



ANNUAL REPORT 2023/2024

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**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 are: Community Fund, Tudor Trust, Trust for London, John Lyon's Charity, Harrow Council, Harrow Giving, Harrow School, Young Harrow Foundation, City Bridge Trust, CVS Brent and the Awards for All.

Our Supporters and Funders



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Message from the Chair

I am really pleased to introduce the Afghan Association of London's Annual Report 2023–2024, which sets out all aspects of the Charity's services and activities for the year. 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 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. We also played a significant role in supporting fleeing Afghans during the large-scale refugee crisis that ensued after the fall of Kabul. We were deeply moved by the public's generosity, support, and quick response to the refugee crisis.

On behalf of the Charity, I would like 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 at a difficult time.

We have developed excellent partnerships and working relationships with key external agencies that seek to enable refugees to rebuild their lives in the UK. We are heartened by the numerous positive feedback letters we have received from members of the community, expressing their appreciation for the Afghan Association's response during an unprecedented refugee crisis. I would like to thank my Board of Trustee colleagues for their immense 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.

In particular, I am extremely grateful to my predecessor **Ms Zohal Nabi** for her fantastic contribution to the Charity, and wish her all the best for her future endeavours. I also wish to convey my sincere thanks for the valued contribution of the Board of Trustee members.

Ms Khadija Azada

Acting Chair, Board of Trustees

Key Achievements and Success

AAL is now running a number of projects and services, which we have offered to the Afghan community of London over the past year.

Refugee Crisis

The Afghan refugee crisis is far from over. We at the AAL, as representatives of the Afghan community of London, have continued to watch the unfolding crisis in Afghanistan with great anxiety and trepidation. These unfortunate events have no doubt seriously affected members of our community in terms of their physical wellbeing and mental health. Many are afraid, confused and in desperate need of help.

According to the Media, thousands of Afghan refugees, many of whom have already been displaced from their hotel accommodation, are currently in unstable, temporary accommodation and at risk of are reportedly set to be forced out of hotels, under new Government plans. The Afghan refugees currently living in hotels and temporary accommodation in the UK, have only been 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, in addition to our community members who need continued support as they are facing numerous challenges in the process of their integration into UK society.

Refugee Emergency Response Project

We continue to be inundated with calls and emails from our community, seeking help for newly arrived refugees and general information about the ARAP programme. We have initiated and delivered numerous successful projects 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 currently 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 of general advice and information on welfare, legal advice on immigration, distribution of a large quality of donations, as well as organising social events for newly arrived families.

Wellbeing support for Afghan refugees in London

The Afghan Association currently offers various activities and workshops aimed at boosting mental health and wellbeing, including those offered through The Women Project, as detailed below. The Afghan Association's comprehensive support for newly arrived Afghan refugees settling into new lives in the UK has been acknowledged by health institutions, government agencies, other charities and the Afghan community in London.

Volunteering

The Charity has benefited tremendously from the invaluable contribution of our committed and professional volunteers. Our volunteers are 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. We are pleased to highlight that some of our valued volunteers have also benefited from their participation in volunteering by successfully securing paid employment as a direct result of their involvement with the charity.

Youth and Sports Activity

We are grateful to **John Lyon's Charity and Harrow Young Foundation** for funding the Afghan Association's Youth and Sports activities. Funding from **John Lyon's Charity** has enabled the Afghan Association to establish and run numerous youth and sport and extracurricular activities. Our youth and sports activities have been providing excellent opportunities for young people to keep fit and healthy, overcome isolation by making new friends and have fun. Annually, more than 500 people including families are benefiting from youth and sport activities.

Football

Football is one of the most popular sports amongst the Afghan community. In addition to regular football training sessions, our group participated in a local league and went on to organise a very successful football tournament, the "Nawroz Cup". 300 people participated in this event, including newly arrived refugees and families, and had a great day of fun and The Watford Football Club also kindly invited the Afghan Association to take part in a Matchday Package on 6th April followed by free tickets to see Watford FC play at Vicarage Road Stadium. This included a friendly U15/U16 tournament, and a great day was had by all.

Football Training & Tournament

The Afghan Association organised a very successful football tournament in 2023, in which numerous football teams participated. The event was a great success and appreciated by participants and football enthusiasts, especially considering the long period of inactivity as a result of COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions.

