



## Afghan Arrivals Support Evaluation

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Macc  
Swan Buildings  
20 Swan Street  
Manchester  
M4 5JW  
Tel: 0161 834 9823  
[www.manchestercommunitycentral.org](http://www.manchestercommunitycentral.org)  
Charity Registered in England and Wales No. 1145921  
Company Limited by Guarantee No. 7788593

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## Introduction

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Macc is the infrastructure organisation for the voluntary community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector in Manchester. We have compiled a peer evaluation of the VCSE sector response to the support for people who arrived in Manchester from the Afghanistan evacuation. **This report evaluates the support provided by Caritas Shrewsbury to Afghan arrivals.**

Caritas Shrewsbury (Caritas), along with several other VCSE partner organisations, provided emergency response to Afghan arrivals in Manchester from September 2021. In April 2021, Caritas were commissioned by Manchester City Council, to coordinate all support activities across three Manchester “bridging hotels”: Crowne Plaza Airport Hotel, Radisson Blu Hotel and Holiday Inn Hotel. This work is led by Mona Moussa - the Refugee Development Coordinator for Caritas.

The Crowne Plaza solely provides accommodation to Afghan arrivals. The Radisson Blu and Holiday Inn hotels host Afghan residents in addition to other guests. Due to its city centre location, the Holiday Inn residents have a multitude of external opportunities in close proximity. In this hotel, there is less need for Caritas’ support activities and engagement is more difficult to monitor. For this reason, we have focused primarily on the two airport hotels.

Caritas collaborates with Manchester City Council and VCSE partner organisations such as City of Sanctuary and Manchester Women’s Aid to deliver a range of support to residents. They have established relationships with the Home Office, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), hotel managers and staff. The bulk of our evaluation focuses on the views of people who are still living in the hotels following their evacuation from Afghanistan, but to develop a well-rounded evaluation of the work delivered, we also interviewed representatives from partner organisations.

A note on terms used in this report:

- ‘Mona’ and ‘Caritas’ are used interchangeably.
- ‘Council’ refers to Manchester City Council.
- Residents of the hotels are categorised by the following\*:

- Young females (aged 17 – 21)
- Young males (aged 17 – 21)
- Adult females (21+)
- Adult males (21+)

\*where appropriate we have included which resident group respondents belong to.

<b>Partner Representatives</b>	<b>Role</b>
Louise Stonall	MCC Homelessness Services Manager
Khita Houten	Afghan MCC Support Worker, Radisson Blu Hotel
Joan Todd	Afghan MCC Manager, Crowne Plaza Airport Hotel
Matt Byram	Hotel Manager, Crowne Plaza Airport Hotel
Liz Hibberd	Strategic and Partnership Lead, Manchester City of Sanctuary
Kate Ferguson	Navigator Labyrinth Project, Manchester Women's Aid

