

# hope projects

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**Annual Report for 2014/15**



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## Introduction

**This report covers the year ended 31 March 2015.**

The Hope Projects work to help destitute asylum-seekers and some others barred from recourse to public funds in the West Midlands. During the year 2014/15 there were five main Hope projects:

**the Hope Destitution Fund**, making cash grants to destitute asylum-seekers,

**the Hope Fund for Children**, making one-off grants to mothers of small children who are barred from recourse to public funds,

**the Hope Special Fund**, making one-off grants for purposes not covered by other Hope Funds,

**Hope Housing**, providing emergency accommodation for homeless asylum-seekers, and

**Ujamaa** (in partnership with the Rape and Sexual Violence Project), providing specialist counselling and advice/casework support for asylum-seeker and refugee women.

There were three sub-projects of Hope Housing:

**the Hope Knitting Group**, which in the course of the year became **the Hope Women's Group**,

**the Hope Gardeners project** (also known as **Kushinga Community Garden**), and

**the Hope Drama Group.**

Other projects developed by Hope Projects with others included

**the Advice Birmingham partnership**, and

**the Migrants' Union.**

All these projects worked in close partnership with other local agencies.

## **Hope Destitution Fund**

Asylum-seekers are barred from recourse to public funds, including all mainstream benefits and provision for the homeless. Fortnightly cash grants from the Hope Destitution Fund are generally made only to those who have a reasonable prospect of securing an alternative remedy to their destitution in the near future.

### **Referrers**

The Hope Destitution Fund takes applications only from local referring agencies competent and experienced in working with destitute asylum-seekers, so that further information on applications, and longer-term remedies, can be sought from the agencies as necessary.

The criteria for grant-making are available at <http://www.hope-projects.org.uk/hdf/Hope-Destitution-Fund-criteria-September-2014.pdf>.

The rates of payment during the year 2014/15 were normally £20 a week for adults and £15 a week for children.

During the year, referrals to the Fund (and to Hope Housing) were made by the following partner-organisations:

ASIRT (Asylum Support and Immigration Resource Team),  
Austin Smith House,  
BIRCH Community Hosting Network,  
the British Red Cross,  
the Children's Society Midlands Refugee Project,  
Entraide (Mutual Aid),  
Lifeline Options,  
the Refugee and Migrant Centre of the Black Country, and  
Restore (Birmingham Churches Together for Asylum-seekers and Refugees);

and also by the Hope Projects' own workers.

All of the above organisations were represented on the Hope Projects Steering Group, which also included co-opted individuals, and which met regularly to guide the work of both the Destitution Fund and Hope Housing.

### **Fund-raising for the Destitution Fund**

In the financial year 2014/15, **£64,630** was raised for disbursement in grants to destitute individuals and families, from grant-making trusts, individuals and faith groups. Trust-funders included:

the 29 May 1961 Trust,  
the A B Charitable Trust,  
the Cole Trust,  
the Roughley Trust,  
the Saintbury Trust,  
the South Birmingham Friends Institute,  
the William A Cadbury Trust,

and a number of individual donors.

### **Grant-giving**

The total of fortnightly grants made over the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015 was **£49,827**. The average fortnightly amount was **£1,916**. (During the year we introduced a “ceiling” of £2,000 a fortnight.)

Over the year, **160 HDF cases** were closed. Of these, 84 were single men, 65 were single women, and 11 were couples. Cases included 28 children, and 9 pregnant women. This amounted to a total number of **199 individuals**.

Generally, a case is closed because a longer-term remedy for the client’s destitution has been successfully secured.

