



**WELCOME
CHURCHES**

NO REFUGEE ALONE

Annual Review 2021-2022



Our Vision

Welcome Churches' vision is for every refugee to be welcomed by the local church.

We believe in the Biblical mandate to Welcome the Stranger, which can be seen throughout scripture. No matter where a church community is in the UK, they have the opportunity and responsibility to welcome those seeking refuge on their doorstep. Welcome Churches exists to equip Christians across the country to say 'Welcome' to those who are arriving.

The majority of refugees have experienced severe trauma, loss and distress before reaching the UK. It is vital that when they arrive in their new home, they are welcomed with love and care. Sadly this is not the case for many. Often extremely isolated and unsure of how to access help, refugees experience further challenges, hampering their efforts to begin rebuilding their lives.

The local church has a reach and capacity that other organisations do not have. In every town and city, the church has buildings, activities, services and volunteers that can help refugees rebuild their lives in a new community. Increasingly churches are asking how they can help welcome those seeking refuge who have arrived on their doorstep, often at very short notice.

At Welcome Churches, we help churches reach out and support refugees in their local area by providing them with on-the-ground training, tools, and expertise, equipping them to care practically for refugees and help them feel at home in a new community.



A photograph showing a woman with dark hair and a light blue face mask hugging a young child. An older woman with white hair and a light blue face mask is also hugging the child. They are all wearing face masks. The background is blurred, suggesting an indoor setting like a church or community center.

**WELCOME CHURCHES EXISTS TO EQUIP
CHRISTIANS ACROSS THE COUNTRY TO SAY
'WELCOME' TO THOSE WHO ARE ARRIVING.**



Our values are...



WELCOME

Christians are called to love and welcome the stranger, whatever their cultural background. Every church has the privilege and opportunity to welcome and care for refugees and people seeking asylum in some way.



EMPOWERMENT

Refugees are resilient and creative. We want refugees to grow in their gifting and leadership and churches to benefit from their unique contribution.



BUILDING COMMUNITY

Churches are well placed to provide community and care for those who have lost homes and family and are recovering from trauma.



RELATIONSHIP

We value relationships with other organisations, networks and individuals. We help churches connect relationally with partners in their own communities to provide integrated support for refugees.



RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Refugees arriving in the UK should have the freedom and right to explore faith without fear of intimidation or persecution. Churches should be well equipped to help them.



JUSTICE

The Church should be at the forefront of challenging injustices faced by refugees and people seeking asylum and fear and prejudice within our wider communities.

Introduction



This past year has provided opportunities for the UK Church to offer a Welcome to more new Neighbours than ever as we aim to see no refugee alone.

From over 100,000 new Neighbours arriving from Hong Kong through the BN(O) visa scheme, 20,000 evacuees from Afghanistan arriving in the UK practically overnight in August, and then the urgent need to respond to welcome refugees fleeing war in Ukraine, the past year has required Welcome Churches to respond to the needs of refugees like never before.

What a privilege it has been to see Welcome Churches take a lead in national charity coalitions including UKHK, Afghan Welcome and Ukraine Welcome, ensuring that people arriving in the UK are met with loving, culturally sensitive and trauma-informed support from churches wherever they find themselves across the UK. Regardless of how someone has journeyed to the UK, whether through a recognised visa scheme, relocation programme or through informal routes to asylum, we believe they are entitled to respect, safety and a Welcome.

As we seek to offer the best possible support to people who have lost so much and are looking to rebuild their lives, we have witnessed churches across the country stepping up to offer a welcome. Our Welcome Network has grown from 70 churches at the beginning of 2021 to over 900 today, with more joining every week. This incredible and unprecedented growth has led us to provide training to over 1100 volunteers as they seek to provide love, care and a welcome to refugees, people seeking asylum and others who have fled their home country in search of safety and refuge.

At the same time, we have seen unprecedented demand from churches looking to run our Welcome Boxes project and launch intentional, practical refugee support in their communities. Welcome Network churches offered a welcome to over 5000 refugees in 2021. That's 5000 people who received love, compassion and support at their time of greatest need.

With global crises and refugee-related headlines, including the government's Nationality and Borders Bill, being at the forefront of news over the past year, the supportive and encouraging response of the Church nationwide has been overwhelming. We are so grateful to the generous financial support of many individuals, churches and trusts that have helped us to respond to crises on a national scale, as well as the individual needs of local churches and refugees. This year has seen the development of our regional Church Engagement team, providing hands-on, localised training and support to the increasing number of Welcome Network and Welcome Boxes churches. This team means that we can be available for every church across the UK, engaging with Strategic Migration Partnerships and the specific migration challenges of each region.

So much of what has taken place in the past year, the growth of our Welcome Network, specialised training and response to crises, are now forming a part of our core work for the future and we are excited to see the opportunities for future partnerships and development ahead of us.

Emily Sue

**Emily Shepherd
& Sue Butler**

Joint CEOs

OUR WELCOME NETWORK HAS GROWN FROM 70 CHURCHES AT THE BEGINNING OF 2021 TO OVER 900 TODAY, WITH MORE JOINING EVERY WEEK.

Our Purposes and Activities



OUR OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the charity are:

1. The promotion of social inclusion among people who are refugees or seeking asylum who are socially excluded on the grounds of their social and economic position.
2. The advancement of the Christian faith in such ways as the Charity Trustees may from time to time decide.

WELCOME CHURCHES CARRIES OUT THESE OBJECTIVES BY:

1. Developing and delivering a range of training and tools to enable churches to welcome and support newly arrived refugees and people seeking asylum.
2. Helping refugees connect quickly to one of the churches in our network via the Welcome Network online platform.
3. Establishing and supporting Welcome Boxes projects in churches around the country, including running an online referral and feedback web platform.
4. Providing ongoing support, capacity building and training to churches working with refugees and people seeking asylum to aid social inclusion.
5. Developing and providing training and resources to churches for refugees who want to explore the Christian faith.
6. Assist churches to include refugees in all aspects of church life.

