



Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers

*promoting the welfare of refugees, asylum seekers and
other migrants in Gloucestershire through....*

1. Our **centre**, which will be *a safe space providing high quality support to all our clients.*
2. Delivering the **Resettlement Scheme** in Gloucestershire.
3. **Liaising with other agencies** in Gloucestershire who encounter asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants. including negotiating access to services at a strategic level.
4. **Raising awareness** about the situation of asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants in Gloucestershire with the public and with decision makers.

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Dotted throughout this report in *italics* are comments that have been said by clients to us throughout the past year.

Chair of Trustee's Report

It was going so well. The local authorities had all supported the housing of Afghan refugees airlifted out of Kabul, and through the hard work of our resettlement staff they were being housed. An amazing amount of hard work was undertaken by our staff and it felt as if we had managed a difficult situation well. What a great resettlement staff we have, and all thanks to them. No problem.

We were also continuing to welcome the growing number of asylum seekers arriving and living in the county. Challenging, but again we were finding a way. Again a great Team were rising to the challenge.

Of course a moment is a long time in the life of GARAS, because as we began to catch our collective breaths Mr Putin decided to invade the Ukraine! After a great deal of dither the cabinet minister in charge of levelling-up introduced a scheme to support those who were willing to house Ukrainian refugees. It shows the character of the Gloucestershire people that they stepped forward. Over 1500 Ukrainians came to the county, and although not all sponsor situations work, the vast majority were successful and the strangers were welcomed into the county, looked after and became settled. We were financed to employ three new members of staff to help those coming to settle, and they have done wonders in helping both the sponsors and their visitors.

Sorted. Take a breath. What else could happen. Farouq left! He had worked with us for 22 years, helping countless asylum seekers and headed up our advice team. We said goodbye to him, and gave him an olive tree in a pot, and showed that we had sponsored an olive tree in Palestine in his name. That's November.

We have appointed new staff, to help with advice, resettlement, and with the sponsorship scheme for Ukrainians and to offer support to those living in the hotels. A wonderful team of paid staff, supported by wonderful volunteers including a whole growing team of those teaching English for those in hotels.

What an amazing group of people support GARAS in so many ways and it is a great privilege to be a trustee for such a wonderful organisation. My deepest wish is that in a few years it will no longer be needed as the world regains peace and there are no more people seeking asylum from oppressive governments or war torn countries - but I'm not holding my breath. As long as GARAS is needed it will look after those who seek its help it will continue its work.

Adrian Slade

Director's Comments

It seems that every year we start the Annual Report discussing the another round of changes and situations that GARAS has responded to.

This year has been no different.

I ended last years comments with:

"As this increase in asylum numbers became more established and as the financial year came towards its end the invasion of Ukraine and the projects around supporting refugees from Ukraine in the UK began. And so began the next new projects. But more about that next year."

And so we start with GARAS role in supporting Ukrainians and the amazing response of the generous people of Gloucestershire. As said by the Chair, hundreds of people have opened their homes to house Ukrainians right across the county – truly, GARAS work is now in every nook and cranny of the county. We have now got a team of three members of staff supporting Ukrainians and their hosts and working closely with the Homes For Ukraine Team in the County Council.

Meanwhile, numbers of asylum seekers continue to rise as more properties of different types are taken on by the Home Office. So we continue to work with clients trying to navigate a system that is painfully slow, meaning people wait and wait for anything to

happen. We now have clients continuing to live in a growing number of dispersal properties while also having hotels housing asylum seekers in the county. In the new year a fourth hotel came on board and by the end of the financial year it was becoming obvious a fifth was coming on board. We took a leap of faith to increase the support provision for hotels and asylum seekers, in part made possible because of a fundraising event put on at the Everyman Theatre.

And we continue to provide Resettlement programmes, both for those on Afghan Schemes and on Resettlement programmes working with those being settled from outside the UK.

So the GARAS team grows and changes. We did say goodbye to Farouq Ginwalla in November as he moved on into other projects, but our paths still cross frequently! We also said goodbye to Penny Calder, a Trustee who was one of the original Committee members and a faithful Treasurer who managed the finances as we moved from an A6 Notebook – one page per month - to a complex spreadsheet and multi-faceted organisation.

We have also seen changes in the Trustee Board and welcome our new Trustees and are grateful for all the contributions made by all involved.

Finally, we have also expanded in the number of amazing volunteers from all over the county providing the most extraordinary support, helping with ESOL provision, welcoming, admin and making curtains. In so many ways, so many people make a difference and help others to feel welcome.

Adele Owen

"You are all absolutely amazing and I will miss working with you all"

Advice Work

Much changed, happened, developed and progressed between April 2022 and March 2023. We grew, gaining a Ukraine Team, had several staff changes and reshuffles as well as continuing to respond to the needs of clients arriving into the county as asylum seekers and refugees.

Ukrainians had already started arriving in the county under the Family Visa and Homes for Ukraine Schemes. At the same time, English lesson provision was beginning at the three hotels in the Gloucester and Cheltenham area, housing hundreds of asylum seeking clients. We had a welcome team awayday in some woodland in Stroud and were soon back at work with much going on. I got married and did a mix of advice work to recently granted Refugees, and managing the new Ukraine Team: This consists of three staff, who work with clients at our thrice weekly drop in sessions and doing home visits, working closely with the County Council's new Homes for Ukraine Team.

