

CARAS Annual Report

2015 - 2016



CARAS

supporting diversity
challenging adversity

porting diversity
challenging adversity
supporting diversity
challenging adversity
supporting diversity
challenging advers

Contents

Section	Page Number
Charity Overview	3
Charity Information	4
Financial information/Funding	5
Our Team	5
Women's Drop-In	7
The Chickpea Sisters	8
Advocacy	9
Youth Club	10
ESOL	12
Study Group	12
After School Club	13
Family Activity Days	14
Mentoring	16
The Grange	16
The Weekend Project	17

Charity Overview

CARAS is a community based organisation working with refugees and asylum seekers. We provide practical, educational and social help, aiming to support people to feel confident and comfortable in their local community. We want to maximise feelings of safety, well-being and belonging, increase people's skills and autonomy, promote a culture of inclusion and provide quality information, advice and learning opportunities.

Everyone at CARAS is part of this community, welcomed, valued, and included in all that we do.



Charity Name:

Community Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers. Community Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers is a private limited company also registered as a charity with the Charity Commission of England and Wales.

Registered Company Number:

6462487 (memorandum and articles of association incorporated 3rd January 2008; articles of association updated by special resolution 9th March 2016.

Registered Charity Number:

1124376 (registered on 6th June 2008)

Registered and Principle Office:

25, Blakenham Road, Tooting, London, SW17 8NE

Trustees

Jennifer Barron, Ladan Hall, Christopher Hands, Katherine Harvey, Shirley Hodgson, Rick Hood, Zara Hosany and Jessica Thomas.

New trustees may be appointed by the directors in accordance with the provisions of the articles of association.

Objects

- 1.** To preserve and protect the physical and mental health of those seeking asylum and those granted refugee status and their dependants.
- 2.** The provision of facilities for recreation or other leisure time occupation with the object of improving the conditions of life of those persons who have need of such facilities by reason of their youth, age, infirmity or disablement, financial hardship or social and economic circumstances.
- 3.** To advance the education of those seeking asylum and those granted refugee status and their dependants in need thereof so as to advance them in life and assist them to adapt within a new community.
- 4.** To advance the education of the public in general about the issues relating to refugees and those seeking asylum.

Financial Information

In the year 1st October 2014 - 30th September 2015, CARAS (Community Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers) received revenues of £226,393 and incurred expenses of £195,618.

CARAS has a reserves policy (approved April 2011, reviewed May 2015) setting out a target range for reserves of 16%-20% of the charity's annual expenditure.

Funding

Approximately 60% of the foundation's income in the year 1st October 2014 - 30th September 2015 was from grant-making organisations, 30% from private donations and individual fundraising, and 10% from trading.

We very much appreciate the generosity of the private donors who fund one of our salaried posts as well as all those who support us where they can with both regular and one-off donations.

We are also very grateful to have received grants that have benefitted our work over the past year from: Sir Walter St John Educational Charity, the Open Society Foundation, Joseph Ettegui Charitable Foundation, BBC Children in Need, Henry Smith Charity, Seedbed Christian Community, Chances, the Wimbledon Foundation Community Fund, the Wandsworth Community Fund, the Wandsworth Grant Fund and Jack Petchey Foundation.

Our Team

CARAS is made up of a small staff team who are supported to deliver projects by more than 100 dedicated community volunteers. At different levels of the organisation, volunteers play a vital role in ensuring that services are delivered, whether through undertaking a part-time internship, attending activities on a weekly basis, offering regular one-to-one support, or joining us for annual events such as our Community Fun Day. Without the contribution of our committed and experienced team of volunteers, many projects simply could not run.

Staff team (during the year)

Molly Abraham, Egle Banelyte, Eleanor Brown, Shelton Graham, Jenny Love, Andreja Mesaric, Anna Rudd, Alexa Sidor.

Interns

Dan Carter, Kim Critchell, Lara Iannelli, Kaeli King, Hugh McDonnell, Jack Metcalfe, Francine Nicholas, Victoria Palazzo, Coumba Sow.

We are also grateful to Kwasi Owusu-Ankomah, Zurah Dica and Keith McGuinness who have served as part of our Strategic Team, as well as volunteering in projects, and to Ruksana Chowdhury and Richard Smith, both of whom have stood down as trustees in the past year.

