

2025/2026



vas
supporting community action

**new
beginnings
project**

Table of Contents

Forward			3
Who we are			4
Our approach			5
Our Impact			6
Employment			8
Education & Training			10
Volunteering			12
Participation & Social Activities			19
Future Plans			26

Foreword

We would like to start by extending our appreciation for the amazing work the team of our volunteers did across the project to support to the New Beginnings project with such passion, commitment and dedication. We supported the highest number of over 1000 clients compared to the previous years. This level of support could not have been provided by staff alone and has only been possible because of your incredible involvement within the project – **Thank You so Much!**

The support we provide is grounded in our strong belief that people seeking sanctuary bring valuable skills, resilience, and potential that strengthen our communities when barriers are removed and opportunities are made accessible. So, in this report you will realise that through trusted relationships, personalised support, and strong partnerships across Sheffield, we empower people to build confidence, develop skills, and participate in Sheffield community life.

Our approach is rooted in empowerment, inclusion, and co-delivery. Many of the people we supported got connected, involved and participate as volunteers in the community, lead activities, and supported others on similar journeys. This creates an impact that extends far beyond individual outcomes. We also worked closely with our partners including local and regional charity organisations, the local authority, employment and education providers to help create more inclusive opportunities and widen access for marginalised groups across the city.

This year highlighted both the growing need for sanctuary support and the importance of early, holistic intervention. Despite the ongoing challenges across the sector, the dedication of our staff, volunteers, partners, and funders has enabled hundreds of people to access opportunities, rebuild confidence, and strengthen their sense of belonging – calling Sheffield Home.

This report highlights key achievements, stories, and partnerships that have made this work possible. We are deeply grateful to all our staff, volunteers, funders and partners for your continued support and commitment to build welcoming communities where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

Moses Lutakome
Manager, New Beginnings Project



Who we are

New Beginnings project has been running since 2004 and supported approximately 900 asylum seekers and refugees in Sheffield each year for the last three years. Developed by Voluntary Action Sheffield (VAS) – a charity that supports people, communities and the voluntary sector across Sheffield.

The project welcomes refugees and asylum seekers to Sheffield, and we are refugees ourselves. Three out of five staff have lived experience of the system, and so do 40+ volunteers. We working with people to feel at home in the community and empower them to access opportunities that improve wellbeing, build confidence, and foster a sense of belonging. We work with people at every stage of their journey – from new arrivals to people who have been in Sheffield for years.

Our offer is built around four pillars of support;

- **Participation in social activities**
- **Volunteering**
- **Education and training opportunities – including ESOL**
- **Employment**

People can access one, some or all – there is no fixed route through the service

This report sets out the key achievements of the team, the impact our work has on the refugees and asylum seekers we support and the progress we have made from April 2025 to March 2026.

Over the 22 years period, VAS has secure a number of funding streams to support the project. We want to thank the National Lottery Reaching Communities fund as our current main funder, alongside, Sheffield City Council through the Voluntary Sector Grant Fund, Pathways to Work, SPRING Project and holiday Activities/HAF for families.

What was involved

Create opportunities

Working closely with our partners and increased collaboration work, we enabled many of our clients access and participate in various opportunities through our support provision which led increased skills (language and communication) and clients being more successful in the labour market.

Co-delivery

Clients play an active role in delivering services as volunteers, advisors, and leaders, using their lived experience to help shape the project. This fosters greater participation, leadership, ownership, role modelling refugees are best placed to deliver support in a peer to peer relationship.

Empowerment

Many of our clients initially come to NB with no hope and low self-esteem. As a result of their involvement with the project, they have improved in confidence, more hopeful, growth in independent and improved in wellbeing.

Community Integration

Our work supported access to opportunities created by our partners which helped our clients to engage more, grow in confidence, improved communication skills and widening friendship network, many of our clients started feeling less isolated and more integrated within the Sheffield community.

Volunteer Progression pathway to Employment

We supported five clients through our administrative volunteering progression pathway, helping them develop valuable workplace skills and gain practical experience that strengthen their employment prospects. The model created a clear progression pathway, inspiring and encouraging others to engage.

Our successful model inspired the creation of a Citywide Volunteer to Career programme to support people who are unemployed and economically active develop their employability skills through volunteering.

Our Approach

We take a holistic and progression approach to ensure our clients receive a well-coordinated support from across the project. A core part of our approach is building trust. In a system that often treats people with suspicion, we intentionally choose to trust first—creating a foundation of respect and mutual understanding. This is crucial for individuals who have experienced the emotional traumas and psychological impact of the UK's hostile asylum environment.

Our clients access support through many channels including;

- One to one meeting
- Group sessions including volunteering, employment and education workshops
- Drop-in Session that includes weekly Job club, IT Club and Sewing Group
- City Multi-Agency Drop-in
- Social events

Our progression framework

Doing For → Doing With → Stepping Back

The direction of travel each relationship within NB builds. The goal is always to move away from staff-led to community-led, from dependent to empowered, from supported to autonomous, client led activity. We enable refugees to co-deliver support with staff.

Safe Space → Supported Space → Public Space

This describes the pathway for clients: starting in spaces that feel safe and familiar (refugee-only sessions), moving through supported spaces (mixed activities with NB staff present), and eventually participating autonomously in mainstream Sheffield life.

Safe Space → Supported Space → Public Space

Impact and examples of the framework



Refugee Rocks / Climbing Hangar:

Started as a refugee-only safe group. Five clients now have lifetime memberships and attend public sessions independently.

Kelham Island Table Tennis Club:
A monthly refugee-led sessions led to three members attending public sessions independently of NB.



Our Impact

1,220 Clients supported by the New Beginnings Project in 2025-26



595
Newly registered clients



624
Returning clients



59
Countries

On average clients attended three appointments before starting any activity. Many got dispersed to other cities shortly after getting settled and registering with the project - causing a lot of disruption and stress.

