

Churches Together in the Merseyside Region

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Support for Asylum Seekers

CTMR – Churches Together in the Merseyside Region

Registered Charity Number 519061

Dear Friends,

Report – March 2020

As we approach the Easter period it seems a good time to reflect on those less fortunate than ourselves. In particular how can we help those marginalised “unwanted strangers” who are seeking refuge or asylum in our communities? The current scenes we are seeing daily on our screens from the Greek /Turkish border are a timely reminder of the desperation of people leaving lives that are untenable and trying to find sanctuary at any cost.

Closer to home the scenarios are not so dramatic. Not all people seeking asylum are destitute but many are and those who are refused asylum soon become destitute as they are obliged to leave their accommodation and their £35+ per week benefit to cover food, clothing and transport is abruptly stopped. They become homeless, and without access to public funds.

I heard a new term recently – “destitute Plus” – which refers to those who are destitute but with serious health (mental and/or physical) and social issues too.

Ironically some of those given permission to stay in UK also become destitute – accommodation and benefits are stopped as above, but they are free to find a job, apply for housing benefit etc. Needless to say that does not happen overnight.

They all certainly need our prayers but also a practical welcoming hand to support them during the most difficult situations.

Support for Asylum Seekers(SAS) is a Destitution Project under the auspices of the Churches Together in the Merseyside Region. SAS delivers the destitution project via collaborative initiatives with our local partner agencies, mainly Asylum Link Merseyside (ALM), Refugee Women Connect(RWC), and Faiths4Change(F4C). Collectively we are providing much needed financial and practical support with humanitarian aid and wellbeing projects for destitute people seeking asylum and refuge.

I have asked each of our SAS partners to provide a brief report on their work since the last newsletter. You can read extracts of their reports embedded below.

ALM provides the bulk of the humanitarian aid required as well as advocacy and wellbeing

Presidents

The Most Rev'd Malcolm McMahon, The Archbishop of Liverpool

The Right Rev'd Paul Bayes, The Bishop of Liverpool

The Rev'd Dr Sheryl M Anderson, Chair of the Liverpool Methodist District

The Rev'd Jacky Embrey, Moderator of the Mersey Synod of the United Reformed Church

The Rev'd Phil Jump, Regional Minister, North West Baptist Association

Major Roger Batt North West England & North Wales Divisional Commander, Salvation Army

(Churches Together in the Merseyside Region is a registered charity, No.519061)

activities for clients. Its premises at St Anne's Centre acts as a place of welcome and sanctuary and a beacon of hope for those amongst the most marginalised people in our community.

ALM organised an ESOL conference at LACE in November 2018 and followed this up with several workshops in 2019 co-ordinated by Bridie Sharkey. These were aimed at charities and faith groups in newly dispersed area where there is little experience of accommodating new arrivals. The workshops were fully attended and well received.

Refugee Women Connect continue their vital work for destitute women and babies who are at risk, among other things, of street homelessness and domestic violence. RWC has included in their report typical examples of the dreadful situations some women can find themselves. Many have been refused asylum, are making fresh claims, have been deserted by their partners or subject to domestic abuse. RWC are making great efforts to provide them with ongoing practical and compassionate support while they are seeking asylum.

Faits4Change continues to deliver several excellent wellbeing projects. A Peace Garden [funded by the Grail Society] was created in 2019 especially for women attending the weekly allotments sessions. Additionally a derelict garden area attached to St Michael in the City has been cleared and developed into a wonderful peaceful garden oasis for attendees of the community market at St Michael's.

I hope you find this SAS report of interest but first the usual numbers.....

Financial Statements

Attached is a summary statement of financial activities for the year to December 2019 with comparative figures for the full year to December 2018. This shows a net deficit of £22,351 and a closing fund of £35,521.

Despite the increasing requests for emergency support grants we have maintained our 100% financial commitment to our partner agencies. The level of SAS funds at the end of December 2018 has enabled SAS to increase our support for our partner agencies despite reduced funding in the year. We will continue to monitor support levels on a regular basis in 2020.

In 2019 SAS received welcome grants of:

- £21,114 from RC Archdiocese of Liverpool.
- £1,650 from LCVS [Everyday Changes Fund]
- £1,000 from the Grail Society.

