

# REFUGEE THERAPY CENTRE

## Annual Report 2003 - 2004



*Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control [article 25(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights].*

A photograph of a young boy with dark hair, looking out of a window. The lighting is dramatic, with the boy's face partially in shadow and the light coming from the window behind him, creating a contemplative mood.

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Registered Company No.: 3895072  
Registered Charity No.: 1085922

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## Trustees and Management Committee

Aida Alayarian  
John Denford  
Gloria Jones  
Josephine Klein  
Winston Shapiro  
Lennox Thomas  
Stuart Turner

## Patrons

Mrs D Clyne  
Jeremy Corbyn MP  
Prof Roland Littlewood  
Dr E Rayner  
Mrs Webster

## Chair

Stuart Turner

## Clinical Director

Aida Alayarian

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### **Pictures**

Front page: Amnesty International

Page 6: one of our women's group

Page 10: one of our Counselling Courses

Page 11: Amnesty International

Page 12: Amnesty International

Page 13: Young Sierra Leonean refugee in Guinea Camp

Somalis in Kenya displaced yet again after Tana River floods their camp

UNHSR

Page 14: UNHSR

### **Poem**

Staying Alive, real poems for unreal times, 2002, edited by Neil Astley, p.333

**The report you are reading from the Trustees, Director, staff and volunteers was presented at our Open Day, which was held on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2004. The Statistical details and accounts correspond with the financial year 1<sup>st</sup> April 2003-31<sup>st</sup> March 2004**

## **Words from our Patrons**

### **Jeremy Corbyn, MP**



“The Refugee Therapy Centre is an oasis of calm and friendship amidst the very difficult lives that asylum seekers face when they arrive in London. For many of them, the pain of personal loss, deprivation, humiliation and torture never goes away. I really admire the way in which dedicated people do so much to help these people with such great need, at the Refugee Therapy Centre. I hope that the centre continues to go from strength to strength, and it certainly has my support as the local Member of Parliament. It is always a pleasure to be invited to speak at the annual meeting, and to have the honour of being a patron of such a wonderful organisation.”

### **Della Clyne**

“The Refugee Therapy Centre has developed and grown each year- this could only happen because of the dedication, energy and integrity of the outstanding people responsible for running it. Together with a dedicated team of professional therapists and the help of volunteers, the day-to-day activities of the centre provide help to young asylum seekers and their families. In this caring and supportive environment, they are helped to adjust to a very different life in a new country. These children, young people and their families are victims, through no fault of their own, of war and brutality and through the work of the centre are given hope and professional help. There is nothing better than to be associated with an organisation that has the sensitivity and professional skills to provide help to those in need. I feel privileged to be a patron”.

## **Report from the Chair**

### **Stuart Turner**



As we see more and more news about conflict in the world, so the need for services for refugees and asylum seekers continues to increase. Refugees have well-founded fears of persecution because of who they are or what they believe. Often they have faced torture, violence and enforced displacement. They come to countries like the United Kingdom hoping to achieve safety but they may experience long delays before their cases are finally determined. It is a sad fact that they may also face rejection through a hostile media and political climate, even racist abuse in some cases.

Fortunately, many refugees do recover from their experiences and become active participants in their new world. However, for some, the task of reconstructing a world in which they can be free to move on can be slow, sometimes taking a lifetime. It is often not just the immediate trauma that matters but a tearing up of the whole social world, leaving some survivors adrift without spiritual or personal anchorage. This is where organisations like the Refugee Therapy Centre can help.

Visitors to the Refugee Therapy Centre often comment on the sense of refuge that exists there. It feels like a safe place in which people can start to open up about their experiences if they wish. It is a place in which trust can develop. And through the widespread provision of same language therapy, refugees are able to receive counselling without the barrier of a third person being present, or without the need to explain culture or history.

This year has been a time of consolidation. We have moved into new rooms in Manor Gardens – a major improvement. We have started the “Introductory Course on Counselling Refugees”. We continue to provide counselling and therapy for many people in individual and group sessions. My thanks go particularly to Dr Aida Alayarian who has been the driving force as usual behind all the developments.

We have seen some changes in the Management Committee. Eric Rayner and Roland Littlewood have left the Committee and have become patrons. We also have new patrons: Della Clyne, Jeremy Corbyn M.P., and Lorna Webster. We have welcomed Winston Shapiro (who has agreed to become Honorary Treasurer) and Mary Robertson as new members. My thanks go to all our patrons and those on the Management Committee for their dedication and support.

However, the strength of the Refugee Therapy Centre lies in the commitment of the staff, the therapists, the members of steering committees and the other volunteers. This was made evident in the powerful talks given at the annual open day. I should like to close by remembering and thanking all those who in a quiet way make the Refugee Therapy Centre what it is today.

## **Report from the Clinical Director Aida Alayarian**



### **Background Information**

Many refugees and asylum seekers who come to this country have witnessed and experienced violence, loss, humiliation, persecution, imprisonment and displacement. The Refugee Therapy Centre was established in 1999 in response to a growing need for a community led therapeutic service for refugees and asylum seekers. Specifically a need was identified for a service which respected and worked with the linguistic and cultural need of refugees and asylum seekers.

The Refugee Therapy Centre was set up with the aims of

- Empowering refugees to deal with their experiences and psychological difficulties by offering a culturally and linguistically sensitive support service
- Providing a safe and supportive space in which people could rediscover their abilities and rebuild their confidence, so as to integrate and become positive members of society
- Giving priority to children, young people and their families suffering as a result of their experiences.

Because many recently arrived refugees and asylum seekers find learning a new language a struggle on top of other difficulties, the Centre offers therapy in their own language. Although interpreters can be used, patients may not feel comfortable with this. We offer patients the choice of talking in their own language or in English. The majority of staff has a refugee or immigrant background and they bring with them a wealth of linguistic, cultural and shared experiences. All therapists receive intercultural supervision on a regular basis, usually in a group of four, as well as individually.

