



## 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.

## Index

Chair of Trustee's Report	3
Director's Comments	4
Advice Team including Refugee Move On	6
Resettlement Team	8
Women and Families Case Worker	9
Unaccompanied Young People's Team	12
Ukrainian Team	13
25 Events for 25 Years	17
Counselling/Psychotherapy	20
Finance	24
Employment Support	26
English Lessons for Younger Clients	27
In Memory of Lindsay Baker	29
Support for GARAS	30
GARAS Personnel	31

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 is my pleasure to present this year's Chair's Report, a period marked by both celebration and significant transition for GARAS.

This year we marked our **25th anniversary**, a milestone that allowed us to celebrate the extraordinary journey of GARAS and the many lives touched along the way. Our anniversary events not only raised vital funds but also strengthened community connections and awareness. Highlights included a thrilling **sky-dive**, a **25-mile walk around Gloucester**, the beautiful and moving book "**Stories from Our Homes**" and the planting of **25 apple trees** as a lasting symbol of hope, renewal, and rootedness in our local communities and our thousands of clients.

Alongside these celebrations, GARAS has continued to provide vital support to asylum seekers and refugees across Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire. The dedication of our staff and volunteers has ensured that our advice work, resettlement programmes, and pastoral care remain compassionate, consistent, and deeply kind, despite the wider uncertainties in the refugee and asylum system.

In **March 2025**, our Director, **Adele**, informed Trustees of her wish to retire. Adele has been an exceptional leader whose wisdom, resilience, and unfailing commitment have shaped GARAS for many years. Her decision marks a significant moment in the life of the organisation, and on behalf of the Trustees I want to express our profound gratitude. The process of preparing for a smooth leadership transition is already underway, ensuring continuity for staff and service users alike.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to the entire GARAS team – staff, volunteers, trustees, and supporters – for their remarkable work this year. As we step into the next chapter, we do so with confidence, solidarity, and a renewed sense of purpose.

Adrian Slade

## Director's Comments

The past year was a year full of activity and changes as ever. These changes were internal and as ever, impacted by the changes imposed by external forces.

For GARAS celebrating our 25 years was very special. We had an ambition at the start of the year to manage 25 events to mark the anniversary and we achieved this. Elsewhere in the Annual Report is a reflection on the year created by Louise McDonald, a trustee, who very ably lead us through the year and made amazing things happen.

For me, several events in the year stand out; in June I stood on Crickley Hill watching in wonder as clients, old and new, flew kites. It was magical. The skill and pleasure and the inevitable picnics was a joy to be part of.

In September GARAS took part in Gloucester Pride for the first time. We joined the procession through the streets of Gloucester and had a stand in Gloucester Park. Again this was a joyous occasion, we danced as we walked and had such a happy day. However, the reality for clients from the LGBTQ+ community who have fled persecution due to their identity can be very different, and this might be the very first time they have been able to see and experience such a sense of openness.

Finally, for me, standing on Robinswood Hill as we planted 25 Fruit trees was a moment of reflection and thoughtfulness. An opportunity to think of the lives that are flourishing in our midst and to reflect on those whose lives ended here in Gloucestershire.

Government Policies continue to drive change as do effects such as Legal Aid issues that have significantly reduced access to legal provision for our clients. A new government arrived in July with a new agenda yet again. We are pleased that the welcome made by Gloucestershire to refugees and asylum seekers remains strong and we were not impacted adversely by riots seen elsewhere. The work to continue to challenge prejudice and mis-information has to continue.

Over the year there have been other changes as you will read elsewhere. We have seen the use of hotels for asylum seekers reduced, but dispersal accommodation increase. 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. There has also been the start of those Ukrainians seeking to extend their initial three year Leave in the UK.

And the Resettlement Programmes continue with the bulk of the work concentrating on those from Afghanistan.

As ever 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 also had an internal restructure which increased the size of the Senior Team.

We have seen changes in the Trustee Board and welcome our new Trustees and are grateful for all the contributions made by all involved. And volunteers are amazing in all they contribute from teaching to welcoming to painting walls!

As ever, the biggest acknowledgment must always go to the clients, they remain the most inspiring group of people I have had the privilege to work with. I often describe the work of GARAS as being that of gently holding someone's hand as we assist them to move on never holding too tight and recognising their right to let go as soon as they want. We want to see lives develop, grow and flourish and that is what we see.

There is so much more to say, but this is a bittersweet report to produce as this is my last report for GARAS. This past 23 years has been the most extraordinary period in my life. I am grateful for having had the opportunity to serve as Director and to every single person who along the way has touched my life.

I wish GARAS all the very very best in the next stage of the adventure that is life here and to all those involved a very big thank you.

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 Team, including Refugee Move on Work**

The Advice Team at GARAS has been stretched and challenged, with drop in remaining extremely busy this year. Looking back, the year had extremes... At the start of the reporting period, Rishi Sunak was Prime Minister and was threatening to send asylum seekers to Rwanda, spreading fear and concern amongst our asylum seeking clients. Asylum applications were pretty much paused and people were living in limbo, some had been living in a contingency hotel for over one year. (Ideally they would only be there for four to six weeks before being moved to a shared house in the community.) Fast forward to a few weeks later, a General Election was called; a Labour government was elected, immediately scrapping the threatening Rwanda policy and shortly resuming processing asylum applications. From then on, the number of people being granted Refugee Status or Humanitarian Protection continued at a pace. Clients have been ably helped by our Advice and Support Workers Abe and Kerry, with help from social work students on placement: Genevieve, Sean, JM and Vera.

