



WATFORD & THREE RIVERS REFUGEE PROJECT ANNUAL REPORT: 2011

WTRRP, run entirely by volunteers, continues to provide practical and emotional support to local asylum seekers, particularly those deemed to have 'failed', and refugees in the Watford and Three Rivers area. All those assisted are destitute and often desperate; and several have small children. Most of those assisted are not allowed to work or to claim State benefits and some are in fear of deportation.

WTRRP seeks to:

- Befriend them
- Give practical help (eg food, toiletries and nappies)
- Help to find accommodation
- Work with the statutory authorities and other voluntary agencies on their behalf
- Publicise their plight.

WTRRP is managed by a committee, and was chaired by Richard Kendall until the summer when he and his wife moved house to West Sussex. Tim Whittaker took over the chair thereafter. Other members of the committee are Chris Carter (treasurer), Joy Hobbs (volunteer coordinator), John Shaw, Sheila Swan (honorary secretary), and Maureen Tilbury.

WTRRP's pattern of work has continued much as in previous years, though we have increased the number of our volunteers and improved our recruitment procedures. During the year we have developed strong working relationships with the Red Cross, Catholic Worker Farm (West Hyde), a very helpful firm of solicitors in Rayners Lane, Home Start, Learning and Refugee Families (LARF), the Watford Housing Department, New Hope Trust, and a number of other local organisations.

Workload

During the year our workload increased from 10 cases early in the year to 21. Since November 2010 WTRRP has supported a total of 26 cases. Most of our referrals are lone mothers and come to us from a wide range of sources. Clients originated from 16 different (mostly African) countries. As well as practical help, our befrienders listen to our clients and help them to make sense of the confusing world which is modern Britain. So, they help clients to navigate their way through innumerable forms, and facilitate attendance at solicitor's appointments and at the offices of the Refugee Council, and the Children Schools and Families (CSF) Department of Hertfordshire County Council. In certain cases, befrienders have

accompanied clients to the London Docklands and Solihull for NASS (National Asylum Support Service) appeal hearings and on another occasion to the Further Submissions Unit in Liverpool.

Clients are referred to us from a range of agencies, including CSF, the Red Cross, Watford CVS (Centre for Voluntary Service), and Home Start. Two clients this year self-referred themselves and came to us direct.

Referrals can be made direct to our 'smart' telephone number 01923 252434.

Volunteers

Our group of volunteers continues to grow and has now reached 20 in number. As WTRRP is run entirely by volunteers, this is very encouraging news. That said, there is a constant need for more volunteers, particularly, but not exclusively, for befriending and assessment visits. But we also need volunteers for other tasks such as marketing and publicity (including a website), work at our store, and organising parties and other events. Working with refugees and for WTRRP is extremely rewarding, as the Befriender's Story (opposite) shows. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Joy Hobbs on 01923 228171.

We work to our clients' agendas and seek to meet their needs and to enhance their self-confidence by providing non-judgemental, compassionate and caring support. Our clients recognise our independent status and feel free to engage with our volunteers without the fear with which they sometimes view 'the authorities'.

Training

Training in communication skills is essential for both volunteers and committee members. We address this training need as an ongoing process by mutual sharing, role playing, and by including training as a part of our volunteer meetings. This year we have covered barriers to effective communication and how to overcome them; listening (a skill which requires fierce concentration and a genuine wish to hear the other's point of view without interruption or loss of eye contact); and confidentiality, which of all our volunteers are required to observe and which is one of the topics discussed with potential volunteers at their initial interview. We also use training provided by our local CVS offices, including an all-day course on Volunteers and the Law, which identified a number of issues for us to consider.

A Befriender's Story

Although it would have been good to include a contribution from one of our clients in our Annual Report, they are naturally rather nervous about such exposure. One of our befrienders, however, has given us this account of her experience (we have changed our clients' names to protect their confidentiality).

'I felt very privileged to be introduced to Maria by WTRRP. She had a new baby (Ozan) and my role was to support her and the baby. Maria is such a lovely person and very appreciative of any support she receives. She and the baby were living in a room in a flat in Watford with a difficult landlord and where the accommodation would be unsuitable once Ozan started to crawl.

