

## Events & Campaigns

In June, Refugee Week 2013 was celebrated with a week long programme of events. These included our longstanding Refugee Week football tournament, a music night at the Revelry in Exeter, a two-hour radio show on Phonic FM kindly hosted by John Stammers, a coffee morning at the newly refurbished St Stephens Church on Exeter High Street, display boards around the county and a discussion panel. The theme of the discussion panel was 'changes in the political landscape: the impact on local refugee communities'. Discussions around policies affecting immigration and asylum took place with great insight from the speakers Tom Hamilton-Shaw from the British Red Cross, Michael Sanderson from the University of Exeter and Ben Bradshaw, MP for Exeter. It was attended by a large audience of RSD members and the local public.

Throughout the year Be the Change Society's 'Project Refugee' has continued to expand its efforts to raise awareness and funds. In November, the project held a highly successful Christmas shoebox appeal in conjunction with the Trussell Trust, resulting in 62 boxes of gifts being donated to refugee

children in Devon and around the UK. In December, Project Refugee took part in Krispy Kremes 'raise dough' scheme, re-selling donuts at a significantly reduced price in order to raise a total of £415 for RSD.



Be the Change members also joined with two STAR members to promote awareness of refugees and asylum seekers as part of an anti-discrimination day at Honiton College. In February, Project Refugee organised a film screening and panel discussion entitled 'The Hot Potato: Cooling the Heat on the Asylum debate.' The event, named after the Australian film The Hot Potato (2013), sought to raise awareness of contemporary legal and social issues surrounding the topic of seeking asylum. Finally, in March, Project Refugee joined forces with the Theatre with Teeth society to put on 'Roads to Refuge' at the Exeter Northcott and Bike Shed Theatre. This included a performance of the 'Asylum Monologues' and original

poetry from spoken word artists Mohamed 'Mo' Rhymes' Mohamed and Aisling Fahey detailing their own feelings and experiences of migration and cultural adaptation. Overall, Project Refugee made a brilliant contribution to RSD and we were delighted to see their efforts being recognised when they received the Community Impact award at the 2014 Exeter Student Guild Awards.

Throughout the year RSD staff and volunteers have also participated in a wide range of events and network meetings organised by other agencies, including the South West forum for Asylum Seekers and Refugees, the Devon and Cornwall Police Local Reference Group, the Domestic Violence Action Group and the Race Equality Foundation. On World Refugee Day (20<sup>th</sup> June) we were proud to receive recognition for 'distinguished efforts towards refugees' from Dr Sheik Mohamed Bin Rashid Alhashimi at an award ceremony in London. Increased networking and partnership working is helping us to raise awareness of refugee and asylum issues more effectively as well as maintaining refugee and asylum issues on the agendas of other agencies.

We would like to thank all our funders this year:

Awards for All: Big Lottery Fund, The Cooperative Community Fund, Sovereign Housing 'Make a Difference Grant', Exeter City Council, Devon County Council Equality Funding, Devon County Council Councillors, John Paul Getty Junior charitable Trust, The Henry Smith Charity, Lloyds TSB Foundation for England and Wales, The Allen Lane Foundation, Truemark Trust, Jill Franklin Trust, The Odin Charitable Trust, The Ashworth Charitable Trust, The Jamieson-Bystock Trust, Clothworkers Foundation, Southernhay Reformed Church, Exeter Quakers, St Davids Church, The Parish of Central Exeter, Hikmat, and all the individuals who have donated and helped us to raise the funds necessary to keep our services running.

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# Annual Review

YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2014

This is the first report for Refugee Support (Devon) Ltd, Charity No. 1143884, Company No. 7731995, formerly Refugee Support Group Devon



## Chair's Report

A year ago in April 2013 Refugee Support Group Devon (RSG) began to operate in its new legal capacity as Refugee Support (Devon) Ltd (now known as RSD) – a seamless transfer of RSG's assets and operations. Directors Anna Lodge, Christopher Holdsworth, Hannah Sweeney, Lindsey Pike, Robert Mycock, David Mezzetti, Matheeshan Selvaratnam and Jenny Longford have continued to serve the organisation in various capacities. Sarah Davis took over from Louise Julin in the autumn as yet another hard working and enthusiastic representative from the University of Exeter, while Peter Bainbridge joined the Board at the end of the year bringing considerable expertise to the organisation. Not least, our thanks go to June Marshall who has served the Board as minutes secretary.

In the last year we have gone from strength to strength. Recognising the changing needs of service users, 2013 saw the launch of our befriending programme. Emma Marshall has trained volunteers as befrienders and the scheme is well underway, while the office continues to host a busy drop-in service. In addition, we successfully bid for funds to develop a Women's Welcome Project. This has provided a programme of regular activities and general education for women and has given them a much greater presence at Exeter Community Centre where our office is based, as well as building their skills and confidence. Funding has also allowed us to employ an administrator for the first time ever and we welcomed Trupti Desai to the staff team in November. This has been a great help in all aspects of our busy organisation.