OUR STAFF TEAM



**Alexa
Sidor**



**Eleanor
Brown**



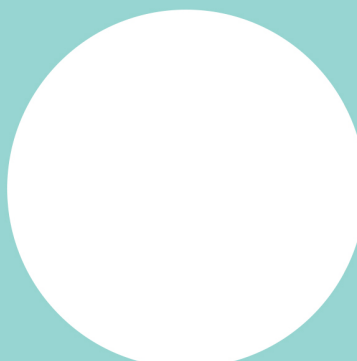
**Egle
Banelyte**



**Jenny
Love**



**Molly
Abraham**



**Carrie
McAlinden**

**“When I came to
this country,
I didn’t know anybody
and I was scared
to talk to even
my neighbours.
I was in hiding...”**

**“...Since I am with
CARAS, I feel more
independent and free.”**

- A WOMEN’S DROP-IN ATTENDEE

Women's Drop-In

Every Tuesday CARAS run a female-only space in which women can learn English, socialise, and take part in a range of activities that will help them take control of their lives, make informed decisions, and be fully involved in the lives of their families and communities. The Drop-In also acts as a gate-way to our other Adult provision. It is a space where staff members can get to know beneficiaries, build trusting relationships, and understand their, often complex, needs.

Being a women-only space is an integral part of the drop-in's effectiveness. It is a place which aims to be welcoming, safe and supportive for all members, and is women-only in recognition of gender-specific needs. Most of the group are from backgrounds where men and women do not learn or socialise together. They have expressed a worry that if they have to learn with men in the room they will not feel confident to speak and will not learn as quickly; for some, having men in the session would mean that their husbands did not permit them to come.

A key development this year has been the introduction of Personal Development Plans. In order to ensure that the group meets the needs of beneficiaries, the project coordinator works

with each person to create a personal development plan, involving an hour long discussion to help us understand changes each woman wants to make in their life and how the project can support them in doing that.

For some, this might mean taking on specific leadership roles within the group, or developing a specific skill. If lots of women express a specific concern, workshops will be run on those subjects, for example, this year we ran sessions on raising awareness about disability in children - a problematic and stigma-inducing topic - with some of the women speaking about their own experiences caring for a child with disabilities.

CARAS' partner organisation Transition Town Tooting are now playing an integral role in the Women's Drop-In weekly activities. Artists and session workers have been leading a range of gardening workshops with the women; growing herbs, vegetable, for the CARAS courtyard and their homes.

Volunteers:

Ashoo Bassoon
Denise Cain
Francesca Reed
Hana Sandhu
Lara Iannelli

Maria Alphonso
Nadia Afework
Natalia Wyroda
Szilvia Remenyik



The Chickpea Sisters

The Chickpea Sisters are a catering company run by refugee and migrant women.

The company developed out of CARAS' cooking project. Socially isolated women, who were new to the country met once a week to share recipes from around the world, then cook and eat together. Gradually, the women who attended regular sessions started thinking about catering for public events; their first was a CARAS fundraiser, followed by a friend's wedding. CARAS were soon granted two-years of funding to support the women to set up their own company; running training on Food Hygiene, accounting, social media and IT. The two years of funding have nearly come to an end and CARAS are immensely proud of what the women have achieved. They are catering for regular events across London, leasing with new customers, developing exciting new menus and managing their own finances,

This year, CARAS have appointed a steering committee to support the group. The Committee is made up of professionals in Finance, Accounting, Communications, Restaurant Management and Welfare.



They will be responsible for advising, supervising and training members of The Chickpea Sisters so as to help the company develop, grow, and recruit new members from CARAS' Women's Drop-In. Both Myriam and Ngone from The Chickpea Sisters are currently receiving weekly one-to-one supervision from individuals on the committee, learning about accountancy and event management skills.

Advocacy

It is with deep regret that, due to funding difficulties, in April 2016 we announced the temporary closure of our Advocacy Project. However, as it continues to be a priority for our fundraising team, we hope that this will only be a short-term measure.

Throughout 2015-16, CARAS' dedicated volunteer advocates had been working hard to resist the negative impact that recent welfare and immigration reforms have had on refugees and asylum seekers living in South London. Residents of Wandsworth have been hard-hit by the Benefits Cap. This, combined with an increase in London rent and zero-hour contracts, has caused a dramatic spike in the number of debt cases we have seen; individuals and families feel disempowered and unable to meet their daily living needs. Housing continues to be an issue, many of our beneficiaries either being forced out of Wandsworth or into unsafe and overcrowded houses.

