

BOAZ SUPPORTER REVIEW

housing • support • advocacy

2024-25 Report





An attendee
of Family Night
in December
2024

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Thank you for picking up our 2024-25 Supporter Review! We're so encouraged that you're taking the time to read about our work providing housing and support for people seeking safety in Greater Manchester.

In this report you'll find updates on our support and advocacy work, stories of people who have been supported by Boaz, and information about our impact over the past financial year (1st April 2024 - 31st March 2025).

We hope that this publication offers you a window into the work that we do at Boaz, as well as providing you with ways you can take action in your context.



A welcome letter from our Chief Executive and Chair

Dear Friends and Supporters,

As we look back on the past 12 months, we are so grateful for your continued support and solidarity. This year has brought both significant challenges, as well as moments of hope, and through it all your commitment has remained a constant source of encouragement and strength.

In a time when the national conversation around migration and asylum has continued to shift and, at times, darken, your belief in dignity, compassion, and justice has made an extraordinary difference. Because of your generosity, we have been able to offer safe accommodation, legal and emotional support, and a place of welcome to more people than ever - people who would otherwise have been left destitute and isolated.

We've walked alongside so many individuals as they've moved from fear and uncertainty towards stability and renewed hope. Some have secured legal status while others are still

in the midst of that journey. This year we've been able to work with more than 600 people, offering not just practical help, but the message that they are seen, valued, and loved.

Highlights of the year include the expansion of our outreach programmes, a strategic review of our housing provision, as well as hearing the powerful stories of resilience from those at the heart of our work. We've also continued to advocate for change, standing up for a fairer and more compassionate asylum system.

This year marked the 20th anniversary of the first informal gathering of a group of friends who came together to support Dave Smith as he started Boaz - you can hear from Dave later on in this report. We could not have continued this work over the past 20 years without the support and partnership of so many people.

We hope this report gives you at least a glimpse into our impact this year and that it encourages you as much as it encourages us.

From all of us at Boaz, thank you for standing with us, as we seek to demonstrate that love and welcome can flourish, even in the hardest of places.

With thanks,

Ros Holland Chief Executive
Phil Rawlings Chair of Trustees



P.S. When you've finished reading this report, why not pass it on to someone you know and spread the word about our work?

P.P.S. The funding climate in the past 12 months has remained difficult for many charities, including Boaz. **If you're in a position to give to help us keep going, you can do so by scanning the QR code below.**



Rahel's story

"I like to work in the community and help other people. I like cooking, cleaning in the house and gardening."

A meal that is shared brings people together in community and solidarity. It creates space for us to open up about who and how we are. It's a chance to feel known.

When Rahel arrived in the UK seeking safety, this love and support from a community around her was what she missed most.



"Coming to this country, there was a lot of suffering. I didn't know anything about the country, the people, the language and even where to go. You want someone to encourage you, to hug you. You want to feel that there are people around you."

Forced to navigate the complexity and hostility of the UK asylum system without a support network, it's not surprising that Rahel

found herself facing street homelessness. Instead of safety or welcome, what she experienced when she arrived here was further harm. Rahel described what it was like to sleep outside:

"Because I'm a woman, it was very hard for me. [...] I passed through many bad times. At the time, they didn't seem like they would end. I didn't think I would make it through."

Rahel first accessed support from the Boaz Trust through our hosting scheme that existed at the time. After staying with hosts for a couple of months, she moved into Boaz accommodation for people who've been refused asylum.

"They helped me a lot. If I didn't go to Boaz, you wouldn't find me here today."

With the stability and security that came from safe accommodation, Rahel began to recover from her experiences of destitution. Having a support worker by her side to offer practical, emotional and person-centred support was also vital. Later, with the help of her support worker, Rahel was able to access legal advice and went on to hand

in further submissions to the Home Office.

Shortly after moving out of Boaz housing into Section 4 accommodation while awaiting a decision on her fresh claim for asylum, Rahel heard that she had been granted leave to remain.

"I want people to learn from me that there is nothing bad that won't pass. They have to be hopeful for tomorrow and be strong."

Now Rahel is studying, teaching people to cook and working towards her goal of getting a job. She's also generously given her



Rahel and Viktor on the filming day in October 2024

time to volunteer with Boaz in various ways. She ran a cookalong for supporters during the pandemic, held a traditional coffee ceremony at Boaz Family Night and participated in our 2024 Christmas Appeal film.

