

Integration Support Services



Annual Review 2023

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About us

Integration Support Services is a charity based in Harlow, Essex and started its support services for vulnerable migrants and refugees in 2005. We were formally registered as a company limited by guarantee (nr. 6308078) and as a charity (nr. 1120609) in May 2007. The charity was founded by a group of refugees and migrants living in Harlow based on their own experiences and challenges faced to integrate into the local communities. ISS' mission statement is to support the successful integration of migrants, refugees, ethnic minority communities and groups in Essex and Hertfordshire and with a vision to see an integrated society where inequalities and barriers between different races, origins and beliefs do not exist.

OUR SERVICES

OUTREACH SUPPORT

One-to-one support

INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

Community events

FAMILY SUPPORTING

Saturday club for children

INTERPRETING

Various languages

HATE CRIME REPORT CENTRE

Report Hate Crime

ENGLISH CLASSES

English Learning Project

Highlights 2023



695
New Service Users
from
60
different countries



1484
I.A.G. Sessions
for
566
different people



351
Social Sessions
for
358
different people



245
Children and young
people supported



206
Students attended
English Classes



104
ladies attended
Women's Club

Chair's Foreword

We are delighted to share our Annual Review of 2023, a year that presented several challenges and opportunities.

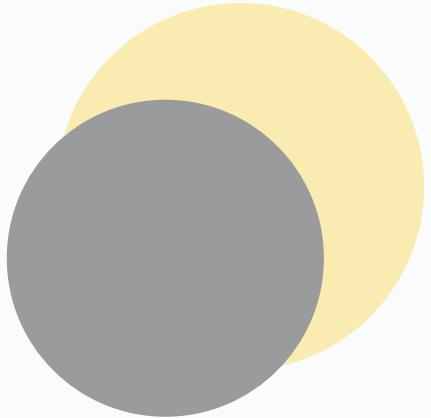
In 2023, Integration Support assisted more beneficiaries than ever before, a fantastic feat made feasible through the empathy, expertise and resilience of our growing team, led by Marina Dunajeva. There is a clear need for our charity's interventions: the cost-of-living crisis continues to destabilise individuals and families across the UK; at the same time, multiple emergencies across the globe, such as climate disasters and war, destabilise lives. In these turbulent times, we are privileged to stand together with refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and ethnically diverse communities.

To meet our beneficiaries' growing and changing needs, we expanded and adapted our charity's support packages. For instance, this year, Integration Support delivered a greater number of free ESOL classes, including more satellite ESOL sessions. Digital upskilling is now at the heart of our educational provision. Furthermore, we organised new social clubs and celebratory cultural events, both aimed at reducing isolation. We were also delighted to host a wide variety of trips, allowing families to explore new locations and create lasting memories.

Of course, our work would not be possible without the amazing assistance that we receive. I would like to thank the incredible number of partners and donors who supported us this year, providing us with everything from venues to furniture. I would also like to thank our funders, whose belief in our mission makes our projects possible.

We are deeply grateful for our volunteers. Our volunteers wholeheartedly devote their passion, skills and time to help our beneficiaries; many of Integration Support's services are dependent upon our volunteers' generosity.

As Chair, it is an honour to serve on the Board and to work alongside team members who dedicate each day to helping others. Together, we are all working towards building a respectful and integrated society – one where no individual needs to place limitations upon their dreams, a future where everyone may thrive.





Chief Executive's Foreword

I'm proud to say that during 2023 we provided support to 750 refugees, asylum seekers and migrants through our services and vital partnerships with other agencies. We provided support to hundreds of asylum seekers staying in dispersal accommodation. Supported over a hundred Ukrainian refugees, and over a hundred migrants staying in emergency accommodation or sleeping rough.

Our dedicated frontline colleagues were there to help. We were innovative, curious, and created new collaborations with both statutory and non-statutory organisations.

Integration Support became a place for our service users to connect, be empowered, be enabled, get support and information, learn and have fun.

