

EAST AREA ASYLUM SEEKERS SUPPORT GROUP

‘Common Ground’

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EAASSG is currently supported by

The James Knott Trust

The Asylum Seeker Unit of Your Homes Newcastle

Lankelly Chase

St Hilda Trust

The Sisters of the Assumption

Anglican Diocese of Newcastle Initiative - Partners In Community Action

a great many individuals, churches and other groups

and



East Area Asylum Seekers Support Group

Business Plan 2009-2010



“Everyone has the right to seek and enjoy in countries other than their own asylum from persecution.”

Article 14 (1), Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948

Recognising this EAASSG strives

To support all who seek asylum

To promote an understanding of why people seek refuge

To work towards a cohesive, inclusive community

EAASSG Mission Statement, June 2005

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Common Ground, where everyone is welcome

The work of EAASSG

Common Ground is primarily a drop-in centre. It is a safe, welcoming place, open to asylum seekers, refugees and local residents alike.

This is the core of EAASSG's work and its ethos.

Because people just drop in there is no filter on casework. Any aspect of life may be shared and a response required: asylum issues predominate but questions of personal finance, housing, physical and mental health, education, access to sports activity, support through pregnancy and childbirth, travel arrangements and matters of the heart may all be voiced – sometimes in one day.

We advise people and support them as best we can, careful of our limitations. We refer people to other agencies. We advocate for them when necessary.

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.

EAASSG's Objects

- 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.

Equally important is the store. This offers clothes for free to anyone who needs them. We also have books, children's toys, crockery and bedding as they are donated.

We have some furniture available but because we have no storage or transport we cannot offer larger items.

History

EAASSG began in 2000 as a response to the immediate needs of asylum seekers who were arriving in the local community as a result of the Home Office dispersal system.

In July 2001 EAASSG was constituted as a charity. It worked with volunteers out of a room loaned by the Roman Catholic Church.

Its first paid worker, a clothing store manager, was appointed in May 2002. Since then EAASSG has worked with up the 2½ paid staff and many volunteers.

Common Ground was opened in Churchwalk Shopping Centre, Walker, in May 2003. In January 2007 the project moved to its present premises nearby, keeping the name Common Ground.

The Project Development Manager is Chris Carroll. She has been part of the project from its the beginning. Since September 2006 her post has been funded by the Big Lottery.

2008 has been a crisis year for the project. In April EAASSG was promised £120,000 for 3 years for staff and running costs. This secured the post of the Principal Project Worker.

With this commitment EAASSG continued to pay the Principal Project Worker, going into debt to do so. In November 2008 EAASSG learned that the money would not be coming. The land sale to fund the grant had not gone through.

Accordingly, and with great sadness, the Principal Project Worker was made redundant. He too had been part of the project since its inception.

The Management Committee have begun to turn the organization around. By May 2009 the debts had been off and steps had been taken to strengthen the organization of the project. This business plan is one aspect of that turnaround.

We do not give out untested electrical goods.

We host two parties each year: in Refugee Week (June) and in the run-up to Christmas.

We host several other agencies' drop-in sessions in Common Ground.

We provide free access to leisure services for asylum seekers in the east end of Newcastle.

The beneficiaries

The beneficiaries of EAASSG's work are, first and foremost, the asylum seekers and refugees who visit Common Ground.

Local residents also benefit. The store is open to all and is well used by local people. From time to time they also turn to caseworkers for advice, referral to other agencies, or access to facilities such as the internet or telephone.

Volunteers benefit through a widening of horizons and the continual challenge of helping damaged, disorientated, able and purposeful people.

The need

At the end of March 2008 there were 3635 asylum seekers in the North East receiving either subsistence only support or in NASS accommodation. This is a reduction of about 12% from the end of December 2007. 37% (1318) were living in Newcastle. (Source: *Asylum Seekers in the North East – as at March 2008 produced by the North of England Refugee Service and the North East Strategic Migration Partnership.*)

Nationally, in the first quarter of 2009 asylum applications (excluding dependents) were 27% higher in the

first quarter of 2009 compared to the first quarter of 2008 (8380 compared to 6595). (Source: *Home Office, Control of Immigration Quarterly Statistical Summary, January-March 2009*)

In Autumn 2009 a new initial accommodation facility will be created in the North East for new asylum seekers. Most will then be accommodated locally.

The number of successful applications for Section 4 support has risen steadily since 2007. The benefit is accommodation and, typically, £35 a week paid in supermarket vouchers. This support is for those whose asylum claim has been refused but who are unable to be returned to their country of origin. Nationally, at the end of March 2009, 10,850 people, excluding dependants, received Section 4 support. (Source, *Home Office, as above.*)

There appears to be no official count of people who are made destitute, their 'asylum rights exhausted' and who have 'no recourse to public funds'. In December 2005 a report by Open Door estimated the number of destitute asylum seekers in Newcastle to be in excess of 300.

At the end of April 2009 63 people were claiming hardship support from Common Ground and 115 from the West End Refugee Service.

Statistics give an important picture but hide individuals' experiences. For many the process of seeking asylum is complex, confusing, and depersonalising.

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.

People who have fled in fear of their lives, sometimes after being tortured, find themselves disbelieved and, they feel, treated as criminals.

Under the New Asylum Model decisions are meant to be made within 6 months. This does not always happen. Others, 'legacy cases', may have been waiting for many years for a decision. During this time they are not allowed to work, are unable to study, and may find it almost impossible to occupy themselves purposefully.

The cost to people's dignity, self-respect, self-worth and their physical and mental health can be devastating.

