

Registered Charity No: 1108113 Limited Company No: 05242598



# START

students and refugees together

Annual Report  
2013 - 2014

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## **START in a nutshell:**

### **Short term interventions:**

- 140 individuals accessed START for one-off support
- 151 individuals attended Job Club during the year, a footfall of 1202 over 50 sessions run with an average of 24 individuals per session

### **Long term support - One to One casework:**

- 171 cases were supported through RHSS, 7500 casework hours

### **Community activities:**

- 24 Cultural Kitchens, 1680 meals served, average 70 people attending
- 111 people participated in 3 START walks

### **Student learning:**

- 23 Students on placement – 18 UK and 5 International.
- 4 disciplines – including Social Work, Occupational Therapy, Clinical Psychology and Law.
- 1585 University level placement days equivalent to 11888 work hours at START

The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.

Edmund Burke (1729-1797)

Doing nothing whilst bemoaning the state of the world has never been acceptable to people with a conscience, Globally we are confronting an increasingly harsh environment as climate change forces populations to move and more countries are devastated by war. An unprecedented rise in the number of displaced people (over 55 million) is reflected in a net rise in immigration in the UK and a significant increase in the demand for START's services. Even though the UK receives about half as many asylum claims (0.49 per 1000 population) compared to the rest of Europe (0.9 per 1000) this small group of people continue to be a political target.

The continuing cuts to welfare services and rise in poverty, destitution and homelessness in the wider population have been accompanied by the rise of right wing political parties. Encouraged by the media, people are encouraged to blame their ills on 'foreigners' and 'vulnerable' members of society instead of recognising their poverty as the result of capitalist greed.

START has been very fortunate to have the support of diverse students from all over the world who have developed their professional capacity by working alongside refugees and the staff team who do such a good job to support them. We have seen an increase in the number of volunteers working with START from both the refugee and host communities. This consistent flow of idealism, energy and hope has enabled us to stay positive and optimistic in these difficult times.

Expert fundraising support has meant that the organisation is financially secure for another year and we continue to develop our understanding of what actually helps people to make the transition from people in need to self-reliant contributors to their new communities. This year's research resulted in a new statement of commitment to people who use START's services. We now know that in our partnership with refugees we should focus on: building warm relationships and connections; working together to face challenges; recognising refugees' resourcefulness and active contribution to society; providing flexible, available and knowledgeable services; and managing uncertainty.

We are aware that the environment is unlikely to improve and that more people will face destitution and homelessness. However, we know that working in partnership with individuals, groups and other agencies means that there is always something you can do, no matter how helpless you may feel. Please use this report as an example of what is possible in difficult times and let it encourage you to think about what else you can do.

Avril Bellinger – Trustee, Chair and Founder of START

## What does START do?

START's work is to enable refugees to settle successfully in the city and begin their new lives with access to all the practical resources and wider support that they need. Our innovative work model remains relevant and fresh. It utilises the resilience of refugees together with the skills and strengths of students supported by professional expertise. This creates a high quality service and provides exciting and challenging placements for professional learners.



*START walk: Cremyl to Cawsand/Kingsand - April 2014*

Just as last year, the environment in which START works is increasingly hostile. The rise of UKIP, the poisonous rhetoric of the right-wing press and deliberate exploitation of ignorance for political ends is a virulent backdrop to work with refugees. The harsh financial climate has seen the disappearance of many organisations that once offered services such as legal advice and support to specific refugee communities. The endless round of welfare, rule and system changes exerts unrelenting pressure on refugees and support workers alike and competition for the few resources that remain is divisive and damaging. START's experience and knowledge allows it to recognise the evolving issues people face, seek solutions and provide help and support even in these harshest of times. A situation confirmed by the experiences of a 2<sup>nd</sup> year Occupational Therapy student:

*“Working with refugees challenged my own perceptions of the British welfare system. This created empathy for someone from another country with little English who was supposed to understand and negotiate their way through a complex system needed to assist them with integration.”*

Our actions are a direct response to the expressed priorities and needs of the refugee communities themselves. We look for and implement successful strategies that support and strengthen positive integration and settlement so that those people in return can build positive and rewarding futures in the UK. There is a dual approach that creates and maximises opportunities for refugees and simultaneously addresses and removes as many barriers as possible. In practical terms, we use three main mechanisms to achieve this:

- [Formal longer term intervention: one to one support accessed through referral](#)
- [Short term intervention: informal one-off one to one support](#)
- [Provision of community activities that promotes peer support and communal learning.](#)

We are skilled at offering a variety of ways for refugees to access information and advice that strengthens their independence, builds their confidence and resilience, promotes understanding of processes, enables integration and aids successful resettlement.



