

Annual Review 2021 - 2022

# Our Three Stage Model: Stabilising, Future Planning, Moving On



[www.assistsheffield.org.uk](http://www.assistsheffield.org.uk)

ASSIST Sheffield is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation no. 1154862

## Welcome to the 2021-22 Annual Review



Our sincere thanks for your support over the past year. It has been a difficult year for everyone – particularly for our clients. But it has also been a year for rebuilding and strengthening our service provision, back up to pre-pandemic levels, as well as incorporating much of the learning that COVID brought us.

It is with great pleasure that I return to ASSIST Sheffield in my new role as Chair, and I am thrilled to have already witnessed a huge amount of growth and development in the organisation. I look forward to seeing us go from strength to

strength over the coming year, and want to thank all of our staff and volunteers for their ongoing work under difficult circumstances.

We have never been more certain of the need to support those forced into destitution by the policies of our Government. Sadly, over recent years we've seen these policies reinforced and strengthened again and again by various Home Secretaries. In spite of the ongoing difficulties of our work, we will continue to challenge asylum destitution in any way we can.

*Kevin Quinton - ASSIST Chair*



## ASSIST Sheffield: What We Do

People who have been refused asylum in the UK do not have the right to work, housing, benefits or other vital support. Having escaped the unimaginable horrors of war, violence and persecution, they find themselves amongst the most marginalised people living in our communities; unable to participate in the daily life we take for granted, they are pushed into destitution and homelessness. ASSIST works alongside people in this situation in our city.

All of our clients show deeply impressive fortitude and resilience despite the terrible circumstances they face. The asylum system

can be extremely complicated to navigate, and simply telling the truth about the nightmares our clients have fled is often not enough for them to secure their basic rights. At ASSIST, we work to remove barriers, seeking to return some freedom and personal autonomy to our clients, empowering them not just to survive but to grow.

Thanks to our supporters, ASSIST offers an invaluable lifeline for people in Sheffield who have been refused asylum. We offer solidarity, support and hope in the form of accommodation, welfare payments, bus passes

and a bespoke casework service, working with clients to understand and access their rights and entitlements in the UK. This includes an accompanying service supporting clients to attend appointments, and a wellbeing service that provides signposting to local services, activities and community groups. We will not stop campaigning until the discriminatory laws that marginalise our clients are changed.

## Client Consultation Group

In September 2021, as a direct outcome of internal client research carried out in the preceding three months, ASSIST established a Client Consultation Group (CCG). Currently made up of five clients, the CCG meets regularly to provide input and reflect on how effectively ASSIST's services are meeting the needs of the people with whom we work.

The CCG offers crucial insight into the impact of ASSIST services on our clients, and we are in the process of working to formally incorporate its work into the organisation's decision-

making process. So far, the group has discussed a number of important topics, such as improving communication between the organisation and clients, redesigning our services to provide appropriate support, and how ASSIST can work better with partner organisations. Members of the CCG have also used the space to reflect on detention and the everyday lives of many of our clients, sharing their crucial expertise and lived experience of the asylum system.

Members of the CCG also use the meetings to discuss their experiences with ASSIST. One

member shared their first encounter with the charity:

*I didn't want to overthink anything. It's really hard when you are in a destitute situation. I walked in and I didn't expect anything. And when they said 'we'll give you £100', I said - 'What! Can you repeat that?!' But I still didn't have any expectations. I am so grateful for that help*

Another member of the CCG has recently become a trustee of ASSIST, and said that they are pleased that volunteering with the organisation offers them the opportunity to *"interact with people from different backgrounds, and to learn from them."*

## Our Three Stage Model

**Our services work on a Three Stage Model of support. This is a strengths-based approach which recognises that the vast majority of people served by ASSIST have the ability and motivation to find their own way out of destitution once the most pernicious effects of the hostile environment have been mitigated.**

### Stage One: Stabilising

Initial support ensures that a client has somewhere to live, money for food and access to any urgent health care required. We have created a new online referral process, which enables agencies to refer clients to us more easily.

This year we increased weekly welfare payments for those clients unaccommodated by

ASSIST to £35 per week. We also decided to maintain the £5 weekly increase (originally introduced during the pandemic) for those accommodated by us, who currently receive £25 per week.