25 individual donors continued to support SAS by either standing orders or individual donations. A widowed lady regularly donates £5 cash from her pension specifically for the fruit project. Sadly, she has health problems at the moment so please keep her and the other donors and supporters of SAS in your prayers.

SAS has continued to maintain a contribution an average of £122 per month to the fruit project at ALM. This has been supplemented by occasional generous contributions of fresh fruit from individual supporters and volunteers. Broadly this enables us to give each visitor to ALM at least one piece of fresh fruit 5 days each week, all year round.

SAS contributed £53k for accommodation and emergency support grants in 2019. This is broadly in line with the level of support provided in 2018 [£55k].

Support grants include both humanitarian aid and wellbeing projects delivered by ALM and other local agencies including RWC [Refugee Women Connect], and Faiths4Change.

SAS had two family referrals via local foodbanks. We were able to support both families through dire situations until their status could be resolved, which is now happily the case.

SAS Support via Other Agencies:

Asylum Link Merseyside

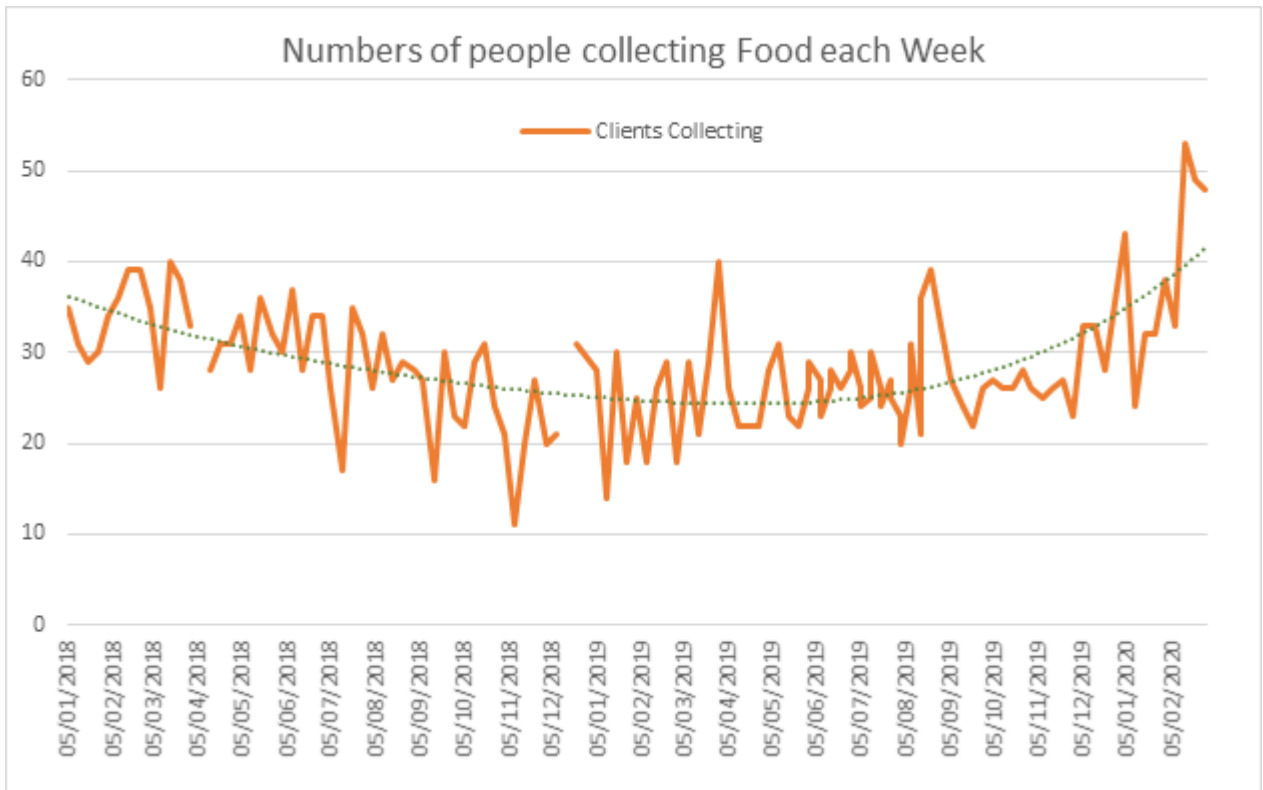
Ewan Roberts Centre Manager has provided this report:

In the year to Dec 2020, ALM had 38 people through the houses. Of these, five people obtained Leave to Remain, based on partnership work with the Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit GMIAU or other Solicitors, two moved into Local Authority care, six accessed Statutory Support, re-joining the Asylum Process (two under Section 4 and four under Section 95), one was sectioned under the mental health act, one person signed for Assisted Voluntary Return, 14 have their cases currently under review, and 9 either left of their own accord or were asked to leave.

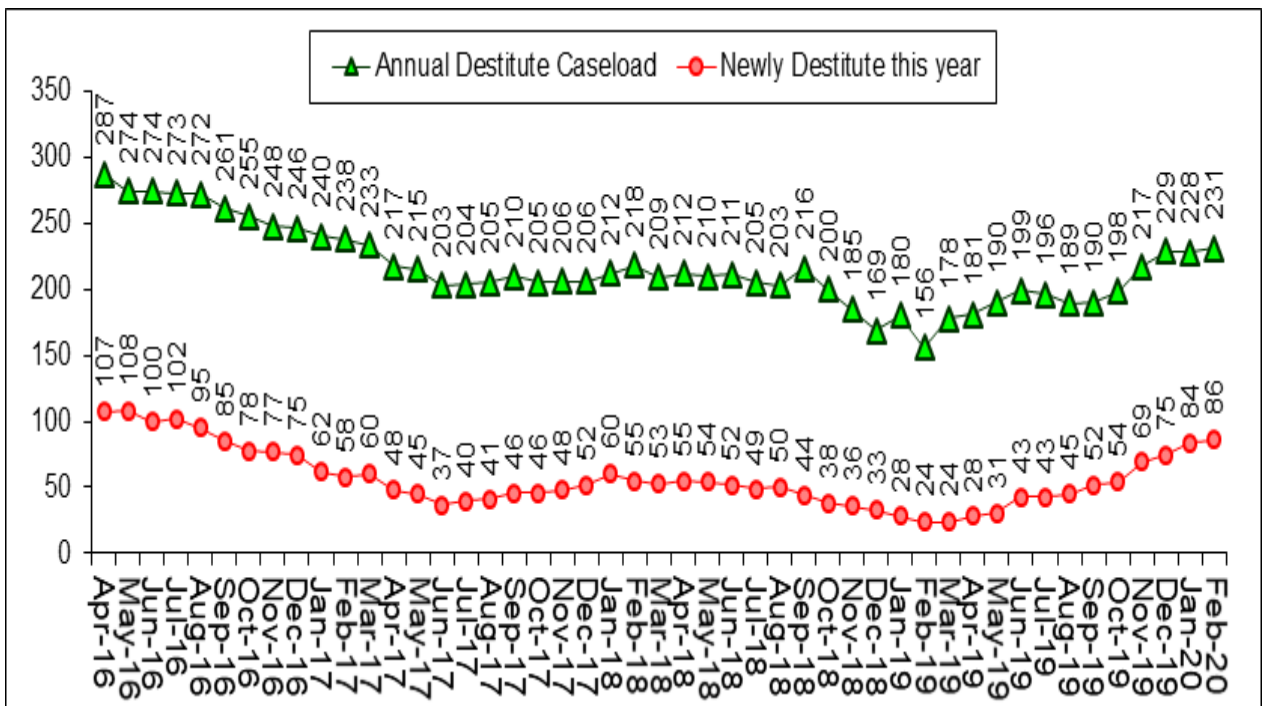
The housing forms an integral part of the Destitution offer at ALM, providing a stable platform for people to build a case for support or a new immigration claim. There are 4 main strands of support for refused destitute Asylum Seekers at ALM.

