

East Area Asylum Seekers Support Group

Registered Charity No. 1101367

Annual Report 2008 - 2009

Contents

	Page		Page
Trustees, Advisors, Organization, Objects	2	Asylum Seeker Unit of Your Homes Newcastle	9
Chair's Report	3	Education Welfare	10
Secretary's report	4	Emotional Support for Ethnic Minorities (ESE)	11
Project Development Manager's Report	5	Walker Medical Group	12
Ken Milor	6	Moving forwards	13
Some facts and figures	7		

Common Ground

Church Walk House, Church Walk Shopping Centre, Walker,
Newcastle upon Tyne NE6 3DH

Tel: 0191 262 2522 • Fax: 0191 263 8281

eaassg@tiscali.co.uk

www.eaassg.org.uk

During 2008-2009 EAASSG was supported by

The Big Lottery ♦ The James Knott Trust ♦ The Asylum Seeker Unit of Your Homes Newcastle ♦
The Lankelly Chase Foundation ♦ The Sisters of the Assumption ♦ Anglican Diocese of
Newcastle Initiative - Partners In Community Action ♦ The St Hilda Trust ♦ and a great many
individuals, churches and other groups

Supported by
 **The National Lottery**®
through the Big Lottery Fund



Trustees

Rev. Eden Fletcher, Chair
Rev. Kevin Hunt, Vice-chair
Mrs. Helen Sabais, Secretary (Resigned March 2009)
Ms. Caroline Dean, Acting Secretary (from 2009)
Mr. Martin Sabais, Treasurer (Resigned June 2009)
Mrs. Mel Carlidge (Resigned February 2009)
Mr. Ali Farddi
Mr. Patrice Kertho (Resigned December 2008)
Mrs. Brenda Johnston
Mrs. Philippa Jones
Fr. John Sherrington, OP
Dr. Hossein Zoghy

Advisers

Mr. Colin Ash
Mr. Franck Ekamba
Mr. Paul Bagshaw (From January 2009)
Mr. Michael Barker
Mrs. Sue Crawley

Organization

EAASSG is an unincorporated association governed by a constitution adopted on 16 January 2003.

Objects

The objects of the Association are:

- 1 To provide relief for asylum seekers and refugees and their dependants in the East Area of Newcastle upon Tyne who are in conditions of need, hardship and distress.
- 2 To preserve and protect the physical and mental health of such asylum seekers, refugees and their dependants
- 3 To advance the education of local people and the education and training of asylum seekers and refugees and their dependants in order to assist their inclusion into the wider community
- 4 To meet the continuing needs of asylum seekers and refugees, with particular emphasis on the transitional stage from Asylum Seeker to Refugee.

Chair's Report

Eden Fletcher



Common Ground - welcome

It has been my very great privilege to Chair the East Area Asylum Seekers Support Project, commonly known as Common Ground, for the past year and to get to know and work alongside some very committed and exceptionally generous people who staff the centre.

The project continues to provide a lifeline to so many clients who come from far and wide to the United Kingdom seeking sanctuary, security and a place to call home, often coming from war torn or troubled lands or situations.

What has always struck me about Common Ground is the family nature of the centre. Common Ground is not simply a place for filling in forms or assisting clients with understanding the often complex and bewildering legal process, as important as these things are, it is a place of welcome, of real care and compassion. I want to offer particular thanks to Chris Carroll and the whole team of staff and volunteers all of whom often go the extra mile to ensure that every client is treated with dignity and respect and welcomed into the family of Common Ground. In all the developments that lie in the future for Common Ground we must work hard to ensure that this essential core is not lost.

In some ways this past year has not been easy. Due to the credit crunch a key piece of expected funding was not forthcoming with the result that the project was plunged into some financial difficulty resulting in the painful decision to have to make one of the project's key workers, Ken, redundant. I want to pay particular tribute to Ken who was very well respected both in the project and the wider community for the hard work and commitment that he brought to his post. He has been sadly missed and I wish him well for the future. Along with Ken we have said our thanks to Martin who has stepped down as the centre's treasurer. Martin has given of his time voluntarily to act as our treasurer

Our organisation is thankful to Common Ground for the emotional and practical support the service offers to people who have survived torture.