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

Those who receive leave to remain in the UK then face another difficult transition. NASS support may stop before other support is in place. They must move out of their NASS accommodation into somewhere new. There are further layers of bureaucracy to navigate. For refugees, applications for family reunion can be an emotional roller-coaster.

EAASSG seeks to support and care for people through all these stages. We provide practical assistance and advice. Most of all, we treat people as fully human.

The demand

Overall the number of people coming to Common Ground has been rising unevenly through 2008 and 2009.

Currently an average of 44 people a day visit Common Ground, 770-1000 a month (January - April 2009).

People come from many countries across the world (see next page). They come for the clothing store, for support and advice, and because Common Ground is warm, welcoming and safe.

An average of 93.5% are adult and 6.5% children. These figures understate the proportion of children. Many children, especially infants, are

not signed in by their parents, and many of the men under 18 (or age disputed) regard themselves as adult.

Two thirds of clients are men (66.4%) and just over a quarter women (27.1%). 4.4% are boys and 2.1% girls.

An analysis of the tracking sheets in March 2008 showed that 'practical help' (i.e. use of the store) was the largest single class of provision, followed by 'moral support'.

These categories hide significant differences in the time devoted to clients. Two hours spent with a client accessing mental health services may be recorded no differently from a 5 minute telephone call to confirm a hospital appointment.

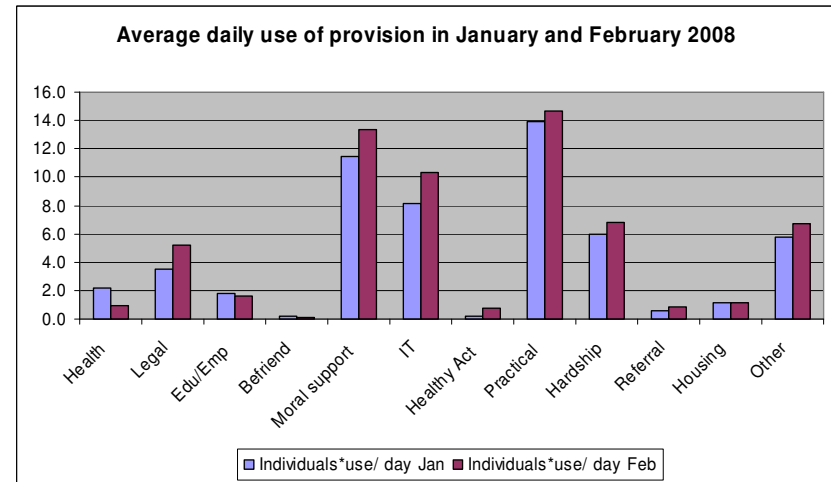
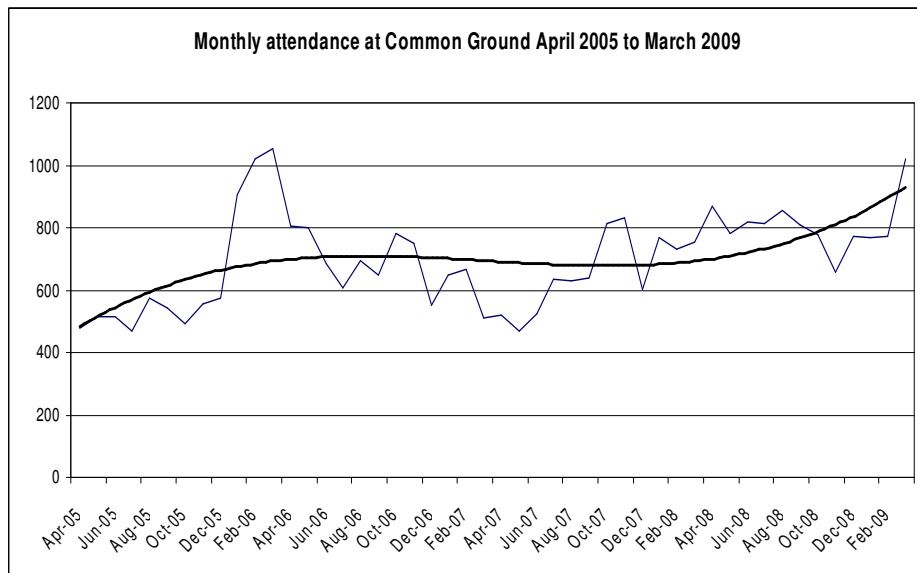
A note on the statistics.

The basic source of EAASSG's data is the signing-in sheet. For various reasons people may not sign in and these figures under-count the actual number attending.

The service provided is recorded on a daily 'tracking sheet'. The categories are not very precise (e.g. 'access to education / employment' or 'moral support') and, especially when Common Ground is busy, it is easy to under-record activity.

Under-recording is likely to be fairly consistent over time and so the general picture of attendance and service provision is reliable even if the absolute figures may be less so.

The collection and analysis of data will be revised.



People came to Common Ground from 67 countries between April 2008 and March 2009. Not all were asylum seekers or refugees.

