

Investing in the future

An evaluation of the work of Southampton
and Winchester Visitors Group

Julian Powe and Stella Smith
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1. Executive summary

The Southampton and Winchester Group ('SWVG') does a quite outstanding job of delivering its core purpose of 'providing for the relief of need, hardship and distress... amongst refugees, asylum seekers and other immigrants.'

In the last three years:

- SWVG has supported 154 clients in the Southampton and Winchester area in befriending relationships that have provided important emotional support;
- 89 of these clients received ASSIST support to help cover basic subsistence and accommodation needs;
- some 27 of them also received legal advice about their cases from SWVG via the Legal Justice Project;
- 66 of these clients were granted Leave to Remain.

"They've helped me in many ways. They helped me find a solicitor and with money and accommodation. But they also helped me with my morale. They told me not to worry. My visitor was like a brother – we chatted about everything."

Client

Many clients come to the Group after significant trauma and distress, and are offered a practical and emotional lifeline; as well as immediate practical assistance across an array of issues, the befriending relationship with the Group's visitors provides a rock to support clients' morale and steer them away from depression, negative influences and potential exploitation. Clients are overwhelmingly grateful for this support. There is a deep well of good will among past clients towards the Group and clients consistently point to their connection with the Group as a pivotal point in getting their lives on track (Section 3 – Client Experience).

The Group's delivery of this significant impact is founded on a number of distinctive features that we understand to be unique in their combination:

- the one to one befriending relationship between visitor and client;
- the ASSIST scheme;
- the Legal Justice Project;
- being volunteer led, thereby allowing the Group to keep overhead costs extremely low.

"Our shared experience is the focus on the client; it permeates everything."

Volunteer

SWVG's impact also flows from a powerful set of organisational characteristics and processes.

Strong values are at play. A deep sense of 'Compassion' and 'Justice' shapes all that is done. There is simplicity of purpose, real collegiality, concern for every client and volunteer, a determination to empower both clients and volunteers, and a pervasive sense of dedication.

The Group's governance combines lightness of touch with meticulous attention to detail. There is an underlying sense of order and structure that is not overbearing and restrictive, and a strong focus on keeping the Group's work financially and managerially sustainable. SWVG is absolutely a volunteer organisation with over 80% of its funds going directly to clients; all of its management posts are held by volunteers, supported only by 20 hours per week of paid support work. It neither seeks nor receives government grants and, as a result, is not beholden to any externally imposed agenda.

The Group attracts a strong group of volunteers (some sixty at present) with the will and skill to undertake excellent work for clients and the Group; Southampton and Winchester are rich sources of high quality people drawn to make a contribution in this field. A core group of leaders across the membership put extraordinary care and attention into the day to day stewardship of the organisation ("There are many conversations every day"). The part time paid roles of Secretary and Administrator make vital contributions to the organisation.

Much emphasis is placed on the training and support of volunteers, particularly the vast majority (some forty-nine at present) who play the highly demanding role of visitor. The satisfaction of visitors is currently high due to:

- the impact they make;
- the training and support they receive;
- the smallness and intimacy of the Group;
- the attractiveness of the Group's values.

“There is something magical about our structure and culture.”

Volunteer

This level of visitor satisfaction translates directly into positive and beneficial experiences for clients (Section 4 – Members, Volunteers and Visitors).

SWVG occupies a vital and complementary position among the several agencies supporting asylum seekers and refugees in the locality (“Without the Group, there would be a real deficit in befriending support and financial assistance”). The Group's many partner agencies offer strong testimony to its contribution, reliability, organisation, collaboration, passion and knowledge (Section 5 – Relationship with Partner Agencies).

In the last two years or so, the Group's campaigning for change has moved beyond responding to issues, reports and briefings. It now works more proactively and several successful campaigns have been mounted (Section 6 – Campaigning).

SWVG has developed a real sense of community and shared understanding among its membership in recent years through its excellent website, monthly newsletters, General Meetings, and highly active support to its visitors. And there is much effective communication and collaboration with external stakeholders (Section 7 – Information and Advice).

The Group's financial structure is remarkable for its extremely modest cost base and the allocation of the vast majority of its funds to client needs. Overall, the Group's financial management is smart, effective and efficient (Section 8 – Overall Financial Position).

SWVG's successful fundraising effort is striking in its highly strategic, research-oriented and disciplined approach, focusing on grant making trusts, events, individual donations and organisations (particularly local churches). There is much to be done to sustain past levels of fundraising in the coming months and years (Section 9 – Fundraising).

Since 2004 the Group has run the ASSIST scheme to support clients who would otherwise be destitute. By dint of exceptional rigour, the provision of authoritative legal advice since early 2009 via the Legal Justice Project, and the capacity to offer a range of different types of support, the Group has done an outstanding job in supporting the accommodation, subsistence and other needs of their clients most effectively (Section 10 – Financial Support to Clients).

The combination of serious macro-economic instability, increasing pressure on immigration into Europe and declining legal aid funds means that there is no prospect at all of any reduction in clients' need for SWVG support; indeed, the opposite is the more likely scenario. And this is likely to play out in a tighter funding environment.

“They might not be a ‘professional’ organisation, but they are highly professional.”

Representative of a partner agency

Of course, in facing this challenge, some aspects of the Group's approach and operation would repay some attention in the coming months and years (Section 11 – Investing in the Future; Summary of Recommendations). We would highlight in particular the need for:

- even more robust monitoring and dissemination of the Group's impact on clients and the benefits achieved;
- continuing access to high quality legal advice
- more active succession planning;
- continuing efforts to support and train visitors to a very high standard in their demanding roles;
- more active communication and engagement with individuals and organisations that come into regular contact with the Group's work;

- further sustained driving of the Group's fundraising efforts, particularly with respect to grant making trusts and individuals.

However, this continued improvement agenda is not the primary requirement. Above all, the overwhelming call to arms is for the Group to continue to stay true to its simple (but not easy!) purpose and to sustain the enormous strengths uncovered in this report – strengths of impact, people, values, governance, communication and involvement, processes and procedures. We have no doubt at all that the Group will rise to this challenge because its history and present organisation is consistently characterised by a deep sense of resilience. As one representative of one of the Group's partner agencies said to us:

“Throughout their history, they have responded strongly to changing circumstances and needs, for instance in embarking on ASSIST and the Legal Justice Project. They have stuck to their core purpose and not ducked any issues along the way, becoming stronger as they have done so.”

Julian Powe, Stella Smith
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2. About SWVG

Summary

Southampton and Winchester Visitors Group provides a comprehensive one to one befriending and visiting service to local asylum seekers.

It was set up in 2001 by a group of people concerned about the welfare of asylum seekers being held in Winchester prison and was known as the Winchester Visitors Group.

When this use of Winchester prison ceased in 2002, the Group transferred its energies to asylum seekers and refugees living in Southampton. Since then the Group has facilitated around 150 visitors working with approximately 250 asylum seekers and refugees. Today SWVG has around 60 volunteer members.

49 of the Group's members are visitors who befriend asylum seekers clients, supported by a back up visitor and support group. The Group operates a scheme which provides some financial support to those clients in most need (known as the ASSIST Scheme, see Section 10) and access to legal advice as part of its Legal Justice Project (see Section 7).

SWVG has evolved into a complex operation with different strands and groups taking responsibility for different aspects of its work. However it remains volunteer led, with minimal overhead costs allowing over 80% of its fundraised income to go directly to clients.

Key aspects of the Group's operation

Structure

There are nine main groups and committees overseeing and managing different aspects of the Group's work:

- Executive Committee – responsible for maintaining a strategic overview and taking strategic decisions. The Executive Committee members (or Trustees) also maintain close contact with the everyday operations of SWVG;
- Fundraising group – responsible for all aspects of identifying potential sources of, and applying for, funds;
- Events group: organises fundraising and awareness raising events;
- Web group – ensures the SWVG website is up to date
- Legal Justice Project group: provides the interface between legal advice and visitors and clients
- Money Allocation group – manages the allocation of ASSIST and other money to clients;
- Campaigns group – co-ordinates local and national lobbying on issues relevant to refugees and asylum seekers;
- Support groups – provide visitors with the opportunity to discuss issues arising from supporting their client(s).

There are currently three support groups;

- Training group – responsible for all aspects of volunteer (particularly visitor) training.

Clients (Section 3 and Appendix A)

SWVG offers befriending to clients, all of whom are asylum seekers from the Southampton and Winchester area. They come into contact with SWVG in a number of ways, but most frequently via friends or referrals from partner agencies. A strict assessment process ensures visitors are working with clients who are appropriate for SWVG's skills and resources and, once accepted, SWVG clients will have regular meetings (usually weekly) with a visitor. At these meetings, the visitor will support the client in a range of ways such as helping them complete paperwork and find accommodation, simply listening, and signposting them to other agencies or individuals who may be able to help.

SWVG also provides two pivotal services which are particularly valued by clients – the Legal Justice Project and the ASSIST scheme (see below).

SWVG members (Section 4)

SWVG is led by members, all of whom are volunteers. Most members are visitors but not all. Those members who do not have a visiting role contribute to the Group

in a range of ways such as playing key leadership roles, organising events, keeping the website updated or campaigning on relevant issues. There are two part-time paid roles: the Administrator and Secretary.

The functions of recruitment, induction, training and support of visitors are a significant part of SWVG's work. Part of this is the allocation of a back up to each visitor, giving them a regular point of contact with whom to discuss any concerns. There is also a comprehensive programme of training, offering members the opportunity to keep relevant skills and knowledge updated. The care given to the recruitment and support of visitors is reflected in high levels of satisfaction amongst SWVG visitors, most of whom remain involved with the Group for many years.

The paid staff roles of Administrator and Secretary are core to SWVG. Both of these roles provide 10 hours a week of support to the Group.

The Administrator role reports to the Coordinator and focuses on maintaining records associated with the finances of the Group. This includes checking and paying visitors' expenses, maintaining records of rent payments, working with the Treasurer on banking receipts, and maintaining the cash book and expenditure spreadsheet. The Administrator is also responsible for record keeping and administration relating to the Money Allocation group (see Section 10) and ensuring finance forms and guidance are kept up to date.

The Secretarial role reports to the Chair. This role is concerned with the administrative tasks relating to publicity, events, the newsletter and internal communication as well as the recruitment and training of volunteers, Criminal Record Bureau checks, support for General, Executive and Annual General Meetings and maintaining contact details and a database of supporters.

These two roles take responsibility for much of the hidden but essential administration of SWVG.

Relationships with partner agencies (Section 5)

SWVG is mindful of the importance of excellent relationships with partner agencies and to this end works to co-ordinate and complement the work of other agencies working with asylum seekers and refugees in the Southampton and Winchester area. These include:

- CLEAR;
- British Red Cross;
- Refugee Action;
- Ready Homes;
- Homeless Health.

In working with these organisations, SWVG occupies a clear and otherwise neglected space in services for asylum seekers, supporting them through a time when there is

still potential for a successful application but they are not receiving support from elsewhere.

In addition, relationships with local services and individuals are critical to accessing support for asylum seekers and the Group maintains strong links with local GP surgeries, landlords and local MPs.

Use of the Avenue Multicultural Centre ('AMC') for meeting with clients at 'Friday Drop-ins' plays a critical role in supporting excellent relationships with partner agencies. A huge amount of collaboration is facilitated by sharing this facility with other agencies.

Campaigning (Section 6)

The campaigning aspect of SWVG is a relatively new function. Initially set up to respond to issues, it is now a more proactive group identifying issues which impact asylum seekers and campaigning for change. The Campaigns group has developed good links with other organisations both locally and nationally, enabling it to support national campaigns for change as well as campaign and raise awareness more locally.

Information and advice (Section 7)

SWVG is keenly aware of the importance of facilitating cross-group communication. In response to concerns a few years ago about a lack of information, overwhelming e-mail traffic and a high number of calls to some individuals, the Group has invested in ensuring all members receive regular communication and updates. Communication is maintained through means such as:

- training events;
- support groups;
- General Meetings;
- regular newsletter;
- up to date website.

Emphasis is also placed on maintaining regular communication with local partner agencies to ensure a co-ordinated and complementary approach.

The Legal Justice Project (Section 7)

In response to a lack of accessible trusted and affordable legal advice for clients, SWVG successfully secured three years' funding for the Legal Justice Project which allows SWVG members to seek advice from a leading immigration lawyer. This has proved quite invaluable in particularly complex cases and when a case has been closed, thereby raising visitors' confidence in supporting clients. It has also been valuable in securing advice when a case has no realistic likelihood of success allowing SWVG and the client to review expectations and to consider alternative courses of action.

Finance: overall financial position, fundraising and money allocation (Sections 8, 9 and 10)

One of the most distinctive aspects of SWVG is its financial management. Being staffed almost entirely by volunteers allows over 80% of its income to go directly to the support of clients. This high level of efficiency is not only motivating for SWVG members but also for donors and funders who can clearly see the direct benefit of their grants and donations. As with all aspects of SWVG's operation, its financial management is characterised by rigour and attention to detail. There are two key groups: the Fundraising and Money Allocation groups. The Fundraising group works hard to research the funding environment, develop relationships and bring well-crafted applications to like-minded funders (and is supported by the Events group which raises significant revenue from local events). The Money Allocation group manages the Group's ASSIST scheme and considers carefully the individual situations of clients to ensure monies are allocated to those most in need.