Common Ground is a safe, warm haven where people are respected, valued and given opportunities to re-establish basic human relationships and re-engage with their life.

Katie Woodward, Clinical Psychologist
Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture May 2009

preparing budgets and constantly seeking new avenues of funding, I would like to thank Martin for the time and energy that he has dedicated to Common Ground.

As has so often happened in the past the community rallied to the aid of the centre and I am so grateful to all local community groups, Religious Orders, Churches and private individuals who so generously made donations to the centre during the past six months, generosity which has allowed the vital work to continue.

On a more positive note the financial crisis caused the management group to ask some serious questions about the ongoing work of Common Ground and to look carefully at how the centre is operated and should operate in the future. I am enormously grateful to Paul Bagshaw who has worked tirelessly to help us with writing policies, budgets and a business plan which I hope will ensure that Common Ground can again find a stable footing from which it can grow and meet the developing needs of our client base.

On a personal note the past five months or so have been personally challenging for me due largely to ill health and I have not been able to play a full role as the Chair. I want therefore, to pay tribute to Rev Kevin Hunt, Vice Chair who has led Common Ground during the past few months and carried the burden of much of the change that has taken place. Due to the heavy commitments involved in my own work I feel that I cannot give the appropriate amount of time that Common Ground deserves and requires and will require in the future and so, reluctantly I have taken the decision to stand down as Chair.

I feel sure, however, that the hard work of the Management Committee particularly over recent months will ensure that Common Ground has a very bright future and that the valuable work that Chris Carroll and her team are already doing will ensure that our clients continue to find a place of welcome and support both now and well into the future.

Secretary's Report

Caroline Dean, Acting Secretary

New members were welcomed to the Management Committee: Ali Farddi, Phillippa Jones, Mel Cartlidge and Kevin Hunt as trustees, and Franck Ekamba and Michael Barker as advisers, later joined by Paul Bagshaw.

Management Committee has met every month except August, and there have also been frequent meetings of sub groups for finance and personnel. Main concerns have been with finance and employment; with development of the Business Plan; with revision and updating of policies; and with Heart of Walker regeneration. In October the Committee spent an Away Day working on the Business Plan; much valuable help has been given in this matter by Michael Barker and Paul Bagshaw.

Common Ground is very polite and helpful and there is a biscuit and coffee and some time have a interpreter. That is very good. And have a computer. So there is very good for some people poor. And thanks for every help at there.
An Iraqi man who has been coming to Common Ground for 2 years.

Funding has been a major concern, and Committee members have attended Ward Committee meetings to support applications, as well as a variety of other meetings with funders.

There have been four resignations of trustees during the year: Patrice Kertho, Mel Cartlidge, Helen Sabais and Martin Sabais. Appreciation was expressed for Helen's work as Secretary, and Martin's as Treasurer.

Eden Fletcher's and later Kevin Hunt's Chairmanship has been greatly appreciated for their effective conduct of meetings.

Project Development Manager's Report

Chris Carroll



There is always hospitality at Common Ground

This last year has been demanding and challenging for EAASSG. More volunteers have come on board and are making a valuable contribution to the work at Common Ground. We have had to face a major funding crisis, resulting in the loss of our Principal Project Worker, Ken Milor. This has impacted on the way we operate. We are having to be more strict about closing times and more precise

about the roles of team members during opening sessions. The changes have been difficult for volunteers and for clients and I thank everybody involved for their efforts and willingness to adapt.

We continue to work in partnership with other agencies in order to meet the needs of clients and very much appreciate the support and advice we receive from them.

In April this year we began drop-in sessions on Thursdays with Kate Chartres and Alan McKee around emotional support for those who are not accessing secondary mental health services. These sessions are proving to be very valuable. Kate and Alan have fitted into Common Ground wonderfully and have become part of the team.

We are beginning work with "Side-by-Side", an accompanying service for people attending appointments or accessing activities. Being accompanied not only reduces stress but also helps to develop confidence.

The work that Sr. Sylvia and now Sr. Patricia are doing with women who are unable to access formal English classes is very much appreciated. I know that it makes a huge

difference and, for those who attend, is much more than an English lesson. Thank you Sylvia and Patricia and your faithful support and for the relationships established.