Whilst the external world has been extremely demanding, we have also focused on developing and improving our organisation. We recruited caseworkers, a community development worker, an operations manager and more than 20 amazing volunteers. We re-launched the English Learning project and introduced new classes for the absolute beginners in different locations; launched the Women's Conversation Club and the Women's Health Club; added an additional session to our Saturday Club.

Great progress has also been made developing our safeguarding practice. We have integrated more digital technologies into our practise, reviewed our approach to data protection and our finance systems and processes.

We move into 2024 with a solid financial position. Going forward, we, alongside our Board of Trustees, are united in our shared commitment to delivering high quality, inclusive services, which amplify refugees', asylum seekers and migrants' voices and ensuring they have choices and chances and confidence to use the opportunities.

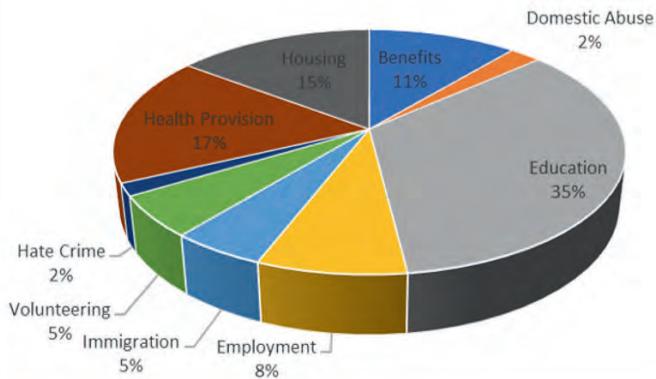
We are also in the process of developing a new two-year Strategy, that will begin in April 2024. It's clear that no single agency has all the answers, and collaborating with partners and coproducing with our service users is now more vital than ever.

Finally, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation for the hard work and dedication of our colleagues including volunteers; to our Board of Trustees who generously donate their time and wisdom, and to our supporters, partners, and donors, without whom we could not continue with our vital work: improving lives of refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, and other ethnically diverse communities. Our primary goal will always be to continue supporting those who need us most. We are here for them and with them. We care.

Information, Advice & Guidance

In 2023 our Caseworkers and Family Support worker provided 662 IAG (Information, Advice and Guidance) sessions.

We provided more than 100 outreach IAG sessions, making our services accessible to those who needed our support. We provided sessions in local churches, Foodbanks, libraries, hostels, hotels and hospitals.



Case Study

Quaraman and Mzhda family moved to Harlow and were struggling to settle and access local services. Their children were not in education and 2 of the children and mum had unaddressed health issues. The family did not have basic household items and there were issues with the accommodation which family was struggling to resolve.

Our Caseworker:

- helped the family to complete school applications for the 2 children
- enrolled parents onto English classes
- helped to register them with GP
- made referrals to the British Red Cross, Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service, Bump to Five and Roots to Wellbeing
- Supported the family to source household items they needed and resolve accommodation issues
- Helped to complete a Harlow College bursary application and apply for a Maternity grant
- Helped them to open bank accounts.

The children are now attending school, their housing issues resolved and the parents started their English learning journey. The family now has all the basic household items they need and is now prepared to soon welcome their new baby.



On the photo: The family enjoying trip to the Sea Life centre

"Thank you for your support, that's good when someone understands our language, it's too hard for us to explain our problems because of language barriers" – Qaraman and Mzhda

Case Study

Eshetu and Eyerusalem's family contacted us after receiving an eviction notice. They were also struggling to find a school place for one of their 3 children.

Our Caseworker:

- Helped them to apply for a school place
- Provided them with digital support: issued sim cards, arranged digital equipment to tackle their digital exclusion
- Helped them to open bank accounts and apply for Universal Credit
- Supported with completing a homelessness application
- Supported the family with sourcing household items they need and essential items for their baby.



On the photo: The family is settling in their new home

The Family's housing situation has been resolved and the children are now attending school. Digital access made it possible for Eshetu to pass his driving theory test and complete Accountancy course.

"Thank you so much for your support, we always remember you" – Eshetu and Eyerusalem

Case Study

Gheorghina was referred to us when she tried to get support with access to emergency food services she was struggling to explain herself because of the language barrier and her being illiterate. Gheorghina has underlying health conditions and had run out of medication prescribed by her previous GP from another area.