- 1) The general casework team and support assistance – this is the gateway to destitution services
- 2) The Destitution project – Housing Food and postal Service (this is the main element funded through SAS which pays for the majority of the Housing and Food costs, without which the destitution project could not function)
- 3) The Social Work Team – 3 part time social workers who assist people to access local authority or other statutory support
- 4) Further Submissions – with the GMIAU and ALM volunteers, the people on the housing and food lists have their asylum cases re-examined to see if there are any grounds for new claims

Numbers through the food store are at their highest for many months. As can be seen, there has been a large jump in October – February. This coincides with a drop in the number of people housed in Home Office mainstream accommodation.



The second graph outlines the numbers of destitute service users during a 12 month period. Looking back to the 12 months up to February 2019, we had 156 homeless people presenting for destitution services. In the year to February 2020, this has grown to 231 people, of whom 86 became destitute this year. These are significant increases and are beginning to place a strain on already stretched resources.



On a happier subject, we are still extremely pleased to receive SAS funding for fresh fruit at the centre which is given out alongside the midday meal. In addition to this are the one off contributions to things like the Christmas Party for the meal. These might seem like a bit of fun, but one service user came to say thank you and for letting him be normal if only for a little while. All these measures of support, allied to the welcome and sense of family, make the lives of Asylum Seekers and Refugees that bit more bearable as they make their way through the Hostile Environment. Thank you to everyone who makes these things possible.



Faiths4Change

Annie Merry, CEO at Faiths4Change, has reported on some of their work which SAS has helped to fund:

SAS Reporting: Dec 2019

Faiths4Change is most grateful to SAS for the continued financial support which has contributed to the following projects / staff salaries:

- **Developing Roots**
- **Community Market @ St Michael's in the City**
- **CEO Salary Contribution**

Developing Roots is our long standing partnership health and wellbeing project at the ALM allotments in Childwall, funded by Allen Lane Foundation, The Co-op and Support for Asylum Seekers. The project is led by Rosie, our Food and Wellbeing Coordinator and Donna, our Wellbeing Support Worker.

We have now downed tools for the winter! Donna will be popping in over the next few cold months to ensure everything is OK on the allotment and sessions will resume in March 2020.

Our Wellbeing Support Worker is turning her attention to attending the Tuesday Foodbank at St Vincent's Church (adjacent to St Michael's in the City). She's spending time speaking to people and handing out flyers about the community market, lunch and other activities at St Michael's all of which are fully funded and free to take up. We're starting to see an increase in people coming....

Community Market at St Michaels in the City

The community market has had increasing numbers in the last few weeks as the weather has turned colder. We have been selling the usual tins, some fresh food, dry goods, eco cleaning products and we have also been selling our home made chutneys.

The chutneys were made by our Monday afternoon drop in group using green tomatoes we grew in the garden at St Michaels.

St Vincent's food bank continues to refer people using their food bank to our community market. Several new people attend each week from St Vincent's, mostly asylum seekers and refugees.

Our volunteers have been working really hard since the market started to ensure a smooth transition for the customers.



Each week we provide lots of fresh fruit, funded by SAS – this is proving really popular with people attending the market, staying for the community lunch which is a ‘donate if you can’ model and into the afternoon arts sessions.

As is befitting an environmental charity, we try to buy short shelf life fruit – this has at least 3 benefits – we get more for our money, people get more fruit to eat and fresh food is diverted from landfill, where it gives off methane and contributes to global heating.

CEO Salary Contribution

As always the contribution to the CEO salary goes a long way to strengthening and developing the charity; F4C doesn’t receive any core funding so this on-going support pays for the CEO to work on income generation, offer 1:1 support to staff, meet partners and attend strategic level meetings.

As a result of SAS support, in early December the CEO was able to offer 4 hours a week permanent employment to a long term unemployed volunteer. Yani, came to volunteer with us as a result of a programme with another charity. She’s been volunteering for over a year and is kind, friendly and puts lots into everything she does – she’s a respected member of the Team.

Thank you

Refugee Women Connect [formerly MRANG]

Alison Moore, RWC Director, has provided a recent report on their work supported by the SAS Destitution Project. I have deliberately included the detail [anonymised of course] which provide typical examples of the situations women find themselves, and also the wonderful practical timely support being provided by Alison and her colleagues.