At this time, EAASSG finds itself entering a new phase. Thanks to the wonderful support of funding organisations and the generosity of individuals we are now on a more stable financial footing. However, we now need to implement our new business plan and to raise funds to sustain the project over the next few years. This will involve tightening up on procedures and policies and developing the professionalism of the organisation.

This said, whatever changes have to be made in the way Common Ground operates we must be determined to maintain the family ethos. Common Ground has always been a safe place in which to meet and share our stories, where individuals are welcomed, and accepted, respected and loved. One of the principles underpinning the formulation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was "faith in the inherent dignity of men and women". We must reflect this principle above all others.

My thanks, as always, to the Common Ground volunteers for their tireless and committed work, to the many organisations and individuals who support our work financially and in other ways, to the Trustees for their valuable advice and support and, especially, to our many friends from around the world for your strength, hope, openness and inspiration.

Ken Milor



Chris Carroll

EAASSG was sorry to say 'Goodbye' to Ken Milor, Common Ground's Principal Project Worker, at the end of February this year when, like many voluntary sector projects, we found ourselves in a funding crisis.

Ken has been with EAASSG since its inception and was passionate about the project. He oversaw the moves into the first and second Common Grounds and was always concerned that the premises should be at their best for everyone. He maintained valuable links with local agencies and residents. He was utterly committed to the clients, encouraged them to be involved in sports, and enjoyed those occasions when he was able to take a group out into the countryside.

Ken is very much missed and will always be remembered for his devotion to the project and his care and concern for clients. He

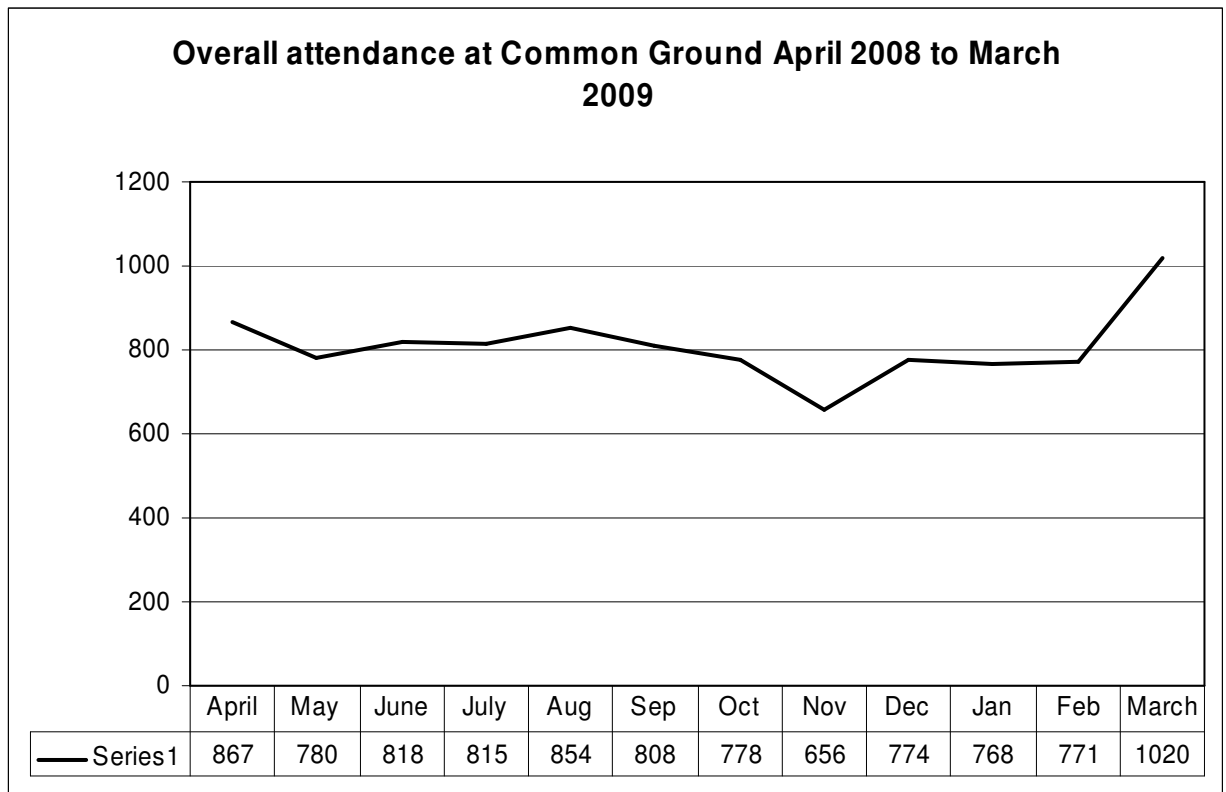
was always prepared to 'go the extra mile' although there was often a personal cost for himself.

