

WATFORD AND THREE RIVERS REFUGEE PARTNERSHIP

Annual Report for 2024

Welcome

Hello and welcome to the WTRRP's Annual Report for January – December 2024. Once again, we give all of you our heart-felt thanks for your support, which enables us to continue to assist a lot of needy people in our midst, through a range of hardships and complexities of life. We are pleased to say that over the past year WTRRP has been able to offer a variety of activities:

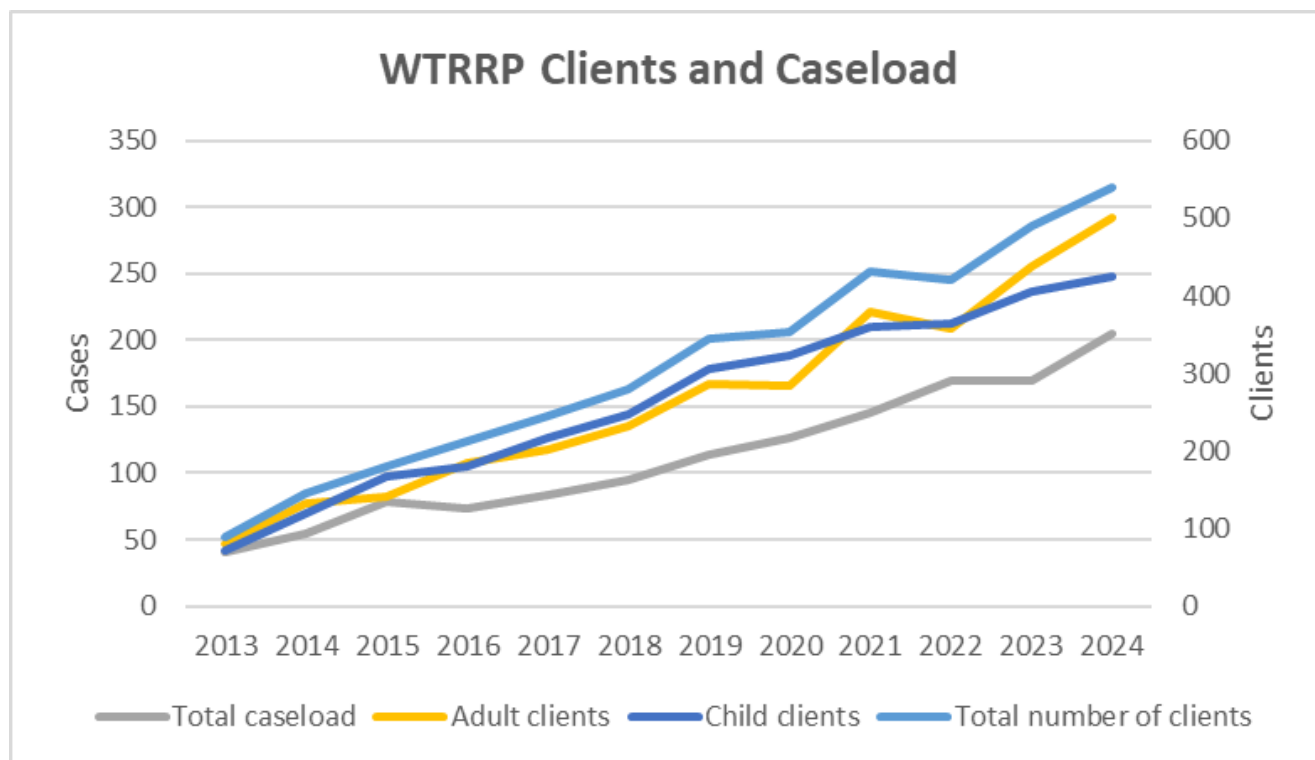
- Our Social Hub continues to run every Tuesday at St Mary's church from 11.30am to 1.30pm where clients can have refreshments and a chat, take part in various activities and take advantage of donations of clothing and other items.
- Our Drop-In also takes place every Tuesday (also from 11.30am to 1.30pm) where clients can meet our case workers, and take advantage of many types of advice, underpinned by our professional Casework Coordinator.
- We held other social events including a fantastic event at Edge Grove School.
- We supported our clients with food and other essentials, school uniforms, sports kit and sporting events and laptop computers.
- Our education programme has continued and grown, teaching our clients English and a range of skills required for living in the UK.
- The number of people – whom we support in many ways – continues to increase.

