



Refugee Support
Devon

ANNUAL REVIEW

2024

2025

“ The staff and volunteers at RSD are incredibly compassionate and dedicated, consistently providing a warm and welcoming environment. Their tireless efforts not only support the immediate needs of refugees but also empower them to rebuild their lives with dignity and hope.

Drop-in client ”

“ One of the standout features of RSD is their provision of essential resources such as bus vouchers and SIM cards, which are crucial for helping refugees navigate their new environment and stay connected with loved ones. Additionally, their support in finding solicitors ensures that asylum seekers receive the legal assistance they need to navigate complex immigration processes.

Client in contingency accommodation ”

“ I am deeply appreciative of the time and effort my teachers (RSD volunteers) invested in helping me understand complex topics, improve my writing, and refine my speaking skills. Their encouragement and constructive criticism motivated me to push myself further and achieve better results. I would like to thank them for their unwavering support and commitment. I am confident that the skills and knowledge I have gained through their guidance will greatly benefit me in my professional endeavours.

RAMP programme participant ”

“ It has put me back on track and I feel like a human being, unlike before I visited RSD, when I felt I was a failure.

Drop-in client ”

“ If I could rate the service received (from RSD), I would undoubtedly say it has been excellent. The help you have provided has been fantastic, and I greatly value every effort and act of kindness you have shown us.

Client in contingency accommodation ”

“ Thank you (RSD staff) for your bravery in being by our side, for your generosity in dedicating your time and energy to us, and for your friendship in being our emotional support. Your commitment has given us strength to move forward and overcome the challenges that arise. We are deeply grateful for your kindness and compassion. We will never forget your support in these difficult times.

Client in contingency accommodation ”

“ We want to give an immense THANK YOU to all the extraordinary people who are part of the RSD team and to all the wonderful people who contribute and support RSD financially, enabling it to continue helping families like ours. We trust that every day we will be better, and perhaps in the future, we will also be able to work and contribute to supporting other families in need.

Family in contingency accommodation ”



Letter from our Chair

This is my first Annual Report as Chair, and I am delighted to say that it has been another successful year for Refugee Support Devon.

Given I assumed my role in November 2024, I cannot claim any credit, and I would like to thank my predecessor, Jenny Longford, who led the Board so diligently over the past 12 years. Jenny remains a trustee and continues to provide valuable advice and perspective.

RSD's work is ever more important in an atmosphere of rising hostility to refugees and asylum seekers. The appalling national riots in August 2024, where mobs attacked hotels housing asylum seekers, and the increasing hostile rhetoric from a few politicians, make it even more crucial to champion the rights of marginalised people and show that Devon is a welcoming place. The national celebration of Refugee Week and events such as the Respect Festival in Exeter are moments when we can focus on shared humanity.

Charities like RSD need to be able to adapt to a fast-changing environment. For example, the numbers of people we're supporting in hotel accommodation decreased last year, but they're now steadily rising again, putting pressure on RSD's resources. A recent survey showed how our hotel clients appreciated the support provided by our Resettlement Co-ordinator, Souad Fadel.

Our core drop-in and immigration services – ably managed by Kiven Emmanuel, Valentina Todino and their excellent volunteers – continue to offer much-needed support to an increasing number of people. Rebecca Michel smoothly took over the management of our English language provision in May. Our RAMP (Refugees as Medical Professionals) programme was making excellent progress under Anne Conway's supervision. The programme has had a challenging time, and due to staff sickness, Denise Parker, the founder of our RAMP programme, has stepped in seamlessly and is managing it on a temporary basis. We are extremely grateful to Torbay Hospital and the University of

Exeter Medical School who continue to champion this service.

We understand that involving people with lived experience of the UK's asylum system contributes to the integrity of our services. We have two trustees and one staff member with this experience and value their insights. One of those trustees, Shehany Warnakulasuriya, is developing a strategy to give more people with lived experience a chance to influence our work.

Sadly, we are saying farewell to our Manager, Rupert Blomfield, who after a period of sickness, is stepping down. In his four years with us, Rupert has led the charity through a period of much change, bringing his incredible knowledge, experience and compassion to the role. He has been instrumental in helping steer RSD into its current position and we are immensely grateful to him. We wish him well in his future endeavours.

