Celebrating 25 Years of the
Nottingham & Nottinghamshire
REFUGEE FORUM

Impact Report 24-25



Everyone deserves the right to rebuild their lives.




Cafe Narjis

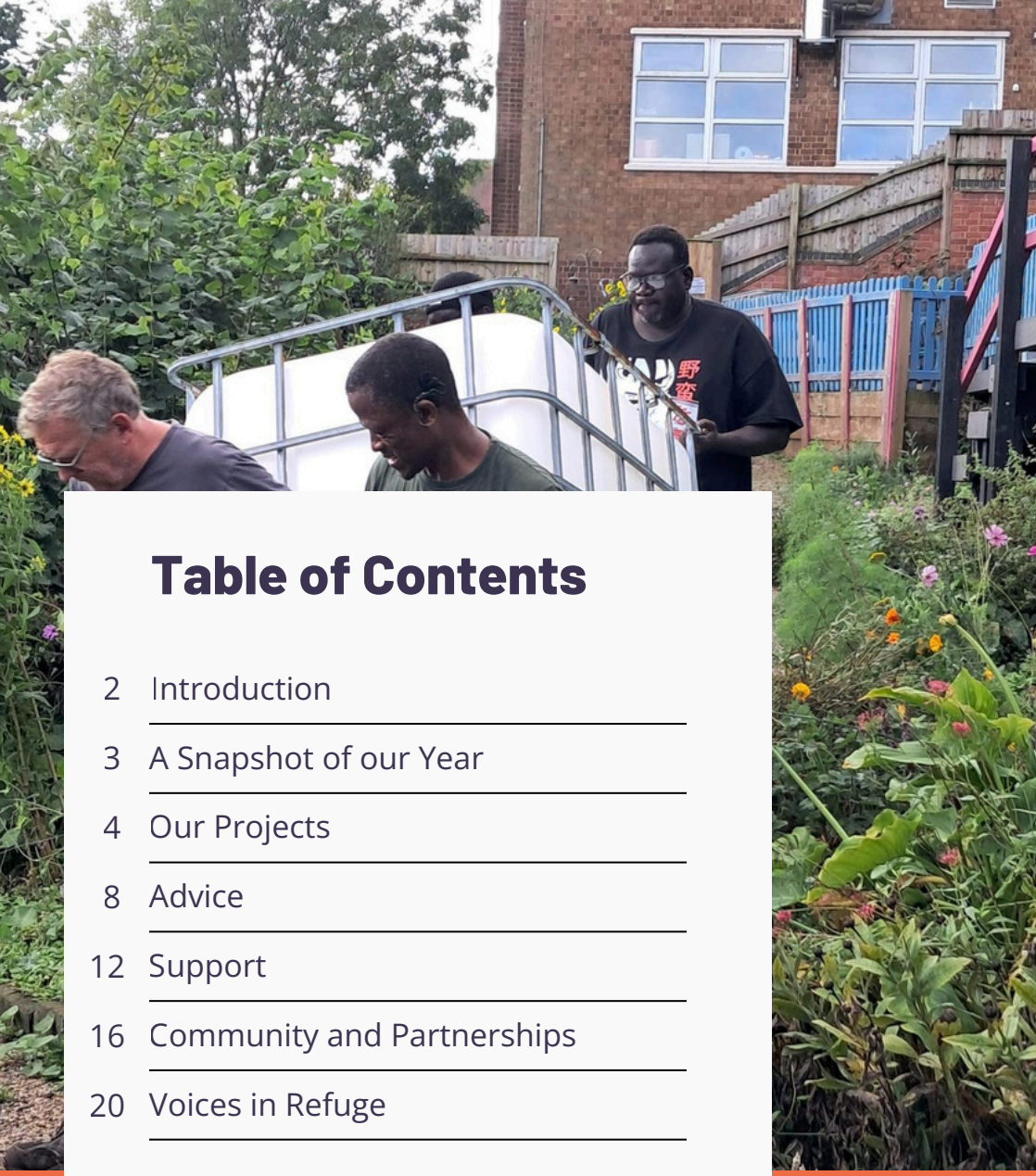


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Introduction

Frank Forman, Director, Nottingham Refugee Forum

Welcome to our 2024-25 impact report.