I visited once a fortnight with a food parcel and did what I could to provide support. Maria is determined to provide a good life for herself and her baby and to do what she can to improve her qualifications for the time when the baby is older and she (Maria) is able to go back to work. Each time I visited, putting my experience as a grandmother to good use, I looked after Ozan for a couple of hours to give Maria a break and some personal space. I also accompanied Maria on a couple of hospital visits so that she could concentrate on her own needs without having to worry about the baby.

After a few months Maria found herself a new place to live in East London where her partner had relatives who were able and happy to support her. The move happened very quickly, so after a few months I went down to visit them in their new home. Ozan and I spent some time in the local park and then the three of us went to see a playgroup and to meet the health visitor; all to help Maria on the road to finding support and new friends.

I feel I was very privileged to have met Maria and Ozan and they will always have a special place in my heart.'



The store

Our store is managed with great efficiency by Tony Hobbs and is situated in a lock-up garage, rented from Three Rivers District Council, in Abbots Langley. From there Tony has distributed over 80 food and other types of parcel during the year. The items which our clients particularly welcome include: rice, pasta, breakfast cereals, coffee, tea bags, sugar, and tinned goods, especially meat, fish, fruit and vegetables. There is also a heavy demand for washing powder, washing-up liquid, and nappies of all sizes (especially the smaller sized ones). We also have occasional demands for household goods and furniture (for example mattresses, cookers and fridges), as in the past year some of our clients have moved to new homes. As we don't have room to store such items, we appeal for them locally ad hoc.

By September our store's reserves were seriously depleted and we had little more than baked beans and soup to offer. But the receipt of Harvest goods from ten local churches came to our rescue and will

The children were thrilled with their party bags and everyone dug into the array of Indian, Albanian, and Ghanaian food

keep us going for some months, but will, we fear, run out well before the next Harvest season.

Unfortunately, the store suffers from damp and, as a result, we cannot accept donations of clothes, bedding and similar materials, which would simply rot. Rather, we pass on such donations to Home Start which is happy to accept them for sale in their Watford shop.

On a particularly encouraging note, one of our clients has started giving Tony a hand with the collection and unloading of goods – help which Tony warmly appreciates and finds most valuable.

Parties

Thanks to the generosity and hard work of Joy Hobbs, we have held three parties for our clients and volunteers during the year: one in February at St Luke's Church, Watford in February (fully reported in our autumn newsletter); a garden party at the Hobbs' home in the summer and, most recently, a great get-together at Cheslyn Gardens, Watford in October. It was attended by a grand total of 21 adults and 17 children. The day was fine, although the autumn

Our get-together at Cheslyn Gardens in October





heatwave was over that day (in other words, it was a bit chilly), but the children got warm chasing about playing games. The mothers preferred to sit around and chat ('the best part', said one Mum) and were able to retire indoors if the chill was too much for them. The children were thrilled with their party bags and everyone dug into the array of Indian, Albanian, and Ghanaian food (as well as more conventional sandwiches and cakes) with gusto. In short, another great occasion! And to round the year off, with tickets donated by a generous supporter, arrangements are in hand to take a party of 24 clients, children and volunteers to the Watford Palace pantomime ('Jack and the Beanstalk') at Christmas-time.

Governance

The committee meets bimonthly. We review our caseload, consider any special calls on our money, and whether our finances are in reasonable shape. And a whole lot more! We try to limit our meetings to no more than two hours, but are not always successful. During the year, as announced in our autumn newsletter, Tim Whittaker took over from Richard Kendall as our chairman. In that newsletter we remarked on Richard's sterling work as our chairman

and expressed our grateful thanks to him for all his hard work on our behalf. Tim regards Richard as a 'hard act to follow'.

One key decision we made during the year was to invite Fran Deschampsneufs to act as our Deputy volunteer coordinator, working with Joy Hobbs to give more support to our befrienders. Happily, Fran accepted the offer and this new arrangement is working well.

We held a successful AGM in February and Christine Knight of the Southampton and Winchester Visitors Group was our excellent guest speaker. Her remarks were recorded in our autumn newsletter and so are not repeated here. Please note that our next AGM will be held once again at the **Friends Meeting House in Watford on the evening of Monday 20 February 2012**, when our guest speaker will be the Reverend Professor Nicholas Sagovsky, until recently canon theologian at Westminster Abbey. He was a commissioner on the Independent Asylum Commission which published its recommendations for the reform of the UK asylum system in 2008. At a more popular level, he is best known for accompanying 'Saint Nicholas' to present gifts to the

children at the Yarl's Wood Detention Centre in the run-up to Christmas 2010. He was denied admission and the headlines the following day told the story. He will take Refugee Rights and Asylum Wrongs as his topic at our meeting in February. It promises to be a lively evening.