Please join us at our **Annual General Meeting** at St Mary's Church, Church Street, Watford WD18 0EG, on **Monday 1 September at 7:00 for 7:30pm.**

Our guest speaker is Irene Austin, Chair of Herts Welcomes Refugees, who will tell us about their work across the county, and how they complement the work done by our own staff and volunteers. HWR welcomes refugees and asylum seekers to Hertfordshire, offering ongoing practical support. They also work with local councils and organisations to ensure that refugees and asylum seekers can access appropriate services, and crucially help refugees integrate into their local communities by connecting them with befrienders and community groups.



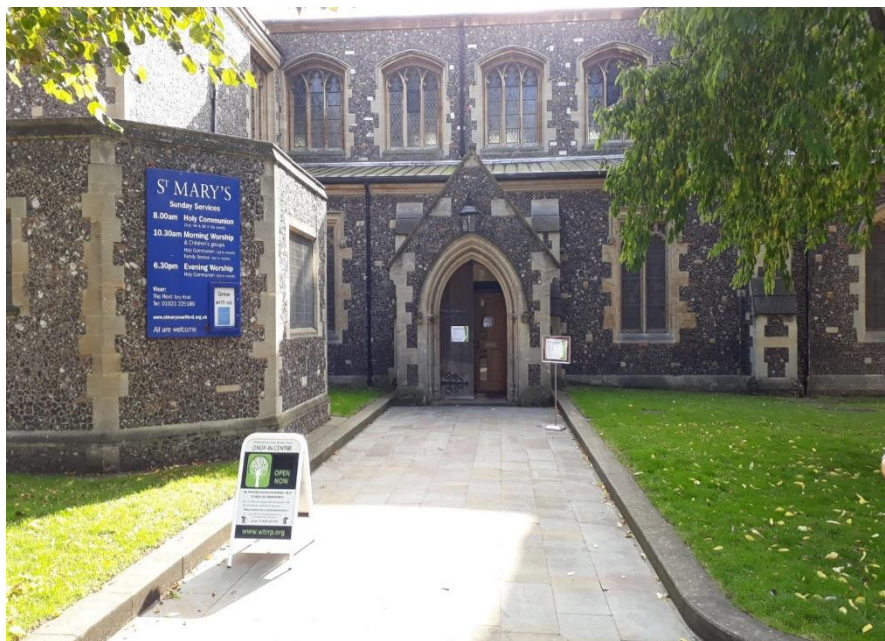
We're proud to have helped 540 people in need during the year



Drop-In Centre

Paul Tucker

The Drop-In service offers an important opportunity for refugees and others seeking 'leave to remain' to access support and guidance. We meet each Tuesday from 11.30 am to 1.30 pm at St Mary's Church, located in the heart of Watford. Our dedicated volunteers and staff provide a comprehensive range of advice and collaborate with various organisations to enhance the support we offer. On the fourth Tuesday of each month, Salma Khan, a solicitor from Pickup and Scott, conducts general advice surgeries focused on immigration matters.



A fundamental aspect of our service is to provide a compassionate listening ear, ensuring that refugees feel empowered to share their narratives and articulate their circumstances. Many individuals encounter the challenges of navigating complex bureaucracies and having a dedicated caseworker who can offer time and understanding

is invaluable. Initial concerns often evolve into more intricate issues as clients gain confidence in explaining their situations.

Specifically, we recorded 263 clients at the Drop-In, with 30% being first-time visitors and the remainder returning for additional support. A significant number seek assistance with immigration advice, including expert legal guidance (66%). This may involve asylum applications, 'leave to remain', enquiries with the Home Office, and more. The help that Salma Khan offers at the surgeries has proved invaluable and we thank her for the significant contribution she makes to this area of work.

Our approach begins with an initial conversation, followed by collecting personal details on a referral form (with their consent), which serves as the foundation for determining the most effective support strategies. This may involve making telephone calls to Government Departments or voluntary organisations, connecting clients with other parts of the Partnership (such as English language), putting them in touch with other agencies and referring them to the solicitor for subsequent appointments at the Drop-In. They are then referred to other parts of the organisation to consider longer-term support options.

