



Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers

promoting the welfare of refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants in and around 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 and around Gloucestershire.
- 3. Liaising with other agencies** in and around 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 and around 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

25 years ago a group of people, about 6 (not trying to emulate Taylor Swift in numbers) gathered in a small church hall in Coney Hill to discuss what we could do to help those fleeing "conscription" into one of the many regional armies in Yugoslavia. At that time the care of asylum seekers was in the hands of the County Council, and they found themselves constrained by the regulations sent down from central government. For some reason Gloucestershire was designated as a dispersal area - which, of course, meant Gloucester! After much decision - my memory tells me it was about five minutes, it was agreed to set up an independent charity to care for these, mainly male, asylum seekers fleeing this regional conflict. The vicar's wife was elected Treasurer (although there was no money and she stayed for 20+ years) and an assisted group of people became trustees.

So we started working. The priority was to find a base in Gloucester where these guys could meet and have somewhere to go during the day. The county council then gave us a grant and we could employ two members of staff. One to run the centre and the other to give advice. We found a redundant Methodist Church in the Barton area - it had a great advantage of being in the right place and unused, it had a disadvantage in that it was a wreck with a hole in the first floor.

We set up shop, and our expectation was that within a few years, especially when the conflicts in the Yugoslav area were finished, we would close, Job Done!

We got that slightly wrong. From caring for about 40 mainly male, young men we are now caring for a couple of thousand people. Having a staff of two, we now have a staff of 25. Working on a budget of £50,000 we are now working with over one million pounds.

Over the years we have seen many changes, but always meeting and helping people who are desperate to flee persecution, discrimination, terror and despotic governments. They come in hope that they will find a safe haven and in most cases they do. The journey to this country might have been beyond most of our

imagining, and the difficulty of gaining the right to remain may be made difficult by a dysfunctional government - but nonetheless we now have many hundred of people who have passed through GARAS who are now members of our country.

And this is because of the wonderful work our staff and volunteers have done over the years. For little reward we have some wonderful people who work for GARAS and have made it the first rate organisation that is it. There are no words good enough to praise these people who dedicate themselves to help the stranger and bring them to a new home in the UK.

From a little church hall to a wonderful charity caring for so many. Let us hope that within the next 25 years we will finally finish our task of looking after some of the most vulnerable.

Adrian Slade

Director's Comments

I don't think it is possible to write the report for the year without acknowledging, yet again the significant changes that have occurred through the year. This is an area that doesn't stand still in any respect and this GARAS annual report shows that very clearly.

This report comes at the end of our first 25 years and throughout that time the reports have echoed this. Therefore within this Annual Report is a reflection of 25 years which I trust you will find is an interesting reflection, although a snap shot, of the growth and change of the work of GARAS.

As you will see reported within the Annual Report, our asylum seeking number increased over the year to reaching five hotels, (only for some of those to close during the year), we have seen more dispersal numbers arrive as more properties have come on board and we have seen a big increase on Home Office decisions being granted which has had an impact on housing requirements elsewhere. Elsewhere you will read about the work to house in Wheatridge Court and with hosts.

Elsewhere across GARAS we have seen Ukrainian guests move on from their original hosting situations, so there has been a lot of movement and housing support being provided as people settle and find more permanence.

Meanwhile 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 said goodbye to a number of staff who have moved on and welcomed new members of team.

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.

Not only do staff, volunteers and Trustees move on, so do clients. GARAS is playing its role well when clients move on and find their new places in the world. Many of our first Resettled Families are now British Citizens. We see them find job opportunities, become trained in new skills or refreshing previous ones. We celebrate with those who have the opportunity to reach new heights.

Last November I attended the graduation of a client graduating from Gloucestershire University with a Masters in Cyber Security. He was very grateful for the help he had received to get into University and remain there despite the various challenges along the way. He said on my arrival at the venue – “You promised you would be here for my graduation!” (pew – so glad I didn't miss it!)

At the back pages of our Annual Report are those who have helped in many ways including the most wonderful list of 67 volunteers who have supported our work in so many different ways from Welcoming clients into the building, teaching ESOL, fixing bicycles and so much more. Thank you, the work of GARAS is not possible without you all.

Adele Owen

“I want to thank you for the support I have always received from GARAS and especially your

help because whenever I looked for you you have been willing to help me. Thank you very much.”

Advice Work

A year at GARAS is always busy, but this year has stretched us in new ways. At its peak, we had five asylum hotels open in the county. During this time, the Home Office decided to process some of the backlog cases that had been unprocessed since they started placing people in hotels nationwide in December 2021. As a result, many people were granted status – more than we’ve ever seen before. We somehow just about managed to cope but it has been challenging.

With the growing number of both hotels and asylum dispersal accommodation in the county, we were able to apply for and secure more funding to take on two new members of staff. At the start of the year, the team comprised of myself (also managing the Ukraine Team); Rachel our Women’s Worker; Rebecca and Jennie working with UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children); Emily and Julianne giving general advice and Antonia working in the hotels, with Yana and Jude on placement as social work students. By the end of the financial year, Antonia had increased her hours and was joined by Fiona doing Outreach work in hotels, overseen by Rachel doing Women’s work; Julianne had moved on and was replaced with Abe and Kerry, working alongside Emily, with Genevieve taking the role of Student Social Worker on from Josh. Plus Sian is giving the UASC sub-team team of Rebecca and Jennie a boost as part of her PhD work.