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	

Hardship payments

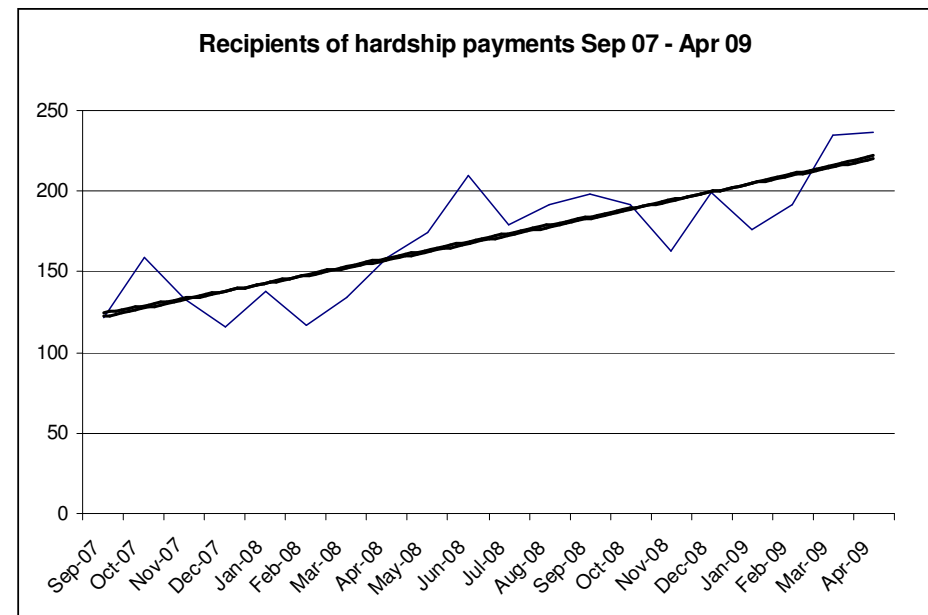
People who are destitute and with no other means of support receive a £10 hardship payment and a small bag of food and toiletries, when we have them.

The money comes mostly as donations from individuals, churches and other groups. However, as the numbers grow steadily year by year, we struggle to keep up with demand.

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.

In January and February 2008 the countries from which most people came were:

	Number	Percent
Eritrea	45	12.53
Iran	39	10.86
D.R. Congo	34	9.47
Britain	28	7.80
Sudan	23	6.41
Czech Republic	22	6.13
Slovakia	22	6.13



Meeting the challenges that EAASSG faces

The implementation of this business plan will amount to a change of the culture of EAASSG.

However, critically, in addressing all these challenges we will keep the quality and ethos of Common Ground at the heart of what we do, driven by a passion for justice and care for the victims of injustice.

We will keep and strengthen the excellent work currently being done in Common Ground. We will continue to spend time with people, to go the extra mile with them, and to treat them as individuals, not numbers.

Common Ground will remain a safe,

welcoming place, open to all, in which each and every person is honoured and respected.

The **key elements of change** are:

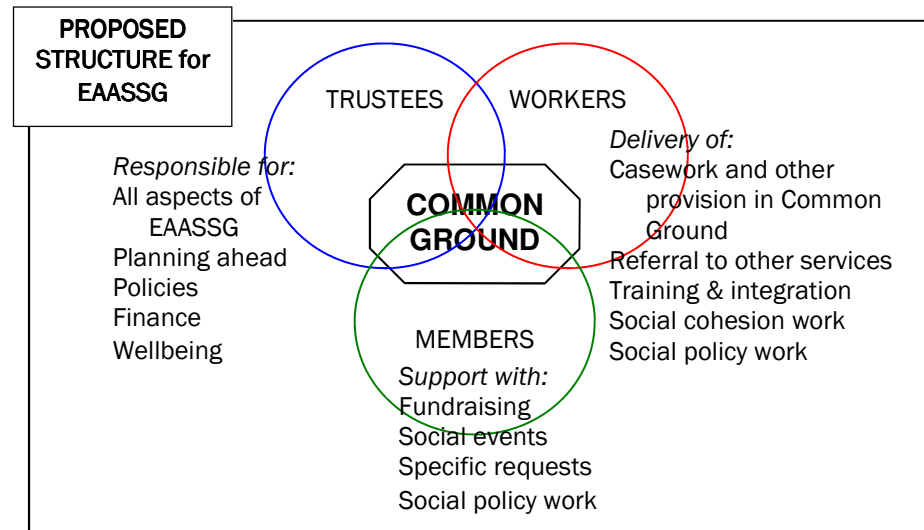
1) **Trustees** will take a decisive leadership role, with clear collective decision making. They will be better trained and develop more effective ways of corporate work.

Their responsibilities will be addressed systematically through sub-groups (see page 13) and regular reporting.

This will include bringing new trustees on board at the AGM.

2) Supporters will become **members** to whom the trustees are accountable.

Members will be encouraged to



become more extensively engaged in the work of EAASSG (see page 12).

Members will be encouraged to be actively involved in the work of Common Ground as well as fund raising and social policy work.

Communication between trustees and members will be reviewed and improved.

3) **Workers** (paid and volunteer) will be better trained, resourced and supported. A new structure will be put in place.

Caseworkers will provide a more professional service.

4) A **new building** will be sought.

Details of proposed changes are tabulated on pages 15-23.

The **key outcomes** of this change of culture will be:

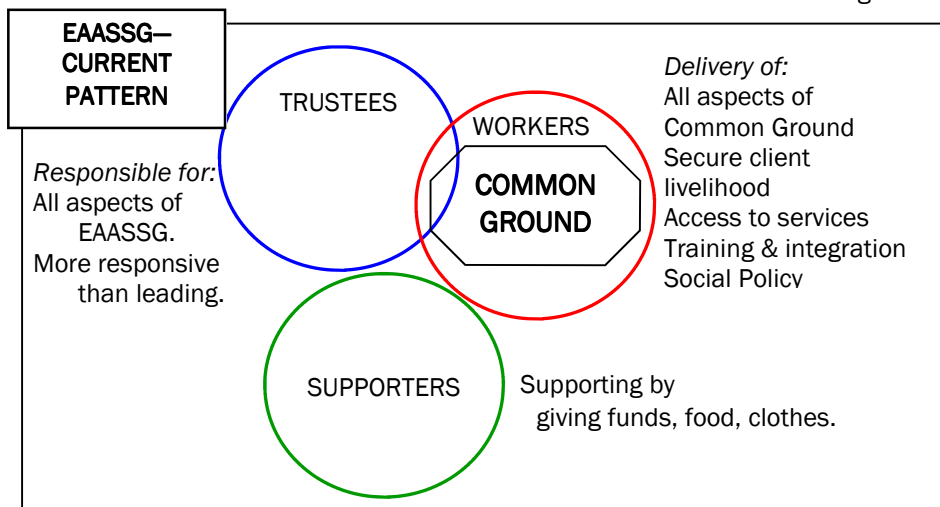
1) an **integrated organization** with all its elements communicating well together and sharing a common vision.

