

ASSIST STRATEGY : June 2023 - June 2024

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.

We are pleased to share the resulting updated strategy below. 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.

We are now in our 20th year and though we dearly hoped ASSIST wouldn't still need to exist at this point, The Hostile Environment that we set up to challenge, is still thriving and so must we in Resistance and Solidarity.

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

So, before we look at our updated Strategic Goals, here is a reminder of ASSIST's Vision, Mission and Values..

OUR VISION AND MISSION

Our vision is for all people seeking sanctuary in Sheffield to live life with dignity and hope for the future.

Our mission is to enable people seeking sanctuary in the UK who are being denied access to public funds, to sustain resilience against the effects of destitution and to make informed decisions about their future.

We challenge the policy of destitution.

OUR CORE VALUES

Respect: We respect and value the intrinsic dignity and worth of individuals and celebrate diversity. We are committed to equality and creating a culture of inclusion and belonging.

Empowerment: We recognise that our clients are powerful individuals who have the agency and right to personal autonomy. ASSIST will work in ways that empower clients, centering them in our work. We will work to support clients to build resilience, take ownership of their lives and thrive.

Social Justice: Our work and campaigns are based on a deeply held belief in challenging social injustice and participating in a movement to bring about social change.

Partnership: We seek diverse perspectives and strive to include the breadth of ideas, experience and skills of all staff and volunteers. Where appropriate, we will collaborate and form strategic partnerships with other voluntary and statutory agencies.

Empathy: At ASSIST, we recognise the humanity in every person we interact with and treat people with compassion and kindness.

Competency: Informed by continuous learning, we aim for excellence and integrity in all our activities. We are courteous, ethical and non-judgemental and operate in line with agreed policies.

Transparency: We are dedicated to and encourage transparency, honesty, commitment and discipline in every aspect of our work.

Strategic Goals: Summary

Goal 1: **INCLUDE**: Clients influence the way ASSIST work 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 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.

Strategic Goals: Detailed Description of Each Goal

Goal 1: INCLUDE

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

> By 2024 we will be using an intersectional lens to understand how to embed more diversity in our teams. Our organisational policies will enable ASSIST to build an organisational culture which challenges prejudice and promotes genuine, meaningful inclusion. We will secure funding and develop our skills so we can do this work well. We will see the benefit of this investment by way of more diverse volunteer, trustee and staff teams.

>Further to this, people with lived experience of the asylum process will be represented at all levels of the organisation. All new services and areas of work will be co-created with Experts By Experience. However, centering the voice and skills of Experts By Experience is only one strand of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion work; we will dedicate equal resources to this EBE work and to other, broader anti-oppressive working practices. ASSIST works towards social justice and is firmly committed to continuous learning, seeking to change our culture as we understand more about the practical meaning of being a truly anti-oppressive organisation.

To achieve this goal we will:

- 1: Review our HR and tendering policies and procedures to ensure that they promote client inclusion, increasing diversity and anti-oppressive practice.**
- 2: Apply for specific funding to develop client participation and broader equity, inclusion and diversity throughout ASSIST, including client consultation and specialist training for staff, trustees and volunteers.**
- 3: Design and deliver a bi-annual consultation process with all ASSIST clients to evaluate our services and identify client priorities.**
- 4: Maintain and develop the role of the Client Consultation Group, and ensure that their participation is included in an organisation-wide protocol for developing new services and areas of work.**
- 5: Set targets for recruitment of people with lived experience of the asylum process and from other marginalised groups to the staff and volunteer teams. These targets, and specific plans to achieve them, will be included in the performance reviews for staff members with relevant responsibilities.**

Goal 2: *STABILISE*

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

>By 2024, we will have standardised our accommodation offer for clients, in terms of both duration and conditions. We will have explored a financial model that seeks to diversify our revenue streams through the provision of housing to people with refugee status; this will contribute financially to the long-term stability of the housing offer for core clients.