This film, produced in collaboration with Rahel, Viktor and Stone Barrell (an Oxford-based creative communications agency), was subsequently shortlisted

for the Smiley Charity Film Awards.

During the filming, when we asked Rahel about the impact that Boaz has had on her life, she told us:

"Boaz helps me to have a bright future and makes me eager to live. I went through a lot in my past life. Boaz hope, it is a great hope."

You can watch the film of Rahel's story by visiting boaztrust.org.uk/stories/rahel or learn to cook injera (one of Rahel's favourite dishes) by scanning the QR code.



LEARN TO COOK INJERA

Injera is a spongy, sour flatbread with a consistency somewhere between a crepe and a pancake. This recipe was written by Rahel in partnership with Heart & Parcel and Boaz for our livestreamed cookalong in 2021.



Supporting people who have been refused asylum

After someone receives a negative decision on their asylum claim, usually they have just 21 days to leave their Home Office accommodation. With no right to work, or to access mainstream welfare benefits and housing assistance, inevitably the system pushes people into destitution.

It is at this point, when people are Appeal Rights Exhausted (ARE) and have very few options left to them, that Boaz housing and support is so vital.

Without a safe place to sleep, people are more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. They also often experience worsening physical and mental health, and engaging with their asylum case becomes near impossible.

But, with holistic, 1:1 support from Boaz and the stability that safe accommodation provides, people can recover from their experiences of destitution and begin to rebuild their lives.

In 2024-25 we provided 7,424 nights of accommodation

in Boaz shared houses for 32 people refused asylum. This year, we've been encouraged to see synergy between different areas of our support work – of the 9 new people who moved into Boaz accommodation for people who've been refused asylum, all of them had been supported by RESS (Restricted Eligibility Support Service) beforehand, while on our housing waiting list.

LEGAL SUPPORT

Many of the people we support want to re-engage with the asylum process to help them resolve their insecure immigration status.

This year, we have continued to work in partnership with GMIAU (Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit) to ensure that people we support have access to good quality legal advice. This can include having previous paperwork reviewed,

receiving feedback on new evidence collected, as well as specific advice about how to progress their legal cases.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

This year we continued to offer pre-payment cards for people living in our Boaz shared houses, to help people meet their daily essential needs.

As well as weekly financial support, we continued to reimburse travel costs for certain appointments (with Boaz, medical or legal appointments), as well as covering costs for things needed to progress someone's legal case (e.g. travel within the UK to meetings / demonstrations or the translation of documents).

LEGAL SNAPSHOT OF THE YEAR

88%

of people with refused asylum claims engaged with free legal support while living in Boaz accommodation.

19

people met with a specialist immigration advisor for **legal advice** about their asylum case.



ANWAR'S STORY

Before accessing housing through the Boaz Trust, Anwar* was facing homelessness following a negative decision on his asylum claim. Moving into a Boaz house meant safety and stability at a time in his life when things felt like they were spiralling out of control.

Although our usual housing provision is for 12 months, because of Anwar's specific circumstances, we decided to extend his accommodation with us. This was partly due to Anwar's ongoing mental and physical health conditions. But he was also in the process of working on a fresh asylum claim, and we felt that he would benefit from our holistic, person-centred support during this process.

During his time with Boaz, Anwar often volunteered with activities such as decorating in the house and gardening. He told us that he enjoyed having something physical to do as it broke up the monotony of the day and helped him focus his thoughts on things other than his case.

Living in shared accommodation also gave him the chance to build friendships with others. Whenever someone new moved in, Anwar would be the first to welcome them and help them to settle in. On several occasions, he supported people who were particularly struggling. Even though he was in a difficult situation himself, he still gave his time to help others facing similar challenges.

When circumstances changed dramatically in his home country, Anwar's solicitor at GMIAU supported him to submit a fresh claim to show that return would be dangerous, if not impossible.

Due to the painful experiences discussed, some of the meetings with his solicitor were intense. In this context, details and advice could easily get confused or be forgotten.

The fact that Anwar's support worker from Boaz attended these meetings with him meant that he was able to implement the advice he was given by his solicitor. This included things like visiting

embassies in London and collecting health records.

