

DEVON AND CORNWALL REFUGEE SUPPORT



2023
Annual
Report



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Mission, Vision & Values



DCRS Vision

A fair, humane and safe asylum experience for all

DCRS Mission

To promote independence, prevent destitution and support those seeking refuge to build their new home in the UK

DCRS Values

- **Welcoming** – being inclusive, accessible and safe; working with empathy, understanding and integrity
- **Experienced and persistent** – providing high quality advocacy and support to those seeking refuge, no matter how long the process takes
- **A lifeline** – helping people when they have no-one else to turn to
- **A place of hope** – fostering resilience and supporting people to use and develop their skills to become part of the wider community, keep active and build a new life
- **Connected** – providing the best possible service by collaborating with other organisations and supporters whilst sharing best practise
- **Responsive** – adapting to the evolving needs of our community
- **Well informed** – developing and maintaining excellent standards of knowledge for staff and volunteers

DEVON AND CORNWALL REFUGEE SUPPORT

Meet Our Team Trustees



Ian Gasper
Chair of Trustees



John Stephens
Vice-Chair



Jane Barkes
Trustee Secretary



Andrew Eccleston
Interim Treasurer



Alana Hunter
Safeguarding Lead



Sana Murrani



Poorna Dias Gunaswker



Azeb Mengisteab



Abbas Mohammed

Staff Members



Alexander Vessis
CEO



Abimbola Adeosun
Finance and Business
Administrator



Azza Gasim
Communications &
Fundraising Officer



Maia Walton
Volunteer Co-ordinator
and Development
Officer for Cornwall
Refugee Resource Net

Wellbeing Team



Suvi Rehell
Befriender Project
Manager



Craig Walker
Activities Co-ordinator



Tressa Thomas
Activities Co-ordinator

Caseworkers



Waleed Abdallah
Casework Manager and
OISC Level 1 Casework
Supervisor



Georgia Edwards
OISC Level 2
Asylum and Protection
Caseworker



Camilla Bostock
OISC Level 2
Asylum and Protection
Caseworker



Vincent Ibekwe
Caseworker



Rebecca Van Der Veer
Caseworker



Tom Rose
Caseworker

Chair's Introduction

DCRS has had a year of meeting the challenges that a 'hostile environment' yields for asylum seekers and refugees. We have provided a space where individuals are safe and feel supported in their journey. This has been true of those who arrive in Plymouth whether sent by the Home Office or other ways or have been housed in hotels in Devon and Cornwall.

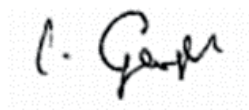
We started the year as an organisation reviewing our vision, aims and values. We recommitted ourselves to providing "A fair, humane and safe asylum experience" and "to promote independence, prevent destitution and support those seeking refuge to build their new homes in the UK".

A successful financial year in terms of grants received has allowed us to carefully expand to meet the organisation's needs.

Devon & Cornwall Refugee Support (DCRS) is managed by its trustees who meet regularly. Day to day administration is in the hands of the CEO. New recruits are found through local contacts or Reach Volunteering.

DCRS aims to ensure that asylum seekers and refugees receive the full benefit of their entitlements under UK and international law. We aim to provide a culturally sensitive and practical response to the needs of the community.

The board of trustees are satisfied that the service provided to a under-supported section of the population constitutes a public benefit.



Ian Gasper, Chair

CEO Report

2023 has been a year of change, growth and development for Devon and Cornwall Refugee Support with the year wrapping up in a strong financial and staffing position to enter 2024.

The organisation has seen a tripling of need across the region with 5 hotels opening to accommodate an additional 943 people. Staff had to adapt to the need and offer our support where possible with caseworker phone and email services being utilised more for service users in more remote regions. HealthPoint conducted over 500 health assessments to support the tenants in the hotel alongside the frontline GP practices and we offered training to external stakeholders looking to support those we commonly serve.

There was a changing of the guard with Jackie Otunnu and Alex Miranda moving on to new adventures as we welcomed Waleed Abdallah, Abimbola Adeosun, Azza Gasim, Maia Walton, Rebecca Van Der Veer, Vincent Ibekwe and Tressa Thomas to our organisation. This has brought new opinions and ways of working to help grow the organisation into the coming years.

The Nationality and Borders Act and Illegal Migration Act came into existence changing the landscape of claiming asylum in the UK. This has made our organisation understandably uneasy as we try to understand what this will mean for those we serve.

We have forged strong partnerships to enhance our impact within our networks. Locally, collaborations with entities like the Pickwell Foundation and Torbay Community Development Trust (TCDT) have enabled us to provide training and assistance to our remote clientele. Additionally, securing a contract with the local authority has allowed us to work alongside the Olive Project and Plymouth and Devon Racial Equality Council, offering support to the tenants in the Exeter hotel.

