



Bristol Somali Resource Centre

Annual Report

2023-2024

Chairs' message

It is our great pleasure to present the Bristol Somali Resource Centre's 2023-2024 Annual Report, recording another year of hard work and success from our dedicated staff team. This was a challenging year, with the ever deepening cost-of-living crisis weighing disproportionately on our service users. The year also brought novel opportunities for support, particularly the sudden evacuation of local Council tower block Barton House, in which over 250 people, many Somalis, were moved out of their homes for several months. Just as it had in the time of COVID-19, the BSRC team responded with amazing agility and speed to this emergency, supporting the building's tenants through the evacuation with advice, advocacy and all sorts of practical support. In an age where many other agencies have moved to remote support, BSRC proudly continues to offer its services face-to-face, recognising that many of the people we serve would otherwise have nowhere to turn. We want to thank all the staff and volunteers for their outstanding commitment and achievements through such a difficult year.

Yet again, demand for our services increased markedly across the year, owing to the rising cost of living as well as BSRC's growing reputation. The staff have helped an astonishing 2696 people facing multiple deprivations with the potential to impact following generations, generating cycles of food poverty, inadequate housing and precarious employment. As BSRC managed to change these challenges into opportunities for education, employment and connection, the organisation has gone from strength to strength, attracting repeat and new resources from funders across the city and beyond.

Our thanks go out to all our funders, with much appreciation for their ongoing support. Huge congratulations to the staff and volunteer team, including service users who contributed to the work of the organisation and our board members, and we look forward to an equally successful year ahead.

Fatia Gure and Hen Wilkinson

Chairs of Trustees, Bristol Somali Resource Centre

Who We Are



Our Story

Established in 2006 and a registered charity since 2008, Bristol Somali Resource Centre (BSRC) offers information, advice and support to socially and economically disadvantaged people in the Bristol area.

BSRC offers culturally competent support and services in several languages including English, Somali and Arabic. As our organisation and its reputation grown, we have come to serve people from an ever widening range of backgrounds, while maintaining a focus on the needs of our city's Somali population.

Our Work

BSRC provides free and impartial information, advice and guidance on range of issues including benefits, housing, immigration, schools and employment.

We aim to get the voice of the Somali community heard in the area, promote community cohesion and reduce the isolation of Somali people.

BSRC has been, and continues to be a key partner for organisations and bodies seeking to establish facts and understanding of the Somali community.

The Need

The greatest challenges reported by our service users in 2023-2024 were

- 1 the ongoing rise in the cost of living, which has drastically outstripped typical local incomes;
- 2 the acute housing crisis in Bristol, particularly for households of 5+ people (as are typical in the communities we serve);
- 3 the shortage of agencies offering face-to-face support, as more and more move towards delivery online or over the telephone, creating additional barriers to those already struggling with low levels of English.

November also saw the sudden evacuation of Barton House (pictured), a high-rise council tower block with a predominantly Somali- and Arabic-speaking population, two minutes' walk from the BSRC office. Our team provided emergency relief, advice and advocacy to many of the 98 households during the following months, while tenants were housed in emergency hotel accommodation and following their return to Barton House in February.

The Demand

Across the year, our team has provided **5000+ one-to-one advice sessions to 2000+ individuals**, on employment, benefits, housing and a range of other pressing issues.

We have also run **12 group activities** ranging from elders' trips to coffee mornings and community consultations. These were attended by **over 500** local people.



Our Impact

A snapshot of the difference our work made in 2023-2024

Our work this year has had a quantifiable impact on the lives of many service users, helping them cope better with the three main challenges named above, the cost of living crisis, the housing crisis and the decline in local, accessible face-to-face advice services. Among those who came through our doors this year...