*Allotment digging day – April 2014*

Our current projects are:

[The RHSS service, Getting STARTed, and START building a future](#)

Our current activities are:

[The Cultural Kitchen, The Allotment Project, START women's creative group  
STARTwalking and the START Job Club](#)

We have developed a range of projects and activities that address and respond to the different priorities identified by refugees. By breaking our work down into a series of individual projects, we have been able to attract direct funding for each. This process ensures that we can produce specific outcomes that meet direct funders criteria, but



when added together become the collective evidence of START achieving its aims and objectives as a charity. This process clearly identifies those projects not directly funded creating a targeted fundraising strategy for START.

A sustainable future is more assured when we respond carefully to community needs and our strategies evolve through feedback and evaluation.



*Craft workshop – February 2014*

## START people

**Refugees** are people forcibly dispersed to Plymouth, through the immigration process, who have been granted leave to remain. Their reasons for coming here and the routes taken are as diverse as the people themselves but what they all share is the experience of seeking asylum in the UK. Their arrival in Plymouth comes after a challenging, often dangerous and difficult journey. In a process constantly swayed by political expedience, now decisions are often made within a short time of people's arrival and they face creating a new life while still traumatised and without the language skills or requisite knowledge to cope without substantial help.

The START workforce consists of **students**. They come from many disciplines, from all stages and levels and from many different institutions both in the UK and internationally. What they gain is practice experience with expert teaching and supervision in a unique organisation. What they bring is energy, creativity, multiple skills, varied knowledge and experience. What they provide is hard work, empathetic support, constantly evolving understanding and professional knowledge for the refugees who receive START's services.

The three full time START **staff** are skilled professionals who provide students with high quality supervision and expert guidance. They are specialists with deep knowledge, extensive experience and current awareness of the refugee sector both locally and nationally, able to transfer their learning and give supervisory support to others. Jointly they manage all aspects of the organisation. A Norwegian student said:

“I felt that I was given a great deal of responsibility, but at the same time I was given good support and guidance from my supervisor.”

The contribution of **volunteers** to START’s work is vital and varied, ranging from chopping vegetables at Cultural Kitchen, helping new arrivals to navigate the internet in a job search, learning to become a trustee and many other valuable roles. Volunteers come from all walks of life and for some it is a brief and necessary experience along the way to finding paid work, for others it is a long-term personal commitment. It has taken time for a body of volunteers to build from the refugee population because in the early days of settlement, survival demands all their time and effort. Whatever their background, if they find paid work here, it is usually for long, unsocial hours on low wages. As previous service-users become properly settled and established we find increasingly that they return to help the next generation of refugees, volunteering with essential first-hand experience of their passage through the systems. A process confirmed by a 3<sup>rd</sup> year Occupational Therapy student:

“There were some challenges I encountered at START to do with the communication difficulties of clients as they didn’t speak much English. However this was quickly addressed by the willingness of some service users who helped to translate.”



*Allotment planting day – summer 2014*

The **Board of Trustees** is a diverse group of worldly people that, as well as rigorously and effectively overseeing the strategic level and governance of the organisation, contribute to many of its day-to-day functions as volunteers. This integration and practical involvement supports good communication and understanding between everyone across the organisation and helps to ensure that strategic decisions truly reflect the needs and circumstances of service users.

