

WATFORD AND THREE RIVERS REFUGEE PARTNERSHIP

Annual Report for 2016

Still growing – and still needed

Do you know which country in Europe received most asylum applications, per head of its population, in 2016? Not unexpectedly from the news, Germany. But any idea about the next in rank? Read on and find out – and if you knew or guessed correctly, congratulations.

The UK's share of asylum seekers and others who have left their homes involuntarily is very small, but as a country we do make it quite hard for people who may have spent everything they have getting away from a place where they were in danger. With costs totalling over £2,500 – Home Office application fees, a 'contribution to likely NHS usage' (around £600) and solicitors' costs – the hurdle is high indeed. One of our significant roles is to provide some of this money, to make a significant difference.

The UK is also a hard place to get to understand, if you come from somewhere with a different culture in society and bureaucracy, and our many Befrienders are there to help navigate the tricky waters of Social Services, schools, housing and just generally living. This activity, and our teaching of English and other skills, is growing.

While your application for Leave to Remain in this country proceeds (and it's not quick), you're not allowed to earn any money, and so finding food to put on the table is a problem. You, our supporters, gave us nearly 10 tons of foodstuffs, which all went to our clients.

To give life a slightly brighter side, WTRRP's volunteers put on four parties for parents and children alike, as well as collecting and distributing a huge quantity of Christmas presents – six Father Christmases set out the weekend before, to give a bit extra to a lot of kids.

This year we say good-bye to **John Shaw**, who has worked closely with caseworkers and on our committee for more than ten years – and for the last five years running our regular case review sessions. John, you have our heartfelt thanks and you will be missed by us all. **Guy Buckler** has coordinated the Drop-In centre and its activities since its inception, but other commitments have made it necessary for him to step down from this role: our thanks to you.



WTRRP still needs you! Our workload continues to increase, and we need more volunteers, donations and money. Our most urgent needs continue to be for more Case Workers and Befrienders, as well as a gamut of other roles. For more details, please read on, or contact us at info@wtrrp.org.uk

Annual General Meeting

We look forward to seeing you at our **2017 AGM on Monday 20 February at 7.30 p.m.** at the Nascot Recital Hall (next to the Junior School), Nascot Wood Road, Watford WD17 4YS.

Our guest speaker will be **Dame Helen Hyde**, who until last year was head of Watford Grammar School for Girls. Helen now leads Refugees to Recovery, a local charity that specialises in activities including educating young people about refuge and asylum matters.

She is also president of Freedom and Autonomy for Schools – National Association and a fellow in Holocaust studies at the Imperial War Museum.

Please come and join us, and hear from one of the refugee experts in our area.

How we have helped our clients

The table summarises the number of cases, and how many were involved over the last few years

Over the year	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Total caseload	74	79	55	40	29	28	10
Number of adults	107	82	77	47	33	35	13
Number of children	105	98	69	42	33	37	13
Adult-only cases	41	29	15	16	9	7	3

Number of Clients 2010-2016

During this past year we have had a considerable number of new clients: 52 parents (of which 22 were single adults) with their 50 children. At the time of writing we are actively assisting a total of 107 parents (of which 41 single adults) with their 105 children..

Drop-In Centre – life at the front end (Paul Tucker & Ruth Jinadasa)

The Drop-In Centre at St John's Church, Sutton Road, Watford is often the first point of contact a refugee will have with the Partnership. Coming from traumatic backgrounds and sometimes having to leave their home country quickly, they come seeking advice and support. The Drop-In, open on Tuesday and Friday mornings (11.00 to 1.00pm), is first and foremost a place of welcome and a listening ear. From this first contact the team of volunteers judge how best they can be helped, and either take immediate follow-up action or refer them to others within the Partnership to provide more detailed and longer term support. The nature of help required can be very wide including finance, food, housing and legal advice and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL – more details below).

21 volunteers now share in these duties, and it is encouraging that new ones keep coming forward as they seek to help some of the most vulnerable people in our world.

On the first and third Tuesdays of each month, many of our clients come to St John's to collect their food parcels and that provides another useful regular point of contact.

During the seven-month period from 1st June to 31st December 2016, we had 119 visits by existing clients, and we welcomed 41 new ones. Principal reasons for these people coming to the Drop-In were:

- a need for food and personal items (apart from clients coming to collect their regular food parcel) 17.5%,
- a need for clothing and furniture 10%,
- seeking legal advice 17.5%,
- requiring advice about accommodation and housing problems 8%,
- in need of financial advice and urgent financial support 19%,
- enquiring about language tuition 11%,

Every Refugee has a story to tell:

Esther's story

Esther was just pregnant when we first met her at the Drop-In with 2-year-old Crystal in March 2016.

