

**ANNUAL REPORT  
2022/2023**

انجمن افغانان لندن

**AFGHAN ASSOCIATION  
OF LONDON  
(HARROW)**

## **Acknowledgment**

The Charity's dedicated staff, and valued volunteers have responded to the Afghan refugee crisis with vigour and dedication. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to everyone who has made a contribution towards the work of the Charity. In particular, we would like to thank our current funders for their generous support.

Our current funders and supporters are: Community Fund, Tudor Trust, Trust for London, John Lyon's Charity, Harrow Council, Harrow Giving, Harrow School, Young Harrow Foundation, City Bridge Trust and the Awards for All.

## Our Supporters and Funders



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## Message from the Chair

Welcome to our annual report 2022 - 2023. As the chair of the Afghan Association of London I am incredibly proud of the difference we have made over the past year to the lives of Afghan refugees seeking asylum in the UK, as outlined in the report. We have played a major part in helping the newly arrived Afghan refugees to successfully rebuild their lives in the UK. Our dedicated staff and volunteers provided invaluable support to resettled Afghan refugees and other vulnerable members of the community in particular after a major refugee crisis in history of Afghanistan. They have adapted quickly in such an uncertain time and have responded by initiating and delivering Refugee Crises and COVID-19 Emergency Response Projects. We were heartened by public generosity and support. In particular our funders whom have offered funding specifically to deal with the refugee crises.

On behalf of the Charity, I would like to thank all our supporters in particular our generous funders for their ongoing support and a very speedy response by providing financial help to the Charity in a most difficult time.

We have successfully moved to a new and spacious premises. The new office space will offer flexibility to enhance and increase the current activities of the Charity. We have developed excellent partnerships and working relationship with key external agencies that seek to enable refugees to rebuild their lives in the UK. We are heartened by numerous positive feedback letters we have received from the members of the community, appreciating the Afghan Association's response in the time of this unprecedented refugee crisis. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our dedicated staff and committed volunteers and in particular the funders, whose support and generosity was essential in providing invaluable services to the community during 2022 - 2023. I would like to thank my Board of Trustee colleagues for their immensely hard work to transform the Afghan Association of London into a mature and ambitious organisation with increased capacity and capability as a trusted Refugee Community Organisation in London.

**Ms Zohal Nabi**

**Chair, Board of Trustees**

## **Objectives, structure, governance and management**

- 1) The main objectives of the Charity are to:
- 2) To relieve poverty amongst the Afghan community in the NW London Boroughs, by the provision of an advice and interpreting service.
- 3) To advance education amongst the Afghan community in the same areas, particularly by the provision of language classes and a library.
- 4) To provide facilities for the recreation and other leisure-time activities for people who are in need of such facilities by reason of their social and economic circumstances with a view to improving their quality of life.
- 5) To assist the aged, particularly those from the Afghan community; and
- 6) To protect and preserve public health by the provision of advice.

Trustees are jointly the governing body and have ultimate responsibility for the operational administration of the Afghan Association, its premises, finances, and the employment of staff. The trustees may appoint co-opted members in order to bring specific skills and expertise to the charity.

## **Key Achievements and Success**

AAL is now running a number of projects and services over the last year.

Decades of conflict, poverty, and the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic were already taking their toll on the people of Afghanistan. The recent conflict and change of government, coupled with the worst drought in 27 years, have tipped the country over the edge into humanitarian crisis. Economic collapse has sent food prices soaring. Afghanistan's health care system has reached the brink of collapse. The Afghan community is following the unfolding crisis in Afghanistan with great anxiety and trepidation. These unfortunate events have no doubt seriously affected their wellbeing and mental health. They are afraid, confused and in desperate need of help.

The Afghan refugee crisis is not over. According to the Media, thousands of Afghan refugees are reportedly set to be forced out of hotels, under new Government plans. Between 8,000 and 9,000 Afghan refugees that are currently living in hotels and temporary accommodations in the UK, will be given a few months' notice before being moved out. The news is likely to spark concerns that some Afghan refugees could become homeless. The services of the Charity will be absolutely vital for newly arrived refugees currently living in hotels or temporary accommodations.