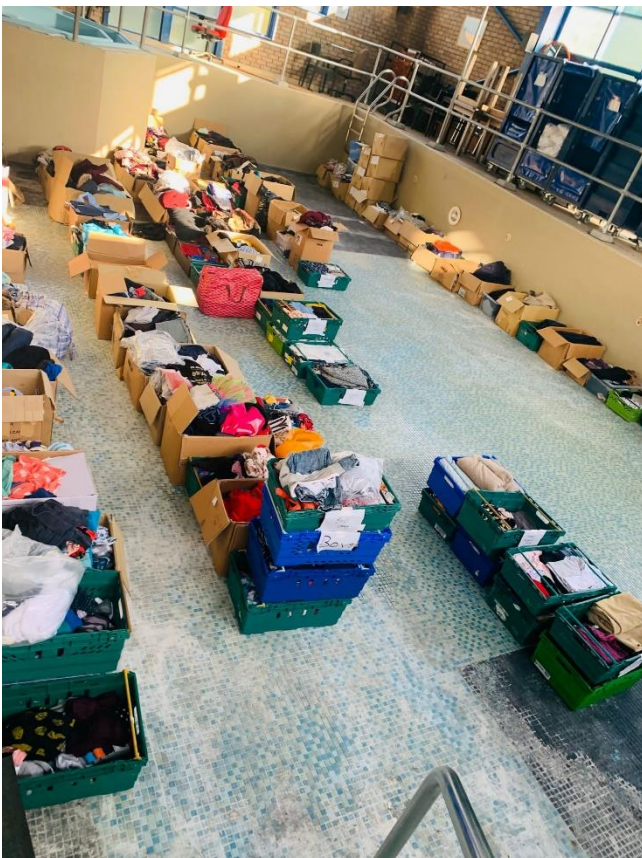
## Afghan Arrivals

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We spoke to 32 Afghan arrivals living at the Crowne Plaza Airport Hotel and Radisson Blu Airport hotels. Asking the same six questions, we built a picture of the impact Caritas has had since the residents arrived in the UK. We have grouped responses into the following categories; initial support, current support and support for future arrivals.

### Initial support

When asked about the involvement of Caritas and other VCSE partners upon arrival in Manchester, the unanimous response was that they “couldn’t do enough”. In September 2021, VCSE organisations worked collaboratively to source clothes, toiletries, mother and baby supplies, phones and much more in each hotel. Mona’s team worked with Care4Calais to coordinate daily donation drop-offs at the Crown Plaza Hotel. These items were moved into the swimming pool area and sorted into piles.



Every resident said that the donations made a positive difference in their first few weeks. Feeling uncertain about their future in Manchester, when the vans arrived with bags of donations it “lifted a weight” off their shoulders. The VCSE response made people feel welcome in this time of turbulence... “I am 100% satisfied with Mona’s support. The first time I met her she asked me what I needed. It felt good to be asked and she found my mum a pushchair for my sister” - young male, Crown Plaza Hotel.

Image: Donations sorted into piles ready for collection in Crown Plaza hotel swimming pool

Donation distribution enabled certain residents to feel useful. A group of adult males at the Crown Plaza Hotel took the initiative to support Mona by becoming hotel floor representatives. This led to a system where residents collected donations floor-by-floor, preventing overcrowding and making the process more efficient. Numerous young women and men helped to sort donations, translating to other residents to make the collection process as smooth as possible. “The coordination of donations was very good. I helped at the swimming pool to sort clothes into sizes and male/female/children. I liked how Mona let us get involved and feel useful. ” - young female, Crown Plaza Hotel.

### **Current support**

Caritas’ involvement has evolved from when residents first arrived - they are now the lead VCSE partner across all three hotels. Mona coordinates the existing programme of well-being activities and is the main point of contact for the Council and other VCSE partners. We asked the residents to reflect on what support they receive from Mona now, and how it has changed over time.

The key feedback was that the support is constantly shifting to adapt to the changing needs of the residents. Caritas and VCSE partners are less focused now on providing basic needs and more on fundamentals for the future. One adult male said “we need support with how to integrate into society, understand laws and take part in vocational training” and others highlighted that they no longer need donations as they receive universal credit.

This shift from emergency response to long-term support was highly commended by all residents, as it reflects their current situation. “People are no longer busy with immediate formalities - like applying for documents & getting clothes. We have done this, so now Mona needed to support social activities and things for the children during school holidays” - adult male, Radisson Blu Hotel.

## a. Activities

Caritas coordinates and commissions City of Sanctuary and Women's Aid to provide weekly activities across the hotels. Through resident meetings and regular huddles with hotel management, NHS and Council colleagues, Mona and VCSE partners create a programme of well-being activities to reflect current wants and needs. Caritas is the sole organisation responsible for coordinating, and City of Sanctuary and Manchester Women's Aid deliver the social activities. This approach provides consistency across all three hotels and enables clear communication between the Council and VCSE organisations who deliver the activities.

