

*Showing love in the
time of pandemic*

Image by Donna Hovey from Pixabay

London
Churches
Refugee Fund

Charity Number
1121108

2020 ANNUAL REPORT

LONDON CHURCHES REFUGEE FUND

www.lcrf.org.uk

Letter from the Chair

Dear friends,

So, God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for all are one in Christ Jesus.

On these two verses from the Jewish and Christian scriptures hangs all that is good, loving, generous and dignified in the affairs of men and women across the world, over the past 2000 years.

They are the foundation of human rights legislation and of the Refugee Convention 1951 and its 1967 Protocol, designed to remedy the problems that arise when people can no longer rely on their state to protect their most fundamental rights and are forced to seek that protection in another country. They tell us that every human being, made in the image of God, is deserving of being treated with equal dignity by every other human being, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality, or any other human characteristic. In short, that every human being is my neighbour.



The implication is that, by whatever means human beings from other nations, states, communities, or continents reach the shores of the United Kingdom, seeking sanctuary as they flee from places where their most fundamental rights are no longer protected, they ought to be welcomed and helped with dignity, kindness, love, and respect as a sister or a brother – members with us of the human family to which we all belong.

Tragically, in this crazy, muddled, compromised (fallen) world in which we live, these human rights and international laws of refuge are often very inadequately fulfilled, and sometimes they are totally ignored. This is something that happens far too frequently here in the UK, and results in many thousands of our brothers and sisters becoming destitute or

suffering oppression and detention – either by the unintended ‘sin’ of negligence, bureaucracy and administrative failure, or through deliberate government policy.

We thank God that across London there are hundreds of frontline refugee projects whose sole aim is to welcome, support, and succour those refugees and asylum seekers who are left destitute in this way.

The London Churches Refugee Fund is humbled by the stories we hear as we play our small part in bringing help and support to our brothers and sisters in need, through our twice-yearly grants to scores of refugee



projects across London. The projects use our grants to purchase phone and travel cards, to make emergency payments or provide food or toiletries. Services that help destitute asylum seekers survive, keep in touch with family friends and seek legal aid and other vital help.

So many projects have shown their love for refugees and asylum seekers in amazing ways in this time of pandemic, going the extra mile time after time. Your generosity is helping vulnerable people rediscover their dignity, and to know that they are loved and respected, so that they too can eventually contribute to the common good with the skills, energy, and new life that they bring to our needy nation.

Please continue helping us to help them, by making either a one-off or regular monthly donation to the London Churches Refugee Fund. You will find more details of how to give later in this report.

With thanks, love and prayers -

Chris

Revd Chris Brice, Chair

The images seen here are details from Cathy Young's wonderful painting that was the basis for our Christmas card 2020. With huge thanks to the artist.

On the front line – case studies from projects we help

Islington Centre for Refugees and Migrants assisted P, from Sierra Leone, who was trying to submit a fresh claim on the basis of Article 8 of the Human Rights Act (Right to Family Life). He has a daughter living in Huddersfield but, as an asylum seeker, he could not afford to travel. Not to do so would both break his contact with his daughter and undermine his asylum case in the process. Thanks to the Fund's grant, Islington were able to provide him with the overnight bus fare so that he could attend his contact visit. His case has been taken on by a new solicitor, via the Jesuit Refugee Service, and he is now progressing his fresh claim.

T, aged 54, an asylum-seeker being supported by **Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network** (LRMN), was housed during the Covid pandemic in a hostel in Romford, East London, sharing with 12 other people. She has diabetes and cancer-related long-term illness, putting her in a high-risk category for Covid. She approached LRMN's Women's Project Team requesting food delivery, as well as some financial support to buy essentials, including sanitizer, toiletries, laundry items and phone top-up. LRMN provided £50 support so she could stock up on essentials and self-isolate as much as possible, and also arranged for Refugee Solidarity South London to deliver an emergency food pack.

A left Sudan in 2017 after government persecution for being accused of supporting rebels. He was trafficked while in Libya, held with as many as 200 people, ransomed and sold several times, working without pay and with minimal food. He finally crossed the Mediterranean in February 2019, eventually reaching Calais before making the journey across the Channel in September 2020. He was rushed to hospital on arrival due to immediate medical problems, but was discharged to a hotel without any understanding of how to seek further medical support, despite suffering diabetes and the lingering effects of torture to his feet. Inappropriate food in the hotel, and its irregular arrival, put him at huge risk of further complications. **Waging Peace** were able to offer A a small grant of £40 to buy food items to manage his blood sugar levels, made him a local GP appointment, connected him to Sudanese community groups, sourced winter clothing for him and helped him with his claim.

