Destitution, Asylum & Insecure Immigration Status in Scotland

Submission to Scottish Parliament Equalities and Human Rights Committee

March 2017

Glasgow Night Shelter for Destitute Asylum Seekers
www.glasgownightshelter.org
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Introduction

Glasgow Night Shelter was started in December 2011 to provide a safe space for men and women who because of their immigration status were not able to access normal homeless services, primarily refused asylum seekers. Initially intended to run for only a few months the positive impact it was having on people staying at the shelter was so apparent that it was decided to continue the shelter for as long as possible. At first the shelter was run from the old women’s wing of The Shielings operated by Glasgow City Mission on the Broomielaw.

On 1 April 2012 the shelter moved location to the Lansdowne church at Kelvinbridge, Glasgow where it used the downstairs floor from 8pm to 9am for one year. On 1st April 2013 the night shelter moved to its current location at the Anderston parish church, 759 Argyle Street, G3 8DS. In February 2015 the night shelter became a Scottish charity with charity number SC045411 and in March 2017, charity members agreed at an EGM to dissolve this charity in favour of becoming a SCIO.

Glasgow Night Shelter currently has three part time members of staff. 2 co-ordinators and a person who supervises in the morning. Apart from them, volunteers do the bulk of the work required to keep the night shelter running. At the moment, we have a list of 225 volunteers that receive our weekly email about the running of the night shelter.

Currently between 22 – 28 destitute migrant men stay at the night shelter every night.

Although we aim to provide emergency overnight shelter for destitute asylum seekers who are not allowed any recourse to public funds, we have other migrants, who, because of their immigration status, cannot get housing benefits and are not allowed to access temporary accommodation. Currently, several men at the shelter are newly arrived in the UK and waiting to start their asylum case, others have outstanding asylum applications but been excluded from Home Office accommodation either because they are believed to have savings over £1000 or because the housing provider has not found them accommodation yet. About a third of the men at the shelter are EU nationals.

The shelter runs from 8pm to 8am. Each night 3 or 4 volunteers stay overnight to ensure the security and safety of the space. Other volunteers contribute in the evening between 8pm and 11pm when the doors are locked and no one else is allowed in. On average about 36 volunteers are involved in the running of the shelter every week. A hot evening meal is prepared and served every night between 9.00pm and 10.00 and men can get their bedding out from 9.30pm. Lights out is at 11.30pm. Men sleep on mattresses on the floor and are issued with sleeping bags, duvets, blankets, pillows which they are allowed to keep while at the shelter. In the morning every one has to be up by 7.30am and out of the building by 8am.

Currently the agreement with the church is that women are not allowed at the shelter although we feel there are no good reasons for this and believe we could easily provide a safe supportive space for homeless asylum seeker women as well. We’re currently actively looking for larger space to use as a larger, mixed night shelter for 35 men and 15 women.
Methodology
A short questionnaire was drawn up (copy at Appendix 1.) This was completed by asylum seeker men staying at the night shelter between 21\textsuperscript{st} February and 1\textsuperscript{st} March 2017 and by asylum seeker men who previously stayed at the night shelter and were visiting the shelter while the survey was being carried out.

Most were completed with the help of one of the night shelter staff or volunteers. Three were completed by the men themselves. 15 questionnaires were eventually returned (1 incomplete, 14 completed.)

Any language difficulties were overcome by the use of Google translate on mobile phones or using other men staying at the night shelter who could speak the same language.

Results
15 questionnaires were returned, 1 was incomplete.

Of the 15 men sampled none were under the age of 18 (Table 1) and most (11 men) were under the age of 35, 3 were between 36 and 50 years old and only 1 man was older than 50 years old.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>Under 18</th>
<th>26-35</th>
<th>61-65</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Age range of men questioned

The men came from 11 different countries, two men came from both Pakistan, Algeria and Morocco whilst the others were from Eritrea, Libya, Syria, Rwanda, Iran, Kosovo, Palestine and Sudan. Most men had some English although for a third it was limited (Table 2.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of English</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Limited</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 2. Level of English

The amount of time that men had spent in the UK varied considerably with one man having spent 9 years in the UK whilst another had been in the UK for only a week or so. Ten of the 15 men had spent at least 1 year in the UK. Similarly the range of time spent in Glasgow varied from 3 days to 8 years with just over half the men (8) having spent 1 year or more in Glasgow. 5 of the men questioned had spent more than a year sleeping overnight at the night shelter with one man having been at the night shelter for over two years. Of the 14 completed questionnaires, the average time spent at the night shelter was 8 months ranging from only 3 days for one man to over 2 years for another.