STRATEGY AND ACTIVITIES

Our activities included:

1. Educating churches and other parties about the need to welcome and support refugees and people seeking asylum arriving in their communities,
2. Providing training, resources and ongoing support to churches to effectively welcome and support the integration of refugees and people seeking asylum, and
3. Networking churches together across the UK who are welcoming refugees and enabling refugees to connect with them.



HOW WAS THIS ACHIEVED?

At the heart of our work is the **Welcome Network**, a growing nationwide network of refugee-welcoming churches. These are churches that are exploring refugee ministries, or are seeking ways to support refugees and people seeking asylum that are arriving in their communities. Churches are included on our interactive map that allows refugees, agencies, churches and individuals to find a welcoming, local church for any refugee or person seeking asylum moving into a new area.

Our flagship project is **Welcome Boxes**, which is offered by churches to refugees and people seeking asylum arriving in their area. This provides the churches with intentional ways to connect with the new neighbours. Through training, resources and ongoing support, churches are equipped to respond to the needs of refugees in their communities in a trauma-informed, cross-culturally aware way.

Our **UKHK** Network was launched to respond to the needs of Hong Kong BN(O) visa holders arriving in the UK. Hundreds of 'Hong Kong Ready' Churches across the UK are part of the Network, ensuring that no matter where in the UK people from Hong Kong are choosing to settle, they are able to find a welcoming church community.

Welcome Churches helped to establish **Afghan Welcome**, a coalition of charities aiming to provide wrap-around support to the thousands of people who were evacuated from Afghanistan after the fall of Kabul in Summer 2021. We provided practical, high-quality training to churches, and worked with the Home Office and local councils to facilitate connections with hotels accommodating Afghans. As a result, we have seen thousands of new arrivals welcomed and provided with immediate and longer-term care.

Following the invasion of Ukraine, our **Ukraine Welcome** project was launched to provide practical information for Ukrainians looking to travel to the UK and provide a way for them to connect with welcoming church communities. Trauma-aware, culturally-sensitive training was provided to hundreds of people as communities sought to open their homes and offer a welcome.

The **Hospitality Pledge** began as a partnership between Krish Kandiah and Welcome Churches with a vision to inspire the UK Church to offer welcome and hospitality to all those seeking refuge in the UK. It aims to inspire a passion for hospitality by encouraging the UK Church to speak up for asylum seekers, help persecuted Christians and mobilise Christian hospitality. This was achieved through the 'Radical Hospitality' Summit in November 2021 and a series of Lent devotionals broadcast on Radio 4.

2021-2022:

Project Updates

Welcome Network: a story of growth

At Welcome Churches, our core programme is our Welcome Network; a national network of churches who can welcome and reach out to newly-arrived refugees. We provide ongoing resources to these churches and help refugees to connect with them when they move to a new area, ensuring they have the support they need.

We have seen tremendous growth in the number of the churches in our Welcome Network during this last year. In April 2021 we had 292 churches in the Network and, whilst we had experienced some growth in the preceding months due in part to the number of churches understanding the need to welcome new arrivals from Hong Kong on the BN(O) visa, we were at the beginning of a period of rapid growth in the Network. By August, with the collapse of the Afghan government and the return to power of the Taliban, thousands of Afghans arrived within a period of two weeks on the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Programme. Churches across the UK were keen to help and joined the Welcome Network. We were able to train 521 individuals and churches in welcoming Afghans and introduce many churches into hotels to provide support to Afghan families. By the end of September 2021 we had 680 churches in our Network - many of them newly joined in order to respond to a call to welcome Afghan refugees. With the start of the war in Ukraine, alongside steady growth and interest from churches in being trained and equipped to welcome refugees, the number of churches in our Network at the end of March 2022 was 916 and increasing each month. With each mass migration to the UK and the call to the church to 'welcome the stranger' we have seen a hugely encouraging response from the Church in the UK, reflected in our Welcome Network growth.

With the number of churches in the Welcome Network growing monthly, we were keen to offer **robust training and equipping to every church**. During the year, we developed and gave Afghan Welcomer training to 521 people, which included information about the relocation schemes, aspects of Afghan culture, supporting Afghans in hotels, healthy boundaries and trauma awareness. We also trained 332 people in welcoming Ukrainians and another 51 people in welcoming refugees in their location and in asylum hotels. Adding these numbers to our core training for churches, we trained over 1,100 people, ensuring that churches were not only joining the Welcome Network, but being properly equipped to 'welcome the stranger'.

Furthermore, we developed new **Resource Hubs for our Network Churches to access**. These include a Wellbeing and Trauma Hub with videos about Trauma Awareness in Refugees, Caring for Ourselves and Others and the third in this series called Looking after Myself which is a gentle look at trauma and wellbeing aimed at a refugee audience. This third video is available subtitled in English, Ukrainian, Russian, Spanish and Farsi. Other Hubs include a Discipleship Hub, a Legal Hub with resources to help churches who are supporting people going through the asylum process, a Refugees Online Hub with resources to help churches think through their response to digital poverty and a Ukraine Hub with resources for churches supporting Ukrainians newly

arriving in the UK. All of these resources and training help churches to work with good practice alongside a warm and friendly welcome from the church community.

Alongside our training and Network growth, we have been able to grow our Regional Team and have added a **Regional Coordinator for the north of England, Midlands and south of England**. Through this growing Church Engagement team, our Coordinators have been able to get to know churches in each region better, liaise with the asylum housing providers to connect more churches with supporting people in the asylum system, and provide better, more focused support for churches and church refugee work in each region.

One of the ways in which we highlighted our Welcome Network, and its function as an **online referral system**, was through the new video Find Your Welcome - a 90 second video available in English, Pashto, Farsi, Spanish, Arabic, French and Ukrainian. The videos have been viewed more than 5000 times across these different languages, encouraging viewers to refer themselves into the Welcome Network to 'find their welcome'. We are seeing increases in the number of refugees being referred to churches through the Welcome Network and also, encouragingly, self-referring to the Network to receive a Welcome from a church.

THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

WELCOME NETWORK CHURCHES AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS YEAR (APRIL 2021):

292

WELCOME NETWORK CHURCHES BY THE END OF THE YEAR (MARCH 2022):

916

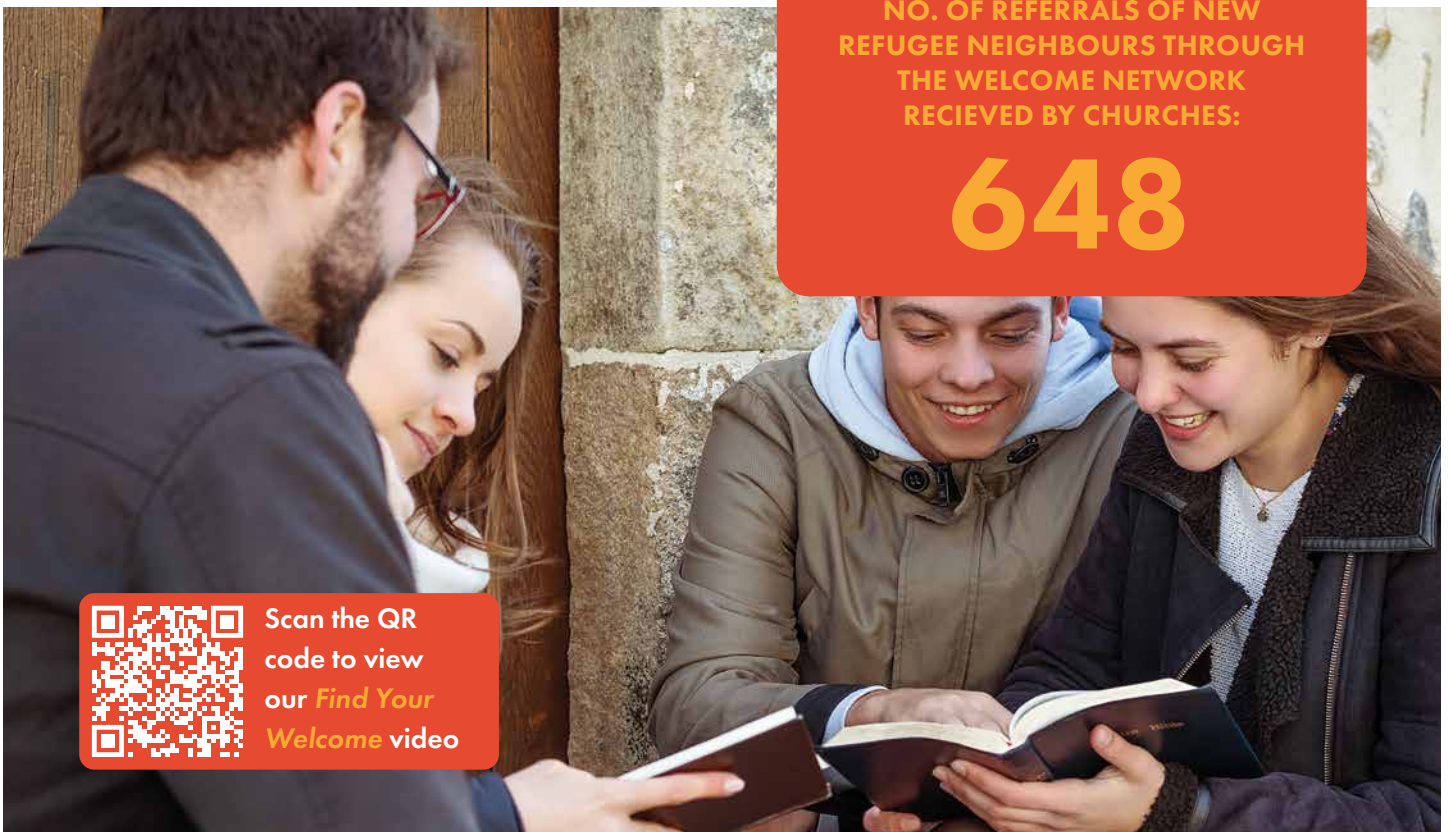
(624 NEW CHURCHES!)

THE WELCOME NETWORK HAS GROWN BY:

214%

NO. OF REFERRALS OF NEW REFUGEE NEIGHBOURS THROUGH THE WELCOME NETWORK RECEIVED BY CHURCHES:

648




 Scan the QR code to view our *Find Your Welcome* video

TESTIMONY:

Omid's Journey

MY LIFE WAS CHANGED AT THAT MOMENT. I LEFT MY COUNTRY WITHOUT EVEN SAYING GOODBYE TO MY FAMILY, OR EVEN SAYING GOODBYE TO MY DAUGHTER, OR MY WIFE.

Omid fled Iran due to his Christian faith. It was no longer safe for him to stay and he had to escape at a moment's notice. In that moment he had to make the decision to leave his career, his home, his possessions and his family behind. *"I think the worst thing about this situation is you don't know if it's the right or wrong decision. Because at that time you don't know about the future, everything's become dark for you."*

Omid was helped throughout his journey; travelling without documents, he travelled for three months and eventually was helped to board a flight to the UK. When he arrived in the UK, he was provided with a flight pass and a passport to get through security. Omid handed the passport that he had just been given to immigration officer who checked it, stamped it and said, 'Welcome'. A sense of relief washed over Omid as he passed through the gates and checked the passport himself for the first time. The picture staring back at him was of a larger man, 20 or so years older than him of completely different ethnicity. *"At that moment, I felt this is serious. God was with me and wanted to protect me from anything"*. A miracle had happened.

Omid arrived in the UK during the first Covid-19 lockdown so it was difficult to find a community as all the churches were closed. Omid came across the Welcome Churches website and searched for a church near him. Within two days he had been invited to an online meeting and connected with a family at Vineyard Cardiff who helped him settle into a new life and community. *"We have to start from zero here. Everybody like us needs support, we can't do it without support"*.