Refugee Move On

Last year I wrote, “During the year, we supported 55 individuals and families, the majority moving on from asylum supported accommodation, a couple from asylum supported hotels.” Well, 2023-24 was a different ballgame! In quarter four alone, we worked with 56 people who had been granted refugee status. Quarter three saw 125 households granted! Over the course of the year, 264 refugee households were granted status who we worked with. It makes me feel a bit dizzy thinking about it. During this period another curveball was thrown when the Home Office, in practical terms, reduced the move-on period between someone granted

leave to remain and the date they had to leave their Home Office asylum supported accommodation, from 28 to seven days. We did some bare bones essential work, and asked for more help. Added to this, unsurprisingly the amount of move-on accommodation options for refugees in the locality did not increase so we saw a rise in rough sleeping among predominantly single males. The county council kicked into action, housing people in December. Then in January, they initiated an additional three month provision for refugees to be housed either with a host family for three months (in a similar vein to the *Homes for Ukraine* scheme) or in a refurbished former care home. That gave us huge relief to see people off the streets and be able to fill out a simple referral form rather than give out another sleeping bag.

Hannah Fleming
Lead Advice and Support Worker

“GARAS is a safe space for clients. It is also a safe space for me... thank you. The knowledge you embedded in me will stay forever. Thank you very much with the support you gave me since I set foot in GARAS.” Social work student to Hannah

Resettlement Team

Over the past year the Resettlement Team have continued to work to house and support those arriving on schemes supporting Afghan clients and a handful on the UKRS (UK Resettlement Scheme). The priority to support Afghan families is the more significant one, partly to ensure those who were already here and in unsecure accommodation are housed and partly for those still arriving on schemes who have had some level of protection in Pakistan which is now being withdrawn and people are being brought to the UK for their protection.

The majority of those arriving on Afghan schemes now are firstly placed in Barracks before being found safe and permanent accommodation elsewhere in the Country. Sometimes that might include moving within the county. As ever, we are collaborating with local authorities to find accommodation and assist with that

move-on, but also as ever the amount and availability of accommodation is the biggest issue.

Housing solutions are being sought, including LAHF (Local Authority Housing Fund) properties and MOD properties. With LAHF the local authorities are able to match funds from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (now renamed as Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) in order to purchase housing to add to the housing stock.

Simultaneously, we are continuing to welcome additional families through the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) programme. These families represent an increasingly diverse range of nationalities, although Syrians do remain a high priority.

This past year has seen a significant number of our early resettled families gaining ILR (Indefinite Leave to Remain) and others now in a position to afford and manage to become British Citizens. It is satisfying to see this positive step in people's lives.

We sadly said goodbye during the year to Laura, Sumaya, Finola, Beth and Vian and welcomed Rachel, Hanna and Stacey into the team. Each member of the team brings so much and makes such a significant difference to the work.

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 Carole and Cheryl from Gloucestershire Fire Service, as well as Daisy and Sharne from Gloucester City Council. As the year ends our work with the Fire Service as partners has come to an end and we will be working with Gloucestershire County Council HFU/HFR team and say a fond farewell to Carole and Cheryl.

As with everyone else across GARAS we are so grateful to be working with many partners who help make life a lot better for our clients, these include SevernWye who help with understanding and sorting Utility costs, Cheltenham Welcomes Refugees and Volunteer Teachers

Sadly we have lived through another year of conflict and need for people to flee and therefore the need for safe routes such as are provided through these schemes remain needed. Therefore we remain committed to continue to provide this support and enable those we work with to resettle their lives here in Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire.

Ismail Ali – UKRS Team Lead – Housing
Linda Satchell – UKRS Team Lead – Social Care

We love the work that GARAS does in the city and beyond so will always do what we can to support and cheer you all on!
– One Church

Women's Work

The role of the women's worker at GARAS has now been in place for 20 years. Unfortunately, we have not seen a reduction in the numbers of women and families seeking refuge. I continue to offer confidential, non-judgmental advice to vulnerable people with various immigration issues.

Four hotels housing asylum seeker have closed, leaving just one in Gloucester open and housing a mixture of families and single people. The closure of the hotels has come with mixed feelings and mixed consequences as some people have been moved to houses and some to other hotels across the country. Many volunteers who worked at the hotels were left bereft at the loss of friendships that they had formed.

There has been some good news. There are now more asylum houses in Gloucester and Cheltenham and we hope that this will continue and more houses will be made available across the rest of Gloucestershire. I continue to work with families to find local schools and access to health care professionals.

In February 2024 the government made changes to the Migrant Victims Domestic Abuse Concession (MVDAC) formerly called the Destitute Domestic Violence Concession (DDVC). This legislation allows victims of domestic abuse to apply for public funds and be

issued a 3 month visa with the understanding that they apply for settlement during this time.

The MVDAC extends this current provision and allows people on other visas to switch to this 3 months' recourse to public funds, voiding their existing visa. However people who do this will then not be entitled to apply for settlement and it is not clear what the way forward is for them. This is causing confusion within agencies that support victims of domestic abuse. This is further exacerbated by the near-total annihilation of legal aid.

The constant threat of being removed to Rwanda has had its toll on asylum seekers. This has been particularly hard for people from Albania. The Home Office has added Albania to the list of safe countries, which makes it difficult for people to claim asylum from there. I work with a number of women who have been sexually assaulted and trafficked from Albania, and have come to the UK to be safe. One particular woman arrived at the GARAS drop-in traumatized and terrified about being sent back to Albania and back to the gangs that exploited her. She has now settled into attending weekly counselling appointments at GARAS. She is now studying English and Sarah Fotheringham has helped her find voluntary work. She seems much happier and has a good GP at Severnside Medical Centre. We continue to work and refer families to the Family Haven which always offers a wonderfully supportive service for families with young children.

Rachel Cheshire

Women's Advice Worker

Supporting refugee and asylum seeking women during pregnancy and birth

Imagine you are alone in a hospital, confused, in labour, about to deliver your baby where no-one speaks your language, no one knows what you've been through, no face is a familiar face.