At present we have forty-five therapists working with us, of these seventeen therapists work at the Centre in languages such as Albanian, Amharic, Arabic, Cantonese, Creole, Deri, English, Farsi, French, German, Greek, Italian, Kurdish, Lingala, Spanish, Somali, Swahili, Serbo-Croat, Tigre, Tigrinian and Turkish. We also have twenty-eight psychotherapists, psychologists or counsellors outside the Centre, who mainly speak English.

The year 2003-2004 has been significant, challenging and educational as we have continued to grow.

There have been a number of major developments in the administration of the Centre. Following the one-year grant from the Lloyds TSB Foundation for the post of Volunteer Co-ordinator, ably filled by Enisa Nura, we were grateful to receive another year of funding from the Leigh Trust to continue this vital area of our work. Enisa Nura has left the position and Natalie Yeong, another committed volunteer took over in October 2003. Natalie's vitality and dedication to the post and the example she sets are a credit to her and to the Centre. Enisa is now reading psychology full-time at University, as well as continuing to work at the Centre as an interpreter.

In May 2003 we moved into our new offices at numbers 6 & 7 Manor Gardens. We now have two small individual consulting rooms, a large group room, (also used for training and as a family room), a small kitchen and three offices for our staff and volunteers, with a quiet waiting area for patients. The space afforded by the new offices has allowed further developments in both the administrative and clinical work. I would like to express my gratitude to everyone who helped in moving to our new premises. I am also grateful to Simon of 'Green Works', an office-furniture charity working with young homeless people, from whom we received so much in furnishing our new offices at a very reasonable price.

I would like to thank all those friends and colleagues who have worked for us and given their time over the year, all of which has made the Centre such a benefit to Refugee as well as Health and Social Services. My thanks also go to all our volunteers who have helped us in different aspects of our work during the year.

I should like to take this opportunity to express gratitude to all our funders, private donors and supporters, for trusting and supporting our work. We are proud of our achievement, which has been totally dependent on their support.

My special thanks go to the Ashden Trust, the Camden Primary Care Trust, the Cripplegate Foundation, Health Action Zone, Help a London Child Impact Awards, the Islington Children's Fund, the Islington Primary Care Trust, the Leight Trust, the Lloyd's TSB Foundation, Trust for London, and all other donors who had faith in us when we struggled for stability. Their confidence and financial support have made it possible for the Centre to thrive and grow to what it is today.

My grateful appreciation also goes to the members of our two steering committees: Saniye Aldemir, Shahida Akram, Abdullahi Farah, Maureen Fox, Sega Habtom, Kate Harris-Thompson, Ayan Hassan Sharif, Bahareh Hosseini Moaf, Khadije Naib, Enisa Nura, Renos Papadopoulos, Elahe Rambarzini, Carmen Rojas, Parvin Sharafi, Amelie Tate, Adrian Webster, and Natalie Yeong whose input is so vital to us in the ongoing evaluation and development of our services.

I would like to thank Ann Curno, Dorothy Daniel, Una Havilland Freeston, Kate Harris, Juliet Hopkins, Josephine Klein, Roland Littlewood, Renos Papadopoulos, Sue Rendal, Lennox Thomas, Stuart Turner and many other colleagues for all the support they have given so generously and tirelessly, for running the 'Introductory Course on Counselling Refugees', another vital area of our work.

And last, but not least, I would like to express my appreciation to all Trustee members of the Management Committee for their continued intellectual and emotional support, upon which the Centre's well-being depends, especially to Stuart Turner, our chairman.

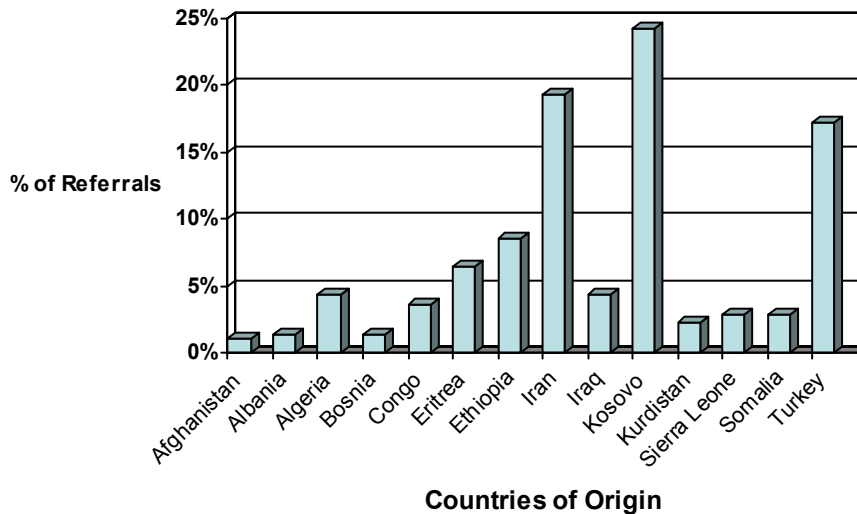
**Clinical Work 1st April 2003 - 31st March 2004**

***Summary of Services Provided from 1st April 2003 - 31st March 2004***

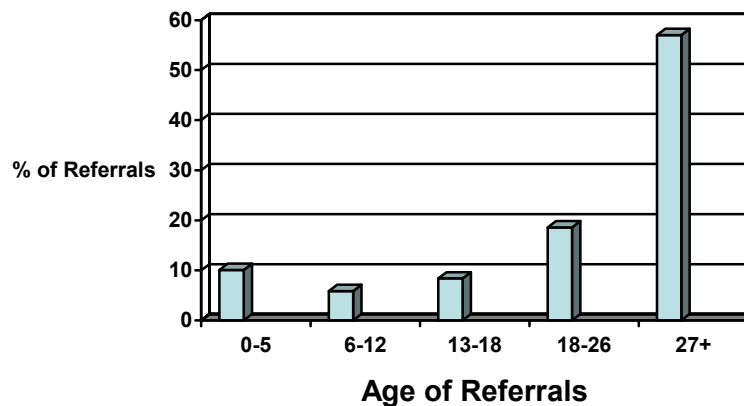
Total number of patients referred to us:	168
Number of patients offered assessment:	137
Number of patients pending funding:	18
Number of patients awaiting assessment	13
Number of patients currently in therapy	65
Number of patient files closed	49
Number of patients who did not attend	23