I am delighted to announce Susanna Revolti as RSD's new CEO. Susanna was previously CEO of Borderlands in Bristol, a charity offering similar services to RSD and we are very excited to see how her role develops.

As for our trustees, we were pleased to welcome Elizabeth Smith, Jury Arevalo (manager of a contingency hotel in Bristol), Shaun Gillanders as our treasurer, and Alice Murdoch as our marketing and fundraising trustee. My thanks go to Michelle Lambourne, who has stepped down as treasurer, for all her fantastic work.

Finally, a massive thank you to all the wonderful staff, volunteers, trustees, donors and supporters who help make such a difference to people's lives. Your dedication, compassion and enthusiasm are truly remarkable.

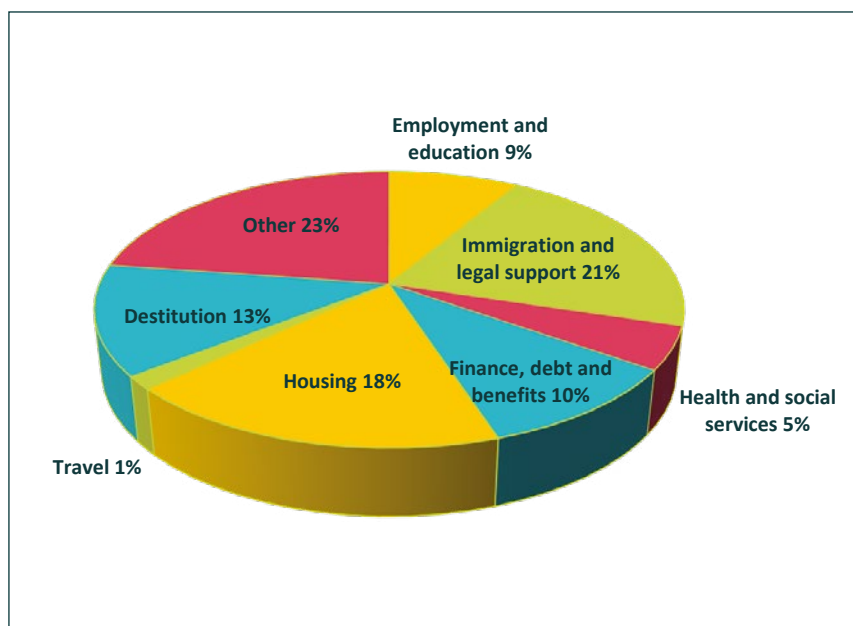
Helen Hartstein, Chair, Board of Trustees



Drop-In Service

Our drop-in clinic is at the core of the services we provide.

Our experienced colleagues and volunteers give practical advice, support and signposting services to our clients in a safe and welcoming space. We run four sessions per week. Of the 229 people this service supported in the reporting year, 112 were asylum seekers, 82 were either refugees or had a refugee background, eight were UK citizens, and 27 had complicated immigration status. See the pie chart for the reasons people came to see us. The spread of demand for our services is broadly in keeping with the trend over the last couple of years.