On a broader scale, our involvement in NACCOM (The No Accommodation Network) links us with housing initiatives and organizations nationwide, facilitating both collaboration and training opportunities.



Similarly, as members of the South West Immigration Alliance (SWIA), we are collaborating with partners throughout the region to enhance OISC capacity. In Plymouth, participation in the Resettlement Contract, initiated by Plymouth City Council, strengthens our efforts in supporting the refugee community. Our partnership with Plymouth University is thriving, marked by the engagement of two social work students, three PhD students, and multiple trustees. Moreover, improved referral processes with the Law Clinic have bolstered our organization's efficacy. In Cornwall, our alliance with the Cornwall Refugee Resource Network (CRRN) has united community sponsorship groups under a single banner, amplifying our efforts. This collaboration, backed by Cornwall Council, enhances our ability to assist those we commonly serve.

We placed a large amount of work to training our caseworkers with Camilla and Georgia gaining their OISC Level 2 Asylum and Protection and have started representing clients. We are further developing our casework team to take on a legal aid contract with the hope that we will have the contract start date by September 2024.

Our wellbeing department developed the HealthPoint and Befriending Projects with HealthPoint seeing over 250 patients in 2023. We also recognised the value of our activities running through the winter as the days became shorter and with social isolation growing so continued to develop our music, creative clubs and indoor activities.

We believe all these developments are helping towards plugging a gap in the inhumane asylum system, opening more doors and opportunities. Everyone at DCRS remain humbled, honoured and lucky to serve and be a part of a community of people with the resilience, strength and courage to forge a new life here and we look forward to many more positive decisions and stories of success.

Alex Vessis, CEO

Financial Report



The financial status of DCRS in 2023 has remained strong, marked by the receipt of substantial grants resulting in a surplus for the year amounting to £136,652.

Key funders include The National Lottery Community Fund, Lloyds Bank Foundation, Blue Thread, Bristol Law Centre (JTI), the Postcode Lottery, and Ministry of Justice.

Expenditure for the year exceeded the budget slightly, totalling £329k compared to the budgeted £296k. This variance can be attributed to slightly higher than anticipated staff costs, offset by funding received from the Livewell Foundation and Cornwall Refugee Resource Network Project for activity and volunteer coordinator positions. Additionally, investments were made in new computer systems for both existing staff members and new additions to our team. In preparation for commencing advanced legal work and expanding our operations, we also incurred expenses for rent, repairs, and office furniture related to our new office location at 93 New George Street.

The charity's reserves policy dictates maintaining reserves equivalent to three months of operating costs and dissolution expenses. Currently, this amount stands at £69k and undergoes quarterly review.

The charity's annual reserve target is set at £100k, well above the mandated reserve level. This target will be subject to periodic review in alignment with updated official reserves requirements. As of the year-end, the charity held £238k in unrestricted reserves and £322k in cash. The difference of £84k is restricted income which has not yet been used.

£466K

Gross Income at end of 2023

£329K

Gross Expenditure at end of 2023

£136K

Surplus



Statement of Financial Activities

For the period from 01 January 2023 to 31 December 2023

	Unrestricted Funds 2023	Restricted Funds 2023	Total Funds 2023	Total Fund 2022
	£	£	£	£
INCOMING RESOURCES				
Incoming resources from generated funds	2,360	119,587	121,947	1,309
Voluntary income	241,252	72,030	313,282	214,604
Incoming resources from charitable activities	1,632		1,632	2,592
Other incoming resources	14,300	14,936	29,236	
TOTAL INCOMING RESOURCES	259,544	206,553	466,098	218,505
RESOURCES EXPENDED				
Charitable activities	122,892	206,553	329,445	215,340
Governance costs				198
TOTAL RESOURCES EXPENDED	122,892	206,553	329,445	215,538
NET MOVEMENT IN FUNDS	136,652		136,652	2,967
BALANCE BROUGHT FORWARD AS AT 1ST JANUARY 2023	86,911	14,684	101,594	98,627
BALANCE CARRIED FORWARD AS AT 31ST DECEMBER 2023	223,563	14,684	238,247	101,594