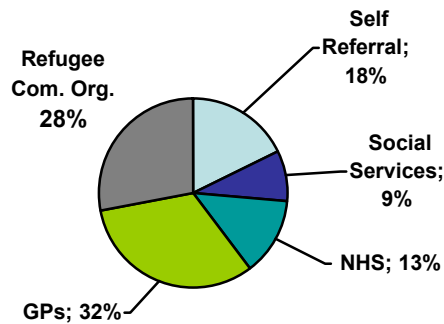
The countries of origin of clients referred are shown below:



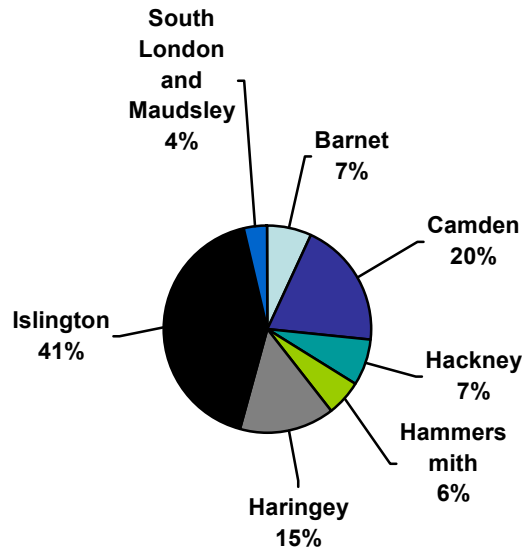
The spread of age groups referred to us is illustrated below:



Sources of referrals:



% of referrals by Borough



### ***Evaluation***

To monitor and evaluate our clinical practice, all therapists receive regular intercultural supervision and produce progress reports on therapeutic interventions. Every ten weeks all patients are also invited to complete confidential feedback forms on the service we offer, on their experience of therapy, and of attending the Centre, all of which is vital in forming the way we evaluate and shape our work. The following texts are extracts of feedback from patients, some of whom are sharing with us their experience of flight and of coming to a new country. They not only gave their consent but also expressed a wish that their feedback be publicised as widely as possible.

Segan, mother of four

*“So, it came to the point in my life where I had to ask myself. Is there life? Does it have to be lived? If so, how and where should I find the strength to live a quiet life. But a light and great*



*hope for me was the Refugee Therapy Centre, where I go every fortnight for a women's group. Now I have started to go to school and I hope to start work soon. The fact that there are people in my life who are working with me, so that I can have a happy life, gives me strength and hope for living. With the help I receive from the group, I may never be a depressive again. I want to thank everyone at the Refugee Therapy Centre who helped me to live and enjoy my children and family again."*

Emma, aged 17

*"Just Thank God we are referred to the Refugee Therapy Centre and Thank God you as organisation are helping us so much, beyond belief. I could not believe last year that I could smile any more in my life. This is how I feel and with full respect I tell you Thank You very much."*

Some words from the Bonad family

*"The good points about therapy are that it is helping us a lot and that we are happy to be taking part in therapy, because we can talk and it is taking the sadness away. We can talk openly and freely. Thank you for your help."*

Maryam, aged 15

*"The therapy helps a lot, I feel good now, because I am talking in my original language, many thanks Refugee Therapy Centre."*

Tricia, aged 16,

*"I did not know what to expect, but therapy has helped me to express my feelings. It makes me less angry and more relaxed and confident. Sometimes it is easier to talk with a stranger than with someone you know, to tell your feelings open without fearing. When I am sad or angry and come to the Refugee Therapy Centre, therapy helps me understand a situation, it helps me to find a way to pass the problem. It makes me able to talk about things that I've never spoken about before. At first I was uncomfortable speaking, but I trust my therapist very much, now I can talk about anything. All week I look forward to come to the Centre and see my therapist"*

### ***The Process of Referral and Therapy***

Currently we are commissioned by the Camden and Islington Primary Care Trusts.

Refugee community organisations, mental health professionals, social workers and schools can refer patients to the Centre in writing. We like the written referrals to state the full name, date of birth, address, country of origin, language needs and reason for referral. For patients who have already been assessed, it is helpful to enclose any correspondence or reports relating to their treatment. If patient have received treatment from a Mental Health Service we will enquire about their history before proceeding. Once a referral is made the referral agency will receive a letter of acknowledgement, informing them of the next step, which may be a request for more information or the first appointment. A letter will also be sent to the patient acknowledging that they have been referred to our service, and that we will invite them for assessment soon.



Following the assessment, for individual therapy the patient will be allocated a therapist for an initial period of twelve to twenty-four sessions on a weekly basis. The patient may see a psychotherapist or counsellor who speaks their own language or an English speaker if they prefer. Some

patients prefer not to see someone from their own cultural background, due to feelings of mistrust, guilt, shame or embarrassment and also the intensity of emotion and pain.

If group therapy is considered appropriate for particular patients, this will be discussed with them, and the patient will be invited to the group. In most cases people join a group after some initial individual therapy. This is to prepare them for the group and also to inform and prepare the group and obtain their agreement for a new member to join.

### ***Women's Groups***

One of the clinical developments of 2002 was the formation of an Albanian-speaking women's group. The women in this group had all suffered atrocities and loss as a result of events in Kosovo and had received individual therapy at the Centre. They now continue to meet as a group to share their experiences and gain relief and support from speaking in their own language. The help and encouragement gained from the group assists in combating the feelings of isolation many of them feel, living in a new environment and with uncertainty about their immigration status.



I am happy to report that, following the success of this group and the opportunities and space which our new offices provide, we developed Farsi-speaking, French-speaking, and Amharic and Tigrinian-speaking women's groups, and we have great hopes for these new ventures. We are also considering the formation of an Albanian men's group, to start September 2004, for those who have experienced torture or state violence.

