

# 2013

ANNUAL REPORT



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### Highlights

In our third year we have supported five successful family reunions through our family reunion service. All travel service clients except one have come from the North West.

Our travel service, for clients who can self fund or find alternative funding has been well used with 11 families being reunited in this way. Travel service clients have come from around the UK.

In September our conference brought together people from a range of organisations to discuss the issues around family reunion.

## OUR AIMS

Our objectives as set out in the formal registration are; the relief of financial hardship, the advancement of education and the relief of unemployment among refugees living in the UK and their dependent family members.

Our vision is that all refugees living in the UK seeking to be reunited with their family are not prevented from doing so by financial circumstance. We also aim to ensure that no hardship is caused by the costs of the reunion and that the family are able to travel in safety.

Our core activity to support these aims is the family reunion service for refugees in the UK which provides a flexible range of support depending on the needs of the family.

Our plans for the third year included:

- Extending the scope of our work through our travel service
- Continuing to build up our fundraising activities
- Promoting our work to raise the profile of both the importance of family reunion and the organisation

## Romain's story

Romain, a nurse, came to the UK five years ago after being persecuted by the government in his home country, the Democratic Republic of Congo.

He was forced to leave behind his wife and three children and flee to the UK.

It took four years until his application for asylum was approved and he was then able to apply for visas for his family to come and join him.

Whilst he was separated from his family it was difficult for them to keep in touch and he was worried a lot about their safety back home.

Romain had been attending the Freedom from Torture North West for weekly psychological therapy.

“I was worried about my family's safety while we were apart”

Six months later the visas were received and Romain was referred to the Refugee Welcome Trust by Freedom from Torture (FFT).

With the help of FFT we met with Romain to start making travel arrangements for his family.

We were able to ensure that his family could travel with a French speaking airline and arrange a slightly longer transit for them to negotiate Brussels airport.

“Without funding it would have been very difficult”



The overnight flight arrived first thing and we were able to be there with Romain to greet his family. Romain said it was very good to see his family after so long and he was 'very very happy for a long while and still am.' He was also relieved that it all happened so quickly.

“When I saw my family I was very very happy for a long while and still am. Every day is different”

His family are now getting used to life in the UK 'bit by bit' and are 'happy and enjoying peace.'

When asked about his plans for the future Romain is focused on looking after his children, bringing them up to have a good education and getting a job in the UK.

## ACHIEVING OUR AIMS

This year has seen an increase in cases through both the family reunion service and the travel service.

## FAMILY REUNION SERVICE

We have provided full support for five family reunion cases this year with an average cost per person of £526. This includes the travel as well as a range of additional expenses we fund on a discretionary basis for example, airport taxes, money to buy food during long transfers and transport home from the airport. Costs continue to be low due to each case being managed by volunteers.

These cases have included:

- A father reunited with his wife and two daughters who had been living in hiding outside their country of origin. Sadly his son is still awaiting his visa and was unable to travel with the rest of the family but we have committed to be able to support his travel once this is resolved.
- A mother reunited with her daughter who had been staying with an elderly relative.
- A wife reunited with her husband.
- A father reunited with his wife and three children. (Romain tells his full story in our case study)
- A father reunited with his wife and two young daughters.

## TRAVEL SERVICE UPDATE

We received 13 enquiries specifically about the travel service. The majority were from organisations referring clients.

Out of these 13 enquiries we were able to process 11 travel service cases. The enquiries that did not progress as RWT cases were because even with any savings we were able to offer the cost was still too high for the family. We hope that in the future we will be able to help more of these families with the cost of travel.

Over the year the travel service has supported the journeys of 24 people. A total of four cases were funded by Prisoners of Conscience who we worked with directly.

We were happy to see one father coming back to us as a repeat customer when his second daughter was granted a visa.

Each case has presented its own challenges and our travel agents, Diversity Travel, have played a key role in supporting our service. This is both through ensuring we continue to get the best value for money on each flight but also in helping us to arrange the easiest possible journey for the families.

They have been able to assist us in a broad range of areas from looking at different routes with easier transfers, airlines whose staff speak the language of those travelling and requests for special assistance.

## Claude's story

Claude arrived in the UK seeking asylum in 2003 but was only granted leave to remain (ILR) in 2010 as part of the case resolution directorate. He had not seen his daughter, Claire, for nine years by the time she was finally able to join him in the UK.

Claude started to work in 2010 as a security guard. It took him a long time to save enough money to be able to pay for the visa fees for Claire to join him and they had to go through an appeal process.

When the visa came through Claude did not have enough money to be able to pay for her airfare. It was high season and tickets were very expensive, around \$1,300 (£810) to travel from Kinshasa.

He came to the British Red Cross and was referred to our travel service. We were able to get Claire a ticket for £374 just under half the price of a commercial fare.

Claude says:

"I ask for other people with cases like me to come to the Refugee Welcome Trust. When she got the visa, Claire said, "When will I come?"