## Short term interventions:

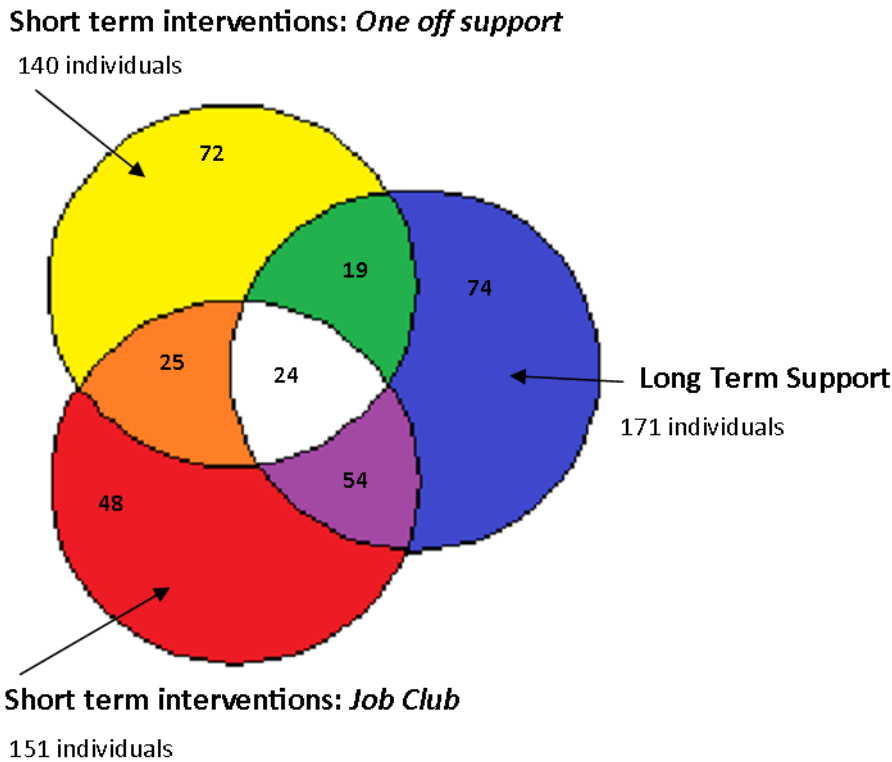
We offer advice and guidance that supports individuals to maintain their independence and autonomy. However, a lack of English is the biggest barrier for people where English isn't their first language. As a German student reflects:

“My biggest challenge was learning to work in a foreign country in a different system in a language that was not my own. However, this allowed me to relate easily to the situation of the refugees who were facing similar challenges.”

Refugees who access our services at an earlier stage can stop difficulties becoming more complicated. By dropping into START, They are able to resolve the issues face to face. Early intervention has reduced the need for referral, the need for more substantial support and has stopped issues escalating out of control. As one refugee says:

“I can come to START with any inquiry and get advice”

This approach enables refugees to better understand benefits systems and de-mystifies the language surrounding welfare. It enables many to become more confident in finding solutions for themselves and means that we are able to rationalise our resources more effectively; only offering longer term one to one support to those who really need it.







*One to one support - 2014*

*In the past year, 140 refugees have accessed one-off support. The issues brought range from water and utilities bills, annual benefit changes, booking driving lessons, changing benefit circumstances due to finding work, booking travel tickets, creating an email address etc. In the majority of cases the issues are resolved within two or three sessions.*

**Job Club:** After finding somewhere to live, refugees identify finding a job as a key objective. The Job Club offers one to one support each week to those looking for work. Using the drop-in format, the refugee works alongside the student/community volunteer and together they

- undertake job search that meets the government's requirements of those seeking work
- explore the individual's skill base to create attractive CVs
- improve English language skills
- access support online
- apply for current vacancies in what is a highly competitive local job market

*151 refugees have benefitted from attending the Job Club. The average session is attended by 24 refugees, supported by 10 volunteers and students. The 50 sessions run have seen a footfall of more than 1200 people attending. Over 20% of those attending find work in some form or other, whereas over 80% are able to manage their current situation more effectively. Strong partnership links have developed between START and the local Job Centre Plus to the mutual benefit of refugees living in Plymouth.*

## Longer term support - One to one casework:

We offer a 'one to one' casework service that addresses the issues presented by an individual. We discover an individual's aspirations and together find solutions that are tailored to them. Longer term interventions are accessed through referral. Our approach is based on a 'journey walked together' ensuring that the refugee is firmly at the centre of the support.