Numbers by type of support



310
received Employment Support

105
CVs & application forms completed

68
Started Employment



405
received Training & Education Support

113
Clients started or completed a course

5
Clients started University

66
attended Higher Education event



230
received Volunteer Support

90
Started Volunteering

25
organisations matched with

103
Volunteer roles filled

11,880
Hours volunteered



729
Attendances at activities

298
Participated in a social activity

250
Children received Christmas Presents

Our Impact

Growing need for support: Refugees & Asylum Seekers supported by New Beginnings 2022-2026



Key Message

- The project supported a record 1,223 unique refugees and asylum seekers in 2025-26.
- Total client reach increased by 39% between 2024-25 and 2025-26 (from 882 to 1,223).
- New client registrations reached their highest level in 2025-26, with 596 new clients joining the service.
- Since 2022-23, the project has consistently supported over 800 people annually, demonstrating sustained demand and growing impact and longer term support is needed.
- The sharp increase in total clients supported in 2025-26 reflects both successful engagement of new arrivals, particularly in social activities and ongoing support provided to returning clients as they progress towards education, volunteering, employment, and social participation.

Employment

2025–2026, was another extremely busy year for employment support.

- **310** clients received some support from registering interest to starting employment.
- **105** CV/applications were completed.
- **68** Clients secured employment across a diverse range of sectors including logistics, healthcare, administration, customer service, hospitality, construction, education, and community services.

This year we delivered the Pathways to Work programme and achieved a Gold Award in our performance and surpassing our required target

We continued to co-create and deliver training with clients with lived experience for the Job Centre Plus work Coaches in collaboration with Refugee Council, UNHCR and British Red Cross. This raised the awareness of the context of refugee journeys and the barriers they face when attending meeting at the Job Centre. This led to improved support received at the JC and created a clear cross-organisation referral process.

310

received
employment
Support

GOLD

performance rating
on Pathway to Work

68

Started
Employment

These outcomes demonstrate the skills, resilience, and potential of people seeking sanctuary, as well as the effectiveness of personalised employment support, volunteering opportunities, and employer engagement in creating pathways to sustainable employment and independence.

Roles secured by our clients

Logistics, Warehousing & Distribution - 25

- Amazon Logistics Operative – Amazon Logistics Sheffield
- Delivery Driver – Deliveroo
- Mail Sorter – Angard Staffing
- Postal Worker – Angard Staffing
- Warehouse Assistant – ASOS
- Warehouse Operative – Amazon Logistics Sheffield
- Warehouse Operative – ASOS
- Warehouse Operative – Clipper Logistics
- Warehouse Operative – Evri
- Warehouse Operative – Mach Recruitment
- Warehouse Operative – Next Warehouse
- Warehouse Operative – Nexus People UK
- Warehouse Operative – Proman
- FLT Driver – KH Resourcing
- Forklift Truck Driver – John Pye Auctions

Customer Service & Retail - 7

- Customer Assistant – Sheffield Christmas Markets
- Customer Service – IKEA Sheffield
- Customer Service Advisor – Concentrix
- Customer Service Agent – G4S
- Sales Specialist – Apple
- Store Assistant – Marks & Spencer
- Shop Keeper – Off Licence, Worksop

Cleaning & Facilities - 6

- Cleaner – Pexton Grange Nursing Home
- Cleaner – The Well Church
- Cleaner/Domestic Assistant – Sheffield Children's NHS Foundation Trust
- Cleaning Assistant – University of Sheffield
- Cover Cleaner – City of Sanctuary Sheffield
- Train Cleaner – Northern Rail

Hospitality & Catering - 5

- Cook – The Psalter
- Cook/Team Member – House of Habesha
- Front of House – Pan Asian Restaurant
- Kitchen Porter – COSMO Newcastle
- Team Member – KFC Hillsborough

Care, Support & Health - 5

- Care Assistant – Pingley Court Care Home
- Clinical Support Worker – NHS
- Domestic Assistant – NHS England
- Support Worker – Chatsworth Grange Care Home
- Support Worker – Citizenship UK

Administration & Office Support - 5

- Bank Receptionist – The Circle, VAS
- Administrative Assistant – Weston Park Cancer Charity
- Administrator – Shelter Housing Support Services
- Internal Case Note Assistant – New Beginnings Project
- SPRING Project Assistant – City of Sanctuary Sheffield

Driving & Transport - 4

- Private Hire Taxi Driver – Self-Employed
- Trainee Bus Driver – First Bus
- Delivery Driver – Deliveroo
- FLT Driver – KH Resourcing

Construction & Trades - 4

- Labourer – JWH Design
- Labourer – Sandal Construction Ltd
- Mechanic – K&A Body Repair Shop
- Tyre Fitter – Wicker Tyres

Manufacturing & Production - 3

- Operative – IPS Schoeller
- Production Operative – Fletchers Bakery
- Production Operative – Greencore

Security & Community Safety - 2

- Sessional Security Guard – City of Sanctuary Sheffield
- School Crossing Patrol Warden – Sheffield City Council

Education - 1

- Lecturer in Electrical Engineering – Sheffield College

Marketing & Communications - 1

- Social Media Marketing Manager – FBCOMMS

Employment Case Studies

This case study demonstrates how early engagement, volunteering, personalised employment support, and strong partnership working can help refugees overcome barriers, navigate the move-on period, and progress into sustainable employment. It highlights New Beginnings' role in supporting people from arrival and uncertainty to independence, economic participation, and meaningful contribution within their communities.

Client received his status back in December 2024. We first met him before he got his status in April 2024 and was looking for volunteering opportunities.

