

The logo for the Reading Refugee Support Group is a green, rounded shape on the right side of the page. Inside this shape, the text "Reading Refugee Support Group" is written in a white, serif font, stacked in four lines.

Reading  
Refugee  
Support  
Group

**Annual Report**

**for the Year ending**

**31 March 2013**

## Chair's Report

This year in particular the trustees, staff and volunteers have been working extremely hard to address a variety of problems relating to our finances, staff & volunteer shortages and a diminished trustee body.

We said farewell to Victor Koroma, to whom we are very grateful for all his hard work as a trustee and I would like to say thank you to Bet Tickner, John Turay, Katherine Prudoe and Kate Smart for their work as trustees during the year. I am pleased to report that as the year ended we were able to significantly strengthen our trustee body and welcomed Mary Richardson, Rachel Spencer and Paul Harper who all bring considerable experience and knowledge to help us meet the challenges we face.

I would offer a special thank you to all the new and existing volunteers in the ESOL programme and the casework team, especially to George Buchanan who is an invaluable asset to the casework team.

We were sad to see our long-standing volunteer Binita Shah leave RRSO. She has been a great asset to RRSO in helping with the home work club and the EU project. Thank you also to Jo Morris and Alice Chigumira, who left during the year, for all of their hard work.

Our thanks are due to all the staff; Alison McQuitty Nina Lugo, Amal Mohammed and Sharon Cole, especially to Alison who has worked tirelessly to ensure we continue to offer the advice and support refugees and asylum seekers desperately need at a time when we were very short of trustees. We agreed a six-month sabbatical leave for Alison to commence on 1 April 2013.

The financial year 2012/13 has ended with a surplus of (£8,164) compared to a deficit last year (£7,171). Despite this surplus, our secured grant income in the following year is insufficient to cover currently planned expenditure and from the following October we will need to bring this in line with our income. In the absence of significant new grant income this will mean some tough decisions, but we will focus our resources on continuing to provide effective support and advice to our clients.

The 'Women Learning Together' project funded by the 'EU Grundtvig Lifelong Learning Programme' came to an end this year. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the women who participated in this project for their hard work and commitment and to the organising committee members; Jo Morris, Alice Chigumira, Nina Lugo, Alison Mcquitty and Flora Roshi. One of our trustees, Katherine Prudhoe has dedicated a lot of her time to this project and accompanied the women on the final trip to the Netherlands. On her return, she said it was *"fantastic to see how the womens' confidence grew during the workshop through developing friendships and participating in the activities"*.

Finally, thank you to all the individual donors/supporters and local charities for your financial support. We are very grateful to Reading Borough Council for their continued financial support, without which we could not provide our essential services, and for their understanding of our current difficulties.

**Shamin Zafar, Chair**

## **Treasurer's Report**

This was indeed a tough year, with uncertainty and continual changes to income, requiring close monitoring of the fluid situation and regular adjustment of our budget. I am grateful to all officers of the organisation for carefully managing finances whilst keeping the organisation afloat. My fellow committee members and auditors have also been helpful in handling the situation.

Despite this, the financial year ended with a surplus of £8,164 compared to last year when the group ended up with a deficit (£7,171). The surplus was mainly due to receipt of project grants which enabled us to re-allocate some of the core cost funding for staff into specific projects the group undertook last year e.g. the Advice Services Project and EU Project.

Reading Borough Council continues to be our main funder, providing £46,997.64 of income. The other main sources of funding were from the EU Grundtvig Lifelong Learning Program (£14,674) to cover the Women Learning Together project and Lloyds TSB Foundation (£5,000) to cover some of the employment costs of our Volunteer Coordinator/Administrator.

On behalf of the Reading Refugee Support Group, I would like to thank our main funders for their continued support and indeed everyone who made a financial contribution towards our work for the past year, all of whom are listed at the end of this annual report.

### ***Income and Expenditure***

Total income for the year 2011-12 was £117,496 compared to last year's income of £74,113, an increase of (£43, 383). This was mainly due to the £40,000 grant from the Advice Services Fund (Big lottery), which will not be repeated in the coming year.

