



**Welcome to the April edition of the WERS newsletter – a special edition devoted to destitution issues.**

**WERS Hardship Fund – the background**

During the last financial year, over £56,000 was raised for the fund. This is an enormous amount of money and allowed WERS to provide vital support to 120-140 destitute men and women who have no other means of support.

**Where did the money come from?**

Church donations amounted to over £15,600

Individual one-off donations accounted for some £10,000

Standing order donations contributed over £16,600

Trusts and companies donated a little over £8,400

Fundraising events raised almost £5,000 of which £3,488 was raised by the music night at the Cluny and

On-line donations amounted to almost £700.

**What is the current position?**

Despite this, the WERS hardship fund is currently running very low and is in danger of running out in the next few weeks. WERS is unable to take on any new referrals at present. Until a few weeks ago, the weekly bill for supporting the 120 destitute clients currently on the books with a £10 cash payment and food parcel was a staggering £1,600-£1,700. The decision was taken not to purchase any food except fresh fruit and vegetables. WERS has recently signed up to FareShare and has been delighted that a number of deliveries of food have already been received. WERS is also very grateful to People's Kitchen for their help.

In the last newsletter there was an article about Paul and Karen Lewton who bring individual home-cooked meals to the project for distribution and more recently the Sai Centre brought curry and rice to give out. Both these enterprises have become a very important element in the support for destitute men and women.

A number of funding applications have been submitted in the last couple of weeks and WERS is keeping its fingers crossed that some or all of these will be successful!

**Has there been an increase in need?**

Yes!

In January 2007 104 destitute clients were being supported.

In January 2008 the numbers had risen to 140.

**Has there been an increase in donations?**

Most certainly:

£56,000 during the last year compared with £43,000 in the previous year. Sadly the fund is not sufficient to meet the huge demands placed on it.

**Has there been an increase in the support provided?**

Yes. In April 2007 WERS raised the cash support from £5 to £10. The value of the food parcels has also increased with the addition of fresh fruit and vegetables. Each parcel now costs £4.32. It is still a pitifully low level of support for men and women in this situation.

**Is WERS supporting the same clients as last year? For how long are clients destitute?**

Clients may be destitute for many years. A recent analysis of the 120 clients currently being supported by WERS revealed some shocking statistics:

1% destitute since 2002

2.5% destitute since 2003

7.5% destitute since 2004

18% destitute since 2005

11% destitute since 2006

32.5% destitute since 2007

27.5% made destitute in 2008

## **What happens to people during these long periods of time?**

Life is very tough.

Take the story of Marie (not her real name) an African asylum seeker, destitute since 2004. Arrested and imprisoned in her home country for her political activity, she was raped by soldiers and tried to commit suicide. She managed to escape from a hospital and come to the UK to seek asylum. The Home Office did not believe her story and refused her asylum claim in 2004. Since then she has suffered long bouts of depression and has received counselling at WERS. She often has trouble eating. She was arrested and taken into detention in 2004, where she was held for 7 months before being released. WERS supported Marie from the hardship fund before and since her detention. It is not known how long the current situation will last.

## **What is being done to raise awareness across the city of the issue of destitution amongst asylum seekers?**

On 17 March Newcastle Civic Centre hosted the launch of a feasibility study about developing work with destitute asylum seekers written by Tim Kell. This piece of work was commissioned as part of an ongoing initiative which began with the Bishop of Newcastle's awareness-raising event in Spring 2006. It is both encouraging and significant that the March event took place in the Civic Centre, was chaired by Simon Underwood, Head of Social Inclusion and was attended by officers and members of the City Council and representatives from a wide range of agencies, both statutory and voluntary. Further meetings have been arranged to look at the 3 principal recommendations of Tim's report which relate to housing, a specialist legal project and data collection. It is imperative that the issue remains on the City Council's agenda and this is an encouraging start.

## **How can supporters help WERS?**

- Set up an standing order for the WERS hardship fund
- Consider increasing an existing standing order
- Make a one-off donation to the fund
- Donate tinned and dried food for the food parcels
- Organise a collection of food at the workplace, church or school
- Organise a fundraising event in aid of the hardship fund

## **Will all the money go in direct support to the destitute clients?**

Yes, every penny. None of the money given to the hardship fund is spent on administration, so supporters can be confident that their donations are going straight to the clients for whom the money was intended.

**Every donation however small will be warmly welcomed.**

**Many thanks!**

Lindsay Cross

### **Office Details**

**Tel:** 0191 273 7482

**Fax:** 0191 256 7862

**Email:** [wers@btinternet.com](mailto:wers@btinternet.com)

**Website:** [www.wers.org.uk](http://www.wers.org.uk)

**West End Refugee Service  
St Philip's Vicarage  
St Philip's Close  
Arthur's Hill  
Newcastle upon Tyne  
NE4 5JE**

### **Office & Clothing Store Opening times:**

Mon, Tues, Thurs, Fri: 9.30am – 1pm

Wednesday: 11am – 1pm