The support we provide has been significantly enhanced this year with the appointment of a full-time caseworker. He brings a considerable amount of knowledge and experience, and his enthusiasm, innovative ideas, and dedication have made a significant difference for clients and volunteers.

We greatly value the opportunity to collaborate with our colleagues at the Social Hub. The ability to direct clients to the resources available there, including recreational activities and expert advice from local organisations, has significantly enhanced the issue-based assistance we provide.

We extend our gratitude to the numerous individuals and groups who have supported us. We appreciate the collaborative efforts with St Mary's Church and the warm welcome we have received from the Church Wardens, and other staff members. Furthermore, we have benefited from the expertise of various agencies, including the Citizens Advice Bureau, Watford Borough Council, Three Rivers District Council, Migrant Help, Red Cross, Social Services, New Hope, and others, all of whom have generously provided their support.

Our heartfelt thanks go to our volunteers and staff, who come from diverse backgrounds and whose dedication and professionalism continue to inspire us. If you are interested in learning more about our work, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Tuesday Social Hub

Rosalyn Baker

The Social Hub at St Mary's church welcomes clients every Tuesday from 11.30 am to 1.30 pm.

2024 has seen a steady increase in clients and has been our busiest year to date. Our team of friendly volunteers, including some who are clients, provide a warm welcome and work hard to provide a relaxing and supportive atmosphere for our many client

guests. The Hub runs alongside the Drop-In team in the church, who help clients with immigration enquiries. We offer a friendly space while they wait and a chance to join in with activities or make new friends.

Thanks to the hard work of the grants team, the Hub was awarded a generous National Lottery grant to expand the services and activities we provide. This has enabled us to offer craft activities such as painting, crochet and jewellery making as well as drumming, dancing, singing, nail painting, games including table football and chess, and children's activities and entertainment during school holidays. We were also able to make and hand out back-to-school stationery kits for children, and hygiene supply kits for adults.

Other visitors attending the Hub over the course of the year have included Watford & Three Rivers Healthy Hub team, Flourish Mental Health support (part of the MIND network) Citizens Advice Bureau, Watford Women's Centre, Hertfordshire Police, the Job Centre and Watford Mayor, all bringing helpful advice for our clients on topics ranging from mental wellbeing, how to access support from the police to job seeking help.

We continue to be supported by regular donations of hygiene products from BGP and Nisaba, beauty products from Beauty Banks, winter warmer bags from A Small Act of Kindness, and more recently, very generous donations of warm clothing and other useful items from Goods For Good. We also keep a stock of nappies and baby wipes for clients with babies.

We now have regular donations of fresh bread and pastries for clients to take home as well offering sandwiches and hot lunches prepared at the Hub by Mei & team (NVQ Food Safety level 3). Some members of the team have also recently completed their Level 2 Food Safety qualification.

Thanks go to Mark for his regular IT (phone/laptop) client support and also to Annabel, Fatima, Georgina, Jo, John, Karolina, Mama, Meena, Penny, Paul, Portia, Shahla and Sara.

Education

Marie-Jo Churchill

WTRRP offers weekly English lessons (ESOL) throughout the year. Students can improve their English in small groups and meet people with similar life experiences. Due to their immigration status or sometimes lack of basic education they may be unable to attend the local college or other ESOL classes in the area. A few are happy to combine classes at the college with ours and enjoy more conversation practice. Some need to reach a good standard of English in order to find jobs in specific fields or obtain their British citizenship. We tailor our classes to their needs, with a focus on spoken practice, listening and reading. Written exercises tend to be done at home. The atmosphere is relaxed and welcoming. Our aim is to enable students to communicate effectively, develop confidence and integrate into British society.

We welcome new students throughout the year. They are assessed and placed in a group according to their level. We are mindful that many of our students have lived

through traumatic experiences and are particularly careful of any source of stress e.g. difficult financial situations, politics etc.

We have three face-to-face groups: Beginners, Pre-intermediate and Intermediate. We also have an Advanced group on Zoom. We offer one to one tuition for 'Life in the UK' and literacy when possible. We have 4 teachers (one less than last year due to long-term illness). Hilary Phillips covers all the groups when teachers are absent which enables us to run our classes throughout the year with very few gaps. Our lessons are free and the material and photocopies are provided. We are grateful to our donors and teachers who enable us to run these classes at very low cost. This year we have modified our teaching hours and class location so that students can enjoy the social hub before or after their lessons and continue to practice their English in an informal setting.

