

St. Mary Redcliffe Hub

Between the pain, fear and division
Lies St Mary Redcliffe with a vision
Of coming together in community spirit
And bringing the people of Redcliffe with it.

For many folk who feel alone
The Hub has become a crucial home
To find a pocket of joy and connection
Gleaming with opportunity, support and affection.

And although society seems to be breaking
It's groups like these that are making
People feel included, seen and welcome
And with it find hope, wherever they come from.

In recent months, far-right protests outside asylum hotels across the UK have highlighted the pressures faced by displaced families and the communities around them. In Redcliffe, those pressures have become sharply visible with the rise of these protesters gathering outside the local hotel housing 300-400 people - all of them in families with young children - awaiting decisions from the Home Office.

Inside the hotel are parents who have already fled violence, children unfamiliar with protests or police lines, and families confined largely to one room per household. During protests, the outside is overflowing with noise, chanting, and ultimately uncertainty for the people stuck inside during these demonstrations.

This article documents the invaluable role played by St Mary Redcliffe Hub, a small, locally embedded Hub whose work before, during and after one of these protests in 2025 helped reduce fear and provided grounding for the families inside. Their work supports people not just in a moment of crisis, but as part of ongoing community engagement in Redcliffe.

For this piece of work, I visited the Hub over a period of months, getting to know some of the staff who dedicate their lives to the workings of the Hub, community members who have had their lives changed by the work they do, and experiencing first-hand some of the community activities providing hope and stability for local and hotel residents.

I wish to extend my thanks to the Hub, who allowed me into their world multiple times to see and experience their wonderful work - and to the community members who kindly spoke to me and shared their experiences. I felt immediately welcomed and safe every time I spent time at the Hub - and it's clear this is how they make every person who walks through their door feel. No one is left behind!

The Calm Before the Storm: Preparing Before the Protests Arrived

For Andy, one of the Hub's cheery, friendly faced community workers, the day of the protest was not a surprise.

"We knew it was coming," he said. "So, we prepared."

In the days leading up to the protest, the Hub, part of St Mary Redcliffe Church coordinated closely with the hotel, the police and local schools. The focus was safeguarding - particularly for the children - and ensuring they would feel protected and safe throughout the day. The Hub offered its support early and asked a practical question: What do you need from us? What would help you feel safe?

The answer was: come in.

On the day of the protest, while far-right and counter demonstrators gathered outside, Hub workers, like Andy, were inside the hotel from early on.

Families were taken up to higher floors, away from the noise and the windows. The Hub had brought toys, games, colouring materials and snacks - the result of a quick, large shop done by Andy and his wife in anticipation of the long day ahead.

Throughout the protests, as tensions rose outside, inside the focus was on entertaining the children. As part of the community preparations, local nursery schools and teachers had come voluntarily to run art sessions, interactive play and familiar nursery routines.

“We all came together to try and make this as easy and calming for the children - and the way the community came together was amazing,” said Andy. A man, one of the grandparents in the hotel, who had previously appeared stern and serious, turned around wearing a princess crown and oversized earrings, playing with the children. A carefully thought out array of the children’s favourite party food was laid out to provide a steady flow of sugar-driven energy and treats for everyone. The aim was to keep morale high for the children, and as the day went on, people relaxed - just a little.

When the protests eventually ended and the streets emptied, the fear did not disappear entirely. But the day had passed without incident inside the hotel with the help of the community brought together that day.

From Crisis Response to Ongoing Presence

The Hub's involvement in the hotel on the day of the protest is just one of the many ways it embeds itself in supporting the local community and hotel. Andy rearranged his working hours to commit at least ten hours a week to support the Hotel residents, thanks to additional Bristol City Council funding. The Hub's work focuses on what it does best: relational, consistent, friendly presence. Andy runs a drop-in at the Hotel every Wednesday, aimed at understanding the skills and interests of asylum seekers, and exploring social opportunities with them. Within the hotels, for example, were barbers, hairdressers, beauty therapists and artists, with no access to materials or equipment. With small amounts of funding and community call-outs to obtain some tools - scissors, clippers, art materials - residents were supported to offer their skills to others in the hotel.

These activities create informal meeting points. The residents come from all over the world and don't always have a shared language to connect over, but these activities restore a sense of purpose and through bits of English, shared laughter and repetition, people learn from each other and form new connections.

