

**IMPACT
REPORT
2023/24**



THE YEAR IN NUMBERS



INTRODUCTION

by Duncan McAuley, CEO

Change has been the hallmark of this last year. We've launched a new service, Young Lives, supporting families and young people; we've started delivering employability work; been recognised in the North East Charity Awards and even seen a change of Government!

We sadly said goodbye to our wonderful patron the Right Revd Paul Butler, the former Bishop of Durham, at our Winter celebration event in December 2023. We had a chance to thank Paul for his committed support for Action Foundation for many years and wish him health and happiness in his retirement.

The changes we celebrate the most are those in the lives of the people we support. Each week we see confidence being built, skills gained and opportunities taken. We see refugee statuses being granted, jobs awarded, and families reunited.

We're really proud to have made a difference for over 3,200 asylum seekers, refugees and migrants we support across our services.

All that we have achieved is only possible thanks to the dedication of our committed staff team and volunteers. We're in the business of seeing lives changed and the

breadth and depth of our people; the compassion and experience they bring is central to everything we do. Thank you.

The sense of optimism in the wake of the general election is palpable and after years of progressively negative policy toward migrants, seeing the Rwanda Bill scrapped in the first 48 hours was an encouraging start. We're cautiously hopeful that there's more to come, but either way, we'll be there to do everything we can to provide a welcome and support to people seeking sanctuary here in the North East.



D. McAuley
Duncan

A LETTER FROM OUR CHAIR

by David Lyall

The Action Foundation community is an amazing integration of staff, volunteers, friends and partners. Many of you who support us have lived in the North East all your lives and many others have come here from distant parts and made here your home. This diversity is our strength, combined with a shared view of the unique value of every human being and a responsibility to show welcome and hospitality.

Times change, governments come and go, stories hit the media in a blaze of attention and then vanish. Amidst all this turmoil, we simply keep going, day in, day out, listening and learning from our clients, supporting them as they show such courage and creativity in overcoming huge challenges, and celebrating their many successes and breakthroughs.

People finding security, families reunited, training and work opportunities, the right to remain here with us and build a new life. We and our clients, together as one family, are bringers of hope to the region. So, thank you everyone – you may be working for us all week, you may contribute once a year, but whatever it is – time, skill, financial support, prayer, encouragement, leadership, wisdom - we are truly grateful to you.

Finally, as well as joining Duncan in welcoming our Young Lives team to Action Foundation, who really are bringing life to us all, I would like to welcome two wonderful new trustees – Dr Helen Young and Sally Hamilton who have added great experience and first-class values to our Board and are already making a vital contribution in helping us improve our services and address key strategic decisions.

And so, we look to the year ahead, keenly aware of the colossal challenges facing our clients, but resolutely determined to continue to make a difference, one life at a time. It's going to be a good year, a year of renewed hope.



D Lyall
David

GIVING PEOPLE A HOME



OVERALL IN OUR TWO ACCOMMODATION SERVICES:



We delivered **5,879** hours of support work.



91% of all residents moved on positively.



We supported **118 people** in our **58 bedspaces**.

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HOUSING



We provided supported accommodation to **19 destitute asylum seekers**.

**Where people were either granted refugee status, re-engaged with the asylum system or chose to return to their home country.*



88% of those who completed a legal review had a positive outcome.*



“**GETTING THE KEY TO MY HOUSE, IT FEELS LIKE NEW LIFE. IT IS EVERYTHING.**”

Mustafa's story is an example of the way our accommodation service cares for people as they transition from being an asylum seeker to gaining refugee status.

He lives in one of our Letting properties but prior to getting refugee status was a Housing client.

It's eight years since he fled Afghanistan for the safety of the UK. "Many people were kidnapped," he says. "Or killed inside their houses. We find out life is not safe anymore. If I stayed I would have to follow Sharia law."

In 2021 when pictures of the Taliban takeover hit our TV screens, Mustafa was, understandably, plunged straight back into the mental torment he thought he'd left behind in his home country, five years earlier. He recalls: "At the time Afghanistan was taken over by the Taliban, I was very distressed and I couldn't sleep. I spoke to my Action Foundation support worker and she said, 'Mustafa, you need to go for a walk' and she took me to Sunderland to show me a refugee place. She said, 'Twice a week you can come here for a coffee and biscuits and you can talk to people'.

