

ANNUAL REVIEW



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CHAIR'S FOREWORD

I am delighted to introduce this year's annual review on behalf of the Board of Trustees. From the off, I would like to emphasise how proud I am of our dedicated volunteers and committed staff who year on year deliver state of the art services despite funding constraints and under difficult political circumstances.

This past year has once again reminded us why CHAWREC exists and why our mission is so vital. As an organisation we are unique as world events have a direct impact on our day to day work both in terms of funding, direction and capacity. Across the country we have seen division, hostility and fear stoked against minority and migrant communities. Yet within the Unity Centre, the countless projects and services delivered by our staff and volunteers, we see the opposite, solidarity, compassion and a determination to ensure that every individual is treated with dignity and respect. Hence our focus on new emerging communities and their needs. Shantele will expand on this more in her introduction and contributions from our other staff members will give examples of the nature of this expanding work.

As a further example of the type of crucial work we are undertaking, I would like to tell you more about our Asylum Seeker Hub that I am leading alongside Dina, Negin, Karen, Kelda and our hard working volunteers.

Last year, I introduced the work we are doing at the Hub which is run on Tuesday's offering English classes, clothing and essential toiletries as well as a hot meal and advice, friendship and support. This work has expanded greatly and on average numbers have doubled from 35 per session to last week over 70. The work is funded from small public donations and is really run on a shoestring and yet the help it offers is invaluable to the people who attend. The type of help people need is accessing GP's and Dental services, help with Universal Credit applications, immigration advice and mental health support. A key feature of this work is the diverse service user group, although there is a core of regular attendees, we see new people each week with different needs,

many of them in crisis. The work is both challenging and rewarding and we are recognising that staff also need mental health support in dealing with some of the harrowing experiences that people recount.

The relationships forged with Refugees and Asylum Seekers have helped partner organisations who wish to engage with these communities to align. An example of this is the engagement work Chester Zoo have undertaken, building community links and helping them to engage with nature by a visit to Grosvenor Park and a visit to the zoo and they very much enjoyed planting our container garden outside the Unity Centre and continuously caring for these gardens since.

This has also been a year of growth and resilience. We have offered Art therapy classes and workshops on how to recognise trauma and process those emotions safely. We now have a member of staff who is leading the volunteer engagement and we are focusing on upskilling volunteers to help them find employment.

Another area of growth and expansion is within ESOL provisions across Cheshire East, strengthening our immigration advice service, and continuing to develop our work with Asylum Seekers, Hong Kong BN (O) arrivals and Ukrainian families. None of this would have been possible without the support of funders, partners and above all, the communities who place their trust in us.

Looking ahead, we face significant societal challenges; the rise of the far-right rhetoric, the pressures on migrant communities and the ongoing erosion of legal aid all create obstacles for the people we support. Closer to home, we are dealing with the ongoing challenges identified last year, in terms of insecure funding, lack of investment and ring fence monies are a hindrance to long term planning and have stopped us progressing some important developments such as;

- Developing our community cafe to bring more people in and foster integration
- Utilising the whole building space cannot be a reality as the building is in urgent need of repair
- Making sure we do not lose sight of our core objectives which is to serve all BME communities.

- Re-Engaging with the communities we established good contact with during lockdown.
- Holding regular meetings with new and emerging communities around Cheshire, Halton and Warrington.

We need to be vigilant that the changing balance of our work and the responsiveness required of us does not involve complete mission drift, excluding help to established communities.

Alongside the important points above, there is room for optimism and opportunities, to deepen partnerships, to advocate more effectively for justice, and to build on three decades of experience as we approach CHAWREC's 30th anniversary.

I would like to thank all our staff particularly – Shantele our Director and the staff and volunteers which all their names will be mentioned in the report as well all the Trustees.

On behalf of the Board, I would like to extend our gratitude to everyone who has contributed to our work this year. Whether you are a member, a partner, a donor, a volunteer or a service user- your involvement strengthens our collective resolve to challenge racism, promote equality, and stand up for all human rights.

Thank you

T.K. Al-Jorani B.Sc (Baghdad);M.Sc (Kent)

Chair



DIRECTOR'S INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our Annual Review for 24/25. 2025 will mark our 30th year in existence, and my 26th year at the helm. When I started at CHAWREC we had a different name, a different location and a handful of staff. Things have changed significantly in some ways, but our overall aim remains the same; to fight racism and stand up for justice. Indeed, over the last year I'd say that actually the need for our organisation is more than it ever has been.

Summer 2024 witnessed racist riots unfolding across the country, with the far right capitalising on the horrific murders of the 3 children in Southport. These were the largest outbreak of far right rioting since the second world war. Have things improved since then? I would say no, they are getting worse. Working in the environment we do, its very easy to see how toxic things have become. Racism is still very evident, masquerading as concern over 'small boat crossings' 'illegal migration' and 'grooming gangs'. 30 years ago we had no social media – now the far right are using Tik Tok and others as a platform to spew lies and misinformation and encourage division, and it is getting harder and harder to fight back against such a huge beast.

I talked last year about the impact of world events on our organisation and the demands on our service. They continue to have a massive impact – the war in Ukraine rages on, meaning many Ukrainians through the HFU scheme remain and are less likely to leave now having made their home in the UK; Hong Kongers have continued to arrive under the BN(O) scheme and we continue to see increasing numbers of people driven from their home land, in the asylum system. Given the reasons behind this migration it is not a surprise that many require significant support – whether that be help to learn English, navigate UK systems, help with their immigration status or support for their mental health and that is where we come in. I am immensely proud of the team we have at CHAWREC, every single one of them goes over and above to support our communities, whether staff, volunteer, trustee or tutor – they are all here because they believe in what we do.

This last year we have welcomed some new staff to the team – Negin Faninam joined us as Volunteer Co-ordinator which is a new post in the organisation, and a very welcome one as we have struggled with capacity within the Centre. Having someone to recruit and support volunteers has been key to our development. It has also been wonderful to have a Farsi speaker in the organisation and someone with lived experience of the asylum system to support as needed with our asylum hub (what did I say about staff going above and beyond?!). We also saw another addition to the ESOL team, with Kelsie Shute starting as Outreach Manager; this was a much needed

post given our expanding ESOL service across Cheshire East. We also saw the welcome return of Charlotte Webber to our ESOL team, who now teaches and provides some part time admin support to the team. Although we have welcomed new people into the organisation we also said a sad goodbye to Valerie Gould, who many of you will remember worked on reception for a number of years.

