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Swansea Asylum Seekers Support (SASS)

Trustees' Annual Report for Jan-Dec 2020

Covid Pandemic – Our Response

For 20 years SASS has offered support and friendship to asylum seekers in Swansea. Much of the initial contact has been via twice weekly drop-ins which offered language classes, a hot meal, sports such as table tennis, and above all: opportunities to engage, make friends, contribute as volunteers, and be made welcome – a home from home. Typically 70-100 people (including 15-20 volunteers) attended our drop-ins, with new arrivals coming almost every week. (Swansea has c.950 people living in c.250 Home Office funded houses, waiting for an asylum case decision, at any one time. Plus those who, following a negative decision, or sometimes even after a positive one, are homeless.)

In early 2020, with the rapid spread of Covid 19, our drop-ins were soon prohibited by public health advice. SASS needed to find alternative responses to its commitment to offer friendship and support to asylum seekers and nurture friendships between new arrivals and locals.

SASS responded quickly and in a number of ways to the new circumstances:

- From April 2020, SASS representatives attended Zoom meetings convened by Swansea City of Sanctuary, including all the local organisations supporting asylum seekers and refugees, initially weekly. The SASS Volunteer Development Worker acted as the coordinator of individual support referrals across all these organisations throughout 2020 and into 2021
- Money formerly spent on providing food at drop-ins was diverted to financial support for several food banks which were focusing on asylum seekers and refugees
- We recruited volunteer drivers to deliver to people needing food and other kinds of support collected by volunteers or purchased with special grants (sanitary products, clothing, household goods, toys and games for children, baby equipment, art and craft materials, blankets, etc etc). Donations went to over 102 asylum seeker households; Christmas gifts to 128 children and 132 adults; 300 blankets were distributed

- To combat loneliness and marginalisation, enable communication and participation, large numbers of phone top-ups were purchased and distributed (over 530 from April to end of December 2020) in partnership with several local organisations and funders
- English learning (formerly at drop-ins) was re-organised on Zoom
- Items for loan, including laptops and sewing machines, were funded through grants and distributed
- We set up a Telephone Tree, with volunteers including speakers of the commonest refugee languages checking in on asylum seekers and offering them support
- Whatsapp groups for volunteers circulate requests for help, arrange small-scale outdoor meetings and discuss how to develop our services
- Hafan Books organised a multilingual audio storytelling project (see tinyurl.com/swanseastories)
- Share Tawe maintained support for existing destitute guests. While evictions of 'failed asylum seekers' were suspended, preparations were made for the expected evictions backlog being released (date still uncertain at Sept 2021) by working to recruit new hosts, develop a new communications strategy, and develop a new partnership with a housing association
- SASS intensified partnership working with many organisations and initiatives including the FAN conversation groups on Zoom, in tandem with Swansea City of Sanctuary

We all still (Sept 2021) hugely miss our drop-ins. 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 2020.

For further information, see the update which we sent out to volunteers and donors in April 2021 - it is appended to this report.

People serving as Charity Trustees during 2020

Gillian Spedding (Secretary), Tom Cheesman (Treasurer), Emilie Short, Kathryn Jones, Alfred Sakr, Sophie Demarco, Funmilayo Olaniyan, Zena Hamodat, Ahmad Hamodat, Kelly Wearing (stood down in March 2021), Sandra Morton, Beverley Dobson, Margaret Lamb

Structure, Governance, Management and Staff

SASS is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) and a membership organisation. We define members as those who have been volunteers and/or beneficiaries of the charity during the 12 months previous to the Annual General Meeting.

The trustees group is responsible for SASS governance and members of the group also perform management functions.

During 2020 we employed one worker – **Wayne Yare** – in the dual roles of Volunteer Development Worker (VDW) and Share Tawe Development Worker (STW). Wayne retired in August 2021. 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's involvement dates back long before he became an employee of SASS in 2017. As a teacher of English and IT with Adult Learning Wales, as a founder volunteer with Unity in Diversity, and then as SASS's VDW and STW, Wayne has long been a much loved and respected community worker with asylum seekers and refugees. He was the 'beating heart' of SASS drop-ins, and a great ambassador for SASS. From March 2020, our drop-ins closed and our work centred on Zoom calls, phone calls, Whatsapp messaging, and doorstep visits. Wayne took on the role of coordinating support for asylum seekers and refugees through referrals across the various organisations supporting them – including Swansea Council for Voluntary Services (Better Welcome project), Ethnic Youth Support Team, African Community Centre, Unity In Diversity, Hay Brecon Talgarth Sanctuary for Refugees, Congolese Development Project, Centre for African Entrepreneurship, Race Council Cymru, Iberian & Latin American Association, as well as foodbanks, Local Area Coordinators, the Council, Gower College and many other partners. Working online from home hardly suited Wayne's gregarious, sociable nature, but he carried it out with skill, flair and good humour for over a year. Not only SASS but all our partner organisations owe him an immense debt of gratitude. He is greatly missed.