Total expenditure this year was £109,415. The main expenses were staff costs 58% (£64,167), events (£12,925) and premises (£9, 017).

Whilst the group ended this year with a surplus of £8,164, this coming year is extremely challenging as it is for the voluntary sector as a whole and the group's future remains uncertain due to a substantial projected deficit of income against expenditure.

However, the Trustees are committed to ensure that the refugee community in the Reading area continues to be able to access vital advice and support services and are proactively working on a range of options to enable us to do so.

**John Turay**  
**Hon. Treasurer**

## Director's Report

The Annual Report last year was written against the backdrop of the RRSB being in receipt of a substantial grant from the Advice Services Fund (a government grant for front-line advice services) that allowed the services we offer to continue and in some cases expand during 2012-13.

This Annual Report is being written against no such comforting backdrop and the challenges our services – and thus our clients – face are dire. So ironically this report covers a year of positive developments whilst simultaneously looking forward to a year of hardship.

One development over the past year has been the consolidation of the casework team and its practice. The content of the casework service has evolved to offer an even more holistic and client-centred approach: the immediate legal needs of a client are met but they may also be referred on to Barnardo's "Mums & Dads Project" and/or their children are signed up for the Abbey School Homework Club and/or the parents are involved in our 1-1 English & Life Skills Programme and/or the mother becomes involved with the EU "Women Learning Together" project. Involvement in these projects can make the difference between marginalisation and integration.

The "Women Learning Together" project and its sister initiative - the Thames Valley Women's Network (TVWN) – has been a real highlight of this past year. One wish of the RRSB team is to develop similar support projects for male RRSB beneficiaries who – as in previous years – constitute over 50% of the clients.

RRSB was commissioned by Refugee Action to set up a secretariat for TVWN which would forge links with other women's groups and refugee organisations in Reading, Slough and Oxford. Two interns – Flora Roshi and Richa Chaudhury – were recruited and established a firm foundation although truly committed and proactive volunteers are now needed to take this initiative forward. One partnership which is part of that foundation is with Ruskin College, Oxford who continue to deliver highly successful literacy classes in Reading in UNISON premises. RRSB is very grateful to both organisations for their generosity and enthusiasm for "making these courses happen". Following on from this pilot, courses have been extended to a partnership between Ruskin College and Refugee Resource, Oxford.

The "Women Learning Together" partnership came to Reading in March 2013 for three days of discussion, learning, laughter, tears, food and dancing. The organisation of the visit was also part of the "learning" and women from the TVWN formed the core – Vanessa Yarde, Zakieh Boudros, Mariam Ali, Rosita Atherley, Flora Roshi, Binita Shah, Robyn Appleton, Fatima Beibar, Habiba Adam & Katherine Prudhoe: they were absolutely crucial to the success of the visit.

The enthusiasm, professionalism, commitment and passion of RRSB staff, volunteers and our partners continue to ensure that RRSB services have flourished over the past year. As an organisation we have been able to benefit the most vulnerable in our society: the reports in the following pages are testament to those contributions. Long may there be a place for that enthusiasm, professionalism, commitment and passion.

## Our Advice Service

The year saw some important changes in immigration law. The long standing '14 Year Rule', allowing irregular migrants to regularise their stay in UK was withdrawn and in its place a requirement of 20 year's continuous residence. People who were just about to reach their 14<sup>th</sup> year and could have qualified to regularise their stay in the UK, now have to wait for an additional six years and must meet additional, more stringent, requirements.

The rules allowing for 'family migration' also changed from July 2012, with partners of British Citizens (and others with residency rights) applying to come to the UK or seeking permission to remain here, now being required to have been in the UK for five years before they can apply for settlement. We continue to struggle in getting feedback from UK Border Agency (UKBA), especially with clients whose cases are being considered under the legacy cases. In recent months it came to light that hundreds of boxes of correspondence had lain unopened or matched to a UKBA clients' file. Our clients who are affected by this are becoming increasingly anxious and frustrated as their lives continue to be effectively 'in limbo'.

