

Annual Report 2024

Reading Community Learning Centre



“a unique, socially inclusive approach to learning”

Table of Contents

• Charity Details	Page 3
• Who We Are	Page 4
• Centre Manager's Report	Page 5
• Highlights From The Academic Year 2023/2024	Pages 6 - 7
• Supporting Refugees & Asylum Seekers	Page 8
• RCLC Core Programmes	Page 9
• Enrichment Activities and Advice Sessions 2023/2024	Pages 10 - 11
• Information, Advice & Guidance (IAG)	Pages 12 - 13
• Case Studies	Pages 14 - 16
• Learner Evaluation & Progression	Page 17
• Learner Feedback Interviews	Pages 18 - 20
• Health & Wellbeing	Pages 21 - 22
• RCLC Creche	Page 23
• RCLC Volunteers	Page 24
• RCLC Partnerships	Pages 25 - 26
• RCLC Research Partnerships	Page 27
• Recognition & Achievements	Page 28
• Statement Of Financial Activities	Pages 29 - 30
• Thank You To Our Funders	Page 31

Charity Details

Chair of the Board of Trustees:	Katharine Sarah del Tufo
Treasurer:	Lucy England
Board Members:	Clare Furneaux Hemamalini Sundararajan Jennifer Theron Karen Rowland Linda Smith Raya Mohamed Rosie Chambers Simran Aul Aydan Gasimova
Manager & Company Secretary:	Aisha Kamal Malik
Programme Coordinator/ Outreach Workers:	Shaheen Kausar Noreen Khan Rohama Kanwal
Administrator:	Petra Robinson Hemamalini Sundararajan
Creche Supervisor:	Premalatha Sudarshan
Creche Workers:	Shahla Maqsud Farida Masud Sumera Rashid
Sessional Tutors:	Parveen Brar (Staff rep on the board) Sanzla Bhagi Farzana Yasmin Shagufta Fuad Simran Aul Donna Ma Amina Rabbani Barakah Sarwar
Registered Address:	94 London Street, Reading RG1 4SJ
Tel No:	0118 959 5455
Registered Charity No:	1123017
Company Registration No:	06442616 (England and Wales)
Website:	www.rclc.org.uk
Facebook:	https://www.facebook.com/readingcommunitylearning/

Who We Are

Based in Central Reading, RCLC has been operating as an independent charity since 2007, and as part of national charity, Workers' Education Association, since the mid-1990s. We have over 20 years of experience in delivering services to support traditionally 'hard-to-reach' refugee and migrant women. Our mission is to empower and support refugee and migrant women by creating a space for learning, and advocating for equal treatment, equal rights, and a life free from violence and discrimination.

Many of the refugee and migrant women we support speak little or no English, and often have limited experience outside of the home; as a result, many are amongst the most isolated and vulnerable members of our community. We offer a programme of outreach activities, free training classes, workshops, 1:1 information, advice and guidance, a crèche and social opportunities.

Our services are designed to build confidence, increase skills and reduce social isolation. In **2023-24**, we supported **507** women on our core programmes from **41** different countries of origin.

We have **10** key objectives which enable us to offer comprehensive and tailored support services:

1. Providing a safe, women only space to learn
2. Promoting equal access to employment opportunities
3. Addressing barriers including cultural, religious and/or social barriers
4. Providing holistic, women-centred support
5. Overcoming isolation and providing mental health support
6. Breaking down barriers between people and promoting community cohesion
7. Being inspired and led by our learners
8. Promoting research and advocacy
9. Supporting the progression of ethnic minority women onto further education, volunteering or work
10. Partnership working



Manager's Report

In this seventeenth anniversary year for RCLC, I am delighted to present our annual report for 2024. As we reflect on the past year, I am filled with both pride and a profound sense of urgency. This annual report encapsulates the resilience, strength, and courage of the women we serve—migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers—who have faced unimaginable challenges yet continue to inspire us every day.

Over this past year, we witnessed significant global turmoil that affected many in our community. The ongoing conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine have created unprecedented levels of displacement, pushing families to the brink and forcing countless individuals to leave their homes in search of safety. The stories of these women, their struggles, and their aspirations remind us of the importance of our mission. We must ensure that they are not just seen as statistics but as individuals with dreams and potential.

Here in the UK, the summer of 2024 was marked by civil unrest and riots centred around racial tensions. These events have illuminated the urgent need for dialogue, understanding, and community cohesion, yet at the same time the solidarity shown amongst the local community in standing up to these racists has been truly inspirational.

RCLC has worked tirelessly to foster inclusive spaces where ethnic minority women can share their experiences and find solidarity amid division. The Centre's efforts have helped vulnerable women build essential skills, such as English language proficiency, employment readiness, and social integration, whilst also addressing growing mental health concerns with the provision of mental wellbeing, health and exercise classes. The Centre's programmes, outreach, creche, and information and advice services have provided a lifeline to women dealing with isolation, poverty, and the effects of the cost-of-living crisis in the UK.

However, our work is far from done. As a small charity we face many challenges around increasing our capacity to meet demand for our services. The increased competition from more charities applying for core costs, economic pressures and uncertainty leading to trusts reducing their funding and shifting funding towards project costs and emergency funding rather than running costs are pressures affecting many charities. Amongst the backdrop of this evolving landscape, we continue to diversify our funding and have diligently supported even more women than last year.

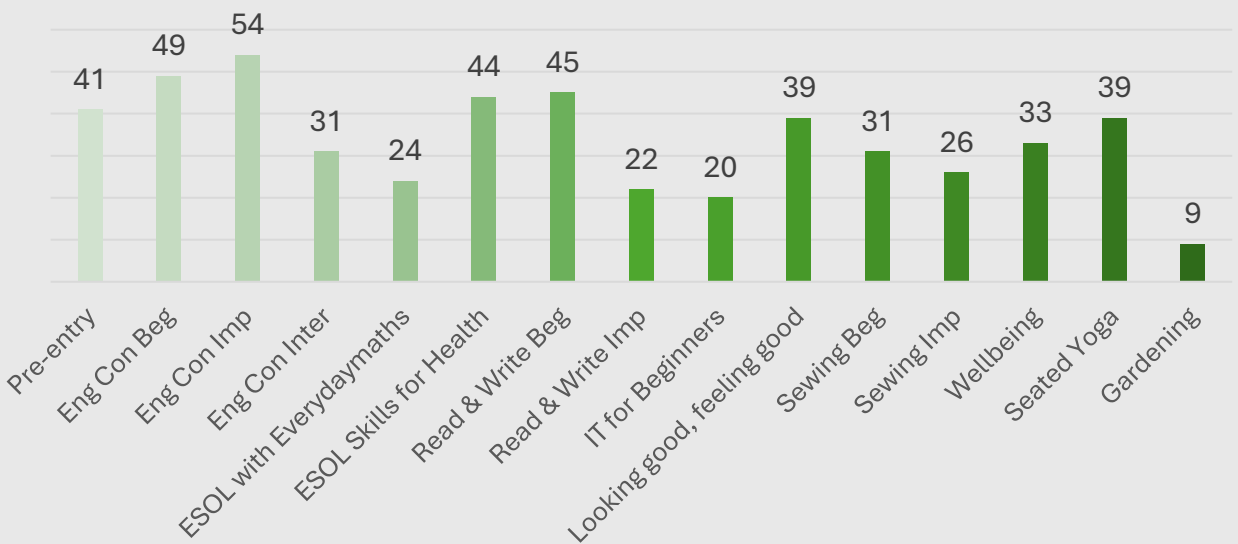
Thank you to our amazing funders, volunteers, staff and trustees for your ongoing support and belief in our mission. With your help, we can continue to create a world where every woman, regardless of her background, has the opportunity to thrive.