Publicity

We are fortunate to have an honorary secretary who is a professional technical editor and designer and you will, we trust, have noticed that the quality of our newsletters (complete with our striking logo) and of this report reflect Sheila's expertise in this area. Although these publications look and feel shiny and expensive, they are in fact cheaper than bulk photocopying. We are in the process of revamping our publicity leaflet and, thanks to a Locality Budget Scheme Grant of £500 from county councillor Mark Watkin, we now have funds to design and set-up our own website, without which no self-respecting charity is able to make its mark these days. The website should be up and running by our AGM in February (please come along and check that out!). We have also placed an order for two pull-up banners for use at exhibitions, talks and similar events. They will be on display at the AGM.

With the departure of Richard Kendall and the retirement of Lawrie Coe, our former honorary secretary, the number of talks given has fallen away and is an area which we need to revive. One notable event at which we were represented (by Richard and Joy) was an exhibition of pictures painted by Emily Kingston (one of our keenest supporters) at Bushey Methodist Church. This aroused a good deal of interest locally, as well as £300 for WTRRP. So, well done Bushey Methodists and thank you, Emily.

Finance

Detailed figures for 2011 will be available at the AGM in February. In the meantime, the provisional financial position, as envisaged in November 2011 before our year end, is set out below.

Thanks to generous donations from our supporters, we have been able to fund our existing activities without undue worries. Our income for 2011 is expected to be around £3100. This is a healthy figure, 16% higher than in 2010, especially as 2010 marked the end of a three-year grant worth £1000 a year. We are very grateful to those supporters who have set up standing orders, as these have given us greater confidence about our future income than we had before.

Watford & Three Rivers Refugee Project

What do we do?

- Befriend asylum seekers and refugees (our clients)
- Give practical help – food, toiletries, nappies etc
- Help in finding accommodation
- Work with the statutory authorities on our client's behalf
- Publicise the plight of our clients

What can you do to help?

- Become a volunteer, befriend and offer practical support
- Donate canned/dried food, toiletries, nappies and other basic household items
- Donations, large or small, to support our work (donations to WTRRP treasurer, 23 Kingsfield Road, Watford WD19 4PP, 01923 460508)



If you can help, or if you need to refer a client please contact **01923 775219**.



Our expenditure in 2011 is expected to be around £3700, which compares to £4200 in 2010 (a high year) and £2200 in 2009 (a comparatively modest year). In addition, we expect to spend nearly £600 from designated funds (funds previously allocated but not yet spent).

Our projected deficit for the year is £500; however, our balance carried forward should be around £3200. As this figure is equivalent to about a year's spending, we are confident that we will be able to continue our work in 2012 and meet what are likely to be expanding needs. To this end, the committee will be

reviewing our activities and the level of support we provide to make sure that we are making effective use of our income to fulfil our charitable objectives.

Thanks

There are so many people to thank, that it would be invidious to name them individually. But they know who they are, whether clients, volunteers, private individuals, other agencies, churches, or members of the statutory authorities; indeed, anyone who has supported the work of WTRRP during the year in any way (time, care, concern, money, goods, transport). Without this support, we could not continue. Thank you (and please keep it up!).

WTTRP is grateful for donations to support asylum seekers and refugees in the Watford and Three Rivers area. Donations, large or small, are welcome but regular standing

order donations are particularly welcome. Please follow the instructions below if you would like to contribute in this way.

Watford & Three Rivers Refugee Project Standing Order Instructions

If you use online banking: Please set up your standing order and complete sections B and C

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

Return this form to WTTRP, c/o Chris Carter, 23 Kingsfield Rd, Watford WD19 4PP

Section A

To the manager.....Bank plc

ADDRESS.....

.....POSTCODE.....

Please pay to Watford & Three Rivers Refugee Project at:

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 on theday of20..... and a like 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 Project

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

Section C

ADDRESS.....

.....POSTCODE.....

Account name.....

Sort code.....Account number.....