Drop-in services used, April - March 2025

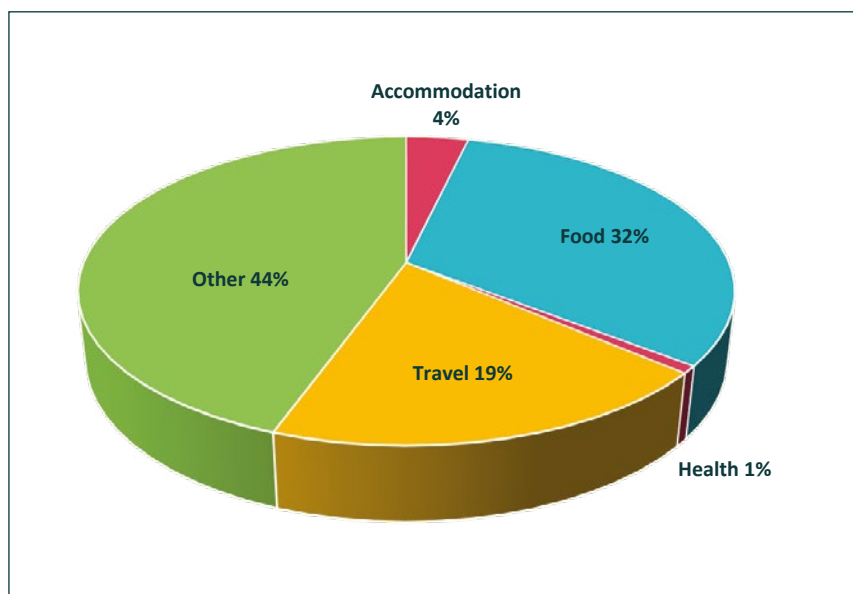
Destitution Project

Our destitution fund provides a lifeline to all those who find themselves in financial crisis for a variety of reasons.

We're always finding new and creative ways to support people facing severe hardship.

We helped 56 people, who made a total of 148 claims, and we gave them just under £2600.

This project is funded by individual donors, who make regular or one-off donations, people who fundraise on our behalf, and faith and community-based organisations. Without them we simply wouldn't have the funds to support people who face destitution.



Emergency Fund 2024-25

Tehmina's Story...

Tehmina had to escape her life in Pakistan with her two children, otherwise her young daughter would have been forced to marry an older man. Tehmina's husband comes from an extremely influential family in Pakistan and she was scared about her daughter's future had they stayed there.

Tehmina had no idea what would happen when they finally arrived in Exeter. She did not speak much English and the family had no clothes or money. What Tehmina lacked in material possessions, she more than made up for in her thirst for knowledge and her willingness to help others. She soon picked up enough English to assist RSD in supporting other asylum seekers like herself at the hotel. She was always ready

to volunteer at events for hotel residents. She enjoys cooking and has made lovely meals for her family, hotel residents and the local community whenever there's an opportunity.

RSD finally succeeded in helping Tehmina and her children to be granted leave to remain in the UK. Tehmina enrolled at a hair and beauty course at Exeter College and is now a qualified beautician. She works part-time at a hairdresser's and is quietly confident that she and her children are safe in their new community now. As well as wanting a good education for her children, Tehmina would like to open her own restaurant one day and contribute to the economic well-being of Britain.

I felt I was reborn the first time I met staff and volunteers from RSD. They harnessed the positive energy I had within and have helped me to become the person I am now.

Tehmina



Immigration Clinic

As an organisation accredited by the Immigration Advice Authority (IAA) at Levels 1 and 2, we supported 39 individuals in the reporting year. We now have considerable expertise in working with clients with various needs around their leave to remain status. These include indefinite leave to remain, leave to remain as parents and spouses, as well as naturalisation applications for adults, and registrations for children as British citizens.

Navigating the immigration system in the UK can be a challenging and time-consuming job. Tony, one of our experienced volunteers, helped a client with her British citizenship application. A translation error by an agency resulted in her certificate giving the wrong place of birth in her country. Due to ethnic tensions, this error would have made it difficult for her to travel

back to see her family. It took two years for Tony, along with an intervention from her MP, to persuade the Home Office to issue our client with an amended certificate.

Another client had been in the UK for many years but was unable to obtain settled status as her husband is disabled and cannot work. We managed to help her obtain discretionary leave so that she can remain in the UK to care for her husband, and maintain a family life with him and her wider family here.

The scarcity of legal aid for immigration advice in South West England, plus the distorted and confused debates on our immigration system, make our services - although limited - ever more crucial.

Contingency Accommodation

We have been at the vanguard of providing support to asylum seekers in contingency hotels in Devon since February 2022. These are hotels which house asylum seekers temporarily while their applications are processed. There is still one large hotel open in Devon that houses up to 300 single women and family groups, including around 100 children.

Exeter has not traditionally hosted asylum seekers, although it has had a long history of supporting refugees. Since we began working with residents of contingency hotels in Devon, our client profile has changed remarkably. Over 60% of the clients we support across all our services now are asylum seekers and around 25% are refugees, the converse of what it was in the past.