Although the staff have all provided reports for this Annual Review, there are a couple of areas I'd like to talk about. Firstly, our ESOL department. Our ESOL provision has grown hugely (and rapidly) over the last few years to respond to the increasing demand in the area. This last year we secured a new contract in Cheshire East, allowing us to expand our classes into Crewe and Macclesfield. ESOL was something new to us when we moved into the Unity Centre in 2011 and since then it has become a core part of our work. The communities we work with need to learn the language to have equality – without it they can't integrate, get a job, access health services and the list goes on. And ESOL classes aren't just about learning words and sentences, but are set in the context of the UK, its culture, its values and its systems. Students also bring to class issues they have and because we have such a wide range of services we can usually help, or at the very least signpost. In house we have Cantonese, Ukrainian, French, Spanish, German, Arabic and Farsi speakers to help.

Our ESOL team have been through two Ofsted inspections during the year under review, and without the stalwart leadership of Sophie Freeman, our Head of ESOL the outcome would not have been as positive as it was. Sophie has over the last year really developed the ESOL team, providing unwavering support to staff and tutors and taking a huge pressure off myself as the chief officer.

The second area of work I'd like to mention is our immigration service. Our immigration work started again as a consequence of need – our refugee families needed immigration advice and so we registered with what was the OISC at the time, now the IAA. Since then we have moved up to Level 2 as an organisation, allowing us to do complex cases such as domestic abuse, human rights, trafficking and asylum cases. Over the years the immigration work has become more and more important as we have seen such changes in the communities, many of whom need advice and support. We have very limited resources and so we have had to determine what types of cases we can take. The decreasing number of legal aid firms has meant that 60% of asylum seekers do not have representation, which has meant many come to us for help and support. Karen Manley as the senior adviser has taken on many asylum cases successfully, but longer term we want to secure a legal aid contract so that we can do justice to the cases we deal with, and ensure that we are financially stable. One of my key aims for the coming years is to secure more funding for the immigration advice service. It, like ESOL has become a main part of what we do. Although we did secure some additional funding through the Home Office this year to support the change to

Evisas, it is time limited so finding alternative funding to maintain, and indeed develop the service is crucially important.

Last year I ended my report with a quote from Maya Angelou ‘Hate, it has caused a lot of problems in the world, but has not solved one yet.’ Given the recent protests outside of asylum hotels, the toxic media headlines and the demonisation of migrants by the right we need to be quoting this more.

In solidarity.

Shantele Sutherland, Director

September 2025

THE TEAM 2024/25

Our team doesn't just include our staff, we wouldn't be able to deliver what we do without our excellent team of external tutor as well as our volunteers who give so much time and support to our services.

Staff Team -

Shantele Sutherland, Director

Anita Dean, Information Officer/finance

Valerie Gould, Information Officer/IT & social media (until July 24)

Karen Manley, Snr Immigration Adviser

Kelda Manley, Immigration Adviser

Lydia Tsang, Project Officer, Hong Kong BNO Project

Lionel Lee, Project Officer, Hong Kong BNO Project

Amy Savas, Community Engagement Officer (GRT communities), Transforming Community Engagement (until May 24)

Yasmin Abdelgadir, BME Health Inequalities Officer, Bridging the Gap Project (until August 24, then Dalia Akood – until April 25)

Negin Faninam, Volunteer Co-ordinator

Dina Hussien, Support Worker

Iryna Dubova, Ukrainian Support Worker

In house ESOL Team

Sophie Freeman, Head of ESOL

Ruth Lane, Exams Officer

Charlotte Webber, ESOL Support

Kelsie Shute, Outreach Manager

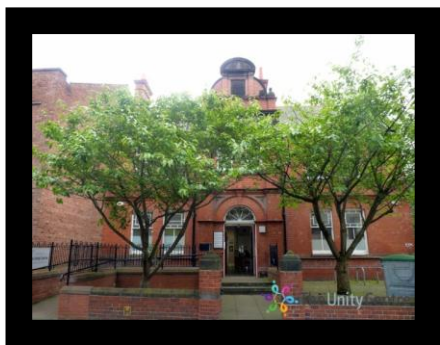
External ESOL Tutors

Abi Williams	Jim Freeman	Josh Oldfield	Nicola Oldfield
Catherine Potts	Lyndsey Marangio	Matt Proe	Aga Trigano
Jane Hopkins	Iryna Dubova	Olga Popivnenko (cover)	

Volunteers

We'd like to take this opportunity to say a massive THANK YOU to all our volunteers who have helped with our asylum hub, community cafe and our ESOL classes:

Mary Briody	Fiona Wilson	Susan Beigel	Mike Mitchell
Sandie Corley	Angie Mohan	Julie Sloan	Jonathan Morrow
Kerry Reid	Karen Dickson	Beth Gibbons	David Evans
Nicola Oldfield	Pauline Roberts	TK Al Jorani	Ibrahim Hassan
Ali Hassan	Katharine Nell	Frank Vernon	John Wooton
Fatima Musawie	Jo Bishop	Arezou Karimi	Molly McGovern
Melissa Castro	Ruth Keziah	Masoud Bazargan	Sheila Longdin
Sheila Morris	Somayeh Eslaminejad		Mohammed Abdullah
Yusaf Isah	Jeishree Kavettapatty		Helen Awhuru
Wafa Mirany	Salah Alburaiki	Douglas Parkinson	Yasin Mohammed



THE UNITY CENTRE

The Unity Centre, since its inception in 2011 has been a focal point for Black and Minority Ethnic communities to get information, advice and services. In 2017 we took over the entire building from Cheshire West council and were therefore able to develop our services with the extra space. The Centre is vital to the communities we work with, it is

seen as a safe space and a 'one stop shop' where people who are new to the area will often just turn up to find out what help they can get. We are lucky that we have a multilingual staff base who can help. Our notice boards are full of helpful information about what is on, not just at the Centre but at other organisations – from women's only support services to Storyhouse and the library – whatever people need we usually have information available.