At the start of the year, a restructure meant I was able to focus on managing the Advice Team, Jennie became Office Manager, and Fiona moved from the hotel outreach team to the UASC/ youth sub team to work with Rebecca, who was also joined for a year by Sian Pearce as she helped us while researching for her PhD. This timed well with four of the five asylum hotels having closed, leaving Antonia to ably assist families in the remaining asylum hotel in Gloucester. Rachel Cheshire continued to work specifically with vulnerable women: those in the asylum system and women experiencing gender based violence and domestic abuse. She was able to 'hand' some of the asylum seeking families she was working with, to Kerry. With Emily focussing on asylum seeking men, of which we have many clients. A challenge continues to be sourcing reputable Legal Aid solicitors. When the Conservative government effectively paused asylum applications, it meant

funding streams for their cases virtually dried up (as they couldn't 'close' cases easily), with several firms we would work with ceasing their legal aid contracts and moving to private only work. This is challenging when we rely on legal aid for those in the asylum system.

Our thrice weekly drop ins have been full to bursting and we are so grateful for our wonderful team of volunteers who welcome clients in the kitchen area. Throughout the year, Sarah started a weekly 'job club' to help clients look for work, being able to help more than one client at a time. We later introduced an 'evisa club' as the government issued Biometric Residence Permits (BRPs) all ran out on 31st December 2024, regardless of when someone's leave to remain expired. We worked with clients to apply for and make the transition from BRPs to evisa. For clients who were granted status from 1st November onwards, we assisted them to try to access their online only proof of status. Due to the teething issues and delays, the Home Office thankfully extended the refugee 'move on' period from asylum supported accommodation from 28 to 56 days.

It has been excellent to refer refugee clients without dependent children to the county council to refer them to the specialist facility they commissioned in Gloucester where clients can stay for three months after receiving their move on notice. This has been going for over one year now and the CCP staff there help clients source and move into accommodation during their three month stay. Aply assisted by the district teams, most notably Tymara Atkins, Lynden Swift and Ruby Hoskin at Gloucester City Council. Clients may move into low supported accommodation through forms we fill and are sent directly to the provider (for Cheltenham clients) or to the dedicated housing officer (for Gloucester clients). It is wonderful to have a scheme that prevents homelessness and we are grateful to have this provision where it is completely lacking in the rest of the country.

Hannah Fleming  
Advice Team Manager

*To GARAS staff: we want to say a big thank you for the amazing co-operation, loyalty and humanity we experienced during our stay in Gloucester. The GARAS staff was so friendly and helpful and the facilities were top-notch. We really appreciate everything you did for us.*

## **Resettlement Team**

Over the past year the Resettlement Team has 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 brought to the UK 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. 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 Ministry of Defence 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. In the past year we have welcomed a small number from Syria and South Sudan.

Our partnership working with the local authorities is ongoing, specifically with Daisy from Gloucester City Council and Virginia from Gloucestershire County Council.

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 Severn Wye 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. We remain committed to this work and therefore if you know anyone wanting to provide rented accommodation to needy families please let us know, by contacting [admin@garas.org.uk](mailto:admin@garas.org.uk)!

Debbie Fawzi & Linda Satchell  
Resettlement Team Leaders

*Thank you for your help and sincere care for me! I am grateful to you for this. I wish you good health, joy and many pleasant events in the future.*

## **Women and Families Case Worker**

I have had another excellent year working with wonderful women and families who are claiming asylum or have difficulties with their status in the UK. I am always in awe of the people that I have the privilege to help navigate this complicated and often unjust system.

My work includes working with families who are claiming asylum and living in Gloucestershire. We have seen an increase in the number of families that are now living in houses provided by the Home Office across Gloucestershire. These families have often spent a long time living in asylum hotels and are very glad to be able to cook for themselves. We apply for school places and find extra funds for school uniforms. ECCTIS has been a great help with this and also providing money for shoes and other essential items. We work with Gloucestershire Bundles and make referrals for baby and children's clothing and toys. Referrals are made to solicitors and other professions when needed.

We have families with children who have spent over 2 years living in a hotel and have spent more than half their life in a hotel environment, never seeing their mother cook for them and never have friends from school over for a play date.

I have continued to work with the increasing number of victims of domestic violence who are not able to access a refuge because their visa does not allow them access to public funds. Most of the women who seek support from GARAS have insecure immigration status. A number are subject to the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) rule. Gloucester City Council have helped to provide a safe place for women to stay while immigration advice, and a path for the way forward, is found. If they are subject to immigration control, women who experience domestic abuse in the UK face particular barriers to finding safety and support. In particular, the NRPF rule means that women subject to immigration controls, on a variety of visa statuses, cannot access safe refuge accommodation or other support. These women expect, and frequently encounter, a climate of hostility to which the state contributes. The state, through this rule, plays an active role in factors that increase danger for women, even as it reduces their options.

There has been an increase in the number of people on sponsored work visas. These visas are essential for many migrants, but the system creates opportunities for exploitation, particularly for low-wage or less regulated jobs, such as care work, hospitality, and agriculture. If the worker leaves the job, they have 60 days to find a new sponsor or leave the country. This dependency can discourage workers from complaining about abuse, poor conditions, or unpaid wages. It gives employers disproportionate power over workers' immigration status. Some employers charge illegal recruitment fees, which is banned under UK law. The extra stress on families has caused family breakdown and there are limited options for the dependents of a "worker", and their only option may be to leave the UK. This has put women in a very precarious position when there is domestic abuse in the family.

I have been able to take up trauma training, and I attended the launch of the Asylum Mental Health and Wellbeing Team that is provided by the Home Office. Gloucester City Council organised

DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment) training and “Train the Trainer”, which in turn allowed me to train the staff at GARAS on how to use the DASH risk assessment model.