RSD plays a pivotal role in supporting the residents of the hotel. We've worked in close partnership with local authorities (both Devon County Council and East Devon District Council fund RSD to provide essential support services), the company contracted to run the hotel, schools, health services and with our friends in other voluntary and faith-based organisations.

As the hotel is in a remote location, together with other partners, we run as many activities as our shoestring budget allows. Please see page 12 for more details.

What each resident desires above all else is, securing legal advice for their asylum case. This is a huge challenge in what is a legal aid advice desert in the region. In September, however, we managed to find solicitors to represent all the cases in the hotel – a very proud achievement for us! Now that the numbers are steadily increasing, it's more difficult to retain that record, and finding lawyers for the residents remains our priority.



I found there was such a focus (from RSD) on (hotel residents') dignity to enable vulnerable migrants not to have to be 'passive or receiving', always dependent on other individuals or organisations, but to be able to make independent decisions for themselves with dignity and 'gumption'. What was evident was (RSD's) emphasis on nurturing, elevating and supporting the lived experience of refugees and asylum seekers.

Marvella, Devon Community Foundation (RSD funder)



Adnan's Story...

Adnan, a cyber security expert, had to flee his home with his two children, his wife and his mother, last year because his life was suddenly at risk. The authorities in his country found out that he had access to critical data on personnel in another country. Adnan knew that unless he gave them the information he and his family would not be safe.

So they quietly left the country as well as everything they were familiar with and that was dear to them. The family arrived in the UK exhausted and frightened about their safety and future. They were put in a hotel in Devon. From the first day at the hotel, Adnan and his family felt welcomed.

RSD is doing very important work in supporting refugees in Devon. They don't just help us with essentials, but they go beyond and think about what will help our mental well-being as well. I am very thankful for that.

Adnan

Adnan and his family have now been granted leave to remain. They are all immensely grateful for the opportunity to start afresh in this country. Adnan can finally feel hopeful for the future and raise his family in safety.

The RSD team was extremely helpful and gave us all the essentials such as clothes, shoes, bus tickets, SIM cards and we were invited to events such as cooking sessions, Christmas and Eid parties and outings that gave us a chance to experience life outside the hotel. RSD has been with us at each and every step of our journey in Devon so far.

Adnan

Community Garden

We've had an eventful year at our allotment. To give it a higher profile, we invited families over for a barbecue in the garden and even provided a children's entertainer, which went down extremely well! Our small polytunnel didn't stand a chance in Storm Bert. Fortunately, the Swan Mountain Trust very generously gave us a grant to buy a larger polytunnel and other equipment for our allotment.

We had a productive growing season including tomatoes, cucumbers, strawberries, greengages, apples and more, which helped people in hotels to top their inadequate diets with fresh produce. Mark and his volunteers also planted a new variety of broad bean called Flock as part of a project for the Exeter Seed Bank.

The garden is a hive of activity during the planting and growing season and Mark and others work hard to attract more people to make use of the beautiful and tranquil space.



Resettlement Scheme

Douha and Mohamad's story

We - together with Devon County Council, local services, other charities and organisations, and remarkable individuals - welcomed the first family under the UK government's resettlement scheme in Devon in 2016. Since then, we have supported many more families to resettle safely in their local communities. Below is the story of one such family we've worked with for eight years.

Douha and Mohamad's oldest son was killed during the Syrian war. Fearing for their and their remaining two sons' lives, they fled Syria and finally came to Devon under the resettlement scheme in 2017. Douha will never forget the first night in their new home. After years of turmoil, she finally felt safe and at peace with herself.

Both Douha and Mohamad have learning difficulties and struggle to speak English. However, their sheer enthusiasm for life, determination to integrate with their local community and learn everything about the UK, have overcome most challenges and feelings of isolation they may have felt because of their lack of English language skills.

Mohamad goes out of his way to make connections with whoever crosses his path – the mosque, his local church, his young son's school, their local supermarket, their GP surgery. Coffee mornings at his home have become legendary in his neighbourhood. Sometimes a sense of belonging within a community transcends needing a common language.

As well as cooking superb Syrian food, Douha has taken sewing classes to improve her skills. RSD provided her with a donated sewing machine a couple of years ago, and she's not looked back! When a group of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children arrived at her son's college, they were given clothes which didn't necessarily fit them. Douha patiently altered each child's clothes, which immediately helped them hold their heads a bit higher.

