



Scottish Charity SC046404 (SCIO)
SBC Family Life Centre, 67 Murray Place, Stirling FK8 1AU
Web: <https://www.forthvalleywelcome.org>
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ForthValleyWelcome>
Patrons: Mr Ayman Jarjour MMus: Sir George Reid PC FRSE

ANNUAL REPORT, April 2020– March 2021

Forth Valley Welcome (FVW) was established in September 2015, to support refugees being resettled in Stirlingshire and Clackmannanshire and help them integrate into the local community. We became a charity in March 2016. Originally called Stirling Citizens for Sanctuary, we changed our name in March 2018 to Forth Valley Welcome to better reflect our geographic coverage.

Our initial focus was on Syrian refugees arriving through the UK government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement (SVPR) scheme. We now also support refugees arriving from Sudan and South Sudan under a similar UK government scheme. The refugees are mainly families who have fled violence and destruction in their country. Many have friends and family members who are still in Syria, Sudan or South Sudan, or in refugee camps, or relocated to other countries.

By the end of the year we were supporting 39 households, comprising 66 adults, 8 young adults, and 81 children. Of these, 26 households are in Clackmannanshire and 13 are in Stirling (155 individuals in total, up from 148 at the end of March 2020). The Resettlement programmes were suspended due to Covid-19 restrictions but when it re-starts we anticipate that the two Councils will gradually bring more families to the area so these numbers will continue to increase.

Support is provided by two part-time staff and 75 volunteers, supported by a Board of 8 trustees.

Our operations and services to New Scots are financed by grants from funders, and from the substantial donations we receive from our large body of supporters. We pay tribute to them at the end of this report and to our New Scots, staff, volunteers, patrons, and to our two Councils and many partner organisations,

Particular thanks are due this year to funders who provided additional grants to help us adjust to the impact of Covid on our activities (see Annual Accounts).

Our Vision

We are welcoming to people seeking sanctuary and support them towards a settled future within communities

Our Mission

To enable families to be welcomed and build their own networks and to become integrated within our communities

To work in partnership with stakeholders to provide support towards education, language learning and employment

To advocate on behalf of people seeking sanctuary for provision of comprehensive local and national services that meet their needs

WHAT WE DO

The impact of the Covid pandemic became clear at the beginning of this financial year. We took the decision to stop all gatherings such as Snack & Chat and Conversation Cafes. Home Visitors had to stop visiting families in their homes. This report sets out how we adapted our services during the pandemic, including regular remote checks on families using Whatsapp and telephone, and deliveries of food and craft sets to families, especially during lockdown.

Home set-up and materials service

When a family first arrives, we help set up the house, to add to what the council can provide and make it feel homely, e.g. toys for the children, nice curtains, rugs, throws, cushions, etc.

As no new families arrived during this period, no house set-up was required but we continued to provide any extra small items needed by families throughout the year.

Snack & Chat

We were not able to run our regular Snack & Chat get-togethers but were keen to find ways to engage with people and support them during lockdown.

With the restrictions on people getting out on trips to shops selling foods they were accustomed to, we organised 3 food drops of a variety of dry staples like rice, pasta, chickpeas etc as well as halal meat. A local zero waste shop that is a social enterprise gave us the dry foods at cost price and a local butcher ordered in halal meat especially and vacuum packed it for each family. Dry goods were weighed out and distributed by staff and volunteers (and some volunteers' children...). These deliveries were well received by the families, who were also happy to see known faces (distanced!) at their door.



We also distributed Christmas and Eid presents for the children at appropriate times. We dropped off craft kits for the children and ran a number of competitions via our WhatsApp group on various subjects including nature photography, self portraits, and pumpkin carving; and we ran a scavenger hunt.

One of our patrons and a few volunteers were involved as judges and prizes were awarded for the best entries. Children and families participated enthusiastically...



Home visiting and befriending

This is an important part of our support in the first few months after a family arrives. We link families with volunteer *Home Visitors*, who visit their assigned families regularly, introduce them to local services, help with transport to appointments, and go on social outings.

Because home visits were not possible, we encouraged Home Visitors to keep in touch with the New Scots by phone, WhatsApp, Zoom, Facetime etc and most of the volunteers were able to do this. We heard from Home Visitors who were continuing to support families in this way and were often imaginative in their approach, e.g. helping English practice by writing emails to each other, learning to cook Syrian dishes online and teaching a young person how to bake a cake. Some volunteers supported New Scots and their children to get online to continue with ESOL lessons or access Google classrooms.

During the first lockdown we phoned all the families with the help of an interpreter to check they were all OK and that their basic needs were met. We also checked that those that owned businesses were being supported to access Government funding that was available.

Transport and support for hospital appointments: Home visitors and other volunteers normally help transport families to medical appointments but we took the decision that one of our staff should take this role over until restrictions lifted. Staff were also involved in picking up prescriptions for families and doing shopping for those who were shielding or isolating due to contracting the virus.

