

THE
HARBOUR
PROJECT
ANNUAL REPORT

April 2023 – March 2024

The Harbour Project for Swindon Asylum
Seekers and Refugees
(1171368)

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The Harbour Project is committed to openness and transparency. This report records the charitable objects, activities and achievements of The Harbour Project from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. It has been compiled with due regard to the Charity Commission's public benefit guidance.

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

2023/24 was the first full year for The Harbour Project in our new premises at Broadgreen Community Centre. Whilst St Luke's Hall will always be part of our DNA, Broadgreen definitely feels like home: a place where staff and volunteers can give their best and where Visitors can feel safe, heard and able to access the help and support they need.

There have been some big changes within The Harbour team this year. Our CEO, Claire Garrett, and myself as Chair of Trustees, have indicated our intention to step down in the coming financial year which has brought our focus to operable succession planning to sustain The Harbour through its next phases of development. Within our staff team, Holly Grey moved on and Rebecca Chick and Fouad Khashah joined us.

As an organisation that reacts to the constantly changing landscape of asylum legislation and media rhetoric relating to forced migration, 2023/24 has been a year like no other. 'Stopping the Boats' and 'clearing the backlog' have been the backdrop to all political discourse, with the Safety of Rwanda Act and Illegal Migration Act coming to life, along with changes in Home Office processes with 'Streamlined Asylum Processing Questionnaires' and a reduction in the Notice-to-Quit period from 28 to 7 days for new refugees.

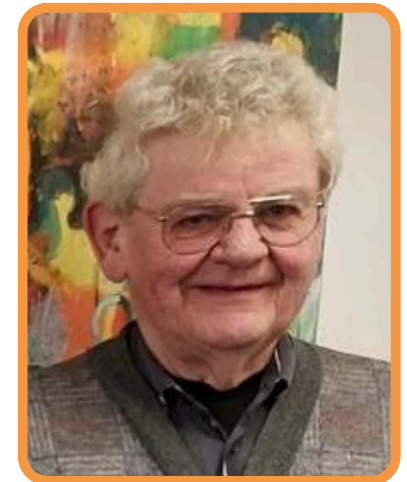
Fortunately, 7-day evictions were reversed in December, after leaving many people street homeless during the coldest months. As well as being totally confusing and stressful for our Visitors, staff and volunteers, the ever-changing process and policy environment was further compounded by the collapse of LegalAid with many firms closing, or being unable to take on new case-work.

A positive development this year has been the establishment of the South West Immigration Alliance (SWIA), coordinated by Bristol Law Centre and funded by Justice Together, set up with the aim of improving Legal Literacy among refugee support organisations in the South West. Partners within the alliance spread from Gloucester, through to Cornwall and all face very similar challenges. We are better equipped to support our Visitors in navigating the asylum process from being part of SWIA.

All of our services are designed with and for our Visitors, making sure that all voices are heard. We cannot hope to change the course of someone's life, but hope that our impact demonstrates that the UK is a place of kindness and welcome and that, by engaging with us, people feel better equipped to build safe and thriving new lives within the community.

I can never offer enough thanks to our funders, regular givers, staff, volunteers and supporters, all of whom make The Harbour Project the vibrant and vital place that it is. Forced migration and asylum are a consequence of humanity at its very worst. The Harbour Project, hopefully, is an example of humanity at its best in the face of such atrocities.

David Rowlands,
Chair of Trustees



OUR VISITORS - THE REASON WE EXIST

We use the term **'Visitor'** when referring to the people who use our Charity's services. We welcome people to The Harbour Project as we would welcome visitors to our homes: reflecting the Charity's values of being warm and welcoming, inclusive and egalitarian and focused upon Visitors' interests and needs. The term also speaks to how our Visitors define the work that we do and the priorities that we set.