Our team supported him to apply for numerous volunteer opportunities: STH, blood donation centre, Learn for Life etc and he started volunteering at the City of Sanctuary clothes bank. Involved with volunteering, social activities and we were working with Client to discuss education and employment advice. We were working with Client to find out how he could continue with his profession as a Lab Technician.

After Client got his status in December 2024, he was supported through SPRING during his move on period. CAS helped him check and apply for Universal Credit to give him some financial stability to move forward, CoSS and SCC helped him with housing advice and support and he received eVisa support through the multi-agency drop in - and from us. Unfortunately, Client got his status amidst the housing crisis and surge in decisions which caused a long delay in him having capacity to engage with job searching as his basic needs were not yet met.

Client found accommodation and came back to NB to engage with job searching. We had been looking for roles in phlebotomy and laboratories but then a programme came up with the NHS - they periodically run a successful Widening Access scheme which is an altered application process to become a Clinical Support Worker, an extremely popular position in Sheffield Teaching Hospitals. Client and I applied to the scheme and Client was offered an interview. We went through lots of interview preparation, going over all Client's relevant experience and he was offered the position!

The NHS have extensive onboarding processes so we continued to work together for several months while we submitted health questionnaires, uploaded his vaccination history and so forth. It even took so long that Client started working at Chatsworth Grange care home in the meantime. However, eventually all the checks were passed and Client started working as a Clinical Support Worker in Sheffield Teaching Hospitals on the 9th of June 2025

Employment Case Studies

Case Study - Empowerment & Partnership Work

Client was experiencing a fairly extended time homeless and was very down and depressed. Client loved cooking and really wanted to work in kitchens but could not find work and this was further getting him down. Housing challenges made finding employment even harder, combined with motivation challenges and mental health.

Training - Client passed his Level 2 Food Hygiene training which will help him find future kitchen work.

Employment - As a result of partnership with Sheffield Council Business Development Officers, client was identified as being an excellent match for a ringfenced role at Vulcan Seals. The client engaged in a work trial and successfully started in full-time employment.

Case Study - Creating opportunities & Partnership Work

Needed work, homeless, no work experience or education in the UK but a bit of experience back home working in construction and as a shop assistant.

We referred the client to SCC Opportunity Sheffield where he was enrolled to a warehousing and logistics course. Later referred to a ForkLiftTruck training with ANS

Client started successfully working at John Pye Auction house as FLT driver. He is ever thankful to the support he received from the Employment Advisors at the New Beginnings project.

Case Study - Volunteer Progression Pathway

Met Client at the initial accommodation, while she was still an asylum seeker. She had worked in healthcare before and wanted to continue this progression. When she got her refugee status, she needed support to find a job, a house etc.

Client started volunteering with New Beginnings, building admin skills and gaining references (also volunteered with LASS and CoSS).

Referred Client to the ReSTORE project with Sheffield Teaching Hospitals, a project aimed at getting refugee nurses/midwives back into their occupation here.

Client was referred to an STH Clinical Support Worker recruitment programme, and has since started working as a CSW in the NHS.

Education & Training

405

Received Training and Education support

Education and training support at New Beginnings is varied and directed for each client. From starting English classes for the first time to writing personal statements for university, education is a vital element of progression, relationship building and confidence and we are honoured that people come to New Beginnings during all stages of their education journey.

113

started or completed a course

We work with clients to overcome systemic and personal barriers to accessing education opportunities, through 1-1 support and strategic engagement sessions such as the annual HE event and drop in sessions with University staff.

66

Attended our High Education event

An incredible 5 students started university in September 2025 and clients have attended and completed a number of other courses and training: CSCS and SIA , Teaching Assistant, Cyber Security, Business Administration, Telecoms Engineering and many more.

5

Joined University

We have collaborated with our partners including NHS, Migration Yorkshire, JCP plus, UNHCR, Business Sheffield, SPRING Project, Sheffield Talking Therapy, Sheffield Digital and Code Your Future and many more to widen access events, learning programmes and open opportunities to refugees and people seeking asylum in Sheffield.



Feedback

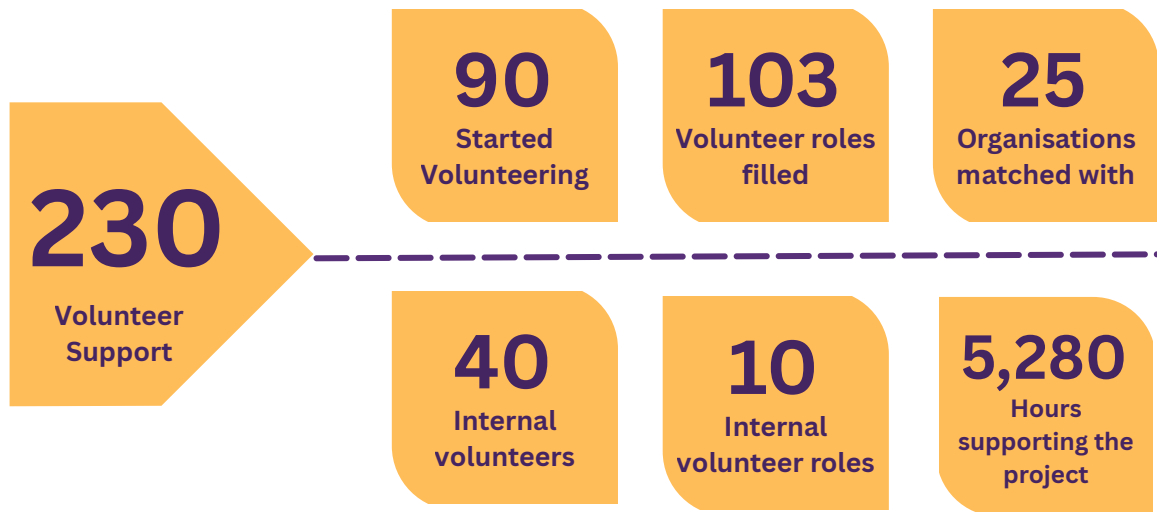
“Trying your best to help people to get a CV help them to do a job application, training programme and help them to do a lot of stuff. Thank you so much for everything”

“The New Beginnings Employment Support Programme has provided me with incredible support in finding a job. They gave me the opportunity to volunteer to gain experience in administration. [They] have been there for me whenever I needed help applying for jobs, and they never refused to assist me. They always found time for me, no matter how busy [they were].

