

# Across the Nations Annual Report 2023-2024



ACROSS  

---

The Nations

## **Our mission**

We believe in a world that welcomes and values minoritised communities.

## **Our vision**

Across The Nations is a charity that partners with local organisations to develop innovative and sustainable programmes promoting the well-being of marginalised communities.

## **Our key principles**

The ethos of the charity and the activities it invests in are underpinned by the following key principles:

- Filling the gap of the marginalised; to be led by the needs of the marginalised and invisible in society.
- Forming and collaborating with local and international partnerships.
- Understanding local culture to find sustainable solutions that are understood by the local culture.
- Building new leadership to enable new leaders to build capacity at local level.
- Investing at the point of need to ensure funding goes directly to those at their point of need.

## **Our history**

Established in 1998, Across the Nations (AtN) was initially set up to provide a response to the marginalised special needs community in Morocco. The charity partnered with others to support the foundation of a special school which was established at this time and continues to the present day.

In 2017, as a response to the needs of people displaced by events in the Middle East, a partnership was established with STEP Iraq which was

already working with marginalised and displaced people in a refugee camp in Rabat.

Working in partnership with STEP, AtN began an Art Therapy Project and an Adventure Therapy Climbing Project aimed at supporting the mental health and well-being of displaced and traumatised young people. In addition, a Livelihood project was started to develop IT skills for those within the refugee camp.

In 2020, HEM, which began independently in 2014 with a small group of healthcare professionals supporting local clinicians in Burkina Faso and Jordan, affiliated itself with AtN to give it a structure to grow within. This affiliation has developed alongside the other strands of the charity and is now an important and integral part of the work of AtN.

HEM connects Health, Education and Mentoring expertise and experience with local and national practitioners and service providers working to meet the needs of the communities they serve.

The charity continues to actively seek ways to support marginalised and displaced people at a local level and in partnership with others, wherever they are in most need across the world.

## **Our partners**

### **STEP UK**

Established in the Kurdish region of Northern Iraq in 2001 when Saddam Hussein was still in power, STEP is a niche child protection agency which primarily supports vulnerable children, refugees, Internally Displaced Persons, and local Kurds; including kids working on the streets. It is also working with the local government to pioneer a regional foster care system which is slowly being rolled out across Kurdistan. For more information see: <http://www.step-uk.com/uk/>

MRDS (Millenium Relief & Development Services)

MRDS partners with AtN to fund all of the food, water and transportation for the climbing trips.

## **ABOUT US**

### **Board of Trustees**

The Across the Nations board of trustees is responsible for governing the charity to ensure compliance with the charities aims and the law, manage the effective use of resources, set strategy and ensure the work is effective.

In line with good practice, the board keeps under regular review its own performance, roles and responsibilities and sets boundaries between its governance role and the charity's day-to-day operations. In June 2023 the Trustees all engaged in a self-evaluation process focused on best practice for the role of Trustees. As a result, the policies and practices were reviewed, updated and improved.

The AtN board of trustees includes a wide range of ages, relevant skills, and experience.

Trustees meet at least four times a year and often monthly to maintain an oversight of all aspects of the delivery and finances of the charity.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>
Tim Morris	Chairperson
Tracey Ripley – McElvogue	Trustee
Conor Mason	Trustee/Finance
Heather Mason	Trustee
Alan Peek	Trustee
Anne Davey	Trustee/Secretary

## Volunteers/field workers

Matthew Low	Volunteer field worker/ climbing project/HEM
Gail Low	Volunteer field worker/art therapy/HEM
Bryony Wilson	Volunteer field worker/Leader of the HEM team

The volunteer field workers lead and develop the day to work of the charity at the point of need. They develop collaborative relationships and partnerships, lead training and engage in the practical tasks relevant to their various areas of expertise.

## Annual update on the activities of the charity

The following section summarises the key activities and development of the charity that have been taken place within the reporting period.

The activities fall under several areas, including the Çiyako Project/adventure therapy, art therapy and health, mentoring and education through HEM.

### Adventure Therapy/ Çiyako Project

The prototype adventure therapy project, named the Çiyako project, has continued amongst displaced people in the Middle East, with progress being made both to document and build improvements into the programme to improve the service for participants.

Climbing continues to be a popular and well-attended activity, with lots of positive feedback from the young people involved. During this reporting period a total of 237 male and female young people took part in 23 climbing days at two locations. It is reported that the more frequently the young people are able to attend, the more confident they are becoming.

For 2023 we went back to mostly using our well established site at Kani Shok, which continues to be a popular site. At the beginning of 2024, the team started to use a site in Hazer Merd for some of the young people who had been climbing with us previously. This is assessed as being a



good, very challenging site but is not as suitable for beginners.

We did three training days for the Çîyako staff to keep their skills fresh and look at new skills. The staff also helped develop the new site, which included risk assessments.

Through partnering with STEP, the charity has provided regular financial support and mentoring to two young local adults who live in the refugee camp: Jwan Fathi and Nour Anwar Mohammad. They train and prepare groups of young people using the STEP facility in the Arbat Refugee Camp in preparation for the climbing days in the mountains when fully qualified and accredited mountain climbers are available to take them. During the summer months of July and August, when it has been too hot to be outside, Jwan and Nour help with the programmes run by STEP.