483

households were helped to maximise their income

44

homeless households secured stable housing

238

people accessed specialist legal, debt and energy efficiency advice

29

families secured school places for their children

133

individuals made new CVS

77

gained new, stable jobs

31

gained accredited qualifications

14

took on new volunteering roles

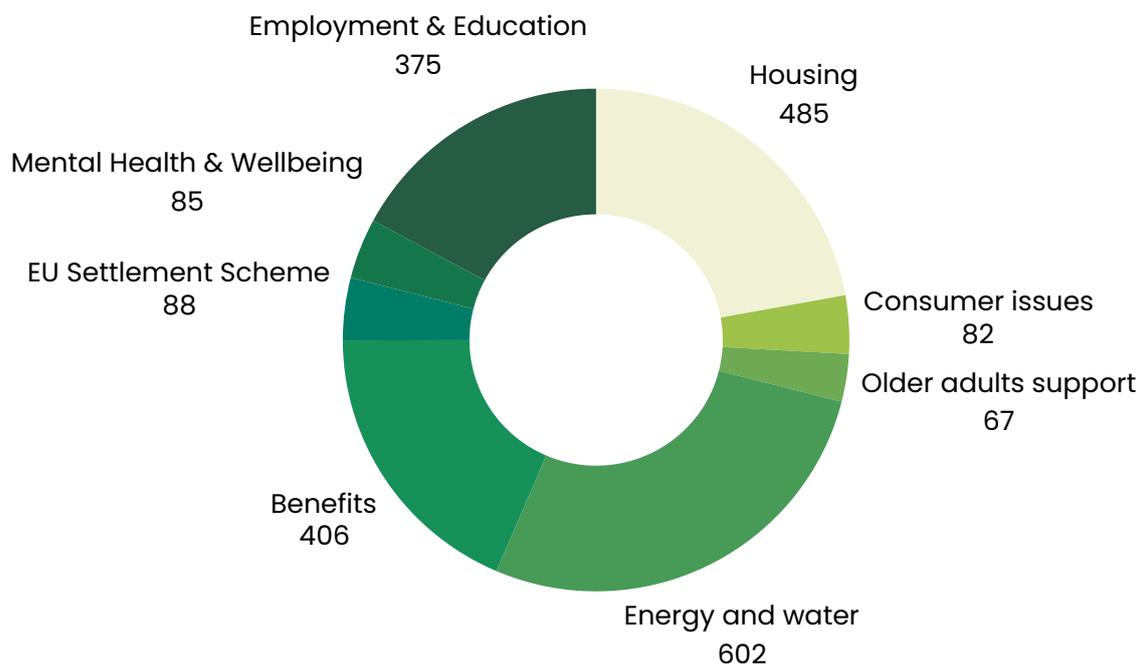
“My electricity bills were so high and I was very stressed. Advice from the Somali Resource Centre helped me save money and make sense of my bills, even though I don’t speak English.

- Muna, Lawrence Hill

Information, Advice & Guidance

An insight into the 1-to-1 support needed by our community

This year our advisors delivered over **5200 hours** of face-to-face support to **2096 individuals**. The numbers seeking our support in the eight most needed areas is illustrated below, as well as a breakdown of the principal issues our service users faced around housing specifically (bottom right).



Users of our **housing advice** service needed a mix of advocacy and language support to enjoy their rights to the full, as well as support navigating the necessary procedures and obligations (homelessness forms, Council Tax and Housing Benefits). A smaller but very significant number of people sought our support as they were facing eviction. Through our advocacy and advice, we helped **10 families avoid eviction**. Overcrowding remains a problem for the majority of council tenants we assisted with Home Choice.

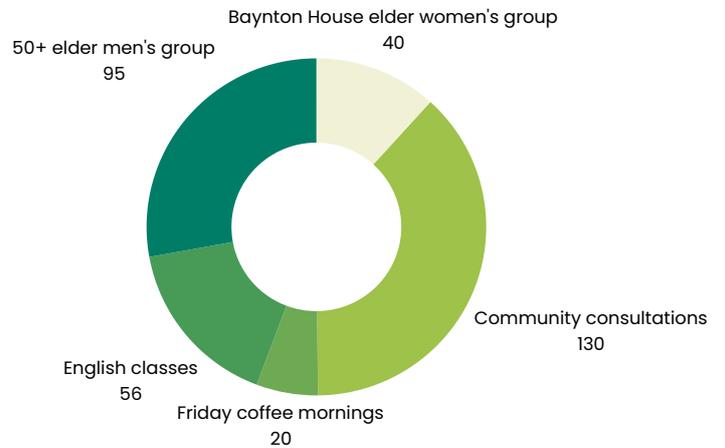


Community events & activities

We have run a range of group activities, trips and events serving a broad cross-section of our local community. Wherever possible, group members have had a decisive role in the design of these, choosing topics for discussion, inviting guest speakers, shaping the English classes' syllabuses and selecting destinations for walks and trips.

Highly Innovative Teaching

This year, three more skilled and qualified volunteers joined us to expand our innovative English programme. These classes are targeted at practising and mastering vital everyday communication skills, and improving employment options: one class builds confidence in speaking, for those distanced from the labour market by lack of spoken English. The other focuses on literacy and grammar, to help those already in hands-on jobs progress towards work requiring more written and digital communication.



