


*Bradford Ecumenical  
Asylum CONCern*

Annual Report for the year to  
30<sup>th</sup> September 2012



**“Welcome the Stranger”**

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## Rita Armitage – Chair of BEACON Executive

### All Change...

**The new BEACON logo** is the most obvious sign of change. It can truly be said to represent team work and our consensual approach to taking decisions as the design process took many months, with lots of consultation. We are pleased with the result, which we trust conveys the ethos of BEACON, as it serves the needs of diverse groups of people.

There have been changes amongst the Trustees and our employees. Twelve months ago we appointed **Fiona Bououden** as a part time **CHAT Development Worker**. Her enthusiasm and determination has proved invaluable. Thanks to her recruitment of volunteers we have been able to add a third morning on which hospitality is offered at Phoenix House. Her most significant initiative is the establishment of a **Spotlight English Club**, which opened in May. *(See Fiona's report – page 6)* Learning English is a vital step to adjusting and participating in a new life in the U.K. for the asylum seekers who are amongst the group. As well as helping them to be more confident in speaking English, our hope is that better understanding will develop between members of different religions and cultures, shattering pre-conceived ideas which are often negative.

**Laura O'Connor** was well known and regarded as our **BEACON Co-ordinator**. We said farewell to her on 3<sup>rd</sup> May as she left to take up a post at Bradford University – so she is still living locally. The Co-ordinator's role has been expanded to include a greater

emphasis on Publicity and Communication. **Kezia Rooke** is proving an able replacement, and as well as providing administrative competence she is a skilful communicator. I confess I have not yet logged on to the Twitter Account or joined the Facebook site she has established!

The **BEACON Executive** has met on ten occasions during the last twelve months, including the now traditional Away Day. We have said goodbye to **Chris Howson** as he and his family moved to Sunderland and welcomed **Eithne Dodwell**.

Once again I reiterate my deep sense of privilege in serving as Chair of BEACON and express thanks for the deep commitment of the other Trustees and the many willing volunteers who give their time so generously. We are also indebted to the Churches, organisations and individuals for the financial support which makes it possible for us to provide much needed service to asylum seekers in our area.

*Rita Armitage*

*Matthew 25:35 "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you looked after me, I was in prison and you visited me."*

## **Kezia Rooke – BEACON Co-ordinator**

Since starting at BEACON as the Communications and Publicity Worker in March this year and taking over from Laura as the Co-ordinator in May, I have had the opportunity to work with some wonderful people and organisations.

I have been working with the members of the Executive to provide a strong base for our projects and volunteers and to develop our database (if we don't have your details please let me know!). The new BEACON logo came about as a result of many months of creative collaboration and is now being used to develop our publicity materials.

BEACON has also joined the world of social media and has both a Twitter account and a Facebook profile so we can share news, promote events and raise awareness of the issues surrounding asylum seekers and service provision in Bradford. Details of both these accounts can be found on the back page.

We have enjoyed a variety of events this year including our sponsored Walk for Justice during Refugee Week, Positive Bradford and our Garden Party. We are currently busy recruiting new volunteers and submitting funding applications so we can continue our work supporting those seeking sanctuary in Bradford.

Finally, I would just like to say thank you to everyone working for and with BEACON for making me feel so welcome and for the ongoing support.

*Kezia Rooke*

## **Fiona Bououden – CHAT Development Worker**

It is hard to believe that it is now over a year since I was appointed to the post of CHAT Worker. So much has happened and I believe that we have seen some really positive outcomes. My role was initially to look into possible options for CHAT's further development. After some research it was decided to set up a Spotlight English Club. This is a conversational English class allowing non-native speakers the chance to practice and improve their English language skills. Following a successful application to the Church Urban Fund's Near Neighbours Fund, Spotlight and its volunteers hit the ground running! Our first meeting was on May 16<sup>th</sup> 2012 and we haven't looked back since!

