

## Summary Preventing Destitute Homelessness

Community InfoSource was commissioned by the Refugee Survival Trust to investigate the Prevention of Asylum Seeker Homelessness in Scotland. Our report may be summarised as follows.

1. There is a substantial amount of research into asylum seeker homelessness arising from destitution. Many previous studies report on the experiences of support agencies in cities across the UK. The conclusions of these reports are broadly similar and include:
  - a) The belief that the asylum system treats asylum seekers unfairly, particularly in relation to the length of the process
  - b) The need for improved access to legal support, to healthcare and to adequate temporary accommodation, at both emergency night shelter level and medium term supported accommodation
  - c) The need to reform the system of Section 4 support
  - d) The need to restore an asylum seeker's ability to work, to allow them to earn an income and to help prevent destitution occurring
  - e) The need for good partnership working at local level to ensure ongoing support for destitute asylum seekers, including improved support for faith and charitable groups working in this area.
  - f) The need for awareness-raising amongst local people and related campaigning work
2. In undertaking our study, our research methods included the following.
  - a) Collecting information on a range of English projects, either through visits or telephone surveys, meetings etc.
  - b) Meeting with and collecting information from local agencies in the West of Scotland which provide dedicated support, advice, accommodation and food
  - c) Contacting residents of the Glasgow Night Shelter for Destitute Asylum Seekers (Night Shelter) that provides accommodation for that group of people
  - d) Conducting focus groups with residents of the Night Shelter and with destitute asylum seekers living in other peoples' homes in the city
  - e) Collating case studies of destitute foreign nationals, including a member of our research team
  - f) Monitoring eviction actions against asylum seekers in Glasgow Sheriff Court
  - g) Learning about a weekly help desk in a neighbourhood where asylum seekers are housed
3. Accurate data on destitute asylum seekers is very hard to find. Agencies record data in different ways and for different time periods. Nevertheless, it would appear that instances of destitution are increasing and include women and young people in this position.
4. Our investigation of English projects revealed a piecemeal approach, with faith groups and churches being significant drivers of support for destitute people. Projects provide a range of support, including temporary accommodation, advice, subsistence, and the encouragement of volunteering. Accommodation was provided

through night shelters, houses leased from housing associations, hosting in individual homes and spare rooms in shared rented houses.

5. In the West of Scotland, there is night shelter provision for 15 destitute people a night and some individual hosting. There is no supported housing, although agencies recognise this is desirable and some housing associations would be willing to make property available. There are ongoing concerns about funding shortfalls and the long-term sustainability of services.
6. User focus groups revealed a range of views. Night shelter users identified as their key priorities as safety, shower facilities, places to go during the day, activities at weekends and legal support. Destitute asylum seekers who were living in other people's houses and who may be said to be 'couch surfing' saw as their priorities personal safety including a bedroom of their own, money for food and legal support.
7. The views of agencies and destitute asylum seekers in the West of Scotland, and the experience of projects in England have all helped to inform our proposals.
8. We propose the establishment of a new project which would have five key components:
  - a) A Destitution Surgery (at a venue which would be an initial point of contact for users)
  - b) The provision of legal assessment and representation
  - c) Emergency and supported accommodation with subsistence in some cases
  - d) One-to-one support through befriending
  - e) Volunteering for destitute people
9. The suggested accommodation would have three formats, namely
  - a) Emergency accommodation on the night shelter model
  - b) Hosting – we recommend giving agencies additional support to expand their database of hosts in individual homes
  - c) Medium-term supported housing provided through local housing associations
  - d) Including a basic level of subsistence
10. Proposals for how the project could be taken forward in the short term are by a Steering Group with representatives from all agencies providing services.
11. The groundswell of goodwill that exists at individual and organisational level in Glasgow suggests that a community based charity could be formed in the west of Scotland for this Project to support destitute asylum seekers in a "joined up" way.
12. The involvement of Refugee Survival Trust as a well established and respected charity would be beneficial in assisting with the raising of funds for the new project.

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