ASSIST (Section 10)

One of the distinctive aspects of the Group is its ASSIST scheme. This provides small weekly grants to asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute to help them meet the costs of accommodation and subsistence. This typically comes in the form of a weekly grant of around £20–£25. Where SWVG is helping meet the needs of accommodation they will pay rent directly to the landlord. SWVG may also provide 'sofa money', that is a small amount of money that a client can give to a friend or relative in return for a space to sleep, and small contributions to support access to education.

The Group at work

The overall approach

The diagram below illustrates key aspects of the SWVG operation and how these translate into the client experience.

In the lower half of the diagram is the SWVG operation. These are aspects of the Group which are core to its functioning but largely unseen by the client.

At the base, and fundamental to SWVG's success, is its **Governance**. This provides roots for other elements of the Group and shapes how the Group as a whole operates. SWVG is led by its members who are all volunteers. It maintains processes and procedures which are light on bureaucracy, and paperwork focusing efforts simply on what is necessary. By keeping the Group small there is little distance between the clients and key

decision-making, and this helps maintain commitment to the clients by keeping their needs at the forefront of all decisions. The leadership of the Group nurtures a wide range of networks and contacts which they can call on at different times for support.

As well as the formal governance, there are also unwritten **Values and Assumptions** about how SWVG operates. These include an emphasis on simplicity of purpose, maintaining boundaries and processes, working as a team and a concern for and value in empowering individuals whether they be clients, SWVG members or other supporters.

There are five main threads to the Group's work which underpin the services provided to clients. These are **Information and Advice, Campaigning, Relationships with Other Agencies, Volunteer and Visitor Support,** and **Finances: Fundraising and Money Allocation**. In the body of this report we explore each of these aspects in more detail.

The top half of the diagram illustrates those aspects of SWVG which every client will have different awareness of and exposure to. This starts with the **Co-ordination and Communication** function, which links the strategic decision-making to the operational management as well as the knowledge and experience of members across the Group. This function brings the five main threads of work together to provide three main services to clients: **Support with Accommodation, Legal Advice and Subsistence**. These three services are all provided through **Befriending and One to One Support**.

The resulting **Client Experience** is both practical and emotional support. As well as access to basics such as food and accommodation, clients are supported with access to information, trusted legal advice and high levels of one to one befriending and emotional support from their visitor.

The client experience

A successful client experience means:

- feeling safe;
- having food and accommodation;
- access to information and legal advice;
- feeling part of a group, having a friend and a sense of belonging.

One-to-one befriending and emotional support

Accommodation support

Legal support

Subsistence

Co-ordination and communication: the importance of keeping it small

Information and legal advice

Campaigning

External links – other agencies

Volunteer and visitor support

Fundraising and money allocation

Consistent values and assumptions – mirrored and replicated throughout SWVG:

- simplicity of purpose;
- clear boundaries and processes;
- sense of “we’re all in this together”;
- concern for and empowering of individuals.

Governance based on:

- volunteer led;
- light on bureaucracy – do what’s necessary;
- sense of dedication;
- minimal distance between clients and decision making;
- valuing networks and contacts.

The SWVG operation

3. Client experience

Summary

For many asylum seekers in Southampton and Winchester, SWVG is a lifeline. Having been forced to leave behind family and friends and endured dangerous journeys to the UK, they find themselves without any means of supporting themselves and are often treated with suspicion and mistrust. SWVG offers these people practical and emotional support.

Through the Group's one to one befriending scheme the client is teamed up with a visitor who meets with them regularly. Their visitor will help them find accommodation, meet their basic subsistence needs with a small financial grant (through the ASSIST scheme) and access legal advice. The positive relationship with the visitor helps maintain clients' morale through

extreme difficulties and steer them away from negative influences and potential exploitation. This enables and empowers clients, allowing them to make the right decisions for themselves.

Some thirteen past and present clients were interviewed. They all expressed their overwhelming gratitude to the Group and a keenness to support SWVG in whatever way they could.

There is some potential for the Group to strengthen its tracking of results and recording of outcomes, over and beyond numbers of clients, receipt of ASSIST and other money, and grants of Leave to Remain.

Findings

Facts and figures

At any one time SWVG visitors may be seeing between 30 and 50 clients. Between September 2008 and August 2011 SWVG saw a total of 154 clients.

89 of these clients benefited from SWVG's financial grants (ASSIST, see Section 10 – Financial Support to Clients) to help cover basic subsistence costs. Depending on individual circumstances some received ASSIST for short periods, some for over a year.

Of the 154 clients seen by SWVG between September 2008 and August 2011, 66 have so far been granted Leave to Remain.

SWVG clients come from very varied backgrounds. In the period 2009–2010, SWVG saw many clients from Zimbabwe, Iran and Eritrea. There were also clients from Kenya, Sri Lanka, Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Ethiopia, Iraq, Nigeria, Western Sahara, Sudan, Pakistan, Azerbaijan, Angola, Burma and Sierra Leone.

Initial contact with SWVG

Some find out about the Friday Drop in sessions at 'AMC' (Avenue Multicultural Centre) from a friend and come across SWVG there. Others are directed to SWVG from organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureau.

The Group increasingly relies on partner agencies to refer cases to them and there are now four steps to the referral process:

- initial discussion with the potential client or referrer;
- referral form submitted to the Coordinator, most commonly by the British Red Cross;
- SWVG assessment, involving an interview with the potential client and one of a small group of experienced visitors;
- and then a decision made about whether or not to accept her/him as a client.

This process was tightened up three to four years ago to avoid a growing problem of cases being accepted by default. The majority of referrals come from the British Red Cross. In the last twelve months, they have referred some 14 cases with one or two referrals coming from Asylum Welcome, Leonards Solicitors, Groundswell (HIV charity), Refugee Action, Southampton Social Services, a Southampton Councillor, and one or two clients.

Assessing clients and matching with visitors

The Group manages to develop very positive and successful relationships with clients and, whilst this is partly due to the high calibre of visitors, it is also based on an initial rigorous assessment of clients. To be accepted as an SWVG client, an asylum seeker must be based in the Southampton and Winchester area and have a realistic chance of being successful in their claim for asylum. Clients who are awaiting extra evidence or documentation before submitting an appeal or fresh claim will be accepted. The Group will turn away individuals who have exhausted all channels and do not have any additional evidence which might be used to overturn that decision. Clients must be actively pursuing a claim for asylum; people who have overstayed their visa and have made little or no progress in making a claim will not be supported.

The Group is also careful not to accept clients whom they feel they cannot successfully support. This includes clients who have obvious mental health problems, are involved in anything seriously illegal, are misusing drugs or alcohol or who are not from the Southampton area.

If a client at some point in their relationship with SWVG receives financial support through NASS (National Asylum Support Service) the Group will no longer provide funding through ASSIST. It is always made clear to clients from the outset that the support provided by SWVG is temporary.

If a client is assessed as being appropriate for receiving support, the Co-ordinator will match them with a visitor. This process considers the interests, motivations and situation of both the client and visitor in setting up a befriending relationship. The allocation of back up visitors is also carefully considered to meet the needs of the individual situation (see Section 4 – Members, Volunteers and Visitors).

If there is no visitor available to take on the client then they become a ‘Team Client’ and are seen by the ‘Friday Team’ on the SWVG desk at the Avenue Multicultural Centre until a visitor is available

These rigorous assessments and careful matching provide firm foundations for a productive befriending relationship.

One-to-one befriending relationship with visitors

Visitors meet with clients every week. Tasks carried out by visitors are varied and can include:

- support with finding a solicitor, accommodation or health care;
- help with form filling and processing their claim;
- help enrolling in English classes or other education or training opportunities;

“(The Coordinator)... matched me with my visitor very well. We had the same interests – we could talk about history and books.”

- help finding their way around the city or joining sports activities.

In addition to the practical support however, visitors befriend clients, listening and supporting them through very difficult times. The length of the relationship varies according to the clients’ needs but a strong bond of respect and support is usually developed which can last a long time after the formal befriending relationship has ended.

What clients value

Thirteen past and present clients were interviewed and three of their stories are included in Appendix A.

“They gave me food that I could give to the people I was staying with as a contribution. They helped me with fares to go to the solicitor. They were so helpful.”

Many SWVG clients have experienced significant trauma and this is compounded by the shock of finding that once in the UK they are often not believed by the authorities. Without the necessary evidence or documents they have no status and as such are refused permission to work or to claim benefits. Many will be or will have been battling with mental health and emotional problems as they try to make sense of their situation, find a place to stay and resolve legal issues around their asylum status. So, when they first come into contact with SWVG, clients are immediately grateful for the practical help with money to buy food and help with accommodation.

“They helped me with contacting a lawyer and getting photocopies of papers. They stood by me.”

For example, the Group’s food packages allow a client to contribute to the household of someone they are staying with and help with fares allows them to meet their solicitors. As well as the financial support, clients benefited from having someone who could tell them

where to go for information. They particularly valued the support in helping them access legal advice. Several clients reported that their solicitor had not presented their case effectively and SWVG had helped them secure sound legal representation.

“They helped me find accommodation. Without them I would be on the streets.”

Clients also really appreciate the befriending. Clients talked about the positive experience of meeting their visitor, how they valued the trust of their visitor and the support they offered. Clients often referred to their visitors as being like family. In particular, they valued their consistency in turning up and supporting them without judgement, whatever issues they were dealing with.

“Of course the money helps, but money cannot solve the problem. Money could not sort out my problem with the Home Office. What makes you happy is someone looking after you. She made me feel comfortable. She listened. She helped me with a few words. Sometimes I felt sorry for her having to hear my problems. But every week she kept coming back.”

Clients also value the wider discussions with visitors in the midst of their difficulties. Clients appreciate the fact that visitors recognise their potential and, through their regular contact, manage to help them focus on a positive future.

“I was really desperate. I had no accommodation and my money was stopped. They really, really helped me”.

Past clients saw their contact with the Group as having been a pivotal point in their lives. People spoke about how depressed they had been and felt that their SWVG visitor had strongly encouraged them to remain positive and forward looking, and had diverted them from negative influences. They had been encouraged to train, study and move on with their lives. Looking back, they were particularly grateful for this because it had allowed them to establish

themselves. Several clients commented that SWVG had helped them to integrate.

“I didn’t think they would help me because I am a different religion. They are wonderful people. Other organisations would give me stress and question me, wanting to know everything. But even though I am a different religion they helped me. They lit a candle in my life. I wish now I could support them.”

Past clients were keen to express their gratitude to SWVG and were very willing to be interviewed. They emphasised the importance of the Group for people who would otherwise have nowhere else to go and their keenness to support the group in whatever way they could.

“I would like to thank SWVG. Say thank you from me. I know how much you help me. I’m better than before. I really, really want to thank you.”

The diagram overleaf summarises those aspects of their relationship with SWVG which clients value most.

Investing in the future

Considerations going forward

There is a wealth of goodwill from ex-clients and whilst it is important that clients move on from SWVG to live an independent life, there may be potential for ex-clients to be more involved in supporting the Group perhaps via an alumni group or a wider supporter forum. Certainly it would fulfil a wish for many ex-clients to give back to and support SWVG.

There is also scope for generating stronger data and insights about client experience and impact. Whilst recognising the complexities of showing the outcomes achieved by the Group, it would be useful to track results and record on-going client stories.

Summary of what SWVG clients value



4. Members, volunteers and visitors

Summary

SWVG is a volunteer led group. It is staffed by around sixty volunteer members and supported by two part time paid roles, the Administrator and Secretary (see Section 2).

Most members choose to be involved as visitors, befriending asylum seekers in the Southampton and Winchester area. However, there is also a small but important number of members who are not visitors but provide essential support to the Group in other ways. As a volunteer led group, the success of SWVG depends on the commitment of a number of very motivated individuals and SWVG appreciates the link between visitors who enjoy their role and a positive and beneficial experience for clients.

Many members are keen to keep SWVG small because this allows them to see the direct positive impact of their efforts on the

lives of clients, and this in turn motivates their involvement.

The Group has developed a well-structured process for recruiting, training and supporting volunteers. The matching of visitors and clients, and support for visitors, are also skilfully coordinated. In particular, every visitor benefits from a comprehensive support system with a back up visitor and access to a support group.

Going forward, the Group will want to maintain high volunteer and visitor satisfaction. Three areas will be particularly important to this – succession planning to ensure that the Group’s knowledge is not vested in too few members; sustaining the recruitment of new volunteers; and maintaining high levels of support for visitors.

Findings

Facts and figures

SWVG has around 60 volunteers. During the year September 2010 – August 2011, 49 SWVG members were visitors and 67 clients were visited regularly with 16 clients remaining in occasional contact.

Very few volunteers leave the Group, most retaining some involvement as a visitor or in another role for several years. Some key members have been actively involved for over ten years.

The visitor role

The majority of SWVG members are visitors and meet regularly with and befriend one or sometimes two clients. It is a personal and individual relationship based on the circumstances and situation for both the client and visitor. The visitor role avoids giving advice but focuses on helping clients explore options so as to come to their own decisions. Visitor support to clients varies but can include tasks such as:

- helping clients find accommodation;
- liaising with the Home Office;
- helping to organise legal documents;
- helping clients access medical care.

If the client receives ASSIST (a small grant for subsistence, see Section 10), then this will often be paid by the visitor. However, the Coordinator or Administrator steps in to make ASSIST payments if the visitor is not available for some reason.

If SWVG is providing support with rent, then this is paid directly by the Administrator to the landlord every week.

For newer clients waiting to be allocated a visitor, they will be supported by the SWVG team at the Avenue Multicultural Centre on Fridays, with the Administrator issuing ASSIST financial support.