In addition to submitting applications and supporting statements, [they] helped me prepare for interviews by conducting mock interviews, which boosted my confidence. Thanks to [their] support, I was able to secure my desired job. I am truly grateful to the entire New Beginnings team for their assistance.”

“I personally benefitted a lot and I’m still benefitting. I was helped to find the employment opportunities and when we found the potential employer, I was supported to prepare for the interview. It was so helpful because I was the best candidate for the position. This is now my second year in employment and I’m able to pay the bills and meet other basic needs. I’m so grateful for your support.”

Volunteering



We focused on supporting individuals to explore meaningful roles within their communities, building confidence, skills and a sense of purpose through active contribution. For many clients, volunteering represents an important step beyond receiving support – an opportunity to give back, develop professionally and become an active and valued member of the wider community.

Over the year, 90 clients took on volunteering roles across 103 different positions with over 25 organisations – reflecting that many individuals embraced more than one role, demonstrating the breadth of their commitment and the range of opportunities available. This is a testament to the enthusiasm and dedication of our clients, many of whom bring significant professional experience, cultural knowledge and personal resilience to the roles they take on.

Our project is supported by around 40 volunteers at any one time giving at least 3hrs a week throughout the year - dedicating a total of 5,280hrs to the project. Their consistent presence and contribution were essential to the smooth running of our programmes and activities.

Tania, Volunteer Coordinator

Internal Volunteer Positions (40 people)

- Admin and Customer Service Volunteers
- Sewing Group Volunteers
- Outreach Volunteers
- Digital Champions/IT Volunteers
- Volunteer Mentor
- Volunteer Advisors
- Social Media Volunteers
- Walk Leaders
- Participation Volunteers
- Reception Volunteers



IT Drop-In Building Skills through IT Volunteering

Case study of Stepping back - with refugees in the lead

One of the most popular and consistently attended opportunities within the New Beginnings Project is our weekly IT Drop-in session, which attracts around 10 participants each week.

A key strength of the programme is that it is co-designed, led, and delivered by volunteers with lived experience of the asylum and refugee journey. Having previously accessed support themselves, these volunteers now play an active leadership role in shaping the sessions, identifying emerging needs, and creating a welcoming learning environment for others. Their involvement ensures that the programme remains relevant, accessible, and responsive to the experiences of participants.

The sessions provide valuable opportunities for clients to develop practical digital skills while making a meaningful contribution to the project. For many participants, building confidence with technology is an important step towards accessing education, employment, and wider community participation.



Key Outcomes

- 10 Weekly participants
- Open digital welcome space
- Access to individual laptops
- Learn new digital and employability skills
- Build self-confidence and communication skills

About our Volunteers

Volunteers are also clients who bring their own expertise, experiences and cultural knowledge, enriching the programme and helping shape activities in ways that reflect the community itself.

Through a co-production approach, clients are not only participants but contributors to the design and delivery of activities. By sharing their knowledge, supporting others and contributing ideas, they help create an environment where participation is collaborative, inclusive and empowering.

These contributions are particularly meaningful as many volunteers themselves face the same barriers experienced by our wider client group, including immigration insecurity and unstable living conditions.

Volunteering Connections

The wide range of volunteer opportunities listed below, reflect the diversity of our clients' backgrounds, interests and ambitions, and demonstrate the genuine value they bring to the organisations and communities

Community and Refugee Support



City of Sanctuary
SOAR Community
The Sunday Centre
British Red Cross
Voluntary Action Sheffield

Education and Learning



Action Tutoring
HOPE English School/ESOL
Learn for Life Enterprise
Burngreave Library
High Field Library

Health and Care



Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS
St Luke Hospice
British Heart Foundation
SCOPE

Art, Culture and Environment



Migration Matters Festival
Sheffield Doc Fest
Utopia Theatre
Sheffield General Cemetery Trust
Heeley City Farm

Food, Sports and Wellbeing



Kelham Island Table Tennis
FURD U-Mix Centre
Burgreave Dementia cafe
Baby Basics
Food Works

Inclusion & Diversity

Worked with over **24** partner organisations. Access to **103** different volunteering positions. **90** New Beginnings clients started volunteering.

10 Thousand+ hours contributed to Sheffield voluntary communities!

Collaboration & Challenges

Introduction to Volunteering with British Red Cross

In partnership with the British Red Cross, we deliver a monthly Introduction to Volunteering session attended by around 10 clients each month.

These sessions provide:

- A welcoming and accessible entry point into volunteering.
- Helping individuals understand what volunteering involves
- Explore opportunities that match their interests and take confident first steps towards community involvement.

Over the course of the year, these sessions have reached a significant number of clients, many of whom have gone on to secure volunteering placements as a direct result of their participation. The partnership with the British Red Cross has been invaluable in providing a structured, recognised and supportive framework through which clients can begin their volunteering journey and access refugee and asylum support provided by the British Red Cross.

Challenges & Learning

One of the most significant challenges facing our volunteering programme is the impact of housing instability on individuals' ability to maintain consistent volunteering commitments. This has been particularly acute for clients and volunteers who have recently received refugee status and, as a result, are required to leave Home Office accommodation – often within a very short timeframe.

