



Within the last 12 months, we have been able to achieve the following outcomes:

Outcome	Indicator
Improved financial situation	164
Employment	48
Access to education or training	66
Improved wellbeing	201
General support, e.g., with school or GP registration-translation	112
Number of clients reporting improved housing situation	38
Number of clients accessing benefits	49
Number of clients reporting improved confidence	66
Clients supported with the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS)	40
Number of clients supported with domestic abuse	14
Number of environmental events, including clean ups	73
Overall number of clients supported on a one to one basis	480
Volunteers - regular	45
Volunteers- environmental – one one-to-one	224 adults, 235 children = 459
Tonnes of refuse collected from Backhouse Park	5.415

* **Challenges to meeting the outcomes and capturing them:**

The estimates are based on our delivery experience. We know we are making a real difference to the lives of many clients, but many need long-term project, and some of our projects are long term projects. Two run for three years, one for two years, and one for 18 months.

- Many clients have ongoing issues and therefore they are still being supported, and on smaller projects, we are not always able to note positive changes before a client is exiting from such a project. We are proud of these achievements, but we have faced some challenges when delivering our work and meeting the outcomes, including still getting used to our new data capture system – Lamplight, and not yet utilising its full capacity, as well as the fact that we have not received sufficient project funding to deliver as much employability work as envisaged, and as needed due to the demise of EU funding and lack of replacement funding.
- We have had extended the delivery timescales for several projects due to capacity issues within our team, as well as when it comes to subcontractors. One of our staff members is on maternity leave, and one of contractors suffered a sudden bereavement and was not available for about 3 months.
- About 10% - 15% of our clients on each of the projects disengage. This is due to the fact that we are dealing with a mobile, transient population- e.g., refugees often leave the area after being granted status, due to family connections elsewhere in the UK, availability of work, or employment prospects, as well as real and perceived discrimination.
- The financial situation of many of our clients has been negatively affected by the cost of living crisis, hence their financial situation is often reported as worse than at the point of registration. However, we know that in many cases, their situation would have been different if it was not for our intervention.
- In this period, we have been using multiple ways of capturing outcomes and results, as we only started using the Lamplight system in December 2022.

We are able to provide a full breakdown if requested.

Project delivery:

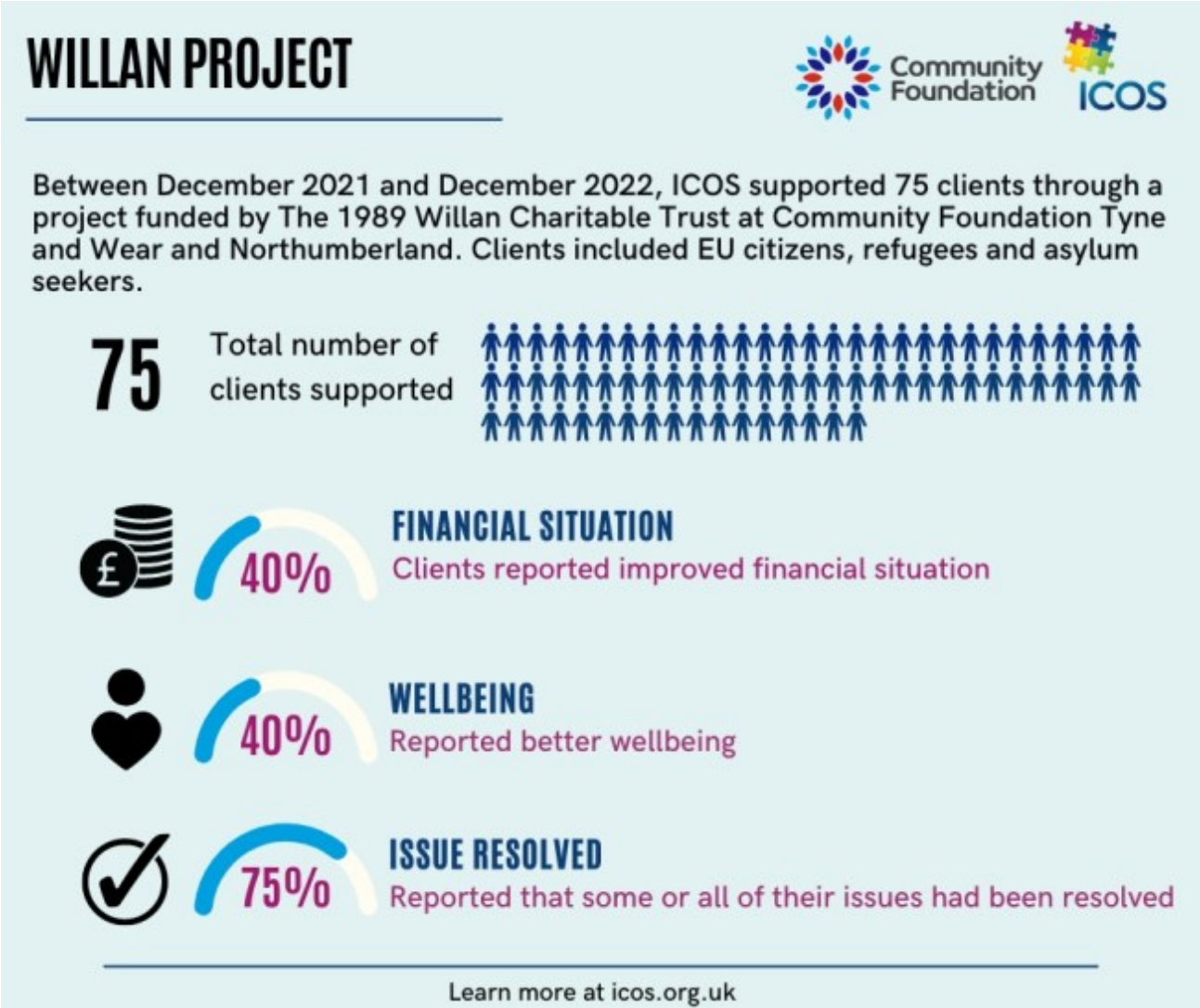
ICOS has been able to provide vital support to BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) clients in a number of areas, including employability, advice and advocacy, community development and empowerment, as well as volunteering. Clients included migrants from a variety of backgrounds, including Eastern European migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, international students and their families. We have worked hard to react to the cost of living crisis, and issues affecting our client group, such as brexit and changes to immigration rules, as well as acute housing issues (including those brought about by changes to Home Office rules concerning the notice period for refugees recently granted status to leave their Home Office – provided property