Our Caseworker:

- Provided her warm clothes and arranged food support
- Helped her to register with GP and supported with GP visits
- Arranged kinetic therapy
- Helped her to solved the Universal Credit payments



On the photo: Gheorghina wearing her new warm coat

"Thank you so much for all your help and support. ISS helped me when no one did. I did starve for 2 weeks living off only with breakfast from the hotel" – Gheorghina

English Learning Project

The past year for this project “previously known as the Falcon English School” has been an exciting one. We expanded our classes across 3 sites, offering diverse learning experiences to over 200 students. Our remote hotel sites focused on practical and conversational skills.

The aim of the remote sites is to prepare the residents for life outside the hotel with more practically useful English. Shifting the focus from what they might need to pass an exam to how they might conversationally engage with anyone they meet or with any organisation they may interact.

We brought on experienced teachers and implemented Google Classroom to enhance instruction. Teachers adopted new teaching plans to respond to ‘students’ needs. Most excitingly, we supported one of our own volunteers who had previous teaching experience to complete her ESOL teaching certification. By investing in the development of talent within our existing team, we were able to empower others to improve themselves.

In 2023, 23 students took the Trinity ESOL exam with a 100% passing rate from Entry 1 to Entry 3.





During the summer holidays, we hosted 2 ESOL Fun Weeks for young people to prepare teens for adult life. This intensive programme combined English lessons with vital awareness sessions about benefits, police, fire services, sexual health, and community services.

Beyond structured language lessons, we delivered reading clubs, game clubs, and other informal gatherings for students to practice English skills in a relaxed and engaging environment. These programmes create a supportive community for people to make connections and build their confidence in speaking English.

Through instruction and engagement, the English Learning Project aims to empower migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers with the language abilities needed to fully integrate into society. Developing English skills helps break down barriers for our students to access education, employment, healthcare and other services.



Saturday Club

Every Saturday morning, we invite children and their parents or carers to join our Saturday Club at the Tree House family hub in Harlow. The Saturday Club is part of a project supporting children, young people, parents, and carers.

Our Saturday Club has become a place where positive changes start for many children and their families. Providing a safe space and taking a holistic, trauma-informed approach we enable families to start a conversation, ask for support and start address the issues they are experiencing.



During 2023 we ran nearly 90 Saturday Club sessions for children, providing more than 180 hours of fun activities and space for children to connect with each other. We added additional sessions every Saturday in response to the heightened demand and making the sessions accessible for some children who don't feel comfortable being in a busy environment.



"Saturday Club is a magical place. I met 2 families there and now we are good friends, celebrating Christmas together. We are from different countries: Romania, Ukraine and Moldova but we are so grateful that we meet each other. Our 5 children are now more than friends, we visit each other, go for a walk. Our children are happier and we see they become more confident!"
- D, Mum of 2 years old A

In 2023 the children's favourite activity was messy play: playing with mud, slime, foam, and coloured water. Last year children learned how to make playdough from flour, salt, water, and cream of tartar. It was so much fun!

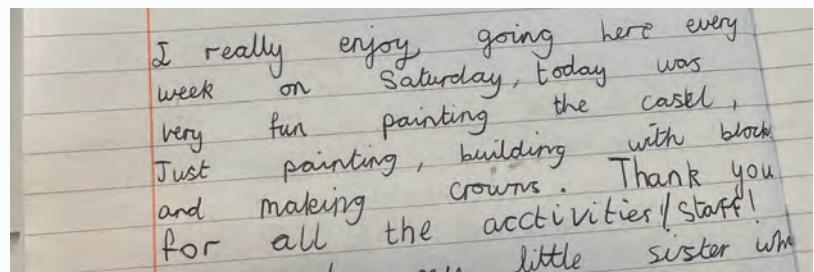


"Due to the language barrier G is struggling with communication at school. He had no friends and spent time playing on his own. He never was invited to someone's birthday, and no one came to his one. This breaks my heart. It all changed when we came to the Saturday Club. G enjoys every minute at the club, he feels like other kids and already made so many friends. Celebrating birthday at the Club is amazing: 20 kids are singing happy birthday, playing games and G also received a gift. G said it was his best party," - L, Mum of 4 years old G

In 2023 we celebrated more than 30 children's birthdays with a birthday song, balloons, bubbles, games and presents.