This is the reality for so many pregnant asylum seeking women who give birth to a baby in the UK. I have had the privileged opportunity

to be a birth partner for a number of vulnerable mothers at the hotels; supporting them through their pregnancy and birth. Pregnancy and birth can be daunting for any mother, and even more so for isolated asylum seeking mothers who have often suffered from traumatic experiences such as sexual abuse, bereavement, and war trauma, which puts them at risk and in desperate need. They are at higher risk of developing Postnatal depression and other birth traumas. The impact of a familiar support worker during the pregnancy, perinatal and postnatal period is significant. One lady I supported wrote 'your care and compassion made all the difference, and we are eternally grateful to you and GARAS'. How valuable is the help of a familiar support worker, and friend during a woman's vulnerability, where the beauty of birth can still be celebrated. It really does make all the difference.

Antonia Brixey

Hotel Support Work

"I want to tell you that this Monday I moved house. I stayed to live in the centre of Cheltenham. I have begun another stage of my life. I am happy because God has been good, I want to thank you for the support that I have always received from GARAS

UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children)Work

In March 2023 the Advice Team for Unaccompanied Children and Young People expanded to two people. Jennie Watts joined me – a huge relief given the high numbers of arrivals and the work supporting them as well as the social workers, support workers, foster carers, teachers, lawyers, mental health professionals and others working to try and meet their needs. In September we were also extremely lucky to be joined by Sian Pearce, Solicitor, two days a week as a volunteer for a year offering us her expertise and contacts on legal queries while also researching the experience of young people with their asylum lawyer for her PhD. We were supported by Dr Hannah Wright, Lead Child Psychologist for unaccompanied young people at GARAS and other therapists, and of course Carol Shayle and her wonderful band of volunteer

teachers providing weekly English and Maths classes for young people.

As always a fundamental part of our work has been supporting young people to access good legal advice and representation to ensure that their claims for legal protection as refugees and victims of trafficking are pursued as effectively as possible. This became increasingly difficult through the year as the impact of the Illegal Migration Act (IMA) and the Rwanda scheme increased. The Asylum claims of those young people who arrived after 7 March 2023 were not processed by the Home Office due to IMA and this, along with the increasingly aggressive statements from the Government on sending asylum seekers to Rwanda, caused enormous fear, frustration and mental health deterioration for children and young people stuck in limbo. While unaccompanied children could not be sent to Rwanda, once they reached 18 this protection evaporated. At the same time the cuts to Asylum and Immigration Legal Aid over the past decades resulted finally in a very significant loss of competent representation as lawyers and firms ceased Legal Aid practice.

We continued to work with the NHS and Social Services to get young people claiming to be under 18 taken out of the adult Home Office hotels where they felt alone and often very afraid, sharing a room or bunks with unknown adults. Subsequently they were age assessed by Social Services – the very great majority found to be indeed under 18, taken into Care and provided proper age appropriate support and accommodation.

We continued to provide a safe space for young people to come and express frustrations and distress, see a friendly face, and get help engaging with relevant professionals to resolve issues. We aim to build resilient relationships with the many dedicated social workers, support workers, teachers and others supporting these young people. In some cases however this meant referring to lawyers to assist in challenging potentially unlawful decisions by social services, the Home Office or others.

We provided English classes weekly, and many social outings. We worked with the Therapy Team to try to ensure those young people that wanted to could obtain one to one counselling, and also Dr Hannah and Dr Lucy facilitated full Sleep Days and Feel Good Days

up at the beautiful Hill House in Amberley with groups of young people of different language groups. These have been a great success and are continuing - we also had a Feel Good Day for our stalwart Foster Carers Group - which was wonderful! We provided group sessions for young people on staying safe in the UK - in collaboration with the local Police, and also sessions on the asylum process - hoping that better informed young people can stay safer and understand their options more clearly.

As always - huge thanks to our young people - who have come through extraordinarily difficult experiences but retain capacity for laughter, dignity, careful thought and friendship. It is a privilege to work with them.

Rebecca Francis
UASC Liaison Worker

"Thank you so much , God bless"

Ukraine Team

In a year marked by significant changes and challenges, the Ukraine Team has continued to play a pivotal role in supporting the Ukrainian community in Gloucestershire. With an estimated 1,500 Ukrainians in the county, our efforts have been crucial in helping them navigate the complexities of life in a new country. From providing housing assistance and visa updates to offering emotional support and access to vital grants, our work is driven by a commitment to empower and uplift this resilient community. This contribution offers an overview of our initiatives, successes, and the stories that illustrate the impact of our support throughout 2024.

Drop-ins

The primary concern of clients attending our drop-ins has been the need for independent housing. Although hosting arrangements are available until early 2025, many families are seeking independence

and stability. During these drop-ins, we have assisted clients in submitting numerous Homeseeker Plus applications. This period is marked by excitement for social housing prospects but also involves explaining housing options, including homelessness and private rent routes. Many clients, particularly single women or single mothers, struggle to enter the private rental market due to the high-income requirements of £28,000 set by agencies.

Home Visits

Occasionally, hosts and guests require support in communication, prompting us to provide home visits. Additionally, we have initiated wellbeing visits for long-term high-need clients, assisting with nursery applications, GP appointments, and benefits advice.

Winter 2023-24 Visa Updates

The first months of 2024 brought several announcements regarding Ukraine Scheme visas, including the closure of the Family Scheme route, the end of the Extension Scheme for most applicants, and stricter rules for the sponsorship route. New initiatives like E-Visas and the 18-month Sponsorship Scheme set to start later in 2024 were also introduced.

End of Family Scheme Visa and Support

With the end of the Family Visa Scheme in February 2024, we had unfortunately to discontinue the £200 Post Office vouchers scheme, which had been instrumental in bringing clients to us and supporting an otherwise underserved segment of the Ukrainian community. While active, this scheme assisted nearly 300 people by bridging the gap between their arrival and the receipt of their first pay check or Universal Credit payment.