Responses about activities were varied. The four resident groups had different opinions on how the activities have impacted their transition into the UK.

Since last April, Caritas have booked weekly football pitches for residents to use. Every young male said football is his favourite activity. "Football has really helped me to settle in and it gets us outside, it's good to get competitive". They highlighted how much they enjoyed the international tournament organised by the Council, in coordination with VCSE partners, and two residents mentioned that doing activities with others their age had a positive impact on their mental health. "My age (group) love football. I completed the Prince's Trust programme for 16-19-year-olds and the Future You programme for 18+. I've achieved something and Mona was great putting these (on) for us" - young male, Crown Plaza Hotel.



Image: Group of young males at local football tournament

The young females spoke of a variety of activities from yoga, to English lessons, to painting. Most volunteer by translating and helping adults to enjoy the workshops. What stood out is that they preferred to support the **delivery** of these activities. Five young females said the main benefit of activities is that they provide an alternative space for their parents to learn English. "I'm involved by translating for the women in sewing rather than doing the activities myself. Mona supported me in volunteering in this way. This has been great for the improvement of my English" - young female, Crown Plaza Hotel.

Most adult males emphasised the positive impact the activities have had on their children. When partaking in activities themselves, almost all found the practical skills sessions to be the most beneficial. The strong relationship between Caritas and the Council has enabled extra practical activities to be scheduled. One example is when the social enterprise KYP approached the Council to offer support. They were referred to Mona who collaboratively coordinated a driving theory test, which one resident noted "was very helpful, as in this country it is encouraged to get a driving licence". "I attended IT classes, ESOL (basic level) and completed a UK construction and safety course as I have previous construction experience. I now work as a freelance interpreter" - adult male, Radisson Blu Hotel.

Among adult females, English and sewing classes were the most commonly mentioned activities. Initially, many could not partake in activities due to childcare. Caritas and Manchester Women's Aid addressed this barrier by organising a crèche when running their women's rights sessions. Mona also encourages volunteers to interact with the children who stay with their mothers during activities. Caritas, Manchester Women's Aid and City of Sanctuary are currently working with the Council to create a wellness programme for women. This will provide space for them to talk about issues that they may not feel comfortable discussing elsewhere.