Reception at Unity

Since June 2024, Lydia has taken on the role of Information Officer following Valerie's departure. We now have two staff members, Anita and Lydia, managing the Reception.

The past year has once again been very busy for the Reception team. With the growing volume and diversity of our services—particularly ESOL, asylum seeker support, and immigration—Reception has become busier than ever, as we remain the first point of contact for all clients.

We respond to enquiries by phone, email, and in person—often all three at once! We triage immigration, ESOL, asylum seeker/refugee, and health enquiries to the appropriate CHAWREC staff. As queries can be wide-ranging and sometimes outside our areas of expertise, we also signpost clients to other organisations when appropriate.

Alongside reception duties, we also carry out additional responsibilities. Anita manages accounts, invoicing, and credit control, while Lydia oversees social media, newsletters, website updates, and immigration administration. Together, we handle general administration and room hire.

Highlights from the past year:

- Both Anita and Lydia completed Fire Warden training and received certificates.
- Lydia also completed an Emergency First Aid at Work course, strengthening staff safety procedures.
- Security has been improved with the installation of cameras on the ground floor.

Other ongoing responsibilities include:

- Managing room bookings to avoid clashes
- Setting up the café for tea and coffee, washing cups, tidying the kitchen, and ensuring provisions are kept up to date
- Assisting asylum seekers with queries and reimbursing bus fares
- Ordering stationery for the Centre and ESOL tutors
- Photocopying when ESOL admin are unavailable
- Maintaining the noticeboard and information resources
- Sorting and distributing post and keeping records
- Photographing and documenting our events
- Liaising with tradespeople for building maintenance
- Liaising with the IT supplier for any computer issues affecting staff
- Managing flood defence and clean-up during the rainy season
- Many other tasks as required to support the smooth running of the Centre

Community Café

We have been hoping to open the community café to the public for a number of years, but there have been various problems along the way. We still are having problems with damp in the building, which affects the café area and we really hope this can be sorted soon. The café area is currently used for ESOL student break times, our weekly asylum hub and events at the Centre. This year Negin, our Volunteer Co-ordinator has been able to train up a number of kitchen specific volunteers which have been a real help – serving teas, coffees and cakes to students and helping to put on food for events.

Asylum Hub

The weekly asylum hub started back in lockdown to support those asylum seekers stuck in hotels, bored and isolated. We hadn't expected to keep it going, but it proved so popular that we did and it is now a key part of our service delivery. Our hub is on a Tuesday and we give asylum seekers a meal, free ESOL classes and are able to deal with any queries or advice they need as we have a variety of multilingual staff in the building as well as our immigration team.

We have developed the hub so that other services can come along too – so we now have a regular drop in from the outreach team at the Council as well as Talking Therapies. We know that mental health and wellbeing is a major issue for those seeking asylum as well as new refugees and we receive a number of referrals from



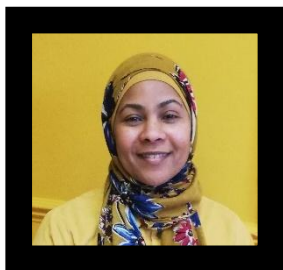
GP surgeries as well as social prescribers who struggle to support them. Our hub provides a safe space and a place where they can connect with others. We were also really pleased to secure some funding around courses for wellbeing and were able to run Therapeutic Art classes and a Recognising Trauma course, which provides some low level

mental health support for our service users. We have also welcomed Chester Zoo in 2024 and again in 2025, who ran a series of sessions based around nature which culminated in a trip to the zoo during the summer. Days out like this are few and far between for this group of people and so this can really lift their spirits.

This service carries on because we secure small grants and donations, so anyone who is interested in the asylum hub, we'd welcome your support.

ESOL Classes

Given the rapid expansion of ESOL (see next report), rooms are constantly in use at the Unity Centre, often with ESOL at various levels at the same time right across the building.



Dina Hussein, Support Worker

Over the past year, I have continued to work closely with the ESOL and immigration teams, and more recently, I began sharing the Health Officer role with Negin. While Negin focuses on partnership development, my work remains centred on providing direct support to service users.

I support service users during our weekly drop-ins—Tuesdays at the Unity Centre and Thursdays at the Trinity Church hub in EP. My role involves providing both practical assistance and emotional support to individuals facing a wide range of challenges.

Client Demographics

- Nationalities Represented: Sudan, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Eritrea, Yemen, Somalia, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, and Kuwait.
- Immigration Status: The majority of clients are refugees, with a significant number of asylum seekers (AS).

This includes help with:

- Housing applications
- GP and dentist registrations
- School placements for children
- Benefits forms and immigration paperwork
- Signposting to mental health, legal, and community services

Key Services Provided

Service Area	Examples of Support Provided
Housing Support	Setting up direct debits for council tax, managing rent arrears, updating housing band status
Benefits & Finance	Assisting with Universal Credit applications, hardship payments, share code generation, tax forms
Healthcare Access	Registering with GPs and dentists, explaining hospital letters, emergency dental care
Education	Submitting school absence requests, helping with college registrations
Legal & Immigration	Supporting ARC card replacements, eVisa access, and appeal processes

Digital & Admin	Resolving bank account issues, uploading documents, providing help with emails
Emotional & Social	Offering ongoing emotional support in clients' native languages

Key Outcomes (2024–2025)

- Provided 1:1 support to over 180 individuals
- Assisted with more than 95 housing-related cases
- Supported 42 families with school or nursery placements
- Helped 78 people register with a GP or access NHS services
- Referred 65 service users to specialist legal or mental health support

Case Highlights

One of the service users, a newly arrived asylum seeker with two young children, was struggling to access healthcare and secure school places. With our support, she successfully registered with a GP, enrolled both children in local schools, and received help applying for financial support. She later said that the guidance she received during drop-ins gave her “a sense of safety and hope.”