Academic Year 2023/2024

- **507** learners participated in our programme of courses. All courses were taught in face-to-face classes except for the seated yoga course which was taught online.
- **60** elderly Indian and Pakistani women with pre-existing health conditions completed online seated yoga classes. This was a huge accomplishment for them as they had never even used a computer before, let alone Zoom. It was a real boost to their confidence, physical and mental health.
- **9** women completed the health and wellbeing gardening programme in partnership with Food 4 Families at the Museum of English Rural Life Garden learning how to grow their own food on a budget and improve their wellbeing.
- **44** elderly Nepali, Indian and Pakistani women completed the ESOL Skills for Health Course in summer 2023.
- **4** learners took part in the autumn walking club in partnership with The Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) with the aim of getting the learners to build their confidence and knowledge of the area whilst getting some healthy exercise, make new friends and improve their mental and physical wellbeing.
- **24** learners completed the ESOL For Everyday Maths course in partnership with New Directions College

Number Of Learners Per Course 2023/2024



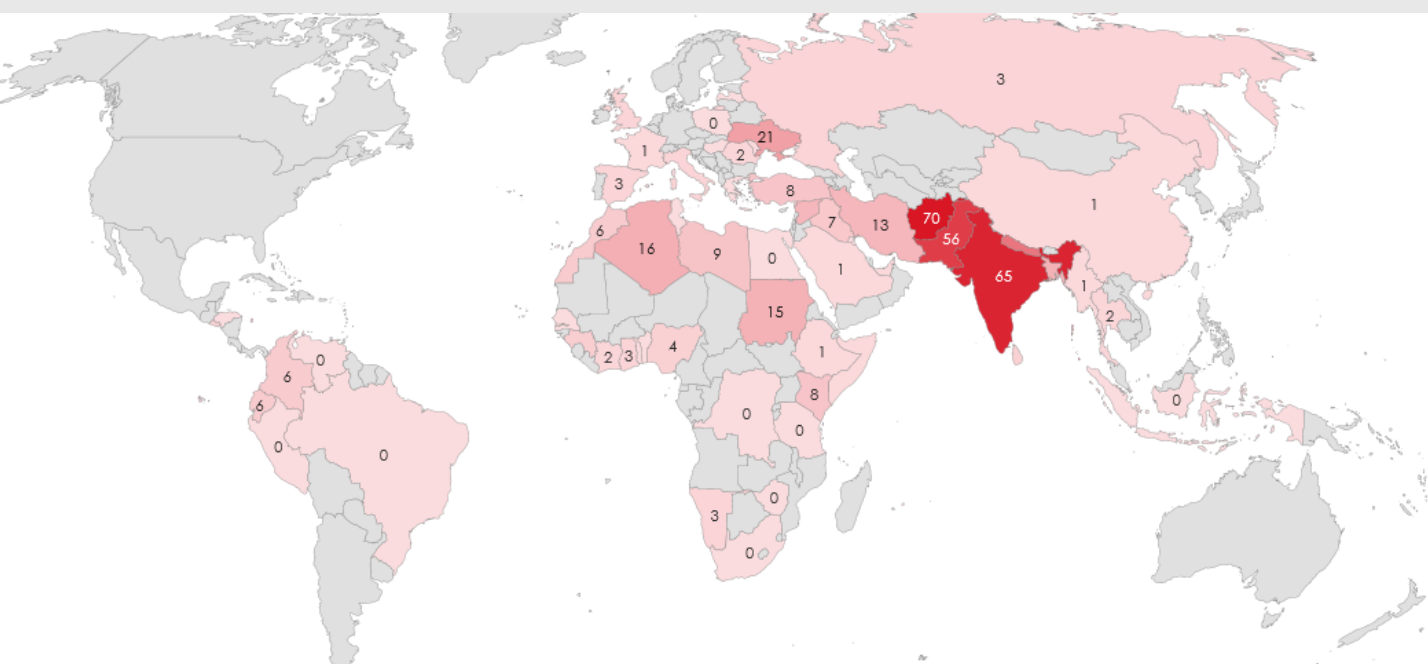
Trustees' Report

Despite many challenges, including, as with all small charities, huge fundraising issues and continuing cost of living crisis, this year has been a real year of development for the Centre. As well as the classes and social opportunities, we are offering mental health and emotional support to our learners, and information, advice and guidance to increasing numbers of women. As always, our learners, staff, volunteers and Trustees, have been amazing, contributing not only their skills and time, but also ensuring that the Centre is a warm, welcoming family for the migrant and refugee women and their children who visit. Our partner organisations, both statutory and voluntary, have also worked hard to support us. A huge thank you to all of them.

Academic Year 2023/2024

- **97%** of our core programme learners have no UK qualifications or are at an entry level in ESOL
- **91%** of our learners are unemployed
- **29%** of our learners are on benefits (it is important to remember that 27% of our learners were asylum seekers and refugees who could not work and were ineligible to claim benefits due to their immigration status so in reality this percentage should be much higher)
- **10%** of our learners use the crèche, a lifeline for those who cannot afford childcare costs and without it they could not use the Centre
- **11%** of our learners are refugees and **16%** are asylum seekers, whilst **61%** of the learners had not been living in the UK for more than 3 years
- **5%** of the learners progressed into full-time or part-time employment and **2%** onto volunteering. These figures are similar to last year as the vast majority of our learners had no qualifications or experience of working in their home country and have not been living here for more than 3 years.
- **85%** of our learners progressed onto internal courses at RCLC, **9%** of our learners progressed onto accredited courses with the WEA, Reading College or New Directions (this is nearly double the figure from last year) whilst **6%** progressed onto other courses in the community.
- **25%** of learners have a degree or higher from their home country but struggle to get work because of their lack of English and difficulties in qualifications getting accepted.
- This year learners came from an amazing **41** different countries, speaking **31** different languages with most learners speaking Urdu 13%, Chinese 13%, Arabic 10%, Pashto 8%, Nepali 7%, Hindi 6%, Dari 5%, Spanish 4%, Ukrainian 4%, French 4%.

Learners' Countries of Origin:



- Our learners are mostly from the following wards: **Abbey (17%), Katesgrove (12%), Battle (10%), Park (8%), Redlands (7%) Whitley (3%), Coley (4%), Norcot (3%), Church (2%), Tilehurst (3%), Southcote (2%)**.
- Data from the Indices of Deprivation 2019 showed the five most deprived areas in and around Reading were located within Whitley; The Meadway in Tilehurst (RG30 4 postcodes); the Honey End Lane area of Tilehurst (RG30 3 postcodes); Norcot (RG30 1 - RG30 6 area) and the Northumberland Avenue area (RG27). This year **24%** of our learners came from these specific areas.