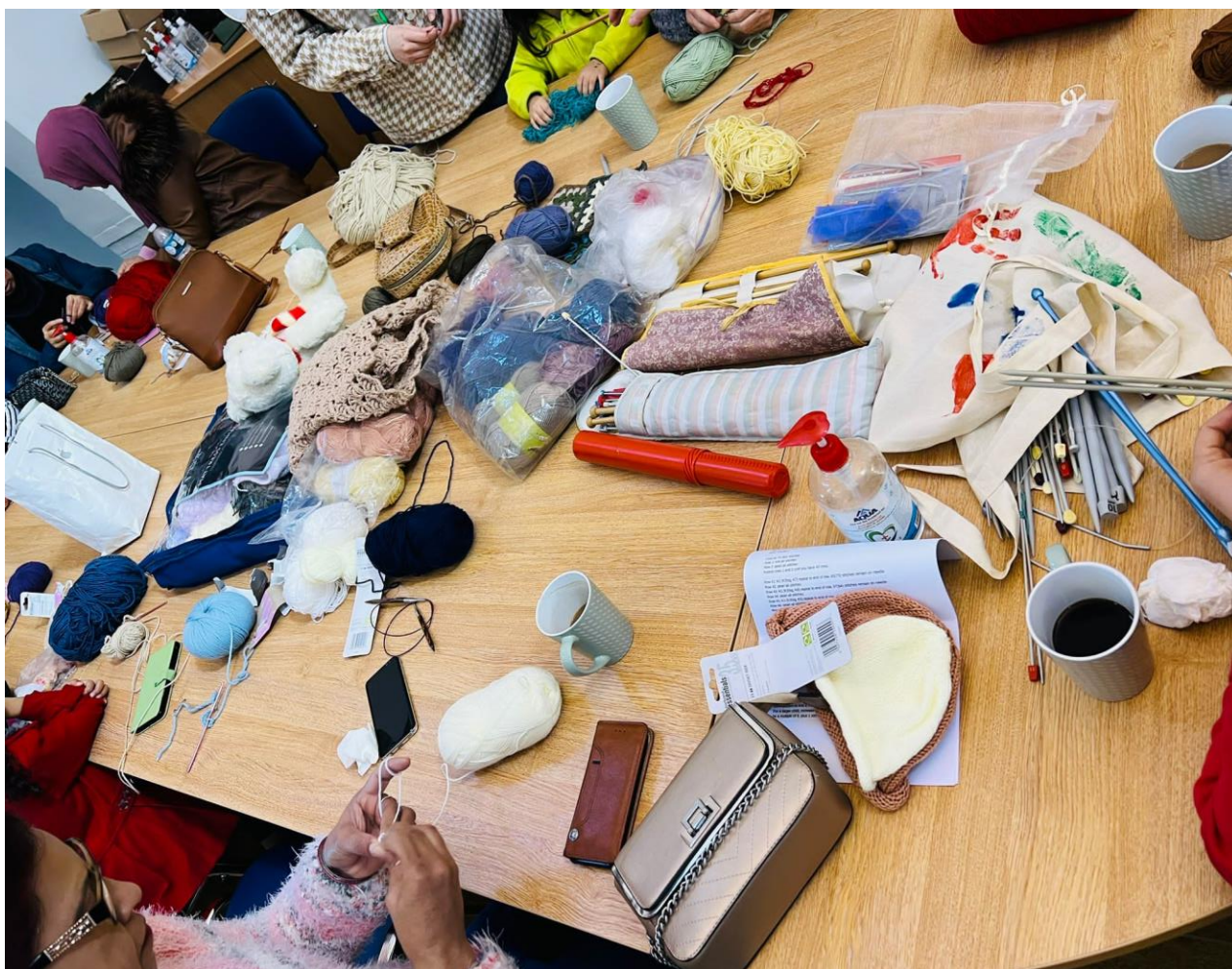


Image: Young females supporting adult females in a sewing activity session

## **b. Trips**

The Council organise numerous trips outside of the hotels and Caritas coordinate the logistics. Day trips to Blackpool and Sandbach were described as a “nice way to experience other places in England... (and) gives us the confidence to see somewhere new”. For Eid, 400 residents travelled to Sandbach to celebrate, partake in activities and enjoy Afghan food and music.

Kites are an important symbol within the Afghan community, so many residents attended the International Kite Festival trip. Mona contacted Manchester International Festival - who were planning a big kite event in Platt Field Park - and worked with the Council to get residents to attend. The consensus was that trips are well-attended and a great way to spend time out of the hotels with

the whole family... “these trips have been good for people’s mental health. They helped us to unite and be together” - young male, Radisson Blu Hotel.

Cultural trips were also highlighted by the residents. For Eid, Caritas and the Council organised residents to attend the Platt Fields Park celebrations with other people from the Muslim community. Afghan food was available as well as face-painting, henna and activities for the children. Residents received £10 to spend... “the food here is not like back home, so this was really special. We met lots of other Muslim people in Manchester too.” The Nayrouz New Year trip took people to a local theatre where four female residents cooked Afghan cuisine for everyone. “Mona made sure the men left once they had finished dancing, so women could dance - the whole thing was amazing”. These responses show that the trips play a crucial role in connecting residents to their food and culture.



Image: Residents celebrating Chinese New Year

### **Support for future arrivals**

When asked whether new arrivals in Manchester would benefit from the support given by Caritas and VCSE partners, the response was a resounding yes. Every resident said that they would not have had the support they needed if not for Mona... “new people coming should have the same level of support, as this is what is needed when you first arrive” - adult female, Radisson Blu Hotel.

