





The Grand Iftar on College Green, April 2023

Introduction

It gives me great pleasure to share this Impact Report with you. As the year comes to an end and we are very mindful of the many difficult things happening around the world, it is good to be able to look back and remember the good things that have taken place at Bridges this year.

We started 2023 by launching our new 3-year strategy, with a focus on increasing both the depth and the reach of our work. It was apt, therefore, to soon find ourselves helping to organise the biggest event we've been part of so far – a Grand Iftar event for over 500 people on College Green, in partnership with the Muslim community and Bristol Cathedral (see photo opposite). This was followed in the summer by an exhibition at Arnolfini showcasing the work of our ladies sewing groups, visited by around 25,000 people, and an invitation to be a charity partner of the Ben & Jerry's Sundaes in the City festival where we ran a kite making

workshop and had the opportunity to engage with new audiences – as well as eat a lot of free ice cream!

Those highlights formed a strong contrast with some of the challenges of the year, like watching Afghan families that we have worked with and got to know for the last couple of years having to move out of the hotels and into an uncertain future, or getting to know many amazing and courageous individuals and families who have sought sanctuary in the UK only to find themselves stuck in a backed-up system, or moved on by the Home Office with very little notice.

In the face of those challenges, our volunteers have once again been absolute heroes, giving their time, energy and skills to support people in difficult times. Thank you to all of you who have been involved!

I would also like to thank our wonderful team. We were sad to say goodbye to Asia and Anna this year, both of whom made invaluable contributions to our work. But we've also been delighted to welcome Rehana and Poppi to lead our Listening Spaces and Bristol School Linking projects respectively.

None of this would be possible without our partners and supporters, listed on p.30 of this report. A special thanks too to all the other amazing organisations we work closely with as part of BRASP (Bristol Refugee & Asylum Seekers Partnership).

Finally, thank you for your interest in and support for the work of Bridges – we couldn't do it without you!



A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Dan Green'.

Dan Green,
Managing Director

Our Team



Dan Green

Dan is the co-founder and Managing Director of Bridges.



Nic Hope

Nic is the b.friend Project Manager, providing one-to-one support for asylum seekers and refugees through our amazing volunteers.



Bushra Alsakkaf

Bushra runs our programme of Peace Feasts, bringing people together around food, music and stories.



Rehana Jaffer

Rehana is our Listening Spaces Project Manager, facilitating intentional listening and dialogue spaces.



Poppi Toon

Poppi is the Bristol Schools Linking Project Manager, bringing children together through classroom connections.



Dawn Giles

Dawn is one of our Stitching Together Project Managers, creating welcoming spaces where refugee women sew together.



Sima Gul

Sima is a Stitching Together Project Manager and provides Resettlement Support, welcoming families into Bristol.



Karen Green

Karen is a co-founder of Bridges and oversees the Resettlement Support, welcoming families who have fled war & persecution.



Amir Mazaheri

Amir is our Walk With Me Project Manager, leading group walks in nature to support refugee wellbeing.



Holly Taylor

Holly is our Task Volunteer Coordinator, providing practical support to sanctuary seekers, and also organises Bristol Welcome Events.



Susannah Gooch

Suus is our RefuLingua Project Manager, coordinating the language and culture classes.



Wala Albouti

Wala is our RefuLingua Project Assistant, helping to develop teaching materials and supporting our tutors.



Dan Morrice

Dan is our Communications Lead, telling stories of what we do and the people we work with.



Fiona Daborn

Fiona is our Grants & Trusts Fundraiser, generating income to increase our project impact.



Mark Walters

Mark is our Operations Manager, overseeing the administration, finances and internal operations of the charity.



Some of 2023's highlights

What We Do

Our Vision

A society where people of different cultures, races and faiths live well together.

Our Mission

To build kinder, fairer and more welcoming communities in Bristol, and to inspire and equip others to do the same elsewhere.



We do this by:

1. Connecting & Inspiring local people & communities in Bristol

Growing our understanding and empathy for one another, reducing fear and intolerance, and influencing action.

