



ANNUAL REPORT 2024/2025

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**AFGHAN ASSOCIATION OF LONDON
(HARROW)**

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF IMPACT

Acknowledgment

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.



Your Support will help us to continue our mission for the next 30 years.



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 2024–2025, which sets out all aspects of the Charity's excellent 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. 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 Afghan refugees and other vulnerable members of the community. We were deeply moved by the public's generosity, support, and quick response to the refugee crisis. As a Chairperson, I would like to express my gratitude to all those who have supported the work of the Charity this year. We have made significant progress. I would like to express my gratitude to all those who have supported the Charity's mission this year in particular our generous funders. 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. 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.

Mr Abdul Wali Zalmai

Chair of the Board of Trustees



Wali Zalmai, the Chair of the Charity with Councillor Salim Chowdhury, Harrow's Mayor, in one of the Charity's major events in Harrow

Key Achievements and Success

As we celebrate our 30th year, we reflect on the incredible contribution the Charity's staff and volunteers have made to bring real positive changes in the lives of our community members. Over the past three decades, we have provided invaluable advice and information on immigration, housing, and welfare benefits, in addition to delivering a numerous groundbreaking project, and services to enable our community members to navigate the complexities of life in the UK. The Charity has indeed assisted our community members to successfully integrate and to call the UK as their new home.

Feedback

"The Afghan Association of London has had a profound impact on my life. You have helped me in my incredible journey from a client of the Charity to becoming a very successful businessman/entrepreneur. **A Big Thank You**".

The Charity's Response to 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.

The services of the Charity will be absolutely vital for newly arrived refugees, 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 Response Project

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.

We Wear Heritage Project



Exhibition of Traditional Clothing funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund was a major success (An Afghan model wearing traditional clothing)

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. 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.



Zohal Nabi, the former Chair of the Charity is one of our invaluable and devoted volunteers.

At Afghan Association of London, we are proud to be a community where colleagues and volunteers from all walks of life come together, each bringing their unique talents and experiences. Beyond their contributions to our programs and activities, many continue to excel in their professional pursuits. Recently, one of our remarkable volunteers and former Chair of the Charity, **Zohal Nabi** has published a paper in Clinical Oncology titled "Regional Lymph Node Delineation Variability and Its Dosimetric Impact in Breast Cancer Radiotherapy."

We believe in nurturing passion, ambition, and excellence, and we are committed to supporting individuals in reaching their highest potential. By empowering them to thrive, we not only help them fulfil their dreams but also contribute to the greater good of society. Together, we build a future driven by knowledge, compassion, and purpose.

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, between 500 to 600 people including families are benefiting from youth and sport activities.

Football Training Sessions & Football Tournament

In addition to regular football training sessions, we are hosting an annual summer youth football tournament in Harrow with 300 - 400 people participated in this event. The Watford Football Club is kindly inviting the Afghan Association to take part in an annual football event annually.

The Afghan Association organised a very successful football tournament in 2024, in which numerous football teams participated. The event was a great success and appreciated by participants and football enthusiasts.

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 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 addition to All Nations Volleyball Tournament annually, in which they will play against several different teams (around 40 teams).



Taekwondo Class and Wrestling Competition

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.

We were delighted to invite and introduce **Abbas Alizada**, also known as **Bruce Lee** of Afghanistan to our Taekwondo Class for a practical demonstration.



The Afghan Association of London was delighted to welcome Farzad Mansouri, an Afghan Olympian and Taekwondo Champion as a special guest at our Taekwondo training session.



We also celebrated, Jamshid Rahimi and Mohammad Asif Mohamadi's success as winners of gold medals in the Wrestling Championships 2025 initiated by England Wrestling.

The remarkably successful community sportsmen can become effective role models for our young people involved as part of the youth and sport activities.

Aryana School

We have successfully relaunched the Aryana School, a Saturday morning initiative offering lessons for children in English, Maths and their native languages. 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.

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

We are grateful to Awards for All for funding the Afghan Association's Elderly Project. The Elderly Group meetings have been well attended over the last year. The 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. A Walking Group has been established for elderly community members to keep active and enjoy the social interaction.