Jwan and Nour are developing experience, leadership and reporting skills under the guidance of the Across the Nations field worker Matt Low. During Matt's visits to lead the climbing trips it was noted that most of the young people managed to climb well and handled the belaying competently.

The project continues to show real potential. It is encouraging to note that an in-country social worker identifies and funnels children into the programme for its emotional therapeutic benefit. Verbal feedback gathered from the young people and staff indicates clearly how much they enjoy, benefit from, and value these climbing sessions. It is an extremely popular programme, with almost 100% positive participant feedback.

*What some of the young people said:*

*"The thing I remember is the encouragement and motivation of colleagues and teachers when I climbed the mountain and reached a point where I could not continue, but thanks to their encouragement, I was able to reach the top and the summit."*

*"The first time when I went to Çîyako. I looked at the mountain and felt afraid and was trembling with fear, but because of this experience and my ascension to the top, I overcame fear and was no longer afraid of heights."*

*"[Çîyako is] very useful. We learn cooperation, encouragement, and a pleasant atmosphere outside the camp. We have fun with friends outside, we are in the mountains, we face our fear, and we can do a lot to be stronger and overcome fear."*

*What some of the staff said:*

*“When I came back from Syria, I didn't trust myself. I was not confident; I had a problem with self-esteem. So, when I attended or joined the climbing team, I felt that the first few sessions were difficult, and then I continued. I trusted my power, my energy, and I continued building the trust within myself.”*

*Çiyako, or the climbing, built a relationship with a young child who didn't trust anybody. “He sought to start to trust the staff who found a way to help him and to avoid the bad things that could happen during that time to him. Now, he takes the responsibility of his family and he's working and bringing the income to the whole family right now. And we saved his life.”*

This feedback is part of the work being developed to capture and collate both qualitative and quantitative data. This is building an evidence base to show how the project is positively impacting the mental health and well-being of the young people involved.

The AtN volunteer field worker Matt Low is writing an evaluation of the project, which he aims to publish in an academic journal. He values the supervision he receives from Dr Glenn Myles. It is expected that it will be finished by the end of 2024.

A review of the project noted a particular challenge which the climbing team are assessing, and they will plan appropriate strategies to overcome them, where appropriate. Some of the young people were struggling to descend from the top of a rock climb despite pre-climb day preparation in the playground at STEP's facilities. Despite a more focused effort to encourage each child to climb two metres and descend to prepare them, this was still a notable difference from the young people who climbed in the United Kingdom.

There were no safety issues or notable injuries among the young people.

Security in the area remains an ongoing concern that remains under constant review for visits taking place.

**Future priorities for the climbing project are:**

- to establish a sound financial footing for the resources required to maintain and develop the work;
- to further develop the therapeutic side of the programme;
- to source additional good climbing sites to provide for those young people requesting to go climbing in different places;

- to consider suitable training and qualifications for local climbing instructors to run this type of programme to facilitate the expansion and longer-term sustainability of the project at both a local and regional level.

A student, from the University of Wales Trinity St David, made a high-quality film in February 2023-2024 as a part of his course, focused on the climbing activities. It can be viewed here:

[https://youtu.be/NCn3yQn7dDA?si=Q\\_7AgLCVoA\\_t9UzP](https://youtu.be/NCn3yQn7dDA?si=Q_7AgLCVoA_t9UzP).

The film has been used to help with fundraising and raise awareness of the work of AtN.

The hope is that, with secure funding, Adventure Therapy programmes could be developed to help displaced people in other parts of the Middle East or those who have fled the region and ended up in Europe.

## **Livelihoods Project**

AtN identified a particular gap in training for some young people in the refugee camp as a result of research and advice from organisations such as the ILO and UN bodies.

A programme was started at the Arbat Refugee Camp to empower some of these young people through IT skills, English language courses, business basics lectures, and leadership sessions.

AtN provided ten computers to help develop this work.

This programme is ongoing and being run by STEP staff.

## **HeM Health**

The collaborative work on person-centred nursing care in Erbil and a national suicide prevention strategy with academics and practitioners in Sulaymaniyah started in the previous reporting period and has continued. There is a strong emphasis on continuing to build effective working relationships and networks across and between contacts being made.

Training for university staff in Koya by the HEM team was provided during a visit to Kurdistan in October 2023. These lecturers are connected to the Education, Peace and Politics (EPP) venture with Ulster University. The training focussed on Occupational Therapy, Art Therapy and Adventure Therapy. This link came through collaboration through HEM with a PhD student in Critical Studies in Improvisation and International Development from Guelph University.

An Occupational Therapist from the UK had travelled with the volunteer team and as well as teaching at Koya, they carried out enjoyable and informative sensory training sessions with staff and the Child Protection Team at Arbat Refugee Camp, Sulaymaniyah. There was a very positive response to the training by everyone involved.

