

20 Year Anniversary Edition
ANNUAL REVIEW
April 2022- March 2023





20 YEARS

Welcome to the 2022-23 Annual Review

A Warm Welcome to our extra special 20 Year Anniversary Edition of our Annual Review.

ASSIST Sheffield was forged in Steel Solidarity; founded by a group of passionate, committed Sheffield citizens who, together with the people directly impacted by unjust immigration laws, birthed and carefully built the organisation & community we are proud today to call ASSIST Sheffield.

20 years ago we began a resistance movement in Sheffield against the injustice of the UK's discriminatory immigration laws, standing against the marginalisation and dehumanisation of people in our society. Two decades on, the challenge remains, but our movement has grown stronger and we remain as committed as when we began.

ASSIST acts in Solidarity Not Charity and knows that no-one is free until we are all free - we are all affected by racist, unfair asylum policy and we work together to challenge asylum destitution.

The last 12 months have involved a significant period of internal reflection, with many staff changes, an organisational review, a collaborative strategy review, all sitting within the bigger broader economic and political picture of a cost of living (profit) crisis, a terrifying piece of anti-migrant legislation that demonstrates that the hostile environment that we set up to challenge, is still thriving and that therefore so must we, in Resistance and Solidarity!

This review will showcase our work in the last year, with a special emphasis on our Accommodation work, whilst also celebrating and recalling our work since our grassroots beginnings.

In Solidarity,
The ASSIST Leadership Team

ASSIST Sheffield: What We Do

For the last twenty years, ASSIST Sheffield has enabled people in Sheffield who have been refused sanctuary to stabilise their situation, plan for the future and live with hope and dignity.

At the point of an asylum claim being refused, within a matter of days people are pushed into destitution and locked out of many of the things that can be taken for granted in our society; money for food or other essentials, the ability to travel and connect in the community, a safe place to come back to every night and rest in comfort.

Yet despite these challenges, we see time and time again how people facing destitution have the resilience, skills, ability and motivation to find their own way forward. Our team of staff

and community of volunteers work with clients in a strengths-based way to:

- Meet basic needs through good quality service provision; safe, secure accommodation, welfare payments, bus passes and casework support
- Support community participation and collectively campaign for change
- Commit to being led by those with Lived Experience, increasing engagement, participation and Leadership



Enabling Empowerment

ASSIST Sheffield is committing to centring the voices of people with lived experience of the asylum system. We ensure our services are scrutinised by those that use them through our Client Consultation Group, made up of 4-8 clients who meet monthly to inform service development, providing input on all areas of our work, from the length of our offer of support to the language we use day-to-day.

Several members of our Client Consultation Group, are also trustees of ASSIST, providing input and direction at operational and strategic leadership levels of the organisation.

We have also committed to conducting a bi-annual Client Voices survey, to gain the opinions of the widest possible number of ASSIST clients on our services, performance and direction.

Our Anti-Oppression Working Group, paused during 2022/2023, has reflected on our interactions and behaviour, to support us to work towards being as inclusive and diverse an organisation as possible.

We are both committed to and near the beginning of our organisational journey exploring the intersection between the issues of Race, immigration status and other equality issues. As an organisation working with people who have been refused asylum, it is important that we develop our understanding of the discrimination faced by our clients and others in society due to each and all of these issues. This work is a journey and we have much to learn. We intend to prioritise this work moving forward.



Client Consultation Group:

Statement Co-written by the group

The group started meeting about 18 months ago and have subsequently met every month.

The groups' formation was an initiation by ASSIST Leadership and their intention was to hear and listen from clients, i.e., what we thought about the support ASSIST provides and how the organisation could improve on its service delivery. As a group we were amazed at the humility of ASSIST Leadership that they would ask for our opinions in order to improve what they do.

At the start, we were a very small group (3 people), but over time the group has increased in number. The group comprises clients from different backgrounds/countries - both male and female clients are represented, and the opinions of each member are taken seriously and considered.

We've had about 25 meetings since the group was formed. Several matters have been raised and discussed at those meetings and we have seen certain things change as a direct result of the points we raised. At one meeting, we highlighted that the use of the term 'asylum seekers' was dehumanising to clients and that term may mean different things to different people. It was then suggested by one member in our group that a term like 'people seeking sanctuary' was more humane when referring to clients. The point was taken, and it was agreed to have a discussion within ASSIST on how certain language can change when referring to clients. ASSIST has created a language guide as a result.

As a group we have connected well with each other and have even become friends. The way the meetings are run is so welcoming and accommodating.