Meanwhile, Farouq Ginwalla, our first ever Advice Worker's time at GARAS was drawing to a close. He trained us up in giving advice, having first received training himself at Citizens Advice many years ago. Starting in 2000, he set up our advice and drop-in system, keeping our immigration advice accreditation with OISC and AQS up to scratch. He kept our paperwork to a minimum so we could maximise time we spent with clients, proactively advising and advocating on their behalf. Farouq does not hear the word 'no' as sign to stop, rather an obstacle to get around. He ingrained in us lateral thinking; creative methods; was often networking in the community and would pull names, numbers, contacts out of a proverbial hat and aim to talk to a person to get the best out of them. Whilst he was born and raised in Gloucester, his relational way of interacting with people meant he got on well with clients. Having reduced his hours somewhat, in the autumn time came to move on, with the need for caring responsibilities within his family.

After he left, I was asked to manage the Advice Team (consisting of Rachel Cheshire, our Women's worker, Rebecca Francis who works with our UASC; Jennie Watts providing administrative support and advice to asylum seeking clients providing community based accommodation assistance to refugees). We couldn't do the work

we do without help from our social work students and this year has been no exception. All of them were offered the chance to work with us in a paid capacity whilst their placement had ended, where other work commitments allow. Thus we have enjoyed having Carys Jones, Mercy Uhuka, Beth Walton and Yana Makani with us and benefited from their experience, help and enthusiasm. From January onwards, Yana in particular helped me with refugee move on work: giving advice on housing and benefits to clients who were granted Refugee Status. In addition, Emily Phillips moved from the Ukraine Team and brought her acquired skills, can-do approach and willingness to learn with her. Later in the year, Jennie moved to the UASC sub team to help Rebecca and Julianne Holcombe moved across into the Advice team to replace her, Olga completing the trio in the Ukraine Team joining Joanna and Radmila.

During this time, the Home Office continued to process very few cases and house more and more people in hotels. Rachel leads on the hotels work and Antonia worked tirelessly to support clients housed there. We implemented weekly full team meetings, joining Resettlement, Advice and Ukraine Teams and Senior Management Team meetings began with Adele, Ismail, Linda and myself.

Refugee Move on

During the year we supported 55 individuals and families, the majority moving on from asylum supported accommodation, a couple from asylum supported hotels. If they wished to remain in the county, we help them to contact their local district council (predominately Gloucester and Cheltenham) and aim to assist them to move into low supported accommodation, temporary accommodation; private rented and or social housing tenancies. Referrals into "Refugees at Home" (please do sign up if you would like to host refugees and asylum seekers on a short term basis!) provided welcome temporary placements to those in need. This is because single people aren't guaranteed accommodation and places can be hard to find. Messages and support from CWR helped too, encouraging refugees in Cheltenham to come and see us as soon as possible.

General support continued to be given: helping clients claim Universal Credit; apply for Homeseekers (the Social Housing Portal); open bank accounts; apply for travel documents and driving licences to name a few. It is great to be able to signpost to Sarah for in house assistance into education, employment and training. We couldn't operate our tri-weekly drop-in without the help of volunteers offering clients a warm welcome; helping us manage those waiting and offering us wisdom and cups of tea throughout the day. We continue to be grateful for volunteers in other roles too, such as our curtain volunteers who help clients furnish their bare accommodation when they move house. Thank you.

Hannah Fleming
Lead Advice and Support Worker

"since we arrived in Gloucester GARAS has been our family, our home"

Resettlement Team

The Resettlement efforts for the new year have seamlessly picked up where we left off. Our focus remains on aiding Afghan families who arrived via the ARAP/ACRS Projects, assisting them in transitioning from hotels to their new homes. Remarkably, we have successfully resettled 30 families so far. Currently, we are collaborating with local authorities to extend our assistance to more families in need, who are currently accommodated in bridging hotels.

The Home Office is actively exploring various strategies to provide aid to families still residing in hotels across the UK (with none in Gloucestershire), seeking housing solutions.

Simultaneously, we are continuing to welcome additional families through the Vulnerable People's Resettlement (VPR) programme. These families represent an increasingly diverse range of nationalities, with our most recent families resettling from Somalia.

Our commitment also extends to supporting families who arrived earlier under this initiative. We are elated to witness a significant number of them being granted Indefinite Leave to Remain, with some even embracing the opportunity to become British Citizens. It has been our privilege to see families grow in confidence and independence over the years, and this is a real testament to the team's hard work and support to empower them to settle in their new communities.

GARAS continues to assist families not only in Gloucestershire, but also in West Oxfordshire, collaborating closely with our partners from Publica, particularly Mandy and Paula.

Our partnership working with the local authorities is ongoing, including individuals such as Carol and Cheryl from Gloucestershire Fire Service, as well as Daisy, Donna, and Sharne from Gloucester City Council.

Moreover, there are additional partners with whom we collaborate under economically challenging times and circumstances, these agencies are the third sector charities such as GDASS, Gloucester Feed the Hungry, Friendship Cafe, Barnwood Trust and local Churches and Mosques to name a few.

The UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) is an ever expanding programme and, as the situations around the globe are forever changing, it is an unfortunate necessity that resettlement will be a service that will be a constant to assist families leaving desperate circumstances through no fault of their own. However, the Resettlement Team remains dedicated to supporting the families in our care.

