



Reg Charity: 1119463

Bradford Ecumenical Asylum CONCern

**Annual Report for the year to
30th September 2011**





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Please note: accounts are enclosed separately



Rita Armitage – Chair of BEACON Executive

I continue to feel a sense of privilege in serving as Chair of the Executive. We have met on eight occasions during the last year, one less than planned as the December Meeting had to be cancelled because of the snow! The May meeting was an Away Day, during which we reflected on the way BEACON has grown and developed over the last 6 years.

BEACON continues to grow and develop in response to need. Indeed, in the current political and economic climate there is even greater need, as highlighted in the reports, which follow.

We can be proud that BEACON is highly regarded by other organisations working with Asylum seekers and Refugees. At the annual City of Sanctuary Celebration and the Bradford launch of Refugee Week 2011, those who had appreciated the help and support offered through Hosting and McKenzie Friends paid tributes. Those in other cities who have commented on our good practice and sought our input in training also appreciate us.

The BEACON **Walk for Justice** during Refugee Week was once again well supported. As well as being an opportunity to highlight the problems faced by those who are required to report regularly at Waterside Court in Headingley, Leeds, the individual sponsorship totalling some £2,000 helps our funding.



In recent months we have been encouraged by news of some grants promised for a three-year period. This greater financial security has encouraged us to appoint the CHAT development worker and to consider extending the general administrative backup.

It is appropriate to pay tribute to those church congregations and individuals which offer prayerful and financial support and to acknowledge the commitment of those who serve as Trustees and all who ensure the smooth running of the various projects which come under the BEACON umbrella, including our committed and willing volunteers, without whom we could not be as effective.

Last, and by no means least, our part time Co-ordinator, Laura O'Connor deserves special mention and grateful thanks: for her unflinching cheerfulness in responding to ever increasing requests to provide information; her willingness to attend events at which we feel a need to be present; and her significant contribution to the development of McKenzie Friends.

Rita Armitage

Zechariah 7:9-10

This is what the LORD Almighty said: Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor.



BEACON Projects



Will Sutcliffe

**Coordinator Hosting
Project**

**A whole host of amazing
people.....**

BEACON's Hosting Project recruits and trains volunteer hosts to provide a home and support to destitute refused asylum seekers. Hosting provides guests with a secure, supportive environment in which they have the opportunity to research and gather the fresh evidence they need in order to submit a fresh asylum claim.

"I look back at the time I spent being hosted by BEACON and am inspired to be a host one day when I have a place of my own. This was a life changing experience for me because I was offered help when I really needed it the most by a most selfless and loving individual. The work that BEACON does has bridged the bureaucratic gap between destitution and receiving statutory support. I support the work that BEACON does because many destitute asylum seekers really have no one else to turn to." S.S from Zimbabwe. Jan 2011 (now granted indefinite leave to remain in the UK)

The good news: At least 14 of the 35 people hosted since October 2008 have now been granted leave to remain (we have lost contact



with one or two). These are people who fled extreme trauma in their homelands but who, without a safe place to stay whilst they gathered fresh evidence to resubmit their asylum claims, may well have been forced to return to the very situations they fled.

The not-so-good news: Whilst our wonderful small group of hosts come back again and again to offer a home and friendship to new people, the project turns away on average three destitute asylum seekers every week. The demand massively outstrips supply. Both guests and hosts speak of the mutuality of hosting and the friendships that develop. *We urgently need more people willing to open up their homes – and their hearts – and be a part of a life-changing experience.* We particularly need households able to help men.

For details call or email Will Sutcliffe: 07505 053149;
host.beacon@yahoo.com

Will Sutcliffe

Isaiah 58:6-7

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter.....

Kath Larrad

Chair of CHAT

During this year we have had contact with over 200 Asylum Seekers and served some 1850 drinks at Phoenix House, the Asylum and Immigration Hearing Centre at Thornbury!



The Court staff and users continue to appreciate our service each Tuesday and Wednesday. The number of asylum cases heard at the court varies and we are there for those who have a long wait, not those whose case is heard when the courts first open, so of course, we do not come across all those present, but we offer refreshments to those seeking visas etc, and staff, as well as to asylum seekers. Some staff and asylum supporters give voluntary contributions and these usually cover costs of providing refreshments.