### ***Children***

The Centre receives referrals for children who may be experiencing problems, at school with bullying, or adjusting to their new homes and lives, or who are struggling to cope with their past experiences, or exhibiting anger and challenging behaviour.



As a result of what they have been through, the inner worlds of some young refugees and asylum seekers may be populated by thoughts of abuse and horror that are repugnant to people around them here in the host country. Their inner worlds dominate their responses and can prevent them settling into their new environment.



The therapeutic approach we use can help children or young people to see how and why they may project their feelings of persecution on to those around them. With ongoing therapeutic intervention, we help them to deal with what lies beneath their behaviour and the reaction it provokes in other people, and help them to learn how they can cope with their experiences.

We give priority to children and young people. When necessary, the issue of funding will be postponed in order to offer a swift response to the need. When referred, a child will be seen with a parent or alone, whichever is appropriate to its age and development, and also depending on the reason for referral. After assessment, the therapist will plan an individualised intervention for

that child. This may involve seeing the child on its own, or seeing other members of the family, either separately, or all together. In some circumstances, the child may be best helped if we work intensively with, say, a depressed angry person, or a desperate humiliated person.

### ***Outreach Work***



Part of the Centre's work involves outreach work with the refugees in our local area, in order to raise awareness of mental health issues and services, and building trust with Refugee Communities. This is very important to the Centre as it helps to identify need, and to address issues before they become too serious. Our outreach work also helps us to keep abreast of the changing circumstances of refugees and asylum seekers here in the United Kingdom as well as in their country of origin. Feedback from clients and therapists encourages us to develop this aspect of our work. We are approaching the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation for funding, to appoint new bilingual outreach workers to support young families and their children's educational needs.

## **Training ventures**

### ***Training for Young Refugees and Asylum Seekers***

One of the aims of the Refugee Therapy Centre is to provide support and training to young refugees and asylum seekers in the local area. Through the work of our Volunteer Co-ordinator we are able to offer them the opportunity to learn new skills, gain experience and receive therapeutic support at the Centre. We currently have young refugees and asylum seekers from the local community, volunteering for administrative and language support work, helping to build their own and their community's confidence.

### ***Introductory Course on Counselling for Refugees***

The Refugee Therapy Centre runs an Introductory Course on Counselling for people who wish to learn about working with refugees and asylum seekers in the community. The course is free for refugees and asylum seekers and is an opportunity for them to learn to use their experiences to help others. The course consists of a one-hour lecture, a one-hour seminar at which a student will present a paper each week on a chosen subject, and a one-and-a-half hour experiential group. The course runs weekly from October to July covering such subjects as:

- Introduction to Counselling, Psychotherapy & Psychoanalysis
- Attachment, separation and loss
- Common mental health problems: depression as a result of trauma and post traumatic stress disorder
- Issues facing professionals working with refugees & asylum seekers
- Assessment and therapeutic approaches to working with refugees
- Working with refugees & asylum seekers in a community setting
- Working with people who have experienced torture or violence
- Working with children, adolescents, families and groups
- Cultural and gender differences
- Cultural variation and mental illness



- Immigration law for refugees and asylum-seekers
- Professional practice

### Some of our Cases

The following cases are of actual people, but we have modified some details to respect their anonymity.

#### Aran

Aran was young, about seven, when in initial stages of ethnic cleansing. The police in his village (from the majority ethnic group) had a station next to the village football pitch. Shooting the ball while the children were playing became a favourite pastime, with beatings dealt out to any child who protested.

When Aran was about ten, he and other children from their ethnic group were forbidden to go to school. His elder brother (intelligent and politically aware) had been warned not to attend any meetings. On his way to a meeting in defiance of this, he was shot and his body kept under guard in the midsummer heat for four days, after which the family were allowed to bring the body home. The stench was terrible, making the wake very difficult.

Meanwhile life was made increasingly difficult for the minority population: a curfew, young men forced to fight in the army, most of whom being killed - so constant funerals; telephones cut off; sniper fire in the streets making it impossible to stand near windows or bring in supplies safely. Then the army arrived at their door. Aran heard his sister and aunt being raped by at least fifteen soldiers in the next room. One of the men in the family was rifle-butted in the face when he protested. The two women emerged from the room and were also beaten with rifles. The family left the house; men and women were separated and the younger men removed, it is assumed to be killed.

The rest of the family escaped to a refugee camp in a neighbouring country, but conditions were very bad with little food and extreme cold. Aran's uncle was very ill and could not help the family. Meanwhile Aran met other young men and decided to return with them to his village to dig up some valuable items the family had buried. The house was an unrecognisable burnt shell, though he found some money, but fighting prevented his return to the camp. Aged fourteen, he joined the militia where he witnessed many further atrocities. At fifteen he came to this country in the back of a lorry.

When we first saw him at the Refugee Therapy Centre he was unable to sleep at night, suffering frequent flashbacks and having suicidal thoughts: coming increasingly to the attention of the Youth Offending Team. Like many young people who have experienced violence, he would be very quick to act out aggressively, with little empathy for his victims.

During the two years he was in therapy here, he felt contained enough to talk about the events he had experienced, frequently gripping the sides of the chair with white knuckles. The flashbacks diminished and his sleeping improved; he stopped behaving aggressively and did well at college. He was also able to contemplate the fact that he may never see his family again. Eventually he felt well enough to say that he could manage on his own, while assured that he would be welcomed back at any time if he felt he needed support.

### Ivan

Ivan started attending the Refugee Therapy Centre at the age of fourteen, with a history of aggression and violence, and an already lengthening criminal record of assaults and attacks in this country. He, also, could not sleep and suffered flashbacks. His level of communication was extremely poor.



Through therapy it became clear that, although he had arrived from a war-zone using the usual refugee routes, he had been deeply traumatized by his family, in particular by a brutal father. From an early age, he had virtually lived as a feral child, with food left out in the yard for him, and sleeping in the barn with animals or in a van.

