



Registered Charity No: 1108113 Limited company No: 05242598

START
students and refugees together

Annual Report
2009 - 2010

START

Students and Refugees Together

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The year in figures:

One to one casework support:

- 189 cases worked (170 RHSS:19 MIAH)
- 7124 casework hours (6641 RHSS: 483 MIAH)
- 327 Service Users involved: 54 families and 122 individuals, from 27 nationalities speaking 27 different languages

Cultural Kitchen:

- 25 fortnightly kitchens run, 60 people on average attending (participants from 45 nations)
- 1500 meals served, 6 volunteers (average) per session

Student Involvement:

- 21 Students on placement – 19 UK and 2 International.
- 5 disciplines – Social Work, Occupational Therapy Youth and Community Work, Health & Social Care, and Clinical Psychology.
- 1345 University level placement days

“If you are coming to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you are coming because your liberation is bound with mine, then let us work together.”

Extract from a poem by an Aboriginal woman

I am proud to present this report which contains very clear evidence of the capacity of human beings to respond positively to unexpected circumstances by working together. International news reports tell a constant story of conflict and displacement across many continents. The majority of refugees stay close to their country of origin and only about 2% seek asylum in the UK. For this small group of people from all over the world, this is the beginning of a difficult journey to negotiate the legal and policy processes designed to deter people from coming to this country. Plymouth has been a dispersal area for ten years now and START has adapted to change whilst preserving a strong commitment to maximising the strengths of individuals, organisations and communities. START collaborates closely with agencies that support people waiting for their claim to be decided and our work really begins when families and individuals are granted leave to remain.

This welcome decision has to be accompanied by a period of intensive and expert support if people are to avoid destitution and homelessness. Constant changes in policy and provision mean that numbers of people needing support can fluctuate without warning and also means that every person's situation is unique. This report shows the very fast and flexible response of START to these changes, often in advance of funding being made available for that purpose. A range of community activities offer a diversity of ways in which people can both access services and support each other.

A highly experienced management team supervise a constant flow of placement students from a variety of disciplines. This student workforce brings energy, creativity and a passion for social justice and often achieves results which we thought were impossible. START's unique organisational model has been recognised by the Social Care Institute for Excellence who cite it as one of 12 good practice organisations nationally. (<http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/guides/guide37/practiceexamples.asp>) Current public sector cuts are already having serious effects on services. For the Big Society to have any positive meaning, we will need creative, resourceful and highly responsive organisations made up of people with the stamina and resilience demonstrated by refugees and students. START's harmonious relationships with the refugee communities, university, local authority, voluntary and commercial sector are a very sound basis for the future.

Avril Bellinger, Chair of Students and Refugees Together (START)

From the Management Team...

Over the last three years, we have continued to work as the management team with students, service users and volunteers, promoting the values and ethics that make START unique and valued in the city.

Utilising the drive, enthusiasm, and 'can do' attitude that students on placement bring, along with our experience and knowledge, we have demonstrated the immense value of START's model of service delivery by meeting each of this years challenges head-on in a thoughtful and responsive way.

This year has been one of huge uncertainty and change, both globally and locally. In Plymouth it started with few people being granted asylum. As the year progressed and this changed, we were very pleased to work with a large number of people who after a very long wait were granted leave to remain. Whilst local resources for the refugee community continue to recede, be withdrawn or disappear completely, START has been successful in attracting and drawing down new resources, e.g. Lloyds TSB funding for our Job Club, Migration Impact Fund for destitution work, and in ensuring that asylum and refugee issues remain on the agenda politically too.

It is testament to the resourceful nature of students, service users, and volunteers working at START and the strengths and skills of those seeking support from START, that we have been able to consolidate our position as the natural 'transition' refugee organisation in Plymouth being both sustainable and community needs-led.

Our challenge for 2010-11 is to make START as financially resilient and sustainable as we can, ensuring the future of this organisation that is so in tune with the needs of refugees in Plymouth.

