

London
Churches
Refugee Fund

Charity Number
1121108

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LONDON CHURCHES REFUGEE FUND
ANNUAL REPORT 2019

www.help4refugees.co.uk

Letter from the Chair

Dear friends,

I am writing this letter in April 2020 during the Coronavirus lockdown.

Finding it hard to speak into the silence, I reached out to some of the many refugee projects the Fund supports to see how they were coping, and to try to give myself a renewed sense of purpose and direction as Chair of the London Churches Refugee Fund.

This report is interspersed with some of the inspiring comments I received, and I leave you to judge for yourselves the electric effect on my morale of what I heard. I am sure that you will be as moved as I was. I have deliberately left these comments from project workers and volunteers anonymous as I want them to be representative of the work undertaken by so many we seek to support. Look for this icon:



One of the projects began by saying ‘Where do we start?’

Definitely not with any more doom and gloom stories....’ and ended with these words: ‘How else could I finish, other than to say ‘God is good?’

God is indeed good and the more I heard about the work of this and other projects we support the more I found myself reflecting on some words of Teresa of Avila:

‘Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.’

Thank you to all the staff and volunteers around London who continue, so sacrificially and at risk to your own safety, to deliver services during the Coronavirus crisis, truly being Christ’s body on earth. Even if the rest of us cannot be there on the front line helping to deliver these services there is something absolutely crucial that everyone can do to support those who work on it every day: **pray and give.**

Pray. Our fund was launched with prayer and worship at Evensong in Westminster Abbey, 12 years ago. Today I have before me a photo from 1940 of thousands of people queuing in orderly fashion (not 2 metres apart!) outside the Abbey as they patiently waited to pray during the Dunkirk crisis, in response to the King's call for a National Day of Prayer. 24 hours later the English Channel miraculously became like a mill pond allowing for the rescue of 300,000 troops trapped on the beaches, despite days of storms immediately before and after.

Prayer works, and both LCRF and the scores of projects we support are *always* in need of your prayers. Please pray for protection, wisdom, strength, discernment and resources (including volunteers) and also for money, food, and all the other necessities that help front-line charities sustain the life and wellbeing of the destitute refugees and asylum seekers whom they support.

Give. In our short history we have distributed over £250,000 to over 80 refugee projects, many of whom come back to us year after year. Demand always outstrips our resources. Our grants enable the projects to buy travel & phone cards for their clients, to make one-off emergency payments or help them with education. To bolster our regular income, we need more Foundation Donors (currently about 60 people) willing to make regular monthly payments to the Fund of at least £10 (or £15 or £25!). Can you help? Or would your church hold a special collection for us at a seasonal festival such as a Carol Service, Christingle or Lent? Could you arrange a fund-raising event for us, or include us as a beneficiary in your will? For how to give, see elsewhere in this report or www.help4refugees.co.uk.

Thank you for being with us and, please, keep on praying and keep on giving... your support is vital!

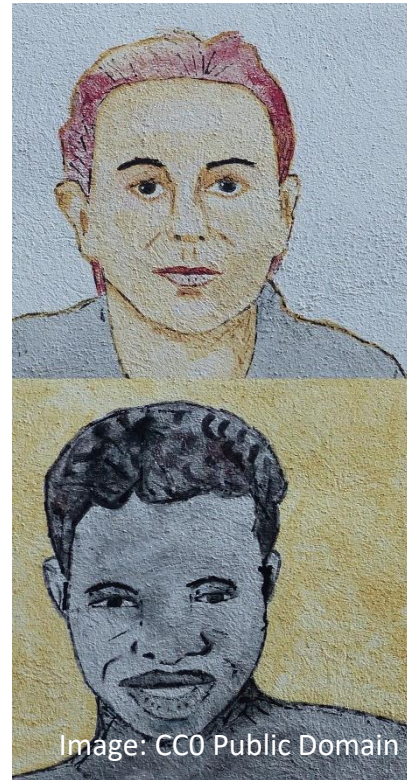
With thanks, love and prayers -

Chris

Revd Chris Brice, Chair

On the front line – case studies from projects we help

F fled to the UK from Africa. After arriving in the UK, he was detained twice in immigration detention centres, exacerbating his very poor mental health. He suffered from nightmares, had difficulty sleeping and struggled to trust people. After he was referred to Room to Heal (RtH), he was able to receive specialist and tailored therapeutic support as well as freshly cooked meals. RtH provided an expert therapeutic report which was crucial evidence in F’s asylum claim, and after 10 years F was finally granted refugee status. RtH’s caseworkers helped him to access self-contained, secure accommodation, and a grant to allow him to buy a bed, table, chairs and a microwave. More recently, they have supported F with his successful university application, laying the foundation for paid work in the future.