Ivan had never attended school and had to be educated alone in this country, due to continual conflicts with other children. Eighteen months after starting at the Refugee Therapy Centre he was able to attend college successfully, had a part-time job, had developed empathy with others, and had begun to realise that no child should be treated as he had been. He had also learned to handle difficult situations without resorting to violence, and has not been in trouble with the police again. He has continued to do well and is now an articulate thoughtful young man with well-developed insight.

### Misha

Misha started attending the Refugee Therapy Centre when he was ten, following a referral from his Primary School teacher. He presented as being deeply depressed and hard to engage. Through drawings we managed to get a picture of a pleasant early life in a lakeside African town, suddenly interrupted by the arrival of militias at his school, where some of the older boys were randomly selected, made to lie down in front of the others, after which their limbs were hacked off with machetes.

As the violence worsened, his family fled, but Misha and his mother were captured by the militia. Whilst in captivity Misha was forced to shoot older child, and his mother was also killed. Following a courageous rescue by his father, the remaining family eventually sought sanctuary in the United Kingdom.

Misha is starting to talk more, and is learning to cope with aggression at school, which he finds deeply traumatising. He is also learning to be more pro-active in searching out help from staff. Young people who have been traumatised by aggression and violence, though initially numb and unable to defend themselves, can frequently start acting aggressively at a later time. It is hoped that through therapy, discussing past events and associated feelings, and working on strategies for present-day difficulties, Misha will be able to control further unacceptable behaviour.

### Maryam

Maryam was a victim of 'state rape', a strategy used in the Balkans to demoralize and terrorize. In her community, as in many, rape was a taboo subject, a source of shame, not to be talked about, so Maryam had suffered in silence. However she appeared to adjust to life in the UK, met an Englishman, but who left her when she had his baby. It was at this point that problems surfaced and she developed an urge to hurt her baby; she started having nightmares in which she mutilated the baby.

Maryam came to the Refugee Therapy Centre on her own initiative, and engaged well with her therapist, and has been coming for some months. She is now much less worried about hurting her baby and confiding in her therapist about the terrible events in her life.

### Grace

A 16 year old girl of African origin was referred to the Centre for help with her anger.



*"I did not know what to expect, but therapy has helped me to express my feelings. It makes me less angry and more relaxed and confident. Sometimes it is easier to talk with a stranger than with someone you know, to tell your feelings open without fear. When I am sad and angry and come to the Refugee Therapy Centre, therapy helps me to understand situations, it helps me to find a way to pass the problem. It makes me able to talk about things that I've never spoken about before. At first I was uncomfortable speaking, but I trust my therapist very much, now I can talk about anything."*

Grace's parents were involved in politics and were shot in front of her and her brothers and sisters, at a political rally. She started taking care of her siblings, but later soldiers arrived at the house demanding money and then commandeering the house and evicting them all. Grace then lived in the local market begging scraps of food until she was picked up by the militia and forced to fight. Following an injury she was taken to hospital where a doctor, recognising that she was still a child, allowed her to stay at his house. Worried for his own safety, he put her in touch with a European man who was recruiting for the pornography business. She appeared lucky in that on arriving in London, she was 'rescued' by a woman who seemed very concerned. However, even this person put her in moral danger. Fortunately, Grace told her Social Worker that she needed to talk to someone in confidence, and she was referred to the Refugee Therapy Centre. Here she was free to express her anger and distress at what had happened to her. She remains in therapy and the process is helping her to accept the traumatic experiences of the past and she is beginning to focus on the here and now and sometimes even to look to the future.

### Alin

Alin came to this country as an asylum-seeker, and acquired refugee status. He is highly intelligent, was well qualified in his profession and had a good job. He requested therapy after beginning to suffer flashbacks and nightmares. He said that he had been arrested first in 1985, and released from prison after three months. He was arrested again 18 months later, and on this occasion he was cruelly tortured throughout five years of detention. He described the torture as being severely beaten with sticks, forced to drink urine, kicked and punched. Electrical shocks were applied to various parts of his body, including his genitalia. He was burned with cigarettes on various parts of his body. He said that he frequently lost consciousness under torture, and described how the pain was often so unbearable that he preferred to die. Alin was held in solitary confinement during part of his imprisonment, and at other times in cells with many other political prisoners, who were also tortured. As therapy progressed, and Alin felt more at ease to talk about the traumatic experience he had endured during his detention he disclosed, with great difficulty, that his guards had tied his arms and legs to the bed, and proceeded to rape him, also with pieces of wood, bottles and metal. Excruciatingly painful, humiliating, and terrifying moments mark his memory. He said they were



beating him while inserting objects into his body. Despite the severe torture already inflicted on him, this particular incident had exerted the profoundest impact on him. He said, indeed, he felt that it had changed his life, his self-esteem and confidence. On his arrival in the United Kingdom, Alin, bearing false documents, was arrested at the airport. He told officials that he was a political refugee and wished to claim asylum. He was incarcerated in Britain for entering the UK with false documents and detained for four months without understanding the reason.

Alin was clearly suffering from severe post-traumatic stress, presenting classical features, including 'histrionics', nightmares and intrusive recollections of trauma, diminished interest in participating in significant activities, feelings of detachment or estrangement from others, and outbursts of anger. He had marked depressive symptoms of helplessness and hopelessness. Alin's symptoms were exacerbated by his separation from his community, concerns for the safety of his family, and guilt over his own survival. He was healthy before his detention and torture, and there was no history of mental illness or disorder in his family, nor in his life before these events.

Since starting therapy, Alin suffers less frequently from his nightmares and we are extremely happy to report that he is now happily married and in a successful professional career.

### Abby

Abby was thirteen when she was referred to us and told us that her Mum took her to see social workers because she 'can't stand her crying anymore'. Her mother and grandmother were beating her. Her uncle had started to abuse her sexually when she was eight. She had told her mother, who didn't believe her, so she told her grandmother. Her grandmother beat her and told her that she really hated her. Her mother told her that she wished Abby had never been born. After assessment we had to refer Abby to Social Services under child protection legislation.