Janet, Isaac & Susie – START Management Team



The Refugee Housing Support Service (RHSS)

Now in its fourth year, The RHSS service is a developed, successful support pathway, that offers a holistic and person centred service, open to all refugees living in Plymouth. Provided by the START / Path consortium, the service is responsive, sensitive, and thoughtful to an individual's presenting needs. We celebrate the transition a person makes from being someone seeking asylum to that of gaining status and becoming a full participant in British society.

Our strength is in our core team of workers that have remained constant and have each become experts in this field, coupled with the enthusiasm, commitment and freshness brought by students on professional placements. This allows us to respond to changing political and strategic priorities, whilst all the time keeping the needs of the individual refugee in Plymouth at its core.

This expertise, care and trust developed by the team are reflected in the feedback from those using the service. Through exit questionnaires, over 90% of clients feel that the service was good or excellent.

We have developed good, strong relationships with housing providers across the housing sector, from the homelessness teams to direct access hostel provision to third stage housing and landlords, both in social and private sector. We are trusted for the advocacy and service we provide. More than 60% of clients successfully acquired secure and safe accommodation on exiting the service: in the last 12 months 66% of those have accessed private rented housing.

The service has fully fulfilled its contractual remit regarding numbers of clients supported and hours of contact time delivered. It guarantees to deliver 100% service and during the last year has effectively provided 13% added value extra over and above this. 173 clients were referred and accepted on to the service during this year, 6641 case work hours provided.



We have become skilled at utilising resources effectively and by adding to and developing complementary services that deepen the value of the core service offered.

- MIAH service – a complementary service, which provides low level tenancy support to Migrants and BME community members.
- Job Club - a fortnightly peer supported employment club for RHSS clients who have support needs based around seeking and finding work.
- Community activities – Cultural Kitchen, Soft Creations and Cultivating Communities: an allotment project.
- RHSS service user group – met every 6 weeks.



A personal Experience from a START service User:

'To me START is a God send. I had just been moved to Plymouth with my partner by the Home Office's NASS programme, when I got my refugee status. It was a tricky situation because although I was happy I had my immigration status, the way forward looked very confusing and stressful as I was so far away from all my support system and heavily pregnant.

I was referred to START and started working with Susie. She explained to me fully about the procedures from getting a bank account, applying for a national insurance number and getting a place to stay as I was about to be homeless, which was very scary. Appointments were set for all relevant welfare benefits. Within a week we managed to get a bank account and had approached the Homelessness team.

It was a rollercoaster in the beginning, but Susie reassured me that things would get better, of which they did...sooner than I thought! I then worked with Lena, and we attended all the other remaining appointments together, and we managed to have a place to stay before my baby was born, which was all I had hoped for. It was so helpful having someone accompanying me as I did not know my way around the city.

Having worked with the START team, I feel like I belong in the community. They made it possible by encouraging me to come to the sewing group and the cultural kitchen, where I met a few people from my country which is wonderful. I might not have met them otherwise.

In my experience, I think it is a very good thing for us refugees to have a team like START as they make our lives easier and as sociable as possible. I know that if I come across a confusing situation START is just a phone call away and that they will point me in the right direction. I have gained a lot of knowledge and am able to live independently.'

START service user feedback, 2010



Migrant Impact Access to Housing (MIAH)

In January 2010, Plymouth City Council Housing Department contracted START to deliver a low level tenancy support service as part of the Migration Impact Fund (MIF). The work was to provide support and assistance for migrants accessing appropriate housing options and maintaining their tenancies. Working in close partnership with the Homelessness team at Plymouth City Council, the Migrant Access to Housing (MIAH) service began.



MIAH ran from January to August and was delivered as a contract variation extension of our successful RHSS service. It was modelled on that service in terms of delivery, frameworks and outcome monitoring and has enabled START to work with people from outside the refugee community and broaden our reach. The service has cemented a good working relationship between START and PCC Homelessness team.



25 clients accessed and sought advice from MIAH service. Of these, 19 clients were offered a tenancy support service through MIAH. All clients presented as either needing support in finding and/or maintaining safe and secure accommodation. 80% clients were able to maintain safe and secure accommodation through this service, of which 73% were tenancies in the private rented sector.