Ismail Ali – UKRS Team Lead – Housing

Linda Satchell – UKRS Team Lead – Social Care

Women's Work

My work with women and families within the asylum system has continued over the year. It has had its challenges, particularly the challenge of working with people who have now been living in the hotels for more than 18 months. For several families this has meant

that their children have already spent a large proportion of their life living in a hotel, with no experience of their parents preparing meals and only eating in their rooms on beds. It is a concern that the normal development of children is compromised by the length of time they are spending living in this environment. Parents are anxious about the uncertainty of their asylum case and living conditions and this will inevitably have repercussions of the well-being of their children.

Antonia Brixey, Hotel Outreach Worker is based at each hotel one day a week. She is able to give food vouchers that GARAS receives from Nourishing Gloucester. She identifies new arrivals at the hotel and supports them to access education and support groups that are based near either at the hotel or nearby. A good proportion of her time is spent with expectant mothers and families to ensure that the children are registered into schools and family centres. GARAS is able to support families with funds for school uniforms and helps towards a smooth transition into school.

People in the local areas where the hotel's are situated are providing support for people living in the hotels. There are many voluntary organisations and activities for people to take part in. Local churches provide support, as well places where people can cook a meal for themselves.

More recently people in the hotels are now being granted their Leave to Remain and I have received a number of messages from families that have been relocated from the hotel. They are always very grateful for the friendly support that they have received from GARAS and the reassurance that they received from our Advice Workers.

English teachers provide English lessons every week based at the hotels.

I continue to support victims of domestic abuse with their Settlement applications and work with families who are NRPF to change their circumstance on their Visa so that they are able to apply for public funds.

We also have more families now living in houses across the county and continue to support them.

There has been a huge reduction in legal aid for asylum and immigration work. It is difficult when we are not able to signpost clients to access Legal Representation for their asylum case. So trying to find solutions is another complex area of our work.

Rachel Cheshire

Women's Advice Worker

Thank you for giving me the chance to start my life again.

Hi my sister – today I got my ID. Thank you so much for helping me. You helped me a lot before, I can never forget”

UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children)Work

We have continued to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people building new lives in Gloucestershire. We provide a safe space, and friendly welcome, enabling them to access us and our offices when they need, and to build relationships of trust. We provide accurate advice, enabling young people to better understand the systems in which they are placed, so they can participate more fully and take better-informed decisions, prioritising their individual wishes and needs. We provide well-being support and therapy, hand in hand with advice, to help young people to maintain their dignity and morale as they navigate these often dehumanising and cruel systems.

This year saw a large increase (doubled) in numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children arriving in Gloucestershire. Many arrived in the Home Office hotels here, unlawfully assessed as adults and living alone and unsupported with unknown adults. We have worked closely with the NHS Lead in

the hotels, and Social Services Assessment Team to get young people out of hotels and properly age assessed. Young people also arrive through the National Transfer Scheme, having made the terrifying voyage by boat over the Channel to Kent and then transferred to different Local Authorities across the Country. Some still manage to climb onto, into or under lorries coming over the Channel despite the militarisation of the South Coast, and escape when the lorry stops in Gloucestershire. Many others are placed in homes in Gloucestershire by other Local Authorities.

Many of our former Afghan UASC now living and working in Gloucester as refugees or British, have tried desperately to find legal ways to bring their younger siblings or cousins safely to the UK given the situation in Afghanistan after the Taleban invasion. This has proved impossible. We have been very pleased that a number of young brothers and cousins have made it over to safety - but deeply troubled at the extreme risks this has entailed.

Our intrepid Student Social Workers Mercy and Carys (with the help of awesome Volunteers Tom and Katie) set up a group on Thursday mornings, in particular for those being age assessed, to do some simple activities and get to know others in similar situations. This has now grown into our Thursday English and Maths Class for any UASC who wants to attend and are not currently in other education and also involves quite a few trips out to local places. For those recently arrived it often helps them to meet others and to get some English and to feel a little prepared for education if they have not been able to go to school before. Our amazing team of volunteer teachers provide support and advice with young people at all levels of education.

Young people come to us for help with a myriad of problems. We may for example, try to help with mending a bike, or getting hold of football boots; or trying to get through to a social worker to discuss placement issues or education or consider Red Cross tracing of family members separated during war or on the journey to safety. We have information sessions by local police at GARAS with young people to explain behaviours that will get them in trouble, and to explain their rights in interactions with the police - as victims or suspects.

The main focus of our young people however is to obtain their Refugee Status so they can stay here in the UK secure from persecution in their home country. We aim to ensure that they have good lawyers - increasingly difficult as many firms are ceasing Legal Aid work given very low pay and high level of administration. We help young people to understand what is happening on their case - or why nothing is happening and they are waiting in limbo for a year or two - or six. We assist young people with lawyers to challenge negative decisions and prepare Fresh Claims.

We spend much time listening to young people feeling distressed, hopeless and isolated. We have been very lucky to work with other organisations to provide bespoke projects to improve their well-being - such as Access Bikes in Stroud, Red Horse providing Equine Therapy, School of Larks providing Circus Skills sessions, and Creative Sustainability who ran a wonderful Summer Camp. Dr Hannah Wright, our Lead Child Psychologist for UASC, and Alice Coles, Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist, are working together as part of our Counselling Team to provide one to one therapy for many UASC and also looking to run Groups on specific issues such as Sleep or Grief/Bereavement.

Fantastically, just before the end of the Financial Year, Jennie has joined the UASC Team as another Advice Worker. She is brilliant and I am so excited! The boat may stay afloat!

We remain in awe of the Foster Carers, Support Workers and Social Workers who provide homes and support to our young people. We continue to run our Support Group for Foster Carers and to provide information sessions for Support Workers and Social Workers.