CARAS have responded to these reforms by; providing a total of 242 advocacy appointments, running training for volunteers on relevant issues, developing good relationships with specialist organisations in Debt, Housing, and Welfare, and creating preventative information Toolkits for 'at-risk' beneficiaries.

Volunteers:

Giulia Nicolini	Mohamed Rashid
Hana Sandhu	Shukria Abdalla
Kaeli King	Vicky Crome
Lucian Cobley Carri	

Youth Club

Prompted by a funding shortage and a huge desire to keep this fun filled, sociable weekly group running, youth club has become volunteer led. It goes from strength to strength, with new ideas from the team, a huge commitment from volunteers, and a wonderful atmosphere of welcome and inclusion for all who come through the door.

Youth club is a time for friendship, fun and relaxing and often sees groups playing jenga, round-the-world table tennis, listening to music and chatting. Volunteers help people

to feel welcome, starting activities, including new words in English, and drawing people into the group so that everyone can feel they belong here.

There is a shared meal each week, made during the club by volunteers and a group of young people who are keen to learn and share skills and make a delicious meal for up to 30 people. The whole club sits down to eat together, and it has become a moment of family time where stories are shared. Recently, they have been discussing having a new name - the vote is still to happen but suggestions include 'Lovely Club' and 'Sunshine Club'.



We have been happy to host monthly immigration advice sessions run by Rosalind Compton from Coram Children's Legal Centre. Young people can drop in during youth club time, talk through any concerns they have about their claim, and be advised on the next steps. It is extremely reassuring to have this resource.

Youth club is supported by a grant from Wandsworth Grant Fund, as well as regular Jack Petchey Awards which recognise the achievements of young people and provides us with additional funding.

Volunteers:

Daniel Wolfson	Lizzie Radford
Maria Alphonso	Charles Gaw
Keith McGuinness	Adar Zehavi
Jemeela Quraishi	

“ESOL is very important, because I can help my children, myself and my friends. I can better understand teacher and parent meetings.”

“When I did not know the language, it was difficult and sad.

When I have entered support, I felt more welcome and very happy.”

ESOL

ESOL continues to be a very popular weekly activity with between 15 and 20 young people attending on a Wednesday evening, and between 25 and 30 on a Saturday.

Each session includes three different levels to cater for a range of learners, and where possible one to one support is offered. Volunteer teachers use their skill and enthusiasm to work with everyone, ranging from one-to-one support for people who have never been to school before and are new to learning in this way, through to advanced classes.

We have recently been awarded a grant from Sir Walter St John's Educational Charity to employ an ESOL Coordinator for two days per week. This role will allow us to develop the work we do to support young people's English language development, linking up between our two existing ESOL teams and creating new opportunities for learning.

Volunteers:

Lydia Parnell	Andrew Chudiak
Gemma Bending	Helen Kirk
Mohamed Wardare	Orshi Nevery
Drakshan Ahmed	Susan Cooper
Syreta Whitter	Naima Ahmed
Chelsea Grant	Sima Daudi
Francisca Ribeiro	Nadia Fayidh
Wiktor Kostrzewski	Luke Baghdadi

"CARAS is a place to meet friends- it teaches me English, I have fun."



Study Group

This continues to be one of our regular weekly fixtures, attended by between 10 and 15 young people seeking help with a whole range of educational challenges.

We have supported people to apply for college, discussed university applications and personal statements, worked through endless maths GCSE papers, and learned phonics. It's a diverse group of learners with people who have never attended school before learning alongside those who are taking A levels and preparing for higher education.

What unites them all is a desire to learn, and a belief that education is the route to success.

Volunteers:

Kwasi Owusu-ankomah
Ellie Karlake
Patrick Conlon
Habtom Okube

After School Club

Throughout the past year until the end of December 2015, the after school club has continued its work supporting primary school aged children from refugee backgrounds, with nearly 40 children attending at some stages during the year and 27 children attending consistently. At the club, children have been able to take part in a range of fun activities, learn and experience new things, receive support from a highly motivated team of volunteers, and make new friends.

A wide variety of activities have been on offer to children, from cooking, organising their own party and making pinatas, to science experiments and making erupting volcanos. We have also welcomed diverse workshops facilitated by partner organisations: Polka Theatre has shown how to make stop animation, own costumes and dances, while Transition Town Tooting has helped us to learn more about nature, conservation and how to make prints from plants.

