


Ten years of supporting destitute asylum seekers in Sheffield



“Before I found ASSIST, I had absolutely nothing. Things have changed now. Now my health problems are being sorted out and my legal situation is moving forward. This is basically because I can have somewhere to sleep and enough to eat.”

Asefa, ASSIST client

In 2003, a small group of Sheffield citizens decided they wouldn't stand by and watch people seeking sanctuary in our city be forced onto the streets. They began to offer help and support to those they had met. Out of their actions, ASSIST began, intended as a short term solution to an injustice in the wider system that, surely, would be corrected before long.

Ten years later, it remains a sad truth that thousands of people fleeing their homeland to seek asylum are instead driven into hardship and further suffering by the UK's inadequate and unfair asylum system. Many genuine claims are refused and very little official support is given. Afraid to return to their own country, people may be faced with a choice between forced destitution and the threat of war or further persecution at home. ASSIST exists to support

Gerard Hunter



people at this crossroads. This report summarises the successes and challenges of ASSIST's work in 2012-13. A toughening stance on immigration, and an economic climate of radical austerity has made the last year one of the most challenging ever for destitute asylum seekers and the organisations supporting them. For ASSIST it also marks an anniversary no one wanted to think would be necessary: 10 years of combatting destitution and discrimination. Whilst we meet this milestone with some sadness, it is also a time to pay tribute to the incredible dedication, commitment, resilience and compassion of the hundreds of people involved – volunteers, clients, staff, supporters. Their collaborations are a credit to the city of Sheffield and a reminder of

its big heart and vibrant community. The last year has seen us reach out and ask our dedicated supporters if they can give any more, and they responded generously to our need. These difficult times have also presented the opportunity to begin a review process of how we help asylum seekers and ask if we can work more effectively and strategically.

Whilst our focus is alleviating the hardship of destitution and supporting people to progress their situations, we continue to strengthen our commitment towards letting the facts of asylum be known, and sharing information with our partners who are campaigning nationally for dignity and safety for asylum seekers in the UK.

How ASSIST helps: meeting basic human needs

1390 enquiries
at the ASSIST
help desk,
including 188
first time visits

801 lunch
vouchers and
324 food bank
referrals issued

Initial help

ASSIST's weekly help desk is a lifeline for destitute refused asylum seekers in Sheffield. It is the first port of call for people who have recently become destitute whilst seeking asylum, as well as an ongoing source of help for those who we already support. In terms of meeting basic human needs, the help desk makes referrals to our night shelter, issues emergency payments and food vouchers, signposts to food banks, clothing banks, and medical services. Many people who come to ASSIST for help are isolated and unhappy, so they are also supported at help desk to access community activities, English classes and volunteering opportunities. Those most in need are referred to ASSIST's weekly welfare payment scheme, advocacy and accommodation services. The help desk operates from the Sheffield Asylum Partnership Group's drop in, so that we can be sure that all of the charitable organisations who offer help to asylum seekers and refugees are working strategically together and making sure the individuals who need help are directed to the most relevant services.

Accommodation

ASSIST provides temporary and medium term accommodation for asylum seekers who are homeless:

Over the year, our volunteer-run emergency

night shelter has provided 64 people with a safe, warm and dry place to sleep. The shelter has been open for 240 nights of the year, accommodating on average 14 people each month. Nine volunteer hosts have provided accommodation for night shelter users during weekends, when the shelter is not operating. 52 people have been placed in temporary accommodation for periods ranging from two weeks to 11 months. 41 of them stayed in shared houses managed by ASSIST and 11 were placed with volunteer hosts.