We are very grateful for the work ASSIST is doing and many of the clients it supports will echo these sentiments we are sharing with you as the Client Consultation Group.

We will finish by saying, ASSIST is quite a progressive and listening organisation which is willing to change some of its practices based on the feedback it receives from its clients.

*Thank you
Client Consultation Group (CCG)*

Accommodation service

Looking back

'ASSIST' was formed in the teeth of injustice. Destitution is immoral'

- Robert Spooner, ASSIST Founding member and former Chair of Trustees

A key component to our collective resistance against the hostile environment over the last twenty years has been the prevention of homelessness amongst those facing destitution. For every one of the thousands of bed nights provided, we have much to celebrate about the changes and constancy of ASSIST's accommodation service.

Number of people accommodated since 2003...1082!



Radical roots and organic growth

Our accommodation service is rooted in the intentions and practical activities of a radical community who were outraged at the devastating impact of destitution. Accommodation has always been a very practical response, sharing what resources people have to take a stand.

'They were being thrown out into the streets with nothing - so we had to act'

Myra Davis, ASSIST Founding member, 2003

'In the current climate of anti-immigration rhetoric and so much prejudice around asylum seekers, we wanted to be part of a culture of welcoming, celebrating and learning from the people we met. We have gained so much from it'

ASSIST hosts, 2019-20

From the first hosting placement of May 2004 to the 100+ people who have opened up their homes since, from the first donated house in 2005 to the fifteen ASSIST houses that have been purchased or leased since, from the early days of the 'Welcome Centre' at Christ Church Pitsmoor and every iteration of emergency accommodation since...

'ASSIST has been a vehicle for Sheffields to support people seeking sanctuary, and it's all happened organically'

Jochen Kortlaender, Accommodation Manager

Safety from homelessness

'People feel uplifted as they realise this is a place they are protected. That feeling of helplessness and hopelessness starts to ebb away.'

Victor Mujakachi, Emergency Accommodation Coordinator

'The worst thing a human being can experience is to be homeless. ASSIST are giving us a roof over our head and food to eat. I really appreciate all the things they are doing.'

Bubacarr, ASSIST client

'We know that clients really value the accommodation. Giving someone the keys to a house is the best part of the job; that's what it is all about.'

Tom Hall, Maintenance Coordinator

Beyond a safety net - good quality accommodation that provides dignity and comfort

'Accommodation is key to enabling people who have been homeless to have predictability in their lives and doing that in a way that respects people's dignity has always been really important. We have been on a journey within ASSIST in understanding what that looks like. For example, in the drive to provide places to stay that are not just 'good enough' but are of a high quality. We have challenged ourselves over the years to do better with this.'

Jochen Kortlaender, Accommodation Manager

'I like to keep the house clean and look after the house like it's your own. I like gardening; I am growing onions, cabbage, potatoes, peppers in the garden.'

George, ASSIST client

'For me the most important thing with a home is comfort. My bedroom is the most comfortable place to be, I like my own space. I like to cook chicken stew and fried rice. I am happy that I am in this house but I am also tired.'

Bubacarr, ASSIST client

'We do things to a high standard because it's important that things are done to a good quality and are energy efficient. It's satisfying to know we're providing a good space for people to do what they need to.'

Tom Hall, Maintenance Coordinator



Building community connections

'Our lives are enriched by learning from each other. While the problems we face are significant, our greatest resource is people and we will face these challenges together'

Gina Clayton, Former Chair of Trustees, 2011

'This is my first week volunteering with the DIY team. Today I have been cutting trees and digging up the ground so we can plant some new trees. I am also involved in the CCG, I have attended 2 meetings and have helped with interviews for the new client manager. I like volunteering because I like to help people., ASSIST is helping me so I want to help back.'

Bubacarr, ASSIST client

'One of the nice things I get to see in my role is the relationships that our clients build with neighbours, and the acceptance that people seeking sanctuary receive as part of the community. Five years ago, when we first took one of our local properties on, the neighbours were quite vociferously opposed to ASSIST clients moving in. They both mellowed considerably over time and struck up a good neighbourly relationship. In May 2023, the lady rang our maintenance worker to let us know how much she appreciated the help she received from the ASSIST residents after her husband's passing last year.'