To achieve this goal we will:

- 1: Maintain all ASSIST accommodation to specified standards, including for energy efficiency, facilities and comfort, with a trauma-informed focus on providing safety, dignity and emotional security in homely environments;**
- 2: Ensure that all ASSIST homes are managed and supported to a high and consistent standard, including clear and transparent policies on the duration of stay, expectations of clients while in our houses, and procedures for resolving conflicts or problems.**
- 3: Secure and maintain 5 houses for people with refugee status, directing surplus income towards housing for ASSIST clients.**
- 4: Further develop our 'welcome accommodation' to provide supervised and safe accommodation to clients in the first stage of support**
- 5: Support volunteer host households to provide additional accommodation spaces for our clients, particularly women.**

Goal 3: EMPOWER

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

> By 2024 we will clarify & embed our Three Stage Model, ensuring that we have the resources in place to deliver a transparent, consistent, and trauma-informed client journey with clear progression through our time-limited support offer.

> Clients will have clarity about the support ASSIST offers and which of the three stages they are currently in.

> Guided by client feedback, we will restructure our client support work so as to prioritise securing early legal assessment for clients.

To achieve this goal we will:

- 1: Recruit, train and support sufficient staff and volunteers to deliver a trauma-informed and holistic support service.**
- 2. We will ensure that IT, training and other resources are researched and developed to support and monitor client progression through ASSIST's support offer.**
- 3: Ensure that ASSIST clients are fully informed about ASSIST's services, personnel, strategy and values and their own stage within our support model, including through accessible signage and information resources.**
- 4: Develop and deliver a programme of rights workshops for clients.**
- 5: Explore ways to secure legal triage and assessment for all new clients within the first 3 - 6 months of joining ASSIST.**

Goal 4. SUSTAIN

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

- > We will prioritise creating and resourcing an ambitious fundraising & communications strategy, as well as developing our Monitoring and Evaluation processes, so we can better demonstrate our impact and ensure continuous improvement in our services, as well as maintaining our current areas of activity. Our financial reporting will be clear, timely and accurate.
- > By 2024 we will have prioritised investing in our systems, skills and well-being, to ensure that our people, teams and organisation are more sustainable. We will build even stronger relationships between volunteers, staff, clients and trustees, working to improve internal lines of communication. Listening to and supporting the needs of our community will facilitate a deeper sense of inclusion, connection and care – this is essential for creating the positive working environment we aspire towards.
- > We will **co-develop** a robust new strategy for 2025-2029. We will only start new pieces of work when we have the resources in place to deliver them.

To achieve this goal we will:

- 1: Develop a new fundraising strategy, including priorities for development and expansion of services, as well as maintaining existing capacity.**
- 2: Review our existing monitoring and evaluation processes, and develop a new M&E framework to provide the information that is most effective for service evaluation, improvement and reporting to stakeholders.**
- 3: Ensure that all staff and volunteers have effective supervision, training and support for their roles, and clarity about roles, accountability and decision-making processes. We will pay particular attention to the impact of vicarious trauma on people working directly with clients, and implement processes to reduce the risk of harm to staff and volunteers in these roles. Staff and Volunteer support strategy document will be developed.**
- 4: Develop an internal & external communications strategy, ensuring that all stakeholders are informed about ASSIST's work and invited and enabled to contribute in the most useful ways. Public communications will centre the experience and expertise of ASSIST clients, and represent the diversity of our community.**
- 5: Co-develop a strategic plan for 2025-2029 in collaboration with clients, volunteers, staff, trustees and partner organisations.**

Goal 5: PARTNERSHIP

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

> By 2024 we will have worked in a targeted and strategic manner to engage with local and national organisations that can guide, advise and directly collaborate with ASSIST in delivering on these strategic goals. We will have re-engaged with and strengthened our relationships within the wide networks of which we are lucky to be a part. We will explore the feasibility of becoming more actively involved in campaigns and communications work in the future (post-2024), both locally and nationally, and learn how to centre the voices of people with lived experience of the asylum system in this work.

To achieve this goal we will:

- 1: Develop a community engagement strategy to identify and build relationships (as donors, volunteers, partners and advisers) with community groups and organisations that have been historically neglected in ASSIST's partnership working, particularly communities of colour and migrant-led organisations.**
- 2: Create referral pathways with smaller migrant rights organisations in the region that have expertise in providing specialist support to our clients.**
- 3: Review the aims of the scope of ASSIST's campaigning work, as part of the strategy development for 2024-2029. We will apply for funding to meet the campaigns and communications goals identified by this process.**
- 4: Maintain and develop our engagement with existing partners and networks, including collaborating where possible on fundraising, improving standards and building resilience across the migrant rights sector.**
- 5: Continuously share and learn emerging best practices with local and national partner organisations.**

Thanks to all who participated in the process of reviewing ASSIST's strategy.

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