"She bought a cup of coffee for me. She was understanding and that was a big thing."

All our support workers receive trauma-informed training. Mustafa's support worker also helped him with other practical things like getting an ID card and registering for English lessons.

When he gained refugee status, after several failed applications, he was delighted but it meant he had to leave our Housing project. Luckily, Action Foundation found him a room in one of our Letting properties for newly recognised refugees where he now lives with two others.

He said: "Action Foundation is changing people's lives by picking up people who might be homeless. To rent a house, landlord is asking, 'Where do you live?' They want to know, 'Did you pay properly?' - and on top of that they need a deposit. There's no possibility of this for people like me." Now Mustafa is studying hard at college to further improve his English and hopes to find work as an electrician or in construction.

"Getting the key to my house, it feels like new life. It is everything," he added.





We supported **91 newly recognised refugees**, helping 22 to move into independent living.



We helped arrange **four family reunions** for people whose relatives were in other countries.



WHY I BECAME A LANDLORD

We rely on a network of philanthropic landlords who rent houses to Action Foundation for us to let to newly-recognised refugees. **Fiona Hall** is one of them.

Q: Why did you become a philanthropic landlord?

A: A lot of problems people have occur after they've been granted asylum status. That's a very difficult period and I realised what a valuable job Action Foundation was doing in helping those people get accommodation, when they were really left high and dry.

It occurred to me this was something I could do. I didn't need the money (from a flat I sold) straight away. It was hopefully money I would need a long time in the future, when I might need care. In the meantime, I could do something useful with it so I had some conversations with Action Foundation and together we identified a property.

I bought a Tyneside flat and I was so pleased to be able to do this because I knew the charity wanted properties but also it was a solution that worked for me.

Q: What are the benefits of being a landlord with us?

A: If you buy a property, normally you've then got to manage it and deal with tenants, whose boiler might burst in the middle of the night. There's quite a lot of responsibility that comes with it and if you don't want that, you may have to pay an agency to do that for you.

With Action Foundation it's really a win-win because they manage the

property for me so anything that happens, like something breaking down, they are the people in the middle who deal with that - I don't have that daily responsibility for looking after it.

Q: What difference do you feel you make as a landlord?

A: For refugees who are single it's very, very hard to get that first step on the ladder. If you don't have that money for a deposit, you don't have the references, you don't have a previous record, how on earth do you get started?

You're not a priority for local authorities and I can understand how, after all that euphoria of being granted asylum status, people can end up on the street.

I think it's a fantastic opportunity just to be able to give people that first step-up. It's like an interim period for them. Once you've had somewhere to live, you're able to move forward and build up your life but the most important thing is to have somewhere to live right at the beginning.

Q: How straightforward is the process?

A: I'm responsible for things to do with the outside of the building like insurance, but Action Foundation looked after all the things you need to put in place as a landlord like electricity and gas certificates, locks on a multi-occupancy dwelling. I've been very impressed by their scrupulousness. The properties they have are run in the best possible way and it's been great to work with them.

I said I didn't want to make money out of it, but I didn't want to lose money either. So, I do charge Action Foundation rent and that means there's a certain amount of money in an account which, when repairs need to be made or the house needs painting, means I have money to pay for that.

I think different people will want to do different things. That was just my own circumstances. I just wanted to cover my costs. Sometimes people have inherited a property, or they can't sell one. I think if you are in that position, it really is a win-win for both you as the property owner and for Action Foundation.

GIVING KIDS A CHOICE



YOUNG LIVES



We engaged around **88 children and young people** in positive regular activities.



We supported **35 parents, carers and guardians.**



10 young people joined Young Lives youth leadership programme.



Since January 2024, we delivered **33 regular youth sessions and 36 sport and arts activities sessions.**

Young Lives is our newest service here at Action Foundation. Launched in January 2024, it provides specialised practical, emotional and social support for asylum seeking and refugee children, families and young people.