Douha and Mohamad remain grateful to RSD - and Souad in particular - for all our support over the years. Douha recalls that Souad was right there to meet them at the airport, take them home, orientate them to their new surroundings, and assign them with wonderful volunteers who helped them to settle into their neighbourhood.



We did not want to be on our own, we did not want to live in isolation, we very much wanted to be part of our community, and Souad and her volunteers helped us to achieve that. We will always be grateful to RSD for their amazing support over the years.

Mohamad



Volunteer Viewpoint

Alex has been volunteering with us for ten years now and is a crucial member of the drop-in and immigration team.

I'm lucky enough to be able to work four days a week and so I volunteer on my day off. When my young boys started school, I looked for opportunities to put my passion for solidarity in human rights into practice. At first I supported RSD's Women's Group with computer classes, then volunteered with the drop-in clinic. It wasn't long after this that RSD took the bold decision to become a registered organisation to provide legal immigration and asylum advice. With my background in legal investigations, I leapt at the opportunity to become an accredited adviser. I've been providing immigration advice for about seven years now, and absolutely love it.

It's hugely rewarding to be able to make a positive difference to the lives of refugees and asylum seekers in my community. For instance, I helped a client to bring his wife to the UK, and then a few years down the line got to see them with their young baby.

There's sadly too much misinformed and dangerous rhetoric about refugees and asylum seekers in the media and even in government policies. It's against this backdrop that RSD's support, although limited, becomes more important every day. I believe RSD's work brings lasting solidarity to Devon's refugee community, it spreads understanding of refugee issues, and it creates opportunities for the wider community to become engaged too.

Everyone has something to give, and giving back enriches everyone.



We are truly indebted to our 80+ volunteers. Without their dedication, expertise, experience and generosity we simply would not be able to do the breadth and depth of the work we do.

RAMP

(Refugees as Medical Professionals)

Our RAMP project supports refugees with a healthcare background to requalify to work in the UK. We had 21 clients over the year in the health sector who engaged with our RAMP services as they sought training and work opportunities in their fields.

The main support we provide is helping clients to pass the specialist Occupational English Test (OET), before they can take their professional exams. Once they have passed their OET, we assign each client with a volunteer mentor who is either a practising or

a retired medical doctor. We also try and find clinical work experience in local hospitals for our clients. We are extremely grateful for our partnership with the Torbay Hospital and the University of Exeter Medical School. Their advice and support throughout the year has been invaluable. Three of our client doctors were able to experience taster days at the Torbay Hospital. One doctor was even offered a six-week placement in paediatrics, which was a remarkable experience for them.

I want to say a big THANK YOU for this opportunity to be at the (Torbay) hospital – it was like being a doctor again. It was for two days only but I went through so many emotions. I found these taster days very useful for me and my exams.

RAMP client

I was really excited to see how it all works here and I now know that everything's possible in the UK. The staff were very lovely and I was extremely happy to be with them in the gynaecology clinic. I even had the opportunity to observe operations. I was a bit upset that I could have done the operations myself, but I am not allowed to work in the UK yet. I have already lost two years...but everything happens for a reason. I am sure it will all be fine in the end, I just need to keep on target.

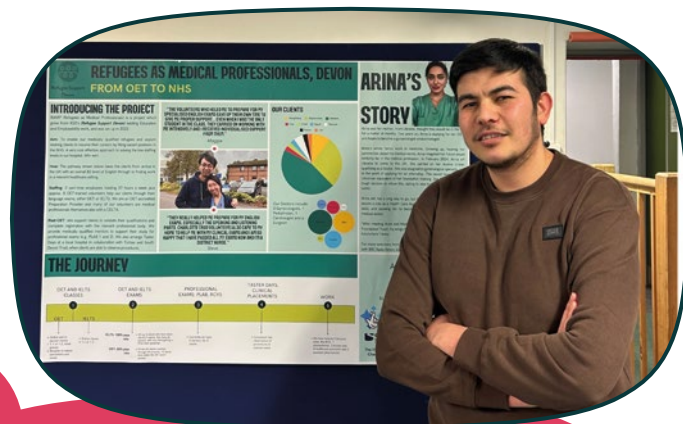
RAMP client

Mujtaba's Journey: From Afghanistan to Requalifying as a Vet in the UK

Mujtaba was the head veterinarian of Nowzad - an animal welfare charity in Kabul founded by British soldiers - until 2021 when the Taliban suddenly regained control of Afghanistan. Mujtaba had a harrowing journey to the UK when the Taliban stopped him and his colleagues from leaving Kabul. They had to flee to Pakistan by land before they eventually made it to the UK.