The following case study highlights the kind of work undertaken:

British Citizen, Sri Lankan Male, Single

Having moved to Plymouth in the previous year, he was lodging with a family of four. He was looking for more independence and wanted to have his own space and live on his own. Through MIAH, START was able to support him. We arranged viewings and accessed a budgeting loan to pay his rent-in-advance. We supported him to find an affordable bedsit and helped him to set-up bill payments for utilities and claim Housing Benefit.



Job Club

In April 2010 and funded through a two year grant from LloydsTSB foundation for England and Wales, we started a fortnightly Job Club for refugees who were currently supported through our casework services. We have run 10 sessions so far, led by staff and students on placement with an average of 5 refugees attending each drop-in from a growing number of 20 different individuals using the drop in for support.

The sessions have two elements to them: one to one support and group work. Individual work looks at job searching, CV writing, describing you and your skills and understanding mainstream systems. Group work looks at language in general, explores challenges that members of the this community face in finding work and has involved linking up with other support agencies. A4E, Job Centre Plus (JCP) and Careers Advice have all attended the sessions. JCP recognises the job club as a beneficial support group for refugees seeking work and regularly refers refugees to the sessions as part of their job searching requirements for this community.



Discussions among attendees have also focussed on wider issues: housing and benefits, discrimination and racism, education and qualifications, children and families, and cultural differences. The material and information gathered and expertise used has been captured in a 'tool kit' for running the session.

The introduction of the Job Club at START has raised awareness within the organisation of the changing needs presented by the people we seek to serve. It has quantified 'employment and training' as an area we support in a much clearer and defined way. It has improved our ability as an organisation to respond better to a service user's needs, as well as provide greater opportunities for students on placement at START to meet their academic learning needs.

Destitution Support: Migration Impact Fund (MIF)

In June 2010 START, with funds from the Migration Impact Fund, we set up various schemes with the aim of reducing the impact of migration and potential destitution on migrant families and individuals, dispersed to the city, by providing access to various forms of financial support.

The specific aims of the scheme are to reduce destitution:

- As migrants move from temporary to safe and secure accommodation. Support given through the provision of rent in advance grants, storage costs, van hire etc.
- By bolstering existing food programmes in the City, in particular through partnership working with Devon Cornwall Refugee Support (DCRS) food parcel scheme.
- For migrant families as they move into the mainstream benefit system by setting up a bridging loan scheme, administered and run by the Red Cross, which uses the family's entitlement to non means tested benefits, as they wait for that benefit to come into payment.
- By enabling migrant children to remain in their original school whilst their families are moved around the city.

We negotiated support and contracted work to the Red Cross and DCRS. The scheme is due to run until June 2011.

By August 31st, we had distributed 130 food parcels and supported 14 migrants to settle in Plymouth. The following case study shows how this works in practice:

Migrant Family, Black African, 1 Adult 3 Children.

Family presented for referral to RHSS service for one to one support. A caseworker supported family to make homelessness approach and apply for all appropriate benefits. The following transition period involved the family moving from NASS to temporary and then on to their final permanent home. Extreme destitution was experienced whilst waiting for child tax credits and child benefit to come into payment. MIF destitution funds were used to: fund bus tickets that enabled the children to remain in their original school whilst moving around the city, providing some stability for the children during this transition. The family accessed food parcels from DCRS and a van was hired for the final move. These interventions reduced the levels destitution experienced and enabled the family to utilise their resources more effectively, ensuring a more successful transition and settlement.

For START, this is a great opportunity to channel resources to some of the most destitute members of our society, to highlight the diverse nature of our work and to strengthen our partnerships with other third and public sector organisations in a sustainable way.

Legacy Advice Service (LAS)

In the spring of 2010, changes in policy enacted by the UK Borders Agency increased the rate at which long term asylum seeker cases were being resolved. Many asylum seekers were receiving positive decisions regarding their asylum claims and being granted Indefinite Leave to remain (ILR). By July 2010, the volume of new referrals each week to our existing services increased fourfold.

Our innovative response, to the unprecedented increase in demand was to channel resources effectively so that these resources reached the widest group of people. We recognised that our service model was unsustainable if offered to all who seek our support.