As we contemplate reopening drop-ins in some form (as of September 2021), Wayne's legacy is invaluable in terms of training drop-in volunteers, ensuring compliance with health and safety regulations, engaging asylum-seekers and refugees in drop-in roles, including 'language ambassadors' translating/interpreting in all the main relevant languages, and maintaining our website and social media.

A 3-year (2017-20) grant from BBC Children in Need to fund the **Welcome to Play** project for children during drop-in sessions came to an end in September 2020. The sessional playworkers were furloughed from March. Continuing support for children (and their parents) took the form of doorstep deliveries of donations of toys and art and play materials, some collected by volunteers and others purchased with grants. Score of families and children benefitted. We delivered gifts at Christmas to about 260 people in over 100 households.

The **ESOL project**, coordinated by George Wilson (Delphine Carley left the post at end of 2019), shifted from drop-ins to Zoom sessions, with between 6 and 8 ESOL teachers at various times offering classes at various levels. By the end of 2020 there were as many learners as had been attending face-to-face sessions. SASS intends to continue offering Zoom classes while re-introducing face-to-face classes shortly (Sept 2021). We found that many learners – especially women with families – prefer Zoom, provided their costs can be met: on a Pay As You Go phone, an hour on Zoom can cost £5, hence the need for phone top-ups. (A 2021 Welsh Government initiative to install MiFi devices in Home Office accommodation is reducing this need.)

Financial Review

We are grateful for grant funds during 2020 from the following funders.

- **BBC Children in Need** - the Welcome to Play children's project costs, including sessional playworkers' wages (£10,000/year, 3 years to Sept 2020)
- **Austin Bailey Foundation** - recurring annual grant of £2000

- **Austin Bailey Foundation** - a one-off Connectivity grant £2,200 (laptops, phone top-ups)
- **Allen Lane Foundation** - £11,000 core costs over 3 years (awarded in November 2019)
- **Awards for All** £10,000 (salaries)
- **Community Fund (Resilience grant)** £2000 (ESOL project salary)
- **Mass Action** £2500 (ESOL project salary)
- **City and County of Swansea, Community Integration** - £4960 for Hafan Books story project (received 2020, spent 2021)
- **City and County of Swansea, Menstrual Products Grant** - £300
- **Wales and West Utilities** - £1283 to buy sewing machines for loan and classes – received 2020, spent 2021
- **Race Council Cymru** - £100 for art materials
- **Community Fund Wales** - £250
- **City and County of Swansea Food Poverty Fund** - £1860
- **City and County of Swansea (recorded in core)** – £600 for menstrual products - received 2020, spent 2021

GRANTS FOR SHARE TAWE:

- **Comic Relief** - £9996
- **NACCOM (Respond and React grant)** - £10,000

For information: MAJOR GRANTS APPLIED FOR DURING 2020, RECEIVED IN 2021

- **Lloyds Bank Foundation, Covid Recovery Grant** – £25,000 a year granted for 2 years from January 2021]
- **Welsh Government** - £21,230 for Share Tawe (spent Jan-March 2021, received August 2021)

As the long list above shows, SASS greatly increased the diversity of income streams during 2020 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.

We were and are supported by many generous **individual donors**, making regular or occasional donations, totalling just under £25,000 in 2020 (for SASS and Share Tawe combined) – up from £19,000 in 2019. Thank you to all! (If interested in donating, please contact the treasurer on t.cheesman@swansea.ac.uk.) Lower costs due to no drop-ins meant that more of these donations went into unrestricted reserves, available for future spending.

Summary figures from approved accounts for 1 January to 31 December 2020:

Income:	£83,716		
Expenditure:	£54,604		
Surplus income over expenditure	£29,112		
Reserves at end of year:	£91,074		
Reserves are split into: Unrestricted:	£49,861	*Restricted:	£41,213
		(*includes grants for specified purposes)	

Our **Reserves Policy** adopted in October 23rd 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.

