

migration <

**PEOPLE
IN
TRANSITION**

TEN VISITORS TO HACKNEY MIGRANT CENTRE

welfare <

SHELTERS :

NO SPACE:



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We want to thank the ten people who agreed to talk about their lives and made it possible to write the case studies. Without their support and their candour it would not have been possible to publish this booklet.

INTRODUCTION

Hackney Migrant Centre (HMC) opened in April 2008 to meet a need for advice and support for migrants in the local area. Since then HMC has run a weekly drop-in for refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants. HMC is open to all migrants, regardless of their immigration status or where they live. During the drop-in sessions visitors can receive free advice on immigration, housing and welfare. A health advocate from the NHS provides information about NHS services and helps visitors register with GPs. During the session everyone enjoys a hot nutritious meal together, creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere. People from over 100 countries have visited the drop-in since it opened. Over the years HMC has expanded and won recognition for the quality of its service.

Our advice services are provided through partnerships with established visiting professionals from a number of local agencies. At present our immigration advisers are seconded from Islington Law Centre and Montague Solicitors in Islington. Welfare/housing advisers are from Hackney Community Law Centre and from the Undocumented Migrants Advice Project run by Praxis, a migrant support organisation based in Tower Hamlets. Recently HMC and Islington Law Centre set up a new project to help destitute migrants who need legal representation for immigration but who cannot afford a private solicitor and can no longer get legal aid.

We rely on a large team of volunteers who together run the drop-in, supporting the work of the professional advisers in various ways - signposting visitors to other services, helping them find hostel places, helping them fill in forms or providing other advice. Volunteers welcome visitors and mix with them during the session. They also prepare and serve lunch for visitors, advisers and volunteers - about 70 to 80 people each week.

Cuts to welfare benefits, increasing restrictions on migrants' rights, and recent cuts to legal aid, as well as the closure of many solicitors' immigration departments, have resulted in ever greater demand on HMC's services. These large numbers have created challenges for us to continue to provide a high quality but still warm and welcoming service.

This booklet provides stories of the experiences of some of our visitors. It is intended to illustrate the kinds of cases that HMC advisers and volunteers deal with each week. Several of the stories demonstrate how irregular or uncertain immigration status creates many other problems and can often lead to destitution and homelessness. They show that many of our visitors face multiple problems which require long-term casework involving both volunteers and professional advisers, and often partnerships between several agencies.



THE DIFFICULTY OF CLAIMING ASYLUM IN THE UK

Ali is a 37-year-old doctor from Sudan, who left his country because he was suffering persecution for his anti-government political activities. He first came to the UK in 2004 to claim asylum, but because of his light skin colour the Home Office did not believe that Sudan was his country of origin, and refused his asylum claim and subsequent appeal. In 2006 he returned to Sudan where he was arrested at the airport in Khartoum, and was placed in detention. After his release he continued to be persecuted for his political activities. Eventually he decided to return to the UK in May 2012 and claim asylum again.

Ali first came to HMC to seek advice in August 2012. At this point he was homeless, with no support or access to healthcare, and was visibly exhausted. We advised him about his asylum claim, and our volunteers referred him to the British Red Cross for further help with his claim and to apply for asylum support.¹ Meanwhile, volunteers helped him to find a place in a shelter for homeless people and to obtain healthcare. Ali continues to come regularly to HMC sessions.

I first came to HMC because I didn't know what to do. I wanted advice where can I find any shelter for homeless. When I came first time to HMC I found very helpful and amazing people working at HMC.

¹ Asylum support is granted by the Home Office to destitute asylum seekers or refused asylum seekers under certain conditions.

² A fresh claim involves giving new evidence on a previous claim that was refused.

Ali was clearly suffering from mental health problems and other serious illnesses following his ill-treatment in Sudan. We were very concerned about him, so referred him to Freedom from Torture, which offers therapy and support to victims of torture.

His asylum case was very complicated because Ali had claimed asylum before and Home Office guidance was not clear as to whether he must start a completely new asylum claim or make a fresh claim.² He was bounced back and forth between various Home Office departments in different cities, adding to his distress.

I faced many difficulties in the UK. I couldn't make any claim for asylum because UKBA (UK Border Agency) gave conflicting information. Sometimes they said you have to make fresh claim and sometimes they said you have to make new claim for asylum. During this period I had been homeless without any support or any healthcare. HMC found me a night shelter in London and not only this. Also HMC found me a GP because I have some medical conditions.