Through this work, we continue to improve access to essential services, reduce isolation, and support the overall wellbeing of people facing significant barriers in our community.

Another Case Highlight from Recent Asylum Drop-in

Client: R Y

Country of Origin: Kuwait

Status: Refugee

Location: EP (Ellesmere Port)

R had been experiencing ongoing mental health struggles and feelings of isolation, regularly reaching out for emotional support. Despite having professional support through NHS Talking Therapies, R found great comfort in speaking to a trusted individual and sought connection and purpose in daily life.

Actions Taken:

- Provided consistent emotional support and active listening, building trust and rapport.
- Encouraged him to engage socially by attending Trinity regularly.

- Supported his application to volunteer at a local church, giving him a meaningful role in the community.
- Addressed a pressing energy bill issue by contacting British Gas, chatting with an online advisor, and successfully setting up a Direct Debit plan.
- Enrolled him in a plumbing course, helping him take a constructive step toward self-sufficiency and employment.

Outcome:

This case demonstrates a holistic support approach—meeting both practical and emotional needs. R now has improved financial stability, stronger social engagement, and a path toward vocational skill-building, which contributes to his long-term integration and well-being.



ENGLISH FOR SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

The past year has seen our ESOL provision expand rapidly once again in response to increased demand across Cheshire West and Cheshire. But also as a result of CHAWREC winning a highly sought after bid to provide ESOL in East Cheshire.

This meant that CHAWREC provided ESOL classes in Macclesfield, Crewe, Northwich, Winsford, Ellesmere Port and Chester.

Unlike the previous year, Ukrainians and Hong Kongers were mixed in classes with all other learners across all locations. This meant classes were fully integrated allowing a space for cross-cultural learning, tolerance and understanding.

A mixture of Drop-in classes and Accredited exam classes were available at all locations and at many levels, with total enrolments across all sites peaking at approximately 500 students and exam success rates at over 90%.

We also offered our first IELTS course, a privately funded course, but at a significant discount from the market rate. The IELTS exam in English helps learners access higher education, be able to practice certain professions they may be qualified to do in the UK, and can be valid for some visa requirements.

We were also funded to deliver a 'English skills to get into Work' course for our learners which had a significant uptake with about 50 learners attending at different levels and in different locations.

Unity Centre classes were delivered by Iryna Dubova, Charlotte Webber, Sophie Freeman, Jessica Brearey, Nicola Oldfield, Josh Oldfield and Jim Freeman and Kat Mickleson. Winsford classes by Jim Freeman and Lyndsey Marangio, Northwich by Kelsie Shute and Lyndsey Marangio, Crewe by Kelsie Shute and Matt Proe and Macclesfield by Aga Trigano. Catherine Potts taught our classes in Ellesmere Port.

Learners achieved 408 ESOL qualifications last year across our centres. We've had more than 500 learners through our doors. As well as this, our Community Learning Drop in classes in Chester, Northwich, Winsford, Ellesmere Port, Macclesfield and Crewe regularly had 10 – 30 learners in attendance each week.

We also delivered ESOL in an asylum hotel in Daresbury for the majority of the year, with Abi Williams tutoring, supporting large numbers, with rolling attendance as learners moved in or out of the hotel.

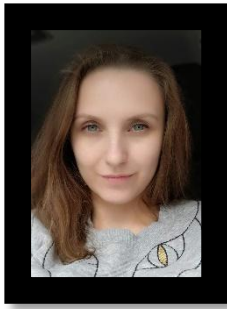
The ESOL classes in our asylum drop in continue to prove popular and we now have several groups. We are incredibly grateful to staff and volunteers who give their time to support these classes, we know the students love coming to these sessions.

Feedback from learners in end-of-course feedback forms has been extremely positive, with many learners saying how much they love coming to class, learning English and feeling part of a community. Feedback from a tutor survey was also very positive with all tutors saying they were happy or very happy to be part of the team for CHAWREC.

In order to support the growing ESOL provision, the admin team increased, with a number of part time positions: Sophie Freeman as Head of ESOL, Charlotte Webber as Admin Support, Ruth Lane as Exams Officer and Admin Support, Olga Popivnenko as Junior Admin Support and Kelsie Shute as Outreach Centre's manager.

We could not have delivered the service we have without the invaluable support of our bilingual project and support workers, Dina, Lydia and Iryna.

Sophie Freeman, Head of ESOL



Iryna Dubova

Bilingual (Ukrainian) Support Worker

This year has been both challenging and rewarding as I have supported Ukrainian refugees arriving in the UK under difficult circumstances. My role has focused on providing practical assistance, guidance, and advocacy to help individuals and families settle into their new environment and access the opportunities available to them.

Key Areas of Work

1. Practical Support & Daily Needs

- * Assisted clients with utility bills, housing queries, council tax, and essential paperwork, helping them navigate unfamiliar systems in person, by phone, and via social media.
- * Supported 27 individuals with e-visa applications and 50+ clients - with share code generation and updates, ensuring access to work and services.
- * Helped escalate cases of errors in e-visas and Ukraine Permission Extension (UPE) visa applications.

2. Language Support

- * Provided interpreting and translation (Ukrainian/English) for official appointments, medical visits, school meetings, and community events.
- * Connected clients to ESOL courses, helping them build language skills and independence.

3. Information, Advice & Guidance (IAG)

- * Offered tailored advice on education opportunities, including school placements and adult training.
- * Supported access to employment, assisting with CVs and job applications.
- * Kept the community informed of changes in UK law and policy affecting refugees, particularly in visas, housing, and benefits, through updates on WhatsApp and Telegram channels (Northwich, Chester, Ellesmere Port, Winsford).

4. Community Engagement & Advocacy

- * Acted as a bridge between CHAWREC and the Ukrainian community, ensuring clear two-way communication.

- * Shared information on services, initiatives, and opportunities for participation.