Our accounts are independently examined. Approved accounts are on the website of the Charity Commission.

To keep funding coming in, to pay for SASS drop-ins and associated projects, Share Tawe, 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 and all trustees would specially like to thank our paid bookkeeper, Delphine Cowley, and our unpaid assistant treasurer, Alan Thomas, for their help; also the advice services and assistance provided by SCVS (Swansea Council for Voluntary Services). We are very grateful for all support offered by our funders, in particular the Lloyds Bank Foundation for their advice and consultancy help.

How did we fulfil our aims in 2020?

Our twice-weekly drop-ins are our core activity and help us fulfil each of our charitable aims. The scope of activity and quality of services increased greatly in recent years with the appointment of paid staff and the engagement of new volunteers including the Friday drop-in landlords at St James' church.

As shown on the first page above we have 'worked around' Covid restrictions in various ways.

AIMS: 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

- 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

- Distribution of donated items (food, clothing, toys, sanitary products etc) continued with volunteers working from home, making doorstep visits, and coordinating with other providers such as foodbanks
- Our Volunteer Development Worker redirected volunteers to new tasks in keeping with both new needs and new health and safety regulations. Acting as a hub for referrals from and to partner organisations, he coordinated SASS support in close liaison with them.

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 had to find alternative ways of keeping in touch.

- We identified digital poverty (including phone poverty) as a major issue early on. We collaborated with partner organisations to source funding for top-ups and distribute them equitably – a major, ongoing administrative task involving close liaison with partners. Funds for this purpose came from a generous Austin Bailey Foundation Connectivity Grant. This work was also assisted by our longstanding friends at Hay Brecon and Talgarth Sanctuary for Refugees. The Children’s Society also gave a large grant to EYST for emergency response (hardship grants, IT equipment, top ups) and SASS’s VDW and volunteers made many referrals to that, with one of our volunteers bearing a lot of the administrative load (thank you to Kelly Wearing)
- Our Telephone Tree, coordinated by trustee Bev Dobson, involved about 15 volunteers making calls to asylum seeker individuals and families to check on their health and welfare, frequently identifying needs from food to clothing, from housing problems to activities for children, and finding ways to meet them through SASS itself or partners. Volunteers who are or were asylum seekers and speak relevant languages played a major role in this project
- Doorstep visits (at a safe distance), usually by volunteer drivers, bringing requested donations, also often brought evidence of new need through conversations. It might be that a mother reveals that she has no baby clothes. Or she might mention someone down the road who has only just arrived, and lacks a coat and connections with people speaking her language...
- Our **Share Tawe** project offers the security of a bed in a local household to asylum seekers who have become destitute. Mental and physical ill health are both major risks with homelessness and destitution. The project works to make hosting placements as comfortable as possible for both host and guest. Regular support is offered to each Share Tawe guest, ensuring that they 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. Each Share Tawe guest lives in constant fear of being deported, as the Home Office has declared them “appeal rights exhausted” and told them to return to a danger they have fled. The care taken by our Share Tawe volunteers contributes to their physical and emotional

health at a very frightening time. Recruitment of Share Tawe hosts was halted while Home Office evictions were paused. We fear that many will be needed when evictions resume.

3. Provide facilities for recreation or other leisure time occupations ¹

- This aspect of the work was severely curtailed by lockdown. We distributed toys/games and arts and craft materials, to children especially but not only. We organised outdoor, socially distanced meetings - these were sparsely attended, but did lift the spirits of those who were there. We engaged 20 asylum seekers and refugees in a multilingual storytelling project (funded by City and County of Swansea) which brought great joy to those who took part.
- SASS collaborated with The Open University on an online documentation project, Covid Chronicles, which invited asylum seekers, refugees, and the undocumented to represent their experiences of the pandemic in video, images, texts, etc. SASS members and volunteers are in the steering group and/or contributed to the project, which encourages meaningful use of time and talent, opens up opportunities for contact and communication and reduces isolation and mental illness (cov19chronicles.com and unlockedarchive.org)

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

- We continued to pay a sessional worker to support volunteers to organise informal language help, from March 2020 on Zoom.
- We provided signposting to any opportunities for volunteering, educational, vocational and leisure activities, all severely curtailed through most of the year.
- 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
- **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 2020, £138. 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

¹ 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".

