

Issue

Summer 2012

Survival

The Newsletter of
the Refugee Survival Trust

RST

Refugee
Survival
Trust

RST is a small volunteer-led charity that provides grants to asylum seekers and refugees living in Scotland.

These grants either alleviate poverty and destitution, or help refugees and asylum seekers to overcome obstacles in accessing educational and employment opportunities.

RST uses the information and experience gained from providing these grants to lobby for improved conditions for asylum seekers and refugees in Scotland.

Please read this newsletter and pass it on to spread the word about our work.

Keep in touch – sign up for email updates at:
www.rst.org.uk

2011-12: Another Successful Year Thanks to your support

During 2011-12, RST continued its work towards ensuring just and respectful treatment and support for refugees and asylum seekers. We are very grateful to our supporters, members, volunteers and partner organisations, who make this vital work possible.

Some highlights from the last year include:

- **Grants:** preventing the destitution of 545 asylum claimants and enabling 106 people to access education and employment—see pp 2&3.
- **Research:** our new report soon to be launched (see pp. 4 & 5).
- **Awareness raising:** new projects including our volunteer-led speakers programme which has reached film audiences, women's groups, Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament, schools



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and more.

- **Communications:** boosting our support through social media and our brilliant new animation
- **Partnership working:** continuing to work closely with other agencies, big and small to prevent destitution.



**Attend our
AGM to find out
more**

**Sept 25th 5.30 pm
Edinburgh City
Chambers**

Glasgow City Council condemns UKBA policy of destitution

On 28th June, Glasgow City Council passed a motion condemning UKBA's "policy of destitution" and the eviction of refused asylum seekers.



RST welcomed the motion which described the number of destitute asylum seekers living on the streets of Glasgow as a "humanitarian crisis requiring an urgent response".

The Council is writing to the UK Government to ask for changes to rules which severely limit the support local authorities can provide to refused asylum seekers.

Delays on Section 4 Support Ruled Illegal

The Migrant Law centre and Refugee Action have won a landmark legal ruling against the UK Government's policy of delaying section 4 support to destitute asylum seekers.

The case concerned the failure of UKBA to provide accommodation and support to those awaiting a decision on whether their fresh submission, including new evidence of the risk of persecution, constituted a

new asylum claim.

The judge ruled that the Government was acting illegally in delaying support for a minimum of 3 weeks and leaving people destitute and homeless.

UKBA is currently revising its guidance on this issue.



Further info:

www.refugee-action.org.uk

Update on UKBA Housing Contract Transfer

In our Spring newsletter, we reported that around 100 asylum seekers were facing eviction from Ypeople accommodation in Glasgow.

This is due to the contract for housing and other services for asylum seekers in Scotland being awarded to Serco, a private company. In the past, YPeople, a voluntary organisation working with vulnerable people, had allowed refused asylum seekers to remain in their homes at their expense after support was terminated.

At the time of going to press the housing contract transfer is underway. The situation for refused asylum seekers in Ypeople accommodation remains unclear. The numbers of people have reduced as some have returned home and others have qualified for other forms of support. Around 50-60 people still face eviction over the coming months.

Who RST supports: Grants in the last 3 months

During April, May and June, RST gave out 134 destitution grants, and, between May and mid July, 20 Access to Education and Employment grants.

Below is a taste of the people who benefitted from the grants, and the stories of their lives.

Mohammed*, a Pakistani asylum seeker applied for support after submitting a new claim for asylum. He has depression and high blood pressure and mobility problems. After two months he had heard nothing. The Home Office said they hadn't received his application and he would have to re-submit it. To keep him going till his

support came through, RST gave him a grant of £36 .

Peter, a refugee from Cameroon, was given Leave to Remain for 5 years after spending 11 years as an asylum seeker.

Early in 2011 RST awarded him a grant of £150 towards buying a computer for his computer course at college. In July he received a further grant of £150 towards the cost of a Security Industry Licence, after completing the relevant qualifications. This will allow him to work while he studies for a degree at Glasgow Caledonian University.

Night Shelter Update

The Glasgow Destitution Network is continuing to run a vital night shelter for destitute asylum seekers. The shelter is open every night from 8pm to 8am. It is a volunteer-run emergency shelter in a church in the west end of Glasgow.