Supporting Refugees & Asylum Seekers

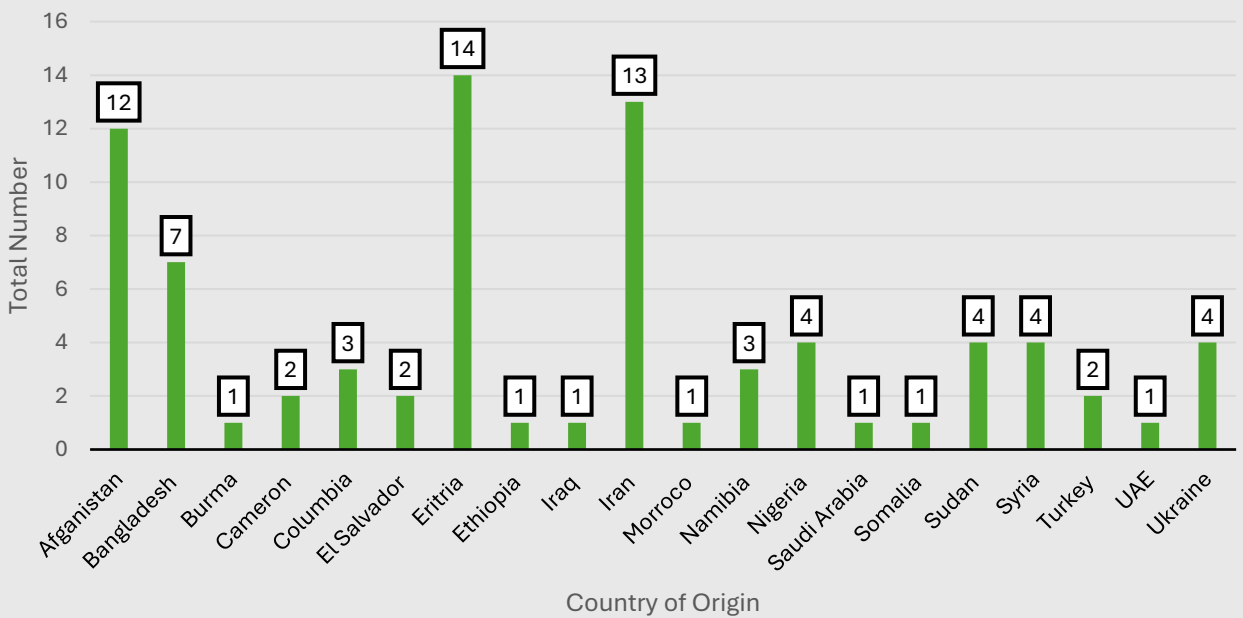
Supporting Syrian, Afghan and Ukrainian Refugees

The Centre collaborates with the Refugee Support Group (RSG) to help Syrian, Afghan, and Ukrainian refugees, especially women, by providing access to ESOL classes and community resources. Partnering under Reading Borough Council's "Closing the Gap" initiative, the Centre connects refugees with immigration advice and critical services. It participated in case management meetings, like the Syrian Vulnerable Placement and Relocation (SVPR) and Afghan Resettlement Scheme (ARAP), until these were replaced by the multi-agency Sanctuary Partner Forum in 2023, supporting Ukrainian, Afghan, Syrian, and Hong Kong nationals.

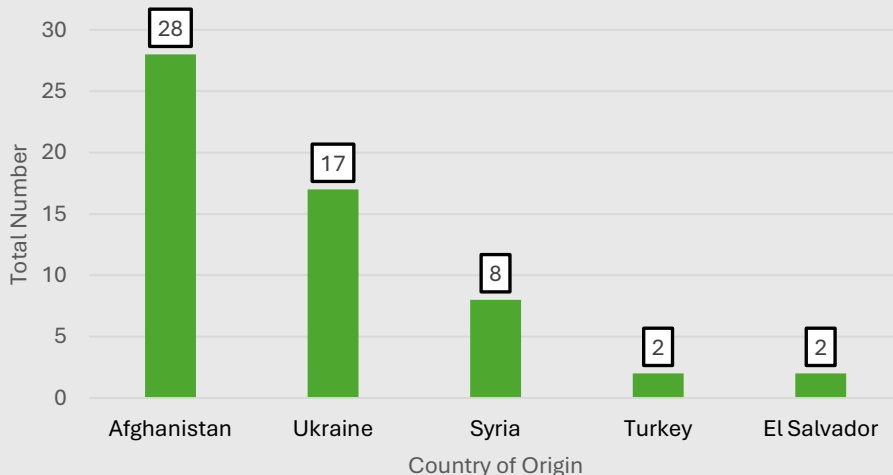
Since 2021, increased global migration and referrals from groups like RSG and Care 4 Calais have driven more refugee and asylum-seeker enrolments in the Centre's courses. Many refugee women, lacking public funding eligibility, depend on the Centre for educational opportunities. After Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the Centre began supporting Ukrainian refugees, although most of them access publicly funded services, resulting in only 4% of learners being Ukrainian.

As of the 2024 academic year, refugees and asylum seekers make up 27% of the Centre's learners, a slight drop from 32% the previous year. Recently, most new arrivals have been from Eritrea, Iran, and Afghanistan, and the Centre remains committed to meeting the needs of refugee women across backgrounds.

Total Number of Asylum Seekers at RCLC 2023/24



Total Number of Refugees at RCLC 2023/24



RCLC Core Programmes

In the academic year 2023/2024, **507 women** (an increase of 20% since last year) completed our termly non-accredited women-only core programmes consisting of

- English Conversation Classes with built in progression (pre-entry through to intermediate level),
- Reading And Writing Classes (beginner and improvers),
- Sewing Classes (beginners and improvers),
- Looking Good Feeling Good Classes (beauty and health)
- ESOL for Everyday Maths Classes
- Health and Wellbeing Classes
- ESOL Skills 4 Health Classes
- Online Seated Yoga Classes

RCLC learners gain vital soft skills like confidence, communication, and cultural understanding, alongside hard skills in English (ESOL), sewing, IT, and health knowledge. In a supportive, women-only centre, they build resilience, self-sufficiency, and employability, fostering both personal empowerment and integration into their new communities.



Learner Quote: *“I did not go to school in Nepal and find it very difficult to learn English. One of our friends told us about the RCLC...I would like to improve my English to be able to communicate with health professionals and when shopping. I did not know any places and how to get there for shopping and other day to day necessities.”*



Learner Quote: *“Learning the language was the main thing. Now I can speak very well. I practice talking to my children and husband. I can also now sew things for myself and my daughter. Getting Pakistani clothes sewn is really expensive. If I get the material from the market it's £5 and then I can sew it. Its much cheaper than paying a tailor £20 to sew it which I can't afford. It saves me money.”*

Enrichment Activities and Advice Sessions

- **134** women attended termly Chai and Chat sessions as part of our partnership with the Salama Project (Challenging hidden domestic abuse within Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities through informal chai and chat) running Chai and Chat sessions twice per term at the Centre. At the sessions women received information on how to report domestic abuse, where to access help and what is defined as domestic abuse in this country.
- **110** women received presentations about CommuniCare's services from their volunteer advisor based at RCLC. Thanks to our partnership with CommuniCare (through the RBC Closing the Gap Outcome 1) an advice volunteer from CommuniCare joined the RCLC team to give benefit and advice sessions once a week during term time, helping women with benefit applications, housing advice, utility bills, child benefit, disability benefit, support for carers and universal credit. Most of the women are those who need regular and extensive support due to the language barriers.
- CommuniCare 1:1 Advice Sessions: **13** different clients received face to face support and **5** clients (e.g. cared for people, carers, 2 anonymous people) received advice by proxy. Three of the clients have subsequently come to the advice centre. This has been **44 visits**. Some clients came several times but half of them were only helped once. **58** pieces of advice and support given. **27** pieces of help with benefits, **9** pieces of help on housing advice, education, carers support, and grants.
- **300** learners in the Centre received information from RCLC's two outreach workers on where and how to access free school uniforms and clothes, food parcels and food banks, furniture and benefit support from our partners but also other local charities.