By August, 35 weeks into her second pregnancy and attending daily hospital monitoring with imminent admission for delivery, she and Crystal were sofa-surfing in Watford and with her third 'hostess' asking her to leave.

Technically she had made herself intentionally homeless by leaving her multi-occupancy house because of an abusive fellow tenant (who was eventually legally evicted), but her situation was dire.

Esther, husband Israel and Crystal were due to go to Appeal court in September. At the Solicitor's briefing the week before, Esther spoke with the solicitor's female assistant, and the story of her arrival in the UK was heard for the first time since 2007.

She had fled to the UK as a member of a visiting scout group, in order to escape Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

Esther is the youngest of six sisters. When she finished secondary schooling at age 21 (delayed for lack of money), her 41-year-old eldest sister warned her to flee as now that she had finished school she was due to be 'cut'. The sister had herself been severely traumatized by FGM and consequently acquired AIDS, and had lost her three children and husband to the disease.

27% of females in Kenya are subject to the barbaric practice of FGM.

(Continued next page)

- looking for help with filling in official forms and with writing letters 6%,
- seeking other support and information 11%.

There is always more that we can do. Legal advice represents one of the greatest needs of our clients as the whole asylum and refugee process can be very confusing for them. We are grateful for the Red Cross in Luton for providing help in this way and we are working with other solicitors locally to improve on the assistances we can give. If you think you can help us with this, do get in touch.

Finally, a huge thank you to all our volunteers who do such a magnificent job and make a real difference to the lives of the people they meet. Also to our friends at St John's where the Drop-In takes place. We are so grateful for all their help and that they see this work as part of their service to the community.

Our Volunteers and their activities (Marie-Jo Churchill)

2016 saw a record number of new volunteers join WTRRP. We welcomed 23 new volunteers who brought their skills and energy to the Partnership, and our active volunteers now total 65. This past year was marked by even closer collaboration with other charities, churches, synagogues and voluntary organisations: as their volunteers joined forces with ours WTRRP has been able to achieve more than ever before.

Mel Southin and Shilpa Barnerjee are now heading our Social Events team. They organised 4 successful parties in 2016, offering families and children a rare day of fun and relaxation. We are extremely grateful to the Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue for laying out an unforgettable Mitzvah party in November for WTRRP's clients.

Our fundraising team has also been very active. For the first time, WTRRP had a stall in the Rickmansworth Christmas Market. Chris Persaud, Fundraising Coordinator, spearheaded a number of events. He personally took part in a fundraising walk, which he successfully completed despite a foot injury. This was indeed going the extra mile! Manju Anand entered a marathon to raise money for WTRRP, and the Tring Justice and Peace Group organised a quiz evening. The money raised will go towards helping families and individuals with the rising cost of immigration fees. We also hope to be able to contribute towards childrens' activities, which most of our families are unable to afford themselves.

Paul Tucker and Ruth Jinadasa took over from Guy Buckler as Drop-In and Deputy Drop-In Coordinators. Although unable to devote as much time to the Drop-In as before, Guy's commitment is undiminished. A big thank you to Guy for his excellent work during the past 4 years and for his continuing help and guidance. Paul and Ruth are working at developing closer links with the Red Cross in Luton and a local firm of solicitors, and hope to increase the support and advice clients are currently receiving at the Drop-In.

Sadly our Case Work Coordinator, Joy Hobbs, was diagnosed with cancer in September and is undergoing treatment. Whilst she is still doing as much as she can, I have almost lost count of the volunteers who have

Esther, now 22, fled to a paternal aunt, who was threatened with her house being torched.

She then joined the scout group and when the group was in the UK, she fled the group and heard a woman speaking her own language who took her home. There she became a domestic help and felt safe. She had no income but could ask for money to go to a party.

At a party she met Israel, also from Kenya, here on a student visa. The young couple decide to marry and the two families celebrated back home and they became traditionally married.

Now after revealing her story, an urgent appointment was made to claim asylum at Croydon. Would they realise the urgency of the situation and need to care for the unborn child? A retired midwife WTRRP volunteer wrote letters, asking that the local maternity unit contact Asylum Support. Within a week the whole family was reunited and accommodated in temporary asylum accommodation.