Balance Sheet

For the period from 12 December 2022 to 31 December 2023

	As at 31/12/2023	As at 31/12/2022
Current assets		
6501: Bank current account	252,097.83	106,009.51
6505: BLF Bank account	-	-
6510: COIF deposit account	69,938.15	67,001.79
6590: Petty Cash	63.84	96.01
6595: Debtors	-	-
6600: Sports & Fitness Petty Cash	-	-
Z05: Accounts Receivable	(83,853.09)	(71,512.97)
Total Current assets	238,246.73	101,594.34
Liabilities		
6602: Wages Control Account	-	-
6699: Agency collections	-	-
Z04: Accounts Payable	-	-
Total Liabilities	-	-
Net Asset surplus (deficit)	238,246.73	101,594.34
Reserves		
Excess/(deficit) to date	136,652.39	2,967.29
Z01: Starting balances	101,594.34	98,627.05
Z03: Gains and losses own use	-	-
Total Reserves	238,246.73	101,594.34

Represented by Funds

General (Unrestricted)	223,563.12	86,910.73
Designated	-	-
Restricted	14,683.61	14,683.61
Total	238,246.73	101,594.34

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REPORT

TO THE TRUSTEES OF THE DEVON AND CORNWALL REFUGEE SUPPORT

I report on the accounts of the Charity for the year ended 31 December 2023

RESPECTIVE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE TRUSTEES AND EXAMINER

The Charity's Trustees are responsible for the preparation of the accounts. The Charity's Trustees consider that an audit is not required for this year under Section 145(5)(b) Charities Act 2011 (the 2011 Act) and that an independent examination is needed.

It is my responsibility to:

- Examine the account under section 145(5)(b) of the 2011 Act
- To follow the procedures laid down in the General Directions 2017 given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b)
- To state whether particular matters have come to my attention

BASIS OF INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S STATEMENT

My examination was carried out in accordance with the General Directions given by the Charity Commission. An examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with those record. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts and seeking explanations from you as Trustees concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit and consequently no opinion is given as to whether the accounts present a 'true and fair view' and the report is limited to those matters set out in the statement below.

In connection with my examination, no matter has come to my attention:

- which gives me a reasonable cause to believe that in any material respect the requirements: to keep accounting records in accordance with Section 145(5)(b) of the 2011 Act ; and
- to which, in my opinion, attentions should be drawn to enable a proper understanding of accounts to be reached.

Dated: 10/04/2024

Signed: J. Gilding
Independent Examiner

Mr John Gilding

104 Lucas Lane



DCRS Wellbeing Programme



In 2023, we conducted weekly activities for 10–35 service users in Plymouth, primarily asylum seekers, some with refugee status. Many of our clients face mental health challenges due to past trauma and language barriers.

Our activities, including arts courses, sports, and outdoor excursions, have significantly improved their mood, social connections, and familiarity with Plymouth.

Particularly valued were our swimming and cycling lessons, enhancing confidence. Our approach addresses four main needs: acquainting with Plymouth, forging social bonds, acquiring new skills, and supporting mental health through outdoor activities.

New funding in 2023 enabled partnerships with Plymouth University Students Union Gym and Plymouth Active/Life Centre for swimming lessons. We've expanded our program to provide year-round support with a focus on skill acquisition.

With the arrival of Tressa as activities coordinator in October 2023, we've emphasized connections to agriculture and food. This initiative has led to partnerships with Jar Squad, Apricot Centre in Totnes, and Flax Project, expanding our resources and opportunities for the future.

These efforts mark a shift towards holistic support, encompassing both physical and mental well-being, while fostering community engagement and skill development among our service users.

263

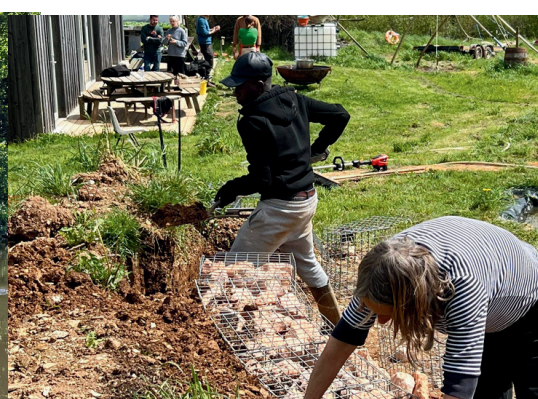
individuals attended

228

Number of activities
sessions

11

Partnership
programmes



Activities Plan 2024-2025

Green & Blue Spaces

Opportunities and benefits:

- Getting to know a new city
- Practical integration, increased confidence and know-how
- Low-barrier activities for all abilities
- Increased physical fitness and activity level
- Opportunity step off the land and experience a new environment.
- Opportunity to get out of the city and into natural spaces which can offer ..
- ... Mental health support and relief
- Fun, laughter, shared lunch: offering clients an experience of "a good day"
- Opportunity to socialise and meet new people in comfortable informal environment
- Opportunity to practice English communication

