

Stronger Together: Annual Conference Report: “What is SANCTUARY in 2025?”



Left to right: Barbara Snowarska – Stronger Together Network Development Officer; Nick Cassidy – CEO of Omagh Ethnic Communities Support Group; Dr Ryan Feeny – Vice-President and Registrar at Queen’s University Belfast; Ivy Goddard, MBE, CEO of Inter Ethnic Forum; Dr Veronica Crosbie – The Chairperson of Places of Sanctuary Ireland; Lynette Fay – the conference host; Deirdre McAliskey, Policy Officer at South Tyrone Empowerment Programme; Aileen Cummins, Head of Social Impact and Civic Responsibility, QUB.

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INTRO: What is the Stronger Together Network?

The Stronger Together network began as an informal collective of organisations primarily supporting culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Its key focus was on fostering better information sharing and identifying opportunities for collaboration.

In 2012, the Network successfully obtained funding, enabling it to evolve into a more formal and structured entity. Today, it comprises over 180 members, including BME organisations and groups, individual BME members, as well as representatives from the community, voluntary, and public service sectors.

The Network's three main aims are

- To share knowledge and information
- To provide a central resource for connecting service providers within the sector
- To identify opportunities for collaboration and innovation

These objectives are pursued through various means, including:

- The ongoing development of a website, offering region-specific information about forthcoming events, new research, best practice resources, programmes, funding opportunities, and policy updates
- An annual conference featuring workshops and presentations tailored to themes relevant to the sector
- Weekly e-alerts providing updates from members, such as local events, programme news, calls for support, and professional development opportunities
- Quarterly seminars and workshops for members, addressing topics identified as pertinent to the sector

This more formalised structure enables members to collaborate more effectively and contribute to the advancement of the sector as a whole.

Context for 2025 Conference

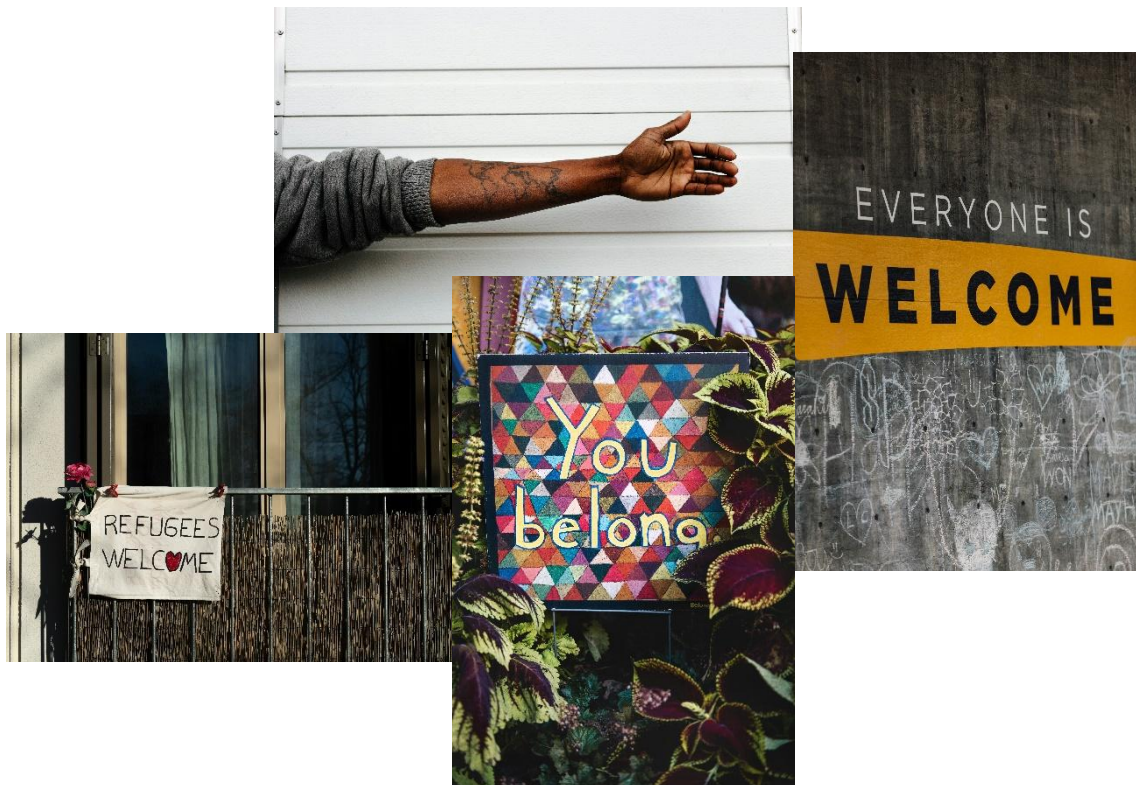
The conference theme, *“What is SANCTUARY in 2025?”*, was inspired by the growing movement in Northern Ireland to create places of sanctuary across a range of sectors, including health, education and the arts, to name but a few.

In light of the anti-immigration protests that took place during the summer of 2024 and the attacks that followed, it felt particularly important to demonstrate support for initiatives that foster welcoming environments and promote equal opportunities for all residents, irrespective of background.

Consortium members identified Queen’s University Belfast as a key partner in the organisation of the conference, as the University was approaching the end of its Path to Sanctuary journey and was due to be awarded University of Sanctuary status later that year.

It was decided that the conference programme should include a number of keynote speakers, case studies and contributions reflecting lived experience, alongside a broad range of workshops. These were designed to provide opportunities to share best practice and to stimulate discussion on how sanctuary work might be progressed within respective sectors.

In planning the event, the consortium also agreed that a different format was required from those used at previous conferences. Rather than being solely workshop-based and delivered exclusively by consortium members, this conference combined workshops facilitated by external contributors with three inspiring keynote speakers.



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WELCOME

Stronger Together Network Development Officer Barbara Snowarska welcomed all delegates and read out a speech prepared by one of the consortium members, Ligia Parizzi, ESOL Coordinator NIRRS (Northern Ireland Refugee Resettlement Scheme), who could not attend due to family bereavement.

Dr Ryan Feeney, Vice-President and Registrar, gave a welcome speech on behalf of our host and partner Queen's University Belfast.



Left to right: ; Dr Ryan Feeney – Vice-President and Registrar at Queen's University Belfast; Claire Graham - Social Impact and Civic Responsibility Manager, QUB; Federica Ferrieri - Civic Engagement Officer, QUB; Barbara Snowarska – Stronger Together Network Development Officer; Lynette Fay – the conference host; Raymond Miller Civic Engagement Officer, QUB.

PLENAR SPEAKERS

KEYNOTE ADDRESS 1:



Dr Veronica Crosby – The Chairperson of Places of Sanctuary Ireland

Dr. Veronica Crosby traced the sanctuary movement from its ancient and medieval roots to the modern City of Sanctuary initiative launched in Sheffield in 2005. She framed sanctuary cities through four dimensions—legal, discursive, identity-based, and scalar—emphasizing how language and narratives shape public attitudes toward displaced people. She highlighted the importance of moving beyond “us versus them” thinking and using dignified terminology to counter marginalization.

Drawing on cosmopolitan philosophy, Dr. Crosby argued that local communities have significant power to drive inclusive change without waiting for national governments. She stressed that meaningful cross-cultural engagement prioritizes mutual understanding rather than agreement and requires obligations that extend beyond borders.