Residents expressed their trust in Caritas to ask the right questions and deliver what people need. They are “made to feel safe in the hotel by Mona” and can “approach her” as she will find the right people to support their needs. Another female voiced that “it would be very different if Mona was not here, especially for the women”.

Future arrivals would benefit from Caritas’ ability to link residents with other VCSE organisations when they need alternative help. Mona voiced how this collaborative approach has been adopted since the beginning as “organisations had to come together to help.” Care4Calais brought donations, City of Sanctuary, Women’s Aid and Foundation 92 were instrumental, along with many other collaborators, and Caritas built trust with all of the organisations involved. These relationships allow Mona to signpost residents to other VCSE partners whenever necessary. For example, multiple residents who supported Mona with donation distribution subsequently asked how they could continue to volunteer. Mona secured them volunteering positions at City of Sanctuary and Foundation92. With these strong VCSE relationships, the scope of this signposting will continue to grow in the future. “Thanks to Mona’s volunteering opportunities, I now have a contract as a receptionist at the GP surgery. I hope to become a dentist” - young female, Crown Plaza Airport Hotel.

### **Case Study - adult male arrival with his family (6 children and wife)**

“We arrived in Manchester in mid-September 2021 and were living at one of the airport hotels. With all six children, this was very challenging. There (were) delays with getting school places so keeping the children entertained in the hotel during the day was difficult. However, we were soon offered daytime activities for the children and adults including education, sports and well-being support. These sessions were useful as England is very different so these activities helped with ... well-being, rights and laws, financial support and understanding the British culture. There are many people who have arrived from rural areas who are not aware of modern-day living in Afghanistan and certainly not how to live in Britain.

We were given clothing donations via Caritas before we could buy anything for ourselves. Caritas ensured all the children received a present at Christmas. This



wasn't part of our culture, as we don't celebrate Christmas, but it mattered to our children to have something to open. **Seeing our children happy was awesome.**

One of the trips was for Eid. Prayer, celebrating and spending time with other families were important to a lot of people. The trips and activities have been well coordinated by Caritas. If we ever need anything, we know to contact Mona and she will always help. There has been a lot of teamwork and support, not just from Mona, but also from the Council and other services. Trust has been built between the Afghan people and those supporting us. This trust has helped to empower people to access service and support for themselves”.



Image: family together on an organised trip to the local park

### **Case Study - young female now in employment**

“I recently got a support worker job at Manchester City Council. This was only possible thanks to the support of the charities in the hotel who encouraged me to volunteer first & then become a support worker. I now work across all 3 hotels and can do my part to give back”.

## Local Authority (Manchester City Council)

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Louise Stonall provided insight into the level of support Mona has delivered and why they wish to continue this working relationship. Khita Houten detailed how the Council works closely with Mona to collaborate and address any concerns rising from the Afghan residents. Joan Todd highlighted the positive way that the Council has worked with Mona.

Caritas was one of the VCSE organisations involved from the beginning, with Louise noting they were reliable from the first couple of days. Mona was involved in coordinating the donations at the Crowne Plaza Hotel and was commended as being the “go-to person” whenever the Council needed it. As Mona’s support was instrumental, the Council put a contract out to tender to coordinate all three hotels. Caritas was successful.

The Council work directly with Mona who coordinates ideas into programmed activities and trips. “A range of activities and trips have been programmed... sports for young adults, information sessions, play activities for young children and much more. Manchester City attended to deliver CV workshops and IT skills.” Khita emphasised the importance of activities, especially for adult females. Particularly noteworthy is the focus on empowering females to understand their own finances, and accessing knowledge they may not have had before. The trips are very well attended, particularly the Kite Festival in Lytham St Anne’s, the music event at Sandbach School, the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) gardens and the Eid and New Year’s celebrations. Louise was keen to acknowledge the good working relationship between the Council and Caritas. “Mona’s approach is well coordinated and there is great communication with our team.”