A few months later, Anwar moved out of Boaz housing when he became eligible for Home Office accommodation and support after his fresh claim was submitted. After moving on from Boaz, Anwar described the impact of support from Boaz in some of his hardest times: "You know I have no words, I cannot say how much is in my heart for all Boaz's help, for your help, for every help. Thank you."

Although Anwar is still waiting for a decision on his fresh claim for asylum, housing and support from Boaz allowed him time to gain clarity and understanding of his case, providing the stability he needed to work on his further submissions.

While we have a clearly defined model of support at Boaz, there is also scope for flexibility when an individual's needs call for it. Anwar's journey with us shows the impact that this tailored, trauma-informed approach can have.

**Name changed and story shared with Anwar's permission*

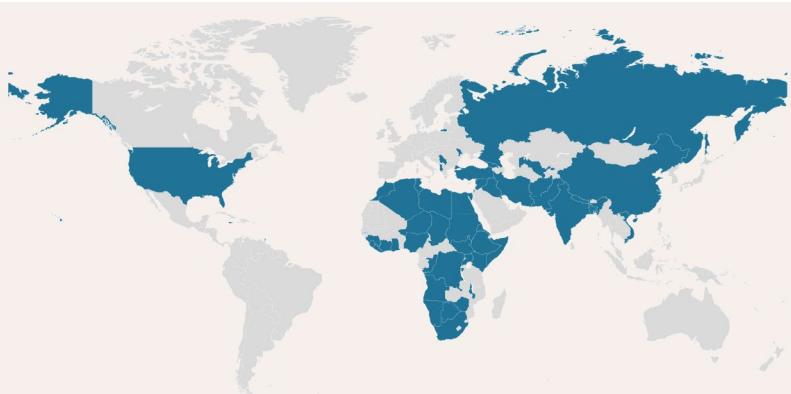
Our impact in 2024-25

625*

People were supported by Boaz this year

18,810

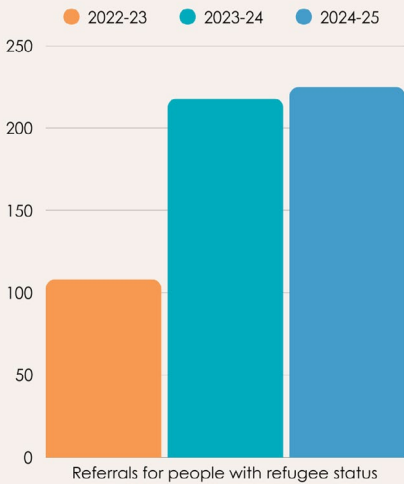
Nights of accommodation provided for 71 people



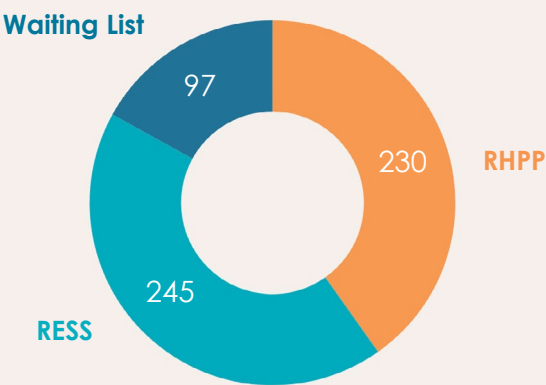
COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

Across all our support services, we worked with people from **51** different countries in 2024-25, most (but not all) of whom had been through the asylum process.

REFUGEE REFERRALS

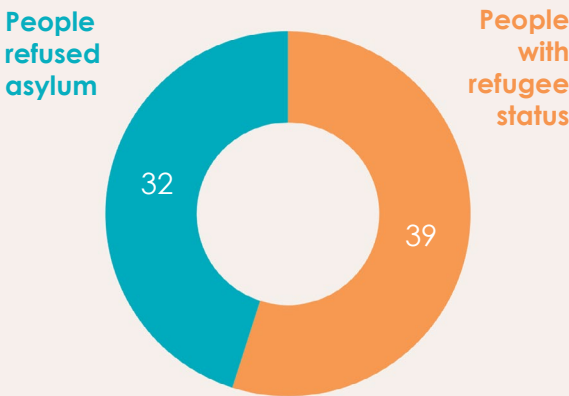


Referrals for people with refugee status



OUTREACH SUPPORT

572 people accessed advice or support through our outreach work



BOAZ ACCOMMODATION

71 people stayed in Boaz accommodation this year

199

Positive housing outcomes where people have accessed safe accommodation, often after having no choice but to sleep outside.