She outlined the growth of Places of Sanctuary Ireland since 2017, noting its expansion across schools, universities, libraries, and community groups, while acknowledging ongoing sustainability challenges due to reliance on volunteers. Dr. Crosby concluded by emphasizing that creating a culture of welcome is not a finished goal but a continuous, collective process that demands long-term commitment and investment.

[Click to access the Keynote Recording on YouTube.](#)

KEYNOTE ADDRESS 2:



Maggie Filipova-Rivers – Regional Coordinator and Local Authority Network Lead for UK Councils of Sanctuary

+ Q&A

Maggie Filipova-Rivers outlined how communities can foster meaningful refugee integration through collective, local action. She highlighted the global scale of forced displacement and noted that, despite strained services and hostile political rhetoric in the UK, migration debates often obscure the reality that most displaced people are supported by lower-income countries.

Her central message was that building welcoming communities is a shared responsibility. City of Sanctuary UK promotes a collaborative, institution-led approach, working with schools, universities, libraries, and especially local councils as “anchor institutions” capable of driving strategic integration where national policies fall short.

She described the Sanctuary Award as a practical framework helping institutions embed inclusive practices and share learning. Crucially, she emphasized the importance of people with lived refugee experience holding genuine decision-making power. Through cross-sector partnerships and everyday community contact, she argued, communities can move beyond crisis response and enable new arrivals to truly thrive.

[Click to access the Keynote Recording on YouTube.](#)

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CASE STUDY:

The Journey to Sanctuary - Caroline McMenemy, former Planning & Equality Manager, BHSCT + Q&A



Caroline McMenemy outlined Belfast Trust's journey to becoming a Trust of Sanctuary, emphasizing how organisational commitment and leadership were central to embedding a culture of welcome within a large health and social care provider. The initiative emerged from Belfast Trust's Good Relations Strategy and was strengthened through staff and community engagement, alongside collaboration with Belfast City of Sanctuary.

A key factor in success was securing senior leadership and board-level support, allowing the commitment to cascade across the organisation.

As the first health and social care trust in the UK to pursue Trust of Sanctuary status, Belfast Trust translated values into practical outcomes, including improved cultural competency training, guidance for working with unaccompanied minors, and tools to support non-English speakers in accessing services.

Caroline stressed that becoming a Trust of Sanctuary is an ongoing process rather than a fixed achievement, requiring continued learning, accountability, and sustained commitment to inclusive and welcoming healthcare environments.

[Click to access the Keynote Recording on YouTube.](#)

Lived experience + Q&A: Hassan (Syria); Ewa (Poland); Mehrshad (Iran); Basia (Poland)

Artistic highlight – Tunes Translated led by Catherine Crean

Break-Out workshops

Delegates could choose two workshops from a selection of eight, delivered in two parallel sessions after lunch. The workshops provided an opportunity for participants to learn about how sanctuary principles can be embedded effectively in the range of areas (**health, education, faith, arts, employment, housing, community development, and museums & libraries**) and fostered discussion around the following questions:

- 1) What practical steps can we take to create sanctuary and belonging in Northern Ireland?
- 2) What challenges prevent inclusion and belonging in Northern Ireland?
- 3) Can you share 3 successful examples of inclusion – either from Northern Ireland or other places?

Participants

101 people registered to attend the conference, with 82 delegates attending. Delegates included representatives from 22 Black and Minority Ethnic organizations, 8 statutory bodies and 37 community and voluntary organizations.

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Feedback from break-out workshops

- Group 1 Health

This workshop's key discussion points included:

- Difficulties with accessing GP service for people whose 1st language is not English, especially in situations when they phone their GP and they get a call back and there is no interpreter provided, the deterioration in access since Covid
- The need for improved circulation to the newcomers of information about the health system in Northern Ireland, to raise their awareness of how to avail of different services, make this information more accessible
- Possibility of using the new tools such as Encompass to provide communications (e.g. letters) in languages other than English or relevant formats when level of literacy is insufficient
- The need for mapping existing resources to know what is happening / what is available in different Trusts as well as in the Community and Voluntary sectors
- The need for sharing best practice across the sector
- The three examples of what works well: The interpretation devices that are used in emergency (Vasco); increasing diversity of the workforce (G.P.s and other professionals speaking a patient's languages) – increasing the sense of inclusion in the community; check-in stations at GPs – which enable checking in in another language

- Group 2 Education

The focus of the workshop's conversation was on secondary education identifying the following issues, many of which would be transferable to primary and tertiary education:

- Practical support included providing visual support, e.g. adapted signage in schools setting, welcome packs that could be developed by schools, sharing and visibility of schools, especially of Schools of Sanctuary to other schools in other parts of NI
- Funding and how can it be tapped into and used in practical way, e.g. to provide subcover for teachers who would like to take time away from their teaching to support people from asylum, refugee or migrant backgrounds
- The practical steps often mean “the small things” – a “small thing” for one person often is an extremely important “big thing” for another person, e.g. what food is available, what books are in the library and if they are representative of the school community, celebrating special holidays, recognizing how what is being taught in schools may make someone feel, for instance if a history lesson is reflective of everyone's history in the room. Small steps can make big difference to individuals.
- Challenges included: taking personal responsibility for being informed about Home Office policies, the government policy, understanding what agendas may be at play, to enable us to make practical differences
- Examples of inclusion – ‘pockets of success’ included some schools in Dungannon running ‘Language Lunches’ where pupils try new foods and are learning five words associated with the food so they can use them when talking about other foods. Another example is from schools in Scotland where teachers were allowed time out of classroom to learn languages of pupils attending their classes. The importance of celebrating these ‘pockets of success’ was highlighted as means of encouraging bigger, more tangible successes.

- Group 3 Faith

Participants of the workshop of Sanctuary strand in Faith shared:

- Examples of practical steps that can be offered by faith communities included sharing spaces and resources, providing spiritual support and sense of community to people who belong to the faiths that they represent, practical help in the form of English lessons, foodbanks, provision of clothing, social space, providing opportunities for shared meals and getting to know about issues which allows to signpost
- There is need for more coordination in faith communities being involved in advocacy as they are working on the ground and know best what the issues are
- There is some good work on local level, but more collaborative work is needed, working strategically together – churches/ Interfaith e.g. Migration officers in GB – people with specific skills; in Belfast English language classes have a good level of coordination, with knowledge and resources sharing
- Challenges included the need to work on our own divisions in Northern Ireland, educating communities around inclusion around faith, and fear of change in the community
- Successful examples of inclusion were foodbank, which offer food to everyone irrespective of their faith or belief and Forthspring hosting Belfast Multicultural Association following arson attacks on their premises.

