

Bristol Refugee Rights



Impact Report

2023-2024

bristolrefugeerights.org





Introduction

Cyril Babeev Chair of Trustees

During 2023–2024, we supported 1,739 people, with 92% of members rating our services as “Very Good.” We continued our collaboration with BRASP partners and secured new funding to sustain the vital work of this strategic alliance. In the same year, BRR experienced significant changes, including a CEO transition, governance restructuring, and notable developments in the national refugee and asylum seeker landscape.

I am delighted to share that in March 2024, Danielle Johnson became BRR’s new CEO. Danielle is a distinguished leader in the refugee and asylum seeker sector, with decades of experience. She previously served as the Head of Integration and Refugee and Migrant Portfolio at Groundwork and most recently as the Refugee, Migrant, and Asylum Seeker Lead for the London Borough of Hackney.

We have also been fortunate to have new staff and trustees join us in 2023 and 2024. I welcome them all warmly!



Danielle Johnson CEO

I am so delighted to be joining an organisation which makes such an impact on people's lives and with such a committed team of staff and volunteers. Bristol Refugee Rights has delivered against the 5 goals of the 2022–2027 strategic plan in a meaningful and innovative way, including providing effective services, influencing system change, working in partnership, empowering people with lived experience and ensuring staff and organisational wellbeing and resilience.

Alongside the many impressive numbers you'll read in this report, what stands out is how these services have been designed in response to members' needs. Bristol Refugee Rights takes pride in including the experiences and voices of members at all levels of decision making, from service design to board level; with 42% of the board trustees having lived experience.

Behind every number is someone's life, a story of change, a positive experience of empowerment. Bristol Refugee Rights has created a community which has changed the lives of so many people, including those who are under-represented and marginalised – from housing support to immigration advice and creating a warm welcome for all new arrivals.

The staff and volunteer team are committed, working with members to reach outcomes against all odds. Against a background of increasing political and media hostility, people who came to the UK to see sanctuary are navigating systemic injustice, including the Rwanda Plan, the Illegal Migration Act, and a large reduction in legal aid, all of which increase the challenges to delivering effective services. Despite these barriers, this report outlines the many achievements and impressive impact staff and volunteers have achieved to uphold the rights of our members.

As a CEO, I'm proud to work here.



Our Members

We call our service-users 'members' as a more empowering, equal term.

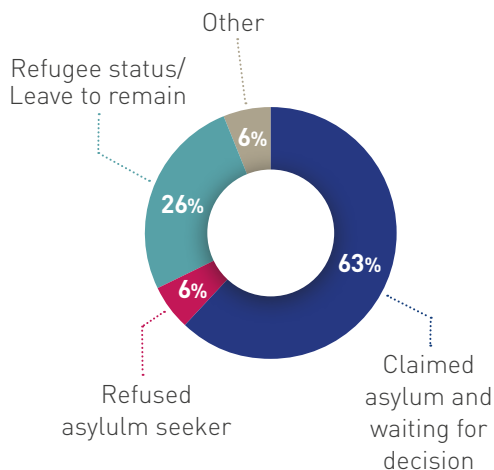
Our Vision A society where refugees, asylum seekers and migrants are welcomed, feel safe, live free of poverty and are able to positively build their lives. A society where everyone's rights and entitlements are respected.

Nationality Our Members came from over 65 different countries, speaking more than 35 languages. Their numbers map global human rights abuses: Taliban rule in Afghanistan, extreme repression in Iran, violent civil war in Sudan, increasing political persecution in Turkey. Between them, Afghanistan, Iran, Sudan and Iraq made up 46% of our Members.



Immigration status

The percentage of our members waiting for an initial decision on their asylum claim has increased year on year. This reflects a backlog in the asylum system which has built up due to the Home Office not making enough decisions. People are waiting years in hotel rooms and disused barracks, uncertain about their future, unable to start a new life and suffering from the effects of isolation, deskilling and poverty.

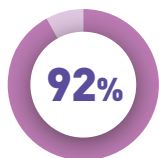


Member Survey

Each year, we ask our members to complete a survey. It is an opportunity for them to tell us how they are doing, and to let us know how we're doing at meeting their needs. The answers help us adapt services.

The survey was conducted with members from October 2023 to April 2024 and showed:

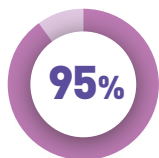
Overall



of members
are happy with
BRR services

“BRR is like a second family to me. They help us when we need it most”

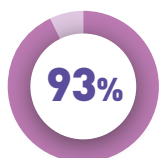
Strong Sense of Community



tell us they feel more
welcome in Bristol
as a result of BRR

“I love it here. The food is delicious, and I enjoy meeting people on Thursdays”

Improved Access to Support



understand and
feel confident
to ask for
their rights

“They are very good, they help us, every time we ask for help we get it so I just want to thank them”

Emotional Wellbeing



tell us that BRR
has helped them
to feel safe

“I felt very scared before, but I'm glad I can come to BRR. They care for me”

Services for people seeking asylum and refugees

Strategic Goal 1: Ensure services are impactful, accessible and designed to meet our members' needs.

