



hope
projects
report
08|09

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This is a report on the work of Birmingham Law Centre's Hope projects in the financial year 2008/9. The Hope projects work to help destitute asylum-seekers and others barred from public funds in the West Midlands. The first project – then known as the Asylum-Seekers' Destitution Fund and now as the Hope Destitution Fund – was founded in 2003. There are now five Hope projects:

- The Hope Destitution Fund
- Hope Housing
- The Hope Fund for Children
- Hope Counselling
- Hope Coventry

All the projects are operated in close partnership with other local agencies.

The Hope Destitution Fund

The Hope Destitution Fund assists asylum-seekers and some others in the West Midlands whose support and accommodation from the Home Office UK Border Agency (formerly NASS) have been terminated, or who otherwise become destitute.

Fortnightly grants are made by a Grants Panel made up of representatives from

- Birmingham Law Centre,
- ARROW (Action for Relief of Refugees from Overseas in Wolverhampton),
- ASIRT (Asylum Support and Immigration Resource Team),
- the Children's Society Midlands Refugee Project,
- Coventry Refugee Centre,
- the British Red Cross (West Midlands),
- the Refugee Council, and
- Restore (Birmingham Churches Supporting Asylum Seekers and Refugees).

All of these organisations are also represented on the Fund's Steering Group, which meets from time to time to agree changes of policy etc. However, legal responsibility for the Fund rests with Birmingham Law Centre.

The Hope Destitution Fund takes applications only from local referring agencies working with destitute asylum-seekers and other new migrants, so that further information on applications, and possible longer-term remedies, can be sought from the agencies if necessary.

In the financial year 2008/9, £194,037 was raised for disbursement to destitute asylum-seekers and others; this figure includes funding of £82,000 from the Heart of Birmingham Teaching Primary Care Trust to provide financial support and accommodation to "new-migrant" pregnant women and new mothers barred from public funds (including non-asylum-seekers), to cover a two-year period up until late 2010.

The PCT funding is disbursed both through the Hope Destitution Fund and through the Hope Fund for Children (see below), in partnership with the Children's Society, who have contributed a further £25,000 to this grant-making.

Beside the Heart of Birmingham PCT and the Children's Society, generous trust-funders for 2008/9 have included the Bryant Trust, the Tudor Trust, the Roughley Trust, the Grimmit Trust, the Cole Trust, the Leigh Trust, the Harry Payne Trust, the Jill Franklin Trust and the William A Cadbury Trust. We have also had much-appreciated support from many individuals, either in one-off donations or through monthly standing orders

Since the Fund was started in July 2003, a total of £519,987 has been raised, from grant-making trusts, individuals, faith groups, collections and benefits, and from Birmingham Law Centre's own charitable funds.

(Online donations to the Fund can be made through the Law Centre's Web site, at www.birminghamlawcentre.org.uk/projects/hopedonate.htm and standing-order forms can be downloaded at www.birminghamlawcentre.org.uk/projects/HDF_standing_order_form.doc.)

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Birmingham Law Centre and its partner-organisations have successfully approached local accommodation-providers for properties to be leased at a peppercorn rent by the project”

As previously, none of the money raised has been used for the Fund's administrative costs, which have been covered by Birmingham Law Centre from its general funds. The efficient administration of the Fund is due to Birmingham Law Centre's Finance Admin Officer Balbir Klair, Admin Assistant Linda Murphy, and volunteer admin worker Judy Twedde. All fundraising for the Fund has been carried out by volunteers.

In the financial year 2008/9 £126,073 was disbursed to 534 destitute individuals and families. Since July 2003 a total of £440,224 has been disbursed to 1,911 individuals and families.

As the year progressed, the Fund faced ever-increasing calls on its resources, with more and more destitute clients seeking support for longer periods of time; and we start 2009/10 with the likely prospect of decreasing support from our trust-funders in the current dire financial climate. To meet these challenges, in October 2008 and again in March 2009 the Fund's Steering Group agreed to reduce the rates of payment to individuals and families.

The case studies section on page 5 gives details of some recent cases in which the Hope Destitution Fund has helped destitute asylum-seekers. The criteria for grant-making, with the current rates of payment, are on page 7.

Hope Housing

In early 2007 Birmingham Law Centre launched the Hope Housing project, which provides emergency accommodation for homeless, destitute and vulnerable asylum-seekers in the West Midlands. The project is a working partnership between

- Birmingham Law Centre,
- ASIRT (Asylum Support and Immigration Resource Team),
- Coventry Refugee Centre,
- the Karis Neighbour Scheme, and
- Restore (Birmingham Churches Supporting Asylum Seekers and Refugees).