LAHF Properties

Several Gloucestershire districts have joined the scheme to acquire LAHF (Local Authority Housing Fund) properties for their social housing stock, with many of these properties allocated to Ukrainian families. We have supported numerous families through the process of signing social housing contracts and starting their independent lives in the properties. Our clients have shown diligence and caution, often requiring reassurance and assistance in

understanding various aspects of renting, including furniture grants, utility accounts, direct debits, and the housing element of Universal Credit. This guidance has been one of the most rewarding aspects of our work, though we foresee disappointment for clients unable to secure social housing due to limited stock.

Barnwood Grants

Empowering our clients through various grant routes has been another gratifying part of our work. Many clients have received substantial support for household items and white goods. In one notable case, a client with no living family and a best friend in Japan faced worsening anxiety and depression due to job uncertainties. Through a Barnwood grant, we arranged a one-week trip to Japan, allowing her to reconnect with her friend and find renewed energy for her job search. She returned with a refreshed spirit and beautiful pictures of cherry blossoms, a testament to the positive impact of such support.

Radmila Faleyeva-Munns
Ukrainian Worker

Counselling/Psychotherapy

As we look back over 25 years of GARAS we recognised very early on that helping people who are living with the trauma of their experiences before leaving, on their journeys and the experience of living here all impacts on their emotional well being. So the first counselling support began in 2003 and has continued and grown ever since into the support of today.

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 most face to face and some on line.

However, we have now been growing the group work and have considered other ways to 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 (who left during the year), Lindsay Baker, Tahira Yasmin Yasin, Agnes Grace and Fadia Courts. However it is really important that the team work together and so they meet together regularly for supervision and reflective practice and also have a monthly business meeting to ensure waiting lists are managed and updates maintained.

We continue to train interpreters for working in therapy and so that recurred during the Autumn period over three sessions. It also provided new people to join our team of potential interpreters to assist with the work.

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.

In group work settings it has been invaluable to offer sleep sessions off site at Hill House for various client groups. This has included our UASC, but also the foster carers were able to take advantage of this. These are run by the UASC Clinical psychologist and advice workers. The days comprise psycho education about sleep and circadian rhythms, relaxation exercises including muscle relaxing, mindfulness and yoga techniques. They have a lovely lunch in a beautiful setting. Feedback is very positive and one youngster went saying he had no friends and left saying he now had many friends.

A women's group ran for ten sessions using the safe space of the Quakers Meeting House in Gloucester. Whilst participants continued to be challenged by life for the duration of the course and spoke about issues relating to insecure accommodation, the process of asylum application, appointment cancellations, a work permit being declined and conflict in close relationships, they also

shared positive experiences of learning new skills, engaging in college, feeling able to offer their support as a volunteer.

Feedback from clients who have been receiving therapy includes:

“I really like the visualisation where we found an object, this helped me a lot”

“As the only middle eastern person in the group i wondered if I would be accepted, but I felt very welcome and appreciated how you emphasised that all people and all backgrounds were welcome”

“I don’t have any family in the UK but this group feels a bit like a family”

“I feel more able to set boundaries and know my worth and don’t seem to be so worried about what others think of me”

“I’ve used some of the ‘tactics’ from the group to help me calm down when I’ve felt panicked.”

Jeanette Campbell Johnston

Lead Psychotherapist

“As the only middle eastern person in the group i wondered if I would be accepted, but I felt very welcome and appreciated how you emphasised that all people and all backgrounds were welcome”

Finance

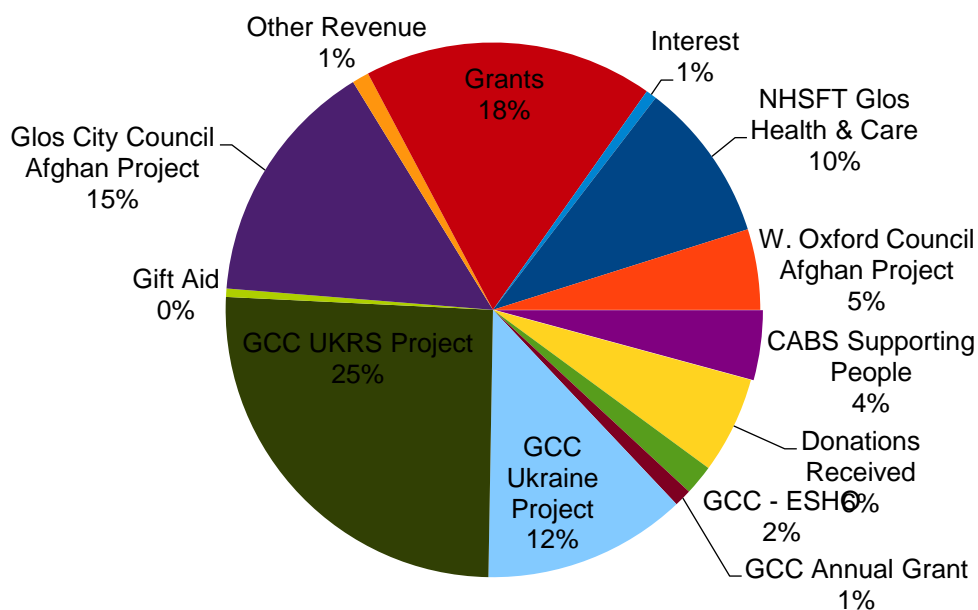
It has been another very busy year at GARAS with the turnover now exceeding £1,000,000 for two consecutive years which has consequently meant that we now require a full audit of our accounts. The audit was carried out successfully by Nicholas J Bishop of Pitt, Godden and Taylor, Chartered Accountants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

I am continuing to get more familiar with using 'Xero' our accounting packaging, which is making procedures more automated, however with the ever increasing workload I still have a little way to go but I have now managed to ditch the old spreadsheets!!

