

# Swansea Asylum Seekers Support (SASS)



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## Trustees' Annual Report for January-December 2021

### Structure, Governance, Management and Staff

SASS is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) and a membership organisation. Members are those who have been volunteers and/or beneficiaries of the charity during the 12 months prior to the Annual General Meeting.

The Trustees are responsible for SASS governance and members of the group also perform management functions.

The Covid recovery grant, consultancy, expert advice, report and recommendations provided by the Lloyds Bank Foundation allowed the SASS Trustees to review their governance, SASS structure, training, priorities and procedures. This resulted in changes including a reduction in the number of Trustees and a clearer distinction between governance and implementation/delivery of service and activities. These changes all began to take effect by the end of 2021.

A new visual depiction of the SASS structure has been agreed by the Trustees. It can be seen at the end of this report.

The **Share Tawe** project has been part of SASS since its inception. In 2021, it continued to recruit hosts and to provide accommodation for asylum seekers whose application had been refused and who, as a result, were destitute. The project also ensures that Share Tawe guests have access to legal help to progress their legal case for asylum, to services relevant to their physical and mental health and to recreational, social or volunteering opportunities.

In late 2021 the Share Tawe project transferred to EYST. SASS volunteers, Alan and Marilyn Thomas, founded Share Tawe. They have managed Share Tawe for 10 years as part of their foundational and enduring commitment to Swansea City of Sanctuary. They were ready to hand the project on, and EYST makes an ideal home for it. SASS was always a temporary home for Share Tawe. We will continue to work very closely with Share Tawe as well as support destitute asylum seekers in other ways.

## **SASS Trustees 2021**

Sandra Morton, Chairman (since October 2021)

Kathryn Jones, Vice-Chairman

Gillian Spedding, Secretary

Tom Cheesman, Treasurer

Sophie Demarco (resigned December 2021)

Beverly Dobson (resigned November 2021)

Ahmad Hamodat (resigned November 2021)

Zena Hamodat (resigned November 2021)

Clare Jones

Margaret Lamb (resigned November 2021)

Funmilayo Olaniyan

Alfred Sakr (resigned November 2021)

Emilie Short

Kelly Wearing (resigned March 2021)

N.B. The total number of Trustees was reduced in 2021 following consultation and advice on strategy and governance of SASS by the Lloyds Bank Foundation. All of the Trustees who resigned are still strong and valued supporters of SASS.

## **Paid workers and volunteers**

Wayne Yare served as Volunteer Development Worker and Share Tawe Development Worker until August 2021 when he retired. We wish to use this occasion to thank him for his enormous contributions to SASS and to the benefit of asylum seekers and refugees in Swansea over many years. Wayne was a much loved and respected colleague and community worker with asylum seekers and refugees. We miss him and wish him and his family well in the future.

Kelly Wearing and George Wilson became co-workers after Wayne's retirement with Kelly working four days per week and George working three days. These two volunteer development workers are the only paid staff employed by SASS.

SASS has about 70 volunteers who have been active throughout 2021. This includes 6 Trustees and at least 15 asylum seekers and refugees. They have a number of different roles including delivery drivers, donation management, telephone tree callers, befrienders, ShareTawe hosts.

## **Aims and Objectives**

### **How did we perform and fulfil our aims in 2021?**

SASS has offered support and friendship to asylum seekers and refugees in Swansea for the past 20 years. Much of the initial contact has been via twice weekly drop-ins which offered language classes, a hot meal, table tennis, children's activities and above all opportunities to meet and make friends with other asylum seekers and refugees and also with people from the local community, contribute as volunteers, and be made welcome – a home from home.

Typically 70-100 people (including 15-20 volunteers) attended our drop-ins before the pandemic, with new arrivals coming almost every week. (Swansea has around 900 people in Home Office funded accommodation at any one time, waiting for an asylum case decision – plus those left without accommodation, after a negative decision, or sometimes even after a positive one.)

