2022 Report for the
"Religions for Peace Multi-Religious Humanitarian Fund – Health, Wellbeing, and Culture for Psycho-Social Support to Refugeed in the UK"

Name of Project: HTB & Hillsong Community Café – Asylum Seeker Support

Project Location: St Luke's Church, Earl's Court, London

Implementing Partner: Hillsong Church UK, in collaboration with HTB Church Earl's Court

Timeframe for Project: June 2022 – February 2023

Executive Summary:

Background

Context:

To deal with the influx of asylum seekers to the UK and the backlog in accommodation capacity due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Home Office is temporarily housing asylum seekers in hotels across the UK. Currently, close to 100 of such hotels are being used across Greater London and the South of England, housing thousands of asylum seekers. There is a significant number of hotels in West London, around the Earls Court, Hammersmith, Kensington, and Paddington areas. Whilst the pandemic is largely behind us, the backlog in asylum claims has not and we have beneficiaries who have been waiting on the Home Office to process their case for over 2 years, all the while being confined to their accommodation and little opportunity to work, study or build their life. Many of our beneficiaries suffer from isolation and mental health issues due to this protracted situation they find themselves in.

Earl's Court Community Café

To respond to the local need HTB and Hillsong Church UK set up a weekly community café at St Luke's Church in October 2021. This is a safe place where asylum seekers in the area can access English Conversation Classes, practical support & advice, and ethnic food. Currently, we see a weekly attendance of 70-90 asylum seeker guests attend the café. Many come from nearby home office accommodation but we have guests join from all over London or even further afield such as Surrey, Sussex and other Home Counties to access the community and support the Café provides.

Our Community Café welcomes of a range of nationalities, ages and religions and all come together in one place and mix with each other. The asylum seeker population is diverse and reflects the trends of displacement across the globe. By approximation, some of the main countries our guests come from are: Sudan, Iran, Eritrea, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Kuwait, Afghanistan, Central America (ie El Salvador / Guatemala / Honduras) or West Africa (ie The Gambia / Senegal / Guinea)

The composition of our group of beneficiaries changes over months as Home Office transfers

people in and out of the area and over the last year we have seen an influx of Central Americans and Iranians come into the area, as well as more Afghans and female asylum seekers.

Generally speaking, the religious background is a mix between Muslim, Christian [protestant/catholic/evangelical] and Orthodox Christian, making the Community Café a unique space where asylum seekers, often from predominantly monocultural backgrounds have the opportunity to interact with people with different ethnicities and faiths.

Whilst at the start of our project the majority of beneficiaries were male, a reflection of the asylum seeker population in the UK, over the last year we have seen a steep increase of women and children joining us. On a typical night around 30-40% are female. Different age groups are represented, whilst most of the beneficiaries would be in the 18-35 age group we have a handful of people over 50 years of age and occasionally a number children & infants attend.

Project Overview:

Together with the *Religions For Peace* UK Interfaith Youth Network and their Humanitarian Fund we set out to supplement the existing Community Café with a series of 5 social events that would provide psycho-social support, build belonging to local areas, signpost to services and improve wellbeing amongst our asylum seeking guests.

From July 2022 to February 2023 we organised the 5 events which included a Summer Celebration, Beach Day Out, Interfaith Fun Run, End of Year Celebration and a Museum Trip. The events are described in more detail below.

Summer Celebration - 11 July 2022

The Event

On Monday 11 July 2022 at the Community Café we had our 'Summer Celebration' thanks to the incredible support from Religions for Peace. We used the big church space making it feel like a special event and giving more space for food and dance. On the night we discussed what cultural celebrations and customs look like and with many nationalities and backgrounds represented a rich exchange of traditions happened. The event coincided with Eid-Al-Fitr around the same time and inspired the food (lamb) on the night and was a great opportunity for our guests and volunteers to learn more about the Muslim faith whilst discussing various religious traditions. The night was accompanied with a delicious meal, Sudanese music and salsa dancing from our Latin American guests. It was a great celebration giving some relief to those who have fled their countries and was a moment of connection between a wide range of people with different ethnic and religious backgrounds.