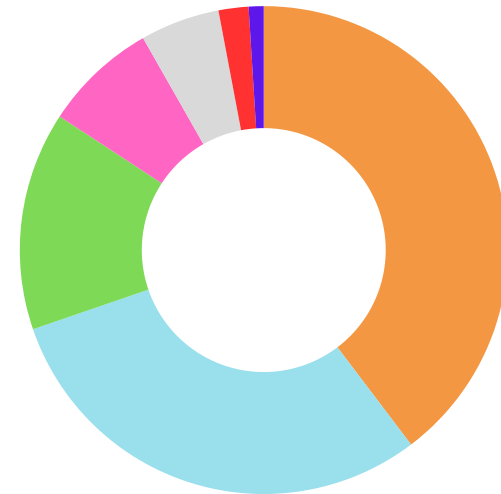
Our vision is that our Visitors have the best possible chance of **a fair hearing, a fair outcome from their asylum claim, and a fair future** in the UK.

Our Visitors come from 77 different countries. 48% of our people came from Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Sudan. During the year 1,480 people attended The Harbour Project, including 629 who newly registered with us. 58% of new arrivals came from Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, Syria and Eritrea.

There were 437 grants of Leave to Remain (or other forms of protection) - 33% more than in 2022/23. Streamlined Questionnaires from the Home Office focused on asylum claimants from 7 countries: Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, Libya & Eritrea which accounted for 64% of all positive decisions.

Overall, there were 19,514 individual onsite attendances at The Harbour Project. Visitors came to seek help and advice, join a class or activity, or enjoy our free café where they could socialise and meet other people.

WHERE OUR VISITORS COME FROM



Middle East & North Africa	39.7%
Sub-Saharan Africa	30.1%
South Asia	14.5%
Europe & Central Asia	7.5%
Central America & Caribbean	5.3%
East Asia	2%
North America	1%

OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES

The Harbour Project is a Swindon-based registered charity (CIO) providing advice, support, practical help and friendship to people who have claimed asylum or have Refugee Status in the town.

Our **Charitable Objects** set out the framework for what we do and remain appropriate and relevant to our day-to-day work and the challenges that our Visitors face:

- To provide relief to Asylum Seekers and Refugees and their dependents who are in conditions of hardship and distress;
- To preserve and protect the physical and mental health of Asylum Seekers and Refugees;
- To provide facilities for Asylum Seekers and Refugees for education, recreation and other leisure time occupations with the object of improving their conditions of life and assisting their inclusion into the wider community;
- To support the needs of Asylum Seekers and Refugees with appropriate information, advice and guidance.

Our **Strategic Priorities** for 2023-2024 were:

- Strengthen our public voice - particularly using experience from our Visitors to talk about wastage within the asylum system, the human impact of policies and the complexities of asylum processes, as well as stories about how our people make a positive contribution to the local community.
- Further build our Steps2Work capability - finding more volunteering opportunities, skills development, relationships with employers and job search skills.
- Build a wider network to help expand our offerings for mental health support.

- Reduce reliance upon paper-based records by digitising Visitor records.
- Absorb and adapt to changes in demand.
- Develop clearer succession plans.



OUR VALUES

VISITOR-FOCUSSED

We prioritise the interests of our Visitors in the decisions that we make, and recognise the importance of their involvement in decisions that may affect them. We take a strengths-based approach to help people to rebuild their lives.

WARM & WELCOMING

We are proud of our warm, family-like atmosphere. We are informal and friendly and aim to provide a safe, comforting environment for our Visitors to integrate into Swindon life in ways that are beneficial to everyone.

Underpinning the informality and friendship, we also pride ourselves on the effectiveness, professionalism, integrity, depth and breadth of the services and advice that we offer.

INCLUSIVE & EGALITARIAN

We are non-judgemental and accepting. We seek to provide equality of opportunity to allow Visitors to access the help and advice that they need, specific to their circumstances.

We do not probe or ask detailed questions about events leading up to someone making a claim for asylum unless the Visitors chooses to share this with us.

We value our diverse board of trustees and staff team, and welcome volunteers from throughout the community, making use of their myriad of skills.