C had been accommodated by the **Housing Justice** hosting project for three years when he was finally granted refugee status, fourteen years after arriving in the UK. As he prepared to leave the project and move on to the next stage of his life, he expressed how he feels he has benefitted from the project:

“The hosting project has made a really big difference to my life, more than I can say in words. I’ll never forget it. Having somewhere to live is the most important thing in life. Before this I was sleeping on the streets for six years. When I was finally able to stay in a house, I couldn’t believe it. It was like a dream. I used not to be able to think well, sleeping on the street; my thoughts were very slow and confused, and I was depressed. Since being given somewhere to stay, I have been so much happier and more optimistic. I didn’t go to church when I was sleeping on the streets because I was self-conscious about my appearance and hygiene. I didn’t think the other people at church would want me there or want to be close to me. Now I go to church regularly, and I am proud that I am taking care of myself and I am much more confident. I feel like a different person. Now I’m looking forward to the future, hoping to find a job and move on to my own flat, so I can live my own life.”

F and her 8-year-old daughter were destitute and being sheltered by a church when they were referred to **Streatham Day Centre** (SDS). She was given a small grant of £10 and the bus fare to visit a local food bank. Over a period of six months she visited the Centre on a regular basis for ongoing advice, and was also assisted by the NHS Health Inclusion Team. Before Covid, mother and daughter attended SDS’s programme of educational, community and fun activities. Transport costs were provided to various appointments, helping the family secure accommodation and subsistence support from the local authority. Both joined SDS’s Saturday homework and family learning project, where F became a volunteer. Through a partnership with a local TechAid project, a laptop was provided so that they could continue to participate in online learning and activities during the pandemic. But they are still awaiting a decision on their status.

See also a very special case study on p11.

Grants in 2020

Grant-making is at the heart of what we do and 2020 saw our highest-ever total paid out in grants to refugee charities and projects. We made 45 grants in all, totalling £36,353.

Thanks to your support, in 2020 we were able to support the following 29 agencies:

Action for Refugees in Lewisham	Jewish Council for Racial Equality
African Refugee Community	(JCORE)
All People All Places	Lewisham Refugee and Migrant
Article 1 Charitable Trust	Network
Asylum from Rape	London Catholic Worker - Refugee
Barnet Refugee Service	Shelter
C4WS Homeless Project	London Jesus Centre
Citizens of the World Choir	Migrants Organise
Cotton Tree	Migrateful
Croydon Refugee Day Centre	New North London Synagogue
Freedom from Torture	Destitute Asylum Seekers Drop-In
Hackney Migrant Centre	Notre Dame Refugee Centre
Happy Baby Community	Refugee Council
Housing Justice	Room to Heal
Islington Centre for Refugees and	Samphire
Migrants	Streatham Drop-In Centre
Jesuit Refugee Service	West London Welcome

Charities interested in applying for grants should see the information on our website, at www.lcrf.org.uk/grants. The application deadline for Spring 2021 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 will find all the information you need, including a link to online giving, details of Gift Aid and a standing order form, at **www.lcrf.org.uk/donate**.

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

No singing? What shall we do?

Lockdown meant we had to cancel our usual carol singing marathon at Oxford Circus station, but as that would have left a huge hole in our fundraising we decided to redirect our energies into selling Christmas cards. Although we had sold a small number of cards in previous years, once we saw the beautiful painting of the 'Flight into Egypt' which Cathy Young donated to us we knew we were onto a winner!

We quickly set up a webshop to handle orders, printers were found, text was agreed and we were off! There was then the small matter of counting thousands of cards into bundles of ten with envelopes and tying them up with minimal wasteful packaging but robustly enough for the Royal Mail. A small cottage industry! This was straightforward but time-consuming, a useful distraction when all outside social activities were curtailed.

The first cards were sent out at the end of September and sales really took off in October and November so that we had to re-order three times. As one of the 'packer-posters' I repeatedly joined the socially-distanced queue at my local post office, hoping that the counter staff didn't dread my repeated appearances there. HUGE thanks to all who bought cards!

Stella Jeffrey, LCRF Trustee

Other highlights of the year

2020 began with a public meeting on Jan 7th at which the Bishop of London, Rt Revd Dame Sarah Mullally DBE, was the keynote speaker.