Most of all we are in awe of these young people - with life experiences we cant even imagine they manage kindness, dignity, thoughtfulness and lots of humour. We gather flashes of Vicarious Resistance every day!

Rebecca Francis

UASC Liaison Worker

I can sleep now and I am not so afraid of going out of the house. I do not know how to thank you”.

Ukraine Team

From the point of view of GARAS operations, the Ukraine team has the elements of both the Advice and Resettlement teams: we see clients at drop-ins as well as going out on home visits to support with bigger concerns. Therefore we find ourselves doing a lot of different types of client work.

On a drop-in day, we will usually see around 5 different client families. Many of them have known us for over a year: they drop in to discuss the next stage of their life in Gloucestershire. We may be talking about housing options (private rent, social housing, or a rematch with new hosts). If the clients have moved into a rental property, they often need support with setting up their utility accounts and applying for a council tax reduction. We still see new families arrive into the county, and we welcome them at the office. This is when we meet the Family Visa clients: they come in to receive their £200 Post Office vouchers and the 50 rides bus passes. This support was not available to Gloucestershire Ukrainians arriving on the Family Visas until Adele negotiated to get this support for them in line with the sponsored families. The money provides financial support to the people awaiting either employment or their first Universal Credit payment. This is one of the key ways GARAS has been making a tangible difference to the local Ukrainian guests' lives.

There are a couple of key reasons to go on home visits to our clients. If the hosts live in a remote village with little public transport access, the likelihood is that the client is isolated and needs extra support linking with the community. We are also asked by the GCC's Homes for Ukraine team to support the host-guest units where things aren't going too well. This is when we are likely to organise mediation sessions - meetings between the hosts and the guests to facilitate and help translate at. These meetings are

particularly helpful for clearing any misunderstanding and softening any cultural differences. Lately the mediated sessions were centred less about the relationships in the household, and more about the next steps in terms of housing for the clients. We work closely with the housing teams at district councils, which means we can give the most updated information about the clients' housing options.

The hardest part of our job is being the friendly face of the generally unfriendly systems. One system which is quite challenging is schooling: as our guests move from hosts to hosts, their children often have to change schools, sometimes twice during an academic year. This is frustrating for the parent, and often challenging for the children as their refugee experience demands higher stability in their life, not lesser. Another difficult system to navigate is housing: we do a lot of myth busting around social housing, and clarifying how private rental works. The clients often look overwhelmed after such consultations, and we empathise with their experience which is so widely spread among the UK people alike.

And onto the good parts of the job. My favourite meetings to attend are with the families who have been here for a while, and we see a noticeable change in their understanding of the UK systems: they are more calm and patient with the bureaucracy, and planning ahead is becoming easier for them. To me, this is a sign that they are landing in the country, feeling safe here, their trauma is soothed and less dominant. Their English starts coming along, perhaps they get a job or complete a course, they build a community in real life as well as online. The children who have been attending a school start speaking in excellent English, and the parents look proud of them. This sense of calmness and 'having arrived' is wonderful to behold, and is usually a credit to the safe and patient hosts who have invested a lot of time and attention to the guests. Sometimes GARAS were involved to explain and guide - but the day-to-day work is done by the hosts and the families themselves.

Some clients show incredible resilience and integrate so quickly, and some are hugely overwhelmed by the war and spend most of

their time in their beds, checking in with their friends and family daily, keeping tabs on the latest shelling updates. The community is diverse, and all are united by the shared pain of the war. It has made the whole of Ukraine into one big family, feeling each other's happiness and pain as if it were their own - and it is a delicate honour to be working with this community.

Radmila Faleyeva-Munns
Ukrainian Worker

Counselling/Psychotherapy

When we consider the wellbeing of our clients at GARAS we recognise that their experiences can lead to support with their wellbeing and recognition of that including the need for therapeutic services alongside the practical advice giving and support with other areas of their lives.

And so for twenty years now, it has been important to provide therapeutic services to our clients through counselling and psychotherapy. The team has changed over the years and the types of therapy offered can change but the need remains and the requirement grows. In line with the growing numbers and the circumstances people have faced. As with previous years, most of the support is in the form of one-to-one work with still a mixture of face to face and on line. But into the mix, in order to assist with the numbers and to recognise different ways to assist, we have been able to provide some relaxation groups for some of those living in hotels. This has been in the form of Yoga and TRE (Trauma Release Exercises). Both these techniques can be used as self-help tools for clients once the method is learnt.

We split the on site work into three teams: the adult lead is Jeanette Campbell-Johnston, the young people's work is led by Clinical Psychologist, Dr Hannah Wright and Nicholas Rose leads on the work with those who have come in on Resettlement routes. The other members of the on-site team Team are: Audrey James, Alice Coles, Lindsay Baker, Tahira Yasmin Yasin, Agnes Grace and Fadia Courts. However, the team meets together regularly for supervision and reflective practice and also have a monthly

business meeting to ensure waiting lists are managed and updates maintained.

GARAS ran three evenings of an interpreter training programme: training and teaching interpreters and therapists to work effectively and collaboratively in Therapy sessions. This was the first time post Covid lockdown that we had done this. We had a group of 15 interpreters and four therapists. It was thoroughly enjoyed by all and provided a fresh group of community based interpreters for us to draw on for our work. This has also led to an awareness that interpreters need additional support and the need to provide regular sessions for interpreters. We also ran a session specifically for Ukrainians who have been living in the UK for many years wishing to support the new arrivals by learning some interpreting skills.