Our clients face additional difficulties during this crisis including exacerbated mental health problems as a result of social isolation and anxiety about getting enough food for themselves and their families. We have made available enhanced emergency relief packages for all our clients who need them including phone data and credit and advance cash relief payments. We are now focusing on ensuring this relief gets to clients as quickly as possible in the face of, and despite, the logistical challenges presented by the stay-at-home directive.

A family of Coptic Christians, with a boy of 12 and twin girls of 9, had been living in a single room for some time and were going “stir-crazy”. They had no money and the children were not enrolled in school. A volunteer brought them to the Croydon Refugee Day Centre (CRDC), where they immediately separated. The boy ran to the art table and joined in, one of the twins ran to a doll’s house and began playing and the other twin joined in a game at the supervised children’s play area. Mum asked if she could help in the kitchen, and Dad took himself off for a walk! A very loving family But they all just needed a break from each other. The LCRF grant

paid for their fares, enabling them to visit three times before they were dispersed to Essex.

A has been depending on the help given by Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) for more than a year, ever since the Home Office stopped his support. Like many other asylum seekers, A feels the isolation created by the harsh policies of the hostile environment. With no financial support or permission to work, A cannot afford to call his family members back in Sudan, which is causing him more distress. He describes the phone top-up vouchers given by JRS at Christmas as a 'very vital factor in keeping my hopes and dreams high, as it is my only way of keeping in touch with loved ones back home. Whenever I get a chance to speak to one of my family, it gives me the patience and strength to keep moving forward during these harsh conditions I am facing.'

[We are seeing] lots of hardship and difficulties as many clients are stuck in their rooms with no easy access to services. We are doing a lot more outreach work and supplying personal protection equipment for volunteers visiting clients. We've provided 7 smart phones so far to give to service users so they can keep in contact with us and with family and friends.

Food is a big issue – many clients are destitute so volunteers are taking out food parcels they've collected from food banks. It's a big challenge for us.



B came to the London Jesus Centre (LJC) for English classes feeling hopeless because of depression. LJC supported her to access immigration advice and gave her the confidence to explain her situation fully. She is now an asylum seeker, housed in NASS accommodation, and in much better mental health. She has also got a bike, through a referral to the Bike Project.

(Read more case studies on pages 10-11)

Grants in 2019

Grant-making is at the heart of what we do and, as you can see from the financial summary on the back page, virtually every penny of our £34,000 income in 2019 went straight out in grants to refugee charities and projects.

Thanks to your support, in 2019 we were able to support the following 31 agencies:

Action for Refugees in Lewisham	Jewish Council for Racial Equality
African Refugee Community	Lewisham Refugee and Migrant
Akwaaba	Network
Article 1 Charitable Trust	London Catholic Worker
Barnet Refugee Service	London Jesus Centre
Black Women's Rape Action Project	Migrants Organise Ltd
C4WS Homeless Project	Migrant Voice
Children's Society	New North London Synagogue
Croydon Refugee Day Centre	Destitute Asylum Seekers Drop-In
Freedom from Torture	Notre Dame Refugee Centre
Hackney Migrant Centre	Praxis Community Projects
Happy Baby Community	Refugee Council
Haringey Migrant Support Centre	Room to Heal
Housing Justice	Samphire
Islington Centre for Refugees and	St James' Church Piccadilly
Migrants	Sufra NW London
Jesuit Refugee Service UK	West London Welcome

Charities interested in applying for grants should see the information on our website, under the 'Grant Forms' tab. The application deadline for Spring 2020 has passed, the autumn round will be open in October.

How to donate

We can only give out in grants what we receive from you, our supporters. You can find all you need, including a link to online giving, details of Gift Aid and a standing order form, at www.help4refugees.co.uk.

If you are not an 'online' person, please write for information to our Treasurer, Dave Bond, at 144 Ladywell Road, London SE13 7HU.

In brief

LCRF has no staff. All activities are carried out by the Trustees and other volunteers. If you feel you could help, get in touch!