The groups at the end of 2024 were as follows:

- Beginners, 8 students. Teacher, Mary Gordon Peace.
- Pre-Intermediate, 12 students. Teacher, Annabel Foley.
- Intermediate, 10 students. Teacher, Marie-Jo Churchill.
- Advanced (by Zoom teleconference), 4 students. Teacher, Marie-Jo Churchill.
- Life in the UK, 1 student. Teacher, Marie-Jo Churchill.
- Literacy, 2 students. Teacher, Marie-Jo Churchill.
- After School English/Literacy, 2 students (they have now left the country). Teacher, Marie-Jo Churchill

This makes a total of 39 students – 1 student attends two groups. This is an increase of over 14.5% from last year. Our teachers are all experienced and qualified. Thanks to their dedication and professionalism students have made noticeable progress. We aim to continue developing our services in the coming year. At the time of writing, 4 students have now found full-time jobs, 2 have passed the 'Life in the UK' test and 2 are British Citizens. We are pleased to have played a small part towards their success and wish them the very best for the future.

Client cases and our Case Review process

Casework Coordinator

During the last year, we have built a caseworker volunteer team to support the caseworker coordinator with clients during the drop in. Training is provided to them in order to help improve their caseworker skills. We also established a triage team that is responsible for registering the clients during the drop in, understanding their needs, the reason for them attending and preparing them to meet the caseworkers.

The Case Review Team has taken on a slightly different role as having a full time Casework Coordinator has enabled him to seek more solutions directly. However, cases relating to safeguarding and financial support are still discussed at the Case Review

meeting. Decisions at the Case Review Team are guided by a policy that was set and approved by the Committee.

A new definition of who should be treated as a client is currently being reviewed by the Committee as part of a strategic review for the charity; at the moment we accept everyone who comes to the drop in as clients. At the end of 2024 we had 205 separate cases, assisting a total of 540 people including 236 children.

Most of the client enquiries are regarding homeless applications and financial support applications. However, we have built good relations with third party charities who are qualified to do the application free of charge when permitted by the granting of a fee waiver by the Home Office.

The Committee is currently looking at befriending options and reviewing how similar organisations undertake befriending to learn about best practice and potentially change our own model, which has a lot of history!

We have had a significant increase in clients especially those attending the drop in and we are receiving more referrals from the Council, NHS and local authorities.

Beside supporting our clients, we are also focused on improving the work of the charity and for it be more professional in order to meet best practice standards. As part of this process, we intend to install a new software system that will digitise our records and hopefully makes us more efficient.

We remain committed to our main goal of supporting and empowering our clients so that they become fully integrated in to the local community

Our social programme

In 2024 we continued our social events, especially all the Tuesday hub social events described above.

Highlights of the year included a five-a-side football event in June, a family party at Edge Grove School in Aldenham, and a children's trip to Watford Football club to support the local team and choose a souvenir to take home!

Our Christmas hamper distribution to 85 clients with families continued in December, providing toys for children and edible goodies for older family members.

Once again, two churches provided significant donations:

- St Luke's church donated items for, and packed, 50 of these hampers for us to distribute: our huge thanks to the church members, with Caroline Tearle and her team of Guides and others packing.
- Stanborough Park church in their annual Toy Service donated a totally amazing selection and quantity of presents for all ages: we are likewise hugely grateful to Pat Walton and the members of the church for their generosity.

Thanks too to many volunteers who packed the remaining hampers and delivered everything by Christmas!



The packing process! Thanks to St Luke's Church for accommodating both lots of packing.

Grants and Fundraising Team

Peter Myers

We commissioned a report from Michelle Wheeler, a fundraising professional, last year to look at the fundraising and promotional aspects of our organisation and she suggested various ideas that could be implemented by our charity.

Since that report we have been actioning the points raised, and have been implementing many of the ideas suggested over the last few months. These include the appointment to the Committee of a fundraising coordinator to be responsible for the implementation of the recommendations received.

A team of two extra people to apply for grants has been appointed and we are currently looking to add to this number.

Monthly fundraising meetings are now being held to discuss grant opportunities and fundraising ideas going forward

Our organisation has now joined the Watford Chamber of Commerce in order to publicise and promote the needs of our charity.