So, we introduced an advice, information and guidance (AIG) surgery; the Legacy Advice Service (LAS), a twice weekly drop-in based at START. It was purely an AIG and sign posting service and aimed to support people to find the solutions for themselves, utilise the skills they bring and the networks they have. Access to the RHSS service was maintained for those refugees who presented with priority needs: e.g. mental health issues, lack of community and friends, limited or no knowledge of English.

The drop-in service was very busy during the beginning weeks with an average of 10 refugees attending each session. During the LAS drop-in service users were given advice and information, both verbal and in writing, about accommodation and benefits. Service users were welcome to return to future LAS drop-ins for more advice and information as they felt they needed.

Many attended only a couple of sessions and used the drop in to support their independent life choices. For others, they came each week to begin with then slowly stopped once their benefits were in payment and accommodation was found. For a few, attendance led to a referral for more structured one to one support at START.



Cultural Kitchen

The Cultural Kitchen (CK) continues to grow from strength to strength, providing a safe space for refugees and asylum seekers in Plymouth. Each fortnight on average of 60 people attend to socialise and share a healthy halal meal. The menu is chosen by different service users from different nationalities. This year has been very busy with students on placement and volunteers working together to produce a recipe book of different ethnic healthy dishes

A large proportion of the community are families making the transition from seeking asylum to refugee status. The transition process has a profound impact on poverty and destitution these families and their young people face therefore they use the CK as a social event providing activities for mothers and young members a safe place they can meet enjoy themselves and make friends. The Cultural Kitchen creates a safe place for people bring their own music and enjoy the evening, a chance to get away from the feelings of isolation and verbal hostility that can exist within their neighbourhood, highlighting the hidden diversity within Plymouth.

“They help solving some difficult situations. Such as getting into college, jobs, food houses, university... it is very useful”.

In April 2010, we hosted the Ghanaian Exchange students who enthusiastically volunteered, taking part and cooking their traditional dishes.





In June, We celebrated our 7th birthday, coinciding with Plymouth refugee week celebrations. The party was attended by the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress, DCRS, Refugee Action, Red Cross, and many other organisations working with refugees and asylum seekers. Thanks to Tim Francis Sound who provided excellent music and entertainment during the evening.

The START team would like to give a big thank you to Emily Cannon for her hard work and dedication to the Cultural Kitchen, whilst working for BTCV and with V-Involved Plymouth. Emily has been an outstanding ambassador for volunteers and volunteering and has supported and encouraged START's involvement in this area. We wish Emily a fond farewell and good luck in her new job...and hope she will still continue to volunteer at the cultural kitchen!



Cultivating Communities - Allotment Project

Cultivating Communities is START's allotment project and is situated at Swarthmore allotments near Central Park in Plymouth. Many of the people who attend regularly have their own keys and can access the allotment whenever they wish, this also helps with the watering!

Students and volunteers attend every Thursday from 11am to 2pm and bring along a lunch for people to share, hopefully supplemented by allotment produce. During the past year the allotment has been supported by 4 regular volunteers and 6 students.



The development of a pack of information on what to plant and when, a community development project run by first year Plymouth University students, has been really helpful particularly when thinking about what to grow in the poly tunnel, which has survived despite pecking by the local wildlife.



Highlights of 2009/2010 include a trip to the Eden project and Calstock allotments, the setting up a link between people attending the allotment and the Cornwall village of Calstock for monthly table tennis games, the manufacturing of garden furniture from recycled palettes and of course the growing of some very successful vegetables.

Soft Creations

Soft Creations is open to women and their pre school children and continues to meet between 1 and 3 pm every Tuesday afternoon at Sherwell Church.

During the past year over 50 women have attended, speaking many different languages, supported by 3 regular volunteers and 6 students. The sessions are informal with people using the space to talk and practice their English skills, meet friends, find solutions to practical problems such as budgeting and paying bills, share information and news with others as well as completing sewing projects.

'I like coming and meeting other people who have children'

Some people bring along clothes they want to alter or mend while others take part in group projects such as making a calendar depicting different festivals, embroidering cards or making bags.