At Nottingham Refugee Forum we believe **everyone deserves a chance to rebuild their lives**. Our range of services support those arriving in Nottingham as asylum seekers, settling in as refugees, all the way through to them gaining British citizenship.

This report proudly showcases our work over the past year, and demonstrates how we have helped people rebuild their lives, through the lens of the three key themes that run through everything we do: **advice, support, community & partnerships**.

I hope you enjoy reading the stories and seeing the impact of our work. It has been a year of both challenge and achievement, and I am grateful to our dedicated team of 54 staff and 175 volunteers who have worked tirelessly to make all this happen. I also extend my thanks to our generous supporters and donors, without whom we couldn't carry out this vital work.

Thank you for showing an interest in the work of Nottingham Refugee Forum.

A Snapshot of Our Year

We supported:

4,239 asylum seekers and refugees including dependents



74 nationalities



7,148 individual cases



We worked with:



111 local and national partner organisations

175 amazing volunteers

We provided:

6,775 Hours of interpreting

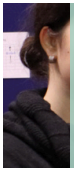
13,000 meals served by Cafe Narjis



Our Projects

Our **General Advice** drop-in service is often the first time we meet our clients. Staffed by a team of volunteers, the project aims to provide basic advice on a wide range of issues, signpost to external services, or refer to one of our in-house specialist programmes.





The **Specialist Advice Team** provides specialist advice and support to asylum seekers and refugees through complex casework, including support for newly recognised refugees, homelessness and housing, and support for survivors of domestic or racial abuse.

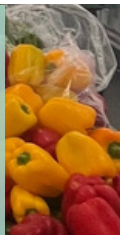
Our **Resettlement Team** provides intense and holistic support to individuals and families who arrive in the area through one of the government's resettlement schemes, including the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and The UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS). We work with these families for between 3 and 5 years, helping them to settle and thrive in their new lives.





The aim of the **Initial Accommodation (IA) Project** is to support, advise and advocate on behalf of those asylum seekers currently housed in initial accommodation sites in Nottingham. We aim to coordinate the Nottingham-wide response to the IA hotels, through regular meetings with all partner organisations involved with supporting the residents.

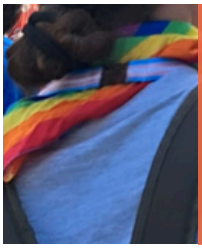
Our **Refused Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project** helps destitute refused asylum seekers with their immediate needs and provides support around their immigration cases via referrals to external organisations and partner agencies. Visitors to our Friday Group can access a selection of groceries, toiletries, a small amount of cash, and a hot meal in Cafe Narjis.





Our **Into the Mainstream Project** helped asylum seekers and refugees access healthcare services, and ran regular workshops with healthcare professionals to help raise awareness and best practice when working with this group.

Our Projects



Our **LGBTQ+ Project** supports our clients who identify as LGBTQ+, who face hostile immigration policies and are often ostracised by their own refugee communities. Our aim is to support these clients throughout their time in the asylum system and beyond, to reduce isolation and increase wellbeing and confidence. We have a community group, a befriending scheme, and provide specialist support.

Through weekly Youth Club activities, and a dedicated caseworker, our **Youth Project** aims to help young people grow friendships and support networks, gain confidence with the English language, and develop a fulfilled life in the UK.





At our weekly **Women's Group, Pamoja**, we empower women by sharing skills, raising aspirations and boosting self-esteem, through a range of activities and trips.

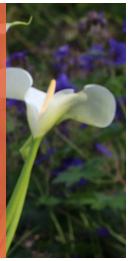
We hold regular **ESOL Classes** each week taught and led by trained volunteer English and conversation teachers; bridging an essential gap for those asylum seekers awaiting places in college.





In our **Community Cafe, Cafe Narjis,** we serve a free – and consistently excellent – hot meal at midday, every day of the week Monday to Friday. By providing volunteering opportunities for people to learn new skills and share culinary traditions, we combat isolation with friendship.