“Routes to Wellness” is a collaborative mental health initiative based in Plymouth, designed to support refugees and asylum seekers who have experienced displacement and trauma. GARAS has been able to access this project and I have referred a woman and a family, who have benefited from the extra support.

### *Case Study*

*BN is a Kurdish woman who came to the UK as the spouse of a British person.*

BN attended the drop-in in December 2024 saying that she had nowhere to stay that night. She presented as very upset and had very little English. I first contacted Language Line and requested a Sorani interpreter. BN had a copy of her passport and BRP and I was able to see that she had come to the UK 2 years ago on a spouse visa which was due to expire in 3 months. She explained that her son was 11 years old and was currently at school. She said that she was too scared to go back to the family home as her husband was going to hurt her. She explained that he often became angry and aggressive towards her. She said that she was very worried that her husband would have her deported and she would be separated from her son.

I explained to her that she would not be deported and that it is illegal for her husband to be abusive towards her. BN’s current visa allows her to work but not access public funds and therefore she cannot flee to a Women’s Refuge.

With her consent I referred her to Social Services and requested urgent accommodation. I also contacted Gloucester City Council who have an emergency budget for domestic abuse cases where the person is not able to access public funds. This housing is temporary and is hotel accommodation.

I referred her to GDASS (Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Support Services), who would be able to work with her to help her move forward on her own. They can offer counselling and support.

I referred BN to a solicitor to receive advice on how to regulate her visa and live in the UK independently from her husband. I made an application for her to receive public funds, and she can now access housing benefits. I worked with the solicitor to find suitable evidence to prove that she is a victim of domestic abuse. This can be hard to find as many of my clients are too scared to call the police due to the fear of deportation, and may not have spoken to many people about the abuse. They can also find it difficult to speak to people from a different culture.

Over the coming weeks BN and her son were able to access accommodation in a safe location. She has accessed free English lessons, her husband had not allowed her to access English classes. We have assisted her to open her first bank account and register with a doctor and dentist. I will also refer her to a family solicitor to find out her options regarding access to financial support and divorce.

Rachel Cheshire

*Thank you GARAS, for everything, For being there everytime time I need help.  
Thank you for my new life, thank you for keeping me safe.*

## **UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children) Work**

This has been a busy year for the Youth Team in GARAS Advice Service. We have welcomed a high number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people newly arrived in Gloucestershire. They come transferred directly from place of arrival under the National Transfer Scheme and looked after as Children in Care by Gloucestershire or other Local Authorities, or need our help to be

taken out of Home Office Adult accommodation by Social Services, properly age assessed and taken in to Care.

We do our best to provide a safe and friendly space where these young people can relax, feel heard, and bring their queries and concerns. We try to ensure they get proper legal advice for their asylum claims and other legal issues and have somewhere to come for help to understand the somewhat un child-friendly asylum process. We were much enriched in our work by Sian Pearce solicitor and pHd student placed in our Team for a year.

We also welcome young people to our English and Maths Class on a Thursday morning, and to other groups and information sessions, for example Safer Relationships run by Children in Care nurses, and Safer Living run by local police. We have also run day retreats for young people at the beautiful Hill House in Amberley with Child Psychologists Drs Lucy Arnsby Wilson and Hannah Wright on subjects such as Sleep, Well-being and Trauma processing.

We have continued to run our Foster Carers Support Group and other training and well-being days for our dedicated local foster carers and support workers. We have been very pleased to work closely with Gloucestershire Social Services in their transformed and re-energised state - as well as Virtual School, Children in Care nurses, several new Supported Accommodation providers, education providers and some very dedicated lawyers. Of course our young people have been hugely impacted by the continued failure to increase rates for Asylum Legal Aid (since 1996) and resulting loss of lawyers in this field; by the continued delays at the Home Office and in the Tribunals and by the riots and other elements of a hostile environment. We are enormously grateful to the lawyers, teachers, carers, social workers, counsellors, advocates and support workers with whom we join to support these young people as they rebuild their lives as much-valued members of our community.

Rebecca Francis & Fiona Cleland  
UASC Team

*"Thank you for the wonderful work you do at GARAS. I am truly grateful for all the kindness and care you showed me.*

## Ukraine Team

Life in GARAS is never dull. One day it's supporting a client with registering a birth. Another day, with another client, a death. In between, it's helping a family figure out their electricity bills, or sitting beside a teenager in a school meeting. Our year was made up of these quiet moments: ordinary on the surface, but extraordinary in what they meant to the people we walked alongside. These moments remind us that support isn't just about policies or systems; it's about being there when life happens, in all its beginnings and endings.

But behind each of these stories is a team, a team that has reshaped itself more than once this year. At the start of this year, there were four of us: three workers and a manager. Then three: two support workers, and one senior worker. For a while, we were stretched thin, covering gaps and holding the fort. Yet somehow, like a puzzle that rearranges itself, the Ukraine Team never stopped working. We adapted, we grew, we welcomed new faces and by the end of the year, we were whole again, carrying forward the same spirit with fresh energy.

In April Radmila stepped up as Senior Officer, balancing team management with client work and also taking a lead on the safeguarding team. As a member of the Senior Management Team, she joined in with running the company and SMT meetings. Millie joined us from the Resettlement Team for six months before moving on to another charity closer to home in Bath. Sean came in first as a social work student and was with us full-time by January 2025. Olya moved to the Cotswolds Council, and we welcomed Uliana, who had been working with the County's Migration Team.

So although the numbers at the beginning and end of the year matched, there were times in between when it was far from straightforward. What held us together was trust in one another, a bit of determination, and the simple fact that the work needed doing.