Our help desk has reopened, providing a weekly drop-in for existing clients and a new client touchpoint. Operating on Wednesday afternoons, we now see new people referred to

ASSIST for initial appointments and respond to walk-in referrals. We also offer follow up “Welcome to ASSIST” appointments to all people who are accepted for ASSIST Support. This includes access to English and other educational & wellbeing activities.

### Stage Two: Future Planning

This stage supports clients to build a life beyond destitution, within the very real constraints of a system that is designed to marginalise and exclude people with insecure immigration status. It almost always includes working to support a legal referral in anticipation of a new asylum application. We also offer advice and support to build resilience, enable community integration and improve English language skills.

**Monthly “Client Welfare” Sessions:** We expanded monthly Welfare Payments sessions to encompass a

wider remit, providing face-to-face drop-in support for everyone who wants it, every month, alongside essential provisions, and our usual financial and transport support. We have expanded the volunteer team and moved delivery of this essential service back into the ASSIST offices.

**Accompanying & Interpreters:** Alongside accompaniment to doctors, dentists, health centres and solicitors, our accompanying team have been focusing on detention action support, preparing clients who may be vulnerable to detention when reporting at Vulcan House. We continue to build and expand our

volunteer interpreter base, as well as using a paid telephone service. We currently have 26 interpreters.

**High Tier Support:** Our clients’ lives involve unimaginable exclusion and poverty, and combined with the excruciating limbo of trying to attain their legal right to remain in the UK can mean many people we work with experience severe mental health crises. Our High Tier Support service provides these at-risk clients with a trauma-informed key worker, regular phone and in-person contact and referrals to external mental health professionals where needed.



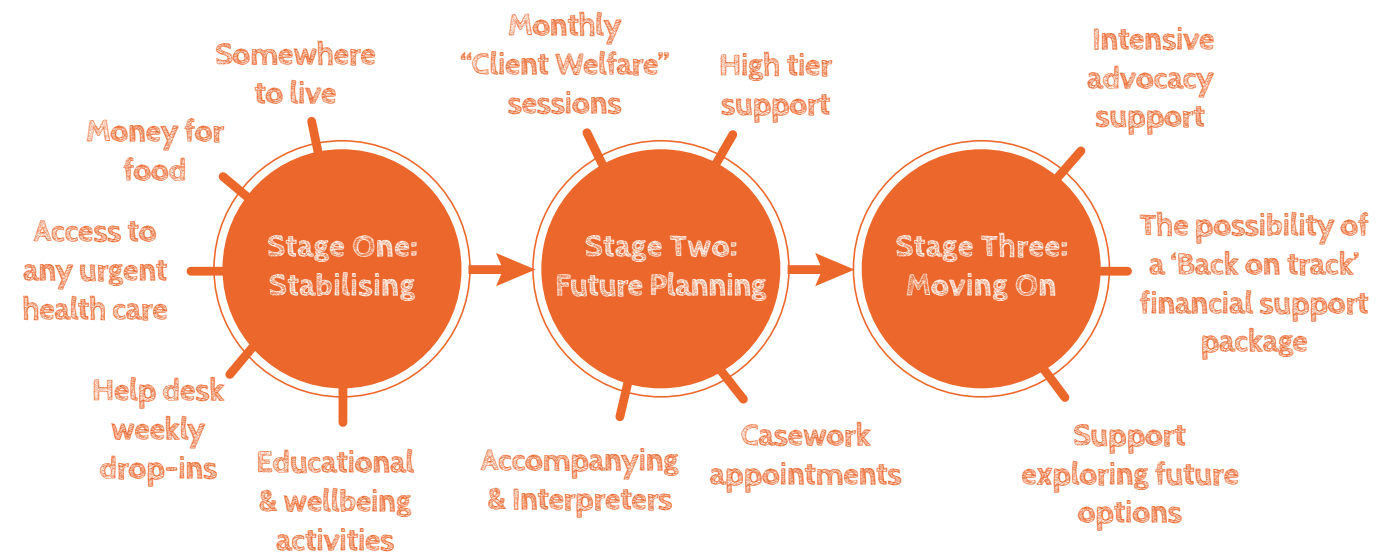
### Stage Three: Moving On

The final stage focuses on helping clients to become as independent as possible. Intensive advocacy support is provided – for example, advice on Home Office support for appropriate clients, who are progressing with launching appeals regarding their asylum claims. For other clients, we sometimes have a more difficult role: supporting them to explore help in other communities in the city and occasionally how to survive living on the streets. Maintaining the dignity of our clients is a core

value in everything we do, and providing a bespoke, phased end period is central to our principles.