The People

- 110 people were present at the event, of which 87 were guests who are in the asylum system and 23 volunteers from HTB and Hillsong Church
- Guests attending ranged from whole range of nationalities and backgrounds including Sudanese, Eritrean, Salvadorian, Kuwaiti, Yemen, Iranian, Syrian and many more

Media

- More photos found on https://www.dropbox.com/sh/nrn6a52cu0zs2oo/AAA-i_eyEoakheIFA2d3tfZXa?dl=0







Testimonials

Thank you for the event last night. What I liked the most was food and the lamb in particular. I really enjoyed it and thank you so much for your effort and support. 🌺💐

I think yesterday everything was great. Thank you so much for everything you did for us. This community made us feel like one family.

Bournemouth Beach Trip – 6 August 2022

The Event

We organised an all day trip to the beach in Bournemouth – many of our guests had expressed a desire to see more outside of London and see the beachside of the UK. Our guests are not in a financial position to do any day trips normally, so this was a special day for them. We organised a coach to take us from London to Bournemouth, where we spent the day on the beach playing games such as volleyball, football, beach tennis, go for a swim or just hang out and relax. We provided a sandwich lunch and typical fish & chips at the end of the day. It was great to see all our guests interact with each other despite background, ethnicity, or age. The guests really enjoyed being able to go to get outside of London, visit the beautiful beach, play games and swim in the sea

The People

- In total we had 52 people join on the day which included 9 volunteers
- The guests came from a range of different backgrounds including Syria, Sudan, Eritrea, El Salvador, Iran and Somalia. Different faiths were represented as well predominantly those of a Muslim and (orthodox) Christian faith.
- We had a number of families join, especially from a Latin American and Iranian back ground (who tend to arrive as a family unit coming to the UK, compared to some of the beneficiaries from African or Middle Eastern countries of origin)

Media

- Click on the picture or link below to hear from some guests how they enjoyed the day: https://www.dropbox.com/sh/a3s8919bdotmxsb/AABwpzwJh7jc6yQrDybT8dIJa?dl=0&preview=IMG_8152.MOV







- More photos / videos found on: https://www.dropbox.com/sh/a3s8919bdotmxsb/AABwpzwJh7jc6yQrDybT8dIJa?dl=0

Testimonials

This my first time to be in the beach. I really enjoyed .

So much appreciate for everyone making this happen 🙏 God bless you all

Guys thank you. You really made our day brighter and cheerfully. Thanks for your contributions and thoughtfulness. I say that coz, mostly we are forgotten but through yours donations and the unforgettable commitment of this wonderful team made us feel that there are some people with great heart somewhere who care other deprived ones. These and many other such activities motivates our mind and as well as play crucial help by overcoming our challenges and previous PTSD. God bless and thank you once again.

Hello, thank you for thinking of us. We had a great time. Thank you very much

Hi , It was very nice trip and I think everyone has enjoyed a lot like me and really thank you all from the heart ❤️

Hi, thank you today was a good day for everyone thank you

My family and I are very grateful for your help and for allowing us to enjoy a very special day, from the bottom of our hearts we wish your whole family many blessings. Our baby Ian enjoyed every minute of it, thank you very much.

This is my best day in the UK I really enjoyed it

Thanks for everything you've done for us But

We really missed @Niwaeli Sumary . We wish she was here with us

I want say again thanks thanks thanks for all that you have dane for us

It's absolutely very nice trip, and we can thank the organizers enough.