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.*

- 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 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 a full-time worker (also a SASS trustee) who helps people navigate "the system". We assist EYST's work by donating occasionally to the hardship fund and our VDW liaises very frequently with them on individual cases.

Destitution – the extreme of poverty: our Share Tawe hosting project

SASS is responsible for the **Share Tawe Voluntary Hosting Project** for destitute asylum seekers. Two of our members were founder members of this project which was launched in 2010. One of our then trustees ran Share Tawe voluntarily between January 2015 and April 2017, a period when we were unable to secure funding.

- During 2020 Share Tawe hosted 6 destitute asylum seekers, all in limbo since 2019. There were no new guests. All hosts who had guests before lockdown continued to host throughout the pandemic- for which we thank them.
- The support offered by Share Tawe staff and volunteers includes consistent help to access legal advice and representation, and to gather fresh evidence for their case for asylum. People can often achieve leave to remain after being refused and being made destitute, if they just get essential support including shelter, food, moral support and advice.
- During 2020 Share Tawe won 2 grants to help meet the costs: the staff member salary, contributions to hosts' costs, and an allowance for guests.
- The food provided at SASS drop-ins, free for all, was an essential form of help for people who are destitute, as in: they have absolutely nothing and no right to any support from the state ("no recourse to public funds"). But all asylum seekers are on the verge of destitution. They are provided with accommodation, heating and light, but the allowance of £37.75/week per person (increased during the pandemic to £39.63) is not enough. None of them are allowed to work.
- Several SASS members host asylum seekers in their homes as their contribution to the Share Tawe scheme. Many of our asylum and refugee members make a contribution to the welfare of those without any state support, by sharing food etc.

- We continue to explore the possibility of working with Housing Associations and the Local Authority to provide additional, alternative models of accommodation and support for the growing numbers of destitute asylum seekers.

Plans for the Future

Our plans for 2020 (as set out in the 2019 annual report) focussed on developing new educational work. The pandemic put that on hold. We are still (at Sept 2021) not certain how, where and when we will be able to hold open meetings again – if ever, given the particular risks associated with gatherings involving people recently arrived in the UK from abroad.

SASS has however developed new ways of working and meeting priorities to maintain our inclusive volunteer community and to support asylum seekers and refugees. We are focussing now on small group meetings, including a mothers and toddlers group at St James, English classes in various venues including the Multicultural Hub at the Grand Theatre, a Spanish-language arts workshop series with at the Volcano Theatre, and (in planning) regular workshops on asylum system survival training.

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.

We are currently (Sept 2021) transferring the Share Tawe project to EYST. Volunteers Alan and Marilyn Thomas, for many years also volunteers and trustees with SASS, founded and managed Share Tawe for 10 years as part of their foundational and enduring commitment to Swansea City of Sanctuary. They are ready now 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.

Our Thanks ...

To individuals and groups for supporting us financially. Many people donate regularly through standing orders, either to the organisation or to the Share Tawe Project. Many also contribute their time and energy, as well as money.

Thanks to all our grant funders (listed above).

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 here we specially want to mention Mouna Balbaki, who was a mainstay of the Friday kitchen for many years.
- 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 the Adult Learning Wales, African Community Centre, Asylum Justice, Bloom, City and County of Swansea, Congolese Development Project, Centre for African Entrepreneurship, Hay Brecon Talgarth Sanctuary for Refugees, Ibero-Latin American Association, Discovery, Displaced People in Action, Ethnic Youth Support Team, the Welsh Refugee Council, Swansea City of Sanctuary, Swansea Council for Voluntary Services, Unity in Diversity, 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 former and perhaps future landlords: St Phillips' Community Centre (though sadly no longer bookable with kitchen) 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.



Update April 2021

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"On a Friday a year ago, I sat on a train to Swansea. Loads of people singing at each other, on the way to the 6 nations rugby. I went to the Glynn Vivian gallery cafe (as is tradition when I'm in Swansea) to work on a funding application. Then I went to this amazing community drop-in. The community hall was full of people - people helping each other, caring for each other, surviving. That spirit has continued but my god I miss people and community. I've thought about that evening so often during this terrible year."

Lisa Matthews, from the charity **Right to Remain**, on Facebook on 12 March 2021

Dear Donors and Supporters,

SASS has traditionally been very bad at keeping people informed about what we do, unless you came to our drop-ins and talked to us.

There's information on our Facebook page and our website, sass.wales, now featuring a blog with news items. But it's high time we contacted our many generous private donors, to say thank you and to explain exactly why SASS members, trustees, and volunteers are so grateful to you.