I thank Ken for all he has given to EAASSG: time, energy, money and his own heart and soul. Special thanks also for the personal support Ken has given me over the years.

We wish you well in the future, Ken, and trust that your many gifts will be put to good use.

Some facts and figures

Attendance at Common Ground



A total of 9709 visits to Common Ground were recorded between April 2008 and March 2009.

Most, 67%, were men, 25% were women and 8% children.

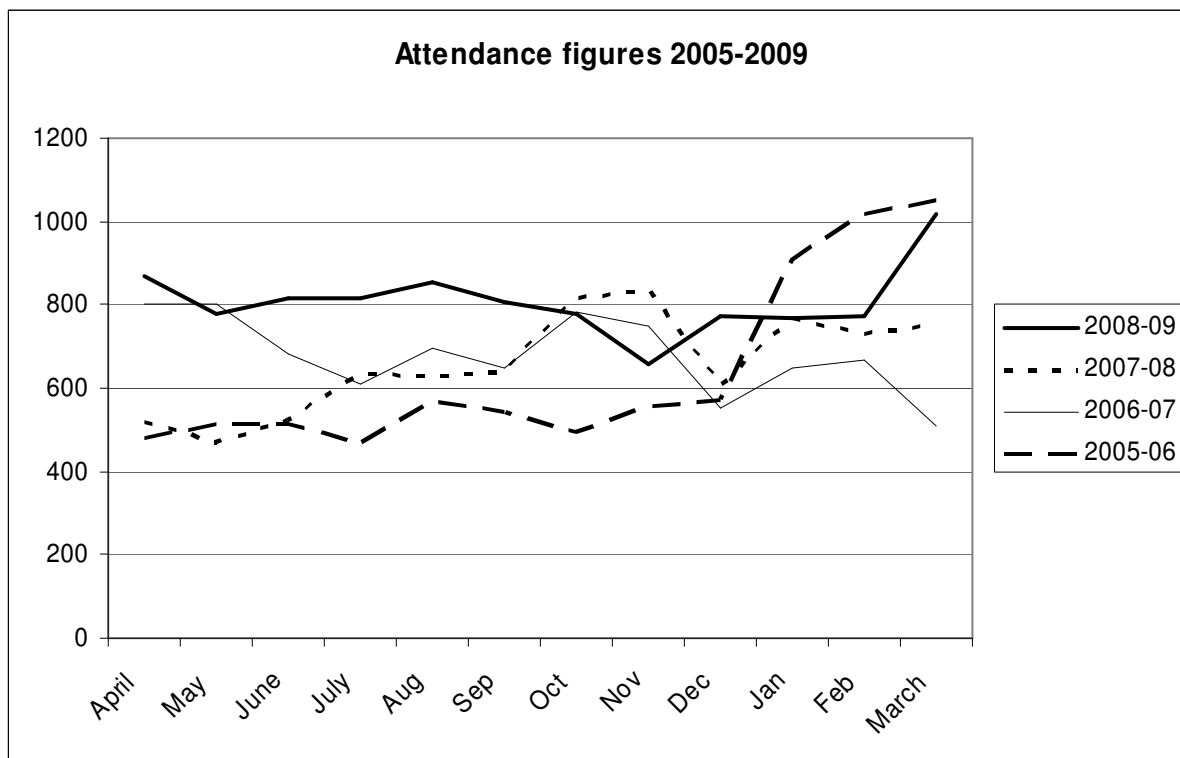
Note: these figures rely on visitors signing in. They undercount actual attendance and particularly undercount children.

People came from a total of 67 countries. Not all were asylum seekers or refugees.