We build connections and work in partnership with other organisations whenever possible.

We actively engage with stakeholders in our management and planning to ensure that our provision remains relevant, valuable and appropriate.



OUR SERVICES HELP EQUIP OUR VISITORS WITH THE SKILLS AND RESILIENCE THAT THEY NEED TO REBUILD THEIR LIVES IN THE UK

At the core of our work is our week-day drop-in centre at Broadgreen Community Centre in Swindon. There are three key elements to our work: **Help and Advice, Personal Development, and Wellbeing.**

The most critical part of our work is to provide advice to our Visitors. We are accredited to OISC Level 1 (Asylum & Protection) which allows us to offer immigration advice on a limited range of matters. The specifics of each advice request varies from appointment to appointment and is largely determined by the immigration status of each Visitor.

Over the year we delivered **5,358** advice appointments supported by **488** hours of free translation help from our volunteers.



ASYLUM APPOINTMENT STATS

1,106 Immigration solicitors contacted

241 Bank accounts applied for

353 Times we supported with health matters

158 Times we helped people access asylum support

223 Times we helped people access education

REFUGEE APPOINTMENT STATS

492

Applications for mainstream benefits

110

Times we helped people obtain BRP (ID) Cards

143

Travel Documents applied for

479

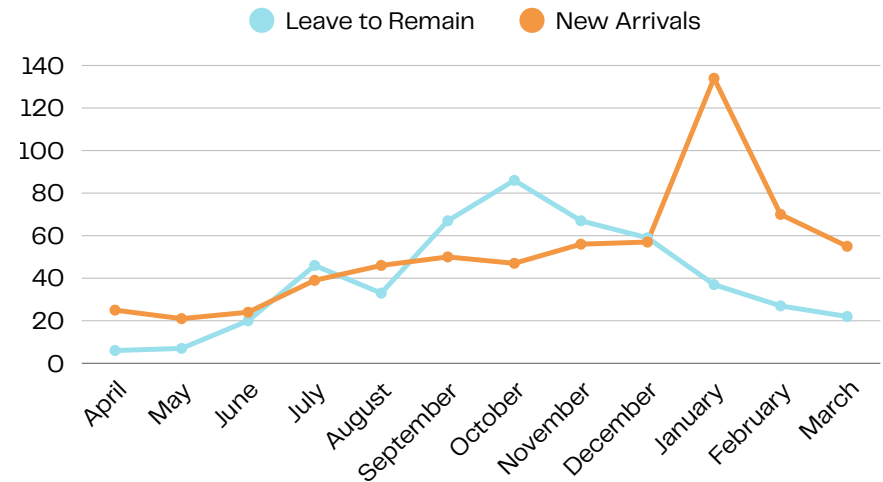
Times we helped people access housing

114

Driving Licence applications

We have seen the highest number of grants of Leave to Remain that we have ever recorded. In the summer months, many people were granted status as a consequence of Streamlined Questionnaires issued by the Home Office in the previous months. As people were required to leave their Home Office accommodation, we saw a spike in homelessness, whilst at the same time welcoming many new arrivals who refilled the Asylum Support accommodation. This was an especially challenging time for our Visitors and Staff. Towards the end of the year, two hotels in the town centre were closed at very short notice with the residents being 'decanted' to other accommodation in different towns.

LEAVE TO REMAIN AND NEW ARRIVALS



We have seen an increase in the proportion of families that seek our support. Over 40% of our people are part of a family unit and we have welcomed 67 new families to Harbour this year, including 198 children. In addition, as the grant rate for Leave to Remain increased, so did the number of family reunions. The support needs of families present additional challenges: interfacing with schools, nurseries, health services, and more safeguarding concerns. Our **Women's Engagement Lead** has proven to be an absolutely crucial role in the team, being the first point of contact for women and drawing upon specialist knowledge and relationships with other agencies to support this cohort. Our weekly Women's Group has been attended **505 times by 108 different women**. A particular highlight of the year was a 9 week floristry course for 10 women funded and delivered by Bread & Roses. We were also able to hold a number of events for families during school holidays including a wonderful magic show at Easter attended by 65 people.