Even in the midst of change, we made sure to keep learning. Training was not just about adding certificates to the wall. It was about sharpening the way we support people and how we work together as a team.

This year we delved into trauma-informed approaches, de-escalation skills, benefits, domestic abuse awareness, honour-based abuse, leadership, safeguarding, and more. Some courses were practical, like lone working safety. Others were broader, like anti-misogyny workshops or immigration sessions. Each one added a piece to the puzzle. It meant that no matter what situation arrived at our door, we had the knowledge and the confidence to respond with care.

Housing was one of the biggest areas of support this year. Through the new Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF), government funding was matched locally to acquire more properties into council stock, with the majority going to Ukrainian clients in this first stage of the scheme. Alongside this, many also accessed social housing through the normal county-wide routes.

But in reality, most of our clients ended up in the private rented sector. Whatever the route, they needed a great deal of support in settling in. That meant learning how to manage a household in a new country: applying for council tax discounts, setting up utility accounts, figuring out recycling systems, and adjusting to the different culture around independent living. These are the small but essential steps that transform a house into a home.

This year we also moved into a new era of record-keeping. Lamplight replaced the stacks of paper files, and we worked hard to move everything across. The benefit was more than tidier desks. It meant we could write clearer reports and show the impact of our work with proper data behind it.

In February 2025, the new Ukraine Extension Permission Scheme came into effect. For our clients, this created yet another layer of uncertainty about their futures: where ukrainians initially had a three year visa, the new one was issued for 18 months, giving the impression of diminishing goodwill. We quickly saw the toll it was

taking. Stress and anxiety increased, and with them, struggles around mental health.

It is important to remember that our clients are already carrying the trauma of leaving a war-torn country. That trauma does not sit quietly in the background. It rises again with every news report of shelling or drone strikes back home. At the beginning of this project we wrote that the war had made Ukraine feel like one big family, where each loss was felt as if it were one's own. This year we began to see the cracks of exhaustion in that family. The resolve is still there, but alongside it runs pain and a weary sort of defiance.

When a client comes in to apply for a visa, these feelings often show themselves. Sometimes it is through silence. Sometimes through demands. Sometimes through frustration. Our role is to meet those emotions with patience and understanding, while helping with the practicalities as well. In other words, to be both steady and kind.

We are grateful for the partners who worked alongside us this year.

Young Gloucestershire appointed a Ukraine youth worker, Khrystyna, who has been vital in reaching young people who might otherwise have slipped through the cracks.

CWR supported clients in learning to drive, giving them more independence and access to work.

The Ukrainian Association collaborated with us on events, including one where Afghan and Ukrainian women cooked and ate together. A simple meal, and yet a powerful reminder of what community looks like.

Barnwood Trust provided a grant to help one client apply for a job.

The Moomin Project created a map of affordable and free food places, a practical resource with a big impact.

We also presented at the GDASS conference on domestic abuse in rural areas, joining our GARAS Women's Worker to shine a light on an often-hidden issue.

As we end this year, we do so with humility and with hope. Humility, because the challenges are many and they are heavy. Hope, because we have seen that with care and community, even the heaviest of burdens can be shared.

The Ukraine Team may be small in number, but our story this year has been one of persistence and presence. Presence in the everyday tasks, presence in moments of crisis, and presence in the quiet resilience of those we support.

Looking ahead, we take with us the skills we have learned, the partnerships we have built, and the lessons of this year. Chief among them is this: being there, truly being there, still makes all the difference.

**Radmila Faleyeva-Munns**  
**Senior Ukrainian Worker**

## 25 events for 25 years

Thinking of ways to mark GARAS' milestone birthday in 2024, we were presented with a myriad of wonderful ideas from staff, supporters, partners, patrons, clients, volunteers and trustees. We celebrated from February 2024 to January 2025 with a wide range of events and activities. We had time for reflection as well as fun and hope that along the way we have increased understanding of the challenges faced by refugees and people seeking asylum and raised awareness of the continued valuable work undertaken by GARAS' dedicated staff and committed volunteers.

We started the year with a screening of *The Old Oak*, Ken Loach's film depicting the arrival of Syrian refugees in a struggling town in the North East, which holds a message of hopefulness in communities coming together. This was hosted at the Stroud Brewery with delicious food from the Syrian pop up kitchen. A former client gave an insight into his own experience as part of the event.

An inspiring evening of song at Nature in Art performed by the excellent Rough Diamonds choir singing songs from around the world, with an opportunity to enjoy the museum and grounds along with supper was a lovely evening.

The Cathedral marked our birthday at the end of Refugee Week with Choral Evensong. The Reverend Canon Nikki Arthy preached a thought provoking sermon with staff and trustees involved in the readings and prayers. Later in the summer the Bishop generously hosted a garden party where staff, volunteers and trustees were able to meet and mingle in the sunshine.

The Everyman Theatre, Cheltenham continued to support GARAS with a production of *The Kite Runner*, the stage adaptation of Khaled Hosseini's haunting tale of friendship across cultures and continents. We had an advert in the programme and volunteers rattled buckets after the performances, with a very generous response from the audiences.

Dominic Rai, artist in residence at Discover DeCrypt, brought together Watan, a celebration of Iranian storytelling, music and dance which took place in September. A capacity audience heard Masoud Teimory's story of arriving in Bristol in 1976, aged only 15 and with little more than his Felica camera, through which he has continued to capture the world, and were entranced by the dancing of Maria Tarokh, director of dance company Scherezade , with Ala Zarei playing the setar. BBC Radio Gloucestershire gave us the opportunity to talk about the show and to highlight the work of GARAS.