While the granting of refugee status is a profoundly important milestone, the transition period that follows can be one of the most precarious and disruptive times in a person's life. Without the safety net of Home Office housing and without yet having secured independent accommodation, many clients find themselves facing homelessness at the very moment they had begun to build stability and routine through volunteering.

For some volunteers, this has meant having to step back from the volunteer roles they were committed to and valued so deeply – not through any lack of motivation, but because the immediate pressures of finding safe housing make it impossible to continue.

When an engaged and experienced volunteer, particularly one who has built trust with participants and developed their role over time, loses their housing, it has a double impact. They lose their home and safety, and also lose their connections with others, the routine and the opportunity to feel good from helping other people.

Volunteering Case Studies

Case Study - Empowerment, community integration & progression into the NHS

When Client S first came to us looking for volunteer opportunities, he was struggling with low confidence and found it hard to put himself forward or engage comfortably with new people. Although he had a strong work history back home, including nursing, customer service, and community volunteering, he felt unsure of his abilities in a new country and environment. He was keen to develop his IT skills, as he felt these were holding him back from accessing opportunities. He also had no volunteering experience in the UK yet, and no clear pathway into the health and care sector, which was where he really wanted to be.

Client has come a really long way since he first walked through our door. We started him off with some gentle office-based volunteering so he could build his confidence in a safe and friendly setting and it worked brilliantly. His IT skills grew steadily, and more importantly, so did his belief in himself.

From there, he took on a Participation Volunteer role, helping out at New Beginnings events and getting much more comfortable around people. He also joined the running group, which gave him a real boost, both physically and socially.

The highlight of his journey has been securing a volunteering placement at the Royal Hallamshire Hospital with Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS. This was something he had dreamed of, and it connected directly to his nursing background from before coming to the UK. He absolutely loved it. He spoke about how wonderful the staff were, how much he valued being able to help patients, and how it made him feel capable and purposeful again.

Case Study - Volunteer to career in practice

N' arrived in the UK from Iran in 2022 with a Master's degree in Architecture and a strong motivation to rebuild her life and contribute to her community.

She started volunteering with a local food bank and later joined the New Beginnings administration progression pathway to employment support. She gained valuable UK work experience, improved her communication skills, and built confidence in a professional setting. With tailored support from the Employment and Education Advisor, including CV preparation and interview coaching, she gradually developed her readiness for employment.

Although interviews were initially challenging, each experience strengthened her confidence and understanding of UK workplaces. In October 2025, N' secured a job as a Support Administrator at Shelter.

She credits New Beginnings for providing consistent encouragement, practical guidance, and meaningful opportunities that supported her journey into employment.

Her story highlights the impact of volunteering, personalised support, and resilience in enabling people seeking sanctuary to move towards meaningful work and independence.

Volunteers' feedback

'Volunteering with VAS and supporting **outreach and administration** tasks at Victoria Hall has become one of the most meaningful parts of my life since arriving in the UK. It has given me far more than a routine or a role—it has offered me dignity, purpose, and a sense of belonging at a time when my life has been marked by uncertainty.'

'On a personal level, volunteering as **admin** has helped me cope with the emotional strain of the asylum process. It gives me a reason to get up in the morning, to stay connected to people, and to feel part of something bigger than my own struggles. The relationships I have built through VAS and Victoria Hall have reduced my isolation and strengthened my sense of belonging in the community.'

'The **administrative** tasks I carry out at Victoria Hall have strengthened my confidence and given me a sense of stability. Working in a structured environment, handling documents, organising information, and supporting the smooth running of community activities has helped me rebuild my professional identity. These tasks allow me to use my communication skills, my attention to detail, and my commitment to doing things properly. Every small responsibility I am trusted with reassures me that I am capable, reliable, and valued.'

'Being involved in **outreach** work has helped me reconnect with the values that have always guided me: service, compassion, and community. When I support people who are facing their own challenges—whether through signposting, listening, or helping them access support—I feel that I am contributing something positive to the society that has given me safety. It reminds me that even though my asylum situation is still unresolved, I am not powerless. I can still make a difference in the lives of others'

'I like supporting the **sewing group** as it is a safe, friendly environment, and a socialising atmosphere too. It has given me the opportunity to keep my self-occupied for my mental wellbeing. Learned a lot through the multi-cultural group and I have expanded my knowledge of their community.'

'Volunteering at the **sewing group** has been rewarding experience for us. It has given us the opportunity to build relationship, learn from others, and be part of a supportive community. It provides a safe and friendly space where people can connect, reduce feelings of isolation, and experience a sense of belonging. It has been wonderful to see how something as simple as sewing together, forms us into a family.'

Volunteers' feedback

Humbling feedback from one of our volunteers when we asked them to share their experience with the New Beginnings Project:

Volunteering with VAS and supporting outreach and administration tasks at Victoria Hall has become one of the most meaningful parts of my life since arriving in the UK. It has given me far more than a routine or a role—it has offered me dignity, purpose, and a sense of belonging at a time when my life has been marked by uncertainty.

Being involved in outreach work has helped me reconnect with the values that have always guided me: service, compassion, and community. When I support people who are facing their own challenges—whether through signposting, listening, or helping them access support—I feel that I am contributing something positive to the society that has given me safety. It reminds me that even though my asylum situation is still unresolved, I am not powerless. I can still make a difference in the lives of others.

The administrative tasks I carry out at Victoria Hall have strengthened my confidence and given me a sense of stability. Working in a structured environment, handling documents, organising information, and supporting the smooth running of community activities has helped me rebuild my professional identity. These tasks allow me to use my communication skills, my attention to detail, and my commitment to doing things properly. Every small responsibility I am trusted with reassures me that I am capable, reliable, and valued.

