

# Launch of Fundraising Appeal

## The Hope Fund – Coventry



Page	Contents
2	Information Release
3	Patrons Letter
4	Introduction to The Hope Fund – Coventry
5	Destitution Case Studies and how the fund helps
7	Impact of gifts to the fund
8	Summary of Red Cross Report
9	Summary of Oxfam Report

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## Information Release

### The Unfolding Humanitarian Crisis in Our Country

The Coventry Refugee Centre is a local charity which assists asylum seekers, migrant and refugee communities in their journey from stranger to citizen. In June 2010 the British Red Cross published *Not gone, but forgotten*. More recently in February 2011 Oxfam published *Coping with Destitution* although the chaotic state of the asylum system cannot give an accurate picture; the report uses official figures to conclude there are now 285,000 people in the UK who have been denied asylum and are choosing destitution in the UK rather than return to places they have left. The Arab spring is producing new refugee flows; potentially the numbers of destitute people in the UK is set to continue to grow unless the coalition government reverses the policy that has produced mass destitution in UK cities and towns including Coventry.

Since 2000 public policy removed all benefits entitlements, replacing these with limited NASS support, changed legal aid which limited access to legal help for asylum and set asylum within the general immigration debate. The changes were predicated on a belief that if the system were made as cruel and swift as possible, it would produce the processing and removal of asylum seekers who were deemed to have failed to prove their case.

The issue of refugees has in the UK been increasingly linked to general immigration policy and it is regrettable the question of Britain's historic role in the battle for human freedom and kindness in providing sanctuary over centuries has been lost.

The destitute in Coventry are estimated at about 1500 people who have no access to food, water, shelter or clothing. The Coventry Refugee Centre and The Bishop of Coventry have established The HOPE Fund Coventry to help feed, shelter and clothe the destitute. The British Red Cross in their report indicate they provided 60,000 food vouchers and 45,000 food parcels in 12 months. The HOPE Fund Coventry, a partnership of local charities, distributes food, clothing, toiletries, travel expenses to attend UKBA interviews and emergency accommodation. Many churches and faith groups have helped individuals with these basic needs. All destitute asylum seekers cannot get recourse to public funds and therefore we must raise funds from individuals and groups who do care that in the sixth wealthiest country in the world there should be such large numbers left without access to basic necessities. The coalition government has been largely silent on what it intends to do about this growing humanitarian crisis. The voices of the destitute carry little weight; it is our wish that local people will help to say "No to Destitution in Our Name" and to make regular donations to the fund. I am confident the legacy of Coventry, City of Peace and Reconciliation can awaken again British values of human freedom and sanctuary.

### Bhopinder Basi

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This pack and The Hope Fund Coventry logo have been produced as a contribution to the Fund by Homer Creative, Birmingham

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## Patron's Letter

From the Bishop Of Coventry  
The Right Reverend Dr. Christopher Cocksworth

May 2011

Human beings need hope. It is a fundamental need. Absence of hope causes the human spirit to wither, the body to decay and the mind to distort. A fundamental responsibility of human beings is to bring hope to those who are in real danger of losing hope. That is exactly what The Hope Fund - Coventry is about: bringing hope to those who are destitute, without home, income and other ways of supporting themselves.

As patron of The Hope Fund - Coventry, I appeal you to support its work helping local asylum-seeking men, women and their families have the very basic necessities of life.

The Hope Fund - Coventry depends entirely on money generously donated by people and groups like you. Please consider making a regular donation by standing order to provide a regular income for the fund. If you are able, why not get together with your local or community groups to raise funds for those in such great need? Your gift will make this sort of difference:

**£50** 10 food parcels with enough provisions for 50 meals

**£150** Food and necessities to support a destitute family for a month

**£500** Food parcels to feed 50 destitute people for a week

**£750** Food and support for one person in destitute accommodation for a year.

There are over 1,500 refused asylum seekers locally, with numbers growing and their situation worsening. Asylum seekers who find themselves destitute quickly become invisible to our systems. They want to stay here locally in safety rather than return home to war, persecution, violence, rape and torture. Your gift will bring hope.

*"If I was able to have regular meals or enough to eat every day, I would feel stronger and more able to cope with my situation."*

*Alia*

With my hope for your support

Yours sincerely

+ Christopher Cocksworth

## The Hope Fund – Coventry

### Helping the homeless, penniless and hungry

Every day, the fund assists homeless, penniless and hungry asylum seekers with food, shelter and practical necessities in order to help them survive. The Coventry Hope partnership is a network of support organisations for the growing number of destitute in our community. The fund provides crucial resources for these vulnerable people who have no home, money or way of supporting their day-to-day lives.

The fund helps to provide night shelter for up to 20 people at the Peace House, it provides destitute rooms at CRC's house, it helps give food parcels and emergency funds from the Refugee Centre, and food and other essential items at the Carriers of Hope shop. It also helps the giving of practical and emergency assistance from CTRIC, Akimbo, Emmaus and the Coventry Friends Programme.