Then came Covid and the long months of lockdown so the Trustees had to learn the art of Zoom meetings. Our website was completely overhauled at this time and we also produced Lenten reflections and a Refugee Week resource, both well received. All our materials, and summaries of speaker events, can now be found at the new site, www.lcrf.org.uk.

LCRF has no staff. All activities are carried out by the Trustees and other volunteers. We were delighted to welcome Gillian Dare OBE as a new Trustee in 2020, and Alfred Enoch as a new patron. If you feel you could help our work in any way, get in touch!

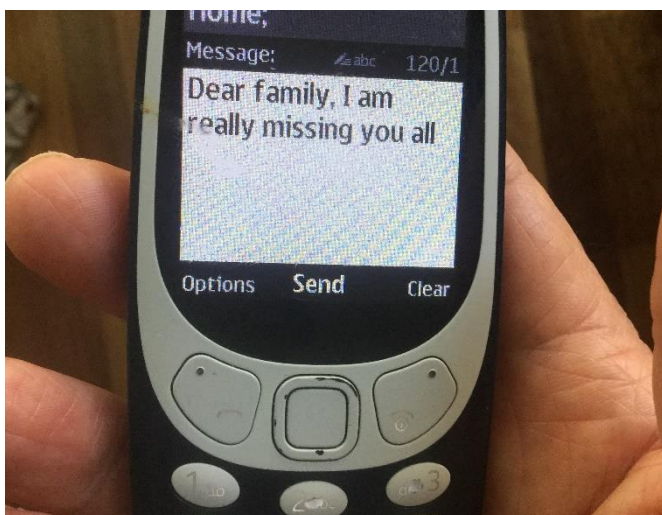
The forgotten people: refugees in a time of Covid

2020 will be remembered as the year of a global pandemic, but sadly also as a year when UK government policy hardened further against refugees and asylum seekers.

Tough though the last year has been for many people, the Covid pandemic has impacted on refugees and asylum seekers twice over. In the countries from which they have fled, through which they have passed and again on reaching the UK, they have been subjected to a hostile environment and a tightening of measures against them, as well as exposure to the virus itself.

Stemming from the UK's hostile environment policy and its implementation, there are no legal routes into the UK open to those who are fleeing for their lives. This means that refugees feel forced to make dangerous journeys, like crossing the channel in small boats, and can fall victim to trafficking and dangerous smuggling practices. We should not blame them and treat them as illegal immigrants or criminals, and yet the government seems determined to do just that.

Refugees hope to find safety in the UK. But, shockingly, homelessness, poverty and hardship is the everyday reality. Many have been placed in former army camps like Napier and Penally, which were previously condemned as unfit but have been brought back into use. The conditions in these camps have been terrible – insanitary, no social distancing, very limited access to healthcare, inedible food. Even seeking help is difficult as asylum seekers' phones were often confiscated at the border. Those placed in camps have effectively been under detention.



And those in hotel or hostel accommodation have fared little better. We remain concerned about the wellbeing of people accommodated in hotels for long periods, as well as about the use of former military barracks. The accommodation in both hotels and the camps is generally of an

unacceptably low standard. Until their use is ended, urgent attention must be paid to the health and safety of the people living there.

All this has placed the refugee support organisations under increased pressure as they have had to adapt their own processes (for example, providing advice and counselling by phone) while continuing to support the physical needs of refugees and asylum seekers as best they can. Many of them will have made heavy use of their hardship funds, for which they often seek grants from the London Churches Refugee Fund.

And poor housing is just the start. Language and employment barriers cause further isolation. Public information on Covid is generally in English – not the first language of refugees – leading to uncertainty, misinformation and fear. Acute mental health problems are an ongoing struggle for so many refugees due to lack of jobs, emotional stress, loneliness and the loss of relatives and friends. Fear of Covid itself added to all those existing stresses.

“Being suspended in limbo, in an incomprehensible state, where time stands still, with no control over what is going to happen. Being isolated from family and friends. And in a different country. Being resourceful. Surviving adversity. These are all everyday experiences for asylum seekers but which many more of us have experienced in this enforced lockdown period,” says Marie Gillespie, Professor of Sociology at the Open University.

Another consequence of the pandemic has been disruption to asylum processes and welfare support services. By September 2020, over 46,000 people were waiting for initial asylum decisions, up 76% on a year before. Child migrants have been particularly hit, with the rights of many teenagers close to adulthood disappearing while still waiting to be granted asylum.

Many refugees are capable, qualified and skilful and want to be integrated and contribute to British society. We need them and their skills and



experience as much as they need us. But getting an overseas qualification recognised here, or converting that to a secure job in the UK, is often an uphill struggle.