The period has, as ever, included additional liaison with doctors surgeries, dental surgeries, carers and lawyers, including writing letters in support of the well being of clients including UASC.

Other significant issues raised through and in therapy include working with the lived experiences of clients living with their trauma. Therefore responding, for instance, to the needs of a woman arriving as an asylum seeker with a history of experiencing sexual violence and the recent loss of a baby requires a response that is multi-agency in approach and more immediate than more chronic cases.

A walking group was started for clients experiencing emotional needs, but not yet ready to begin one-to one therapy.

Feedback from clients who have been receiving therapy includes:

"I am very grateful to GARAS for providing me with a therapist. This has changed my life. I could not have got to this point without this help."

Another client reports fewer nightmares and feels reassured that she has counseling at GARAS. Therapy is conducted in her native tongue and she feels safe that she is understood. And another: "I

can sleep now and I am not so afraid of going out of the house. I do not know how to thank you”.

Jeanette Campbell Johnston

Lead Psychotherapist

Finance

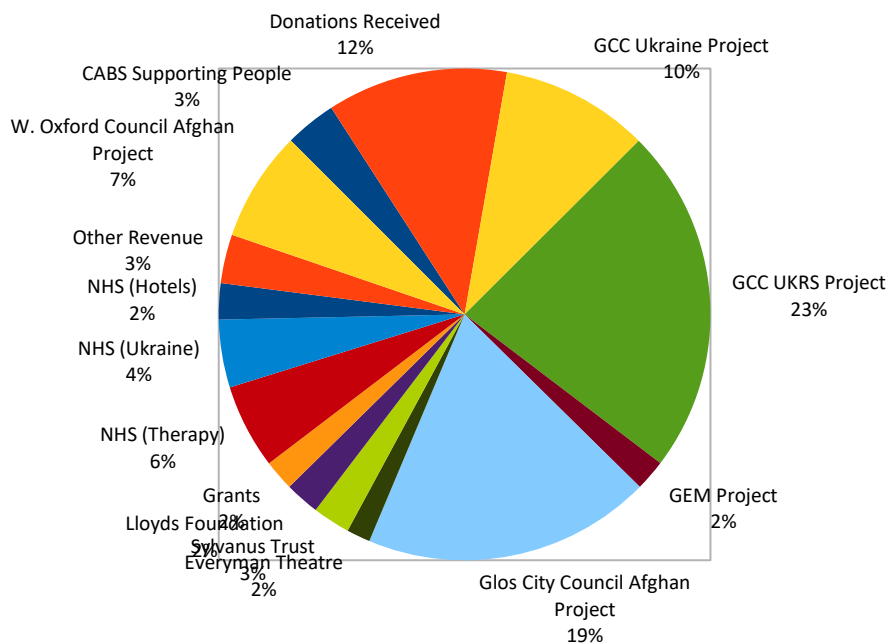
It has been another very busy year at GARAS with the turnover exceeding £1,000,000, which has consequently meant that we now require a full audit of our accounts. The audit was carried out successfully by Nicholas J Bishop of Pitt, Godden and Taylor, Chartered Accountants who has prepared a full set of accounts, these are available separately.

I have also been busy getting familiarised with our new accounting packager 'Xero'. Previously we have used spreadsheets to record all our financial transactions but as our turnover has increased this has become inefficient so we have invested in Xero which will assist us in the recording of all the finances.

The largest percentage of GARAS' work is the running of the Afghan, UKRS (formerly the Syrian Project) and the Ukraine project which are fully funded by the Government via the Gloucestershire County and City Councils. We receive funding from the NHS to pay our psychotherapist fees along with any interpreting fees that are required and although we receive a generous sum of £60,000 per year we still have a list of clients awaiting therapy. We also receive our ongoing funds from our CABS contract. We also received extra one off funding from the NHS to assist in the work we are carrying out with those currently residing in hotels and for the Ukrainian Project. The remainder of the work we carry out at GARAS is funded by various trusts, grants and donations. Some of the grants are ongoing others are for a set period and when this has expired we need to re apply or source different funding.

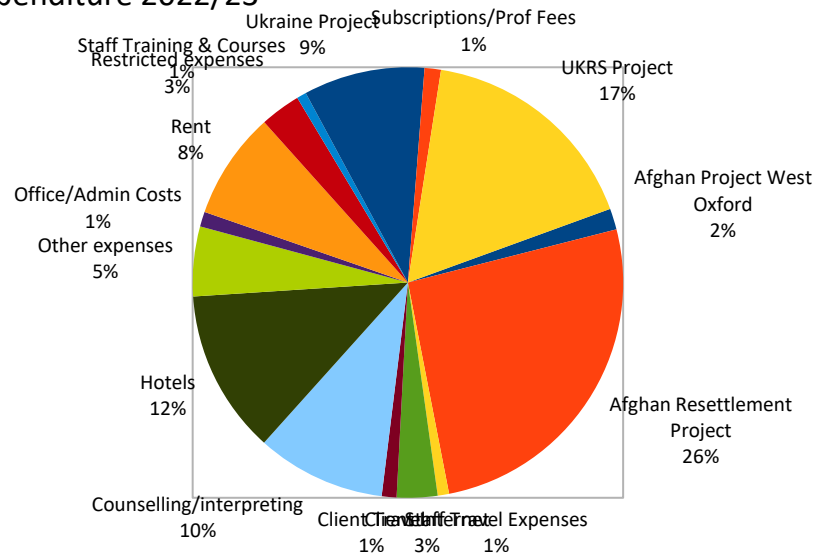
Below is a summary in the form of a pie chart showing GARAS income for the year.