We've been very busy during the pandemic period, supporting as many as possible of the c.900 asylum seekers in Swansea.

For over a year now, we've had **no drop-ins**. We hope to re-open, cautiously, later this year. With many SASS members newly arrived in the UK, and many volunteers of a certain age (even if vaccinated), we do have to be cautious. We may start with small groups e.g. English classes, potentially in the Multicultural Hub at the Grand Theatre.

No drop-ins means some cost savings. But we have had new costs too. Overall, SASS still costs about **£75,000 a year** to run. About a quarter of that comes from private donors, like you – the rest from various grants. About a third of spend is on salaries: one full time worker, two part-time, and a fee-paid bookkeeper. Nothing is spent on office costs.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Led by Swansea City of Sanctuary, local organisations supporting asylum seekers and refugees began meeting on Zoom in March 2020 to coordinate responses. This '**ASR support network**' includes SASS, Better Welcome to Swansea (SCVS), EYST, African Community Centre, Centre for African Entrepreneurship, Congolese Development Project, Gower College, REACH and others.

SASS's Volunteer Development Worker, **Wayne Yare**, was appointed the network's coordinator for support to individuals and families. His post was made full time (previously 4 days/week) as his workload dramatically increased. He ensures that our volunteers work in tandem with other organisations, so all needs are met through referrals or SASS action: whether for food or clothing, data, legal advice, support in health emergencies, dealing with accommodation issues, transition to refugee status, and much more.

In March/April 2020, SASS donated £1000 each to 5 local **food banks** which support many of our members. We distribute some food donations ourselves, but mainly refer people to the specialists for this. Many SASS volunteers also support food banks, e.g. as doorstep delivery drivers.

SASS set up a **Telephone Tree** in May, coordinated by trustee Bev Dobson. Currently it involves about 15 volunteers, including speakers of 10 relevant languages, themselves refugees or asylum seekers. They have been calling around 70 members weekly or fortnightly to check on their physical and mental health and needs.

SASS has around 70 volunteers in a variety of roles. We've recruited several new ones during the pandemic, and retained most existing volunteers. Volunteers keep in touch via Whatsapp groups mainly. One group has about 40 members.

Anyone **interested in volunteering** should **contact Wayne:**
vol.sbassg@gmail.com or 07853717017

SHARE TAWE – A DOOR TO THE FUTURE

Facebook: "Project Share Tawe" / www.sharetawe.wordpress.com



The Share Tawe project finds and supports private hosts for destitute asylum seekers, and supports the guests in fighting their asylum case. It received Welsh Government funding in January-March 2021 for the first time. Similar projects in Cardiff and Newport also received grants, to meet basic ongoing costs and to prepare for an expected surge in demand later in 2021. In Share Tawe's tenth year, this is very welcome support for the 'Wales Nation of Sanctuary' ideal.

Share Tawe has a new logo and is benefitting from professional communications advice, to try to recruit more hosts.

During the pandemic, the Welsh Government barred the Home Office from evicting asylum seekers here. But asylum cases are still being decided, and about half of decisions are negative. (Negative decisions are not yet being communicated to asylum seekers or their legal representatives.)

When the present curb on evictions ends, asylum seekers deemed 'failed' will be evicted and *asked* to leave the UK – but they will not be prevented from remaining here, destitute, with no accommodation, no right to work, and no entitlement to any benefits.

We fear that **up to 80 single people** now living in Swansea may find themselves in that position, all at once, at some point later this year.

Those who are terrified to return to the country they fled, but can't or don't want to 'disappear' into the UK 'shadow economy' (where they face dire exploitation), may turn to Share Tawe for shelter, food, and the necessary support to submit a fresh asylum claim.

On past experience, about half of Share Tawe's guests fight their asylum case successfully, and eventually get leave to remain here. It's an indictment of the rough justice meted out to asylum seekers: many endure months or years of destitution before getting the right to live a normal life.

All support for Share Tawe is welcome. We need cash to cover hosts' costs and provide guests with bus passes, bikes, or data. We welcome introductions to kind people with a spare room who might consider hosting. Welsh Government funding may be renewed, but we don't know when, or what strings will be attached. Popular support is vital to continuing this project.