Learner Quote: *“I have been only coming here for 2 months but my English is improving. Now I can write my name and practice writing my address, recognise some alphabet. My progress is very slow due to all the stress and worries I have I am unable to concentrate. I have no schooling and cannot read and write my own language so therefore the progress is very slow, but I am learning. My English is better – I can go to the supermarket and understand the labels and talk to the workers.”*

Enrichment Activities and Advice Sessions

- **110** women received information received information from Together Outreach around their mental health services. Our partnership with Together for Wellbeing has enabled one of their outreach workers being based at the Centre once a week to deliver mental health support to our learners to improve their wellbeing.
- **156** women received information on symptoms and accessing support for breast, lung, bowel and cervical cancer from Cancer Champions.
- **27** women from the pre-entry classes visited the Museum for English Rural Life (MERL) as part of their learning and enrichment activity
- **85** women engaged in presentations from Adviza careers advice on how to access their careers services, what they can assist with and how to make 1:1 appointments at the Centre.
- **4** women attended the walking clubs organised by Berks, Bucks & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust which benefitted the women with enhanced social integration, improved physical and mental health, informal language practice, and increased safety and support.
- **25** learners from the English Conversation classes received information from Fedcap on their support services to find employment, deliver training and personalised 1:1 support for those who are economically inactive and face barriers to work).
- **12** women from the English Conversation Classes visited Swallowfield Village Coffee Club for morning tea, coffee and delicious English cakes and in return the volunteers from the village came to our end of term celebrations in July which we held at RCLC. Our celebrations had music, dance and a cornucopia of world foods to share with the Swallowfield Coffee Club Volunteers.



Learner Quote: *“ When I come here (RCLC) I feel very happy, and the happiness stays all day when I am at home. Being here lifts me.....”*

Information, Advice and Guidance

The Centre provides support and guidance to learners, especially women facing challenges like trauma, refugee experiences, or social isolation. It offers help with accessing benefits, navigating domestic violence issues, and managing immigration concerns. For many women, especially those with limited language skills or outside experience, adjusting to society is overwhelming. The Centre often serves as a primary help point, which has become even more essential during the Cost-of-Living Crisis, as simple referrals may not suffice for those needing more intensive support.

Building on the Centre's current support work with around **70 - 90** vulnerable ethnic minority women per month. Thanks to funding from the **National Lottery in Dec 2022**, for an additional Outreach Worker/ Social Prescriber for 14 hours per week, offering a listening ear, active signposting and referral for those requiring weekly support calls we have been able to support **62%** more learners than last year!

The support for clients consists of:

- Guidance on progression, courses, Covid, and flu vaccines, and healthcare access
- Support with accessing food parcels, benefits, housing, clothing for children, and NHS health services
- Translation, form-filling, and aid for refugees and asylum seekers, including appointment support
- Weekly benefit surgeries via CommuniCare partnership
- Fortnightly mental health support surgeries with Together Outreach
- Referrals to Reading Voluntary Action Social Prescribers
- Phone-based mental health support from a trained first aider, with referrals to Talking Therapies, Adult Social Care, and refugee support clinics



Information, Advice and Guidance

Over the academic year 2023/2024 RCLC has referred learners and non-learners to the following organisations:

- **109** women to CommuniCare
- **22** women to NHS Health Check Service
- **12** women to Workers Education Association (WEA)
- **8** women to Together Outreach
- **7** women to Readifood
- **3** women to Mustard Tree
- **2** women to New Directions College
- **3** women to RVA Social Prescribers
- **3** women to Talking Therapies
- **1** woman to RBC Social Services
- **1** woman to Reading Welfare Rights
- **1** woman to Refugee Support Group (RSG)
- Other referrals were made to Adviza (careers advice), Age Uk, Mencap, Oxford Rd Mosque, NHS 111, MacMillan Cancer, Newbury College and SmartWorks

The largest number of referrals were made to RCLC (42%) as the majority of women were interested in courses or needed further support and advice from RCLC.

A total of **1,416** information, advice and guidance sessions for women were carried out at the Centre over the academic year 2023/2024. Out of these women **39%** of these were not RCLC learners and had been referred to us from friends, neighbours or other organisations and our partners.

New learners mostly come to the Centre through word of mouth from a friend, relative, previous learner, a relative or through RCLC outreach work. Around **174** women came to the Centre through this route. Refugee Support Group has been our largest referrer this year (last year it was Care 4 Calais), referring **68** women over the academic year 2023/2024 to RCLC. Other referrals to RCLC over the academic year are listed below:

- **66** women were referred by Job Centre Plus
- **53** women were referred by Care 4 Calais
- **50** women were referred by the Pakistani Community Centre (PCC)
- **29** women were referred by RVA Social Prescribers
- **24** women were referred by RBC Adult Care and Social Services
- **17** women were referred by Reading Borough Council
- **7** women were referred by Reading College
- **7** women were referred by WEA
- **6** women were referred by CommuniCare
- **3** women were referred by Together Outreach
- **2** women were referred by New Directions College
- **2** Women were referred by Berkshire Women's Aid

Other referrals were from Age UK Berkshire, Launchpad, Macmillan Cancer, Royal Berkshire Hospital, the Walk in Health Centre, Thames Valley Police, Brighter Future's for Children, Ukrainian Community Centre, Networking events and local schools.



Case Studies

Student A is a retired woman from Nepal who moved to the UK four years ago. With no formal education and a limited ability to speak English, she found herself feeling isolated and sad, missing her family deeply.

Upon arriving in the UK, Student A struggled with the language barrier, which made it hard for her to communicate and make friends. This led to feelings of loneliness and homesickness. Her lack of schooling only added to the difficulties she faced in adapting to her new environment.

Things began to change when Student A discovered the ESOL Skills for Health course with RCLC. This programme focused on teaching English, particularly health-related vocabulary and communication skills, which helped her manage her healthcare needs more independently. At RCLC, she also found additional support and opportunities to learn new subjects.

Student A also enrolled in the sewing and conversation classes. The sewing classes provided her with a practical skill that she enjoyed that she could relate to and gave her a sense of great accomplishment. The conversation classes were crucial in improving her spoken English, allowing her to communicate more effectively and make new friends.

The impact of these programmes on Student A's life was profound. Her English improved significantly, making daily interactions easier and more pleasant. She also formed new friendships through the conversation classes, which helped alleviate her feelings of loneliness and homesickness. The structured activities and social interactions brought her happiness and a sense of fulfilment that she had been missing.

Student A's journey highlights the transformative power of RCLC's courses and community support. Through her involvement in these programmes, she went from feeling isolated and sad to becoming a happier, more connected, and fulfilled member of her community. Her story is a testament to how education and community can significantly improve the lives of immigrants.