(<https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/latest/news/thousands-of-new-refugees-face-destitution-and-homelessness-after-being-told-to-leave-their-accommodation-at-short-notice/>). This work has included providing one to one support advice and advocacy for clients who needed support with claiming benefits, registering for housing, registering with GP practices, schools or other local

services. As part of our advice and advocacy work, we have also provided support to people affected by the energy crisis, e.g., we have helped them to communicate with their energy provider. Most one to one support clients we have supported have accessed these types of support.

Example project:

Willan Project (Dec 2021 – Dec 2022). Between December 2021 and December 2022, ICOS supported 75 clients through a project funded by The 1989 Willan Charitable Trust at Community Foundation Tyne and Wear and Northumberland. almost 40% reported increased wellbeing and financial situation and 75% reported that some or all of their issues had been resolved. Clients included EU citizens, refugees and asylum seekers.

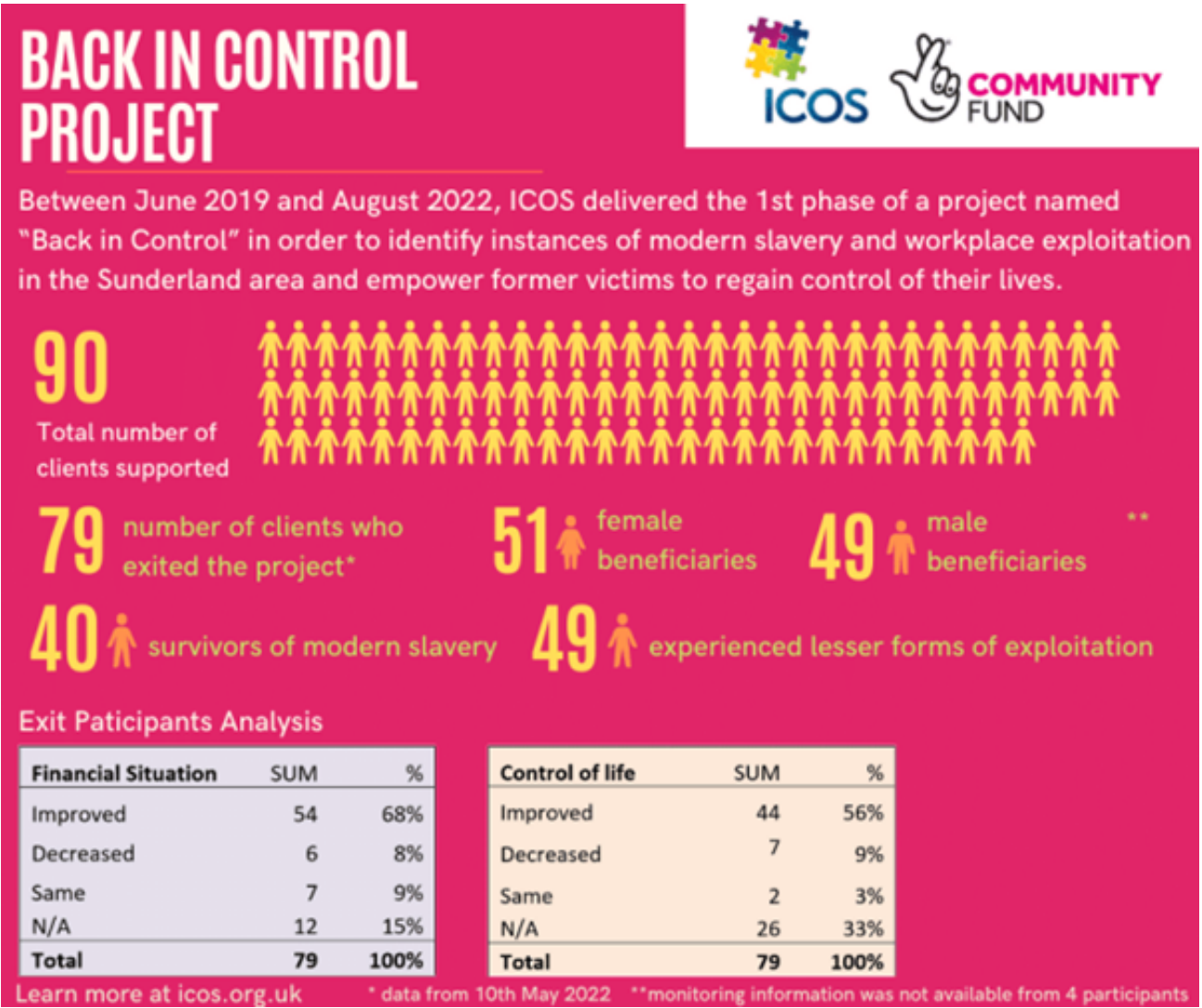


This part of our work also includes the Back in Control (BiC) project, which started its phase 2 in August 2022, following a successful application to the National Lottery Community Fund to fund the project again. It provides intensive, one-to-one support to clients affected by modern day slavery and workplace abuse and exploitation. The BiC 1 phase, which ended in December 2022, supported a total of 90 clients, leading to

substantial outcomes. The clients received holistic support with issues such as access to welfare and housing, immigration, wellbeing and counselling support, as well as liaison with external organisations such as the council regarding correspondence.

Additionally, we have also supported clients who were being exploited at work to write grievance letters. Emergency support has been provided during the pandemic, which included starting English language classes in response to other services closing, as well as material support, such as food vouchers and connectivity equipment, as well as internet access.