The project was originally intended to be only emergency accommodation over the winter and was due to end in March.

However because it has been so successful and played such a positive part in the lives of the men and women staying there, a team of volunteers is continuing the drop in (now in a new location) for the rest of the year.

Donations and volunteers are urgently needed. Contact: **07929852264**

glasgownightshelter@gmail.com

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New Destitution Research



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At a workshop at Glasgow Caledonian University in June, asylum seekers, service providers and academics helped us to review the initial findings of our new research report and input into the recommendations.

The research is a joint project between RST, Scottish Refugee Council, British Red Cross and the Scottish Poverty Information Unit. It examines the extent and impact of destitution in the asylum process in Scotland.

Researchers carried out a destitution survey over 1 week in March, conducted focus groups and interviews and analysed RST's grant

statistics over 3 years.

Beyond the stark statistics, interviews from the research revealed an insight into the harshness of life as a long-term, destitute asylum seeker and the burden of having so little choice over your life:

"You live in someone's house, you cook in someone's kitchen...when you go to the toilet, you are in someone's toilet...every time you have to hold yourself and try to think : do they like what I am doing?"

"Yes, I live for people. I don't live for myself. I don't have a life, I'm not myself any more... I would say all choices are lost to me".

Key Findings:

Destitution Survey

- **115 destitute people** contacted our partner agencies for help in a single week and completed our questionnaire.
- During the week of the destitution survey, **one quarter** of all people accessing dedicated asylum support were destitute.
- The number included people with mental health conditions, pregnant women and new mothers and disabled people.
- The average length of time for which people had been destitute was **1.5 years**, and ranged from one week to **6.5 years**.
- The longer people were destitute the more likely they were to have **mental health problems**.
- Most of those responding to the survey had claimed asylum in 2010-2011, but many had been in the asylum system for years.

The interviews also gave an insight into the lack of faith people have in the authorities deciding their asylum claim:

“I’m afraid now to hope for anything because, you know, I think it’s just been too long... the way my asylum case has been handled is such that everything I said was just slashed, slashed, slashed and it left me with no words to say”.

From a researcher’s point of view, the findings brought some surprises. Morag Gillespie, of the Scottish Poverty Information Unit, commented:

“I’ve done a lot of research with many different groups about poverty and what their experiences are. However, I found the scale and depth of destitution amongst asylum seekers quite alarming, particularly amongst those who have been refused status. In the survey work, I think we only uncovered a fraction of the people who are coping with destitution

and its consequences, sometimes for a very long time.

The support from church and community groups and support services is impressive, especially given how little resources they have. But I think the wider public needs to be made much more aware that destitution, and all the issues it brings for vulnerable people, it is not just a problem in other parts of the world—its on their own doorstep.”

Report Launch and Campaign

We will be launching the report on October 1st 2012 as part of Black History Month (venue and time to be confirmed). The research will provide the evidence for a new joint campaign to raise awareness of asylum destitution and lobby for change.

RST members will have a sneak preview of the report at our AGM on Sept 25th.

Key Findings:

Analysis of RST Grants



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- Over 3 years (2009-12), RST awarded over **1849 destitution grants**.

- Of these, almost half (892) were **homeless** and more than a hundred applicants had children

- Those seeking a grant came from 67 different counties, with high numbers from Iran, Iraq, Zimbabwe and Somalia.

Refugee Week Scotland 2012



RST Talks Ambassador Mehdi Saki

Refugee Week Scotland took place on 18th—24th June 2012. The annual celebration of the contribution refugees make to life in the UK saw over 100 fantastic events taking place across Scotland.

RST organised for volunteers from our Talks Ambassadors' programme to speak at events throughout the programme and to show our destitution animation.

Our speakers contributed to discussion and film events at the Filmhouse in Edinburgh, and the Centre for Contemporary Arts in Glasgow, talking about the work of the organisation, and the key issues around destitution. Our volunteers also spoke to Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament, Women's Inter-faith groups and school pupils, and there are more engagements planned for the Autumn.



