



Restore

a project of Birmingham Churches Together
supporting refugees and
people seeking sanctuary from persecution

Annual Report 2014



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Charity Number 243931

Report of the Chair of the Management Committee

There is no such thing as 'an illegal asylum seeker'.

The 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the status of refugees - to which the British Government is a signatory - makes it clear that someone genuinely fearing persecution in their own country has a right to flee and seek the protection of another government.

Of course governments would be foolish not to have a process to ensure that people seeking asylum do indeed have a genuine claim. But sadly it is the case that governments, including our own, often zealously go beyond the reasonable and proportionate vetting of asylum cases. Too often governments can deliberately engineer their processes so as to make them overly complex, oppressive and inflexible in order to satisfy a political desire to avoid Treaty obligations; or even (astonishingly) politicians can entertain the fond belief that red tape and bureaucracy will deter terrified and distraught people as they flee war and terror to save their lives and those of their families.

The media can often portray very stereotypical ideas of refugees and asylum seekers, and to their shame journalists will often, through sheer laziness or in pursuit of their own political agendas, deliberately conflate those who are escaping a very real threat of violence and persecution with those trying to illegally enter this country as economic migrants.

The experience of Restore is that despite the media clamour and misinformation, and the short-term desire of politicians to appease ill-informed prejudice, there is a genuine need for Christians to be organised so as to be able to offer a welcome to the strangers in our midst and the compassion and love they desperately need. In Restore we regularly meet people who are in dreadful situations and have suffered terribly; people who were well-established, hard-working citizens in their own countries, often highly qualified and holding responsibility in respected professions, who through tragic circumstances suddenly find themselves in a very different culture, cut-off from relatives and friends, reduced to penury and subject to regulations and restrictions that seem to be based on a premise that they are ill-educated, devious and unwelcome scroungers.

The effect of this dramatic change of circumstances in their lives can take a serious mental and physical toll. And so this is where Restore comes in. The men's, women's and family events provided by Restore staff and volunteers answer a very particular and pressing need, both practical and emotional, for people who suddenly find themselves in our country, often disorientated and feeling very isolated.

This annual report will give you some idea of the type of heart-rending cases we encounter and some of the truly inspiring and uplifting stories of the people we help.

I am humbled by the dedication shown by our permanent staff and I am moved by the care, consideration and selflessness shown by our volunteers and befrienders. I am also grateful for the work undertaken by our Management Committee who spend much of their time and effort in supporting the work of Restore. In spite of the widespread misinformation, people continue to put themselves forward to help their fellow men and women.

Finally, I'm sure I speak for all of those involved with Restore in expressing gratitude to those churches, funding bodies and individuals who so generously provide the money we desperately need to answer the demands made on us.

Thank you for taking the trouble to read this report. I promise you that you will find its content both uplifting and inspiring.

Philip Rogerson

Report of the Project Coordinator

In pursuance of Birmingham Churches Together purposes, Restore's mission is to encourage friendship and build resources to enable asylum seekers and refugees to make a valued contribution in society. Restore seeks to welcome, include and assist integration of refugees and those seeking sanctuary from persecution, particularly through befriending and social activities.

Restore's befriending scheme involves the matching of volunteers with asylum seekers to provide one-to-one support. Our social activities include a holiday programme for families and events for lone men and women. In 2014 we received 145 new referrals of asylum seekers and refugees and initiated 41 new befriending matches.

Restore continues to assist people who have been granted leave to remain to become more job-ready. Our 'Equipping Refugees for Work' training course in 2014 helped 82 participants learn more about the UK work environment and how to apply for employment.

Restore seeks to change negative attitudes and encourage a 'welcome of the stranger' by raising awareness in the host community. This is achieved through speaking engagements, training courses, participation in church services and school classes, and circulation of information. In 2014 we facilitated 3 training courses on refugee and asylum issues attended by 54 people. We were also delighted with the production of a film and design of a new website (www.restore-uk.org) able to better communicate our purpose.

Restore engages in advocacy and networking with other voluntary and statutory organisations to improve services and strengthen the participation of refugees and asylum seekers in our society. It supports the national movement of City of Sanctuary and is a key partner in Birmingham's response to destitution through the Hope Projects. Restore liaises closely with local church support groups, e.g. 'Welcome' in north-west Birmingham (which runs a drop-in providing food on a Friday) and the Solihull Churches Asylum Seekers' Support Group (which hosts a drop-in for people reporting to the Home Office's regional unit).

