

WATFORD AND THREE RIVERS REFUGEE PARTNERSHIP

Annual Report for 2014

Project or Partnership?

You'll have spotted a change in our letterhead and in the heading of this annual report – no longer Project but Partnership – why? Two main reasons: first, the word Project implies something with a limited time-scale and a defined objective (despite WTRRP's 13-year history!) whilst the scope of our activities, and the needs of refugees and asylum seekers has no such limits. Second, Partnership reflects our core activity of befriending, getting alongside to support and – where needed – to help those who end up in our neighbourhood without the means to make the necessary applications or, in some cases, even to feed or house themselves and their children.

Another change is that we are now of sufficient size to register with the Charities Commission, which means that members of your committee have become Trustees. A big advantage from this is Gift Aid, which adds around 25% to your donations if you pay UK income tax. Being a charity will also enable us to offer a wider variety of placements for volunteers, for example, in fundraising and some of our administration.

In 2014 WTRRP continued to support refugees and asylum seekers in the Watford and Three Rivers areas, still run solely as an independent voluntary funded organisation. This is possible thanks to you, our **volunteers and donors, for your phenomenal support in time, goods and money**. Our organisation continues to exist to support in a variety of ways 'refugees' (I've put the term in quotes because our clients, all in some distress and seeking to gain permission to remain in the UK, are in a range of categories) who have fled persecution and abuse, and who come to WTRRP with often-complex needs. They have a high level of anxiety about the intricate asylum process in the UK, as well as separation from family members and culture. They worry too about accommodation, money, education, access to legal advice, detention, fear of deportation, destitution and homelessness. So these 'refugees' are pushed to the brink financially, socially and emotionally due also to today's hostile UK environment where refugees are now less welcome than ever before.

Dealing daily with the very real and pressing problems of these clients brings constant challenges to the Partnership and its volunteers, especially those involved doing individual casework. Our befrienders too face a bigger range of language and cultural differences as well as being supportive to their clients for a much longer period. Yet our volunteers continue to be incredibly generous in giving of their time and passion to the clients, assisting them to regularise their immigration status and helping them adjust to life in the UK with day to day practicalities including food and toiletry parcels through to getting their children into school and toddler groups. One of our most important services is to provide this food and other essentials to needy clients, with the total value in 2014 being over £8,000.

Our Drop-In Centre (at St John's Church, Sutton Road, Watford) has now entered its third year and has become a vital part of how new clients make contact with WTRRP. The 2 hour sessions, twice a week, have become an established place where 'refugees' can come and bring their practical issues and get a warm welcome.

Whilst WTRRP volunteers can't provide legal advice, specialist immigration solicitors Lawrence Lupin attend the Drop-In by appointment for one session per month to offer initial guidance free of charge to individual clients. We are most grateful to them for this service.

We continue to run our English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses at the Centre, which we expect to expand to more classes due to demand. We're also considering another course focusing on PC skills, to enable our clients to have better access to employment.

Our four social events continue to be important, as our clients are able to meet each other and enjoy themselves. This included two family parties, a visit for the kids to the Watford Palace Theatre Pantomime in December and a June Garden Party at Cheslyn Gardens. WTRRP also had a stall at the St John's Fun Day as part of our acknowledgement of all that St John's Church does for WTRRP.

WTRRP still needs you! Our workload continues to increase, and we need more volunteers, donations and money. For reasons, and more details, please read on, or contact us at info@wtrrp.org.uk



We are pleased to have strong working partnerships with other organisations including the Red Cross, New Hope and the YMCA, who help us extend our service provision in various ways.

Annual General Meeting

We look forward to seeing you at our **2015 AGM on Tuesday 24 February at 7.30 p.m.** at St Luke's Church, Langley Way, Watford WD17 3EG.

Our guest chairman will be **Tony Rindl, vicar at St Mary's Church** in the centre of Watford. As chair, Tony will speak about his own family's experience of arriving here in the UK as immigrants, as well as interviewing some of our clients, volunteers and committee members, which we have found is a more interesting way to carry out the official business of an AGM! We'll also provide tea, coffee and excellent cakes.

How we help our clients

Our year's 'throughput' of clients continues to increase year on year, with more cases resolved, but even more people becoming clients of the Partnership too.

Over the year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Caseload	19	10	28	29	40	55
Number of adults	22	13	35	33	47	77
Number of children	17	13	37	33	42	69
Adult-only cases	8	3	7	9	16	15

Table 1: Number of Clients 2009-2014

(In annual reports up to 2012 we gave a year-end snapshot of figures. Figures for 2013 and 2014, of total year's activity which includes clients who joined or left us over the year, give a better idea of the Partnership's total workload.)