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- Group 4 Arts

- Practical steps: people coming together to do together either visual arts, music, or dance which helps physical and mental health and breaks down barriers between people in terms of experiencing other people's cultures, once you've heard it, sang it, danced it, you can't have the same kind of barriers towards other people. Particularly in dance and choir – the more people are involved in a choir or dance, the better the experience is for everyone, it is one of the few things that multiplies so if you are a funding person and you want “to get a bank for your buck”, make sure to support music and dance in particular. At the workshop Yousuf and Mustafa were talking about the Dabke dancing, which they consider a peaceful resistance, a way of celebrating culture where regimes try to wipe out the memory of these things and by singing the songs, by dancing the dances, doing the art, writing the poems, reading the poems, we are keeping these things alive. Another thing that is wonderful about it is that no one is left on the bench in these kinds of activities, e.g. the choirs that one of the workshop's facilitators runs are “larks & crows” choirs where everyone is welcome, no one is left behind, no one is left out.
- The biggest challenge is: funding & strategy for that funding.
- Examples of successful initiatives are: Yallaa, Dumbworld, Sing for Justice, Beyond Skin, Catherine Crean's project – Tunes Translated, and Anaka Women's Group.

- Group 5 Employment

- Challenges: some shared in other thematic workshops, e.g. around language barrier and understanding the system. Another challenge mentioned in context of employment was recruitment culture in Northern Ireland, the differences in not having a CV and having an application form, the equivalences and qualifications, the application process and interview culture, e.g. the interview culture in the USA and NI differ and subsequently people's expectations. Difficulties are also encountered in pathways to employment from education. Other issues included: visas, immigration status
- Solutions/practical steps: bridging programmes, bridging and transition courses – would require funding as otherwise people would not be able to afford to take time off work to get their equivalent qualifications; funded transition processes that would create pathway to employment. Particular focus needed on people going through asylum seeking process so that they do not lose skills and confidence – finding way to enable them to practice their skills and ideally that they could be paid for it and not treated as cheap labour. Mentoring courses on recruitment processes and interviews. Perhaps lobbying for the immigration and visa processes to be streamlined. Last and not least – cultural awareness in employers.
- Examples of good practice: Future Forward – bridging the gap, diversity in management structure, e.g. a lot of meat-processing factories employed in leadership positions people from diverse backgrounds, much of the work that The Law Centre is doing.

▪ Group 6 Housing

- The practical steps: myth-busting. Since there are lots of myths about people coming here and getting homes – The Housing Executive has produced a myth-busting leaflet which should be available by the end of April, breaking down to all the different myths that people have heard, making it accessible to the target groups, e.g. community groups. Training of HE staff to increase cultural competency – some steps has already been taken towards this, e.g. with partnering with Friendship Club to do small worlds café, in-house EDI training is also planned
- Examples of inclusion: Housing Executive giving small funding for Race Relations projects, e.g. Inter Ethnic Forum receiving funding that could be accessed by various groups – the programme available via Community Cohesion team; people can approach HE to find out about opportunities for such funding.

▪ Group 7 Community Development

- The group discussed what community development and how each participant understands the concept of ‘sanctuary’, then working from the definitions given the practical steps identified were put as:
 - peaceful coexistence of people, – when we coexist peacefully then the community will be a better place, the next was
 - equity – it is not ‘us’ up there and ‘them’ down there and we have to do something for them, but each one of us is equal, we are all humans, and then:
 - listening and understanding, because sometimes you do not understand people around you – if you listen and understand then there will be peaceful coexistence. Another is:
 - working in cohesion – working together, working peacefully to achieve that aim of developing community. Next:
 - accurating information, because sometimes people do not hear the right thing, like ‘they are all coming here to do this, they are taking our homes, taking that’, the information they get is not accurate and they act accordingly.
- Healing from trauma was also discussed among the challenges to community development in Northern Ireland, the place of divided community, a place where the society to a large extend has not healed and because you can not pour from an empty cup, you cannot embrace people coming from elsewhere to seek sanctuary, because they themselves have not healed from their traumas of losing their loved ones, they still need to heal.
 - Patronizing was another challenge to community development – people saying ‘oh, look they’re there, let’s do it for them; Also:
 - tokenism is an obstacle – ticking boxes, so and so has happened -we’ve done it, without actually looking and listening what the community really needs, so the communities are not being listened to. Another thing was
 - lack of finances and resources to actually developing that community, then there is

- government policies and shut funding – sometimes the community development is going well, everything is developing and suddenly the funding is shut and it stops and the groups stops being represented.
- Examples of successful initiatives: Friendship Club – has been a place of sanctuary for many people, Schools of Sanctuary, DiverseYouth NI, Refugee Week Picnic
 - Group 8 Libraries / Museums
- 3 successful examples of inclusion – this is a very good example (the conference) of coming together and having a sense of being included because everyone that is here is included and me sitting here amongst people who are different, different works, different departments, professions for a conversation about inclusion – that is a very good starting point. It was good to see some people who are here – Equality Commission... everybody who is working in this field. Those are successful examples of inclusion. National Museums of NI, Ulster Museum... me (Agrippa) being part of that team for the past almost 4 years – not being from the museum background, but now bringing my lived experience as expertise that can be used in the museums' space – I think is quite successful. And it speaks about the work that we have been doing. When we came today we were facilitating a workshop that was handling objects, allowing people, away from the glasses and the display cabinets in the museums, for people to actually feel the objects, touch them and experience what they smell like. This is the way to create accessibility within the community. This is a practical way to connect our audiences with our objects.
- One thing that is the biggest problem in Northern Ireland – mixing it up with the second question – of challenges for inclusion – idea of others in NI, it's already divided: you are 'that', you are behind that wall so you don't know what is happening behind that (other) wall ; so when people come here they are probably in the middle of all this that is happening so how you become included? But a lot is happening - when you go to a new place, it just takes time, it is a place where inclusion is happening, adjusting to a new society. So that could be one of the challenges – it should be accepted that it takes time, but we are going there.
- From the contexts of museums – they hold photos and objects from the world cultures and one way of making it places of sanctuary that when people come in and as there is a growing diaspora, they should be able to see themselves reflected, their history properly represented, object not mistranslated; people expect that what they see the reflection of the whole society and also that there is a community engagement; respecting the community input – it there is a conflict to give the museum various opinion and finding the way of balancing the history that is to be told because it is our shared space. The museums are on that journey – it is not perfect but we are getting there.



Appendices

1. Conference Agenda
2. Speakers and facilitators' bios
3. List of attendees
4. Conference resources: PowerPoint presentations and Recordings (please contact info@strongertogetherni.org to request a presentation/link to recording if having any problems accessing)
5. Table with feedback from the breakout workshops
6. Photo report
7. MENTIMETER pre- and post-conference results and feedback

Contact Stronger Together: info@strongertogetherni.org, Tel: 028 877 50211

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Appendix 1

2025 Stronger Together Conference Programme

5th March

Venue:	The Great Hall, Queen's University Belfast
Time:	9.30am – 3.30pm
Theme:	“What is SANCTUARY in 2025?”
Keynote Speakers:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Veronica Crosbie – The Chairperson of Places of Sanctuary Ireland • Maggie Filipova-Rivers – Regional Coordinator and Local Authority Network Lead for UK Councils of Sanctuary
09.30 - 10.00	Registration & Refreshments
10.00 - 10.15	Welcome - Stronger Together / QUB
10.15 - 11.15	Plenary Session - keynote speakers + Q&A
11.15 - 11.30	Comfort Break - tea/coffee
11.30 - 12.30	Lived experiences + Q&A
12.30 - 12.45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Journey to Sanctuary - Caroline McMenamin, former Planning & Equality Manager, BHSC + Q&A
12.45 - 1.30	Lunch & Networking
1.30 - 3.00	Workshops in breakout rooms
1.30 - 2.10	Session 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Group 1 Health ▪ Group 2 Education ▪ Group 3 Faith ▪ Group 4 Arts
2.15 - 2.55	Session 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Group 5 Employment ▪ Group 6 Housing ▪ Group 7 Community Development ▪ Group 8 Libraries / Museums
3.00 - 3.30	Plenary session. All Attendees - Feedback from workshops
3.30	Summary of the day's themes and discussions & Closing Remarks