Volunteers who are not visitors

Whilst most members are visitors, there are some eleven Group members who are not visitors and who contribute in different ways, such as:

- playing key leadership roles such as Chair and Treasurer;

- campaigning;
- updating the website;
- contributing to fundraising;
- organising events;
- maintaining stocks of bedding.

Co-ordination and communication

Critical to the success of the Group is co-ordination and communication. Many members quoted the Coordinator role as being pivotal to this success. In particular, the role combines meticulous attention to the detail of individual client and volunteer situations with a high level of interpersonal skills, whilst holding an overview of the work and direction of the Group.

SWVG's weekly presence at Avenue Multicultural Centre also assists communication. This base acts as a 'home' for some SWVG visitors and clients where they can meet each other and representatives of other organisations such as Refugee Action, CLEAR and the British Red Cross.

The SWVG monthly newsletter and website make up to date information and experiences available to all visitors. There are also special training events organised and the General Meetings.

The Administrator and Secretary are central points of contact, important in the communication across the Group. They respond quickly to special requests (for example, when the children of a client arrived from Kenya in winter, the Administrator and Secretary coordinated a call out to all members for children's warm clothes). When a request for financial assistance is presented by a visitor, this will initially go to the Administrator who will then ensure it is communicated to the Money Allocation group ('MAG').

The process for recruiting and supporting SWVG visitors

Raising awareness

- Friends
- Talks
- Internet search
- Volunteer centres

Assessing overall match

- Informal phone call
- Identifying interest
- Visit to Avenue St Andrews

Training

- Introductory evening
- Training
- Matching client and visitor

Support

- Back up visitor
- Support groups
- Red file

Involvement

- Sharing information – newsletter
- General Meetings
- Involving in other opportunities
- Up to date internet and website

Recruiting and supporting volunteers and visitors

The diagram above sets out the main stages for recruiting and supporting SWVG volunteers, and in particular visitors. Those who join the Group with the intention of visiting do not become visitors until they have completed training and undergone Criminal Record Bureau ('CRB') checks. Each stage of the recruitment and support process is described in more detail below.

Raising awareness and recruitment

Much SWVG recruitment is informal with many volunteers being recruited by friends who are already members of the Group. Some others get in touch having heard an SWVG talk at a local event or church; or find SWVG through searching on the web for Groups working with asylum seekers in the Southampton and Winchester area. And others come through volunteer centres in Winchester and Southampton where SWVG advertises.

Assessing overall match

When someone contacts the Group with an interest in volunteering, it is the Secretary who sends out initial details. This is followed up by a phone call from the Training Team Leader. During this conversation, the Team Leader finds out more about the enquiry but particularly focuses on the motivation of the individual, what they are hoping to achieve and why they have chosen SWVG. If they are able to, the prospective volunteer is invited to attend a Friday drop in session at the Avenue Multicultural Centre (AMC). This gives them the opportunity to see the work of SWVG in action and talk to one of the co-ordinators. Not all expressions of interest result in the enquiring individuals becoming visitors. Whilst some people are enthusiastic, in the course of these discussions it may be apparent to the potential volunteer or to SWVG that a visitor role is not right for them and they may choose to defer their involvement or volunteer their skills in another way.

Training

All potential visitors attend an introductory evening which covers the history of the Group – the work it does, the context of asylum seeker issues, the practicalities of visiting – and answers any questions.

Following the introductory evening, recruits wishing to become visitors go on to attend a day's training. This day covers all of SWVG's policies and procedures (every visitor is issued with a red loose leaf file with policies and procedures). The training covers health issues for asylum seekers and important behaviours as a visitor, such as listening skills. Asylum seekers and visitors talk about their experience and this is followed by group discussions on case studies. There needs to be around 10 participants to make a training event viable, so these are intermittent but at least once a year.

Once they have completed training and CRB checks have been completed, a visitor is able to take on a client.

Throughout their time as a visitor there are a range of opportunities for visitors to participate in on-going training and to attend talks, events and conferences associated with refugee and asylum issues.

Recent training events have included topics such as:

- listening skills;
- legal training;
- communicating with people for whom English is a Second Language;
- OISC ('Office of the Information Services Commissioner') training, qualifying individuals to complete immigration forms.

Support: back up visitors and support groups

The experience of visiting can be very stressful as visitors are confronted with what can seem like a myriad of intractable problems with no guarantee that their client will be safe at the end of it. SWVG therefore provides a comprehensive approach to visitor support.

All visitors are provided back up from an experienced visitor. This back up provides practical and emotional support including giving advice on specific issues, signposting to sources of information, acting as a sounding board and providing cover when the visitor is away. The Co-ordinator, with an overview of the different visitors and clients, matches each visitor with their back up. The first meeting between a new visitor and client will include the back up visitor while more experienced visitors may introduce their back up to the client at a later stage. This individualised back up system is much appreciated by visitors, especially those who are new to the role.

In addition, there are support groups for visitors. Currently there are three support groups operating.

These meet regularly and provide a space where visitors can discuss issues they are facing, and be advised and supported by peers. Currently these are fairly unstructured gatherings which are not mandatory. About 75% of visitors attend a support group.

There is general agreement that the support groups need to be clearly led to ensure that everyone who wants to talk gets the opportunity to do so and there may be a need to provide training for individuals leading support groups.

There is some discussion as to whether attendance should be mandatory. Some members believe that given the particularly stressful nature of the visitor role, support groups should be obligatory. Other visitors however prefer to get support from outside the support groups. There are also difficulties associated with making attendance at support groups obligatory and how this could be enforced. It is possible that insistence on attendance at support groups, along with other visitor duties, would discourage people from volunteering.

Involvement in the group

Once an SWVG member, individuals have various opportunities to get involved in the Group's work. In addition to General Meetings and Support Meetings, they can get involved in any of the committees and may be invited to do so.

The volunteer-only part of the SWVG website is also a critical aspect of keeping updated and involved. Here there is space for volunteers to report their experiences and share information; procedures and policies in electronic form; and updates and news on national local and Group events and developments which are relevant (see Section 7).

What volunteers value

There is a high level of satisfaction amongst SWVG members and many people stay involved with the Group for several years. This is important to the Group's success as a strong body of knowledge and understanding has built up particularly amongst the more long standing members, some of whom have been Group members for over 10 years.

Interviews with volunteers pointed to the following aspects of the Group as being key to their satisfaction.

Commitment

Across all volunteers there is a palpable sense of commitment to addressing the situation for asylum seekers. Members feel strongly that "*We've got it wrong about asylum seekers*", "*They are misrepresented*". There is a clear sense amongst members that they should do something and they cannot "*let each other down*".

“The strength of clients is humbling: their resourcefulness, courage, coming here and not being welcomed, or believed.”

Many commented that they were inspired by the courage, determination and human spirit which clients exhibited in the face of significant adversity.

Well organised

The Group is well organised but not overly so. There is an underlying order and structure but this is not overbearing and restrictive. Volunteers feel trusted and allowed the flexibility to respond to situations as they feel appropriate whilst knowing there is support there if they need it.

Respect for each other

Volunteers have great respect for each other and many commented that they feel privileged to be included in such an enthusiastic, dedicated group of ‘independent thinkers’. Members are also very respectful of each others’ expertise, and appreciate how fortunate the Group is to have such a wealth of particularly talented and skilled individuals in the membership.

“There is a sense of personal responsibility and respect and not letting each other down.”

Trust

There are high levels of trust. Members know that other members will support them and that when another volunteer says they will do something, they do it. This also translates to respecting the boundaries of others’ roles and giving people the discretion to do what their role requires of them.

“There is a caring culture, commitment, trust, professionalism and respect.”

Structure and boundaries

The clear structure and boundaries underpinning the work means volunteers do not feel the full burden of responsibility when a tough decision has to be made. For example, when support to a client has to stop, a member from the Money Allocation group will accompany the visitor to the meeting with the client to communicate this, making it clear that this is not the decision of the individual visitor but of SWVG as a whole.

“Our shared experience is the focus on the client: it permeates everything.”

Support

Visitors appreciate the training, the backup system and the support groups. Every client situation is different and they cannot be prepared for every situation they face. However, visitors know there is always someone to turn to if they are faced with a difficult situation.

“There aren’t any agendas: we do what we say we do with a common respect for each other and for clients.”

We’re all in this together

Several volunteers talked about the lack of competition or agendas amongst the volunteers and the genuine desire amongst all involved to work hard and resolve the situation. Many found this a refreshing and motivating experience.

“It’s not competitive. There’s a co-operative spirit.”

Making a difference – keeping it small

Volunteers commented on the value of having a short distance between the Executive Committee’s decision making and the clients. Volunteers appreciate the Group being small, thereby being able to see quickly the impact of decisions on clients and to keep client needs at the forefront at all times.

The fact that over 80% of funds go directly to clients is a great motivator and some volunteers felt that if more funds were going to pay salaries or overheads and to pay for offices this would diminish motivation.

“SWVG travels lightly – over 80% of the money goes to clients. It’s not the same as raising funds to pay someone’s salary. That wouldn’t be so motivating.”

Focusing on what we enjoy

The flexibility of the Group to be able to play to people’s strengths is appreciated. Some felt they would not be able to be visitors but appreciated the opportunity to use their

skills to contribute in other ways. The Administrator and Secretary roles are important to allowing individuals to focus on what they want to do. Having key roles separated, for example the role of Coordinator and Training Team Leader, was also felt to be important.

“Although it is a group of volunteers, there is a professionalism and reliability to the Group – it plays to people’s strengths.”

be able to support the Group more perhaps in taking responsibility for important but small jobs.

Ending the relationship

SWVG could provide even clearer guidance as to when the visitor/client befriending relationship ends. It would be useful to remind clients and visitors more that the support is temporary and introduce the issue of ending the relationship earlier on.

Investing in the future

Considerations going forward

SWVG volunteers clearly enjoy their role. Key issues for SWVG going forward with regard to maintaining SWVG members’ motivation and capability are set out below.

Succession planning

It is important that not too much information is held by a small number of people, such as the Executive Committee. Whilst retaining a strong core group of individuals is clearly critical it is also important to keep new people coming into the Group, taking on the work and responsibility. In the longer term, SWVG will want to consider the impact of a higher retirement age and how that might affect their ability to continue to recruit high calibre volunteers who have the time to commit to the Group.

Support for visitors

Visiting can be an emotionally draining role and it is important that the Group continues to ensure it is supporting visitors appropriately. Expectations of visitors need to be kept realistic. Visitors need to be reminded of the extent of the role as some may put themselves under pressure to do more.

Some of the support groups are now quite large and there might be benefit in dividing them into smaller groups. There could be value in having more training at meetings to consider the emotional aspects of being a volunteer.

Guidelines exist for the back up role but these could be highlighted more. There may be value in providing specific training for back up visitors.

Support for non-visiting volunteers

Members who are not visitors are not so actively co-ordinated and supported and there is scope for incorporating more information about volunteer activities generally in training and induction. There could also be potential for exploring how these individuals might

5. Relationship with partner agencies

Summary

The Group's relationship with a range of other Agencies in the Southampton and Winchester area is critical to its capacity to support its clients in the way it wishes.

We have interviewed all of the key Agencies and have received outstanding feedback both about the Group and its collaboration with them. There are clearly deep levels of trust in place and a strong wish among partner agencies that SWVG sustains its important contribution in the future. Use of the Avenue Multicultural Centre makes a pivotal contribution to these levels of trust and collaboration.

In order to continue to perform great work in the coming months and years, these partner organisations also invite the Group to continue to pay attention to:

- its succession planning;
- the supervision and mentoring of visitors;
- the art of bringing befriending relationships to an appropriate close at the appropriate time;
- the costs and availability of acceptable accommodation for clients;
- the pinpointing of some of the emerging and more challenging requirements of visitors in their support of their clients, such as advocacy and mental health difficulties;
- the anticipation, perhaps jointly with some partner organisations, of the likely emerging needs of asylum seekers and refugees in the area in the next few years;
- the implications of reduced legal aid funds.

Findings

A network of important relationships

A number of organisations provide complementary support to asylum seekers and refugees in the Southampton and Winchester area. These include CLEAR, the British Red Cross, Refugee Action (which has recently experienced a 65% reduction in funds), Ready Homes, Homeless Health, St. Mary's GP Surgery and the local MPs' offices. Landlords also play an important role in helping the Group meet its clients' accommodation needs.

The Group invests strongly in its relationship with these partner organisations. Referrals come from different organisations for different reasons – Homeless Health might refer a client for health reasons, whereas the Red Cross might refer someone needing support while they complete the NASS Section 4 (State support) application for them. There are considerable amounts of joint problem-solving on behalf of clients.

The Group also participates actively in two important fora which bring together all the relevant parties to review

the overall position on asylum seekers and refugees in the Southampton area:

- **Southampton New Communities Umbrella Group.** Chaired by SWVG's Training Team Leader, this group brings together a wide range of voluntary and statutory agencies who work with asylum seekers, refugees and new communities in Southampton, in order to share information about the work of each agency, avoid overlaps, co-ordinate research, and share problems and issues (such as the demise of Refugee and Migrant Justice Solicitors, the changes taking place in statutory agencies and the withdrawal of much of Refugee Action's funding).
- **Southampton Local Dispersal Management Group.** Chaired by the Communities Development Manager (Communities Team, Neighbourhood Directorate, Southampton City Council), this group was formed following the dispersal by UK Borders Agency of 500 asylum seekers to Southampton with a mission of overseeing and ensuring the smooth running of the contract among critical local services. The contract changed and Southampton now accommodates some 120 asylum seekers – mostly families, and about twenty single

people. SWVG are part of this Group, along with a range of other bodies. As well as providing a forum for SWVG's voice, it also affords strong opportunities to liaise with specific people about the particular issues affecting SWVG clients such as passport/birth certificate problems.