Throughout 2021, the continued coronavirus pandemic meant we were unable to hold those drop-ins. SASS adapted its offering in 2020 and continued to provide alternative means to offer friendship and support to asylum seekers and nurture friendships between new arrivals and locals. Details of those activities are highlighted below under specific SASS aims. Many of the activities relate to more than one of the aims. In order to avoid repetition, they are only listed once.

We hugely missed our drop-ins throughout 2021. But many, many SASS volunteers have done extraordinary things to help people in need, to maintain contact, identify need, and preserve a sense of community. Most pre-existing SASS volunteers are still with us and several new ones were recruited (with help from SCVS) during 2021.

***SASS AIMS to: To develop a community of asylum seekers, refugees and locals in Swansea and the surrounding area which will:***

***1. Promote equality and diversity by promoting activities to foster understanding between people of different backgrounds***

- About 900 people from all over the world await asylum in Swansea and SASS continued to reach out to them to offer friendship and support during the pandemic.
- In July 2020, a FAN (Friends and Neighbours\*) group began to meet each Friday on Zoom. In January 2021, a second FAN Zoom group began to meet on a Wednesday. A total of 220 people (approximately 34 different nationalities) attended during 2021 (average 5 per meeting). Of those attending, about 35% were from the local community and 65% asylum seekers or refugees.
- One weekly session became two in January 2022 as the groups grew and prospered. Here are some views of FAN members about the group.

- My name is J. I am from Afghanistan. When I join FAN I found friends, and FAN is very good and encouraging for me.
- S. from Afghanistan. FAN is for me the best centre for loving and introducing each other. FAN changed my thoughts and concepts of the life through positive and which we understand how the Great United Kingdom people are friendly, helpful and struggling for the other life to be better, particularly the nice people of Welsh and mostly the FAN excellent members and providers. I found a lot of best friends within this FAN group. I always hope and pray for FAN to be more and more happy and healthy.
- M. from China. thank you for invite me to this group. I really enjoy that to hear from others and talk a little bit about what I thought about the topic and expressing myself and also I can practise my English. I'm rare to talk to other people from different language so this is a very good place for me and I really enjoy.

- SASS's publishing project, **Hafan Books** (see [www.hafanbooks.org](http://www.hafanbooks.org)) brought out a photojournalism book, **Second Home**, by Joseff Williams with words by Amber Esther, Beatrice Kitavi and Otis Bolamu; a book of poems by Alhaji Kamara, **Afromantic**; and two other books
- Hafan has also gone multimedia with **More Stories – Swansea People's Multilingual Storytelling Audio Library**. Swansea people tell children's stories in their various mother tongues with illustrations and animations by other Swansea people. Online at: [tinyurl.com/swanseastories](http://tinyurl.com/swanseastories). Contact Tom [t.cheesman@swansea.ac.uk](mailto:t.cheesman@swansea.ac.uk) 07736408064

\*FAN (Friends And Neighbours) groups provide a safe space in which to make friends, keep in touch and chat. **For learners, the meetings are an opportunity to practise speaking English or just listen.** They are promoted by the [FAN Charity](#) and in a typical meeting, everyone introduces themselves, talks a little about their week and then speaks on the chosen topic for a few minutes. Conversations are generally uplifting, often funny and always thoughtful. In the SASS (Swansea Asylum Seekers Support) groups, people from many different countries, as well as locals, regularly attend. Anyone and everyone is welcome.

## ***2. Preserve and protect the mental and physical health of asylum seekers, refugees and their dependents through developing community and combating isolation***

Creating community is one of our major achievements and this contributes to the mental health of everyone involved. In the absence of drop-ins and in-person meetings, SASS found alternative ways of keeping in touch.