The website of WTRRP has been changed, and we have made it much easier for people to donate to our charity. The website is also being updated on a much more frequent basis and the visitor numbers and subsequent donations continue to increase. A 'Just Giving' page has also been set up.

We have held three fundraising events in the past year which have all been successful, and we plan more of the same in 2025.

We would like to appoint possible patrons to our charity this year. We would benefit from successful business people who have the knowledge and expertise to increase money received by hosting high end events with proceeds going to our charity



Audience enjoying the fundraising event at the Pump

Applying for grants and general fundraising are the key issues that will allow our charity to have a sustainable and successful future.

Our Office Manager and our Volunteers

Georgina McCarthy

Our total number of volunteers is currently 75 – down slightly from last year as we assessed our volunteer list: volunteers who had not attended in a while were contacted to see if they still wanted to help WTRRP in any capacity. Some had acquired childcare duties, had started new jobs or had finished/started university, so congratulations to them!

However, many of the current volunteers are now taking on multiple roles and all have confirmed that they were happy with their time volunteering for WTRRP and if there were any other aspects of the charity they wanted to get involved with. We constantly receive new volunteer applications; with Seema, Georgie and Cat working hard to recruit new people to support all the different teams that form WTRRP. Georgie has joined us as a part-time professional Volunteer Coordinator, currently until October 2025.

Several new roles have been created so that WTRRP can continue to grow. The Welcome Desk Volunteer aids in the smooth running of the Drop-in and the Communications Volunteer will create public awareness and form a relationship with local and wider media. Richard Bunn has become our voice at the Watford Chamber of Commerce, which was recommended in Michelle Wheeler's fundraising report. A fundraising and grants team has been formed which meet regularly to fundraise and apply for money for the services provided by WTRRP.

There have been many training opportunities including Asylum Seekers & Refugees in Herts, provided by Herts County Council for the second year in a row, mental health first aid, first aid and food hygiene. Our membership with NCVO (National Council for

Voluntary Organisations) has created the opportunity to have monthly networking meetings with hundreds of other UK charities on a number of subjects such as engaging younger volunteers and how to celebrate Volunteers' Week. Their support for smaller charities and their help desk has been invaluable for volunteers to get information and advice.

Our Volunteer Support meetings every other month were great opportunities for volunteers to get together, chat, find out any updates and to hear from the committee and our Casework Coordinator.

There have been many changes to the committee over the last year. We are sad that Jane Byng, Fionnuala Smith and Vicky Shaw have left the committee – they go with our huge thanks for their considerable contributions to WTRRP. We welcomed Gabriel Umoren (treasurer), Martin Holden (case review team), Peter Myers (fundraising lead) and Jonathan Carmichael (vice-chair)

A huge amount of gratitude is given to all our volunteers. Whether you do a couple of hours a year helping with the Christmas boxes or an event, to put many hours in week in, week out, you are all so valuable to WTRRP and the clients would not have the opportunities they have without you all. THANK YOU!

Volunteering with WTRRP is incredibly rewarding and makes a real difference to people's lives – and probably your own too. If you're interested in joining us, please get in touch by emailing admin@wtrrp.org.uk – we would love to hear from you!

Our committee and trustees

These committee members served with WTRRP since 1 January 2024 unless otherwise stated, and wish to stand for re-election at the AGM:

<i>*Seema Agnihotri Volunteer Coordinator</i>	<i>Gabriel Umoren Treasurer (since January 2025)</i>
<i>*Tinku Mitra Committee member and data protection specialist</i>	<i>*Laurence Blake Secretary</i>
<i>*Martin Holden Casework reviewer</i>	<i>*Jonathan Carmichael Vice-Chair (since January 2025)</i>
<i>Peter Myers Fundraising coordinator</i>	<i>*Tim Whittaker Chair</i>

Committee members marked with * are currently Trustees.

We say goodbye and heartfelt thanks to Victoria Shaw, Jane Byng, Fionnuala Smith and Maggie Bryant who have left the Committee.

Finances for 2024

Victoria Shaw

The finances show a bank balance of £98,094 on the 31 December 2024, a surplus of £13,529 from the start of the year.

The success of the grants team in securing multiple large grants has provided the charity with the means to improve and expand on its services. Thank you to all volunteers and employees who have worked to secure these funds.