The Avenue Multicultural Centre in Southampton provides a focal point for these relationships. It is managed by the Avenue St. Andrews' Church, CLEAR and the British Red Cross, who are joined each week by SWVG, Ready Homes and Refugee Action (in more modest a capacity than before 2011 after its significant budget reduction). Up to 100 asylum seekers and refugees come to the centre to enjoy friendship and food, receive advice and help, and take part in a range of activities such as sewing, guitar and IT. This weekly contact with the Group's partner organisations has allowed it to strengthen links and liaise carefully over helping individual clients. It has made the Group accessible to new clients who would not otherwise have heard about it. And the Centre has also enabled the Group to take on more clients by providing short-term help when no permanent visitor has been available.

There are numerous examples of the advantages afforded by the Centre and the close relationship with partner agencies:

- liaising with other bodies on specific client issues (for instance SWVG members recently sitting down with their client and Groundswell, or their client and the Noise Abatement Officer);
- getting access to a range of different skills (for instance, speaking Farsi);
- discussing common issues across partner agencies such as security for visitors;
- encouraging much interchange on the availability of English classes, guitar lessons etc;
- providing a focal point for the interest of local MPs;
- being able to use the Church's facilities, including the kitchen and the photocopier;
- establishing a strong foundation for partner agencies to respond effectively to difficult situations affecting their clients such as, recently, the budget reductions for Refugee Action and the need for Refugee and Migrant Justice (lawyers) to go into administration.

Feedback from partner agencies

We interviewed 11 key people in the following organisations (the full list is in Appendix B):

- CLEAR;
- British Red Cross;
- Refugee Action;
- Ready Homes;
- Homeless Health;
- St Mary's GP Surgery;
- MP's Office.

We also spoke to two landlords who provide accommodation to the Group's clients.

There was overwhelmingly positive commentary about the Group and its contribution:

“They are brilliant and do a marvellous job.”

“It is very unusual to find such a successful voluntary Group.”

“Not a ‘professional’ group perhaps; but there is no doubt that they are highly professional.”

“They attract a brilliant group of highly skilled, professional people who are able to provide strong advocacy and problem-solving on behalf of their clients.”

This positive feedback identifies the following strengths:

- **Impact and results** – *“They have achieved some outstanding results. Users would be in grave difficulties without them.”*
- **Deep levels of care** – *“They go beyond the bounds of duty. Extraordinary care and commitment.”*
- **Capacity to perform a very challenging task** – *“They perform a highly demanding task. There is no doubt in my mind that it is much more demanding than counselling for instance, much more open-ended.”*
- **Highly organised** – *“They are very organised, both overall and in their one to one relationships with their clients. For instance, their use of one visitor (with back-up) for each client compares favourably with other similar groups who normally deploy a panel of volunteers for a pool of clients.”*
- **Deeply knowledgeable and ready to supplement this wherever they can** – *“They really know what they are doing. In the early days of our relationship with them, they were hungry for the sort of information we had. They have absorbed a great deal of this, to the extent that they now only come to us for ‘supplementary’ information about the more difficult cases and issues.”*
- **Highly creative** – *“They work hard with us to find creative ways to access the public purse on the health issues facing their clients.”*

- **Resilient** – *“Throughout their history, they have responded strongly to changing circumstances and needs, for instance in embarking on ASSIST and the Legal Justice Project. They have stuck to their core purpose, and not ducked any issues along the way, becoming stronger as they have done so.”*

The feedback from partner organisations also bears witness to the **Group’s positioning in a clear space that complements well the work and focus of other parties:**

“A brilliant service that no one else could provide.”

“They fill a clear gap.”

“Without SWVG, there would be a real deficit in the befriending support and financial help.”

“The visitor system and befriending – combined with money – marks them out.”

“People who are completely refused. Without SWVG, these people would be destitute.”

“It is their funding – the availability of money, alongside their ability to find accommodation and solve problems – that makes SWVG so attractive.”

Equally strong is the testimony that partner agencies offer on the **Group’s collaboration and co-operation**. There is no doubt that there is a highly collaborative and co-operative relationship across these agencies, driven by the needs of the client: and that the Group makes an important contribution to this. ‘Trust’ is an overworked word; but it is safe to say that the Group is highly trusted by their partners – by dint of their commitment to their clients, their determination to help solve their clients’ problems, their deep sense of reliability, and the strength of the personal relationships that they form with colleagues from their partner agencies:

“There is a high emphasis on personal relationships.”

“SWVG are completely reliable. I can go to anyone in the Group and the subject-matter will never be dropped or forgotten.”

“I can do this; you can do this. Our relationship and transactions are completely focused on the client.”

Investing in the future

Considerations going forward

In this area, the primary need for the future is that SWVG continues to perform its current important function and to invest in sustaining the quality of its relationships with its partner agencies:

“We really hope that they continue to attract money to support people at the ‘hard end’ of the asylum seeker/refugee spectrum. Their contribution is, and will continue to be, really needed.”

In addition, the Group will wish to attend to the following improvement themes advocated by its partner organisations:

- **Continuing to bring on volunteers to play important roles in the Group** – *“It looks as though a few people carry a very large burden.”*
- **Continuing to strengthen the supervision, mentoring and support of visitors** – *“Given the innate challenge of the visitors’ role – open-ended, often full of distress, real problem-solving issues, and a propensity to significant projection – it seems to me that there is a case for even more active supervision and mentoring.”*
- **Guarding against the befriending relationship continuing too long, beyond the real need** – *“At the margins, in a few cases, we do see some visitors hang on to their client too long. Befriending always needs an exit strategy. We do sometimes see – ‘I am your soul mate, not anyone else’.”*

- **Carefully monitoring the cost, availability and standards of accommodation in the Southampton and Winchester area** – “£65 is becoming a real challenge for rent, given all that is involved.” (NB. The Group has very recently raised accommodation support to £70 and £75 exceptionally.)
- **Potentially leading some joint thinking across partner organisations about the likely needs of asylum seekers in the area in the next two to three years.** Clearly, there is much uncertainty about likely trends: but partner organisations expressed some interest in jointly stepping back to reflect and to plan most appropriate responses. (The Group’s recent role stimulating discussion about the implications of Refugee Action’s reduction in funds in early 2011 is a powerful example of this potential role. Those discussions led to Asylum Welcome at the Avenue Multicultural Centre. The Group was instrumental in organising an early meeting of Refugee Action, CLEAR, and Haslar Visitors’ Group, and then played an active role in the steps towards this result.)
- **Taking a fresh look at some of the requirements for visitors.** There were some suggestions that some new needs were emerging – such as advocacy and mental health issues – and that it might be worth articulating these even more clearly. Not only could this point to some potential adjustments in the training provision for visitors, but it might help sharpen the Group’s external message in attracting high quality people who would be interested in some of the more challenging aspects of the Group’s support of clients.
- **Looking ahead to the impending reduction in the quantum of legal aid.** Given the importance of strong legal advice in supporting SWVG clients, there is widespread concern about this among the Group’s partners. They are thinking aloud on the Group’s behalf on this issue, making suggestions like ‘identify more pro bono sources of legal advice’; ‘focus above all on “end of line” advice’; and ‘do even more in arming some volunteers with OISC qualifications’.

6. Campaigning

Summary

The SWVG Campaigns group has transformed itself over the past year from a group responding to issues, reports and briefings to one which proactively campaigns for change. Its members have developed influencing skills allowing the group access to key individuals and meetings where they can lobby on issues facing asylum seekers both locally and

nationally. Campaigning is an important aspect of SWVG but the mainstay of the Group's work will always be the befriending of clients. It is in this context that the campaigning work will regularly need to review its priorities, in particular how it balances supporting national campaigns with supporting the immediate issues of SWVG clients.

Findings

The operation of the Campaigns group

The SWVG Campaigns group meets about every four to five weeks and campaigns on issues relevant to asylum seekers both locally and nationally. Between them the seven members of the group hold a wealth of relevant experience, having previously been key to campaigning for the World Development Movement, held senior positions in charities such as Oxfam, and gathered extensive experience of journalism.

Recent issues

In 2010, the Campaigns group actively lobbied MPs to allow asylum seekers to work and supported a national campaign to end the detention of children of asylum seekers. This child detention campaign has involved liaising with Barnardo's which is overseeing the care of children at a new detention centre. Barnardo's has promised that it will protest strongly if families are routinely referred to the new detention centre.

SWVG has been active in campaigning against cuts in the budgets for English classes for speakers of other languages (ESOL). The group has worked with colleges and had some success in encouraging them to give free or very subsidised ESOL courses.

Currently SWVG is vigorously campaigning in support of the UK Borders Agency Early Legal Advice Project ('ELAP') initiative. This initiative will see legal advice for asylum seekers front loaded, focusing significant investment in fully researching cases soon after an asylum seeker arrives. This will minimise lengthy delays

and appeals which are both costly and particularly distressing for people seeking asylum. This initiative is currently being piloted in the Midlands but if successful could then be rolled out across the UK, with considerable impact for many SWVG clients.

External links and contacts

The group maintains excellent links with Steve Brine, MP for Winchester and John Denham and Alan Whitehead, MPs for Southampton. It is through these contacts that SWVG recently secured a meeting with Emma Churchill, the Director of Asylum at the UK Borders Agency to discuss the implications of cuts to legal aid as well as to lobby in support of the Early Legal Advice Project. In addition, the Bishop of Winchester (an SWVG patron) has been very supportive of asylum issues in the House of Lords.

The group also co-ordinates effectively with a range of organisations and supports other campaigns which it sees as relevant to SWVG clients.

Keeping SWVG members involved and updated

An up to date campaigns newsfeed on the SWVG website as well as a regular entry in the SWVG Members' Newsletter keeps members informed on wider developments for asylum seekers. Issues on which to focus campaigns are prompted by members and campaigns from other groups such as Citizens for Sanctuary, Detention Forum and the Church Refugee Network. The group is keen to ensure also that they remain sensitive to the needs of SWVG clients and have set up a survey to establish (via visitors) the issues of greatest concern to clients.

Investing in the future

Considerations going forward

The SWVG Campaigns group is still developing its approach but has made significant progress over the past year. It will always be balancing what it can realistically achieve with its ambitions, and needing to allocate its resources and time accordingly. As part of this, the group is always looking to make the best use of the skills of members and to make judgements on when to reach beyond the needs of SWVG clients to the plight of asylum seekers across the UK. Maintaining good links with partner organisations and supporting national campaigns should remain an important part of its work and it will be through working in partnership with groups across the UK where it is likely to have the greatest impact in effecting change.

At the same time, the Campaigns group is also keen to give a voice to SWVG clients and particularly to champion the issues that they face. This needs to remain a core priority for the group. There might be a role for the group in looking at what support they can give to clients who are facing such problems as imminent removal, family reunion and access to basic services.

SWVG could also consider where campaigns sit with regard to its outreach work. At the moment, outreach events are organised in an informal way. There are plans that the Secretary will keep track of who is speaking at what events and this will allow SWVG and the Campaigns group to target specific audiences and identify speakers who are appropriate for particular events.

There might be potential for SWVG to use its contacts and expertise more widely, perhaps sharing these with other groups but also by attending public events generally to raise awareness. There could also be a role for the group in hosting conferences and networking events.

7. Information and advice

Summary

In the last two to three years, SWVG has placed strong emphasis upon providing information to, and communicating with, all its members.

This effort came in response to concerns among members about:

- a lack of information;
- the high numbers of emails going to members who felt overwhelmed by a barrage of messages;
- the substantial number of telephone calls coming in to the Coordinator, Administrator and Secretary requesting advice, information and forms;
- too weak a sense of community within the membership.

A wide range of media are now used including the website, monthly newsletters, induction and training sessions, visitor support groups, ‘ad hoc’ and informal support to visitors through their back-up and other colleagues, General Meetings and Annual General Meetings.

Overall, these media work extremely well and the concerns that gave rise to this effort have been significantly reduced.

The Group has primarily focused its communication effort on the ‘internal’ audience, because it is the visitor who is the main communicator with the Group’s clients: bolster visitors’ knowledge and confidence, and clients

experience the benefits directly. Consideration has been given to a client chat room in the website, but this has understandably not been seen as a priority.

As we show in the section on ‘Relationship with Partner Agencies’ (Section 5), there are strong tactical communications and relationships with key agencies such as CLEAR, British Red Cross and Refugee Action, which are facilitated by the presence at the Avenue Multicultural Centre. However, there is some scope to raise the game here and engage more strategically with this group of stakeholders about the Group’s impact, the changing needs of asylum seekers and refugees, and collective responses. This intent might usefully be extended to the Group’s wide range of donors, friends and supporters. The Group has emerging plans in this area – creating a database of contacts and donors, and communicating more actively with them – and we would urge them to take these forward with active volunteer support.

The Legal Justice Project, the Group’s vehicle for legal advice, has proved to be quite invaluable, making a difference in a number of client cases and bolstering the confidence of visitors and clients alike. It is vital that further funding is found for this once the current funding (Sir Halley Stewart Trust) has finished.

Findings

Main communication media for members

We review each of the main media below.