Through the project, we were able to support 54 clients to improve their financial situation, and 44 clients to improve their control of their life. We have also been able to support clients to improve their wellbeing and confidence.



As part of the wider advice work, we have also worked to make our clients safer, supporting women affected by domestic abuse, as well as providing support to migrant families affected by hate crime. In some cases, individuals and families struggled with both. This support has included contacting the police with them/on their behalf, help with finding alternative accommodation, re-assurance and providing support with issues

such as child contact arrangements. In many cases, it was necessary or beneficial to work closely with other local agencies and organisations, such as Wearside Women in Need, in order to make progress for the clients.

The project has also contributed to personal development of the clients, as well as their engagement and involvement in the local community through supporting clients to become Project Steering Group members.

When it comes to employability work, ICOS has been able to make a real, tangible difference to the lives of our clients (which we have illustrated through the case studies we have included below). It has provided vital support to migrants, including refugees in areas such as effective job searching, CV writing, career planning or accessing training. Supporting clients to fill in job applications has also been an important part of the project, as we have worked to make sure that clients' applications are filled in correctly, but also, that they presented the skills and experience of the clients in a positive way. Often, clients had limited knowledge about the UK labour market, or had faced long gaps in employment, e.g., due to not previously being able to work due to home office restrictions placed on them. Many were facing multiple problems, at the same time, such as having to find accommodation and employment at the same time, and navigating the UK benefits system for the first time). We have also worked to connect them to mainstream services, and opportunities, such as local colleges, further education providers, or the National Careers Service.

Example project:

Progress into STEM. This project was funded by Community Partnering Fund at Leeds Community Foundation and ran from December 2021 and December 2022. It provided 44 BME women with support, guidance and advice on employability and access to education. 6 clients accessed education, 11 received support with employability and 5 found employment. 8 women volunteered and 11 applied for STEM-related roles. The analysis of the data recorded on registration and exit forms showed that 45% of women reported improved wellbeing, 20% reported improved financial situation, 50% reported improved knowledge of the STEM sector, 45% reported improved overall confidence and 45% reported improved confidence when applying for STEM related roles. Through the project, it was found that there is a high need for this sort of work to be delivered to BME women in Sunderland and surrounding areas. 59% of women had a bachelor's degree or above level of education, 16% faced barriers such as poor English language skills, communication problems and lack of access to information.

PROGRESS INTO STEM



Leeds
Community
Foundation



This project was funded by Community Partnering Fund at Leeds Community Foundation and ran from December 2021 and December 2022. It provided 44 BME women with support, guidance and advice on employability and access to education.

44 Total number of beneficiaries



6 clients accessed education



reported better wellbeing



11 received support with employability



reported better financial situation



5 found employment



reported improved knowledge of the STEM sector



8 accessed volunteering



reported improved overall confidence



11 applied for STEM-related roles



reported improved confidence when applying for STEM related roles

Learn more at [icos.org.uk](https://www.icos.org.uk)

While supporting those in need is the core of our work and at the heart of what we do as an organisation, we have also worked on empowering our clients and providing personal development opportunities for them. This includes:

- The ICOS Women project is currently supporting over 50 women, mostly from Eastern European backgrounds. It is the only dedicated group for Eastern European women in the region. While it delivers a degree of one – to – one support, most of the work focuses on group activities- from social meetings and trips to improve wellbeing and reduce social isolation, to arts activities. This work is being undertaken by the women themselves, and planned together with them through the project steering group. One of the women has now become a lead for the mum's club, which is an offshoot of the wider women's project, and having improved her skills and confidence levels, she now leads some of the activities as a volunteer. We have also delivered STEM activities, enabling and supporting women to access STEM- related opportunities.

Additionally, we have now developed two research and empowerment projects based on this work, including a research project which seeks to understand barriers to taking part in healthcare research experienced by Eastern European women, which is being undertaken together with the NHS, as well as a project researching the experiences of Eastern European women and families in relation to the cost of living crisis, undertaken together with Newcastle University. In both projects, women

themselves are the co-researchers, and are being paid for their time as participants, as well as members of the project steering group, if they choose to be one.

- The ICOS Sport project has engaged a large number of BME people in our area, who have been able to take part in a number of sports activities. ICOS has worked with the clients to choose the activities, and therefore, the clients have enjoyed a number of different sessions, from futsal to winter sports, to water sports, canoeing and quads. Men of mostly Eastern European descent have been telling us that since the start of the pandemic, they have had less opportunity to take part in a physical activity. They also felt socially isolated and would like to get together more often. Some have reported putting on weight while on furlough, or picked up unhealthy habits. In response to this challenge, last year we applied for, and were successful in receiving Together Fund investment, which enabled us to deliver (until the end of March 23):
 - 35 sessions
 - Which engaged 85 individual clients

Whilst the project has targeted mainly men to date, we would like to apply for additional funding to continue to provide opportunities for some of our most vulnerable people and communities, which will also include increased provision for women. Our current programme has also focussed on Eastern Europeans – with additional funding, ICOS would also explore opportunities for wider asylum seeker and refugee communities.

- Through the Shared Sunderland project, we have been able to successfully engage with the local BME community to enable them to become community leaders, and we expect to make even more progress next year.

Relationships and partnerships :

Developing a good working relationship between the partners is crucial to the success of the Shared Sunderland project. In recognition of this fact, ICOS has worked closely with the Sunderland Bangladesh International Centre (SBIC), and New Horizons (NH) to establish a close and effective working relationship. This has been easier than would have otherwise been due to the fact that all three organisations have previously cooperated, e.g. as part of the Sunderland Black and Minority Ethnic Network; ICOS and SBIC have also delivered projects together in the past, e.g., cooperated on the delivery of the 2021 national census. ICOS, NH and SBIC meet regularly to discuss progress and two types of meetings, usually happening on the same day, are held:

- Leadership/ strategic meetings – attended by the managers of the three partner organisations. So far, we have held 11 meetings.
- Staff meetings- operational meetings to get delivery staff together to coordinate delivery and ensure quality, as well as plan joint activities. So far, we have had 10 such meetings.