5. Emotional Support & Wellbeing

- * Provided a listening ear and informal counselling to individuals and families coping with stress, uncertainty, and trauma.
- * Referred clients to their GP as an initial step toward mental health support. Younger people tended to engage more readily with services, while some older clients expressed stigma due to cultural attitudes from their youth. Encouragingly, several have since reported improvement and are now receiving appropriate treatment.
- * Coordinated 10 art therapy sessions at the Unity Centre for 14 vulnerable Ukrainians aged 55+, creating a safe space for comfort, expression, and solidarity. These sessions were highly successful in supporting participants' wellbeing.

6. Community Collaboration

- * Took part in a joint Diversity Project event with the Hong Kong community, fostering intercultural understanding and solidarity as part of refugee-focused initiatives.

Challenges & Next Steps

Despite progress, many clients continue to face barriers related to language, digital literacy, and mental health. There is also a strong need for sustainable employment opportunities and long-term housing solutions, particularly as Ukrainian visas have recently been extended for another 24 months.

In the coming year, I aim to:

- * Expand outreach to more families, particularly those newly arrived.
- * Strengthen partnerships with local education and employment providers.
- * Deliver workshops on navigating UK systems (bills, healthcare, legal rights).
- * Explore new housing opportunities and run workshops on renting and tenant rights, education.
- * Organize wellbeing events tailored to community needs.
- * Develop a digital awareness course focused on local apps, online banking, and government services (gov.uk).
- * Continue assisting with UPE visa applications.

It has been a privilege to support the Ukrainian community during this difficult time. Through practical help, language support, and advocacy, I have witnessed families gaining confidence, independence, and hope for the future. I look forward to continuing this important work and building on the progress made this year.



IMMIGRATION SERVICE

Report by Karen Manley, Immigration Caseworker

The Immigration team comprises of myself, Kelda and Lydia who now assists with administration. We have been lucky to have had a student, Yanira, who has consistently worked with us for two years, but she will sadly be leaving us later this year. We work on a range of cases from family visas, supporting domestic abuse victims and asylum claims. We have also begun working on Modern Slavery cases. Kelda has also been leading on a contract supporting the change from ID cards to the e-visa system.

We both attend the weekly asylum hub as well as a similar drop in Widnes twice a month. This work covers a range of issues. It can include lodging appeals and help with e-visas but the main body of work is in helping those with no solicitor to prepare for asylum interviews and hearings with one off advice sessions. We are having to limit number we take on for casework but many cases come to us through this triage system.

We still get many requests for help with both immigration matters and asylum through other avenues. These can be those who have found us online or are signposted in. We also receive referrals from a number of organisations throughout the region including local authorities, citizens advice, health workers and domestic abuse charities and organisations.

We work to offer a range of advice and will give one off advice as well as casework or referrals to other organisations. We have provided support to the Hong Kong community as they start to think of applying for their next visa steps.

We were awarded a contract from the Home Office to support 220 clients to create and manage their e-visas. However, many clients have had issues in accessing this system and new decisions awarded after November 2024 were not included in this funding. We have also had to assist with No Time Limit applications for those with paper immigration documents which were also not included in the funding. This has created a huge workload for our department.

We are taking on a varied caseload which includes complex family cases where clients rely on making the best case for their visas and asylum cases where we feel we can add best value to the claim.

We have been working with victims of modern slavery and servitude to try to ensure they get better access to help and care to help in their trauma recovery. Slavery during journeys remains a problem but also people being taken advantage of in the

UK. Many of our clients have been traumatised through their experiences and are vulnerable to exploitation and we are keen to support these victims.

Cases of domestic abuse remains a part of our workload both those in the UK and those who flee abuse abroad and this remains a focus of our work.

Case Studies

1/ Our client came to the UK as a student with her husband and three children. Unfortunately, her oldest child's health deteriorated during the time in the UK and we assisted the family to apply for a Human Rights visa on health grounds. The application was awarded, and the child has access to good medical care which was not available in her home country and her family are best able to care for her.

2/ Our client fled her husband in her home country following his abusive behaviour but was pursued by him through the country's legal system which did not allow rights of divorce. She fled to the UK and claimed asylum here. We argued the system of that country amounted to persecution of women escaping domestic abuse and the client was awarded refugee status.

3/ Our client escaped to the UK whilst pregnant with her third child after her husband's family tried to poison her. The children and maternal family have also been subject to attacks from the family with demands she should return to her home country. We assisted her and the newborn daughter with a claim for asylum in the UK. This was recently successful, and we are working to bring the oldest children to join the family in the UK.

4/ A client came to us in November 2024 as he could not access his visa as he was not sent a BRP with his October decision. We submitted multiple reports and escalated the issue a number of times. The client was then given notice to leave his accommodation and was told this could not be changed. We successfully got his accommodation reinstated. After multiple client meetings, calls and emails the client finally gained access to his visa in March 2025.



PROJECTS

We often secure funding for particular projects that fit with our overall aims and objectives. They are generally time limited because of the funding but it allows us to offer additional services while the funding is available. During the year under review we have secured funding for a number of projects - we have reported below on the key ones with some background to each, and the corresponding staff member's report below.



VOLUNTEERING FOR UNITY

Negin Faninam, Volunteer Coordinator

This is a UKSPF funded project which has allowed us to develop the capacity of the organisation through volunteering. We secured funding from April 2024 – March 2026.

This year has marked a significant milestone for CHAWREC, as it was the first full year with a dedicated Volunteer Coordinator in post. Since stepping into this role, I have been focused on strengthening the foundation of our volunteer programme, ensuring our policies and procedures are clear, supportive, and accessible.

Programme Development and Coordination

Over the past year, I have developed and implemented CHAWREC's first Volunteer Pack, giving new and prospective volunteers a centralised resource that outlines expectations, support structures, and opportunities for involvement. This has improved both our onboarding process and overall volunteer engagement.

To ensure consistency and coverage, we introduced a structured rota system for our ESOL and asylum drop-in sessions. This has helped us maintain adequate volunteer support across all services.

Volunteer Hours Contributed

From **1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025:**

- **Community Café Volunteers** contributed over **750 hours**.
- **ESOL Volunteers** contributed over **800 hours** supporting learners in drop-in sessions.

From **1 April to 30 June 2025:**

- **ESOL Volunteers** contributed over **200 hours**.