Destitution Fund Report, April 2019 – July 2019

<u>Initials of service user</u>	<u>Reason for application</u>	<u>Dates for fund in this monthly period</u>	<u>Reason for multiple application</u>
AA	Destitute, asylum claim rejected and pending appeal for section 4 support.	2 April till 7 May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Errors were made by another support service in Liverpool who incorrectly completed section 4 application, and this resulted in a refusal and because the application was not made in time of her appeal, she lost her right to appeal. • Service user did not want to appeal when it was offered because she wants to submit her fresh claim first.

BB	Appeals rights exhausted, no support from home office e.g. no financial support or accommodation	4 April till 19 July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She is stateless as there were challenges in getting evidence from country of origin. • She could not obtain evidence from her country of origin to prove her nationality and other evidence she needed to submit her fresh claim. • Her country of origin denied that she was a citizen of that country and this caused several complications for her fresh claim. • She had a successful decision from the Home Office for her Section 4, but it took several attempts for them to start her support and move her into dispersed accommodation. They attempted to do this three times, but failed to do so on each occasion. She was left without support and homeless and so we continued to support her.
CC	Destitute and expecting an outcome within 5 weeks.	2 April till 23 July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further submissions appointment – could not obtain an appointment, had been waiting 3 months. • Difficulty in obtaining evidence about her sexuality, the Home Office did not believe her claim to be true regarding her sexuality.
DD	Street homeless, waiting on section 4 appeal.	2 April till 7 May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DD had no financial support and was street homeless at the time. There were many challenges in helping her find suitable accommodation during this time as she had no resource to public funds. • Had difficulties in obtaining birth certificate, case has been passed over to City Hearts.
EE	Refused asylum and released from detention without support.	2 April till 10 May	N/A

In a previous SAS report [detail not provided here] Alison also noted:

“ The data above shows that most of the service users are on their second or more application for destitution fund. 4 of the service users above have had continuation funding. All the above service users are at the appeals process of their asylum claim. In situations where a further submission is required, asylum seekers will have to wait to apply for NASS support and gather their evidence to be sent to the solicitor, this can take an extremely long time. Therefore, service users are in a vulnerable position in which they are homeless and rely on foodbanks and good-will donations from charities and other organisations. Additionally, some of the service users above have “complex” cases. Above we have 1 case of statelessness and 1 victim of trafficking....”

Support for SAS/ALM

As usual I would take this opportunity again to thank individuals, faith groups and other organisations for continuing to support the work of SAS and its local partner agencies with donations, fundraising activities, new and old clothes, donating specific food items, etc. You can obtain a full list of food items wanted and fundraising ideas for SAS from the CTMR administration office [sas@ctmr.org.uk or tel: 0151 709 0125] or directly to myself.

Cheques should be made payable to “Churches Together in the Merseyside Region S.A.S” or simply “CTMR SAS”.

Donations can alternatively be made directly to:

Churches Together in the Merseyside Region S.A.S

HSBC, 40-29-28

Account 61156144

We can provide a list of other ideas or suggestions for raising funds and supporting the work of SAS.

You can see from the reports from our local partner agencies the positive support work and wellbeing activities that are being provided to arguably the most marginalised group in our community. Their professional approach and compassion is clear to see. All this of course comes at a price and your continued support is greatly appreciated. Please keep in your prayers the staff, volunteers and trustees of SAS and our local partner agencies.

May you and your families enjoy a wonderful Spring and Summer ahead and all the joy and hope those seasons represent. Please keep in your prayers those unfortunate people who are desperately trying to find peace and sanctuary and a blessed release from their current untenable lives.

Neil Cunningham

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March 2020

Ps If you prefer not to receive SAS newsletters in future please let me know. Neil



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**Statement of Financial Activities
 for the 12 months period to December 2019**

	2019	2018
Incoming Resources		
Grants from Organisations	23,764	53,001
Individual Donations	7,340	6,884
	31,104	59,886
Resources Expended		
Accommodation	16,657	20,386
Destitution Support	36,798	32,376
Probation Grants for Asylum seekers	-	1,870
	53,455	54,635
Net Incoming (Outgoing) Resources	(22,351)	5,251
Fund Balances		
At 31 December 2018	57,872	52,619
At 31 December 2019	35,521	57,872
Represented By :		
Bank Bal @ 31 December 2019	35,521	57,872