There have also been opportunities to take part in exciting day trips for many of the children, including visit to Polka theatre, cinema, laser quest, ride on the cable car, games in the park.

Last year, by continuing to work in close collaboration with several local primary schools and maintaining referral links with social services and the refugee health team, we have been able to welcome 5 new children into the club's safe, friendly environment.

It is with a heavy heart, great thought and consideration that CARAS have made the very difficult decision to close the After School Club starting January 2016.

However, we have continued working with families to make sure the children are attending additional provision in school or with partner organisations: many children have joined sports clubs, cooking clubs as well as homework support groups and were matched with learning mentors. We also continue to see many families in our Family Activity Days during school holidays.

As always, we would like to thank the amazing team of committed volunteers who worked so hard to make the club run each week and who - taking the time to get to know each child and thinking about how best to meet their needs were so thoughtful in their approach to supporting all of the children.



Volunteers:

Jamie Dean	Gemma Bending
Jenny Papworth	Vicky Crome
Seun Ikotun	Klara Wertheim
Eniola Oladinni	Chloe Mould
Tom Bocket	Neslihan Kurtas
Margot Thomas	Nic Greaves
Feodora Rayner	Anna Young
Meera Shah	Zivile Adulcikaite
Chiara Mapelli	Malyun Ali
Julia Morano	Mariana Paiva
Yasmine Yau	Amran Mohamed
Susanna Revolti	Florence Ndanghwa
Amy Lambert	Hafsa Hassan Mohammed
Hannah Jenkins	Lizette Ahendra
Ricardo Avenido	Eyrusalem Abraham
Mariama Musse	



Family Activity Days

CARAS Family Activities aim to provide children of refugee background and their families with fun, meaningful activities and outings together at times when other provision and contact with services is significantly reduced, particularly during school holidays.

We have started in Summer 2015 with pilot of 4 half day sessions. On average, 12 families attended sessions and enjoyed time spent together. After successful launch, we have committed to deliver 10 more sessions in 2016 during school holidays. So far, we have offered creative and educational activities, promoting family bonding with a focus on empowering parents to meet their children's need and encouraging cross-cultural, supportive relationships between people from a range of backgrounds with a common migratory experience. Activities were run by ongoing partnership with Transition Town Tooting, Royal Horticultural Society and a group of local Tooting volunteers.

We have offered a range of activities for people of all ages, which included crafts, gardening, screen printing and many more.

As well as offering engaging activities, we also offered a shared group meal, kindly cooked by Chickpea sisters, promoting the social side of the experience and creating informal opportunities to practice English. Creche was available for families with children under 3.

As usual, thank you for brilliant volunteer team in helping family activity days to happen.

Volunteers:

Ashoo Basson	Volunteers:
Lara Ianelli	Vicky Crome
Helen Gribble	Tom Brocket
Hana Sandhu	Ramlo Hassan Mohamed
Susana Revolti	Hamdi Hussein
Natalia Wyroda	Victoria Palazzo

**“CARAS is part of our
life, family, it is not just
one thing...**

**...if I had any problems,
there is always
someone to help me.”**

Mentoring

This year has seen some extremely successful matches, with all pairs lasting for at least a year. It's a big commitment for all of our volunteers, and we thank everyone who has given their time to this project.

Our youngest mentee is 7 years old, and our oldest 21. Activities have included going to the library and gaining in confidence to go independently, exploring London and using the tube, playing in an adventure playground, visiting art exhibitions, and catching up in cafes.

All of our current pairs are due to end by summer 2016, with mentoring becoming one component of our new range of visiting relationships, continuing to offer long term support to those who would most benefit.

Volunteers:

Irene Odur	Maria Alphonso
Dorothy Jarman	Anna Fiennes
Molly Abraham	James Pickford
Zurah Dica	Kwasi Owusu-ankomah
Ellie Karlake	Emma Parfitt
Jess Thomas	Zara Hosany

The Grange

We ran another successful trip to The Grange in July 2015. The Grange is a wonderful place where everyone is made to feel welcome, encouraged to participate, and allowed to take time to relax and recuperate.