Additionally, occasional, ad hoc planning meetings (e.g. to organize events or internal activities such as the away day) also take place.

Developing external relationships has been as important as internal work. We have strengthened our links to other organisations to ensure successful delivery of Shared Sunderland objectives. For example:

- Local councillors– we have engaged with local Sunderland councillors in order to provide leadership opportunities for local migrant and ethnic minority people in the area of politics. We have been able to get a cross party agreement from the East Area Committee, which includes about 1/5 of all Sunderland councillors to offer 2-3 days' shadowing opportunities for local BME people.
- Tyne and Wear Citizens (TWIC) and its member organisations- We have worked constructively with TWIC to ensure better practice with regards to race equality and inclusion in local schools.
- Operation Black Vote- We have established a relationship with OBV and had a speaker at our political engagement event in attendance. We aim at more engagement with OBV in the near future.
- Social Enterprise Academy- we have started working with this organisation to establish a leadership training program for the local migrant people

In May 2022, we have also officially launched the project- the launch event brought together local community leaders, migrants and councillors from most political parties on Sunderland City Council, engaging a total of 43 people: <https://www.sunderlandecho.com/news/people/shared-sunderland-initiative-launched-to-promote-diversity-and-support-integration-of-asylum-seekers-and-refugees-3713859>.

We continue to strengthen the links with other partners locally, regionally and on a national level.

Outcomes, impact and progress so far:

1. New Horizons- increased resilience

New Horizons builds strong foundations as an organisation for future growth and impact.

The support provided by ICOS has included, and, subsequently, been based on, a needs assessment created in June 2022, which highlighted areas for development, such as developing a funding matrix, increasing funding and introducing fit for purpose.

ICOS has been working closely with NH help NH improve its internal processes and its capacity. This included providing advice on improving funding applications and providing support to write an Awards for All application, providing advice on measuring outcomes, capturing evidence and impact, as well as internal procedures and processes, such as financial procedures and a reserves policy. Advice on applying for further funding has also been delivered.

Support for NH will continue in this new year of the project. This will include creating a funding application to Community Foundation (Tyne and Wear & Northumberland).

Additionally, NH has also accessed external help- e.g. with governance and incorporating as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO).

2. Increased leadership within the minoritised and migrant communities.

While in year 1 we were originally supposed to focus on outcomes 5 and 1, as well as setting up the project, we have made the decision to also start early work on outcomes 2, 3 and 4 to make sure enough progress is made within the project timescale.

We have taken several steps to make progress on the leadership outcome. In October 2022, we held a workshop on political engagement for BME people, which featured the deputy leader of Sunderland City Council, the former mayor of Newcastle upon Tyne (and the 1st and only BME mayor in the North East of England so far), as well as a total of 8 councillors from 4 different political parties represented on Sunderland City Council, South Tyneside Council and Newcastle City Council- Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Green. Amongst them was the first ever minority ethnic councillor elected in Sunderland. The workshop was aimed at engaging migrant people in the political process, creating links between local politicians and the migrant and minoritized communities and explaining the local political process to migrants. It included practical information, such as what being a local councillor involved.

The event was attended by 33 individuals and we have been able to gather feedback from 17:

- 13 rated the event as between 8 and 10 on a rising Likert scale
- 13 said that the event would make them more likely to pursue leadership opportunities in the future.

The workshop was well received by the community:

What did you like most/least about the workshop?

- *I liked everything*
- *Hearing from lots of different people*
- *Thinking about barriers to engagement for diverse groups*
- *All of it*
- *Presentation and speakers*
- *How to politically get engaged*
- *Insights from OBV*
- *It provided a good overview of the political scene of Sunderland*
- *How to engage*
- *The importance of votes*
- *Variety of speakers*
- *Honesty and transparency*
- *Giving more information about being councillor*
- *Informative*

Please tell us about anything new you learned at this workshop:

- *So many good things*
- *Learn about leadership*
- *Drive to be involved, starts with an individual rather than waiting on others*
- *Individuals journeys*
- *Wider engagement opportunities*
- *Political scene of the area, new ways of engaging, the questions in the workshop made me to think from new perspective*
- *Barriers to engagement*
- *How to get into political engagement*
- *How easy it is to access Councillors*
- *Any age group can be a councillor, doesn't matter about the ethnic group, being confident.*
- *All the political parties actually work together*
- *I learned about leadership*

As a follow up from the event, we have been able to get agreement from the East Area Committee, which represents approximately 205 of all Sunderland Councillors from various political parties to offer 2 – 3 days' shadowing opportunities to our clients, so that they could learn about the work of a local councillor. Additionally, we have had a commitment from Cllr Habib Rahman, the former mayor of Newcastle that he could provide mentoring sessions to several minority ethnic people.

In February and March of 2023, we started supporting our clients to access the abovementioned shadowing and mentoring opportunities.

Additionally, our work with the Tyne and Wear Citizens, as described below, also contributes to increasing leadership within the migrant community.

3. Increased recognition and understanding around issues of racial justice in Sunderland

4. Public and voluntary services in Sunderland are more inclusive and responsive to the specific needs of migrants. This improves access to services for the migrants and there is greater collaborative working across agencies

We have worked with Tyne and Wear Citizens (TWIC) to create a grass roots movement for change in Sunderland, which will lead to people – led change, where Black and Minoritized communities are in charge of driving racial equality. ICOS, NH and SBIC have worked with TWIC over the summer and early autumn of 2022 to launch a Sunderland Hub for the Citizen's UK movement, with the official launch taking place on 27 September 2022. The launch was attended by 23 individuals interested in forming a hub. The attendees expressed their wish to establish a local hub and take part in its work, and decided to focus on racial justice in education as a primary object, while selecting immigration justice as a 2ndary one.

Out of 18 participants who filled in the feedback form, 15 rated it as between 8 and 10 on a rising Likert scale. 8 said that attending the event made them more likely to pursue leadership

opportunities in the future, and 10 said “much more likely”.