Our annual carol-singing on 6th December was a huge success, raising £2,800 on the night (£3,500 including Gift Aid, plus "match" donations of £1,000) despite a security alert that meant we had to evacuate Oxford Circus station! Equally good was our annual speaker meeting which was held over to 7th January 2020 and at which the Bishop of London, Rt Revd Dame Sarah Mullally DBE, was the keynote speaker. A summary and transcript may be read on our website.

Keep an eye on www.help4refugees.co.uk, too, for upcoming dates including this year's carol-singing. Let's see if we can make it an even bigger success! You can also follow us on Facebook (@RefugeeFundLondon) and on Twitter (@LCR_Fund). Please 'like' us, retweet us, and generally help spread the word.

Last, big thanks to the Trustees, to our honorary Treasurer, and to everyone else who contributed to the work of the charity in 2019.

Lift the Ban: the campaign continues

The core purpose of the Lift the Ban campaign (representing a coalition of more than 200 organisations) is to win the right to work for asylum seekers who have been waiting more than 6 months for their claim to be decided. The two primary reasons are, firstly, to alleviate the poverty, destitution and homelessness which result from trying to live on £5.39 per day and, secondly, to let people have the dignity of earning and contributing to community and society.

'For people seeking asylum, money is only one motivator for work. Working also allows people to have a clear mind and a clear vision for the future. I don't have that now – I don't have a clear vision for the future'¹.

¹ Alexander, quoted in *Lift the Ban: Why People Seeking Asylum Should Have the Right to Work*, Refugee Action, 2018 (www.refugee-action.org.uk)

The numbers waiting continue to rise

The campaign is driven by the rising number of asylum seekers waiting for over 6 months for a decision. In December 2018, the number was 16,555 out of the 35,855 waiting for an initial decision (46%); in December 2019, it was 29,218 out of 51,213, or 57%. Stephen Hales, the Chief Executive of Refugee Action which began the campaign, has said that the Government has a 'moral duty' to lift the ban.

'Snowballing wait times combined with a ban on working has created a perfect storm for poverty and homelessness for people seeking asylum' (Feb 2020).

The argument for lifting the ban

The campaign's Parliamentary Briefing of January 2020² sets out the argument. Taken together, the points suggest that *not* to lift the ban amounts to a self-defeating strategy: one estimate of the financial benefit to the UK from the switch from depending on allowance to contributing to tax revenues is £42.2 million a year. 74% of asylum seekers have a secondary education and 37% have a degree, not far short of the average for the UK working-age population.

The impact in Parliament: argument once considered, now forgotten

In the past, the Government has given 'complex reasons' as the reason for the failure of a Private Member's Bill to change the current 12-month rule and replace the existing limited options for work after that time, known as the Shortage Occupation List. The phrase reappeared in the Government's White Paper in late 2019. When she was Prime Minister, Theresa May promised a revised points-based system which 'will be a system where it's workers' skills that matter, not which country they come from.'

The Immigration Bill – in full, the Immigration and Social Security Coordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill – was published on 5th March this year but in its present form does not refer to asylum seekers. Stephen Hale has

² <http://lifttheban.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/January-2020-Lift-The-Ban-Parliamentary-Briefing.pdf>

called this a 'wasted opportunity', pointing out that the Government has issued a call for 'the brightest and the best' yet failed totally to engage the talent and experience at all levels of work of people who are already here. A failure highlighted starkly by the Covid-19 outbreak and the NHS's urgent need for people with medical and social care qualifications.

Expertise waiting to be used



RefuAid (an organisation that has received grants from LCRF) works with those who have gained refugee status, helping them with education and requalifying for employment. At the height of the Covid-19 crisis, RefuAid appeared twice in a Sunday paper highlighting skilled medical workers being excluded from working.

The General Medical Council (GMC) is responsible for the formal process for recognising overseas-qualified doctors. One Syrian refugee doctor, an anaesthetist, said he could not complete the process, 'a role play with the doctor and an actor playing the patient ...But this is what I would be doing if I were going to work.' RefuAid and others appealed to the GMC to apply its emergency powers to hundreds of refugee doctors who have one stage of the process to complete.

The absence of any reference in the Bill to the unused skills of asylum seekers, and continuing delays in authorising overseas-qualified refugee doctors and nurses, some of whom have probably worked in crisis situations already, does not give grounds for optimism for the time when Parliament re-engages with migration issues. Yet recent events have surely only strengthened the case for Lift the Ban, and those it aims to help are here now and have shared the dire experience of the pandemic in the UK.

It's almost as if they have earned twice over the right to work here.

The Lift the Ban petition can be found online at www.refugee-action.org.uk/liftheban.