## **Refugee Crisis**

We are still inundated with calls and emails from our community, seeking help for newly arrived refugees and general information about the ARAP programme. We have initiated two major projects to help our community to stay safe during the Coronavirus Epidemic and an Emergency Response Project to help newly arrived refugees from Afghanistan as part of the Government's resettlement programme. The Refugee Emergency Response Project is one of the most successful projects that the Afghan

Association has initiated, which is assisting hundreds of newly arrived vulnerable refugees to fully rebuild their lives the UK. Our dedicated staff and our impressive pool of volunteers are helping with the provision general advice and information on welfare, legal advice on immigration, distribution of a large quality of donations, organising social events for newly arrived families. The Afghan Association's Advice team and volunteers are constantly in touch with people seeking asylum in the UK including families evacuated as part of the resettlement programme. We have distributed a large quantity of donations including books to newly arrived refugees, who desperately needed practical help and support.



## **Wellbeing support for Afghan evacuees in London**

The Afghan Association's support to newly arrived Afghan refugees to settle into new lives in the UK has been acknowledged by health institutions, government agencies, other charities and the Afghan community in London.

## **Research Project with London Metropolitan University**

The Afghan Association of London has played a key role in successfully completing a research project called "Recently arrived migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in London: accessing support in hostile times", initiated and funded by London Metropolitan University. The Afghan Association of London's staff and volunteers' invaluable contribution was acknowledged and highly appreciated in the launch event in Harrow. Drawing on the experiences of diverse Afghans in London, this project provides valuable data on these important issues and makes recommendations for how services and support could be improved. The final report can be accessed on our website.

## **London RCO Advocacy Forum**

The Afghan Association of London was approached by Refugee Council to take part in establishing an advocacy group for the refugee sector called "London RCO Advocacy Forum" with 15 other London-based Refugee Community Organisations who have been selected to be co-production partners for this project. The Afghan Association of London is represented as part of the leadership of the newly established Advocacy Forum. The Advocacy Forum has enabled the Refugee Community Groups to have a stronger voice in London on refugee issues.

The membership of the Refugee Advocacy Forum has increased considerably. Since the inception of the Refugee Advocacy Forum, 22 new members have joined, bringing the total number to 37, which is considered to be a great success.

## **Volunteering**

The Afghan Association has benefited tremendously from the volunteering project in a number of ways: increased activity for the charity; increased variety of services, creating new projects, reaching out to more users. Volunteering is now an integral part of the Afghan Association's service delivery. Our volunteers have contributed tremendously to the Afghan Association's Projects, providing essential support to the most vulnerable members of the community. Volunteers have been an integral part of the Afghan Association's services, activities and projects. It is important to highlight that they have also benefited further from their volunteering experience – by helping to learn new skills, maintain and expand skills, knowledge and social networks. We very much appreciate all the help given by our volunteers which has made such a difference to the lives of our community members. **A Big Thank You to all our volunteers**

## **Youth and Sport Activity**

We are grateful to **John Lyon's Charity and Harrow Young Foundation** for funding the Afghan Association's Youth and Sport activities.

The Afghan youth are vulnerable and experience isolation and exclusion from different aspects of social life. They are affected by the lack of support, resources (sport and leisure facilities) and support networks. Many young people have difficulties settling into educational institutions and consequently fail to do as well at their studies. They, therefore, have limited employment opportunities and as a result may adopt a pessimistic outlook to life. In addition, young people are dealing with a range of issues such as lack of UK qualifications, lack of work experience, low self-esteem and confidence, little motivation or aspiration and a lack of positive role models. AAL facilitates different youth and sport activities. The Charity is now focusing on newly arrived refugee youth and children.

## **Football, Taekwondo, Volleyball**

Football is one of the most popular sports amongst the Afghan community. We have assisted four football managers to participate and successfully complete a coaching qualification. The feedback from participating teams is extremely positive. We would like to thank John Lyon Charity for their generous funding and support which has enabled the Afghan Association to organise such a successful event annually for the last three years.

John Lyon's Charity's funding has enabled the Afghan Association to establish and run numerous youth and sport and extracurricular activities. Our youth and sport activities has been providing excellent opportunities for young people to keep fit and healthy, overcome isolation by making new friends and having fun.

## Football Tournament

The Afghan Association has organised a very successful football tournament, participated by numerous football teams in 2022. The event was a great success and appreciated by participants and football enthusiasts, considering a long period of inactivity as a result of COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions.