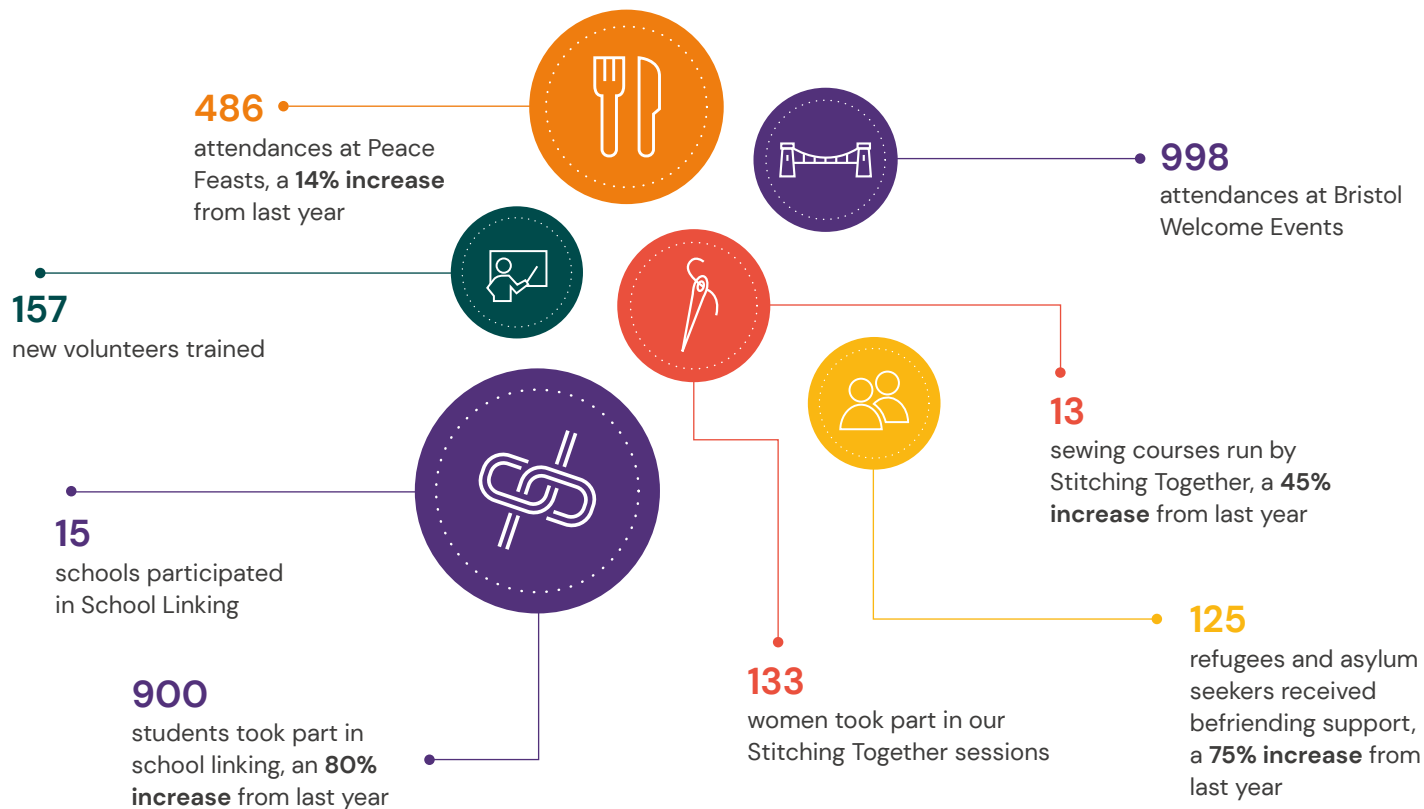
2. Welcoming & Enabling refugees & asylum seekers in Bristol