Since then Omid has become more and more involved in the church, helping with the Alpha Course and even volunteering with Welcome Churches as a Digital Champion, supporting other refugees as they arrive. More recently, after many difficult months apart, Omid's wife and daughter have been able to join him in Cardiff and they are settling into a new home and finding work. It has been a long journey with many challenges along the way, but Omid is thankful to the church, for how it has welcomed him and his family, and to God, for His faithfulness. *"In all of my journey, one thing that always guides me and always pushes me is my faith"*.



Scan the QR code to view a short film about Omid's Journey

Welcome Boxes: the gift of Welcome

Welcome Boxes, our flagship training and equipping programme, has already had an incredible impact, welcoming thousands of refugees across the UK since it was first launched. Welcome Boxes acts as the entry point for local churches to intentionally connect with refugees and asylum seekers in their area.

As the Welcome Network grows, we are working with an increasing number of churches to establish Welcome Boxes projects in their churches, adding churches monthly, to ensure that in even more locations across the UK there is a church trained and equipped to welcome refugees into their local community. Welcome Boxes is run by churches in their location in partnership with Welcome Churches. Through Welcome Boxes, we train between one to three Coordinators so they can launch and run the project successfully. Trained volunteers understand the needs of refugees, visit them in their homes with a small box of practical items and support their integration into their new community. The box contains new items such as toiletries, toothbrushes, stationery, gloves, hats and small toys. It might also contain a map of the local area, leaflets advertising local services and groups, and a welcome card from the person who made the box. Items are donated or purchased by members of the church, and it's a great way to get everyone involved in the welcome!

Welcome Churches supports the Coordinators as they make and build relationships locally with potential referrers and other organisations that support refugees. We support the Coordinators in recruiting church volunteer Welcomers who are trained by us to take Welcome Boxes from the church to newly arriving neighbours seeking asylum and being housed in their location. The Welcomers support and welcome the recipients, representing the church and asking "How can we help you?". Over a period of around three months, the Welcomers help the new neighbours to access

services locally, meet new people from the church and the wider community and feel more confident and connected with local people.

As our Welcome Network has grown as churches have responded to the needs of people arriving from Afghanistan and Ukraine, more and more churches have partnered to establish Welcome Boxes projects in their communities. In March 2021, 18 churches were running Welcome Boxes and by the end of the year 32 churches were running the project and there are many more soon to be added! Counting both Coordinators and Welcomers, a total of 231 people were trained in running Welcome Boxes this year.

This year has seen over 220 people receive a Welcome Box, and more importantly a friendly, intentional welcome into a new community. We know that people seeking asylum can be moved at short notice and find themselves, once again, alone and at risk of isolation in a new town or city. If that should happen, our Welcome Network ensures that Welcome Boxes churches are able to connect people with another Welcome Network church to continue the compassionate care and support that they need.

For churches with people seeking asylum arriving in their area, this is such a great project to run. Welcome Boxes gives training and confidence to church volunteers, and the structure that a national project provides helps churches know where to start and how to welcome people with good practice, awareness of trauma and culture, and a good understanding of the asylum process.



THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

WELCOME BOXES PROJECT AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS YEAR (APRIL 2021):

18
CHURCHES

THE WELCOME BOXES PROJECT HAS GROWN BY:

78%

TRAINING COMPLETED FOR NEW WELCOMERS WITH THE CHURCHES:

193

WELCOME BOXES PROJECT BY THE END OF THE YEAR (MARCH 2022):

32
CHURCHES

(14 NEW CHURCHES!)

NEW WELCOME BOX COORDINATORS TRAINED THIS YEAR:

38

WELCOME BOXES CHURCHES WELCOMED:

227
NEW NEIGHBOURS

TESTIMONY:

Hope Church, Hounslow

"We arranged a welcome visit with an asylum seeker and were able to bless her with some simple gifts and clothes. She started coming to church and wanted to know more about the Christian faith. A while later she decided to give her life to Jesus, so we led her in a prayer. She's now part of our church family and joins in as a volunteer too!"



UKHK: mobilising Hong Kong Ready Churches

Following the Government's launch of the BN(O) visa scheme for people from Hong Kong to come to the UK in January 2021, Welcome Churches has been delighted to partner with Krish Kandiah, the Chinese Overseas Christian Mission (COCM) and OMF to form the UKHK coalition.



UKHK was set up to mobilise the UK Church to welcome the thousands of people arriving in the UK from Hong Kong and to provide new arrivals with key information about life in the UK. With many people coming from a church background in Hong Kong, we knew it was essential that new neighbours arriving in the UK would have a simple way to find a welcoming church community near their new home.

We have seen hundreds of people from Hong Kong connected with their local church through the UKHK initiative, and over 750 churches say that they are 'Hong-Kong ready'. We produced training videos for churches on Hong Kong culture, and what it means to give a good 'welcome'. We have set up a mailing list for new arrivals to the UK from Hong Kong which reaches over 3500 people. Each month we email out different information on life in the UK in both English and Traditional Chinese. Topics have included British festivals, features on different British cities, schooling in the UK and healthcare.

It was essential to us that we were providing the help that was most needed to people from Hong Kong and that we would equip churches to offer the best possible support. After carrying out a survey of BN(O) visa holders, we identified that the key integration needs for new arrivals focused around **social, professional** and **educational** integration. We were successful in securing government funding from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities for projects in these areas. We are mid-way through these projects, which are focusing on these three areas, and are excited by the possibilities to bless people from Hong Kong who have already arrived, as well as those who are expected to arrive over the coming months and years.

UKHK has been a huge success so far. We have been delighted to work in partnership with OMF, COCM and Krish Kandiah to form this coalition and to provide a good welcome to those arriving from Hong Kong. We have heard many stories of 'welcome' happening for new arrivals from Hong Kong; James' story (page 16) is one example.

THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

UKHK NETWORK CHURCHES AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS YEAR (APRIL 2021):

453

UKHK NETWORK CHURCHES BY THE END OF THE YEAR (MARCH 2022):

771

(218 NEW UKHK CHURCHES!)