Over 40s Football

The over 40s Football team is becoming very popular, with new members joining every week. The feedback from participants has been very encouraging.



Volleyball

The Afghan youth and newly arrived refugees are enjoying regular volleyball sessions, which will culminate in a full day's tournament between different teams. Our team will also participate in a local tournament in which they will play against several different teams in the local community.



Taekwondo

Our taekwondo sessions are becoming popular, attracting many new participants. The club is supervised by a well-qualified and professional British Instructor. The participants are making good progress towards the higher levels. One student commented:

“Taekwondo classes have given a massive boost to my confidence...I am able to channel my energy into such a positive outlet.”



Aryana School

We have successfully relaunched the Aryana School, a Saturday morning initiative offering lessons for children (in particular the newly arrived refugee children) in English, Maths and their native languages, Dari and Pashtu. We successfully expanded these classes when the demand increased. More than 40 children are now benefiting from these classes, which support them alongside their mainstream education. The families are greatly appreciating the extra help.



Winter Wonderland

More than 40 children benefitted from a day out over the Christmas holidays, during which they were treated to a free meal and a present. It was a day of much needed festive fun for everyone.



Chess Club and Chess Competition

Our Chess Club participants are enjoying this cerebral endeavour. The club meets every week, and holds a regular Chess Competition and tournament, which is very popular.



Elderly Group Project

Our Elderly Group meetings have been well attended over the last year. In addition, our specially created WhatsApp group is becoming an essential means for social interaction amongst our elderly community members. We have also initiated an allotment project for our elderly members, which is functioning very well, and for which we are planning a big event this summer.



Partnership and joint working

We have established strong, mutually beneficial links with local, London-wide and National organisations as well as charities. We would like to thank **Harrow Council, Harrow Giving, Harrow School, and Young Harrow Foundation** for funding our numerous projects. We would also like to thank **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. Finally, we would like to gratefully acknowledge the **Refugee Council** and **Refugee Action** for their capacity building support and **Voluntary Action Harrow** for their practical support with fundraising.

Women Project

The Main Activities & Services Provided

First, on behalf of the Afghan Association of London, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the **Tudor Trust** most sincerely for funding the Women Project. The project was initiated specifically to empower Afghan women – one of the most vulnerable segments of the Afghan community – to integrate successfully into UK society. The number of activities and services on offer has increased considerably after the launch of the project. The project has attracted new participants, particularly from the population of newly arrived refugees who entered the UK as part of the Government's resettlement programme. The second year of the project saw further expansion of the activities and the introduction of new initiatives including: ESOL classes, Healthy Cooking and Yoga & Meditation sessions, and Tailoring classes, in addition to our general service providing advice on different issues including how to access essential services and provisions.

Partnership agreement with Stanmore College

We have been fortunate to attract the support of Stanmore College to provide funding and teachers for both tailoring and ESOL classes for Afghan women.

These new initiatives are extremely popular and the number of participants is increasing considerably.



Joint Meetings with Stanmore College colleagues to finalise the partnership agreement

We are currently discussing the possibility of expanding the Women Project activities in neighbouring boroughs in partnership with Stanmore College.

ESOL Classes:

The current ESOL classes are taking place every Thursday from 11:00-12:30 and 1:00-2:30pm. In the beginners' class approximately ten women are currently learning the language. Childcare is also available, and three women are benefiting from this service by bringing their children to the classes. Some of the women are illiterate with no formal

education in Afghanistan. ESOL classes have provided them with the opportunity to participate, to learn how to read and write for the first time in their lives, in addition to overcoming isolation by making new friends. In the intermediate class, more than twenty women are participating. Stanmore College has recruited an excellent professional ESOL teacher, who has previous volunteer experience, to run these classes. She is a highly competitive and compassionate ESOL teacher with years of experience in the field. We are lucky to have her as part of the team. In total thirty-six women are currently benefiting from these ESOL classes, with many more expressing interests in participating.



Tailoring & Sewing Classes:

We have initiated a fantastic new activity, tailoring & sewing classes. These classes are taking place every Tuesday from 9:30am-11:00, 11:20-12:50 and 1:20-2:50pm, and are incredibly popular. We currently offer Beginners, Intermediate, and Advanced classes.