With most management costs covered for the next 2 years by the National Lottery Reaching Communities grant and a recent £19,600 grant received from the National Lottery for Social Hub activities, it is recommended that fundraising for 2025 focuses on securing non-restricted, repeat donations.

Year	2024	2023	2022	2021
Income				
Unrestricted income	£22,417	£25,304	£25,754	£46,692
Restricted income	£113,688	£63,097	£86,063	£49,374
Total Income	£136,105	£88,401	£111,817	£96,066
Expenditure				
Charitable activities	£65,207	£65,831	£70,276	£68,569
Management of the Partnership	£57,369	£27,760	£24,664	£19,774
Total Expenditure	£122,576	£93,592	£94,940	£88,343
Surplus/(Deficit) for Year	£13,529	-£5,190	£16,877	£7,723

Income

The income for the year of £136,105 is an increase of £47,704 (53.96%) on the previous year's figure of £88,401.

Restricted funds represent funds received by the charity that can only be used for the purpose agreed with the donor. This year the charity received grants from 8 different organisations, all of which are listed in the statutory accounts.

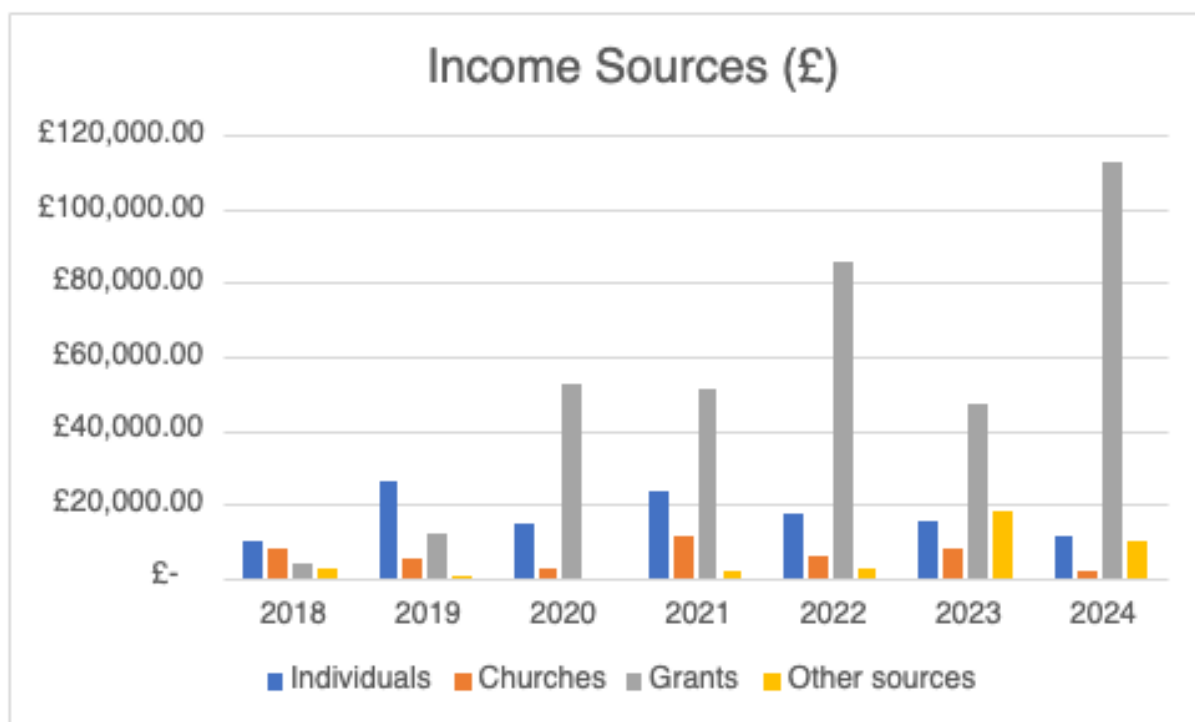
The figures show an 80.18% increase in restricted funds income compared with the previous year. The National Lottery Reaching Communities grant has provided £70,900 of income in 2024 which has provided the funds for the charity to employ a full-time caseworker and covered other management expenses such as rent and salary for the part-time administrator.