2) stronger **finances** and **financial controls**.

3) **external accreditation and validation** of the services provided at Common Ground

4) **improved services** for asylum seekers, refugees and local residents.

5) Common Ground will be based in a **more suitable building**.



Funding the work

These proposals and commitments will require more funding than is currently received.

Running costs need to rise but the greater increase will be in paying more workers.

EAASSG's finances may be envisaged in 3 blocks:

1) Demand led

Spending on hardship (for destitute clients) has risen by one-third each year. This rate of increase is likely to continue until there is a change of government policy.

The commitment to providing £10 and some food is open-ended (though unenforceable) and responds to demand.

(Spending from the emergency fund can be restricted to the amount in the fund; need is almost limitless.)

2) Minimal running costs and salaries

Below a certain level of spending on running costs EAASSG cannot function.

This minimum includes fixed costs for the building, insurance, fuel, telecommunications, security, administration costs, equipment

maintenance, and a cushion for occasional but predictable costs of repair or replacement.

Common Ground can probably function without core paid staff, but not well and not for long. The minimum effective staffing is two people full-time.

3) An aspirational budget

Beyond this minimum there is considerable scope for further development.

There would be benefit in improving and upgrading some of the equipment and spending more on publicity. In general, however, spending on running costs is constrained by the limitations of the building.

The optimum paid staffing (in the present building) is probably

- a full time project leader,
- an administrator
- a volunteer co-ordinator (half-time)
- 3 fte caseworkers
- Cleaner (4 hrs/week)

Volunteers may do the same casework job as paid staff. Volunteers are essential to support caseworkers, administration, maintaining the store, accompanying people to appointments, befriending clients and developing new services.

This level of staffing is necessary to improve the quality of service provided to clients, to strengthen the organization, and to engage effectively with other stakeholders.

Funds for organizational development, training for both workers and trustees, and provision for professional fees would be invaluable.

As at present funding for events and activities can be raised on a case-by-case basis.

Project development (e.g. training, befriending scheme, outreach, or specific projects) could be costed separately and funds sought for each separately.

A new building will certainly be more expensive than the present one. There is no way to quantify the cost until much more work has been done. However it would be prudent to identify potential sources of funding at the same time as beginning the search

We will endeavour to build up a reserve of 3-6 months running costs and a contingency fund for both occasional costs and to pump prime project developments.

The **funding strategy** addresses these strands separately:

1) Demand led (hardship)

We will seek to increase the number and value of regular standing orders from individuals, supplemented by occasional donations, both gift-aided wherever possible. We will hold some fund raising events, and also apply to local trusts for the relief of poverty.

2) Minimum running costs and salaries

Running costs funding will be sought from local and smaller trusts and public sector grants.

Funds for salaries will be sought from a mixture of public sector sources, local and national trusts.

3) Aspiration

Beyond the minimum we would look to develop EAASSG with more staff, better resourced staff and volunteers, and developing new activities in a new Common Ground.

This is aspirational budgeting: we will cut our coat to suit our cloth.

Financial strategy 2009-2010

Notes: 'Already identified' comprises money already received and money for there is a high degree of confidence that it will be received.

EAASSG's financial year runs from April to March.

1) Hardship Fund

<i>Income sources:</i>	Individual SO	Occasional donations	Gift Aid	Fundraising Events	Local Trusts	2009-2010	
						<i>Budget</i>	<i>Shortfall</i>
Goal	12000	5000	3920	2000	10000	32920	33000 80
<i>Percent of total</i>	36	15	12	6	30	100	
Already identified	11280	3500	2527			17307	15693
<i>Percent of goal</i>	94	70	64			53	

Over previous years spending on hardship has risen by one-third year on year. There is no sign of this diminishing. £33000 is the mid-point of current projections.

2) Minimal income for survival

a) Running costs (see next page for more detail)

<i>Income sources:</i>	Bbf	YHN	Local Trusts	Total	2009-2010	
					<i>Budget</i>	<i>Shortfall</i>
All non salary costs		4998	12000	16998	17000	2
<i>Percent of total</i>		29	71			
Already identified	4600	4998	3000	12598		4402
<i>Percent of goal</i>		100	25	74		

b) Salaries for 2 people

Chris Carroll, Project Development Manager, is currently funded by the big Lottery Fund until September 10 2009.

Current negotiations with YHN and Newcastle City Council have identified sufficient funds for an Administrator for 12 months from mid-July 2009 to mid July 2010. (YHN £7,000; NCC £11,000; EAASSG £10,000 from already identified income). This is still subject to final approval.

The pressing need is to identify funds for a Project Leader to start as soon as possible (though there will be a gap).

Project Leader - £28,000 plus £5,320 on-costs. Probable source - major trust as part of larger package.