Drop-In-Centre Coordinator's report (Guy Buckler)

The Drop-in Centre (St John's Church, Sutton Road, Watford) is now much better recognised, both in the community and by different agencies, as an ideal place for clients and potential clients to meet with WTRRP volunteers. This is borne out by the growing number of referrals and self-referrals. The emergency food parcel that is stored at St John's now needs replacing frequently! Our new clients who arrive at the Drop-In are invariably in need of these basic necessities and it's good to be able to respond quickly.

This Drop-In Centre offers a safe, supportive and welcoming environment which is at the heart of what we do. We rely heavily on our team of volunteers to cover sessions twice a week for 2 hours on a Tuesday and Friday. Without them the drop-in centre simply could not function, and it is a testament to their commitment that in 2014 we were able to cover every session. We are, however, always looking for more volunteers to help out and provide what can only be described as a life-line for the 'refugees' who come through the doors.

Whilst most of our clients are eligible for free legal advice, a significant number never receive it due to demand for representation. So during 2014 we have been able, at one session each month, to offer appointments at the Drop-In with a solicitor from Lawrence Lupin, a firm which specialises in immigration as well as other human rights issues. Several clients have made good use of this new service on offer.

We are very grateful to St John's Church for the welcome we continue to receive and the support they give us week by week.

Casework Coordinator's report (Joy Hobbs)

In our complex and often intensive case work, we often provide the link between the UK asylum system, the lawyers, and addressing the welfare of our often confused refugees. Getting to know and support each of our clients can be a long and arduous journey. Immigrants are fearful of disclosing their stories and situations but eventually trust develops. We may be the first people they have met who are kind to them since they left home. (one such anonymised story has been highlighted). Nevertheless, the effort needed to take on the protracted process of seeking Asylum is more than worth it when we see our clients move on with their lives.

Our costs continue to rise, because the Partnership is increasingly being asked to help pay for application fees to the various government agencies. Costs are expected to escalate further in 2015 due to the number of clients on our list who are both applying for Asylum and seeking to renew their Discretionary Leave to Remain status.

Until now our volunteers have helped our clients by accompanying them to official interviews and appearances at the UK Borders Agencies offices. With its new charity status, WTRRP is now eligible to become an OISC (Office of Immigration Services) approved organization. WTRRP is keen to continue investing in its volunteers, and our experienced caseworkers can now be trained to provide basic immigration advice with Level 1 OISC certification. WTRRP also welcomes new volunteers who have already passed OISC Level 1 or 2. In this way we can then offer a more comprehensive and effective service to our clients.

We remain grateful to the Red Cross Refugee Centre in Luton for all their assistance they give to our clients; to Lawrence Lupin, the immigration solicitors who attend the drop-in centre once a month; and to the other organizations who support us in a variety of ways, e.g. New Hope, Social Services, local children's centres, and the Watford food bank.

The majority of the case work is currently done by Joy with Sue Ellison and Andrea Hudson. John Shaw continues to lead bi-monthly review and supervision meetings with our volunteer case workers. During 2015 we will bring in a shadowing and buddying system to support the casework volunteers in their vital and often intense work.

It is a hard and difficult journey to get to the UK, and so our client base continues to change year on year. But the majority still come from Africa (Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone etc.) and a significant number also have a family to support. These 'refugees' are often not in a position to choose their destination country. Many have only heard of England and have minimal known contacts here. Most of the countries that produce 'refugees' and asylum seekers have well-documented poor human rights records.

Food Store Coordinators' Report (Mick and Jeanette Hayter)

Our clients depend on our monthly food parcels, which are stocked with non-perishable items and in-dated food like tea bags/instant coffee, long life milk, cereals, pasta, rice, tinned vegetables, tinned fruit and tinned meat/fish such as tuna and corned beef. Much-needed toiletries (shampoo) and liquid detergents are also included when in stock. This year we have distributed 315 food parcels compared with 236 in 2013.

Our ability to pack and distribute every month about 30 boxes relies on the generosity of our supporters. We regularly marvel that as soon as a particular commodity runs out it is replenished by one of the donors. We also send out a "needs" list to assist those regularly giving food and other items to provide long dated items. The number of donors keeps expanding year on year, which is helping us to just keep pace with demand. So we are reliant on larger collections that help to supplement our stock as part of contributions made at Harvest Festivals and Tins and Treats services at Christmas.