Activities

Walking / Rambling on Coastal Path
Canoeing
Cycling trips

Indoors

Opportunities and benefits:

- Learning to use local mainstream facilities; opportunity to access in own time
- Opportunity for clients to plan their own activities and schedule when to do them, become more independent, and gain independence and ownership of their lives
- Opportunity to interact with local people and potential for integration
- All-weather activities
- Opportunity for a multi-sport, indoor activities that can be utilised by almost all levels and abilities
- Opportunity to feel accomplished and take action towards own wellbeing
- Team work through team sports
- Fun and laughter
- Improved fitness, wellbeing, mental health

Activities

Gym usage
Team sports: basketball, volleyball, badminton
Tenpin bowling

Training

Opportunities and benefits:

- Opportunity to learn skills for life: swimming and cycling
- Cycling training attached to opportunities to gain access to bicycles: new means of transport that can give people access to essential appointments, and new opportunities such as volunteering or work
- A confidence boost through learning new skills
- Overcoming fears and insecurities
- Team-building: groups supporting each other to learn and tackle problems together
- Resilience building
- Mental health support

Activities

Beginner swimming lessons
Beginner cycling lessons



Barriers to entry into activities

100% Lack of Funds
87% Lack of transport
33% Poor mental health
60% Unfamiliar with places & people

86% Said they would like to part take in more activities and make an effort towards improving their wellbeing if a program was made more available to them

Health Point



Health Point is a drop-in triage service every Tuesday with a volunteer GP and mental health professional on site.. The impact of our efforts is evidenced by Healthpoint Lamplight Statistics for 2023. With 274 service users accessing Healthpoint, we've provided over 1,080 hours of service, conducting 640 actions encompassing mental health consultations and health screenings.

This vital service came about in response to our concern that our service users were unable to get essential healthcare and advice due to language barriers, lack of IT access and not understanding the NHS system. Health Point advises our service users on how to access healthcare, provides women's health advice, helps with GP referrals, provides a letter writing service and facilitates a service user to speak to a mental health worker.

We initially funded Health Point through existing resources and voluntary work by a local GP acting as the Clinical Lead. We also received some funds from NHS resources in recognition of the valuable work we had carried with asylum seekers in hotels across the region. In 2023 we started to remunerate the professional Clinical Lead to ensure continuity of what had become a vital service and have gained core funding from National Lottery to support Health Point.

274

people supported

1080

Hours worked

500+

health assessments
conducted across
Devon



Volunteer Impact



Volunteers support every aspect of our activities and wellbeing services. An incredible team of volunteer GPs allow us to run our Health Point triage service which improves access to health care and mental health support for asylum seekers and refugees in the region.

English classes are completely volunteer led and allow people seeking asylum who've recently arrived in Plymouth immediate access to English language learning which would otherwise be unavailable.

Other particularly valued activities are swimming lessons and music club which allow for new learning opportunities while enhancing confidence, forging social bonds and improving mental health. These activities, again, are all volunteer led. DCRS Volunteers work hard to facilitate a welcoming environment to all and have allowed the wellbeing department to increase the diversity of activities available to the people we support, while also being able to take part in rewarding activities!

Volunteers support every aspect of DCRS service provision and the total amount of volunteering hours at DCRS is equivalent to just over 4 full time staff members! We couldn't do this work without our wonderful volunteer team and are s grateful for their support!

42

Volunteers

7587

Hours worked in

Auxiliary Casework
Reception & Admin
Activites



Casework

Level 2 OISC Work

Due to a chronic lack of Legal Aid provision, there are only two solicitors in the South West that are representing clients in asylum cases. In addition, over the past few months, we have found it increasingly more difficult to refer service users to solicitors in other regions of the UK.

"In order to help alleviate the lack of legal advice and representation in Devon and Cornwall, Camilla Bostock and I are now qualified as OISC Level 2 Asylum and Protection advisers. This means that we are able to represent our service users who have claimed asylum in the UK and reduce the amount of time it takes for a service user to access legal representation.

Without accurate legal advice, our service users may be wrongly denied protection status in the UK, consequentially lengthening their journey through the asylum process by months and potentially years." – Georgia Edwards

ARE Home / Fresh Claims

Following the Crowdfunder campaign we launched at the beginning of September, we have raised £21,345 alongside a £10,000 donation from the National Lottery and £5,000 from POP. Amazingly, this means we have exceeded our £36,000 target! Thank you for all your donations, social media shares and support for the most vulnerable in our community.

In 2023, significant progress was made, with 5 service users housed under the initiative and an additional 5 accommodated through ARE facilities. Three new service users joined the fresh claim list, totalling around 5 active cases.