Unrestricted income has fallen by 11.41% compared to 2023 with individual, church and other donation sources all down. This does not impose an immediate threat to charity

operations as the restricted fund income streams cover a wide range of both management costs and funds for charitable activities. It is recommended that focus is given to building the general fund pot over the next 2 years to ensure the charity can continue to afford the same level of management spend once the National Lottery grant ends. Failure to build sufficient general funds may result in a forced reduction in charity activities.

We would like to thank all organisations and individuals that continue to support the Partnership, all donations big and small are greatly appreciated and are vital to maintain the ongoing work of the charity.

Below is a graph that shows the charity's income streams since 2018.



Expenditure

Total expenditure for the year was £122,576 compared with £93,591 in 2023. An increase in spending of 30.97%.

Compared with 2023, this year shows a reduction in spend on befriending activities and a notable increase in administrative/management costs. This reflects the employment of the full-time caseworker which has allowed the charity to improve and increase its client services. Rent costs have also increased considerably over the past year. Attempts have been made to negotiate these costs, or move charity activities to another venue, however the new rent rate seems to be in-line with the rest of the market.

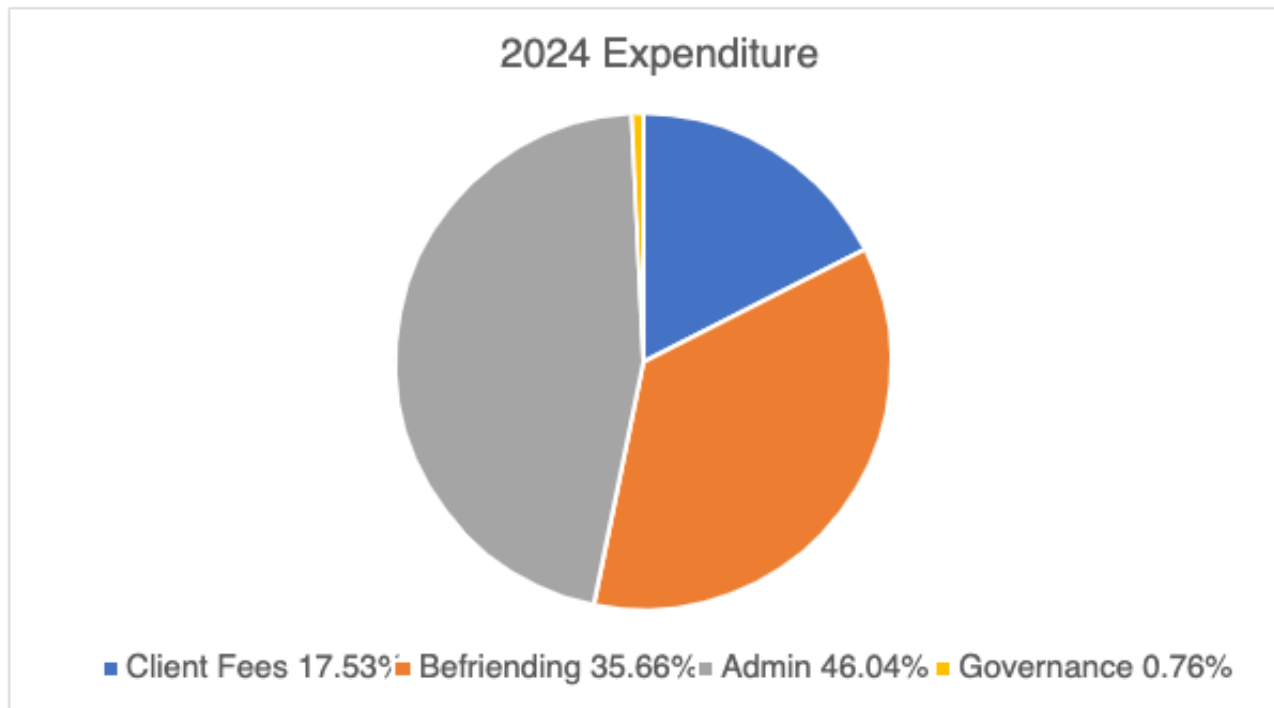
As the pie-chart shows, 35.66% of charity expenditure was spent on befriending activities which includes the provision of food and toiletries, food vouchers, laptops to help children with their education, the provision of school uniforms, providing parties and activities for clients and help with travel and other costs. 17.53% of expenditure was spent on contributions towards legal costs, NHS and Home Office fees. 46.04% of

expenditure paid for administration expenses including the salaries for the 2 employees and rent costs. 0.76% of funds were spent on governance items including mandatory DBS checks for all volunteers to ensure safety of volunteers and clients.