'I say thank you to all people who support this group'

Sometimes specific events are organised including mask making and the very popular cooking sessions where women can come together to cook dishes and talk about cooking and eating traditions which are important in their cultures. Playback Theatre has also run a number of well attended sessions giving women the opportunity to share some of their stories.

Student Placements 2009 – 2010

START is about the collaborative work between students on placement and those seeking asylum in the UK. The following student statements are testament to this...

'For me, START is a unique and special organisation...in 5 months I experienced one to one casework, being involved in several projects, managing my own work, and working in a big team of friendly and helpful people. Every day it was amazing with never ending learning possibilities'
German social work student. 2010

'For me, START is about growing and facing yourself. It is quite incredible what the work in START did with me! In the beginning it seemed impossible but the atmosphere and the people encouraged me to grow in so many different ways, by the end I was an important part of this organisation and that I had the possibility to give something back to the organisation and let it grow as well' German Social work student, 2010



'START is a wonderful placement to find out what your skills are and to try yourself out. I was impressed at how much trust the management team gives you in your work and how independently you can work with your clients. I have never worked in a project that is organised like START. I think it is a brilliant solution working together with other students learning from each other. As big as the challenge might be at the beginning, the bigger your learning the more you achieve for the future!'
German Social work Student, 2010

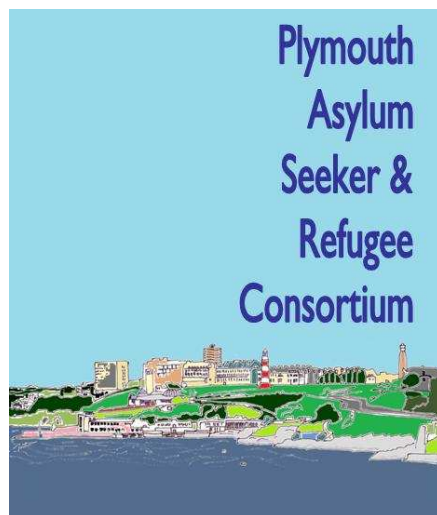
'I think that START really engages students with the positive aspects and learning opportunities available. Now that I am applying for jobs, for example, I have a whole load to say about cross cultural work, interpreter use, immigration and housing legislation, mental health issues and anti-oppressive practice. I have gained a massive social work 'tool-kit' which is easy to transfer to a statutory setting' 2nd year MA social work student 2009

'If I am honest, I didn't know what to expect from START, and was really interested to know how OT fitted in with the START process. However, I think I have gained experience in many different fields that I wouldn't experience in any other setting' 2nd Year OT student 2009

'I liked working alongside other students, we all bring different experiences and we can learn from each other. It was nice to have this level of support and no one made you feel inadequate for asking for help' 2nd Year OT Student 2009

University/College	Discipline	No. Students
Plymouth	BSc Social Work – Stages 2 & 3	6
Plymouth	BA Social Work – Stage 1	4
Plymouth	MA Social Work – both years	5
Plymouth	Occupational Therapy – 2 nd and 3 rd Year	3
Plymouth	Trainee Clinical Psychology – Post Grad.	1
Plymouth	Health and Social Care	1
Esslingen - Germany	Social Work	1





PASRC

Formed in September 2008, PASRC is an association of three unique and individual organisations in Plymouth: Students and Refugees Together (START), Devon and Cornwall Refugee Support Council (DCRSC) and Refugees First.

In recognising the collaboration and diversity of work each member organisation undertakes, within the broad spectrum of services needed to support asylum seekers and refugees dispersed to Plymouth, The consortium brings together these three diverse organisations with the main objective:

‘To meet the needs of asylum seekers and refugees through the promotion of collaboration and co-operation between those organisations in Plymouth and surrounding areas for which such work is their core purpose’.

The consortium distributes funding, from Plymouth City Council through a service level agreement (SLA). The fund was split equally between the three consortium member organisations, and contributed toward the costs of services delivered by each. The following is some what has been achieved so far:

- PASRC has delivered effective services in accordance with the SLA.
- PASRC has raised ASR issues at a strategic level: worked with and attended meetings with PCC, UKBA and MPs.
- The members discuss and recognise the need for a comprehensive collective voice. Current policy changes that affect the ASR community have been discussed.
- There is greater and more effective communication between the member organisations. Each member has a better understanding of the work each organisation does, ensuring that there is no overlap in the provision of services provided by the members.