Life and Language Skills

In addition to the English language conversation provided by Home Visitors, our 'Snack and Chat' gatherings aim to help with language practice. Our Conversation Cafes and Walk and Talk also encourage English practice and skills that are useful to help New Scots become independent and increase their understanding about living in Scotland.

With all our usual events cancelled due to Covid-19 restrictions, we embarked on activities that would encourage IT skills, useful in itself but also enabling remote communication and training. And so began our *Digital Inclusion Project*.

Digital isolation became a hot topic for groups like ours during the pandemic. The families we support often have low levels of IT literacy so continuing with ESOL lessons as they moved online and helping their children access their schooling online became a big issue.

We managed to source funding to purchase laptops for the families and provided training in using the laptops. We ran sessions on various topics including the Driving Theory test, spotting scams online, online energy bills and managing online banking. Some of the sessions were developed and presented by our volunteers while others were delivered in partnership with other organisations e.g. Scottish Refugee Council, Energy Saving Scotland, NatWest.

One of the biggest subjects we tackled was Voting Rights for Refugees as the Scottish Parliament had passed legislation in February 2020 that allows refugees to vote in Scotland for the first time. We supported a number of New Scots to register to vote and then ran sessions on the process of voting, e.g. what a polling station looks like, what to expect when you go to vote. Finally, we ran sessions on who the political parties are and what they stand for. This was all quite challenging and a lot of information for the New Scots to absorb, but many participated enthusiastically in the sessions and were looking forward to voting in the coming elections in May 2021.

We also ran some reading groups online, again to help with the practice of English. We used 'quick read' books, where the New Scot and a volunteer would go through a chapter and pick up on pieces of the language they were unsure of.

Financial Support

Through our *Positive Activities fund* we provide help with activities that promote language learning, employability, and social integration. Examples include subscriptions for football clubs, Girl Guides and Cub Scout troops. Because of lockdown these activities also had to stop but the aim is to restart these as soon as possible.

We also contribute to the cost of driving lessons, which helps employability but is also useful in our rural area where transport for a family is expensive. Our online training allowed us to continue to provide help with preparation for the theory test, but we recognise that it will take some time to get back into preparation for the practical test when driving lessons become possible again.

Through our *Crisis and Care fund* we provided help with one-off payments for unexpected costs, e.g. short-term help to newly arriving refugees in cases where there was a delay in start-up of their benefits package.

Community Engagement

Under normal circumstances we give presentations to various groups in the community including school pupils. These are an important part of the work, informing people in the community about the refugees' situation and the support provided. These sessions are also useful in attracting donations, volunteers and offers of services.

Advocacy

In early 2021, we liaised with the two MPs for our area to ask them to put pressure on the UK government to restart the funding schemes for refugees that had been put on pause at the start of the pandemic a year before. We held online meetings with them. Both were sympathetic to the issue and took a series of actions to put pressure on the Home Office.

We were also in contact with the leaders of our two Councils to encourage them to accept new refugees when Home Office funding re-started and assure them of our continued long-term presence to provide community support for New Scots.

STAFFING AND VOLUNTEERS

Forth Valley welcome has two part-time staff: our Volunteer and Project Coordinator, Rebecca Dadge, and our Clackmannanshire Support Worker, Avril Hunter. Rebecca and Avril coordinate the services provided by our 75 volunteers.

We suspended recruitment of volunteers for most of the year and then piloted running our induction and training online in January 2021. This went well and we started recruiting volunteers again. We will continue to run the induction sessions online until we can meet in person.

We ran three online Volunteer Networking Meetings during the year. These provide an opportunity for volunteers to meet each other and staff and trustees; for sharing experience on what works well and any problems encountered; and for continual development of the services provided. When training opportunities arise, we make these known to our volunteers.

We also had volunteer help from the Scottish Tech Army, a new charity that started up in response to the pandemic. They supported small charities to adapt their services during the pandemic. One of their volunteers has been helping us develop a new indicator framework that will better evidence the impact our service has on the families we support. This will also help to identify individual support needs and facilitate the development of integration plans for New Scots individuals and families. The Scottish Tech Army volunteer also spent time with our staff to help them improve their IT skills.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

We work in liaison with many other organisations including Stirling Council; Clackmannanshire Council; Stirlingshire Voluntary Enterprise; Clackmannanshire Third Sector Interface; Central Scotland Regional Equality Council (CSREC); Home Start Stirling; Scottish Tech Army; The Conservation Volunteers (TCV); Stirling Baptist Church Family Life Centre; Alloa Ludgate Church; Stirling University students; Macrobert Arts Centre; Scottish National Heritage (SNH); Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA).