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Appendix 2

Speakers' Bios



Dr Veronica Crosbie was appointed the Chair of POSI early in 2022. As a former Assistant Professor in Migration and Intercultural Studies in DCU and outgoing Chair of the MA Refugee Integration, she brings a wealth of experience and expertise to the role. Veronica was a key player in establishing DCU as the first University of Sanctuary in Ireland in 2016 and was the founding Chair of the University of Sanctuary Ireland (UoSI) network. In 2024, she was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Glasgow for her work in establishing the network of Universities of Sanctuary in Ireland. She has conducted Participatory Research projects on refugee integration and has supervised and examined PhD theses in related areas.

Veronica contributes to refugee integration at a local level, through her leadership initiatives including establishing the Phibsboro Community Sponsorship and Phibsboro For All programmes, both inclusive community led initiatives to welcome people with migrant and refugee backgrounds into the neighbourhood. Veronica is an able and vocal advocate for refugee rights in Ireland and beyond.

(<https://ireland.cityofsanctuary.org/governance>)



Maggie Filipova-Rivers has over a decade of experience in refugee integration in the UK. As the Local Authorities Programme Manager at City of Sanctuary UK, she supports the development of effective and compassionate local policies and practices for over 170 UK councils—nearly a third of all local authorities. Her work focuses on co-production methodologies, ensuring that refugee support frameworks are informed by lived experiences and developed in close collaboration with local government, statutory services, the voluntary and community sector (VCS), and other local stakeholders. Maggie is known for her strategic advisory role in shaping refugee integration strategies, delivering capacity-building initiatives, and advocating for inclusive service adaptation across housing, education, public health, and social care. Her work has helped local communities embed welcoming practices so that people seeking sanctuary can rebuild their lives with dignity and opportunity.

The Journey to Sanctuary – case study



Caroline McMenamin has just taken up post as a Section Lead in EDI in Ulster University. She worked as a Planning and Equality Manager in Belfast Trust from January 2020 to February 2025. She worked for Belfast Trust since 2009 and practiced as a Social Worker in Children's Services and Adult Learning Disabilities Services and as a Day Opportunity Manager. Caroline is an Experienced Member of the (Mental Health) Review Tribunal, appointed in 2020. She was educated at Queen's University, Belfast and has a Master's degree from University of Dundee.



Workshop facilitators

HEALTH – Jordan Stanev & Laura Euler

Jordan Stanev was born in Bulgaria and graduated from a mathematics and language high school in Shumen, specializing in French, English, and mathematics. He later earned a Bachelor's degree in Economics in Bulgaria. Jordan gained experience in supply chain and logistics, working for several companies in Bulgaria and Northern Ireland. After relocating to Northern Ireland in 2007, he completed a Master's degree in Business Management at Queen's University Belfast in 2010. In 2012, he qualified as a community interpreter, initially working part-time and since 2017 he has been working full-time as an interpreter, collaborating with all major agencies across Northern Ireland.

Laura Euler serves as the Inequalities and Inclusion Coordinator within the Involvement and Community Development Team at Belfast Trust. In her role, she leads the Community Development – Inequalities and Inclusion programme, which aims to reduce health inequalities faced by ethnic minorities in Belfast. Her work focuses on building and strengthening relationships with Traveller, Roma, and other ethnic minority communities, as well as refugees and asylum seekers.

Laura is also actively advancing the Trust's 3rd Good Relations Strategy, implemented through the Trust Healthy Relations Committee. This strategy promotes collaboration across the Trust to enhance training, develop good practices, and provide valuable resources for both staff and service users.

EDUCATION – Ligia Parizzi & Whitley McAdam

Ligia Parizzi

Originally from Brazil, Ligia has lived in Northern Ireland since 1999 and works at the Belfast Metropolitan College as the Regional ESOL Refugee Resettlement Coordinator. With over 20 years of experience in the community, voluntary, and statutory sectors, Ligia leverages her background in linguistics, marketing, and community development to support refugee and migrant families. She has extensive experience as an interpreter, trainer, and manager of interpreting services for public and community sectors. Ligia has been an active member of the Belfast City of Sanctuary management committee and co-founded NI Hyatt, an organization assisting Syrian and other refugee families with integration and well-being.

Whitley McAdam - Whitney McAdam is an Outreach Officer for the Widening Participation Unit at QUB. Whitney is responsible for the development and delivery of the Senior Academy Programme.

FAITH – Co-facilitators: Danisa Hlaisi & Denise Wright

Danisa Hlaisi also known as Miss Kay or Khanyisa, is a Social and Community Worker and Health and Wellbeing Coach/Tutor. With 10 years of experience, she has dedicated her work to supporting asylum seekers, refugees, and migrant women in Belfast, using her own lived experience of the asylum system. Danisa founded Happy Women's Group, which provides support, advocacy, and engagement for these communities, particularly for women and families living in hotels.

Denise Wright was Race Relations Coordinator for South Belfast Roundtable and coordinated The NI Refugee and Asylum Forum for many years. She was also a founder member of EMBRACE NI - a group of Christians from different denominations who work to support Churches to provide welcome and a positive response to newcomers to NI.

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ARTS – Co-facilitators: Mustafa Alsaidi, Catherine Crean, & Anne McCambridge

Mustafa Alsaidi is a 34-year-old Palestinian from Gaza City. He holds a degree in Mass Communication from Cairo University. After arriving in Belfast in July 2022, he applied for asylum and was granted refugee status in June 2024. Mustafa has been passionate about Dabke dancing since childhood, learning the art from his father at the age of six. Now based in Belfast, Mustafa is improving his English at Belfast Met College as well as volunteering as a Dabke teacher since 2023. He has trained diverse groups, including Palestinians, Irish people, and others, and co-founded the Belfast Dabke Team to perform at events and promote Palestinian culture and heritage through Dabke. More can be learned about this initiative via Instagram page @BelfastDabke.

Catherine Crean started playing music at age 6, started gigging with the harp age 13 at various events around Belfast, started teaching harp and piano at 19, originally with Andersonstown Traditional and Contemporary Music School. She earned a BA in English from QUB in 2017, followed by a CELTA qualification in 2018. Since then, she has been teaching ESOL classes primarily for refugees and asylum seekers. In 2023, she completed an MA in Music Psychology in Education, Performance, and Wellbeing at the University of Sheffield. Tunes Translated was originally her research project for the dissertation, its success merited a second run currently under way.

Anne McCambridge is a choir leader and music educator who actively fosters intercultural connections through her work. She collaborates with asylum seekers via Yallaa and Dumbworld, engaging them in singing initiatives that celebrate diversity. As Co-director of the Open Arts Community Choir, Anne champions inclusion by working with individuals of varying abilities and backgrounds. She also founded the annual Larks and Crows Festival, bringing community choirs together to celebrate inclusive singing. Anne's intercultural impact extends to collaborations with organizations like Belfast City Council and the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, supporting carers and marginalized groups. Through projects such as the 'Pick Me Up Choirs' in rural areas and the NI Choral Collective, she promotes belonging and social cohesion. Her dedication to making music a bridge across cultures is evident throughout her career.