She had to wait for me to get money. I missed her for 10 years."

"I was very relieved that it all happened so quickly"

Now Claire is settling into life in Leeds;

"It was great when I heard I would be coming. The flight was easy. I was overjoyed to see my dad because so much time had passed."

## SUPPLY AND DEMAND

We received 19 enquiries with visas in place equating to over 45 people needing our support with travel.

With our average cost per person just over £520 we would have potentially needed to have around £24,000 in additional funding available provide a service to these individuals.

In addition to the enquiries where the family is likely to have met the criteria for our family reunion service there were some where they were likely to have done so in the next six months or if we had the capacity to reasonably extend our criteria.

Of these:

- 39 enquiries were received from people needing to obtain visas for family reunion
- 3 requests for retrospective funding for family reunion

If these families had got visas it we would have required over £60,000 in additional funding to be able to provide a service to them.

## ENQUIRIES

In addition to the main services we provide we have seen an increase in enquiries coming through the website.

There were 231 enquiries in total despite it being made clear there was no funding available to take on new cases.

Out of these 74 were related to our work and the other 157 were relating to services we do not provide such as immigration advice.

The key areas issues for people contacting us in this way were requiring:

- Additional money for living, housing or education costs.
- Advice on how to seek asylum in the UK. These were from people both within and outside the UK.
- General immigration advice

We also saw our enquiries reflect events in Syria with an increasing number of people from within Syria contacting us asking for help.

Although we are clear that we are not in a position to offer immigration advice we responded to the increase in enquiries by working to consolidate our knowledge on the remit of other organisations in order to be able to refer people on effectively.

We feel it is important to respond to these enquiries quickly and with as much advice as possible on where to go next given some of the desperate situations people are presenting with.

We aim to reply to every enquiry within one working day and to date have managed to maintain this service.

Despite us not always being able to help we have seen a growing number of people return to us for further signposting.

Unfortunately this is in part a reflection on the cuts being made around the sector and we are hearing reports of people being unable to access the advice or services they need.

## CONFERENCE

*"I would welcome more events like this in the future to be able to share ideas and good practice with other agencies working in this field."*

*"A different experience and chance to meet other people from different organisations"*

*"An insight into an area I previously had limited knowledge of"*

On the 9th September 2013 we held our first conference event. The aim was to bring together organisations working with people throughout the family reunion process.

The choice of speakers reflected this and included:

- Wei Lynn Ng, British Red Cross International Family Tracing,
- Clare Farnsworth, Freedom From Torture,
- Denise McDowell, Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit,
- Jon Lord, Bolton at Home, a local housing association,
- Kimberley Rennick and Jennifer Tuft, British Red Cross Research Evaluation and Impact Team

There was a good turnout of around 40 people on the day and the feedback was generally positive.

## FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Restricted funds  
£2937.33  
Unrestricted funds  
£1121.43  
Total income  
£4058.76

Total cost of family reunion service  
£6316.30  
Total expenditure  
£7372.90\*  
Total carried over to Year 4  
£770.94

\*The expenditure of £1056.60 that was not spent on cases was for the conference which was covered by the £1121 of unrestricted funds which included the conference fees.

The conference itself broke even with no money being spent on this from donations. We are still able to offer donors the promise that 100% of their donation is spent directly on cases.

## SOURCES OF INCOME

Individual giving  
£1889.69  
Fundraising activities  
£1047.74  
Conference Income      £952.00  
Travel Service      £165.13  
Miscellaneous  
£4.30  
Total Income      £4058.76

This year fundraising activities have been predominantly based around supermarket collections and speaking at local groups. Fundraising has been identified as a priority for next year.

## LOOKING AHEAD

Following a busy year we are hopeful that next year we can continue to take on more cases.

The main obstacle we have to being able to fulfil this objective is a lack of funding so as a result a key priority is to expand our fundraising activities and secure grant funding.

We have also developed a promotion and marketing plan for increasing awareness of the organisation as a whole.

We hope that increasing knowledge of the service within the sector will help to avoid seeing the cases where people are applying for retrospective funding having overpaid for their family's travel.

## THANKS

We would like to say thank you to the following people who have provided their time and expertise to support our work or who have made a difference by going above and beyond what they need to do when providing a paid service.

All the staff at Diversity Travel who have been so patient and understanding of our client's needs and who have taken the time to give us an amazing service for every case we have worked with them on.

The staff at British Airport Transfers who took the time to listen to our special requirements and did everything they could to help us make things easy for the family including providing a taxi driver who spoke their language.

All the staff at Freedom From Torture for providing us with a place to meet clients and all their support with everything we do.

Our conference speakers, Wei Lynn Ng, Clare Farnsworth, Denise McDowell, Jon, Lord, Kimberly Rennick and Jennifer Tuft, who gave up their time free of charge to support the event.

Dave Wostenholme at idhost for continuing to provide our website hosting free of charge.

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