These clients were of **39 different nationalities**:

Afghanistan: 5  
Albania: 1  
Algeria: 2  
Angola: 1  
Azerbaijan: 1  
Bangladesh: 1  
Cameroon: 2  
China: 5  
Cuba: 2  
DR Congo: 6  
Egypt: 1  
Eritrea: 10  
Ethiopia: 1  
Gambia: 3  
Ghana: 1  
Guinea-Bissau: 1  
Guinea-Conakry: 1  
India: 3  
Iran: 19  
Iraq: 14  
Ivory Coast: 3  
Kenya: 2  
Liberia: 2  
Malawi: 1  
Morocco: 1  
Nigeria: 8  
Pakistan: 7  
Palestine: 3  
Rwanda: 1

Saudi Arabia: 1  
Sierra Leone: 1  
Somalia: 8  
South Africa: 2  
Sri Lanka: 2  
Sudan: 5  
Syria: 1  
Togo:1  
Tunisia: 1  
Turkey:1  
Zimbabwe: 29

Since the Fund was started in 2003, a total of **£932,532** has been disbursed.

### **Hope Fund for Children and Hope Special Fund**

Over the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015 **£6,750** was disbursed to mothers with young children in 54 one-off grants of £125 from the **Hope Fund for Children** (via the Children's Society). The Children's Society's funding for the Fund has run out, so no more grants will be made after the end of March 2015.

Over the year **£2,236** was disbursed from the **Hope Special Fund** in one-off grants for purposes not covered by the other Funds (mostly for travel costs, e.g. travel to the Home Office, medical appointments etc.). Most of the funding for the Hope Special Fund came from Hope Projects supporters in Lichfield.

### **Hope Housing**

Hope Housing provides emergency accommodation for homeless and destitute asylum-seekers, who are barred from mainstream provision for the homeless, including nearly all hostels and night-shelters. All Hope Housing residents receive financial support from the Hope Destitution Fund.

Hope Housing residents can now generally only be accommodated for a maximum of six months – whether continuously or with breaks. However, if there is evidence that good progress is being made on the resident's asylum case, e.g. through the preparation of a further application, an extension may be allowed.

Over the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015 we accommodated **44 women** (7 pregnant), **33 men** and **1 couple**, together with **5 children**. This amounts to a total of **84 individuals**.

As with the Hope Destitution Fund, accommodation is generally provided only to those with some prospect of securing a remedy to their homelessness in the near future.

The general development of Hope Housing was guided by the Hope Projects Steering Group; and a Panel meeting every six weeks guided housing-management matters. Applications from our referral-agencies were considered through email by a panel including Hope workers and trustees and other co-opted members.

Over the year Hope Housing managed 9 properties. Eight of these were made available at peppercorn rents by housing associations and other social landlords:

Bournville Village Trust,  
Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham,  
Friendship Care and Housing,  
Mercian Housing Association,  
Midland Heart, and  
Yardley Great Trust.

The ninth property came to us through the generosity of a local family.

As before, the salary costs of the project workers, together with the cost of electricity, gas and water, Council Tax, TV licences and other bills, the furnishing, repairs and maintenance of the properties and other management and running costs, were covered by funding from trusts and other bodies, including:

the 29 May 1961 Trust,  
the A B Charitable Trust,  
the Barrow Cadbury Trust,  
Bournville Quaker Meeting  
the Bournville Village Trust,  
the CB & HH Taylor Trust,  
the Cole Charitable Trust,  
the Joseph Rowntree Foundation,  
the Roughley Trust,  
the Saintbury Trust,  
the South Birmingham Friends Institute Trust, and  
the William A Cadbury Trust,

as well as from individual donors.

Over the year our adult residents have been of **28 different nationalities:-**

Algeria: 2  
Angola: 1  
Azerbaijan: 1  
Cameroon: 2  
DR Congo: 2  
Egypt: 1  
Eritrea: 10  
Ethiopia: 1  
Ghana: 1  
Guinea-Bissau: 1  
Guinea-Conakry: 1  
Iran: 3  
Iraq (Kurdistan): 8  
Ivory Coast: 2  
Jamaica: 1  
Kenya: 2  
Kuwait: 1  
Liberia: 2

Malawi: 1  
Nigeria: 8  
Pakistan: 4  
Palestine: 1  
Philippines: 1  
Rwanda: 1  
Somalia: 3  
Tunisia: 1  
Turkey: 1  
Zimbabwe: 15

We continued to use our largest property, in Selly Oak, as first-stage accommodation where residents' needs could if necessary be assessed before they moved on to other properties.