Comments included:

- *Together we can make change*
- *About injustice in education*
- *How to voice a change*
- *I learnt that people actually do wanna make a change and that's empowering*
- *The amazing work of Citizens UK across the country*
- *To share each other ideas*
- *I learnt how to be a leader in your community*
- *I learnt how to do community work together*

As a follow up of this event, we organised listening training, enabling 14 clients to become trained listener and gather views from within their local community –this was delivered in partnership with Tyne and Wear Citizens.

Between early and mid-February 2023, the listeners will hold several drop in sessions and listen to the views of parents of schoolchildren from minoritized communities in Sunderland with the view of changing local schools in Sunderland to become more inclusive. We have also got plans to hold a further session at Richard Avenue primary school in Sunderland with the local parents. The school will also be running similar exercises with children and with staff members (the sessions with the school children will of course be organised in a sensitive manner and the school plans to undertake them in April 2023). We are working with this particular school due to the particular issues related to the behaviour of the former head teacher of the school, who accused Bangladeshi parents of not behaving “covid-safe” and spreading the disease.

We hope to take this model to other schools in the area in the near future.

As described above, this will also provide opportunities for leadership for migrants in Sunderland and in fact, it has already started contributing to this outcome.

5. Increased stability within and resilience within the community

We have provided direct one-to-one support to 112 individuals in need of help and provided support with a range of issues, including:

- 49 were male and 61 – female (we have no data for two individuals)
- 20 were in need of immigration advice and support
- 24 needed support with housing (including registrations with housing associations, presenting to the council as homeless and general advice on housing, such as disrepair)
- 23 needed support with benefits, including applying for benefits and understanding decisions, as well as reviews and appeals
- 9 needed support with accessing the health service, e.g., GP registrations

- 14 needed support with managing their universal credit account due to language barriers and / or lack of access to devices or low IT skills
- 22 were facing other problems, such as domestic abuse

Many clients accessed more than 1 type of advice.

While the vast majority of the clients need long term support and so far, only 49 have been exited, 11 have reported improved financial situation and 11 have reported improved housing situation, as well as 24 have reported improved wellbeing.

- We have delivered a number of environmental projects, which have contributed not just to increased awareness of environmental issues amongst the BME community and the overall society, as well as behaviour change, but also got people from diverse backgrounds together. Those taking part included migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, international students and local residents living in the close proximity to the park. This includes:

The Together for our Planet, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, aimed to inspire local people to take care of the environment/take practical action and create momentum for change in the community. It focused on a particular geographical area- St Michael's ward, Sunderland and Backhouse Park (Ryhope Rd, Sunderland SR2 2EF) within that ward, engaging minority ethnic people, including refugees, asylum seekers and Eastern Europeans. While it built on the success of the East Area Rangers project (<https://icos.org.uk/past-projects/>), it focused on environmental education, behavioural change and environmental change rather than litter-picking.

The project focused focus on two main areas:

Creative activities, focusing on families- including local environmental surveys (e.g. on birds, butterflies, bugs), identifying different species, making bird houses and feeders from recycled materials and upcycling- e.g. making items such as homemade poop dispensers, as well as restoring the Sensory Garden at Barley Mow Park (adjacent to Backhouse Park) with the local community.

Green employability- supporting clients to access accredited and unaccredited environmental training (delivered by an external partner organisation), including on invasive species, land management, invasive species: control and eradication, use of equipment (such as strimmers), risk assessment and health and safety.

Throughout the year, 130 adult volunteers and 190 children took part in weekly clean-ups. We organised 39 litter picking session and 89 seasonal activities to maintain the park. It made a difference by creating awareness and reducing the environmental impact of human activities. Clean up efforts included removing debris and preventing damage to the natural habitats and wildlife in the Park. Eradicating invasive species has helped to restore natural habitats. 2915 kg of litter, refuse and green waste has been removed from the Backhouse Park and St. Michael's Ward. Volunteers delivered 1944 volunteering hours.

We delivered a number of workshops and awareness sessions: 5 Bird watching walks for the public, 4 Bird watching walks for scout groups and 1 Evening Bat walk. Participants learned about the importance of protecting the environment, and the benefits of conversation. Workshops also helped participants to develop a deeper understanding of the wildlife behaviours and habitats. All the workshops, especially those dedicated to children had a goal to inspire participants to take an active

role in protecting the environment. This included volunteering and participating in local clean-ups efforts, and making changes in their daily lives to reduce their environmental impact.

East Area Rangers (April 2022 – March 2023)

The project included regular environmental activities (such as litter picks, and maintaining greenery) and educational workshops held across the East of Sunderland. ICOS was the lead provider for St Michael's ward and works with volunteers, and partner organisations (such as Friends of the Backhouse and Barley Mow Park), to organise activities in Backhouse Park and several other areas.

Apart from regular litter picks, we have also been able to organise educational workshops involving children and families, such as bird watching, bug surveys and make practical improvements, such as making and installing bird or bat houses. We ran an average of 2 activities per week.

The project delivered/achieved:

- 224 adult volunteers and 235 children took part in weekly clean-ups.
- We organised 49 litter picking sessions and 73 seasonal activities to maintain the park and St Michael's Ward.
- It helped to make a difference by creating awareness and reducing the environmental impact of human activities.
- Clean up efforts helped remove debris and prevent damage to the natural habitats and wildlife in the Park.
- Maintaining invasive species helped to restore natural habitats.
- 5415 kg of litter, refuse and green waste was removed from the Backhouse Park and St. Michael's Ward

Our work has been focused on supporting the local community to take care of their local assets, while raising awareness of environmental issues. This work has also provided important health and wellbeing benefits, especially during the pandemic: <https://icos.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/East-Rangers-Case-Study-Susan.pdf> . The time of the pandemic affected vulnerable groups, such as refugees, who are often traumatised by being uprooted from their previous lives even more, deepening the feeling of loneliness and isolation. Finding a sense of belonging can be difficult for them, especially in a completely new place and culture. Spending time in nature was essential to the wellbeing of many. Backhouse Park became a welcoming space for daily exercise, which in the long term had a positive impact on mental health and this pattern continues to this day.

