

WATFORD AND THREE RIVERS REFUGEE PROJECT: 2012 REPORT

In 2012 the Project increased significantly the number of refugees and asylum seekers whom it supported in the Watford and Three Rivers areas, our befrienders and other volunteers helping a total of 34 (and their families). This meant practical help with food and toiletry parcels and small cash payments – as those without Leave to Remain are not permitted to work. Our befrienders provided emotional support too, and we held four events where our clients were able to meet each other and enjoy themselves.

During 2012 we increased and improved our services:

- We started a drop-in centre in the centre of Watford, twice a week,
- We have started English classes,
- We are undertaking more intensive 'casework'. This typically means supporting clients in their dealings with the UK Borders Agency, whose assessment processes can be protracted and expensive.
- We distributed food and other essentials of a value of over £4,000

We expect 2013 to be a challenging year as we continue to grow, expecting more clients as people discover us through our website and the drop-in centre. With more cases and more requests for contributions towards the large fees charged by the UK Borders Agency, our costs are rising. At the same time, public funds have ceased to be available in what is becoming an age of austerity. **We are grateful for your generous and loyal support in time and money to date, and we hope that this will continue and grow.**

Referrals can be made by phone (01923) 252434, by email to info@wtrrp.org.uk, or through our website <http://www.wtrrp.org.uk/>

Annual general meeting

We look forward to seeing you at our 2013 AGM on Wednesday 20 February at 7.30 p.m. at the Friends Meeting House, 150, Church Road, Watford WD17 4QB. Our host will be Jonathan Ellis, the British Red Cross's Head of Policy – as a change from the usual AGM format Jonathan will interview clients, volunteers and committee members and also give a talk about some of the broader issues that affect our work. And there will be tea, coffee and cakes.

If you want to know more about the Project, please email our chair tim@wtrrp.org.uk.

How we help our clients

The number of current cases has risen steadily since 2010, as the table shows. We expect this to continue, especially as our profile will rise following the opening of our drop-in service. The plights from which our clients are fleeing are diverse: they include instances of domestic servitude and female genital mutilation, stories that sometimes creep into our newspapers, alongside more typical cases of political and other oppression.

Caseload 2010-2012	2012	2011	2010
Cases at year end	24	16	10
<i>containing</i> adults	27	20	13
children	24	19	13

Helping individuals

This year we have done a great deal more 'casework' – which means supporting clients in their dealings with statutory agencies. It is more intensive than befriending and asks for a different level of commitment from our volunteers. For example, volunteers have accompanied our clients to tribunal hearings in places as far afield as Solihull and Liverpool, as well as Heathrow and Croydon.

Most casework involves the UK Borders Agency (UKBA) and is expensive as from July 2012 registering an Application for Leave To Remain costs £716 plus £358 for each child. We cannot pay the entire fee, but we made large contributions for four clients. This is in addition to providing help by driving or by paying train fares.

Outside casework, in their befriending our volunteers go far beyond the obvious visiting, caring and delivering food parcels. See the box opposite for some examples from this year.

The work of our volunteers is co-ordinated by Joy Hobbs. To ensure that we do our best for all our clients and that we work alongside other agencies like the Red Cross and local family centres, John Shaw continues to lead bi-monthly review meetings that we established in 2011.

Parties and entertainment

The parties in February (St Luke's Church), June (Garden Party) and September (Cheslyn Gardens) complement our befriending work, by giving our clients and their children time to meet each other, the other volunteers and, in June, our supporters. And, thanks to an anonymous gift we took 25 children and parents to the Pantomime at Watford's Palace Theatre. All the events were enjoyable and well supported, for example 30 adults and 30 children attended Cheslyn Gardens.

Examples of services provided by our volunteers in 2012

- Acting as 'birth partner' to a single mother.
- Helping clients to move home.
- Trips to family and other centres for free clothing, books, and toys.
- Undertaking repairs from cots to washing machines
- Helping with budgeting and money problems.
- Attending nationality, baptism and other ceremonies.
- Contacting the police over the abuse of clients.

Our Volunteers

We currently have 27 volunteers, some of whom are former clients. This is 11 more than in December 2011 and has been crucial in enabling us to respond to our rising caseload. Our volunteers regularly go the extra mile in helping our clients: for example together with her client a volunteer organised a Turkish afternoon to raise money for a UKBA application.

Volunteer numbers 2010-2012	2012	2011	2010
Volunteers at year end	27	16	15

In 2012 we ran three evening sessions to support our volunteers. These covered some training in both standard issues like confidentiality and cultural sensitivity and those specific to us such as our drop-in service (which may well become the focus for volunteer interviews and training).

We still need more volunteers as we think there will be more calls for help in 2013. We would love you to join us, so if you're interested please phone Joy Hobbs on 01923 228 171 for a chat.

Looking to the Future - New Initiatives

In March and May 2012 the committee, with help from our counterpart group in Bedford, BRASS, considered how we should develop our services in the next few years. From these meetings have come our new initiatives of a drop-in service and ESOL lessons.

The Drop-In Centre

In November we opened a drop-in service in the hall of St John's Church, Sutton Road. It is an ideal location, being about five minutes' walk from Watford High Street and Watford Junction. (Hitherto Joy's house had been a de-facto drop-in centre for our clients – this is a great improvement!). We are very grateful to St. John's for their enthusiastic support.

The service, coordinated by Guy Buckler, is open between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. on Tuesdays and Fridays. Each session requires two volunteers and so far we have about a dozen on the rota. To avoid overburdening them we need more volunteers – if you are interested please phone Guy on 01923 269 975.

We think it will take some time for news of the service to spread on the grapevine, but we are helping this process by distributing publicity material. We think it probable that some of our existing clients will come to the centre, if only for a chat and a cup of tea. We saw our first client on the day the centre opened.