We offer regular youth groups in Newcastle and Gateshead, as well as residential and day trips and social and sporting activities like surfing and circus skills to enrich their lives.



MEET MAYAR

Mayar came to the UK with her mum and dad and three brothers from war-torn Libya four years ago aged only 12.

She is one of ten young people who sit on the youth leadership programme helping steer the direction of Young Lives under the guidance of Manager, Bridget Stratford MBE.

Mayar feels her English has improved hugely as a result of being involved in Young Lives alongside her confidence and ability to make friends.

"Young Lives is important for people who don't know how to speak English and it gives you confidence, and someone to talk with. It gives you a free place for you to have fun."

When she and her family arrived in the UK, lockdown was underway and it was difficult to meet people but as normality resumed, Maya's mum found out about Bridget's work and she began coming to sessions. Mayar has just begun learning to skateboard and joined the female-only Solace Surf Club – a joint venture between Action Foundation and Yonder Surf School.

"It's only for girls, so I feel comfortable and it's nice. This is the first time I do it. By doing new things like this I can improve my English, meet new people

and it makes you more comfortable with others."

Mayar and other members of Young Lives' leadership programme were recently invited to speak about their experiences of school and looking for employment to members of Newcastle City Council's Work and Thrive partnership at Newcastle Civic Centre.

Bridget said: "Young Lives provides essential support for young people who are in need of someone they can rely on and something to belong to. The activities we deliver provide a fun, safe space for children to play, be creative, try new things, stay healthy and make new friends.

"Through attending activities, the children's English ability and confidence improves as they begin to integrate. Some of our highlights this year include a trip to Edinburgh Zoo, our exciting youth club and the opening of our Surf School sessions. Above all, the development and implementation of our youth leadership programme has ensured that everything we have built has been with the young people's voice at the centre."

GIVING PEOPLE HOPE



interaction



2,415 people were supported through our casework by more than **33 volunteers**.



49% of case work was immigration issues, **20% was housing** or homelessness and **13% was financial wellbeing**.



Over 80% of volunteers were people with lived experience of migration.



Our volunteer barbers gave **630 free haircuts**.



InterAction welcomed **68 different nationalities**.



We recorded almost **4,000 attendances** at Drop-ins and delivered 47 Drop-Ins in Newcastle.



We dished up over **2,200 free hot meals** to clients.



ABDUL'S STORY

Each week Syrian asylum seeker Abdul Rahim gives up his time freely to volunteer at our InterAction Drop-in where he says he felt 'instantly welcomed with open arms'.

In common with many people who seek sanctuary in the UK, Abdul's story is one of fortitude and resilience in

the face of war and natural disaster. He says: "The Syria I grew up in is completely unrecognisable today.

I have memories of a loving home, with my mother nurturing my three sisters and two brothers, while my father worked as a dentist. Life was stable and very good for us.

"Then in March 2011, pro-democracy demonstrations broke out in Syria – with deadly consequences – and my family's world changed forever."

Abdul had been studying pharmacy in Pakistan but returned home to find 'a war zone'.

"I couldn't walk from one street to another without fearing for my life," he recalls.

His father urged him to return to Pakistan and finish his studies, which he did, graduating in December 2014. However, he couldn't get a visa to stay in Pakistan without returning to Syria to make the application in his home country.

"I knew I couldn't put myself in that danger, so I felt I had no alternative but to flee to southern Turkey in 2015."

Abdul worked there as a pharmacist and then in the humanitarian field for several years and in 2022 he married. But on 6th February 2023 his life was

uprooted for the second time after a devastating earthquake ravaged both Syria and Turkey. Abdul's home was destroyed.

"This is when I decided to come to the UK to try to study a Master's degree in Business Administration, relating to my previous humanitarian work. In October last year I packed up everything I owned once more and flew to the UK with my wife."

However, he soon realised he didn't have enough money to study and so had to apply for asylum instead. "I still can't go back to my home country, so this felt like the only option left," he says. Because asylum seekers do not have the right to work, Abdul has tried to volunteer his time as much as possible to help the local community.