Abby's mother was also offered an assessment at the Refugee Therapy Centre, which she eventually attended having missed the first two appointments without explanation. The greatest initial barrier was that Yvonne (Abby's mother) was reluctant to admit, even to herself, that she was treating her child badly. As therapy progressed, she was able to allow herself to take responsibility for assaulting and mistreating Abby. She admitted that she was aware that her behaviour wasn't right, but feared that if she asked for help, she would lose Abby, and face public shame in her community. She was scared of prosecution and imprisonment, and feared that no professional would understand her, as she was not able to speak English. She was also not able to ask a member of her community with English skills to help her, as everyone in the community would then know her business.



In her mind Yvonne tried to persuade herself that she was not really doing any harm to Abby, and that other parents do the same. When she was not able to persuade herself, she would seek comfort in drugs and alcohol. She would leave Abby at home alone and come back with a stranger, putting herself and Abby in danger. She would regret it the next day but said that if Abby disclosed any abuse and asked for help, she would hit her again. For her, it was like a vicious circle and was getting worse.

Yvonne then came to understand that the Social Services were here to protect her child, not to “rip her family apart”. She understood that they wanted what she really wanted - a safe home for Abby.

Abby temporarily remains in care, but is hoping to go back to her family home when her mother feels better. Yvonne wishes to be a good enough mother and to feel at peace and be able to enjoy her child. In therapy she was able to explore her childhood traumatic experiences, talk of abusive parents and extended family, and also to explore the effects of the trauma she had been through in her own country, having been persecuted and raped by military gangs, and unable to talk to anybody. She felt guilty and shamed.

Abby became independent in the end and is in regular touch with her mother and the rest of her family



## Words from Staff and Volunteers at the Centre



### Ayan Hassan Sharif, Support Outreach worker



“I first came at the Refugee Therapy Centre middle of 2003 for the introductory course for counselling, after some few months I started volunteering once a week as a Somali interpreter. In mid May 2004 I got another wonderful opportunity to work as an outreach support worker. The Centre has given me great opportunity and confidence in helping other refugees like myself in trying to help them cope with living in a foreign country.

The Refugee Therapy Centre is a place where you feel comfortable and relaxed and friendly place for both the clients and staff. I am fortunate, and I feel privileged to be part of such a wonderful multicultural family. I have enjoyed myself in every minute I have been here and hope to be part of the Centre in the long term future.

### Bahareh Hosseini Moaf, Outreach Support Worker



“I joined the Refugee Therapy Centre as a student of the Introductory Course. This course was about counselling for young refugees. After a few weeks I started to work in the Centre as a volunteer. At present I am working as an Outreach Support Worker with the aim of giving support and guidance to asylum seekers regarding their children’s education.

I believe that the Refugee Therapy Centre not only gives admirable support to young refugees and asylum seekers but also encourages volunteers to want to develop their skills and abilities. I have had the chance to meet wonderful people and learnt a lot from working at the Centre”

### Bernadette Hawkes, Psychotherapist



*“England has changed. These days it’s difficult to tell who’s from around here and who’s not, who belong and who’s a stranger*

From *A Distant Shore* Caryl Phillips Published 2004 Vintage

These are the opening lines of Caryl Phillips’ latest book. I think it vividly tells us about the experience of the person seeking refuge and the character who is supposed to belong.

I believe one of the things we try to do here at the Centre is to help people find an emotional home, within themselves and also to find a place in their new community. It is not easy for the

clients or the therapists to work towards this goal. The psychological journey is often as painful and sometimes as dangerous as the physical journey to get to the United Kingdom. There is often a sea of pain or desert where no feelings can be recalled for fear of being in touch with the painful memories. Hopefully whilst undertaking this journey the clients can feel that they are not doing it alone.”

Dorothy Daniel, Psychotherapist



“I come into the Refugee Therapy Centre sometimes once, sometimes twice a week, to see clients and to take Supervision. There is a remarkable atmosphere of great activity, but also of confidence and calm, which comes from the central direction and administration. It is good to be a small part of this integrated work. The development of the Training Course has been particularly important I feel, this year, bringing in young volunteers with so much to offer in the future, as therapists and outreach workers. The premises, which seemed so spacious when we moved in a year ago, are already used to the full!”

Enisa Nura, Interpreter



My name is Enisa Nura and I work at the Refugee Therapy Centre as the Albanian Speaking Interpreter and as part of the Outreach Support team. I was the volunteer co-ordinator at the Centre from October 2002 to November 2003 which I enjoyed thoroughly. Due to university commitments I left this position, as I could not give the Centre as many hours as I should have liked.

In October 2003 I attended the Introduction to Counselling for Refugees Course at the Centre. Throughout the course I learned so much about working with refugees, the difficulties that they face, and the different ways in which help is available. But, most importantly, I learned a lot about myself as a refugee, I learned to listen and to think about others in a different way and I also realised how much I love doing what I do, because of the great personal satisfaction gained.

Josephine Klein, Supervisor



“I always have a great time at the Centre, it is my favourite place. This year I helped the students on the *Introduction to Counselling* Course to become a group, and to learn how to do this kind of enabling. Everyone had a good time, learned about themselves and each other, and improved their English amazingly. Watching everyone blossom over the thirty-odd sessions was a lovely experience.

Also I ran a fortnightly training and supervision group for therapists who were polishing their skills as group facilitators. What agonies we in our group suffered when only two or three -or even just one!- group member in their group turned up. How can you run a one-member group? How do you help people act on their knowledge that to enjoy their group they have to be there regularly? How do you live with your - quite unwarranted - feeling that attendance is so irregular because you are not doing right? But we survived and are looking forward to doing more and better next year, with two ‘graduates’ from the *Introduction to Counselling* Course joining us. One of them is going to run a group for men. Wow!”

Kulsum Hassan, Admin Volunteer



“I joined The Refugee Therapy Centre a few months ago as an admin volunteer. It’s really been a great experience for me, with the help and support from every body at the Centre. I have not only learnt more but have actually enjoyed learning too.

I would like to thank Aida and Natalie who have been extremely helpful and friendly to me since day one, I have found them to be great encouragement. I have also gained a lot of self confidence and have found the courage to join the Introductory Course to Counselling Refugees in October, (something I would not have dreamed about). I am glad that I am here and looking forward to continue being part of The Refugee Therapy Centre family.”