Jochen Kortlaender, Accommodation Manager

Key developments this year

- Our accommodation provision remains the largest of its kind in the region, and by the end of March 2023 we managed or owned ten properties for people who have been refused sanctuary, as well as referring people to our partner agency Open Hands, and through our volunteer hosting network. Together these spaces accommodate ~48 people at a time, and 73 people benefitted from the service in the last year.
- As we have developed the three-stage support model (1. Stabilising; 2. Planning for the Future; 3. Moving on), we have provided high quality support to clients living in our properties through joined up work across the accommodation and client support teams.
- We have undertaken maintenance work and repairs on our properties to fulfil our commitment to delivering high quality accommodation and enabling people to live with dignity and hope for the future.
- We have implemented trauma-informed service delivery across all client support, including accommodation. This has involved training and the introduction of reflective practice amongst volunteers and staff.
- Our partnership with South Yorkshire Housing Association (SYHA) has continued with provision of our 'Welcome House', a high quality alternative to the night shelter on a short term lease. As this comes to an end in the summer of 2023, we are exploring other ways to meet need, maintain local partnerships, and ensure dignity for all.
- We began to partner with Sheffield City Council's Refugee Resettlement team and now manage five properties which are rented to recently resettled families. Rental income brings in regular unrestricted income which supports our core work, and enables us to diversify our income streams in a challenging funding landscape.

Looking ahead

- We are making plans to develop our 'Welcome House' model to ensure people in immediate need of shelter can access high quality short term accommodation.
- We have been part of a successful consortium bid for the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund to improve energy efficiencies in our properties.
- In response to reduced capacity within our hosting network during the pandemic, we began working more closely with 'Refugees at Home,' a national network of hosting volunteers. We still see a need for in-house provision as we integrate our services for clients at the earliest stage of support, so alongside partnership work we are beginning to reinvigorate our own hosting network again.



Strategy review

ASSIST engaged in a collaborative review of our current strategy (2020 - 2024) over the period of Nov 22 - Feb 2023. This review consulted and included 38 members of the ASSIST Community; Clients, Volunteers, Staff and Trustees.

In it, we make clear ASSIST's priorities over the next 12 months. We aim to consolidate the enormous changes that have occurred within ASSIST since the COVID-19 pandemic and to create stability and consistency across our services.

We wish to celebrate the wonderful networks, partnerships and passions for social justice that enable ASSIST to exist and continue centering the voices of ASSIST's clients.

Clients have told us we need to carry on doing what we are already doing, to the highest possible standard. This is no small feat in a climate where funding is reduced and we are in an economic crisis.

Therefore the focus of the next 12 months will be to stabilise and sustain our existing services. Only when we feel confident that we can sustain our services, will we seek to explore and develop new areas of work, guided by the voices of our clients.

We now have five key goals. These outline what we want to achieve and how we hope to achieve them: guided by our values.

Strategic Goals: Summary

Goal 1: INCLUDE:

Clients influence the way ASSIST works and that our ways of working become even more reflective of different groups in society.

Goal 2: STABILISE:

We will increase the capacity and quality of housing that we offer and increase the lengths of stay so that more clients will move on positively from our accommodation.

Goal 3: EMPOWER:

Clients are supported in a way that is clear, fair, effective and informed by their own priorities and choices.

Goal 4. SUSTAIN:

We are in a position to continue supporting our clients through our core services: housing, casework support and financial support. Staff and volunteers have what they need to do this, now and in the future.

Goal 5: PARTNERSHIP:

Clients will see the benefits of us working more closely and effectively with our partner organisations.



This year's impact in numbers



68

clients accommodated in shared ASSIST and Open Hands houses



105

clients supported overall



4

houses managed and provided for newly resettled families



11

clients stayed in hosted accommodation



47

clients supported to access legal advice through partnership with South Yorkshire Refugee Law and Justice



418

1-2-1 casework sessions, 56 with an interpreter



3,956

weekly Welfare & Emergency payments issued



10

houses managed and provided for ASSIST clients



140

volunteers across the organisation including 8 clients



35

clients matched with accompaniers to attend appointments



15,124

bednights provided to ASSIST clients



28

clients moved on to asylum or statutory support services



3

clients got Leave to Remain in the year and we heard from 7 former clients that they now have Leave to Remain as well.

Client Support Service

We continue to embed our three-stage model of support (Stabilise, Plan for the Future and Move on) across our services. Clients receive advice and support to ensure basic needs are met, and to navigate the asylum system, build resilience, enable community integration

and improve English language skills. Trained volunteers and staff deliver work in a trauma-informed way, and our teams of companions and interpreters ensure accessibility for everyone who needs our support.

Key priorities from clients

- Understanding rights: legal aid, housing, money
- Understanding immigration options and fresh claims
- Help accessing legal representation
- Understanding more about ASSIST activity and services
- Improved interpreting support

Key developments...