Our **Young Visitor Engagement Lead** supports people between 16 and 25, many of whom claimed asylum in the UK before they were 18 (defined as Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children [UASC], by the Home Office).

101 UASCs engaged with us during the year. Where age is disputed, young people are entitled to a legal age assessment to determine their age, undertaken by two social workers with the support of an Appropriate Adult. As well as our Young Visitor Engagement Lead, we have trained a number of our volunteers to be able to act as Appropriate Adults in age assessments. A number of new arrivals into the asylum support hotels have declared to us that they are under the age of 18, so having the ability to work quickly with local social services and provide continuity through being an Appropriate Adult, has really helped to build trusting relationships with some of our most vulnerable Visitors.

As well as support navigating the technical aspects of Home Office processes relating to UASCs, we also offer a weekly Youth Group which was attended by **92 different people** during the year.



Our **Steps2Work Programme** has been busier than ever helping people to develop skills, build connections and be ready to enter the employment market once Leave to Remain is granted. Overall, we provided **548 Steps2Work advice sessions**. Asylum Seekers are forbidden from working but are able to volunteer with a range of not-for-profit organisations. Over 100 volunteer placements were underway during the course of the year with organisations such as **Great Western Hospital, British Heart Foundation, Canal Trust, The Night Shelter and Mechanics Institute**. As well as running our own Employability Skills course, some of our people successfully completed courses in First Aid, Fire Safety and School Support Work. A new partnership was also established with the Refugee Employability Programme, a Home Office initiative to support Refugees in finding work and tackling the barriers that hold people back.

Also, within the Advice Team, we have worked hard to digitise all Visitor records, avoiding the need for transposing from hand-written notes, scanning and printing, all of which takes more time and paper. This change has been absorbed pretty seamlessly, with the additional benefit of being able to readily retrieve the most up-to-date information and also allowing us to balance workloads more easily.

The opportunity to learn and develop new skills encourages positive mental well-being and helps people on their journey to integration into life in the UK. **25 volunteer teachers** delivered English classes across a range of ability levels to **347 students, who collectively attended 3,829 times**. 3 maths teachers supported 18 different people in one-on-one or small group settings. There were also 170 attendances at computing classes.

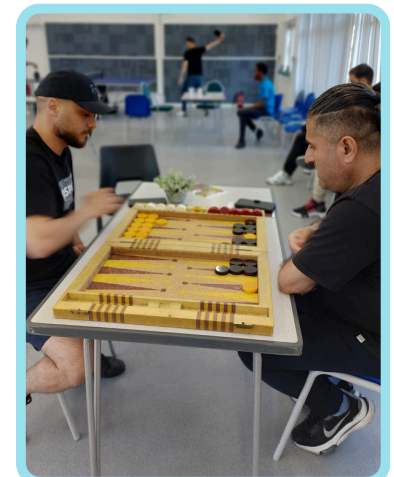
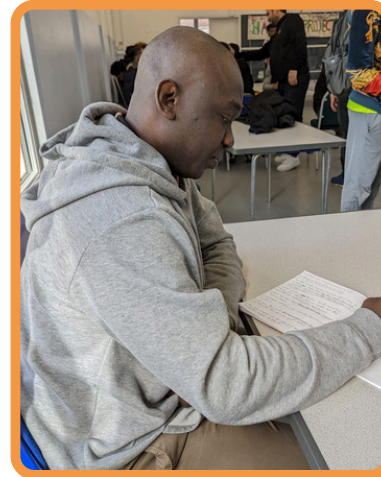
Football has been a mainstay of life at Harbour and is often the first thing that men (and sometimes women) engage with after registering with us. We have expanded our football provision to two weekly sessions, the second session is led by one of our Visitors who completed an FA coaching qualification.