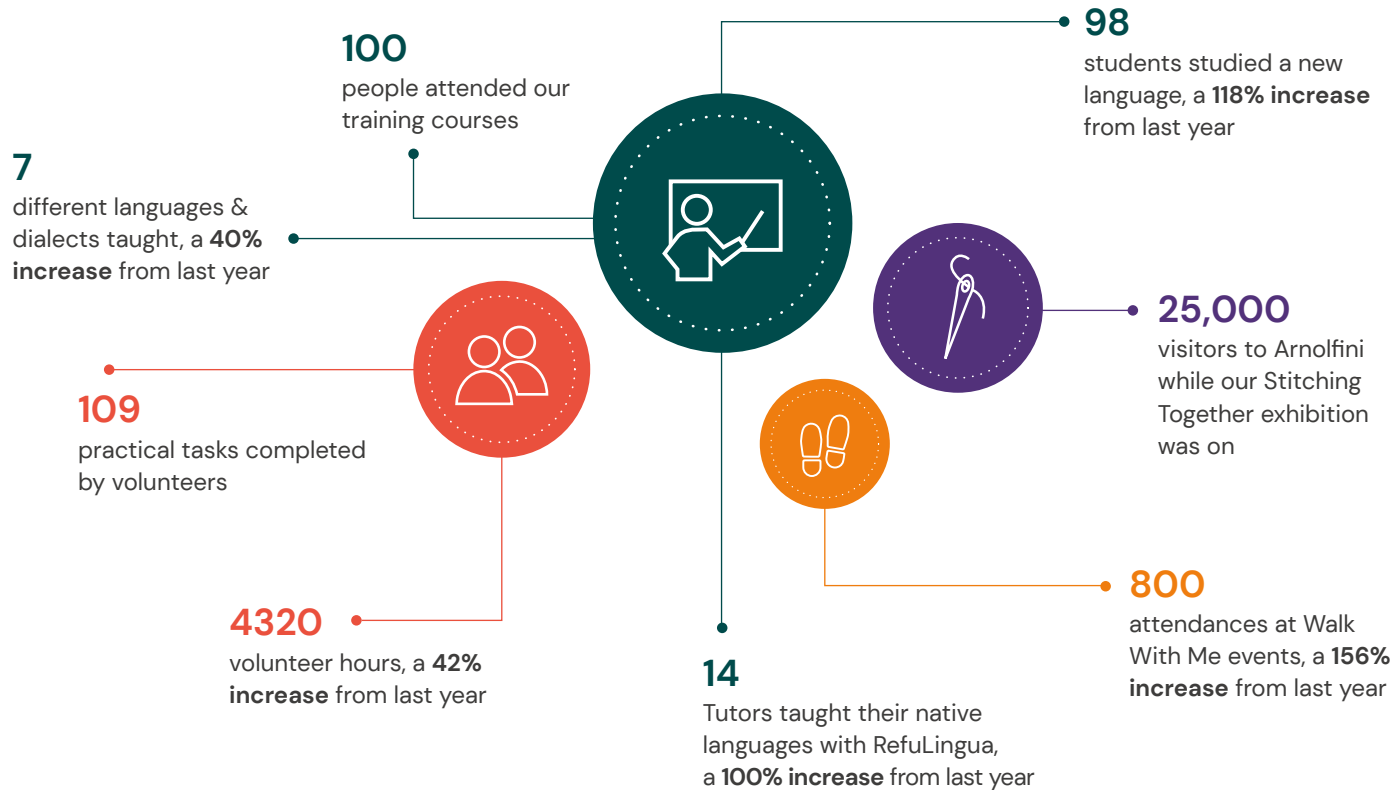
Creating a hospitable city that connects people into local communities, improves confidence and wellbeing, and enables people to use their skills.

3. Resourcing & Equipping individuals & organisations in Bristol & beyond

Helping people to understand other cultures and traditions, and to feel more hopeful and confident so they can take action to build more welcoming communities.

2023 At A Glance







75%

of participants
attended for
the first time



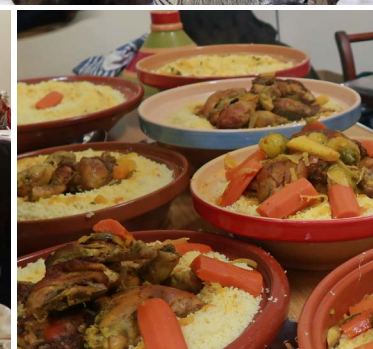
95%

of participants
said they had
met someone
from a different
culture or faith

486

people attended
7 Peace Feasts

In total, Bridges has now organised
81 Peace Feasts with a combined
attendance of over **5300 people**



Highlights from our Peace Feasts during 2023

Peace Feasts

Our Peace Feast events are at the heart of what we do at Bridges, giving people from different backgrounds the opportunity to meet and build friendships over a meal. The events help to increase people's awareness of the diverse communities in the city, their understanding of other cultures and faiths, and their sense of connection.

This year we were able to hold Peace Feasts in several new areas of the city, including Hartcliffe and St Pauls, and to celebrate the Afghan, Eritrean and Sudanese communities in the city. This enabled us to forge new partnerships and gain new insights into the needs of people across the city, as well as stand in solidarity with people who are directly impacted by some of the conflicts happening around the world.

By working with refugee catering groups and musicians, we were able to provide some welcome business and publicity for several

refugee-led startups. At all of our feasts, we were also able to invite guests from refugee and asylum seeking backgrounds through our 'Pay it Forward' ticketing system, as a way of welcoming them to the city and providing a friendly environment to make new connections. Our events included:

Hartcliffe Peace Feast – **35 people**

St Pauls Peace Feast – **51 people**

Winford Peace Feast – **120 people**

Redcatch Community Garden Peace Feast – **70 people**

Afghan Peace Feast – **80 people**

Eritrean Peace Feast – **70 people**

Sudanese Peace Feast – **60 people**

We were also pleased to support a Peace Feast organised by Ebenezer Church in Horfield, which was attended by 70 people, and several run by the Racial Justice Team at the Church of England's Education Department.

“

Amazing! Came to be inspired and learn, and I am leaving with new connections and plans to volunteer.”

“

Events like these are essential in cultivating tolerance, understanding and respect within our diverse society... thank you.”

We would like to say a special thank you to the following for supporting Peace Feast this year: Westhill Endowment, Bristol City Council's Climate & Ecological Emergency Programme (through Quartet Community Fund).