- In December, Christmas gifts and a small monetary gift of £10 were delivered to 82 single adults and 139 family units. At least 275 children from babies of a few weeks to teenagers in those families each received Christmas presents. Many of these presents were donated by four primary schools and six churches in the Brecon area. The gifts were collected, sorted and delivered to Swansea by members of the Hay Brecon Talgarth Sanctuary for Refugees group.
- The Hay Brecon group also provided 15 goodie bags that were donated to single adult asylum seekers living in shared houses.
- Gifts of toiletry care boxes were donated by Leonard Cheshire Homes. They went to single adults.
- Fifteen volunteer drivers delivered the presents to asylum seekers living all over the Swansea area.
- Thank you to all of the children, their parents and teachers in the schools, the church congregations and Leonard Cheshire Homes for these gifts. It was a wonderful team effort that was much appreciated by all of the recipients.
- The Telephone Tree begun in 2020 continued to run with about 30 volunteers making regular phone calls to between 80 and 100 individuals and families. Friendships developed during these calls, needs were identified, joys and anxieties were shared.
- Volunteers continued to make doorstep visits to deliver requested donations of clothes, toiletries, toys and games to keep children occupied during the lockdowns when schools were shut.

- In the first quarter of 2021, deliveries were made to 73 households. Gifts included toys, books, games, art materials for 100 children, baby essentials (nappies, wipes, clothes, a cot) for 17 babies, children's clothes for 71 children of all ages, clothes for 20 men, 25 women, toiletries including sanitary products for 25 women, household goods (cutlery, crockery, bedding, towels etc) for 19 families. One sewing machine was provided for an asylum seeker enrolled in a fashion and design course at College.
- One parent requested a Welsh costume for her daughter so that she could take part in St. David's Day celebrations at her primary school.
- Volunteer drivers helped several food banks deliver food to asylum seekers and refugees across Swansea.
- Phone and digital poverty continued to be a problem even after the Welsh Government funded mi-fi in asylum seeker houses.
- In April 2021, SASS joined the Community Calling initiative funded by Hubbub/O2 to provide mobile phones as well as regular phone top up costs. Each phone came with 12 monthly codes worth £10 each. 127 referrals for this service were made by SASS to SCVS who managed the project.
- In addition to that, SASS spent £8175 on top-ups and managed £2400 of funds provided by Hay Brecon Talgarth Sanctuary for Refugees for this purpose. This amounts to 1160 phone top-ups at £10 each. We thank HBTSR as well as three grant givers: Moondance Foundation, Comic Relief/SCVS Emergency Fund and the Welsh Government/SCVS Integration Care Fund for helping to fund this vital provision. Having mobile phone credit is often the only way that asylum seekers and refugees can maintain contact with their families. It's also essential for communication with the immigration services, with lawyers and to take part in educational courses held on Zoom.
- A small face-to-face mother and toddler group ran from July to December 2021 when Welsh Government rules allowed that. About 6 mothers with their babies/toddlers benefitted from attendance at the group through five months of 2021. Average attendance was three or four mothers per session.
- Internal Whatsapp groups and Zoom meetings continued throughout 2021 sharing information, offers of help, meeting needs and providing mutual support for SASS volunteers and workers.
- Regular joint monthly Zoom meetings led by the City of Sanctuary continued ensuring coordination between health, education, housing and local charities across Swansea.
- More and closer ties and work with other local charities, e.g. EYST, Unity in Diversity, Better Welcome to Swansea was enhanced to provide a more comprehensive service.

### ***3. Provide facilities for recreation or other leisure time occupations <sup>1</sup>***

- This aspect of the work was severely curtailed by lockdown.

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<sup>1</sup> Full version of object 3. "Provide facilities for recreation or other leisure time occupation with the object of improving the conditions of life of those persons who have need of such facilities by reason of their youth, age, infirmity or disablement, financial hardship or social and economic circumstances".

- Toys/games and arts and craft materials were distributed by volunteer drivers through doorstep visits. They provided learning materials, toys, games and activities for children during lockdowns while schools were shut.
- Outdoor, socially distanced meetings and football on the beach were held from the end of March to the end of September when weather permitted. An average of eight attended each week. About 12 volunteers and 40 asylum seekers and refugees took part in at least one meeting.
- About 75 asylum seekers, refugees and local women embroidered squares of material on the theme of Friendship. These squares are being sewn together in a quilt by a member of the Hay Brecon Talgarth Sanctuary for Refugees group.
- 20 asylum seekers and refugees took part in a multilingual storytelling project (funded by City and County of Swansea) which brought great joy to all. It allowed stories from many countries and cultures to be shared with others of different backgrounds.
- Hafan Books organised a multilingual audio storytelling project ([tinyurl.com/swanseastories](http://tinyurl.com/swanseastories))
- SASS members continued to contribute to the Open University online project, Covid Chronicles, which invited asylum seekers, refugees, and the undocumented to represent their experiences of the pandemic in video, images, poetry, texts, etc.