Welcome Centre

Weekly drop-ins, open to all asylum seekers; a hub of social and community support where people can build connections, learn, volunteer, play games, make art and access support.

1,113 visited our drop-in
2023-2024



feel less isolated
due to attending
our drop-in

- We served **more than 4,000** delicious hot meals
- We provided **over 500** free haircuts
- We delivered more than **1,200** helpdesk sessions, enabling access to services and support at BRR and around the city

“The people are very good, very helpful. I love what they do, everybody comes and they’re happy, you can see that”

Crèche

We run the only free crèche in the region for asylum seeking families.

96 crèche sessions
at BRR

166 parents supported by
our Early Years team

For Jannah, a space in our crèche for her son meant she could attend a group for people experiencing PTSD. She told us *“It gave me a break without him. It was good to have that support as a single parent”*. Her son has Autism and she told us how in the long term, attending the crèche had helped him adjust: *“It helped my child’s settlement, it was very helpful for him to be able to stay without getting anxious. It helped [him] be confident around other kids and adults.”*

Learning and Groups

Learning is vital for well-being and for building a new life in a new country.

6 different levels of English classes and maths and wellbeing sessions

309 people joined our classes

After attending our classes:



of members say their English is better



of members say they feel better prepared to get a job or go into education



of members say they feel more connected to other people or have made new friends

“When I came to Bristol Refugee Rights, I couldn’t speak anything – I could write, but couldn’t respond when asked a question because I didn’t have enough confidence – when I went to BRR they helped me to open my mouth and speak” Azeb even gave a classroom presentation about her views on technological change

Outreach in hotels

Working in hotels ensures support for those who need it.

192 visits to hotels

700 individuals supported, plus their families

Asylum Guides

Asylum Guides are volunteers with lived experience of the asylum system, sharing their knowledge to help others understand and prepare, building legal literacy, confidence and avoiding crises.

5 languages used to deliver Asylum Guides

145 members given information to navigate the asylum system

“I thought I knew lot of things about my situation but the session was an eye opener” Member

Advice Service

Our Advice Service supported **872** people seeking asylum, helping them navigate a complex system, to access services, and exercise their rights.

471 members received advice around how to access legal representation

143 members accessed additional advice aimed at preventing destitution

434 members received advice around their rights to safe and appropriate accommodation and financial support



of members understand and feel confident to ask for their rights

Before coming to BRR, Aariz was living in unsafe conditions with her children. She told us *"I was really scared, distressed, nervous, frightened. I was thinking if anything happened to my kids, I would end my life."* but after support from our advice team *"I finally found safety, I felt at peace, any help I needed, there was a way of getting it."*

Specialist Services

Delivering in depth casework and tailored support for groups with specific needs.

Project CLEAR supports some of the most at risk asylum seekers experiencing multiple, complex barriers to accessing support, including those with serious physical and mental health issues, drug and alcohol misuse, long periods of street homelessness and experiences of domestic abuse.


In depth casework with **17** individuals resulted in:

13 people now live in safe accommodation

10 engaged in mental health support

15 people now have an immigration solicitor who is progressing their case, the remaining 2 have been referred and are waiting

5 Of these, 5 people have now been granted leave to remain



Our pioneering **Young People's Immigration Project** offers support to migrant children and young people:

60 children, either homeless or in unsafe accommodation were supported into safe accommodation

50 young people supported to challenge the age assigned them by the HomeOffice:



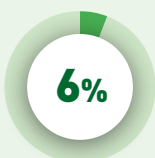
successfully established they are children



did not pursue due to stress and other barriers but maintain they are children



ongoing



Only 6% accepted that they were over 18

Pride Without Borders runs a social support session for LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers as well as doing wrap-around casework to support members.

