BRIDGE TO UNITY

Bringing communities together

Impact Report 2025/26

1 May 2025 to 30 April 2026

Helping people who have come to the UK as refugees, and their families, to find their feet and build a life here.

ABOUT US

Who we are

Bridge to Unity is a charity based at The Pallant Centre in Havant. We help refugee families with the practical things that make a new start possible, from paperwork and appointments to meeting their neighbours.

RAF veteran Matt Simmons founded Ems4Afghans in 2021, after the evacuation from Afghanistan. We then led a coalition of UK charities, supported by the Cabinet Office, to help families move from hotels into permanent homes. What began as a grassroots response became a community interest company in 2022 and a registered charity in 2023.

How we work

We are volunteer led. Our volunteers come from many walks of life, including the armed forces and public services. Refugee volunteers, such as our Liaison Officers, bring their own experience of arriving in the UK, so cultural, religious and practical needs stay at the heart of everything we do.

Our three pillars

Community

Befriending, our Refugee Support Hub, food support and events that bring people together.

Education

Talks and free education packs for schools, and support when tensions arise.

Employment

Our CommUNITY Skills programme, with help on CVs, applications and English.

Our RADAR framework

RADAR stands for Refugee Assistance, Direction and Resettlement. It grew out of our frontline work, shaped by people with lived experience, and helps us see how each family is getting on and what to focus on next.

About this report. It covers 1 May 2025 to 30 April 2026, a year of change for us. To tell the full story it also looks back at what we built before then, with dates given throughout. The headline figures cover everything since 2021.

OUR STORY

Our story so far

From a grassroots response in 2021 to a registered charity with its own hub.

2021 Matt Simmons founds Ems4Afghans after the evacuation from Afghanistan. We support Afghan families living in bridging hotels and lead a coalition of UK charities, supported by the Cabinet Office, to help them into permanent homes.

2022 We become a community interest company and start sending aid to Ukraine.

2023 We become a registered charity in October. During 2023/24 our volunteer team more than doubles, from 8 to 18.

2024 We take more than 60 Ukrainians to visit Parliament, and our first cinema event brings together more than 100 Ukrainians from Fareham, Gosport, Havant and Chichester.

2025 We open our Refugee Support Hub at The Pallant Centre in January. Demand is so strong that by March we have moved into bigger rooms.

2026 We start refreshing our board of trustees, and our founder is invited to speak at the Community Sponsorship Summit in London.

> "There are fewer people that have helped in the UK on our arrival than the team at Bridge to Unity."
>
> **Tahir, British Armed Forces Afghan translator**

OUR IMPACT

Since 2021

What five years of work adds up to.

3,000+

people supported

2,500+

Afghans supported in bridging hotels in 2021

£150,000+

of aid to Ukraine since 2022

8,000+

hours given by our volunteers

ALONG THE WAY

650+ schools across the UK had accessed our Afghan and Ukrainian education packs by April 2024

250+ people joined our employment workshops in 2023/24

300+ people received food packages from our volunteers and One Foundation in 2023/24

150+ people came to our Ukrainian Easter event in April 2025

> "Bridge to Unity has done so much for only a small charity."
>
> **Mustafa, Caseworker, Camden Council**

WHAT WE DO

In the community

Most of our work happens quietly, one family at a time.

Refugee Support Hub

Our hub at The Pallant Centre in Havant opened in January 2025, the first dedicated hub for people with refugee status outside Portsmouth and Southampton. It is a safe, friendly place to meet people and get one-to-one help with things like council tax, eVisas, Universal Credit, GP registration and CVs.

Community Associates

Our Community Associates are volunteers matched with refugee families. They visit once a month and act as a friendly point of contact, or keep in touch by phone each week if a family prefers. Either way, families have someone to ask. In 2024/25 our befriending grew into West Sussex.