During this year we saw 57 *new* clients, of whom 30 were seeking asylum and 13 had Refugee status. In total, during the year RRSB caseworkers assisted 125 clients of which the majority were single people (68 men and 21 women) and 36 were families; these data are summarised below.

Figure 1: Summary of clients at RRSB (2012-13)

Status	Number
Single Female	21
Single Male	68
	<b>89</b>
Family – Female headed	23
Family Male headed	13
	<b>36</b>
<b>TOTAL (all)</b>	<b>125</b>

Of the clients we saw during the last year, most (60%) are asylum seekers, 6% are overstayers/students and 34% have some form of leave to remain. The most common forms of advice required include: legal/immigration, benefits support (particularly housing for those facing destitution) and travel documentation. However, our skilled casework advisors have also helped with: accommodation queries, health care advice, education and training support.

To further support the Advice service (drop-in and appointments) we have recently recruited two new volunteer caseworkers. These two workers will shortly complete their formal training and accreditation thus ensuring we offer a consistently high quality advice service. With displacement still an international issue, we do not expect there to be a significant decrease in the need for our advice services, rather we expect that it will continue to be required and may potentially increase. We continue to record case studies from clients in order to document their individual stories and demonstrate the urgent need for our services.

## ***Client Testimony***

My name is Maude Moyo. I came to the United Kingdom in 2008 from Zimbabwe. I sought asylum on arriving at the airport, reason being that I was being victimized back home for supporting the opposition Party. I went on to apply for the right to remain in the U.K because I knew the U.K is a safe place that I would carry on with my life in one peace but to no avail. I went from one solicitor to the other seeking for help and trying to get things right but I was denied. I wanted to start living my life but this experience of losing my appeals left me feeling tortured and traumatized. After losing my appeal, I was thrown out of my accommodation that I had been allocated. I was now homeless. I sought help from a few people; as a result I moved from one home to another, from one city to another. To get accommodation, I was forced to work doing house chores and at times working as a slave so that I would be given food and shelter. This experience affected me so much psychologically and to make it worse people started talking about me, treating me like rubbish and this left me feeling helpless. Soon my health started getting worse and worse. As that was not enough I received very sad news of my son's death back home. There is nothing worse like loosing a loved one thru death, I started going crazy as I did not know what to do and I did not have money for the funeral as a mother. It was so terrible I will never get to understand the system.

In 2012 in November I was granted a refugee status. But still things are not working well for me. I have been going to the job centre every week. I continuously keep applying for work only to be told that you don't qualify we need someone with an experience. This is becoming very difficult for me. I have not settled down I am still wondering when and how will I ever rest and get a place that I can call my second home and work; I don't have a place that I can call a home.

*Maude Moyo*

# Our Integration work

## **ESOL Project**

English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classes are an important tool to enable our clients to integrate into the local community. This is especially the case for students, whose education may have been disrupted, enabling them to gain maximum benefit from mainstream education in the UK. This year RRSG has supported 6 students from Afghanistan, Albania and Sudan with 1-1 ESOL classes. The classes take place in different public places such as the Reading library and cover areas the clients feels they need more help in. 50% of the Clients who have taken ESOL classes with RRSG have gone on to study a range of subjects at college afterwards.

## **Case study**

This year we have taken on a whole family. The family of Mrs S composed of mother and two children aged 10 and 12, the mother was provided with help with her academic English to support her Nursing studies, whilst her two children were helped out with their school work. After three months of constant tuition the daughter's school reported that she had improved remarkably and exceeded their expectations in English and Mathematics. Mrs S also gave us a testimony saying she felt she and her son have both benefited from RRSG's support.



*'I really enjoy volunteering as an ESOL teacher with RRSG. It's not only given me an opportunity to meaningfully use my skills, but it has also allowed me to meet people from all walks of life which I have found really enriching. RRSG staff are supportive and the volunteers are friendly and really motivated'. Mariama.*

Mariama Sheriff ESOL Teacher

## ***The Homework Club***

Refugee and asylum seeker children can find it difficult to establish and rebuild friendships in their new surroundings and may not have the benefit of 'peer support' that other children enjoy.