***4. Provide education and training to asylum seekers and refugees and their dependents to advance them in life and help them to adapt within a new community***

- ESOL (English language) groups met on zoom throughout 2021. The groups grew both in number and popularity throughout the year. There were at least nine groups meeting each week with an average of 5-6 in each group. Nine volunteer teachers led the groups which covered all ESOL levels from beginner to advanced.
- The Zoom lessons were especially beneficial to women with babies and small children. They could learn and improve their English at home while their children slept or played. These women would not be able to travel to college or a centre to take part in classes.
- Face-to-face classes re-started at the Grand Theatre multi-cultural hub in September 2021. On average five teachers and 20 learners attended the sessions. About 50 learners took part over the four months to the end of 2021.
- Although curtailed, SASS workers, Trustees and volunteers continued to signpost and refer SASS members to any opportunities for volunteering, educational, vocational and leisure activities.
- Volunteer training focussed on health and safety

***5. Advance the education of the public in general about issues relating to refugees and asylum seekers***

- Our "SWARM" email list is a forum for the exchange of information of interest both to asylum seekers and refugees and the people who work with them. To become a member of Swarm, contact our Treasurer on [t.cheesman@swansea.ac.uk](mailto:t.cheesman@swansea.ac.uk)
- **Hafan Books**, a project run by our Treasurer, has published seven high quality anthologies of refugee writing since 2003 and about 30 other books, most including work by asylum seekers and refugees. All proceeds from sales go to SASS: in 2021

that was £1417. See the books at: hafanbooks.org – the story project is also at that website

- SASS is an active partner in **Swansea City of Sanctuary**, and in the UK-wide City of Sanctuary movement. This movement encourages individuals and organisations in the city to welcome, support and celebrate people seeking sanctuary here. SASS members helped Swansea City of Sanctuary in several ways: on the committee, as speakers, volunteer mentors and raising awareness of refugee and asylum issues in their own community. The challenges which our members share with staff and volunteers continue to inform the strategy of this ambitious movement. Many SASS members also are involved in the ‘Welcome to Swansea’ mentoring project, set up by SCoS and now run by Swansea Council for Voluntary Services.

#### **6. Relieve poverty amongst asylum seekers, refugees and their dependents.**

- During 2021, asylum seekers and refugees frequently contacted paid workers, volunteers and/or Trustees with urgent needs. Their needs were varied. For example, they urgently required food, nappies or baby milk while isolating with Covid. The ASPEN card system changed and many cards did not arrive quickly (or at all) so they were left with no money to purchase food. New arrivals came to Swansea with no warm clothing. Boilers failed in the height of winter. Over 300 warm blankets were delivered to individuals and families during the winter of 2020-21.
- We give people seeking asylum character references, acknowledging their voluntary participation in our organisation. This can help people to obtain work and therefore become economically active or to gain a university place. It can also contribute to someone being granted leave to remain in the UK - thus avoiding possible destitution and deportation.
- Ethnic Youth Support Team (EYST) has full-time workers who help people navigate “the system”. We assist EYST’s work by donating occasionally to the hardship fund and our workers regularly refer and liaise very frequently with them on individual cases.
- Share Tawe established a collaboration with POBL housing association to provide shared housing for two rent-paying refugees and two Share Tawe guests. This project is now managed by EYST.