Louise emphasised that supporting the Afghan arrivals would have been difficult without Caritas and other VCSE partners like City of Sanctuary and Manchester Women’s Aid. Joan added that Council colleagues “would not have been able to do what Mona does”. Khita agreed, noting, “Mona has been great to work with.” The Council are keen to continue these working relationships.



Image: residents' trip to the kite festival in Lytham St Anne's

### **Case Study - sourcing a mosque alternative**

“There is no accessible mosque in Wythenshawe. By working together, Mona and I identified a community centre to offer a space for Friday prayers. This has been very well attended and means a lot to the people living in the hotels whose religion is very important to them” - Khita Houten.

### **Case Study - smear campaign collaboration**

“Mona and the Council worked together on a smear campaign. We recognised that once women were registered in the UK, they would receive automatic smear test letters and that residents were getting anxious. So we put in place a smear test campaign, sharing information with the female residents. Collaborating here worked well as the residents know Mona well, so trust her when she comes with important information like this” - Khita Houten.

## Hotel Staff

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Matt Byram provided context around how and when Caritas started supporting the Crowne Plaza Airport Hotel. Sharing how Mona works alongside hotel staff, he highlighted how her role is beneficial to the hotel staff as well as Afghan residents.

This hotel was used as a standby quarantine hotel and vaccination centre, so had the capacity to support Afghan arrivals. Since September 2021, the hotel has been used exclusively to house Afghan arrivals. Caritas made contact with Matt's team in September 2021 as people began arriving in Manchester. Mona contacted him directly to ask how Caritas could get involved and offered immediate support.

Matt is in regular contact with Caritas and voiced that activities are one of the most successful things coordinated by Mona. "The children-focused activities have always had good attendance, but the women's classes had a lower engagement at the beginning". Hotel staff and Mona identified that this was due to childcare responsibilities, so they worked with the VCSE partners to provide a crèche to enable women to attend sessions. Now that people have settled into living in Manchester, their needs are different. Matt advocates that the VCSE organisations are a huge benefit as they provide daytime activities for adults and trips out for families during school holiday time. "Activities provided during the school holidays are a godsend and limit other problems within the hotel".

Matt stressed the importance of how Mona's presence supports his staff. Having Mona physically in the hotel is a "game-changer" as residents can communicate with her directly, taking pressure off hotel staff. "It would have been a different story without her". Matt also acknowledged the collaborative effort Caritas makes with other services like the Council, DWP and the Home Office to provide a much-needed wraparound service.





Image: a group of children in an activity coordinated by Caritas



## VCSE Partner Organisations

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Caritas works closely with VCSE partner organisations and were keen to emphasise the importance of this collaborative effort. To build a picture of the involvement of VCSE partner organisations, we spoke with Liz Hibberd, several volunteers from City of Sanctuary, and Kate Ferguson from Manchester Women's Aid. All of the above play an instrumental role in delivering hotel wellbeing activities.

Initially, there were four "bridging hotels" in Manchester. When the immediate response was convened, following meetings arranged by Macc in September 2021, four organisations stepped forward (with no guarantee of funds or resources) to act as a lead VCSE coordinator for a particular hotel. Macc held regular meetings to share information, practice and feed into the regular city-wide response meeting led by the Council. These four organisations were Caritas Shrewsbury, Manchester Women's Aid, Mustard Tree and British Red Cross - working alongside others such as City of Sanctuary and Manchester Refugee Support Network.

In January 2022, a report was produced by Macc summarising the work that had been done and the level of resource needed for ongoing support (the four hotels being consolidated down to three to reduce capacity pressures by having fewer sites to work at). Following this, the Council issued a tender for one organisation to act as lead coordinator. Caritas successfully bid for this and was then contracted to coordinate activities at all three hotel sites. Building on the convening role established by Macc, Caritas worked alongside VCSE colleagues from the beginning, which has led to positive collaboration between partner organisations.