Food support

We partner with One Foundation, based at One Church in Emsworth, to provide weekly food packages for families and individuals in need, with urgent help when it's needed. In 2024/25 packages went to families across Chichester, Fareham and Gosport, and to a local homeless shelter.

Bringing people together

Our CommUNITY Games bring families together for a day of activities and food, with around 150 people at each of the first two. In 2023/24 our Unity Kitchen brought more than 100 people together to cook, eat and share stories, and in early 2025 we hosted the Heart of Hope exhibition at St Faith's Church and The Pallant Centre.

Ukraine

Since 2022 we have delivered more than £150,000 of aid to Ukraine, including medical equipment and an ambulance used for medical evacuations. Here in the UK we have brought Ukrainian families together through cultural events, exhibitions and memorial services.

WHAT WE DO

Education, work and resettlement

Schools

We offer schools a free 45 minute presentation on refugees and asylum seekers, and free Afghan and Ukrainian education packs. In December 2024, at the request of the Ministry of Defence, we ran workshops in a school where tensions were rising between British and Afghan pupils. We created space for open conversation and shared stories, challenged harmful myths and gave the school ongoing support on cultural awareness, conflict resolution and mental health.

Work and skills

Our CommUNITY Skills programme builds the confidence and know-how to find work in the UK, with help on CVs, applications and interviews. In 2024/25 we ran workshops and one-to-one support with Winchester City Council, Waverley Borough Council and Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council, and teamed up with Reallyenglish to offer online English courses with modules for healthcare, retail and nursing.

Afghan families

We have stood with Afghan families since 2021. In 2024/25 we supported people arriving through the Afghan resettlement schemes, including families who had waited a long time in other countries before reaching the UK. We also worked with Reading Force so children from families who came through ARAP, whose parents served alongside British forces, received free books.

> "Bridge to Unity's work with AVA had a profound impact on our whole community... we've seen real progress in how our pupils relate to one another and celebrate their differences."
>
> **Mrs Shelley Tuke, Headteacher, Avon Academy**

THIS YEAR AND NEXT

A year of change

2025/26 was a year of change for Bridge to Unity. This is where things stand, and where we are heading.

Our board

In spring 2026 we started refreshing our board of trustees. That work is still going on, so the charity is well set up for its next stage.

Our hub

The Refugee Support Hub has moved to a new format, with more presentations and talks alongside advice.

What carries on

Our food support with One Foundation and our CommUNITY Skills programme are carrying on, and families can still reach us on WhatsApp for help.

Where we're heading

- Building our volunteer team back up, so more families have someone to call on.
- Working more closely with councils, the NHS and other public services.
- Keeping our community, employment and education work going across Hampshire and West Sussex.
- Our founder, Matt Simmons, has been invited to speak at the Community Sponsorship Summit in London in December 2026, hosted by Citizens UK with the Community Sponsorship Alliance and Pathways International.
- Exploring new ways to help families find their next step. Watch this space.

Could you help?

If you can give a few hours a month to befriend a family, deliver food parcels or share a skill like CV writing, English or IT, we would love to hear from you. Our details are on the back page.

THANK YOU

Who we work with

We have worked with local authorities and central government to support some of the UK's largest refugee resettlement operations. Thank you to all our volunteers, partners and funders, including:

GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC SERVICES

- Cabinet Office
- Home Office
- Ministry of Defence
- Office for Veterans' Affairs
- Department for Work and Pensions
- The NHS

COUNCILS

- Hampshire County Council
- West Sussex County Council
- Havant Borough Council
- Fareham Borough Council
- Gosport Borough Council
- Winchester City Council
- Waverley Borough Council
- Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council

COMMUNITY PARTNERS AND FUNDERS

- Hampshire and Isle of Wight Community Foundation
- Action Hampshire
- Voluntary Action Arun and Chichester
- Community First Gosport
- One Foundation and One Church Emsworth
- Barnardo's
- Reading Force
- Reallyenglish
- Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain
- Support Ukraine UK
- CM Sports

Get help or get involved

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Registered charity 1205400

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