Every Refugee has a different story to tell

Charity's story, from Living Undercover to 'Leave to Remain'

Charity (name has been changed to protect her identity) came from Africa to seek her baby's father, a European national. Her family sacrificially helped her pay for a visitor's visa to obtain a safe and better life in Europe. She found the father and succeeded in getting his name on the birth certificate before he disappeared. Along with the kindness of the African community and as a trained hairdresser she supported herself and paid for her son's British nationality (about £1,000) whilst living in one room in multi-occupancy for 6 years, until the rent escalated.

Referred by her MP, she came to WTRRP seeking to regularize her own status. Sofa surfing/homeless and almost destitute, we referred her to Social services who refused help as she was not street-homeless. WTRRP obtained a community care lawyer's letter, and after a Human Rights assessment; Social services accommodated them in a B&B. With the help of WTRRP, Charity is now moving towards achieving **Leave to Remain status** when she will become independent again.

For the past two years we have joined forces with New Hope to make a Harvest Appeal, aiming to help bring in more staple foods. This collaboration has worked well and we are very grateful to New Hope for storing the goods and then supplying us with food items as needed. Our thanks go to all the staff at New Hope, who are very supportive of our work. We would also like to record our thanks for the help given to us by Watford YMCA, who respond very generously to our needs when asked.

The smooth running of the food parcels programme is a tribute to all the volunteers involved: those collecting, those managing the stores, those packing the items through to those transporting and distributing the packages.

We are very grateful for the donations from many schools, organisations and churches who support us with their regular food collections throughout the year; and also the much needed bonus of the larger contributions at Harvest Festivals and at Christmas 'Tins and Treats' services.

We estimate that these donations-in-kind have this year been worth over **£8,000**.



Volunteer Coordinator's Report (Marie-Jo Churchill)

This year we have welcomed 4 new volunteers, bringing our total of active volunteers to 27. Each year we sadly have to say good-bye to a few volunteers who move away or have other pressures on their time.

We are delighted to have new volunteers on board, because our caseload is steadily increasing as more clients use our Drop-In centre at St John's Church, Watford. New volunteers bring new ideas, energy and valuable skills to the Partnership.

We are extremely grateful to our longer-established volunteers for the experience and dedication they bring to the partnership; especially Joy Hobbs, Casework Coordinator who helps each befriender and caseworker feel secure in their role. Joy, Sue Ellison and Andrea Hudson handle the more demanding and sensitive cases from the 47 families we have on our current clients list.

Volunteer training is a priority, especially with a view to improving our interaction with clients. As well as sending its volunteers on 'must do' courses (e.g. vulnerable adult and child safeguarding), WTRRP runs two annual volunteer evenings dedicated to sharing experiences and learning more about 'refugee' issues. In 2014, an extra volunteer evening was held to assist with volunteers understanding of clients' issues. This session utilised material from an excellent booklet produced by Guy Buckler, Drop-in Centre Coordinator) ranging from latest info on immigration status, to information about how best to support clients based on a variety of Drop-In-Centre experiences.

John Shaw, our Case Review Officer, has been instrumental in putting together our Volunteers' Handbook, which focuses on best practice that WTRRP volunteers must adhere to in terms of processes and procedures. The key elements of volunteer selection (successful completion of application form, references, interview) are included in the Handbook as well as an explanation of the things (mandatory training, safety & support, confidentiality etc.) that volunteers need to know about volunteering with WTRRP, as well as essentials such as claiming expenses and insurance cover. All our volunteers, deployed in a variety of roles and settings are required to read, digest the information and return the 'Consent Form' to confirm the document has been read and understood.

A First Aid Training course was offered for the first time this year with the support of the Red Cross Centre in Croxley Green. The course was aimed at clients and volunteers alike. The first course was well received and we intend to extend it next year to more recipients. Our publications and training is intended to equip our volunteers to work confidently and effectively with our clients. There are also safeguarding refresher courses being planned, and we plan to create more opportunities for volunteers to discuss and share their experiences.

The number of students attending ESOL classes (English for Speakers of Other Languages) has more than doubled this year. We currently have 15 students. Our ESOL Co-ordinator, Andrea Hudson is looking at

ways to expand our curriculum, hoping next year to offer computer skills classes in a bid to open up future livelihood opportunities. We are greatly indebted to St John's Church, which allows us to run our ESOL class alongside the Drop-In on Tuesdays.

Marie-Jo Churchill, our Volunteers' Coordinator and ESOL teacher, now has a dedicated role as a point of contact for all our volunteers. One of her objectives is to ensure there is ongoing training for those volunteering with WTRRP, and to help ensure volunteers have a rewarding experience. Marie-Jo is also keen to continually review training needs and to foster more recruitment of volunteers with the help of our secretary, Dorothy Knightley.