The year's activities also included some amazing sponsored events, with people pushing themselves to extraordinary lengths to raise funds: Hannah and other staff members ran the Gloucester 10K, with the GARAS logo proudly displayed on their running vests;

Adele, Debbie and Antonia heroically walked 25 miles and Emily, Stacey & Paula (from Publica) completed a breathtaking 10,000ft skydive. Between them they raised around £5000 – a fantastic achievement!

The Association of Ukrainians in Gloucester hosted a *varenyky workshop* sharing lunch afterwards, welcoming women from Kenya, Iran, Botswana and other countries. The group prepared Ukrainian dumplings and ate them together, listening to each other's stories, recognising the commonality of loss of homes, separation from families and starting everything in a totally unfamiliar environment.

A member of the Ukrainian team reported: "It was moving to see two Iranian ladies who were delighted to have the opportunity to cook which they miss so much whilst staying in the hotel. I heard them talking to Ukrainian women and making plans to meet up for more workshops."

Clients took part in the Cheltenham Paint Festival and their colourful work is still brightening up one of the bridges along the Honeybourne line, as well as the back wall at GARAS.

At the end of the summer, clients were invited to a family fun day in the community garden next to GARAS, where families enjoyed a range of traditional British fete activities and entertainments organised by staff including splat the rat and a coconut shy.

We joined in a lively day of celebrations at the Tredworth Resident's Association Street Party in June. In September we had stands at both Gloucester Day and Pride. It felt important and fitting to stand alongside so many other local groups and organisations. Staff and volunteers helped out and at Pride clients and staff joined in the parade too.

The amazing arts collective Squidsoup ran an immersive installation called Submergence for a couple of weeks in August in an empty store in the Eastgate shopping Centre, bringing Where

There is Light back to the city from GARAS' 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary 5 years ago. They most generously gave two days to GARAS, and an evening, when the soundscape was changed to a special soundtrack developed by refugee organisations across the UK, addressing issues of home, hope and belonging in a beautiful and inspiring way. The footfall was incredible, with people of all ages coming to move amongst the lights or sit and contemplate, sometimes returning to this lovely haven after their shopping. The GARAS boards were displayed and volunteers were able to chat with people about their reactions to the installation, as well as the work of GARAS.

A fabulously sunny day in June saw the kite festival on Crickley Hill, inspired and funded by the Everyman Theatre and with support from Cheltenham Welcomes Refugees. Workshops with clients in the preceding months produced 100s of kites, and more were made as well as mended on the day. Numerous client families, past and present, learned from the experts (Afghans are celebrated kite flyers!) and had such fun. Lovely food was shared and musicians entertained us.

A triumph of the year and to be treasured into the future was the delightful idea from Jude Emmet that blossomed into Stories from Our Homes, a charming collection of traditional stories from 25 different countries. Generously funded by Voices Gloucester and beautifully illustrated by Zariq Hanif, a former client, the resulting book is a joy. This has led to opportunities for story-telling from the book which Jude reads with such skill.

The final event of the birthday year was the planting of the GARAS Community Orchard at Robinswood Hill. At the end of January, bathed in winter sunshine, we gathered to plant 25 trees of

different local apple varieties. Bishop Rachel, Alex McIntyre MP and Lorraine Campbell Mayor of Gloucester all spoke movingly and inspiringly about the significance of trees and the importance of putting down roots. And then, under the guidance of our friends at Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, and the support of Gloucester City Council, we planted the trees. All the trees were provided through personal sponsorship. A lasting legacy for an amazing year.

Enormous thanks to every single person and organisation along the way that made it possible.

Louise MacDonald  
Trustee

## **Counselling/Psychotherapy**

The structure of the therapy service has three distinct groups; Resettlement Team, Unaccompanied Young People and Adult asylum seekers and refugees. Following a positive away day for the entire therapy team in February, came the sudden and sad death of a much loved therapy colleague, Lindsay Baker. The end of the year also saw us say goodbye to the amazing Audrey James as she moved to other projects.

### Resettlement Team

Nicholas Rose heads up this with Agnes Grace. Nicholas seeing the majority of the men mostly from Syria and Afghanistan, and Agnes the women. They are assisted by a strong and committed team of interpreters.

Nicholas writes “A significant feature of this client cohort is the somatisation of trauma and the way in which the body ultimately suffers damage which resists treatment.”

Most of this client work is long term and ongoing due to both the extreme nature of trauma experienced and the fact that resettled status, whilst deeply appreciated, can also be accompanied by on-going high levels of distress as clients face into continuing struggles to do with adapting to culture, language and the realisation that although they have landed, they don't feel settled, and life in the UK continues to pose many challenges. High

expectations are accompanied by severe disappointments and deepening understanding of the enormity of what displacement means existentially for themselves and their families.

### Unaccompanied Young People

A number of our staff are dual trained to work with adults and young people and some are specialist workers for young ones alone. Our lead for young people, Hannah Wright, psychologist, left this year, leaving myself as Team lead to manage the UASC service. We were joined by Kieta Bennetts who made a deep impact with her excellent work.

### Adult therapy team

The remaining team keep the work going Fadia Courts qualified as a young person's therapist this year in addition to her adult training, Sarah Jane Heath brings her Gestalt vision to the team and group work skills and experience, Agnes Grace her gift with Afghan and Syrian women and Fatima her all round compassion, cultural sensitivity and generous support to women and men alike.

## **Some other insights into our work**

### Impact of housing situation

The impact of being moved at short notice from hotels as they close or out of other housing has frequently cropped up as a major concern in therapy which can throw clients back into familiar feelings of rootlessness and homelessness. With that lack of basic security, triggers to prior traumas can be exacerbated or reawakened. Some other accommodation has been opened up across the county, but dispersal to other counties can cause premature ending to therapy sessions. The impact of potential homelessness following an asylum decision can also exacerbate old memories and we know it can take time to find a permanent home.