A new addition to our programme of activities this year has been the creation of an LGBTQ+ support group. This group is a vital life line and opportunity to form friendships for people who otherwise find the asylum system especially isolating and lonely.

Along with much of the rest of the country, we celebrated the coronation of King Charles with a party in May 2023, which was held in our weekly café.



1,244 Free Vodafone SIM cards provided to our Visitors



53 Private counselling sessions offered to 12 Visitors by IPSUM



1,189 Attendances by 139 people at football training



You will be forever in our hearts. Please continue doing this, people like us needs you.

Harbour Visitor

EXPANDING OUR REACH THROUGH COMMUNITY & PARTNERSHIPS

Integration into UK life for our Visitors also takes community acceptance, underpinned by an ecosystem of specialist organisations and supporters, helping people to create their own friendships and networks, building independence and self-reliance to go on to successfully rebuild their lives and thrive in their new world. We are privileged to work with many amazing teams within the public sector as well as not-for-profit groups to make early interventions into housing and homelessness, education and schooling, a myriad of health issues, debt and money management advice, mental health support and access to volunteering opportunities.

We have tremendous support from many different faith groups, schools and other local groups, along with partners all of whom go above and beyond to raise awareness, funds, and offer a hand of friendship to our Visitors. We were a beneficiary of a number of Rotary events; Wiltshire Wildlife Trust funded a 6-week programme of nature-based activities; The British Computing Society created a workspace within their offices for people to get online; and our footballers took part in the Mayor's Charity Tournament.

As recognition for our work in helping Refugees to build life and employability skills, our CEO, Claire Garrett, was invited to a reception for community champions hosted by The Rt Hon Michael Gove at 10 Downing Street.

This year, we saw the installation of a mural on the outside of Broadgreen Community Centre. With the theme of 'Compassion' and coordinated by local artist Sue Bardwell, a team of Visitors worked together to create a really impactful piece of art that was unveiled during Refugee Week.

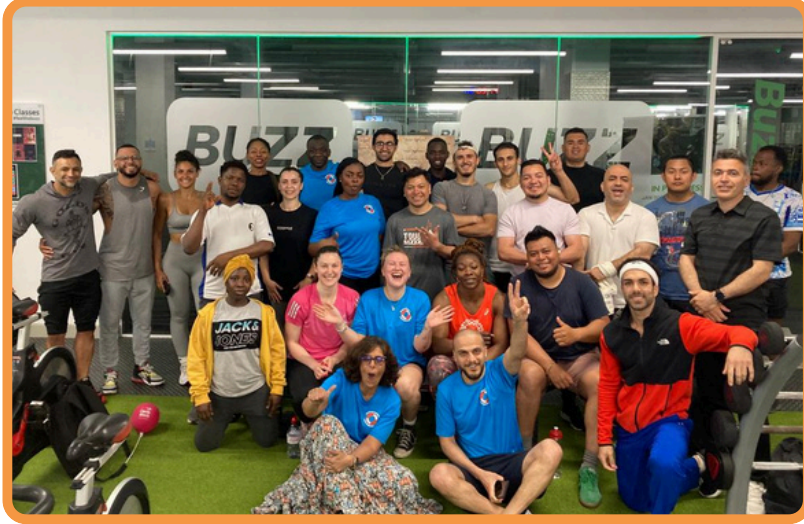


Buzz Gym arranged a 4,800 mile cycle from "Kabul to Swindon"

BUZZ

Zurich offered volunteering days for their staff, hosting a summer BBQ





SWIA

South West Immigration Alliance

The Harbour Project became an inaugural member of the South West Immigration Alliance (SWIA) in September 2023. SWIA is a project funded by the Justice Together Initiative to make immigration advice more accessible in the South West. This project aims to establish a more coordinated, collaborative and sustainable legal advice ecosystem to ensure equitable access to justice for those that need it most.