Learner Quote: *Before I used to sit at home but now, I have friends, I can go out and do the shopping on my own, go to the doctors and am independent.*

Case Studies

Student B is a married woman in her early 20s from Pakistan who moved to the UK 4 months ago to live with her husband and her extended family. She is finding it hard to settle into the lifestyle of living in a big household and being away from her siblings.

In Pakistan, Student B obtained a secondary school level of education and would like to continue learning here. She feels her confidence needs a boost and has made some real friends whilst on the course. She is happy with the support she received in the Centre and is interested in doing some volunteer work if possible. She is hoping to progress to the English for Conversation class next term

Student B has found the course very helpful and feels it has given her more confidence to take further courses. She said:

“I made some real friends on this course, and I am so happy I took it. I always look forward to coming to RCLC because I can be myself and learn in a fun environment.”



Student C moved to the UK from China a year ago and has struggled a lot with settling in and a getting accustomed to her new environment in Reading. She found it very difficult to communicate with her children’s schoolteachers, going shopping and a lot of other daily tasks. One of the main barriers came with language and so she made the decision to join the English reading and writing classes at Reading Learning Community Centre. She stated that joining these classes and learning English through RCLC has helped her considerably, stating *“it’s been life changing”*.

Student C says that RCLC has allowed her to feel part of a community and grow in confidence through engaging in volunteering opportunities and also learning to sew. It's been a very positive outcome overall and says that she *“stands as another example of someone RCLC have managed to help in a deep and meaningful way”*.

Student C said:

“It’s not only that I got better at language and learned how to sew thanks to the Reading Community Learning Centre's supportive environment and wide range of programmes, but I also felt like I belonged and had a role in the community.”

Case Studies

Student D is from India. She was referred to RCLC by RVA two years ago and has overcome significant hardships. Forced into marriage young, she had two children, then faced divorce, losing custody of her children. Remarrying, she had one child but tragically lost her husband while pregnant with their second. Lacking family or friends for support, she endured severe mental health challenges, striving for the well-being of her children, whom she deeply loves. Fluent in English and creatively talented, she began volunteering in an admin office and enrolled in a beauty course. However, her mental health struggles and childcare responsibilities made it difficult for her to continue.

Consistent support through RCLC'S outreach workers phone calls and meetings provided some relief. As her children began school and nursery, her stability improved, and she successfully secured a part-time teaching assistant job at her children's school. She expressed gratitude and resilience, viewing her challenges as divine tests of patience, and now takes pride in being both mother and father to her children. In her own words, she shared,

“I have part-time work as a teaching assistant... I wish I could celebrate this beautiful moment with you (referring to RCLC Outreach worker).”

This job represents a milestone in her journey toward self-reliance and fulfilment, achieved through determination and the support she received, as she strives to create a better life for her family.



Partnership Work with Communicare at RCLC

A client was referred by the RCLC outreach workers with a Homechoice Form which she had started, and CommuniCare's volunteer helped her with the questions that she could not understand with support from the RCLC translators. On a subsequent visit with CommuniCare, their volunteer had to telephone Homechoice as the client had not received her PIN number and needed to be shown how to bid on properties. The client also had to complete a housing medical needs assessment form. She was given the contact number by CommuniCare to telephone for a PIP form and this was filled this in with the client and the CommuniCare volunteer when it arrived.

The client had advised the CommuniCare volunteer that her 19-year-old daughter was her carer, and so they also arranged for another CommuniCare colleague to meet with the daughter to complete a carer's assessment. Communicare also advised the client to inform her children's schools that they are affected by the client's poor health, as it may affect the children's exam results.

Learner Evaluation & Progression

At the end of each course every learner completes a learner evaluation form. The statistics below summarise the learners' feedback from their classes over the academic year 2023/2024:

- **77%** of learners felt their learning experience had been excellent whilst **23%** said it was good.
- **73%** said that the course level and content was excellent whilst the remaining **27%** said it was good.
- **84%** said that the way the course was taught was excellent whilst **16%** said it was good.
- **82%** said that the information and support which they received was excellent whilst **18%** said it was good.
- **100%** said that they felt they had improved their confidence and language skills.
- **98%** felt that their health had improved since coming to the classes.
- **90%** said that they would like to do more courses, volunteering or get a job after finishing their classes at RCLC.
- **94%** said that they had made new friends since coming to the Centre.
- **96%** said that they now knew who to go to, to ask for help and support.
- **98%** said that they felt happier since coming to the Centre to learn.
- **98%** said that they had learnt new skills.
- **96%** said they felt they were now more confident to go out and do other activities since joining the classes.
- **99%** said that they felt more confident in their everyday lives.

Learner Progression

An incredible **100%** of all our learners progressed on to either internal courses at RCLC, jobs, volunteering or external courses both accredited and non-accredited in the academic year 2023/2024. This figure highlights the significance of the Centre as an important steppingstone in the journey for our learners to be able to aspire and grow their skills, confidence and become active participants of the community in which they live.

5% of the learners progressed into employment or volunteering. This figure is 1% higher than last year (4% for 2022/23), which is primarily due to the fact that **97%** of our learners in 2023/2024 had no qualifications, were at an Entry level ESOL level and over two thirds of learners had not been living here for more than 3 years.



Learner Feedback Interviews

At the end of this academic year, staff and trustees conducted 26 interviews, covering 9 core classes interviewing in 4 languages. The interviews represent around 15% of the learners that term, and 7% of the learners for the year, a smaller number than usual because of time pressures. However, the findings mainly reflect those of previous years.

1. Reasons for coming to UK and feelings about Reading

Whilst some families were economic migrants, who were coming for improved living conditions, for better education for children and/or to join husbands or families, many learners had escaped from extremely dangerous countries. Whilst some learners were new to the UK, coming as refugees or asylum seekers or on spouse visas, some learners had lived here for a long time but had not been able to learn English, mainly because of multi generational family caring responsibilities, or lack of knowledge of the Centre's existence. Almost all those interviewed liked living in Reading, mentioning how central and close everything was, with some identifying the good schools and transport. Some felt it was quiet, but others felt the town centre was crowded. Many mentioned the high cost of housing. A number mentioned that people are kind and helpful and its multicultural nature is valued.

2. Learner needs

Most of the learners interviewed wanted to improve their spoken English so they could better communicate in everyday situations like shopping, visiting the doctor or helping their children with homework. Many identified a loss of confidence having come to the UK and their wish to gain confidence and get out and meet new people. Others wanted to learn English, so they were not dependent on their husbands for translation. Most wanted to learn English to get a job in the future. Most women arrive at the Centre with very little English language, even if they had worked in their countries of origin, or lived in UK for years, and sought an opportunity to learn. Some of the women had never gone to school in their countries of origin or had only completed Primary School studies. Whilst some women had families in the UK, many were alone with husbands and/or children and faced isolation, stress, boredom and loneliness. Others specifically mentioned mental health issues.

3. How learners discovered the Centre and enrolment

Most learners first found out about the Centre through a friend who introduced them to the outreach/ support workers, or the administrator, though some were referred by other agencies. After visiting the Centre and having their needs assessed, learners had often to wait to get on language courses. The choice of classes was often not what was originally requested as that class (mainly English language or sewing) was full. They were helped to choose an alternative and their names put down for a future class.