Once in the UK, Mujtaba was determined to rebuild his professional life. He set his sights on requalifying to practise in the UK. With the support of RSD and Nowzad, he took English proficiency and professional exams, and achieved his goal. In October 2024, he officially requalified as a vet in the UK and is now back to practising in his field.

In addition to his veterinary work, Mujtaba now helps others on our RAMP project in their journey to employment.



Mujtaba worked incredibly hard and showed amazing resilience and dedication to achieve this success. He will be a credit to his profession and we wish him all the very best.

Rebecca Michel,
Education for Integration Co-ordinator

English for Integration

Over the year demand from our clients for ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) tuition has continued to grow and we collaborated with other providers in the community to ensure the most effective way of delivering learning opportunities.

We now see our role in ESOL provision as offering chiefly specialist English language tuition while other providers in the community are able to offer regular ESOL classes for beginners to intermediate level. For instance, our Book Club

and conversation classes represent a different approach to acquiring language skills. We're having discussions about combining learning English alongside cookery classes for the residents of the contingency accommodation hotel. Most one-to-one tuition is now online and enables RSD's volunteer teachers to tailor tuition to clients' availability and learning needs. Refugees Rock, though ostensibly a wall-climbing activity, has nevertheless enabled participants to develop their confidence in using English in a social setting, making connections with other members of the community, an important step towards their integration. We provide IELTS (International English Language Testing System), as well as our RAMP programme's Occupational English Test (OET) for refugee medical professionals wishing to pursue their careers in the UK. Four clients took the OET in the reporting year, and we're very proud that all of them passed the highly demanding test.



Events

Refugee Week

RSD, in partnership with Exeter Phoenix, showed two thoughtful films and a Persian dance production on the profound impact of displacement. There were lively panel discussions after the shows. We also took part in a timely symposium on Legal Aid Provision in an Immigration Context organised by the University of Exeter. The setting for the discussions was especially poignant as it was in the Exeter Liberation Encampment for Palestine, where students camped for several weeks in protest against the war in Gaza.

As the theme for Refugee Week was Our Home in 2024, it was fitting to support Art Work Exeter to celebrate the humble dumpling and dumpling makers from around the world! It was a memorable project with people – including our clients – making dumplings from their home countries evoking memories, traditions and above all, connections with other people from across the globe.

Exeter Multicultural Choir

We were thrilled to launch this brand-new initiative in partnership with Devon County Council and Devon Community Fund, and facilitated by Valentina, our talented Drop-in and Safe Spaces Co-ordinator. The choir is a weekly get-together of speakers of other languages. They explore songs, music and dance from around the world. It gives them the opportunity to share and learn about each other's musical traditions and heritage.

I was shocked by how happy it made me, watching such a diverse group of people come together and sing so well. It was genuinely amazing to see how impactful simple songs can be in such a supportive environment.

Eddie Rudolph, RSD staff

Other Events

The majority of our events are for hotel residents as the hotel is in a remote location and apart from receiving a one-day bus pass (generously funded by East Devon District Council) from us every week, the residents are not able to go out much. So for most of them, this bus pass is their only window to the outside world.

Together with our many partners, we organised fortnightly cookery and Refugees Rock sessions, and a monthly pop-up shop, which enabled individuals to select clothes, shoes, toiletries and other essentials donated by generous people in the community. The cooking sessions were another lifeline for the hotel residents, as it was the only time they could eat nutritious food cooked by themselves. There were also film shows, football tournaments, mixed yoga classes, swimming lessons for women, acupuncture, quilt-making, mindfulness, the Scouts Club, crafts activities,

Christmas and Eid parties. These events helped alleviate feelings of isolation and created a sense of community within and outside the hotel.