BRISTOL SCHOOL LINKING

BRINGING CHILDREN TOGETHER
THROUGH CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS



• **30**
classes from
15 schools

• Over 900
children
took part

Bristol School Linking in action

Bristol School Linking

Bristol School Linking is building relationships between children across the city. School Linking twins year 5 classes from Bristol's different communities. It encourages a sense of togetherness, challenges prejudice and stereotypes, and contributes to a more cohesive city.

Last academic year, 30 classes across 15 schools completed the Bristol School Linking programme (approximately 900 students). It was a great year filled with a variety of experiences for each link, as they explored identity with one another in creative ways. This academic year we have 14 schools signed up so far ranging from BS3 to BA3, three of which are new, equating to 22 classes and approximately 660 year 5 students. Most of those classes have already been in touch via video call, or have shared artwork or letters with one another. We plan to continue partnering with organisations such as Arnolfini,

RWA, Burges Salmon and Bristol Beacon for collaborative workshops which give linked classes the opportunity to get together and explore the questions: 'who am I?', 'who are we?', 'where do we live?' and 'how do we all live well together?'.

St Nicholas Tolentine Primary:

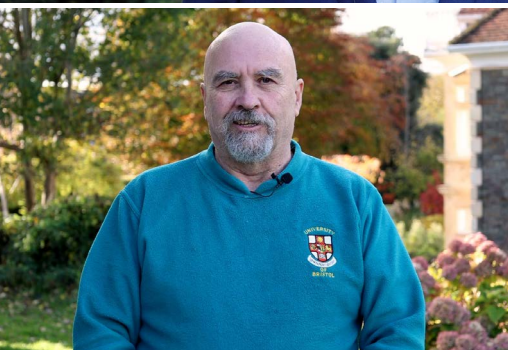
"Our linking school's trip to Arnolfini was a fantastic opportunity to meet our linked school after a build up of lessons and a call where we got to know each other. The trip was brilliantly run and well-aimed at the target age, giving them an opportunity to work together and share their interests and ways of thinking. Our schools are from different demographics, which gave both classes a chance to meet children from different backgrounds. This was particularly valuable. The staff at Arnolfini and School Linking were extremely supportive throughout and the children reflected very positively on the experience."

Avonmouth Primary:

"My class and I thoroughly enjoyed the trip to the Arnolfini. It was fantastic to have an opportunity to meet our partner class and walk around the exhibits. I thought the day was very well organised and the children enjoyed all of the activities, especially the drawing ones. Lots of the children in my class were so excited to meet children from a different school and learn about their lives. Overall, it was a fantastic experience!"

Bristol School Linking is part of The Linking Network, which has supported over 30,000 children nationally to take part in school linking.

We would like to say a special thank you to The Linking Network, The Department for Levelling up & Communities and the Department for Education, the Pears Foundation, Jack Lane Charitable Trust and Burges Salmon for supporting the project this year.



Participants in our Inter Faith Week conversations – you can watch their stories on our Youtube channel, under the Listening Spaces playlist.

Listening Spaces

Our new Listening Spaces project was launched in September. Listening spaces are events and activities that facilitate intentional listening and dialogue between people of different views, beliefs, or experiences of life. It is born out of the conviction that there are not enough ways for people who hold opposing views to meaningfully engage and to encounter one another as people.

During the first three months, project manager Rehana has been connecting with a number of community groups and organisations across the city, to explore potential partnerships and to learn from work they are already doing. This has included established activities and projects working closely with the local community, as well as ones that are keen to do so going forwards. The response to these discussions has been overwhelmingly

positive, with organisations expressing support for the idea and a willingness to contribute – we even had one Bristol Libraries events manager keen for us to host events in each of their libraries across the city!

As well as developing partnerships, this initial period has also been used for researching models and tools to help us manage and curate dialogue (including difficult conversations). We are now in the process of creating our own program to suit the local communities here in Bristol, and look forward to trialing these activities and events from January – June 2024 in order to find out what best supports the building of bridges. These are likely to include a range of larger scale events and smaller localised ones to cater to communities who are less likely to travel outside of their areas, as well as to people's different interests and needs.

As one of its areas of focus, Listening Spaces will also facilitate connection and dialogue between people of different faiths. Recognising that religious differences can create barriers for some, we will be hosting interfaith events where people can come together to share and learn from each other, challenge their assumptions, and explore more about their own faith in the process. As a first attempt at doing so, we recently took part in Inter Faith Week, and asked seven people from different faith backgrounds to share a little bit of their story with us.

We would like to say a special thank you to the following for supporting our Listening Spaces pilot project: Pears Foundation, the Jabez Trust, Woodlands Church.



71 •
people received
support during
the year



41
new partnerships
formed

32
different
countries
of origin

We would like to say a special thank you to the following for supporting Befriend this year: BrisDoc Community Fund, Comic Relief / Groundwork, Matrix Causes Fund, St Michael's Stoke Gifford, Holy Trinity Blackford.