### Group-work

Off site group work has been a useful experience for those who have attended. The focus on relaxation and self care was very well received and carers, who have had their own experience report it helps enormously in their care of their young people.

For young people we have started EMDR group work (a specialised trauma focused reprocessing technique). This is run by a former GARAS therapist and psychologist, Lucy Arnsby-Wilson.

Following the success of a women's group last year, this year has hailed the beginnings of a men's group. Here is a quote from a group attendee:

*"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"*

#### Building networks and partnerships

Growing partnerships with Children in Care (CAMHS team) along with meeting the NHS CRISIS and GRIP (recovery in psychosis) teams. Hopefully this will smooth our pathways to accessing services and create stronger collegial relationships. The *Routes to Wellness Project* has also impacted on the Therapy work, supporting clients in their well being with practical support.

The increase in anti immigrant feeling has impacted clients we have been seeing, some of those in therapy have been exposed to increasing levels of violence and racial abuse which reached a peak in the anger against the housing of refugees in other parts of the country.

Waiting for Home Office decisions remains a huge issue. Although slowly improving the wait feels intolerable especially when court cases keep getting deferred.

Young clients struggle to cope with decisions regarding their age. For example one believed he was 16, but the Local Authority assessed him as in his 20s. This meant leaving a stable foster placement and moving into adult accommodation resulting in him feeling very fearful and unsafe and many positive therapeutic gains being reversed. Fortunately he was able to move in with family members once he received a positive refugee status.

Another engaged well in therapy and in the community, including volunteering and visiting friends. He reported the benefits of attending therapy as feeling less defensive, improving sleeping patterns and reduced flashbacks. He then decided he was ready to leave therapy and focus his energies elsewhere.

For clients with inner turmoil and unresolved traumas, the weekly schedule of a therapy session provides a sense of stability and on going-ness. Having the understanding of a therapist and an interpreter who can speak your language can feel enormously reassuring. Sessions might begin with a focus on stabilising someone's condition by working on a risk assessment or crisis management plan which helps clients to identify triggers but also their protective factors and strengths. The emotional regulation forms part of this by exploring alternative coping mechanisms to self-harm, such as grounding techniques, sensory regulation, breathing exercises, and body scans. Talking and making sense together, understanding the flow of their narrative and finding a way to place that in the past, can then gradually become more resourcefully future focussed. Sometimes therapists use alternative forms of expression, such as art, movement, or voice work whilst always recognising how language forms a vital part of someone's safety along with the therapeutic alliance. The trusting relationship people build with their therapist can heal disturbed and broken relationships that frequently precede, thereby allowing them to begin to gain a sense of internal safety. The capacity to imagine a better future, renews people's hopes and dreams.

Jeanette Campbell-Johnston  
Clinical Lead Psychotherapist

*You carry their tears and their silent fears. Walking beside them through the years. Thank you for all your kindness. You offered hope with open hands even in a strange land. Many thanks for that.*

## 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!!

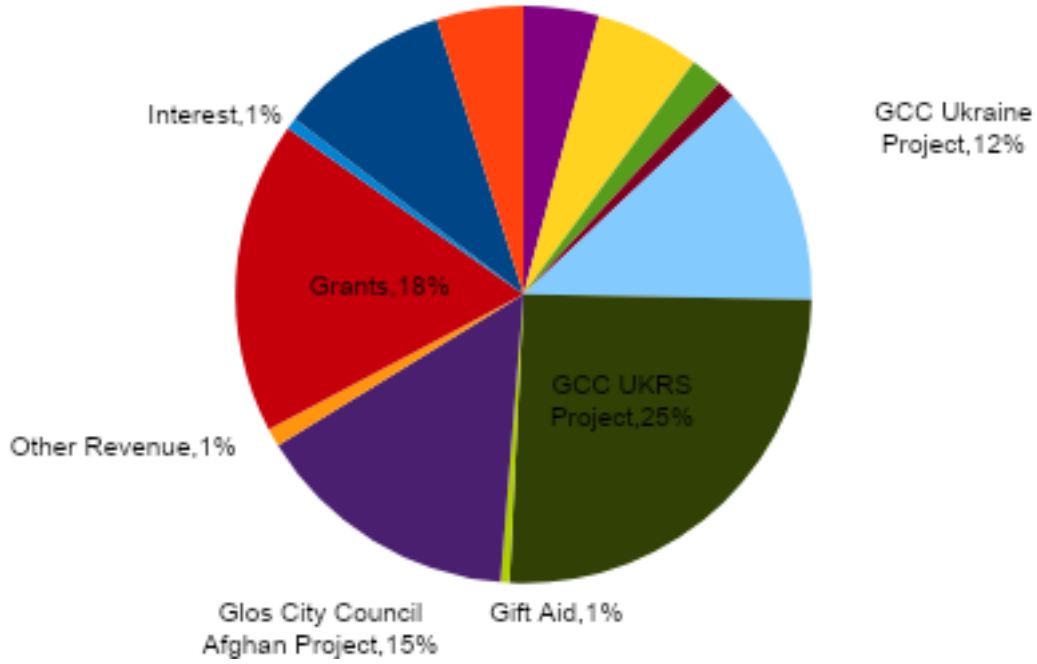
The largest percentage of GARAS's income is through the running of the Afghan, UKRS (formerly the Syrian Project) and the Ukraine project which are fully funded by the Government via the Gloucestershire County and City Councils. We receive funding from the NHS to pay for our psychotherapist fees along 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.