The staff team of Restore joins Philip, our Chair, in expressing deep appreciation to the individuals and churches who generously support Restore, both through financial contributions and in reaching out to the strangers in our midst. Please also note our thanks to the number of charitable trusts listed on page 10, which enable Restore's work to be carried out.

The following story encapsulates my experience of journeying with a long-standing refugee friend.

Paulette Mengnjo's story

"It's on me!" was Paulette's greeting when I met her at a church cafe in Birmingham early this year. I was about to challenge her offer to pay for lunch but then thought otherwise. Her African tradition requires that a first salary be broken in sharing with others ... and Paulette had just received her first pay cheque!

Paulette Mengnjo is in her early 40s and comes from southern Cameroon, West Africa. She was a successful business woman back home and engaged in politics through joining the opposition party calling for greater autonomy for the minority English speaking south. She had a son and supportive parents. Following arrests during political demonstrations she grew particularly fearful when security police called at her home. Warned that they had targeted her, she fled into the rural area and then left the country on false papers.



Arriving in the UK in September 2006 she made her way to Croydon to apply for asylum. She still speaks of her apprehension about approaching anyone in uniform and the loneliness of being in a strange country. Yet there was relief and confidence that she would be granted asylum soon. She was dispersed to a hostel in Birmingham and went forth to find a solicitor - the first on a list she had been given (as they must be the best!)

Today she talks with frustration about the lack of quality legal representation she received in her first case. She was refused asylum by the Home Office case worker following her substantive interview and the case then went to court. Her solicitor arranged for a French interpreter, who was finally instructed to step back by the Judge who recognised that Paulette was an English speaker. There was no evidence to substantiate she had been tortured as her solicitor had argued a medical report was unnecessary as the Home Office believed she had been in prison. Paulette's asylum application was rejected. The Judge determined she was not a high profile political activist and could relocate to a safe place in the Cameroon.

With no more entitlement to legal aid she paid the solicitor privately to appeal. No action was taken, however, to translate a French medical report her parents had sent from the Cameroon and she became particularly vulnerable to removal from the country as she had no 'live' case. Paulette was detained when reporting at the regional Midlands Enforcement Unit in 2007 and sent to Yarl's Wood Removal Centre. An injunction led to her release some days later and she returned to Birmingham. Homeless and without benefits (as Asylum Support had long since been terminated), she turned to the Hope Projects, a Birmingham project offering accommodation to destitute asylum seekers. She reminded me that she was accommodated by Hope Housing for 1 year and 8 months!

Further submissions were made by another solicitor in 2009 and Paulette was able to apply for Section 4 Asylum Support (accommodation and cashless support - a card which is topped up each week and can be used in supermarkets). In 2010 her fresh claim was refused and she became destitute again.

Finally in 2011 a much respected legal firm took on her case and insisted a medical report was needed. She was referred to Freedom from Torture. Friends and church people accommodated her. In April 2013 she was detained again ... and then released after 11 days (she has subsequently received compensation for unlawful detention). Finally on the 25 January 2014 Paulette was granted Refugee Status!

"Seven years and four months later!" says Paulette, with a wry smile, she won her case for asylum. I ask her what kept her going through those tough years and she answers: "Hope kept me going!" She then refers to:

- the daily communication she has with her son, who is doing well in his studies back home
- the support of agencies like Restore and Hope Projects
- the commitment of her last solicitor
- the wonderful support of her church community at Olton Baptist Church
- certain individuals who have generously provided accommodation, financial support and counselling
- her political activism in exile (with the Southern Cameroon National Council) and involvement in the organisation Right to Remain (she is currently the Chair).

Now able to access mainstream benefits, housing and having entitlement to work, Paulette rejoices in the opportunities open to her. She has a small Council flat and through the Learning Hub at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH) received training in late 2014. Her first salary cheque comes from the QEH where she began work as an Auxiliary Nurse in January this year. She calls me 'next of kin' and I threaten that she is never to get ill and cause me further concern, but I am grateful for the inspirational, courageous woman she has been in my life over the past seven years!