We need more volunteers of all ages and life-experience. If you would like more information about WTRRP or are interested in joining us, we would love to hear from you. You can contact us by phone on 01923 252434 or volunteers@wtrrp.co.uk. You can also find us through our website, www.wtrrp.org.uk

Treasurer's Report (Chris Carter)

These accounts were revised in early December 2014, making estimates for the rest of December.

	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008
Income (£)	10,285	6,823	4,698	4,231	2,699	4,359	2,019
Expenditure (£)	10,151	7,340	5,436	4,496	4,181	2,172	2,199
Surplus / deficit (£)	134	-517	-738	-264	-1,482	2,187	-180
Balance c/forward (£)	2,289	2,155	2,672	3,409	3,673	5,155	2,968

Table 2: Income and Expenditure 2008-2014

In this, my final report as the project's treasurer and as in my previous six reports I am confident about the project's future as our income has risen along with the increase in our activities.

Income

Our growth is sustainable, as donations by standing order from individual supporters have risen from less than £500 in 2009 to £2,750 this year. Combined with significant donations from a number of churches each year, this has given the Project's committee confidence to expand our activities.

Alongside the growth in regular giving, we have benefited from one-off matters like fixed-term grants (2009-11), donations of £1,000 or more (2012 and 2014) and most recently being invited by St John's to use their church building for our Drop-In Centre. Whilst we have used other facilities cost-free, as the Drop-in Centre opens twice a week, chart 1 includes a line for "In-kind" donations of £2,150 in 2013 and 2014 that saved us from incurring expenditure.

Chart 1 is limited to what goes through the books, but we are equally grateful for what isn't costed. Firstly, there is the time of our volunteer befrienders and caseworkers. This is considerable as we reimbursed about £750 of travel costs to those volunteers who submitted claims. The food and other donations used in the 315 food parcels we delivered are also uncoded.

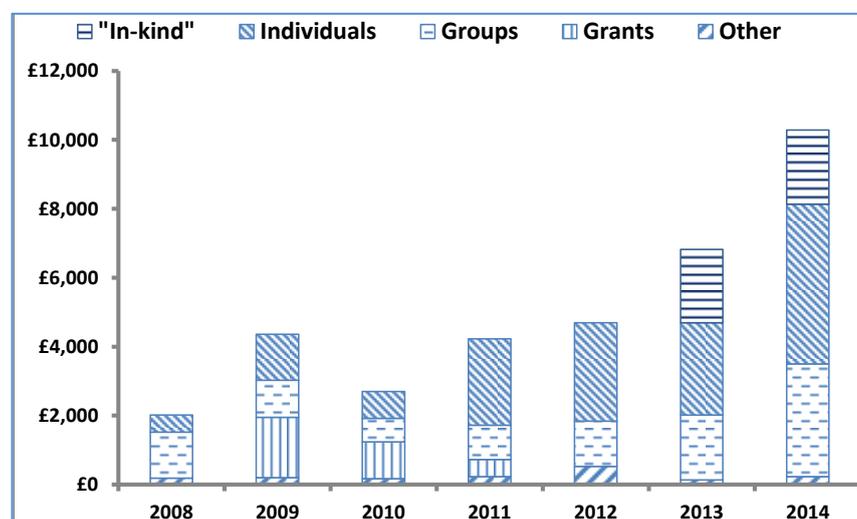


Chart 1: Income 2008-14

'Refugees' and asylum seekers rarely receive positive press coverage, and in this austere economic climate we are very grateful for the generous support we have received, which includes food and other supplies collected through New Hope and the YMCA. We look forward to your support in 2015; if you are

able, please consider supporting us through a monthly or quarterly standing order.

Expenditure

In 2014 our spending has risen by close to £2,800. More than half of this was due to payments for applications and the rest was split between direct support for clients and reimbursing volunteer costs. Fortunately our income has risen by around £3,000. Thus we expect to end 2014 with a small surplus of £134 (our first surplus since 2009) and a balance carried forward that will cover just less than three months spending.

As we seek to provide care that meets our clients' needs effectively and efficiently, breaking-even in 2015 will be challenging as we face three important cost-pressures.

1. Having successfully established a Drop-in service we intend through registration with the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner to expand our service to include advice on defined immigration-related matters as such matters are a key concern for our clients. If successful, we will have to support the training of least two and maybe four volunteers. Costs for a 2-day level 1 course are in the £350-450 range.
2. As already noted in previous reports, there are substantial fees for Leave to Remain and similar applications. In 2014 we contributed to four applications and with associated costs spent £2,400. As many applicants are receiving restricted (formerly discretionary) leave to remain that has to be renewed, application fees have become a recurring cost. (We have also received requests for help with legal costs, as immigration cases no longer receive legal aid.)
3. The project originally focused its services on refugees without leave to remain, as they had No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) until leave to remain was granted. Now clients remain as NRPF cases after Restricted Leave to Remain is granted, and they continue to look to us for support.