Further info: on Refugee Week

www.scottishrefugeecouncil/news_and_events/refugee_week_scotland



Help us arrange more events

If you know of a potential audience for an RST talk, contact Heather on rst.talks@gmail.com

RST AGM

Sept 25th 5.30 pm
European Room,
Edinburgh City Chambers
253 High Street,
Edinburgh, EH1 1YJ

All are welcome to attend our Annual General Meeting. We have an interesting line up of speakers, including Dr. Alison Elliot, our patron, and Morag Gillespie, of the Scottish Poverty Information Unit. It's an opportunity to hear more about RST and contribute ideas for the future. If you would like to come, please either phone us (0131 243 2660) or e:info@rst.org.uk

Interesting Event at the Festival of Politics

"Who are Jock Tamson's Bairns? Attitudes towards Migration in Scotland."

24th August, 10.30 am in Committee Room 3 of the

Scottish Parliament. This will be chaired by Lesley Riddoch, with speakers from the Scottish Refugee Council—sure to be interesting!

An interview with an RST supporter

During Refugee Week, Glasgow West Amnesty group organised a concert to raise funds for RST and Amnesty International. Claire Crossan, a member of the group, spoke to RST about her experiences .

How did you hear about RST?

Initially, from the Scottish Refugee Council. When we began planning Refugee Week events, we wanted to support a small charity so the money would go further.

What activities are the group involved in?

We campaign on different topics using different tactics. This year we ran a stall at the West End Festival on LGBT rights. We did Refugig, and we ran a 2nd event during Refugee Week on the Arms Trade. A Syrian refugee talked about how the first words children in his country were coming out with were sometimes words like “tank”, “shrapnel” etc. That was very affecting.

You attended a workshop on RST's research on destitution, what were your impressions?

I was struck by the holes the government leaves behind, and how it's left to charities to plug the gaps. I think governments are reluctant to be seen to be helping refugees and asylum seekers because it's not popular with voters. It's important to change how refugees are portrayed in the media.

What needs to happen?

I'd like to see local groups and charities working together more to address destitution in the asylum system.

Fundraising News

RST is very lucky to have such dedicated supporters and members. In recent months, our supporters have been active, demonstrating ingenuity and commitment to raising funds for RST.

Sandy Small, a long term RST supporter, ran the Ardbeg Islay Half Marathon on 4th August. Let's hope this summer's weather let up for a day! You can still sponsor him on : www.justgiving.com/Sandy-Small

Thanks also to the Quaker Meeting House (Edinburgh) for choosing RST as one of its charities to benefit from funds raised during the Edinburgh Fringe, when the meeting house becomes Venue 40.

Profits from the tearoom and events held there will go to the chosen charities. To see what is on, go to www.venue40.org.uk/charities



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Visit our website:
www.rst.org.uk

The Refugee Survival Trust only exists thanks to the generosity, help and support given by people in Scotland—individuals, churches, clubs, companies and schools. It is thanks to you that we are able to prevent hundreds of vulnerable people from being destitute on the streets of Scotland. However, as harsh legislation and an often ineffective asylum system forces more people to rely on RST funding to survive, we need your help more than ever.

Please pass on this newsletter to friends, family and colleagues, and encourage them to support us—ask them to show their support by making a donation online or by joining us. You can also donate online: www.rst.org.uk

Please make a donation

Last year, RST made grants of over £39,000 to prevent the destitution of asylum seekers and refugees in Scotland. RST only has limited funds, and desperately needs to raise more if it is to continue. Without RST, asylum seekers, refugees and their children would be left with no money for food, and often no accommodation. Please make a donation now to help us continue this essential work. Thank you!

Title: Mr / Mrs / Ms / Other

Full Name:

Full address:

..... Postcode:

Email: (Please give us your email address if you would like to receive occasional updates about our work by email)

- I would like to make a donation of £ and enclose a cheque/postal order payable to the Refugee Survival Trust for this amount.
- I am a UK Taxpayer and would like the Refugee Survival Trust to reclaim tax on this and all donations hereafter (*please tick*)

NB This only applies if you currently pay tax on income or any savings you have. You must pay an amount of income tax or capital gains tax at least equal to the tax we reclaim on your donations in the tax year.

Please return to: The Refugee Survival Trust, The Melting Pot, 5 Rose Street, Edinburgh EH2 2PR