Volunteers from our **Grassroots Garden Project** transformed the overgrown land behind our building into a green oasis of calm. It provides a space where asylum seekers and refugees can develop new skills and volunteer their gardening skills to grow flowers, fruit and vegetables (which are then used to prepare delicious food in our cafe). We recycle, re-use and re-purpose wherever possible and we use environmentally-friendly materials in all we do.





Khaled

Like many asylum seekers in Nottingham, Khaled was desperate to improve his English but faced a long wait before being able to access ESOL courses at Nottingham College. Khaled wanted to feel useful and work in the garden, using skills he had already developed in Sudan and Greece, where he had worked in a tomato farm.

Khaled started volunteering in the garden, taking responsibility for growing and looking after the tomatoes, of course. We bought him his own gloves and wellies as he has very large hands and feet! He also accessed English classes at the Refugee Forum and enjoyed participating in a day's baking course at the School of Artisan Foods, where he made a range of breads and honed his kitchen knife skills. Khaled was also a very important part of the team which built the polytunnel in the garden. The work involved levelling and preparing the ground as well as building the actual tunnel.

Khaled continues to work in the garden and is an important member of the polytunnel team, looking after tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers and aubergines, which are grown for the café, as well as the sowing and potting of new plants for the garden. He would like to pursue his interest in working with food and study for catering qualifications once he has improved his English.

April - July

















Advice

Providing practical advice, signposting and advocacy

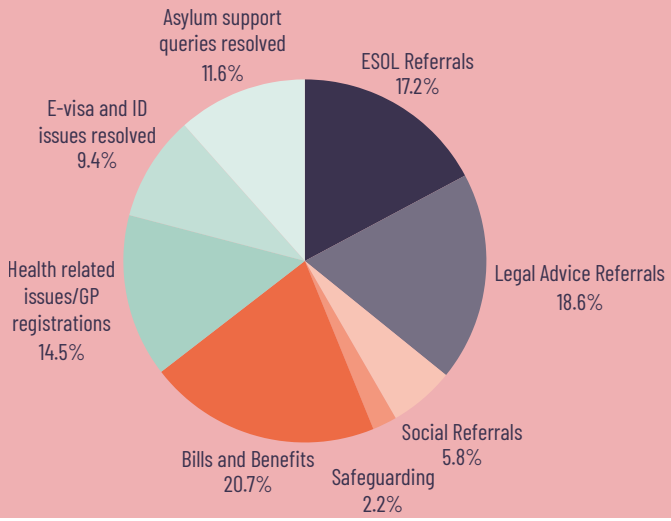
On arrival asylum seekers and refugees need help getting to know the system, structure and support networks in their new country, and we're there every step of the way.



At Nottingham Refugee Forum most advice is accessed through our **General Advice** drop-in service Monday to Thursday.

This year **1,883 asylum seekers and refugees** came to our drop-in advice service, where our team of volunteers helped with a total of **4,525 different cases**.

General Advice Case Breakdown





Yusif

Yusif had recently been moved to Nottingham and came to visit our specialist mental health advisor. He was concerned that he would need to restart the referral process for talking therapies. He was suffering with depression and trauma and worried about a long wait for therapy. Being unable to communicate in English meant that he had been unable to make a referral himself, and he struggled to speak with his GP about other health conditions.

We spent time speaking to Yusif about his mental health, physical health and other factors affecting his life and wellbeing.

Our caseworker called the NHS Talking Therapies service to arrange a face-to-face appointment. She maintained contact with Yusif to help him understand his medical letters, contacted his GP on his behalf to arrange appointments and view his reports, helped him navigate the online appointment systems, and advocated for him when the GP did not provide an interpreter.

Yusif had an appointment with Talking Therapies who arranged further therapy to treat PTSD. This much needed treatment and support has allowed him to live more healthily and enable him to focus on settling into a new city. He expressed his gratitude for the support he received, and for our willingness to help him when he felt nobody else would.

Advice

Helping people to navigate services until they are able to establish themselves locally and feel confident once more.

On arrival

917 clients in initial accommodation given on-site tailored advice and support

237 supported with medical referrals

157 registered with GPs and dentists

92 young people supported by our Youth Project, nearly a 50% increase on the previous year.