GARAS Income 2022/23



The following pie chart shows the expenditure of GARAS for the year. I have excluded all the personnel costs i.e. salaries of staff, PAYE and pension as this equates to just over 50% of our costs at nearly £600,000, in order to be clearer as to where else funding is used.

GARAS Expenditure 2022/23



Sally James

** For more information on the finances please see our Financial Statement.*

Employment Support

Employment is a challenging transition as people move on and the situations that clients encounter can be difficult. It can be possible to get permission to work for asylum seekers, but it is never straight forward :

Hello Good morning, hello I am Sarah please, sit down, How can I help?

I want job, good job or to learn.

Ok, let's see, do you have CV? Resume - they call it in America?

No, nothing, just job please

Yes good ok, can I see your ID, your card? ... OK it says you can work on the SOL - that means only some jobs.

What did you do in your country, what was your work - ?

Engineer

Hmm ok, well did you do any caring, maybe for your children or wife?

No - my wife of course....

Hmm - Construction jobs have just come on the SOL - maybe you could do some labouring?

OK - I have bad back.

OK - lets look at caring for people with learning difficulties - there is no lifting in that job.

But I am Engineer

I know, but this is the only job you can do, and if you work more than 15 hours, you lose your right to legal aid.

What?

..and you may be asked to leave the supported house you are in as you will no longer be destitute...

What?!

....And the Home office will ask you to pay back for your accommodation they have spent on you...not all at once, but little by little, actually maybe a lot by a lot...!

Oh, but I was Engineer in a big company in my country...

Also we will have to send a letter to the care employer explaining that this card you have does not make a Share Code. - This could be longer and more confusing if we do it through an agency as well. Its very confusing for you, I know, its very confusing for employers too, and me....

But I am Engineer

Yes, sorry

It's raining outside, that's because of climate change

Welcome to the UK...

Sarah Fotheringham
GEM/ESHO Worker

Thank you I wish it could be more .GARAS have been wonderful supporting us with a case of DA with our Ukrainian guests; member of staff was outstanding in supporting not only the mother but also her stepson and me as well. We have had a good referral to get a family court case processed with a good outcome as well.

English Teaching

Lessons have continued in GARAS for our unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people. The need for these lessons is as great as ever. Our numbers have increased this year making the delivery of lessons more complex. Most learners have no English, a few are illiterate in their mother tongue and others have learnt a little English at school or along the arduous journey from home to the UK. For some education is new as they haven't been to school at home. Additionally, we have a few students with special needs which makes the planning of lessons even more interesting for us.

Learning English is essential for our young clients if they are going to be able to socialise, make friends, develop the skills to integrate and contribute as members of a new society. Lack of language can result in isolation and mental ill health. Most of our young people are distressed and frightened when they arrive in the classroom, so feeling safe and cared for is essential. Being able to smile and laugh is often a breakthrough. Asking the young people what a dog's bark sounds like in their country always produces a laugh. Dogs say "woof woof, wow wow, yap yap, bow wow, arf arf " etc depending on where they are in the world.

Besides offering English lessons two of our teachers sometimes teach Maths. Maths has its own language and for some of the boys Maths is a new subject, but they all eagerly get involved.

Classroom teaching is important, but we've done a lot of extra curricular activities too. Even with little English we had fun watching a theatre production of "Snow White" and we even joined in the chorus of "He's behind you". The tickets were kindly donated by Damian of the Dursley Drama Group, one of our ex-teachers.

In August, camping was another highlight. Many of our young people will have spent time in tents on their journey but this was a very different experience. The kids helped with chores like food preparation and the washing up. Singing round the camp fire at night was enjoyed by all as was making jam from their picked blackberries. Our boys are great at keeping themselves entertained by playing cricket, dancing etc. all in a safe environment where I'm

sure long-lasting friendships were made through English conversation.

Again this year the organisers of the Science Festival in Cheltenham donated tickets for which we were very grateful. The hands-on Science didn't always require English so we all got involved; even the teachers. Travelling on the bus was a new experience for a few. Bemused passengers heard the teachers give a running commentary pointing out sheep, semi-detached houses, bungalows, traffic lights etc!

All the young people love the Gloucester library visits. The library is something we take for granted but for them being able to choose and borrow books is exciting. One Afghan student having lived in a mountainous village explained he hadn't seen a library before and was eager to choose his books. Since our trip he's visited the Cheltenham library on his own.

Little Amal, a giant walking puppet visited Cheltenham and we went to see her. The organizers of the theatrical project describe the puppet as a 10-year-old Syrian refugee searching for her uncle. When we saw her, she'd already trekked across Europe. As well as following Amal through the streets with hundreds of other people, some of the boys met people with circus skills and tried juggling and learning how to hula hoop. Much fun was had by all.

We were invited to take part in the Community Tudor Wall Art Project in The Folk Museum. The boys learnt to paint and one learned to sew. All were willing to join in and have a go unlike I'm sure many of our 17-year-olds! Their efforts as part of the community project can be seen at the museum.