At national level, we are organisational members of the Scottish Refugee Council (SRC) and The Befriending Network. We have a close relationship with the SRC's Regional Coordinators and participate in online meetings organised by them for refugee support organisations across Scotland.

Our partnership with TCV had to be suspended for most of the year due to the pandemic. We are part of their 'Building Roots' project which is to encourage refugees to learn about Scottish cultural heritage and share some of the culture from their own countries of origin. However, they did drop off some 'make your own greenhouses' to families who were interested, provided the tools and materials to make greenhouses, and encouraged New Scots to grow plants in them.

We are grateful to all partnership organisations for the cooperation we enjoy with them.



FUNDING

Details of income, donations and grants are provided in the 2020-21 Accounts. In summary:

- Grants were received this year from the National Lottery Community Fund; the Scottish Government's "Promoting Equality and Cohesion Fund" (managed by Inspiring Scotland); and St James's Place Foundation.
- Donations were received from individuals and organisations throughout the year, both directly and via the Golden Giving donate button on our webpage and Facebook site.
- Extra grants were received this year from several funders to enable us to adapt to Covid-19 circumstances and to finance our Digital Inclusion project (details in 2020-21 Accounts).

We aim to meet staffing and running costs from grants from trusts, and use funds received from donations and fund-raising events for services that directly benefit the New Scots.

GOVERNANCE

Responsibility for governance rests with our Board of 8 trustees. The Board meets 8 times a year. The names of trustees are given in the appendix.

We maintain a set of policies to guide our work and maintain consistent standards across all our operations. All our policies are available to view on our website and are reviewed on a bi-annual basis, or as and when necessary.

Monitoring and evaluation of activities and impact is carried out through regular review by the Board of the records maintained by staff of activities, materials provided, on-going feedback received from home visitors and other volunteers, and any issues that arise. In addition, a set of integration indicators is being gradually rolled out to enable Home Visitors and New Scots to identify continuing support needs, which will also help us to monitor the impact of our work.

THANKS!

The trustees are delighted to record here our appreciation of the work carried out by our two staff, for their unstinting efforts to provide the best possible services to our New Scots through their own work and through coordination of the work of volunteers, and especially for the extra planning and work needed this year to adapt to new ways of working.

Huge thanks are due to our 75 volunteers for the time and energy they devote to Forth Valley Welcome, their willingness to adapt and be flexible in ways of working this year, and for the immense contribution they make to meeting the needs of service users.

We are extremely grateful to our funders, whose grants meet most of the cost of employing our two staff and contribute to other running costs.

We also wish here to say thank you to the two Councils and their staffs for the immense amount of work they do in receiving and resettling refugees and providing continuous support to them.

Many thanks also to our two patrons, Sir George Reid and Mr Ayman Jarjour, who support us in many different ways; and to all of our partner organisations at local and national level.

And finally, we pay tribute to all of our New Scots, for the work they put in to their own resettlement, for their resilience in coping with very difficult circumstances this year, and for the diversity they bring to our communities.

DECLARATION

The trustees declare that they have approved the trustees' report above. Signed on behalf of the charity's trustees:



Full Name: Savitri Maharaj

Position: Chair

Date: 16 Dec 2021

STATUTORY INFORMATION

Charity trustees

Trustee name	Office (if any)	Dates acted (if not for full year)	Person/body entitled to appoint trustee (if any)
Donald Black	Former Secretary	Retired 31 Dec 2020	OSCR
Sang Cha			FVW Trustees
Jean Evans	Secretary	Serving trustee, appointed Secretary 01 Jan 2021	OSCR
Hugh Grant	Treasurer	Re-appointed Treasurer 26 May 2020	OSCR
Alan Howes			FVW Trustees
Savitri Maharaj	Chair	Re-appointed Chair 26 May 2020	OSCR
Abigail Moriarty		Retired 02 Mar 2021	FVW Trustees
Claudia Marques Martin			FVW Trustees

Type of governing document: Constitution

Trustee recruitment and appointment

The board may at any time appoint any person to be a charity trustee - by way of a resolution passed by majority vote at a board meeting (Constitution, article 18).

Charitable Purposes (Constitution, article 4)

The purposes of Forth Valley Welcome are:

1. The relief of unemployment among refugees through (a) support towards employment, such as with job seeking, sourcing training, work placements etc., (b) support such as with language (Arabic speakers are among our volunteers), social and emotional support, mentoring and coaching within a Social Enterprise context.
2. The advancement of citizenship or community development through (a) social inclusion and awareness raising events & sponsored events within the communities where the refugees settle, (b) seeking opportunities for the refugees to contribute to their communities, and (c) through successfully integrating into the local economy.
3. The relief of those in need by/through providing a befriending service and activities promoting inclusion and raising awareness.

Summary of the charity's policy on reserves: To maintain a minimum cash balance of 4 months' average expenditure.

Details of any deficit: None.

Donated facilities and services (if any): None