The project's work is guided by a Steering Group made up of representatives from these organisations plus co-opted members, chaired by Shari Brown of Restore. Again, legal responsibility for the project rests with Birmingham Law Centre.

Also associated with the project are: the British Refugee Council, West Midlands; the British Red Cross, West Midlands; the Institute of Applied Social Studies, University of Birmingham; the Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham; and local Registered Social Landlords (RSLs)

Birmingham Law Centre and its partner-organisations have successfully approached local accommodation-providers for properties to be leased at a peppercorn rent by the project. Our first clients were accommodated in May 2007.

During 2008/9 we have managed short-term accommodation for up to nine women (with some children) and four men in houses leased at peppercorn rents from three RSLs (Friendship Care and Housing, Mercian Housing Association and the Yardley Great Trust) and the Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham; and some other RSLs are committed to finding us more properties.

We also have secured funding from the Heart of Birmingham PCT for "respite accommodation" for new-migrant pregnant women and new mothers barred from recourse to public funds.

Residents in Hope Housing accommodation are supported by fortnightly grants from the Hope Destitution Fund. Running costs at properties, including utilities bills, Council Tax etc., were initially funded by a "setting-up grant" made by Birmingham Law Centre's trustees from the Law Centre's own general charitable funds. This has been supplemented during 2008/9 by generous grants from the Friends Hall Farm Street Trust, the Eveson Charitable Trust, the Cole Charitable Trust, the S C and M E Morlands Trust, the Saintbury Trust, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the Garfield Weston Foundation,



and the AW.60 Trust. Two part-time Birmingham Law Centre Hope Housing project workers, Sarah Malka and Geoff Wilkins, are funded by a grant from the Lloyds TSB Foundation.

A brochure on Hope Housing's work (recently updated) is downloadable from www.birminghamlawcentre.org.uk/publications/HopeHousing-v2.pdf.

The Hope Fund for Children

One-off grants to new-migrant pregnant women and new mothers barred from recourse to public funds are made through the Hope Fund for Children, administered by the Children's Society (see above on the Hope Destitution Fund).

These grants have gone to mothers, whether or not destitute, who do not have the funds to cover the extra costs of new motherhood. (Many of them are living on very basic support from the UKBA or Social Services.)

Officers of the Children's Society receive and determine applications for grants from the Hope Fund for Children. In the year 2008/9, starting from November 2008, £9,250 has been disbursed from this Fund.

Hope Counselling

This is a partnership between Birmingham Law Centre and the St Martin's Centre for Health and Healing. Another grant from the Heart of Birmingham PCT has funded training for St Martin's counsellors in counselling traumatised asylum-seekers and refugees, and a limited number of counselling sessions.

The Steering Group for the project includes representatives from Birmingham Law Centre, the St Martin's Centre, the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, and ASIRT.

Leaflets about Hope Counselling are downloadable from the Web page at www.birminghamlawcentre.org.uk/projects/hcounsel.htm.

Hope Coventry

In January 2009 our partner-organisation in Coventry, Coventry Refugee Centre, began working with Birmingham Law Centre to establish a locally funded emergency fund for destitute asylum-seekers in Coventry which could make small grants between Hope Destitution Fund meetings, and to acquire one or more properties in Coventry to accommodate homeless asylum-seekers, under the aegis of Hope Housing.

Hope Lunchtime Event

Also in January 2009, we welcomed past, present and potential supporters of the Hope projects to an African lunch at the Central Methodist Church in Birmingham, to learn more about the projects and our work with asylum-seekers and refugees.

Guest speakers included Clare Short MP and Ranjit Sondhi, chair of the Heart of Birmingham Teaching Primary Care Trust. More information about this event is at www.birminghamlawcentre.org.uk/news/hopeevent.htm.

Hope Video

The design agency Homer Creative, a good friend of the Hope projects, has offered its time and expertise free to help us make a video on the work of the Hope projects; we started filming in March 2009. With additional support from the media organisation VIVID, the video will give a voice to clients of the Hope Destitution Fund and Hope Housing at zero cost to the projects.

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The work of the projects is linked with efforts by our partners to find longer-term remedies for applicants' destitution and homelessness”

Case Studies

Here are brief details of eight recent cases in which the Hope Destitution Fund and Hope Housing have been able to help destitute asylum-seekers (names have been changed). They illustrate that the work of the projects is linked with efforts by our partners the referring agencies to find longer-term remedies for applicants' destitution and homelessness.