- **Community Café Volunteers** contributed over **190 hours**.

These figures reflect the dedication and generosity of our volunteers, who play an essential role in the delivery of CHAWREC's work.

Volunteer Roles and Contributions

Community Café Volunteers

Our Community Café officially re-opened internally in June 2025, after a long break, offering refreshments twice a week (Wednesdays and Fridays) to our students. This was made possible thanks to the energy and support of our Community Café Volunteers. We hope to expand this further and open to the public as soon as volunteer capacity allows.

Community Café Team:

- Mary Briody
- Pauline Roberts
- Melissa Castro
- Ibrahim Hassan
- Ali Hassan
- Fatima Mousawie
- Arezou Karimi
- Somayeh Eslaminejad
- Mohammed Abdullah
- Yusuf Isah
- Molly McGovern

ESOL Volunteers

Our ESOL volunteers have continued to provide essential support across multiple drop-in sessions. Their contribution not only helps learners build language skills but also provides meaningful personal connection and cultural orientation.

ESOL Volunteer Team:

- Fiona Wilson
- Susan Beigel
- Mike Mitchell
- Sandi Corley
- Angie Mohan
- Julie Sloan

- Jonathan Morrow
- Kerry Reid
- Karen Dickson
- David Evans
- Nicola Oldfield
- Pauline Roberts
- Katharine Nell
- Frank Alan Vernon
- John Mark Wootton
- Jo Bishop
- Ruth Keziah
- Sheila Longdin
- Sheila Morris

Asylum Seeker and Refugee Support Volunteers

This team has been instrumental in helping our asylum seeker and refugee service users access essential support and feel welcomed.

Support Volunteers:

- Chamoda Koskandawala
- Sumaiya Bushra
- Yanira
- Jeishree Kavettapatty
- Helen Awhuru
- Salah Alburaiqi
- Masoud Bazargan

Training Delivered

Between April 2024 and March 2025, and into the first quarter of 2025, we delivered the following volunteer training opportunities:

- **Food Safety Level 2**
- **An Introduction to Support ESOL Learners**
- **Techniques and Strategies for Supporting the ESOL Learner**
- **Bespoke Barista Training** – 3 sessions

These trainings have ensured volunteers feel confident and prepared in their roles, especially within the café and ESOL support settings.

Volunteer Recognition and Feedback

We proudly celebrated **Volunteer Week in both 2024 and 2025**, recognising the invaluable contributions of our volunteers across all departments.

A recent survey of our ESOL volunteers found:

- **91%** felt very well supported in their role by staff or volunteer coordinators.
- **100%** felt recognised and appreciated for their work.

New Developments: Volunteer Interpreter Bank

We have recently launched a new project to establish a **Volunteer Interpreter Bank** to support service users with limited English. We already have volunteers who speak:

- Farsi
- Kurdish
- Arabic
- Chinese
- Spanish
- Ukrainian
- Amharic

We are continuing to recruit additional volunteers to expand this linguistic support, which will enhance the accessibility of our services for many users.

Looking Ahead

We aim to:

- Expand the Community Café opening hours to the public.
- Grow our Interpreter Bank to support more service users in their own languages.
- Continue developing training and support systems that equip volunteers and make them feel valued.

I am incredibly proud of what we've accomplished together and grateful for the continued dedication of our volunteers. Their time, effort, and care have made a measurable difference in the lives of those we serve.



Hong Kong BNO Project

Report by Project Officers – Lydia Tsang & Lionel Lee

Hong Kong BN(O) Support Programme

The Hong Kong BN(O) Support Programme has been successfully running from February 2022, originally funded through the Dept of Levelling Up and more recently through the Northwest RSMP. The project concluded in June 2025. This exceptional and impactful project has supported a large number of Hong Kong BN(O) residents in the region, helping them settle into local communities with confidence and dignity. Over the past three years, we have built strong connections, delivered meaningful events, and witnessed numerous success stories among those we served.

Programme Overview

From April 2024 to March 2025, we organised 16 events, seminars & activities and 71 conversation club sessions, directly engaging over 1,754 Hong Kong BN(O) residents. During the final phase, from April 2025 to June 2025, we conducted an additional 6 activities & 19 Conversation club sessions, reaching over 290 individuals.

Since its launch in February 2022, the programme has engaged with over 6,000 individuals and families across the region. Our activities have reached a diverse range of community members, providing tailored support that has helped many feel more settled and connected in the UK.

We also developed and maintained a robust communication network, growing our email database to over 1,400 contacts. This network has been vital for sharing information, promoting events, and sustaining long-term connections within the Hong Kong BN(O) community.

Programme Highlights

The English Conversation Club has been one of the most impactful and enduring initiatives of the programme. Running continuously over two years in Warrington and Crewe, the club was designed to help Hong Kong BN(O) residents practise conversational English, connect with local residents, and better understand British culture. It quickly evolved into a safe and supportive space where participants could share experiences, seek advice, and form friendships. Many expressed that the club helped them feel welcomed and less isolated. The true success of the initiative lies in



its sustainability—thanks to the dedication of local Hong Kong volunteers, led by Lionel and Lydia, the Conversation Club will continue even after the programme concludes. This is a meaningful legacy and a strong example of how community projects can thrive through volunteer leadership and collective commitment.

Life in the UK Test Workshops were another vital component of the programme, providing targeted support for BN(O) residents preparing to take the Life in the UK test—a key requirement for settlement. Delivered in multiple locations and conducted in Cantonese, the workshops helped participants better understand the content and format of the test. Our Project Officers prepared clear and practical study materials



tailored to those who may struggle with English. The sessions gave attendees not only the knowledge they needed but also the confidence to move forward. Many participants shared that, with our support, they successfully passed the test. These workshops reduced stress, improved outcomes, and empowered individuals at a crucial stage of their immigration journey.

Immigration Seminars addressed a particularly pressing need within the Hong Kong BN(O) community. Delivered by Karen Manley, our immigration adviser, these seminars focused on applying for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR), a major milestone for many who are approaching their five-year residency mark in the UK. The sessions offered detailed information about application procedures, required documentation, and how to navigate complex or unique family circumstances. The seminars were very well attended and generated many follow-up enquiries, reflecting the high level of interest in this topic. For many, these sessions provided clarity, reduced confusion, and offered reassurance at a pivotal point in their settlement process.



