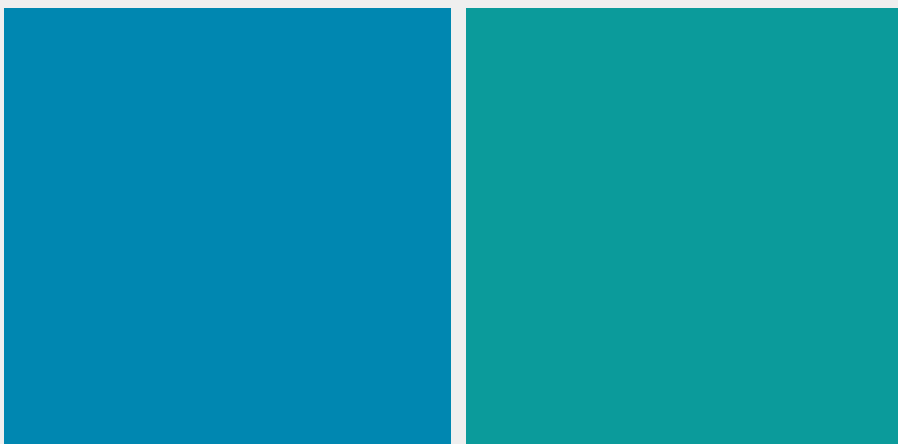
**16 staff countries of origin**



**15 languages spoken by staff team**

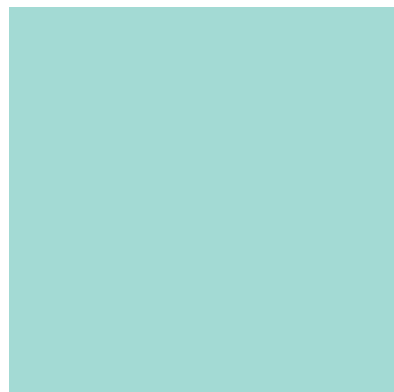
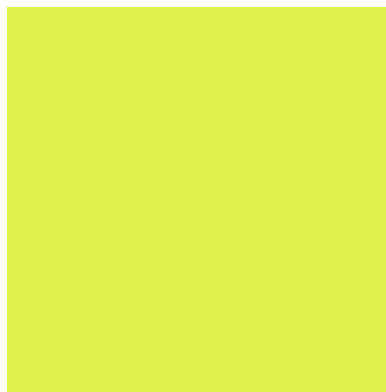
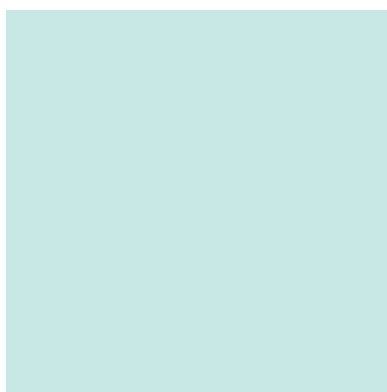
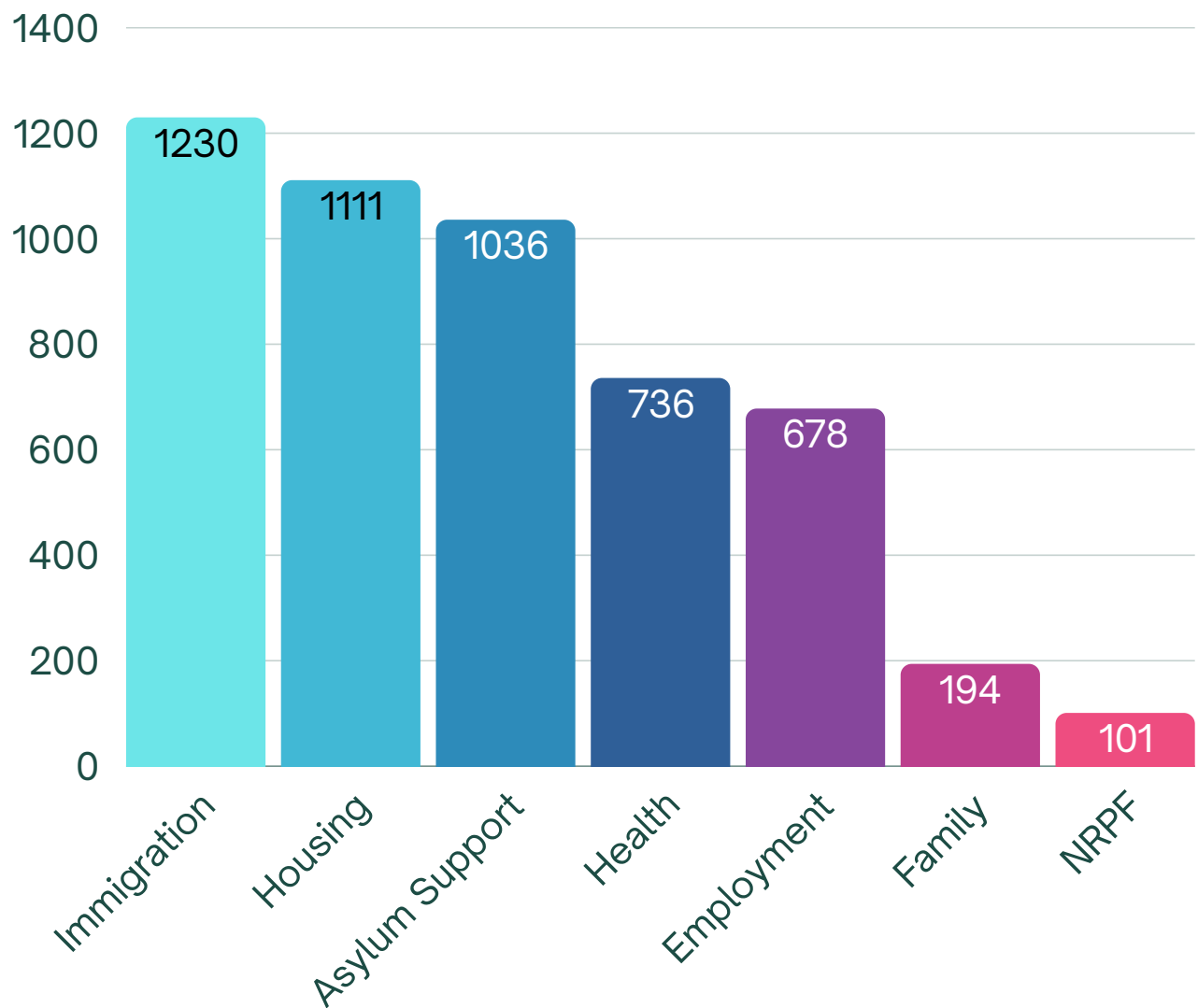