Learner Feedback Interviews

4. Perceptions of the Centre and classes

There was universal praise for the quality and style of the teaching, and the friendliness, kindness and supportiveness of tutors and volunteers:

- *The best thing about RCLC is the support it provides. For example, the language classes have really helped me. The staff is very understanding and patient, which makes learning easier.*
- *The staff and tutors are very helpful and understanding. They make learning enjoyable and accessible.*
- *RCLC is a good place for women who do not have confidence to go to other educational institutes. It provides friendly and supportive environment to learn.*

A number of the learners valued particularly the Centre being a women only safe space, really valued the diversity of learners from many countries, and the importance of free courses.

The administrator and the outreach/ support workers and creche are also greatly valued, the phrases *kind, helpful supportive and friendly* were used in most interviews:

- *It feels like a second home where I can connect with others who share similar experiences.*

5. Changes or improvements requested

Few changes were identified by learners in beginners or pre-entry conversation courses: *I like everything about RCLC and can't think of anything which can be improved.* However, far more suggestions were made for improvements or changes than in other years. The resounding request from the learners in other classes was for more language classes, especially conversation classes and sewing, as learners had to be on a waiting list for up to 2 terms. This was at a time when the number of language classes had been doubled but learners wanted more frequent classes and suggested a variety of options, which will be considered by staff and Board members.



Learner Feedback Interviews

6. Outcomes – the difference coming to the Centre has made

The outcomes/ benefits for the learners cover issues, linked themes:

- **Almost all Learners reported increasing their skills, including English language skills, confidence and independence, allowing them to be more resilient, active and empowered members of their community, and better prepared for living and working in the UK e.g. Able to talk to neighbours, go shopping, get on a bus, visit the doctor or hospital, help with children’s homework, or visit their children’s school on their own. Learners also report benefits to their families of attending RCLC:**

The best thing about learning at RCLC is that now I don’t feel shy. I feel confident when speaking even when my English isn’t good.... I never went to medical appointments alone before but two weeks ago I went with my daughter to her hospital appointment – no husband, no interpreter. I could not have done this without RCLC. I can now complete paperwork alone. We have the same issues, so I don’t feel shy.... I feel supported in Reading, there are people that I know here and its my home. My family like me coming here – it makes them happy because it makes me happy.

Looking at the feedback from pre-entry and beginners English language classes, many learners report how long it takes to get proficient, their struggles with confidence in speaking and writing, but do identify improved understanding of the English language.

- **Almost all learners report making new friends with women from different backgrounds, thus feeling less isolated and lonely and more connected by building stronger social networks and improved wellbeing:**

I have made new friends at RCLC, which makes me feel more connected, and we go to group study sessions.

- **Most learners report feeling happier, less isolated, with reduced stress and depression, improved mental health and feeling more supported and able to ask for help if needed:**

I felt lonely and depressed before coming to RCLC because I had no friends and family members, was not able to communicate in English, did not know who and where to go for an advice and information.....I cannot explain how happy I feel since I started coming to RCLC. My English is improving, I have made new friends and my confidence is improved.... the most important factor is that my health is improved, I don’t feel depressed now.

- **A number of learners mentioned enjoying helping other learners whilst others spoke of taking steps towards employment by starting volunteering or starting online courses:**

I have been getting help with job search and volunteering and now found volunteering role at the (hospital). My language skills and confidence improved since coming to RCLC. I can visit places myself when looking for a volunteering or paid role.

Health and Wellbeing

Evidence shows that the pandemic has intensified mental health needs and domestic abuse cases, especially among ethnic minority women. Around 36% of British adults reported higher stress or anxiety during the pandemic, with 21% finding lockdown difficult and 14% experiencing strained relationships—rising to 19% among BME groups. Reports from the Red Cross and Runnymede Trust confirm that ethnic minority individuals face worsened social isolation and mental health challenges post-lockdown.

Migrant and refugee women face significant barriers to healthcare access, which are worsened by financial stress. The Health Foundation reports that economic hardship exacerbates health outcomes, with migrant-related challenges intensifying this impact for these women. Financial instability and immigration uncertainty have also taken a toll on their mental health. According to the Mental Health Foundation, economic pressures are a major contributor to the mental health crisis in these groups.



RCLC Health Day in Partnership with RVA & Royal Berkshire Hospital's Community Nurses: MEET PEET

In partnership with RVA and the NHS MEET PEET Team RCLC delivered hugely successful termly health check days. In 2023/2024 **86** women received their free health checks and were able to receive advice and support around their health concerns. Three NHS health nurses were at the Centre to complete BMI, Blood pressure and diabetes checks on the women. The health check reports were then sent directly to the learners' GPs for follow-up visits, increasing access to healthcare.

Hepatitis C Royal Berkshire NHS Bus

62 women received Hep C tests at RCLC thanks to the Royal Berkshire Hospital Hep C Bus led by Jade Roberts (Royal Berkshire Hospital-Hepatology Team)



Health and Wellbeing

Wellbeing Classes

In the 2023/2024 academic year, RCLC offered three 10-week wellbeing courses across three terms to **33** women. Tailored for ethnic minority refugee and migrant women, the course was designed by RCLC's bilingual tutor with an ESOL background to teach mindfulness, stress, and anxiety management in simple English. Participants were referred by social prescribers, partners, RCLC outreach workers, or self-identified a need for support. The course aimed to provide women with accessible techniques for identifying and managing stress, along with guidance on seeking specialist help when needed.



Online Seated Yoga

In the academic year 2023/2024 RCLC delivered three 10-week online seated yoga classes for elderly Pakistani and Indian women with pre-existing health conditions over 3 terms to **66** women.

Our classes offer accessible wellness, promoting physical health, stress relief, and social connection. A bilingual tutor bridges language gaps, making techniques easier to understand and culturally inclusive, while fostering comfort and trust. This approach enhances participation, confidence, and holistic well-being.

ESOL Skills 4 Health

In the academic year 2023/2024 RCLC delivered three 10-week classes for elderly Pakistani, Nepalese and Indian women with pre-existing health conditions over 3 terms to **44** women. This course aims to empower women by teaching them English to access health services by enhancing their understanding of local health services, healthy lifestyle choices, time management, and self-care practices for physical and mental health. Through a combination of classroom learning and field visits, participants develop practical skills for managing their health and accessing services effectively.

Learner Quote: *“The yoga class help me a lot, it boosts my confidence. I become more active and some pain in my body has been eased because of this. I can move my body confidently and I really feel good. Our teacher is also nice to all of us and we get more confidence to talk to her always”*

RCLC Creche

Alongside its other activities, the Centre provides a crèche which offers important support for children from 4 months to 4 years old.

Many of these children have had little social contact outside their family and almost all have no English language when they arrive. Some are unfamiliar with toys or have no experience of playing with other children. Others are living in, or have already lived through, extremely difficult circumstances, including as refugees or asylum seekers in hotels.

Through the crèche, children learn to speak English, to be confident separated from their mothers, and to take part in educational play which stimulates social, emotional, physical and intellectual development, in the care of a multicultural team of well-trained, loving workers. The crèche also helps to develop language skills and the ability to socialise and provides informal parenting advice and support. This provides crucial school readiness skills.