Harriet was born on the due date. WTRRP arranged for the family to be visited in Dulwich, to be provided with a pushchair and money for birth certificates to claim the baby's allowance, and finally for Father Christmas to visit them in Bristol on Christmas Eve!

The problem of homelessness with a risky pregnancy was resolved, Esther at last feeling secure enough to reveal how she had arrived in the UK, to someone was prepared to listen.

All the effort of late evening and Sunday afternoon consultations plus writing supportive letters, the extra mile of the WTRRP 'conscripted' volunteers in Dulwich and Bristol meant a happy Christmas and hope for this family.

stepped up to help and take on some of her work. Joy initiated most of the activities WTRRP are now doing routinely, such as befriending, case work, food distribution and parties, and she remains the heart and soul of WTRRP. We all wish her a full and speedy recovery.

The food operation is going from strength to strength under the efficient leadership of Mick and Jeanette Hayter and the support of Watford Food Bank. With John Gray, Peter Myers and Christian Anene managing the distribution team, more clients than ever before are receiving food parcels. Ensuring that food is tailored to the clients' needs, then delivered or picked up is a huge undertaking.

Our ESOL classes have also expanded and we now have 25 regular students who come to St John's Church, along with a few more receiving home tuition. Thanks to the arrival of new teacher Yvonne Zane we opened a second beginners' group in the autumn. Other volunteers are helping children with after-school work, an area which we would like to develop further in 2017.

Volunteers' training has increased considerably. Seema Agnihotri and Marie-Jo Churchill organised two successful training days at Home-Start and these will continue in 2017.

The Father Christmas deliveries were a major operation, conducted with military precision. Donations of toys, toiletries and chocolate kept flooding in throughout the months leading up to Christmas: there was a determination that no refugee or asylum seeker would be without presents this Christmas. Mo Fasanya had the humongous task of organising the packing and delivery of all the presents. I am glad to report that all Father Christmases returned safely to base!

We should not forget the volunteers who do our core work, our 22 befrienders and Case Workers and our 21 Drop-In volunteers. They share the difficult journey our clients face in trying to make a new life in the UK. Working in the background are our committee members, ensuring that everything runs smoothly. We continue to need more volunteers of all ages and life-experience to make 2017 an even better year.

We are always on the lookout for new volunteers. No previous experience is required as full training is given. However, many who do join us find that their life experience and desire to serve provides a very good starting point. Do come, you will be very welcome: you can contact us by phone on 01923 252434 or volunteers@wtrrp.co.uk.

Our specialist Case Work and its review (John Shaw)

Every two months or so, the Case Review team meets to look over the Partnership's current case-load to review the current status and action being taken on each individual case, and to see what additional action, if any, needs to be taken. The team comprises our handful of Caseworkers, who share information, raise problems, give each other mutual support, and, on occasions, just let off steam!

The meetings were set up initially – about 7 years ago – for purely pragmatic reasons. In the early days WTRRP's case-load was so small that the whole Committee was able to discuss the handful of cases involved. As our caseload increased, it became impracticable for this routine to continue, as we (the Committee) were in danger of never getting beyond the first item on our agenda item, as we rightly always took client issues first. Such was the birth of the case review team.

The issues discussed in strict confidence are many and varied. Here are some examples. Is this client about to put in an application to the Home Office for Leave to Remain? If so, will he/she be looking to us for a contribution (from 1 January 2017, we provide up to £500) toward the fee? Does anyone know someone with a Moses basket or cot to spare? Why has this client's attendance at ESOL suddenly dropped off? Would this client welcome a befriender? If so, who? Despite trying, we haven't had any contact with this client for ages, should we discharge him/her? This client needs legal advice: who could take them to the Red Cross in Luton for such advice? This client needs help with money matters (Council tax, benefits, rent arrears, NHS charges, debt more generally), who is best able to advise? This family are moving house next week, can we help them with transport or pairs of helping hands? Will you write a letter of support for this client? Who will support this client at her next Children in Need meeting? This client needs to go on the Food Parcels list. And so on.

John is standing down from our Committee and from chairing these meetings in the New Year, and we are homing in on his successor. **We are immensely grateful to John and our core Caseworkers** who have had the energy and patience to run what are invariably very long meetings – and especially for John’s Civil Service skills and experience, which were crucial in ensuring that these meetings ever ended at all!

Food, toys and essentials (Mick and Jeanette Hayter)

We have now been using the Watford Food Bank premises for over 15 months and it is proving to be very successful. Our dedicated teams pack the boxes on a Monday and then the distribution team collects and distributes them on Tuesday. This causes the least disruption to the Food Bank operations.