It was only in October 2012, after his solicitors threatened to challenge the Home Office with a judicial review, that Ali was able to lodge a new asylum claim. He was then granted asylum support. By this time he had unnecessarily suffered five months homelessness



and destitution, which exacerbated his mental stress and depression. In line with the Home Office policy on 'dispersing'³ asylum seekers outside of London, at the end of 2012 he was sent to Birmingham.

Ali still has regular contact with HMC via email. We are also trying to connect him to supportive services in Birmingham as he is still feeling very distressed. Happily, after more than a year in limbo he was recently granted refugee status.

I think HMC is doing perfect job. I would have done nothing without HMC because I didn't know what to do before I came to HMC. HMC refer me to the British Red Cross where they helped me to apply for asylum support...I felt very well supported by HMC.

³ Asylum seekers receiving support and accommodation from the Home Office may be sent to be accommodated anywhere in the UK. This process is known as dispersal.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY GOOD QUALITY IMMIGRATION ADVICE

Samuel is a young Jamaican, who first came to HMC for immigration advice in May 2012. He had arrived in the UK in 2008 with a study visa for university which was about to expire. When he came to HMC Samuel was gravely concerned about his imminent return, as in Jamaica he had received threats because of his homosexuality, and he feared further persecution because of widespread homophobia there. Our immigration adviser helped Samuel to submit an asylum application and made written representations on his behalf. Eventually the Home Office recognised the risks associated with Samuel returning to Jamaica, and in September 2012 he was recognised as refugee.

Seeking asylum in the UK was very scary. While I was in fear of my life in my home country, I was also afraid of the fact that I may be placed in detention as an asylum seeker, or that I may be detained then have to return to Jamaica. But the adviser took charge of my case immediately, scheduling meetings at his office and guided me through the entire asylum process. Overall, I found the experience at Hackney Migrant Centre extremely helpful and indiscriminate.

Recently Samuel returned to HMC for assistance with a pressing housing problem. After living in a student hall of residence, he had moved to private shared accommodation, and was renting

the living room in an overcrowded flat. He no longer received financial support from his family, and was claiming job seekers allowance, to which he is entitled as a recognised refugee. However, as is often the case, his landlord was reluctant to accept a tenant who was receiving benefits, and had given him a week's notice to vacate the property.

I was in limbo by that time and I didn't know what to do. I again sought advice from Hackney Migrant Centre.

Samuel's only viable option seemed to be a place in supported accommodation through the YMCA. Even this seemed challenging as, in order to register, he needed a letter of recommendation from his local council. Despite Samuel's best efforts his caseworker at the council didn't provide this and he was at serious risk of homelessness. HMC assisted him with his application to the YMCA and wrote him a reference to get him a place in a hostel.

Hackney Migrant Centre has made a big difference in my case by providing me with legal advice which resulted in a positive decision.

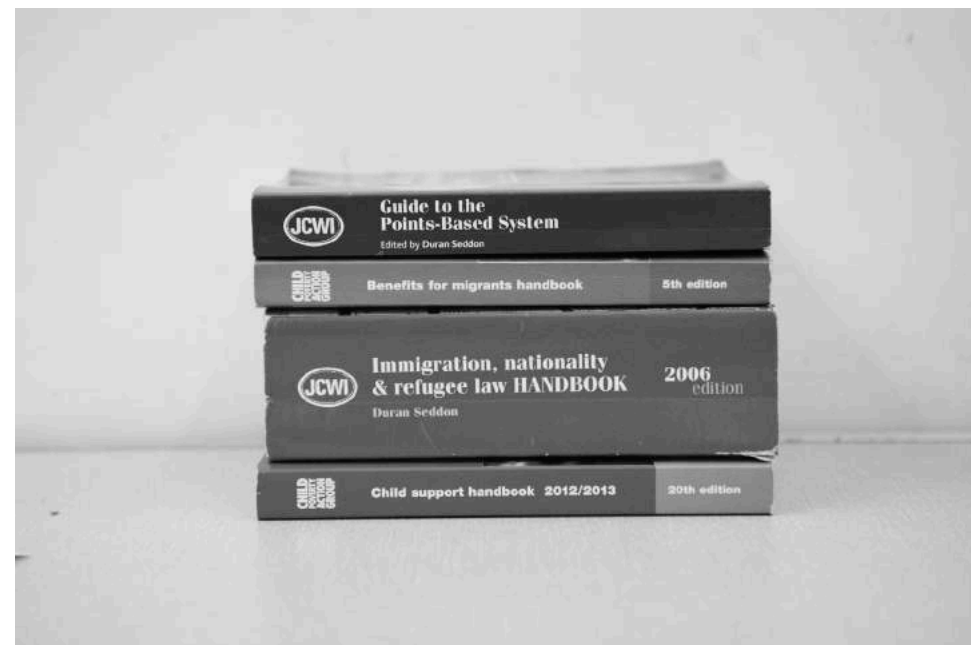
A HMC volunteer met Samuel by chance recently at a book launch. He had finished his studies a couple of months earlier and found work as a social care advocate. He has moved in with a friend and is involved with LGBTI groups.