Shari Brown

Befriending

145 new referrals and 41 new befriending matches in 2014
84 ongoing matches at the end of 2014

Befriending remains at the heart of Restore's work. Since 1999 Restore has been linking trained volunteers to an asylum seeker or refugee to offer 1-to-1 support. One volunteer described the benefits of the service as follows: ***"Befriending is invaluable in helping asylum seekers to feel valued, loved and a part of their new community, and to give them hope and build their confidence in a situation, which can be very desperate and distressing."*** She goes on to explain how the relationship with her own befriender has developed over the past 12 months: ***"The relationship that I have with my befriender has really grown during 2014 – trust has developed between us and she now opens up a huge amount to me about her current situation and past experiences. It is extremely important for her to be able to do this as she is very isolated in the UK and through befriending she is able to feel that someone truly cares about her here and is able to offer her support in both a practical and emotional way."***

Some befriending relationships last for a few weeks or months until the asylum seeker or refugee becomes more settled and involved in other activities. Other befriending relationships endure for much longer and there is a long-term engagement in the befriender's life. It is essential to have an influx of new volunteers. 25 new volunteers joined the Restore befriending team during 2014.

Enriching relationships can develop and befrienders observe change and progress: ***"I'm very grateful for the chance to get to know my befriender. She has changed from someone who didn't like to leave the house on her own, to someone who will come running with me in Canon Hill Park! We have become good friends and will continue to keep in touch after any formal befriending has finished."*** Another befriender wrote: ***"Restore is a fabulous charity and has made a real difference to the asylum seeker I befriend. Before she got in touch with Restore she had very little English, was quiet and lacked purpose. She is now on a college course, and her English is improving very quickly and she is really positive about the future!"*** Volunteers can also share in and be touched by special events: ***"One sunny day in July I went to Heartlands Hospital where my befriender's first baby had been safely born the previous day. I will long remember the look on my befriender's face as he held and gently rocked his son. He had been reunited with his wife after a separation of four and a half years. Sharing with them as they establish a new life together and then become a family is a wonderful privilege."***

We recognise that befriending can be challenging for volunteers as they support people who may have limited English skills, poor mental health and be living with the uncertain outcome of their asylum case. Yet it is this consistent, caring support that makes such a difference as this befriender describes: ***"The support I have given has helped my befriender to keep going through months of frustration and anxiety as he has waited for his case to be dealt with."*** Befriending offers volunteers valuable insights into the lives of others: ***"Befriending gives me a better sense of perspective on life. I really enjoy learning about different people and cultures and hope that I can bring strength for the present and hope for the future by being supportive and giving time."*** Another wrote: ***"I have certainly gained a very caring friend and some insight into how difficult life has been for her as she's settled into life in Birmingham."*** Befrienders also testify to the impact of the character and resilience of their befrienders: ***"In spite of the difficulties she faces, she is always sweet, friendly and gracious, and it has been very rewarding to witness how her communication in English is developing."*** Another commented: ***"My befriender is so grateful for the little that she has and positive about people and life. Even when someone has treated her badly, her response is "May God bless them". If only we could all be more like her."***

Perhaps the following comment written by a befriender to her befriender in a Christmas card captures the impact of befriending: ***"We are thankful for all the help & joy you bring to our family in our hard time."***

Thank you to all our befrienders - your service makes a difference in the life of each befriender: it enables them to feel valued and gives hope for their future.

Social Activities for Women and Social Activities for Men

26 events for women in 2014 - 93 women attended at least one event in 2014

31 events for men in 2014 - 85 men attended at least one event in 2014

Group activities are the quickest way Restore can help new asylum seekers to meet other people. These activities for women and for men provide vital social interaction, which combats isolation and depression. The groups draw in those who are new to the city and looking for a network and also asylum seekers who have a lot of time on their hands before they take up English courses and volunteering opportunities. People move on as they become more integrated, but there are always new referrals we can welcome to the friendship networks in both groups.

In 2014 highlights for the women's group included a visit by 16 women to see the Disney blockbuster 'Frozen'; a tour of Sarehole Mill, where the women were delighted to see the working mill producing its own flour; a trip to the First World War display at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, which led to conversations about their own knowledge of the war and some women sharing how their own grandfathers and relatives had joined the British forces to fight; and a visit to the Pen Museum.