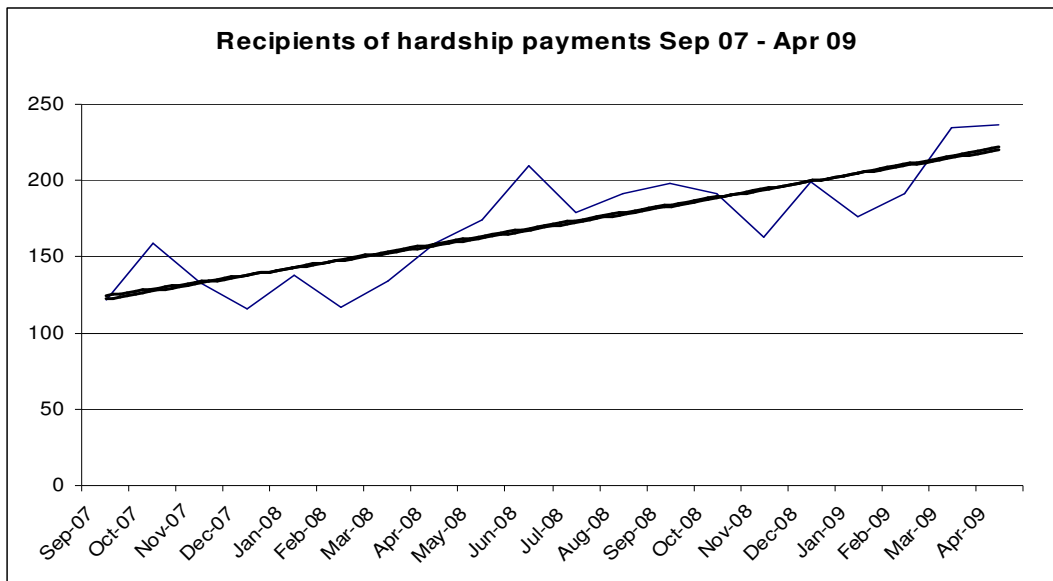
Visitors to Common Ground came from:

Afghanistan	Eritrea	Kenya	Sierra Leone
Albania	Estonia	Kuwait	Slovakia
Algeria	Ethiopia	Latvia	Somalia
Angola	Gambia	Lebanon	South Africa
Armenia	Georgia	Liberia	Spain
Azerbaijan	Germany	Mali	Sri Lanka
Brazil	Ghana	Mongolia	Sudan
Britain	Greece	Nepal	Syria
Burundi	Guinea	Nigeria	Tanzania
Cameroon	Holland	North Korea	Togo
Chad	India	Pakistan	Turkey
China	Iran	Palestine	Uganda
Croatia	Iraq	Poland	Ukraine
Cuba	Israel	Portugal	U.S.A.
Czech Republic	Ivory Coast	Russia	Uzbekistan
D.R. Congo	Jamaica	Rwanda	Zimbabwe
Egypt	Kazakhstan	Saudi Arabia	

Compared to previous years 2008-09 has been busy throughout the year:



Hardship payments



Payments to destitute asylum seekers (£10 per week) continue to rise by approximately one-third each year. In April 2008 there were 159 claims and 235 in March 2009. In total 2269 payments were made.

Most of the money comes from individual donors, churches and other groups. The North East Humanists made EAASSG their Charity of the Year in 2008. The Lankelly Chase Foundation gave a grant of £5,000, the William Moulton Trust £85. For all these generous donations we are immensely grateful.

Asylum Seeker Unit of Your Homes Newcastle

David Lowe, Support Officer

I have been a support officer for over two years working with the Asylum Seekers Unit. During the first part of my employment, approximately 10 months, I used the East Area Asylum Seekers Support Group on a regular basis advising clients of its existence and the support they could offer.

Since then I have worked predominantly in the East End of the City and am now working in close allegiance with the staff at Common Ground.

I use the facility every week as a "Drop in Centre" for all my clients in the East End, I find the facilities excellent, and the staff most accommodating and helpful.

I really like Common Ground. They do everything possible to find help to all people who come there: I think that without Common Ground I don't know what and where I am now. I thank them so much, and God will continue to bless them for ever.

RS, who has been coming to Common Ground for 2 years.

I have together with the staff worked up a very good and close working relationship, where they find it easy to contact me if they have any issues that they are not sure how to deal with and once I have explained any procedures, they have been more than ready to deal with the situation for me.