A very successful Day Trip to Historical Bath City for Afghan Elderly Group

Women Group's Project

The Main Activities & Services Provided

We 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 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 and other events

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. We are currently discussing

the possibility of expanding the Women Project activities in neighbouring boroughs in partnership with Stanmore College.



ESOL Classes:

In the beginners' ESOL 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. 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. 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.

Social and Cultural Events

Our social and cultural events are extremely popular and very well attended. A fantastic opportunity for the women to overcome isolation, make new friends, and celebrate their culture together. 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.



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.



Social events for women to overcome isolation

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.



Driving Theory Test, IT & Beautician Classes

In partnership with Stanmore College, we have successfully launched 3 new activities, namely; Driving Theory Test Class, IT class, and a Beautician Class. The number of participants is increasing considerably.

The beautician class, in particular, was a highlight. One participant shared her views as below *“This was the first time I did my nails-something just for myself. It was so relaxing and joyful experience.”*

Cooking Competition

We collaborated with Spiced in Watford, a charity supporting women facing mental health challenges and domestic violence, to organise a three-month cooking programme at West Herts College. Women from various cultural backgrounds came together to cook, share meals, and engage in open discussions. This initiative helped combat isolation and provided a comforting space for many women.

The programme culminated in a cooking competition, where Afghan dishes won first place among entries from seven countries. The competition was judged by Harry Lomas, a renowned chef managing 200 cooks at Wembley Stadium, the Olympics, and The Grove Restaurant.



End-of-Term Event (14th July 2024)

We hosted an End-of-Term Celebration to honour the women’s achievements. Participants received certificates for successfully completing ESOL and tailoring classes.

The event also featured workshops on:

- **Budgeting & Healthy Cooking** - Women prepared healthier versions of Afghan street food, incorporating more fibre and reducing oil to help prevent diabetes and high cholesterol.

- **Women's Health** - Experts spoke about diabetes, cholesterol, and cervical smear screening, with Harrow Healthy Living providing valuable insights.
- **Prenatal Support** - Our long-term partner, Blossom Charity, offered one-to-one advice on maternal health.



Representatives from Harrow Council and other organisations also attended, demonstrating great interest in our work.

Health Workshop (December 2024)

A Health Workshop was delivered by Safia Fazli, a registered paediatric nurse. The topics covered included:

- Basic Life Support (chest compressions, rescue breaths, emergency response).
- Choking Response (cough techniques, back slaps, abdominal thrusts).
- Diabetes Awareness (symptoms, treatment, and lifestyle changes).

Participants gained essential life-saving skills, which were well received.

Wellbeing Sessions

Due to popular demand, we increased our Wellbeing Workshops from one session per month to two:

1. **Yoga & Reiki** - Focuses on relaxation and stress management.
2. **Sound Healing** - Helps process trauma and promotes emotional healing.



Both sessions have been warmly embraced by the Afghan community.

Women Project WhatsApp Platforms

We have 153 women in our WhatsApp platform using our services and we are communicating with them about women group activities, raising awareness and discussing other relevant topics.

We have also created a WhatsApp Advertisement Hub – where women are promoting their business and generating income through this hub. 88 women are using this platform.

One-to-One Support Sessions

Throughout the year, we provided general advice and one-to-one support to women facing challenges, including:

- Housing & Benefits Assistance
- Children's Education Support
- Legal Aid & Family Law - Two women were referred to family law solicitors, and we accompanied them for interpretation and moral support since legal aid does not cover initial meetings or interpreter costs.
- Emergency Support - We provided clothing and kitchen essentials for newly arrived Afghan families in Bushey.
- Domestic Violence Support
- E-Visa Applications and other issues.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Social & Cultural Events

The Charity's social and cultural events and activities are oversubscribed. These events offer numerous mental health benefits, including increased social connection, reduced feelings of loneliness, and a sense of belonging for the most isolated members of the Afghan community. The individuals struggling with mental health issues will benefit particularly from these events.



Appreciating Qari Abdul Wakil's remarkable contribution to the community

Looking to the Future

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 **250** clients (individuals and families) 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 **2024/25** was around **£50K**. This is a significant amount of money, especially if one considers the current cost of living crisis.

Breakdown of the Advice Service Provision



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 2025**

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