To help overcome this, RRSG has developed a 'homework club' in collaboration with The Abbey School in Reading. The project is managed by RRSG volunteer staff and has provided free one-to-one tuition by sixth form students from the school to the children of Asylum Seekers and Refugees since November 2012.

The homework club is linked to curriculum subjects and assists with key skills of reading and writing. These sessions run twice weekly in term-time and provide an opportunity for boys aged 7 – 16 yrs and girls aged 7 – 18 yrs to learn in a safe and diverse environment. An initial six-week programme is provided, with the possibility of extension where continuing support is required. So far, 42 children have benefited from the club and there is a waiting list for future participants.

## ***'Women Learning Together'***

RRSG has been working with groups in other European countries setting up a learning partnership for women refugees and the organisations that support them for the past two years. The primary goals of the partnership, which has groups in Denmark, Belgium, Netherlands, Wales and England and is funded through the EU Grundtvig Programme, are aimed at improving pathways to work.

Workshops, hosted by partner organisations are one of the means by which the project has enabled refugee women to further their skills. RRSG participated in four "Women Learning Together" workshops this year focussed on practical activities to enable participants to realize the goals in their development plans.



The workshop in March was hosted in Reading in the Irish Centre where RRSG staff and volunteers welcomed over 30 refugees from our European partner organizations to a long weekend of learning about entrepreneurship and practical job-hunting skills.

One participant in the Reading workshop commented: *"The programme of the seminars was very well selected and planned; actually I think it is the best selection in all our meetings. The hard work was evident and the team did a brilliant job."*

RRSG trustee, Katherine Prudhoe, took over as the project coordinator when Alison McQuitty, RRSG Director, took a six month sabbatical in April 13 organising the participation of five women from Reading in the final workshop in Antwerp and producing the project report, which is available to anybody interested further. The partner organizations were very grateful for the participation and support of RRSG in this final conference and Katherine is working with the other country leads to work out how to use the experience of this two year project in the future.

### ***Thames Valley Women's Network***

Thames Valley Women's Network (TVWN) was launched in late 2011 with funding from Dorchester Abbey and Refugee Action. TVWN was conceived as a local extension of the 'Women Learning Together' project to seeking to involve and provide women from ethnic minority communities (including refugee women) with a platform to empower themselves personally and professionally through networking with other women facing similar issues. RRSG was commissioned to act as the secretariat for TVWN and to this end employed two interns between June and September 2012 to help develop the network.

Discussions were held with other refugee groups in Oxford and Slough, as well as other women's groups and these were followed by initial events in June and July which attracted 36 and 35 participants respectively. These events were used to flesh out the aims and organisation of TVWN, to secure engagement of women in the network and the creation of a management group to take TVWN forward as input from RRSG interns ceased. The July event also offered participants personal development workshops.

The management group organised two further events in autumn 2012 and members of TVWN were well represented at the 'Women Learning Together' international workshop held in Reading in March this year. Productive links were also established with Ruskin College who ran a series of English classes for TVWN members.

Evaluation of our input concluded that, whilst TVWN was established to form a self-reliant group, the period of support offered by the RRSG secretariat was probably too short to provide a proper foundation for this, engagement of groups and women across the Thames Valley (outside Reading) was a challenge and a degree of continuing funding was necessary to sustain the group.

## Our Volunteers

Volunteers are involved in every aspect of RRSG and it's only through them that we are able to serve the vulnerable men, women and children who seek our help. Yet again this year the volunteer team made a big difference to the lives of asylum seekers and refugees through their significant contributions to the organisation.

RRSG participated in the Volunteer recruitment fair at Reading University and held a recruitment evening at RISC this year. Existing volunteers, alongside paid staff, talked about their experiences of working in RRSG to help asylum seekers and refugees rebuild their lives at these successful events, which act as a way to raise awareness of our mission and highlight volunteering opportunities.

Overall 6 volunteers have been recruited and inducted this year bringing our total volunteer staff to 18. They have each contributed from 1 hour to 8 hours per week in casework, administration, ESOL classes, homework club, events, database & website, art and the women group projects.