Being a host doesn't mean sharing your home forever. Short-term placements are valuable too. One case in 2019 was a woman 8 months pregnant. After the baby was born, she was entitled to accommodation as its parent, under the Children's Act. But for the last month of pregnancy, she depended on our charity for a roof over her head. In fact, women make up a majority of Share Tawe guests, some of them older women.

In March, Share Tawe convened a workshop led by Right to Remain, on asylum case evidence, attended by people from most of the local organisations in our network.

To find out more about Share Tawe, **contact Wayne:** vol.sbassg@gmail.com or 07853717017

LEARNING ENGLISH

Informal English classes were always very popular at drop ins, as preparation or reinforcement (or sometimes as a substitute) for formal College classes. They are now on Zoom. Six dedicated volunteer teachers are supported by a

part-time paid coordinator. They offer classes at all levels, with no rules about attendance.

We have around 30 regular learners. Quite a few of them never attended drop-ins – notably, women facing childcare, transport, and other barriers. So when face-to-face classes start again, we will want to continue Zoom English classes too.

Contact George Wilson, ESOL Coordinator: georgefw1@gmail.com
07719876193

DIGITAL INCLUSION

Most of us became frequent internet users under lockdown: online learning and teaching, socialising, shopping, leisure activities... Before lockdown, most asylum seekers relied on libraries and cafes for wi-fi. There is no wi-fi in their accommodation. Given their allowance of under £40/week, they can't afford it, and without a bank account, they can't sign a cost-effective phone contract either. The vast majority use Pay as You Go phones for internet access. **A single Zoom class costs £5 or more.**

So asylum seekers are effectively excluded from the online world. They and their children have little chance of learning English or keeping up with school. (About half the c.900 asylum seekers in Home Office accommodation in Swansea are families.)

SASS has spent about £1000 a month throughout the pandemic to address this. A series of grants has enabled us to donate £10 or £20 phone data top ups, and to buy reconditioned tablets and laptops to loan out. About 60 people a month receive top ups. 12 laptops are out on loan now, and there's a waiting list for 10 more we have ordered (paid by Lloyds BF).

Schools and colleges have become better at meeting learners' 'tech' needs, but still many asylum seekers fall through those nets.

In March 2021, we created a short-term, part-time post mainly devoted to distributing top ups and otherwise tackling digital exclusion. Kelly Wearing is in this post. **Contact Kelly:** kellywearing@gmail.com 07846542687

We thank in particular Hay Brecon Talgarth Sanctuary for Refugees and the Austin Bailey Foundation for their rapid, generous, unbureaucratic, continuing support for digital inclusion; SCVS, Lloyds Bank Foundation, and Moondance for grants and kit; all the referring organisations in the Swansea ASR support network; and all the volunteers who help with referrals, deliveries, etc.

HOUSEHOLD ITEMS, CLOTHES, ART AND CRAFT MATERIALS, TOYS...

A dedicated network of volunteers, led by trustees Sandra Morton, Margaret Lamb and Bev Dobson, fields requests for and offers of donations, stores and sorts them, and allocates and arranges deliveries of a great range of items. It's a major operation. **Contact: Sandra:** stmorton48@gmail.com
07400605669

Poverty is a core problem for asylum seekers. Universal Credit was increased by £20/week at the beginning of the pandemic. The weekly allowance for an asylum seeker was increased from £37.75 to just £39.63/week: and they are not entitled to any benefits, or allowed to work.

Basics like shoes, jackets, blankets, toys are unaffordable. Sanitary products are a luxury. Poverty is compounded by language barriers, cultural unfamiliarity, anxiety and trauma (the result of experiences in no-longer-home countries, and sadly, also often the result of experiences in the UK), and for many, physical isolation: accommodation can be 5 miles walk from the city centre and good value shops.

During the summer, clothes, along with books and adult and children's art and activity packs were put together and delivered to 53 households for 97 children and 17 adults.

Autumn donations of blankets, bedding, clothes and household items were delivered to 42 households (approx. 107 adults and children).

At Christmas, SASS delivered a small monetary gift along with gift bags and cards to well over 100 households with over 120 children.

A Council grant of £600 for period dignity bought sanitary products distributed to around 85 women so far.

So far in 2021, 91 households have been supported in response to requests including clothing and shoes for adults and children, basic household items, e.g. pots and pans, toys, games, drawing materials for children while schools are closed. These are mostly new contact households as well as some who have been supported in the past.

In February 2021, educational games, bought from a grant from Swansea Council's Play Team, were distributed to 35 families (77 children).