The Pen Museum and the Black Country Living Museum

A new opportunity in 2014 was the generous offer from The Rep Theatre of free tickets to see 'Refugee Boy' in June and their production of 'The BFG' by Roald Dahl in December. Live theatre trips are usually beyond the Restore budget. One man commented: "***This is the first time I have been to the theatre in my whole life!***" Another man wrote about his involvement, the opportunity to meet others and some of the signposting help: "**Restore arranged day trips for men, which included Soho House Museum, Walsall Art Gallery, Handsworth Swimming Pool and Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. These group trips have helped me to know more about Birmingham and to interact and create friendships with other asylum seekers. I am also very grateful for all the assistance I get from Restore, which has included referring me to Handsworth Welcome for their Friday lunch drop-in and to St Chad's Sanctuary where I collect clothes each month.**"

In the summer 10 men embarked on a trip to the Black Country Living Museum, courtesy of 2-for-1 tickets via West Midlands Travel. This gave an insight into how the UK has changed considerably over the past 100 years. Going down the Victorian coal mine gave first-hand experience of the hardships miners endured. However, in the school room some of the men saw items and teaching styles still used in rural parts of their own home countries. One participant wrote: "**I was able to be in touch with and know about some parts of British History and heritage, particularly the Industrial Revolution and the impact of the World War One.**"

There are other benefits too. "**Considering the state of anxiety common amongst most asylum seekers, I was able to de-stress myself through exercise, and was actively engaged with other people in sporting and social activities. Therefore, the bowling and swimming outings I took part in immensely contributed to my physical and mental well-being.**" One participant wrote about the impact of visiting Coventry: "**The trip to Coventry Cathedral Memorial Ruins was indeed a witness to hope and healing. Hearing about the destruction of the Cathedral in 1940 gave me the opportunity to reflect about the moral virtues of forgiveness and reconciliation regardless of the prevailing circumstances we find ourselves in, even as people seeking refuge.**"

Holiday Activities for Families

In 2014 we organised 8 activities for families across the school holidays. Our winter party for young children took place during the February half-term and was its usual success through the exploits of Wolly the Clown and support of St John's Church in Harborne.

Our Easter holiday activity was a day trip for older families to the Black Country Living Museum. In May members of the Iona Community (peace network) and Lichfield Hope Support Group again supported our outing to Beaudesert Park scout camp near Cannock Chase. Families enjoyed BBQ food, bluebells in the woods and outdoor activities. For the first time in a few years no child fell in the water during the coracles adventure!



Activities at Beaudesert Park

91 children and 61 adults participated in our 4 summer holiday activities, which included:

- A Fun Day at Olton Friary on 31 July: There was face painting, a bouncy castle, activity with animals and a water slide. We were particularly appreciative of the support of Solihull Welcome, SVP volunteers, the hospitality of Olton Friary and volunteers Mary Carroll, Pauline and Ian Swancott, and Nathalie Marytsch.
- A trip to Twin Lakes on 6 August: This Adventure Park was a favourite among the families and there was no holding back from getting wet as adults and children alike queued to go on the Log Shoot.
- A day at the Birmingham Wildlife Conservation Park followed by crafts and games at Christ Church in Selly Park on 13 August: This was another well attended day with families travelling by bus to the Park and then on to the church for lunch and activities.



Craft at Christ Church, Selly Park, and dressing up at the RSC Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

- A day out to Stratford on 20 August: Families travelled by train to Stratford, had lunch at Stratford Methodist Church, visited the Royal Shakespeare Theatre and took a trip down the River Avon on a local boat.

In the October half-term a group of older children visited the Think Tank and spent a day exploring exhibitions and learning through the Planetarium and Science Show.

Equipping Refugees for Work 2014

Refugees are entitled to work in the UK but face many barriers in their search for employment, including lack of UK work experience or references, qualifications not recognised, limited understanding of the job market and developing English language ability. To help refugees overcome these barriers, Restore developed a training programme entitled Equipping Refugees for Work in 2012 and continues to deliver and improve this resource.

Equipping Refugees for Work is monthly interactive training to help refugees become more job-ready. The aims include increasing confidence for job-searching and employment in the UK, improving written skills especially for CVs, job application forms and covering letters, improving spoken English skills for interviews, and encouraging volunteering to gain skills, UK work experience and references relating to work in the UK. In 2014 we embarked on this training programme in partnership with the British Red Cross who had funding from the Big Lottery Fund. Restore's work is relational and it is because of the on-going relationships we build with refugees and asylum seekers that we can encourage people to participate in this training. 2014 saw the largest number of participants since the training began with 82 people attending at least one session. The average attendance was 28 participants at each session with a larger core group of 24, higher than in previous years. The impact on the lives of individuals is evident in the following testimonies:

“When I heard Restore was running the programme Equipping Refugees for Work, I did not know how important it was until I attended. I applied for my first job and Restore gave me a practise interview. I did not get the first job but had useful experience through that. I worked on my C.V. and personal statement, always going to Restore for approval. I applied for a job with the NHS and with experience and knowledge gained from Restore’s workshops, I got offered a full-time position. I am looking forward to starting my job with the NHS come January 2015.”