A small group of unaccompanied asylum seeking children went for five days of exploring, working together on outdoor projects, and living together for a few days in rural Norfolk. Everyone who came commented on how green and quiet it is- listening to birds, being among trees and having space is something that many have spoken about since returning to London.



Everyone completed the John Muir Award, which encourages engagement with the natural environment and wild spaces. We built bird boxes, fed the animals, weeded, planted and harvested from the vegetable garden, and wielded tools to make a bench and fix fences.

We also had a lot of noisy meals together, and shared stories, games, music and dancing around a fire.

We look forward to summer 2016 when we will be running two residencies for young people. Volunteers:

Volunteers:

Daniel Wolfson
Maria Alphonso

Other Partnerships

Border Crossings
Coram Children's Legal Centre
Refugee Children's Consortium
Croydon Refugee Youth Network
Tooting Transition Town

The Weekend Project

This year the weekly weekend drop-in provision for young people has built on the success of its first year and continued to go from strength to strength. The project ran on 50 of the 52 weekends this year and there were also additional residential and day trips.

During this time 124 young people accessed the service, benefiting from social, education and recreational opportunities in a safe, supportive and friendly environment.

PHOTO

Three levels of English classes, delivered by qualified ESOL teachers, have been offered every Saturday. Much of the focus, particularly in the lower levels, has been on developing basic communicative English skills which are essential for newly-arrived young people - many of whom have long waits for school and college places - to manage in daily life.

Each week young people volunteered themselves to cook a meal for the whole group, cooking for up to 50 people (including staff and volunteers). Recipes were chosen by the young people and were an opportunity to share foods from different countries as well as learning basic, and more complex cooking techniques. It also provided an opportunity to learn about providing healthy meals on a limited budget.

Throughout the year more and more young people used the drop-in session as a space to complete homework and get adult and peer support for this. A dedicated classroom space was created where young people could study in a quiet environment with access to laptops, dictionaries and other educational resources.

A caseworker was available each week for young people to speak to one-to-one about issues which were worrying them or with which they needed support. Common issues included: understanding age assessments, foster placements and rights and entitlements of looked after children; leaving care; asylum interviews and appeals; educational placements; making friends; access to sports and leisure activities; and, ill health. Where possible information was shared and young people were supported to find solutions and make plans during the meeting.

Each week the young people shared a sit-down lunch together with the staff and volunteer team, promoting a sense of community and providing opportunities to share and validate as a group diverse cultural heritages.

The afternoon workshop and information sessions, delivered both by external specialists and our trained volunteer team, were based on common requests made by referrers and young people themselves.

“We have fun and I can make friends there and we can speak English with each other and more things I can’t remember now.

Thank you club”

They included creative and sporting activities such as radio and podcast production, screen printing, drama, gardening and football; and educational and life skills sessions such as CV writing, computer skills, goal setting, budgeting, life in care, indigenous cultures and psycho-education.

We also ran a number of trips throughout the year to help the group get a greater knowledge of London and other parts of the UK, to offer new, positive experiences and to enable young people to create shared memories together. The trips were chosen and planned by members of the group. Day trips included visits to Brighton, Lambeth County Fayre, an outdoor activity centre, ice-skating, football matches, a workshop at the Royal Festival Hall and a boat ride up the Thames to Greenwich. Trips in London helped the young people feel more confident using public transport, especially the underground, and helped them to feel more at home in London.

The Saturday project has only been possible because of the fantastic team of volunteers who have committed so much time and energy to creating a wonderful project - a big thank you to all of them:

Local Partners

Transition Town Tooting
Who Cares? Trust
St. George's STAR
A Human Love Story

Volunteers:

Avalon Rousseau	Grace Ashley
Helen Kirk	Luke Baghdadi
Karen Scott	Naima Ahmed
Susan Cooper	Wiktor Kostrzewski
Keith McGuiness	Andrew Chudiak
Josh Harris	Vikram Balan
Kwasi Owuso-Anko	Spriha Srivastava
Zara Hosany	Nadia Fayidh
Huw Illingworth	Feodora Rayner
Laura McCarthy	Tom Brocket
Rosie Spiegelhalter	Margot Thomas
Pablo Petralia	Vicky Crome
Kathryn Harvey	Sima Daudi
Orshi Nevery	



**“Sometimes my
foster carer does
not really help me.
It’s ok, I can come
here and ask
for help...”**

**...CARAS is my
foster family”**

- A 16 YEAR OLD BOY