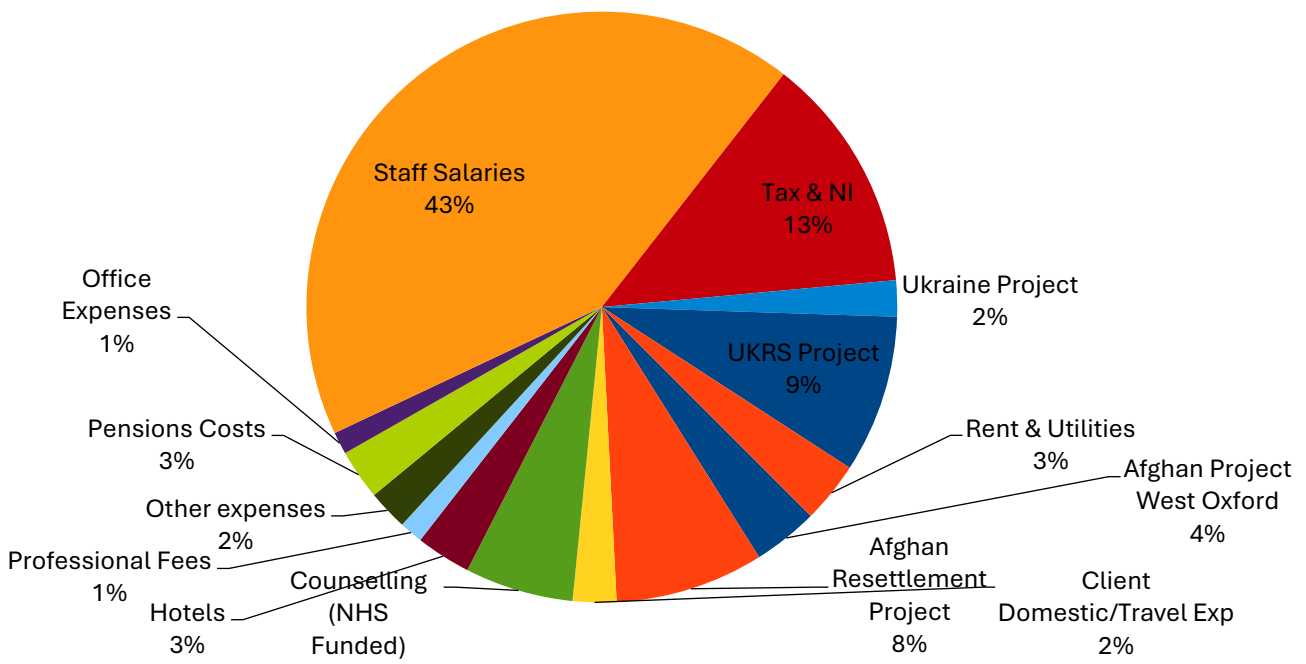
The largest percentage of GARAS's income is through the running of the Afghan, UKRS (formerly the Syrian Project) and the Ukraine project which are fully funded by the Government via the Gloucestershire County and City Councils. We receive funding from the NHS to pay for our psychotherapist fees along with any interpreting fees that are required as well as funding to support the mental health of clients through group therapy sessions such as off-site 'Sleep Days'. 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. We are extremely grateful for all the individual donations we receive from our regular givers who donate via standing orders, Stewardship or CAF Donate (the links to this funding is on the GARAS website) and to various groups who support us.

Below is a summary in the form of 2 pie charts showing GARAS income and expenditure for the year

Income 2023-2024



Expenditure 2023/2024



Sally James
Finance Officer

* For more information on the finances please see our Audited Accounts.

“I wasn't sure I would like the day but I really did. The part I liked was the breathing and the relaxing bit. Thank you for whoever made the idea, those who planned it and those who helped on the day!”

Employment Support

The Story of Sayeed, the Afghan Tailor from Stroud.

Sayeed, his wife and family, came through the Resettlement Programme about three years ago and settled in Stroud. The same old challenges rouse up to meet them, English language, Universal Credit, doctors, schools, food, understanding how the processes and procedures of a strange new country could be fathomed including the maze of employment systems, negotiating agencies and application procedures, how easy it is to disappear down a rabbit hole!

Sayeed wanted a job, but as his English was not progressing and after numerous 'rabbit hole' dead ends, I discovered he loved sewing. So we went on a journey together: All my usual sewing contacts gave him a sewing test but unfortunately he was not successful at these either, so to another plan: Start small and build your business, use what you have and be seen. We visited cafes and empty shops in his area to see if they would give him a chance, and finally persuaded Star Anis cafe in Stroud to give him a table for three days a week and make alterations while customers waited, enjoying a coffee or a light brunch. It took off. Sayeed's children gave his business a name, "Heray Alterations!" and you can now find him on Instagram and he is at the Long Table in Brimscombe.

His English has improved enormously, his confidence and sewing skills too, he is seen and heard throughout this area now and is acting as a role model for others. It takes time, but 'Heray Alterations!' has only just started. Do visit him when you come to Stroud and bring that most loved pair of jeans you need patching while you have a delicious coffee.

<https://www.instagram.com/sa.yeed9403/>

<https://www.instagram.com/p/C9zarMPM2vY/>

Sarah Fotheringham

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

Unaccompanied asylum seeking young people are still taught for two hours a week in GARAS. They are all traumatized on arrival having experienced the horrors of war, oppression and brutal journeys but a lasting change we hope starts in our classes. Their educational background varies considerably, many are illiterate in their mother tongue and others have little formal education. None of these hurdles phase the small band of teaching staff who are Delyth, Ian, Lou, Penny and Sarah. The staff make the students feel comfortable so learning can begin. Teaching them is a challenge, and so we must constantly be prepared to deal with the unplanned. A brand new student can arrive part way through a lesson and needs to be accommodated into a group. The staff all enjoy teaching the young people, they have a dignity which translates into good manners, respect and a sense of fun. It's not just ESOL (English as a second or other language) that is taught but Maths too under the watchful eye of Ian and Penny. Maths with its complex language and how questions are phrased can be tricky. Understanding the concepts is usually easier than the English wrapped around it.