## **Financial Review for the year 2021**

### **Introduction**

Our accounts are independently examined. Approved accounts are on the website of the Charity Commission, and on our website, [www.sass.wales](http://www.sass.wales)

The movement in the bank accounts for the year January-December 2021 is shown in total and as split between SASS and the Share Tawe project:

	<b>Total bank</b>	<b>SASS</b>	<b>Share Tawe</b>
<b>Bank balances at 1/1/21</b>	91,308	64,437	26,871
<b>Income</b>	86,233	79,100	7,133
<b>Expenditure</b>	117,419	84,868	32,551
<b>Bank balances at 31/12/21</b>	60,122	58,669	1,453

- Assets of **£25,000** belonging to the Share Tawe project were transferred to EYST at end of year, the balance to be transferred in 2022.
- SASS held **£950** for Swansea City of Sanctuary at end of year.
- **SASS reserves** at 31 Dec: **Unrestricted: £52,336**      **Restricted: £7,552**

### **Income**

SASS is grateful to numerous individuals, congregations and other groups who support through regular standing orders or one-off gifts. These donations to SASS totalled **£13,697** and SASS collected a further **£1,417** from book sales during the year.

We thank the following organisations for grants received in 2021 totalling **£63,737**:

- **Lloyds Bank Foundation** Covid Recovery Grant - £25,000 – unrestricted (second/final year)
- **Austin Bailey Foundation** £2,000 – unrestricted
- **Welsh Government** £21,230 – Share Tawe project
- **Moondance Foundation** - £4,000 – phone top-ups
- **Comic Relief / SCVS** Emergency Fund £3,114– phone top-ups
- **Swansea City of Sanctuary** £2,500
- **Open University** £2,456 – Spanish photography workshop
- **Welsh Government / SCVS** Integration Care Fund £2,100 – laptops and phone topups
- **City & County of Swansea** Sustainability Grant 1 £696 – toys and craft materials
- **City & County of Swansea** Sustainability Grant 2 £641 – toys and craft materials

The following grants or portions of grants received during 2020 were spent in 2021:

- **City and County of Swansea** Community Integration - £4,960 – Hafan stories/animations project
- **Wales West Utilities** - £1,283 - sewing machines
- **Mass Action** - £783 – salary
- **Awards for All** - £1,439 – salary
- **Community Foundation Wales Coronavirus Resilience** - £410 – salary
- **NACCOM** Respond and React - £5,468 – Share Tawe project

### **Expenditure**

Expenditure for SASS amounted to £84,868.50 for the year. The breakdown of this is:

• Staff costs	£33,965
• Office related	£12,492
• Donations made	£1,220
• Top-ups	£8,175
• Other client support	£8,670
• Toys, literature and books	£7,852
• Events and related costs	£4,810
• Volunteer expenses (includes Share Tawe hosting)	£6284
• Consultants	£1400
• TOTAL	£84,868

SASS has increased the diversity of income streams during 2021 and responded quickly to opportunities for emergency and recovery funding offered by a range of funders. But overall, the financial position is secure only for a limited period – without major new core funding (a major grant or two) we will cease to be able to pay staff beyond early 2023, especially if costs rise as expected, when we re-open drop-ins, and/or organise multiple small group face-to-face activities.

Our **Reserves Policy** adopted in October 23<sup>rd</sup> 2012 states that:

- i) We will review the level of our reserves annually, based on the following principles:
  - (1) To use the resources of the charity to support activities which will further the aims of the charity.
  - (2) To protect the long-term future of the charity by assessing potential risks and, as an organisational priority, to set aside an appropriate sum to deal with them.
  - (3) To integrate the setting of our reserves level with an annual review of needs and opportunities. The long-term future of the charity will always be paramount but in budgeting for the forthcoming year we will, when we can, also designate any unrestricted funds for meeting identified needs and opportunities prioritised by the management committee.
  - (4) We aim to keep enough money in reserve for **one year** of basic operations without funding.

As shown above, reserves at end of 2021 did not fully cover a year of expenditure.

To keep funding coming in, to pay for SASS drop-ins, staff salaries and sessional wages, and other activities, requires constant work by the trustees and others: applying for grants, reporting on funding, improving our projects to make us fit to fund. More help doing this is welcome – if interested please contact us!

The Treasurer, Tom Cheesman, and all the trustees, specially thank our paid bookkeeper, Delphine Cowley, and our long-time unpaid assistant treasurer, Alan Thomas, for their help. In preparing this financial report we have had important help from volunteer Sherry Coates. The advice services and assistance provided by SCVS (Swansea Council for Voluntary Services) are invaluable. We are very grateful for all support offered by our funders, in particular the Lloyds Bank Foundation for their advice and consultancy help.