## Elderly Group Project

The WhatsApp group is becoming an essential part of the social interaction between community members in particular the elderly. As part of the Coronavirus Epidemic Emergency Response Project, we have created a social group to ensure the most vulnerable members of the community overcome isolation. We have assisted two elderly people to use WhatsApp for the first time. "It is fantastic to be in touch with my friends and family in such a difficult time". "So, thank you very much". Mr M

## Chess Club and Chess Competition

The Chess Club meets every Monday 18:30-22:00. The Chess Club is becoming one of the most popular activities in Harrow. The new meeting room is a perfect place for Chess Club.

## Over 40s Football

We have resumed the football sessions after the lockdown period. The over 40s Football team is becoming very popular with new members joining every week. The feedback from participants has been very encouraging.

## Partnership and joint working

We have established strong mutually beneficial links with Local, London-wide and National organisations and charities. We would like to thank **Harrow Council, Harrow Giving, Harrow School, Young Harrow Foundation** for funding our numerous projects, **Harrow School** for funding a fantastic Christmas project, helping our community with financial support and vouchers and for allowing our youth project to utilise their pitch facilities. We would like to thank **Refugee Council** and **Refugee Action** for capacity building support and **Voluntary Action Harrow** for practical support with fundraising.



## **Women Project**

We have been fortunate to receive a very generous funding from the Tudor Trust for a vitally important initiative; the women project. It has been fantastic to watch the project grow and go from strength to strength. Hundreds of Afghan women have taken part and benefited enormously from their participation in different activities. The feedback from the community has been extremely positive.

The project in particular focuses on provision of essential help and support to newly arrived refugees after the recent refugee crises in Afghanistan. The Afghan Association of London's Women Group Leaders and women project volunteers have been the lifeline for newly arrived Afghan women, providing practical help and support including a very successful event in partnership with the E5 Baby Bank Charity. The event was extremely successful and we have received positive feedback from the participants. A large quantity of donation including children's toys, Afghan food, and Primark vouchers.

### **The Main Activities & Services Provided**

The Women's project has been a great opportunity for women especially Harrow residents to come together and have a 'come to' place when they need support. For the first couple of months the project focussed on establishing the needs of the Afghan women. We attended numerous Afghan events, met women and obtained their views. The women we interviewed were from different backgrounds, successful businesswomen, headteachers, lawyers, journalists, housewives, students, single mothers, from different Afghan ethnicities, Dari and Pashto speakers.

Our study showed that language barriers, low self-esteem and lack of confidence, cultural differences, mental health issues, housing concerns and difficulties connected with a low income were common problems. Many Afghan women are well established and earn a good income when they receive the support they need. We decided to support those women who are in need of English language skills, have cultural barriers and find it difficult to attend educational institutions because of low self-esteem, or having young children that are not of school age.

We have over thirty women utilising our services and taking part in different activities on a weekly basis. The project has attracted participants from other communities too, including Iranian and Syrian refugees.

Feedback: "I am so pleased to have a place that I can share my concerns and you understand me." My mental wellbeing has improved since I come to the women project. It is therapeutic for me to talk to my fellow "WATANDARS" – (My fellow country women)

In addition to general advice and information, the Women Group Leaders have organised the following activities and services for Afghan women since the project commenced.

## ESOL Class

ESOL class was one of our most successful services, where we managed to provide help and support for many women. The main aim was to help women who could not go to college due to childcare responsibility, mental health issues, and lack of confidence. The course helped them to learn how to speak, listen, read and write in English to gain employment, understand the medical professionals they encounter, assist their children at school and more.

We managed to provide childcare for women with small children so they could come to the ESOL class with peace of mind. We had different levels of English competency and one teacher. It was a challenge for the teacher to manage differing levels of English, but because of her experience and empathy for these refugee women she confidently run the class very successfully.

We have been approached by the Job Centre, charity organizations and Local Authorities to accept more women. The demand is there but we are lacking resources to expand the project further.

For the time being we are renting Victoria Hall for two hours for ESOL class. The class is so popular because of the support they are getting from each other in the class and through the WhatsApp group. The class structure is informal, and we try to make it as pleasant as possible and stress free.