Eight of the men questioned said they had stayed in Home Office accommodation for periods ranging between 10 months and 4.5 years. 5 of the 8 had spent more than 1 year in Home Office accommodation. Of the 8, three told us they had received “Section 4” support although there was a lot of confusion about what support they had received. Men had received “Section 4” support for periods ranging from 3 to 18 months.

When asked where they had stayed before coming to the night shelter, four men said they had stayed with friends. 5 had slept outside, one man had been in detention and another
had been in a commercial hostel that he had been paying for. 4 had come direct to the night shelter directly from Home Office accommodation. When asked how long they had stayed with friends the answers ranged from 2 weeks to 2 years whilst those who said they had been sleeping outside said they had been doing this for 3 nights to two years before coming to the night shelter.

When the 5 men who had said they had been sleeping outside were asked if they had felt safe then, four of them said no.

Notes made at the time for their answers on what had made them feel unsafe include:

- Didn’t trust anyone, no English, couldn’t relax as never knew what people were saying. Slept in the doorway of an office. Got food from charities and a soup kitchen. [Two weeks sleeping rough in Liverpool, England]

- The threat of violence and the stress of having been attacked previously. It was horrible. Experienced severe flashbacks. Slept in parks, gardens and on the street. Got food mainly from friends. [6 weeks sleeping rough in England]

- Spent 5 years in HO [Home Office] accommodation [with no support, in Glasgow] while they tried to evict him. [Plus 1 year with friend.] Being long term homeless has compounded his anxiety over his legal situation and increased his health problems including clinical depression. He felt very anxious of the HO constant threat of eviction.

- Hungry, cold, alone, sometimes slept on the street sometimes in a park. Took food from rubbish bins. [Homeless 2 years in England and Scotland.]

Of the people staying with friends two of them said they had also got additional food from outside agencies, from a Gurdwara and the Central Mosque in Glasgow.

Of the agencies listed, men identified that they had received help from all of the agencies except from DASS [Destitute Asylum Seeker Service led by Refugee Survival Trust]. None of the men knew what the letters “DASS” stood for. Of the four Integration Networks, only the Govan and Craigton Integration Network (now Govan Community Project) was identified as having helped one man.

Two churches, the Tron Church in the city centre and St Andrews Church were identified as having helped the men, the Tron church being identified three separate times. Similarly two Mosques, the Central Mosque and Paisley Mosque were also identified as places where men had got help. Five of the men said they had received help from the Central Mosque.

Outside of the list, men also listed the Simon Community Street Team, the Sikh temple (Gurdwara), the Social Bite social enterprise café project and the Migrant Help charity as being agencies that had provided help of one kind or another.

When asked how they had been helped the men replied:

“Food and lawyer; Coffee and a talk at church; Shelter, food, etc. at NS [night shelter]; Street team directed him to shelter; Food;
Sport, football team;
Food clothes money;
Shelter, food, legal advice, health advice;
Given £20 a fortnight for 5 months from PAIH, St Andrews gave him £10 once a week;
Sometimes food, space to pray; financial support, advice, legal support;
Food from Mosque;”

Not surprisingly of the 14 completed questionnaires all 14 identified the night shelter as having been a source of help. 11 also said the night shelter had been the most useful.

Three refugee services, the Red Cross, Positive Action in Housing and the Scottish Refugee Council were all identified as having helped half of the men questioned (7) whilst two homeless charities, City Mission and Marie Trust, were also identified as helping the men at the shelter in 7 of the fourteen replies. The Unity Centre was identified by 28% of the men as a source of help as well (4 out of 14.) Two men identified another homeless charity, the Wayside Club.

Apart from the night shelter identified as the most helpful by 11 of the men, two men felt the Red Cross had been most helpful whilst three felt Positive Action in Housing had been. Another felt the City Mission had provided the best range of support. Numbers here do not match the total number of questionnaires completed (17 instead of 14) as some men indicated finding more than one agency as being 'most' helpful.

When asked to rank which services had been the hardest to find men, perhaps reflecting the services available at the night shelter, placed a shower as top and Emotional support at the bottom (Table 3.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hardest to find</th>
<th>Ranked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[hardest] 1 – 10 [easiest]</td>
<td>[Hardest to find]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice 8 [69]</td>
<td>1. Shower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food 9 [93]</td>
<td>2. STLYB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing 7 [66]</td>
<td>3. APTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedding 5 [58]</td>
<td>4. Laundry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APTS 3 [49]</td>
<td>5. Bedding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STLYB 2 [44]</td>
<td>6. Friendly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laundry 4 [57]</td>
<td>7. Clothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shower 1 [37]</td>
<td>8. Advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emo 10 [104]</td>
<td>9. Food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly 6 [62]</td>
<td>10. Emo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Which is hardest to find? Men were asked to identify by ranking from 1-10 which services they had found the hardest to access. This gave each service a maximum possible score of 140 (14 x 10.) The higher the answer indicating the easier the service is to find.