THE EFFECTS OF LEGAL AID CUTS

Abeke is a 21-year-old young woman from Nigeria. In May 2013 the Citizens Advice Bureau referred her to HMC for both immigration and housing advice. Her visa had expired and she was homeless and destitute. We discovered that Abeke also needed health advice and help with GP registration as she was six months pregnant. Abeke's irregular immigration status meant that her housing and financial situations were difficult to address because she had 'no

recourse to public funds' and therefore could not seek benefits, housing or work; she was in a very desperate situation. The reasons why she was in this situation were very complicated.

Abeke first came to the UK for a month as an unaccompanied minor aged 13 as her stepfather didn't want her to stay with the family in Nigeria. On this visit she stayed with a Nigerian family not related to her. After her one month visa expired in 2005 she returned to Nigeria





and obtained a multiple entry two year visa. In June 2006 she returned to the UK and lived with the same family until 2008 when they had to leave London. During these three years Abeke never attended school.

Before I came to HMC I had no idea. After I finished college I wanted to go to university but I couldn't because of my immigration status. I had never thought about my visa until I wanted to study... I didn't know. I was so depressed and I couldn't get any help. I was sitting at home and all I was thinking of, were my friends who were able to study.

After her original host family left London, Abeke went to live with Jennette, a woman of Nigerian origin, and her two children. Jennette arranged for her to go to school and supported her as much as possible. After school Abeke decided to go to college where she completed a BTEC Level 3 in IT and Business. During her studies she developed a relationship with a young man she met at college. When she became pregnant he abandoned Abeke and never contacted her again. On top of this, Jennette told her that she was unable to support her with a baby and asked Abeke to leave.

When I first came to HMC I was basically homeless. I came to the centre around 6am in the morning but the doors were still closed. It was cold and raining but I had no place to go, so I sat down at the door step of the vicarage. At 8am the vicar opened her door and saw me sitting there freezing. She took me to the early mass in the church. After the mass she took me to her house where I had a cup of tea whilst I was waiting for HMC to open.

During her first visit to HMC our health adviser helped Abeke to register with a GP, and our volunteers made several successful grant applications on her behalf. Unfortunately we were not able to find her a shelter for the night but the vicar of St. Mary's church agreed to house her temporarily.

Abeke came back the following week and after lengthy discussion with her, an immigration solicitor from Islington Law Centre took on her case as an Article 8 Human Rights application.⁴ As there is now no longer legal aid for this type of immigration case, we accepted Abeke on the project we have developed with Islington Law Centre to help destitute people who need immigration representation and cannot pay a private solicitor.

After her Article 8 application was lodged Abeke should have been able to get housing and financial support from social services, while the Home Office was considering her claim. Our generalist adviser helped her apply for housing and financial support but which borough had responsibility for her was disputed,