27

PWB social space sessions, 85 members engaging with the project

34

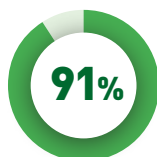
members have had successful asylum claims, PWB providing supporting evidence

32

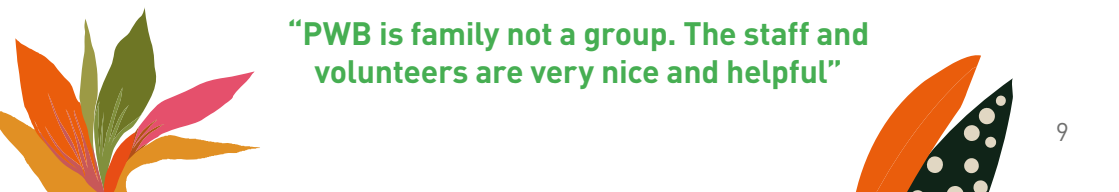
members of PWB attended Bristol Pride to celebrate!



of PWB members feel part of a community



feel they have a better understanding of their rights and where to find help



“PWB is family not a group. The staff and volunteers are very nice and helpful”



Experts by Experience

Strategic Goal 2: Empower and work in solidarity with people with Lived Experience

We work with Experts by Experience* at all levels of the organisation, including members, volunteers, staff and trustees. In 2023/2024:

10 out of our 33 staff were experts by experience

4 out of 9 trustees were experts by experience

Expert by Experience Ezzeldin Ali

"I arrived in the UK alone in October 2022. With no money or anyone to turn to, I felt trapped in a situation that mirrored a Sudanese open prison. I couldn't work (no right to work), or study for the first six months.

"Then, I found a beacon of hope in BRR. They offered me a chance to volunteer as an asylum guide. They trained me, provided resources, and empowered me. This experience transformed my life. My English improved dramatically, I connected with my community, and finally felt free.

"After I received refugee status, BRR again supported me, this time by supporting me to apply for a paid job at BRR to utilise my skills.

"Today, I'm a confident person with a network of friends and colleagues. I can support myself and my family. I'm eternally grateful to BRR for the life-changing opportunity they gave me."

Member Voice

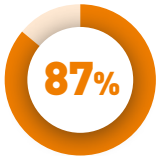
BRR's Members Voice Group empowers members to input into key decisions and guide strategy and services. It encourages a rich diversity of points of view. We explored whether Members felt BRR embodied the values of Solidarity and Empowerment. They were overwhelmingly positive, reminding us that we are embodying these values for a reason.

"Solidarity is about holding hands. It's about being stronger together, and knowing that some people's voices are heard better than other people's voices, so it's better to stand together" Aimee

Organisational Wellbeing

Strategic Goal 3: Be sustainable and invest in the wellbeing and resilience of our people and organisation

Staff at BRR



of people said they enjoyed their job



of people feel valued in their role

We filled 12 vacancies during the year, supported internal progression and recruited volunteers into paid roles. We offered 27% of jobs to people from a refugee background, increasing our proportion of Experts by Experience.

Volunteers

We had an amazing team of 108 volunteers over the year, including 34 member volunteers. The sense of community is facilitated by how BRR gets advice from members on how to run, creating inclusion. "The staff and other volunteers treat me as one of them, with no-discrimination."

There's real commitment:

- **23%**, have volunteered for us for between 5 and 10 years
- **40%** between 1 and 5 years
- We have also recruited **50** new volunteers over the past year

What do they like most about volunteering for BRR?

- Being part of the BRR community
- Feeling valued and supported
- Learning new skills

Member Volunteers

We worked closely with our team of member volunteers to create a rich volunteering experience. Volunteering with BRR gives members the opportunity to share their skills and expertise with us, increase their knowledge and pick up new skills.

"BRR is my second home, people here are like my family. For BRR to carry on, it needs me and you"

Member Volunteer

"I see people from all around the world, and I feel good when I can help them. When I help people and people smile, it makes me feel very good emotionally"

Member Volunteer



Partnerships

Strategic goal 4: Use partnerships to increase impact and resilience

“There is no other group doing what BRR do in the South West. They plug the lacuna. Their services are absolutely vital and specialist” Bristol Sector Partner

We believe in strong partnerships. Bristol Refugee Rights is a founding partner of Bristol Refugee and Asylum Seeker Partnership (BRASP). In 2023/2024 BRR continued hosting BRASP and secured further funding for a coordinator, enabling work such as:

- Forums and networks for information sharing
- Responding to the significant increase in the number of hotels in central Bristol
- Shared training and resources
- Developing service mapping ahead of a signposting and referral tool for the sector

The **BRASP partnership** has led to two key jointly funded projects: Bristol City Council Impact Fund – and Supporting Asylum Seekers and Refugees Together, funded by the National Lottery.

We are proud members of **Bristol Migrant Forum**, which shares best practice, including for anyone whose work impacts refugees and migrants.

We continued our strong partnership with **Bristol Law Centre**, expanding our co-working model to include new areas of law.

Through the **Refugee Action** led ‘Explore, Adapt, Renew’ programme, we continued our work with 6 partner organisations across the UK to develop and share best practice with.

Our Young People’s Immigration Project continues to coordinate the **Young People’s Forum**, a network of 38 local organisations working to ensure young people can access the immigration advice they need.