OUR UKHK NETWORK HAS GROWN BY:

70%

NO. OF HONG KONG NEW NEIGHBOURS REFERRED THROUGH UKHK:

707

IT WAS ESSENTIAL TO US THAT WE WERE PROVIDING THE HELP THAT WAS MOST NEEDED TO PEOPLE FROM HONG KONG AND THAT WE WOULD EQUIP CHURCHES TO OFFER THE BEST POSSIBLE SUPPORT.



TESTIMONY:

James' Story

'Last year, I noticed that a family from Hong Kong had moved on to our street. Because I'd heard about your resources and the importance of being welcoming, I went to knock on their door to say hello and I met W. We ended up having a number of conversations and he would come and ask me questions about all sorts of issues such as how and when are the bins emptied. At Christmas, I decided to put a Christmas card through his door with an invite to my church carol service tucked inside. A few days later he came round with a lovely card that his son had made for us. He told us that he'd been a church-goer in Hong Kong but when he came to the UK he wasn't sure which churches he'd be welcome in. We ended up going to church with him and then his family started going and their son is now signed up to the children's ministry work at the church.

Last week he sent me a text to tell me he had found a job (something we'd talked about a lot) – at the end of the message he said: "I sincerely treasure having a neighbour like you".

If it hadn't been for your resources and the interviews you've done on the radio, I don't think I would have even thought about reaching out. I'm so glad I did. Thank you for all that you're doing – it's making a real difference.'

James, Sale, Manchester



IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR YOUR RESOURCES AND THE INTERVIEWS YOU'VE DONE ON THE RADIO, I DON'T THINK I WOULD HAVE EVEN THOUGHT ABOUT REACHING OUT. I'M SO GLAD I DID.

Afghan Welcome: a coalition crisis response

No one foresaw the rapid takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban in August 2021 and the approximately 20,000 people who arrived from Afghanistan to the UK, almost overnight. Once again we were able to form a charity coalition, Afghan Welcome, to provide a wrap-around response.

Thanks to our established Welcome Network of refugee-welcoming churches, we were able to rapidly respond to provide assistance to Afghan families when they first arrived.

Welcome Churches were asked to provide support directly to approximately 25% of hotels used to accommodate Afghan families, totalling around 4200 Afghans. Through the Welcome Network, we were able to mobilise local churches to be the first point of contact with the families as they arrived in the UK. By partnering with Baby Basics UK, we were able to provide practically for young families' needs in particular, which gave us an excellent 'way in' to providing longer-term relational support to the families too. Our partnership with Krish Kandiah was vital in raising the profile of the project, and highlighting the needs of the Afghan families who arrived.

In total, Afghan Welcome raised an incredible £500,000 to support Afghan arrivals in the UK. This is being used to support churches across the country who are working in hotels accommodating Afghan families. We were able to provide training to 521 church volunteers, equipping them to support Afghans in hotels. We also worked intensively with church partners to help them to build relationships with Local Authorities and partner agencies. This was vital in building trust and

being able to provide ongoing support to the families who had arrived. The funds have also been used to enable Baby Basics to continue their practical support to Afghan families with young children.

To provide additional support to Afghan families arriving in the UK we launched afghanwelcome.org which received over 28,000 visits. The site provided essential information in English, Dari and Pashto on housing and other services, as well as useful information for churches providing practical support to Afghans arriving in their local communities. In September 2021, Afghan Welcome sent an open letter to UK-wide councils to encourage them to provide housing solutions for the thousands of Afghans living in hotels. The letter was signed by over 560 church and community leaders, including numerous Bishops and CEOs of national charities.

With thousands of Afghans still living in bridging hotels, Welcome Churches continues to partner with churches across the UK who are providing regular support and practical programmes to help hotels and local councils. It has been encouraging and inspiring to witness the incredible ongoing response of churches, including Christ First in Watford, who are supporting Afghans in local hotels such as Farid and his family.

THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

HOTELS SUPPORTED BY CHURCHES HOSTING RELOCATED AFGHANS:

40

NO. OF PEOPLE THAT JOINED OUR AFGHAN WELCOMER TRAINING:

521

SIGNATURES FROM CHURCH AND COMMUNITY LEADERS ON OUR OPEN LETTER:

562

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF AFGHANS WELCOMED:

4,200

VISITORS TO THE WEBSITE AFGHANWELCOME.ORG:

28.6k



WELCOME CHURCHES HAS BEEN THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF THE AFGHAN SCHEME AND WE COULDN'T DO WHAT WE DO IF IT WASN'T FOR THE GREAT WC TEAM. THEY ARE ALL AMAZING.

Richard - Cheshire East Council





TESTIMONY:

Farid's Story



BEFORE, WE DIDN'T KNOW (THE) BRITISH WERE SUCH A GENEROUS PEOPLE, BUT, WHEN WE CAME HERE, THEY HAVE HELPED US A LOT.

Farid, a Resettled Afghan, is now living in Watford and being supported by a local church. Farid and his family, including four children, was evacuated from Afghanistan in August 2021 and is one of over 9000 Afghans still living in a bridging hotel whilst long-term accommodation is found for him. The family arrived in the UK with just a single set of clothes and received support from the church through Welcome Churches' Afghan Welcome initiative, including practical items like clothing and toys, as well as language, community and cultural support. This has really helped them to settle and adapt to British life.

Christ First Watford is running up to 16 activities each week to provide education, community and practical help. This includes sports events, language classes, family events, communities cooking together and cultural exchanges.

