



RESTORE

***Birmingham Churches Together Supporting Refugees
& People Seeking Sanctuary from persecution***



December 2011

Dear Friends

Greetings from Restore!

Helping refugees into work - Open Meeting, 3 November: Restore has supported refugees and asylum seekers for over 12 years and recognises that during that time the needs of those with whom we work have changed. Five years ago the majority of people known to Restore were asylum seekers still waiting for decisions from the Home Office. Now about 50% of the people we know have refugee status or Indefinite Leave to Remain. With permission to stay comes permission to work. We have also observed that it is very difficult in the current economic climate for refugees to find work.

Restore wants to help – if we can – but we do not want to duplicate what others are already doing. That was the backdrop for our pilot event on 3 November, which focused on improving interview skills. We are grateful to new volunteer Sue Bains, who is an Human Resources professional, for her advice and input during the evening. Farhana Darwich from the West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership also gave valuable input on the services that refugees should be able to access from Jobcentre Plus. Over 30 refugees and volunteers joined us and the written feedback we received was for ‘more please!’

The good news is that Restore has just been given a European Social Fund (ESF) grant for a year to help us develop this work further. (So you will see the ESF logo at the foot of this communication – it is one of the conditions of the funding contract!) The funding is to run similar events and offer befriending/mentoring for those with leave to remain, who are looking for work. This is a significant new development for Restore and we will need the support of our volunteer network to help with activities at training events and to befriend in new ways. But please be assured, we will also be supporting the other 50% of our client group who are still seeking sanctuary or who have been refused and are destitute.

Launch meeting of our project ‘Equipping refugees for work’ – Monday, 19 December: We would be delighted if you could join us on 19 December from 7.15pm – 9.30pm at St George’s Community Hub to mark the launch of this new strand of work. Sue Bains will assist us again in facilitating a needs analysis identifying what skills and consequent training are required to enhance people’s ability to get employment. Volunteers interested in supporting refugees as mentors are welcome to come and learn more and support the interactive sessions of the evening. We will also have a mince pie or two to mark the festive season!

‘Asylum: human tragedy, humane response’ – 11 October: This joint event of Amnesty International (AI) and Restore held at Wragge & Co, on Colmore Row, on 11 October was attended by over 120 people. Ralph Brauholtz of the Wythall Amnesty International group deserves a special word of thanks for all the work he put into promoting the event and helping make it a success. It was a valuable opportunity to raise the issue of destitution, which is hidden from so many, and to encourage a response. Further information including a fact-sheet and suggestions for action will be circulated in due course, both to those who attended the meeting and to our Restore and AI networks. We are heartened by the wish of West Midlands AI groups to take a proposal to next year’s Amnesty International UK AGM to commit more resources to a campaign for better treatment for asylum seekers in the UK.

Training & befriending: We had good attendance at our autumn courses with 40 people joining us to find out about asylum issues and Restore. So far 8 people have applied to befriend. We will be running our next course on Thursday evenings in January and February, hosted by the Near Neighbours team in Sparkhill. **Please would you seek to publicise this training with the attached flyer.**

Holiday Programme for families: Families with older children joined us for a trip to the Thinktank in the October half-term and enjoyed the planetarium, an explosive science display, an animal handling session, as well as all the exhibits. The next event for families with younger children will be the **party at St John's Church, Harborne, on Saturday 21 January 2012 from 12.30 – 3.30pm.** This will include a mix of craft, games, party food and our annual visit from Wolly the Clown. Space is limited, so please book places for the family you befriend by contacting the office - we can guarantee they will have a great afternoon!

Activities for men and women: Many of those attending our activities are asylum seekers, as refugees are often busy on courses or seeking employment. In recent months the men's group has seen an influx of new members from Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia. Some are very new to Birmingham, which gives the opportunity to help orientate them early in their time in our city. A highlight this autumn was a trip for men and women to the Malvern Hills at the invitation of the Amnesty International group there. We had a delicious meal at Regents Theological College, then enjoyed climbing to the Beacon in glorious sunshine. Some participants have said it was the best trip they have been on with Restore! We are hugely grateful to our new friends in Malvern for their welcome to us.

Funding for Restore: Although we have received the ESF money, valuable grants from the Barrow Cadbury Trust and Farm Street Friends Hall Trust, AND some generous donations in the past few weeks, Restore will still be in deficit and using up more of our reserves to balance the books in 2011. If you know of any local charitable trusts or other possible sources of income to keep us going in 2012, please contact Shari.

Christmas concert for Human Rights: Amnesty International and Freedom from Torture's fundraising Christmas concert is taking place once again - on Saturday, 17 December, 11am – 1.30pm at Birmingham (Anglican) Cathedral on Colmore Row. Performances include a children's gospel choir and the Quinborne Choir. Kate Allen, the Director of Amnesty International, will address the audience. Tickets at £5 are available through the Restore office.

As the year comes to an end, we thank you for your support during 2011 – it really is much appreciated.

Wishing you a joyful Christmas and all the best for the New Year!

Shari, Jeremy, Jess and Geraldine

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