This house also has a small office for Hope workers and volunteers, and is the base for a range of activities for residents from all the houses.

A local storage firm, 1st Self Access Storage, generously continued to provide us with free furniture storage space.

### **“Mixed use” accommodation project**

This project would provide a mix of: rented accommodation for people recently granted leave to remain, who can work and pay rent or claim Housing Benefit; and rent-free Hope Housing accommodation for destitute asylum-seekers barred from recourse to public funds – income from the former would fund the latter. We continued to seek suitable properties for the project.

### **Coventry Peace House**

There is no night-shelter in Birmingham that regularly accepts homeless asylum-seekers. We therefore continued to rely on our partner-organisation the Coventry Peace House, with very little funding but a huge commitment, to provide basic emergency overnight accommodation in cases where we could not help street-homeless people immediately.

**Ms G, from Angola, was detained in Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre, and then, after an application for Judicial Review had been lodged, was released to Home Office emergency accommodation in Birmingham. She was later made homeless and destitute, even though seven months pregnant, as she was “not pregnant enough” to qualify for support. She had few social networks and limited English language.**

**The Hope Projects provided accommodation, financial support, and other assistance. Ms G was helped to submit a new application for Home Office Asylum**

**Support and send all the necessary evidence required to prove her destitution, and that her Judicial Review application was still outstanding.**

**She was also put in contact with the Birmingham Doula project, which supports pregnant women, and with the Narthex project in Sparkhill, which assisted her with baby items and emotional support. Her Asylum Support accommodation was approved five days before her estimated delivery date; she went into labour early and was discharged directly from hospital to stable accommodation.**

**Ms C, a single mother from Nigeria, and her 7-year-old child born in the UK were homeless and destitute. The Home Office wanted to send them back to Nigeria where the child could face inhuman and degrading treatment through female genital mutilation. The security of Hope Housing accommodation allowed Ms C to contact a country expert and obtain a report which was used to make a fresh asylum claim. She was then supported and accommodated by the local authority.**

**Mr N, from the Democratic Republic of Congo, was a teenager when he first arrived in the UK, and so came under the care of a Social Services department; but this ceased when he reached the age of majority. He moved to the West Midlands after the Home Office refused his application for asylum and he no longer had access to accommodation or food.**

**He was desperate and suicidal, saying that if he went back to the Congo he feared he would be killed, and if he were forced to stay on the streets in the UK, he would kill himself.**

**A partner-organisation referred him to Hope Projects for support and accommodation while an application for Home Office “Section 4” support was being considered.**

**His Section 4 application was refused, but an appeal against this refusal was lodged, and succeeded. Mr N was granted “Section 4” support and was “dispersed” to Leeds.**

**Ms Q, a Pakistani woman, suffered sexual and domestic violence in Pakistan; she was then ostracised by her family as not being a “good wife”. She visited her sister in the UK, and was abused by her sister’s husband. She claimed asylum, but was refused due to “lack of evidence”. She had a mental breakdown, attempting suicide, and was admitted to a local crisis centre. She had handed in further submissions to the Home Office about her case but they had been lost.**

**She stayed in a night shelter with 15 men, and was then referred to the Hope Projects, who provided her with housing and financial support. She was referred by Hope to partner-organisation the Rape and Sexual Violence Project (RSVP) for counselling, and to the organisation Healthy Minds.**



**She currently engages with activities organised by Hope and partner-organisation Restore, making friends among other asylum-seeking women.**

**Mr A** was an asylum-seeker from Somalia. He had been staying in Home Office Asylum Support emergency accommodation while his asylum case and his application for longer-term support were being considered by the Home Office.