On a personal level, volunteering has helped me cope with the emotional strain of the asylum process. It gives me a reason to get up in the morning, to stay connected to people, and to feel part of something bigger than my own struggles. The relationships I have built through VAS and Victoria Hall have reduced my isolation and strengthened my sense of belonging in the community. These connections are especially important for me as an LGBTQ+ asylum seeker, because they provide safety, acceptance, and human warmth at a time when my future feels fragile.

Most importantly, volunteering has helped me feel human again. It has reminded me that I am more than my case number or my immigration status. I am someone who contributes, who cares, and who wants to build a life rooted in service and community. The experience has shaped my personal growth, supported my mental wellbeing, and strengthened my hope that I can build a stable and meaningful future in the UK.

Why Volunteering matters

The Case-studies above says it all. Volunteering offers benefits that extend far beyond the immediate role. For our clients, it builds routine, purpose and professional confidence. It creates connections with people and organisations outside of their immediate community. It opens doors to employment, further training and long-term integration. And perhaps most importantly, it affirms that they have something valuable to offer — a recognition that can be profoundly meaningful for individuals who have often faced significant hardship and uncertainty.

Participation

729

attendances at
a participation
activity



250

Children received
Christmas presents

Our participation work focused on supporting individuals to move beyond short-term engagement towards confident, long-term participation in community life.

Alongside our regular group activities — which reached about 300 clients and recorded more than 700 attendances — we also facilitated individuals to explore opportunities across the city beyond NB-organised sessions.

140

Attended seaside
trip in summer

Over the year, we facilitated attendance at more than 20 different activities and events, spanning cultural participation, wellbeing, physical activity and creative expression. These included music concerts, theatre performances, community walks, sewing sessions, sports activities and wellbeing groups.

Participants also attended events and volunteered at the Migration Matters Festival, an international celebration of sanctuary and diversity held in Sheffield. Through their involvement, they gained valuable hands-on experience while contributing to one of the city's most significant cultural events.

120

Children attended
HAF activities

A central part of this work has been strengthening partnerships across Sheffield. By building relationships with community organisations, cultural venues and sports providers, we are creating sustainable pathways into mainstream spaces. These partnerships help participants move from supported introductions to independent and self-directed participation.

7

Secured
memberships to
Refugee Rock

Our participation programme is made possible through the dedication of participation volunteers (over 15 throughout the year) who contribute their time, knowledge and professional skills to support the planning and delivery of activities

Ethel - Participation Coordinator

298

Participated in a
social activity



Social Activities

The Climbing Hangar/Refugees Rock: Strengthening Identity & Belonging

Since June, seven clients have secured membership with Refugees Rock, an indoor climbing initiative based at The Climbing Hangar supporting people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

Membership represents an important milestone. It reflects a commitment to regular attendance and integration into an established community space. Through independent engagement, participants are building friendships, developing new skills and strengthening their sense of identity and belonging.

One client shared that she now visits the hangar independently and spends time in the café while her child is at school.



Kelham Island Table Tennis: Building Healthy Routines though Sport & Wellbeing



Another client achieved an important milestone by becoming a member of Kelham Island Table Tennis Club, following introductory sessions delivered in partnership with the club.

Through regular attendance, the client is improving physical health, building social connections, and establishing a consistent weekly routine.

Importantly, the client has also become a volunteer, supporting other participants to engage in the activity.

Community Seaside Trip

A community seaside trip brought together more than 100 participants and children for a day of relaxation, fun and shared experiences.

For some families and participants, this was their first visit to the British seaside, providing an opportunity to enjoy nature, spend time together and create joyful memories. The trip created a shared experience for families who may otherwise face barriers to leisure activities.



Social Activities

Cultural Participation & Creative Expression

Partnership with **Brightside Music CIC**, opened opportunity for clients to attend relaxed music-making and sharing sessions. Participants were also signposted to wider cultural opportunities including music concerts, theatre performances and arts events.

“It was good. We relax from our stress. We are very happy. Thank you. If you could do more in the future would be good.”

At the **Migration Matters Festival**, participants attended a range of events celebrating culture, storytelling and music and participated as Events Volunteers

One participant reflected: *“I’m happy I came and shared my grandmother’s song. Thank you for bringing me.”*

Children & Families Activities - HAF Programme

Family activities played an important role in strengthening community connections and supporting children's wellbeing.

During the festive season, we organised a Winter Warmer Party where over 70 clients enjoyed a relaxed afternoon of shared food and music. Guests also took part in a range of festive activities, including Tambola, sewing and crafts, and face painting.

Through the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme, over children and young people participated in activities including:

- Multi-sport sessions during the Easter holidays
- Children visited Chatsworth House, giving many the opportunity to experience one of the region’s most significant heritage sites for the first time.
- Trampolining sessions in December

These activities helped children stay active, build confidence and enjoy positive social experiences.

One of the most heartwarming aspects of the programme is seeing volunteers support and interpret for one another, while shaping how activities are delivered through their cultural knowledge. For example, volunteers advise on the most suitable dates and timings for activities, taking into account other commitments such as English classes and community celebrations. Ethel

Participation Case Study

Brightside Music

The Brightside Music sessions provided a safe, welcoming, and inclusive space for women seeking asylum at one of the initial accommodation to connect, relax, and build confidence through creative participation. Delivered over six months through 10 consistent sessions, the programme created opportunities for trust, friendships, and peer support to develop naturally within a setting often shaped by uncertainty, isolation, and frequent movement of residents.

By delivering sessions on-site, the project successfully removed practical barriers such as travel costs and distance from the city centre, enabling women to access wellbeing-focused activities they may otherwise have missed. The flexible and non-pressured approach allowed participants to engage in ways that felt comfortable to them, supporting emotional safety, autonomy, and confidence-building.