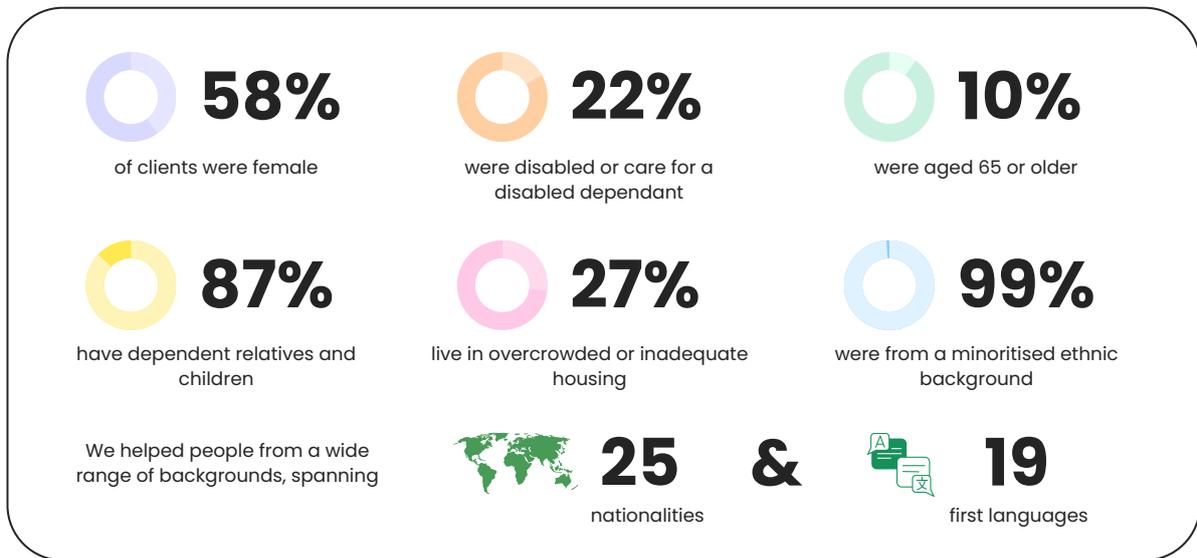
Battling Isolation

Many local older adults continued to report feeling socially isolated and struggling with health problems made worse by a lack of activity. In response, BSRC recruited an older adults engagement worker to run a range of physical and social activities, as well as visiting less mobile elders at home. We have also run regular events from the community room of a Lawrence Hill tower block with a large older female population, offering the chance to socialise, share food and get support without the need to travel.



Who We Supported

In the financial year 2023-2024...



The Geographical Spread

Last year we supported residents of numerous Bristol wards, including Southmead, Hartcliffe & Withywood, Stockwood and Knowle, as well as neighbouring local authorities South Gloucestershire, Bath & North East Somerset, North Somerset and Swindon Borough Council. The majority of those we support, however, reside in the most deprived neighbourhoods of Bristol according to 2021 census data, and in particular Barton Hill, where our office is located. Our ward of Lawrence Hill has the highest number of benefits claimants in Bristol (76.9%), the highest rates of child poverty (46.6%) as well as a concentration of overcrowded Council tower blocks.





Success Stories

Overcoming multiple challenges

Ms S is an older Senegalese woman who sought our services as she was destitute, unable to find work and struggling to pay for her temporary accommodation. She spoke no English and relied on an interpreter to access any services. We immediately recruited a French-speaking volunteer via the local council's volunteering platform, who has helped her to explain her situation and needs to our staff and offered a welcome point of contact.

Meanwhile, we invited Ms S to join our English programme. She attended regularly for six months, and gained enough confidence to secure two part-time cleaning jobs. The class also allowed her to make local friends and form a valuable support network at a time of need, with several women independently helping Ms S with donations of food.

One particular struggle for Ms S was her failure to prove her entitlement to benefits. However, we collaborated with staff from Bristol City Council to secure her housing benefits, meaning her housing costs at least were now paid for. More importantly still, with our guidance, she was then able to use this award of housing benefits to prove her entitlement to Universal Credit, offering her much-needed financial security.

Ms S also benefited from our housing advice and advocacy. Facing antisocial behaviour in her shared temporary house, she had tried unsuccessfully to complain to the council about other occupants' binge drinking and all night parties. These took a growing toll on her mental health as she grew more sleep deprived, and as the fasting month of Ramadan approached. We contacted the council's homelessness prevention team on Ms S's behalf, urging them to find more suitable housing. Within a month, she had been offered the tenancy of a council flat to herself, close to her workplaces.

Changing directions

After a career in cleaning, Khadijo wanted to find work that she could do from home, where she cares for a son who was a victim of a stabbing. Our advisor helped her through the process of registering as a nanny, navigating Ofsted requirements and preparing for a home visit, and provided information on public liability insurance.

Family pressures led Ilhan to leave Sweden in the middle of her care worker training and relocate to Bristol in January. Despite arriving with very little English, she took full advantage of our spoken English classes and one-to-one sessions. By April, she had successfully interviewed for a role in a local care home. Alongside her job, she now attends our more advanced, writing-focused classes with a view to progressing eventually into a leadership role.

Getting back on track

After a misunderstanding with a customer, Ahmed's taxi licence was suspended until he could complete an accredited ESOL course. As the sole earner in a large household, Ahmed did not have time to enrol on a local college course, which would take several months. We helped him explore other options and enrol on a fast-track programme with an independent provider, allowing him to gain his qualification and return to work within six weeks.

Staying active

Mr K, a socially active pensioner, has been getting his health back on track after joining our elders' walking group:

Every Sunday my group and I follow the public footpath along the river, walk 3km to Troopers Hill and the same distance back. I found the walking helps me manage my blood pressure and diabetes. I also lost 5lb of weight. Being active is good for my physical and mental health, a chance to spend time with friends and explore nature.



Thank You

...to all our funders, and all those whose donations and volunteering help us meet the demands and needs of our community.

Our vision to create a healthy and vibrant Somali community, integrated into British society as active social and economic participants.

Our mission is to promote a culture that values all individuals and communities, in particular the Somali community.

If you would like to support our work towards these goals, you can make a donation [here](#). There are plenty of other ways to get involved too, from volunteering to fundraising. Contact us via our [website](#) and [social media](#) or call our office on 0117 907 7994.



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