We have also begun to offer a limited 3–6 month financial support package for past ASSIST clients whose situation has changed and they have been re-referred by local organisations into our service. This has been a long-term goal, originally suggested by a client participating in our 2018 Client Voices report: a client suggested having limited support once someone had exhausted their 3 years of support. People on this level

of support will receive £20 per month and casework support to get back on track. To date two people have been accepted on this support package.



## Challenges and Future Priorities

Any service like ours faces numerous challenges. Our three stage model helps us to build and sustain momentum in our clients' lives, as far as possible, but the complexity of the asylum system means that sometimes things can take longer than they should.

Since we work with a person-centred approach, we recognise that each client's situation is unique and any catch-all model of working will not necessarily reflect each individual's needs. Monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of our services is a priority for ASSIST, and is crucial to reflecting on what is and what isn't working

in our offer to clients. Over the next year, we plan to undertake a full review into our monitoring and evaluation process in order to better understand the points at which our clients might become stuck in their journey. This will also enable us to better identify ways in which we can support clients who have reached the end of their support from ASSIST, and find ways to help them to move on.

Following client research in summer 2021, five key priorities were outlined by clients for ASSIST to focus on improving:

- 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

We have made steps towards improving these areas of our work, and they remain our priorities moving forwards.

## Accommodation Update

ASSIST is now responsible for nine properties providing accommodation to our clients, houses which are either owned by the charity or leased to us on peppercorn rents.

We have continued to support individuals living in the nine ASSIST houses (35 bedspaces) and the three houses run by our partner organisation Open Hands (12 bedspaces) with some financial support from ASSIST. Due to the unique set of challenges during the pandemic, we temporarily suspended our usual time limit to give clients additional time to resolve their situation. 52 people

lived in ASSIST housing during the year, and a further 13 in the Open Hands properties. We provided over 15,000 bed nights for our clients over the year.

We are also in on-going discussions with a number of very generous supporters interested in helping ASSIST to expand its accommodation offer by buying further properties for the organisation.



## Anti-Racism at ASSIST

The charity and asylum sectors are no stranger to racism. In August 2021, inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement in the USA and UK, ASSIST published its Anti-Racist Statement, committing the organisation to tackling structural racism inside and outside of the organisation. We sought external consultation regarding our approach to this, as well as opening up further discussion amongst staff and volunteers in the organisation. Part of our anti-racist commitment means a dedication to centring client voices in our work, which has led to the establishment of the Client Consultation Group, and we are

actively working to build stronger partnerships with Sheffield-based organisations led by people of colour and/or people with lived experience of the asylum system.

As part of this commitment, we established an Anti-Oppression Working Group, which has met six times over the last year. The group is made up of ASSIST staff and volunteers. In November 2021 the group reviewed its Terms of Reference and in January 2022 we engaged the services of an external anti racism consultant to review our work to date and to develop our plans for the future.

Our annual update to the Anti-Racist Statement was published in August 2022 and can be found in full on our website – [assistsheffield.org.uk](https://assistsheffield.org.uk).



## Looking Forwards

Our plans for the future include:

**Developing a model of High-Tier Support:** Client Service Managers will directly provide one-to-one casework support for clients who we have assessed to have safeguarding concerns or who require more support in order to resolve their situation and engage with ASSIST.

**Detention Action Support:** a training and support programme is being developed in partnership with These Walls Must Fall, supporting ASSIST volunteer accompaniers to work with more confidence with clients who are

at risk of Detention (i.e. all of our clients). This will also help clients to understand the risks of possible detention and prepare themselves in case they experience it.