Best wishes to you 💘

Interfaith Fun Run – 29 August 2022

The Event

On 29 August 2022 we attended The London Interfaith Fun Run. The London Interfaith Fun Run which was launched in 2020 to bring together individuals, communities, and charitable organisations for a day of family fun, unity, and raising money for good causes. We organised a coach from St Luke's Church that took our guests and volunteers to the event. During the event we enjoyed the fair, playing games and connecting with the many organisations present. Our guests took part in the different runs organised, the 1km, 5km or 10km. We provided a meal for our group with cooperation of the food trucks present at the event who were kind enough to give us a good deal. It was a great day out for our guests and a great opportunity to get our guests (back) into exercise which will help with physical and mental health. Working together with the Interfaith Fun Run and connecting with the different other (religious) organisations was also a highlight.

The People

- The Interfaith Fun Run was attended by 30 of our guests and 5 volunteers
- We had a number of families with children join the day who all loved it
- In terms of nationalities we had a large group of both Iranians and Salvadorians and some Sudanese join the day.

Media



- Interfaith Fun Run video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=njzCFRKK8y0
- More photos on: https://www.dropbox.com/sh/bgkc17j1j28jcxm/AAAx6rThXHQne7UrXX1mYAopa?dl=0





Testimonials

- *It was a great day for me and my children because we were able to enjoy nature with other friends like a family. I also liked the music. Overall, it was a good environment to relax. It was because we could challenge ourselves. Thank you for your hardworking team. God bless you.*
- *It's unforgettable day for me I really enjoyed. I had run five km without stress. After running there were some speakers motivated me during the programme there were some people sang songs and dancing, first time for me in UK to dance. I do appreciated the opportunity you gave to participate. Thanks Hillsong Church*

End of Year Celebration – 19 December 2022

The Event

At the end of the year, we organised the 'End of Year Celebration' which was a great way to celebrate the year, all what we have achieved and the resilience of our guests. It was a great night with many people in attendance. The night took place in the upstairs church hall (normally we are in the smaller hall downstairs), which was beautifully decorated for the occasion. During the night we played games including Bingo with all the guests, had a performance from a local artist and had a typical British Christmas Roast with a twist, kindly provided by Refettorio Felix at St Cuthbert's Centre. We also had a wish tree where people could write down their wish for the New Year and hang them in the Christmas tree. The evening was topped off with a dance party with music from all corners of the world, representing many of the nationalities present at the event. At the end of the evening we had gift bags for all guests provided by the Love Your Neighbour initiative of HTB Church. We also had a group of recently resettled Hongkongers help volunteer during the evening and giving out presents to everyone as well – we even had Santa from Hong Kong visit the evening!

The People

- This was our biggest event to date – we had 178 guests join the celebrations with 35 volunteers.
- It was a great event as many people who had been part of the Community Café and our events attended the evening.
- A great mix of people representing many nationalities and religions attended – with people from all over the Middle East, Africa and Latin America.
- Many families with children and teenagers were part of the evening as well who especially enjoyed the gifts and visit of Santa.

Media

- Video Impression of the evening:
  https://www.dropbox.com/s/69d1izudfdfw4e9/htb.mp4?dl=0



- More photos and videos on:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/o85z4qn3qexd8em/AAATc6SiGHnfSFjSXat6bZy3a?dl=0






Testimonials

- *this Christmas party there were a gifts for everyone and you did a nice contest with presents, we spent a nice time and known a nice friends.*
- *It was an excellent evening everyone is happy. Thanks to Church and the Conversations Cafe Team and volunteers* 💕

Museum Trip London – 24 February 2023

The Event

On 24 February we took a group of our guests to the Science Museum. It was a great way to help connect our guests who live local to many great museums and show them that they can visit these for free whenever they want. It also helps them with their language skills and understanding of British culture, plus it built connection with their local area. We met the group at our Welcome Hub in Earl's Court where we provided them with a (halal) sandwich lunch, and we made our way in small groups to the Science Museum. The smaller groups of guests went through the museum with volunteers for a few hours learning lots of interesting things.