**Staff by gender**



# Casework

## Top Advice Issues 24/25





# Casework

## Financial Outcomes for Clients

Universal Credit- £1,133,781

Immigration Fee Waiver- £245,700

Housing Benefit- £84,757

PIP- £77,515

Asylum Support- £56,024

Other Financial Gain- £47,586

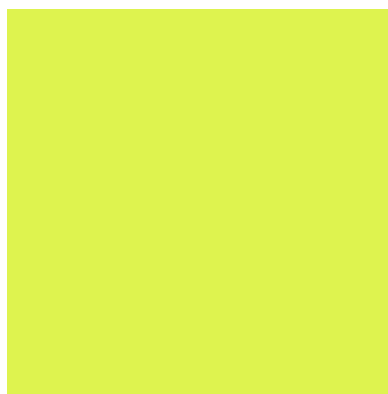
Pension Credit- £43,586

Disability Living Allowance- £36,350

Free Bus Pass- £23,928

Child Benefit- £19,247

**That's £1,823,440 secured for clients by our amazing, dedicated advisers in 12 short months.**



# Casework

## Non-Financial Outcomes



365 CVs created



343 Housing Applications



323 Health Certificates (HC2)



268 Employment Applications

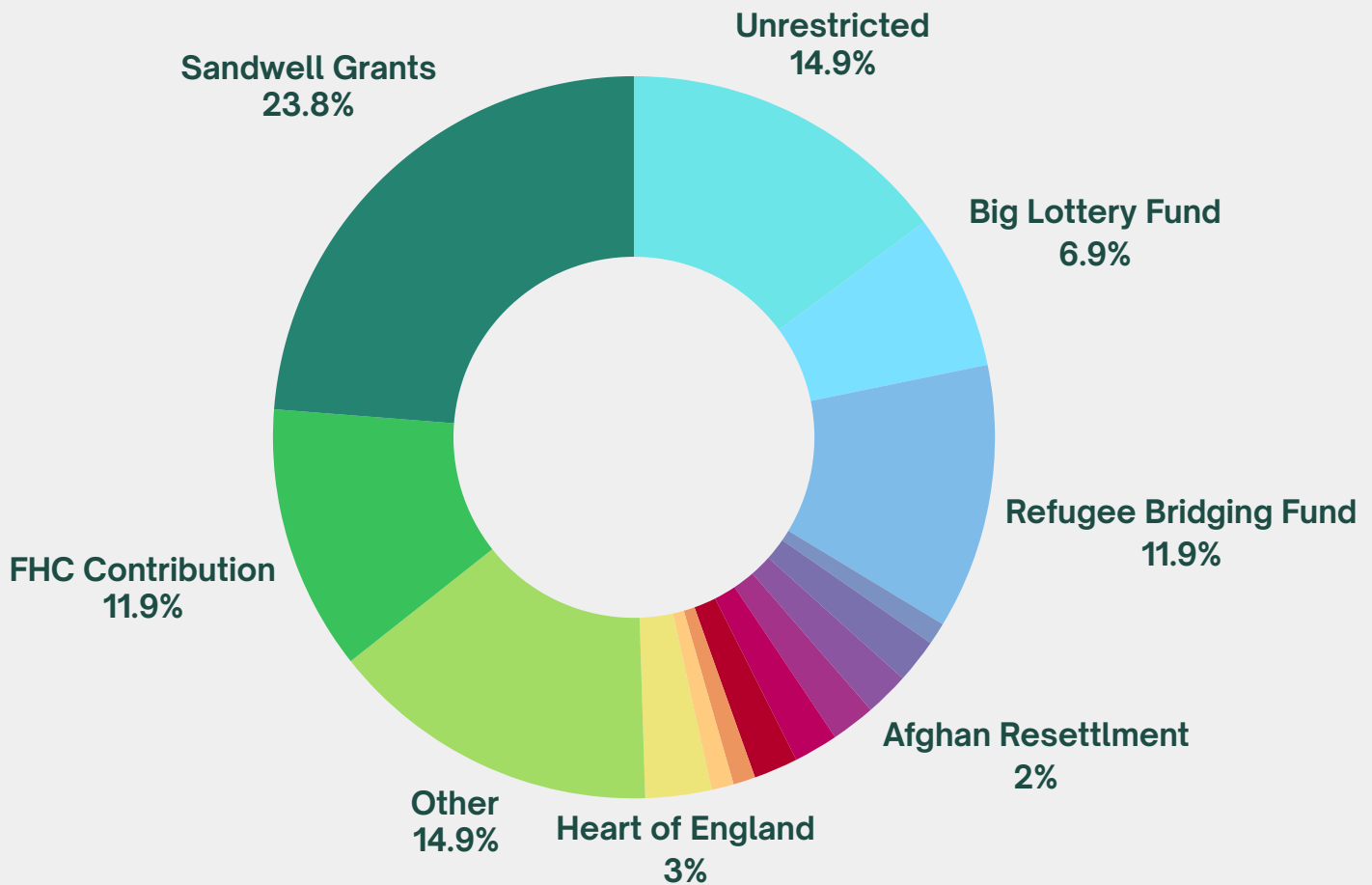


180 Homelessness Preventions

# Finances



**Income 2024/25**  
**£1,838,911**

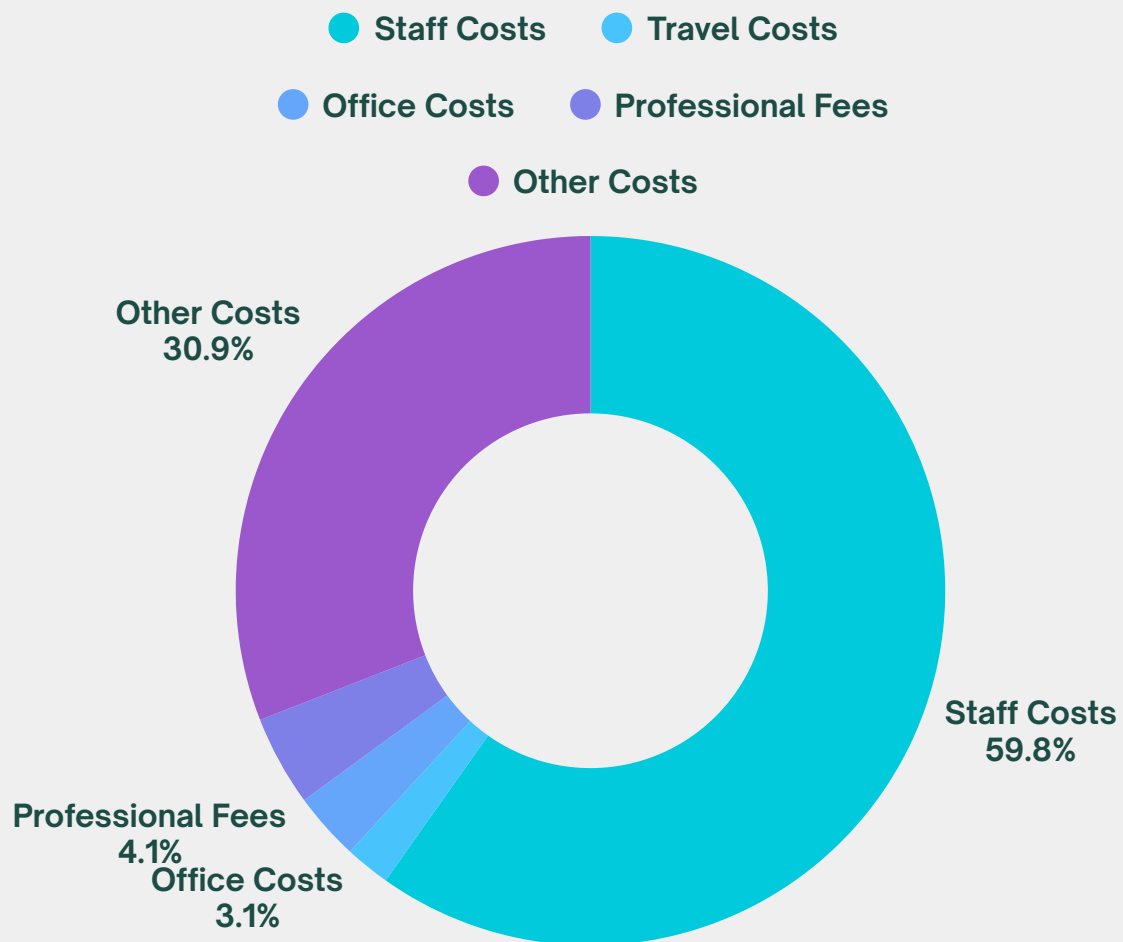




# Finances



Expenditure  
2024/25  
£1,856,796



“If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.”

John 3:17-18

If you lavish your food on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted; Then your light shall rise in the darkness, and your gloom shall become like midday. Isaiah 58:10

The charity you give will be your shade on the day of judgement.

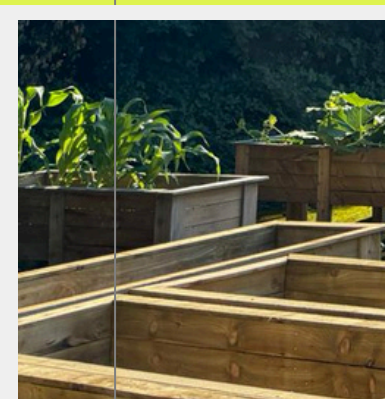
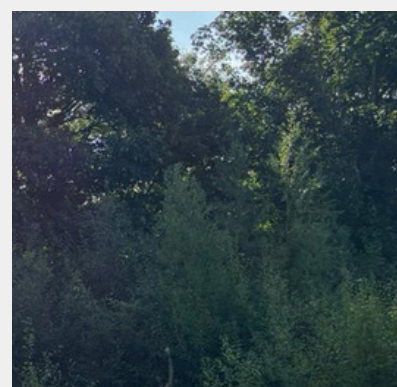
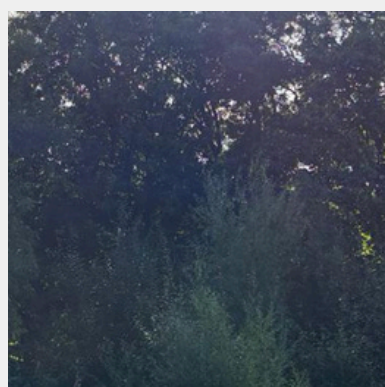
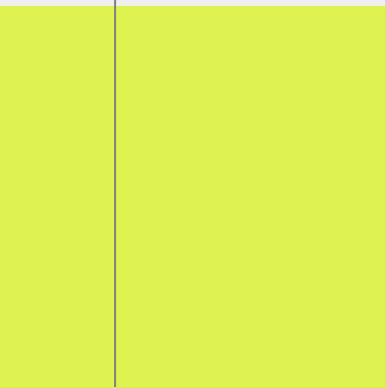
The Prophet Muhammad

One who works for what he eats, and gives some of what he has in charity, O Nanak, he knows the path to fulfilment.

Guru Granth Sahib Ji

If you knew what I knew about the power of giving, you would not let a single meal pass without sharing it in some way.

Buddha





# Thank You

We look forward to another 25 years of meaningful advice and support for the vulnerable communities of the West Midlands and we look forward to your continued support. If you require any further information, please feel free to contact us.



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