A summary in the form of 2 pie charts showing GARAS income and expenditure for the year can be found on the next page.

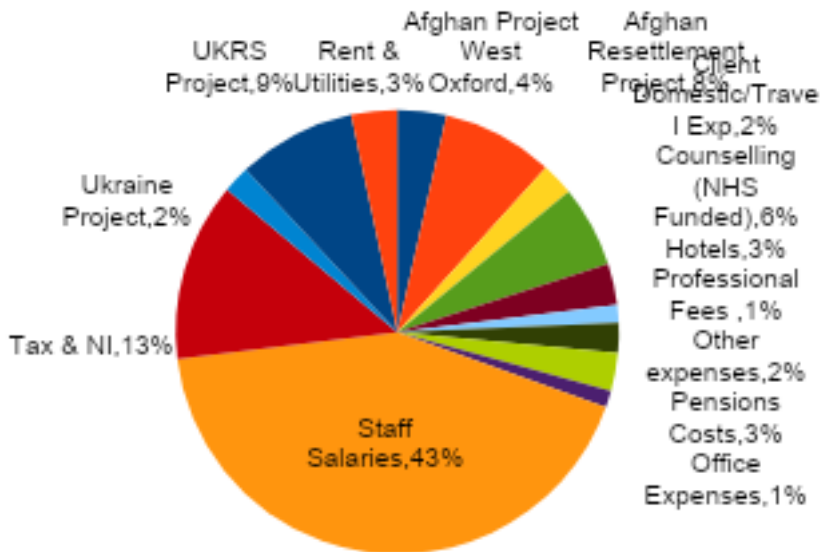
*\* For more information on the finances please see our Audited Accounts.*

### Income 2023-2024

NHSFT & Care, 10%    W. Oxford Council Afghan Project, 5%    CABS Supporting People, 4%    Donations Received, 6%    GCC - ESHO, 2%    GCC Annual Grant, 1%



### Expenditure 2023/2024



Sally James  
Finance Officer

*Thank you for all the wonderful work of GARAS. I am truly grateful for all the kindness and care you showed me.*

## **Employment Support**

Employment, Training and volunteering advice and guidance has become an integral service of GARAS and this boat still floats on. However one major change in this period was the ending of the ESHO, Employment Support Hub Officer role funding. For those uninitiated, the ESHO programme followed on from GEM - Going the Extra Mile, a 6 year European Social Funded project through a large national scheme, Building Better Opportunities fund. This all stopped as a result of Brexit and the council managed to find some bridging monies to run a much smaller programme called ESHO aligned to its Employment Hub. This funding also stopped in 2024 and GARAS was left adrift. However, an individual in the council realised the importance of the role of supporting our clients into work, finding volunteering and getting training and in April 2024 GARAS secured a further two years funding for the Employment Officer post through the councils Health Budget. So the boat moves forward again.

Finding and securing employment for our clients involves a variety of agents not least Employment Agencies offering roles in factories and warehouses; small, local, family run businesses, the NHS and care work are popular fields and of course the delivery driving roles are always very popular. Self-employment is key in many roles as employers change their working practices and we continue to work with individuals to help people understand how the UK systems work, when they need to challenge the system and how important it is to sometimes make waves and get stuck into a storm that will ultimately be worth the extra mile. There is always plenty of work to be done on the Employment boat.

**Sarah Fotheringham**  
Employment Worker

## English Lessons for Younger Clients

One of the most rewarding aspects of teaching ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) at GARAS is to be contacted by a past student desperate to share their latest good news. Recently, one student told us that they'd opened a business. Another has gained his Master's Degree and another has had a child - he's got a family again.

This year we've had a steady stream of distressed and frightened young people from the hot spots of the world, for example: Afghans, Eritreans, Iranians, Somalis, Sudanese and, Yemenis. It's heart warming to see their determination to progress in life, and in an alien situation, but before this can happen they need to feel safe and comfortable in our classrooms. 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 of a new society.

After volunteering in the local hospital one students is now doing a medical degree. This is the result of a huge amount of dedication and determination as she had no English on arrival. We thank Tim for his GCSE coaching and mentoring in order to have such a positive outcome. We are also pleased that Jonathan is teaching our teenagers Maths on a one to one basis as their needs are so diverse. Two of the students want to be nurses and will require GCSE Maths or the equivalent in order to train. For one of them this challenge is immense as she had never been to school before.

All the ESOL team - myself, Sarah, Ian, Lou, Delyth and Aisatta, not forgetting our Maths teacher, Penny - many of whom have volunteered their time in this role for years - plan their lessons in advance, but always have to be adaptable as new students can arrive unexpectedly. Some have picked up other languages on their journeys, so our classes include teenagers with varied experience and knowledge. Our dedicated and caring team endeavour to cater for them all.

Alongside our unaccompanied young people we've welcomed teenagers from the Advice and Resettlement Teams this year. These teenagers have arrived with their families and required ESOL teaching before they can join formal education establishments.

Accessing formal education is still difficult for all these young people, but has improved since enrolment has changed. GlosCol is offering places earlier than before rather than putting them on a waiting list. This cuts out the worry of not knowing if they have a place close to the Autumn term start date.

Unfortunately that still doesn't mean many get places due to their level of English but fortunately Prospects and Bridge Training can take students at different times in the year which also helps those arriving within the academic year. We thank the staff for their support over and above the classroom teaching. School education is still the preferred offer as it can provide the widest curriculum.