He sought the help of the British Red Cross when he received a letter out of the blue saying that he was not entitled to support and must leave his accommodation the same day.

As a result of his experiences in Somalia, where he had been trapped in a burning building, Mr A's hands were badly misshapen, with almost no fingers, and severe burn scars. He found it difficult to carry out everyday tasks, such as clothing himself, cooking or writing. He had no family support or friends in this country, and spoke very little English.

The Red Cross accommodated him temporarily in a bed-and-breakfast for two days, and he was then granted HDF/Hope-Housing support and accommodation.

Mr A's solicitor was later able to secure Social Services support for him following a successful application for Judicial Review. Some weeks after that he was granted Leave to Remain in the UK.

## **Hope knitting and gardening projects, Hope Women's Group, Hope Drama Group**

During the year the Knitting Group (Kuwadzana U-Knitty) evolved into a very active **Women's Group**, meeting weekly, which, as well as providing emotional and practical support to Hope Housing residents and others, learns about and campaigns around asylum issues.

**Hope Gardeners** (Kushinga Community Garden) continued to meet regularly on Saturdays for planting and garden upkeep; and the project ran a programme of barbecues and skill-shares on the last Saturday of every month from April to September, funded by the Bournville Village Trust, and then a series of work and skill-share days at the garden one Tuesday of every month.

The **Drama Group**, made up of Hope Housing residents and others, was formed during the year. The group performed at the Hope Projects Lunch Event in March 2015 and also in Coventry at the invitation of the Coventry Asylum Seekers and Refugees Action Group (CARAG). Audience feedback was very positive.

## Ujamaa Project

Ujamaa works in partnership with the Rape and Sexual Violence Project (RSVP) to provide specialist counselling and advice/casework support for asylum-seeker and refugee women.

During the year the Hope project worker was able to support and assist **80 women**. In **57** of these cases she worked with local law firms and agencies to ensure better legal representation for the women. **56** women attended weekly drop-in sessions for confidential advice and assistance, and “sign-posting” to other organisations, as well as group sessions offering training and information, and involvement in local and national campaigning groups. The project worker also ran **4** training days around refugee and asylum-seeker issues, in partnership with Birmingham University and the British Red Cross.

RSVP provided professional counselling to **38** women, and specialist training to **143** workers and volunteers from other organisations.

Hope Projects and RSVP worked together to produce expert reports when requested by legal advisors to submit to the Home Office around women's experiences of rape and sexual violence.

**Ms M** survived rape and sexual violence in the Congo when imprisoned by authorities. She was refused asylum and made homeless; she found assistance living with a man who abused her and prostituted her out. She was detained when “signing” at the local immigration centre one day. She was admitted to a mental health crisis centre in Coventry, after being released from Yarl’s Wood Immigration Removal Centre, when she was suffering destitution for a second time. She was discharged from the crisis centre onto the street again. She was referred to the Hope Projects by someone she met when “signing”.

We found Ms M accommodation and obtained grants from the Hope Destitution Fund. We liaised with her solicitors, but they were not co-operating or responding to requests for information. We found her a new solicitor, who worked on a comprehensive fresh claim. She was referred to and attended RSVP for counselling, and they also wrote a report detailing her abuse which has been submitted to the Home Office. She was then provided with “Section 4” support while waiting for a decision on her case. She was offered accommodation in Nottingham, but we lobbied the Home Office to give her a house in Birmingham so that she could continue to access counselling and practical support. They agreed to this after two requests. She has made some friends and is engaging with college and partner-agency activities, which keep her busy and stop her thinking too much.

**Ms F** from Iraq, recently granted refugee status, was housed in private accommodation with three men. She fell and broke her ankle due to bad flooring in the bathroom, and was very upset. She had suffered abuse and violence and missed her family a lot. She had no local support networks.