"I've volunteered in Jesmond Library, West End Refugee Service and then discovered Action Foundation, helping provide case work advice."

Abdul speaks Arabic, English, Urdu and Turkish – so he helps translate for others at Drop-in.

"It feels great to be able to give back within my local community," he says.



We expanded our work in South Tyneside this year thanks to funding from the Community Foundation Tyne and Wear and Northumberland (through the Dept for Culture, Media and Sport's Know Your Neighbourhood Fund).

Action Foundation welcomed Amelia Noake as Social Inclusion Officer whose role is to boost volunteering and tackle loneliness amongst refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants.

This builds on our existing work with South Tyneside Health Collaboration on behalf of the primary care networks improving links to health services.

IN 2023/4 WE:



Helped **43 people** through our service at South Tyneside to better navigate health and asylum pathways.



Enabled **32 social activities** for people such as sewing, cycling, First Aid training, cookery



Enabled **25 people** to volunteer in their communities and improve their own mental health.



MEET BIM

Abimbola, or Bim, is one of 43 asylum seekers learning new skills and hobbies in South Tyneside thanks to Action Foundation's new volunteering project.

Each week she can be found at NECA's Community Garden, planting and growing veg and her favourite flowers. She loves to take home eggs from the garden's chickens to share with her family and has introduced her children to events at the garden during school holidays.

Bim, who is 62 and from Nigeria, had never learnt to ride a bike, but through our volunteering project, she has finally started cycling thanks to our link-up with The Cycle Partnership's Learn2Ride scheme.

She even got her own bike and helmet, kindly restored and delivered by Tyneside Outdoors who provide fortnightly bike mechanic workshops - and bikes - to our Interaction South Tyneside participants.

As if this weren't enough, Bim has also completed a six-week beginners' sewing course with 'Quirkiness By Debs' and now has her own sewing machine thanks to InterAction South Tyneside.

Bim says meeting new people and connecting with different groups has significantly improved her loneliness and feelings of isolation.

"Volunteering is soul lifting for me. I love having a purpose to my days and something to tell my children when we talk after school. Volunteering helps me to focus my mind and my thoughts, improving my mental health and healing. I am learning new things every day."

Interaction South Tyneside has connected other clients to a range of opportunities - from cooking with Food Cycle to woodworking with Tyne Community Woodshed. One cricket lover has done grounds keeping and training at South Shields Cricket Club. The project has also provided accredited courses, such as First Aid at Work, through Rose Health and Safety Training Ltd and admin experience with Oxfam.



WE COULDN'T DO IT WITHOUT YOU!

We have an amazing community of donors and fundraisers, and we'd like to say a huge thank you for the thousands of pounds you've given to support our clients in the past year. Whether you

took on a personal challenge like the Great North Run, made a donation or attended one of our events, you are all AMAZING! Here's a snapshot of what you got up to...



£83,142

Total raised from regular donors, one-off donations and our community of fundraisers.



17 people ran the Great North Run for us raising over **£8,000**.



Bird artist, Katherine Rodger, donated her White Stork of Ukraine painting for a Refugee Week auction which raised a whopping £1,250. Law firm Muckle LLP donated over 26 hours of pro bono legal support worth £4k to enable us to run the auction.



We highlighted the plight of homelessness amongst refugees with our **'Raise the Roof' Winter Campaign** which was match funded by Aviva insurance company. The grand total was an amazing **£21,929**. We're grateful to all the churches, Aviva staff and businesses who held fundraising events to help us exceed our target.



We joined forces with **Tyneside Cinema** to show the Ken Loach film, *The Old Oak* and reached new supporters.



Whitley Bay artist and ESOL teacher Ann Winter held a fascinating **art exhibition**, *The Earth Belongs to Everyone* which brought in **£800**.



Stalwart supporter **Jon Sandwith** took on the **Yorkshire Three Peaks** to raise **£277**.