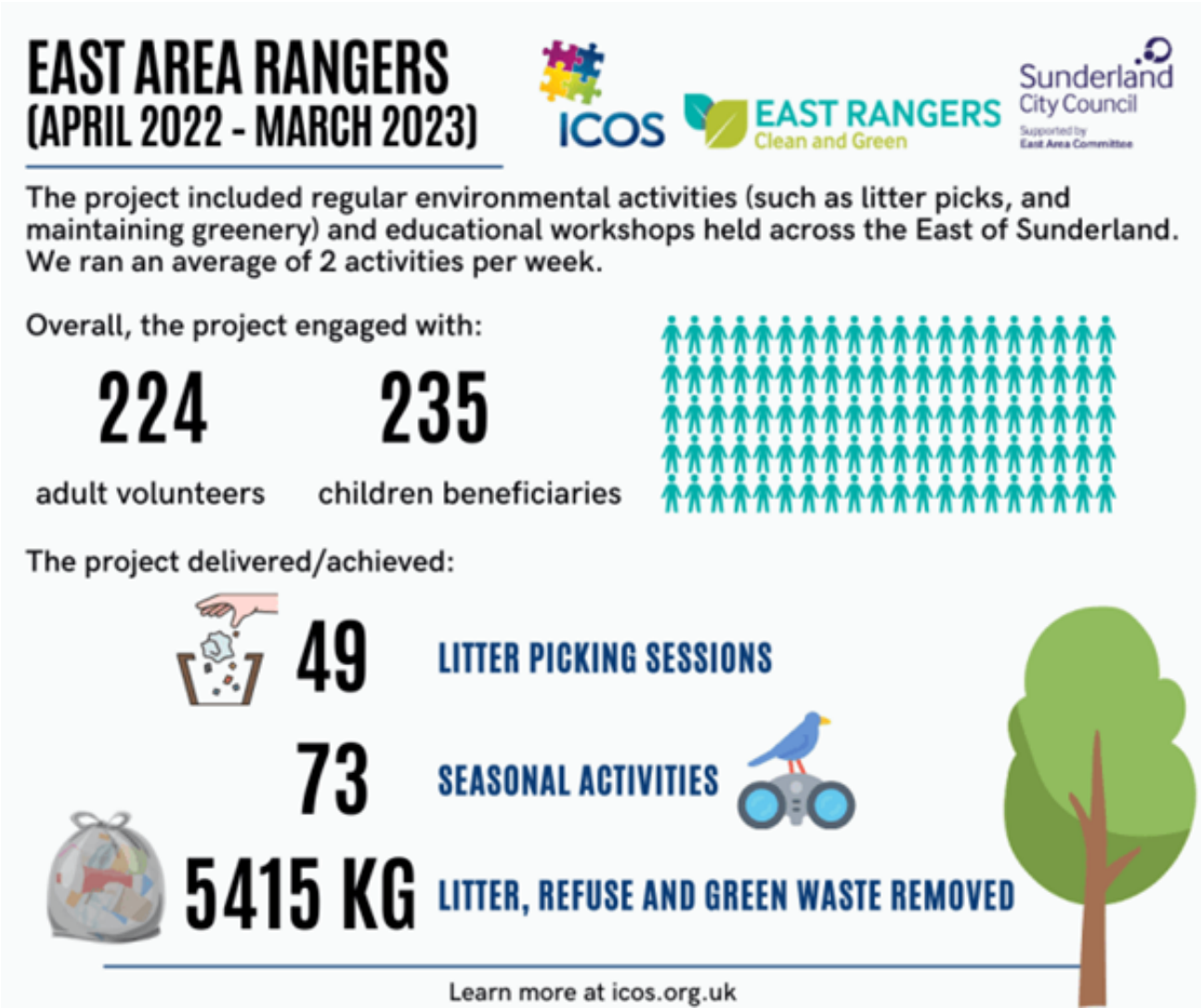
The project has successfully engaged volunteers and local community in various activities in Backhouse Park and provided them with access to a range of environmental workshops and events. One of the project's key strengths is its commitment to promoting diversity and inclusion by welcoming volunteers from different backgrounds, including refugees and asylum seekers.

Volunteers have played a critical role in the project's success by participating in clean-up and litter-picking activities and supporting the delivery of environmental workshops and events. This

engagement has provided a platform for community involvement and social cohesion, bringing together people from diverse backgrounds to work towards a common goal.

The involvement of refugees and asylum seekers has been particularly beneficial, providing opportunities for social integration and cross-cultural understanding. The project has created a safe and welcoming space for these individuals to engage in meaningful work and connect with the wider community, including an opportunity to improve their English language skills.

Through regular clean-ups and litter picks activities, the project has not only helped to improve the local environment but also promoted environmental awareness among the volunteers and the wider community. When the environment is clean and safe, people are more likely to engage in their local community and take pride in their surroundings.



Organisational development:

- ICOS has now submitted its application to be the Office of Immigration Services Commissioner, and can now deliver basic immigration advice at level 1. This makes us the only non-profit, Sunderland- based provider of immigration support. While only one staff member is currently regulated to deliver the advice, two others will sit their exam early next year for the first time, and one will re-sit as soon as possible, having failed the initial one (it has a high pass threshold).
- We have been able to recruit a new trustee with significant business management and risk management background and a track record of working for major organisations. We look forward to recruiting 1-2 new trustees within the next 12 months.
- In response to long term financial challenges affecting the voluntary and community sector, including the demise of EU funding, ICOS has been able to analyse its options for income diversification, and commit to exploring one main option out of the three in the medium to long term. This enables us to now focus our efforts in that direction.
- ICOS has successfully implemented the Lamplight data management system, and its use has now been embedded within the organisation, enabling for better resource management, and aiding data collection, monitoring, and ultimately- evaluation.