Cultural Festivals and Community Fun Days were an essential part of the programme's outreach and community engagement efforts. Despite working within limited funding, we successfully organised several large-scale events centred around Lunar New Year celebrations, drawing hundreds of attendees—including both Hong Kong BN(O) residents and members of the local British community. These festivals showcased traditional Hong Kong music, food, games, performances, and children's activities, creating a joyful and inclusive atmosphere. The events provided a meaningful opportunity for Hongkongers to celebrate their culture and identity, while also allowing local residents to better understand the BN(O) community and its unique background. These gatherings played a vital role in building bridges between cultures, fostering mutual respect, and creating a strong sense of belonging. In addition, the festivals attracted the participation of various local organisations, who used the platform to connect with the Hong Kong community, share resources, and promote their services. The result was not only greater visibility for the BN(O) community, but also deeper community integration and stronger support networks.



The Hong Kong BN(O) Support Programme has made a lasting and meaningful contribution to the lives of Hong Kongers in our region. From practical support such

as immigration and language assistance to community-building and cultural celebration, the programme has laid a strong foundation for integration, empowerment, and continued support.

We are grateful for the collaboration of local authorities, volunteers, service providers, and the Hong Kong BN(O) community. The legacy of this programme will live on through community-led initiatives and the strong networks we have built together.

Bridging the Gap

Bridging the Gap started at the end of January 2022. Coming out of covid it was really important to us that the focus we had on the health of BME communities was not lost. During covid the NHS were very aware that they lacked the links into BME communities and therefore were highly reliant on organisations like ours to get key health messages out there. Funding from Cheshire and Wirral Partnership Trust was initially for one year, but since then we have had it renewed through a new fund, joined up with the local authority and we now have funding until the end of December 2025.

Unfortunately, the limitations in funding and uncertainty about it has caused some issues in terms of maintaining staff in the role, and since we began we have had 3 different project officers with our most recent, Dalia Akood leaving in April 25. As the funding is only confirmed until December we have split the role between two very capable existing members of staff – Dina Hussein and Negin Faninam who have extended their roles; Dina is dealing primarily with individual support and Negin with taking on the external partnerships role.

The project is all about addressing health inequalities in Cheshire West and has 3 main aims - to:

1. Promote better health for BME communities
2. Provide individual support to BME individuals who are struggling to access healthcare as well as
3. Provide healthcare support and feedback to healthcare agencies. The project covers the Cheshire West and Chester area.

Between April 24 and March 25, the service supported in excess of 400 individuals with access to healthcare across Cheshire West. The primary issue that has dominated project workers time has been support around mental health, particularly around our asylum community. We have always ensured that the project worker is on hand at our asylum hub to provide support and help with health issues and the main demand has been around mental health concerns. In order to address this we now have Talking Therapies attending the hub on a biweekly basis, as well as having developed good relationships with other providers like Café 71.

We were also asked to join 'Joy' a system whereby the GP practices can refer to us directly with individuals. Since we signed up in July 2024 we have received an average of 10 referrals a month, mostly asylum seekers experiencing trauma and depression. However, the lack of specialist support for these communities, especially the lack of counselling in own language makes it very difficult for us to do much more than provide a listening ear, support with practical issues and refer to our asylum hub where they can meet others in the same position.

In recognition of these problems, we bid for funding from the local authority for wellbeing courses that at least would provide some low level mental health support. In the last year we have run therapeutic art for wellbeing for asylum seekers and refugees as well as a 'recognising and managing trauma' course during the summer. We hope to be able to expand on this provision in the coming year.



In June 2025 we held a health awareness event with a number of different health partners who came to talk through their services. We also gave away health goody bags, which contained a number of hygiene and health products.





POLICY & PARTNERSHIPS

It has always been important to our organisation to work in partnership with others. Some partnerships are about us influencing in order to advocate for the communities we work with, others are more about working together towards a common goal. We recognise that as a small charity

we can do more with less resources if we work with others and it is important to reduce duplication in services.

The pandemic fundamentally changed our partnership working with all meetings going online, and that has more or less remained the same. Everyone recognised that we could get more done, less travel time and less travelling expenses by running meetings through teams or zoom, so although we do now have *some* face to face meetings, the majority have stayed online.

To follow is a precis of the main partnerships we have played an active role in this year. We often get invited to additional meetings, but attendance is very much down to our capacity at the time.

Cheshire Gypsy & Traveller Strategic Partnership: - This group has been in existence for many years. It is the key partnership looking at sub regional issues around Gypsies and Travellers, including policy on encampments, GTAA's and site provision.

Cheshire West MAF on asylum seekers and refugees:- This is a strategic group which was initially set up to deal with the Syrian refugee resettlement programme but has now expanded into looking at issues around asylum as well as new migrant communities. It brings together statutory and voluntary sector groups that support asylum seekers and refugees.

Halton Asylum Seeker and Refugee MAP - This is a group similar to the West Cheshire MAP but around Halton and includes discussion about asylum seekers as well as resettlement.

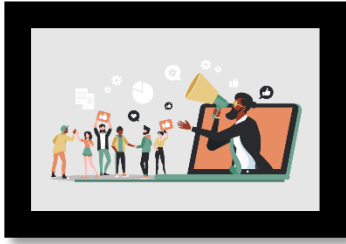
Cheshire West 4 Sanctuary – This is a group that brings together different organisations that support sanctuary seekers in Cheshire West on a practical support level and feeds into the MAF above.

Prevent Panel - Prevent is about identifying individuals vulnerable to radicalisation by using existing multi-agency working between local authorities to identify individuals at risk of being drawn into terrorism.

Cheshire West Voluntary Action Trustee Board - It is important for us to maintain strong links with our local voluntary sector partners, and so the Director is part of the Board of CVWA.

Cheshire West Mental Health Alliance - We are now a part of the Cheshire West Mental Health Alliance which brings together different agencies to look at how we can be more co-ordinated in our offer to our service users around their mental health. It is also a vehicle for campaigning for better services and support for the VCFS.