Impact on participants

Participants experienced a range of positive emotional, social, and wellbeing outcomes through the programme:

- Increased confidence and social connection, with women becoming more comfortable greeting one another, interacting openly, and forming friendships.
- Reduced isolation through opportunities to come together regularly in a relaxed and supportive environment.
- Improved wellbeing and emotional relief, with many participants describing the sessions as calming, joyful, relaxing, and helpful in relieving stress and worries.
- A stronger sense of belonging, particularly for newly arrived women navigating the asylum system.
- Greater empowerment and participation through choice-led engagement where participants could join in at their own pace without pressure.
- Cultural exchange and mutual understanding, as women shared songs and music from their home countries, fostering pride, respect, and connection across cultures.
- Peer-led engagement and community-building, with participants confidently encouraging others to join sessions and sharing information about wider opportunities and services.
- Sustained engagement and motivation, with several women attending multiple sessions and expressing interest in continuing with music activities beyond the project.

Feedback from participants highlighted the deep emotional impact of the sessions. Women described the music as making them feel **“happy,” “calm,” “relaxed,”** and able to **“forget my worries for a while.”** One participant shared that the sessions **“opened my soul,”** while others expressed gratitude for creating warmth, joy, and relief from stress during difficult circumstances.

The programme demonstrated the importance of accessible, trauma-informed, and culturally inclusive activities in supporting the wellbeing and participation of women seeking sanctuary. Through a strong partnership between Brightside Music CIC and the New Beginnings Project, the sessions successfully promoted dignity, empowerment, connection, and ongoing participation for women living within the asylum system.

Participation Walk Leaders & Pastoral Volunteers

Wellbeing, Nature & Community Activities

Organised **Walks in the Peak District** is one of the popular monthly social activities our client take part in. These activities would not be possible to run without the immense support of our Pastoral Volunteers and Walk Leaders.

One participant reflected: "When I'm in the countryside I feel free and happy."

Participants also attended weekly **Sewing Group Sessions** in a relaxed environment where they shared practical skills and built friendships. More to come later in this report.



"Walking also allows for practising English, finding out about each other and sharing words of advice and encouragement. Sometimes volunteers are able to suggest new opportunities people can access in the City through the Project"

"The New Beginnings Walk day is one of my favourite days of each month, as it is so lovely to see people relaxing, enjoying the beautiful countryside and able to forget their problems for a few hours. I always know that the folks who come out with us will go home and sleep well after the walk (which as a retired GP gives me great satisfaction)."

Pip - Pastoral Volunteer

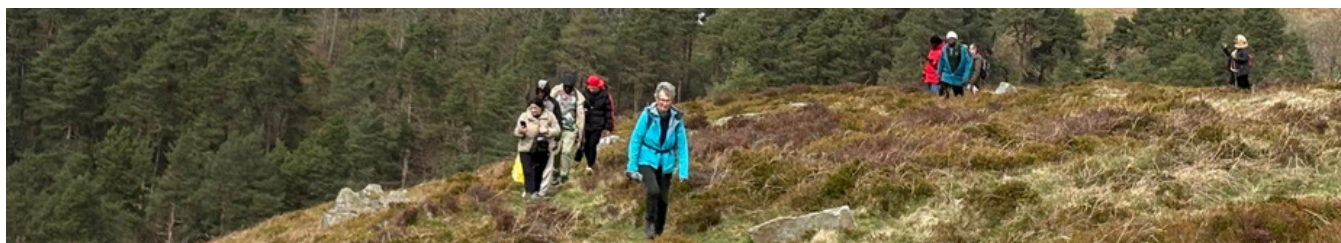


'I do hope the project continue to take both asylum seekers and refugee out into the Peak District.

The brave lone women who have joined us from the women's refuge, and then again of conversations with individual refugees, and overhearing conversations between female asylum seekers and more settled refugees.

All contributing to making a single day special, a safe space to share memories, laugh after an exchange in a familiar language, get physically challenged and tired, with fresh air and green spaces that are known to be so good for mental health. It's hard to put into words all that is achieved from this simple activity, but it is so obvious when we are out there, in this precious space, with these people who deserve better than they are currently being offered.

Catherine /Pastoral Volunteer



Participation Walk Leaders & Pastoral Volunteers

When we go on the walks it is often (usually) the first time most of the people who come out with us have been into the British countryside.

On one walk, an Eritrean refugee, who has lived in Sheffield for almost ten years, told me that she had come out to see if it would be safe to bring her children into the Peak District.

She really enjoyed being out of the city in the fresh air and green fields, so I suggested places that she might have a picnic outing with her family. The next week was half term, so the timing was perfect. She was still a little bit worried about whether the roads would be OK, but, with some reassurances from me, the next week her husband drove the whole family out. The children had a lovely time splashing in one of the local streams and running up and down a hillside in the sunshine.

Even though her husband had been working in the NHS for several years, even he had not ventured out into Derbyshire before, but ***I am sure that the family will be back!***

Another lady who came out with us had been a keen hillwalker in her home country. I gave her some information both about Sheffield Health Walks and also about social walks at Longshaw National Trust Estate.

Longshaw run a free 5 mile walk every week, and it is easy to get to them on the bus. The stop for the 272 bus is just outside their estate and is reachable on a Sheffield bus saver ticket.

I was really pleased when she contacted me to let me know that she was going to give one of the free walks a try even when, as she told me she was just “a little scared” of going out on her own.

Pip - Pastoral Volunteer



Sewing Group

The Sanctuary Sewing group has been running since 2018, with the exception of closing during Lockdown. It is based within the City of Sanctuary project, giving us access to a broad field of services and clients and the group has flourished since our return to the building. We are very fortunate to have been given space to store our equipment and to hold the group sessions.