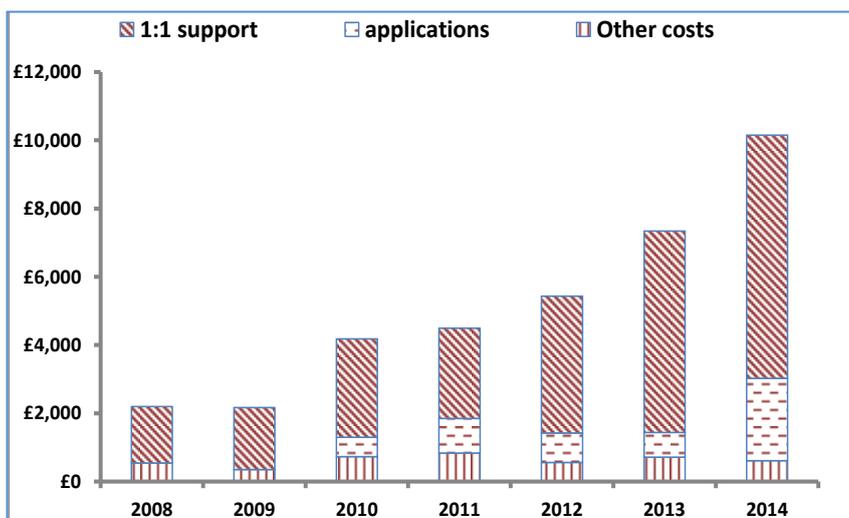


Chart 2: Expenditure 2008-2014

The Future

We expect the following major changes to the Partnership in 2015:

- We will claim Gift Aid on cash donations once we become a charity, which will help to improve our financial position. This claim will require more administration, but in fact WTRRP has been run 'as a full charity' for some years, so not a big change.
- We plan to increase the professional support and representation provided by specialist immigration solicitors Lawrence Lupin. We also have access to legal help via the Red Cross as well as a good relationship with solicitors Duncan Lewis, who are the largest legal aid immigration practice in the UK. Duncan Lewis Community Care and Family Law teams based in Harrow were particularly helpful in lobbying Social Services and generating a non-molestation order to protect one of our clients in 2014.
- We intend to train a few volunteers and/or bring into the organisation volunteer(s) who have appropriate legal training to OISC Level 1 - that is, the basic adviser level trained and licenced by the Home Office's Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner. Level 1 allows us to help with some of the basic applications, and raises our general level of legal competence. We will still need

our excellent lawyers who can still provide free legal advice assistance through Legal Aid funding.

- We continue to focus on our commitment to our amazing Volunteers – the newly published Volunteer Handbook covers our policies, procedures and responsibilities for the recruitment, induction through to the continuous well-being of our volunteers. It is our intention in 2015 to set up on-line specific WTRRP safeguarding training as well as provide easy access to e-learning etc. to enable our volunteers to feel confident. A new pairing system to ensure boundaries with clients are maintained and that everyone receives the same level of help will be introduced in 2015. This buddying system will also provide an extra level of care and support in stressful situations.
- We are constantly looking to expand our pool of volunteers for existing as well as new posts. As such we could then take an active part in Refugee week 2015 (15th – 21st June) which is an annual event celebrating the contribution of ‘Refugees’ to the UK and to take a more positive look at Asylum. A fundraiser is specifically needed to proactively pursue community grants as well as seek out other money raising options to fund fees to the UKBA and other agencies for our deserving clients. A dedicated volunteer for managing training is also a priority.
- We intend to expand our well managed ESOL courses to the development of vocational skills such as PC training to provide more opportunities for our clients to gain skills which will increase their chances of finding gainful employment and achieving self-reliance.

The hostile environment for ‘refugees’ continues, exemplified by the UK Government’s refusal to support planned search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean. The crippling low level of support given to asylum-seekers in the UK remains unchanged. Our organisation will need to work even harder to help and support these vulnerable people.

In the meantime, we’re committed to supporting refugees and we’ll continue to help them in every way we can. We are grateful for support you have given us so far.

Please continue supporting WTRRP with your donations of time, food or money. Our greatest need is for more volunteers to befriend our clients, or to help us in other ways – please do consider if you can help us in this way. If you are able to make either a single or regular donation to the Watford and Three Rivers Refugee Partnership, please use the bank details on the back page of this report, or visit our website www.wtrrp.org.uk/donations/ or contact us on Watford (01923)252434.