Outings provide many opportunities to learn. Along with the actual event conversations on the way widen learning opportunities. This can also include everyday activities. So we have visited coffee shops, the Cathedral, Gloucester Museum, Nature in Art Museum, travelled on buses, seen films, walked around Gloucester, visited a lights and sounds installation, been star gazing, attended traditional fun and games in the garden, experienced Feel Good Days at Hill House and joined the library.

Every year the Cheltenham Science Festival organisers kindly provide complimentary tickets so we were able to take a group of clients to experience this exciting event. Thanks to Sarah Cooksley from the Festival for her support. Activities this time included boxing practice and building the undercarriage of a plane in the quickest time.

One visit to Nature In Art led to a youngster volunteering, thus increasing his self confidence and confidence in his use of English

The joy of running trips rubs off onto the teaching Team who appreciate being part of the experience. Even a visit to the Cathedral with a short history can include the opportunity for silent

reflection and prayers, probably remembering family far away and at risk.

Traditional Fun and Games held in the Nelson Trust Garden next to GARAS was a new venture. Similar to a Garden Fete it showed the students another aspect of British Life. Exam boards often expect students to know about a Eurocentric life including going to the seaside, visiting the zoo, and attending a fete so this experience can be surprisingly helpful. The afternoon taught students how to Splat the Rat, ride a Penny Farthing bike and have their faces painted. Wonderful to see our students laugh and enjoy the fun. Thanks Adele for organising this.

Joining a library increases access to free learning, so important, while relaxing and laughing together at Hill House brings a whole new dimension to working together.

It's on our trips out that we often see our teenagers relax and open up about their past lives and hopes for the future. Sharing time with these dignified, thoughtful, resilient, fun loving, caring, genuine and unique teenagers has been a privilege. We wish them well for the future and thank them for what they've taught us.

Carol Shayle  
Young People's Teaching Lead

### **In Memory of Lindsay Baker**

Lindsay, a former news and radio journalist, feminist, dynamic woman, loved colleague and wonderful volunteer, had an ongoing cancer diagnosis which she kept very quiet, preferring to work for as long as she could. GARAS was the final volunteering job she let go. Lindsay had been with us for 10 years and will be deeply missed.

It is an amazing reflection on her that a few days before her death she sent an email which included:

*I have been able to carry on while making preparations and relishing my friends and family who are so kind.....*

*I'm blessed that I have been able to continue so long with GARAS and the clients whose need is so profound. Certainly puts an old lady's cancer into proportion, humbling.*

It is a measure of who she was that clients were determined to attend her funeral which was a fitting farewell to such an amazing person.

## 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.

Working with Plymouth University on the **Routes to Wellness** project was hugely beneficial this year. Amani, Ayat and Mona helped clients in mentoring and support that has been incredibly impactful.

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. We have also been able to use the premises as a base for increased youth work.

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

And to all the places across the county who have set up English 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 2024 – March 2025**

### **Volunteers (for the period of this report)**

Delyth, Annabelle, Colin, Tim, Alison, Penny, Mike, Malcolm, Jean, Steven, Den, Caroline, Jude, David, Martha, Mel, David, Sue, Mary, Cerys, Zoe, Dominica, Annie, Penny, Caroline, Catrina, Fiona, Simon, Liz, Jacqui, Alan, Teresa, Lewis, Richard, Ian, Julie, John, Lou, Tim, Carol, Lou, Jan, Gordon, Sarah, Anita, Lesley and Liz.

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.

### **Trustees**

Adrian – Chair

Sue – Vice Chair

Michael

Louise

Sheila

Catherine

John

Robert (resigned March 2025)

Simon (resigned September 2024)

Zulekha

Charles

Louise

## **Staff**

Adele – Director

Jennie – Office Manager

Ismail – Housing Manager

Sally – Finance Officer

Sarah – Employment Support

Ellen – Volunteer and Therapist Co-ordinator

## Advice Team

Hannah – Team Leader Advice

Rachel – Women's Advice Worker & Hotel Lead

Rebecca – Unaccompanied Youth Lead

Emily – Advice Worker

Kerry – Advice Worker

Ibrahim – Advice Worker

Antonia – Hotel Outreach Worker

Fiona – Unaccompanied Youth Support Worker

## Resettlement Team

Linda – Senior Refugee Resettlement Officer

Debbie – Senior Refugee Resettlement Officer

Nancy – Refugee Resettlement Officer

Sophia – Refugee Resettlement Officer

Bridie – Refugee Resettlement Officer

Joanna – Refugee Resettlement Officer (left July 2024)

Rachel – Refugee Resettlement Officer

Hanna – Refugee Resettlement Officer

Stacey – Refugee Resettlement Officer (left February 2025)

Ali – Refugee Resettlement Officer

Carys – Refugee Resettlement Support Worker

## Ukraine Team

Radmila – Senior Ukraine Worker

Olga – Ukrainian Advice and Support Worker (left September 2024)

Milly – Ukrainian Advice and Support Worker (left December 2024)

Sean – Ukrainian Advice and Support Worker

Uliana – Ukrainian Advice and Support Worker

## **Counsellors/Psychotherapists**

Jeanette

Agnes

Audrey

Fadia

Hannah

Kieta

Lindsay

Nicholas

Sarah Jane

Tahira

## **Students on Placement**

Genevieve

Sean

John Michael

Vera

Siân (placement during PhD research)

**Interpreters** include: Adil, Muhammed, Kamal, Rawan, Naj, Fahimeh, Gennet, Ayat, Iqbal, Shakila, Mona, Magda, Yunus, Diba, Esra, Sheri and Mariam

## **Patrons**

Reverend Jim Caterer

David Drew

Mark Goucher

Martin Horwood

The Right Revd Rachel Treweek, Bishop of Gloucester

Dame Janet Trotter

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