FUNDRAISING

Thank you to the following for their fundraising and in-kind support in 2023/4:

- Muckle LLP
- Clifford Chance
- Art for Refugees
- Aviva Community Fund
- Cool Blue
- Bellwoods, Whitley Bay
- King's Church, Durham
- Love Amelia
- Success4All Tyne Tea'ers
- Tyneside Cinema
- Behalla, Whitley Bay
- Trinity Methodist Church, Hexham
- North Standard
- Evangelical Fellowship Trust, Carlisle
- Newcastle Reform Synagogue

Could you fundraise for Action Foundation?

actionfoundation.org.uk/get-involved/fundraising

Follow this link for more information or email:

fundraising@actionfoundation.org.uk

We'd love to hear from you!



ACTION FOUNDATION TRAINING

In 2023/4 we expanded our Action Foundation Training offer to Sunderland City Council. We recruited a dedicated trainer, John Grummitt, to deliver sessions on UK Immigration, Cultural Competency and Trauma Informed Support.

"The training delivered by Action Foundation has been excellent with very positive feedback from participants. The training is well delivered, informative and powerful.

FAREWELL BISHOP PAUL

We said a fond farewell to the Right Revd Paul Butler who retired from being Bishop of Durham in February and also from being our Patron.

In his farewell speech to Action Foundation, he said the UK had a proud history of being a country of welcome to those who seek asylum.

"That is this country's history and anybody who traces their ancestry back several hundred years will normally find that, somewhere in their own history, someone arrived from another country and was welcomed in this country and contributed to it and that is part and parcel of what has made the United Kingdom the United Kingdom."

He added: "Action Foundation is the living example that the heartbeat of

If you would like more information on our training please contact us on info@actionfoundation.org.uk



Those who have completed the training have a better understanding of asylum seekers and refugees and are better equipped to support migrant communities. The inclusion of lived experience in the training is invaluable. I can't thank Action Foundation enough for delivering this informative training in a professional and engaging manner," Sunderland City Council.

the ordinary people of this nation is to welcome people, is to support them, to care for them, to love them, to meet them in their need.

"That's what Action Foundation does. That's what all of you who volunteer for it do. You seek to care, to welcome, to make things happen, to give people hope, to help people with clothing, to help people with language, to help people into jobs.

"So thank you for everything you do. It has been a real privilege being Patron of this organisation and I trust it will go from strength to strength in the future."



NORTH EAST CHARITY AWARDS SUCCESS!

Action Foundation was honoured with two prestigious titles at the 2023 North East Charity Awards.

Our dedicated Language & Learning volunteer, Libby Selman, scooped Charity Champion whilst former staff member, Abi Walker, won Rising Star. Libby has devoted her time to help refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants learn English and integrate into their new lives in the North East since Action Foundation began.

For her part, Abi raised tens of thousands of pounds to help clients through her business development role. At just 27 she was the youngest person on both Action Foundation's leadership team and Virgin Money Foundation's Board of Trustees. She now works with the charity Women's Aid.



IT IS ALL POSSIBLE BECAUSE OF YOU, THANK YOU!

- Aurum
- Asian Fund (Community Foundation Tyne and Wear and Northumberland)
- Changing Lives
- Clifford Chance LLP
- Curtin Parp (Community Foundation Tyne and Wear and Northumberland)
- Department for Media, Culture and Sport (Community Foundation Tyne and Wear and Northumberland)
- Garfield Weston Foundation
- Gateshead Council
- Hospital of God

- Lesley and Lilian Manning Trust
- Newby Trust
- Newcastle City Council
- Newcastle Law Centre
- North East Combined Authority
- Migrant Help
- P&G Fund (Community Foundation Tyne and Wear and Northumberland)
- Paul Hamlyn Foundation
- Pea Green Boat/The Temple (Community Foundation Tyne and Wear and Northumberland)
- Porticus

- Refugee Action
- Sir James Knott Trust
- South Tyneside Primary Care Network
- The National Lottery Community Fund
- The Platten Family Fund (Community Foundation Tyne and Wear and Northumberland)
- The Wellesley Trust (Community Foundation Tyne and Wear and Northumberland)
- The Tuixen Foundation
- Virgin Money Foundation
- Your Homes Newcastle
- 1989 Willan Trust (Community Foundation Tyne and Wear and Northumberland)



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The Queen's Award
for Voluntary Service