Website

The external and internal websites are ably managed by the Web group and the volunteer Webmaster. They are first rate, containing a large spectrum of information including news, achievements, calendar events and

announcements, policy guidelines, commentary on legal issues and administrative forms. There is also helpful clarity about ‘who does what’ (for instance, accommodation, legal advice, bed linen – to name a few areas). And there is a useful section giving links to recent press articles on topics relating to asylum.

The current improvement agenda for the websites includes ensuring that the home page consistently carries information about the core purpose of the Group and its results and achievements, including client stories. This

has been slightly lost in the recent past by dint of the understandable objective of regularly changing the Home Page to keep it interesting.

Monthly newsletter

This has been produced every month for the last three years, thanks to the energy of one volunteer. As well as news and up-dates, the newsletter often carries some important guidance for members on key client issues such as confidentiality and financial support for citizenship claims.

Visitor support groups

We describe these in Section 4 ('Members, Volunteers and Visitors'). Important groups, based in different localities, their approach is to be strengthened in the near future as a result of recent evaluation work. Reflecting the importance of active supervision and mentoring for visitors, there is to be more active engagement of attendance (currently 75%) and more assertive/active leadership of each group to ensure sound, focused discussion.

Visitor induction and training sessions/seminars

These are also dealt with in Section 4. Again, in the spirit of continuous improvement within the Group, there are ideas emerging about making these a little less exclusively focused on the requirements of visitors. For instance, the induction session might include some time on all volunteer activities before focusing on visitors' activities and requirements.

General and Annual General Meetings

All the reports we have received – and we have attended one General Meeting – suggest that these are helpful events. The agendas cover a range of subjects and issues, including the work of the different groups in SWVG, key emerging topics like working with clients who have just recently been given Leave to Remain, proposals on important policies and procedures such as ASSIST criteria, new developments such as the introduction of Asylum Welcome to take on Refugee Action's work, and talks by other relevant organisations such as AVID (Association of Visitors to Immigration Detainees.) The design intent is always to combine some information sharing with some learning and development at the General Meetings.

The Executive Committee is now looking to create a planning team for the agendas of General Meetings over a twelve month period in order to be even more proactive in this area.

Enhancing communication with external stakeholders

The Group does much in this area. Clients can access the excellent website; they receive on joining a small card detailing SWVG and key contact details: and they are invited to events, including two parties a year (in

September 2011, the Group held a very successful 10th Anniversary Party) – all this in addition to the day to day availability of the visitor.

As we have detailed in the sections on Fundraising (Section 9), Campaigning (Section 6), and Relationship with Partner Agencies (Section 5), there is significant activity involving external stakeholders such as day to day interaction with CLEAR, British Red Cross, Refugee Action and other partner agencies, much of which is undertaken at the Avenue Multicultural Centre; communication with and reports to funders, particularly Trusts and organisations; events with extensive invitation lists; and a whole series of talks to local and national organisations such as the University of the Third Age, the Church of Immaculate Conception and Rotary clubs, some of which attract modest fees.

However, *two potential improvement needs stand out*, in the context of a general need to strengthen the Group's overall Public Relations approach:

- *Communicating more regularly with actual and potential donors*, particularly individuals, about the activities of the Group, its successes and challenges, and the results it secures with the funds it attracts. For instance, there is no database of the multitude of individuals – some of whom are active donors – who join the Group's events like concerts and walks, or who have contributed to church appeals on behalf of the Group.
- *Communicating more strategically with key partners such as CLEAR, British Red Cross and others*, about the Group's activities, impact and the general asylum seeker/refugee situation in the Southampton and Winchester area.

A simple approach would involve a quarterly Newsletter, the production of some core leaflets, a more strategically targeted series of talks, and an actively managed database of contacts. The job description of the newly appointed Secretary includes setting up such a database and producing a newsletter of some sort.

Legal advice (Legal Justice Project)

The sourcing of reliable, cost-effective legal advice has become absolutely pivotal to SWVG's work and is now one of the key legs of its offering. Importantly, it supports the confidence and assertiveness of the Group's visitors and is essential to the successful, timely conduct of clients' cases.

In 2008/9, the Group was confronted with a major challenge, verging on a crisis, which was placing a significant strain on its resources. Numerous clients were coming forward to seek support in finding good legal advice or in funding often large legal bills. Many clients were experiencing difficulties in this respect. A significant reduction over time in the number of

Legal Aid solicitors meant that clients were travelling further to access Legal Aid advice, finding it difficult to secure advice for fresh claims and experiencing variable (and sometimes very expensive) standards of advice when obtained.

The Group therefore secured funding from the Sir Halley Stewart Trust for the Legal Justice Project which draws on the services of Jo Renshaw, a leading immigration lawyer and partner at Turpin and Miller in Oxford. SWVG have been absolutely delighted with these services which are based on Jo Renshaw's knowledge of immigration law, her authority as a partner in an important firm, her keen understanding of the charity sector and her judgement about when to press a case and when to pause and await developments.

The Project has delivered the following services in the last two years (all but the last point refer to Jo Renshaw's work):

- 27 assessments of client cases, with advice and recommendations, usually very complex cases or ones that appeared to have exhausted all possible legal avenues. Jo Renshaw has personally taken on a number of clients, using legal aid where possible. Jo's advice has helped clients to obtain Leave to Remain and others to reactivate their claims. In a few cases, she has advised that there was no hope of ever getting Leave to Remain. Although very disappointing, this saved clients from clinging to false hopes. Visitors could then sometimes help their clients consider other options, including returning to their country of origin;
- answers to 27 quick queries about specific legal/procedural points, such as advice on family reunion processes and on how best to manage fresh representations;
- advice on the reasonableness of two clients' legal bills, including scrutinising them and advising on what offers to make (which were accepted);
- provision of regular training workshops open to all Group members (for instance on developments in asylum law and entitlements), followed by surgeries on individual client cases. The notes of all issues covered are placed on the website;
- funding of three visitors on an OISC (Office of the Information Services Commissioner) Level 1 Course, qualifying them to give limited legal advice.

The Legal Justice Project sub group works hard to ensure that the legal advice is provided to the Group and then communicated appropriately to the client. The Legal Justice Project group Co-ordinator plays a vital role in ensuring clear processes and lines of communication in all cases.

The Project has proved to be of immense value to the Group, especially in bolstering the confidence and awareness of visitors and their clients. In particular it has:

- provided visitors and clients with robust, reliable advice that ensured they were aware of all the relevant aspects of their cases and the likelihood or not of success;
- obtained answers to a range of quick queries – such as new rulings being given in asylum cases involving Zimbabweans – with the potential to be relevant to a number of different client cases;
- helped the Money Allocation group manage its resources even more effectively by enabling clients to progress their cases constructively and often more speedily, either positively by helping them to get Leave to Remain and so to access work and benefits, or by confirming that there were no further steps to be taken and that return may be the most realistic option. Although not all clients benefitting from the Legal Justice Project are on ASSIST, the Project has meant in several cases quicker provision of state support and thus no further need for ASSIST funds;
- given visitors and clients an important sense of reassurance on complex issues in what has been a rapidly changing policy context. This has helped reduce understandable levels of hesitancy.

We have spoken with Jo Renshaw who confirmed her own appreciation of both the Project and the Group as a whole:

“It has worked really well.”

“Pressures on my time have been the main constraint. They might have nagged me more! They are very nice people.”

“The training sessions/seminars are highly effective and worthwhile.”

“There really are not many organisations like SWVG. It is unique, especially in the befriending, which is very important. There is a strong need for effective supervision and mentoring.”

Looking forward, her main concerns focused on the likelihood of the Group being faced with very long term relationships with its clients, given the recent end to the legacy programme, the significant reduction in legal aid quantum, and the fact that the Group finds itself dealing with people at the 'Appeals Right Extended' stage. She urged the Group to consider the use of some funding to secure 'end of line' advice from lawyers and perhaps to be somewhat tougher in deciding which clients to take on.

Given the importance and success of the Legal Justice Project, and the vital relevance of good quality advice, it is not surprising that the Group is determined to find money for this from core funds once the Sir Halley Stewart Trust funding comes to an end (although reduction in legal aid represents a threat to the commercial survival of all legal practices in this area).

For us, the most important learning points about managing such a project to access expert legal advice include:

- ensuring the high quality of the legal advisor;
- establishing a detailed, explicit agreement with the legal advisor;
- putting clear processes in place for the management of individual cases;
- steering the project with a group (in their case the Legal Justice Project sub group) with a clear intent about what the project is aiming to achieve.

Investing in the future

Considerations going forward

While continuing to maintain its high standards in its deployment of information and advice, there would be value in the Group paying particular attention to the following aspects:

- make every effort to secure more funding for, and access to, continuing legal advice as part of efforts to integrate the Legal Justice Project within the Group's core work;
- engage even more strategically with the Group's main partner agencies about the Group's impact, the changing needs of asylum seekers and refugees, and appropriate collective responses;
- initiate more active engagement (based on a simple database and a regular brief newsletter) with individual donors and the multitude of other individuals who come into contact with the Group and its work;
- pursue some minor improvements of the website, including ensuring that the Home page carries consistent messages about the Group's purpose and impact.

8. Overall financial management

Summary

Notwithstanding the serious economic challenges of the last few years (and it is a considerable strain to achieve financial health), the Group's finances are exceptionally well tended and managed. The Group has consistently achieved its unrestricted reserves target of £15,000 over the last six years.

The Group has had notable success on the fundraising front – focusing on grant making bodies, events, individuals and organisations (particularly local churches) – and is actively considering how best to approach the uncertain funding times ahead in order to meet clients' subsistence and accommodation needs that show no sign of abating in the foreseeable future (see Section 9).

The vast bulk of the Group's receipts is allocated to clients via the ASSIST scheme through a process run by the Money Allocation group in a way that effectively balances real care for clients with the necessary discipline, rigour, fairness and sustainability (see Section 10). Direct client expenses have actually accounted for over 80% of the Group's total payments in the last five years – outstanding performance by any standards.

And the Group's strong financial management processes and decision-making are characterised by speed, efficiency and the important active presence of its financial management team in the core processes of the charity.

Findings SWVG accounts: 2005–2011

	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11
Receipts (£)	79,000	90,000	79,400	89,000	110,000	116,000
Direct client expenses (accommodation and subsistence, phone cards, professional fees, travel, other) (£)	58,700 (87%)	71,900 (84%)	67,000 (85%)	67,200 (78%)	82,700 (81%)	75,800 (83%)
Visitors' travel and expenses (£)	3,300 (5%)	3,500 (4%)	2,600 (3%)	4,300 (5%)	4,300 (4%)	4,200 (5%)
Administrators' honorarium (£)	3,800 (6%)	4,000 (5%)	5,900 (7%)	8,000 (9%)	7,700 (8%)	7,700 (8%)
Other administration costs (fund-raising expenses, training, stationery etc) (£)	1,200 (2%)	5,600 (7%)	4,100 (5%)	7,100 (8%)	7,400 (7%)	3,800 (4%)
Total payments (£)	67,000	85,000	79,600	86,600	102,100	91,500
Balance carried forward (£)	26,300	31,200	31,000	33,400	41,300	65,800
Of which unrestricted reserves (£)	24,600	29,700	24,900	23,300	25,500	38,300

(NB: receipts and total payments in 2010/11 have both been deducted £28,076: this was payment for the 'This is My Home' project, a joint project with CLEAR for which SWVG acted as banker.)

In 2008, the trustees decided that the minimum level of unrestricted reserves should be set at £15,000. This value was based on the maximum eight week commitment to clients under the ASSIST scheme and also allowed some funds for administration. Year end unrestricted reserves have been relatively stable from 2007 to 2010 and comfortably above the minimum.

However during 2009/10 the trustees became concerned that reserves would fall below £15,000 and decided to reduce the weekly subsistence allowance for clients. The increase in reserves late in 2010/11 – due to an unexpected increase in grants and individual donations – has allowed that reduction to be reversed.

The overwhelming message is that the Group has achieved both a reasonable level of financial stability over the last few years and an outstanding record, as a volunteer led and managed charity, of deploying the vast majority of its hard earned and generously awarded funds towards the needs of their clients. Direct client expenses have accounted for over 80% of its total payments in the last five years. The Group's own benchmarking shows that this stands out clearly from all other similar organisations in the UK; the nearest proportion is around 50%, and is often much lower. Quite rightly, the Group is determined to maintain this stance; however, it might be appropriate to consider some modest increase in administrative costs in support of even greater effectiveness in some aspects of its external communication and fundraising.

Financial management processes

The Group's financial management processes are in good shape with three characteristics standing out in particular:

- **Speed** – When it meets towards the beginning of alternate months, the Executive Committee is always in receipt of the accounts for the previous two months and is notified very quickly of any emerging challenges in the meantime. This makes a strong contribution to the overall management of the Group.
- **Efficiency** – The Group makes some 5–600 payments each year. A basic software package handles these well, and there are very few errors. The main challenge is keeping all visitors up to date in making their expenses' claims; and there can sometimes be changes at short notice in making weekly payments to clients, with visitors not always able to make them in a particular week and either the Coordinator, Deputy Coordinator or Administrator having to step in.
- **Presence** – Both the Treasurer and Administrator take great care to be actively involved in the core

processes of the Group. They both play active roles in the Money Allocation group, and the Treasurer is a member of the Fundraising and Legal Justice Project groups. This strengthens both their ability to make good financial decisions on behalf of the Group, and their credibility with other volunteers and visitors.