The People

- We had a mix of people join the trip with guests from El Salvador, Sudan and Eritrea. They were mostly single males.
- We had a smaller number than expected but in total we had 15 guests join and 5 volunteers – we took two groups to the museum

Media





- More photos:

Testimonials

- *I just wanna say thank you so much for giving me this opportunity to visit the science museum you and Niwa my lovely Teacher.so besically I wasn't expecting that today I'm going to see the science museum and I'm so proud of all of you guys for being together also I get the chance to take a lots if pictures also thanks for all of the support I couldn't have done this without you 💕💕🙏it's my first time and I'll never forget. God blessing you 👐👐*

Project Outcomes & Successes:

The Humanitarian Fund has had a great impact on our guests and volunteers. It has been a very successful project and we have seen the following outcomes:

- **Increased Cohesion and Community**

  The events that we were able to do through this fund allowed for additional social activities and experience that we otherwise would not have been able to do. The events itself were a great way to build community amongst our guests and volunteers. The events local to Earl's Court (the summer, end of year celebration, museum trip) allowed for people to celebrate, dance, talk and connect with people from within and outside our group. The trips out of London to were instrumental in fostering strong friendships amongst our guests and volunteers – having a whole day to spend together really build relationships across different nationalities, religions and backgrounds. The project also reinforced the relationship our volunteers have with the guests. They were also a great opportunity for guests to bring friends, growing the community with new people.

- **Improved Mental Health**

  The activities were the highlight of the year for many of our guests – giving them first something to look forward to and after to look back on. The events reduced feeling of isolation, facilitated friendships and the opportunity to 'escape' their daily reality and routine which caused the mental health of our guests to improve significantly.

- **Increased connection to local area and services**

  The events helped create a sense of increased connection to the local area as well as connection with the UK and British culture, which will be beneficial for their integration process. Introducing the group to different places across London and the UK, as well making them familiar with British traditions such as Christmas Roast, Fish & Chips, Beach picnic etc helped with feeling more connected to their new home country. Through the events guests got connected to other people and organisations, such as our own church communities at HTB Earl's Court, Hillsong Church but also helped them find local mosques, register them for local schools and colleges as well as our other projects and other charities.

- **Increased understanding of other cultures / religions / backgrounds**

  The project provided a melting pot of cultures, religions and backgrounds which created an inclusive atmosphere throughout the events and evenings. Lots of learning about other cultures and religions was done by guests as well volunteers, especially around key celebrations such as Eid-al-Fitr and

Christmas, which we believe leads to mutual respect and understanding amongst the different groups represented in our project.

Project Challenges

There are a number of challenges we identified during the course of the project, often related to the circumstances many of our guests find themselves in.

- **Capacity**

  One challenge is the capacity, there is an overwhelming need amongst asylum seekers for practical, social and emotional need. The number of asylum seekers is very high and with the protracted backlog at the Home Office this number only seems to grow. For our events of this project we often had limited capacity. We mitigated some of this by ensuring our celebration events at Earl's Court would be able to take additional people and offer places to different people on the trips where possible. We cannot meet all the needs asylum seekers have but we try to provide as much support as possible and empower our team with fact sheets and knowledge to help our guests.

- **Transfer / Moving on**

  Our guests are always at 'risk' of being moved on to other Home Office accommodation in other parts of the country, losing the connection and network they might have built up. We try to support them as much we can and connect them to other local organisations and charities.

- **Monitoring / Evaluation**

  We organised two moments to monitor outcomes of our project and how the guests attending our project felt. Looking at the results the group seem all very positive about how they feel, where they live and the relations they have. In terms of what they thought of the project they were once again very positive in the effect it had. Save from a few exceptions when using questionnaires, the guests engaged in this seem to present a positive view of themselves and their situation. Whilst a positive outlook is great, we know that many of our guests having a tough time being isolated in hotels, not being able to autonomous and lack resources. This information largely comes out of individual conversations with guests. For future M&E it would be more useful to do interviews rather than a quick questionnaire as more valuable and realistic information will be gathered in our opinion.