Our role of supporting refugees and asylum seekers in Devon, although locally significant, is dwarfed by the enormity of the global refugee situation. In 2013, for the first time since the end of World War II, the number of refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced people worldwide exceeded 50 million. Refugee Council Chief Executive, Maurice Wren, has said: "The world is in the grip of a refugee crisis of catastrophic proportions... We should not fool ourselves into believing that this is someone else's problem; this is a global crisis... and it is essential the UK plays its full role." It is with this belief that we strive to continue our work and welcome those who want to join us and contribute in some way.

Jennifer Longford,  
Chair

## Volunteers

Annette Hughes continues to manage RSD's much depended-on volunteers. There was a significant turnover of volunteers, a total of 77 throughout the year, with between 50 and 60 volunteers helping out in our projects each month. Of these, 40 volunteers have been committed to the organisation for more than two years, and 10 volunteers have helped out for over six years. We are most grateful for such high levels of commitment and all the skills that the volunteers bring.

A total of 63 members of the public participated in volunteer inductions throughout the year – many of these were students through the STAR (Student Action for Refugees) group and Be The Change Society from the University of Exeter, who attended to increase their understanding and knowledge of RSD in order that they could help the funding and awareness raising activities that they organised within their own societies. RSD's partnership with these groups has been a tremendous resource. We would especially like to thank all those students who have volunteered in the office drop-in and the regular weekly conversation and reading group for women, as well as those who have devoted much energy to fundraising events. An important development this year has been introducing new methods to improve the monitoring and analysis of



our projects, which has been made possible by the addition of our administrative worker. We greatly value the contribution of volunteers as they offer a great deal of their time in order to sustain our work, and being able to capture more data has assisted us in improving the support we are able to provide. Additional training offered to volunteers through this year included befriending and mentoring, and listening tools and mindfulness. We aim to continue to increase opportunities for the professional development of our volunteers and are currently seeking funding to enable this in future years.

## Accounts

	April 2014	April 2013
B/forward	51,530	51,953
Income	41,419	59,102
Expenditure	56,974	59,525
<b>BALANCE</b>		
Restricted	17,272	38,870
Unrestricted	18,703	12,660
	35,975	51,530

**Refugee Support (Devon) Ltd**  
Exeter Community Centre,  
17 St Davids Hill,  
Exeter,  
EX4 3RG

## Drop-in Service

Our drop-in service has had a busy year, with an increase in numbers from the previous year. We saw 143 individuals with a total of 920 visits between them. This means that we saw an 18% increase in the number of people accessing the service and a 31% increase in the overall number of visits. Of the people we saw in the drop-in service 41 were new to us. This can partly be attributed to the success of the Women's Welcome Project (visits by women made up 39% of the total, which is more than double the year before), and partly due to us receiving increased referrals from other services including the Migrant Legal Project, Exeter City Council, Devon County Council (social services), St Petrocks and the local Citizens Advice Bureau.

People from 28 different countries of origin accessed the service, and 61% of the people we saw were from Afghanistan (less than the previous year). The remainder were from a range of other countries including Albania, Algeria, Bangladesh, Botswana, Burma, China, Egypt, Gambia, Guinea, India, Iraq, Iran, Ivory Coast, Kosovo, Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestine, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Syria, Tibet, Turkey and Zimbabwe. Only 14 of the people we saw in the office were under 18, but we often see families who have children at home and we plan to start collecting

## Befriending Project

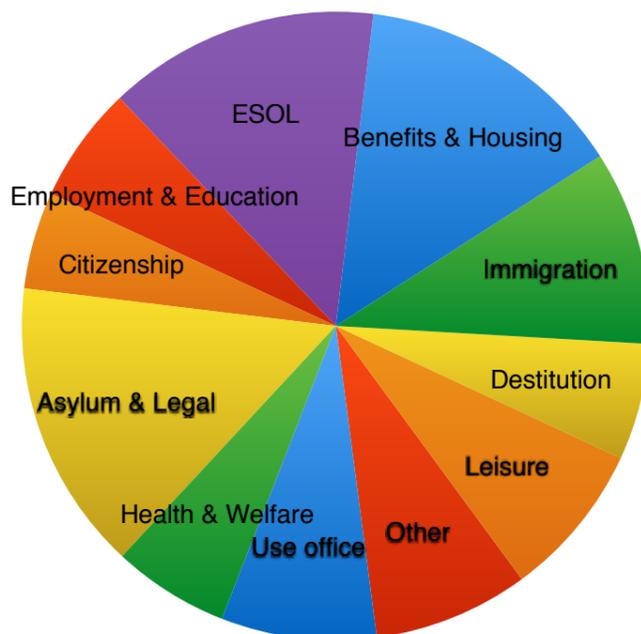
We started the befriending project in July with the aim of providing focused one-to-one support to refugees and asylum seekers living locally in order to help them settle into their new lives in the UK. Between July and March we helped 12 service users, who between them received 165 hours of support from volunteers. They included 9 refugees and 3 asylum seekers, 2 of whom received their permission to stay. We also trained 17 volunteers who were able to develop their skills and knowledge through the project.