More than sixty women are currently attending our tailoring classes. This is an impressive number, especially compared with the number of participants of other well publicised events in London.



Employment of Previous Service User

We are delighted to highlight that a previous service user of the Afghan Association, a professional and skilled tailor with previous education in tailoring, is now working as a teacher as part of this initiative. This is a remarkable achievement for a newly arrived refugee housewife and is a huge step along the pathway to rebuilding her life in the UK, and we are immensely proud of her initiative.

She has established an excellent rapport with her students and colleagues. It is fantastic to observe her progress and to witness how her self-esteem and confidence have grown after these positive changes in her circumstances. These classes are taking place in Victoria Hall in Harrow, the same location as last year. The venue is centrally located and in an ideal location for access.

End of Year Event

Our end of year event for the Afghan women was a huge success. This was a fantastic opportunity for the women to overcome isolation, make new friends, and celebrate their culture together. The participants brought their favourite, regional dishes and shared them with other community members.

It was a perfect opportunity for isolated women to socialise and to seek support from other community members. We were able to share details of other services and provisions to newly arrived refugee women during this event, empowering them by increasing their ability to access community resources.

Selection of feedback from the women participating in different activities

We always receive brilliant feedback from the beneficiaries of our projects and services. Here is a selection of some of their comments:

“I look forward to coming to the class and spend time with other women and to learn new skills too”

“It has improved my mental well-being”

“I feel that I belong to my community, which empowers and motivates me”

“Thank you for creating this opportunity for us women to get together, it is a relief that we know that Maliha and Anahita are there for us, and we can turn to them with our problems and they will find the ways to help us and comfort us”

Perinatal Peer Support Training

We held a very well attended perinatal training event with Blossom charity. The training focused on teaching women how to help themselves and other women in the community from the beginning of the pregnancy until the child is two years old. These sessions were very therapeutic as the women were able to share their experiences during pregnancy, and any lack of knowledge which created anxiety for them.

The women were taught how to take care of other women during pregnancy and to signpost the women to relevant services and provisions. The female participants were issued with certificates, providing recognition of their skills, which mark a great achievement, as the certificates can be added to their CVs.



Yoga and Meditation

Our yoga and meditation sessions took place once a month and continued throughout the year until the school summer holidays. Our service users benefitted greatly from these sessions, which provided them with an opportunity to relax their minds, and improve their physical and mental wellbeing, whilst learning new skills. We are currently in the process of planning new sessions.

Camden Volunteers support for Afghan women

The Women Project was kindly supported by the Camden Volunteers, namely by organising a large event for Afghans living in hotels in Camden. Over four hundred people participated and had a great time. During the event Afghan dishes were sampled, alongside music and entertainment. After the event, we facilitated an English conversation session between the Camden volunteers and the Afghan women who were interested in improving the language skills that are so vital for successful integration into UK society. These informal learning conversation sessions continued after securing a venue at Argyle School in Camden. We have received several messages of appreciation for not only supporting the initiative, but for the practical help we provided to the newly arrived Afghan refugee women.

Reproductive and Sexual Health and Menopause

We had two workshops on women's health run by NISABA, an outstanding organisation that fights "for menstrual justice and health equity...for refugees." The sessions enabled women to learn more about their periods as well as personal hygiene as well as how to manage pain during menstruation and access personal care products, which is especially helpful as some families find this very challenging due to rising costs.

In addition, the sessions discussed the unhealthy myths and stigmas pertaining to periods in Afghan culture. Women were made aware of the health consequences of, for example, not during their periods as well as the mental health consequences of the stigma and shame associated with their menstrual cycles. The participants raised relevant questions with regards to the subject of menstruation and were signposted to how to receive practical help for themselves and their daughters during their periods by this very worthwhile organisation.

Menopause is a social stigma and taboo subject for Afghan women, which is not discussed openly. The symptoms experienced could cause anxiety and depression. Anya Maclaren, a Clinical Research Assistant in Sexual Health and HIV, ran a fantastic workshop on menstruation and menopause. She provided extremely useful information about the subject, as well as how to receive practical help during the menopause and to access the support available. We have received excellent feedback from the participants, requesting similar educational workshops in the future.