2023 percentages for comparison:

Befriending 58%, Client fees 12.4%, Admin 28.2%, Governance 1.4%

A more detailed breakdown of our expenditure is provided in the statutory accounts.



What's next?

Tim Whittaker

Enormous thanks are due to our supporters, volunteers and staff, that we have been able to help so many people – a total of 540 people in 205 separate cases.

We have been fortunate in recruiting our full-time professional Casework Coordinator, and this has allowed WTRRP to become significantly more effective in the help that it can provide: we have been able to build relationships with a range of other charities and organisations, who are able to increase the scope of what we can offer. He has also been training a number of our volunteers in casework as well as streamlining our Drop-In organisation, further increasing our effectiveness. A big thank-you to everyone who supports and participates in this.

Our social activities add human comfort to the necessarily procedure-driven casework, and the weekly Social Hub has become an important activity to many of our clients. In addition, a programme of parties and activities like Christmas hampers and occasional gift voucher distribution has – we believe – made life a bit more fun for many of those we seek to help. Thank you too to our Hub and social event organisers and volunteers!

Life continues to be risky and difficult for anyone with uncertain status in this country, with new legislation and other government activity. We continue to hope that changes in the law and promised improvements in Home Office processes will make life a bit easier for so many people.

WTRRP continues to try to mitigate these miseries by assisting affected individuals and families with support, vital items and social events. To do this, we always need more volunteers for all activities, including befriending, helping with casework, helping to raise funds, helping with the support and entertainment of our clients in many ways – please see next page.

Thank you! See you at the AGM on 1 September – we promise you an interesting evening!

Trustee Approval

The Trustees approved this Annual Report at a meeting on 23 June 2025, and it was signed on their behalf by Tim Whittaker as Chair.

We continue to need these Volunteers

If you are interested in any of the activities mentioned in this report, or in the following roles – or if you know someone who might be interested – please get in touch with one of the WTRRP coordinators or committee members. Alternatively, our office manager Cat will be able to help you – please contact her at admin@wtrrp.org.uk

Fundraisers

Our fundraising team would very much appreciate more people, to help with both grant applications and public fundraising campaigns. We have had considerable success in both, but need to continue the process, as well as wanting to increase amounts raised so that we can assist our clients more.

Fundraising Events Lead

We are always needing funds, and arranging and participating in special events is an enjoyable and rewarding way of doing this.

Communications and Marketing

Social media

Videographer / Photographer

All these roles help us to make WTRRP known in the area, and support us hugely in finding funds and volunteers. Our communication, both traditional and social media, is crucial to our operation and we would be keen to have more people involved, including someone to manage our comms.

Client Events Lead

Putting on special events for the people we help and their families is a key part of what we do, and adds a bit of fun to lives which can otherwise be a grind.

Literacy teacher

Our education programme would benefit enormously from an experienced teacher of literacy skills, to support a number of our clients.

Caseworkers

This role is for people who already have some previous experience in people facing roles. We are looking for people who have empathy, are good listeners and are non-judgemental. You will be supporting a small number of clients who have more complex needs and require extra support to get through difficult situations. We are looking for people who have two to four hours a week to spare. You will be offered training and support in this role by the Partnership.

Drop-In Centre Volunteers

Volunteering at the Drop-in Centre provides an opportunity for you to help our refugee clients with any issues they might have. We meet (currently) every Tuesday between 11.30 and 1.30pm at St Mary's church in the High Street, Watford, and we generally help with

- The welcome desk

- Helping with casework
- Access to the charity's other services, such as regular food parcels and free English classes.
- Close working with our Casework Coordinator in all these activities

HR Lead

As we grow, experience and expertise in sympathetic and supportive management of our own employees and volunteers is of huge value to us.

Committee Members and Trustees

If your forte is helping to lead and develop organizations, we are always looking for expertise and enthusiasm in our committee, and among our Trustees.

If you are able to support us financially, please visit <https://wtrrp.org.uk/donate> and follow the links, or contact us directly for more details. Thank you!



Supported by the National Lottery

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