Monitoring & Evaluation

We organised two moments to monitor how our guests felt about their life at the moment and how they thought the project helped them. We organised these moments at the start of the project and about half way through. We engaged 35 people in the questionnaires. As mentioned in the learnings there were some challenges that the questionnaires came back quite positive but not always necessarily reflect the reality that we observe in our individual contact with our group. The other challenge is the language barrier, the questionnaires had to be kept simple so our guests, who often have limited English were able to understand.

Some key observations that could be made are:

- The majority 60-70% is happy or very happy with their life and how they feel
- At the same time 75% indicated they wish they had a different kind of life and felt dissatisfied with the thing they have and own
- About 25% mentioned that they found it difficult to make friends and get to know people in the area
- All of the respondents said that the project helped them with making friends, feel connected to the area and get to know other people from different backgrounds

Objective 1: Improved mental well-being

Indicators:

- Guests feeling at ease, smiling, confident to speak
- Participation in activities, classes, and other events
- Guests feeling joy, love and happiness

Outcome:

- During the events of this projects our guests enjoyed a great time of relief, happiness and joy
- Participation in the various activities during the events was high - people enjoyed playing and learning new games & activities
- Guests are able to better regulate their emotions through positive reflections of good things happening around them.
- Increased self confidence in themselves and more confident to open up with each other.
- New shared experiences helping to build positive memories and strengthen bonds.

Objective 2: Increased and improved friendships and connection with local community

Indicators:

- Guests building friendships with each other and local volunteers
- Guests feeling confidence to interact with others outside the café

Outcome:

- Guests have improved their social skills and understanding of cultural norms
- Guest have assimilated to life in the UK through real life experience

Objective 3: Improved connection with local area, organisations and services

Indicators:

- Guests feeling confident joining other activities and services
- Guests feeling a connection to the local area as well as their new host country
- Guests feeling confident about exploring new areas independently
- Guests able to access signed posting organisations independently

Outcome:

- Greater engagement with local services. Able to go to college, GP and volunteering in other local organisations such as Red Cross and charity shops.
- Guests have been more excited about exploring other free local activities. Have been taking their children to museums and libraries.

Project Visibility:

At the Interfaith Fun Run we had a photographer take a number of photos with Religions for Peace banners with a group of our beneficiaries. We also shared updates and highlights of the Community Café project on the @hillsongsocialjustice.uk accounts on Instagram and Facebook (around 2,000 followers each).

Project Sustainability, Replication and Scalability:

The project outcomes helped strengthen the community of our asylum seeker guests and its effect will continue to benefit them. The activities of the project have created strong both amongst the guests and with volunteers as well as with other provisions and organisations such as HTB St Luke's Church where a number of guests have become regular attendees. This cohesion amongst guests and volunteers will ensure that the current Community Café and other activities we organise is built upon a strong foundation of existing relationships facilitated by this project.

The Community Café of HTB and Hillsong Church is continuing to run and we are planning to apply for new funding we can run similar activities in the year to come and continue to develop the community and welcome in any newcomers.

It is not currently in the planning yet there have been conversations about launching a Community Café in some of our other Hillsong locations across London or UK. This would be located in other areas where there is a heavy presence of asylum seekers and refugees, for example Liverpool, Newcastle or North London. If we do start any other Community Cafés we can work together on these events or add additional events, and offers a range of possibilities to work on exchange projects, connect with other organisations and charities.

Lessons Learned/Best Practices:

- Collaboration – we learned that great collaboration is possible between various churches, organisations and with a mix of faiths.
- Inclusion of beneficiaries in volunteering and organising of events very valuable and created a stronger community
- New events and activities are a great community bonding experience for our guests as well as our volunteers – it really has strengthened the feeling of togetherness amongst our group.
- Timing – the day and time we organise events defines the success of the day – for example we will refrain organising activities on a Friday as many of our Muslim guests will be busy with prayers and other activities.