Common Ground offers a wide range of services for our clients, such as;

- Free clothing store
- Internet facilities
- Refreshments
- Help and advice
- Trips out
- Transportation to external partners
- Emergency support, and food parcels
- Arranging emergency accommodation for failed Asylum Seekers pending other decisions etc.
- Dealing with missed delivery of Emergency Support Tokens for our clients, and re-arranging re-delivery.
- New arrival greeting.

I don't mind going to Common Ground every day. Common Ground it's like my family now. When I don't go there I don't feel comfortable. The staff is so nice I do really like Common Ground.

LM, who came to Common Ground relatively recently, just 1 year ago.

Part of our induction procedure for new arrivals is to take them to Common Ground and introduce them to the staff, and facilities, we always find that they are welcomed with "open arms and treated with the utmost respect". New clients are shown around Common Ground and advised of all the facilities and what they can expect from their staff while they live in the United Kingdom.

Education Welfare

Dave Smith, Education Welfare Officer

I have been working at Common Ground for the past seven months. I am available every Tuesday morning between 10am -12:30pm, longer if necessary. As an Education Welfare Officer, I work for the KalidRAScope Project. The KalidRAScope project is a joint Venture between The Educational Psychology Service and The Education Welfare Service, the main aims of the project are,

- 1) to secure school places for asylum seekers within 28 days. (This has been achieved)
- 2) to assess each newly arrived family's identified needs and help them to settle into the local community fully integrated.
- 3) the Educational Psychology Service assess any child with special educational needs and provides appropriate support in school.

The main client group I work with is families with children aged 0-18 years of age. I also help young adults gain entry to Newcastle College.

Although I am generally informed by the Home Office of most asylum seekers and refugees, I gain a lot of information and support from the Health Authority mainly from Health Visitors who tend to come across a great deal of international arrivals mainly from

eastern Europe and the European Economic Community.



English classes for adults were held during the year. However take-up proved erratic and in the end it was decided to halt them. Our thanks to Roger Allen and Kirsten Klutz for their work with this project.

When a new family arrives especially if they are asylum seekers we have a fund of money which allows us to provide a school uniform and if necessary the provision of a school bus pass. We also have a group of Home Language Volunteers who have received special training and are supervised. They are mainly asylum seekers themselves or workers from other countries who can speak similar languages to newly arrived asylum seekers. This helps with communication and generally supports in the transition period until families are settled.

During my time at Common Ground I have developed good contacts with both volunteers and clients, this has been a great support in allowing me to support this client group. On average I have offered advice and support to approximately 20 clients per month.

Emotional Support for Ethnic Minorities (ESE)

Alan McKee, Primary Care Counsellor

ESE started to work at Common Ground in April 2009. The idea for this project came from an unmet need identified by the Primary Care Mental Health Community Development Workers in their work with ethnic minority communities.

ESE is a collaborative venture between EAASSG (East Area Asylum Seekers Support Group) and the Newcastle Primary Care Mental Health Team of Newcastle and North Tyneside Community Health.

The aim of the service is to provide a confidential mental health 'drop-in'. ESE is staffed by a Primary Care Mental Health Worker (Kate Chartres) and a Primary Care Counsellor (Alan McKee). Through our presence we aim to increase awareness among people who access

When the Home Office closed our case no-one supported us. [Common Ground] was the first community who gave us support, such as money and support and food, everything they provide.

We know two or three people with no where to sleep, Common Ground helped to find them a place to stay. Common Ground is my family for me and my wife.

I have met with people from other countries and made friends, we are living alone here and making friends from other countries.

For the Home Office we have the same number, me and my wife, we are not separate. In Common Ground person is person.

A couple from Iraq who first came to Common Ground 2 years ago.

Common Ground on the availability of mental health services via their GP and bridge the gap that will assist people to make use of mental health services in primary care.

This is an exciting project to be involved with that is further helped by the way Common Ground has accepted us as part of their team. Everyone has made us welcome and we look forward to the ongoing working relationship being built between both services.

Walker Medical Group

Dr Chris Tasker



The store: clothes, books, crockery, toys are free to any who need

I am writing this short report regarding the East Area Asylum Seekers Support Group based at 'Common Ground'. I am writing this report as a GP of a large practice based 50 yards from 'Common Ground'.