One Volunteer, Flora Roshi, also had the opportunity of a 3 month employment contact as the Thames Valley Women Network (TVWN) Coordinator. Where she helped coordinated and facilitate all the TVWN activities for that period. Many of our volunteers have had the chance to attend different training sessions as part of their development and voluntary experience.

*'I have been volunteering with RRSG group for over a year. During this time I have done many different things such as helping out in different festivals, taking on administrative duties and volunteering within the EU project which I have thoroughly enjoyed. Being here at the group has given me confidence and experience to move forward in any future employment.'*



*Vanessa Yarde (volunteer) collecting donations at the Oxford Road Fun Day*

## **FARYAL SAGHIR**

My name is Faryal Saghir. I live in Reading and am studying HND business & management in William College I also work part time in Primark Reading.

I'm doing voluntary work as an admin and event assistant in Reading Refugee Support Group. It is very interesting working and a great way of getting better knowledge and experience. I've obtained professional and life experience and learnt ways to help vulnerable people.



The voluntary work as given me many benefits and in turn I have been able to help those who need the service. Working with RRSR I've meet people who are from different cultures can share experiences, learn more and more and teach many things and have also been able to make more friends.

# Income and Expenditure for the year ending 31 March 2013

	<b>2013</b>	<b>2012</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
<b>Income Resources</b>		
Grants, Donations	117,496	74,113
Membership Fees	30	0
Interest	53	33
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>117,579</b>	<b>74,146</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>		
Wages & Salaries	64,167	54,189
Administration Costs	7,083	6,147
Training	3,936	1,227
Travelling	365	349
Premises	9,017	8,463
Publicity & Publications	200	94
Events	12,925	4,793
Refugee Welfare & Expenses	5,123	2,783
Office Equipment	4,681	2,036
Membership Fees & Subscriptions	904	483
Bank Charges & Interest	22	24
Professional Fees	753	729
Sundry Expenses	239	
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>109,415</b>	<b>81,317</b>
<b>NET ADDITION TO RESERVES</b>		
Opening Reserves	14,060	21,231
Closing Reserves	22,224	14,060

### ***RRSG funders***

Reading Borough Council  
Lloyds TSB Foundation  
Berkshire Community Foundation  
Big Lottery Fund  
Refugee Action  
EU Grundtvig Programme  
Dorchester Abbey  
British Red Cross  
Reading Family Church

### ***RRSG donors***

Dianne Hilfi  
A.J.Moss  
Roger Tribe  
David C Wilson  
Elaine Bradshaw

### ***Other Supporters, we thank:***

Rachel Hemstock and Ruskin College for their support and partnership with Thames Valley Women's Network.

British Red Cross for supporting our clients with small grants.

Faith Christian Group for their generous provision of food parcels to help support destitute clients.

The staff and students of Abbey School for their dedicated support to refugee children with their school work.

### ***Volunteers***

Robyn Appleton  
Rosita Artherly  
Liz Bailey  
George Buchanan  
Tomson Chauke  
Alice Chigumira  
Stephen Cook  
Nick Davis  
Elaine Edge  
Ben Gordon  
Zezva Maglakelidze  
Jo Morris  
Tutu Melaku  
Jo Rado  
Flora Roshi  
Faryal Saghir  
Binita Shah  
Adam Sharpe  
Mariama Sheriff  
Tenisha Trotman  
Melissa Tomas  
Vanessa Yarde

### ***Trustees***

Shamin Zafar (Chair)  
John Turay (Treasurer)  
Victor Koroma (resigned 27 March 2013)  
Bet Tickner  
Nyasha Taru (resigned May 2012)  
Katherine Prudoe (from 23 August 2012)  
Bethany Tribe (from August – November 2012)  
Kate Smart (from 27 March 2013)  
Paul Harper (from 27 March 2013)  
Rachel Spencer (from 27 March 2013)  
Mary Richardson (from 27 March 2013)

### ***Staff***

Alison McQuitty (Director)  
Nina Ligor (Casework Manager)  
Amal Mohammed (Volunteer Coordinator/Administrator)  
Sharon Cole (Bookkeeper)  
Yasmin Bador (cover for Volunteer Coordinator)