Children said they feel "special and happy" to be able to celebrate their special day in the Saturday Club.



At the Saturday Club we strive to make every family feel welcome. We celebrated Chinese New Year, Easter, Eid Al Adha, Black History Month, Diwali, and Christmas.



In 2023 we introduced new "recycling sessions" to help families who are new in the UK to understand the recycling system. Many were unfamiliar with how to sort and dispose of various materials. Children enjoyed making art and crafts with recyclable items. We made Eco bricks by packing solid dry plastic into a bottle and practiced sorting the household waste.



At the Saturday Club we promote physical activities. For the last 30 minutes of each session we have energetic dancing and games. Children love this burning-off-energy time. Even parents join in with dancing the Macarena.



The Saturday Club became a place where children were able to get warm clothes, food, enjoy fun activities, celebrate special events, meet friends and enjoy trips. Parents/carers enrolled with our English classes. They received support with their housing issues, benefits, employment, health provision and many other issues.

Feedback received from P's mum M:

"Hello, I just would like massive thank you for everything you done and still doing for my Family. Not sure if you remember, but when We first met, I was very new in Harlow, didn't know the town and people, I was literally lost, plus my little one who didn't speak English had no friends as well.

The amount of help, advices and guidance, ISS provide us are unbelievable.

ISS saved with food. That's massive help especially when we struggle with paying all bills. For me as mother, seeing my baby enjoying healthy nice food (which I couldn't afford) is more than anything. Clothes, shoes and toiletries for my daughter helped us face changing seasons.

I'm very thankful for advice about lovely places where I can find fun and friends for P. We regularly attending Saturday Club, where I met many other mums and my baby found lots of friends. I attended Women's conversation Club and English class too, which also make me feel part of community. We could enjoy Christmas/ Easter party, trips to seaside, park and RAF museum only because of ISS. Harlow Holiday Club, activities at church, Harlow Museum, local Library, Pardon Woods and Three house, plus many others, are places which I wouldn't know without ISS.

I did not have clue about nursery, I didn't think P is eligible. ISS suggested send her to nursery, helped with application and I'm so happy I did it, as after couple of months there P is able to communicate in English.

I will never forget ISS support when I found out my diagnosis. You gave me your time, attention and 'shoulder' to cry out all my worries. ISS saved my mental health that day.

ISS have very important place in our hearts, as you Guys improve our life dramatically.

Happy P's Family"

Our Trips

Our trips allowed participants to experience new cultural institutions, to expand their perspectives, and bond over adventures. In 2023, we organised outings to destinations including:



Royal Air-force Museum Trips x2



Southend Seaside Trips x2

"Park was great and daddy won for me a big doll, I love it. It was the best day" - S. (10 years old)



Wicksteed Park



Chessington Park

"It was a good day, machine games were the best. I am happy because I have new friends. We had a good day and we wish to go on a trip again." - J. (8 years old)

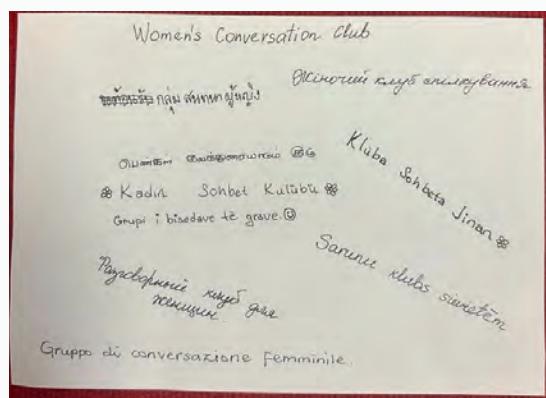


Southend Sealife

"Being isolated as a single mother is not nice so having to meet other mums out was a brilliant thing integrated support has done thanks. " - F

Women's Conversation Club

In January 2023 we launched new Women's Conversation Club at the Adults Learning Centre in the Town library. We created a welcoming and supportive space for women from all backgrounds to practice their English, make new friends, and support each other.