Investing in the future

Considerations going forward

The primary message here is that SWVG will wish to do all it can in difficult economic circumstances to sustain its outstanding financial management performance. The key areas are of course fundraising and financial assistance to clients, both dealt with in the next two sections. However, the Group might also consider some modest increase in administrative costs in support of even greater effectiveness in some aspects of its external communication and fundraising.

9. Fundraising

Summary

SWVG has raised £94,000 per annum on average in the last six years, from grant income (average annual contribution – 54%), event proceeds (average annual contribution – 15%), individual donations (average annual contribution – 22%) and organisation donations (average annual contribution – 9%). This is a strong performance, drawing from a healthy mix of different income streams. It is a performance that the Group is determined to sustain and if possible improve in the coming months and years, because there is no prospect of there being less demand for the Group's financial support to clients.

A series of multiple and repeat **grants** have added much stability in recent years to the Group's financial position, but there is a strong need to continue to find other grant making trusts who might fund the Group to the level of £10,000 per annum or more.

The Group's **events** effort has been a successful part of the fundraising campaign and needs to continue to be so. The Winchester area is particularly fertile ground for this activity.

Individual donations have consistently been a strong source of funds. There is now scope to give this even more attention, especially as individual donations in the Winchester area

are likely to remain a relatively stable source of funds in difficult economic times.

On the **organisation** front, local churches have proved to be a stalwart and generous source of funds (and volunteers and other support). They will remain a key component of the Group's fundraising strategy.

Funders of SWVG told us that they saw the Group to be a highly effective charity, distinctly cost effective and 'on the front foot' in its fundraising approach. This point of view tallies with our own evaluation – the Group's fundraising efforts are highly organised, strategic, results-oriented and research and evidence-based.

To sustain and if possible increase the current level of receipts, it will be vital for the Group to continue to source funds from all four sources. Grants and events need to remain the foundation, but it should also be possible to raise the level of individual donations in the next few years.

It will also be important to continue to reinforce the Group's capacity in the Fundraising and Events areas by encouraging even more volunteers to play a role alongside the current leaders of these two activities.

Findings

SWVG receipts: 2006–2011

The annual average quantum of receipts from SWVG fundraising and events in the last six years has been £94,000.

The four sources of grant income (average annual contribution – 54%), event proceeds (average annual

contribution – 15%), individual donations (average annual contribution – 22%) and organisation donations (average annual contribution – 9%) have formed the foundation of this fundraising effort over the years, but the relative contributions have altered significantly since the early days of SWVG when over 50% of receipts came from individual donations and most of the remainder came from church donations ('organisations'). By contrast, in 2010/11, individual donations accounted for £22,000 (some 19%) and organisations £14,500

	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11
Grant income (£)	48,500 (61%)	45,200 (50%)	47,500 (60%)	40,300 (45%)	50,600 (46%)	67,800 (58%)
Organisations (£)	5,100 (7%)	7,800 (8%)	3,200 (4%)	6,500 (7%)	10,700 (10%)	14,500 (13%)
Individuals (including gift aid) (£)	22,400 (28%)	21,300 (24%)	16,800 (21%)	28,100 (32%)	23,700 (21%)	22,000 (19%)
Events/other (£)	3,000 (4%)	15,700 (18%)	11,900 (15%)	14,100 (16%)	25,000 (23%)	11,700 (10%)
Total (£)	79,000	90,000	79,400	89,000	110,000	116,000

(NB: The 2010/11 figures exclude the £28,000 payment for 'This is My Home Now' as in the SWVG accounts table shown in section 8, but they include two special project grants – Sir Halley Stewart for the Legal Justice Project (£9,500) and Bromley Trust for the Investing in the Future project (£10,000).)

(some 13%). The significant difference over the years has been the major contribution now made by grants from national grant making trusts (£50,600 (46%) in 2009/10 and £67,800 (58%) in 2010/11) and the important impact of the work of the Events Group (£14,100 (16%) in 2008/09, £25,000 (23 %) in 2009/10 and £11,700 (10%) in 2010/11).

The Group has a healthy mix of differently sourced income streams. Its position in respect of each of these funding sources – grant making trusts, events, individuals and organisations (particularly churches) – is examined further below.

Grant making trusts

SWVG's attraction of funds from grant-making trusts in the last few years is clear testimony to the generosity of these bodies. It is also testimony to the professionalism and drive of the SWVG Fundraising group. This is founded on a highly strategic, research-based approach:

- choices of 'targets' come from a search via the Charity Commission of the annual reports of asylum/refugee groups across the country to establish who funds most of the comparable organisations, leading to a list of national grant funders and the typical size of their grants;
- applications are then made with considerable discipline, showing statistics, quotes, impact summaries and explanations of SWVG's success;
- attention is paid to relationship-building with key funding officers, and the Fundraising group prides itself on its responsiveness to Trusts' requests for further information.

In the last eight years, SWVG has attracted grants from the following national and local grant making Trusts who are conscious of the difficulties of unpopular causes in the present economic climate:

AB Charitable Trust, Allen Lane Foundation, Bromley Trust, Church Urban Fund, Churches Commission for Racial Justice, Eva Reckitt Trust, Jill Franklin Trust, French Huguenot Church of London Trust, Sir Halley Stewart Trust, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Community Fund (Sports Relief), Henry Smith Charity, Heritage Lottery Fund, Hilden Charitable Trust, IBM UK Trust, John Paul Getty Jnr. Charitable Trust, Knight Charitable Trust, The Lankelly Chase Foundation, Lloyds TSB Foundation, Norda Trust, Observer Charitable Trust, Roger Brooke Charitable Trust, St Clare and St Francis Trust, St Faith's Mission Room Charity, Sheba Charitable Trust, Southampton City PCT, W. F. Southall Trust, UIA Charitable Foundation, Ward Blenkinsop Trust.

Their grants per year can be grouped into 3 categories as shown in the table below – grants below £2,000, grants between £2,000 and £10,000, and grants over £10,000 (Trusts giving the Group multiple grants for periods of three years are shown in bold; Norda Trust is one such example. And Trusts giving the Group repeat grants are shown in italics; Eva Reckitt Trust is one such example).

Grants from trusts to SWVG 2004–2011

£2,000 or below

Jill Franklin Trust

Roger Brooke Charitable Trust

Hampshire and Isle of Wight Community Fund

Observer Charitable Trust

St Faith's Mission Room Charity

W. F. Southall Trust

Sports Relief

Knight Charitable Trust

Eva Reckitt Trust

IBM UK Trust

St Clare and St Francis Trust

Sheba Charitable Trust

UIA Charitable Foundation

£2,001 – £9,999

Allen Lane Foundation

Churches Commission for Racial Justice

Hilden Charitable Trust

Southampton City PCT

AB Trust

Church Urban Fund

French Huguenot Church of London Trust

Norda Trust

Ward Blenkinsop Trust

£10,000 or above

Bromley Trust

Henry Smith Charity

The Lankelly Chase Foundation

Sir Halley Stewart Trust

John Paul Getty Jnr. Charitable Trust

Lloyds TSB Foundation

Key: **Bold** = multiple grants; *Italics* = repeat grants

The following points can be noted from this table:

- there are five major funders of SWVG (Sir Halley Stewart has been excluded as the funder of the special Legal Justice Project). The success in obtaining 3-year grants from these five major funders at the level of £10,000 per year has been a major factor in permitting SWVG to maintain a full ASSIST programme. With the likely withdrawal of the Lankelly Chase Foundation from funding asylum seekers beyond its current commitment, it emphasises the need to find others who might fund at this level.
- most grants in the range £2,000–£10,000 have been for £5,000 per year with two Trusts giving not only grants for 3-year periods but also giving repeat grants. Hence the Allen Lane Foundation and the Hilden Charitable Trust have added much stability to the Group's funding.
- grants from the smaller trusts are typically between £500 and £2,000. The finances of SWVG are sufficiently strained that all these grants are to be

valued highly. All local funders, with the exception of the local PCT have given grants at this level.

- the success rates for applications are lowest for those requesting below £2,000 and highest for those at the £10,000 level. The policy of fundraising is to continue making applications requesting below £2,000, to seek other possible funders in the range £2,000–£10,000 and to emphasise the importance of those applications requesting above £10,000.

It is of paramount importance that the Group continues to make every effort to find other trusts who would be prepared to fund them to a substantial level. They know from their meticulous research that at least thirty-seven funders of asylum seeker/refugee groups in the UK have given grants of £10,000 and above. The Group have made applications to a number of them in the past, and some of them are very regional in their funding policy and are thus unlikely to provide funds for Southampton. This area represents therefore a considerable challenge for the Group over the next few years.

Funders' views

We interviewed the relevant funding officers at the Allen Lane Foundation, Henry Smith Charity and The Lankelly Chase Foundation to gauge their perspectives about the Group, its fundraising approach and the potential implications of the future funding environment. Their responses fell into four key areas:

- **SWVG is a highly effective charity**

"SWVG is a very good, sound Group, providing an excellent service. Works well in partnership with others."

"Low cost. Befriending, drop-in, legal advice, ASSIST; strong service mix."

"They are highly resilient."

"They are very good at what they do."

"Not just the local focus. They also use their information and lobbying power to make an important impact nationally as well."

- **SWVG is distinctly cost-effective**

"We are very taken with their Value for Money. Very low running costs. Only two part time staff and no office space. The very major balance goes to clients."

"They do an excellent job, maximising their resources, particularly given their very low administrative costs."

- **SWVG is on the front foot in its fund-raising approach**

"Well written cases, produced in a timely fashion, with thorough information and useful statistics. It is very clear how the Group operates and delivers."

"They are responsive in providing additional information."

"They are not pushy, not obnoxious. That is welcome!"

"No concerns at all about their responsiveness and provision of relevant information."

- **The funding environment will be very challenging in the coming months and years**

"SWVG should definitely survive, where other charities will not."

"As a foundation, we are not going to reduce the overall quantum of our funding, despite the economic difficulties. Everyone is currently hanging back and monitoring how spending cuts will bite and what needs emerge. We will carefully review those emerging needs before making further funding decisions."

"We shall be reviewing our funding approach in the coming weeks and months and, unfortunately, it is likely that our changing priorities will affect our future funding of SWVG beyond our current commitments. Local support and commitment will be the vital factors for SWVG's future."

"A lot of organisations put effort into events and it is not a good use of time. Not here! They are excellent at events and raise good money this way."

A fundraising consultant who, free of charge, advises the Group on its fundraising efforts

Events

The Group's 'Events' effort is a critical part of the fundraising campaign. It raises good money. It also contributes to internal morale among volunteers; involves clients; raises external awareness about the Group's mission and the issues related to asylum seekers and refugees; and, importantly, shows funders that the Group is in the business of both asking for money and raising it themselves.

The Events group organises a wide range of events including walks, talks, concerts, theatre events, themed evenings, quiz nights and Christmas Fairs. Successes in the last two years have included (often involving active patron support and involvement):

- Annual marathon walk (£6000 in 2010, and nearly £6,000 again in 2011);
- 'A few of our favourite things', presented at the Theatre Royal by Miriam Margolyes with Stephen Fry and friends (£12,000);
- A themed evening at the Bangkok Brasserie (£2,700);
- Winchester College concerts (£750 in 2010, £500 in 2011);
- Wolvesey Chapel concert with the Clifton singers (£1,000).

There are also many important 'small' events put on by Group members in their local village halls and other suitable locations.

The Events Group does a very professional job in putting on events in the Winchester area – fertile

ground that helps the Group attract interest, and secure good turn-out and reasonable ticket prices. There might be an argument for establishing an additional group focusing more specifically on the Southampton area, perhaps involving some current and past clients in the activities.

Individuals

Having started as a key contributor to SWVG receipts in the Group's early days, individual donations have continued to be a consistent source of funds (an average of 20% over the last six years), even though their relative contribution has fallen slightly with the significant increase over time in Trust grants.

Of the total amount of individual donations in the last three years (£28,100 in 2008/09, £23,700 in 2009/10 and £22,000 in 2008/09) an annual average of 35% has come from donations of over £500 with £5,000 being the highest individual donation in each of the last two years. An annual average amount of £5,400 has come from monthly standing orders, with an average of 18 standing orders in place at any one time.

Even though SWVG has a core of very generous individual donors, consideration is being given to raising the overall level of individual donations. Possibilities include:

- improvement of SWVG leaflets (already actively under consideration);
- establishment of a database of donors and other interested individuals (for instance, attendees at SWVG events) as a foundation for more active communication with them;
- more disciplined use of standing orders;
- overcoming some current hesitancy to make more direct fundraising approaches to individuals.

We would encourage this initiative, particularly as in the Winchester area individual donations are likely to remain a relatively stable source of funds in a difficult economic environment.

Organisations, particularly churches

Throughout its history, the Group has had a very strong relationship with local churches as a source of support, volunteers and funds. The Fundraising group orchestrates the Group's contact with churches through talks, approaches for funds etc. Churches have been exceptionally generous; for instance, St. Peter's Church Winchester recently raised £9,000 for the Group in one of their six monthly appeals. As well as raising funds, the contact with churches plays a pivotal role in raising awareness about the challenges facing asylum seekers and refugees, through talks and discussion. Churches will remain a key component of the Group's fundraising strategy; the Fundraising group mounts a substantial

approach every three years or so, with some more targeted approaches in the interim.

SWVG has had more success in attracting funds from churches than from organisations such as Rotary. Rotary clubs are rarely to be seen in the fundraising pages of Annual Reports of asylum seeker/refugee groups, whereas churches are frequently seen as supporters.