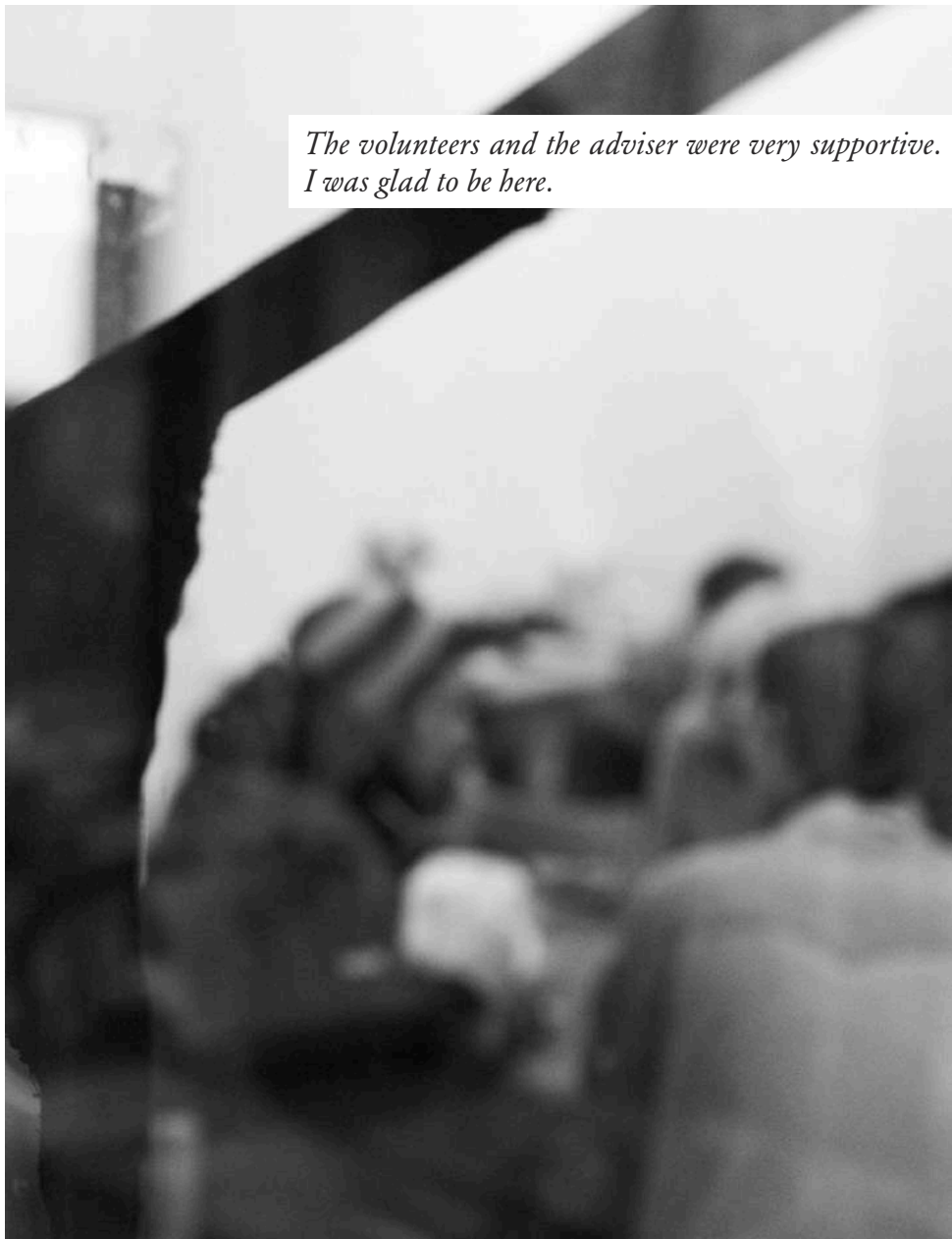
as she had been living in Newham when she became homeless but was now in Hackney, and neither borough would accept responsibility for her. HMC helped to refer her to a community solicitor who lodged a judicial review against Hackney Social Services. They finally accepted responsibility and have housed her in temporary accommodation.

HMC really supported me. The volunteers applied for grants. With the money I can take care of my baby. I don't know what I would have done without the support of HMC and the vicar. Probably I would be still on the street.

At the end of August 2013 Abeke gave birth to a healthy little boy. She is still living in temporary accommodation with financial support from Hackney Social Services. Abeke still comes regularly to HMC to meet people and get help when needed. Recently we managed to find her a pushchair for her baby. We are hopeful that she will receive a decision from the Home Office granting her the right to remain, which will enable her to build a new life for herself and her son.

I feel useless at the moment because I can't work or study here. I'm only waiting for my documents and a decision from the HO. I would be really grateful if I could work or go back to school. I want to be useful for the society and want to be able to take care of my child. I don't want to depend on the support of others or the government.

⁴ The Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights provides a right to respect for a person's private and family life, his/ her home and correspondence.



The volunteers and the adviser were very supportive. I was glad to be here.

EFFECTS OF TORTURE AND DESTITUTION

David is a 33-year-old Liberian whose asylum claim has been refused. He came to the UK in 2006 after having been tortured and stabbed in the stomach during the civil war. After inadequate medical treatment in hospital in Liberia, David almost died and had to undergo a second operation from which he is still recovering. Because of this traumatic experience and continuing fear he decided to leave Liberia and seek asylum in the UK.

After I arrived in Newcastle I was arrested even though I claimed asylum. The Home Office refused my asylum claim and detained me. I was very terrified and I was suffering from pain in my stomach from the injury. I kept on telling them that I have pain until they released me after two months.

David first came to HMC in June 2013, referred by the Jesuit Refugee Service for help in making a fresh asylum claim. Due to his immigration status David was destitute and homeless and relying on the support of charities. We referred him to the Red Cross to help him apply for asylum support.

When I first came to HMC I was very hungry and desperate. The coordinator of HMC gave me hardship and travel money. The volunteers and the adviser were very supportive. I was glad to be here.