North West Contract Asylum Board- This is a partnership that includes the local authorities in the NW region, Home Office, Migrant Help, Serco and RSMP looking at asylum issues and the asylum contract for the area. They recently agreed to accept voluntary sector representatives from each area, and we are now the Cheshire representative. This meets quarterly, but the voluntary sector representatives have a pre meeting to discuss any key issues they would like to raise within the meeting.



PUBLIC AWARENESS & CAMPAIGNS

In the age of social media, our public awareness and campaigning role is more important than ever. There is a huge amount of misinformation in the public domain, and we try very hard to counteract a lot of it through our social media, website and getting out there to talk about the needs of our service users. Unfortunately, we have limited resources around this and so we are always on the lookout for people who are able to support us in this work.

Not only is it fundamentally important for us to counteract the misinformation, particularly around asylum seekers, refugees and migrant communities it is also important for us to tell people about our services and the amount of work we do. We don't shout about it enough, because we are all too busy getting on with the job in hand, but this remains an area of work we need to get better at.

So what do we do around this area of work?

Events & Presentations - Each of the staff members talks to various organisations in order to promote their area of work and the organisation itself. We have also been organising our own events, for example through the Hong Kong BN(O) project. We have various banners and publicity materials that we use for these events to publicise what we do.

Social Media and Marketing – Social media is a key way of us getting our messages out there. We currently have two social media accounts – facebook and X, with 1.3k supporters on facebook and 756 on X. We do try to make sure that there is regular information on our social media pages, so that we are seen as an active contributor and we also respond quickly to messages. However, there is a lot more that we could do with this if we had the resources and this is an area we would like to develop. If you haven't already 'liked' us please do so and share with your friends.

Lydia has taken over from Valerie doing a great job of creating our monthly newsletter for the Unity Centre, which is packed full of information about what is going on at the Centre as well as key issues generally around equality and diversity.

Website - We have a website www.chawrec.org.uk and if you haven't checked it out please do. We get many enquires through our website and we are always trying to keep it relevant and up to date. We would welcome any volunteers with website experience to provide support to us with this.



Fundraising events – this year we were chosen by the Lord Mayor, Razia Daniels to be one of her charities. This meant that working with her other four charities we developed fundraising events, which also raised awareness about our organisation. Key events we organised were a Bollywood themed night at the Town Hall and a supper club.

Pippa Virdee Lace, Vice Chair of CHAWREC on Bollywood Night

CURRENT MEMBERSHIP

We still need as many members as possible to support us. If you aren't already a member then join up now! Download the membership form from our website www.chawrec.org.uk

Organisational Members

Cheshire West Voluntary Action
Cheshire Asian and Minorities
Community Council
Chester Bahais
Nipponkai
Muir Group Housing
OCEAN

Priestley College
University of Chester
SHAPLA
Warrington CAB
Warrington Russian Group
The Hungarian Community of Chester
Hong Kong in Chester

Individual Members

Vijay Singh
Robert Bisset
Shamla Naidu
Derek Ross
TK Al-Jorani
Hammideh Brice
Mohammed Monchab Ali
Bhupinder Virdee Lace
Sherin Akhtar
Hassan Kazi
Jim Michie
Ram Darigala
Lesley Riley
Shamen Naidu
Yumi Andrews
Pradeep Verma
Bodrul Islam
Lauretta Righi
Richard Omoyele
Jubeyar Ahmed
Arfa Bayne
Halina Kelly
Clide Batchelor
Kate Bond
David Jamieson
Chantal Davies

Hu Zhixin
Birgit Schalow
Paras Gorasia
Abdush Shaheen
Celal Acar
Shahanara Hussain Razu
Fazil Afzal
Tony Liow
Sue May Liow
Ling Liow
Angela Jarvis
Alift Harewood
Hasan Ahmed
Abdelsalam Sati
Mark Arratoon

Heather Lannin
Dina Hussien
Brian Slocock
Michael Melville
Mohammed Hussain
Karen Dickson
Helen Lydon
Seema Burhani
Philip Walton
Kwesi Davies

Dakin Yang
Alison Shepherd
Emma Andrew
Daniel Tang
Dr Eghosa Ekhatior
Elizabeth Lambrakis
Nicola Oldfield
Dorothy Darnborough
Dr Corinne Thomason
Donald Dickson
George Martin Meredith
Rachel Blake

Diane Williams
Shaunagh Moss
Sophie Minshull
John Morrow
Aihua Zhang
Jeffrey Angove
Peter Speirs
Hussein Aljanob
Heather Swainston
Rob Herd
Adedayo Adebisi

TRUSTEES FOR THE YEAR 2024/25

(Because we are a charitable company our trustees are also company directors)

TK Al-Jorani, Chair
Bhupinder Virdee Lace (Vice Chair)
Martin Meredith – co-opted and now resigned
Karen Dickson (Secretary)
Shamla Naidu
Rob Herd
Seema Burhani (resigned)
Hussein Aljanob (resigned)
Ivan Yip
Shaunagh Moss

There are generally always casual vacancies that arise throughout the year – if you are interested in joining please let us know. The Trustee Board meets every other month at 6pm in the evening. We also have various sub groups for key issues such as HR and Finance.

Please note that our accounts are available on our website www.chawrec.org.uk or you can request a copy from the office

FUNDERS

We would like to say a huge thank you to all of our funders for this year. Without you we wouldn't be able to deliver the services that we do. Although they aren't named here we would also like to say a big thank you to those donors that gave so generously.

We would particularly like to pay tribute to the late Harold Dixon who bequeathed quite unknown to us, a generous sum of money in his will. His wife Judy had been a volunteer at the Unity Centre and we had raised some money in her name when she died with the family's agreement to support asylum seekers. Her husband also wished to continue her legacy, supporting the most vulnerable and left money to a range of charities including ourselves. This donation will be of great help to the organisation and be used to support our important work with asylum seekers and refugees.



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**Cheshire West
and Chester**



**CHESHIRE
COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION**