Investing in the future

Considerations going forward

In conclusion, we have found the Group's successful fundraising effort to be:

- results-oriented;
- strategic not scattergun (the Fundraising group prioritises a number of funding applications and pursues these with considerable energy);
- research and evidence-based (with the targeting of applications based on careful analysis of funders and funded in this space in the UK, and deployment of strong statistics and testimonies in funding applications);
- highly effective in the development and pursuit of strong funding applications;
- reflective (including regular reviews of fund-raising efforts and articulation of both key learning points and key messages/stances for future funding applications);
- relationship-oriented (seeking to build long term relationships with Trusts and their funding officers).

Looking ahead, SWVG fundraising will undoubtedly continue to be a hugely important part of the Group's future success. All the evidence points to the prospect of there being even more demand for the Group's financial support to clients in the next few years:

- there has been a rise in the number of asylum applications in the UK in 2011;
- continuing turmoil in parts of the world will put further pressure on immigration to Europe;
- the number of immigration legal workers is highly likely to fall substantially as a result of significant reductions in legal aid;
- continuing economic difficulties will contribute to further financial hardship for the Group's current and future clients.

Furthermore, the economic climate is going to place huge pressure on the capacity and priorities of grant making organisations.

The Group is therefore determined to continue to put its energetic shoulder to the fundraising wheel to sustain, and if possible grow, the current level of funding. The emerging thinking, with which we agree, is that:

- the current balance across grants, events, individuals and organisations (churches) is broadly right;
- grants and events continue to require particular attention;
- raising the game somewhat on fundraising from individuals would be worthwhile;
- great care should be taken in seeking to raise more funds from businesses and philanthropy because of the effort required to generate even modest returns;
- it would be helpful to continue to reinforce the Group's internal capacity in the Fundraising and Events activities by encouraging even more volunteers to play a role alongside the current leaders of these two critical activities.

10. Financial support to clients – ASSIST scheme

Summary

Since 2004, SWVG has been running the ASSIST scheme to support clients who would otherwise be destitute. Provisions include:

- a weekly payment for food and other necessities;
- payment for the rent of a small room;
- ‘sofa money’ to help some clients contribute to their host’s expenses when staying with a friend;
- small sums of money to help clients access education;
- small financial allocations to clients for a range of specific needs such as bicycle repairs and the provision of clothes and shoes.

In the last five years, ASSIST support has been provided to 41 clients per year on average to the level of £1554 on average.

The Money Allocation group (‘MAG’) takes meticulous care in managing the ASSIST scheme. Its approach is:

- infused with a real sense of care towards clients;
- highly disciplined, systematic and evidence-based;

- outcome-oriented and pragmatic;
- clear that it cannot offer indefinite financial support (MAG curtails its support when a client’s legal options have been exhausted).

SWVG has been increasingly successful in enabling more of its clients to secure state and local authority support, thereby reducing the average ASSIST payment per client over time and maximising the availability of its funds for its whole client base. Two factors in particular have been at work here – the provision of authoritative legal advice via the Legal Justice Project and the introduction of ‘sofa money’ three years ago as an alternative, lower option for certain appropriate cases.

Looking forward, the primary intent is to continue to apply, and where possible to strengthen, MAG’s rigorous processes and in particular to ensure that ASSIST support continues to be both financially and administratively sustainable. The Group has little expectation of any reduction in the overall requirement for ASSIST support in the foreseeable future.

Findings

Operation of the ASSIST scheme

The Group’s funds are spent primarily on the ASSIST scheme which has been running since 2004 to support clients who would otherwise be destitute. If an asylum seeker’s claim for asylum is refused, all support previously provided by the National Asylum Support Service (‘NASS’) is withdrawn – he or she is not allowed to work and not entitled to any sort of benefits (not even for night shelter which requires eligibility for housing benefit), effectively becoming destitute.

All clients on the ASSIST scheme receive £25 per week for food and other necessities (it was reduced to £20 between January 2010 and September 2011 against a background of some concern about the Group’s level of reserves; it is now back at £25). For those whose need is greatest, the Group also pays for the rent of a small room; this has stood at £65 maximum for some time but has recently been increased to £70 maximum (£75 maximum in exceptional circumstances) in light of market conditions in the Southampton area. A cheaper alternative for those who have friends willing to offer them somewhere, however basic, to sleep and keep their few belongings, is to give an additional £10/£20

to enable them to contribute something to their host's expenses; this is known as 'sofa money'.

In addition, the Money Allocation group ('MAG' – see below) also has the authority to allocate small sums of money to help clients access education, usually English classes, and for travel to college. For instance, in 2010/11 eight clients were allocated money for education, six for travel to college and two for enrolment/exam fees. No more than £100 can be paid to a client over a twelve month period, but this small amount can make a difference in allowing clients to enrol for exams, buy books or to afford some transport to college.

SWVG also makes small non-ASSIST financial allocations to clients for a range of specific needs such as bicycle repairs, repairs to a disabled person's scooter, and provision of clothes and shoes. Visitors can independently authorise payments below £20, the Coordinator and Deputy Coordinator authorise payments up to £100, and MAG authorises payments of this nature over £100.

MAG – effectively the Group's Finance Committee – manages the ASSIST scheme on behalf of SWVG, seeking to allocate the money as fairly and as rigorously as possible, and also in as financially sustainable a way as possible (the Treasurer's presence in the group is particularly important in this respect). It meets once per month, sometimes making urgent decisions in the interim by phone and email. It is composed of the Treasurer, the Coordinator and Deputy Coordinator, the Vice Chair and two other visitors (each month, another visitor is invited as an observer so that SWVG members more generally develop an understanding of the financial realities facing the Group and the difficult decisions that need to be made. MAG and the Executive Committee intend to encourage even more active visitor involvement in future). The Group Administrator is also a member of MAG and plays an absolutely vital role at the core of the process, managing the day to day financial records, refunding expenses and paying rents.

To ensure that the Group can always meet their commitment, MAG never agrees to support a client for more than eight weeks without careful review of their situation. At least half of ASSIST recipients are reviewed every month, taking into consideration the progress (if any) with their asylum claim (often supported by legal advice), their health and general vulnerability as well as alternative possible sources of support. Unless there are exceptional circumstances, the Group only supports those for whom there might be some possibility of making a fresh claim or putting in an appeal (again supported where possible by legal advice).

MAG is supported by a full array of data – a table listing all cases (status, risk, country of origin, start date for ASSIST, name of visitor and back-up, support type, current ASSIST amount and duration, costs and comments); visitor notes on each case; and legal advice in a number of cases.

MAG does take decisions in a number of cases, after full consultation with the client and visitor, to withdraw support; because some clients do reach the 'end of the road' when there are no more legal options available and they have no hope of ever obtaining Leave to Remain. Case assessments by the Group's Legal Advisor play a critical role here. The Group is clear that it cannot offer indefinite financial support and some clients need to consider their very limited options for the future (voluntary return to their country of origin or remaining here 'underground'). As shown in the table below, MAG's determination to make these decisions, and also its increasing success over the years in enabling more of its clients to get state and local authority support, is reflected in the declining average levels of ASSIST support over the years (£1635 per client in 2006/7; £1373 per client in 2010/11).

ASSIST Support: 2006/7 – 2010/11

2010/11	£65,900
48 clients (average of £1373 per client)	
2009/10	£71,000
48 clients (average of £1479 per client)	
2008/09	£61,000
35 clients (average of £1743 per client)	
2007/08	£57,000
37 clients (average of £1541 per client)	
2006/07	£63,750
39 clients (average of £1635 per client)	

To take the last twelve months, of the 48 clients who received ASSIST support, 27 were carried over from the previous twelve months and 21 were new recipients. As many as 32 of these 48 clients (66%) came off the ASSIST scheme during 2010/11 for the following reasons:

- Section 4 NASS support – 9;
- Section 4 NASS support then Leave to Remain – 3;
- Leave to Remain – 14;
- moved to friend – 1;
- moved to friend then Leave to Remain – 1;
- legal options exhausted – 4.

Two factors in particular have supported MAG's increasing success in enabling more of its clients to receive state and local authority support and to reduce the average payment per client over time:

- Provision of authoritative legal advice since early 2009 via the Legal Justice Project has made it easier to curtail ASSIST funding in a number of cases because it is now clearer when clients have exhausted their legal options – “*Beforehand, we just did not know for sure*”.
- The introduction of ‘sofa money’ instead of rent for a room three years ago has introduced an alternative, lower option for certain appropriate cases – “*Beforehand, it was just subsistence and rent*”.

Money allocation group working arrangements

We have attended a MAG meeting, talked to its members and studied the supporting data. We are struck by the way MAG’s painstaking and effective work carries the following characteristics:

Infused with a real sense of care

- MAG does its very best to provide appropriate support, but is also ready to take the tough decisions to withdraw support when there are good reasons so to do (exhaustion of all legal possibilities or very occasionally disruption and damage of landlords’ property).

Highly systematic

- MAG has authoritative case notes on all ASSIST recipients.
- The summary data on all the current recipients is comprehensive, built especially on visitors’ notes about all that is happening in the case in terms of legal progress, accommodation, emotional well-being etc.
- There are rigorous routines revolving around the monthly meetings.
- MAG is thoroughly on top of the quantum of individual and collective expenditure at all times.
- There are robust policies (for instance on supporting clients who are not eligible for Section 4 and the use of visitors’ money in supporting clients) and guidelines (for instance on how visitors can find accommodation for their clients) in place. The policies are all discussed and shaped with members in General Meetings.

Evidence-based

- As well as the data above, there are authoritative case assessments from the Group’s Legal Advisor.
- MAG deploys a strikingly deep knowledge of the local and specific circumstances surrounding an ASSIST recipient (landlords, costs, partner agency perspectives).
- MAG is highly informed about the particular circumstances and emotional well-being of the recipient.

Strong, collective decision-making

- There is a strong committee at work here. The Chair role and responsibility for writing meeting notes are rotated. This is not the domain of one or two people.

Highly transparent

- All the relevant data is shared across the Committee, subject to confidentiality.

Clear boundaries

- MAG **does** say ‘no’ to financial requests and **does** curtail support.

Outcome-oriented and pragmatic

- MAG members clearly think hard about what will work best for a particular ASSIST recipient in **their** circumstances. This is not a ‘tick box exercise’; MAG’s focus is squarely on the client as a person and what is most needed in his/her circumstances.

Strongly linked to the work of partner agencies

- For instance, MAG members talk regularly to those who make the NASS support applications to ensure that SWVG clients are not being assisted with SWVG funds for accommodation when other options are available; and requests are often circulated to all Group members and other agencies about the availability of items such as bedding, bicycles and warm clothes.

Investing in the future

Considerations going forward

There is no expectation that the requirement for ASSIST support will lessen in the coming months and years. The primary intent is to continue to apply, and where possible to strengthen, MAG’s rigorous processes and in particular to ensure that the support that it provides continues to be both financially and administratively sustainable. In this respect, future fundraising will be vital of course. But it will also be essential that SWVG continues to safeguard its current approach for distributing the workload for this enterprise, with visitors responsible for key activities such as writing case notes and finding accommodation. The effort would not be sustainable if it rested on the ‘central shoulders’ of a few.

11. Investing in the future: summary of recommendations

The overwhelming requirement for the future is for the Group to continue to stay true to its simple (but not easy!) purpose and to continue to tend the enormous strengths that have been outlined in this report – strengths of impact, people, values, communication and involvement, governance, processes and procedures. This is not to say that the Group can stay still and not change and improve; it never has done this and, with no sign of there being an end to its clients' needs in the Southampton and Winchester area, and with clear signs of funding challenges ahead, it cannot afford to do so now.

This section simply sets out some of the areas that the Group might want to consider as it continues to develop, drawn from the evidence of the previous sections. And we know that, in many of these areas, progress is already underway.

Client experience (Section 3)

1. Consider the potential for ex-clients to become even more actively involved in supporting the Group, perhaps via an alumni group or a wider supporter forum.
2. Generate even stronger data and insights about client experience and impact, showing the outcomes achieved by the Group (including continuing stories and tracking results after Leave to Remain).

Members, volunteers and visitors (Section 4)

3. Sustain active succession planning, continuing to articulate changing capability requirements for members, keeping new people coming into the Group and ensuring that key people are actively supported, shadowed and, in time, succeeded by suitable colleagues.
4. Maintain and always seek to improve the Group's active support to visitor training, back-up support and peer support/mentoring.

5. Provide more clarity as to when the role of SWVG starts and ends with regard to supporting clients; consider introducing the issue of ending the relationship earlier on; and generate more shared knowledge and support on the difficult challenges of ending visitor/client relationships in good order.
6. Consider getting to know non-visiting members better as a means to increasing their involvement.

Relationship with partner agencies (Section 5)

7. Consider opportunities for the Group to lead even more joint thinking across partner agencies about the likely needs of asylum seekers in the area in the next few years, and the requirements for evolving collective responses.
8. Continue to carefully monitor the cost, availability and standards of accommodation in the area.

Campaigning (Section 6)

9. Consider how the Campaigns group might best balance supporting national campaigns with supporting the immediate issues faced by the Group's clients.
10. Ensure the campaigns work is co-ordinated with other outreach work to maximise impact.
11. Consider hosting conferences and networking events to share learning and experience and to strengthen the critical mass on issues of national concern.

Information and advice (Section 7)

12. Make every effort to attract more funding for, and to secure access to, continuing legal advice as part of efforts to integrate the Legal Justice Project within the Group's core work.