Inadequate food at the hotel has resulted in cases of malnutrition, particularly for children and elderly people. Food insecurity also deeply affects mental health as individuals lack the opportunity to buy food of their own choosing or that has personal and cultural value. Being able to make decisions over what you eat, and cooking your own food, play into feelings of autonomy and dignity, as well as helping to create a sense of 'place' and 'home'. This makes it much harder for asylum seekers in the UK to rebuild their lives as fully as possible. RSD is helping to alleviate this.

**Marvella, Devon Community Foundation
(RSD funder)**



Our gratitude goes to Devon County Council, East Devon District Council, acupuncture volunteers, Al Shola Community Group, Belmont Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Exeter, Cranbrook Community Hub, Exeter International English Café, Exeter Phoenix, Park Life Heavitree, Pinhoe and Broadclyst Medical Practice, Rediscover Church, Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital, the St Vincent de Paul Society Exeter, the Scouts, XR Samba Band, Shumba Arts, and many other community groups and individuals for their wonderful support.

Staff

Rupert Blomfield	Manager (until August 2025)
Susanna Revolti	Chief Executive Officer (from August 2025)
Annette Hughes	Finance Manager
Amelia Jepson	Administrative Assistant (April to October 2024)
Anne Conway	RAMP Co-ordinator
Denise Parker	Education Co-ordinator (until June 2024)
Eddie Rudolph	Administrative Assistant (October 2024 to April 2025)
Ella Marsh	Outreach Co-ordinator (until July 2024)
Kiven Emmanuel	Casework Co-ordinator
Natasha Pavey	Administration and Communications Assistant (from March 2025)
Rebecca Michel	Education for Integration Co-ordinator (from May 2024)
Souad Fadel	Resettlement Co-ordinator
Trupti Desai	Administrator
Valentina Todino	Drop-in Co-ordinator

Trustees

Helen Hartstein	Chair (from November 2024)
Jennifer Longford	Chair (until November 2024)
David Mezzetti	Secretary
Shaun Gillanders	Treasurer (from September 2024)
Michelle Lambourne	Treasurer (until September 2024)
Alice Murdoch	Marketing and fundraising (from May 2025)
Anna Camilleri	Communications
Bob Mycock	
Ruth Grove-White	
Emma Marshall	
Shehany Warnakulasuriya	
Jury Arevalo (from April 2024)	
Elizabeth Smith (from September 2024)	

Our Heartfelt Thanks

We'd like to say a huge thank you to all the individuals and community groups who raise much-needed funds for us every year. A few highlights for us were Professor Vikram Devaraj and his colleagues at University of Exeter, who held a sari exhibition of his late mother's sari collection and donated the proceeds to us. Our indomitable septuagenarian supporter, Delia Kennedy, walked over 100 miles in August in support of our work. Bee Harley, a long-term RSD supporter, performed a musical concert with her friends and donated the proceeds to us.

We're also indebted to all the organisations and charitable trusts which support our work: AB Charitable Trust, Anton Jurgens Charitable Trust, the David Gibbons Foundation, Devon Community Foundation, Devon County Council, East Devon District Council, Exeter City Council, Exeter Phoenix, Garfield Weston Foundation, Hilden Charitable Fund, Jamieson Bystock Trust, JTI, Lloyds Bank Foundation, National Lottery Community Fund, Souter Charitable Trust, St Edmunds and St Mary Major Charity, the Swan Mountain Trust, and Thomas Wall Foundation.

A special mention goes to all those who contributed to our online Christmas Appeal to support our RAMP project.

Last but not least, a special thank you to all our one-off and especially our monthly donors. Without your contributions we would not be able to provide services to our vulnerable clients. To you and all those who supported and continue to support RSD in so many different ways ... A HUGE THANK YOU!

If you wish to organise a fundraising event for us or you wish to become a regular donor, then please visit our website for further information.

Accounts

	2024-25	2023-24
Income	£281,628 (draft)	£344,721
Expenditure	£263,224 (draft)	£265,611

Our full accounts will be ready to view at our AGM in October 2025.



Refugee Support Devon



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