EMPLOYMENT – Tayra Lopes-Lister & John Orsi

Tayra Lopes-Lister is an experienced trade unionist and activist with over two decades of experience advocating for workers' rights including supporting diverse communities. As the Director of Organising and Leverage for Unite the Union, Tayra heads the department that is responsible for building workers' power, strengthening collective bargaining in workplaces and sectors and building a workers' movement that is inclusive and give working people a seat at the table.

John Orsi has over eight years of experience in the community employment sector, focusing on employability support for underserved communities in Belfast. He has worked with GEMS NI for the past four years, initially as an Employability Liaison Officer with BelfastWorks, where he built connections with employers and secured opportunities for program clients. Currently, John serves as Training and Employment Manager on the Gateway to Choices service, a Belfast City Council-funded pilot offering impartial advice and guidance on training and employment. He also contributes to the Future Forward initiative, supporting highly qualified individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds by connecting them with mentors in relevant sectors like IT, Finance, and Engineering.

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HOUSING – Tony Clarke

Tony Clarke is the Race Relations Officer with the NIHE and has worked in NIHE for 2 two and half years. Tony has been involved in Community Development and Good/Race Relation projects for over 35 years, in the Community and voluntary sector in many roles with various responsibilities, ranging from being a committee member of community groups, to staff member, youth worker, and good/race relations facilitator. Over the years Tony has gained a wealth of experience in many areas working with all age groups and abilities groups and many people from different backgrounds. Tony has worked here at home and internationally working on Community Development and Good/Race Relation projects.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT – Israel Egouogie & Alexis Ekwueme

Israel Eguaogie is a prominent community leader in Belfast. He serves as the Coordinator at Belfast City of Sanctuary and is the founder of Diverse Youth NI and IASSIST NI. Additionally, he co-founded the Minority Community Network TV to showcase the positive contributions of ethnic minorities. Formerly a computer technician, Israel now focuses on promoting inclusivity and supporting refugees and asylum seekers.

Alexis Ekwueme is a communicator, teacher, youth worker, mother, community worker, and survivor. Guided by her life motto, "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger," Alexis brings resilience and passion to her work. Having lived in Northern Ireland for 11 and a half years, she has spent the past six years actively supporting young people from BAME communities. Through her work in the community, Alexis empowers youth to make informed choices and thrive, contributing to a brighter future for all.

Tiwalade Olatunbosun, originally from Nigeria and a member of the Yoruba tribe, is a committed community leader and volunteer in Belfast. She moved to provide a better future for her children and has since become deeply involved with Belfast City of Sanctuary, supporting initiatives like conferences, refugee picnics, and coffee mornings. She also contributes to Schools and Libraries of Sanctuary projects, creating welcoming spaces for refugees and asylum seekers. Tiwalade actively supports Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities through iAssist NI, organizing events to tackle health inequalities and other challenges. Her dedication and impact have earned her respect and admiration in Belfast.

LIBRARIES / MUSEUMS – Agrippa Njanina

Agrippa Njanina is Assistant Curator of Inclusive Global Histories at National Museums Northern Ireland (NI), focusing on the research and accessibility of the 4500 World Cultures collections making him a contributor to valuable discussions on the role of cultural institutions in representing diverse communities. He has a keen interest in ethics and community engagement within museums promoting inclusivity and diversity by empowering marginalized communities. Agrippa is a member of the UK Museums Association Ethics Committee and was part of the Advisory Group of MMMV project at Queen's University Belfast. In addition to his curatorial work, is a skilled mbira musician, sharing the musical traditions of Zimbabwe through performances and educational initiatives.

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Appendix 3

List of attendees (those who agreed to have their data shared)

STRONGER TOGETHER ANNUAL CONFERENCE - 5/3/2025		
First name	Last name	Organization
Abigail	Linton	EANI - Intercultural Education Services
Agrippa	Njanina	National Museums Northern Ireland
Alexis	Ekwueme	Diverse Youth NI & Belfast City of Sanctuary
Amy	Stothers	MindWise
Aneta	Breza	Polish Sisterhood
Anne	McCambridge	Choir director
Barbara	Snowarska	Stronger Together Network
Betty	Tierney	Tunes Translated Musician
Brendan	Quail	Public Health Agency
Caroline	McMenamin	Ulster University (previously in BHSCT)
Catherine	Crean	Tunes Translated Music Project Coordinator / Conway Education Centre
Colin	Flinn	Belfast City of Sanctuary
Cony	Ortiz	Freelance intercultural visual arts facilitator
Damian	McIlduff	Ulster University
Danisa Allela	Hlaisi	Happy Women's Group
Deirdre	McAliskey	South Tyrone Empowerment Programme (STEP)
Denis	Long	Forward South Partnership
Denise	Wright	NI Together
Denise	Callaghan	Financial Inclusion/Trussell
Dominica	McGowan	Mental health professional
Dorothy	Jones	Mid and East Antrim Inter Ethnic Forum
Edie	Shillue	QUB Open Learning tutor
Ellen	Farren	EANI - Intercultural Education Services
Emma	Soye	QUB - Early Career Fellow (HAPP)
Eva	Galambos	Omagh Ethnic Communities Support Group
Ewa	Szlachta	Lived experience panelist, Hazelwood IPS
Federica	Ferrieri	Queens University Belfast (QUB)
Gabriela	Cuevas Domingue	Tunes Translated Musician
Hassan	Alkhawam	Lived experience panelist, NI Hyatt
Hossam	Hamid	Tunes Translated Musician
Huiam	Ibrahim	Mental Health Foundation
Israel	Eguaogie	Diverse Youth NI & Belfast City of Sanctuary
Ivy	Goddard	Inter Ethnic Forum
Jane	Camara	Education Authority NI
John	Orsi	GEMS NI
Jordan	Stanev	Bulgarian Interpreter
Julia	Fitzpatrick	Migrant Centre NI

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Julie	Brown	Acacia Path
Karolina	Wenta	Omagh Ethnic Communities Support Group
Krystyna	Przadek	Polish Sisterhood
Laura	Euler	BHSCT Community Development
Lekan Ojo-Okiji	Abasi	Counselling All Nations Services (CANS)
Leish	Dolan	Belfast City Council
Ligia	Parizzi	Belfast Metropolitan College
Lucille	Lennon	Public Health Agency
Maggie	Filipova-Rivers	Local Authorities Programme Manager at City of Sanctuary UK
Margaret	McNulty	EMBRACE NI & Belfast City of Sanctuary
Marta	Kempny	Ulster University
Marty	Gillan	Belfast Drugs and Alcohol Connections Team (BDACT)
Marwan	Kaddad	Tunes Translated Musician
Mary	Magennis	Tunes Translated Musician
Maurice	Macartney	QUB
Menglin	Li	Tunes Translated Musician
Nandi	Jola	Writer/Poet/Storryteller/Facilitator&Speaker
Nicholas	Cassidy	Omagh Ethnic Communities Support Group
Nourah	Almaman	Agus Mná Productions
Paddy	McEldowney	Public Health Agency
Paul	Noonan	Equality Commission for NI
Paula	Mcilwaine	Migrant Centre NI - REMIT project
Peter	Gitari	Tunes Translated Musician
Phyllis	Graham	Association Talking Newspapers NI (ATNNI)
Rebecca	Loader	QUB
Rebecca	Ng	Chinese Welfare Association (CWA)
Sarah	Kaburuk	QUB
Sean	French	Northern Ireland Office (NIO)
Shannon	Doherty	CAJ / North West Migrant Forum
Shayan	Kargarán	Tunes Translated Musician
Stephanie	Mitchell	Together CIC
Tayra	Lopes-Lister	Unite the Union
Teresa	Mendiguren	ESOL teacher / Interpreter
Tin	Chan	1 PLUS 1 Project (CWA)
Tiwalade	Olatunbosun	iAssist NI
Tony	Clarke	NI Housing Executive
Triona	White -Hamilton	National Museums Northern Ireland
Veronica	Crosbie	Places of Sanctuary Ireland
Whitley	McAdam	QUB - Widening Participation Unit