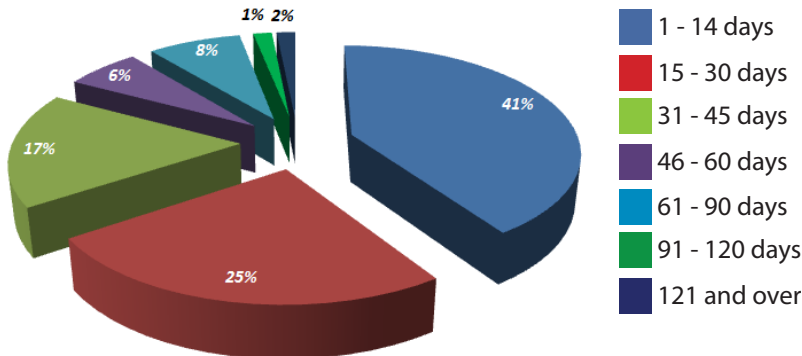
Weekly welfare payment and bus pass scheme

ASSIST offers practical support through small weekly welfare payments and free bus passes. The bus pass scheme enables clients to travel to attend medical, legal and home office appointments throughout South Yorkshire - further supporting the progression of their situation. It also helps people to access other support services and community activities, reducing the social isolation which comes with destitution. ASSIST's welfare payments and bus passes are allocated on an assessment of need basis, and places are capped to supporting 60 clients at any one time.

Support for 157 people who were rough sleeping or sofa hopping

120 clients were supported during 2012-2013 with the welfare payment and bus pass scheme

How long clients stayed in the night shelter

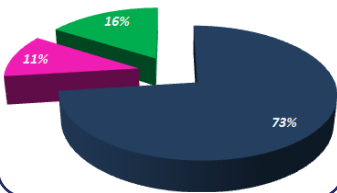


How ASSIST helps: Moving on support

24 people
accompanied
to 64
appointments

Reasons for accompanying

- UKBA reporting
- Medical appointments
- Other appointments



323 one-to-one advocacy appointments were attended by ASSIST clients

First steps

ASSIST's help desk volunteers are there to help with the crucial first steps on the road to stability and safety for many of our clients, assisting them in finding legal representation and supporting with home office communications.

Advocacy

ASSIST offers a one to one advocacy appointment service, so that every ASSIST client is supported and encouraged to actively engage with their situation, however challenging, and to pursue their asylum case where applicable and to progress with legal and medical issues. Volunteer advocates and interpreters assist with correspondence, research and signposting to other services. Clients will have a minimum of three advocacy appointments over the course of a year, but often clients have several additional follow up appointments scheduled in to keep their situation progressing. Without this practical and emotional support, many of our clients would face their extremely difficult situations alone and without the language and local or system knowledge to have any agency in their own lives.

Accompanying

2012-2013 has seen ASSIST's accompanying team grow from three to eight volunteers who support ASSIST clients primarily to attend critical medical and Home Office appointments, but occasionally

to support especially vulnerable clients with more routine visits.

Asylum seekers are required to report to the home office regularly, and it can harm their case and increase risk of deportation if they do not report. However, because reporting appointments are often used as opportunities to detain and deport refused asylum seekers, many of our clients are very frightened of reporting and would not attend without being accompanied. This could have serious consequences for their situation and inhibit their opportunity to pursue their asylum case. Accompanying also means that in the event that a client is detained, any solicitors, individuals or organisations supporting the client can be informed immediately so that they can act quickly in their best interests.

For clients with mental and physical health issues, accompaniers support to attend medical appointments for diagnosis, assessment and treatment. Many clients are depressed and withdrawn and may not keep appointments without the support and encouragement of an accompanier. Practical help in locating services and navigating bureaucracy is also key, as well as encouraging clients to share all relevant information with healthcare professionals. Fear, mistrust and poor English language skills could easily render asylum seekers unable to advocate for themselves in a medical setting, without the practical and emotional support provided by accompaniers.

Clients are supported to attend medical assessments which sometimes help them to get the local government support that is reserved for those with significant care needs.

'When I got to Sheffield I had no friends, support, money, nothing. I was sick too. So when I came to ASSIST, a volunteer took me to register with a doctor. I received some medicine and slowly my medical problems became smaller and smaller for the first time. I also received help and advice on how to do something about my legal case – help finding a solicitor, appointments with CDAS (Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers) and SYRLJ (South Yorkshire Refugee Law and Justice). I wouldn't have known how to go about any of this without ASSIST. They gave me this chance.'