We helped refer Ms F to a women's refugee housing project and she was given somewhere more suitable to live. She was referred to Restore activities, and she also began attending the Hope Women's Group. She is attending college and hopes to re-qualify as a massage therapist and work in this field. She is getting legal advice so she can be reunited with her son in the UK. She attends the RSVP counselling project to cope better with her past trauma.

## **Migrant Families Support Project**

This project is operated by the Hope Projects in partnership with ASIRT and Birmingham Community Law Centre, and funded by the Baring Foundation, Comic Relief and Unbound Philanthropy. The Hope Projects Housing and Women's Support Worker provides support to migrant women and children with "no recourse to public funds" who are having problems living in the UK, including on-site advocacy for such families during the Local Authority support process.

During the year the worker was able to support **32 women with children**. Sixteen of these had been refused asylum; 7 were overstayers, 3 were women who had entered the UK as wives of men settled here and then suffered domestic violence; 6 had been granted "discretionary leave to remain without recourse to public funds"; and 1 was a "family settlement" case.

**Ms S** was granted "discretionary leave" by the Home Office in 2012 for one year, which expired in October 2013. She applied to extend this leave on time with a community organisation who made the wrong type of application. The Home Office wrote back advising of the right application, which was subsequently made. All her benefits were stopped in November 2013. She contacted the Hope Housing and Women's Support Worker via a community member in June 2014: she was facing eviction from her housing-association property for non-payment of rent; she and her daughter were living on £20 a week Child Benefit payments, while she was pregnant.

The worker consulted partner-organisation ASIRT who contacted the Home Office to confirm that Ms S's application for extension of status was pending a decision. ASIRT opened a dialogue with the housing association and benefits office about the fact that her benefits should not have been stopped. Ms S and the Hope project worker went to the Housing Court and they granted an adjournment of a month for a response from the Home Office, to rectify the fact her benefits were stopped. The Home Office did not respond so ASIRT contacted Ms S's MP, who wrote on her behalf to get an update on her case. ASIRT commenced Judicial Review proceedings against the benefits office and the housing association over her cut in support. The Home Office confirmed that her benefits should be ongoing while her application was pending; this information was sent on to the benefits office, which paid the full backdated amount of income support and her outstanding housing-benefit arrears.

**Ms C** was referred to the Migrant Families Support Project by her family support worker; she was 6 months pregnant and facing homelessness. A valid immigration application had been lodged with the Case Resolution team at the Home Office, but Ms C had no recourse to public funds to get any support. Social Services refused to support her as they felt she did not cross the threshold of eligibility for support under the National Assistance Act. Legal advice was taken and after she was 32 weeks pregnant, and clearly unfit to fly, a challenge was tried to get the local social services department to support her. She had complications with the pregnancy at this time and the baby stopped growing.

She was supported and accommodated by Hope Projects as she was street-homeless. She was told by two midwives the baby would need to be taken into care as she could not provide support herself. The legal process was still ongoing when Ms C had a baby girl. With legal support she was housed with her baby pending a decision on her immigration case.

## **Migrants' Union**

The Migrants' Union, currently a part of the Hope Projects but soon to become independent, continued to meet fortnightly at Birmingham Asian Resource Centre, for migrants to come together and discuss their asylum/immigration cases.

Increasing numbers of participants attended the Claimants' Group, which meets every fortnight from 6 to 8 p.m. at Birmingham Asian Resource Centre.

The Migrants' Union committee met to discuss priorities and key targets for 2015. Activities are funded by a grant from the Barrow Cadbury Trust.

**Ms L**, from Kenya, arrived in the UK with a student visa, which was later extended. She then obtained Discretionary Leave to Remain. She sought advice from a solicitor with regard to her immigration status when her leave was about to expire. The solicitor asked her for £1,500 but never explained what application he was going to submit on her behalf. Months later, her Discretionary Leave had expired and she had not heard anything from the solicitor.