It is still difficult to get the full-time education our unaccompanied young people need, particularly if they are nearly 16 and over. Prospects Training now takes more students on their programmes for which we are thankful, but many of our young people still can't get into Further Education as there aren't enough spaces. The college doesn't accept students with little or no English so we all have to work hard to teach them as much as we can before their interviews. Even so many are bitterly disappointed when the

college doesn't take them. Personally, I long for the day when our young people can access the education they deserve and require. Our students have a thirst for learning and would be an asset to the country if they were given the learning opportunities they need and deserve.

It is a delight and privilege to be a part of these young people's journeys. We are all grateful to the teaching volunteers, Ian, Sarah, Delyth, Mercy (on placement), Penny and Lou whose strategic support and commitment ensure the success of this programme. Thank you all.

Carol Shayle
UASC Teaching Lead

Volunteering with Asylum Seekers living in Hotels

I volunteer each week with asylum seekers currently housed in a hotel in Gloucester. At this particular hotel there is no communal space, so we meet in a nearby hall. Our aim is to provide a social space for them, offering conversation, tea and coffee, help with English, fresh fruit and snacks, a listening ear and a chance to relax and maybe even laugh a bit. One of the volunteers always brings a home baked cake, made by a friend of hers specifically for the clients. The cakes are hugely appreciated and hardly a crumb is left on the plate. We play games for the last half an hour or so and it is wonderful to hear the laughter and enjoy the fun together.

We have many different nationalities who come along: regulars are from El Salvador, Honduras, Columbia, Sudan, Afghanistan, Syria, Iran. Many come once and we don't see them again. Others come every so often. We worry about them when we don't see them. Sometimes they tell us they just couldn't get out of bed that day. Since war broke out in Sudan, our Sudanese clients live in constant fear for the families they have left behind, watching footage on their phones of the fighting and desperately trying to contact their loved ones. Meanwhile it has dropped off the UK news broadcasts so we try to let them know we care about it and hope with them that their families are safe.

Many have been in the hotel for eighteen months or more. Some of them share rooms, and families have to split up into two rooms, not always even on the same floor. Because there is no space at the hotel, it is particularly hard for young children who cannot run around anywhere on site. They have to eat in their rooms as there is no dining area. Some do not feel comfortable drinking the tap water and spend a fair proportion of their weekly allowance on bottled water. Check in and check out is closely monitored, as required by Home Office. Most would just like to work: inaction is desperately draining, especially when the clients are young and fit. Some are very diligent in trying to teach themselves English from apps on their phones during the long days and evenings.

However, on the positive side, it is lovely to see the children doing well at school. They join us after school and like to join in the games. There are also some opportunities for voluntary work: some people work in charity shops, or help with bike maintenance at their children's school. Some are being supported by the churches they have joined. With GARAS' help we have been able to source some bikes for several of the asylum seekers, which means they can get around more easily. A recent piece of good news is that one of the children has been chosen by his school to be an ambassador to Forest Green Rovers.

Some of the volunteers in our group have been able to organise trips for our hotel-dwellers with GARAS' help: they have been to some woods near Stroud and made fires and cooked; they have helped with some tree planting; we took them to the Christmas tree festival in Stroud last December and then to have lunch at a nearby community café; and also to Forest Green Rovers to watch a match – they were given some kit and vouchers by the club to choose their own food; and on Christmas Day some came over to Stroud to the community lunch and social occasion where they were entertained by Tweedy the clown. Not least, several of them have been to Hill House in Amberley and enjoyed the walking and hospitality.

High points have also been the cooking that has taken place in the hall: we have shared and enjoyed meals from Sudan, Afghanistan, El Salvador and Honduras, and seen how cooking and being in charge of a kitchen is so empowering for asylum seekers who can

only eat what they are given in the hotels and for whom cooking was such an important part of their lives in their home countries.

We all have the greatest admiration for the resilience and positive attitude that the clients demonstrate, despite the hostile environment that surrounds them here. Some of them have an unshakeable faith in this country and really believe in a good future once they have been granted leave to remain. We hugely value their friendship and company and what they share with us, and look forward to our sessions with them each week.

Jude Emmet
Volunteer

Support for GARAS

"Thank you so much God bless"

GARAS benefits extraordinarily from the support and partnership we experience when we work together to support refugees and asylum seekers. This past year has been no different and has included some extraordinary feats of generosity and actions to make this even more important than ever.

Thank you to **Cheltenham Welcomes Refugees** and **Cheltenham Volunteer Teachers** who we have worked with to improve the lives of those arriving in Cheltenham and have worked through such challenging days. To **Gloucester Vineyard Church** and other local groups who have provided so much support including food, clothing and ESOL support in Gloucester. Thank you **GAYGLOS** with whom we work in partnership, both for the training you provide and for the amazing support you provide some of our most vulnerable clients.

The **Barnwood Trust** gave us the ability to support individuals struggling in different ways.

We have appreciated working with the **Ukrainian Association of Great Britain Gloucester Branch**, conveniently based just around

the corner. They have welcomed us to their Saturday morning events. Also with SURCS (Stroud Ukrainian Refugee Community Support), Ukraine Community Hub, St Briavels and Cheltenham.

As ever we are grateful to the **Friendship Cafe** and **Fairshares** who support clients in so many ways. And to **Sladebank Woods** for hosting team and clients.

And to all the places across the county who have set up ESOL provision in halls, libraries, cafes and schools.

To churches and schools, to mosques and other places of faith, to trusts and choirs and all the individuals who gave from the heart a huge thank you.