*One to one support - 2014*

As a learning organisation, we are experienced at developing casework skills, and responding to feedback from the community so that the service remains valued and relevant. Our current core service, the refugee housing support service (**RHSS**), offers a good basic provision that addresses the physical accommodation need as a starting point for support. Finding somewhere safe and secure to live is the absolute foundation on which all other aspirations are built. Without a permanent address success in finding work, maintaining income, improving physical or mental health or making progress to integrate are much harder to achieve. A 2<sup>nd</sup> year Social Work student explains:

“I was exposed to the complexities of the welfare system and how this could create barriers to the service user’s potential towards integration in the community. It gave me the opportunity to work together with service users, embracing differences and cultural aspects on a strong level. It was a great feeling to work with the service user to the end, watching them take control of their own lives.”

The housing route for each individual is unique to their personal circumstances. We have a trusted track record in promoting the right route for each person, working with accommodation providers and others to best meet people's needs, both short and long term.

Over 62% of those referred had been in the UK for less than 6 months. They had few connections or networks, little English and were finding it difficult to access support services via the telephone or digitally. However, their positive attitude and sufficient initial support meant they quickly engaged with the service and began their new lives, concentrating on learning English and finding work. As one refugee reflects:

**“START helps me to go forward and I have a better chance”**

In the past year, 171 cases were opened. Over 7500 case work hours were provided. Over 91% found accommodation in Plymouth that suits their needs, 46% is within the private rental sector.

The current service is valued and offers a vital specialist service delivering good quality advice and support. Exit questionnaires show that over 90% of clients feel that the service was good or excellent.

In addition, START has consistently attracted additional funding that enable additional services that add value and depth to the RHSS service. The RHSS delivered 112% against targets during the year...with no extra cost to the city.



*START walk - May 2014*

## START community activities: being part of a new community

**STARTwalking:** Building on the success of last year's pilot project, STARTwalking has become a valuable and valued addition to our range of activities. 'Walking and talking' is an effective vehicle for cultural exchange and informal learning, where refugees, students, volunteers and others share a common experience together. The programme of walks is drawn from those described in the STARTwalking e-book and takes place early summer through to early autumn. One walk is timed to coincide with Plymouth Refugee Week and is open to the public.

*This year, a total of 111 walkers participated; a quarter of these joined us for all the walks. The walks attract both those with leave to remain and those still seeking asylum. Refugees express the need to do something active and outside and have enjoyed exploring the countryside beyond the city.*

The START walking e-book was made available on our website in December 2013. It contains details of all the walks done as part of the STARTwalking project in 2012-13. A hard copy launch of the same book happened in June at the refugee week Cultural Kitchen. STARTwalking was funded this year through grants from Edith M Ellis 1985 Charitable Trust and Stepping Stones to Nature.

**The Allotment Project:** The Allotment Project offers refugees outside space to do something non-sport orientated but active. The plot is open each week for three hours from March through to October, with an additional group day event planned every 6-8 weeks throughout the season. In deciding what to do each session, we are mindful of the natural timescales of gardening, the increasingly inclement weather in Plymouth and what is realistically achievable!

*Over 40 people have enjoyed the allotment this year, helping us to reorganise the growing spaces. There is now a clearly defined plot for bulk produce for the cultural kitchen and a new patchwork of small gardens for individuals to take on. The fresh layout has encouraged new people to get involved and take a space to tentatively try growing their own vegetables. The season was productive with broad beans, potatoes and butternut squash being the most successful crops. We look forward to harvesting the leeks, onions and garlic, planted at the end of season, in the New Year.*



**The START women's creative group:** Organised by the students on placement at START, this activity offers a programme of simple craft activities and structured therapeutic drama workshops. Refugee women enjoy the informal setting where they can practice their English, meet friends, find solutions to practical problems and are encouraged to share their experiences and skills.