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Appendix 4

Conference resources

PowerPoint presentations:

[“Sanctuary in Ireland: concepts and practices”](#) by Dr Veronica Crosbie – The Chairperson of Places of Sanctuary Ireland

[“City of Sanctuary – an Introduction”](#) by Maggie Filipova-Rivers, Regional Coordinator and Local Authority Network Lead for UK Councils of Sanctuary

[“The Journey to Sanctuary”](#) – a case study by Caroline McMenamain, former Planning & Equality Manager, BHSCT

Recordings:

[Click to access the Recordings of the Plenary Speakers on YouTube.](#)

A bag of treats from around the world was given to delegates, and included a recipe:

Tobomotwe (Mealie meal biscuits) – popular in Zambia



2 cups mealie meal
tablespoons sugar
3 tablespoons custard powder
4 eggs
1/2 cup Cooking oil

Mix all the dry ingredients in a bowl, add beaten eggs and knead into dough.

Shape as desired and fry on both sides till golden brown. sprinkle with some icing sugar or pour some dessert cream (optional)

From: <https://com235.wordpress.com/2015/09/23/26/>

Table with feedback from the breakout workshops

WORKSHOP STRAND (number of participants) QUESTION	1) What practical steps can we take to create sanctuary and belonging in Northern Ireland?	2) What challenges prevent inclusion and belonging in Northern Ireland?	3) Can you share 3 successful examples of inclusion – either from Northern Ireland or other places?
HEALTH (14)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Return to Pre Covid GP access ▪ BHSCT Community Inclusion Worker ▪ Informing Newcomers of Health System in an appropriate way – simplify ▪ Language – Literacy - Translation - Marker ▪ Encompass ▪ Translate – but English version on the back? ▪ Mapping of resources ▪ Sharing what works ▪ Alternative ways to make appointments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Missing languages in websites ▪ GP access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Letters in other languages ▪ Vasco (translation device) ▪ Check-in stations ▪ Doctors from different cultural backgrounds
EDUCATION (13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Providing visual support, e.g. signage in schools ▪ Welcome packs ▪ Sharing good practice ▪ Visibility of schools of sanctuary ▪ Finding ways to tap into funding that can be used in practical way ▪ Importance of ‘small steps’ which are big for another person ▪ The importance of celebrating ‘pockets of success’ as a means of encouraging bigger, more tangible successes ▪ Many of the issues are transferable between primary, secondary and tertiary education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ taking personal responsibility for being informed about Home Office policies, and relevant info to be able to make practical differences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ‘pockets of success’, e.g. some schools in Dungannon running ‘Language Lunches’ - pupils trying new foods & learning five words associated with the food ▪ schools in Scotland where teachers allowed time out of classroom to learn languages of pupils attending their classes
FAITH (9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Advocating for Integrated Education ▪ Working strategically together – churches/ Interfaith e.g. Migration officers in GB ▪ English classes already working together to share people + resourcing ▪ Advocacy group to speak out ▪ Create safe spaces for Religious Gatherings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lots of good work at local level ▪ Risk = divides more often than include ▪ Need to work on our own divisions at same time ▪ Barriers at higher levels ▪ Difficult for newcomers to understand division within Christianity, Monitoring Forms!! ▪ Awareness raising = e.g. Ramadan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Food banks (Storehouse, All Saints) ▪ Refugee week = doing events ▪ International Meeting Point ▪ N Belfast Fellowship = mixed congregation ▪ Embrace NI ▪ Quakers = hosting ▪ Change makers funding ▪ Focolare

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Allow people practice their religious belief freely so they feel welcomed and included in the Society ▪ Create Healthy networking groups ▪ Spiritual support ▪ Financial support ▪ ENGLISH LESSONS – free intensive English courses (1-week or 2-weeks) ▪ SOCIAL SPACE – organize social/cultural events highlighting the rich heritage of diverse cultural heritage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Disinformation – what are you coming to – Media – Stereotypes ▪ Education = especially where there is fear of change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ City Church – BFC host = Big Lunch ▪ Inter Faith Forum ▪ Beyond Welcome = ensuring people get to use skills + gifts ▪ NIMFA = Holyland Festival = contributing ▪ Forthspring = space for BMCA (when Comm Centre burnt down) ▪ Marrowbone = North Belfast ▪ CHILDRENS ACTIVITIES – Autism support group @ Bloomfield Presbyterian – Muslim family said from this they can see how the Christian church has been there for them ▪ PROVIDING COMMUNITY – B2B – Bridges to Belonging project is about community; Conversation – Mental Health Foundation ▪ HOSTING GROUPS who don't have their own venue – e.g. The Redeemer, Belfast – Anaka Collective ▪ SIGNPOSTING – PCI International Meeting Point, Belfast; EMBRACE website
ARTS (16)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Engaging in arts is one of the most effective ways of breaking down barriers between people ▪ Arts foster good physical and mental health ▪ Arts, particularly, singing and dance, leaves no one behind – is very inclusive ▪ Arts can serve as expression and preservation of cultural identity ▪ Arts can serve as a peaceful protest, e.g. Dabke dancing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Funding ▪ Lack of strategy for funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yallaa ▪ Dumbworld ▪ Sing for Justice ▪ Beyond Skin ▪ Catherine Crean's project ▪ Anaka Women's Group
EMPLOYMENT (11)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transition / bridging courses (funded) – pathway to job security ▪ Support during asylum progress / volunteering opportunities /work ▪ Mentoring ▪ Courses on recruitment process and interview skills ▪ Immigration / Visas processes streamlined ▪ Cultural Awareness in employers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Language ▪ Experience ▪ Provision ▪ Qualification - Recruitment Culture – Recognition of qualifications ▪ Access ▪ Immigration Status ▪ Application process/ interview culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Future Forward ▪ Diversity in management Structures ▪ Law Centre ▪ Info sessions for migrant workers