The church has helped Farid, his family, and many others feel at home and start to integrate into life in the UK. As Farid shares, *"Now I love Watford a lot, even sometimes we think that we were born in Watford, this is a really loving place."*

At Welcome Churches, we are humbled and honoured to see the incredible impact that churches up and down the country are having on refugee communities. This is a testament to the church, Christian communities and a practical outpouring of the Bible's command to Welcome the Stranger. It is great to partner with churches to help them maximise the impact they can have. Andy at Christ First Watford shared *"It's really important to have people who are experienced in this because we weren't."*



We continue to equip churches supporting Afghan refugees and Ukrainians, as well as those seeking asylum from many other countries. At Welcome Churches, we seek to provide support Beyond the Crisis and to make a long-lasting difference in the lives of refugees looking to rebuild their lives. As with so much when seeds are planted, we may never know the full impact of the church's ministry and the long-term transformation of lives and communities. But as Farid shared, *"We are really grateful to the church. Not just me, but even the next generation will be grateful to them."*

"I'm calling on communities and churches, please help people who came to the UK and are vulnerable. They had houses, they had good lives back in their countries, but once they come here they wouldn't have anything. Please continue your support of them. People from Afghanistan and Ukrainians. Please continue helping them."

Ukraine Welcome: an urgent response

February 2022 brought the devastating news of yet another international crisis, the war in Ukraine, and we started to prepare to respond once again. As we had learnt from our previous Afghan Welcome response, we knew that refugees having access to information was critical.



In order to ensure that Ukrainians eligible to travel to the UK would be welcomed, we launched ukrainewelcome.org, providing key information on life in the UK to Ukrainians. This included accessing health, education and employment, as well as letting them know that their local church would be there to welcome them and how they could connect with a church community. The website was launched in English, Ukrainian and Russian to make sure that it was accessible to all who would need it. At the end of March, the website had been visited over 14,400 times, including 750 visitors directly from Ukraine, Poland and Moldova.

Our immediate response was to also provide information and training to churches on giving a 'welcome' to people arriving from Ukraine. We provided information and training to 332 people by the end of March 2022; this is set to continue in the coming months. As the UK Government launched the Homes for Ukraine visa route, we engaged our Welcome Network of churches to identify church communities that had applied to be hosts for Ukrainian refugees to ensure that we could provide the best possible support. At the end of March 2022, 114 church communities, representing hundreds of potential hosts, had responded and we are continuing to work with them as they explore the hosting scheme.



THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

NO. OF PEOPLE THAT JOINED OUR UKRAINE WELCOMER TRAINING:

332

VISITORS TO THE WEBSITE UKRAINEWELCOME.ORG

14.4k

NO. OF CHURCHES REGISTERED FOR SUPPORT WITH HOSTING UKRAINIANS

114

TESTIMONY:

Gold Hill Baptist Church

"I was invited to share at a fundraising lunch recently about what the church is doing for Ukrainians locally. My main message was that 'it takes a whole community to welcome a refugee'. This is our experience and observation; that it is our whole community that is engaging in welcoming, loving and supporting the approximately 160 Ukrainian guests in the Gerrards Cross, Chalfonts and Denham area and God has placed His Church at the centre of what is happening. Rather than just focusing on how local churches could support the various church families

who are currently hosting guests from Ukraine, we want to engage the wider community in the welcome also, finding like-minded and hearted people wanting to work together. Through the twice-weekly drop in café and the English classes we have become known as a 'hub' of support locally and in addition to welcoming Ukrainians, God is giving us wonderful Gospel and pastoral opportunities with hosting families and those offering help. Our church family have continued to step up and support 'welcoming' those in need and we thank God for this opportunity."

Hospitality Pledge: a passion for hospitality

The Hospitality Pledge began as a partnership between Krish Kandiah and Welcome Churches in June 2021, with a vision of inspiring the UK Church to offer welcome and hospitality to all those seeking refuge in the UK.

ITS AIMS ARE:

Speak up for Asylum Seekers:

By building a coalition of Christian charities working with refugees in the UK, we can offer a united approach to the government to help as many people seeking asylum in the UK as possible.

Help Persecuted Christians:

By establishing a coalition of charities working with persecuted Christians around the world, we can make the most of the provision in the government's plan to resettle more persecuted groups.

Mobilise Christian Hospitality:

By inspiring more Christians to offer hospitality to refugees and asylum seekers in their homes, we can offer a more humane alternative to the government's accommodation.



The last 12 months have been unprecedented and unexpected in a number of ways. This has meant that The Hospitality Pledge has taken different focuses at different times in the year. Our work with Krish Kandiah through The Hospitality Pledge helped us to respond quickly to the Afghan crisis in August, as the partnership enabled us to connect quickly with the government and other key partners.

The Afghan response provided a good start to The Hospitality Pledge initiative, as it enabled us to call the UK Church to respond to the immediate needs of people seeking refuge in the UK. We were able to



celebrate all that was being achieved through the Radical Hospitality Summit in central London in November 2021.

This was a great day, with over 100 people coming together to hear more about the different ways that people were being welcomed to the

UK - both from Afghanistan and from Hong Kong - and to talk about all that could be achieved in the future too. Speakers included World Vision, Chinese Overseas Christian Mission, Love your Neighbour (a HTB initiative) and others.

In the new year, we were able to launch The Hospitality Pledge website, and over 400 people have signed up so far to receive the 30 day devotions on hospitality.



THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

NO. OF GUESTS THAT ATTENDED OUR IN-PERSON RADICAL HOSPITALITY SUMMIT:

over
100

NO. OF PEOPLE THAT HAVE SIGNED THE HOSPITALITY PLEDGE:

422

We were able to build on this mobilising of Christian hospitality during Lent, working with BBC Radio 4s Sunday Service to produce their Lent series: 'A Passion for Hospitality'. This six-part series invited different Christian leaders to share their reflections on hospitality each Sunday morning during Lent. Many people engaged with this material, and signed up to the Hospitality Pledge as a result.

It has been exciting to see The Hospitality Pledge inspiring normal Christians to do more to extend the hand of welcome and hospitality to those seeking refuge in their communities.



TESTIMONY:

"I just wanted to thank you and let you know how much I've enjoyed reading and meditating on these daily devotions. In fact I wish they could continue for the whole year! The insights are fascinating and I feel like we've learned a lot. How has it affected how we live? Well, recently our household had Covid so lots of arrangements and invitations had to be

cancelled. Since recovering I've decided to prioritise my invitations so the first two people we've invited over have been young refugees we know rather than friends and acquaintances. I intend to keep this up for the rest of the year too - inviting people who probably can't invite us back rather than those with comfy homes and lifestyles."