Action for Change

Strategic Goal 5: Raise our profile to influence others

Strategic Litigation

This year we supported **3** significant legal challenges against issues in the asylum system, providing evidence to support

- **DPG** challenging the decision not to give extra financial support to pregnant women and new mothers living in Initial Accommodation. This resulted in a back dated payment increase.
- **Public Law Project** challenge against the mismanagement of the Legal Aid contract. This ongoing crisis in Legal Aid immigration advice continues to be one of the biggest challenges affecting our members
- **LawStop** bringing a challenge against long delays in decisions on asylum support applications

System Change

We have worked with Bristol Law Centre and regional partners to create a new referral pathway and make steps to increase the availability of free immigration advice across the south west

Our Young People's Immigration project coordinates the Young People's Forum to promote best practice among **38** organisations supporting young migrants.

We have continued to develop work with Local Authorities to encourage best practice for young migrants in care:

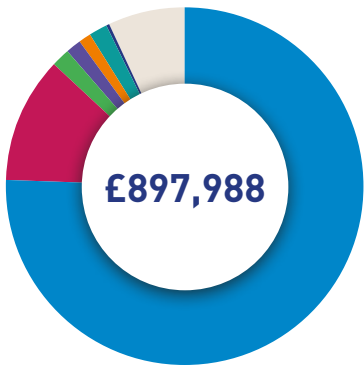
- 9 drop in advice sessions at Bristol City Council (BCC) for social workers and PAs – on average 4 appointments per advice session
- Monthly meeting with Social Workers to discuss referrals for age disputed children
- Supported the Local Authority to engage with national networks – ie. Immigration Special Interest Group for local authorities and partner organisations, and supporting BCC to meet with members of the Refugee and Migrant Children's Consortium on their immigration pledge for children in care

Finance

BRR’s total income in 2023/24 was **£897,988**. This includes multi-year restricted funds for use in subsequent financial years. BRR’s total expenditure in 2023/24 was **£940,158**. Most of our funding came from trusts, foundations, Bristol City Council and National Lottery. £101,694 of income came from individual donations and subscriptions.

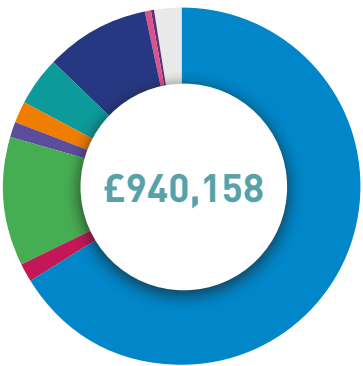
All funding received has been vital in ensuring that we can continue to be here for our members. A full copy of our Trustees report and further detail on 2023/24 finances can be found in our Annual Financial Statements 2023/24 which are submitted to the Charity Commission and are freely available on our website.

Income



Grants	£680,037
Subscriptions & Donations	£101,694
Gift Aid	£14,453
Other Charitable	£12,440
Gifts in kind	£11,450
Investments	£14,826
Trading Activities	£1,782
Membership fees	£275
Funds transferred between years for multiyear projects	£61,031

Expenditure



Staff salaries	£623,975
Other staff costs	£14,152
Office costs	£110,176
Fundraising	£14,137
Hardship payments	£15,870
Interpreting	£43,108
Grants payable	£89,414
BRASP inclusion fund	£4,044
Governance	£4,009
Other admin costs	£21,273

Fundraising expenditure is **7.5p out of every £1**

Thank you

We're hugely grateful for the support of our regular givers, the funding bodies that help sustain us and the individuals who have gone the extra mile, sometime literally; running marathons, turning their birthdays, dinner parties or art exhibitions into fundraising events to support us. We're humbled by the care individual people and organisations have for asylum seekers and refugees. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts on their behalf.

To our volunteers, we say a huge thank you for your dedication and energy; those who give information, advice and guidance to members in complex situations; those who support our busy Welcome Centre making it the welcoming and nurturing environment it is, those who teach; those who support our youngest members and their families; our interpreters; our Pride Without Borders volunteers for being compassionate and flexible; those who support with admin, monitoring, fundraising, and communication; our trustees; and those who help behind the scenes – thank you very much!



Support Us

Bristol Refugee Rights needs support. Even more so as increasing numbers of people reach out to us for help and their prospects remain uncertain.

You can support us in a variety of ways:



Make a **donation online**



Set up a **regular monthly donation** by Direct Debit



Fundraise for us



Leave a **gift in your will**



Your business can support us through donations and volunteering



Sign up to our free quarterly newsletter or **follow us** on social media

Contact Us

Bristol Refugee Rights,
Wellspring Settlement,
43 Ducie Road,
Bristol,
BS5 0AX



Call our helpline – 07526 352 353
(Mondays & Tuesdays 10am–1pm)



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Registered charity no: 1126646 Registered company no: 5669208

* Throughout this report, all member names have been changed *