At that time, the Red Cross case worker was too busy to take on new cases, but agreed to collaborate with HMC to support David as much as possible. The Red Cross requested his records from the Home Office as he did not have all his documents, and HMC gathered evidence about his physical condition and his destitution. We also applied for grants for David to help him financially. His GP wrote a medical declaration for the Home Office to explain that Dave could not travel back to Liberia in his current medical condition as this would trigger a relapse of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder from which he had been suffering. His psychotherapist also wrote a long report stressing David's mental condition.

The Red Cross referred David to Asylum Aid's outreach solicitor who is working to submit a fresh asylum claim on his behalf, and the Red Cross case worker has applied for asylum support on medical grounds. David is currently awaiting the Home Office decisions. However, he is still homeless and HMC volunteers are still trying to find him accommodation.

I am happy about what I am seeing here and I hope HMC will continue like that. Maybe grow and become bigger and even better.

THE IMPACT OF TRAFFICKING

Awa is a 26-year-old from Gambia. She was trafficked to the UK in 2010 on the pretext that she would be able to study here. Instead of being sent to college, she was forced to live with a family as their housemaid.

I was staying with people to help them for two years. I had no opportunity to go to school or to college to educate myself. Not even to leave the house. A friend helped me to escape this situation and assisted me to access services. I didn't know anything about the UK and I was not aware about my status.

The Citizens Advice Bureau referred her to HMC in August 2013. When Awa came to the first drop-in session she was very distressed and seemed scared. She had a distressing history to reveal. Almost two years after she had left the family where she had been 'housemaid' a friend helped her to contact an organisation for victims of trafficking. This organisation helped her to apply to the Home Office for asylum on the basis that she was a victim of trafficking but unfortunately her application was refused. This had a very negative impact on Awa. Because she was so afraid she just broke off contact with this organisation and went underground. Homeless and destitute, some nights she stayed with friends, others she slept at City Airport or on a bus.

Awa was trying to submit a fresh asylum claim with a private solicitor and a friend was paying the solicitor's fees. During her first visit to HMC we wrote several grant applications to find financial support for her. Our immigration adviser referred her to the

Helen Bamber Foundation for psychological support.

When I first came to HMC I was desperate and I didn't know what to do. I felt hemmed in because it was so busy but after my first visit I became more confident. I was never expecting that I have to go through all this. I had no idea and never thought about my immigration status.

Awa continued to come to HMC in the following weeks, and our welfare adviser referred her to Praxis which helped her find a hostel place and obtained an emergency grant for her. We noticed that she felt supported and welcome at HMC and she told one of HMC's volunteers that she had started to feel more confident and would love to go to college and study social care.

One month after her first visit, Awa told us that the friend who had been supporting her had stopped paying for her solicitor but we managed to find her a lawyer with expertise in acting for victims of trafficking at a specialist legal charity dealing with this issue. We have also managed to obtain a set of her records from the Home Office.

One of our volunteers has helped Awa to register for a health and social care course at Hackney Community College where she is now studying. We hope she may also soon be entitled to receive asylum support.

If I'll get my immigration status things will be easier. I can finally focus on my education, finish college and get a good job or continue to study.

GOOD LOCAL PARTNERSHIP

Daniel is a Ghanaian who had been studying for a bachelor's degree in Cyprus. After finishing his studies there he applied for a visa to visit the UK for a holiday before returning to Ghana to start work. Whilst he was in the UK he suddenly became very ill and was diagnosed with end stage kidney failure. His condition was so critical that doctors took immediate action, providing him with the lifesaving treatment he required. Daniel was put on dialysis three times a week, the only way to keep him alive without a transplant. Without it he would have died within seven days.

It is extremely doubtful that Daniel would have access to a dialysis machine in Ghana, and so he made an application to the Home Office for permission to continue to stay in the UK. The Home Office refused, rendering him ineligible for continued dialysis treatment on the NHS because of charges imposed on migrants with irregular status. His only option was to lodge an appeal.

Daniel first came to HMC seeking advice less than three weeks before the hearing of his appeal in the (lower) First-tier Immigration Tribunal. An immigration solicitor from Hackney Community Law Centre who had given sessional advice at HMC took on the case and represented Daniel at the Tribunal.

I was introduced to HMC by Haringey's MP David Lammy in 2011. I met the programme coordinator who made it crystal clear to me,

that HMC actually helps people especially migrants with once a week cooked food and referrals if needed. The following week I was given £20 to help me ease a bit of the financial woes on me.