EAASSG aspirational budget for 2009-2010 (excluding hardship fund)**b) Salaries**

To fully fund the proposed staffing structure (see page 14):

Post	Proposed Salary (2009)	Salary per person	NI (12.8% above threshold)	5% contribution to pension	Total salary bill
Project Leader	28,000	28,000	2,952	1,400	32,352
Administrator	25,000	25,000	2,568	1,250	28,818
Volunteer co-ordinator (half-time)	25,000	12,500	968	625	14,093
Caseworkers (5 people 3days / week – 3 people fte)	24,000	14,400 (x5 – 43,200)	1,211 (x5 – 3,633)	720 (x5 – 2,160)	48,993
Cleaner (4 hrs / week @ £6.50)	1,352	1,352		70	1,422
Total:					125,678

Recruitment Costs at, say, £500 per person £4,500

Salary administration £750

The primary source for salaries is likely to be major trusts, though there may also be assistance from public bodies (Newcastle City Council, Your Homes Newcastle).

Caseworkers

Advice giving in a drop-in centre is emotionally demanding. To reduce the risk of burn-out we will appoint part-time caseworkers

Volunteers

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

If paid minimum wage (£5.73 per hour) this would amount to £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 at £24,000p.a.

EAASSG Aspirational Budget 2009-2014

Expenditure	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-2014	
Salaries & on-costs						<i>3year fixed contract</i>
Project Leader	32352	32352	32352	34708	34708	
Administrator	28818	28818	28818	29996	29996	
Volunteer co-ordinator	14093	14093	14093	17273	17273	
Caseworkers	82919	82919	82919	86454	86454	
Recruitment	4500		4000			
Cleaner	1352	1393	1434	1477	1522	3% increase
<i>Total salaries</i>	<i>164,034</i>	<i>159,575</i>	<i>163,616</i>	<i>169,908</i>	<i>169,953</i>	
Direct provision for clients	1500	1800	2160	2590	3100	<i>rising by roughly</i>
Building	8020	8650	9350	10100	10900	20% (emergency fund)
Equipment	1750	1850	1900	2000	2100	8%
Activities	2410	2900	3500	4200	5000	5%
Worker expenses	6450	7100	7800	8500	9350	20%
Administration	11410	11980	12580	13200	13860	10%
Membership	500					5%
Management	1750	1750	1750	1750	1750	
Contingency	1690	1860	2045	2250	2475	10%
<i>Total non-salary costs</i>	<i>35,480</i>	<i>37,890</i>	<i>41,085</i>	<i>44,590</i>	<i>48,535</i>	
Total all costs	199,514	197,465	204,701	214,498	218,488	
<i>Overall % increase</i>		-0.8	3.6	4.7	1.9	
Hardship	33,000	44,000	58,600	78,000	100,000	<i>Rising by roughly 33.3%</i>

Possible sources of funding:

The main source of funding for salaries will be major trusts. Caseworkers are likely to remain a mixture of paid and volunteer workers doing much the same job.

Hardship, emergency fund and other direct provision to clients is likely to be funding from individual donations, fundraising and local trusts.

Running costs are likely to come from local trusts, public sector sources, and a small contribution from funds generated from talks, student supervision etc.

EAASSG Membership

The EAASSG constitution envisages a membership-based scheme. However this has never been put into effect.

The primary need for membership is to fulfil the terms of the constitution ensuring that the trustees are properly accountable.

EAASSG has a wide base of support amongst local churches and other groups. Supporters provide clothing and household items for the store. Many give financially through standing orders and occasional gifts.

To a very large degree this support base has been built up by Chris Carroll, Project Development Manager. It is in danger of being lost with the end of her post.

The potential

Membership will give supporters opportunities to be more actively engaged in the work of Common Ground. They will have a stronger understanding of issues around asylum seeking and thus be able to inform and educate others.

In June 2008 the EAASSG management committee endorsed the proposal for a membership scheme.

It was officially launched at the 2009 Annual Meeting.

Early publicity had led to over 40 people becoming members before the launch and several people had offered to join the committee.

Members may also undertake the work of producing a newsletter and organizing social events, thus taking some of the workload from Common Ground volunteers.

Membership may also raise funds for EAASSG – though this goal comes after awareness raising, good communication with supporters, and active support for the work at Common Ground.

Membership

Membership is open to individuals and to organizations.

Membership is free. The hope is that asylum seekers and refugees will comprise a significant part of the membership.

There is a suggested donation of £5 p.a. (which may be gift-aided). Organizations may be members for a fee of £25 p.a.

Members will receive a newsletter, the annual report and accounts, and have a vote at the AGM.

They would also have invitations to social occasions, talks on related issues, and other relevant activities (e.g. Refugee Week events).

The membership committee is formally a sub-committee of the trustees though elected directly at the AGM.

Start-up funds of £500 have been identified. Membership funds form part of the EAASSG accounts but are administered separately.

Membership records are kept in accordance with EAASSG's data protection and confidentiality policy.

Trustees must be members by the constitution. Workers at Common Ground are encouraged to keep active links with the membership (and to be members themselves).

Liaison with members will be a specific responsibility of the Project Leader.



Chris Carroll with a lion at a recent Common Ground party

Management Committee Structure

Officers: Chair (elected at the AGM), Vice-Chair, Treasurer, Secretary

5 Elected members from amongst EAASSG members: including clients, volunteers, asylum seekers, and other supporters

4 Reserved places 1 person from “a local health care provider”

1 person from “a local Churches Together Group”

2 people “chosen by and from the volunteers”

Co-opted members (up to 2) to balance and supplement the skills mix of elected members

Up to 12 trustees with *advisors* on an occasional or regular basis

The committee will work through **sub-groups**, each with at least one trustee and others, reporting regularly to full trustee meetings.