Befriend

Befriend provides one-to-one support for some of the most isolated and vulnerable members of the refugee and asylum-seeking community in Bristol, with volunteers giving friendship, support and connection.

Befriend has again seen increased numbers of people needing support this year, reflecting the increased need for people to seek safety in this country as well as a growing recognition among referral agencies of the benefits a befriending partnership can have.

We have 32 countries represented amongst those we are helping and have volunteers from across the wider Bristol area. Our partnerships have been bike riding, planting flowers, drinking coffee, ice skating, cooking, walking in local parks and even playing golf! These activities have helped alleviate some stress and anxiety, combat loneliness, improve English, and provided opportunities to get to know local communities and settle into life here.

What people say about befriend:

“ (She’s) added something so positive in my life that I couldn’t imagine before. I sometimes think if I didn’t meet Befriend and Rachel my life would have gone very differently – I wouldn’t have made it without your help.”

What volunteers say:

“ (My time volunteering) developed my knowledge of asylum seekers, compassion and sense of social responsibility. It has made me appreciate what I have more and reflect on what’s happening globally around refugees that you may not know through the news.”

What referral agencies say:

“ I supported someone who had a long term befriender (and for them) knowing that they had this friend meant the world and it was one of the most important protective factors in their recovery.”

Tasks referred by support workers –

149

Number of new befriending partnerships formed this year –

31



Hours volunteered to support with tasks –

400

Number of refugees in active befriending partnerships this year –

54

We would like to say a special thank you to Bristol City Council for partnering with us on this project.



Resettlement Support

Throughout 2023 we have continued to work with families who have been resettled in Bristol, partnering with Bristol City Council's resettlement team to help them adjust to life in the UK and get connected in their local communities.

For the families who have moved from temporary accommodation into more permanent accommodation, we have partnered them with a volunteer befriender who will visit them once a week for up to 12 months. It's been lovely to see that many friendships have continued beyond that on an informal basis.

'My befriender and I have spent a good time the whole year. She was very helpful, she helped me to learn English and took me so many times out to show me how to find places. She was amazing, she always can visit my house anytime.'

Y from Afghanistan

"I'm very grateful to Bridges for giving me the opportunity to befriend T and to learn about the difficulties he encountered in his country of origin. It has been an enriching and rewarding experience for me. The incident I remember most was when I accompanied T to a Christingle service in Clifton and his delight at seeing so many families with their children taking part in the service. Although he was unable to participate in singing carols, I could see how much he was enjoying this totally new experience for him. Since I met T, my eyes have been opened to the difficulties that refugees encounter when they leave their country of origin and settle in a new land. I feel so privileged to have met T and to help him integrate into a new society which is so different from the one he came from. Sometimes I feel that I have learnt as much from him as he has learnt from me. It has been very much a two way interaction and a very valuable and positive experience for me."

Steve, Befriender

We have also provided resettled families with extra support from our team of wonderful 'Task Volunteers'. These volunteers visit families around the city supporting them with tasks that range from form filling to mending bikes to CV writing. Our volunteers often support the families to learn how to do the tasks themselves, helping them grow in confidence and learn new skills.

"I've appreciated meeting the individuals and families and interacting with them. I've also been glad to have a way of staying a little bit connected with some of the refugee community in Bristol, not just to live in the same city but not interact."

Steve, Task Volunteer

"The volunteers were so polite and helpful they treated us very well. We are happy with the English support."

W from Syria



Attendances at
Bristol Welcome
Events this year –

998



Highlights from our Bristol Welcome Events this year

Bristol Welcome Events

Our programme of Bristol Welcome Events helps refugees and asylum seekers connect with others, have some fun, and find some respite from the challenges of daily life.

Over the past year Bristol has continued to welcome Afghan families, as well as a number of families from other countries such as Sudan, Iraq and Syria. It has been a joy to be able to provide some fun activities for these families to participate in, including:

- Welcome Dinners for new families – **37 people**
- Watching football matches – **103 people**
- Women's gatherings at St Paul's Church, Southville – **230 people**
- Afghan Kite Making and Cooking at St Paul's Church, Southville – **40 people**
- Visits to Central Library – **8 families**
- Cooking Afghan Sweet treats for Bristol Refugee Festival, Paige Park – **5 Women**
- Visit to Barry Island Beach – **168 people**
- Visit to Noah's Ark Farm – **84 people**
- Visit to Puxton Park – **88 people**
- Visit to Tintern Abbey – **100 people**
- English conversation class with St Stephen's Church – **3-10 women with their young children every week**
- English conversation class in Resettlement bridging hotels – **3-15 men every week**
- Parkour classes – **25 people**
- The Snowman at St Georges Hall – **15 people**
- Jump Softplay – **20 people**
- Bristol City match courtesy of the Robins Foundation – **50 people**

“

It is my honour to help you during this one year that I have been in England. I am very satisfied with your efforts for us Afghans. I had a great time with you on every trip with great memories.”