Angela, a Nigerian woman, came with her two-year-old son to a “drop-in” session operated by one of the Hope partners, ASIRT. They were homeless and destitute and reliant on the charity of friends following the refusal of their asylum claim. Angela and her child had been staying with friends for some time, but were rapidly wearing out their welcome.

Angela had paid an agent to bring her to the UK, where she was expecting to become employed as a hairdresser. On arrival, however, she discovered that she was expected to work in the sex industry. After some days, she was able to escape, and claimed asylum. She has been detained twice with her son, and fled with her child from their UK Border Agency accommodation when the house was raided for a third time in their absence by Immigration Officers. Consequently, Angela is now listed by the UKBA as an absconder. Because of her flight from her accommodation, Angela had lost all documentation relating to her claim for asylum and believed her situation to be hopeless.

ASIRT was able to gain access to her asylum case-file at the Home Office and advise on further representations. ASIRT has also referred Angela to specialist organisations the Rape and Sexual Violence Project, the Poppy Project and the Helen Bamber Foundation. ASIRT was also able to refer Angela to the Hope projects, obtaining emergency accommodation and support for her and her young son. Thus Angela's situation was transformed from desperation, destitution and potential street-homelessness to one in which her immediate material needs are being met and

longer-term action is planned, to ensure that her case is properly considered by the Home Office.

Juliet, an asylum-seeker, is from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Whilst in the UK she married a man who had Indefinite Leave to Remain, and they have two children together. Their relationship broke down due to domestic violence, and Juliet was forced to leave the family home. Because Juliet is a refused asylum-seeker she has no recourse to welfare benefits or other public funds and was therefore unable to access women's refuges or any mainstream hostels; as a result she found herself destitute. The Hope Destitution Fund is providing Juliet with financial support whilst she makes an application for support from the UK Border Agency under Section 4 of the Immigration Act 1999 (Section-4 support).

Claudette, from Jamaica, is a refused asylum-seeker with a young daughter who has a serious and rare medical condition. Claudette and her daughter had previously been staying with a friend, but found themselves homeless and destitute when their host moved abroad. The Hope projects provided the family with accommodation and financial support whilst legal representations were made on their behalf and support from the UK Border Agency was applied for. Whilst Claudette and her daughter were approved for UKBA support relatively quickly, they had to wait for almost three months to be accommodated. The Hope projects continued to offer support and accommodation during this time.

Ali, from Pakistan, made a fresh application for asylum in February 2009. At the time he was being assisted by a friend who was living in Section-4 accommodation. Ali was also receiving treatment for cancer and other blood diseases. While his application was still under consideration by the Home Office, his friend was detained in Yarl's Wood Removal Centre, leaving Ali homeless and destitute. He contacted the Red Cross, and a volunteer was able to assist him with food vouchers and travel expenses and signpost him to the Refugee Council to apply for Section-4 support. The volunteer also completed an



application to the Hope Destitution Fund, and the Fund was able to assist Ali until his Section-4 application was decided.

Ahmed, an asylum-seeker from Sudan, was refused asylum in 2007. In 2008 he was sent a questionnaire by the Home Office under its programme of reviewing longstanding asylum cases, which he completed and returned. He had been living rough for a long period, and was diagnosed with TB and hepatitis B. The Refugee Council assisted Ahmed with a Section-4 application, and while he was waiting to hear from the Home Office, the Red Cross's destitution service was able to support the client for two weeks and then made a successful referral for continuing support from the Hope Destitution Fund.

Joseph and Grace, a couple with a child one year old, were refused asylum because the Home Office did not believe that they were members of a minority clan persecuted in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Following this their support from the Home Office was terminated - even though the Home Office does not currently seek to return asylum-seekers to the DRC. Joseph and Grace were able to submit a fresh asylum claim through their legal representatives based partly on a report from an academic expert on the DRC, which confirmed their membership of the minority clan. However, the couple were evicted from their accommodation by the landlord, who advised them to go to the Red Cross. The Red Cross's destitution service was able to arrange emergency accommodation and provide food vouchers, nappies, milk and clothes for the baby. The service also made an emergency referral to the Refugee Council to apply to the Home Office for Section-4 support. At the same time the couple were referred to the Hope Destitution Fund for further assistance. The Fund assisted the couple and their child, and the Hope Housing project provided emergency temporary accommodation for the family, until a Section-4 decision was made.

Nahid, a 67-year-old Afghan male, was street-homeless and had been sleeping in a phone box for three nights when he was referred to the Refugee Council in November. Nahid had severe health problems and post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of witnessing his immediate family killed in front of him. He had travelled by lorry to England, with little paper work to support his asylum application. He had applied for Section-4 support in October 2008, but the application was initially "lost" by the UK Border Agency. The application was further delayed by the need for a medical appraisal of his case. Nahid was referred to the Destitution Fund and received support till he was finally housed by Section 4 in mid-December 2008.