It is estimated that there are currently over 1,000 refused asylum seekers in Coventry who are long-term destitute, being invisible to 'the system' and prepared to live in poverty here rather than return to their country of origin. There are also around 150 short-term destitute at any one time in Coventry, people who have been made destitute by delays, inefficiencies and breakdowns in 'the system'. 1 in 6 clients of the Refugee Centre are destitute

### The Hope Fund – Coventry is a lifeline

For **Miss M**, a woman who fled persecution in Eritrea, the fund supported her over 5 months after her application for asylum had been refused and claims for 'section 4' support were rejected – leaving her homeless and destitute. During this time she stayed with friends, at the Peace House night shelter and then in a destitute room at CRC's house when it became available.

For **Miss D**, a young woman who had escaped Zimbabwe with her life but had her application for asylum refused, the fund provided support and accommodation in a destitute room at CRC's house. It was hoped that this would only be for a short time until her application for 'section 4' support was approved, but Home Office delays extended her period of destitution to over three months. The Refugee Centre helped make fresh representations and she has now received leave to remain with access to housing and benefits.

For **Mr Z**, a man who escaped political repression and violence in Iran, the fund supported him after multiple applications for asylum had been refused and he was street homeless. He did not apply for 'section 4' support as he was afraid the Home Office would move him away from Coventry, where he had built up a support network whilst recovering from mental health breakdown. For over a year he was destitute, sleeping at the Peace House night shelter, and then in a destitute room at CRC's house when one became available. He has now received leave to remain.

For the hundreds of people each week who come to Coventry Partnership organisations for help because they have nobody else to turn to, the fund really does provide a lifeline.

## Destitution Case Studies

**Miss M** from Eritrea had escaped from violence and persecution at home, she presented to us as a vulnerable woman who was destitute. She was staying with friends in Coventry but as this was not a permanent abode she also regularly slept at the Peace House night shelter. Her initial submission for refugee status had been refused and we worked with her to generate further evidence to support fresh representations to UKBA.

Over the Xmas holiday period and the following two months she was kindly accommodated in a private home via Churches Together. When CRC's room in CRC's social housing property became available in March, she was moved into one of the destitute rooms with the intention of providing shelter and subsistence until her 'section 4' support was obtained. Her representations were refused and we subsequently worked with her in order to gather further evidence and challenge her potential removal from the UK.

For five months The Hope Fund - Coventry provided shelter, food and other necessities as well as CRC supporting her representations to UKBA. We also funded travel to Eritrean and Sudanese embassies in London which were needed for her case. When in London she stayed with extended family and community connections and eventually she decided to move away from Coventry to reside with a family in London.

**Mr P** left Afghanistan because of violence and persecution and had been dispersed to Coventry by UKBA whilst his application for leave to remain was considered. Despite suffering genuine persecution in his homeland his repeated applications for refugee status were refused. After final refusal of asylum he was made homeless and destitute, forcing him to attend the Coventry Peace House night shelter which provided a bed and a meal each day.

During this time he was an enthusiastic, full-time volunteer caseworker at CRC helping fellow asylum seekers and refugees. CRC helped him submit new representations to the Home Office. When a 'destitute' room became available at CRC's social enterprise house it was agreed that he move in. The Hope Fund – Coventry supported Mr P with various shelter, food and necessities for 66 weeks until his last application for leave to remain was successful.

**Mr J** came from Sudan where he was studying at University. He was arrested during unrest in Darfur, detained as an anti-government agitator and tortured during detention. After release he fled his country using an agent to take him somewhere safe. He arrived in the UK and claimed asylum but was finally refused after lengthy appeals, his support then ceased leaving him homeless and destitute,

He sleeps on floors of a number of people in the Sudanese community who give him shelter, generally eating only once a day if friends can spare food. When he occasionally presents himself at the Carriers of Hope food shop or the Refugee Centre we provide food and whatever else we can to provide his basic needs and some relief from his predicament.

**Miss D** had fled her home in Zimbabwe after severe persecution and trauma, she had her application for asylum refused and when she presented to the Refugee Centre to apply for 'section 4' support, she was homeless, hungry, destitute and getting desperate.

While waiting for 'section 4' support to be approved on the basis of outstanding fresh representations her situation became acute, she had no funds and nowhere to stay. We moved her into a destitute room at our social enterprise property and provided food and necessities from The Hope Fund – Coventry, whilst we pushed through her 'section 4' application and fresh representations for asylum.

A month later she successfully received her Indefinite Leave to remain in the UK and stayed in our destitute room with our destitution support until she received her official benefits and accommodation. The Hope Fund – Coventry provided help over a period of 2 months.

**The H family** from Somalia suffered tribal and religious persecution and fled to the west two years ago to preserve the family. Initial applications for UK asylum were refused and eventually their Home Office support ended, leaving them homeless and destitute. Although staying with friends to provide a roof over their heads, they had no support or money to feed themselves or even contribute to their host family household.

The Hope Fund – Coventry provided food and necessities regularly for over six months to enable the family to eat and remain healthy. They were referred to CRC who helped them apply and eventually receive 'section 4' support of which they were previously unaware.