Interactive small group activities

“Before I joined Restore I didn’t know anything in this country, not even how to get a job. I started my training with Restore and within a short time of training I got a job. I started work with Kentucky Fried Chicken in September and I’m also doing voluntary work. The training built my confidence to apply for jobs, fill forms, attend interviews and to transfer the skills I have to another job. Today, I have many friends and I know many things about UK as far as work is concerned all because of Restore.”

“This programme has provided me the platform to understand better what UK work experience is all about. I am now more equipped, empowered and ready to find and apply for jobs and attend any job interview in the UK that I may be short-listed for. This programme increased my confidence and competence level.”

In terms of numerical outcomes: at least 4 people gained employment; at least 14 people started volunteering; 22 have stated their plans to move forward with employment related issues and 26 have shown through the information on their feedback forms that they increased in confidence and skills.

Equipping Refugees for Work 2014 empowered participants to grow in confidence, to develop skills relating to job search and work, and to increase their employment prospects.

BIRMINGHAM CHURCHES TOGETHER

RESTORE

DETAILED STATEMENT FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2014

	General Fund £	Restricted Funding £	Total £	2013 Total £
INCOMING RESOURCES				
Grants other	16,400	13,986	30,386	61,314
Grants – Barrow Cadbury Trust	-	19,500	19,500	13,125
Grants – Lloyds Bank Foundation	-	14,500	14,500	14,500
Grants – Joseph Rank Trust	-	15,000	15,000	-
Donations - Individuals	15,563	-	15,563	29,920
Donations - Churches	9,968	8,594	18,562	18,864
Fundraising	573	-	573	1,370
Bank Interest	136	-	136	107
Other	4,951	-	4,951	2,868
	47,591	71,580	119,171	142,068
EXPENDITURE				
Befriending Scheme	3,419	53,607	57,026	53,750
Co-ordinator	-	32,139	32,139	32,173
Administration	5,526	-	5,526	5,461
Office Expenses	11,115	-	11,115	11,395
Information and Publicity	-	5,903	5,903	120
Accountancy Charges	400	-	400	400
Programme Activities	11,555	-	11,555	9,921
Training - Staff and Volunteer	-	509	509	364
	32,015	92,157	124,172	113,584
Net Incoming Resources	15,576	(20,577)	(5,001)	(28,484)
Transfers between funds	(20,626)	20,626	-	-
Fund Balance at 1 January 2014	77,013	20,034	97,047	68,563
	71,963	20,083	92,046	97,047

This statement is for information only and does not form part of the Statutory Financial Statements.

Funding in 2014

Grants were greatly appreciated from the following charitable trusts:

Allen Lane Foundation
Barrow Cadbury Trust
BBC Children in Need
Big Lottery Fund c/o the British Red Cross
CB + HH Taylor 1984 Trust
Cole Charitable Trust
Grantham Yorke Trust
Joseph Hopkins Trust
Joseph Rank Trust
Leigh Trust
Lloyds Bank Foundation
Richard Kilcuppe's Charity
Roughley Trust
SC & ME Morland's Trust, and
South Birmingham Friends Institute Trust.

Management Committee, Staff and Trustees in 2014

Chair of Management Committee
Secretary
Treasurer
Other Management Committee Members

Philip Rogerson
Sarah Dixon
Natalie Chong
Anne Holding, Elizabeth Corrie (stepped down), Andy Jolly, Boaz Atwine, Charles Worth, Sue Morgan, Mauricio Silva, Mohinder Kaur and Josephine Houghton.

Project Coordinator
Befriending Coordinator
Befriending Support Worker

Shari Brown
Jeremy Thompson
Jessica Poyner (maternity leave from Nov)
Rachel Dale (covering maternity leave)
Geraldine Hunt

Administrative Assistant

Trustees of Birmingham Churches Together
Roman Catholic Archbishop
Anglican Bishop
Free Churches Moderator
Free Churches Moderator
Trustee
Chair of BCT Coordinating Group
Trustee/Chair of Restore
Trustee
Treasurer

Most Revd Bernard Longley
Rt Revd David Urquhart
Major Samuel Edgar (retired June 2014)
Barrie Smith (from June 2014)
Nan Haigh (retired June 2014)
Roy Lowes (from June 2014)
Philip Rogerson
Margaret Walsh
Michael Hastilow