For ongoing updates on the project's developments, visit our website's News page.



911

people supported

10

people supported with
Level 2 OISC Support

5

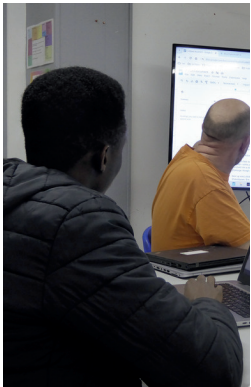
housed at ARE
accommodation



Case Studies and Feedback



O.K – After a period of isolation O.K has quickly become a valued and confident member of our community – When we first met O at the beginning of the year 2023 they told us they had in fact been in Plymouth for almost two years. They hadn't however engaged in any activities and been almost completely isolated from society during that time. Over the last 6 months there have been a lot of firsts with O, first time socialising with other adults in Plymouth, on a public transport in Plymouth, first time on cycling and walking paths, canoeing, bowling, trips to the sea... The transformation from early January has been immense. O has become one of our most regular participants, they are reliable, sociable, and friendly. They have developed friendships with other clients and tell us about trips they have done in their own time to places we have introduced them to. "I am an asylum seeker, yet instead of suffering I have had all these amazing experiences" O said. This is what they sent after one walk to a sea side location: "Thank you, [activities coordinator] for such a lovely experience! It helped me to break the monotony of my everyday life – I returned back and looked at my usual things with the different eyes :) Of course, I enjoyed it! The place, the sea view touched my heart. Another thing that I mentioned-the feeling of security. I was going to an absolutely unknown place but I had no fear, worries, doubt about what to do, how to get there and so on. I knew that there are some people with me who know everything and I am safe. It is very precious for me – to receive some new pleasant experience and to feel someone near me who I can count on."



S.A & N.A – During their first casework interview S & N were referred to the wellbeing department as wanting to spend time in nature – S. and N., two siblings came to DCRS in early 2023. We were able to offer them activities to get involved shortly after their arrival which we believe have helped them immensely in not experiencing such a dramatic dip in mental health and wellbeing after relocation and being torn from any social networks they may have made elsewhere – something we witness often with our clients. They have both become eager and regular participants, taking part in swimming lessons, longer walks and cycling lessons. Having grown up in restrictive society they both continue to express their gratitude to learn skills they were never able to. "Thank you [activities coordinator], for making dreams come true." N said in a message after a swimming lesson.



“

I want to use this opportunity to thank and appreciate you. You know many of us entered asylum with depression and broken spirits and not knowing what to do. Depriving us normal life and having us stuck in the bed was a dead sentence. Me personally I came to DCRS and came in touch with you and you made me know that there are some activities that is available to help relief the situation. I made myself available, associating with others, learning how to ride bike, learning swimming and doing gym and improved my mental health greatly. I am no longer depressed but I am a happy person.

”

Letter of Gratitude



Thanks to Grantors and Individual Donors!

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the generous grantors and individual donors whose unwavering support has been instrumental in fuelling our mission and empowering our community initiatives. Their dedication to making a positive impact in the lives of those we serve has been truly remarkable.

Through their benevolence, we have been able to advance our programs, expand our outreach efforts, and address critical needs within our community. Their contributions have enabled us to implement innovative projects, provide essential services, and create meaningful opportunities for growth and development.

To our grantors, we express our deepest appreciation for their trust and confidence in our organization. Their visionary investments have not only provided vital financial resources but have also served as catalysts for positive change and lasting impact.

We also extend our sincere thanks to our individual donors whose generosity knows no bounds. Their ongoing support, whether through monetary contributions, volunteer efforts, or advocacy, has been invaluable in driving our mission forward and empowering us to effect positive change in the lives of others.

As we reflect on the past year and look ahead to the future, we remain profoundly grateful for the continued partnership and support of our grantors and individual donors. Together, we are making a tangible difference in our community, one life at a time.

Thank you for believing in our mission, sharing our vision, and standing with us in our pursuit of a brighter, more inclusive future for all.

Warm regards,

Devon and Cornwall Refugee Support



Our Partners

We couldn't do this without the help and support from our partners!



Our Funders

We'd like to say a big thank you to all our supporters, both individuals and organisations, for the generous contributions.



DEVON AND CORNWALL REFUGEE SUPPORT



Follow us on Social Media

✉ communications@dcrs-plymouth.org

🌐 <https://dcrs-plymouth.org/>

📍 7 Whimble Street PL1 2DH

📘 @DevonandCornwallRefugeeSupport

📷 @DCRSPlymouth

✕ @dcrsPlymouth





Thank you for your
ongoing support