**Refugee Housing:** we are in the process of expanding our housing offer to include accommodation for refugee families. This will strengthen our relationship in working with partner organisations, including local housing associations, as well as diversifying our income streams

**Cost of Living:** like all charities, we face an insecure and challenging funding landscape, and the

next year will provide numerous financial challenges. We are working to secure long-term funding which will limit the impact that the unfolding cost of living and energy crises will have on our services and clients.



## Volunteering Update

ASSIST's dedicated volunteer teams have continued to adapt to new services and ways of supporting clients as we have moved out of lockdown. Our efforts this year so far have focused on recruiting and training volunteers for our new-look services, and increasing the diversity of our volunteer teams, recognising that we are a stronger organisation when people from a wide range of backgrounds and life experiences contribute to our work.

We currently have 154 active volunteers in 26 different roles, from supporting clients in our

accommodation to interpreting, advocacy, finance and public events.

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 this continuously.

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

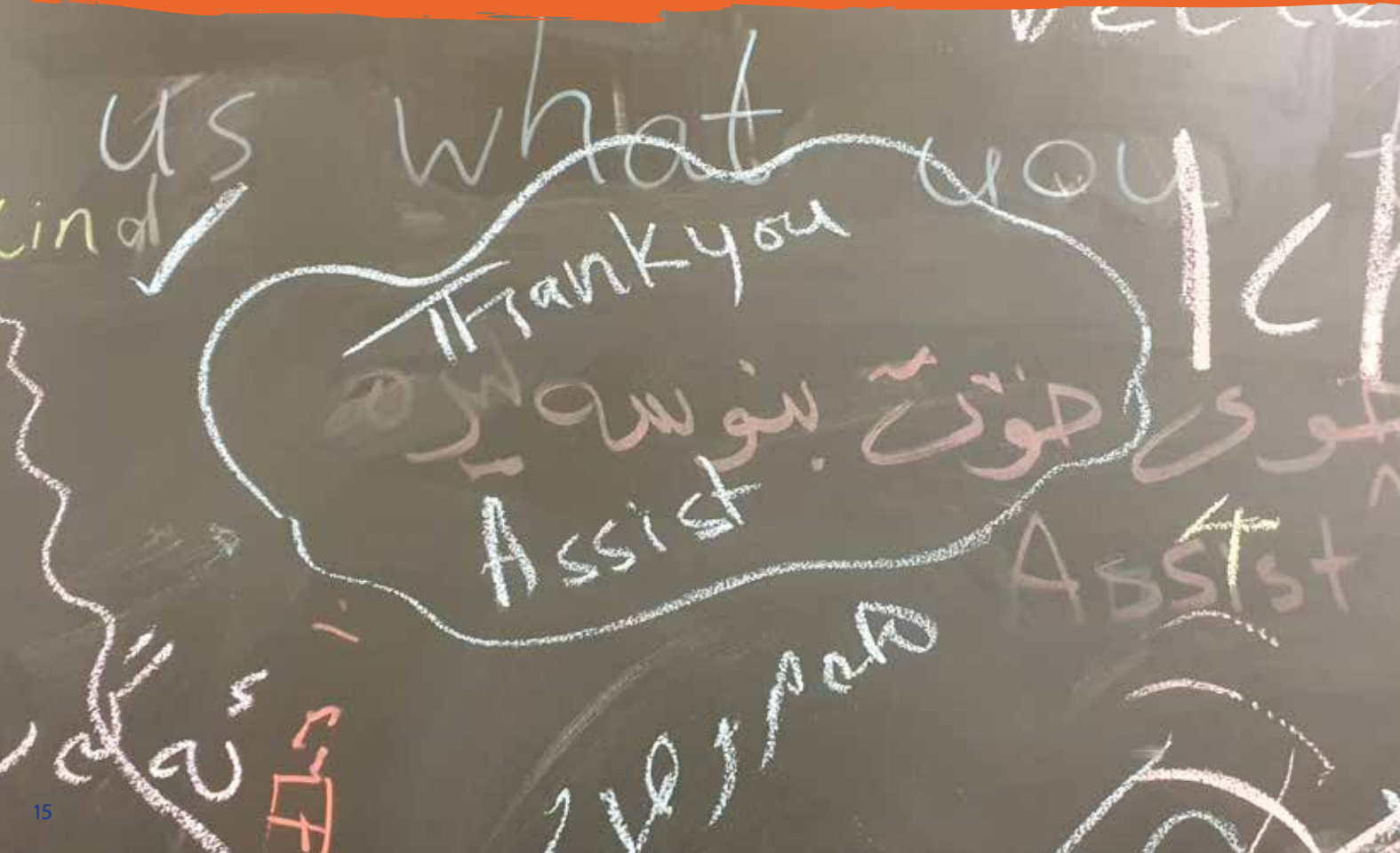
**154**  
active  
volunteers

**26**  
volunteer  
roles





## Volunteer Story



Chamila volunteered with ASSIST for a year as a finance volunteer, while in the process of applying for asylum. She worked in the finance team for a year, being mentored directly by staff, before finding a paid role in another charitable organisation:

*“I joined ASSIST in Autumn 2021 and worked under two finance officers, which was great. I have learned to work in account software (Xero) which I hadn’t studied before. The finance officers were very understanding about my experience and studies. They encouraged me to keep at it when I occasionally lost my faith working on the finances!*

*I’m now working part time in the charity sector as a finance officer and I’m very happy and very proud to say that what I learnt from ASSIST helped me to understand how actual finances work. I highly appreciate and so respect what ASSIST does and wish you the very best!”*

*Chamila, volunteer*

## Finance Update

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

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Restricted Income = £181,098

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Unrestricted Income = £219,815

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**Total Income = £400,913**

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Restricted Expenditure = £299,957