## Healthy cooking

Healthy cooking sessions started in May 2022. The sessions focussed on introducing healthy recipes along with healthy meal preparation and to learn more about the dietary benefits of individual ingredients. The sessions were found to be most beneficial for women.

A primary aim of the sessions was to let women be creative, happy, be in control of portion size and ingredients as well as an aid to de-stress and boost confidence.

At the beginning women in the group were shy and thought they knew very little about healthy cooking but gradually they realised they knew as much as everyone else. Women were made to feel at home, they made friends and were able to engage with each other.

At the beginning of the healthy cooking session there was one lady who was very shy and reserved. She was very depressed as she had no one at home to talk to. Her daughters were married and lived in other countries and her sons were busy with their

own lives. She had no friends locally and felt isolated. She was not talking and sharing her ideas at the beginning. However, once she realised the set up was very informal and she was surrounded by friendly people, she bloomed like a flower and could not stop talking. Once she cooked a lovely Afghan bread and brought it for others to taste. She also made these beautiful oven mitts along with a thick cover for steaming rice and generously gifted it to the group for us to use. The craft illustrated her talent which she had hidden most of her life. She was immensely proud and full of joy for her creativity and neat work.



### Tea morning:

We started the tea morning in October. The purpose of the morning was to provide a healthy and peaceful environment for women. Most women suffered from not having a companion to talk and felt lonely. Women who were mostly quiet and withdrawn seemed happier by coming to different activities. By bringing women together, they were able to tell stories and share their experiences. It was received well by women especially the newly arrived refugees as they were new and did not have friends and a well-established social life. Socialising with others helped them a lot with their mental wellbeing.



### Personal Hygiene presentation:

The project delivered a personal hygiene presentation in November 2022. The aim of the presentation was to help women, especially the newly arrived refugees, to maintain both physical and mental health and to have more information about infectious

diseases especially Covid 19. It was received very well by all, and the group requested more presentations like this. All the women had an active role and shared clever ideas.

Most of their basic personal hygiene needs were ignored while growing up in Afghanistan, especially the fact about body changes and menstruation. There was one woman who had a traumatic experience and still cannot believe why her needs as a young and unexperienced girl was ignored by her own mother. She was not told what to expect in puberty. Once she shared her experience others were encouraged to tell their stories and experiences.

It was great to see most of these women wanted to educate their daughters about puberty, changes in their body behaviour and the importance of maintaining a good personal hygiene. They did not want to ignore their daughter's needs as some had been ignored by their parents.

## Yoga and Meditation

After the collapse of the previous regime in August 2021 and a dramatic change in Afghanistan, ensued one of the major refugee crises in the world. Many evacuated Afghans were placed into two bridging hotels in Watford. The Bushey Spiritual Centre collected donations of clothes to distribute to Afghans in these hotels. One of the Women Group Leaders was volunteering in the Temple to help refugees. Through an established contact with the Temple, a collaboration to run Yoga and a meditation programme for Afghan women began. Bushey Spiritual Centre hosts the yoga sessions every month. The women attending have benefited enormously from the yoga and meditation, plus educationally too, learning about a new culture and faith. The distance to the Centre was a challenge for some women with small children and we experienced a three-month gap whilst sourcing a new venue. In January this year since we secured Victoria Hall and have arranged for the two yoga and meditation teachers to come to Victoria Hall. Many more women have since joined the classes. For some it was the first-time experiencing yoga and meditation. Our ESOL class concentrated on body parts, body movements and feelings vocabularies, before the class. It was an enjoyable and relaxed atmosphere and the classes continue monthly, but the demand to increase this to twice a week is not possible at present due to the issues of resources and capacity.



## May/October/December Parties:

In May 2022 we took part in an Eid event and had a stall at the Kenton recreation Ground – we had a table with a variety of activities like drawing, knitting for women and Afghan Eid pastries. We used this event to ask what activities people would like and to assist in designing a programme for the year. Many women joined our bringing WhatsApp group and we continue to communicate with them.



We organised two parties for women and children in October and December. They were well received by all. The October party was to celebrate half term, the Group's achievements and an opportunity to share home cooked food with each other. The December 22 party was to celebrate Christmas and New Year where we had great Afghan food from the Sham Restaurant. Everyone loved the food and entertainment. The newly arrived refugees really enjoyed the food as they had missed traditional food for several months. We had women from Iran and Kurdistan who shared their dancing and music. Many of the women missed parties and Women Only Gatherings, they were so pleased to have something like this and enjoy.