We are extremely grateful to all our supporters who continue to donate food and toiletries on a regular basis enabling us to provide nearly 50 food boxes each month to our clients. Currently we are giving out approximately **800kg** of food a month and we couldn’t run this level of operation without the support of the Food Bank. We owe them a real debt of gratitude, both for making up any shortfall we may have and also for the use of their premises. Their volunteers are very supportive of us for which we are grateful.

This year we had our own Harvest Appeal and again must thank all of our 25 donors – churches, schools and individuals – who really gave very generously. At one point we were nearly overwhelmed with goods, but we know from experience that everything will be used over the coming months.

We confidently look forward to the continuing support of all our donors.

Finances (Mahesh Chauhan)

The finances of the charity have moved from strength to strength with a surplus balance in the year of £5,254 and an overall bank balance of £10,003 at the end of the year. This figure is after a deduction for accruals of £1,340 (all volunteer expenses) for expenditure incurred in 2016 but paid for in the following year:

	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009
<i>Income (£)</i>	20,102	11,382	9,169	4,695	4,698	4,231	2,699	4,359
<i>Expenditure (£)</i>	14,848	9,392	8,565	5,212	5,436	4,496	4,181	2,172
Surplus / deficit (£)	5,254	1,990	604	-517	-738	-264	-1,482	2,187
Balance c/f (£)	10,003	4,749	2,759	2,155	2,672	3,409	3,673	5,155

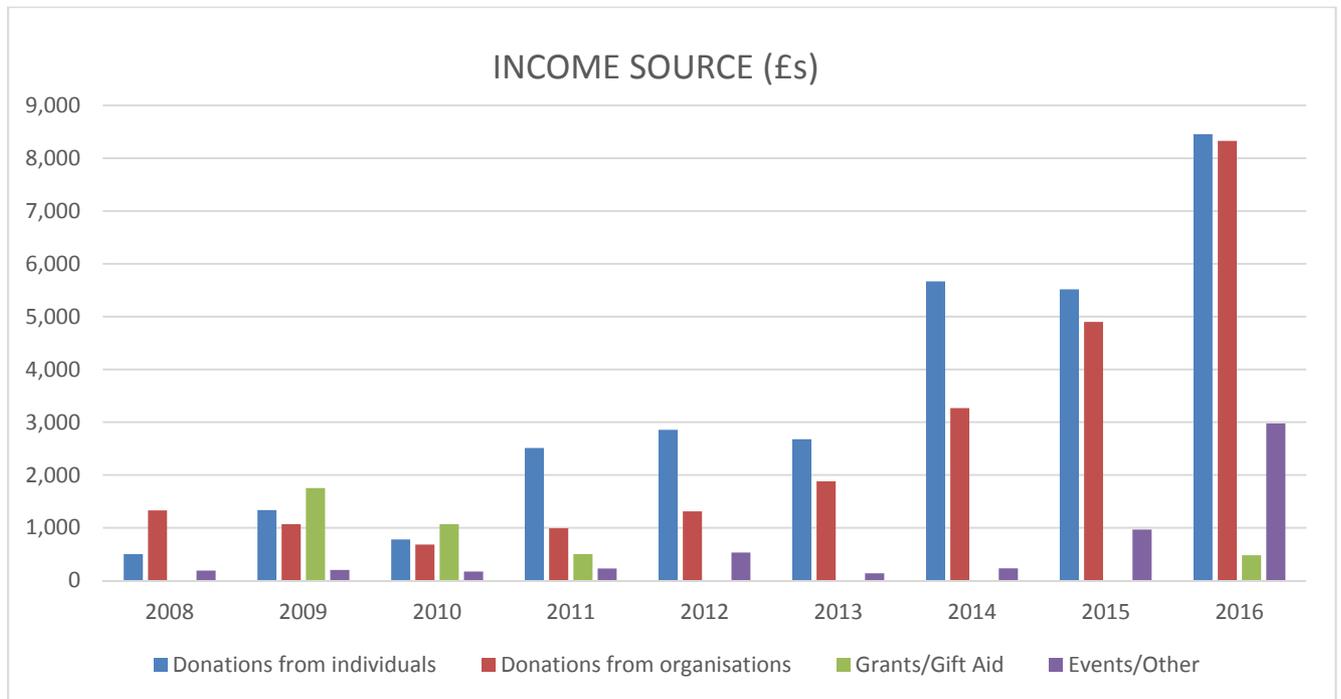
Income

The annual income continues to increase year on year with a total sum donated of £20,102, an increase of 76.6% on the previous year. This reflects the increased awareness of the plight of asylum seekers and refugees and perhaps of the charity itself.