RESS HOUSING OUTCOMES

41 people now have a safe place to stay through RESS outreach support*

Positive housing outcomes

are recorded when people access safe accommodation through Boaz support. This can include moving into Boaz housing, moving on positively from Boaz, or accessing other safe accommodation through RESS or RHPP.



RHPP HOUSING OUTCOMES

72 people accessed housing through RHPP support

A BREAKDOWN OF WHO WE SUPPORT

Across our support services, we work with people who have a wide range of immigration statuses and histories in the UK.

We've outlined some of these groups below, while also recognising that people are not defined by their immigration status and it is something that can change.

- **People with refugee status**
People who've received a positive decision on their asylum claim. Usually they will have been granted leave to remain in the UK for 5 years. At this point, people have the right to work, rent and claim benefits.
- **People who have been refused asylum**
People who've received a negative decision on their asylum claim and are Appeal Rights Exhausted (ARE). At this point they are no longer eligible for Home

Office accommodation, do not have the right to work, claim benefits or access mainstream housing assistance.

- **People with restricted eligibility**
Through RESS, we work with people inside and outside of the asylum system. This includes people seeking asylum, people refused asylum, people whose leave has expired or been revoked and people with unclear, unknown or changing immigration statuses.

Most of these people will have the 'No Recourse to Public Funds' (NRPF) condition attached to their immigration status and face barriers to accessing welfare support, healthcare and local authority housing assistance.

*Outreach is the name we are now using for our Floating Support work.

*Boaz supported a total of 643 people this year but some people accessed more than one of our services (e.g. moving from accessing support through RESS or the waiting list into a Boaz house). So, without double counting, we worked with 625 individuals.

Viktar's Story

"I love drawing sometimes, just sitting and drawing something, just what I feel."

For Viktar, arriving in the UK was an anxiety-inducing, lonely and disorientating experience. Having fled Belarus, he came to the UK seeking safety, but instead found himself facing street homelessness.

"When I came to England, it's been a time when I worried about and scared about everything. What's next to me, about the people, because I've been alone in that time, and expecting that someone will support me and help me - it's been like, oh, something unbelievable."

After his asylum claim was refused by the Home Office, Viktar accessed accommodation through the Boaz Night Shelter that was in operation at the time. He later moved into a Boaz house.

Having somewhere that was safe to stay was a turning point for Viktar.

The security that came from having stable accommodation, alongside the holistic, person-centred support of Boaz staff meant he could take steps to resolve his immigration status. With the help of his support worker, he was able to access legal advice and submit a fresh asylum claim.



Now Viktar has his refugee status and is working as a bespoke furniture maker. It's a profession he loves.

"I really like my job, and I have passion and inspiration to do my job."

In his spare time, Viktar advocates for people seeking asylum to be able to experience this same satisfaction and self-sufficiency through employment.

In particular, he has been involved in the 'Lift the Ban' campaign to see people seeking asylum given the right to work.

"My life in total if do the line, drawing a line, it will be like going up, straight down, and now a little bit rising again. So this is how I can describe my life, and most important, and that rising take Boaz Trust, because trust, it's not only like something loyal, it's also about the trust which people need."

Years after coming to the UK in search of safety, Viktar has finally found it. But he shouldn't have had to wait this long. People who seek safety here should feel safe as soon as they arrive, not in further danger or left in limbo for months or years.

Despite this, and against all the odds, Viktar has built a new life for himself here in Manchester – and Manchester is all the richer for it.

If you've been inspired by Viktar's story and his campaigning work, visit boaztrust.org.uk/advocacy to find ways you can speak out and take action in your context.



Viktar speaking at Family Night in December 2024

SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH REFUGEE STATUS

This year we provided 11,386 nights of accommodation for 39 people with refugee status through Boaz shared houses.

Each person living in Boaz accommodation is offered holistic, trauma-informed support that is tailored to their needs. This can include support with employment, college, higher education, training, or accessing health services, ESOL provision or volunteering opportunities.

Our support workers also help people manage their tenancy with Boaz, navigate benefits systems and prepare for moving on to longer-term accommodation.