472 women attended 52 Women's Conversation Club sessions in 2023. During each session women were having discussions and sharing their experiences and views on a variety of subjects. These included, but were not limited to: embracing differences, taking care of one's mental health, hobbies, comfort zones, the world of cinema, standards of beauty around the world, maternity, countries of the world, life in the UK, education, healthy choices.

"I always learn something new at my club. I am so excited every Friday as I will meet all the ladies. I feel they all are my friends. We laugh when make mistake in English. We are so different but have same worries and problems." - P

"I like to learn new things about other people and other countries" - O



"Good lady energy in the class" - N

"Thank you for this club, it is a great opportunity to meet people from different countries and speak English" - S

"Loneliness is hard. This club is saving not just me but many women. We enjoy coffee and treats, speak, laugh, hug. Thank you for this Club!" - M

"This club helps me being more confident" - S



Our ladies crocheted squares to make blankets for End of Life care patients at the Princess Alexandra Hospital.

We invited special guests to join the discussions and share their skills and experiences. Our partners from Essex Wellbeing Service, Active Essex, Terrence Higgins Trust, Changing Pathways, and Rainbow Services provided the women with opportunities to check their health, explore physical activities and sports clubs, get a better understanding of NHS pathways and local services and be aware of domestic abuse and hate crime.



"Last week Friday 10-12pm at Harlow Central Library I was invited to attend the Integration Support Services Women's Conversation Club and discuss the Active Essex campaign as the theme of the session was 'Hobbies'.

This is a fun interactive group run by the amazing Ana and her wonderful volunteers. Also lovely Fiona Tidd the Wellbeing Coach for Terrence Higgins Trust part of Essex Wellbeing Service and her colleague were available to give out free health checks.

These sessions are so well organised as each woman is encouraged to speak in English as they come from various countries and are refugees or immigrants. I love hearing about their cultures as I too can relate as my parents were Italian immigrants and we only spoke Italian at home. Which note to self I need to practise more!

Spending time with these positive women makes my heart soar with happiness and engaging them in an activity even happier as there is always a variety of games, conversations and activities which are interesting. Ana plans and taps into the interests of the participants so that they are fully involved discussing their hobbies. " – Mirka Marri, Active Essex Community Connector

Women's Health Club

Our women shared their concerns about poor mental health and being physically inactive. Our response was to host yoga session which had a great success.

Together we decided to continue physical activities and in November 2023 we launched trial session of Women's Health Club at Latton Bush Centre. The aim of Women's Health Club is to support women's physical and mental well-being in a safe, welcoming space.



"This was the first time I tried yoga in a group, and I feel positive about it" - M

"I enjoyed the healthy eating topic conversation after the yoga" - S

Following the successful Women's Health Club trial, we decided to launch Women's Health Club in 2024 offering women a unique opportunity to try a variety of physical activities, including pilates, yoga, fitness, boxing, body conditioning to improve their health and well-being.

All sessions are free and support is available with travel costs.



Crochet Project

In November, we launched a therapeutic crochet project to create handmade blankets for end-of-life care patients.

Through this project, 120 squares were crocheted by service users, staff, volunteers, and community members by the middle of December. These squares were assembled into 2 full-sized patchwork blankets.



“Crochet gives my mum a purpose and keeps her minds off with all the worries ”
- A

“I finally have the chance to showcase my skills. Received praise from other ladies is such a good feeling. I’m teaching others to crouch now” - M



Events

Events serve as a vital platform for our organisation to directly engage with the community while raising awareness of our mission and programmes and measuring their impact. This past year we organised 15 community events.



International Women's Day @Harlow Rock School



Harlow Pride | organised by Harlow Pride



Puppet Shows | performed by Sabotage Theatre



Sexual Health Awareness | guest speaker Red Kite

Our team represented the organisation at 13 community events hosted by our community partners.