ESOL Classes

We have launched a pilot ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) programme, led by Andrea Hudson and Hilary Evans, two very experienced ESOL teachers. They are meeting in a client's home on a weekday morning and they intend to move the class to the drop-in centre.

Behind the Scenes

Like all charities we have to do some admin and other unseen work. Some of this has been mentioned above, for example volunteer evenings, and some, like interviewing new volunteers and our store for food and other donations, are implicit to items mentioned above.

The Store

In 2012 we have distributed over 170 food parcels, double the 80 in 2011. Reflecting the increased calls for our help, this is also a tribute to our volunteers Jeanette and Mick Hayter who have been our storekeepers since May, following the sad deaths of Tony Hobbs in December 2011 and his assistant Humphrey Chemabus in 2012.

We are very grateful for your donations. 14 schools and churches supported us with their Harvest festivals, while a number of churches support us throughout the year. We estimate that these donations-in-kind have been worth over £4,000, but they are worth considerably more than this to our clients because they are forbidden by law from earning anything.

Finance

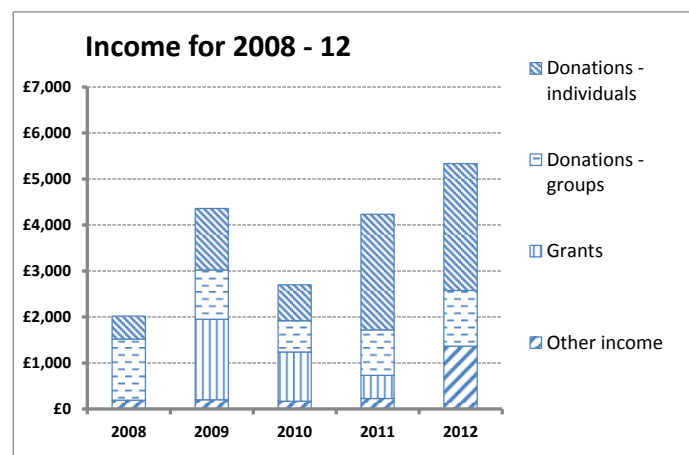
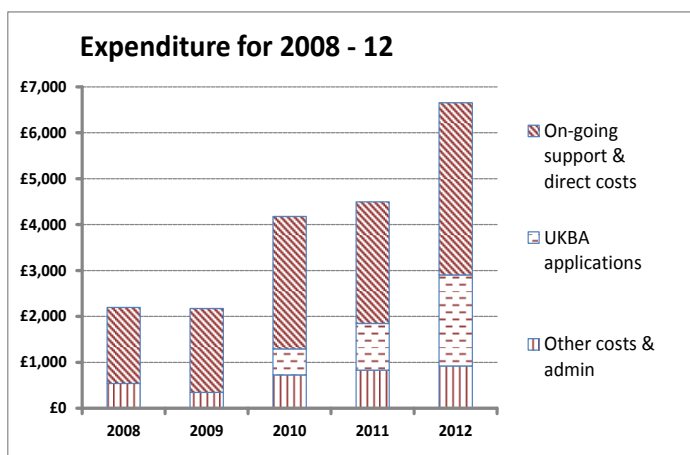
We have funded our activities throughout 2012 with few restrictions thanks to generous (and often unprompted) support, but our reserves now (December 2012) will cover less than four months spending, compared to nine months in 2011 and 16 months in 2008. The table and charts show the reason – the Project's expenditure grew faster than its income.

	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008
Income (£)	5,337	4,231	2,699	4,359	2,019
Expenditure (£)	6,652	4,496	4,181	2,172	2,199
Surplus / deficit for year	-1,319	-264	-1,482	2,187	-180
Balance carried forward (£)	2,094	3,409	3,673	5,155	2,968

Foodstuffs that we need

The highest demand items are cereals, rice, pasta sauce, pulses, tinned tomatoes, tuna, and meat and tins of a 'complete breakfast'. Soup and pasta are less popular.

Our website will be updated regularly to show current urgent needs and surpluses.



Note: 2012 figures are provisional on the preparation of the end of year accounts.

Income

- Our income has risen to around £5,000 a year and we no longer have access to any grants from the public purse to meet our costs.
- Donations from individuals now account for half our income, largely by standing orders. As they give us some assurance about future income, we would like more people to support us in this way.
- Our 2012 income was buoyed up by a single large and probably one-off donation.
- Our real income for 2012 was about £4,200 after allowing for £670 for a 2011 UKBA application that did not proceed and £430 expenditure that was subsequently reimbursed.

Expenditure

- Our direct spending on clients has risen primarily as we are helping more people, but our core spending has changed little.

- Much of one-to-one support is necessarily in the form of cash because asylum seekers are not allowed to work.
- Support for UKBA applications can be very expensive, but as Leave to Remain is a key concern for our clients, it is a core function and there will be more requests for help in 2013.

In conclusion

Over the past three or so years the Project has grown steadily and the number of people we are helping has doubled and you have helped us to make this sustainable by volunteering your time, money and goods. We have accompanied this by improving our backroom systems.

Our steady growth has included new initiatives of a drop-in service and ESOL classes. Sustaining them in 2013 will be challenging because they are different from the services that we have provided to date. By raising our profile through the drop-in service, we may see a yet larger increase in our workload than we have experienced to date.

We are grateful for the loyal and frequently unprompted support in time, money, goods and general interest that you have given us so far. We ask that you will continue this and maybe consider doing a bit more, whether in time, kind, or money.

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)

In either case please return this form to Chris Carter, 23 Kingsfield Rd, Watford WD19 4PP

Section A

To the manager..... Bank plc

BANK 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

MY ADDRESS.....

.....POSTCODE.....

My Account name.....

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