HEM has now completed its role in instigating links between health professionals to raise awareness about suicide prevention. Three psychologists in Sulaymaniyah are carrying out research on causes and prevention to inform future work.

HEM will continue to support the work from the UK.

HEM is currently investigating and researching links with further international areas of conflict and exile within the Middle East, with a possible focus on emergency response. A slow and gradual approach is being advocated to gain an understanding of where the charity can best help.

## **ART THERAPY**

The Art Space developed for children in STEP's Child Friendly Space in the camp continues to be used by the young people in the camp. Gail Low's work as an art therapist in this context has ended, but the therapeutic value of art continues as children use this space. Gail continues to mentor one of the staff as she explores how to establish art therapy indigenously.

Having relocated to Wales, Gail continues to explore ways to develop art therapy among marginalised and displaced people.

### **How have our activities met the AtN aims and objectives?**

Filling the gap of the marginalised; to be led by the needs of the marginalised and invisible in society.

- The Çiyako Project has been attended by children and young people who need experiences to support their mental health and well-being, from the refugee camp in Rabat.
- HeM health has raised awareness about the high level of suicide among women, often unseen, living in Northern Iraq and fostered links to promote a strategy to address this.

- HeM health has fostered international links to support the training of staff and development of patient centred care in Northern Iraq.

### Forming and collaborating with local and international partnerships.

Partnership working and collaboration has continued with:

- STEP
- MRDS
- Health professional from the UK, Iraq and the United States
- Local climbers in Kurdistan

### Understanding local culture to find sustainable solutions that are understood by the local culture.

- Two of the volunteers have lived and worked in the Middle East for many years and have a sound understanding of the local culture and language where the projects are currently focused.
- The third volunteer has visited the projects and built relationships with people on the ground.
- Opportunities are prioritised to listen to local people and discuss their needs and the projects with people on the ground both in person and remotely.
- Young people participating in the projects are asked for their views and actions are taken because of their feedback.

### Building new leadership and capacity at local level.

- Jwan and Nour are provided with opportunities to develop their leadership skills through funding, leading sessions with young people and receiving mentoring from Matt Low.
- All three volunteers have participated in leading training workshops to build capacity and leadership skill of staff.
- Sensory training sessions were held for staff and the Child Protection Team at Arbat Refugee Camp, Sulaymaniyah.

### Investing at the point of need to ensure funding goes directly to those at their point of need.

- Almost all funding goes directly to the projects to benefit the young people who participate.
- Essential resources are purchased to maintain a safe and high-quality project.
- A minimal amount of resource is used for administration purposes.

## **TREASURER'S REPORT**

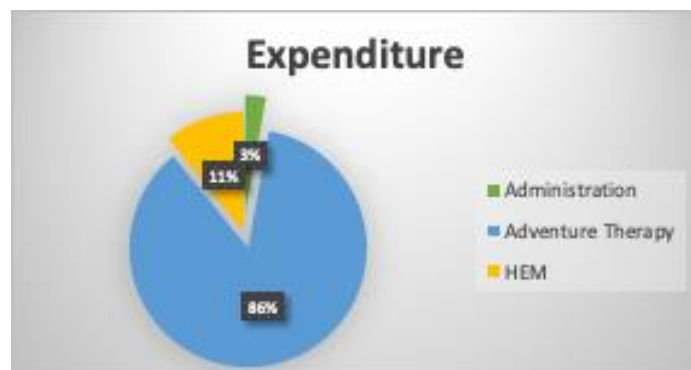
There has been a significant increase in gifts this year, primarily driven by additional fundraising to provide regular support for the adventure therapy project via STEP.

Most of our giving this year was through one-off gifts. The trustees are aware of the need to grow regular support to enable more consistent project funding going forward.

Costs of running the charity remain minimal with only accountancy and bank fees this year. We continue to leverage grants and charitable benefits wherever possible to keep our costs to a minimum. Accountancy fees decreased this year due to not having to prepare a corporation tax return.

Expenditure was allocated as follows:

- Adventure Therapy £7915
- HEM £1000
- Administration £257



AtN continues to leverage CAF, Stewardship and JustGiving platforms as well as direct bank transfers where appropriate to receive funds.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS & THANK YOU**

The Trustees are very grateful to the following donors who have provided funds for the charity during this reporting period. The annual report summarises some of the significant impact you are making in the lives of many people because of your generous giving.

A BIG THANK YOU TO ALL OF THE FOLLOWING DONORS

**MRDS** (*Millenium Relief & Development Services*): for the generous funding that provides all of the food, water and transportation for the climbing trips.

**Individual donors**: for the donations given on a regular monthly basis.

**Derby Community Choir led by Gaynor Shaw**: for the generous donation raised by a Saturday walking up a hill in the Peak District and the sponsored “sing” on top. <https://www.justgiving.com/page/local-vocals-community-choir-1682456615723>

**Flashpoint in Swansea and RedPoint in Bristol**: For their support for AtN in hosting fundraising events at their climbing and bouldering sites.

Across the Nations Ltd. Registered Charity Number NIC100326. Registered Company  
Number NI028174