We set up booths and activities at local fairs, festivals, and events to recruit volunteers and share our mission with new audiences.

We engaged with over 358 community members at the Community events.



Community Celebration Fête | organised by Harlow Council



Re-drawing Harlow | organised by Harlow Art Trust



Family Fun Day | organised by Rainbows Services



Voluntary Sector Forum | organised by Rainbows Services



Black History Month | organised by PATAAC



Volunteering opportunities & Movie night for Asylum Seekers

"I wish we could do it more often"

"I haven't laughed for ages, it was so nice."

"It was my best party, and I want to go again next year" - Pola(4 years old)



Bring & Share Lunch @Latton Bush Centre



Winter Special Celebration @Latton Bush Centre

Ukrainian Refugee's Support

In 2023 we provided support to more than 200 Ukrainian refugees and became a central point of contact for them.

We provided information, advice, and guidance. Advice regarding Benefits, education, health provision, housing options and employment support were the five main enquiry areas.

Ukrainian Get Together Sessions, held at the Harlow Playhouse and Latton Bush Centre provided a warm welcome and opportunity for many Ukrainians to meet new friends, connect and socialise.



“Without your support and information, we would struggle to live here. I am grateful for having a place to go when I need help. You also connected me with other Ukrainians and I now have friends here” , - Olesya

“Thanks to your support I was able to see GP immediately on my return. I wouldn't be able to find my way with NHS” , - Maryna

“The information you provided, and support helped us to secure the rent for 2 new Ukrainians!” - Liubov

To reduce social isolation and improve wellbeing, we invited Ukrainian refugees to the events and trips. Ukrainian ladies shared Ukrainian songs with us at the International Women's Day celebration and gave everyone who joined our Bring&Share lunch an opportunity to taste Ukrainian cuisine.





Ukrainian families together with other families enjoyed the days out we organised. We spent a day at the seaside, visited the Royal Airforce Museum and Wiksteed Park.

"Thank you for the well organised event. It was a pleasure to meet new people. Thank you for warm welcome" , - Olga

We had an unforgettable experience attending Ukrainian National Opera performance of Madame Butterfly in March. Thanks to the support provided by Harlow Council, Harlow Playhouse Trust, VAEF and Good Companions, 47 Ukrainian refugees enjoyed the Opera and met with the artists after the performance.



"Thank you very much for the evening. We spent amazing time together in a friendly atmosphere" , - Halyna

We coordinated 6 full-day adventure boat trips. 50 Ukrainian refugees joined the cruises provided by CanalAbility and even experienced English classes on the boat.



"Thank you for the great cruise. this was the first time I was on the boat, it was a very special day. I not only met new friends but also met someone from my home town." - V

"Thank you for the day. we felt very special. it was the first time since we arrived in the UK when we had such a special day. Thank you for connect me with other Ukrainian." - M



We supported Ukrainian refugees with English learning through our ESOL classes, Conversation, Reading Clubs and volunteering. We are proud to see them leading Women's Conversation Club and Women's Health Club and supporting our Saturday Club (family activities).

"First I joined the women's conversation club and English class to improve my English. Now I'm volunteering to help others" , - O

In response to the high number of enquiries about navigating the health system, we hosted Health awareness workshops for Ukrainian refugees, supported by Harlow Council.

44 Ukrainian refugees and 8 guest speakers - Health professionals from Vita Health Group, Terrence Higgins Trust, Essex Wellbeing Service, Stellar Healthcare, The Princess Alexandra Hospital, as well as community nurses attended. The guest speakers provided information and answered questions about role of GP and Social prescribers, sexual health clinics, emergency services, Mental health support services, how to reduce risks of cancer and its treatment, Health checks, as well as explaining NHS career pathways.



"Because we don't speak English, when we need help with health issues, we go to hospital, A & E. Yes, we wait but then see a doctor. I will now check health with Fiona (Essex Wellbeing service). I now know that I can call 111 phone line and ask for interpreter."