During the year, we ran three Financial Wellbeing training sessions and three Renting Ready training sessions. Renting Ready helps people to understand landlord and tenant responsibilities ahead of moving into private rented

accommodation, while Financial Wellbeing covers managing finances and budgeting, but also focuses on financial safety and raising awareness of scams.

Waiting lists for our accommodation remain long. But through outreach support offered to people while they wait, we've been able to help people understand their housing options and move forward. We supported a number of people who weren't eligible for housing assistance from local councils in Greater Manchester in this way.

We also offered support with health, education, employment, benefits and invited people to women's wellbeing sessions or Renting Ready training where relevant. Connecting people in with local support services they were previously unaware of has also been part of this work.



"[Boaz] helped me with providing accommodation, supporting me with wellbeing sessions, registering with college, looking for a job and I've got a job during my stay. The best thing about Boaz was the help with the accommodation, the practical, emotional and physical support, the support with materials like laptop and anything we need in the house."

Jesca*, who recently moved on from one of our houses for people with refugee status

Restricted Eligibility Support Service (RESS)

RESS delivers specialist outreach support and immigration advice for people who have restricted eligibility for public funds because of their immigration status and are facing, or are at risk of, homelessness.

This was the second year of RESS, funded by Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and delivered in partnership with the Booth Centre and the Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit (GMIAU).

This year, GMCA provided an uplift in funding for RESS providers which allowed us to increase our staffing capacity. In August 2024, we were delighted to welcome Hassan to the team and since then we've been able to work with more people through RESS.

RESS operates in every borough in Greater Manchester and this year we continued to receive referrals for outreach support from all 10 boroughs. We met people in their local areas (for example, at local libraries), and ran four drop ins per month at partner organisations.

In 2024-25, we worked with 245 people:

- 133 people who had been refused asylum
- 23 people who were in the asylum system
- 89 people with different immigration statuses / histories (including people with non EU visas with NRPF, where leave had expired or been revoked, and people with unclear or unknown immigration statuses).



41 people found a safe place to stay through RESS support:

- 16 moved to Home Office accommodation
- 9 moved to Boaz houses
- 13 moved to ABEN*
- 3 moved to other accommodation

Due to the many barriers people with insecure immigration status face, it is not possible for everyone to access accommodation. However, we have received feedback that the approach taken by the RESS team was one that people had not experienced often: people were listened to, understood, and given time (even when there was no tangible outcome).

HOLISTIC SUPPORT

As well as housing focused support, the RESS team also helped people to access vital financial support (usually through the Migrant Destitution Fund), healthcare or specialist services, and supported them with progressing their legal situations.

Through the RESS Personalisation Fund, we also provided tailored financial support as needed by the individual. For example, this year we provided supermarket vouchers, vouchers to buy appropriate clothing during the winter months, bus tickets for travel to appointments and phones for keeping in contact with friends and support workers.

*A Bed Every Night (A cross-sector service providing a bed every night for people sleeping outside in Greater Manchester)

Boaz Housing

Providing somewhere safe to stay for people facing homelessness after claiming asylum was where Boaz started as an organisation. As we look to the future, we are keen to grow in this area, keeping our central focus on the provision of accommodation.

In 2024, freelance consultant, Julian Prior, worked with us to carry out a full review of Boaz housing. He helped us to establish what was working well, where we could do better and some key steps we needed to take to move forward.

One of the key recommendations from this review was to recruit someone with senior housing expertise to join the team permanently as Head of Accommodation. In January 2025, we were delighted to appoint Janine Walters in this role.

Janine brought with her a wealth of experience from the housing sector, having worked for multiple small-medium housing associations on specialist projects such as housing for young people, women, and the Syrian Resettlement programme.

One project that has been a key area of focus in the

past year has been fire safety. Fire risk assessments have been completed for every property and work has started to install upgraded fire doors and escape windows where necessary. Every kitchen has fire blankets and fire extinguishers, along with notices about how to use them. Staff members have also been out to each house to give a fire safety talk and to distribute newly produced fire safety leaflets to everyone living in Boaz accommodation.

As well as ongoing actions from the fire safety risk assessments, the past year has also seen major works completed at multiple properties. These have included external painting, soffits, guttering, a floor replacement and a new back door being fitted.

In 2024-25 we were able to provide 18,810 nights of accommodation to 71 people through our shared houses. We asked Janine about the impact of this housing provision:

"It's a safe space, it's home, it gives the people we support headspace and a brighter future. It's everything that housing encompasses because you can't get anywhere unless you've got somewhere to sleep."