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pathway to employment from education 	
HOUSING (12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Producing a myth-busting leaflet and making sure it is available in different formats and reach target groups ▪ Training staff in cultural competency ▪ (from Faith strand workshop: shared housing; creating culture of welcome in estates; integration has to be bidirectional.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ People believing myths around housing problems being caused by immigrants ▪ (from Faith strand workshop: lack of housing.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Partnership with Friendship Club to run small world cafes ▪ Funding available for Good Relations projects (Community Cohesion team). e.g. Inter Ethnic Forum and associated groups availing of it ▪ (from Faith strand workshop: shared housing project; Housing for All project; Good Relations programmes))
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Peaceful co-existence ▪ Equity ▪ Listening & understanding ▪ Cohesion ▪ Accurate information ▪ Healing from traumas -- Sanctuary is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A place to be self and respected - Safety, hospitality, give and receive in equal measures - Having each other's back - It is about people irrespective of background, language, or culture - Valued - like minded group - Sense of belonging - Unconditional welcome into a space - Inclusion - Welcoming, safe, participate - Free to be yourself - Kindness & compassion - Having a purpose - Acknowledgement of people's humanity - Celebration of all cultures - Integration, cohesion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Patronising ▪ Tokenism ▪ Not being listened to (Need to listen to communities) ▪ Lack of finances / resources ▪ Government policies – the link needs to be valued (communities to the lawmakers) ▪ Lack of funding and resources ▪ Short funding (going well and it stops) ▪ Not being well represented – speaking for them, acting for them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Friendship Club ▪ Common Grounds ▪ School of Sanctuary ▪ Diverse Youth NI ▪ Refugee Week Picnic
LIBRARIES / MUSEUMS (14)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create spaces where diverse people meet as equals (e.g., conferences bringing together different professions, sectors, and backgrounds). • Use hands-on, sensory engagement in museums – letting people touch, feel, and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deep societal division and the “idea of the other” – long-standing separation creates walls (literal and symbolic) between communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The workshop/conference itself: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -brought together people from different sectors, backgrounds, and professions,

	<p>smell objects removes barriers created by display cabinets and glass cases.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make museums community-centred spaces by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - representing diaspora communities accurately, - avoiding mistranslation or misinterpretation of cultural objects, - ensuring people can “see themselves” in exhibitions. • Value lived experience as expertise by including people without a traditional museum background in museum teams. • Invite and respect community input when interpreting objects or histories. • Acknowledge that inclusion is a process – it takes time for newcomers to adjust and feel part of the community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newcomers arriving in the midst of existing divisions may struggle to understand or navigate them. • Time needed for adjustment – inclusion does not happen immediately; communities need patience and openness. • Museums’ responsibility to handle global cultural objects sensitively – risks include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - misrepresentation, - mistranslation - failing to reflect the diversity of contemporary society. • Balancing conflicting opinions in community engagement and shared heritage interpretation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - created a meaningful sense of inclusion where “everyone here is included.” • Representation of equality organisations (e.g., Equality Commission) working collectively towards inclusion. • National Museums NI / Ulster Museum practice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - including team members (like Agrippa) who bring <i>lived experience</i> rather than traditional museum backgrounds, - integrating diverse expertise over four years to shape museum practice. • Hands-on object-handling workshops: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - allowing people to physically interact with museum objects, - creating accessible, engaging ways to connect communities with heritage.
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Appendix 6

Photo report – [CLICK HERE](#) for more photos



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**The Journey to Sanctuary
- a case study**

Caroline McMenamín

Former Planning & Equality Manager @ BHSCT



Tunes Translated

Catherine Crean
Project Coordinator

Musicians:
Menglin Li / Gabriela Cuevas Dominguez /
Hossam Hamid / Marwan Kaddad / Betty Tierney /
Shayan Kargaran / Mary Magennis / Peter Gitari



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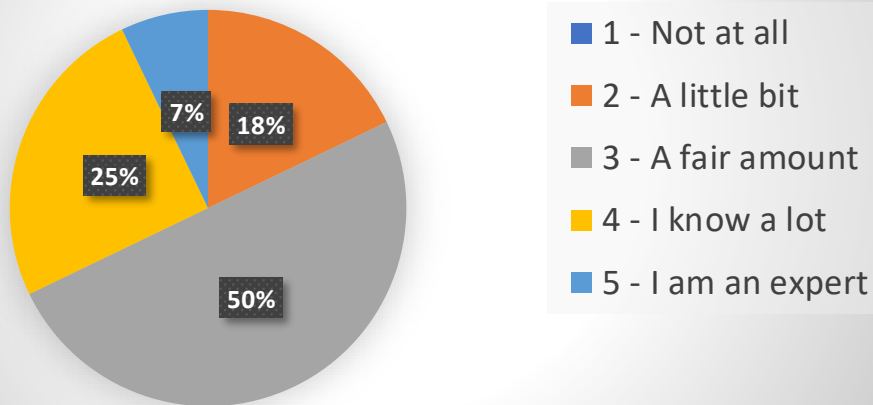
Appendix 7

MENTIMETER pre- and post-conference results and feedback

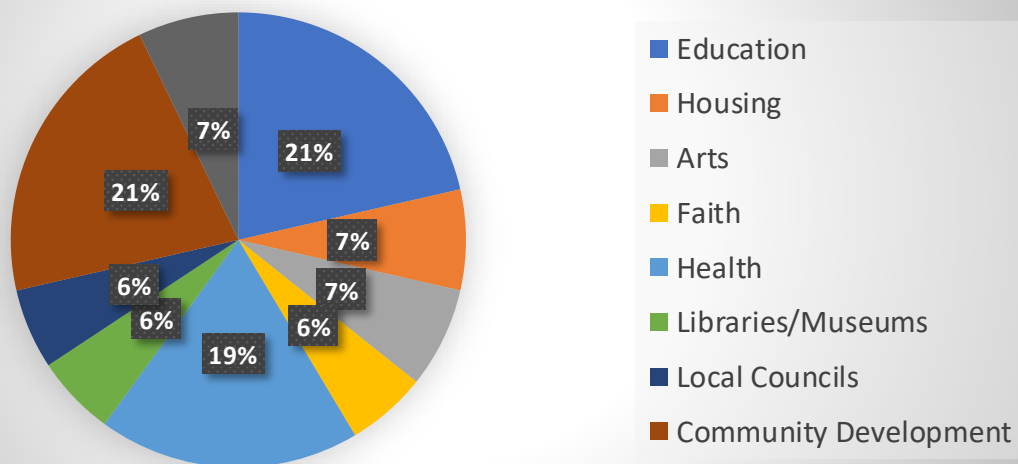
PRE – CONFERENCE



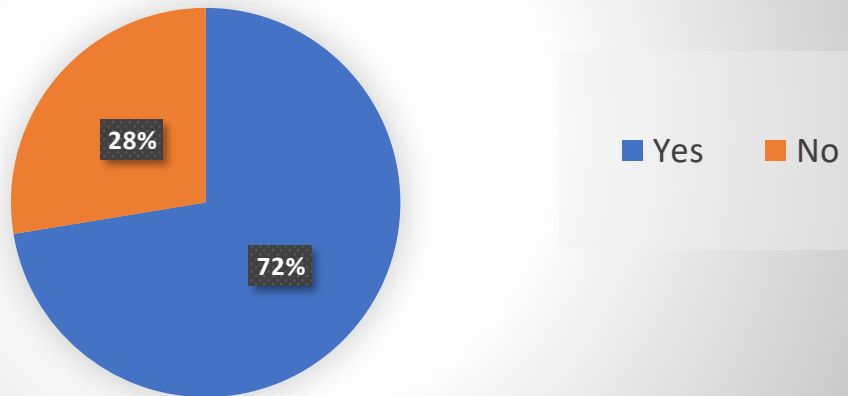
How well do you understand the meaning of seeking 'Sanctuary'?