"I already shared with my teenage son about free condoms he can get using eC-card app, I also explained him about sexual health clinic"

"I did not know what to expect from the workshop. I thought, I will not be able to understand the information and was very glad that interpreter was provided. I didn't know about Sexual health clinics, free health checks and social prescribers. Health system in the UK is very different from one in Ukraine but now I at least know what services are available and what are not (e.g. NHS dentists), so I will make my decisions on where to get the health support I need. 111 was a new number for me. "



"A friendly and truly festive atmosphere was created for our children! Thanks for the professionalism, creativity and coordinated work of your friendly team, the holiday turned out to be bright, interesting, fun, unusual and unforgettable. Children received pleasant impressions, gifts and positive emotions, good mood!!" , - Valentyna

We ended 2023 by hosting a Ukrainian Special Winter celebration attended by 90 Ukrainian refugees. Good Companions generously supported the special event and their team provided delicious refreshments and amazing gifts to all the children.

Donations received & distributed

We have been humbled by the generous support of partners and individuals this past year. Every donation made a positive impact with people needing extra compassion and care.



I would like to say a massive thank you for an amazing gift after puppet show ,craft box .It's helps so much for girls to rise up them imagination and creativity.
On that rainy days we enjoyed so much to make our own puppet show with our made characters and heroes:)
Thank you

13:13

We also getting ready for halloween with stuff from craft box



13:16

Our Team

The Strength of Our Diverse Team

Our organisation is powered by a team of 33 dedicated staff who collectively speak over 25 languages. We come from diverse cultural backgrounds which reflect the communities we serve.

80% of our team are migrants themselves. Our personal understanding of our client's needs helps our organisation think creatively to provide culturally competent and accessible services. Our team have built trust and community spirit through engaging with service users in their native languages.

Team Members	Board of Trustees	Volunteers
Marina Dunajeva CEO	Sumana Begum Chair	Aleyna Chalashkan
Elanie Kong Operations Manager	Addie Adewole Treasurer	Megan Fidgeon
Adam Bruton English Learning Project Admin & Caseworker	Destin Maroy	Mihaela Mihailiou
Kinga Betancourt Canas Family Support Worker	Louise Prinjha	Nassir Ahmed
Leyla Ozgul Caseworker	Jabeen Haque (resigned Oct23)	Oksana Gutsul
Ana Bocancea Community Development Worker		Olena Poliasheva
Yasmin Raza Specialist Caseworker		Patrycja Kus
Jacqueline Atkinson ESOL Teacher		Polina Halinauskas
Sarah Elwes ESOL Teacher & Coordinator		Victoria Puzderi
Nadejda Furculita ESOL Teacher		Kubra Takcan



Financial Report

Integration Support Services

Statement of Financial Activities for the Year Ended 31 March 2023 (Including Income and Expenditure Account and Statement of Total Recognised Gains and Losses)

	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	Total 2022 £
Income and Endowments from:			
Donations and legacies	3 10,002	-	10,002 20,115
Charitable activities	4 5,716	82,274	87,990 161,452
Other trading activities	5 -	-	- 89
Total income	<u>15,718</u>	<u>82,274</u>	<u>97,992</u> <u>181,656</u>
Expenditure on:			
Charitable activities	(39,325)	(86,737)	(126,062) (163,791)
Total expenditure	<u>(39,325)</u>	<u>(86,737)</u>	<u>(126,062)</u> <u>(163,791)</u>
Net (expenditure)/income	(23,607)	(4,463)	(28,070) 7,865
Transfers between funds	(2,951)	2,951	-
Net movement in funds	<u>(26,558)</u>	<u>(1,512)</u>	<u>(28,070)</u> <u>17,865</u>
Reconciliation of:			
Total funds brought forward	<u>101,938</u>	<u>57,594</u>	<u>159,532</u> <u>141,667</u>
Total funds carried forward	<u>75,380</u>	<u>56,082</u>	<u>131,462</u> <u>159,532</u>

All of the charity's activities derive from continuing operations during the above two periods.

The funds breakdown for 2022 is shown in note 16.