Feedback from Volunteers:

"Volunteering at the sewing group has been rewarding experience for us. It has given us the opportunity to build relationship, learn from others, and be part of a supportive community. The sewing group has also had a positive impact on our guests. It provides a safe and friendly space where people can connect, reduce feelings of isolation, and experience a sense of belonging. It has been wonderful to see how something as simple as sewing together, forms us into a family."

"I like coming to the sewing group so I can make my own garments , instead of the paying outsiders. It saves me a lot financially. I have learned a lot and also am able to share skills with others too. It's a safe , friendly environment, and a socialising atmosphere too. It has given me the opportunity to keep my self-occupied for my mental wellbeing. Learned a lot through the multi-cultural group and I have expanded my knowledge of their community."

"I enjoy the creativity and enthusiasm of the people who come to the sewing group and it is good to spend time with people from a range of cultures and experiences."

Feedback from Clients:

*"I'm so pleased and fortunate to be part of this great sewing class in the sanctuary. It makes me feel fulfilled, confident, and humbled seeing people from different cultures and ethnic groups each time I attend the classes . I have now concluded that every race is one which is known as the human race. However, sewing has been my passion, and coming to this sewing group has really helped me to accomplish one of my dreams. The Teachers are excellently fabulous. I really feel fulfilled.
Thank you, guys xx"*

"When I am with the group on a Monday morning, it helps me to forget about my troubles and support others in need. Thank you for this opportunity."

"You are so nice and good to us, especially myself. I like all the teachers. I'm so happy. I'm so proud of you people, how you are learning sewing. I used to come since 2018, but I'm sick and this took over me, but now I can come with my support worker, and he likes the group as well. The sewing group helps me learn English as well."

"One day I want to get work sewing, and designing. Coming to this group has shown me that I can do it."

Sewing Group Feedback

"I come to the Sewing Group so I can learn a skill, I can belong to a community, I can socialise"

Why do you like coming to the sewing group?

"Learn a new skill, socialising, save money by making your own clothes, supporting each other, proud to wear your own produce and lift your spirits"

"Be professional and sewing my own, family and friends clothes and even do business in future."

"Gain more skills, socialise, exchange ideas about different cultures and work as a team and help each others."

How has the sewing group changed your life or your future?

"The group has help boost my confidence in interacting with people easily, I can cut and sew clothes by myself."

"It has changed my life in a way that I have acquired new skills in sewing and knitting. Before joining the class, I had no knowledge of using a sewing machine nor could I hold a knitting needle. Now, I can mend my personal and husband's clothes and enjoy knitting while watching TV. Doing things on my own and seeing the end product makes me happy."

"I found a community in the sewing class with people who share the same passion I have for the art of sewing and knitting. I learned about this class through VAS and later met lovely volunteers who became my friends."

Our Future

Planned developments

We believe in continuous improvements, shaped by lived experience and have identified the following priorities. Some of these are subject to continued funding.

- **Extend our support for the city-wide Volunteer to Career (V2C) pathway:** Working with the V2C team to continue building on the admin pathway and create new pathways to becoming a Volunteer Co-ordinator and Employment Worker within NB.
- **Increase group support session:** We will open up more space for job search support and application assistance to allow refugees to develop Employment Worker experience.
- **Community voice development:** With our co-delivery model, we will work with volunteers and clients to develop better ways of capturing client voice.
- **Action Asylum (Task Force Trust / Asylum Link Merseyside):** From July 2026, NB becomes Sheffield's refugee-sector delivery partner for this National Lottery Climate Action Fund programme, co-delivered with Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust.

We will also continue to respond to new unexpected and unforeseeable offers, partnerships and crises that come to NB

Partnership and collaboration



SPRING Project

We are strong partners of SPRING (Sheffield Project for Refugee Integration and Growth), including City of Sanctuary Sheffield, SAVTE, Citizens Advice Sheffield, Solace and Sheffield City Council.

Activity and Education

British Red Cross (Introduction to Volunteering co-delivery); Sheffield Climbing Hangar and Refugee Rocks (climbing); Kelham Island Table Tennis Club (table tennis); Sheffield College and Northern College (further education); Sheffield Hallam University and University of Sheffield (higher education); Code Your Future and Sheffield Digital (IT to digital skills); Migration Matters

Employment and business partners.

Job Centre Plus and DWP; BITC (Business in the Community) business mentoring; AVIVA (Co-producing Volunteer to Career training resources with VAS), employer partners e.g. Breaking Barriers and Ikea who operate national inclusive recruitment programmes and need NB's community connection to identify and prepare candidates.

Thank you

We would not exist without all those who support the project on a daily basis - with funding, time, knowledge, experience, compassion and energy. We are thankful to you all.

Thank you to our funders

Thank you to our funders, without whom we would not be able to operate. In the current challenging funding landscape we are thankful we are able to continue operating.



To the volunteers, and visitors

Thank you to everyone that comes to New Beginnings, everyone that is part of New Beginnings and that acts for change in their day to day lives.. People who show up daily, despite the hostile environment, changing policies and the challenges being faced continuously are the reason the project exists.

We acknowledge that in an ideal situation, our work might look different with less hostility, and a society that welcomes people seeking sanctuary.

We aim to work reflectively to adapt to the needs of our community, as we believe communities are built by people listening to, and caring for each other and we look forward to another year of keeping the needs and desires of New Beginnings visitors at the heart of what we do. Thank you.

Moving forward

We seek to continually review and improve our services to work best in developing circumstances and for those who come to New Beginnings. If you have any ideas for collaboration, engagement or improvement, please get in contact with us. There are exciting things on the horizon and we would love you to be there with us.



To all at New Beginnings,
Please know that you are
dear to many people. You
touch so many lives + make
the world a better place



vas | **new beginnings**
supporting community action project

The Circle, 33 Rockingham Lane, Sheffield, S1 4FW
www.vas.org.uk/new-beginnings