John Murphy, LCRF Trustee

More case studies from front-line projects

C was targeted by the government of her native DRC for exposing corruption and as a result was detained, beaten and raped by soldiers. After escaping from detention, she made her way to the UK, where a doctor referred her to Freedom from Torture (FfT). One very rainy day she came to her therapy appointment wearing flip flops on her feet. She explained to her therapist that these were the only shoes she had. A small grant from FfT's relief fund enabled her to buy herself some better shoes. C said to FfT, 'the people that help this organization must be people with very big hearts. I pray for them. I hope they are granted their every wish.'

D, an asylum seeker in a hostel, suffers from sickle cell disease and end-stage kidney failure, needing dialysis and constant medication. Admin errors caused her ASPEN card to be deactivated, and she had no money for five weeks so had to rely on the food bank and borrow money from other tenants at the hostel. On three occasions she was wrongly charged for prescriptions. Unable to pay, each time she incurred a penalty fine of £45 on top of her prescription costs. A combination of malnutrition and excessive medication has had a detrimental impact on her health. Action for Refugees in Lewisham (AFRIL) supported D to seek help. Her ASPEN card was reactivated and back payments received for her outstanding Section 95 support. AFRIL made a referral to Doctors of the World who helped D challenge the NHS charges and penalty fee. She is now debt free.



Image: Linnaea Mallette
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We have been supporting 63 asylum-seeking, refugee and vulnerable migrant families throughout this crisis, including new clients who have turned to us in desperation.

We continue to provide advice and assistance remotely. Successes include a destitute family receiving Universal Credit for the first time, and helping people navigate changes in government policy and apply for additional support to meet their needs.



R is a victim of trafficking who was held in domestic servitude and sexually abused. After escaping, she was taken in by her church and supported by a member of the congregation while she waited for the outcome of her asylum application. Unable to work until the outcome has been determined, R is completely dependent on her host family. Hackney Migrant Centre (HMC) gave R £20 to pay for food and transport for a short time as they work towards longer-term support for her.

Mr X, married with three children, came to the UK from the DRC. His initial application for asylum was refused as was his appeal. The Home Office stopped all his support, he became homeless with his children and social services did not want to assist them. He decided to move his family to

London, relying on friends for a place to stay. They became divided, his wife and children living in one place while he slept in a night shelter. African Refugee Community (ARC) provided him with money for food, fares, phone cards, warm clothing and hygiene packs, and instructed a solicitor to help him with a fresh claim. He has recently been granted refugee status, offered accommodation and applied for benefits. He has also registered with ARC as a volunteer to support others. He is very grateful for LCRF's support which has enabled him to reunite his family and rebuild his life.

M sought help from Praxis with her immigration and housing issues. She was pregnant and had recently escaped from a violent relationship where she had been held by an ex-partner. She was in unstable accommodation and at times street homeless. Praxis referred M to a solicitor to progress her asylum claim and helped her to find further support, including food banks and children's services. The LCRF grant enabled Praxis to give her some money for travel expenses, and an additional sum to cover basic needs for her and her new-born baby.

We are a very small charity.... but three fundraising events in the last month have had to be cancelled as will others in the future. The needs of clients in crisis has increased our spending while income has decreased.



LCRF Receipts and Payments for the year to 31 Dec 2019

A full copy of the audited accounts is available on request

Where the money came from



Foundation Donors
£10,404



Single donations
£8,636

Churches / organisations



£7,693



Events / other
£3,008

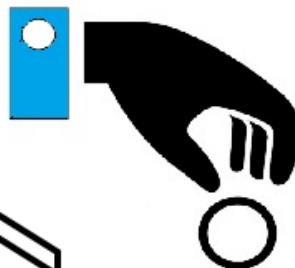
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HMRC
£4,644

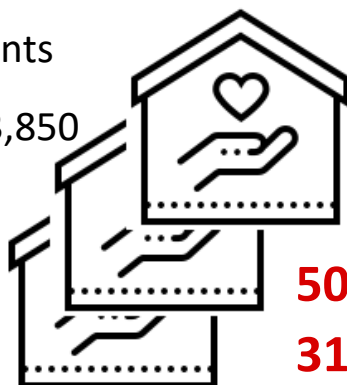


TOTAL £34,385

And where it went



Grants
£33,850



**50 grants to
31 projects**



Admin / other
£490

TOTAL £34,340

Bank balance

At start of year
£24,491



At end of year
£24,536