On the way

244 refugees provided with move on support following a positive decision on their asylum application

222 refugees helped to secure accommodation and set up their new homes

45 asylum seekers were supported through our Refused Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project

27 LGBTQ+ clients were supported with specialised advice

26 clients provided with specialised support around mental health

Almost there...

12 families settled in Nottingham following refugee family reunion

181 clients attended 1:1 employability sessions

5 refused asylum seekers were rewarded their refugee status following appeals and **6** returned to their home countries via the voluntary return service



September - December





















Support

Providing clients with the tools, the space, and the support they need to rebuild their lives



744 refugees helped to register with the new E-Visa scheme

1,139 food parcels were distributed

442 people accessed ESOL classes at the Forum

303 refugees supported through the Resettlement Project

"Nottingham Refugee Forum is such a supportive and inclusive environment. It's a place where I've grown so much both personally and professionally and I'm really proud to be part of the team."

Employability

55 refugees on our Resettlement Project were supported into paid employment over the past year

51 refugees attended the 8-week "Life, Skills, and Employability" course

9 clients attended the NTU Enterprise Skills Course, equipping them with knowledge on setting up their own business

7 out of 12 new staff members last year had lived experience of forced displacement





Selam

Selam was a doctor in Ethiopia before claiming asylum in the UK. While still an asylum seeker, she joined our Front of House volunteer team and our Interpreting volunteer team in 2024. After receiving refugee status, Selam got a job as the caseworker on our Refused Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project (RASAP).

“When I was an asylum seeker, I really wanted to do something meaningful rather than just sitting at home, it was important for my mental health. I also wanted to be involved with an organisation that supports people like me. Nottingham Refugee Forum felt like the perfect place to do something positive and feel connected.

Volunteering gave me a strong sense of purpose and routine during a difficult time. It helped me rebuild my confidence, meet amazing people, and feel part of a community. It also gave me useful skills and experience that helped me take the next step into paid work.

As a Front of House volunteer, I supported RASAP and got to know many of the clients, some of whom are now my clients in my current role. That hands-on experience gave me a strong understanding of the project's work and helped me build the communication and organisational skills I now use every day. It also made the transition into the caseworker role feel natural.“

Support

Providing clients with the tools, the space, and the support they need to rebuild their lives



98 women attended our **Pamoja women's group** over the past year. The group enjoyed a range of activities, including a seaside trip, visits to the Lincoln Market, Nottingham Playhouse, and Nottingham Castle.

We've also partnered with several **independent artists**, enriching our sessions with creative and engaging experiences. The group remains a valued and welcoming space for women to connect, explore, and enjoy new opportunities together.



Our **Afghan Women Integration Programme** provided a women-only space for the clients on the ARAP scheme to **socialise**, **learn new knowledge** and **share skills**. The women attended weekly workshops over 15 weeks to support their integration and understanding of UK laws, culture, and society.

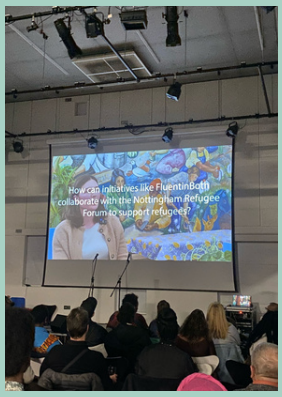
As part of the programme:

- 13 women completed the DVLA Theory Course.
- 14 women continued the Sewing Course.



January - March















Community & Partnerships

Providing opportunities to build and develop social networks, both within Nottingham Refugee Forum and with the wider community



Volunteering

We rely on a team of dedicated, passionate and hard-working volunteers to enable us to carry out our work. We could not help others to rebuild their lives without their incredible contribution.

- 175 volunteers across 11 projects
- 47 new volunteers recruited and trained
- 25% of our volunteers have experience of forced migration
- 500 hours given by our volunteers each week
- 100% of our volunteers would recommend the experience to others
- 7 volunteers joined our staff team

Café Narjis

Our Community Cafe Narjis served over 13,000 meals and we regularly serve between 60 and 80 meals a day, with a record of 96 meals served in a single lunchtime.