The service users we supported were made up of 5 men and 7 women. Of the people we helped 3 had families with dependants under the age of 18 and 2 were destitute and homeless. Volunteer befrienders provided help with issues around learning English, adult training, health, finding employment, accessing benefits, finding leisure activities to reduce social isolation and accessing legal help for asylum applications. Some of the benefits of the project included two people being supported to engage regularly in new social and leisure activities. They learnt about places to meet other people in Exeter, took part in activities such as yoga and also visited the RSD allotment. Volunteers also accompanied individuals to the Job Centre - just one example of a good outcome of this was that a service user was able to get their professional qualification from their home country converted so that they could then look for work here as a qualified engineer.

***"The group has been quite a profound learning experience for me which has challenged my assumptions. For instance, when the women were asked to put photographs of men they thought were good and ones they thought were bad into separate piles, I was surprised to see that most of the women put a picture of an American soldier - complete with weapons- on the good pile! This astonished me initially until I realised that I had viewed this activity through a western lens; as far as the women were concerned, the man's nationality was irrelevant, for them he was "good" because he had a job which meant he had the resources to feed his family." - Josie Hanson***

this information next year to give a bigger picture of the young people who benefit from our work.

78% of the people we saw were refugees, but we also saw 26 asylum seekers who made up 18% of the overall visits. Issues presented and helped with through the year included:



## Women's Outreach Project



The year to April 2014 has been one of the best for women's activities thanks to a grant received from Awards for All and the enthusiastic participation of volunteers including Josie Hanson, a second year

## Legal Advice and Advocacy

We were most fortunate to commence a fortnightly legal clinic from August within the drop-in service, enabled by Avon and Bristol Law Centre's Refugee and Asylum Seeking Women's Project. Indrani Currie, a senior immigration practitioner and supervisor for 13 years, has been funded to give expert legal advice to asylum seeking and refugee women throughout the South West, with special regard for women who have been subject to sexual violence and/or domestic violence. Indrani has been invaluable, not only in taking on casework with women, but also providing advice to others on asylum and immigration matters. In a period of 8 months, Indrani held 16 sessions at RSD and responded to queries from 57 clients. During this period there were significant improvements to the lives of the people helped - including 2 families receiving leave to remain after complex and long-term immigration issues.

## Allotment

We have had a good year for produce despite the usual ups and downs: too much rain, not enough rain, rampant weeds, a big wasps nest (thankfully removed swiftly by Exeter City Council), and many other species enjoying the fruits of our labour. Despite these challenges there were regular deliveries of produce to the office for service users, including salads, beans, greens, potatoes, onions, soft fruit and apples. Planting was done by Helen, Pat, Jean and Beth from RSD and Musarat and Asif from Hikmat. Hikmat have been a great help and we will miss their allotment picnics with delicious food and cheerful company now that they have their own plot. Ali and Beth took on the strimming over the summer, which makes such a difference to appearance and practicality, Richen has been a regular worker, a stalwart waterer and expert pruner, and Helen is our mainstay in providing seedlings grown at home, with some contributions from Jean. Pat is in charge of the strawberry bed which produces more and more each year! In November a successful Saturday 'Big Dig' was organised to weed, dig and tidy ready for winter, which was supported by 17 volunteers including a group from Community Action at the University of Exeter. In December a group of Plymouth University first year Social Work students started their placement with RSD, helping to support service users to access the allotment. Chris, Sophie and Ashley were also involved in the 'Spring Dig' in March when we started preparing the soil for planting again. Thanks to all those who have helped to maintain and develop our allotment, it continues to be a safe and peaceful haven for those without their own urban green space.



Social Work student on placement from Plymouth University, who has been involved in co-ordinating the project. This has enabled us to host a regular series of Friday afternoon workshops with external facilitators. Altogether 24 women participated in the sessions and activities included basic First Aid, managing money, healthy eating, yoga and hairdressing. The autumn sessions kicked off with a month-long photography project in which women were encouraged to produce photo stories based on their lives. Amongst the women's requests for the year was an outing, so during the autumn half term we took 17 women and their children for an enjoyable day out to Bicton Park, which was made possible by a small grant from some of the Devon County Councillors.

The ESOL home tuition scheme is still very much in demand. During the past year 12 volunteer tutors have given regular English lessons to 18 women in their homes. In addition we have developed the on-site provision. Four students participated in a weekly writing class and several others attended informal conversation and homework support groups. Our connection with students from the STAR group at Exeter University has become firmly established. Their weekly conversation class at RSD started in May 2013 and has recently evolved into a reading group attracting 7 participants. The group has also begun to develop their computer skills, write letters and read fiction. We are looking forward to further developing these activities in 2014-15.