NISAB donates natural, eco-friendly women’s sanitary care products every month to be distributed amongst women on low income, and newly arrived refugees who are not in a position to afford the cost of purchasing these products.



Hair presentation:

We hosted a hugely enjoyable presentation by one of our very capable volunteers, who is an expert in health and beauty. The primary focus of the presentation was on hair health, covering anatomy, hair structure, hair growth cycle, natural remedies, and lifestyle.

The participants benefited immensely from the session. They were able to see how to brush, oil and massage the hair of a live model.



Exiled Writers Workshop

We organised a very successful workshop facilitated by an organisation called Exiled Writers Ink. The central theme of the event was identity, and participants were encouraged to

explore their own personal perspectives on this. We had the pleasure of welcoming two Exiled Writers' distinguished poets as facilitators of the workshop, namely **Dr Jennifer Langer and Ziba KARBASSI**.

Each participant brought in a box of meaningful objects related to their identity or a memory of a deeply significant event. The budding poets were then invited to compose a poem collaboratively, embedding it with significance of these objects.

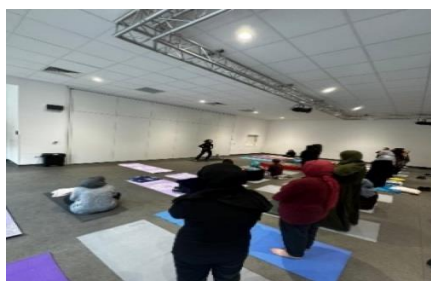


Wellbeing workshop

We held a wellbeing workshop, whose main objective was to reduce the high levels of stress experienced by our service users due to dealing with the pressures of their day to day lives, including looking after their families, and adjusting to life and culture in the UK. The women practiced breathing exercises, stretching, and yoga postures to help alleviate stress and anxiety.

For most of the women it was their first-time learning and practicing breathing exercises as well as doing gentle yoga poses. One of the participants mentioned that it was the first time in fifteen years that she finally had a moment for herself, as she was normally too busy with childcare responsibilities and household chores.

The participants were able to learn the useful skill of self-care for their well-being, whilst increasing their physical fitness and coming together as a community of strong women.



One to One Sessions and Ongoing Support, Case Studies

Domestic Violence Case

We provided ongoing support to a very vulnerable young woman who was experiencing both physical and emotional abuse. She was also in the midst of an extremely complicated and exhausting divorce case.

We assisted her to successfully apply for indefinite leave to remain status, secure volunteering positions, access benefits and temporary accommodation, and finally to secure paid employment. We are pleased to see her rebuilding her life, and finding some happiness again.

Separation Case

We supported another vulnerable woman going through a complicated separation process. We have provided support on many different fronts and are pleased to see positive changes as a result.

A client with a Housing Issue

We provided ongoing support to a family of seven. The father is suffering from mental health issues. In addition to their lack of English, understanding of the British system was a major problem for this newly arrived refugee family. They were facing numerous issues and were struggling to deal with these difficulties. We have provided support in many different ways – including taking them to food banks for four months until January 2023, as they didn't have any financial support. Since then, we have been in regular communication with the family, enrolling the daughters in school, involving Children's Social Services, and the Harrow Housing Team to help them.

We have submitted all the documents required for their housing application, with the help of Citizen's Advice Bureau, and rallied other charities to support the husband with his mental health issues. After nearly two years of waiting, the family has finally been rehoused to an excellent, three-bedroom Council house in Uxbridge. The family is extremely happy and thankful for the Charity's ongoing support and assistance. The family's daughters' English language skills have enormously improved, and they are interpreting for their mother.

An elderly domestic abuse victim

A woman in her sixties approached us to support her. She came to the country six years ago, but her immigration documents were still with the Home Office, and she had no legal papers nor any financial support. Unfortunately, she was also diabetic, had impaired vision, and suffered from other health issues.

On top of that, she was receiving emotional abuse from her family, and was forced to live in a two-bedroom flat with them, as well as share a bunk bed with her teenage granddaughter.

