07 March 2017

To Whom It May Concern:

The St Rollox Community Outreach Project is pleased that the Equalities and Human Rights Committee is looking into the issue of destitution, asylum, and insecure immigration status in Scotland. In accordance with the document outlining your call for evidence, I have compiled some information that will hopefully be of use to the committee.

First, I have given my own perspective on the issue as the coordinator of destitution support at the St Rollox Community Outreach Project for the past five years. Second, I have asked some of our clients for their own perspective on their situation and how the Scottish Government might be able to support them. These clients were pleased to contribute and let basic their details be known but preferred to remain anonymous.

Destitution support at St Rollox Community Outreach Project:

St Rollox provides destitute clients with a basic food parcel with non-perishibles, fresh fruit and vegetables (from the North Glasgow Community Food Initiative barras), and toiletries.

In the past 5 years, we St Rollox has supported over 80 different people on our destitution support programme. On any given week, we support 10-15 individuals. Many of these clients did not use the destitution support service for a longer period; 60% needed support for a couple weeks. Some went back onto mainstream support, others moved to another part of Glasgow where they received support from a more local organisation. However, for the remaining 40%, destitution support has lasted for a longer period: up to a year, oftentimes longer.

We have partnered widely with other organisations. St Rollox provides the most basic level of support in the form of foodstuffs and toiletries, but other charities can link in through our weekly drop-in cafe. Of particular help has been the DASS Project that offers legal support and the Refugee Survival Trust with the bus tickets they are able to give occasionally.

All of our clients have been informed about the DASS project and/or have a lawyer actively looking into their case. All continue to sign on at the Home Office, so are legally in the country although they have exhausted their appeal rights. Though most of these clients are attempting to
find enough evidence for a fresh claim, they have not yet submitted this because they do not have the specific evidence that the Home Office requires (in their own definition) for a substantive fresh claim. This evidence is not always straightforward or easy to come by as a result of problems in their countries of origin and/or because of the length of the intervening time since leaving their country of origin.

As a project, as follows are some concerns that we have identified while supporting destitute asylum seekers. Any support from the Scottish Government on any of these issues would be appreciated:

- Lack of access to travel is an ongoing problem. Having to walk long distances in poor weather often compounds existing health issues. In addition to this, many destitute asylum seekers find it difficult to pay for overnight travel to Liverpool to submit a fresh claim. There are charities who do provide grants, but this can prove difficult to access when there are time constraints.
- The majority of our destitute clients suffer with mental health issues. While GPs are generally supportive, many clients would benefit from counselling or other talking therapies, but waiting times are often very long.
- The DASS Project has provided necessary support on legal issues; we hope that this service will continue or something like this could be expanded. Legal support is the key element in finding long-term solutions for destitute asylum seekers.
- Many destitute asylum seekers do not have access to cash.
- Many destitute asylum seekers miss important items of post because they move around so often. A central and secure PO Box or postal address might help with this. This is also an issue when applying for volunteering positions.
- Destitute asylum seekers often have a skewed perspective on Scotland as they usually stay in deprived urban centres. Many would benefit from experiencing green spaces or trips outside the city.
- There seems to be little consistency for sign-on times at the Home Office. Some sign on a weekly basis, others every month. Travel to the Home Office can be an issue as they only provide expenses for those who live outside a 3 mile radius. It would be better if all travel expenses were covered and before the sign on date.
- We have supported pregnant women as well as families with children who have been made destitute, some for over a year. In some situations, Social Work services have stepped in to support where children are involved but in our experience, this has been inconsistent or slow to start.

**Destitute client testimonials:**

Client #1 – Female, 60s, Zimbabwe

I have been destitute for 15 years, I was on Section 4 support for a little while when I tried to submit a fresh claim. For the past 15 years, I have stayed with friends who have let me sleep in their homes. For a little while I stayed in a flat provided by a charity. I have always got all of my food and other things I need from the church and other charities.

I have had a good experience with many public services. My GP will always see me if I am ill and I am able to get medication with a prescription. My local library has also been helpful in letting me get a library card. I can get books and use the computer there.
I have been here for so long because being here, even as a destitute person, is better than what I would face in Zimbabwe. I would love to find a long term solution to my situation, but I feel like there is nothing that I can do. I am tired and worried all the time. Travel is very difficult. I get bus passes once in a while and I get travel expense when I volunteer, but it’s still difficult because I have to walk everywhere and my health is not good.

Client #2 – Male, 40s, Zimbabwe

I have been destitute for about 3 years, I tried to submit a fresh claim, but it was not successful. I have stayed with friends and go around to different homes every couple of weeks. The church gives me food and toiletries and I go to the Glasgow City Mission for hot meals when I can.

I try to keep involved in normal life as much as I can and try to keep my mind active by going on college courses. This can be difficult when you are destitute and you can’t move up to higher levels of study. I have a GP and I see him regularly because of depression and they are able to provide me with the medication and support I need.

As a destitute person, it is very easy to become isolated. It would be good if there were more options for studying. Sometimes friends help me out with a little bit of money, but it’s usually just enough to get the bus. I have to save for a long time just to get a haircut. There is not much dignity being destitute. I know that many charities try to help the destitute and I am very thankful to them, but we know that they struggle with funding their programmes.

Client # 3 – Male, 30s, Cameroon

I have been destitute for 6months and I am trying to get more information together to submit a fresh claim. My lawyer says that I need more evidence to make the case stronger.

I stay with one friend. He is kind and says I can stay there as long as I need. Before that, I stayed for a few nights in the night shelter when I was told to leave the flat I had when I applied for asylum.

Public services have been okay with helping me as before but I haven’t told some of them that I am destitute yet, like my doctor.

The legal situation is very confusing and it feels like all the lawyers do not have enough time and are worried about not getting legal aid.

Yours faithfully

Paul Wilson
Volunteer Coordinator of Destitution Support

Recognised Scottish Charity SC 035587
Funded by Church of Scotland Go For It Fund