GARAS Personnel, April 2022 – March 2023

Volunteers (for the period of this report)

Delyth Allen, Annabelle Barton, Beata Bello, Colin Bookless, Tim Bonsor, Trish Butler, Malcolm Christie, Ingrid Corbett, Jean Dawes, Steven Dawson, Den Donnelly, Tom Dove, Jude Emmet, Jack Everett, Helen Forbes, Nathalie Genes, Gari Giles, David Hale, Kath Hudson, Mary Jeans, Carys John, Katie Kelly, Damian Kenny, Zoe King, Sue L'Anson, Annie Lapington, Penny Lidstone, Catherine Lillington, Caroline Marshall, Fiona McDonaugh, Liz Mitchell, Jacqui Moore, Ayat Moradi, Teresa Moutafis, Christine Murray, Lewis Owen, Richard Owen, Ian Parker-Dodd, Julie Richardson, John Roberts, Lou Rowden, Paulina Sagan, Tim Sara, Carol Shayle, Lorna Smith, Lou Spira, Rachel Stevens, Jan Stuart, Glynis Taylor, Gordon Thompson, Hege Usborne, Sarah van der Wijngaart, Anita van Rossum, Lesley Wagstaffe, Liz Whiteside, and Gareth Zimmerman.

We are very grateful for all the extraordinary work these people have put into GARAS.

Students on Placement

Carys Jones

Mercy Uhuka
Beth Walton
Yananisai Makani

Trustees

Adrian Slade – Chair
Sue Oppenheimer – Deputy Chair
Lizzie Abderrahim – Resigned September 2022
Penny Calder – resigned October 2022
Michael Gibbons
Stella Jenson – Resigned October 2022
Jess Lawson
Louise MacDonald – co-opted March 2023
Sheila Miklausic
Catherine Montgomery – co-opted October 2022
Diana Organ
John Price
Robert Simpson – co-opted March 2023
Simon Trapnell

Staff

Adele Owen – Director
Sally James – Finance Officer
Sarah Fotheringham – GEM Worker/ESHO

Advice Team

Farouq Ginwalla – Advice Supervisor – left October 2022
Rachel Cheshire – Women's Advice Worker
Hannah Fleming – Team Leader Advice and Ukraine Team
Rebecca Francis - UASC Liaison Worker
Jennie Watts – Advice Worker and Administrator

Emily Phillips – Advice Worker (previously Ukraine Team)
Julianne Holcombe – Advice Worker (previously Ukraine Team)
Antonia Brixey – Hotel Outreach Worker

Resettlement Team

Ismail Ali – VPR Team Leader
Linda Satchell – VPR Team Leader
Nancy Beach – Resettlement Worker
Leigh- Anne Evans – Resettlement Worker – left July 2022
Sumaya Ali – Resettlement Worker
James Jarvill – Resettlement Worker – left January 2023
Sophia Rowson – Resettlement Worker
Carys Jones – Resettlement Worker
Finola Jones – Resettlement Worker
Beth Walton – Resettlement Worker
Laura Callard – Resettlement Worker
Vian Alo – Resettlement Worker

Ukraine Team

Joanna Crowther – Ukrainian Worker
Radmila Faleyeva- Munns – Ukrainian Worker
Olga Merinova Michael – Ukrainian Worker

Counsellors/Psychotherapists

Jeanette Campbell-Johnston
Lindsay Baker
Audrey James
Hannah Wright
Tahira Yasmin Yasin
Alice Coles
Nicholas Rose
Agnes Grace

Fadia Courts
Fee Morris
Kate White
Claudia Weston

Interpreters include: Fadia Courts, Adil Jaifar, Muhammed Naeem, Kamal Boulkenafet, Rawan Qutteineh, Halyna Maslonyi, Naj Sherzad, Fahimeh, Malekinezhad Gennet Abraha, Ayat Moradi, Luwezo Lumakingilu, AZ Iqbal, Shakila Habibullah, Mona Besiso, Magda Shaleed.

Patrons

David Drew, Martin Horwood, The Right Revd Rachel Treweek, Bishop of Gloucester, Dame Janet Trotter, Barbara Winton and Rev Jim Caterer

In memory of our patron Barbara Winton

Our patron, Barbara Winton, sadly died in September 2022 aged 69. We were privileged to first meet Barbara in 2019 when she came to talk at our event at St Mary de Crypt celebrating GARAS 20th birthday and the 80th anniversary of the Kindertransport. Her father, Nicholas Winton, organised the evacuation from Prague of 669 mostly Jewish children on the Kindertransport to safety in England, saving them from the Holocaust.

Barbara became a shepherd for his history, speaking at events and publishing his biography *"If it's Not Impossible..." The Life of Sir Nicholas Winton*. But as she said *"Talking about my father is only useful if it impacts on people today"*. She felt that her father's story was valuable if it could give people some inspiration to do something for themselves that would help people in the world. *"It's better to do something than to do nothing"*.

She herself practised this philosophy and was a fearless campaigner for asylum seekers and refugees in her own right. Responding to the refugee crisis, she joined Lord Alfred Dubbs to campaign tirelessly for the rights of child refugees and for their safe entry to the UK. Her work with Safe Passage and compassion for refugee children was inspiring, working hard in an attempt to improve rights for children along with the aim of reuniting children already here with family members being able to come here. She was outspoken about her disgust at the British Government's policy of sending asylum-seekers to Rwanda, and described herself as *"supporting today's refugees while talking about yesterday's"*. We are proud to have had Barbara as a patron of GARAS and will sorely miss her.

Sue Oppenheimer
Vice Chair

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