We also provide catering for events. At the last year's Refugee Week BBQ we served over 250 meals and provided dinner at the Christmas Party for over 200 people.



Grassroots Garden

26 people volunteered in our Grassroots Garden this year, 15 of whom have lived experience.

More than 100 clients have engaged with at least one garden activity this year, including the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch, Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust Dead Hedge workshop, Pamoja women's group bulb planting and seed sowing workshops, and bird box building with the RASAP project.

The garden supplied the café with a plethora of fresh and healthy ingredients, including salad, strawberries, tomatoes, courgettes, pumpkins and squashes.



Ava

Ava and her family arrived in the UK seeking asylum. While accessing advice from Nottingham Refugee Forum, they ate at café Narjis and asked if they could help. Within a month, Ava was leading a team of kitchen volunteers on a weekly basis.

In their home country Ava and her husband owned a restaurant and had dreams to do the same here. Volunteering at Café Narjis provided Ava with purpose. It was a safe space to actively engage in something positive with other people after dropping her kids at school. Living in a hotel at the time, Ava evidently enjoyed volunteering, taking as much from the experience as she put in. It also meant that her catering skills were kept up to scratch while she waited to hear back about her asylum claim.

After receiving a positive decision, Ava began looking for work and was able to use volunteering with us for her CV and as a reference. She quickly found work as a chef in a popular city centre restaurant and amazingly still volunteers from time to time when her work schedule permits. Volunteering at Café Narjis provided Ava with a stepping stone to bridge the gap and helped immeasurably in their family's transition to life in the UK.

Community & Partnerships

Providing opportunities to build and develop social networks, both within Nottingham Refugee Forum and with the wider community

The people we meet are keen to participate and become active members of their community again. To make that possible we help people to develop their confidence, skills and knowledge.

220 Christmas presents were delivered to clients and their families

18 visits to local schools to talk to children about refugees

4 workshops in collaboration with local arts initiative Notts Poetry

13 LGBTQ+ socials including meeting Nadia Whittome MP



The **ARAP Project** ran a **Summer Activities Week**, with over **180 Afghan clients** participating. These included a cinema trip to see 'Wonka', a women and girls garden induction, a dads and lads cricket session, women's-only yoga, a women and children's picnic at Victoria Embankment, and a women's-only 'Chat and Chill' in our Garden. Additional activities featured a boxing session, bowling, and the All Star & Dynamos cricket summer club. The feedback from clients was overwhelmingly positive. These events offered clients a chance to enjoy themselves, connect within the Nottingham Afghan community, and create lasting memories. The activities week also helped break up the long summer holidays, which can be challenging for clients with limited entertainment budgets for their children.

In Collaboration With...

This year we were proud to work in partnership with **111 local and national organisations**, to help enhance our work and better support our clients.

Including **befriending** hotel residents, **providing alternative education** to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and **organising football sessions** for refugees, to **improving mental health**, **access to food** and **providing children a healthy start** in life.












Voices in Refuge

Making Everybody Heard



"This course was the most useful and interesting for me. The best course I have done. The course was well organised. We discussed very useful information for me."
Myroslava

Voices in Refuge is a Community Interest Company owned by Nottingham Refugee Forum, set up in 2016 in order to provide high quality professional interpreting service for Refugee Forum clients, whilst also promoting fair, ethical pay for interpreters, and offering community interpreting training to multilingual individuals who often themselves have experience of forced migration. As a small interpreting agency with focus on quality and integrity, our goal is to change the landscape of community interpreting, especially in the context of services for refugees and asylum seekers, one interpreter at a time.

Highlights

109 trainees, including **81** with lived experience of forced migration
25 languages covered by trainees
Over **1550** hours of interpreting provided to external partners
An **162%** increase of external sales compared to 2023/24
At least **25** people gained employment or volunteering placements as a direct result of completing the interpreting course.

100% of participants appreciated the structure and organisation of the course.
96% of participants noted how useful and interesting the content of the training was.
91% of the participants told us the training met their expectations, and that they will be able to apply the knowledge acquired.

Visit www.voicesinrefuge.com to find out more about our standards of practice and upcoming interpreting training courses.


Cafe Narjis

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