Key: APTS = A place to stay; STLYB = Somewhere to leave your belongings; Emo = Emotional support; Friendly = Friendly Space.

Men also identified services that were not included on this list such as Sunday activities, work and money. Sunday activities reflects how many places the men attend for support including the Mitchell library are closed on a Sunday.
Perhaps not surprisingly men identified a place to stay as the most important thing to find (Table 4.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most important</th>
<th>Ranked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[Most] 1 – 10 [Least]</td>
<td>[Most important]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice</td>
<td>10 [67]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>7.5 [59]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>4.5 [53]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedding</td>
<td>4.5 [53]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APTS</td>
<td>1 [28]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STLYB</td>
<td>3 [50]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laundry</td>
<td>7.5 [59]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shower</td>
<td>2 [40]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emo</td>
<td>9 [61]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>6 [54]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[Least important]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Which is the most important to find? Men were asked to identify by ranking from 1 -10 which services they had found the hardest to access. This gave each service a maximum possible score of 140 (14 x 10.) The higher the answer indicating the easier the service is to find.

Key: APTS = A place to stay; STLYB = Somewhere to leave your belongings; Emo = Emotional support; Friendly = Friendly Space.

This was followed by a shower, somewhere to leave your belongings, clothing and bedding. Advice was at the very bottom of the list with emotional support ranked as being second least important thing to find.

Of the support services they had received when asked if they had anything else to say, some of the men answered:

“Thank you for helping”

“Scotland is the first time since travelling through Europe for the last 2 years that I have felt like a human being.”

“I found a big welcome”

“Wish to say thank you to everyone who has helped me”

“Thank you”

“Status and a home is the most important thing for us all”

Of the public services, 9 of the 15 men interviewed had accessed healthcare services while at the shelter and 10 of them had used a public library. Only 1 recorded they had used a Post Office or bank and only two had accessed a college.

None of them said they had encountered any problems accessing these services.
Discussion

The results from the questionnaires appear to accurately reflect the range of men staying at the night shelter. Most men at the night shelter are under the age of 35 years old (78%) but we can get men into their 60's staying here. Most speak some English but mostly not very well. A few speak very good English. Men will stay at the night shelter for a short period of time but we have a significant number of men, about a third (35%), who have needed to stay at the night shelter for a year or two, or sometimes even longer.

The men's journeys to the shelter also reflect the diversity we have at the shelter. It is difficult to think of circumstances worse than being homeless in a strange city in a foreign country and unable to speak the language. Two thirds of the men had experienced some sort of destitution before coming to the shelter. 9 of them had either stayed with friends or slept outside before coming to the shelter (64%). The time spent in this precarious situation varied from a few days to a significant period of many months, possibly even years. 35% of the men (5) had slept rough for more than one night before coming to the shelter. 4 of these five had been worried about being attacked and one at least had been subject to violence.

Four of the men (28%) came straight the shelter after being evicted from Home Office accommodation, whilst another was released from detention directly to the night shelter. It is worrying that someone could be released from detention without having anywhere fixed to stay as clearly the Home Office have a duty of care for the person.

It is clear that the night shelter provides a crucial service for these men and this was reflected not only in the list of organisations the men named as having helped them, with 78% (11) of the men identifying the shelter as being the organisation that had helped them the most, but also in the list of services the men weighed as being important and hard to find. Currently the night shelter does not provide shower facilities so it is possibly not surprising that showers come close to the very top in both table 3 and 4 as being the most important and the hardest to find.

Another possible reflection of how much the night shelter helps men is how low food is rated in the same lists. Men get a hot meal, freshly cooked, every night, they also get a wide range of snacks and cakes that are donated every week to the night shelter. There is no shortage of food at the night shelter. Maybe it is not a surprise therefore that men staying at the night shelter do not prioritise food as much as they may have done before coming to the shelter.

What is difficult to understand however is how little weight the men put on getting emotional support or advice. In both lists these two were in the bottom three, as the easiest to get and the least important. This was surprising as it was expected that it would be difficult to find emotional support whilst living on the tough streets of a foreign city. Maybe it is not? This finding may reflect the fact that many organisations working with refugees do offer advice, even to those who have no recourse to public funds. In fact this is all that many of the large, government funded, charities are legally allowed to offer – advice and emotional support. Perhaps there is no shortage of people offering destitute asylum seekers advice but the difficulty is the men getting the practical support they need?

Alternatively, do the results reflect a rather hard-bitten attitude? Practical matters matter more than emotional ones?
The fact that the men didn't seem too worried about getting advice or emotional support is also possibly reflected in the fact that although most men said they had attempted to use at least one of not two public services in Scotland they had not encountered any difficulties doing so. The results seem to reflect a quite confidence that the men felt about getting information, support and access to services. As one man said “Scotland is the first time since travelling through Europe for the last 2 years that I have felt like a human being.”