Countries of origin of asylum seekers continue to be the obviously troubled parts of the World: Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran (interestingly referred to as Persia by some!), Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka. More recently we have been aware of more from North Africa and Pakistan. When we were told the overthrow of Gaddafi was imminent, a very anxious young Libyan man, who was struggling to watch live TV news coverage in the waiting area, told me in no uncertain terms, that it was 'not over yet!'

We have a willing, faithful band of volunteers but would welcome more, especially any who could give time on other days of the week as we are hoping to extend the service.

The good news is that we have been successful in securing funding to employ a part time Worker for one year. **Fiona Bououden** joined



us early in September and is already taking the initiative in investigating how the project might develop.

A CHAT volunteer writes...

I volunteered for CHAT as it gave me a chance to do something for other people, not just pop a coin in a charity box and then forget what is happening in other countries. I call myself a Christian, asylum seekers are ordinary people, my neighbours as Jesus Christ said, and so we must help them where we can. Often they are met with suspicion, indifference and hatred, CHAT shows a different side.

As a volunteer I gain insight into the plight of those who have fled and some understanding of their pain in leaving their families and their country, not knowing when they will see them again.

We would like to extend CHAT to other days next year. If anyone is interested in becoming a volunteer please contact:

Laura O'Connor, BEACON Co-ordinator, details on back page.

Kath Lannad

Psalm 23:4 *Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*



Judy Midgely

Chair of McKenzie Friends

McKenzie Friends have been busy again, facing the challenges of supporting asylum seekers through the complex legal system, without the help of a solicitor. The numbers of Asylum Seekers who were looking for help increased dramatically with the closure of Refugee Migrant Justice early in the year.



They transferred their clients to the Immigration Advisory Service – they closed in June. This was very bad news for Asylum Seekers, we supported them in finding new solicitors and their documents, which had gone into storage and when they had no legal aid we accompanied them to court.

During the year the Red Cross have organised a Drop-in for destitute Asylum Seekers. They have assisted them to make New Submissions and to receive regular financial support. McKenzie Friends have liaised with them supporting Asylum Seekers in different ways. Sally McGee the Red Cross Coordinator has generously shared their documentation with us.

The extra workload demanded more volunteers. We responded by having two training sessions for new volunteers. A group of 10 were trained in November and a further 7 in June. Many of the volunteers are university students doing MA and Phd studies. Although some of them are only with us for a year their expertise and support is invaluable. Their lively minds, typing speeds and Internet search skills combine well with the experience of the older volunteers who



are familiar with the process and are not intimidated by the court system.

We are liaising closely with Manuel Bravo, a group of volunteer solicitors in Leeds. They visited us with a complete change of staff and direction. We did some training for them so that they could start a Leeds branch of McKenzie Friends. We earned enough money through the training to join EIN the Electronic Immigration Service, which will give access to case precedents and country information for those we support.

Mark Taylor, a local solicitor kindly gave up his Saturday morning to train us in how to make New Submissions – this is how asylum seekers, who have come to the end of the line, reconnect with the system.

We are planning more training for November and we have a regular group of 10 – 12 McKenzie Friends who meet monthly to share information, support and adapt to changing conditions. The appointment system/drop-in is scheduled for every two weeks and has worked well throughout the year with 2-4 clients each week.

If anyone is interested in becoming a volunteer please contact:

Laura O'Connor, BEACON Co-ordinator, details on back page.

Judy Midgeley

Psalm 82:3 *Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.*



Roy Howarth – BEACON Treasurer

Once again BEACON has continued to support Asylum Seekers in Bradford, thanks to generous donations from individuals and churches and also well supported fund- raising events, such as the Sponsored Walk and the Charity Dinner. One great encouragement has been the willingness of some Charitable Trusts and the West Yorkshire Methodist District to commit to funding for a three-year period.

At a time when people generally are experiencing financial difficulties, it is gratifying to see that the work of BEACON not only continues - but is growing to meet an ever- increasing need. We trust that our financial position at the end of this year will enable us to continue to be as successful next year.

There are a number of plans in the pipeline, which will increase and extend our support for Asylum Seekers. With the level of financial support which we receive through the generosity of donors; the endeavour of those who raise funds and secure grants; careful budgeting and prudent spending we hope to continue to grow and develop throughout the coming year.

Please refer to Accounts enclosed.

Roy Howarth



For all enquiries for BEACON projects, please contact:

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