



# Glenthorne Quaker Centre and Guest House

Easedale Road, Grasmere, Cumbria, LA22 9QH

Registered Charity no 232575

## **WELCOME PROJECT – Hospitality to asylum seekers and refugees**

### **Annual Report 2011**

#### **Introduction**

Glenthorne Quaker Centre's **Welcome Project** provides hospitality and support in the form of short respite holidays to groups of asylum seekers, refugees and those made destitute when their asylum claim fails.

Glenthorne operates this project by making links with faith and community groups supporting asylum seekers in towns and cities in the north of England.

We arrange for asylum seekers and refugees associated with these local groups to stay at Glenthorne for a weekend at a time. The average size of each group is about a dozen, including accompanying befrienders from the local support groups.

#### **Purpose and Benefits of the Project**

Asylum seekers in the UK commonly endure great stress while going through the process of claiming asylum. Health and well-being are even more severely impacted when an asylum claim fails and the claimant is left with no State support, barred by law from working and contributing to society, yet unable to return home for fear of persecution or death.

The Welcome Project contributes relief to this attritional stress. During the weekends when Welcome Project guests stay with us, we make the most of Glenthorne's beautiful and peaceful Lakeland surroundings; going for walks, trips on the boats on the lakes, and strolling round the nearby towns and villages.

Our Welcome Project guests also share friendly company with other Glenthorne visitors and staff, making for relaxed social integration.



The Welcome Project extends practical and moral solidarity to the staff working in asylum seeker support agencies – often over-strained in trying to meet the needs of people in destitution. Included in this report is feedback from our Welcome Project guests and support workers, illustrating the impact of the Project on well-being.

### **2011 Welcome Project Facts and Figures**

2011 was the fourth year of the Welcome Project.

Number of groups hosted at Glenthorne: Six (increased from five in 2010)

Local organisations involved: Blackburn ARC (Asylum and Refugee Community)  
Sheffield ASSIST (Asylum Seeker Support Initiative - Short Term)  
Oldham Unity  
Leeds WAST (Women Asylum Seekers Together)  
Bury Eagles Wing  
BRASS (Bolton Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support)

Total number of guests:	70 (increased from 60 in 2010)
Number adult asylum seeker/refugee guests:	44
Number children/young people as guests (infant to 18 years):	16
Number accompanying befrienders	10

Countries of origin of asylum seeker/refugee guests: Angola, Burma, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Iran, Iraq, Ivory Coast, Kuwait, Nigeria, North Korea, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Syria, Togo, Uganda, Zimbabwe.

Cost items: Full board accommodation at Glenthorne  
Support for travel costs for guests to get to Glenthorne (train fares, vehicle hire)  
Pocket money given to guests (£10 per adult, £5 per child)  
Hire of minibus for duration of each visit  
Sundry items eg boat trips on the Lakes

Total project cost in 2011:	£8,865.42	(increase from £6,330 in 2010)
Total cost per guest	£126.65	(increase from £113 in 2010)

Balance of reserved funds remaining (at 14 Nov 2011) for Welcome Project activity in 2012: £5132.32



## **Some of the feedback and comments from 2011 Welcome Project guests**

“We left all our troubles behind for three days and had peace of mind. It was a wonderful experience especially wandering in nature. We socialised with different kinds of people and got to know each other. I am excited and I wish it could happen again.

It is difficult to describe in words the generosity and kindness of the people who made this trip happen. We appreciate it so much.

We learned about the Quaker community’s attitude to foreigners. Our spirits were uplifted to know there are people who listen to us, who respect us and see us as human beings.....

It was good to be in a place of nature. When you hear the birds singing and smell the fragrance of flowers you get a real happiness. When love and respect and kindness are shown: these are the fruits of love.”

“After six years [in the UK] this is my first trip. I really enjoyed it. The food was good. All the people behind the scenes worked so hard to make it special for us...On Sunday morning, I sat outside and had a very peaceful time. I listened to birdsong. For me it was the best part, just to sit and listen to nature.”