We have on average seven learners a week but this does vary and has been as many as fifteen. A particular wonderful thing about Spotlight is the friendships that have been formed between different faiths and cultures, including Muslims, Sikhs and Christians, asylum seekers, refugees plus many others. Some of our members have gained confidence in speaking English and gone on to start formal ESOL classes. We are sad to lose them but happy that they have been encouraged to take their learning further. Everyone who joins us for has commented on the wonderful atmosphere they find at Spotlight.

Each week we have an audio transcript to follow or undertake practical learning exercises mixed in with games such as Charades and Hangman. These activities, as well as being immensely enjoyable by volunteers and learners alike, have the

added bonus of getting people to speak English! We have a core of six volunteers who do an amazing job. The Club is free and very sociable, everyone sitting and chatting at the end of the session over tea and biscuits. Spotlight meets at Thornbury Methodist Church between 10 -11.45 every Wednesday morning.

As for CHAT we have now extended the work at Phoenix House (Tribunals Court) to include a Monday morning. This is going well with a couple of volunteers coming from the Spotlight English Club which is particularly encouraging. However, more Spotlight or Court volunteers would be most welcome!!!

*Fiona Bououden*

CHAT@beaconbradford.org

*“I decided to volunteer for Spotlight because when I saw the advert I felt that it was something different which I could do. It is helping people whom I would not normally come into contact with and I have already learnt so much about the different cultures from the people who come and share in the conversations.”*

*(CHAT-Spotlight Volunteer, 2012)*

*“It is gratifying to be there for people in their desperation. Although the practical help we can offer is very little, we do what we can.”*

*(CHAT-Court Volunteer, 2012)*

## **Kath Larrad – Chair of CHAT (Care & Hospitality At Thornbury)**

There is nothing much to add to Fiona’s report except to thank Fiona for her excellent work since she first started this job!

The regular visits to Court on Tuesdays and Wednesdays continue, even though there has been a reduction in the number of Asylum cases heard there. Most days we see on average 3 or 4 asylum seekers, who have to wait before a court is available, but we are very welcome, both by staff and other court users, many of whom have their own problems. We continue to signpost individuals to various organisations for further support, including McKenzie Friends.

Occasionally we feel slightly discouraged by how few seem to want refreshments, but are greatly encouraged by positive comments from others in the court. One woman, who has visited the court on several occasions supporting different asylum seekers, told us how the whole atmosphere in the waiting areas was ‘transformed’ when we appeared with our trolley and ‘chat’! So perhaps it is still worth continuing, and we shall see what happens on Mondays!



Many thanks to all our supporters  
and volunteers!

*Kathryn Larrad*



## Will Sutcliffe – Hosting Project Co-ordinator

*“We have found it a real privilege to host several women from several different countries. One in particular became a good friend and she continues to challenge and inspire me. All have been sensitive to the way we live in our home, and most have been extremely easy to live with. We have really appreciated*

*BEACON’s processes and protocols, and felt supported and protected by them. Being part of the scheme has been an enriching experience, and we have been very glad to provide a home to some of the people who need it most”*

*(L.L. host: June 2012)*



Over the past four years the Hosting Project has provided a home and support to 44 guests from 15 nationalities. To date 27 have regained Home Office or Social Services support – and of these 16 have so far been granted leave to remain in the UK.

***That is*** ..... 16 people who clearly had valid claims to remain in the UK who, but for the extended periods of support from wonderful BEACON hosts such as ‘L’ above, might have been forced through destitution to accept voluntary return to the countries they had fled *‘due to a well-founded fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group’* (UN Convention 1951).

Our perception over the past year has been however that it is becoming increasingly difficult for those with even the most compelling and clear-cut cases to win their asylum cases. The need for this project clearly continues, and for the excellent support our guests receive from McKenzie Friends, British Red Cross, Bradford Action for Refugees, Stepping Stones and other local agencies.

We are forced to turn down many more referrals than we are ever able to accept and continue to have a particular need for households able to accommodate men.