Apart from teaching to write a new script and sometimes how to hold a pencil, there's much more to learn. I was particularly excited to find one of the illiterate young men had written " T... is in the box" during the coffee break after a lesson about prepositions of place. I keep a picture of his writing on my phone to remind me

about the huge smile and sense of achievement. I'd seen this smile before at a student's graduation ceremony. This is why teaching at GARAS is so rewarding.

Tim has continued teaching other students who require more input to further their studies for which we say a big thank you. His group has taken GCSE English exams for a variety of reasons. Getting our students into Further Education has never been easy and so it continues. Many students enrolled at Prospect Training for which we are thankful, a few went to Bridge Training and a few of the others to Gloucester College. Unfortunately there's never enough places and so students have attended colleges as far away as Bristol and Cirencester. This means a really early start in order to arrive on time. It would be wonderful if there were more places for full time education in Gloucester but after years of wishing for this, I don't hold out much hope. I don't believe that our country can afford to ignore and waste this potential and the moral duty is beyond question. Every young person deserves to reach their potential.

Sometimes it's possible to have a tailor made ESOL session with a small group of students whilst introducing them to a new experience. So it was on the day two students and I visited Nature in Art Museum. Both students had shown an interest in drawing; here we met a famous artist diver, painting the things he saw. It was fascinating learning about the underwater world which was all new to them.

Later with some other students at the Cheltenham Science Festival, we met a member of the women's rowing team who was about to row across the Atlantic ! One student talked about his experience of going across the English Channel in an inflatable. They discussed the safety aspects of their respective craft. The woman was tied to her boat and wore a life jacket whereas my student didn't even have a life jacket. Explaining that he was born again having survived; I thought about our students' perilous journeys.

Every year the organisers of the Science Festival kindly give us complimentary tickets. We are very grateful for these. Everyone goes by bus and they individually have to request their bus tickets. You can hear them rehearsing their requests, much to the interest of the other passengers. Once at the festival the students become competitive whilst involved with various challenges e.g. building

the landing undercarriage of a plane in the quickest time. Access to English is immaterial in these circumstances so they can all join in.

The Science Festival had them concentrating on something new and they were obviously at ease. Acting like a child again often takes months after their arrival in classes at GARAS. Looking frightened and being quiet eventually changes to a more relaxed teenager. Our trip to Gloucester Docks was one such occasion when the group broke out into spontaneous dancing. It was lovely to see them having fun on an extremely cold December day. Visits to Gloucester library always brings a smile. I'm sure British teenagers wouldn't be excited by a trip to the library! Here they all apply for a library card and then borrow books for free. Virtually all of them have never stepped inside a library. In later lessons I'm always pleased to see that the books have been changed. Of course some won't have returned to borrow books. On the same trip we visit Gloucester Museum particularly to see the dinosaurs which are always a hit.

Next year I hope to be able to say all our young people have got into full-time Further Education, but, in the meantime, I'll keep watching the news to see where the next students will be from. That said, we will do all we can to support and educate these enthusiastic, hard working and inquisitive young people we have at GARAS.

Carol Shayle
UASC Teaching Lead

Amazing teachers have also supported adult learners throughout the year in or near the various hotel sites that have been supported. This work is invaluable for the well-being and integration opportunities for all living and settling here.

GARAS over 25 years

As we celebrate 25 years of GARAS this is a good opportunity to consider and reflect on the past. So here is a brief history of GARAS over that period.

July 1999 – A group of people meet to set up GARAS because of the needs of an increasing number of asylum seekers needing help

in Gloucester. It is named Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers because it is about being active in the work we do. GARAS starts supporting people from the Trust Centre in Conduit St, Gloucester. Many of the early clients are coming from the break up of the former Yugoslavia.

2000 – GARAS employs its first two employees - Kirsten as Co-ordinator and Farouq is appointed as an Advice Worker. This is due to demand from clients needing answers to their questions. GARAS continues to also support with emergency support and regular activities including ESOL provision.

2001 – GARAS has to move premises as Sure Start are turning the Trust Centre building into a Sure Start Centre. GARAS moves to the former Labour Club on Barton St. As the Labour Club had run out of funds it had been left with half drunk glasses and cigarette butts in ash trays, so it needed a lot of cleaning and preparation. It is a great location which GARAS shares with Gymnation (Later to become Friendship Cafe). GARAS is supporting around 400 people each year.

2002 – NASS (National Asylum Support Service) for asylum seekers is being rolled out across the country, which will change the nature of Dispersal and mean that contracted companies will provide the accommodation for asylum seekers. GARAS starts a youth project supporting youngsters from families. GARAS is now registered with Quality Mark and we have our first audit to provide advice at Level 1 in Immigration and Asylum Work.

2003 – Kirsten resigns from her role and Adele is appointed Director of GARAS. GARAS starts to provide Counselling support for those living with multiple loss and trauma as a result of their experiences and what they have witnessed.

2004 – GARAS is able to employ a Finance Officer and another member of the advice team working with the new arrivals coming into ClearSprings dispersal accommodation. The expansion of the EU to add 10 more countries into the EU means a significant amount of work as we ensure that our clients from countries including Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia do not become homeless and they can safely remain with the change to their status.

2005 – We are able to employ a Women’s Worker – Rachel to join the Team. The needs of the women we were meeting and the stories we were hearing, specifically from the Democratic Republic of Congo meant this specific work was becoming more vital. This was the first year clients started to experience the British Citizenship tests and ceremonies. GARAS hosts its first social work students on Placement. GARAS is able to reconnect a couple who had been separated by war. After 6 long years they were re-united.