Samuel,
ASSIST client

An incredible 354 volunteers made ASSIST's work in 2012-2013 possible

'Once my own situation had improved I became a volunteer, and through volunteering and helping other people I was able to focus less on my own problems. I felt like I was useful; at ASSIST I am listened to and respected, and thanks to their help I feel like I am part of British society.'

**Souley, former
ASSIST client and
ASSIST volunteer**

Volunteer recruitment and training is coordinated by Jenny Richardson, and has become increasingly volunteer led over the year. We are lucky to benefit from both long term experienced volunteers, as well as a constant flow of new faces with fresh enthusiasm and ideas. 43 of our volunteers in 2012-2013 were refugees or asylum seekers.

Recruitment

14 volunteers from across the organisation led 20 volunteer recruitment drop ins with an average of 10 prospective volunteers attending each one.

"I found the session really useful and accessible and I learnt a lot about the structure of ASSIST"

- Recruitment drop in attendee -

Training

72 volunteers attended a 2.5 hour interactive induction session,

'Induction training gave me more pride in what I do, more passion, more motivation'

- Induction participant -

Our full day training session which covers the basics of asylum law and processes in the UK, **Asylum: the Basics**, has grown in reputation in 2012-2013. Jenny and four volunteer trainers delivered two sessions to 25 ASSIST volunteers and 12 attendees from partner organisations.

'This training gives me a broader perspective as to what individuals go through – their dehumanising experiences of the asylum process.'

- Training participant -



Interpreting

During 2012-2013, we have focused especially on the development of our interpreter team who support communications across our front line services. Covering 15 languages, the team has grown to 13 volunteers who attend monthly meetings and training sessions at ASSIST. 10 of our interpreters are refugees or asylum seekers themselves.

'You never forget the first time someone tells you they slept in the park last night. Or on the steps of a police station, in a phone box or on someone's doorstep. Especially when there was frost on the ground. Is this really the Sheffield I live in?'

Carita Thomas, Night Shelter volunteer

**...Thank you!
To each and
every one of
them.**

ASSIST: a volunteer led organisation

We are incredibly grateful to ASSIST's 2012-2013 volunteer team leaders.

Without them, our work would have been impossible:

Accommodation: Cath Roberts and Paul Harvey
Accompaniers: Chris Tyldesley and Anne Greenwood

Advocacy: Jo Snell; Andrea Spurling until January 2013; Joan McFarlane from January 2013

Events Fundraising and Awareness: Abigail Taylor; Chris Johnson until June 2012; Carita Thomas from June 2012

Finance: Bernard Greenwood

Grants: Edmund Greenwood

Help desk: Margaret Spooner and Liz Clough

Night Shelter: Souleymane Bah and Victor Mujakachi

Panel: Pat Wormald and Sarah Neil

IT: Naomi Rosenberg and Declan Walsh from December 2012

ASSIST's strategic leadership comes from its board of Trustees.

Thank you to those who served on the board in 2012-2013

- Gina Clayton (Chair)
- Joan Macfarlane
- Maxwell Magadzire
- Paul Harvey
- Paul Snell



- Richard Chessum
- Tendo Makwenha (until October 2012)
- Claire Arthur (from October 2012)
- Andrea Spurling (from October 2012)
- Phil Wormald (from October 2012)
- Dan de Arriba (from January 2013)
- Paul Redgrave (from January 2013)

Team leaders and trustees were supported in their work by our small staff team: part time Volunteer Coordinator Jenny Richardson, and full time Office Coordinator Katherine Myles.