START has played a key role within the consortium and values the opportunities it offers these organisations to speak strategically with a united voice.

Partnerships and collaborations

We need to nurture and develop sophisticated and well supported networks in order to guarantee a more sustainable future for START. Through our collaborations with statutory and voluntary agencies, we are able to grow our success in offering the widest informed choice to those we support, and promote greater understanding and learning in others of the issues refugees face in our society.

We provided small placement opportunities to undergraduate medical students and dentists, bespoke training and have presented at conferences: Global Citizenship Conference, Change up symposium. We are active participants and encourage students to take part in a variety of events throughout the year: Refugee Week, International Women's Day, volunteer week, and through direct action with citizens for sanctuary. At every point, we have encouraged the participation of community members to work alongside students at these opportunities

The following are a few of the many organisations that, through partnership working collaborations or signposting to, contribute to our success:

Path, Supporting People, DCRS, Refugee Action, Refugees First, PCC Homelessness Unit, PCC Housing dept., PCC Social Inclusion Unit, Amber Initiatives, Citizens Advice Bureau, the Ship hostel, the Salvation Army, Harbour project, Money Advice Plymouth, the Foyer, the Red Cross, PDREC, Shelter, Devon and Cornwall Housing, Colebrook Housing, Signpost Housing, Tamar Housing, The RSS (formally known as Path deposit guarantee scheme), Open Doors international School, ASR Mental Health Team, Plymouth City College, Plymouth Homes 4 let, Kew-5, the Food Bank, Nomomy Children's Centre, Plymouth Guild for Volunteers, Time together, Language and Lunch, Calstock table tennis club, British Trust Conservation Volunteers (BTCV), V-involved, Diggin' It, the Eden Project, Devon and Cornwall Police Diversity Team, Sherwell United Church, The University of Plymouth, Merrivale Butchers, Playback theatre, TR 2, the Barbican Theatre, Harvest home...

Financial Statement

START annual accounts are independently audited in accordance with current Charities Commission guidelines. Full accounts are available on request.

Summary of accounts:

Income:	£	Expenditure:	£
Operational obligations carried forward on 1 st Sept 2008	5968	Salaries, on-costs & pensions	92495
Local authority SLA – Migration Impact Fund	30000	Interpreters, training & professional fees	4343
Grant- LloydsTSB Foundation for England and Wales	6500	Buildings – rent, utilities, insurance	17470
Grant –Mental Health and Wellbeing	4000	Travel expenses	1970
Supporting People contract – RHSS	138790	Office supplies and services	11185
Migration Impact Fund – MIAH	12000	Depreciation	1900
PCC SLA – PASRC	14515	Charitable activities – Community Work	4994
Cultural Kitchen donations	1381	Charitable activities – Casework Support	19587
START donations	229	Path - RHSS	41131
Student placement fees	3438		
Activities to generate funds: Invoices & fundraising	276		
Friends of START	225		
Investment income and interest	64		
Total:	217386	Total:	195075
		Operational obligations carried forward - Restricted	19091
		Operational obligations carried forward – Unrestricted	3863
		General Reserve	25000

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START is supported by and/or has received funds from the following organisations this year:



Sherwell United Church and kind donations

Thanks

We would like to acknowledge the hard work of all students, volunteers, community members including Sam Brooks, Laura Myles, Rebecca Walls (Summer case work staff) and Oz Osborne, Alicia Smith, Gislaine De Souza, Sejah Alkazwini and Kaywan Mohammadi (Volunteers). We would like to thank all those who have supported START's work this year and those who have volunteered their time and skills to START and START activities.

Thank you for the work you have done.



People at START:

The Management Team

Susie Dent, Janet Hamilton and Isaac Kelly

The Trustees:

Avril Bellinger – Chair

Allan Foad – Secretary

Frank Clements – Treasurer

Viv Horton, Deirdre Ford and Marilyn Lean

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