

Bradford Destitution Project Annual Report 2020

In a year dominated by the Covid 19 Global Pandemic which shook everyone into a different way of living and coping it is good to focus on the positive contribution Abigail Destitution Project makes to our residents by sharing the words from one of them:

“I want with all my heart to say **thank you** to Abigail Housing. They help me a lot, a lot, and I can never imagine that I could get food, accommodation, **just everything**. Its not easy but just **thank you because before it was hard**, very hard. Just **thank you, thank you**. I have hope, **hope that everything is going to be fine**. Thank you **for continuing to help me**. God bless you guys”.

In 2020, The Bradford Destitution Project

- Accommodated and supported 28 refused asylum seekers from 11 different countries.
- Prevented 5,522 nights of homelessness.
- Provided £14,145 in Weekly Allowances of £20 and 188 bus fares to vital appointments.
- 33 weekly drop-in sessions delivered by our experienced and capable volunteers.
- Distributed 744 food parcels.
- 1289 Individual support sessions and 327 individual casework sessions were offered.
- 7 people moved onto Home Office support and accommodation.
- 1 person granted Leave to Remain: Refugee Status.

Echoing the wisdom of our resident above: Thank you from our hearts.

In early February 2020 we had a meeting in the office at Touchstone and Amanda said “things do not look good, look what is going on in Italy. ” Yes our Project Manager was way ahead in her anticipation that soon the office would close, the Monday Drop In would cease, that she, and volunteers would soon be packing the food bags and household goods to take to our residents in their five houses across the city.

In March we interviewed Medhat Fakhoury, a Coptic Christian and former Lawyer and Business Analyst in Egypt. As an asylum seeker he had joined us as a volunteer and as an Arabic speaker he made a big impact on the help we could offer during the Drop-In sessions. When he received Refugee Status, he brought with him the “lived experience” which influenced how we made decisions. Medhat was certainly qualified to take on the Role as Relief Worker and then Housing Support Staff. A Big Thank you Medhat. He had no idea what an important role he was going to play in terms of support!

In March we had to cancel the Irish Night which would have been another evening of fun and music as we danced to the music of the “Wild Geese” Band. Tickets had been sold and kind people refused to take the money back. Thank you to Clare, Sharon, Fr Gregory, Mick, Andrew and the Band for your kindness and support.

Thank you for your generosity and kindness, the individual extra mile people.

To Giddy Arts Saltaire whose customers supported our charity and then he delivered quality food and containers of cleaning products so we could refill and reuse and begin a new era of awareness about how we should care for the planet.

To Wellsprings whose donations were delivered by Inn Churches

To Bookers Warehouse who generously donate toilet rolls on a regular basis.

To Racial Justice Network who donated phones and top up cards

To Tesco Fair share

To St Pauls, Shipley.

To the Skipton Refugee Group.

To the Sisters of the Holy Family of Bordeaux for their regular substantial contributions.

To many individuals who donate monthly, one off donation or deliver food and household products.

To the Mirfield Foodbank group who travel over to Bradford and bring supplies of food and lovely 'goodies' to us.

To Bevan Health Care Team in Bradford who gives our residents so much health support.

To Green Pastures and The Diocese of Bradford who have provided the houses we use.

Without the help from individuals and groups of people, from the wonderful charities , who are mentioned in other parts of our reports and are the backbone of our funding , without the positive encouragement which witnesses our support for this community of people we seek to share on a journey to dignity, we could not hear the words spoken in Italics by our grateful residents.

" I can relax in Abigail because you let me be myself you are not always asking me hard and painful questions."

Thank you to the Volunteers who make sure "everything will be fine".

2020 had to be the year of being flexible in how we responded to the new situation.

Volunteers had meetings on Zoom, and they agreed to make regular 'welfare' phone calls with our residents.

Thank you for giving "Hope":

During Refugee week in June, we took up the theme of hope and challenged friends, volunteers, and supporters to join us in '**Climb for Hope**'. We chose the mountain called Erta Ale, an active volcano, in Ethiopia It is 613m high. The equivalent in steps to reach the summit is 805 steps. We divided these steps between us and across the charity and cites we raised £1,600 so an uplifting experience all round.