Which is your most relevant area of interest?



Do you work directly with sanctuary seeking people?



Mentimeter

In 2 words, please describe your understanding of what it means to find sanctuary:

57 responses

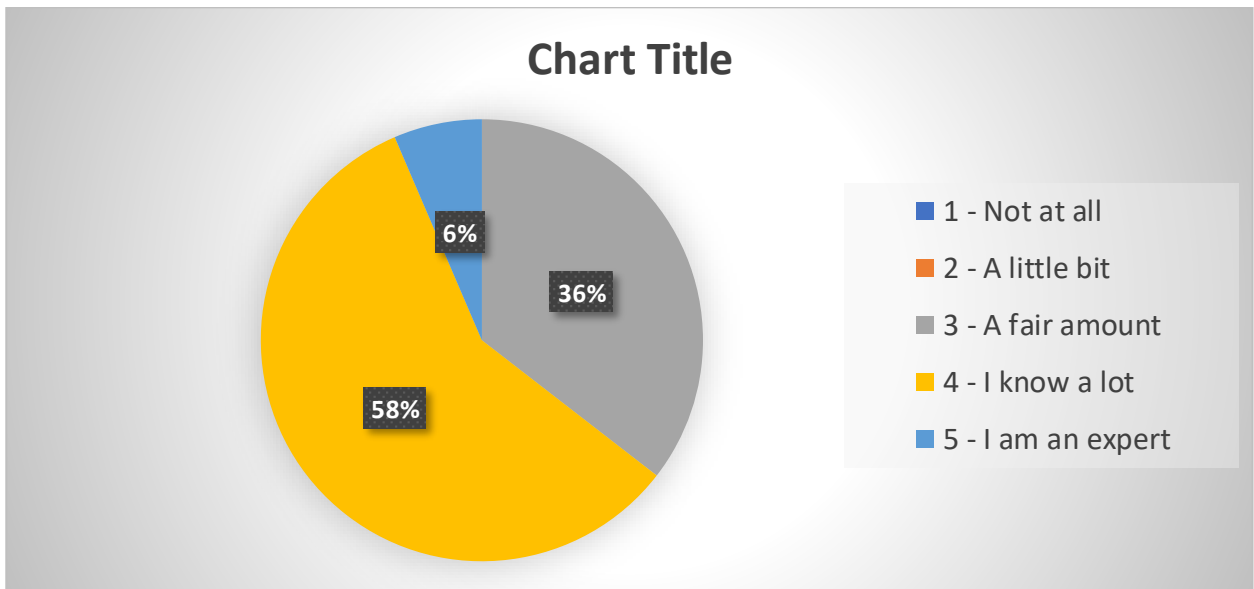


POST-CONFERENCE



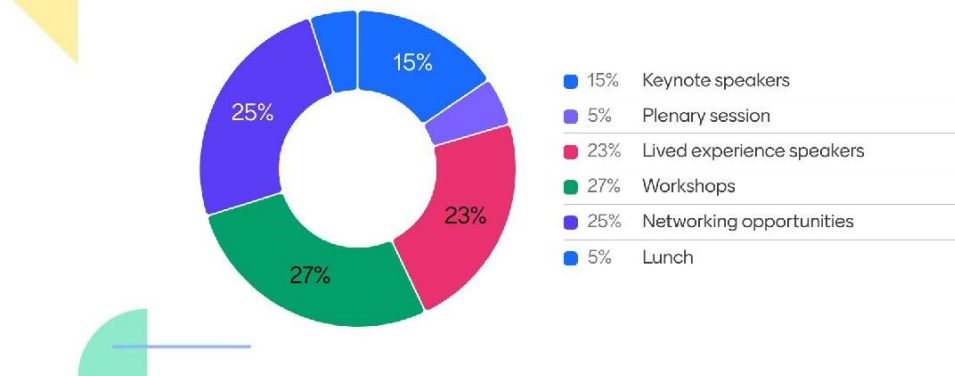
Post-conference brief survey:

Please join by scanning the QR code



STN post-conference survey

What was the most beneficial part of the conference today (up to 3 options)?



STN post-conference survey

Name one thing you learned today (optional)

Vast range of organisations working in City of Sanctuary space - very good networking opportunity

A lot about cities/places of sanctuary

Funding is never gonna stop being a hindrance for needing to improve community projects.

I learned about the health involvement in the Sanctuary awards. Pleased to learn more about schools and universities of sanctuary

Found the Place of Sanctuary Ireland presentation very interesting. Made me think about the negative stereotypes created around the use of the term asylum seeker, for example.

Better resources, information and structures in the Belfast area that the rest of NI needs to learn from and adopt/adapt.

GEMs future forward project, fab!

Pleased to hear about the Belfast health involvement in the sanctuary awards and pleased to hear how schools and universities of sanctuary are continuing to increase.

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STN post-conference survey

Name one thing you learned today (optional)

GEMs NI future forward project - fab!

Long term influence and impact: keynote speaker Veronica was involved in running a Phibsboro initiative in Dublin, one of seven across NI/ROI/UK inspired by our own Belfast Friendship Club!

I learned today, that important to chat about the problems. Maybe easier to solves it.

Fab examples of work in health and education

The range of viewpoints that we have and opportunities that we have to share our experiences.

Myth busting from housing

Reflecting on the need for depoliticising Sanctuary

I didn't know that stronger together existed - I'm glad that it does

19

STN post-conference survey

Name one thing you learned today (optional)

Learned huge amount re immigrants' difficulties in accessing health care & education. Shocked that such crucial services fall so short of need. Can't believe was so ignorant & naive!

Team work was top notch

Sanctuary means different things to different people

Very good networking opportunities. The speakers were excellent and provided great examples/good practice of what Sanctuary is, what it means to get involved etc.

I didn't know that schools, libraries etc actually signed up to being places of sanctuary and had a process to do so. This is a great idea and so good to see organisations getting involved.

The amount of work about sanctuary going on around the UK

The amount of work going on around the UK

More aware of what's available in local community.

19

STN post-conference survey

Name one thing you learned today (optional)

The difficulties facing those from ethnic backgrounds.

The difficulties facing those people coming here for work.

Sanctuary is human needs

A joined up approach across sectors and support organisations is required. ESOL provision very important

19

Comments / suggestions for future included:

Allowing more time for workshops • planning fewer workshops • planning the conference outside Ramadan • Considering different sitting arrangement • Getting everyone to sing



Additional Feedback by e-mail:

"Excellent conference, superb & valuable content. Thank u" – Dominica McGowan, mental health professional

"A big thank you to you and all the organisers, speakers etc, I was really glad that I attended, it was very worthwhile." – Lucille Lennon , PHA

"I'm just getting in touch to thank you for the annual conference. I found it really interesting and appreciate how much work is involved in setting up and managing an event of that size." - Paula McIlwaine, Migrant Centre NI

"Congratulations on one of the very best conferences I've ever attended. I loved every minute of it." – Colin Flinn, Belfast City of Sanctuary

 Mentimeter



**Thank
you!**