Looking to the near future, we are committed to improving the energy efficiency and safety of Boaz houses to make sure these homes are fit for purpose for years to come as spaces of sanctuary, restoration and hope. As part of this, we have launched a new appeal ('Warm Welcome, Firm Foundations') to help us complete the renovation projects we've identified as critical.

Looking further ahead, we asked Janine what she was excited about for the future. She said:

"Building our portfolio of good quality housing stock because that's really important to me. I want us to be able to provide more accommodation to people that have been granted status and people that haven't."

To find out more about supporting our 'Warm Welcome, Firm Foundations' appeal visit boaztrust.org.uk/warmwelcome or scan the QR code below.



Refugee Homelessness Prevention Project (RHPP)

As part of Greater Manchester Combined Authority's Refugee Welcome Programme, Boaz has been working across several boroughs in Greater Manchester to support people with newly granted refugee status who are now experiencing homelessness.

The Refugee Homelessness Prevention Project (RHPP) was commissioned by Greater Manchester Combined Authority as a pilot project from June 2024 – May 2025.

THE CONTEXT

RHPP was developed in response to the refugee homelessness crisis caused by a combination of the Home Office's new streamlined asylum processing (which saw a high volume of asylum decisions made very quickly) and an administrative change around the ending of asylum support.

The change meant that people were being given as little as seven days' notice that their asylum support and accommodation would cease. This was instead of the standard move-on period of 28 days - subsequently extended to 56 days as a pilot until June 2025.

At what should have been a moment of relief and joy upon being granted refugee status, these evictions into homelessness caused unnecessary distress and severe hardship to many.

There were also far-reaching implications for frontline statutory and voluntary services. Huge additional pressure was placed on Local Authorities and voluntary organisations saw – and continue to see – higher than average referral rates for their services. At Boaz, we've seen a 108% increase in the number of referrals for people with refugee status between 2022-23 and 2024-25.

In June 2024 we recruited two members of staff to deliver a new form of outreach

support across four Greater Manchester boroughs (Bolton, Bury, Manchester and Oldham). We were delighted to be joined by Tsegaye Bobasso in the role of RHPP Support Worker and Elaine Eland as RHPP Lead Support Worker.



WHAT DOES RHPP DO?

The Refugee Homelessness Prevention Project works with single adults who find themselves facing or experiencing homelessness after recently being granted refugee status or humanitarian protection.

Following a homelessness assessment, the people we support will have been identified as having no priority need under the Homelessness Reduction Act. This means that the local authority has no legal duty to provide them with housing.

We offer people support to find, secure and move into accommodation, primarily through the private rented sector (including shared housing). We offer information and advice about housing options available to people in the UK, and help them to understand these housing pathways. Our support workers help practically with

property searches, landlord liaison and tenancy readiness support.

We also work with partners (including local authorities and voluntary sector organisations) to access other forms of relevant support, including deposit schemes, furniture offers and more. As people move into their new home, we offer support where this is required to ensure they have the best possible chance of sustaining successful tenancies.

IMPACT

Through this project we have seen significant numbers of people finding a safe place to live, often after sleeping outside. Since June 2024, we have worked with a total of 230 people and supported **72 people to access accommodation**. Of those who have moved into their own private rented housing, we've seen **100% tenancy sustainment**.

Other outcomes have included:

- 60 people were supported to apply for welfare benefits
- 32 people were able to connect with health services
- 54 people were supported to manage bills or their finances
- 20 people were supported to access ESOL or employment support



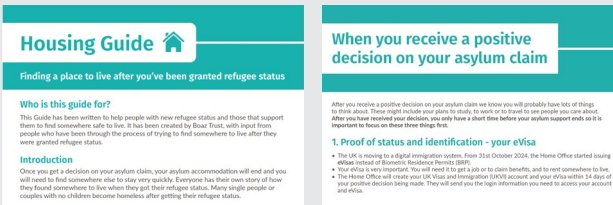
RHPP RESOURCES

As part of this project, we have also developed resources to equip people recently granted status (and those supporting them) to find accommodation.

Our **Positive Decision Guidance** was translated into 15 languages, shared with the Regional Strategic Migration Partnership and distributed to people in Home Office accommodation when they received their asylum decision.