*This year, over 35 women have attended the group, with at least 5 women and their children coming to each session. There have been 22 sessions during term time. The women have enjoyed a variety of creative activities from jewellery making, sewing and knitting, card making, to belly dancing and Middle Eastern movement. These were interspersed with a series of Playback theatre workshops. Each workshop was attended by up to 20 women where they provided the material for some dramatic retellings of their own life stories; a rewarding and richly therapeutic experience.*

The START women's creative group was funded this year through a grant from the Eleanor Barton Trust.



*Craft project, START woman's creative group - 2014*

**The Cultural Kitchen:** Once a fortnight, this is a safe space for refugees and asylum seekers in Plymouth to socialise and share a communal meal. Since 2003, the Kitchen has consistently offered a focal point for those who have just arrived in Plymouth to meet others on a similar journey. The activity creates a friendly vital gateway to advice,



information and friendship, volunteering and skill sharing opportunities, and positive social interactions that facilitate informal English language development.

As refugees say:

“It gives you space to relax and play table tennis”

“I enjoy meeting a lot of people there”

“It helps me integrate into the community”

*During 2013-14, we have held 24 kitchens and served over 1680 hot meals. Over 300 individual refugees participate, with an average 70 people attending each kitchen. 15 refugee volunteers cook regularly. Table tennis became a fixed feature of the evening and the variety of craft activities offered were enjoyed and led by skilled refugees too.*

As refugee children report:

“We have fun!” “It is never boring”

“We can play with other children – I have made new friends”



*Supper is served! – Cultural Kitchen 2014*

The Cultural Kitchen is important to START because it is a very visible event in the city each fortnight. In the main our work is at a one to one level and is not publically accessible. The Cultural Kitchen enables us to have those open conversations and raise awareness to the wider population in an environment that showcases the diversity and vibrancy of the refugee communities in a safe and equitable way.



*Sharing time together – Cultural Kitchen - 2014*

**Table Tennis Group:** A small group of refugees befriended each other at the Cultural kitchen and enjoyed playing table tennis together. It became part of their adopted culture and, improbably began to travel by train to the Cornish village of Calstock to play with local people once a month.

A combination of optimism, imagination, a tiny amount of seed funding from START, immense amounts of goodwill and sheer serendipity have produced a fine, self-sustaining model of intercultural understanding and harmony!



*Allotment lunch - 2014*

The group is now autonomous and the relationship between the Plymouth refugee community and Calstock village, rich and evolving! One fabulous example is a musical collaboration between refugee and local musicians extolling the joys of the train journey they travel along the Tamar valley, linking Plymouth and Calstock. The show, called ‘SONGS FROM A SMALL TRAIN’ played to full houses at every performance in the autumn.

## Student learning

University/College	Discipline	Students
Plymouth	BSc Social Work – Stages 2 & 3	5
Plymouth	MA Social Work – Stage 1	2
Plymouth	Occupational Therapy – 2 <sup>nd</sup> & 3 <sup>rd</sup> Yr.	8
Lillehammer, Norway	Social Work	3
Esslingen, Germany	Social Work	2
Plymouth	Clinical Psychology	2
Plymouth	Law – volunteer	1

Two Occupational Therapy students said:

“I really enjoyed my placement at START and felt that it has contributed to my own personal confidence and development, giving me transferable skills I have been able to use in other work settings.”

“As a student Occupational Therapist the approach used at START was easily transferrable to the OT process however it was down to me to develop my own knowledge to find the health and wellbeing in amongst the needs of each refugee.”

A Norwegian student said:

“I really enjoyed the casework. This gave me a bigger picture of the struggles that refugees and asylum seekers have to deal with, both in England and in Norway. The casework also gave me more confidence in my own personal and professional skills, which I believe is very important for me as a future social worker. After my placement at START I felt (and still feel) inspired to continue working with refugees back home in Norway, whether it is as a volunteer or as a professional social worker.”

And a 3<sup>rd</sup> year Social Work said:

“I feel that the knowledge and skills I have developed in this placement has had the largest impact on my professional and personal identity. The work undertaken and experience gained in this agency will stay with me forever, and have significant impact on my future employments.”