In the year, WTRRP has claimed back £479 as Gift Aid from HMRC. The portion claimed back relates to 2015; the claim relating to 2016 has not been made yet and therefore is not included in the receipts figure shown in the table above. Furthermore, these numbers do not include as income the value of food donations received from the public. It has been recorded by the Watford Food Bank (where food donations are received and then distributed to clients) that we distributed 9,250 kg of food to WTRRP clients with an estimated value of £15,540.¹

The graph below shows the split of the income made from individuals, organisations, events and other since 2008. As usual individuals and organisations, predominantly local churches, make up the bulk of the receipts. The generosity of these two groups is remarkable and the committee wishes to thank everyone who has contributed so generously in the year.

¹ Trussel Trust, which runs the Food Banks has established and agreed this average value with tax and charity authorities.



The charity is fortunate to have as volunteers a number of talented fundraisers, and a number of events through the year have proved to be very successful. Examples include a concert held in Watford utilising the talents of some local musicians and the charity's volunteers undertaking sponsored bicycle rides and walks.

Once again we strongly encourage individuals to set up regular standing orders on a monthly or quarterly basis and to also fill out a WTRRP Gift Aid declaration form. This will enable us to claim another 25% on such donations from HMRC.

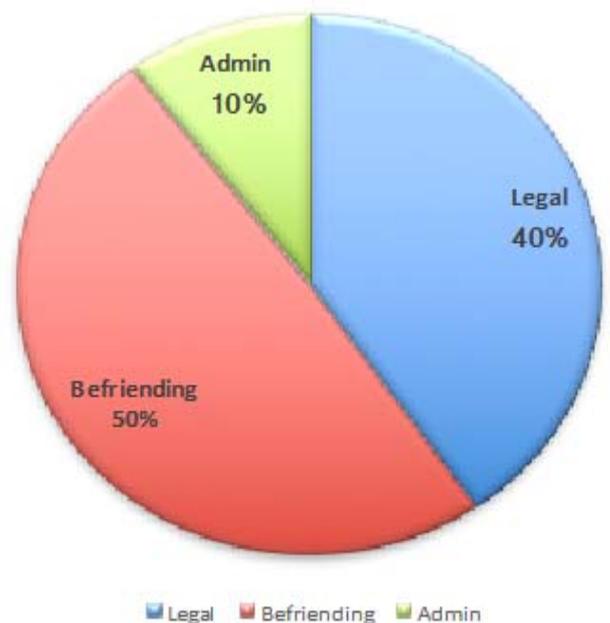
Expenditure

Total expenditure in the year was £14,848. As the chart shows the majority of the expenditure (50%) was on befriending activities for clients incurring costs for travel, telephone calls, and subsistence.

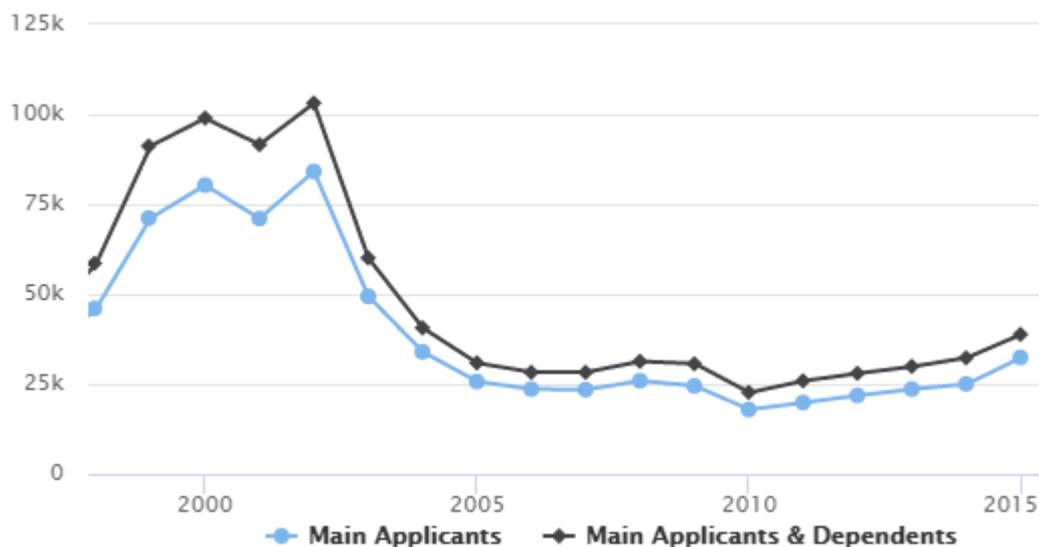
Legal costs comprise financial assistance mainly for applications for Leave to Remain in the UK, and account for 40% of the expenditure: we assisted 12 clients in this way during 2016. The committee has decided to increase our maximum level of financial support for these applications from £325 to £500 in response to various increases in fees.