Daniel's case involves some very complex issues of immigration and human rights law. In general the Home Office does not allow non-British and non-EEA nationals to remain in the UK for medical treatment, and the established case law on the matter reflects this. Despite this, Hackney Community Law Centre's immigration solicitor managed to convince the tribunal to grant Daniel's appeal. However the Home Office appealed against this decision and the matter was taken to the Upper tribunal for another hearing. In July 2013 the Upper Tribunal upheld the First-tier tribunal's decision, dismissing the Home Office's appeal. However this did not automatically grant Daniel leave to remain. The matter dragged on for nearly two years but recently he was finally granted leave to remain.

This charity has helped me a lot, now thank God, upon their referrals of my ongoing immigration issues to the Hackney Community Law Centre, I have a permit to live in the UK.



*If I'll get my immigration status things will be easier.
I can finally focus on my education.*

COMPLICATIONS OF ASYLUM SUPPORT

Ahmad first came to HMC in September 2012, less than a month after he had arrived in the UK from Iran. He spoke almost no English and was silent and introverted. Fortunately one of our volunteers had studied Persian at university and was able to interpret. Because of that we were able to give Ahmad a whole afternoon's individual attention in his own language.

It emerged that he had been imprisoned and tortured for political activities in Iran. He managed to escape and fled to the UK where he claimed

asylum at Gatwick airport. Although Ahmad had succeeded in escaping the Iranian regime, his arrival at Gatwick marked the beginning of a succession of new difficulties.

When he came to HMC he had already been 'dispersed' to asylum support accommodation in Cardiff, but had left and returned to London because he was experiencing mental health problems that included 'nightmares and insomnia'. He was staying with an 'acquaintance' who didn't really want him there.



Because he had left his accommodation, Ahmad was no longer receiving any asylum support, and the Refugee Council had advised him that it would take four to six weeks until this would start to arrive at his new address. In the meantime, he had no money. On his first visit we were able to give him £20 from our hardship fund and our volunteers also applied on his behalf for some further grants. Our immigration adviser agreed to take on his asylum claim.

Normally asylum seekers cannot get accommodation in London as part of their support, but receive only enough money for 'subsistence'. With advice from specialist agencies Praxis and the Asylum Support Appeals Project, HMC established that Ahmad could reapply for asylum support accommodation in London because he was receiving therapy from the Helen Bamber Foundation which helps sufferers of human rights violations.

Meanwhile, however, Ahmad's financial situation was far from ideal, the weather was getting colder, and he was deeply depressed, living in limbo and not welcome where he was staying.

It turned out that after his experiences in Iran, Ahmad had been living under a pseudonym in the UK. HMC helped him inform the Home Office of his real name, gathering evidence for this. HMC also helped him resolve other administrative problems with the Home Office and to

obtain asylum support as well as to get emergency support so that, even if the problems persisted, he would not be left destitute.

Finally, in January 2013 Ahmad was offered asylum support including accommodation in the London area. However because he had not understood the letter from the Home Office properly, he was out at a doctor's appointment when the driver arrived to take him to his new place. His absence was regarded as a refusal of accommodation. Fortunately HMC was able to speak for Ahmad immediately and in mid-February 2013 Ahmad came to HMC with a letter saying that he would be taken to his new accommodation the next day.

Since then we have only seen Ahmad briefly. He has now joined the myriad of unresolved asylum cases in the UK, and entered a new kind of limbo. But in fact, in comparison with many other asylum seekers, Ahmad has been remarkably lucky.

PROBLEMS OF GETTING CITIZENSHIP

Radovan, a 55-year-old man of Croatian origin, is a regular visitor to HMC. He first came in May 2012 seeking advice for his application for naturalisation as a British citizen. He was referred to HMC by Freedom from Torture where he was seeing a counsellor for Post Traumatic

Stress Disorder. After 14 years in the UK, he had refugee status and wanted to apply for a British passport but Radovan was concerned that he would not pass the Life in the UK test due to memory and concentration problems related to his mental health. Radovan also wanted to find out if he was indeed eligible to apply for naturalisation.

I went to four different organisations and everyone said I'm not eligible to apply for a British passport and that I have to wait five years. But I knew that I can apply. When I came here and discussed my situation with the immigration adviser he said immediately that I am eligible for British citizenship.

In 2001 Radovan was first diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and major depressive disorder as a result of a number of traumatic events related to the war in former Yugoslavia. He was receiving support from a number of qualified mental health professionals but his insecure status and two earlier refused asylum claims were further exacerbating his mental health condition. As a result he did not feel able to sit the Life in the UK test which is a requirement of the naturalisation application.