2006 – More changes in legislation and policy by Government. We are able to provide ESOL classes on each of our drop-in days. We are also able to provide IT classes and access to computers for clients. GARAS starts a sewing group run by a former client, a vibrant encouraging group of women supporting each other. The change in the way the housing provider was working meant we lost some funding and we had to reduce the staffing and cut some costs.

2007 – In a year that commemorated the Abolition of the Slave Trade it was becoming more and more apparent that the Trafficking of people remains a real issue in Gloucestershire. Working with two housing providers reveals some shocking conditions people are living in and we are glad when one contract is cut short. GARAS started a pilot project with Supporting People to assist those who having received their Leave to Remain need support as they move on. (Gloucester is flooded! - GARAS stays open!)

2008 – A big change this year is that GARAS starts to work more with a growing number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). We start a bridging course to help the young people prepare for life in the UK and we are starting to work closely with a newly reformed asylum team at Social Services. Many of the young people we see have found their way to Gloucestershire in very difficult and dangerous ways including under lorries. A legacy backlog project starts to work with those who have been waiting for decisions for many years. Hannah is employed to work full time with these families as an extension of the Supporting People Work. GARAS also works with Refugee Action on Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES) to assist clients into employment and training. Due to the challenges of accessing medical care the GARAS team is devastated by the death of a young man who died of a treatable condition.

2009 – Austerity cuts sees the closure early of the RIES programme! We partnered with ArtShape on an amazing project of various creative projects including the Barton Street Recordings – a recording of songs in a wide variety of languages along with a lovely animated cartoon of Barton St. The challenges this year include the introduction of Azure Cards which took the place of vouchers and the increase in those with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF).

GARAS celebrated 10 years. We also fitted a shower so we could give brand new arrivals some dignity in getting themselves clean and providing a change of clothing to them.

2010 – GARAS appointed a new UASC worker, who started to coordinate legal representation for UASC, challenging age assessments and implementing a new arrival protocol and a number of significant changes that continue to have an impact 14 years later. The impact of the austerity cuts and another change in Immigration law from Government. Our local neighbour in Bristol, Refugee Action, had to close most of its work following an 80% cut in funding. There was also the start of the impact of Legal Aid cuts.

2011 – GARAS starts to work with FareShares to provide food otherwise destined to go to landfill. Each week we can distribute food once a week that helps to eke out what we can provide too needy asylum seekers. A success in 2011 was to finally reunite a family of our client here with her children after over seven years separated. This was a long and painful battle, but worth it! GARAS also has a nurse with us part-time, working with clients living with or affected by HIV, she was able to support individuals to attend appointments and ensure they were getting their medication and maintaining their medical regimes.

2012 – It was a year that was deeply affected by rising homelessness and Welfare Reform cuts meaning those being granted refugee status now struggled to get the basics for furnishing their accommodation and coping with bare floors and essential items. A highlight was offering a Bread Making course at Harts Barn in the Forest of Dean to some clients helping some of those living with the effects of trauma. Theresa May, then Home Secretary states “the aim is to create, here in Britain, a really hostile environment for illegal immigrants”.

2013 – Following the move by Friendship Cafe to Chequers Bridge GARAS took the leap of faith to take over the use of the entire building. This freed us up to make more activities happen and to take English classes out of Adele’s office and into a bigger space.

Sadly, one of the founders of GARAS a long time friend, volunteer and Trustee, Barbara Kew died. She remains well remembered by all who knew her.

2014 – Yet another Act – the Immigration Act 2014 – comes into force, which included combining Asylum Claims with Human Rights in the initial decision making process. Growing awareness was rising into the tragedies happening in the Mediterranean. GARAS re started the Sewing Group, made possible with the use of the hall, this included learning sewing skills with sharing a meal together each week. GARAS also hosted the Hate Crime and Incident project.

2015 – This sees the launch of a whole new area of GARAS work as we started Resettlement with the Syrian Vulnerable People’s Resettlement scheme. This grew out of the tragedies of those fleeing the Civil war in Syria culminating in the death of little Alan Kurdi. GARAS was blown away by the generosity and support we received as we worked to help find and prepare homes and a welcome to those who could arrive on “Safe Routes”. Our first team members were Amina, Danijela and Ismail, a team that has grown and developed ever since.

2016 – This year sees us build on existing work and develop the Resettlement project as more families started to arrive. This had developed to over 20 families by the end of the year.

The Hate Crime work ended with GARAS and moved to Victim Support. The increasing need for therapeutic support meant that we grew our counselling team to meet this need.

2017 – GEM (Going the Extra Mile) starts at GARAS – Sarah joined the team to assist clients with employment and training needs along with helping others into volunteering opportunities. Growing the Mental Health support for all included working with our young people and providing group work to support each other through the Tree of Life exercise.

2018 – In our women’s work we were able to work with a local GP to provide workshops to Trainee GPs, midwives and health visitors. This is important work when helping to explain the realities for our client group. This was a year that sees the Windrush Scandal deny rights to those who had spent a lifetime here in the UK. It is dreadful for those affected.

2019 – Quite a year – In April GARAS moved buildings back to our first home in the Trust Centre. We also had a year of celebrations to mark our 20th Birthday. Just before we moved we had an amazing “Big Hug!” where with the BBC we attempted to create a Guinness Record for the number of people from different nationalities all in one hug! It was great. We meet Michael Zorek, an American, whose father had been welcomed to Gloucester on the Kinder Transport and lived in Alexander Road.

2020 – The year started with the amazing “Where there is Light” Exhibition at Gloucester Cathedral, the culmination of our birthday celebrations. Lights, sounds and music combined to create a wonderful experience. An experience that kept us going through the hard days of Covid the lock downs. GARAS was able to stay open throughout and work in different ways to support the various needs of those living as asylum seekers and refugees amongst us. The effects of Brexit saw us involved in helping EU friends achieve their EU Settled Status.