Challenges and learning:

- The cost of living crisis is impacting on our clients' lives in multiple ways, and basic necessities, such as food and energy costs are going up. This situation is especially difficult for those who have not got an established support need in the UK, including Ukrainian refugees. We have therefore worked hard to access external support, e.g. food vouchers from Sunderland City Council and free sim cards from Vodafone.

We are experiencing increased demand, and are now seeing about 15% more clients who require one-to-one support than before the cost of living crisis, including people coming with issues related to covering the basic living costs, as well as debt and housing issues. Often, there are no easy ways to increase their income, as they are not eligible for benefits and/or cannot work. In such cases, there is often the need to liaise with external services, such as the CAB, in order to support people with debt agreements, which means staff need to spend more time with the clients. This translates into unmet demand, as we need to deliver more casework, and often– deal with more complex cases. Staff have reduced capacity, causing longer waiting periods, often for vulnerable individuals. Additionally, we have had to increase staff more than we would have otherwise had- including £11/hour for those staff on the living wage, which increased from £9.90/hour to £10.90/hour. A further increase to at least £12/hour will be needed from April 2024. We are a living wage employer and we will continue to be one, but this will have an impact on our finances.

- The housing crisis is currently especially acute in Sunderland, and every week we hear about clients who are at risk of homelessness and / or living in overcrowded accommodation. This is

because many more international students are now coming to Sunderland, and many arrive with accompanying family members and the university housing stock is too small to house them. This makes it very difficult for Ukrainian people to access independent housing when their sponsorship arrangements come to an end, or when they break down. This puts them at an even greater risk of exploitation. This situation exists despite the fact that until fairly recently there had been many empty buildings in Sunderland. We will be working closely with the City Council to understand the situation and highlight its impact on our clients.

- Applying for OISC regulation has been a very difficult process, as we had to meet stringent requirements, including having a current business plan in place. When we started the application process in 2022, our business plan was just coming to an end. The business plan also had to include a section on OISC regulation and how our work could be sustained, and writing this section well was a difficult task, as we have had no prior experience of combining business development with the OISC regulatory environment. Additionally, some processes have proven to be much more time consuming to complete than originally anticipated, such as the standard DBS process. We have found out that not many local organisations offer it and our staff had to travel to South Shields to deliver their documents, as South Tyneside Council was one of such organisations. We have also found that the preferred DBS provider used by OISC to be lacking in several areas, including customer care, and our staff were reluctant to use them and provide their documents to them.
- Financial challenges. As many VCSE organisations, we face financial challenges in the mid-term, due to issues such as the demise of the EU funding increased competition for grants. ICOS is working on becoming more resilient through generating unrestricted funding. We are currently exploring ideas such as running a community café.

The local delivery landscape and partnership:

The Community Foundation's Vital Signs report (2017) states: "overall lack of diversity in parts of Tyne & Wear suggests the needs of minority communities may be harder to meet than in those parts of the country where they are more prevalent". Our daily practice confirms this- local services are often not able to respond to the needs of transient communities/recent migration.

In Sunderland, ICOS is part of a thriving and diverse BME sector. This includes members of the Sunderland Black and Minority Ethnic Network (SBMEN) an infrastructure organisation, which provides support to other BME organisations and a united voice of the BME community. ICOS has been an active member of SBMEN since its foundation (2009) and is represented on its board. No organisation in Sunderland actively targets the EE community. While some work with asylum seekers (e.g. FODI), they mostly provide emergency support, and serve asylum seekers rather than those granted asylum.

ICOS occupies a particular niche, and has a distinct client group, focusing primarily on those with limited access to information and resources due to being a recent arrival, language barriers or social isolation- including Eastern Europeans, other economic migrants, refugees, and increasingly- asylum seekers. The ICOS Women group is the only EE women's group in the region.

ICOS works closely with SBMEN's member organisations, such as Sunderland Bangladeshi International Centre, Young Asian Voices, or Friends of the Drop in for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (FODI). Cooperation includes referrals/signposting between the different partner organisations, joint delivery of local projects and exchanging information and expertise (e.g., SBMEN meets regularly). This minimises duplication/inefficiency. E.g., ICOS is able to provide effective support at the point of transition- when asylum seekers are provided refugee status and need intensive/timely support with housing and accessing benefits, while FODI would mostly provide support to asylum seekers. At any given point of time, in Sunderland, there are at least 450 asylum seekers (North East Migration Partnership, 2023), and about 10% receive refugee status every month.

Within Sunderland, several advice providers work mostly to help accessing welfare benefits and on dealing with issues such as debt. From the point of view of BME communities however, there remain significant gaps, which ICOS works to fill in. E.g., language barriers often mean clients cannot communicate with their advisors. No one else apart from ICOS provides free immigration advice.

Most of the support provided by the abovementioned agencies focuses on appeals rather than initial support. Due to limited English language skills and lack of familiarity with UK systems, many of our clients need support at this stage (e.g., applications for housing/services/benefits).

Our clients include victims of modern slavery and others who have suffered trauma (e.g., domestic violence) and generalist provision is often insufficient.

Case studies and quotes:

Employability

1.

FO came to ICOS in February 2022 seeking support with finding a job and updating his CV. After an initial conversation and having reviewed his CV, the project worker and the client decided to create a new one, and from that point, they started working together. ICOS staff also found out that the client would like to find a part-time job as he is an international student.

A week later, the project worker created a new CV for him and the client came for a second appointment. During this meeting, the project worker explained the easiest and most effective ways of applying for jobs, uploaded his CV on Indeed App, sent a digital version to his email, printed a couple of copies and advised him to distribute them in restaurants, cafes, shops, because these were the places where international students are most often employed. FO didn't know what kind of job he was looking for, but one of his areas of interest was the care sector, so the project worker suggested searching for appropriate recruiting agencies employing in the care sector. ICOS employee rang them

on the client's behalf and asked if any part-time job opportunities were available. Afterwards, they applied for jobs.

The project worker was in constant telephone contact with FO, and whenever there was an opportunity or offer that might interest him, she contacted him immediately. Such as after participating in a job fair, she suggested to the client that she could send his CV to one of the employers (Dickson's) that employs many part-time students.