*Will Sutcliffe*

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*Job 31:32 "...but no stranger had to spend the night in the street,  
for my door was always open to the traveller."*

## Destitution Concern Bradford

The Hosting Coordinator, as a founding-member of Destitution Concern Bradford, has been heavily involved in recent months in the commissioning and oversight of a piece of long-needed research into the extent and impact of destitution amongst refused asylum seekers in the city. During a five week period during the summer, sixty six people were counted, including ten children. This research will be a useful tool for campaigning and awareness-raising, and adds another piece to the jigsaw of similar research carried out in other UK cities in recent years. It can be accessed at:

**<http://www.destitutionconcernbradford.org/>**



## **Eithne Dodwell – Chair of McKenzie Friends**

This has been another busy year for McKenzie Friends, complicated by health crises for both Judy Midgely and myself. These happened as we were saying sad farewells to Laura O'Connor, whose presence at Touchstone has helped so many of us. We were soon delighted by the very different, but equally friendly skills of our new Co-ordinator, Kezia Rooke. We have pulled together, as we always do with the help of each other and of our personal visions of God's Republic on Earth – how we want the world to be.

At first glance, 19 volunteers have dealt this year with 56 clients from a wide range of countries. The reality, as always, is more complex:

The number of volunteers is constantly shifting, partly because people's circumstances change, especially students'. This year we have noticed an increase in numbers of people from other agencies who attend our training in order to increase their general knowledge of the Asylum System, and to strengthen network ties. We are happy to provide this service, and pleased at this indication that our reputation and training, based on previous input from many sources, is valued. However, it is a strain on our already stretched energies and resources. To address this we have decided to ask those wanting to receive our training, without making a commitment to work with us, for a voluntary donation; we anticipate this varying depending on the resources of the agency concerned. We delivered two days of training in early summer and two are taking place in October.

Unsurprisingly given recent events, most of our clients have fled countries in the Middle East or Sub-Saharan Africa; with the largest number arriving from Iran. Fewer of our clients than last year have come from Afghanistan and more from Pakistan.

The greatest number of clients [23], as often before, have needed help to prepare their Appeal statement, and someone to accompany them to the 1st Appeal Tribunal. One of these Appeals was successful, two were passed on to a Solicitor, and twenty were refused. Together with other agencies we were particularly concerned about decisions to return gay people to Nigeria, where they are well known to face persecution, and to return women to Eritrea, where enforced long term conscription, with the probability of sexual exploitation, is likely. Next steps have included 13 helped to prepare an application for the Upper Tribunal, and 16 helped to prepare a Further Submission; sometimes that help is provided by us, sometimes by a solicitor or other agency. Obviously, many cases are on-going, and some are unclear – for a variety of reasons.

We continue to liaise closely with other agencies, in particular The Red Cross, Bradford Action for Refugees, Manuel Bravo, Rape Crisis and Refugee Action. We have received valuable help from local solicitors, notably Barry Clark and Mark Taylor.

If anyone is interested in volunteering or attending a training course, please contact: Kezia Rooke - details on the back page.

*Eithne Dodwell*

*Matthew 25:40 "Since you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me."*

## **Roy Howarth – BEACON Treasurer**

As always, my first task is to say a heartfelt ‘Thank you’ to all those individuals, churches and charitable groups who continue to offer financial support to the work of BEACON. As a voluntary organisation, working to support asylum seekers in the Bradford area, we are inspired and encouraged by so much generosity in times which are financially challenging. For the third year we held our ‘Walk for Justice’ which was well supported. We thank all those who took part for helping to raise awareness of the plight of asylum seekers and those who sponsored them and raised much needed funds.

As a result of the continued level of funding, the work of both the Hosting Project and McKenzie Friends has continued to grow and develop during this financial year. We have also been able to begin Spotlight English at Thornbury Methodists, a project which aims to improve language skills for non- English speakers.

The next financial year will prove to be a challenge as the work and costs continue to grow, while reserves of capital dwindle! It is essential that we secure long term funding as well as maintaining the generous support of donors.

Let me conclude by thanking all who have supported the work of BEACON throughout the year and ensured that – yet again - we have had the money to meet the needs of a very vulnerable group of people.

*Roy Howarth*





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**[www.beaconbradford.org](http://www.beaconbradford.org)**

 **@BEACON\_Bradford**

 **BEACON Bradford**

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