We employ two crèche workers and a crèche supervisor. In the academic year 2023/2024, **103** children were able to access the creche.

Evaluations from parents/ carers of children in the creche showed that:

- **100%** of the children were very happy in the creche and thought that the creche was excellent.
- **93%** of the parents thought that their child had learnt new things and that their knowledge had improved.
- **83%** said that the care their child received in the creche was excellent whilst **17%** said it was good.
- **100%** of the parents/ carers thought that their children were safe in the creche.
- **66%** found that the information they received on their child's development in the creche was excellent and **34%** said it was good.

Learner Quote: *"The creche is really nice here. I used to bring my daughters here when they were little. If I didn't have the crèche, I could not have learned anything."*



RCLC would like to say a huge thank you to **Ellen Law** (RCLC Carewell Project Researcher) and her wonderful group, **The HongKongers Youth Team** (aged 11-17) who as part of their charitable Christmas activities collected and donated some beautiful presents for the children in the RCLC Creche in November 2023.

Thank you so much from all the children and parents in the crèche for your generous gifts for the festive period. We had some presents left over so we will be giving some more presents out to the children in Nov 2024 as well.

RCLC Volunteers

Volunteers play a vital role at RCLC, a small organisation with limited part-time staff. Their contributions support RCLC's mission and provide volunteers with a sense of purpose and skill-building opportunities. For some, volunteering has even opened doors to paid employment. In 2022, volunteers returned to in-person roles post-pandemic, and throughout 2023-2024, the Centre expanded its volunteer group.

In the past year, RCLC had **15** learner volunteers across various roles:

- **6** classroom assistants
- **4** administrative aides
- **4** translators
- **1** outreach helper.

Additionally, two long-term volunteers and ex-teachers, Rita Parr and Sylvia Cox, supported classes for many years. Rita volunteered for nine years, assisting in English conversation classes, while **Sylvia Cox**, shortlisted for a **Senior Changemakers award in 2024**, supported pre-entry learners over the last three years. Sadly, RCLC bid farewell to both.

Overall, RCLC had **19** volunteers in 2023-2024, including one former Healthwatch Reading employee and another who joined the board. RCLC extends heartfelt gratitude to all volunteers for their dedication, which has greatly enriched the community and helped achieve the Centre's goals. Their time and skills have made a profound difference, and RCLC is deeply appreciative of their impact.



Work Experience Students from The Holt Secondary School

In Summer 2024 RCLC opened its doors to a pair of talented work experience students, **Maryum Butt** and **Anchul Kainth** from the **Holt 6th Form in Wokingham**. As an educational charity, we have always believed in the power of education to transform lives, and this exciting initiative reflects our commitment to providing opportunities for all, especially those from Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic, Refugee, and Asylum Seeker (BAMER) communities.

RCLC's work experience programme aims to offer valuable insights and hands-on experience to young individuals who are passionate about making a difference in the world. We understand that access to opportunities can sometimes be limited, especially for those facing various challenges, and we are dedicated to breaking down those barriers. The students joined us to support learners in the classrooms, administration, creche and policy research.

RCLC Partnerships

The Reading Community Learning Centre (RCLC) has continued its active engagement with local steering groups and forums after the pandemic, enhancing its role in health and wellbeing initiatives in partnership with Reading Borough Council (RBC) and other health organisations. Key collaborations include Narrowing the Gap Meetings, Mental Wellbeing Health Forums, Health Inequalities Steering Groups, and Physical Disability and Sensory Network Meetings, where RCLC contributes to community health strategies and action plans.

RCLC's Tackling Poverty partnership (funded by Reading Council) with voluntary organisations, such as the Refugee Support Group, Communicare, ReadiFood, CIRDIC, Starting Point, and Reading Welfare Rights, strengthen its support network for learners, especially women. By advocating for women's issues and involving women's voices directly, RCLC influences local policy and shares insights with other organisations. It also maintains informal ties with RVA's Social Prescribers, Citizens Advice Reading, and various ethnic community groups, expanding support for its learners.

Since the pandemic, RCLC has increased its outreach through new partnerships and additional referral channels, broadening activity options for women. In 2023/2024, RCLC remained involved in RBC and RVA-led forums and also participates in the Reading Integration Board for Health Inequalities, New Directions College's ESOL Providers Network, CPAR (racial equality research), and the CareWell Research Project with the University of Reading. These engagements allow RCLC to share best practices, strengthen community ties, and enhance its positive impact on the lives of women and families in Reading.



Reading Borough Council Funded: "Closing the Gap" (CTG) Program

This programme, previously under the "Narrowing the Gap II" framework, funds services in Reading to reduce poverty, discrimination, and disadvantage, promote wellbeing, and foster thriving communities. Funded by Public Health, Adult Social Care, Housing, Neighbourhoods, the Resources Directorate, and additional Clinical Commissioning Group support, CTG focuses on three key outcomes with separate funding allocations:

- 1. Reducing Poverty:** £270,300 per year.
 - 2. Building Resilience and Wellbeing:** £551,700 per year.
 - 3. Supporting Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Infrastructure:** £158,000 per year.
- RCLC partnered with six charities—Communicare, Christian Community Action, Starting Point, ReadiFood, Reading Welfare Rights, and CIRDIC—to secure funding for Outcome 1. Additionally, RCLC partnered with the Refugee Support Group for Outcome 2, focusing on supporting refugee, migrant, and asylum-seeking families. These three-year partnerships began in November 2022 and will conclude in November 2025.
 - Achievements in Year 1 (Nov 2022–Jul 2024)
 - Outcome 1 include providing **advice to 600 women** annually (target: 250), offering **courses to 246 women** (target: 102), and **providing creche services to 42 children** (target: 18).
 - Outcome 2, the Centre supported **121 elderly Pakistani and Indian women** in seated yoga (target: 30), **93 elderly Nepali women** in ESOL Skills For courses (target: 30), and provided **outreach to 1,015 women** (monthly target: 45).

This funding has significantly supported RCLC's core mission and outreach and is a part of the core RCLC figures.

RCLC Partnerships

New Directions College

The ESOL for Everyday Maths course helps ESOL learners improve numeracy skills for daily life, covering topics like cooking, understanding bills, shopping, budgeting, and reading timetables. RCLC delivered the course with monthly subcontractor reports, quarterly reviews, training from New Directions College, and quality assessments, including teaching observations. New Directions College praised RCLC's quality checks and had no recommendations. In the 2023/2024 academic year, **24 learners** completed the course. The partnership continues, with New Directions using RCLC as a teaching venue on Tuesdays and Thursdays, generating rental income for RCLC and offering learners progression to accredited courses.

Promoting friendships, Reducing Loneliness and Isolation: Engage Befriending and RCLC

Jelly Arts

In autumn 2022, RCLC partnered with Jelly Arts to offer an eight-session sewing programme aimed at reducing loneliness and building friendships among ethnic minority women. **Seven learners** attended, creating a small quilt using hand-sewing techniques on scrap fabrics. Sessions were drop-ins, fostering a relaxed environment for making friends over tea and producing artwork for display at RCLC. Funded by Reading Borough Council's Small Grants Programme, this successful initiative led to a new 10-week course starting in autumn 2024. The upcoming course in autumn 2024, exploring heritage through fabrics, knitting, and crochet, will be held at the Museum of English Rural Life (MERL) and at RCLC with a display planned for 2025 at the museum.