- Increasing capacity within our Client Support Service - 2 brand new posts created
- 5 years funding secured from the National Lottery to deliver and develop our Client Support offer
- Training for volunteers to provide person-centred, trauma-informed support across all teams
- High tier support service developed providing continuity for people with complex needs
- Use of Clear Voice to ensure interpreter provision for every client who needs it
- Organisational Review
- Practice around how ASSIST ends support has been standardised and made more transparent, as directed by the Client Consultation Group Last year 2 people accepted onto the limited 3-6 month support package.

Our Three Stage Model

Stage One:

Stabilise

- Somewhere to live
- Money for food
- Access to any urgent health care
- Help desk weekly drop-ins

Stage Two:

Plan for the Future

- Monthly "Client Welfare" sessions
- High tier support
- Accompanying & interpreters
- Casework appointments
- Educational & wellbeing activities

Stage Three:

Move on

- Intensive advocacy support
- The possibility of a 'Back on track' financial support package
- Support exploring future options



Volunteering Update

ASSIST's dedicated volunteer teams remain vital to our service delivery and our wider impact in the community. We were forged in the Steel Solidarity of the goodwill of the people of Sheffield and no-one is more representative of solidarity in action than those who give their time freely to work alongside members of the Sheffield community so wronged by the Hostile Environment.

In 2022/23, 140 active volunteers were involved in thirteen teams: House Visitors, Hosting Support, Help Desk, Welfare Sessions, Interpreting, Casework, Accompanying, Office/IT, Community & Events, Grants, Finance, Signposting and Volunteer Support.

Within our wider work around participation and inclusion, our teams are increasingly diverse including our board of trustees, which includes people with lived experience of insecure immigration status and the Hostile Environment.

Our Housing Team has developed a client led Maintenance Group, involving client volunteers in the care and upkeep of our houses. This work has been led by Tom and Victor and has been empowering and enjoyed by all who took part.

Volunteer recruitment is now taking place in 3 windows during the year – starting in January, May and September. This allows us to focus resources on initial training and induction during these periods, rather than running recruitment continuously.

We have continued to provide regular volunteer training sessions on trauma-informed working, Introduction to ASSIST, Safeguarding & Boundaries and Confidentiality & Data Protection.

In a year of such change and challenge, never have we been more dependent upon and grateful to those who give their time freely and generously to ASSIST - we salute you all!



Challenges we've faced

Destitution has a lasting impact on people's mental and physical wellbeing, compounded with uncertainty around legal advice and Home Office decision making that can leave people in a state of limbo for months or even years. Our work promotes solidarity and gives people hope, but the politics around asylum is as challenging and hostile as ever.

Practically, we have faced economic challenges with rising costs this year around house fuel bills and transport, and we anticipate that the cost of living crisis will impact our community donations in the year ahead. Capacity to deliver

our work continues to be a challenge, with staffing changes this year stretching our small team more than ever. We've had significant staff turnover and at one point were operating with 50% less staff than usual. Despite all of these challenges, we have delivered better outcomes than ever before and we are proud of the difference we can make in our community and for the improved outcomes we are achieving for those we support.



Our People and Changes within the ASSIST Community in 2022/2023

ASSIST has always been fortunate to have an incredibly skilled and passionate staff team, past and present, working alongside our exceptional volunteer community.

This last year has seen an extraordinary number of colleagues, both newer and long serving team members, move on to exciting pastures anew. We thank them all (Andrew Key, Lyndesy McLellen, Isabelle , Daisy Pound, Craig Barnett and Daniela Arcuri) for their time and dedication, we are immeasurably stronger as a result of their excellent work with us. We wish them all the best in their new roles and also look forward to welcoming in many new staff skills and strengths to our community.

We've said goodbye to 31 clients this year. It's always hard to say goodbye to people we have formed relationships with and who have become part of our community. Most of our clients leave ASSIST support because they have submitted new asylum applications and are eligible for Home Office support. And although a new application is a brilliant step forward for someone wanting to access the right to remain, safe and free, in the UK, we know that moving into Home Office Accommodation is by no means a positive experience. So these goodbyes are always bittersweet. We are super happy when people stay in touch and visit us and let us know how things are.



In Memory

In May of this year our dear friend and long-term ASSIST volunteer Margaret Spooner passed away after a short illness. Margaret had been pivotal to shaping ASSIST's work and ethos over many, many years of our existence and volunteered in a multitude of roles right up until the end of her life. Together with her husband Robert, Margaret hosted countless individuals in their home; she oversaw our Helpdesk at the weekly drop-in for many years, supported the accommodation team, spent many a night volunteering at the night-shelter, and served on various committees where she was invariably the voice of reason when discussions got a bit heated. Most importantly, Margaret was a mentor to many of us, volunteers and staff members alike, and both as individuals and as an organisation we will endeavour to continue to live up to the amazing example that she has set.