Our **Housing Guide** was created in consultation with people who have lived experience of the asylum system, while also incorporating our own learning from the past year. It provides advice on finding somewhere to live following a positive asylum decision and includes information people we supported wish they'd known at the time.

You can find both of these guides by visiting boaztrust.org.uk/our-resources



Advocacy

It has been another year of significant societal and political shift. In the months leading up to last summer's general election, our asylum system was in freefall.

The language being used to describe refugees and people seeking sanctuary had become particularly toxic and polarising, and was heavily influenced by political and media discourse, in large part enabled by the exponential growth of online mis and disinformation.

Labour's election into power was quickly overshadowed by rioting that took place around the country. Hotels accommodating people seeking sanctuary were set alight, charities and organisations working with refugees and people seeking sanctuary were threatened, and people of colour and racialised communities were targeted.

You would have been forgiven for thinking that such abhorrent and terrifying actions by the far-right would have led to a form of societal soul searching. Furthermore, that there would have been an acknowledgement by those with political power of the role that toxic and dehumanising language had played in radicalising

people. Neither came to pass and instead we have seen a continuation of language, including from the Labour Government, that stirs up distain and blame towards people seeking sanctuary in our communities.

While the Labour Government have reversed some of the worst elements of the Conservatives' legislation (for example dismantling most of the Illegal Migration Act and scrapping the Rwanda scheme), they have continued to pursue a quite toxic narrative, initiating their own harmful policies. For example, earlier this year the Government announced changes to the Good Character Guidance, stating that people with indefinite leave to remain (including refugees) who arrived in the UK through irregular means of travel (e.g. small boat crossings) will usually be banned from becoming British citizens. This is a pernicious policy that targets people who have often been in the UK for many years, attacking a person's sense of true belonging or acceptance in this country.

The Government's Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill does very little to positively overhaul the UK asylum system, making no

mention of safe routes or the dire state and decimation of legal aid provision. Instead, it focuses on the criminalisation of people making perilous journeys and expands powers to grow the detention estate. Concerned by the contents of the Bill, Boaz launched an online campaign action, asking our supporters to write to their local MP to advocate instead for a fair and compassionate asylum system, and to bring an end to the divisive and toxic language used by politicians and political parties to talk about people seeking sanctuary. We were encouraged by all of our supporters who took this action.

As part of our local and regional advocacy and influencing work, alongside our wider colleagues in the asylum and immigration sector, we have been meeting with Greater Manchester MPs to raise our concerns about key issues impacting people we work with: destitution and homelessness, the Border Security Bill, the changes to the Good Character Guidance and the language and narrative used. These meetings have also given



'Fair begins here' is a UK wide campaign for a fair new plan for refugees.

us the opportunity to hear from local MPs about their support for our work; including their own concerns about the political and media discourse and how we can work together to effect change.

We will continue to advocate on a local, regional and national level for a fair and compassionate asylum system, and will be developing more opportunities in the months ahead for you to join us in this work.

To stay up to date with ways you can take action, sign up for our monthly news email by visiting boaztrust.org.uk/stayintouch



INTRODUCING OUR EMPOWERMENT AND INCLUSION WORK

In January we were delighted to welcome Hassan Hussain to the team in the role of Empowerment and Inclusion Coordinator. In alignment with our commitment to being trauma-informed and person-centred, this role was established to evaluate and improve the work and services we provide to people seeking sanctuary and those with refugee status, and amplify the voices of people with lived experience within our services.

The insights gathered through this work will not only enable us to make any changes needed to our service provision, but crucially mean that the voices of people we support can be better and more fully heard to effect change. We also hope that this work will help us to advocate for policy changes at a local, regional and even national level.

Hassan has led on participatory research design to gather the views and insights of the people we support and bring their voices to the decision-making table. From focus group discussions to targeted interviews, these activities are led by people with lived experience, allowing them to shape and improve the support we provide based on their own journeys.

Most recently, Hassan has worked on an evaluation of our Refugee Homelessness Prevention Project (RHPP). Using a range of participatory tools, we engaged with people across four boroughs in Greater Manchester to understand their experiences of being supported by the project. We hope that their insights will help us to advocate for stronger support systems for single refugees, as well as enable us to continually improve our services. More on this work will be shared in our RHPP end-of-project report later this summer.