A from Afghanistan

“

We did not expect that you are going to invite us to welcome our family in Bristol. It is a nice initiative we appreciate, especially my wife who is lonely here.” **M from Afghanistan**

We would like to say a special thank you to all of the organisations who have hosted or contributed towards these events this year.

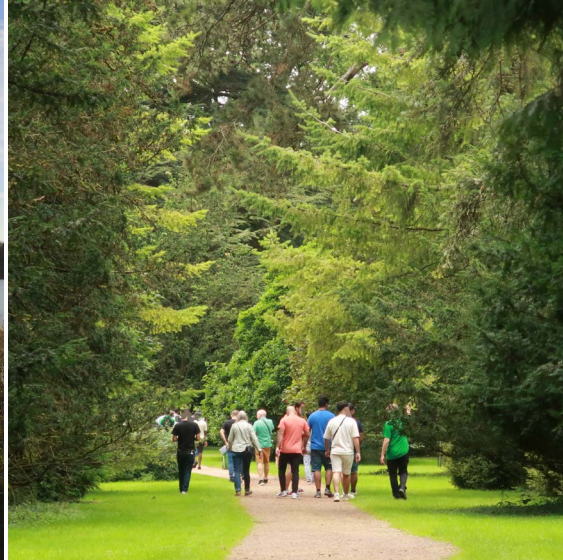


Attendances
at group
walks –
800



Group walks
we've organized –
21

Getting outdoors for some exercise together



Walk With Me

Walk With Me gives refugees and asylum seekers the opportunity to meet local people, walk in green spaces, practise their English, and enjoy some exercise together at the same time.

In 2023 we have taken over 800 participants from refugee and asylum seeking backgrounds for a walk in and around Bristol to explore new places such as parks, woodlands, beaches, lakes and forests. Volunteers joined each of the 21 walks to engage with participants and give them the opportunity to meet local people and practise their spoken English.

97% of participants have told us that the walks help them manage their mental health, and 91% of participants said it helps them manage their physical health. Participants rated the overall score of walks 9 out of 10.

“ The scenery is beautiful and amazing which helps comfort us much mentally.”

“ Going out helps return my strength. I enjoyed it a lot.”

“ 10/10 – The walk really helped me have a good day.”

“ The combination of opportunities to talk whilst walking, having refreshments and engaging in sightseeing activities really helped prompt varied conversations and maintain engagement. It was a really positive experience to speak on an informal basis with people from other countries and learn about their culture and experience of life in the UK.” **N, Volunteer**



We would like to thank the organisations and venues who have partnered with us on walks this year, including Westonbirt Arboretum, Tyntesfield National Trust, SS Great Britain, as well as Wesport, BrisDoc Community Fund, Bristol Mind, Borderlands, South Glos Community Support and Integration Hubs for resettling communities, Stay Belvedere Hotels Limited, and Wesleyan Foundation for their financial support.



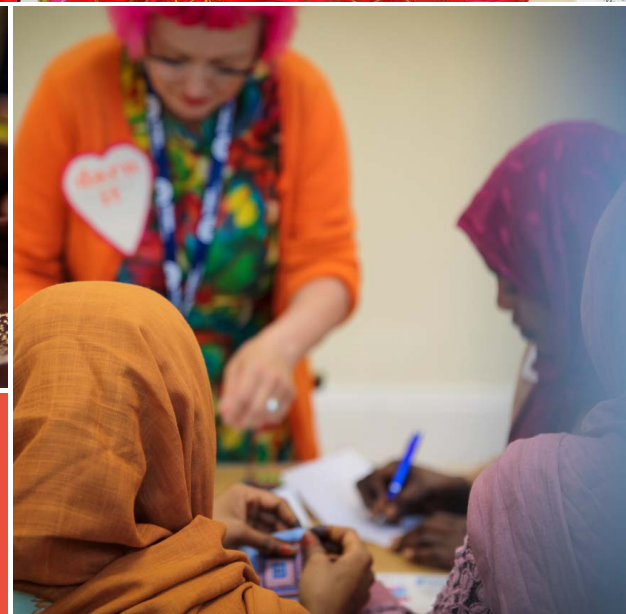
13

sewing courses run
by Stitching Together



133

women took part
in our Stitching
Together sessions



We would like to say a special thank you to The National Lottery, The Leonard Laity Stoute Charitable Trust, The Hilden Charitable Trust, The Matrix Causes Fund, Quartet Community Foundation (Bristol City Council Social Action small grants & Cost of Living grant) for kindly sponsoring the project this year.

Stitching Together

Stitching Together provides welcoming spaces for refugee and asylum seeking women in Bristol to be creative and make beautiful and useful textile based art, clothes, and homewares, while gaining confidence and making friends.