In October 2021, City of Sanctuary had been working with Manchester Libraries to support asylum seekers in the city. Having built a successful programme, the Council approached them to provide social and well-being activities for Afghan arrivals. City of Sanctuary provided volunteers to deliver activities across the three hotels, so began collaborating with Caritas at an early stage.

City of Sanctuary volunteers gave an insight into the challenging and limited nature of the hotels before school places were found. Particularly within the airport hotels which, surrounded by busy road systems, have no access to open or green space. They emphasised how important the collaborative activities between Caritas and City of Sanctuary were... “parents were delighted to see children return enthusiastically from an afternoon of entertainment with handmade hats, puppets, paintings and models”. Liz supported this sentiment stating, “without our collective support, the situation would be dire”.



Image: outdoor activity for children to play with giant bubbles

Mona coordinates with City of Sanctuary as they continue to deliver drama, dance, yoga and commissioned sessions from Afrocats and Odd Arts. City of Sanctuary volunteers said that while they rarely receive verbal feedback, many Afghan women remove their hijabs during sessions... “this is a

sign that the women feel comfortable” at the sessions delivered by City of Sanctuary. Mona and Liz work together to ensure clear communication with the Council. Liz commented that building a positive working relationship with the Council has been a significant benefit... “they are open to partnership and have been adaptable and positive to work with.”

### **Case Study - the impact of consistent workshop delivery**

“One of the women was a tailor in Afghanistan so took on a leadership role in the sewing sessions. Staff and volunteers could see children come out of their shells, and believed it was partly due to the consistency of having the same person leading the group. The Afghan children have been through a lot of trauma and whilst they are resilient, they still need huge care and support. These sessions are part of that.”

- Kate Ferguson.

Manchester Women’s Aid were originally responsible for coordinating activities at the Holiday Inn Hotel. Working with Mustard Tree, Manchester Refugee Support Network (MRSN) and City of Sanctuary, they delivered sessions on women’s rights, therapeutic support for children and domestic violence awareness group workshops. Once Mona became the coordinator across the three hotels, Manchester Women’s Aid became the delivery partner for a number of wellbeing sessions and provided Caritas with feedback and insight. Kate felt that these sessions were hugely beneficial for resident’s mental health, particularly the women’s activities held at Mustard Tree. It provided an opportunity for women to get out of the hotel, meet other women and often led to conversations around contraception and their rights in the UK. Manchester Women’s Aid are working with Mona to ensure that these discussions continue to form the basis of the women’s rights workshops rolled out across all three hotels.



Image: Adult female partaking in a women-only session

### Case Study - the impact of self-led women's sessions

“One woman arrived from Pakistan the night before a women’s session. She didn’t know anyone in the room, so was timid and uncertain, but was welcomed by a volunteer who spoke Urdu. The session included a discussion on feminism and women’s rights. By the end, her whole demeanour had changed and she was smiling which showed the impact of just one session. As they are self-led, the topics are decided by those who attend. We’re proud that one of the original attendees to the group has now volunteered to lead it and has been inducted as a formal volunteer for the Pankhurst Trust” - Kate Ferguson.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

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In our report produced in January 2021, Macc noted the following as a recommendation for future work:

There is a need to think about evaluation across the response – in particular capturing the voices of the people who were evacuated. Due to the complexity of the situation and the range of agencies involved (as well as the additional pressures of responding in a COVID-safe way), it is understandable that the focus has been on getting support and services organised – but little formal attention has been paid to hearing the experiences of the people most affected by all this and ensuring their views shape the response. As arrangements settle in, hearing those voices and working on basic principles of co-production should not be forgotten.

We are pleased to note that the brief for this evaluation included an opportunity to gather feedback from Afghan residents, enabling their views to shape recommendations going forward.

While conducting this evaluation, we received a number of suggestions on how Caritas can build upon its work going forward. These suggestions came from Afghan residents, the Council and the VCSE organisations mentioned above. All parties stressed that Caritas has built trust, so are the only organisation with the ability to deliver these suggestions.