During this period, the government has made some efforts to help refugees and asylum seekers. The 'Everyone In' policy to keep people off the streets, and the temporary suspension of evictions from asylum accommodation for people who have been granted status, were well intentioned if not always well executed. Home Office procedures have been adapted, to an extent, to reduce Covid risks. But, positive as this has been, it is not enough.

Many have still fallen through the cracks and have become the 'forgotten' people – which is why we are still calling on the government to do more to protect refugees. Looking to the future, we need to encourage a new compassionate, welcoming governmental approach to refugees and asylum seekers. Sadly, the 'new plan' announced by the Home Secretary on 24th March 2021 appears to be heading in the opposite direction. But that will have to be the subject of a future article.

Gillian Dare, LCRF Trustee



Cathy Young's original artwork, 'Flight into Egypt', used for our 2020 card.

A final case study – in memory of a special person

The case study below shows how Covid has called for new and creative responses from frontline projects. It came to us from the Croydon Refugee Day Centre and is poignant because the charity's long-standing manager, Peter Hall, died on 24th January 2021. He had been suffering from cancer, compounded by Covid. Peter will be hugely missed in Croydon. He also spoke at our last in-person public meeting in January 2020, before lockdown intervened. We have included this case study as our tribute to Peter and as a demonstration of what 'going the extra mile' can mean.



For all organisations in the sector, lockdown meant changes in working practices had to be made very quickly to meet very different needs. In Croydon, the Home Office released more than 200 people from detention, and **Croydon Refugee Day Centre** (CRDC) were approached to support a number of ex-detainees.

B was picked up by the Homeless Outreach Team and put in a temporary hostel with Croydon's No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) Team having agreed to support him, as no food was provided. Unfortunately, this support was very slow to come, so CRDC gave him an emergency food parcel and a small cash grant on a Friday to tide him over until Monday. However, on Saturday he rang to say he was not allowed to share cooking pots, crockery, cutlery etc with others, so CRDC gave him the necessary equipment, even a cheap rice cooker as he came originally from a country where rice was eaten with every meal.

Unfortunately the NRPF Team was overwhelmed and were unable to provide support for the next week, so CDRC gave him more food. They also put him in touch with the Samphire Project (ex-detainees support) who were prepared to give him a small grant. Because he didn't have a bank account, CRDC agreed to receive the Samphire grant and gave B the cash.

LCRF Receipts and Payments for the year to 31 Dec 2020

A full copy of the audited accounts is available on request

Where the money came from



**Foundation Donors
£13,134**



**Single donations
£15,269**



**Churches / organisations
£6,099**



**Card sales
£3,159**



**HMRC
£4,776**

And where it went



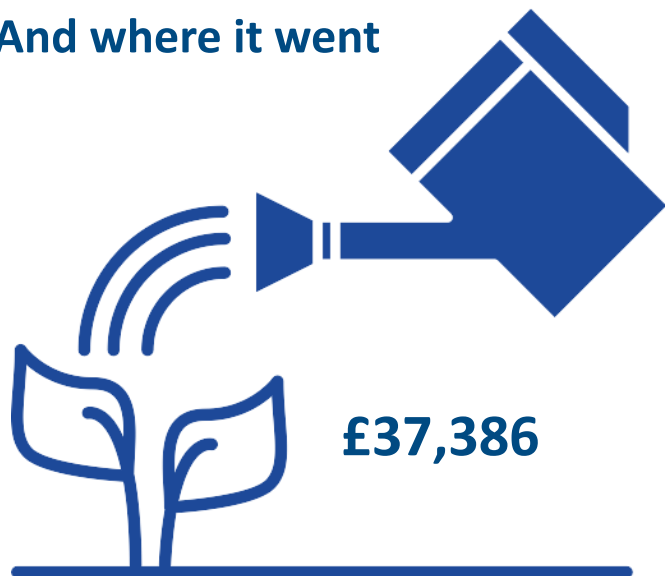
**Grants
£36,353**



**Card print/postage
£782**

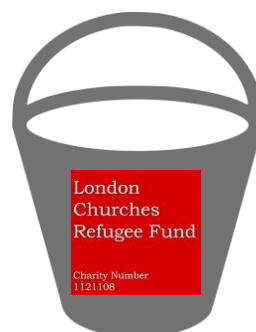


**Administration
£251**



**2020 surplus
£5,051**

**Balance brought forward
£24,536**



**Balance at year end
£29,587**