Achievements: A year in review

The past 12 months have seen an incredible response from the public and UK churches to the real and urgent needs of refugees and people seeking safety, security and asylum in this country. We have been humbled and encouraged by the way that the Church and Christian communities have reached out, got involved and supported their new neighbours in so many ways.

APRIL 2021

The newly formed UKHK Network, a network of Hong Kong welcoming churches, had grown from zero to 453 churches in just two months with over 200 churches also joining the Welcome Network to welcome refugees and people seeking asylum.



JUNE 2021



Refugee Sunday 2021 coincided with Father's Day and our *'Together One Day'* video highlighting the story of refugee father Asghar* was shared with 56 churches to show in their Sunday service with over 730 views online.

Our Refugees, Jesus & Justice online event, sharing the biblical message to welcome the stranger, saw 155 attendees join the event with over 242 online views.

JULY 2021

Our first ever Welcome Holiday took place, with Gold Hill Baptist Church welcoming 11 refugee guests from 2 separate churches in the UK for a few days of outings, food and friendship.



Welcome Holiday

We launched our Digital Champions programme, with five refugee volunteers providing their expertise to remove digital barriers by offering help to refugees all over the UK with connecting with their church community and improving their digital skills.

NOVEMBER 2021

We launched our new *Find your Welcome* video, available in multiple languages, to help refugees understand the UK church and help them connect with a welcoming church community. The videos have been viewed over 5000 times.



SEPTEMBER 2021

Over 560 church and community leaders signed our open letter to UK-wide councils appealing for housing for Afghan families.

Our Wellbeing and Trauma Hub launched, including a video series for churches. The series included *Trauma Awareness in Refugees and Caring for Ourselves and Others* as well as *Looking after Myself* which is subtitled in English, Ukrainian, Russian, Spanish and Farsi for a refugee audience.



Trauma Awareness

AUGUST 2021

The evacuation of Kabul witnessed thousands of Afghans relocated to cities across the UK housed in bridging hotels. Our Afghan Welcome coalition of charities mobilised wrap-around support providing practical items, immediate care and longer-term support programmes to over 4200 people.



AfghanWelcome



Radical Hospitality

NOVEMBER 2021

The Radical Hospitality Summit, our first in-person event since Covid-19, took place in London with over 100 attendees joining to launch The Hospitality Pledge, a movement to encourage Christians to be actively welcoming to new neighbours.

DECEMBER 2021

Huge thanks to everyone who supported Welcome Churches as we participated in the Big Give Christmas Challenge for the second year running, raising an incredible £51,148! This year we shared the *Journey of a Welcome*, recounting Omid's journey from Iran to the local church in Wales.



This Christmas, we also released a multilingual version of *Joy to the World* featuring the voices of refugees and church members from across the Welcome Network, celebrating the diversity of the UK Church and the joy that this brings. The video was shared and viewed over 1280 times.

JANUARY 2022

Over 400 people signed up for The Hospitality Pledge daily devotional series leading up to a six-part Lent series on Radio 4's Sunday Service encouraging the church to offer a *Welcome to the Stranger*.

MARCH 2022

After a year of incredible responses and growth, the Welcome Network has grown 214% to 916 churches nationwide, representing over 30 denominations!

We have seen churches launch 14 new Welcome Boxes projects, with 32 now running across the UK. Our UKHK network now has 771 churches with more being added as we launch new welcome projects.

Across the Welcome Network (421), Welcome Boxes (227), UKHK (707) and Afghan Welcome (4200) programmes, we have seen over 5700 people welcomed by local churches across the country and over 1100 volunteers receive training to provide the best possible cross-cultural welcome.

In April 2021 we were a team of seven. As we have responded to crises and developed resources, training and support programmes, our team has grown too to meet the demands and challenges. Our team now comprises 14 people, including our National Development Team who provide local, hands-on support to churches in the North of England, South of England and the Midlands.



Welcome!

FEBRUARY 2022



The invasion of Ukraine resulted in millions fleeing into neighbouring countries and as well as seeking safety in the UK. We launched Ukraine Welcome to provide practical support to people fleeing Ukraine, as well as resources for individuals and churches seeking to welcome refugees. Over 330 people joined our Ukraine Welcomer training.

In recognition of the contribution UKHK had made to welcome BN(O) visa holders from Hong Kong, we were delighted to receive a UK Government Grant from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities of £312,000 to develop a series of social, professional and education integration projects running until June 2022.

The Year Ahead

DEVELOPING NATIONWIDE SUPPORT

Following a year of such tremendous growth across the **Welcome Network**, we plan to build on the momentum that we are seeing throughout the UK Church to offer a welcome to more refugees.

We will continue to focus on engaging new churches to join the Welcome Network, aiming to see 1200 churches nationwide, as well as developing deeper relationships with existing churches to provide the best possible support. We will do this through the continued expansion of our **National Development Team** across the country who can provide localised, specialist support and training to churches.

As more and more churches join the Welcome Network and establish intentional outreach and support programmes to refugees and people seeking asylum, we are aiming for 5% of Welcome Network churches to run the **Welcome Boxes** project. This will ensure the best welcome possible for people seeking refuge in the UK, with dedicated teams in churches ready to welcome anyone seeking refuge in their communities, proactively and intentionally.

UKHK

With the receipt of funding from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), we are excited to be launching a range of **UKHK** projects run in partnership with **OMF** and **COCM** to help local churches connect with new arrivals from Hong Kong, and enable them to feel welcome in their new home.

Social Integration projects include **The Welcome Course**, a six-part course for churches welcoming people from Hong Kong, and a series of **Friendship Festivals** around the country. Professional Integration projects include the hosting of an online job fair and a series of **Skills to Work** webinars helping people from Hong Kong to adapt to the UK job market. Finally, our **Educational Integration** projects will produce and distribute a Welcome Magazine to primary school age children across the country as well as running an online **Every Child Welcome** event to help schools and families to better understand how to support children in the UK school system.