## Plans for the Future

Our plans for 2022 focus on

- Drop-ins: restart both the Friday and Saturday drop-ins as soon as it is safe to do so;
- Opportunities to share food and to take away an additional meal to reduce food poverty;
- ESOL/English language teaching: continue to provide much needed and valued opportunities to learn and improve speaking, listening, reading and writing skills.
- Informal training opportunities for asylum seekers including food hygiene, safeguarding, signposting
- Workshops on asylum system information and survival

- Small interest and activity groups, such as sewing, cookery, mother and toddler, family learning.
- Supporting the FAN groups.
- Encouraging more asylum seekers to become active volunteers for SASS
- Giving an opportunity for those with lived experience to become advisors, shadow Trustees and become full Trustees of SASS or other charities.

Ideally, Swansea needs a 'hub'-like service, bringing together the disparate asylum and refugee support organisations, and we would like to be able to play a leading role in developing this kind of service. We hope that one of the numerous large empty shops in the city centre might be put to community use and SASS can be involved in that.

## Our Thanks ...

To individuals and groups for supporting us financially. Many people donate regularly through standing orders. Many also contribute their time and energy, as well as money.

Thanks to all our grant funders (listed above, page 8).

Thanks to our workers in 2021: Kelly (retired June 2022) and George. Their job is difficult, complex, demanding and at times emotionally draining—as well as very rewarding. We appreciate their great commitment, knowledge and skills. Kelly is no longer employed by SASS but we are glad that she will continue to volunteer with us.

Hay Brecon Talgarth Sanctuary for Refugees group does very important work, mostly quietly in the background, supporting SASS and other charities such as EYST and UID, by providing resources to help asylum seekers and refugees in various kinds of crisis, in an unbureaucratic way. In the years before the pandemic, the group also arranged wonderful 'respite' coach trips. Many SASS members forged close bonds with HBTSR members. We look forward to those trips starting up again in summer 2022.

Thanks also to everyone in SASS who has been involved in supporting people in need, collecting and sorting and distributing donations, teaching English, making friends and supporting individuals, and contributing to campaigns on issues relevant to the welfare of asylum seekers:

- Remembering the drop-ins, we specially want to thank all the wonderful people who have cooked delicious food for us down the years and we look forward to the time when they can do it again.
- To all our colleagues working with asylum seekers and refugees in Swansea and South Wales for their support and willingness to work in partnership.
- Special thanks to Adult Learning Wales, African Community Centre, Asylum Justice, Bloom, City and County of Swansea, Centre for African Entrepreneurship, Congolese Development Project, Discovery, Displaced People in Action, Ethnic Youth Support Team, Hay Brecon Talgarth Sanctuary for Refugees, Swansea City of Sanctuary, Swansea Council for Voluntary Services, Unity in Diversity, Welsh Refugee Council and many others.

- To everyone in Swansea who works with us to say "welcome to asylum seekers and refugees".
- To everyone who is part of our lively community.
- To all hosts and guests in the Share Tawe project.
- To our landlords: The Grand Theatre Multicultural Hub and St James' Church Uplands, for being helpful and tolerant landlords. A very special thanks to St James' Church members.
- To all the people in Swansea who support asylum seekers and refugees – many of them asylum seekers and refugees themselves – without SASS, or even anyone, knowing about it. Many who come to us with their problems tell of amazing acts of quiet kindness and generosity by people who ask for no reward or recognition.



Two of the 75+ embroidered squares completed by SASS members and volunteers for the Friendship quilt. See more details above in achievements in aim number 3.



Zinia Akter, student beautician and volunteer with SASS's former Welcome to Play project, recorded the story 'The Cow Boy and the Tiger' in Bangla. Music student Dai Griffiths created an animation based on her story. See and hear lots more stories at [tinyurl.com/swanseastories](http://tinyurl.com/swanseastories) or [youtube.com/watch?v=4m4-N17M6Hk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4m4-N17M6Hk)