Finance to

- work in accordance with EAASSG financial policies
- ensure the financial security of EAASSG in the present and future
- maintain financial controls, book keeping and record keeping
- maintain a record of the terms of all restricted donations
- be responsible for insurance
- prepare and monitor a working budget
- ensure a broader knowledge and understanding of EAASSG finances
- be responsible for contingency planning
- make the best purchasing decisions
- ensure accounting is in accordance with SORP

Personnel to

- oversee the recruitment, training and deployment of staff and volunteers.
- ensure compliance with legal requirements
- be responsible for the creation, implementation and review of relevant policies ensuring that workers and Management Committee members fully understand their roles under these policies.
- plan future personnel needs
- make the best recruitment decisions
- exercise the trustees’ duty of care for workers

Changes under consideration include increasing the size of the Committee to a maximum of 15 with 2 reserved places for asylum seekers and up to 3 people co-opted.

Casework to

- develop best practice in casework
- be responsible for the creation, implementation and review of a code of ethics
- be responsible for induction and further training, individual training plans and regularly reviewing training provision
- ensure caseworkers are appropriately equipped and supported
- ensure casework is appropriate and compliant with relevant regulation

Membership to

- fulfil the obligations of the constitution
- ensure trustee accountability to members
- develop membership as a support group for the work of Common Ground
- advance the education of members of the public on asylum issues

Building to

- ensure compliance with the terms of the lease
- ensure compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act
- be responsible for risk assessment, physical health and safety

Compliance to

- ensure that all constitutional, legal and contractual obligations are collated and met, (including those where responsibility for implementation lies with other sub-groups).
- ensure that EAASSG activities conform to its Objects.

Information to

- ensure compliance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act .
- implement the communication strategy
- be responsible for the effective provision of information in support of EAASSG’s functioning
- be responsible for publicity
- be responsible for developing, co-ordinating and keeping under review formal relations with partner agencies and other groups

Proposed Common Ground Staffing Structure

Notes:

There may be little difference in the work done by paid staff and volunteers.

All workers are encouraged to become members of EAASSG.

Volunteers are also represented directly on the Management Committee.

Project Leader

Key responsibilities

- All aspects of the work of Common Ground
- Best quality service to clients
- To be the 'public face' of EAASSG
- Liaison with other organizations
- Promote justice for asylum seekers
- Project development

The Project Leader will work closely with the Management Committee and all its sub-groups.

Administrator

Key responsibilities

- The smooth operation of Common Ground
- Work towards Quality Mark standards of advice provision
- Compliance with constitutional, legal and contractual obligations
- Administer finance and assist fund raising
- Provide information management system
- Building and equipment

Caseworkers

Key responsibilities

- Provide careful, accurate and sensitive advice and guidance to clients
- Develop areas of expertise
- Support asylum seekers as they navigate the system
- Identify issues of injustice

Volunteer co-ordinator

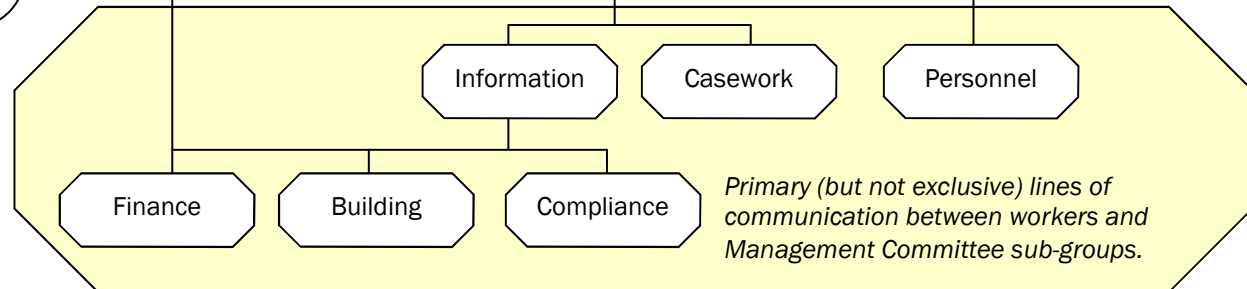
Key responsibilities

- Recruitment and retention of volunteers
- Induction, training, support and wellbeing
- Forward planning

Volunteers

Responsibilities

- Make clients welcome
- Support the caseworkers
- Receive, sort and distribute donations of food and clothes
- Befriend clients
- Accompany clients to appointments



Areas in which future volunteers could engage might include: help with fundraising, developing social activities out of Common Ground, publicity, engagement with issues in social policy and social cohesion.

Tables: present provision and proposed actions

1) Service Provision

EAASSG's core provision is **Common Ground**, a drop-in centre which is safe, welcoming and open to all.