We, therefore, have four main recommendations to offer in conclusion:

### **Recommendation 1:**

Build on communication with the hotel staff to see whether the people **asking** for help are the same as the people who are **accessing** help. They are often well-placed to see the need but are not usually the ones delivering the support. As the coordinating organisation, Caritas could bridge this gap, enabling hotel staff to feed information to support services to improve their delivery.



## **Recommendation 2:**

When providing feedback on the women’s rights sessions, the residents stressed that they would like the same information and education to be given to their husbands. “It is not useful for us to know about our rights if our husbands do not also know and respect them”. This request could be coordinated and implemented by Caritas.

## **Recommendation 3:**

To continue to develop a positive working relationship between the VCSE organisations and the Council. It was highlighted how powerful this process has been for establishing these relationships and harnessing the best opportunities available from the wide range of partners and resources available. Caritas should continue to be resourced to facilitate communication between the parties.

## **Recommendation 4:**

In delivering this ongoing role, it is important that there is an identified person with the right mix of collaborative skills, empathy and pragmatism. The success of the work lies in having both the capability and capacity to do the role well. While the feedback on the role of Caritas is extremely positive from all partners, it should be noted that this is often specific to the personal skills, knowledge and approach shown by Mona Moussa. The levels of resource available must reflect the need to employ someone with these skills, and for this person to have the time needed to build relationships across the wide network of partners: with the hotel staff, the residents, colleagues in the public sector and many VCSE organisations. It is important that the “coordination” role is understood to be more than just making practical arrangements - it requires time and skills to listen, connect, reflect and develop.

## Appendix: About Macc

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Macc is the support organisation for the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector in the city of Manchester. Our purpose is to encourage, support and develop voluntary and community groups, charities, faith groups and social enterprises and individuals to have a real influence over the places and communities in which they live. Macc has been active in the city of Manchester since 1981.

Macc's services include:

- Our Manchester Community Central web portal [www.manchestercommunitycentral.org](http://www.manchestercommunitycentral.org) includes details of support services, a directory of local groups, a funding database, events, jobs and information - everything you need to know about the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector in Manchester.
- Volunteer Centre Manchester provides information, support and training for Manchester residents who want to volunteer and Manchester based organisations who want to recruit volunteers or need advice on how to support the development of volunteering in their organisation.
- Capacity Building Support – Macc's staff team have extensive experience of providing VCSE organisations with a comprehensive range of support services and training on subjects including: financial sustainability; financial management; accountability; governance; legal structures; staff management; volunteer management; safeguarding; service delivery; quality assurance; business planning; partnership working; market and promotion; ICT; monitoring and evaluation.
- Our Grants Service delivers a range of programmes of all sizes and durations including small grants for community activities, a Volunteer Expenses Fund and hardship funds such as Real Change Manchester and the Greater Manchester Migrant Destitution Fund.
- Macc builds collaborative and influential relationships local charities, community groups and social enterprises and supports joint working with local public sector bodies including Manchester City Council, local NHS organisations and Greater Manchester Police. Macc supports collaborative initiatives such as the Greater Manchester Older People's Network and the Manchester Homelessness Partnership and works in partnership with other infrastructure organisations across Greater Manchester in our 10GM partnership.
- Macc also convenes Manchester Voluntary Sector Assembly and various forums on key topics across the city as well as providing expert analysis, representation and influence in key areas of sector policy.
- Macc's annual 'Spirit of Manchester' programme is a celebration of the work of thousands of voluntary organisations, community groups, charities, faith groups and social enterprises in Manchester. Now in its tenth year, our Spirit of Manchester Awards recognise, support and encourage volunteers and local voluntary action.

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Registered office: Macc, Swan Buildings, 20 Swan Street, Ancoats, Manchester M4 5JW

Website: [www.manchestercommunitycentral.org](http://www.manchestercommunitycentral.org)