Finance Update

Our finances have been independently examined and our full financial statements will be available on the Charity Commission website.

Restricted Income = £141,237

Unrestricted Income = £440,273*

Total Income = £581,510

Restricted Expenditure = £207,131

Unrestricted Expenditure = £302,602

Total Expenditure = £509,733

Surplus = £71,777

* N.B. The unrestricted income figure includes the value of a property asset (£132,000) donated to ASSIST.

We continue to be amazed and so grateful to people who donate property to ASSIST or allow us to lease their property for free in order to accommodate our clients.

2022-23 was a challenging year financially as excluding the donated property asset ASSIST had a deficit of £60,223 for the year. However this deficit was covered by reserves.

Restricted Income brought forward from the previous year = £67,262

At year-end free reserves (excluding restricted and designated funds) = £74,687

**Excluding the property donation in 2022/23 ASSIST raised an income of £449,510. This was an increase (£48,597) on the previous year's income. Approximately 31% of this income was restricted for use for specifically pre-agreed purposes (e.g. grants). The rest is unrestricted and can be used to cover any costs. We are very grateful to our many regular and one-off donors who contributed £193,504 in total. All regular donations and most irregular donations, unless otherwise specified, were used to help fund welfare payments or bus passes given directly to our clients. We aim to fund all staff salaries from grant income.



£581,510

TOTAL INCOME**



£509,733

TOTAL EXPENDITURE

76%

UNRESTRICTED
INCOME

24%

RESTRICTED
INCOME

59%

UNRESTRICTED
EXPENDITURE

41%

RESTRICTED
EXPENDITURE



£48,597

INCREASE ON PREVIOUS
YEAR'S INCOME



£132,000

PROPERTY ASSET
DONATED TO ASSIST

100% of Regular donations were used to fund Client Benefits (welfare, bus passes, emergency payments, etc).

Language Guide

Language can be dehumanising. We aim to focus our language on the person, not their asylum status. ASSIST recognises its power as an organisation and as a community of individuals and chooses not to use language that disempowers, dehumanises or others whole groups of people. Therefore we have adopted the following language guide to inform our written, digital and face-to-face communications.

We have adopted the following language guide based on feedback from our Client Consultation Group:

1. We work *with* people seeking sanctuary *not for*
2. We refer to *people, not their asylum status*. I.e we work with people seeking asylum or seeking sanctuary, not 'asylum seekers'; nor terminology such as 'failed asylum seeker'
3. We don't use acronyms when referring to people. Never use ASR (asylum seekers and refugees)
4. We use the term *people with lived experience* or *experts by experience* not asylum seekers when people provide testimony to our work
5. We refer to the people we work with as clients, our client consultation group has chosen this as a preferred term.

Thank you

Thank you to everyone that has supported us in any way over the last year. We are enormously grateful for the way that people bring their different strengths and skills to ASSIST. Without the commitment of the local community, the strength of our partnerships, and the generosity of those who donate, our work would simply not be possible.

Thank you to those who give regularly! We have over 200 people donating on a monthly basis, which gives us the freedom and stability to provide our clients with crucial support that makes a real difference in their daily lives.

Thank you also to the incredibly generous people that have lent us houses or provided hosting support to ensure our clients have somewhere safe to stay this year.

Thank you to everyone who volunteers for the organisation in whatever way that is. You are the bedrock of ASSIST and your generosity, skills and passion is the only reason ASSIST can deliver such high quality, attentive, and social justice driven services.

Thank you to our funders in 2022/23 including Henry Smith Trust, Forrester Family Trust, Big Lottery, Night Shelter Transformation Fund, Blue Thread/Jubilee Foundation, AB Charitable Trust, The Balcombe Charitable Trust and 10 other grant giving bodies.

Thank you to partners:



Annual Review Credits

This report is, like everything we do, a product of collaboration between people paid and unpaid, and all of us passionate! Thanks to all involved in making it happen.

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Get Involved

Whatever your situation there is something you can do to help ASSIST continue to provide its crucial services.

VOLUNTEER - Please visit the 'how you can help' pages on our website for any current vacancies

FUNDRAISING - Set yourself a challenge, be it sporting or otherwise, or organise an event. We want to hear your ideas!

DONATE - we appreciate all donations, big or small, one-off or by standing order. Or leave a gift for ASSIST in your will.