Migrants' Union members discussed the issues and encouraged Ms L to contact her solicitor and request a copy of her Client Care Letter together with any applications he might have submitted on her behalf. It emerged that the solicitor was not genuine and was not employed by the firm. The Migrants' Union continued to support the claimant and to pursue the matter through formal complaint procedures.

## **Asylum/immigration casework**

The Housing and Women's Support Worker attended the Friday immigration drop-in advice sessions run by Salman Mirza at the Brushstrokes project in Smethwick.

Towards the end of the year we sought funding for one or more asylum/immigration caseworkers from some grant-making trusts. One of these applications has been successful,

## **Advice Birmingham partnership**

The Advice Birmingham Web site at <http://www.advice-birmingham.net> has been maintained, but the partnership was otherwise not active during the year.

## **Birmingham City Council – voluntary-sector tender for S17 NRPF services**

During the year Hope Projects together with partner-organisations met with officers of Birmingham Council to discuss the possible provision by the voluntary sector of support, accommodation and services to families with no recourse to public funds, under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

We have recently resumed discussion of this with the City Council.

## **Report: *Destitution and asylum-seeking women in the West Midlands***

This report by Sarah Taal investigates how the current social needs of destitute asylum-seeking women are constructed through professional discussions, analysis of data and personal narratives. It looks at the practical assistance provided to women when they have been refused asylum, suffer destitution and have approached advocacy or support agencies in Birmingham.

## **Hope Projects people during 2014/15**

### **Trustees**

Shari Brown, chair  
Derek Bennett, treasurer  
Chris Chaora  
Dr Surinder Guru  
Rev. Neil Johnson  
Adrian Randall  
Rt Hon. Clare Short  
Ranjit Sondhi CBE

## **Workers**

Geoff Wilkins, Project Co-ordinator  
Sarah Taal, Housing and Women's Support Worker  
Almamy Taal, Housing Worker

## **Volunteers**

Agnes Tanoh - housing, women's group, garden, cooking & interpreting support  
Bridget Obi - housing and women's group  
Charles Tonga Bawa - housing  
Charles Mjawe - garden project leader  
Dot Squier – gardening  
Felipe Molina - gardening  
Ger Sampson – women's group  
Hamida Mohamed – cooking  
Harriet Thuambe - women's group  
Iram Mushtaq - cooking  
Juliet Osarenwinda - women's group  
Khatam Mitalov - housing  
Linda McLeod - office volunteer  
Marie Mezartio - cooking  
Nomagugu Tshuma - childcare  
Rania Youssef - interpreting  
Rose Basada – women's group  
Sue Fallon - Hope Housing panel volunteer  
Talhatou Diallo – women's group  
Taous Tadjer – interpreting  
Zenzile Chabuka – gardening and women's group

During the year the projects also depended heavily upon the commitment and support of workers at our partner-organisations, and individual supporters.

**Our thanks also go again to Birmingham Asian Resource Centre for providing office space and facilities to the Hope Projects workers.**





## Hope Web sites

We are now offering a professional Web-site development service. We can design, build and maintain fully responsive sites with or without content-management systems, at competitive rates. All proceeds go towards the work of Hope Projects.

(For examples, see our own site at [www.hope-projects.org.uk](http://www.hope-projects.org.uk), or the Birmingham Black Oral History Project site at [www.bbohp.org.uk](http://www.bbohp.org.uk).)

**Contact [websites@hope-projects.org.uk](mailto:websites@hope-projects.org.uk) for more information.**

**Hope Projects (West Midlands) Ltd** is a company limited by guarantee no. 07341898 and registered charity no. 1138402.

The registered office of the company is at **110 Hamstead Road, Handsworth, Birmingham B20 2QS.**

You can contact Hope Projects at [admin@hope-projects.org.uk](mailto:admin@hope-projects.org.uk) or through our Web site at <http://www.hope-projects.org.uk/>.