"When I am with you people, I am relaxed, I feel different, and I forget some of my problems."

In July 2020 we received a donation so we could buy a laptop for each house so residents could engage in educational, holistic, and creative activities across the wider network. We hoped to also provide EAL classes. By November, all our houses were set up, so we were able to have contact by Zoom and the Christmas party was a big success and fun.

"I am learning so much to help me in the future, to read to spell and to speak English, Its all fun."

One of our volunteers was given the Green Pastures Award for his regular work support at the Drop in and extra research he did in locating resources which were sent to Residents via "What's app". His support as an interpreter is valued across the charity.

Volunteers from Skipton came and worked in the Garden at one of the houses in July and Socially Distanced walks in Parks were organised.

By September and October, the worry about the increased spread of new variants of Covid meant we had to cancel a visit to Skipton Castle which The Yorkshire Dales Millennium.

"You are my family; I am so grateful for friendship and to be able to meet so many different people."

In October Safety F1rst Community Training Centre based in the heart of Bradford city centre offered us space and an organised safe environment where we could meet our residents again in their 'house bubbles'. The 'Drop In 'was therefore spread over two days and the food bags were delivered on Friday. The work and effort had tripled but there were visible signs that the personal contact was a lifeline for our residents. We are grateful to Chris at Safety F1rst and the team for their welcome and support.

"I am helped with my thinking especially when I am confused and when there is so much going on in my head that I can't tell anyone."

Thank you. Thank You

To the Subgroup, volunteers who meet to support the work undertaken and a huge thanks to **Michael Skelton** who served as Secretary for ten years and but was also so positive and supportive of staff and the project. He gave considered advice and when he decided to retire in December some tears of loss were shed. He is hopefully enjoying his garden.

Thank you to Ruth Cooke, our Director and all the Board who support our project.

Thank you to Neal Heard and the Staff at the Refugee Project in Leeds whose work generates income and whose expertise and support working with Refugees, in particular , is appreciated in our partnership.

Thank you to Cath who is our admin assistant and an expert on the quick book system as well as producing our Charity letter.

A huge shoutout of thanks to Amanda who leads the Project with dedication, passion, and unstinting hard work. She has built Abigail Housing Destitution Project, so we are a recognised, effective charity

in the sector. She is part of the network in Bradford; ASROG and DCB and has been involved in initiatives to have a network for a Single Point of Access for Asylum Seekers and Refugees. Amanda is a strategic thinker par excellence, and she is valued by her contacts with NACCOM and other agents. The hidden work she does supporting our residents never gets written down in reports, but they know about the phone calls, the detail required in following up their cases and that her quality of care is outstanding. Having Medhat as the Housing Support Worker has created a powerful effective team.

My last words of thanks go to the Henry Smith Charity Foundation who have supported us for six years and in October wrote to tell us our application was successful *"Your organisation is amongst the 20% of applicants applying to receive award"*.

They wrote ***"During assessment we were particularly impressed with your well-connected organisation that provides holistic housing, advice and support services to destitute asylum seekers in Bradford. You maintain close working relationships with relevant partners organisations in the city and you ensure your service users benefit from immediate and ongoing outcomes as they navigate the asylum process."*** The grant of £153,800 followed this email.

I hope this inspires confidence in this small charity who reaches out and walks along the path with some people of our world who represent all who suffer from displacement from their homes caused by violence, war, discrimination, human trafficking, and abuse. We need to be proactive in defending people but also speak up for justice for those who have no voice against the powerful.

Many thanks

Teresa Jackson

Volunteer and Chair of the Bradford Destitution Project

Member of the Board for Abigail Housing Charity

LAST WORDS GO TO OUR FAMILY

" I enjoy sharing when we meet new people, I have made good friends and learn about different cultures."

"I am helped with my thinking especially when i am confused and when there is so much going on in my head that i can't tell anyone."