Edward is a Zimbabwean asylum-seeker and MDC activist, who is wanted by the police in Zimbabwe. He has a Zimbabwean wife, and a nine-month-old son. The family were supported by a friend till his financial situation deteriorated. They were then completely destitute and sleeping in the National Express Coach station. The Refugee Council approached Birmingham Social Services and pointed out their obligations to the family under the Children Act 1989, and Human Rights Act 1998. Social Services declined to help. The family spent another night in the coach station, in January, during a very cold spell. The Refugee Council made a "priority A" application under Section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. Due to concerns over the child's wellbeing the Refugee Council also made an application to Hope Housing. Hope Housing found a place for the wife and child, but this was in a property that only accommodated vulnerable women and children. The Refugee Council managed to find Edward a place in a local church which has very limited accommodation for destitute people. This was within walking distance of his wife and child. The whole family was supported by the Destitution Fund till they were finally accommodated by the UK Border Agency in Walsall.

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Hope Destitution Fund: Criteria for Grant-making

Agreed 12 March 2009

1 Transparency

Current criteria for grant-making will always be circulated to all referring agencies. The criteria will also be available from Birmingham Law Centre's Web site at www.birminghamlawcentre.org.uk/projects/hdf-criteria.pdf.

Agencies wishing to refer cases to the Hope Destitution Fund are generally expected to send representatives to the fortnightly Grants Panel meetings.

2 Basic criteria for grant-making

Grants can be made only to people who have at some time applied for asylum, or to pregnant women and new mothers who are barred from public funds, and generally only to those who are currently destitute – but see 5 below.

3 Rates of grant payment

The normal weekly rates of grant payment are, as from 12 March 2009: £15 for a single adult, £30 for a couple, plus £15 per child. After six weeks' receipt of grant payments, the rates will drop to £10 for a single adult, £20 for a couple, plus £15 per child.

The rates for residents of Birmingham Law Centre's Hope Housing accommodation will generally be: £25 for a single adult, £45 for a couple, plus £15

per child, without any reduction after six weeks. Where Hope Housing residents are receiving some support “in kind” of food etc., HDF support may be at a lower rate.

The HDF Grants Panel will have discretion to increase these rates only in exceptional circumstances.

4 Grants and longer-term solutions to destitution

Grants will generally be made only where there is the prospect of a longer-term solution to applicants' destitution, e.g. from UKBA Section-4 or Section-95 support or support from local authorities, within a reasonable period of time. Furthermore, grants will not be made where:

- It appears from applications that there is no “need” beyond the fact that the applicant has no income – e.g. cases where applicants are living with and supported by friends; OR
- there is no evidence of a potential “remedy” for the destitution having been already initiated, e.g. a Section-4 application lodged or Social-Services support sought, and no evidence of special or compassionate circumstances that would nevertheless justify a grant; OR
- more generally, documentary evidence has not been included with the application, including copies of UKBA applications, fresh asylum/HR applications, correspondence with Social Services etc.

5 Grants for those not completely destitute

The Fund's trust-deed allows for grants to those not completely destitute but, e.g., lacking support or accommodation for their dependants or support to cover special needs. Such grants can only be made provided a case has been made on “humanitarian” or other special grounds.

6 Grants for people “indefinitely destitute”

Grants will rarely be given to people indefinitely destitute and without any possible remedy pending, and only provided a strong case has been made on humanitarian or other special grounds, e.g. because of a recent change of circumstances seriously worsening the person's situation.

7 Grants for former asylum-seekers

Grants for, e.g., refugees unable to access welfare benefits should be made only exceptionally and with a low priority, and only if an MP has been asked to pursue their case.

8 Grants for non-support expenditure (e.g. essential travel, doctor's reports, translation, other reports)

Such grants can be made only exceptionally, and with a low priority.

9 Cases for review by Grants Panel

The Panel will always require clear information about action/progress on a case from the referring agency.

Contacting Hope Projects

The Hope Projects are based at

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54 Coventry Road
Birmingham
B10 0RX

tel: 0121-766-7466
fax: 0121-766-8860
email: admin@birminghamlawcentre.org.uk
www.birminghamlawcentre.org.uk

Donations to the Hope Destitution Fund can be sent to the above address – cheques to be made out to ‘Birmingham Law Centre’.

Donations can also be made online at www.birminghamlawcentre.org.uk/projects/hopefund.htm.



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