	Present provision (May 2009)	Review	Responsibility
<p>Constitutional objective 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</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for c. 60 destitute 'failed' asylum seekers each week with £10, some food and toiletries • A store with clothing, household goods, toys, books free for any in need • General support on any issue a client may raise • Response to crises, not least at the point at which a person is made destitute • Support for asylum seekers as their cases are processed through the New Asylum Model and as they prepare their legal appeals • Referrals to a wide range of services in the fields of law, health, education, employment, volunteering, child care • Advocacy for clients where the system finds it hard to hear their case • Someone to accompany vulnerable clients to court hearings, immigration, hospital or other appointments • 2 computers with internet access in use almost the whole of every day • Regular drop-in sessions for workers from other agencies • Access to sports facilities and gym sessions • Tea, coffee, and a relaxed, friendly atmosphere 	<p>Common Ground is busy and popular with asylum seekers, refugees and local residents.</p> <p>The quality of personal support for clients and the working relationships with other agencies is very high.</p> <p>There is a need for more trained caseworkers, stronger internal communication, casework supervision and review.</p> <p>The building (previously an NCC housing office) has significant limitations for our purposes.</p>	<p>Management Committee</p> <p>Workers</p>

	Action	Benchmarks	Timetable	Responsibility
Constitutional objective 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	<i>Overall:</i> to actively maintain the welcoming, safe, caring and respectful ethos of Common Ground by keeping the quality of welcome under review continuously improving the quality of advice developing a more systematic pattern of review and assessment of casework Continuing to review and strengthen the extent and quality of relationships with other agencies	Numbers visiting Client feedback Feedback from other visitors and agencies we work with	Continuous A pattern of regular overview assessments should be set in place (perhaps each 6 months).	Workers Project leader
	Worker induction and training will be more systematic, balancing the needs of the organization with the preferences of volunteers The recording of workers' training will be systematised	Number of volunteers who receive full induction Training received (subject, type and level)	Summer 2009	Volunteer co-ordinator Administrator
	Allocate responsibility for casework lead Casework specialisms to be developed	Report to Management Committee Training of caseworkers	Autumn 2009 (and as more caseworkers are appointed)	Project Leader
	Regular casework meetings and file reviews	Meetings held, files reviewed	Autumn 2009	Casework lead
	Create a code of ethics	Code submitted to Management Committee Worker training	Autumn 2009	Personnel sub-committee
	Provide better emotional support to workers	Worker feedback	Now	Volunteer co-ordinator
	Create a single information management system (a Handbook on paper and computer) for Common Ground	Handbook created	Now continuous updating	Administrator

The trustees have decided to work towards OISC level 2 provision.

However this will require extensive restructuring of the organization and service provision and will probably take 4-5 years to achieve. In the short term we will begin with QASRO (quality assurance self-assessment scheme for refugee organizations) provided through NERS. We will review this experience with a view to working towards Community Legal Services Quality Mark in the provision of advice and information (below specialist level).

In doing so we will keep under review the impact of quality systems on the open-ended drop-in character and ethos of Common Ground.

	Present provision (May 2009)	Review	Responsibility	
Constitutional objective 2: To preserve and protect the physical and mental health of such asylum seekers, refugees and their dependants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close working relationships with a number of health providers - including local GPs (Walker Medical Centre, St Anthony's practice) and providers of mental health services (including the crisis intervention team). • Close working relationship with the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture and the ability to refer clients directly • Support for individuals in seeking and receiving treatment for physical health conditions, including accompanying them to appointments • Two workers from the Emotional Support for Ethnic Minorities Project offer a service in Common Ground on a regular basis • We provide free access to sports facilities and gym sessions through NCC Leisure Services Department. 	Care for the mental and physical health clients is a core part of EAASSG provision. File reviews could give a more systematic overview of the service we provide.	Caseworkers Chair of casework sub-group	
	Action	Benchmarks	Timetable	Responsibility
	Monitor and keep under review actions taken to preserve and protect the physical and mental health of clients	Feedback from clients file records of action taken	Continuous (part of the regular overview assessment of the project)	Project leader Casework lead Workers
	Review and strengthen working relationships with healthcare providers	Feedback from other agencies		Project leader
Develop a befriending scheme	Number of befrienders, Number of clients befriended	As soon as possible	Volunteer co-ordinator	

	Present provision (May 2009)	Review	Responsibility	
<p>Constitutional objective 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</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Project Development Manager, sometimes with others, gives talks to a wide range of local community groups. • Students from Northumbria University and the University of Durham have had placements in Common Ground • a worker from the Move On team in NERS provides a regular drop-in facility for clients at Common Ground • Caseworkers assist in citizenship applications and • the Common Ground store is open to all, including local residents, through which increasing numbers of local people understand more about the project's work 	<p>There are extensive links with a wide range of groups which has led to equally extensive support for the work of Common Ground</p> <p>Links are largely focused on the Project Development Manager and now need to be handed over to others.</p>	<p>Project leader</p>	
	Action	Benchmarks	Timetable	Responsibility
	To set in place a structured handover from the present project development manager to her successors in relationships with local churches and other groups	New relationships established	As soon as possible	Project development manager
	Project Development Manager to hand over working relationships with Durham and Northumbria universities to other workers in order to maintain the provision of placements	New relationships established Workers trained as a placement supervisors	As soon as possible	Project development manager
	Take a more active role in the Refugee Week activities in the centre of Newcastle	Participation in activities	June 2010	Project leader
	Review "the education and training of asylum seekers and refugees and their dependants" and to identify what further action can be taken.	Reported to Management Committee	Autumn 2009	Project leader Casework lead
Advance the education of local people through the proposed membership scheme (see page 12)	Membership scheme activities	July 2009	Management committee Membership committee	

	Present provision (May 2009)	Review	Responsibility	
Constitutional objective 4: To meet the continuing needs of asylum seekers and refugees, with particular emphasis on the transitional stage from Asylum Seeker to Refugee.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practical help with, for example, furniture, bedding, other household items • Support in becoming a British citizen • Help with family reunion • Continued help with referrals and advocacy as the need arises • Regular assistance for clients at Common Ground from NERS Move On team 	The work is not differentiated from other support. <i>See review of Object 1 above</i>	Management Committee	Caseworkers
	Action	Benchmarks	Timetable	Responsibility
	File reviews to identify 'legacy' cases Identification of patterns of need	Numbers of clients helped	Autumn 2009	Casework lead
	File reviews to identify those helped in the transition from Asylum Seeker to Refugee	Numbers of clients helped	Autumn 2009	Casework lead
Obtain feedback from longer-term clients to identify possible improvements to Common Ground provision	Responses from clients	Autumn 2009	Casework lead	

