

**ASSIST Sheffield  
Annual General Meeting  
2<sup>nd</sup> November 2022  
Quaker Meeting House**

**Welcome: Kevin Quinton, Chair of Trustees**

Kevin welcomed everyone to the meeting and expressed his pleasure that it was possible, once again, to meet together in person. The period since the last AGM has been one of great difficulty and volatility, faced with the Covid pandemic and lockdowns. He thanked ASSIST staff for all their hard work over this difficult time. Kevin explained that the appointment of an Executive Director had not worked out as expected but he thanked the Executive Director for his contribution.

Kevin informed the meeting that ASSIST is now in a period of review, in close consultation with the staff group, and that he is optimistic that the running of the organisation can be improved. He thanked the staff who have taken on new roles in this context.

Kevin also thanked the Trustees for their contribution. Ethel Maqueda, Anderson Moyo and Juliann Hall have stepped down as Trustees, while some new Trustees have been appointed. However, ASSIST needs additional Trustees. The Trustee recruitment drive is being co-ordinated by Paul Harvey.

Kevin explained that recent government policies have worsened conditions for ASSIST's clients. Eight years ago, 8 out of 10 claims for asylum were processed in 6 months. Now it is only a quarter of claims. The delays are getting worse and by June last year only 6% of people seeking asylum have been dealt with within 6 months. There is also increasing pressure on accommodation and the costs of accommodation are rising.

We need to challenge the destitution facing people seeking asylum whenever we can and, more than ever, we need financial support, our volunteers and our advocates across the city.

Kevin concluded by thanking everyone for all the work they do.

**Developments this year and moving forward: Anna Rudd, Interim Director**

Anna set out some of the challenges ASSIST has faced in the context of the Covid pandemic, when no face to face meetings were possible, clients could only come in once a month, clients couldn't have visitors, and staff and volunteers were largely working from home. ASSIST is founded on human connection, so it was very difficult to deliver our service.

As restrictions were dropped we set about a three-month research project with clients to find out what they valued about our service and what changes they would like to see. This research led to the development of the Client Consultation Group

and the Help Desk. We discovered that clients wanted to know more about Legal Aid, immigration options, legal representation, ASSIST services and interpreting support.

In the New Year accompanying requests increased, we created a signposting team and a face to face casework service was established. We also organised Trauma Informed Training for staff and volunteers and, once restrictions were lifted in March 2022, trauma informed practices were integrated into our model of working. ASSIST's Three Stage Model, which is set out in the Annual Review 2021-2022 booklet, was also highlighted. Overall, this was a period when we changed the way we worked with clients.

Over the year we supported 40 new clients, provided on-going support to 60 clients, and said goodbye to 27 clients. Our bed spaces were consistently in use. The staff group grew to 13 and there were 140 volunteers.

Anna then introduced the various volunteer teams to the meeting, who were thanked and applauded for their work.

Looking forward, ASSIST will be developing the client journey, expanding its accommodation offer, developing mental health support, centring the client voice and building the ASSIST community.

### **Financial Update: Kevin Quinton, Chair of Trustees**

Kevin took the meeting through a summary of the organisation's accounts, including income and expenditure and the reserves policy.

Income has fluctuated over the past 7 years, while there has been a steady increase in expenditure. Kevin explained how the organisation's income comes from grants, donations and fundraising. Income totalled £400,913 in 2021/22. 254 people made a regular monthly donation to ASSIST. The donors were thanked for their support. With regard to expenditure, ASSIST provides welfare payments to clients who have no recourse to public funds. In 2021/22 these payments amounted to £104,800, or 23.5% of total expenditure.

There are challenges going forward as two of the organisation's main multi-year grants are coming to an end. This means that a lot of work is being devoted to securing new grants and to fundraising. Regular donations are vital for ASSIST and Kevin thanked donors once again for their support.

### **Client Consultation Group (CCG): Pious Nyandoro, on behalf of the CCG**

Pious explained that the group began meeting in September 2021 and that it now meets once a month. It was set up by ASSIST in order to listen to clients' concerns and their ideas about how the service can be improved.

The CCG is a small group and involves clients from different countries. At the meetings clients are listened to and their views are considered and, as a result, changes have been implemented. For example, clients were concerned about being

given 4 weeks' notice to leave accommodation. Now they are given 6 months' notice, along with a face-to face interview. Another example is the change in the relationship between ASSIST and Refugee Law and Justice. There is much better communication now, which is really helpful for clients.

Pious explained that recently the group had discussed the use of language in relation to asylum and how the group would prefer to be referred to as 'people seeking sanctuary'.

Members of the group have now become friends and have got involved in different parts of the organisation.

The CCG group are grateful that ASSIST is willing to change its practices on the basis of clients' contributions.

### **Accommodation Update: Jochen Kortländer, Accommodation Manager**

Jochen explained that stable accommodation is critical to people's lives. He paid tribute to the volunteers and those people who have given ASSIST houses, with special thanks to John Newport. He also thanked the residents for looking after the properties.

In the last year ASSIST has housed 70 people for a total of 15,498 bed nights, with the average length of stay 12 – 13 months.

It has not been possible to re-open our night shelter but South Yorkshire Housing Association have helped with emergency accommodation. Hosting numbers have been low because of Covid, but this is a service we plan to continue.

A new development for ASSIST has been offering houses for refugees. ASSIST works with the Sheffield City Council resettlement team, using our expertise in managing accommodation. We have opened our first house and the rent generated is used to support housing for our core clients. We plan to open some new houses in the future.

### **The Year Ahead: Lyndsey McLellan, Fundraising Manager**

The cost of living crisis is a threat that everyone is experiencing and our finances have dipped as a consequence. We did very well in the covid period as grant givers were generous at that time. However, even though we are entering a new funding environment, the organisation remains safe and stable.

Lyndsey explained that ASSIST is running a social media campaign to raise awareness of the issues facing the organisation in the context of a cost of living crisis. The aim is to extend our support.

Lyndsey thanked supporters present at the meeting and reminded everyone that their help is very much appreciated.

## Questions and Answers

There were a number of comments and questions from the floor.

Q: “Thank you to the staff and the Trustees and also thanks for the support of volunteers. Based on the report from the CCG, is ASSIST adopting the term ‘People seeking sanctuary?’”

A: This hasn't yet been discussed, so no decision has yet been made.

Q: “These are very challenging times to be in this movement so I want to register thanks from City of Sanctuary Sheffield for all the work you do. Your work is excellent and you are pioneering in the way you work with volunteers. It is amazing how much you do and achieve”.

Q: “Speaking as an interpreter, before lockdown we used to meet at Victoria Hall, a big group of us. Is there a way to bring us back together and reacquaint ourselves?”

A: We want to build back the interpreters team and we are working with SCOS on this.

Q: I would like to reinforce the point that the training for volunteers you provide has been first class.

There were no further questions or comments.

**Kevin Quinton closed the meeting and thanked everyone for coming.**