Lennox Thomas, Supervisor



“The challenge continues for both intellectual and emotional learning in the supervision of therapists at the Centre. The membership of both groups has changed a little and new people have come with different interests and skills. Seeing adults, adolescents, parents and children, as well as what worries them: torture and persecution, the problems of survival in the UK, there are still practical problems which therapists can now get help with. The Centre has now employed three outreach workers who have been of tremendous support to the therapists. The confusion that existed between the practical and therapeutic tasks can now be more separated out. Having said that, the outreach workers have valued support with the emotional strain, which sometimes seeps into their part of the work. Therapy through interpreters is different and new to many people, whilst this is interesting and throws up many technical issues like the splitting of the transference, these issues need to be constantly explored. The other issue is that of assessment and selection of therapy method from a range of orientations in psychotherapy.”

Mahabad Hamad, Student in Placement



“My name is Mahabad. I am a Swedish citizen with a Kurdish origin. 14 years ago my family had to leave the country because of my father’s political activity for Kurdish autonomy and we became refugees in Sweden.

currently I am studying International/Intercultural Social Work, Education and Psychology at Mid Sweden University. I started working at the Refugee Therapy Centre for my placement which is included in my education. I choose having my placement at the centre because of my big interest in refugees and asylum seekers but also because I wanted to find out how to help the people who are in the same situation as I was in. I started at the centre doing some admin work to be more familiar with the centre. Then I continued with outreach work with other refugee communities to introduce Refugee Therapy Centre services and also find out about the services they provide. Soon I began to be involved with clients as an Interpreter in Arabic. This gave me a great opportunity to increase my knowledge about the kind of issues refugees and asylum seekers face. My placement finishes in 4 weeks and I regret that it ends on a time I start to enjoy it most. I started my placement with some anxiety because I found it quite difficult to find my role at the centre, but with great support from the staff I managed to end my placement well. I want to end this to give my gratefulness to the centre for having me with them during my placement, especially to Dr. Aida for supporting me during my time at the centre. I wish you good luck with your wonderful work!”

Matthew Hart, Educational Psychologist



“I started working at the Refugee Therapy Centre as a volunteer therapist in November 2001. I am an educational psychologist used to seeing a large number of clients in a short time or using consultative problem-solving skills with teachers or whole schools, but I had previously taught children with emotional and behavioural problems. I had been missing the long-term in-depth work; a need met here at the RTC.

The time has gone so quickly; I find it hard to believe that I have been here two and a half years. There has been a demand for therapy from adolescents, and, with a view to meeting this demand, I recently started working here one day a week in addition to carrying on the volunteer work. Some of the material patients bring up in sessions can be extremely harrowing but supervision, the clinical meetings and professional yet friendly and fun atmosphere ensure that it is a containing place to work.”

Natalie Yeong, Volunteer Co-ordinator



“I have been working for the Refugee Therapy Centre since June 2003 as a volunteer. In December 2003 I was employed as a part-time Volunteer Coordinator. Although the position as Volunteer Coordinator was a completely new experience for me, I received lots of positive encouragement and support which helped me to settle into the role.

Through outreach work I have been able to make contact with many new Refugee Community Organisations. Firstly we send a letter, introducing myself, the Centre and our services. Then, follow up the letter with a phone call and try to arrange a meeting to exchange information about one another’s services. Since December I have made contact with 26 Refugee Community Organisations in Camden and 38 in Islington. So far I have visited 11 organisations through outreach work. On a visit, we take with us our leaflets including client, referrer, volunteer leaflets, annual reports, and also information about the forthcoming Introduction to Counselling course.

I really enjoy my role as the volunteer co-ordinator and relish meeting new people and organisations and learning about their communities and services. I feel I have been able to make strong links with these organisations and we have since received referrals from some. We have also generated strong interest in the ‘Introductory Course to Counselling Refugees’.

One of the main aims of the Centre is to provide training and support for young refugees and asylum seekers to develop their capacities of the Refugee Communities. Working with volunteers is a valuable part of my role, helping volunteers to extend their skills and abilities to move onto further education or employment. Having started as a volunteer myself I can understand the anxiety one can feel being in a new environment and therefore the importance of feeling secure, supported and safe.

During my time in this post 17 people have applied for volunteer positions ranging from administration and book-keeping to interpreting. Our admin volunteer has recently joined us and comes to the Centre two mornings and one full day per week. Our advertising volunteer is designing lovely children and teacher leaflets for us. She works at home and comes to the Centre for weekly meetings. We have also recruited three volunteers from our Introduction to

Counselling Course. It is a pleasure to be able to watch the Centre grow, with our volunteers moving into employment and other areas.

It is hard to explain the importance of The Refugee Therapy Centre as it provides such a valuable service to the community, clients, volunteers and staff. In my view, I like to see the Centre as a second home that is full of warmth and energy. It is a safe place where clients are helped to work through trauma they have experienced in their past and also where volunteers are able to learn through encouragement and guidance.”

*Nerma Biscevic, Psychotherapist*



“I am a Bosnian speaking Counsellor with a background in Psychiatry and Neurology, and a longstanding and keen interest in Counselling and Psychotherapy.

I have been involved with the RTC for 2 years now. This has been a truly enriching and rewarding experience for me, both personally and professionally.

Soon after I first approached the Centre in 2000, I was invited to attend its AGM, which offered me a better insight into the work of the Centre. I was impressed by the core values and ideas as well as the great creative potential within the Centre. I was left full of excitement and hopeful of expectations of my further involvement with the RTC.

Last year, I was not able to attend the AGM, as it coincided with my first visit to my home country after nearly 11 years of living in the UK. This was quite a significant point in my life – yet another step forward in coming to terms with my experience of trauma, exile and displacement.