Connection Through Food

Food is a way to connect to home, familiarity and comfort. Residents at the hotel lamented over their inability to cook and connect to their home flavours and activities that keep morale boosted. The food they eat at the hotel is often basic and plain in comparison to the rich array of flavours and ingredients many love to eat and cook with. As a response to this, the Hub linked up with St Mary Redcliffe Church to provide a free kitchen space for hotel residents to use for weekly cooking sessions. Families come and cook food, socialise and share what they make with each other, offering an opportunity for meeting and bonding over food. When I visited, I was overwhelmed at the amount of delicious food I was offered, and the kindness of everyone sharing their dishes!

A central principle of The Hub's work is that integration works best when people are recognised for what they bring, not only for what they need, and I see this so clearly in the way they meet everyone where they're at. There is no template - everyone's individual needs, personalities and priorities are listened to - and the Hub's staff and volunteers aim to always stand with what each individual would benefit from, whether this be food help, socialising, help with healthcare or benefits and much, much more.

Connection with the wider community



The Hub's work with the Refugees and Asylum Seekers living at the hotel sits within a wider programme of community development that the Hub has been building in Redcliffe over the last few years.

Redcliffe is an economically mixed and diverse part of Bristol. This diversity has not removed the political tension which has arisen in recent months, but it does provide a strong base for connection when supported.

The Hub also organises community days in Redcliffe bringing together long-term residents, people living in temporary accommodation, and newer arrivals in the hotel through shared activities: food, sport and creative workshops. The focus is on doing things together and bridging the gap between communities in the local area.



For some families from the hotel, these events are often the first they see - and see themselves - as part of the wider neighbourhood rather than separate from it.

Much of this community work happens quietly. English is learned through conversation and some cultural knowledge - from football allegiances to British quirks - is picked up through everyday interactions between people.

Community member spotlight

Sara: Finding connection inside isolation

Sara lives in the hotel with her two-year old son, who is disabled. She is a single mother and has spent over two years in the asylum system.

At first, she was frightened of the system, of judgement, of getting things wrong. Through the Hub's presence, she found something simple but crucial: another adult she could talk to and a welcoming community space. She began volunteering and contributing where she could, and now volunteers regularly. Relationships formed gradually, replacing isolation with familiarity and friendship.

Kelly: From suspicion to involvement

Kelly is a local resident who described herself as working class. Before the hotel opened, she said she held strong prejudiced views about people seeking asylum. “Why are they getting funding when people like me are struggling?” she remembers asking. Living on a low income, juggling work, benefits and insecure housing, her anger was rooted in real and social pressure she was experiencing.

When she started going to the Hub, what she saw challenged her assumptions. “I felt so much empathy for what they had gone through when I spoke to some people in the hotel, and the uncertainty and insecurity in which they were living,” she said. Seeing how many of the individuals were struggling broke through her resentment and made her change her mind completely. Kelly began collecting money and donating items. Over time, she became more involved - eventually running women’s groups for women living in the hotel and organising trips they could never afford alone, including visits to SS Great Britain and Weston-super-Mare.

“I didn’t change my mind because someone argued with me,” she says. “I changed it because I met them, and we’re all human and deserve care and support.”

Reducing fear, building community

Opposition to migration in Redcliffe has not come from one demographic alone. Some resistance has come from white residents; some from people of colour. Much of it, Andy observes, is rooted in fear rather than fact.

The Hub does not prioritise argument or persuasion, it prioritises contact and community. By creating opportunities for people to meet, in supported, ordinary settings, fear consistently reduces, in Andy's experience.

This approach has remained consistent even as the hotel's use has changed. Before it housed families, the building accommodated Afghan men, many of whom had worked alongside British armed forces. The Hub supported them through interpreters, trauma-informed activities and community links, adapting its work as needs shifted. That continuity has built trust with residents inside the hotel and with the wider community.

What remains

One day, the hotel may stop being temporary asylum accommodation. Families will move on. The building will return to its previous use. But the relationships built through the Hub's work will not disappear easily. Children feel safer, residents move between the hotel, the Hub and the neighbourhood with greater confidence. Volunteers have emerged from inside the hotel itself who help the local community. A community that might have fractured under pressure instead found ways to hold together.

The work of St Mary Redcliffe Hub is transformative for many people. In moments of high, public tension - and in the quieter work in between these times - it has functioned as something essential: local infrastructure that keeps people connected when it matters most, with empathy, compassion and inclusion at its core.

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