

REFUGEE ACTION KINGSTON

IMPACT REPORT



2022-2023

A Message From Our Chair

You awake and remember you are thousands of miles from home. Your loved ones are just a memory. You have no status, little money and nowhere permanent to live. You can barely communicate because nobody speaks your language. How do you start to pull together the pieces of your life?

This is the challenge faced by countless ordinary people across the globe, driven to flee their home and seek refuge elsewhere. Even those fortunate enough to escape with family or friends, or to have relatives abroad, are among the most vulnerable people in the world.

In the last 30 years, Refugee Action Kingston (RAK) has helped thousands of refugees and asylum seekers to establish themselves here. We work to secure their status, their benefits, and a place to live, as well as access to health services, English teaching and employment opportunities. And we offer counselling because we recognise the emotional impact of the refugee experience.

Every year new events test RAK's resourcefulness. Civil unrest in Iran and war in Ukraine has produced more refugees and new challenges for our team. 2022-23 saw significant growth in the number of clients using our advice and advocacy services. Meanwhile, the online ESOL lessons we had pioneered during lockdown were replaced by a successfully managed return to in-person classes.

We remain positive about the future because RAK, led by a dynamic new director, is an organisation of unrivalled expertise. Together with a substantial cohort of volunteers and a 12-strong board that includes three new trustees, the Refugee Action Kingston team is looking forward with unwavering optimism, enthusiasm and commitment.

Mark Greaves

Mark Greaves, Chair



A Message From Our Director

War in Europe and Iran's crackdown on women's protests have dominated the news over the past year, revealing humanity at its worst but also at its best.

The spirit of enterprise shown by those forced to leave everything to make a new start in the borough has been matched by the empathy of the many who have opened their arms and their homes.

Against an increasingly challenging backdrop both at home and abroad, we have sought to be a positive beacon for our clients. One that focuses on matching the ambitions of our clients and their needs.

We have introduced new values that reflect the journey our clients make as we seek to achieve our mission of empowering those seeking sanctuary in our borough to become integrated members of the local community.



Empathy:
**We put ourselves
in the shoes of those
we work with**

Enterprise:
**We are
resourceful
and innovative**

Empower:
**We are
aspirational**

Highlights: Last year, we increased the number of people we supported to over 1,500 as we have rejuvenated our counselling offer; increased the numbers provided with our quality-assured advice; expanded our asylum hotel support; stepped up to provide support to Ukrainian arrivals, doubled our support of hardship payments and continued our work in so many critical areas of support. This report seeks to tell some of their stories.

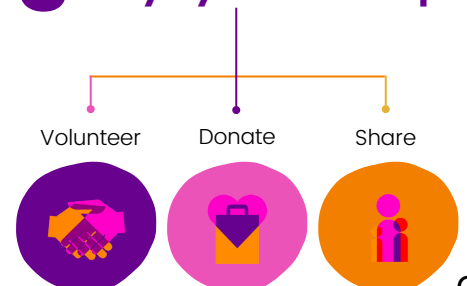
Stories of despair turned into dreams; stories of helplessness turned into hope; but most importantly stories of people. People, just like you, who were not fortunate enough to be born in a place where they could live free of war or oppression simply for being the person they are.

Thank you to everyone who has donated, volunteered and supported the charity over the past year. We couldn't do what we do without you!

Bassam Mahfouz

Bassam Mahfouz, Director

3 ways you can help



Our Stories

Homelessness

Rashid (all names changed), 17, had suffered abuse in his Middle Eastern country of origin. He claimed asylum after arriving in the UK by boat, and was taken first to a detention centre and then to a hotel. At a friend's suggestion, he came to RAK's Kingston office.

RAK immediately contacted social services. We provided him with clothes, food, a Sim card and a £20 payment card. He was helped to secure a safe place to live, register with a GP, and find an English class.

RAK's Arabic speakers were vital in building trust with Rashid, allowing the team to create a plan for his new life in the UK. And thanks to RAK's connections with other local groups, Rashid has not spent a single homeless night in this country.



Housing

Makisa, an asylum seeker from Africa with a young baby, contacted RAK because the friend she had been staying with could no longer afford to house them. They faced the prospect of being made homeless

A RAK adviser completed an application on her behalf for accommodation and subsistence. We then contacted Migrant Help to request urgent accommodation. By the evening of the same day, mother and child had received temporary shelter, and are now in appropriate accommodation.

This shows the challenges that people face when confronted by a forbidding asylum system. Makisa was unaware of the available support arrangements. RAK's expertise ensured that she and her baby were spared the anguish of homelessness.



Securing status

Isaac, a young refugee from Africa, contacted us because he needed urgently to visit his ill mother, who lived elsewhere in Europe. He had to apply for a refugee travel document, which he did not know how to do.

RAK assisted Isaac in making the application, resulting in a quick and successful decision. However, the Home Office was reluctant to send Isaac the new documents because his address was deemed insecure. We worked with the Home Office to amend the address so that the documents could be delivered to RAK. After several delays, our client received his paperwork and could travel to meet his mother.



“RAK has been instrumental in supporting me to integrate in Kingston. It provided a nurturing environment to learn English, secure housing and establish meaningful connections.”
– Farah (32, from Syria)

Mental and physical health

RAK aims to ensure that clients lead fulfilled, independent lives in the local community, supporting them not just with practicalities but also to be happy in body and mind.