2) Strengthened organizational structures

Goal	Present provision (May 2009)	Review	Responsibility
<p>To create a strong organization by</p> <p>a) stronger management</p> <p>b) stronger finances</p> <p>c) better communications</p> <p>d) with a better building</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EAASSG is a charity governed by a constitution created in 2001 The Management Committee currently has 9 elected members. It is supported by 5 advisers. 	<p>The growth of work with clients has not been matched by a commensurate growth in its management and administration. This imbalance now needs to be redressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A stronger management will plan further ahead. Administration will be given greater weight within EAASSG There will be tighter financial control, greater transparency and a continued commitment to openness Responsibility within Common Ground will be distributed more widely and lines of accountability will be clear and understood A membership scheme will be created. Accountability will become clearer. Communications within EAASSG and between the organization and its stakeholders will be improved <p>Since November 2008 the Management Committee has taken a number of steps to restructure its working in order to secure the future of the organisation. These steps are reflected in this document.</p>	<p>Management committee</p>

Goal	Action	Benchmarks	Timetable	Responsibility
a) create stronger management	Co-opt new trustees on the basis of skills to supplement elected members	Skills of Management Committee assessed; other members co-opted	September 2009	Management committee
	Establish new sub-groups with clear terms of reference	Sub-groups established and reporting back	September 2009	Management committee
	Revise existing and create new policies (framework management policies and working policies)	Policies revised and endorsed by Management Committee	Now, continuing through 2010	Management committee and sub-groups
	Create a membership scheme (goal: 200 to 300 members in a year)	Membership numbers Feedback from members	Inauguration at the AGM (July 2009)	Management committee

Goal	Action	Benchmarks	Timetable	Responsibility
b) ensure stronger finances	Create a fund-raising strategy	Financial stability Increasing confidence of income into the foreseeable future	Planning – now Implementation - July 2009 onwards	Management committee Finance sub-group
	Build up an operating reserve, contingency funds, and unrestricted funds	Increasing reserves	As soon as possible	Management committee Finance sub-group
	Develop trading income (<i>student supervision; talks, training and advisory services, hosting other agencies</i>)	Increased income from services	2010 onwards	Project leader Finance sub-group Management Committee
	Establish stronger financial controls	Greater transparency in each step of financial administration and cash handling	Now	Administrator treasurer Management Committee Finance sub-group

Unrestricted income. There is a need to build up unrestricted income to give the project flexibility for organizational development. This may come through the membership scheme, trading (e.g. student supervision and fees for talks and consultancy), and small unrestricted donations.

The work of Common Ground is highly dependant on government policy. Both financial and organizational strength and flexibility are necessary to cope with the impact of changes in policy.

Goal	Action	Benchmarks	Timetable	Responsibility
c) create and implement a communication strategy	Agree and implement a communications strategy addressing relationships with all stakeholders: clients, funders & donors, workers, Management Committee, supporters, local community, other agencies, policy makers	Strategy agreed and understood	Now	Management Committee
	Internal communications: create a Staff Handbook (on paper and computer) containing: EAASSG policies, procedures, structure and other management information; Information in direct support of casework; contact information for other organizations	Handbook created Growth of information Regularity of updates	Now, continuous revision	Administrator
	Create effective (1 way and 2 way) communications with stakeholders	Regular newsletter and other publicity Meetings and talks Use website effectively More extensive links with local residents Dialogue with policy makers	Now, continuous	Project Leader Administrator All workers Membership
	Seek feedback from all stakeholders and integrate it in Common Ground's work.	Establish systematic sources of feedback Collated feedback reported to Management Committee	Autumn 2009	Administrator Management Committee
	Statistics: revise the recording and collection of statistics, revise analysis and presentation.	Clearer statistical picture of Common Ground activity and clients Appropriate and robust evidence to inform casework priorities and social policy work	Summer 2009	Administrator

Goal	Action	Benchmarks	Timetable	Responsibility
d) find a better building	Draw up specification for the ideal building	'Shopping list' in place	Now	Administrator Management Committee
	Identify potential sources of funding	Funding identified	July 2009	Administrator Finance sub- group
	Continue as part of the team creating a multi-use building in Walker		Current	Project development manager Project leader Management Committee

If Common Ground is to be part of the proposed multi-use building there funds will be needed for increased rent, rates and other building costs. There is likely to be the opportunity of significantly increased floor space in the new building, and therefore scope to increase the range of provision EAASSG can offer.

Conclusion

EAASSG has had a difficult time recently. The cost has been paid most directly by the Principal Project Worker who had given so much to the project over eight years and had put unstinting energy into building up Common Ground.

We are immensely grateful to those trusts and others whose generosity has enabled us to pay off accumulated debts in just four months.

These difficulties have shown us how much Common Ground is valued by the local community and other agencies working in the same field, as well as by the clients. We are very grateful to all those who have expressed concern and good wishes and who have offered practical help.

This plan is one expression of the commitment of the Management Committee and workers to avoid such a crisis again. Together we will build a stronger organization capable of taking forward the work into the foreseeable future.

We will continue to support asylum seekers and refugees, some of whom are amongst the most vulnerable people in the community.

We will continue to ensure that everyone is made welcome, valued, helped and treated with courtesy and respect in Common Ground.