We contacted her solicitor and chased her case with the Home Office. After five months she received a decision from the Home Office granting her refugee status. We helped her to successfully apply for Universal credit and become financially independent. We also

communicated with her GP and hospitals to follow up with her medical appointments, to receive the necessary treatment. We also managed to secure accommodation from the Harrow Homeless team. She is now living independently and is very happy to have a place called home. She is also attending our ESOL beginner's class every Thursday.

Ongoing Support to the community

We are providing ongoing, one to one support to Afghan women on a variety of issues. We are pleased to highlight that three of the Afghan Women Project volunteers have successfully secured paid employment, with GP surgeries and charities.

Unique Community - STORK Project

We are assisting Unique Community to deliver the Stork project, offering Afghan refugees art sessions to improve their wellbeing and mental health. Two of the Afghan Association's volunteers have been referred and secured paid positions as part of the project.

Social Events

We recently assisted a famous Afghan film Director with a screening of his newly released movie. We extended an invitation to Afghan refugee women to come and enjoy the film. It was a great event and a perfect opportunity for the community, particularly the women, to enjoy a film with their family and friends.

Looking to the Future

We are very grateful to the **Tudor Trust** for funding such a marvellous project. The Women Project is one of the most successful endeavours the Charity has ever initiated. The project is going from strength to strength.

We have been approached by an Ealing Council representative seeking the Afghan Association of London's assistance and advice in the process of initiating and delivering a similar project, geared towards newly arrived Afghan refugee women.

Considering the current remarkable achievements, in particular the constantly increasing numbers of participants in different activities, and how essential our services have become for many in the community, it is very important that The Women Project continues beyond the current funding period, which ends in March 2025.

To illustrate this, we would like to highlight a remarkable story, of a family who arrived in the UK in 2016. The Afghan Association assisted Ms H to deal with numerous family crises and difficulties. On the 15th of February we assisted Ms H and her four children to apply for British Passports and submit their Afghan passports to the Home Office.

Ms H is now studying part time to become a teacher and works part time while her children are at school, where they have settled in and are thriving. They continue to receive help and support and are now integrating successfully into UK society, all thanks to the generosity and support of the Tudor Trust.

Without the Tudor Trust's significant support, we at the Afghan Association of London could not have opened so many doors for refugee women and run the hugely empowering Women project, providing Afghan Women with a sense of agency, and tools to grow and succeed in the form of informative workshops and coming together as a community.

On behalf of all of us who have been involved directly or worked closely with the incredible Women Project, it has been a privilege to carry out these charitable works, thanks to the Tudor Trust's generous, ongoing support for the Afghan Association of London, and we are hopeful that we can continue to do so into the future.

Advice and Information Service

ADVICE AND INFORMATION

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



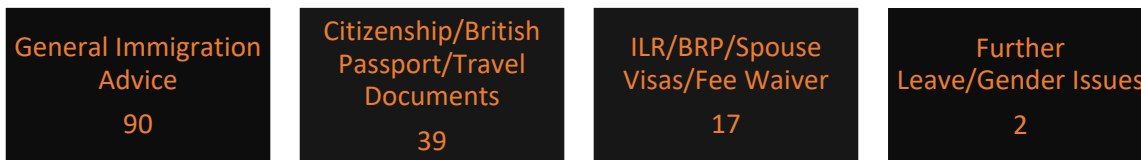
Newly arrived refugees experience numerous challenges. In addition to securing suitable accommodation and support, access to professional advice and information is crucial in the process of seeking asylum. The pressure on the Charity's Advice and Information service has been substantial. We receive numerous phone calls and emails from individuals and referral agencies seeking help, accurate advice and up to date information.

We have provided professional advice and information to over 200 clients on a wide range of issues from seeking asylum to submitting passport applications.

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 or British Passports to obtain the status and the documents free of charge. We have saved the community thousands of pounds through this free advice service.

The financial benefit to the community resulting from all the free immigration advice and fee waivers provided by the charity in 2023/24 was around **£75K**. This is a significant amount of money, especially if one considers the current cost of living crisis.

Breakdown of the Advice Service Provision



Feedback from Clients

One client who has received continuous support from the Afghan Association of London commented:

"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". (translated from Farsi)

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 have enjoyed a period of relative financial stability. We will continue our search for sources of funding in response to the 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: **Abdul Wali Zalmai** Date: **06 June 2024**

Name: **Abdul Wali Zalmai** (Chair).

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