SWINDON

BOROUGH COUNCIL

In response to the increasing levels of homelessness that new Refugees were experiencing, we strengthened our relations with Swindon Borough Council's Housing Team. We developed a more effective referral pathway, and greatly benefitted from having a staff member from their Early Interventions Team establishing a weekly presence at Harbour to speak with Visitors who were are risk of homelessness.

OUR PEOPLE ARE OUR GREATEST ASSET, BRINGING DIVERSE EXPERTISE AND SKILLS THROUGH A WIDE RANGE OF EXPERIENCES

TRUSTEES

The Harbour Project Trustees met 6 times during the year. Meeting agendas are managed on an annual cycle with standing items such as financial performance and risk discussed at each meeting. Our vice-chair of trustees, **Faisal Nawaf Mayed** resigned in January 2024 and three new trustees were appointed to the board: **Farzin Rahmini-Shirazi** in May 2023; **Nabi Mohammed Duski** in July 2023 and **Gurpreet Singh Nijjar** in November 2023.

We were able to access consultancy support through the Lloyds Bank Foundation Enhance Programme, focussed on enhancing Board development, strategic outlook and governance practises, as well as succession planning. This has proven instrumental in considering the frequency of meetings, construction of agendas and how to make use of everyone's time and skills through the establishment of sub-committees.

VOLUNTEERS

We have greatly benefitted from the ongoing support of our incredible volunteers, with **82 people** offering their time. All volunteers require satisfactory completion of a DBS before they are able to work with our Visitors. We conducted a volunteer survey and held a number of volunteer get-togethers to ensure views are heard and that our volunteers experience with us is as good as it can possibly be.

People have many different motivations for volunteering with us. Many feel frustrated by the 'hostile environment' and want to take action locally to show Asylum Seekers that they are welcome.



6,600

Volunteering hours
given to Harbour

STAFF

There were a number of changes to our staff team during the year. As Visitor numbers grew and churn rates increased, we rebalanced workloads to ensure that members of the team have the opportunity to develop and learn new skills, whilst keeping Visitor needs at the heart of our operations. After three years as our Young Visitor Engagement Lead, **Holly Grey** left us in November 2023 to pursue her career elsewhere. **Rebecca Chick** joined us in January 2024 as our new Young Visitor Engagement Lead.

We have wanted to establish a clearer career path into and through The Harbour Project for people with Lived Experience of the asylum system. When recruiting for our Youth Lead and Receptionists roles we have given priority to applicants with Lived Experience, an approach that has worked really well for us. This year **Fouad Khashah** joined the team as Receptionist, meaning that **Micael Rostami** was able to move to a front-line Advisor role, strengthening the Advice Team with a breadth of new skills and insight.



The people. Whether that's staff, other volunteers or visitors. I get so much out of meeting people with varying experiences and backgrounds.

Harbour Volunteer

PATRONS	Lord Michael Wills	Nicky Alberry DL
TRUSTEES	David Rowlands Chair of Trustees	Faisal Nawaf Mayed Vice Chair of Trustees (resigned in January 2024)
	Ian Robertson Treasurer	Mari Williams Secretary to Trustees
	Hadiza Mahuta	Emma Graham
	Nabi Mohammed Duski (Appointed 28th July 2023)	Farzin Rahmini-Shirazi (Appointed 4th May 2023)
	Gurpreet Singh Nijjar (Appointed 24th November 2023)	
FREELANCE SUPPORT	Robert Raynes Independent Examiner	Rachael Taylor Bookkeeper (Simply Bookkeeping)
	Kerry Marsh Counsellor (Ipsum)	Albano Abrantes Football Coach (ASA Sports)

STAFF	<p>Claire Garrett CEO</p>	<p>Nan Bains Operations Manager</p>
	<p>Jaz Sumal Business Manager</p>	<p>Giles Matthews Advisor</p>
	<p>Mindy Sandhu Advisor</p>	<p>Tom Bain Advisor</p>
	<p>Holly Grey Young Visitor Engagement Lead (Left 17th November 2023)</p>	<p>Mia O'Sullivan Women's Engagement Lead and Positive Mental Wellbeing Coordinator</p>