The opportunity to get together and meet others from different backgrounds has led to some strong friendships.

## Event for Afghans in the bridging hotels in Camden 23 July 2022

Camden's residents under the leadership of Alison Rooper had a fun day out for Afghans in the bridging hotels in Camden. One of our women's leaders was approached to support the team in organising the event. She was delighted to take part and support her fellow Afghans who had been living in overcrowded accommodation in hotels for over a year. She was part of the team who met regularly, advising and coordinating between the Camden residents' team and the Afghan women in the hotels. She was responsible for organising food for 400 people which

she arranged via two Harrow bakeries by ordering Afghan street food and pastries. She also approached an Afghan woman, Soraya who was running a catering business from home. She has supported Soraya by creating a business name: Soraya Caterer - Afghan Dishes.

Both our Women Group Leaders attended the event and supported with translation and coordination on the day. Over 400 people attended the event. Most were women and children. They had food, music and entertainment and at the event the women were asked if they are interested in informal conversational English language lessons. We gathered a list of those interested and our Women Group Leaders are coordinating this initiative.

Most of the families have recently moved out of one of the hotels. Few families are accommodated in Camden and are receiving continuous support. Women from the other hotel are still there and the language support continues for them. Our pool of professional volunteers is providing a remarkable support to these families. At present, they have a room in the school where the women children are attending. The women are attending English class one hour before collecting their children from the school.



## Integration via Music

On 5<sup>th</sup> July there was a concert in Earth-part of Spitalfields Music Festival. New music by Afghan composers in exile were performed by the Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra and conductor Cayenna Ponchione-Bailey, with guest performers playing traditional Afghan instruments.

The Afghan Associations' Women Group Leaders facilitated the attendance for a group of newly arrived refugee women (29 people including 3 new arrivals) by purchasing tickets and transportation. It was a great opportunity to learn about cultural integration via music. We had great feedback, especially about the great concert Hall and the atmosphere.



## Networking Events

We attended a networking meeting - Afghan Business Awards organised by Arian Magazine on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2022. It was great to meet successful business women and learn from their experiences.



## One to Once support

Our service of one-to-one support has been extremely popular. We do receive referrals from the boroughs of London such as Brent, Barnet, Hounslow, and Harrow and outside of London, including Northampton.

The issues that our clients face vary across; children's services, housing, mental health, loneliness, cuts in benefits, schooling, university fees, job search, hospital appointments, food bank, and baby bank, travel costs, utility bills.

## Case studies

An elderly member of the Afghan community who lives in sheltered accommodation was suffering from loneliness. We visited her at home where we learnt that she was hoping to bring her daughter over from Afghanistan. This is obviously out of our power, but we were able to listen to her, gave her the opportunity to socialise and talk to others and we are still in contact with her.

Ms S is suffering from severe depression, and we have invited her to our activities and arranged one-to-one sessions for her. Initially it was a challenge for her to attend our activities, but as time went by, she has found the courage and is now attending regularly and her mood has improved remarkably. She was educated in Dari up to high school and married at a young age and has 3 children. We were researching what we could do to help motivate her to get engaged and learn. She wanted to help her family back in Afghanistan to get out of Afghanistan. We have helped her write a letter to the US visa application for Afghans. She has created an email address for herself. Despite knowing that there is very little hope for her family to get out Afghanistan, this issue has motivated Ms S to get out of the house and keep her mind busy. We have seen an enormous improvement in her mental wellbeing. She attends our activities and is engaging very well.

B A has approached us; her husband is addicted to heroin and is in a rehabilitation hospital in a neighbouring country. She has a spouse visa with two sons age, two years and 8 months old. Her Universal Credit has been cut as it was in her husband's name. She has been left with no income in a rented studio flat. We contacted Citizens Advice Bureau and arranged for the food bank and baby bank to assist her. She does

not speak English and is not able to go out on her own, as she is from a very conservative family and all work outside the home was done by her husband.

For three months we helped her until her husband arrived home with their two teenage daughters. The husband is drug free and is working part time. We are in communication with Citizens Advice Bureau and following up their application for improved accommodation with the help of Harrow Housing team.