However, our immigration adviser suggested that Radovan should apply for exemption from the test and advised him to collect as much evidence as possible about his mental condition. In cooperation with Radovan's GP, Freedom from Torture, and his psychologist at a Traumatic Stress clinic

he attended, we managed to collect all the evidence necessary to prove that he was incapable of completing the Life in the UK test and our immigration adviser applied for an exemption. Nevertheless, in spite of all the evidence, after six months' delay, the Home Office refused this request. Eventually we wrote to Radovan's MP who was very helpful and helped us to appeal against this decision.

HMC supported me fantastic. It was a great experience because everyone was always friendly and the volunteers and especially Helen, the coordinator of HMC, supported me a lot. Without HMC I would have done nothing...no application...nothing. A quote from 1 to 10 I would give HMC a 10.

It took over a year until the Home Office finally agreed to exempt Radovan from the Life in the UK test and we then helped him to submit his application. In March 2013 he was awarded British citizenship and has since applied for a British passport. In June he went to visit his family in Croatia for the first time in many years.

Since I have a British passport my life has changed totally. Recently I went to Croatia and it was much easier than before. When I used to visit my family, my parents, my brother and sister I had still problems with the government. Beside that I have been all the years a refugee and now I am a British citizen. This is very important to me.



I was very terrified and I was suffering from pain in my stomach from the injury.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LIVING INDEPENDENTLY

Paul is a Ghanaian who came to the UK in 1994 aged 40. He claimed asylum on entry but was refused. In 2002 he made a fresh asylum claim and has been waiting ever since for the outcome.

He first came to HMC seeking welfare advice and help to register with a GP. He was staying at the London Catholic Workers hostel in Haringey after being homeless, and with no financial support, depended on the generosity of charities.

Both Paul's legs had been severely affected by polio when he was a child. During his first visit he seemed exhausted and was suffering from severe pain from walking using crutches. He explained to a volunteer that he can walk only a very short distance but has to leave the hostel every day from 10am to 8pm. He was able to reach only the nearest shop to the hostel, an old betting shop. Unable to walk to any further, Paul would just sit at the shop the whole day waiting to go back to the hostel in the evening.

The reason I first came to HMC was that I needed financial support for clothing, boots and for transport, to be independent as a disabled man and also to socialise. The winter before I was not having warm clothing and boots to wear to protect myself in the cold and my polio got worse during the winter weather. I was homeless for a long time and I have been staying in the hostels. With no adaptation makes it very difficult for me due to my disabilities.

HMC's volunteers sent several grant applications on behalf of Paul explaining his medical condition and his destitute situation with the aim of obtaining money for a scooter and for assistance towards his living costs.

The staff is very lovely and they always treated me very well. They always helped me as much as they could, any time I came there. HMC helped me to register with my GP and with a grant to buy an electrical scooter that I am glad I can now be independent to do my shopping, to go to the library, to the park and socialise in the town.

After almost a year, several grant refusals and many applications HMC managed to collect over £3,000 to enable Paul to buy an electric scooter. Recently he moved to temporary accommodation with the support of Hackney social services. He is still awaiting the Home Office decision on his asylum claim.

Getting leave to remain in the UK would make my life perfect. I would get the chance to get a better treatment of my polio disability. I would get the opportunity to attend university to continue my IT studies and to get a degree and a good job. Therefore my life would change completely and I would also feel part of the community. Even as a disabled man I would like to get to the top of my life and gain a better life like everyone.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A SAFE AND WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

Charles is a 58-year-old man from Democratic Republic of the Congo. He applied for asylum when he came to the UK in 2012 and came to HMC three months after he arrived to ask for financial support. He also wanted information about food suppliers as he was destitute with nowhere to go and 'no recourse to public funds'. He had made two asylum support applications the first one was refused because his application form was not signed, and the

Home Office lost the second one.

Charles seemed distressed and very silent and introverted on his first visit to the drop-in. He spoke no English but fortunately one of our French speaking volunteers spoke to him. Charles told her that he suffers from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder from his experiences in the Congo, and also from high blood pressure. The stress of his situation in Britain had caused his condition to deteriorate significantly.



I was feeling really abandoned because there was no one to tell me what to do or where to go. I had to look after myself without knowing anything. That was my main problem.

Our welfare adviser from Praxis helped Charles with a third asylum support application. HMC's volunteers applied for grants for him to enable him to bridge the financial gap whilst his application was processed.

HMC is a really warm place. When I first came I had nothing and there was a really nice lady in the kitchen who gave me food. HMC gave me also £20 because I was still waiting for an answer for my asylum support. HMC referred me to Praxis where they helped me with my asylum support application and to register with a GP.

After two months of coming regularly to the drop-in Charles asked to be a volunteer kitchen helper and was accepted. Since then he has helped in the kitchen every week and is very popular with all the kitchen volunteers. In April 2013 he started to attend our weekly English classes and recently passed his first level speaking and listening exam. He is now continuing to the intermediate level.