STAFF	<p>Stella Mortazavi Steps2Work Lead</p>	<p>Micael Rostami Youth Lead and Advisor (Appointed as Receptionist / Junior Advisor on 22nd May 2023)</p>
	<p>Ann Meeus Advice Coordinator</p>	<p>Fouad Khashah Receptionist (Appointed 6th November 2023)</p>
	<p>Rebecca Chick Young Visitor Engagement Lead (Appointed 29th January 2024)</p>	

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW 2023-24

This year was our first full year in Broadgreen Community Centre, following our move from St Lukes Hall in January 2023. We expected our operational costs to increase: higher rent, utility bills, and accountability for services such as waste management and safety checks. £30,939 was moved from Designated Reserves Unrestricted Funds in line with our Policies set out in our Annual Financial Statements. In comparison to 2022/23, costs increased year on year by 6%, demonstrating our attention to financial management and cost control. Cost per head per Visitor, however, held flat at £229.

Our annual contract with Swindon Borough Council was awarded in summer 2022 for £46k per year for 5 years. At the beginning of the year, SBC awarded us a one-off additional payment of £46k, following an additional payment to them from Central Government in relation to support services for Refugees and Asylum Seekers. This put us in a strong position financially from the outset of the year.

After focussed effort during the first three months, we secured a new three year grant of £75k from Lloyds Bank Foundation in July 2023.

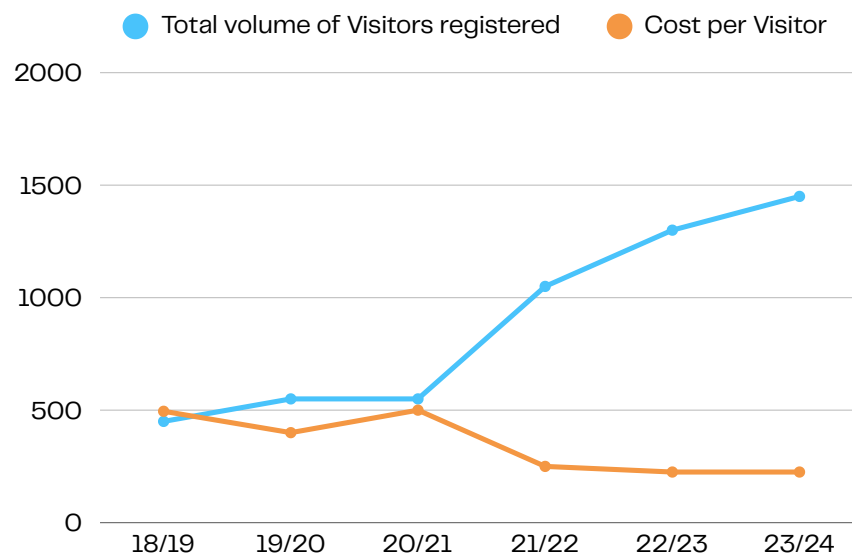
As in previous years, around 88% of all of our costs relate to people, premises and other overheads (such as printing, insurances, and subscriptions). Being able to meet the expenses associated with these core aspects of our operations, we are able to provide a wide range of support for our Visitors at minimal incremental cost.

We have a diverse income portfolio with a mix of Public Sector funders (including Swindon Borough Council and Wiltshire Council), large multi-year grants (from organisations such as National Lottery, Lloyds Bank Foundation, the Blagrove Trust and the Zurich Community Trust), smaller grants which are often single-year and project