FO using his new CV, and advice and tips he received, the client got a job as a carer after weeks of trying. His employer provided him with healthcare training. He admitted that his interpersonal skills have improved e.g. empathy, work ethic, confidence, teamwork, and time management.

2.

T (36, originally from Poland), came to ICOS in April 2023. She was in need of careers support and guidance. While she was employed full time, she felt stuck at her job and felt that she wanted to do something different and to utilize her skills and experience (she was, at that time, employed by a local factory). At the initial appointment with the project worker- Ewelina, the client and the project worker had an in-depth discussion about her skills, priorities, interests and aspirations she had, as well as hopes for the future.

T was interested in becoming an accountant but has not worked in the field in the UK. She was employed full time and was afraid that she would not be able to keep her job while studying, and not yet being a qualified accountant, she would not yet be able to work in the chosen field, hence, there was the potential for ending up in financial difficulty.

It became clear that T needed time, space and guidance to make the best decision for herself. The project worker supported T to look at career pathways, courses and eligibility criteria.

After several appointments, and having received support from the project worker, including motivational support and enrolment on a careers fair, T made the decision to enroll on a level 2 AAT accounting course at Newcastle College. At the time of writing (November 2023), she had passed almost all of her exams and assignments, and was hoping to progress onto level 3 next year.

The client has reported that she felt her confidence levels had risen as a result of the work delivered by the project, which enabled her to take up the course. She also feeling safer.

3.

Y (a female, aged 55, originally from China), approached ICOS in January 2023. She was experiencing issues when looking for work, chiefly because of English language barriers, and lack of experience of looking for work in the UK and knowledge of the techniques employed to look for work effectively, and when to find work. At the initial meeting, Ewelina, the ICOS Project Worker, assessed

the needs of the client and together, Ewelina and Y created a comprehensive action plan, taking into account client's aspirations and plans. It turned out that Y had an impressive track record of working in the construction engineering industry, gained outside the UK.

Initially, they created a CV, making sure it was applicable to the UK labour market and understood by potential employers, as well as a covering letter. During future appointments, the project worker assisted the client in making job applications and identifying opportunities. As the client still needed support with her English language skills, the project worker referred her to Action Foundation, our partner organisation, so that she could improve those skills.

With the support from the project, in April 2023, Y successfully applied for a job with a local construction company and she is now in full time work.

As a result of the support provided and finding paid employment, the client also reported improved financial situation. She also has reported that her English language skills are now better, as a result of the support she received to enrol on an English language course.

Advice and advocacy

1.

Alina (name changed), originally from Latvia, approached ICOS in March 2023 seeking help. Her friend, acting as an interpreter due to Alina's limited English proficiency, contacted the organisation on her behalf. Alina was facing significant challenges as she had no access to public funds, and her inability to communicate in English set back her efforts to find employment. At Alina's first appointment, the project worker conducted an initial conversation to assess and understand her situation better. Alina's lack of English language skills made it challenging for her to find suitable employment opportunities. Having no recourse to public funds, Alina was experiencing financial hardship, which was made worse by her inability to secure a job. Alina was living in an unfurnished accommodation, without essential appliances like a fridge, washing machine, or cooker. Recognising the importance of language proficiency in empowering Alina to find employment and integrate into the community, the project worker assisted her in enrolling for ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes in Sunderland. Alina was provided with all the necessary information about the enrolment process and the class schedule. Understanding the significance of basic household appliances for Alina's well-being, the project worker applied for grants on her behalf. The application was successful with the Greggs Foundation, securing a new fridge/freezer for Alina. The project worker went the extra mile by helping Alina arrange the delivery of the fridge/freezer through phone communication. This step was crucial as it ensured Alina received the much-needed appliance promptly. With the support of ICOS project worker and the grant from Greggs Foundation, Alina now had a new fridge/freezer in her accommodation, improving her living conditions and enabling her to store food and manage her daily needs more effectively.

2.

Mary came in the UK to join her husband in 2020 with their 9 children however, her husband was still living in 1 bedroom flat, all the family has no knowledge of basic English language. New Horizon have supported the family with housing support, Universal Credit claims and immigration IAG, they were successful with a 4-bedroom house which they moved in last February. Unfortunately, due to the language barriers, Mary have received a seeking note repossession of the house they were given due to the non-payment of rent, their housing benefit support was stopped but she did not know and could not understand the letters she was receiving through the post. New Horizon has supported Mary and her family by getting in touch with the housing association and stopped the court procedure since Mary and her family weren't made aware, when they signed up the agreement the Housing officer failed to arrange an interpreter who speaks their native language. Therefore, the Housing Association agreed to translate any correspondence sent to her so she can understand. We have also made another claim for her housing benefit. Mary said " I can't put into words how grateful me and my family are from all the support I have received through New Horizon since I came in Sunderland , without your support me and my family could have been homeless today."

3.

Semira (not her real name), from Ethiopia, was referred to ICOS from Jobcentre. She came to England in 2021 and from that time she struggled with the language barrier. On her initial meeting with project worker it very quickly turned out that the English language is not the only problem with which the client needs support. Semira suffered from long-term health conditions and she had difficulty doing certain everyday tasks. At that time client was receiving Universal Credit. With her condition she wasn't fit for work, she had a sick note from her GP. The client didn't know how to add a sick note to her Universal Credit account. She also asked for help and guidance in accessing her UC account, updating her journal notes, and changing details and circumstances.

After further conversation and assessing the client's needs project worker learned about her difficult housing situation. Further appointments were arranged for the client to support her with her application for Council and Gentoo (local housing association) housing. The project worker was providing ongoing support on using a Universal Credit account, and after some time the client received a UC50 application to fill out. Semira found it difficult to understand questions in the application, so she called ICOS for another appointment. On this occasion, the project worker helped Semira to translate and understand questions thanks to that she wrote all the answers and returned the completed questionnaire on time. Shortly after that, she attended a medical assessment.

The trustees would like to express their gratitude for your funding, which has enabled ICOS to continue its work.