What the men at the shelter seem to be looking for are practical things in short supply; a place to stay; somewhere to leave your belongings; a shower. Interestingly these three are the top three of both lists. As has been already said, these also reflect what is in short supply at the night shelter. We are currently looking for a new venue for the shelter. Somewhere larger where we can run a mixed shelter, taking destitute women as well as men for larger numbers of men and women. We also need a new space so that we can create a more suitable space with improved and secure baggage storage areas where men can leave their belongings safely and securely. And we need a new space so we can provide showers and other improved facilities. The men's answer's to the questionnaire do seem to support the need for larger improved space with a better facilities.

Although the questionnaire throws up some interesting information and highlights how important the sort of service the night shelter provides it is not very comprehensive. Time constraints did not allow us to carry out a more detailed investigation that may have produced a greater insight into the experience of being a destitute asylum seeker in Glasgow in 2017.

What is clear however is that the services of the night shelter are still needed and unfortunately it is unlikely that demand for these services are going to go away in the near future.

Phill Jones
Senior manager

Glasgow Night Shelter
March 2017
Appendix 1
Copy of Questionnaire given to men staying at night shelter Feb 21st - 1st March 2017

NIGHT SHELTER QUESTIONNAIRE
January 2017
CONFIDENTIAL

The Scottish Government's Equalities and Human Rights Committee is calling for evidence on the destitution of asylum seekers in Scotland.

Glasgow Night Shelter is asking people staying at the night shelter for information about their experience of destitution to help the Scottish Government develop it's policy on supporting destitute asylum seekers and other migrants in Scotland.

Thank you for helping us to do this. Your answers will be kept anonymous so that you cannot be identified.

Gender
M            F

Age
Under 18 18 – 25 26 – 35 36 – 50 50 – 65 65+

Country of Origin.............................................................

Level of English None Limited Fair Good

Length of time in the UK .............................................................

Length of time in Glasgow .............................................................

Length of time at the night shelter .............................................................

How long were you in Home Office accommodation? (Please tick)

Were you getting Section 98 / 95? (Cash from post office) For how long? ..................

Were you getting Section 4? (Azure card / voucher support) For how long? ..................

Tell us about your experience of being destitute, for example, how long you were destitute and how you found shelter and food?

Where did you stay before you came to the night shelter? (Please tick)

Home Office accommodation With friends Sleeping outside
Privately rented accommodation With another charity Homeless services

How long did you stay there for? ......................

Did you feel safe staying there? Y / N

If No can you tell us what made you feel unsafe?

[Continue overleaf]

Please tell us about your experience of being homeless:

[Continue overleaf]

Where did you stay at night? [Before coming to the night shelter]

Where did you get food?

Where did you get support from when you were destitute, please explain what support helped most and why?

What organisations did you go to try and get help? [Tick]

Night Shelter Red Cross The Unity Centre DASS
Positive Action in Housing Maryhill Integration Network Central & West Integration Network
Scottish Refugee Council Govan Integration Network North Glasgow Integration Network
City Mission Marie Trust Wayside Club
Church [Name] ............................................................. Mosque [Name] .............................................................

Any other organisations? [What were their names?]:
What sort of help did you get?
Which organisation was most helpful?

How did they help you? [Tick all the things they gave you]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advice</th>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Clothing</th>
<th>Bedding</th>
<th>A place to stay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somewhere to leave your belongings</td>
<td>Laundry facilities</td>
<td>Shower</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional support</td>
<td>Friendly space</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Did they help you with anything else? .................................................

Can you rank what were the hardest things to get help with?
[Number 1 -10 with 1 being hardest and 10 being easiest]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advice</th>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Clothing</th>
<th>Bedding</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional support</td>
<td>Friendly space</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Can you rank what was the most important things you needed help with?
[Number 1 -10 with 1 being most important and 10 being the least]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advice</th>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Clothing</th>
<th>Bedding</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Any thing else? .................................................................

Is there anything else you'd like to say about the organisations that you went to to get help?
[Continue overleaf]

If you sought help from public services, for example, health care, what made it most difficult for you to get support?

Have you tried to get help from a public service?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health Care</th>
<th>College</th>
<th>Bank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job Centre</td>
<td>Library</td>
<td>Post Office</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Did you have any problems? Please describe them:

Is there anything else you would like to say about being a homeless asylum seeker in Scotland?

Thank you for your help with this questionnaire. Your answers will be used to make a report for the Scottish Government's Equalities and Human Rights Committee. They may be interested in you speaking at one of their meetings at the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh. Would you be happy to do this? Y / N

[Please give this person's name to Phill or Clare.]