This has been a high profile year for Stitching Together, with our work being showcased at the Arnolfini gallery as part of their Threads exhibition over the summer. The exhibition was visited by thousands of people and has raised our profile significantly.

Yet again our programme has grown, thanks in part to a number of great partnerships. We have run three terms of regular dressmaking classes at Easton Family Centre, with 48 women taking part during the year. At the beginning of the year we increased our hand-sewing classes at Borderlands from one to two classes a week, meaning that 70 women have been able to take part in those. And in the autumn

term we added a new beginners hand-sewing class in Yate with a focus on new Hong Kong and Ukrainian families, delivered in partnership with Mind and Borderlands.

In addition to these regular classes, in May Tyntesfield National Trust very kindly provided a minibus and tickets to enable 4 trips to visit the Red Dress collaborative embroidery project. We took 47 women and children and were inspired to create our own collaborative piece – an embroidered cape which was shown in the Arnolfini exhibition. Our hand-sewing ladies also had the opportunity to contribute to 'Common Threads', a project which saw women in Karachi, Pakistan and Bristol and Lancaster, UK share their lives through embroidered panels. Common Threads was initiated by the artist Alice Kettle and was exhibited as part of the British Textile Biennial in Blackburn.

All of our classes are supported by a dedicated team of brilliant volunteers who give their time and skills every week to help.



“ I like the sewing course... it's very useful and for me it is like meditation.”

“ The sewing class helped to...release our stress and find ourselves on the course.”

RefuLingua



98

students have studied
a new language



7

different
languages
& dialects
taught

14

tutors have
taught lessons



We would like to say a special thank you to the following for supporting this project: The Nisbet Trust, John James Bristol Foundation, The Schroder Charitable Trust, Quartet Community Foundation (Express grant from the Wormhole Fund)

RefuLingua

RefuLingua is a grassroots language project that organises language and culture classes taught by people of refugee and migrant background. Tutors are able to develop new skills, meet new people, and gain work experience through teaching their native language.

RefuLingua has had an exciting year of new projects and opportunities, while continuing to offer our usual language and culture classes. In the Spring, we ran a series of Arabic Language Café events, including one in conjunction with Bristol Refugee Festival and one at Arnolfini. Our work with both partners continued in the Autumn when we co-organised a Celebration of the Arabic Language afternoon.

We've also worked closely with Arnolfini this year to pilot *Walk and Talk*, a programme of multilingual exhibition tours led by our

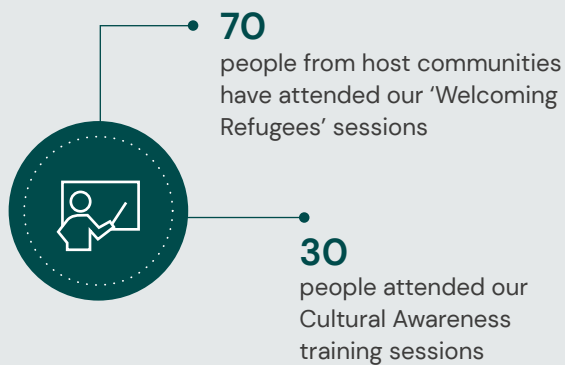
tutors in Arabic, Pashto, and Dari. Our tutors have enjoyed learning about the artworks, and in turn welcoming others to the gallery in their own language, and we are looking forward to continuing *Walk and Talk* in the new year.

Our regular group and 1:1 classes also continued to grow this year. We've run Dari Introductions and have also offered Farsi for the first time. We're currently pioneering a course of Kiswahili, and are excited to see where this leads.

Our tutors are, as ever, central to everything we do. We've welcomed Ibrahim, Ahmad, Harriet, Nazia, Arezu, Tamana, Ayham, Nabil, and Sana to our existing team this year, and would like to say a huge thank you for their combined 280 hours of teaching. Shukran, manana, tashakor, asante, mamnoon!

“ I have enjoyed the informal way that you can talk to the tutors, so that you learn about their life and their country's culture, while also learning language. This also makes it very easy to ask lots of questions and feel comfortable in the Arabic language.” – **Sudanese Arabic student**

“ It was a wonderful opportunity for me to teach the Arabic language, and through this course, I developed my skills a lot and got to know new people, and this makes me very happy.” – **Ibrahim, Syrian Arabic tutor**



Cultural Awareness Training

‘Welcome to the UK’ Training

Settling into a new country is difficult at the best of times, but for families coming out of a war zone and from a very different cultural background, getting used to life in the UK can present a major challenge. This year we have been developing our materials and preparing sessions for Afghan families arriving in Somerset (to be delivered in Jan 2024), as well as developing a course that will enable other groups to provide this training themselves.