As a practice we have many patients who are asylum seekers as well as a few refugees. Over the last few years we have worked closely with 'Common Ground' (EAASSG) and we have a two-way relationship with the charity. They know that they can bring patients to us who are distressed, and we likewise know that we can use them as support for our distressed patients.

The main areas of concern are our patients with psychiatric, social and emotional problems, especially those who require extra time because English is not their first language. We certainly have many patients who could not cope if they were not given the support they are given by the team at 'Common Ground'.

We have had patients whose psychiatric care has been organised through 'Common Ground' and the patients otherwise would not have attended, would not have received support and would have been poorly treated by unorganised care e.g. in casualty or by emergency out of hours services who do not have the skills to cope with people whose first language is not English, especially when they have a background of psychiatric problems

I have come every week for 6 years. If not I have no money and I can't buy bread.

CB, a destitute asylum seeker.

We have many other patients who are socially isolated or have difficulty coping in living in a new part of the world and they have had tremendous support from meeting together

with people from similar backgrounds, but also having a focus at 'Common Ground' and people they can turn to for practical help in completing forms and finding telephone numbers etc. At present there is no other service available in Newcastle that we could turn to for patients experiencing these difficulties.

This is the kind of support we would usually ask families to give each other but if you are an asylum seeker on your own somewhere new, you do not have this social networking, therefore 'Common Ground' becomes extremely important to you.

We are certainly very thankful to have 'Common Ground' next door to us and thankful for their help and support with our difficult patients and also for those who are less difficult who just need a bit of extra encouragement and support.

We are aware that due to financial pressures other places in Newcastle have closed and this is one of the few places left and there would be great difficulty looking after our patients as well without this service and I think the patients would suffer greatly if it was not around.

We would hope for many more years of working together and I thank them for the good relationships that we already have with them.

Moving forwards

Kevin Hunt, Vice-Chair

We are immensely grateful to the individuals, trusts and other groups who have come to EAASSG's aid so generously. Because of them the debts have been paid off and the management committee have been able to plan for the future.

A business plan for 2009-2010 and beyond was approved by the Management Committee at its June meeting. This is now the agreed basis for moving forwards, for funding bids, and for developing some aspects of the work of Common Ground. Copies of the plan are available electronically on request. It is a

I like it. I like the place, I find the staff extremely helpful and friendly. I like coming down because it's quiet and peaceful. It's not boring.

K, a local resident who first discovered Common Ground about 5 or 6 years ago.

positive and encouraging read: now we are all challenged to translate words into action! The Committee is immensely grateful to Paul Bagshaw for the work he has put in to drafting the plan.

Plans for the immediate future include the appointment of an Executive Administrator to ensure the smooth running of Common Ground and our fulfilment of legal obligations. During the coming year we hope to secure funding for a Project Leader post to take Common Ground forward. Chris Carroll's contract comes to its end in the autumn and she will be moving on from Common Ground after several years of dedicated and passionate service, for which the Committee, a countless number of our users, and indeed the East

End Community is indebted. There will be an opportunity to celebrate Chris's work at Common Ground before she leaves.

In all this change EAASSG is committed to keeping and building on the core of what Common Ground is - a safe, welcoming drop-in, open to asylum seekers, refugees and local residents alike, driven by a passion for justice and care for the victims of injustice.

Membership

One development will be the creation of a membership scheme. This will be launched at the AGM. The intention is that supporters will become members of EAASSG. The Management Committee will be answerable to the members and members will vote for the Management Committee at future AGMs. Membership will be free (to encourage as many members as possible) though a donation of £5 to cover costs will be suggested. Please help us to demonstrate your support of EAASSG by becoming a Member.

Volunteers

EAASSG relies heavily on volunteers to continue its work: please ask yourself whether you have time, talents and skills which you may be able to offer. We shall be delighted to hear from you!

EAASSG has around 25 volunteers. Together they give 136 hours / week on average.

If paid minimum wage (£5.73 per hour) their work would be valued at £40,600 p.a. At the slightly more generous £6.50 per hour it would amount to £46,000.

Volunteers currently provide 11 days / week casework - the equivalent of £52,800 plus £8,766 on-costs if we were to pay them a salary of £24,000p.a.