Administrative costs, including insurance and postage accounted for 10% of the expenditure. The charity remains entirely run by volunteers, and does not employ any paid personnel.

At the AGM we will present detailed accounts which will have been verified by our external examiner, Philip Bond – and we are grateful for his contribution to WTRRP in this area over a number of years.



Today and the Future (Tim Whittaker)



Source: Home Office figures, via Migration Observatory at Oxford University

The graph shows how many asylum applications the UK has received over recent years: the UK's current level of applications at 36,465 (July 2015-June 2016) is about 570 per million population, 20th in Europe. Top of the Europe 'per million' league is Germany, and second – rather unexpectedly – is Malta, followed by Greece. The UK granted 38% of these applications first time around, which rises to 49% on appeal: with application fees at each stage, the hurdles for an applicant are high.

What of the future? The overall total in the graph above may fall a little, if the peace process in Syria succeeds (to say nothing of all the other countries at war), but with Watford and Three Rivers not being associated with any port or international route, it's difficult to say whether this will affect our numbers at all. There is little doubt that increasing knowledge of WTRRP from the Drop-In and other publicity has contributed to our growth, and this trend is likely to continue as our outreach increases.

WTRRP continues to be recognised as a leading, well-established and well-experienced agency working in this field in Hertfordshire.

We are fortunate to have seen one U-turn in national policy for applicants, which is that a proposed increase in appeal fees from £140 to £800 was abruptly withdrawn in October, apparently as a result of pressure from the many groups involved, and much to the relief of several of our clients who were in the middle of the appeal process.

For application fees in general, we decided to increase the amount that WTRRP would contribute to a maximum of £500, of a total cost to an average applicant of around £2,500. This is, as ever, a compromise between immediate needs and our requirement to keep some reserve to ensure that future needs are met fairly and evenly considering that the growth in our client numbers remains around the 20% level (and in some past years has been a lot higher). For some clients though, especially single-parent families, the shortfall presents significant hardship – not least because Social Services are cutting the very small benefits that some of them do get – and we will over the next year aim to offer more in some specific cases, wherever we can, thanks to your continuing financial generosity.

To add to the burden, the **repeated** need to apply continues, as today the Home Office invariably gives only a 30-month Discretionary Leave to Remain: after this time, the application process – with all its costs – has to begin again.

Please continue supporting WTRRP with your donations of time, food or money. If you are able to make either a single or regular financial 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.

Watford & Three Rivers Refugee Partnership

Standing order (or single payment) instructions

If you use online banking: Please set up your standing order or other payment and complete sections B, C and D

If you do not use online banking: please complete all sections (A, B, C and D)

Please return this form to The Treasurer, WTRRP, PO Box 2474, Watford WD18 1XT. You can also make donations by cheque, payable to Watford and Three Rivers Refugee Partnership, to the same address.

Section A

To the manager Bank plc

BANK ADDRESS.....

..... POSTCODE

Please pay to **Watford & Three Rivers Refugee Partnership**

Lloyds TSB Bank plc, Edgware Branch

P O Box 1000, BX1 1LT

Sort code **30-98-07** Account **03770168**

Section B

The sum of (figures) (words)

commencing the day of20..... and the same sum *annually/*quarterly/*monthly

until *notified / 20.....

(*delete as appropriate)

This order cancels all existing standing orders in favour of the Watford & Three Rivers Refugee Partnership

SIGNED.....DATE.....

Section C

MY ADDRESS.....

..... POSTCODE

My Account name

Sort code Account number

Section D – please complete if you are a UK taxpayer

I am a UK taxpayer and would like all my donations to Watford and Three Rivers Refugee Partnership to be Gift Aid until I notify you otherwise. I understand that the charity will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I have given.

SIGNED.....DATE.....