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Unrestricted Expenditure = £146,553

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**Total Expenditure = £446,510**

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Deficit = £45,597\*

\*N.B. The Deficit was more than covered by Restricted Income brought forward from the previous year = £186,121

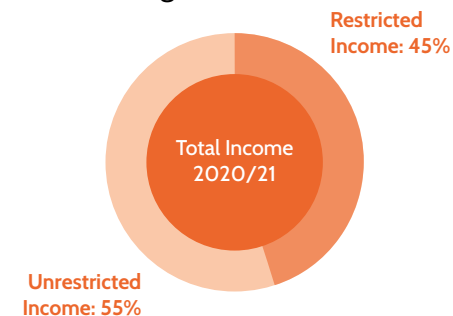
At year-end free reserves (excluding restricted and designated funds) = £78,832

In 2021/22 ASSIST raised an income of **£400,913**. This was a reduction on the previous year's income, which had included a number of short term grants made available to support charities during the pandemic. Approximately **45%** of our 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 **£166,387** 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.

ASSIST's expenditure in 2021/22 was **£446,510**. This was higher than the previous year, which involved the reduction of our services during the pandemic lockdowns. As our services have resumed, so our expenditure has increased again.



## Thank you

Thank you to everyone that has supported us in any way over the last year, whether it's been through donating money, your time or through supporting us in other ways. We are enormously grateful for everyone's help during this challenging year.

We have over 200 people donating on a monthly basis. This is so helpful to allow us to plan for the future and to ensure we are there for people seeking asylum in Sheffield, particularly in the face of an increasingly uncertain funding landscape. Your donations give 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 to provide shelter for our clients.

Thank you to the individuals that make up ASSIST's eleven Volunteer Teams. 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.

Sincere thanks to the House Visitors, Help Desk Team, Welfare Sessions Team, Interpreting Team, Casework Team, Accompanying Team, Office Team, Community & Events Team, Finance Team, Signposting Team, Volunteer Support Teams and, last but not least, our Host Team!

## Get Involved

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

- **VOLUNTEER** - Accompanying our clients to appointments, visiting our houses, helping with administration, running stalls at our events; these are just a few of the roles you can take on as an ASSIST volunteer. To find out more come along to one of our information sessions, posted in the Events section of our website.
- **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.

Find out more at:

[www.assistsheffield.org.uk](http://www.assistsheffield.org.uk) • [admin@assistsheffield.org.uk](mailto:admin@assistsheffield.org.uk) • 0300 2010072