A Journey to Healing

We are honoured to share a powerful story written by Lizzy, an asylum seeker who found motivation to overcome her challenges after escaping traumatic experiences in her home country.

Lizzy courageously uses the story of a sea snail that she inadvertently brought back with her from the trip to the seaside to illustrate how similar her personal journey was to that of this small creature.

We will continue walking beside Lizzy and all those seeking refuge. Their courage drives our mission to continue helping others like Lizzy. To provide them with the voice they have been denied for too long, and the freedom to tell their stories. Through people like Lizzy, we aim to spread awareness and compassion.

Be or not to Be like a Snail?...



A few months ago, I had the opportunity to visit a beach in the United Kingdom for the first time. Like every sea-loving Latina, I took on the task of walking many kilometers along the shore of the beach, admiring and enjoying the mystical beauty of the ocean. And since I couldn't let it go I had to collect several shells and sea snails for my personal collection.

A month had passed since that adventure and checking my suitcases to start another new trip I found my shells, but to my surprise one of them was alive. I did have a beautiful baby snail, I adopted him as my pet and called him "Burpy" but their resistance and resilience to survive inside my backpack, without water or food, was what inspired me to write this reflection.



Because we can be like a Snail and learn from them, from their tranquility, from their perseverance and especially from their way of self-protection. Because this small and fragile animal, which carries a large spiral shell on its back, in addition to showing us one of the most beautiful works designed by the creator, shows us the reality and at the same time the simplicity of life itself.

He is slow to advance, he is not in a hurry, but his progress is constant and without pauses, he knows how to defend himself despite his fragility, some will say that he is a coward because he hides within himself, on the contrary he patiently carries his burden without showing it to others by carrying it inside with stoicism and tranquility.

The Snail grows within itself and projects itself outward, being its own architect and teacher of its soul. Furthermore, if it feels that its environment is favorable for it, it comes out of its shell and continues on its journey.



He is incredibly skilled, although you see him moving slowly along the floor, he can climb walls, rocks, walls, he is capable of climbing as high as he wants, he will take breaks but he will reach his goal because his horizon is well defined, even beyond the weight that he carries on his back.

Burpy taught me that I must be able to live intensely every moment of my life, stop and continue despite my fears or oppositions on my path, life is a journey of small but constant steps, it is a path where we must leave a positive mark, having faith and resisting with resilience making our adventure of living easier.

Burpy invited me to live in peace, because although we are sensitive to superficial, noisy and busy life, to violence, to acting in a defensive, competitive and aggressive way towards our environment, he showed me that no one is so fragile or small to be treated with respect, love and with the delicacy of the Snail.

That we can adapt to our reality and patiently wait for the result of our dreams and projects, that although we are impatient, the Snail teaches us persistence in the face of effort.

And what can we say about our personal weaknesses, frailties and vulnerabilities, we can defend ourselves with dignity and humility, but with the gallantry of growing from within ourselves.

Although **Burpy** was locked in darkness for days, one day the sun came out again for his life, and even though he closes himself in, he always finds a light to follow his path, every day is a beautiful challenge. Let's enjoy every minute and every second of this beautiful journey called life.

October 2023

Big Thank you

The progress highlighted throughout this annual review would not be possible without the invaluable support of our funders, partners, and communities. We are grateful for their generosity and collaboration which empowers our mission.



We would also like to extend our thanks and gratitude to our too many to count contributors.

You are too many to name, but please know your help and assistance this past year has been invaluable to us as a charity and vital to our service users. Thank you is not enough.



Harlow

Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service

Believe in children
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Harlow Art Trust



GALLERY
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Refreshing Our Image to Better Serve Our Community



This past year we embarked on an exciting rebranding initiative to create a new visual identity reflecting our dynamic approach to empowering the community. After months of collaboration and research, we are thrilled to unveil our new logo!

Our refreshed look features vibrant yellow and charcoal colours symbolising the warmth and strength of our community. The image of diverse individuals surrounded by uplifting images communicates our passion for empowering asylum seekers, refugees, migrants and ethnically diverse communities through care and support.

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Integration Support

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