*From a group co-ordinator:* “The families have had a very traumatic time before and since they have arrived in the UK. They have been unable to move on with their lives, not knowing if they are going to be picked up by the UK Borders Authority and placed in detention or even given flight directions and returned to the place they have escaped from. There is also the constant struggle with UKBA regarding their asylum claims.

When they were chosen to go on this trip to them it was a chance to put their worries at the back of their minds just for a while.

Since we got back, I have noticed a change in the mums especially. They appear to be more relaxed and confident. This may only last for a short while but thanks to your generosity it is better than nothing.

The guest house is warm and welcoming in beautiful surroundings. The families were amazed at their accommodation and felt like royalty for the weekend. They were relaxed knowing that the children were free to roam and enjoy without unnecessary restrictions.

They discovered how much fun walking can be as well as the benefits to their health. Adrian made sure they were occupied for the majority of the time and the activities he planned were all accepted without question, even the long walk around the lake, which greatly surprised me as the children do not normally like walking too far.

The children all took postcards of Glenthorne to their schools to show their friends and teachers; they also told everyone that they were going to live with Adrian at Glenthorne ‘forever’! They often ask me when they are returning to have more fun.

They have also discovered how much fun it can be outdoors, and when I remind them of how far they walked round the lake they almost burst with pride.”

“It was an amazing experience for me [as a befriender]. I love the Lake District and it was a joy to introduce its tranquillity and beauty to those whose life is a struggle. I watched anxious, worried faces turn to smiles and laughter....”

## **Some reflections on Welcome Project 2011 from Project Key Worker at Glenthorne**

It has once again been a great privilege to host and spend pleasurable days with our asylum seeker/refugee guests. Pictures speak a thousand words, and the photographs included in this report show some of the good times we have shared in 2011 at Glenthorne and around the Lake District.

Our Welcome Project guests have had traumatic experiences. We don't ask about their stories – that's not part of the Project. But sometimes they mention snapshots of their stories: fleeing war, loss of home and family, persecution because of taking a political or conscientious stand against their government. Their stories continue with the ordeal of going through the process of seeking asylum in the UK. Some have stories of racially aggravated abuse since their arrival in the UK. One of our guests spoke of an arson attack on his flat.

As in previous years of the project, a number of our guests have had their claims for asylum refused and are therefore destitute. The weekend at Glenthorne was a stark contrast to their usual daily experience. As one visitor said: "For those of us who are homeless and living on friends' charity, the weekend gave us a place of our own, to relax and feel safe." Much of the day-to-day work of the local support groups is about providing a lifeline to people in these circumstances.

The Welcome Project provides a brief and temporary respite to our guests' troubles. However, from the feedback we receive, and our sustained contact with the local groups, we know that the benefits are real.

This year, many of our guests have spoken of the benefit from being outside in nature and beautiful countryside, and how this has positively affected their sense of well-being. By contrast, since arriving in the UK, our guests have generally spent little if any time outside of the urban centres.

A positive lasting benefit for our guests has been the realisation that they could make this a more common experience in their own locations. For example, some of the mums on one of the visits realised that might take their children out to the local park back 'home.' Some of the men in another group came up with the idea of seeing if they could get some free bicycles from a local charity and get out into the countryside. In such ways, the Welcome Project has played a part in encouraging our guests to take longer-term action for their own well-being, even while they are undergoing continuing uncertainty and stress.

For me personally, one of the joys of hosting the Welcome Project is the singing that goes on over the weekends, thanks largely, I have to say, to our African guests. Singing in the bus as we're motoring round the Cumbrian lanes; singing and dancing at Castlerigg stone circle (much to the enjoyment of other tourists); singing at meeting for worship at Glenthorne on Sunday morning. In the face of all the struggle going on for our guests, their voices bring a message of hope and perseverance: as a Welcome guest said to me over breakfast one morning, "What else can we do, but keep going?"

We are now fundraising to continue the Project in 2012 at the same level of activity as this year. Glenthorne extends warm thanks to the Grant Making bodies, Quaker meetings, and generous individuals, who have donated funds to the Welcome Project and enabled its continuing success.

Adrian Rose

*Glenthorne Friend in Residence/Development Officer*