2021 – Covid restrictions carried on, but so do world affairs. And in August we see the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the chaotic scenes. As a result GARAS resettlement team grows and work incredibly hard to respond and meet the needs of those families who start to come to live in Gloucestershire. By Christmas we have a new role to play as the first hotels opened to support asylum seekers living in the county.

2022 – The work in hotels continues to grow with the most amazing support from volunteers and the public. We are able to call out for clothes and we are so grateful to all who sorted and picked these so we could get these out to all in the hotels. But the year leads to another crisis – this time the full scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia. Again GARAS got involved in the support of those arriving on both the Family Visa Route and the Homes for Ukraine scheme. This was

the most extraordinary mobilisation of public generosity with homes opened and guests welcomed.

2023 – All the work has continued to grow and morph to help those in need. By the autumn of 2023 we are seeing the impact of the Legacy work from the Home Office when numbers being granted positive decisions quadrupled over a very short period. This is great for those wanting to make their lives here, however there is a challenge in housing when trying to find accommodation for all in need! Especially when the Notice to Vacate period as curtailed from 28 – 7 days! Working with the Local Authorities solutions have been identified and by the end of the year handing out sleeping bags was no longer a real necessity. We also started to see the closure of hotels but an increase in dispersal housing across the county.

2024 – The year sees us celebrate 25 years. But how sad that we need to exist. We have seen more hotels close already, but a growing understanding of the needs of those seeking Sanctuary.

The Rwanda Act passes into the Statute books and is already spreading fear into already frightened people. (ps Phew gone with the new government July 2024!)

Support for GARAS

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 local groups including Gloucester Feed the Hungry and Gloucester City Mission who have provided so much support including food, clothing and others who provide 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 and **ECCTIS** who have helped make it possible to fund trainers for runners and school bags for children and in so many ways help with relatively small amounts that make huge impacts

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 and enjoy working in partnership.

As ever we are grateful to the **Friendship Cafe** and **Fairshares** who support clients in so many ways. And to **Hill House** for hosting team and clients in such a beautiful setting.

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 2023 – March 2024

Volunteers (for the period of this report)

Delyth Allen, Annabelle Barton, Beata Bello, Colin Bookless, Tim Bonsor, Trish Butler, Alison Butcher, Penny Calder, Mike Challis, Malcolm Christie, Ingrid Corbett, Jean Dawes, Steven Dawson, Den Donnelly, Tom Dove, Caroline Eardley, Jude Emmet, Jack Everett (deceased), David Frith, Martha Flood, Nathalie Genes, Laura Geraci, Mel Glass, Gari Giles, David Hale, Kath Hudson, Sue l'Anson, Mary Jeans, Cerys John, Damian Kenny, Zoe King, Dominica Kodeeswaran, Annie Lapington, Penny Lidstone, Catherine Lillington, Caroline Marshall, Catrina McDonald, Fiona McDonough, Simon Milward, Liz Mitchell, Jacqui Moore, Alan Morgan, Ayat Moradi, Teresa Moutafis, Christine Murray, Frances Neale, Lewis Owen, Richard Owen, Ian Parker-Dodd, Julie Richardson, John Roberts, Mary Robinson, Lou Rowden, Paulina Sagan, Tim Sara, Carol Shayle, Lorna Smith, Lou Spira, Elizabeth Stanley, Rachel Stevens (deceased), Jan Stuart, Glynis Taylor, Gordon Thompson, Hege Osborne, 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. The breadth of support is huge from teaching to making curtains to welcoming. Each provided with a smile and care.

We are sad to note the death of two volunteers: Jack Everett and Rachel Stevens and are so grateful for how they supported our clients. They are missed.

Students on Placement

Yanannisai Makani

Jude Sabu

Josh Taylor

Genevieve Owusu

Trustees

Adrian Slade – Chair

Sue Oppenheimer – Deputy Chair

Michael Gibbons
Louise MacDonald
Sheila Miklausic
Catherine Montgomery
John Price
Robert Simpson
Simon Trapnell
Zulekha Raja
Charles Campbell

Staff

Adele Owen – Director
Sally James – Finance Officer
Sarah Fotheringham – Employment Support

Advice Team

Rachel Cheshire – Women's Advice Worker
Hannah Fleming – Team Leader Advice and Ukraine Team
Rebecca Francis - UASC Liaison Worker
Jennie Watts – UASC Worker and Administrator
Emily Phillips – Advice Worker
Kerry Oldham – Advice Worker
Ibrahim Aljalab – Advice Worker
Julianne Holcombe – Advice Worker – left August 2023
Antonia Brixey – Hotel Outreach Worker
Fiona Cleland – Hotel Outreach Worker

Resettlement Team

Ismail Ali – VPR Team Leader
Linda Satchell – VPR Team Leader
Nancy Beach – Resettlement Worker
Sumaya Ali – Left May 2023

Sophia Rowson–Wyatt – Resettlement Worker
Debbie Fawzi – Resettlement Worker
Carys Jones – Resettlement Worker
Amelia Slater – Resettlement Worker
Rachel Southall – Resettlement Worker
Hanna Stuerckin - Resettlement Worker
Stacey Thomas – Resettlement Worker
Finola Jones – Resettlement Worker – left August 2023
Beth Walton – Resettlement Worker – Left June 2023
Laura Callard – Resettlement Worker – left June 2023
Vian Alo – Resettlement Worker – left May 2023

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
Sarah Jane Heath
Fee Morris
Kate White
Claudia Weston

Interpreters include: Adil Jaifar, Muhammed Naeem, Kamal Boulkenafet, Rawan Qutteineh, Naj Sherzad, Fahimeh, Malekinezhad Gennet Abraha, Ayat Moradi, AZ Iqbal, Shakila Habibullah, Mona Besiso, Magda Shaleed, Yunus Tuncel, Diba Nadib, Esra Tuncel, Sheri Pavdeja and Mariam Amin.

Patrons

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

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