Our client Saleh spoke little English. He felt isolated and had become very anxious. Judging that he might benefit from physical activity, RAK took him down to Parkrun, the free running event that happens every Saturday.

Saleh enjoyed the experience so much that he has become a Parkrun regular. He also runs with GoodGym, the charity combining exercise with practical efforts to help people in need. Saleh reports that he now feels much better – and that his activities have helped him to lose weight!



Our Year in Numbers



1500
Clients
Supported

Advice and advocacy

In 2022-23 our team –

- helped 948 clients to navigate the UK's immigration, welfare, and legal systems – a 9% increase on the previous year, in part reflecting a rise in the number of people seeking asylum.
- helped nearly 100 clients to secure improved immigration status (refugee/leave to remain etc).
- doubled the number of people we advised on housing issues, including homelessness.
- ensured that 56 clients received financial support through RAK's hardship fund – a 71% increase on 2021-22.

Education and employment

Employment and education give refugees a real sense of direction. In 2022-23 the RAK team –

- supported 20 clients into employment.
- helped eight clients to secure volunteer placements.
- saw 119 clients access our careers management sessions.
- provided ESOL classes to more than 300 clients via our community hub.
- gave learning back-up to almost 200 children and young people via our after-school and supplementary school support schemes.

Physical and mental wellbeing

At RAK we actively promote the benefits of physical and mental health. During 2022-23 this included –

- an increase to 122 in the number of people using our Walk and Talk service, in which volunteers and clients chat in English as they walk around Kingston's parks.
- giving out more than 30 bicycles to clients.
- growing our weekly yoga class, with a total of 27 people joining us in person or online during the year.
- providing more than 200 hours of counselling to 24 clients.

Volunteers

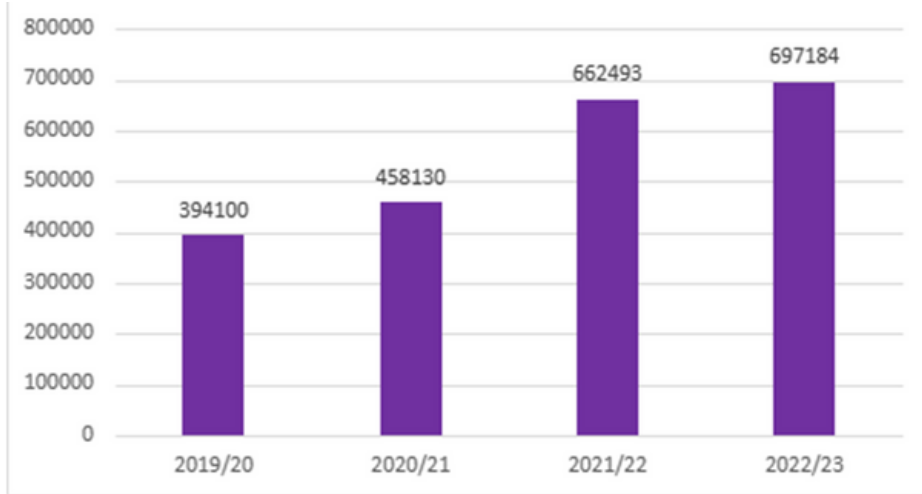
Volunteering is one of the bedrocks of our charity. By the end of 2022-22 RAK had –

- 145 active volunteers, of whom 52 had joined over the preceding 12 months.



Funding

Income



Value for Money:
£459.88
per client

Income Sources

Kingston Council	£254,000
NHS SW London ICS	£67,957
Henry Smith Trust	£59,900
City Bridge Trust	£49,000
Trust for London	£45,000
Garfield Weston Foundation	£25,000
Nationwide	£25,000
AB Charitable	£20,000
Lloyds Bank Foundation	£15,833

Our Corporate Partners

Thanks to the wonderful staff at eBay, who helped restore bikes to be given out to families, pulled together goodie bags for young people and volunteered at a number of our events!



And thanks to Regeneron, who helped make beautiful backpacks for our young people to have for their summer activities exploring Richmond Park and Kew Gardens.

Thank you to our funders...

The Henry Smith Charity

South West London Integrated Care System

LLOYDS BANK FOUNDATION
England & Wales

Garfield Weston FOUNDATION

CITY BRIDGE TRUST

Trust for London
Tackling poverty and inequality

nationwide



CHARITABLE TRUST

THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF KINGSTON UPON THAMES

A Summary of Our Impact

Here are just a few ways we are changing lives...

1500

Number of clients we supported

948

Clients we helped navigate the UK's immigration, welfare, and legal systems

100

Number of clients we helped secure improved immigration status.

300

Clients who used the RAK community hub to benefit from our range of ESOL classes.

200

Number of children and young people we supported via our after-school and supplementary school support schemes.

122

Number of clients who used the Walk and Talk service.

24

Number of clients supported by our counselling team, receiving over 200 hours of counselling



COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

- Afghanistan - 16%
- Syria - 15%
- Iran - 14%
- Ukraine - 11%
- Iraq - 9%
- Middle East & N. Africa - 14%
- Rest of Asia - 10%
- Sub-Saharan Africa - 6%
- Rest of World - 5%

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