- 13.** Engage even more strategically with the Group's main partner agencies about the Group's impact, the changing needs of asylum seekers and refugees, and appropriate collective responses.
- 14.** Initiate more active engagement (based on a simple database and a regular simple newsletter) with individual donors and the multitude of other individuals who come into contact with the Group and its work.
- 15.** Pursue some minor improvements of the website, including ensuring that the Home page carries consistent messages about the Group's purpose and impact.

Finance (Sections 8, 9, 10)

- 16.** Whilst still keeping direct client expenses as a very high proportion of total payments, consider some modest increase in administrative costs in support of even greater effectiveness in some aspects of external communication and fundraising.
- 17.** Continue to put real energy into raising funds from grant making trusts, events, individuals and organisations (particularly churches).
- 18.** Seek in particular to find other grant making trusts prepared to fund the Group to a substantial level; and to raise the game on fundraising from individuals.
- 19.** Continue to encourage more volunteers to play active roles alongside the leaders of the Fundraising and Events groups.
- 20.** Consider constructing a simple database for client case ASSIST notes, so long as the responsibility for up-dating them stays firmly with the visitors.
- 21.** Continue to build general visitor awareness about the realities and challenges of ASSIST processes.

12. Appendix A: clients' stories

Through the research for this report, interviews were carried out with 13 people who were current and past SWVG clients. All had important stories to tell. Three of those stories are set out here – names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

Yonas's story

Yonas arrived in the UK from Ethiopia in 2003. As a member of the Oromo Liberation Front, Yonas's opposition to the Ethiopian government brought him to the attention of the authorities. Yonas's father was arrested and died in prison. After enduring six months of imprisonment and torture himself, it was clear that Yonas had to leave the country. His uncle paid an agent to get hold of the necessary documents and accompany Yonas on a plane to the UK. Once at Heathrow, the agent went with Yonas to Croydon Asylum Unit where they stood in a long queue waiting to talk to officials. Whilst Yonas waited, his agent disappeared and never returned, taking with him all of Yonas's documents. After waiting for hours, Yonas was called into a meeting with an interpreter to explain his situation. At around 10pm that night he was taken with a group of asylum seekers to Ashford in Kent. There he stayed at Millbank Hostel, where he waited, altogether for 45 days, before being dispersed to Southampton in November 2003.

Initially Yonas was granted NASS Support while the Home Office was processing his application. But after months of working with his solicitor and waiting for their decision, his application was refused. Yonas appealed against the decision, but the original decision was upheld. He went on to appeal to a Tribunal, but again he was unsuccessful. His application remained refused. By the summer of 2004, Yonas found himself in a desperate situation. His application had been refused and his case was closed. He had nowhere to go. He had nothing and nowhere to live. He remembers it as being: *"...a terrible time. Everything became very dark. It was very frightening"*.

An Ethiopian friend who had a room offered him space and Yonas stayed there for a while. However, this arrangement could only be temporary: his friend wanted his space back but Yonas had nowhere to go.

Then a friend told him about SWVG and Yonas made contact, finally meeting the Coordinator in January 2005. *"I took all my documents and told her everything. She was very supportive, but she didn't promise me anything. She said all she could do was tell the Committee about me. It was their decision whether to support me or not"*.

SWVG started their support of Yonas on 11th February 2005. They paid rent for a room and gave him money for subsistence. They helped Yonas find another solicitor and in May 2005 they submitted an appeal. The solicitor wrote repeatedly to the Home Office asking for updates on Yonas's case, asking for permission to allow him to work but there was no response. Rather than do nothing, with SWVG's support Yonas became a volunteer at the British Heart Foundation.

Yonas had no response to his appeal until September 2010. From February 2005 until September 2010, he did not receive any NASS support. He was totally reliant on SWVG for subsistence and rent. *"All the time I was afraid. I didn't know what would happen. I was scared they would come to my home and deport me. Anything could happen anytime. Every month I had to report to the police station. If you don't report to the police station then they can arrest you"*.

In September 2010, he was allowed to claim NASS support and was sent to Hastings where there was accommodation. Then suddenly, in October 2010, he was granted Indefinite Leave to Remain. *"It was wonderful!"*

Now Yonas is working as a Production Operative in Southampton. He has just passed his citizenship test and wants to apply for naturalisation. *"There is life now – I am working and pay tax"*

He says of SWVG: *“Through everything they met with me every week. Sometimes I was very down, it was very dark, but they encouraged me. Without SWVG you are completely on your own, no-one cares what happens to you. They supported me with the basic necessities of life: with shelter, food, clothes. But they also encouraged me, helped my morale, encouraged me to improve myself with finding work, getting education, learning to integrate and communicate with the culture in all aspects. They helped me psychologically because sometimes it feels so hopeless. SWVG are my family. I don’t see much of them now, but when there is a meeting or they need some support I am there for them. Things are better now but I haven’t forgotten what they did for me in the darkest time. I will always be there to help them. That’s why I am here now”*.

Kip’s story

Kip arrived four years ago from Eritrea. A Christian Pentecostal, Kip was caught praying with his prayer group of 18. They were all sent to prison for two months and from there sent to work in harsh conditions in cotton fields. Life was difficult and conditions very basic. A group of them decided to run away. Some were caught and taken back but Kip with a few others escaped and walked for two days to Sudan. From there Kip went to Libya, where he was found and put into prison in Misrata. He stayed there for seven months then one morning, while the guard’s back was turned, he took his chance and ran out of the prison grounds. He ran through the town, with police pursuing him and hid in an olive grove where he stayed until dark. He met a Libyan man who promised to help him, but could not offer him anywhere to stay. For days, Kip didn’t sleep but had to hide. Eventually he managed to get himself onto a boat sailing from Libya to Italy. It is a notoriously dangerous journey with often over-packed and dangerous boats: Kip knew that 336 Eritreans had died attempting the journey in the past year. Once in Italy, Kip met a group of people who paid a driver to take them to France. Once in France, Kip stowed himself away in a lorry and was brought to England in 2007. He was found by police and put into a hostel in Dover before being

sent to Ashford. After 14 days in Ashford he came to Southampton.

“They don’t believe me. Everything I’m telling them is the truth. They tell me I didn’t have to leave Eritrea but I have the evidence and witnesses. They can see that my parents have had to pay because I left. Police at Dover found me on a truck and I had to sign something. I didn’t know what I signed, but now I realise I signed to say I was over 18, but I wasn’t. I didn’t know what I was signing. But they don’t believe me”.

In Southampton he went to the church and members of the congregation allowed him to stay and gave him food. He stayed with different people for a few months at a time. In 2009 he had to have an operation and was put into Home Office accommodation but then was moved out and went back to staying with friends.

In August 2009 he met SWVG. *“They’ve helped me in many ways. They helped me find a solicitor and with money and accommodation. But they help me with my morale. They tell me not to worry. My visitor is like a brother – we chat about everything”*.

Kip wants to study for GCSEs and take a course to be an electrician. But he has no money and a recent back injury has been giving him problems. His recent application for asylum was rejected. SWVG are supporting him to find a solicitor to represent him at appeal.

Aban’s story

Aban is from Syria. He lost both his parents at an early age and, with his sisters, was raised by his uncle. Aban supported his uncle in his opposition to the ruling party and this brought problems with the Syrian authorities. Realising that Aban needed to leave Syria, his uncle paid someone to accompany Aban out of the country.

In all it took Aban 27 days to travel from Syria to England. He was 16 years old when he left and on the way he was looked after by different people at different stages of the journey. Every day was different. Some days he was travelling and some days he stayed in houses, but he always had to

stay indoors. He didn't know where he was or even what country he was in. He hid with a group in a refrigerator lorry and eventually made it to England. On their arrival, the lorry driver called the police who found him there.

Aban stayed in Ashford for two months and then he was sent to Bristol where he lived for two years. He applied for asylum but was refused after six months. It was a very hard life. He had nothing – nowhere to stay, nothing to eat. After 21 days he had to leave England and went to Belgium where he applied for asylum. But they sent him back to England. On his return he was sent to a detention centre in Oxford for three months and then sent to Southampton where there was accommodation for him. He applied again for asylum but was again refused and had to leave his accommodation.

It was a terrible situation. Again Aban was homeless with nowhere to go. With no other choice, he slept in the park but it was very cold. He came to Avenue St Andrews where he could get food vouchers and Refugee Action told him about SWVG. When he met the SWVG Coordinator he carried everything he owned in a bag. He hadn't been able to sleep for days because it was so cold outside.

SWVG first found him a room to stay. Then they helped him with food and with some money for clothes. *“They helped me with everything. They are like parents. It was a very hard life – you can't work, you have nothing. For two years I lived like that. But my visitor helped me. He listened to my problems. They helped me find a solicitor”.*

Aban was recently granted temporary Leave to Remain. His uncle has now died and he hasn't been able to maintain contact with his sisters. He wants now to settle in the UK, to study, work and eventually get married and have children.

13. Appendix B: approach to *Investing in the future*

This Appendix outlines:

- the **methodology** used for *Investing in the future*;
- the **events** we attended and the **documents** we reviewed;
- the **people** who agreed to be interviewed and generously gave their time to contribute.

It has been a pleasure working with SWVG to document their work. Throughout we have been hugely impressed by the Group's dedication to its clients, and the integrity and professionalism of its members. Documenting the work of such a uniquely dedicated volunteer group has been a privilege.

We undertook the project between September and December 2011. We (Julian Powe and Stella Smith) are both management consultants and are Associates of the Centre for Charity Effectiveness at CASS Business School.

The overall aim for the project has been to provide SWVG with a clear record of their work to:

- act as a strong evidence base for discussions with potential funders;
- support the spread and exchange of good practice among similar organisations;
- stimulate continuing improvement within the Group.

We are grateful to all those associated with SWVG who kindly donated their time and thoughts to this project. In particular our appreciation goes to the steering group for the project (Christine Knight, Andrew White, Anne Leeming, Sue Turner) who have individually and as a team worked closely with us.

Methodology

Throughout the project, we have endeavoured to stay true to the values and principles of SWVG, particularly the Group's deep respect for the men and women who are its clients. The client experience, and the impact of SWVG's work on their lives, has been the foundation stone of our methodology.

There have been three main Stages.

In **Stage 1**, we developed an initial hypothesis about the Group's impact on clients and the values, policies, systems and processes that underpinned this impact. In addition to background reading and research, this stage included meetings with the steering group and attendance at meetings of the Executive Committee and Money Allocation group. There were also telephone interviews with key individuals. This set the background for *Investing in the future*, highlighting the rigour of SWVG processes combined with a concern and interest in the wellbeing of clients and volunteers.

Stage 2 focused on testing and deepening this hypothesis, examining in more depth those areas of SWVG's work which were identified in Stage 1 as being critical to the success of the Group. This stage involved meeting clients, attending meetings (and a party!) and interviewing volunteers, visitors and relevant external stakeholders. There was also a review of data and documentation. The areas of focus for this research were **client experience; members, volunteers and visitors; relationships with partner agencies; campaigning; information and advice; and finance.**

Stage 3 involved finalising and presenting the results. In close consultation with the steering group, we explored and analysed the findings, checked our understanding and wrote up the record of SWVG's work.

Events attended and documents reviewed

We attended a number of events including:

- an Executive Committee meeting;
- a Money Allocation group meeting;
- a General Meeting (where we facilitated a discussion among members about SWVG);
- a Campaigns group meeting;
- the SWVG 10th Anniversary party;
- two drop in sessions at the Avenue Multicultural Centre at Avenue St Andrews' Church in Southampton.

We reviewed a number of documents including:

- policies and procedures on the website and in the SWVG Visitor Red File;
- past and current annual reports;
- Memorandum and Articles of Association;
- recent internal reports on Visitors' Support and the Legal Justice Project;
- documentation supporting Visitor Training;
- fundraising group working papers and documentation;
- minutes of committee and sub-committee meetings (specifically the Executive Committee and Money Allocation group);
- 'This is My Home Now', a booklet featuring stories about refugees and asylum seekers in the Southampton and Winchester area.

People interviewed

We are grateful to all the people below who, in addition to the steering group, generously gave their time to be interviewed as part of this project:

SWVG Members:

Jackie Batchelor, Dennis Cooke, Jilly Cooke, Elizabeth Decie, Shirley Firth, Catherine Gregory, Linda Huggett, John Launder, Graeme Marshall, Judith Martin, John Mellor, Rachel Robertson, Angela Sealey, Liz Statham, Hazel Still

SWVG Clients:

We interviewed six past clients and seven current clients (their names have been withheld in line with SWVG policy)

SWVG Staff:

Xanthe Hackett (Administrator), Elspeth Howie (Secretary in 2011)

SWVG Advisor (fundraising):

Stefan Lipa, Stefan Lipa Consulting

Partner Agencies:

British Red Cross – George Brown, Azalia Gosling
CLEAR – Stella Haig, Cath Watkins, Pam Watson
Homeless Health – Pam Campbell
MP's Office – Christine Bull, Personal Assistant to Alan Whitehead
Refugee Action – Admir Selimovic
Ready Homes – Tracie Kochanowska
St Mary's GP Surgery – Barbara Guthrie
Southampton City Council – Tony Pascoe, Neighbourhood Directorate

Landlords in Southampton area:

Mark Breen, Martin Guest

Funders:

Henry Smith Charity – Jo Murren
Lankelly Chase Foundation – Ailsa Holland
The Allen Foundation – Gill Aconley

Legal Justice Project:

Jo Renshaw, Partner, Turpin and Miller, Oxford