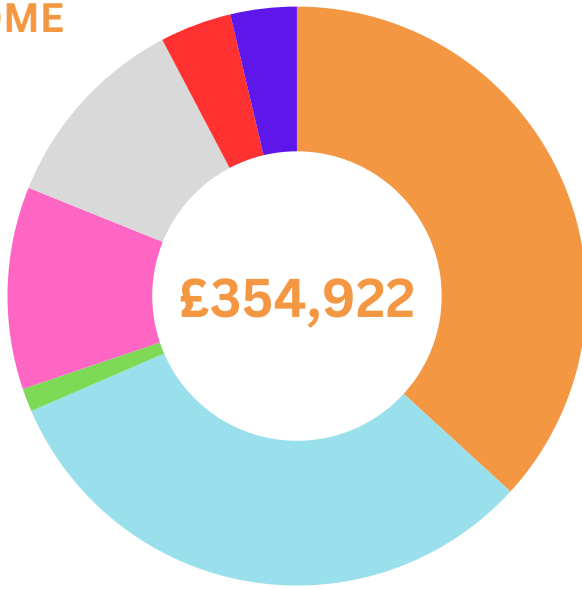
specific, alongside income from events, regular donations and through our relationships with local schools, churches and organisations such as The Rotary Club. Every penny received helps ensure that we can continue to offer vital support to our Visitors. A copy of our Annual Financial Statements 2023/24 has been submitted to the Charity Commission and is also available on our website.

The Trustees are grateful to Ian Robertson, our Treasurer; Rachael Taylor from Simply Bookkeeping; and Independent Examiner Robert Raynes for the preparation of financial statements.

OUR COST TO SUPPORT EACH VISITOR HAS REDUCED AS PEOPLE ENGAGING HAS INCREASED OVER 6 YEARS

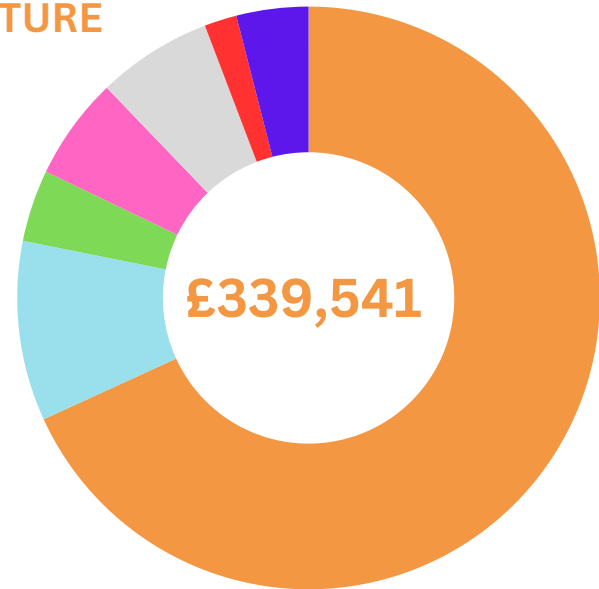


INCOME



Major Grants	£130,604
Public Sector	£112,470
Gifts & Donations	£4,720
Smaller Grants	£40,061
Gift Aid Donations	£39,684
Events	£14,145
Other Income	£13,238

EXPENDITURE



Staff Costs	£253,091
Premises & Rent	£19,834
IT & Telephony	£13,089
Overheads	£5,954
Visitor Classes & Activities	£23,887
Food & Cleaning	£5,954
Other	£19,514

THANK YOU!

We at The Harbour Project are incredibly grateful for the support of our regular donors, the many different funding bodies that ensure we can continue to provide the necessary support for our Visitors, and those who have bought different items from our Shopping List to be given out to our Visitors. The amount of compassion, empathy, and care shown by people and organisations towards people seeking asylum and those with Refugee Status never fails to amaze us. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

To our fantastic team of volunteers, we could not do the work we do without your energy, enthusiasm, and dedication. The time that you give to Harbour allows us to provide English and Maths classes, run many different activities, communicate with people in a wide variety of languages, and respond to a variety of questions and queries that our Visitors have. More importantly, your presence maintains a warm and welcoming space for those who have been forced to leave their homes and have found themselves in Swindon. We are thankful to each and every one of you!





**THE
HARBOUR
PROJECT**

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HARBOUR