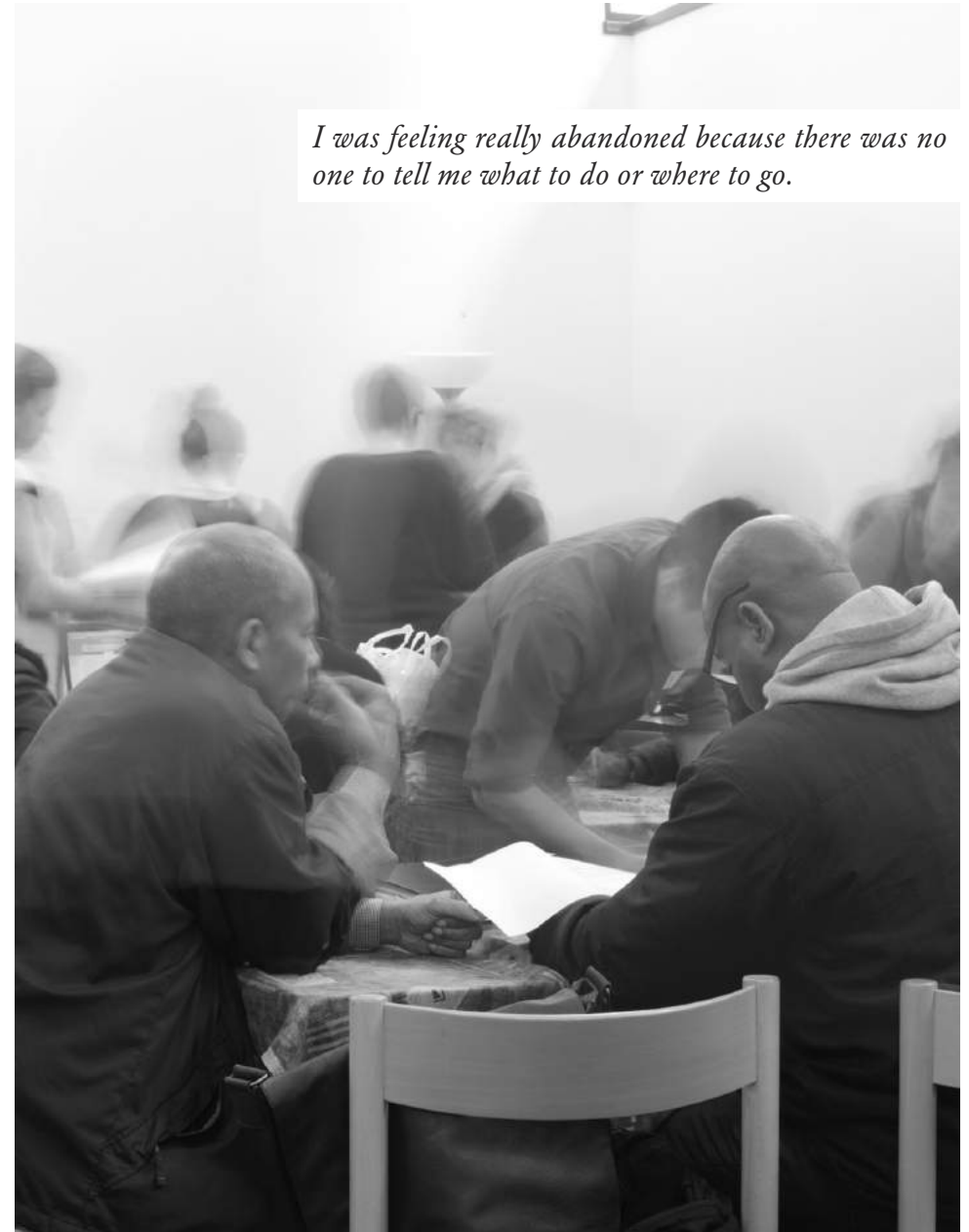
People were so kind at HMC. I felt better supported than anywhere else even from people from Congo. It was a very good experience...I found something good in that place and I wanted to give it back. Everything

I got started right from here. When you find something good you can't leave it like that.

After almost one year of destitution Charles recently received asylum support and now has accommodation and some financial support. However, he is still waiting for a decision from the Home Office concerning his asylum claim.

I would like to work and do more for this place for HMC. In my dream I always say I am working the whole week but I have the Wednesday off [drop-in day] for that place and try to help all the people. That was what I was doing in Congo. I like helping other people.

I was feeling really abandoned because there was no one to tell me what to do or where to go.



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