ASSIST was fortunate to have the support of our patrons in 2012-2013:

Sheila Cassidy (prisoner of conscience Chile 1975)

The Rt. Hon. Nick Clegg MP

The Right Rev Dr Steven Croft (Sheffield Diocese)

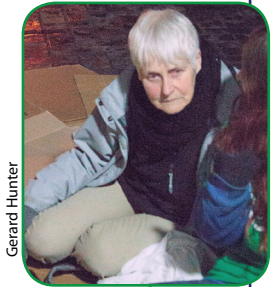
Rev. Vernon Marsh (Chair of Sheffield Methodist District)

Pat Midgley JP

Haji Mohammad Nazir O.B.E.,

The Right Rev. Bishop John Rawsthorne (Hallam Diocese)

ASSIST is immensely grateful to the following partner organisations for their support and collaboration: British Red Cross, Burngreave Ashram, Cathedral Archer Project, Central United Reformed Church, Christ Church Pitsmoor, Church Action on Poverty, Citizens Advice Bureau, City of Sanctuary, COMAC bicycle project, Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers, Conversation Club, Howells solicitors, Morgan Dias Solicitors, Mulberry St Central Health Clinic, Northern Refugee Centre, St Thomas Church, St Wilfrid's Centre, Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield Quakers, South Yorkshire Migration and Asylum Action Group (SYMAAG), South Yorkshire Refugee Law and Justice, Student Action for Refugees (STAR), Transcultural Team, Sheffield Health and Social Care NHS Foundation Trust, University of Sheffield, Victoria Hall Methodist Church.



Gerard Hunter

Events, Fundraising and Awareness

In 2012-13, the Events Fundraising and Awareness (EFA) team of volunteers not only raised over £15,000, but led ASSIST's awareness work and invited new people to join the ASSIST community. None of it would have been possible without the dedication and support of some remarkable people. Here we pay tribute to their efforts and just some of the highlights.

Gigs & Events



World Over, our flagship world music concert, raised over £1338 thanks to energising performances by Rafiki Jazz, Son de America, Side by Side, the Karen community dancers and Kweku of Ghana.

Jellybean Jazz and Andy Whitehouse let us shake buckets at their gigs, Body of Sound busked for us on the street, and Everard let us set up stall in his yard to serve tea and sell cards at the Nether Edge Farmers' Market. Other highlights were a rousing ceilidh in Broomhall and a carol service at St Mary's, featuring Umubano Congolese choir and the Christmas story complete with pantomime camel and Herod's G4S henchmen.

Fabulous fundraisers

Philip Booth and JJ & James cycled Land's End to John O'Groats, and Laura Caley cycled from John O'Groats to Land's End!

Becky Lehane and Emma Garrod travelled 100 miles via 40 modes of transport (tractor and pogo stick included) raising sponsorship celebrating a special birthday.

Sam Hemmati, Angela Waterfield, Cesca Frascina, Annemarie Morsch and Tony Cornah ran the Half Marathon and Esther Northcott did the Great North Run.

Judy ran a clothing swap and Jo organised a fondue party.

Jonathan and Rachel Saha raised funds by asking their wedding guests to donate to ASSIST in lieu of personal presents.

Vicky Seddon put on a month of dinner and lunch parties in her house.

Robert Spooner's talks not only raised awareness but inspired donations.

Cath Baldock coordinated the production and sales of ASSIST greetings cards throughout the year.

Kevin Hanson put his book of original poems on sale, donating all the income to ASSIST.

A special thank you everyone who shared deeply personal stories of seeking refuge in order to raise awareness of asylum issues. You have our admiration and thanks.

"Through volunteering at New Roots (shop for justice) we have met both asylum seekers and those who work to support them. We know how hard it is to get legal right to remain if you are new to the country and that the system fails people without proper support. ASSIST are a small but vital charity that gives asylum seekers a bit of breathing space."

**JJ & James,
megacyclists.**

Get involved!