## Impact of Gifts to the Fund.

Donations will help us to provide:

- £5** 1 food parcel with enough for 5 meals  
Toiletries and necessities for one person to last a month  
Sanitary towels to last a month
- £10** 2 food parcels, enough to feed one person for a week  
Toiletries and necessities for a family to last a month  
Night shelter at Peace House for one with meal, breakfast, shower
- £25** Food and necessities for a destitute person to contribute to a host household towards their upkeep for a fortnight  
Travel expenses for one person to attend UKBA in Croydon or Liverpool
- £50** 10 food parcels with enough provisions for 50 meals  
Food to support one person for a month in a destitution room
- £75** Food and necessities for a pregnant destitute woman to last a month
- £150** Food and necessities to support a destitute family for a month  
30 food parcels with provisions for 150 meals
- £250** Emergency shelter & support for a vulnerable destitute family for a month
- £500** Food parcels to feed 50 destitute people for a week  
Food parcels to feed one person for a year
- £750** Food and support for one destitute person in destitute room for a year



## The urgent need for a more humane asylum system

The British Red Cross has launched an advocacy report which highlights the dire hardships facing destitute asylum seekers – and the urgent need for a more humane asylum system.

The report – titled *Not gone, but forgotten* explores the Red Cross' work supporting thousands of destitute asylum seekers and refugees throughout the UK, and the daily challenges they face just to survive.

In particular, it explores the experiences of refused asylum seekers who have reached the end of the appeal process and suggests some policy solutions to help improve their humanitarian situation. The report's findings show that, under current policy, thousands of refused asylum seekers are denied employment, made homeless, refused healthcare and rely on handouts to survive.

### Living in limbo

Chief executive Nick Young said: "Our report shows that current policy is making thousands of refused asylum seekers destitute. Unable to work and provide for themselves, deprived of accommodation and denied healthcare, these people's lives are in limbo.

"The British Red Cross believes that anyone who comes to this country fleeing persecution and applies for asylum should be treated in a way that maintains their dignity. Making them homeless, withdrawing support and often forcing them to go underground with the risk of exploitation and illegal work does not meet with these standards and is actually counter-productive."

### Four key changes

In the destitution report, the Red Cross suggests four key policy changes to the asylum system that would improve the humanitarian situation of this vulnerable group:

- The adoption of the principle that destitution should not be an outcome of the asylum system.
- The provision of support for all destitute refused asylum seekers with dependent children.
- An end-to-end asylum support structure, including permission to work, until the applicant is either removed or granted leave to remain.
- An entitlement to healthcare throughout the asylum process.



## Oxfam report on destitution amongst failed asylum seekers in the UK 2011

UK asylum policy has increasingly restricted asylum seekers' access to welfare support, both while their application is being processed and if they are refused. Existing evidence suggests that many asylum seekers have been destitute for more than six months and a significant proportion for more than two years. This strongly indicates that refused asylum seekers are prepared to face long periods of destitution in the UK rather than returning to their country of origin.

Research uncovers how the hundreds of thousands of people currently living in the UK, with no access to legitimate means of securing a livelihood, survive on a day-to-day and longer-term basis.

### Key findings

- Many refused asylum seekers would rather remain destitute than apply for government support because they fear it will result in deportation.
- Many are unaware of their entitlement to free primary health care, or are anxious about contact with the authorities and therefore do not access health services.
- Destitute asylum seekers are often deterred from accessing support from large voluntary organisations because of a perceived lack of independence of these organisations from the Home Office.
- Churches appear to provide an important source of support for many of those living in destitution.
- Some relationships are overtly transactional, with destitute asylum seekers providing childcare, cooking and/or housework, and sometimes sex, in exchange for meals, cash, shelter, or other daily necessities.
- Both men and women form sexual relationships with local people as part of their livelihood strategy, but these relationships are sometimes disempowering.
- All destitute asylum seekers know it is illegal for them to work, but often have no choice but to work illegally to survive. Wages were mostly reported as being between £1 and £3 per hour, and in some cases were even lower.
- Most examples of illegal work involved low-skilled jobs, with low pay, long hours, poor working conditions, and a constant fear of being raided by immigration officials.
- There are very few examples of destitute asylum seekers being involved in criminal activity other than illegal work, as they are extremely fearful of being caught by the authorities and deported.

- There is evidence of both men and women involved in commercial sex work, with many of those who pursue this strategy being physically abused, sexually exploited or manipulated, or forced to stay against their will.
- Destitute asylum seekers will avoid coming into contact with authorities, even if they are subject to abuse or the victims of criminal behaviour.

## Conclusions

Their overwhelming lack of access to institutional, social and economic resources denies them a sustainable livelihood, and results in a life that is robbed of dignity and unacceptable by human rights standards.

That hundreds of thousands of people would rather live in poverty and in constant fear of deportation suggests the failure of government policy.

The government should accept the growing body of evidence that shows that destitution does not lead refused asylum seekers to return to their country of origin. The risks associated with continuing to pursue this approach are enormous, with significant implications for wider society.

It is not acceptable for asylum seekers to continue to live in destitution, and the government has a responsibility to ensure that the human rights of asylum seekers are upheld. Being human means having access to the resources needed to survive on a day-to-day basis with dignity. It also means having hope for the future.