



PoSI Annual Report 2023

2023 was a year of changes and expansion for Places of Sanctuary Ireland, at the level of the Board, the Schools of Sanctuary (SoS) team and across PoSI streams, against a backdrop of rising levels of international protection applicants entering the country as societies across the world recovered from COVID travel restrictions.

At Board level, two Directors, Jacqueline Phiri and Andy Pollak, stepped down in 2023, and Mavis Ramizani, Aileen Kennedy, Tonye Benson-Olatunde and Dr Tetiana Lokot were appointed as new members.

As PoSI is closely affiliated with sister organisation City of Sanctuary UK, a Memorandum of Understanding was proposed between Chairs of CoS UK and PoSI to safeguard sharing of practices, websites and related materials. This was ultimately deferred as PoSI is currently developing plans to de-couple from the UK platform. A new website was created for SoS but implementation has been deferred subject to Board approval due to decisions about domain names and identities of different 'places'.

Many of the changes throughout the year in PoSI took place at the level of Schools of Sanctuary. These include support for a change of work culture ethos to facilitate upscaling of SoS activities, as well as ongoing commitments to funders. During the course of the year, two members of the SoS team resigned and some restructuring of the SoS team was implemented. Adare HR Management Consultancy was recruited to assist with new structures and practices, including updating contracts of employment and advising on the staff handbook. Three SoS award ceremonies took place: i) in February, in TU Dublin, with Minister Roderic O'Gorman; ii) in May, in TUS, Athlone campus; and iii) in December, in Wexford Opera House, each event being an occasion to celebrate the wonderful integration work taking place by whole school communities at primary and secondary school level. By year end numbers of schools engaged in SoS had increased significantly with 25 Champions, 47 Members, and 63 Friends recorded as being part of the expanding SoS community. In addition, the resource pack for schools was substantially updated and a number of activities and campaigns were initiated, including webinars for teachers, development of the 'Wear Red Day' anti-racism programme, the development of a library of age-appropriate reading materials, and fact sheets to counter misinformation.

The Universities of Sanctuary (UoSI) stream conducted a review of its Strategic Plan in conjunction with Dr Lucy Michael Research consultants and relevant stakeholders, at an in-person event on the TUS Athlone campus. Highlights of the new strategic plan include a restructuring of the national steering group to include six sub-groups to focus on specific tasks; increase in the number and quality of scholarships and related supports; improve data collection

and the narrative on refugee inclusion; and continue to campaign for derogation of fees for refugees and international Protection Applicants not eligible for state grants.

Developments occurring across other Places of Sanctuary included Louth becoming the first County Library Services to receive the Libraries of Sanctuary (LoS) award, paving the way for others to follow suit. Sanctuary in Nature and Heritage (SinNH) secured funding to develop nature and heritage walks and was also nominated for an award by the National Heritage Council, which was a great recognition of the valuable social and cultural work carried out by this innovative group.

Sanctuary in Faith (SiF) increased accreditation of churches of different denominations, with the number now standing at fifteen different faith-based organisations accredited. They hosted an inter-faith conference in May 2023, which was well attended, with plans to host another in 2024.

Sanctuary Ambassadors (SAs) play a vital role in supporting and disseminating the three core sanctuary principles of *Learn*, *Take Action*, and *Share* by talking to stakeholders across the community about their refugee journey, in so doing, consolidating anti-racist messages of hospitality and solidarity. The number of SAs engaging with PoSI continues to grow with over one hundred currently in the database. Training events facilitated by the national coordinator are held regularly to support monitoring activities in schools of sanctuary, with the Chester Beatty Museum acting as a generous host for in-person meetings.



Veronica Crosbie
Chairperson of Places of Sanctuary Ireland
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