‘Welcoming Refugees’ Training

This course enables volunteers to be more effective as they support refugees and asylum seekers. By understanding the reasons why refugees come to the UK, the challenges they face when they get here, and some principles of cross-cultural interaction, volunteers are better prepared for the role they are undertaking. In 2023 we have delivered this training course for 40 volunteers with the network of Welcome Hubs in Bristol and to 30 volunteers who are part of the Welcome Hubs in Somerset.

Cultural Awareness Training

These sessions help participants understand the role culture plays in shaping our experiences and expectations in life, as well as preparing them to relate more effectively to people from different cultural backgrounds or perspectives. This year we delivered a session for 30 participants in Nailsea, focussed on cultural awareness and particularly on understanding Afghan culture.

Thanks

We would like to say a huge thank you to all of our volunteers who have given their time and energy to support people and help make Bristol a more welcoming and inclusive city. We'd also like to say a sincere thanks to all of the individuals who generously support our work – none of this could happen without you!

And finally, we'd like to thank the following organisations for supporting our work this year with strategic, financial, or in-kind contributions:

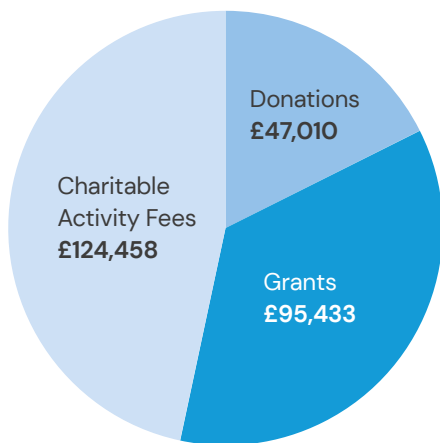
Arnolfini
Ben and Jerry's
BrisDoc Community Fund
Bristol Beacon
Bristol Climate and Ecological emergency community grant
Bristol Rotary Club
Burgess Salmon
Cardiff Vineyard Church
City Centre Culture and Events Grant Scheme
Comic Relief Groundwork
Garfield Weston Foundation
Imagine Foundation

Natwest Bristol
Quartet Community Foundation (Bristol City Council Social Action small grants)
Quartet Community Foundation (Cost of Living grant)
Quartet Community Foundation (Express grant from the Wormhole Fund)
Stay Belvedere Hotels Limited
St Michael's Stoke Gifford
St Peter's Henleaze
St Stephens & Holy Trinity Hotwells
The Clothworkers Foundation
The Hilden Charitable Trust
The Jabez Trust

The Jack Lane Charitable Trust
The John James Bristol Foundation
The Leonard Laity Stoate Charitable Trust
The Matrix Causes Fund
The National Lottery
The Nisbet Trust
The Pears Foundation
The School Linking Network
The Schroder Charitable Trust
Wesleyan Foundation
WeSport
Wessex Water Community Fund
Westhill Endowment
Woodlands Church

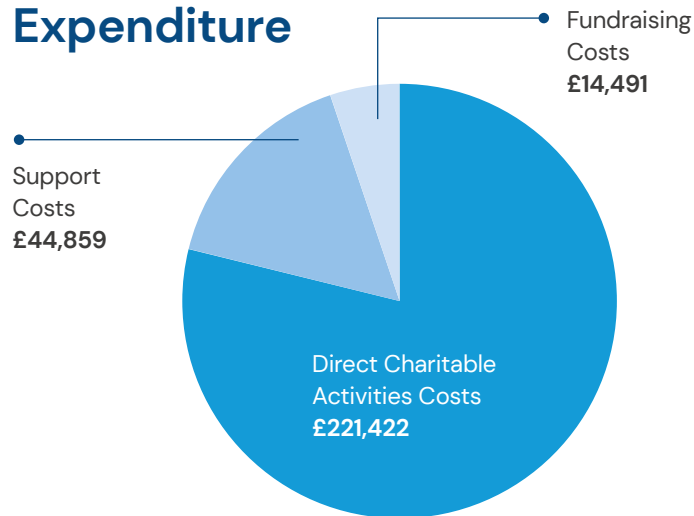
Financial Summary

Income



Total = £267,067
(£209,749 in 2021/22)

Expenditure



Total = £280,772
(£181,500 in 2021/22)

NB. These figures are from the full accounts for the year ending 31st May 2023. Grant income and charitable activity fees include funds given towards the ongoing work of our projects in 2023/24. For BFC's full accounts for 2022/23 please see www.charitycommission.gov.uk



Bridges
for Communities

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Join Us

We would love you to join us in building kinder, fairer and more welcoming communities. Here are some of the ways you can do that:

Make a donation –

bridgesforcommunities.com/donate

Fundraise for us –

bridgesforcommunities.com/fundraise

Partner with us –

bridgesforcommunities.com/partner

Volunteer –

bridgesforcommunities.com/volunteer

Come along to an event –

bridgesforcommunities.com/events

Spread the word –

follow us on social media and share our work