An interview with our founder

Despite challenges of many kinds over the past 20 years, we're still here. Recently we interviewed Dave Smith about his experiences pioneering an organisation like Boaz. He told us about the biggest challenges, proudest moments and his reasons to keep hoping today.

What's been the greatest challenge that you either experienced or witnessed in the years you led Boaz?

I think there are two things, and they're actually linked. And one is the waiting list. We've got hundreds and hundreds of people who need the services that Boaz provide, need accommodation, and we can't provide it because there are just so many. So that's the first thing.

But the second thing, I think is linked to that and it's what

I would call the narrative. The biggest challenge is that when you read the papers and when you hear the politicians, they're all wrong, (not all but nearly all). So it's the narrative, it's the story that we need to somehow change. And it seems to have got worse and worse.

What are you proudest of?

I thought about this, and actually there's no one thing, but every time somebody gets their status, they just get that phone call, you know, or somebody comes in with a smile on their face. That's what I'm proud of. It's not the end of your troubles, but it's the beginning of the end, isn't it? So that's what I'm proud of: when anybody gets their status here in the UK.

We live in difficult times, but when it comes to the asylum and immigration system, what gives you hope today?

You know when the Rwanda scheme came out, lots of people thought, that's not right. I think there is a groundswell of people saying there's something wrong with this, that it can't be right.

I think more and more people when they find out what's going on, they want to get involved. And there are new organisations just springing up and helping wherever they can - whether that's in Calais, whether that's visiting hostels and hotels. There is hope there because there is a new thing that's rising up within that.

But ultimately, I think: if I care deeply, I know that there's a God who cares a lot more than I do, who really cares about refugees and people seeking asylum. So that's where my hope is.

Find 20 ways you can get involved at boaztrust.org.uk/20-years



Community as a superpower

The theme for Refugee Week 2025 is 'community as a superpower' – celebrating the incredible everyday, the power of collective action and simple acts of generosity that when multiplied become an unstoppable force.

In light of this, we'd like to share two ways we've been buoyed by the wider Boaz community in the past year.

In December 2024, the Vivaldi Ensemble chose to support us through their 'Mozart & Mince Pies' concert held at St Mark's Church in Levenshulme. The evening featured beautiful music by Mozart, Bach, Boyce and Sibelius, raising an incredible £477 for our work.

The Vivaldi Ensemble was set up by Rudolf Botta, who fled the Hungarian revolution in the 1950s and was brought to Manchester by a local bus company who rescued hundreds of refugees from mainland Europe.

In July 2024, we saw the power of community through Nelson Shardey's victory in his legal battle against the Home Office. A retired shopkeeper from the Wirral, Nelson had lived in the UK since arriving as a student in 1977. In 2019 he was told he had no right to live in the UK.

Nelson was told by the Home Office to apply for the 10-year route to settlement, which would cost thousands of pounds. In 2023 GMIAU brought a legal challenge against the Home Office.

Nelson and his family began crowdfunding so that they would be able to pay the legal fees in the event of the case going to court. Despite this financial risk, they said: "Whatever the outcome, we would much rather have tried than to have submitted to a biased system that penalises the most vulnerable in our society."

Donations and messages of support came flooding in. The community around

Nelson raised over £48,000 – far exceeding their target of £20,000.

In July last year, we heard that Nelson had at last been granted indefinite leave to remain and that he had decided to donate the funds raised to three charities in the North West, one of them being Boaz. After the lengthy and emotionally draining legal battle, Nelson's son Aaron described feeling bittersweet: "Immigration is not easy. It is certainly not a one-size-fits-all policy. It is also a policy that needs to be handled with great care, compassion and empathy."

Visit boaztrust.org.uk/getinvolved and unleash the power of community.



Our founder, Dave Smith and Chief Exec, Ros Holland





Stay in touch

The Boaz Trust

Kath Locke Centre
123 Moss Lane East
Manchester
M15 5DD

T 0161 202 1056

E info@boaztrust.org.uk

 [@boaztrust](https://www.instagram.com/boaztrust)

 [@boaz-trust](https://www.linkedin.com/company/boaz-trust)

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This report was written by
Kerry Wigglesworth, with input
from Ros Holland, Katie Lifford,
Amy Merone & Hassan Hussain

Photography by Jacob Barrell,
Hannah Beatrice, Heather
Woodward, Jarek Maciejowski,
& Kerry Wigglesworth

Design by Kerry Wigglesworth



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