Our current activities are beneficial to the women and we can see that their self-esteem and confidence has improved since they joined us. English language skills have improved too. We will continue our ongoing ESOL class, Healthy Cooking, Yoga and Medication and one to one support service. We will also continue to coordinate English Conversation classes for the women in the bridging hotel in Camden and the volunteers' residents of Camden.

Some of the women have shown interest in tailoring class. We are hoping that we will purchase sewing machines and provide tailoring facilities for those interested parties.

### **Way Forward:**

The Afghan women are the most vulnerable segment of the society. Considering the serious challenges that the Afghan refugee women face, the existence of a women project for Afghan women in particular for the newly arrived refugees is vitally important.

### **Advice and Information:**

## **ADVICE AND INFORMATION**

■ Citizenship ■ Travel Document ■ British Passport ■ ARAP applications ■ General Advice



The newly arrived refugees could experience numerous challenges. In addition to securing suitable accommodation and support, access to professional advice and information is considered to be crucial in the process of seeking asylum. The pressure on the Charity's Advice and Information service has been huge. We are receiving numerous phone calls and emails from individuals and referral agencies seeking help, advice and information. As a case study we have highlighted below the extracts of an email we received from a professional agency seeking our help for a client.

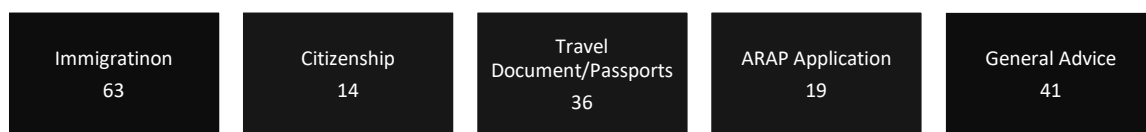


“I am a counsellor working in London with young people seeking asylum. I am contacting you on behalf of a client I am working with, he is a 22-year-old male from Afghanistan. The client would really benefit from some advice and guidance with his asylum claim. He is feeling understandably frustrated and concerned with the complicated processes of the asylum system and would really like some practical help with navigating it to ease his anxiety. He is having some trouble finding a solicitor also”.  
S. W.

## **Mental Health Practitioner, Young Refugee Service**

We have provided professional advice and information to 173 clients on a wide range of issues from seeking asylum to submitting passport applications.

## **The Breakdown of the Advice Service Provision**



We have received remarkable feedback from our clients. “I am really pleased with a fantastic service that I received from the Afghan Association. Whenever I needed help and advice, they were there to assist with kindness and compassion. I am grateful for their patience to listen to my problems and for the practical help and assistance I received. I did not speak English, and I was having to cope with the recent death of my husband. I had to look after my extended family. They helped me to overcome numerous issues that I was facing. They never charged me for their services”.  
Translation of a client’s feedback from Farsi

It goes without saying that seeking professional help and advice is hugely costly. We have successfully assisted clients who were not in a position to afford the cost of applying for Citizenship and British Passport to obtain the status and the documents free of charge. We have saved the community thousands of pounds by provision of free advice service.

## **Financial Statement**

The Board of Trustees are pleased that AAL has finished the year in a relatively stable financial position. AAL has secured additional funding from different sources including donations from the public in response to the refugee crisis. The Afghan Association enjoys a period of relative stability. However, we will continue with our search for funding in response to emerging needs of the community.

## **Reference and administrative information**

### **Statement of trustee’s responsibility**

The Trustees are responsible for preparing the Annual Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law. The Trustees prepare financial

statements that provide a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the Charity, the incoming resources and application of resources including the income and expenditure of the Charity for the year.

The Trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the Charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Charities Act 2011, the Charity (Accounts and Reports) regulations and the provisions of the trust deed. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the Charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

## **Declaration by the Trustees**

This report has been prepared in accordance with the Charities Law. The Trustees declare that they have approved the Trustee Report

By order of the Trustees:

Signed on behalf of the Charity's Trustees: **Zohal Nabi**          Date:

Name: **Zohal Nabi** (Chair).

# A selection of pictures of the Afghan Association's activities and projects



**Cultural Events**



**Research Project**



**Education**



**Public Donations**