Food for Families, Museum of English Rural Life (MERL) and RCLC

In summer 2024, RCLC partnered with Food 4 Families and MERL to offer a five-week gardening course focused on health and wellbeing. **Nine learners** participated, sharing knowledge of plants from their home countries, growing vegetables and herbs on a budget, and improving mental and physical wellbeing by caring for the MERL garden.

Befriending Project in Partnership with Mustard Tree

Due to increased commitments from a successful Lottery Application, RCLC redirected befriending project funding in agreement with Reading Borough Council to its partner on the project, Mustard Tree, to support and nurture ethnic minority women from RCLC to become Befriending Volunteers.

In collaboration with Engage Befriending, RCLC identified **15** interested learners, supporting them through volunteer applications, DBS checks, and befriending safeguarding training to join Engage Befriending as bilingual befrienders. Currently, **six** of these learners are in the process of being matched with individuals needing befriending support, enhancing community outreach and engagement for minority groups.



Research Partnerships

Carewell Research Project: University Of Reading

RCLC has been actively working to influence policy and service development in Reading by advocating for learners and supporting them in voicing their concerns to agencies. Over the past year, RCLC collaborated with researchers, including universities, to address the challenges faced by ethnic minority and refugee women. One key initiative is the **CareWell Research Project**, a two-year study in partnership with the University of Reading (UoR) and Refugee Support Group, set to conclude in November 2024.

The project focuses on the care experiences of families with relatives in different countries, exploring how caregiving responsibilities impact their well-being, education, employment, and social opportunities. It also examines the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on families' caregiving roles and access to services. RCLC employed three community researchers with lived migration experience to conduct interviews with families both locally and abroad. The data from these interviews is currently being analysed.

In 2023/2024, the interview transcripts were translated for analysis. In June 2024, RCLC participated in an interdisciplinary symposium that examined the relationship between migration, care, and inequalities in the context of the post-pandemic world. The symposium discussed issues such as intersecting inequalities in care practices, the impact of migration on caregiving, and global access to formal care and social protection. These discussions are crucial for policymakers, practitioners, and academics grappling with the complexities of migration, care, and social protection.



RCLC in Partnership with University of Reading, RVA and ACRE launches a Participatory Action Research Toolkit

RCLC was delighted and honoured to have been part of the CPAR project and hopes that the new toolkit launched in July 2023 by the University of Reading for community researchers will inspire, equip and enable many more community researchers to start their own research. This toolkit is for community researchers, community organisations, students and academics who want to reflect on and better understand the principles and everyday practices of Participatory Action Research (PAR), how to build community research teams and how to use PAR to understand local issues.

Recognitions & Achievements

We are delighted to announce that Reading Community Learning Centre (RCLC) were awarded a renewal of their **Reading Voluntary Action Safe and Sound Good Governance Award**. This is our second renewal in 2023, following our initial award in 2018, demonstrating that the charity continues to have good charity governance in place for all eight areas, from solid foundations through to protecting their beneficiaries



In May 2024, the new Mayor of Reading, Councillor Glenn Dennis (Labour, Kentwood) was sworn in as the first Black Mayor of Reading. RCLC would like to say a huge thank you to the mayor as he has chosen RCLC to be one of his **Mayoral Charities for 2024**. We are really excited to have been chosen, especially as there are so many amazing charities in Reading



Celebrating Learner Achievements

In July 2024, RCLC had their annual learner celebrations honouring the achievements of our learners. Originally planned as a picnic at the Museum of English Rural Life, rain relocated the certificate presentation to RCLC. The event underscored the value of education for ethnic minority women, recognising their perseverance despite unique challenges. Each learner's certificate presentation was met with applause, symbolising not only course completion but also personal triumphs. The celebration continued with a Bollywood dance performance, highlighting the rich cultural heritage of the attendees, and concluded with an indoor multicultural picnic with food which learners brought to share from around the world. This occasion celebrated our students' hard work and resilience, showcasing their strength and marking a new beginning filled with opportunities. Congratulations to all certificate recipients—your achievements are our pride.



Statement of Financial Activities

(Incorporating an Income and Expenditure Account)
for the year ended 31 March 2024

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2024 Total Funds £	2023 Total Funds £
INCOME FROM				
Charitable activities				
Grants – Core programme	15,000	165,236	180,236	125,521
Grants – Research projects	-	-	-	13,388
Courses	4,010	-	4,010	4,008
Total charitable activities	19,010	165,236	184,246	142,917
Donations and legacies	5,652	-	5,652	3,768
Other income	7,711	-	7,711	4,263
Total income	32,373	165,236	197,609	150,949
EXPENDITURE ON				
Charitable activities				
Building costs	27,693	40,734	68,427	64,719
Office costs	5,955	1,044	6,999	5,439
Programme costs	14,082	40,120	54,202	57,534
Staffing	9,051	85,925	94,976	79,909
Independent examination	504	-	504	480
Total expenditure	57,284	167,823	225,107	208,081
NET INCOME / (EXPENDITURE)	(24,911)	(2,587)	(27,498)	(57,132)
RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS				
Total funds brought forward	119,968	49,799	169,766	226,897
Movements between restricted and unrestricted funds	1,240	(1,240)	-	-
TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD	96,297	45,971	142,268	169,764

Balance sheet

as at 31 March 2024

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2024 Total Funds £	2023 Total Funds £
FIXED ASSETS				
Tangible assets	3,871	-	3,871	6,592
CURRENT ASSETS				
Debtors	6,411	5,388	11,799	1,190
Cash at bank	94,073	80,347	174,419	196,554
Total current assets	100,484	85,735	186,218	197,744
CREDITORS				
Amounts falling due within one year	(8,059)	(39,764)	(47,823)	(34,571)
NET CURRENT ASSETS	92,425	45,971	138,396	163,173
TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES	96,296	45,971	142,267	169,765
NET ASSETS	96,296	45,971	142,267	169,765
FUNDS				
Unrestricted funds			96,297	119,968
Restricted funds			45,971	49,797
TOTAL FUNDS			142,268	169,765

Thank You!

**Thanks to our funders, the commitment and passionate work ethic of our staff, trustees and volunteers for an amazing year
We know next year will be even better than the last!**

In August 2024, **ProvenWorks' team of 14**, led by CEO Joel, volunteered to paint the creche and a classroom at RCLC on one of the hottest days of the year. Their enthusiasm and dedication helped make the space more welcoming and allowed RCLC to redirect funds from maintenance to offering free classes for migrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking women. RCLC extends heartfelt thanks to ProvenWorks for their impactful community support.



Thanks to grants and contracts from the organisations listed below, we have been able to run a sustained programme of activities throughout the year. Also, unlike many charities, our staff have stayed with us throughout the year, which has allowed us to offer real continuity, for which the trustees are very grateful to:

- Reading Borough Council
- NLDC Grant from New Directions
- The National Lottery
- The DCLG Controlling Migration Grant
- Healthwatch
- WEA Branch
- Garfield Weston Foundation
- Marsh Charitable Trust
- The Gerald Palmer Eling Trust
- Santa Fun Run (Rotary Club of Reading)
- Multiply Project Funding (Funded by New Directions)
- University of Reading (CareWell Research Project) and
- Rental income from WEA and New Directions