## Research

We continue to work with the findings of previous research which identified key priorities for refugees in Plymouth and subsequent feedback that confirm their continuing validity

- Finding somewhere to live
- Learning and improving English
- Finding a job
- Your health
- Getting into education and training

During 2014, Kim Embra, a Doctoral Clinical Psychology student on placement at START, undertook research, entitled 'The well-being of refugees in the UK: Living in peace - An appreciative inquiry study'.



*START walk - April 2014*

The research explores how refugees cope, and manage their lives in the UK; particularly through the transition from asylum seeker to refugee, and how services can best support them through this process. The findings produced a set of guiding propositions that both illuminate and affirm the way START works. Central to all activity is the acknowledgement of what refugees bring, what they say and how they wish to receive START's services, enshrining their voice in every aspect.

The research findings will be integrated into all areas of START's future growth and development, enriching the way we work at START.

As a 3<sup>rd</sup> year social work student said:

**'Service users' unique stories touched my heart, angered me and shocked me throughout my placement, but the overall resilience of service users astonished me.'**

## Funding START's work

START has received funds from the following organisations this year:

*For the work we do with individuals on a one to one basis (referred work):*



*For short intervention work (additional 'non-referred' work) and the Job club project:*

**JP Getty Jnr. Charitable Trust** and **Plymouth Advice Transition Fund**

*For funds that contribute towards the delivery of our community work projects:*

**Henry Smith Charity,**  
**Eleanor Barton, Edith M Ellis 1985 Charitable Trust,**  
And **Stepping Stones to Nature**

*And, the following charitable organisations have granted funds that contribute towards our core organisational costs:*

**AB Charitable Trust, Garfield Weston,**  
**29th May 1961 Charitable Trust** and **Woodward Trust**

We would like to thank Swift Fundraising for the advice and guidance they have provided this year. Their support has transformed our fundraising strategy and enabled us to diversify our funding portfolio, making START more financially sustainable.

We would also like to acknowledge the long term financial support of those who donate regularly through our 'Friends of START' scheme.



## Financial Statement:

Summary of Accounts (Sept 2013 – Aug 2014) START annual accounts are independently audited in accordance with current Charities Commission guidelines. Full accounts are available on request.

<b>Income:</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>Expenditure:</b>	<b>£</b>
Supporting People RHSS Contract	122176	Salaries, on-costs & pensions	99317
Big Lottery Reaching Communities	32547	HR support, training & professional fees etc.	7005
JP Getty Jnr Trust	15000	Buildings – rent, utilities, insurance, cleaning	20742
Henry Smith Charity	6833	Travel expenses	2187
Advice Transition Fund	3550	Office supplies and services	14185
Garfield Weston	2917	Depreciation	1872
29 <sup>th</sup> May 1961 Charitable Trust	2000	Charitable activities – Community Work	7459
Other Small Charitable Grants	4350	Charitable activities – Casework Support	2724
Cultural Kitchen donations	708	Interpreters	1542
Invoices Raised	4021	Path - RHSS	36000
Friends of START	720		
Investment income and interest	<b>78</b>		
<b>Total</b>	<b>194900</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>193015</b>
		<i>Net movement of Funds</i>	<b>1885</b>
		Total Funds Brought Forward (1 <sup>st</sup> Sept 2013)	67112
		<b>Total Funds Carried Forward</b>	<b>68997</b>

Volunteers and the student workforce create capacity, flexibility and enable START to respond quickly to change. If they were all paid employees in the traditional way, it would cost an additional £120,213 per year to provide an equivalent service.

**£1 invested in START gives a return value of £1.79!**

## Thanks

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.



## People at START

### *The management team:*

Janet Hamilton      Susie Dent      Isaac Kelly

### *Summer case workers:*

Phyllis McNally      Catherine McCormick      Marigold Thorpe

### *The trustees/board of directors:*

Avril Bellinger – Chair  
Allan Foad – Secretary  
Frank Clements – Treasurer  
Viv Horton      Deirdre Ford  
Emily Cannon      Jasmine Singh-Khaira  
Helen Thomas (prospective)

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This is a START collaborative document, edited and produced by Isaac Kelly and Viv Horton

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