

Trustee Annual Report

2022- 2023

This is the Trustee Annual Report of Migrant Support Service, registration number NIC107476, and principal address at Office Unit F, Mayfair Business Centre, 193-205 Garvaghy Rd, Portadown, BT62 1HA. It covers the period of the 1st April, 2022 to the 31st March, 2023.

On the date of approval of this report, the charity trustees were Alicja Moates, Brendan MacPartlin, Frank Brady, Hemiterio Mendes, Gary Moates, and Francisca Soares.

Migrant Support Service registered as a charity on 23rd March 2020. It is unincorporated and governed by a Constitution. Its charitable purposes are welcome and support, .migrants who happen to be our neighbours and integrate them into a community of right relations where they can flourish and enjoy equal opportunities and parity of esteem. .

The current project, Walking with Migrants, is funded by the National Lottery and has undertaken to improve, over three years, the lives of some 900 Migrants living in the ABC Council and general Mid Ulster area by offering advice and support on a range of social issues as well as advocating on behalf of the individuals and their family.

What we have done in the 2022-23

We envisaged four avenues of action relevant to newcomers namely, settling down, finding employment, building community, recovering from the Pandemic, and dealing with the cost-of-living increases.

Categories of Action	No. of Cases	Activities
Immigration issues	392 face to face meetings	As we progress beyond the Brexit deadlines, we are faced with increasingly difficult immigration cases. We had about 275 face-to-face meetings linked with settlement status, Biometric Residence Card applications, and visas.
Settling in	350 cases	The cases concerned National Insurance number; Child Benefit; Rate rebates; Tax return penalties; Driving Licence etc.
Employment issues	379 cases	The cases concerned Tax credits; HMRC overpayments; Universal Credit, Writing CVs, Job applications, Pension, PIP (Disability Allowances); research on the living wage as distinct from the minimum wage.

Sharing Learning	155 People	Of 155 enrolled for English about 100 individuals have successfully completed a language module and have shown a noticeable improvement in their English proficiency. Many have already secured employment. Approximately 30 children were registered for Romanian classes where they enhanced their skills and formed new friendships.
Community Services	125 cases	The cases concerned crime prevention, assisting with contracts, and help with energy suppliers.
Training	5 Events	Concerning mental health and wellbeing
Food Poverty	1030 people	140 Food Vouchers, 90 Referrals to the food bank; 800 Xmas dinners in collaboration with the Knights of Columbanus and Drumcree Community Centre.

Outcomes – what we have achieved

Immigration issues came to the fore with Brexit and required European residents to apply for settlement. By helping with this we enabled hundreds to settle and gain confidence and increased independence. Maria, for instance, said: “I just wanted to say a huge thank you for all the help and support you gave me during my settlement application. Your advice and resources made everything so much easier and helped me to feel more confident about starting my new life. I really appreciate all the hard work and dedication you put into helping people like me find stability and new opportunities. Thanks to you, I can now look forward to this exciting new chapter with real excitement and confidence.”

The schools are good in these parts and newcomers want to see their children get into education. Poverty is an obstacle and causes anxiety. Lenguta, for example, found that help in this area lifted her anxiety and stress: “I am immensely thankful for your support in securing free school meals and uniforms. Your assistance lightened our financial burden and enabled my child to thrive in their education. Your dedication to helping families like mine is truly appreciated. Thank you for making a meaningful difference in our lives.”

Learning to speak English is key to many aspects of integration and not only involves imparting learning and skills but also reduces isolation, builds community, and empowers people with confidence in their daily interactions. Felicia’s experience was that it made a difference: “I just wanted to say a big thank you to your organization for all the help you've given me in learning English. Your classes and resources have made such a difference - not only have they opened up new opportunities for me, but they've also boosted my confidence and made my life richer. I'm so impressed with your dedication to education, and I feel lucky to have benefited from it. Thanks for empowering me to communicate effectively and achieve my goals!”

Successes, Challenges and Learnings from Experience

The project, Walking with Migrants, was developed and is delivered by members of the migrant community who serve as trustees, staff, and volunteers as well as those who seek our services. Their skills are crucial in achieving our proposed goals. We learn from each other as we work together. We also use user feedback is crucial to identify the needs of migrant communities and areas of improvement in our services.

We aim to build on the strengths of those who walk with us and in that way build their confidence. Assistance with settling down increased peoples, confidence in controlling their lives and claiming their rights.

People who attended the English felt empowered to pursue job opportunities and become active members of the community.

By helping with settlement status, benefits, and skills development people learned how to access their entitlements, gained in self-sufficiency, and leveraged their unique strengths and experience to contribute to their communities.

Newcomers are entitled to the many services provided by many agencies but not knowing their way around is a big obstacle. In providing information and referring onwards we have made good connections with the relevant statutory agencies as well as the Food Bank and the local Borough Council (ABC). We have organised joint events with the PSNI and been materially supported by the Knights of /Columbanus.

The rise in the cost of living has been a challenge, as it has for everybody, and our funders have responded well to needs that arose in this context.

Brexit has changed the position of EU citizens who are resident here. So far the immigration authorities have ensured that the transition has gone successfully but we think cases will be more difficult to deal with further changes in the immigration rules. There is a scarcity of immigration advice in Northern Ireland and we see a need to skill ourselves up to deal with the need.

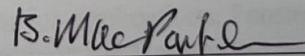
750 people benefitted from our activities in the past financial year. The beneficiaries are migrants living mainly in the boroughs of the Armagh City, Banbridge, and Craigavon Council and of the Mid-Ulster Council. They originated mostly in the Portuguese-speaking countries of Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America as well as European and Middle Eastern countries. The activities and services were delivered by 3 paid staff and 16 volunteers. The total expenditure on these activities amounted to £99,005 during that year which was met by a total gross income of £116,393. These activities flowed from the purposes of Migrant Support Service and are beneficial to the newcomers involved. No harm has followed from the charity's purposes.

Signed on behalf of the Trustees



Francisca Soares, Trustee

Date: 30/09/2023



Brendan MacPartlin, Trustee

Date: 30/09/2023