Four sewing machines, funded by a grant from Wales and West Utilities, arrived in February. SASS will loan them out for people to repair or make clothes and other items. **Contact Bev** beverlydobson7@gmail.com
07800978294

SOCIAL AND ARTS PROJECTS

SASS collaborates with Swansea City of Sanctuary on a **FAN (Friends and Neighbours)** weekly Zoom group, for friendly conversation on set topics. About 12 attend each week and a second group is starting. Great for English learners, but also anyone who misses company. **Contact: Bev** beverlydobson7@gmail.com 07800978294

SASS collaborates in many ways with **Hay, Brecon and Talgarth Sanctuary for Refugees**. Many SASS members miss their wonderful hospitality on regular trips to the mountains, and they assist countless individuals and families with critical small grants. Now they're creating a **Friendship Quilt** made of squares embroidered by asylum seekers/refugees and supporters. Everything needed to create a square is supplied. The quilt will be auctioned with proceeds going to SASS. So far, 54 squares have been distributed locally to embroiderers from many nationalities. **Contact: Bev** beverlydobson7@gmail.com 07800978294



SASS collaborates with the Open University on **Cov19: Chronicles from the Margins**: an ever-expanding online platform for sharing stories, images, audio and video about the impact of the pandemic on asylum seekers and refugees in Swansea and worldwide. An exhibition of selected items is at www.unlockedarchive.org. See also cov19chronicles.com. **Contact: Marie** marie.gillespie@open.ac.uk

SASS's publishing project, **Hafan Books**, will shortly bring out a photojournalism book, **Second Home**, by Joseff Williams with words by Amber Esther, Beatrice Kitavi and Otis Bolamu.

Hafan has also gone multimedia with **More Stories – Swansea People's Multilingual Storytelling Audio Library**. Hear Swansea people tell children's stories in their various mother tongues! Watch illustrations and animations by other Swansea people! Fun for kids of all ages. **Online** at:

tinyurl.com/swanseastories. Contact Tom t.cheesman@swansea.ac.uk
07736408064



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 or youtube.com/watch?v=4m4-N17M6Hk

LOOKING AHEAD

Meeting and eating together has been the essential thing for SASS for the past 20 years. When and how will drop-ins re-open? Members, trustees and volunteers have discussed various post-lockdown possibilities. Maybe a venue should be open for a longer time each week, for smaller groups doing specific activities, e.g. English lessons, sewing group, cooking, mother and toddler group. A meal might be taken away at the end of the session. This will require funding for venue hire, food costs, possibly sessional tutors, PPE and cleaning products and time; and we may need a larger pool of volunteers in order to run an extended activities timetable.

Despite all the uncertainties, SASS's core values of friendship and mutual support have not been damaged. We continue to find ways of making Swansea a welcoming place for asylum seekers.

Thank you to everyone who supports us in all your varied ways!

... on behalf of all the trustees, volunteers and members of SASS

JUST MENTIONING...

Could you help recruit new donors?

Contact Tom: t.cheesman@swansea.ac.uk for Standing Order and Gift Aid forms

Donations by Paypal are easy on our website: sass.wales

Bank account:

Swansea Asylum Seekers Support, Cooperative Bank, 089299, 65846283

AND LAST NOT LEAST

We are very grateful for recent **special donations** from:

Margaret Kenna and Christopher Stray / Albert Ostermaier / Micki Schloessingk (Bridge Pottery) / The Uniting Church, Sketty

... and for current **grant funding** from:

Allen Lane Foundation / Austin Bailey Foundation / Big Lottery Awards for All / City and County of Swansea (Play Team, Community Integration Team, Poverty Prevention Team) / Comic Relief / Community Fund for Wales / Lloyds Bank Foundation / Mass Action / Moondance / NACCOM / SCVS / Wales & West Utilities / Welsh Government / Western Power