“WE PLAN TO BUILD ON THE MOMENTUM THAT WE ARE SEEING THROUGHOUT THE UK CHURCH TO OFFER A WELCOME TO MORE REFUGEES.”

BEYOND THE CRISIS - SUPPORTING AFGHAN AND UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

With thousands of Afghans still living in hotels across the UK, we continue to train and equip churches throughout the UK as they provide direct support to councils, hotels and Afghan communities.

We also continue to provide guidance for churches welcoming Afghan families as they move into more permanent housing, and practical resources for churches to use with Afghan families to facilitate their integration. This includes translating the Welcome Course into Dari and Pashto.

Likewise, with thousands of Ukrainian refugees living with short-term hosts and potentially seeking longer-term homes, we will develop programmes that provide practical support to churches and meet the direct needs of refugee families. **Welcome Homes**, which has developed from the **Hospitality Pledge**, will work with the UK Church and socially-minded Christian landlords to identify and provide long-term housing solutions in their local area.

FUNDING AND SUSTAINABILITY

With a growing number of churches receiving support across the Welcome Network, an increasing number of refugee groups receiving direct support, and the resulting need for an expansion of the Welcome Churches team, we will continue to develop new and existing income streams including trust funding, government grants, and regular support from individuals and churches. This is vital to ensure that Welcome Churches continues to meet the growing needs of the 900+ churches in the Welcome Network and to ensure that thousands more refugees will be welcomed by their local church in years to come.

Financial Review 2021-2022

The charity has seen a significant increase in funding, rising to £1,332,721 (2021: £199,790).

This has included government funding of £312,000 towards UKHK from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to develop a range of training, resources and events for people arriving from Hong Kong.

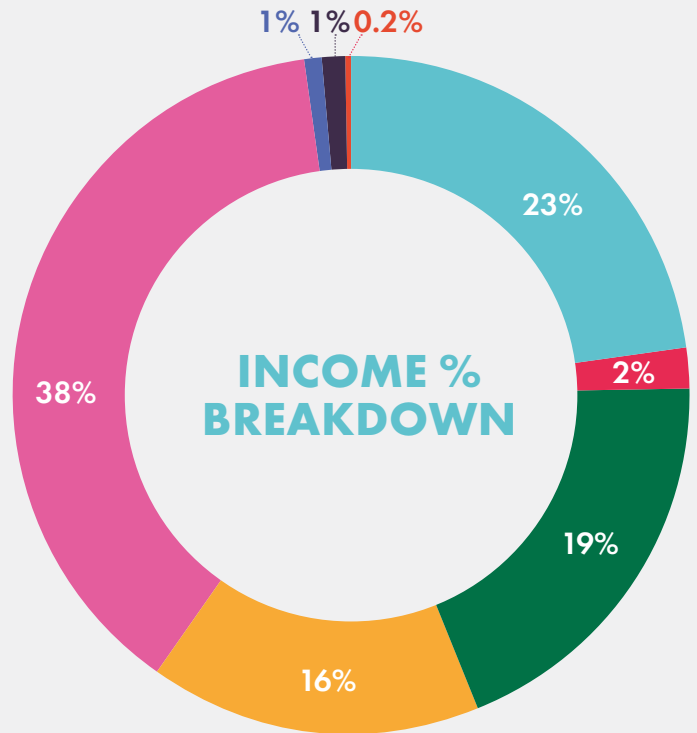
We also saw incredible generosity from individuals, churches and organisations, raising over £500,000 in response to the needs of Afghan refugees arriving at such short notice.

We are honoured and humbled by the trusting response and generosity of the UK public and the Church as we continue to develop innovative programmes that provide the best possible support to refugees as they rebuild their lives.



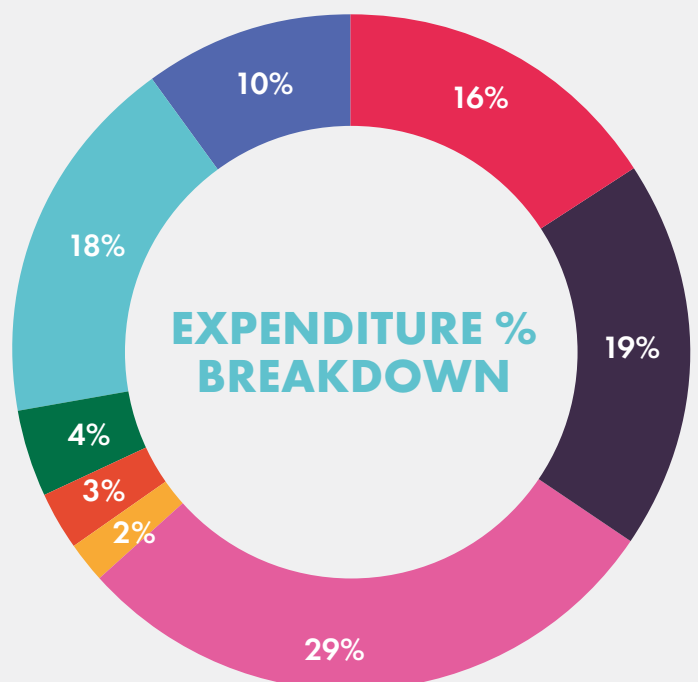
WELCOME CHURCHES INCOME 2021-22

● Government Grant	£312,000
● UKHK Consortium Funding	£26,160
● Grant Funding	£257,830
● General Donations	£211,570
● Afghan Emergency Appeal	£502,052
● Welcome Boxes	£11,700
● Events	£9,022
● Other	£2,387
Total	£1,332,721



WELCOME CHURCHES EXPENDITURE 2021-22

● UKHK	£79,859
● The Hospitality Pledge	£97,355
● Afghan Response	£144,725
● Online Welcome Network	£8,227
● Refugee resources	£16,110
● Fundraising and communications	£17,604
● National Network Development	£88,770
● Support Costs	£48,350
Total	£501,000





WELCOME CHURCHES

NO REFUGEE ALONE

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Registered charity number: 1177344