Today, I am very glad to be here. It is amazing to see how we have grown by now. I feel privileged to be part of this project. This is a place where I learn, feel supported and inspired. Working with refugees can be challenging in many ways. Because of the multitude and intensity of trauma, cultural difference and often a language barrier, the need for empathic understanding and holding is ever so great. With some clients, indeed, I feel this is all I can do – be with their pain, anger and sadness...and the wounds begin to heal. Sometimes, deeper psychoanalytic work is more appropriate.

If I am to sum up, very briefly, what it is that makes this work so fascinating and attractive to me, it is the uniqueness of every therapeutic encounter as well as the integration of creativeness and discipline that are so intrinsic to this work.

I wish to thank my colleagues here at the Centre, my Supervisor and my Experiential Group Conductor for their valuable help and support. I am particularly grateful to my clients for being so ready to challenge and teach me.”

*Patricia Oteyza, Psychotherapist*



‘Being part of the Refugee Therapy Centre has been a very rewarding experience, from both personal and professional aspects. The Centre has a very friendly and safe atmosphere, and like many of the visitors and clients, when I come to the Centre, I feel it is more like a home than an office. On a professional level, the

Centre has provided me with a very containing and supportive environment, with regular supervision, training and a strong sense of team spirit.

I was offered a place on the 'Introduction to Counselling Course' this past year which is aimed at refugees and asylum seekers. It was a great opportunity to learn from the experiences of other students. Through these new areas of work I feel the Centre will be able to reach a wider target area of those refugees and asylum seekers in need of help.

I hope that the good work done by the Centre will be given recognition, so as to enable the RTC to further expand it's capabilities to provide much needed service across London. It has been a wonderful opportunity for me to be given the chance to develop my skills and to meet so many talented and warm hearted individuals. Thank you so much!

Rachel Adema, Psychotherapist



"At the end of my second year of being part of the life of the Refugee Therapy Centre, I still feel grateful for the opportunity of being involved with this lively organisation. I continue to learn and to feel enriched, both from the clinical work and from the enthusiasm, energy, commitment of the staff and volunteers who are the life blood of the Centre."

Sega Habtom, Outreach worker



"My name is Sega. I came to Refugee Therapy Centre to take introduction counselling course in October 2003, before I start I have no idea how deep is counselling and how helpful it is to refugee and asylum seekers. I become more interesting about counselling and Refugee Therapy Centre. I am so lucky I attended the course because in the course we were eleven students and from ten country, it was good opportunity for me. I learned different cultures and different experience.

Susie Renshaw, Trainee Counsellor in Placement



"I have been on a trainee counsellor placement at the Refugee Therapy Centre since October 2002. In this time I have gained an enormous amount from my association with the Centre.

The service that is provided by everyone at the Centre is much more than just a service. The Refugee Therapy Centre provides a home and extended family for many people, many of whom have lost their home, friends and family members. It offers a nurturing space in which clients can feel safe to explore painful and difficult emotions. It also provides a place of learning and development for many refugee volunteers, staff and trainee counsellors like myself.

It has been wonderful to watch the Refugee Therapy Centre grow and develop along with its clients, to see new therapy groups begin, a new outreach programme develop, and the counselling training course now going into its second year.

I never cease to be inspired by the courage of my clients and working with them has been such a valuable experience."

REFUGEE THERAPY CENTRE  
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES (INCLUDING INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT)  
For the Year Ended 31 March 2004

	Notes	Unrestricted Funds £	Designated Funds £	Restricted Funds £	2004 Total £	2003 Total £
<b>Incoming resources</b>						
Donations and grants	2	9,832	-	137,731	147,563	137,870
Psychological reports		10,420	-	-	10,420	16,135
Interest receivable	3	3,151	-	-	3,151	1,654
Tax refund		121	-	-	121	16,070
<b>Total incoming resources</b>		23,524	-	137,731	161,255	171,729
<b>Resources expended</b>						
Direct charitable costs	4	-	-	124,556	124,556	76,917
Admin. And established costs	5	21,916	-	-	21,916	12,151
<b>Total resources expended</b>	6	21,916	-	124,556	146,472	89,068
<b>Net income/(expenditure) For the year</b>	8	1,608	-	13,175	14,783	82,661
<b>Transfers between funds</b>						
		-	-	-	-	-
<b>Net movement in funds</b>		1,608	-	13,175	14,783	82,661
<b>Total funds at 1 April 2003</b>		28,615	100,000	6,783	135,398	52,737
<b>Total funds at 31 March 2004</b>	14	30,223	100,000	19,958	150,181	135,398

BALANCE SHEET

31 MARCH 2004

	Notes	31.03.04 £	31.03.03 £
<b>FIXED ASSETS:</b>			
Tangible assets	10	2,960	2,290
Investments	11	2	2
		2,962	2,292
<b>CURRENT ASSETS:</b>			
Debtors	12	7,560	28,948
Cash at bank and in hand		159,891	121,348
		167,451	150,296
<b>CREDITORS:</b> Amounts falling due within one year	13	20,232	17,190
<b>NET CURRENT ASSETS:</b>		147,219	133,106
<b>TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT</b>		147,219	133,106

<b>LIABILITIES:</b>		£150,181	£135,398
		=====	=====
<b>FUNDS:</b>			
Unrestricted		30,223	28,615
Designated		100,000	100,000
Restricted		19,958	6,783
<b>TOTAL FUNDS:</b>	<b>14</b>	£150,181	£135,398
		=====	=====

This is a summary Balance Sheet of our audited accounts. Full audited accounts accompanied by detailed notes are available from the Centre.

*Homeland*

*For a country of stone and harsh wind  
For a country of bright perfect light  
For the black of its earth and the white of its walls*

*For the silent and patient faces  
Which poverty slowly etched  
Close to the bone with the detail  
Of a long irrefutable report*

*And for the faces like sun and wind*

*And for the clarity of those words  
Always said with passion  
For their colour and weight  
For their clean concrete silence  
From which the named things spring  
For the nakedness of awed words*

*Stone river wind house  
Lament day long breath  
Expanse root water-  
My homeland and my centre*

*The moon hurts me the sea weeps me  
And exile stamps the heart of time*

**SOPHIA DE MELLO BREYNER**

*Translated from the Portuguese by Richard Zenith*