SWANSEA ASYLUM SEEKERS SUPPORT

Registered Charity Number 1175186

INCOME & EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st DECEMBER 2020

Income	2020 £	2019 £	Expenditure	2020 £	2019 £
Grants:			Staff:		
City & County of Swansea (Community Integration)	4,960.00	-	Staff Pay: Salaries and Pension (including redundancy)	30,250.71	38,743.92
City & County of Swansea (Menstrual Fund)	300.00	-	Financial Administration	-	2,505.00
City & County of Swansea (Food Poverty Fund)	1,860.00	-	CRB & Police Checks	-	-
City & County of Swansea (General)	600.00	-	Staff Training	10.00	102.00
Children in Need	7,774.95	10,000.00			
AB Charitable Trust	-	10,000.00	Volunteers: (including Trustees)		
Awards For All	10,000.00	-	Volunteers Expenses	-	7,624.20
The Austin Bailey Foundation (Connectivity Fund)	2,200.00	-	Volunteers' Training & Travel	870.47	2,737.18
The Austin Bailey Foundation (Regular Fund)	2,000.00	3,500.00	Volunteer Hosting Expenses	5,762.00	-
Lloyds Bank Foundation	-	-			
The Tudor Trust	-	-	Office & General:		
Share Dydd	-	-	Rents	2,533.00	5,771.00
NACCOM (Respond & React)	10,000.00	10,000.00	Refreshments	4,932.21	6,324.93
Allen Lane Foundation	-	5,000.00	Speaker & Tutor Fees	360.00	4,120.00
Home 4 U	-	9,759.00	Events	-	-
Comic Relief	9,996.00	-	IT, Printing, Stationery, Postage & Telephones	2,359.26	1,069.23
Community Fund Wales	250.00	1,000.00	Teaching & Play Materials/Equipment	1,321.76	-
Community Fund Wales (Resilience Fund)	2,000.00	-	Insurances	786.24	786.24
Mass Action	2,500.00	-	Outings, Trips, Activities & Family Tickets	-	1,231.88
Race Council Wales	100.00	-	Donations made	3,272.23	-
Wales & West Utilities	1,283.00	-	Miscellaneous expenditure	42.84	-
			Independent Examination & Accounts Preparation	384.00	384.00
General Funding:			Poetry Workshop	-	-
Donations received	24,770.82	18,904.32	Toys and Play Materials	-	1,044.28
Book Sales	138.64	555.71	Equipment (re: Lloyds)	-	4.00
Miscellaneous	2,983.02	272.00	Meeting Rooms	-	-
Gift Aid	-	2,239.41	Book Sales	-	-
Refreshments	-	-	Management Costs	159.39	923.26
Fundraising	-	-	Non-food items (not otherwise categorised)	567.36	-
			Repayment of underspend on grant	927.77	-
			Affiliations & Subscription	60.00	20.00
			Bank account fees	5.00	-
Deficit of Income	-	2,160.68	Surplus of income over expenditure	29,112.19	-
	£83,716.43	£73,391.12		£83,716.43	£73,391.12

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31st DECEMBER 2020

	2020 £	2019 £	
Fixed Assets at cost	-	-	
Current Assets			
Bank	91,308.01	62,195.82	
Cash in hand	150.00	150.00	
Debtors	-	-	
	<u>91,458.01</u>	<u>62,345.82</u>	
Current Liabilities			
* Deferred Income: NACOM grant prepaid for 2019	-	-	
Independent Examination & accounts preparation	384.00	384.00	
Other Creditors	-	-	
	<u>384.00</u>	<u>384.00</u>	
Net Assets	£91,074.01	£61,961.82	
Represented by:			
Accumulated fund b/f	61,961.82	64,122.50	
Surplus or Deficit for the period	29,112.19	(2,160.68)	
Accumulated fund c/f	<u>£91,074.01</u>	<u>£61,961.82</u>	
	49,860.70	32,868.95	Of which these Assets are "Unrestricted"

These accounts have been prepared based on the records provided to show the organisation's position at 31st December 2020.

J-P. Eckersley

John Eckersley
Community Accountant / Cyfrifydd Cymunedol
Swansea Council For Voluntary Service / Cyngor Gwasanaeth Gwirfoddol Abertawe

SWANSEA ASYLUM SEEKERS SUPPORT

Registered Charity Number 1175186

Bank Reconciliation as at 31st December 2020
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st December 2020

	£
Balance at Bank (current account per bank statement) 31 Dec 2020	91,308.01
Less: Final ledger entries after 31/12/20 but transactions relating to 2020 cal/fin year (see ledger s/sheet for details)	
Income entries	
Expenditure entries	
	0.00
Balance on ledger (current account) at 31 Dec 2020	91,308.01

Note

* Comprised of two bank account balances at 31st Dec 2020:

	£	
1 The old SBASSG Co-Op Bank a/c no. 65063888	1,288.26	<--(Being phased out.)
2 The new SBASS Co-Op Bank a/c no. 65846283	90,019.75	
	91,308.01	