Thanks to professional expertise of volunteers Cath Baldwin and Mark Nielson, you can find out about this year's exciting events at our revamped website: www.assistsheffield.org.uk

Future direction

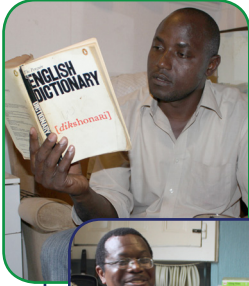
In response to a changing context, and informed by a decade of experience, ASSIST will be responding to the changing needs of our client base in 2013-14 by:

Building on our current accommodation services

In addition to the Night Shelter and a small, highly valued network of hosts, we will seek and implement new ways to house more asylum seekers. A recent grant from the Homelessness Transition Fund has enabled early progress in this area. It is hoped that in 2013-14 this work may be further extended to include the purchase of a house, made possible by the very generous support of anonymous donors.

Increasing access for women

In 2013-14, ASSIST will take steps to understand and resolve the under-representation of women among our clients. We will seek to identify barriers to first access and to continued support, working with clients (current, past and prospective), frontline volunteers and other agencies, and to tackle these in an effective and well-informed way. We anticipate this area of work may include more provision of private and/or female-only space and improving communications with clients and prospective clients about services for women.



Tracy Litterick

Reviewing criteria for support

ASSIST currently limits the offer of support to refused asylum seekers, but increasingly former clients are returning - sometimes more than once - to ask for help, as the effects of government policy make it harder for them to establish themselves after being granted leave to remain. With a gradual reduction in the average number of requests for support in recent years, 2013-14 is a good time for ASSIST to investigate how changes to criteria might enable us to better serve the needs of the asylum community.

Investing in resources, continually improving processes

With over a hundred people involved in delivering ASSIST's services and activities (and when all but three are volunteers), it is essential for us to ensure that we have clear processes, that our volunteers and staff are well supported, and that we are making sound choices about the resources our people need to get the job done. 2013-14 will see developments in our IT systems, clarification of decision making structures, and a review of the support people need to keep fulfilling the demanding and crucial roles they do.

'In this country, it's so cold in the winter that you can die when you're living in the streets and without food you get desperate. When you're cold, hungry and desperate, you'll do anything for food. You'll steal. You'll look through bins. You'll do bad things that make you a bad man. If someone gives you a chance to be warm and eat, you have the chance to be a good man. Without this chance, you can't be a good man. The chance can change your life.'

Samuel, ASSIST client



Thank you!

Our work relies upon the generosity and support shown by the people of Sheffield. We only exist because local people decided that they could not stand back and watch while others within the community went without food or shelter.

We are immensely grateful to each and every individual and organisation who made financial contributions to ASSIST in 2012-2013, including:



Gerard Hunter

- 150 individuals who donated a total of more than £33,000 through regular giving, which enabled us to plan our delivery and fundraising.
- 6 major donors who gave significant gifts amounting to £12,500 in total
- The generous donation in kind, which permitted ASSIST to use 2 houses to accommodate destitute asylum seekers
- The family and friends of the late Nigel West who donated over £1100 to ASSIST in his memory.
- The incredible Events, Fundraising and Awareness team who raised over £15,000 (see page 8)
- All of the supporters of ASSIST who dedicated special birthdays and weddings to

ASSIST, and their generous friends and families who donated in their honour.

•The following organisations and trusts, who provided large grants or donations in the year:

Evans Cornish Foundation
 Lankelly Chase Foundation
 Sheffield Quaker Meeting House
 Sheffield University Give as you Rent
 Central United Reformed Church
 Sheffield City Council
 Sheffield Agencies for the Vulnerable and Excluded

The following organisations, many of them longstanding supporters, gave gifts in kind and donations totalling almost £8000 to ASSIST in 2012-2013:

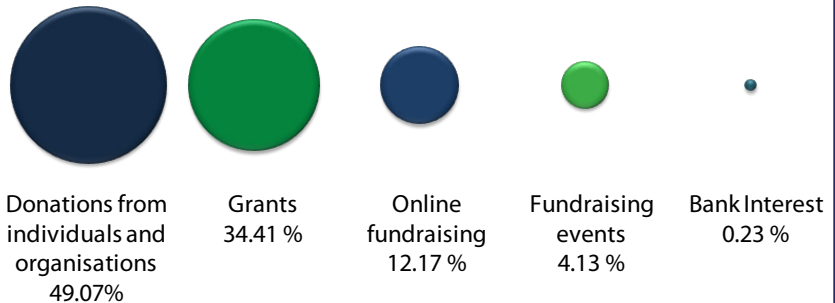
Aviva Sheffield, Body of Sound, Chesterfield Quaker Meeting, Chinley Independent Chapel, Digby Trust, Don Valley High School, Endcliffe Friendship Club, Ladies of Charity St Vincents, Lady Manners School, The CG Murray's Charitable Trust, Nether Edge Women's Institute, Nether Edge Farmer's Market, New Roots, Diocese of Hallam, Pitsmoor Methodist Church, Sacred Heart Justice and Peace Group, SCC House of Hope, Sheffield City Council, Sheffield Hallam University Students' Union, Sheffield University, Sheffield University Students' Union, Sir Jules Thorn Charitable Trust, South Yorkshire Migration and Asylum Action Group, St Andrew's Psalter Lane Church, St Columba's Church Crosspool, St John's Church Ranmoor, St Mark's Church Broomhill, St Peters Ellesmere, St Vincents Association of Charity, St Vincent's Catholic Church, St Peter and St Oswald, Steel City Striders, The Crossing Methodist Church Workshop, The Grand Plan, The Rotary Club of Sheffield Vulcan, Upper Chapel Women League, Wayham College.



Finance - our income sources:

Our total income for 2012-2013 was £170,101

Organisational income for 2012/2013



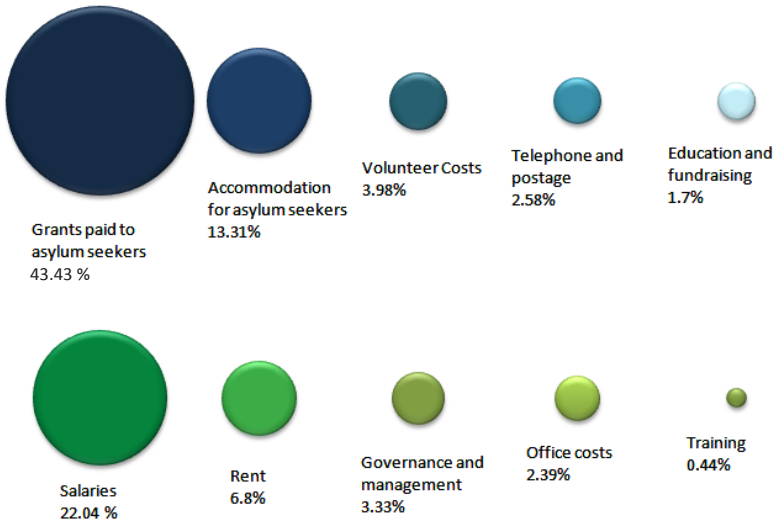
£29,011 of this was the Homelessness Transition Fund grant, received at the end of 2012-2013, and primarily will fund work for 2013-2014.

Our costs

ASSIST's small size, and the enormous gifts of time our volunteers make, have allowed us to ensure that donations and grants made in our name have a real and significant impact upon people's lives.

Our total expenditure for 2012-2013 was **£149,368**

Organisational spending for 2012/2013



Accounts subject to finalised independent examination

We need your help so we can continue to support asylum seekers in Sheffield and enable them to overcome the incredibly difficult situations they face

There are many ways to help ASSIST to continue providing these crucial services for people who become destitute through seeking asylum:

1. Give generously by making a one-off donation or setting up a standing order.
2. Host an asylum seeker in your home.
3. Organise a fundraising event.
4. Volunteer with us.
5. Spread the truth about asylum

Find out more at:

www.assistsheffield.org.uk

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admin@assistsheffield.org.uk

Together we will put an end to destitution for those seeking refuge

ASSIST Sheffield Annual Report 2012-2013

www.assistsheffield.org.uk



**Together we will put an end to destitution for those
seeking refuge**