

Waltham Forest Migrant Action Trustees Annual Report 2023

This report is the second during my tenure as chair of trustees. It has been an honour to serve and work with a team of dedicated and committed people drawn from the London Borough of Waltham Forest. All trustees give of their time and skills on a voluntary basis. The contribution they make towards the wellbeing of asylum seekers, migrants and refugees should not be underestimated. Thanks is also due to the team of volunteers so ably led by our part time paid Support Centre manager. They have had considerable success in providing support and a welcoming environment to some of the most vulnerable and underprivileged members of our community. This has been done in the face of an ever increasing hostile environment faced by our service users. That coupled with support from WFMA members and the general public, give us cause for hope and is an encouragement to those who avail themselves of our resources.

WFMA continues its successful partnership with the Refugee and Migrant Forum of Essex and London (RAMFEL). WFMA purchases expert legal advice from RAMFEL provided at our Support Centre. A separate report is available regarding the activities of our Support Centre.

Thanks are due to Black Horse Road Baptist Church who continue to provide use of their premises enabling WFMA to run the weekly Support Centre. WFMA welcomes this ongoing support.

The Board of Trustees meets bi monthly and currently consists of nine members. We welcomed our latest trustee, Tahreem Noor, when she was co opted during the year. The board has very recently commenced a recruitment campaign both to more readily represent our diverse community, seek specific skill sets and attract those with lived experience of migrant issues.

This campaign has been enhanced by the skills of our recently recruited part time Campaigns and Communications Manager, our second paid employee.

A significant advance led by our trustee Luke Rooney, has seen WFMA's application to become registered by The Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC), accepted. This will enable us to provide in house level 1 advice on Immigration, EU and Asylum law. As WFMA volunteers undertake training and become qualified, level 2 (more complex case work) and level 3 (appeals), will become available to our service users. The registration by OISC will also enable WFMA to access more funding streams and further enhance our ability to meet the needs of asylum seekers, migrants and refugees.

Thanks are due to Dr Jean King, our trustee who leads the WFMA grants applications team of volunteers. The team has been successful notably in securing funding from City Bridge Foundation (CBF), for the post of Campaign and Communications manager. The board is grateful for the support from CBF. The team faces a challenge during the coming financial year when funding expires for the Support Centre manager post. The board is confident that this important post will

attract the necessary grant funding.

As WFMA continues to grow and volunteer capacity increases, the funding of a Volunteer Coordinator manager will become an increasing priority. Additionally, office accommodation will become an increasing necessity to facilitate continuing growth. A potential joint funding application with our sister organisation, Stories and Supper, may prove the best avenue to secure funding.

Funding opportunities via community events have been limited primarily due to organisational capacity. It is envisaged that the addition of our Campaigns and Communications manager will improve this source of funding and raise awareness of the issues facing asylum seekers, refugees and migrants.

Thanks are due to Wood Street Music and Arts Festival for hosting a very successful fundraising event. Over £500. was raised. A welcome addition to WFMA funds. The event took on an added significance as one of our volunteers, an asylum seeker from Iraq, spoke eloquently and passionately about his and his families' harrowing journey to the UK. The hushed room and thunderous applause gave recognition to his powerful, moving and hopeful testimony.

We have a good working relationship with our local authority, Waltham Forest Council. The council regularly refers people to our Support Centre. Whilst WFMA acknowledges the considerable financial constraints caused by the current difficult financial climate, funding from the local authority remains limited.

I wish to pay tribute to Clive Bower (trustee and volunteer), who is the WFMA treasurer. Clive virtually single handedly ensures WFMA finances are on a sound footing and the Board of Trustees recommends reading the annual financial report. The Board recommends acceptance of the WFMA Income and Expenditure Accounts for the year 2022-2023.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the fortitude of the men, women and children who make the often harrowing and dangerous journeys to the UK. They often receive a far from warm welcome to these British Isles including the seemingly endless raft of rules and regulations seemingly, aimed at making their already traumatic lives even more difficult. The thanks our volunteers receive from asylum seekers, migrants and refugees who seek the help of WFMA is truly humbling. We will continue to provide that help to whoever and whenever we can.

Norman Minter
Chair of Trustees
WFMA