

MEETING: 09/07/2015

Ref: 12619

ASSESSMENT CATEGORY - Reducing Poverty

Notre Dame Refugee Centre

Adv: Tania Bronstein

Amount requested: £94,901

Base: Westminster

Benefit: London-wide

Amount recommended: £94,900

The Charity

Notre Dame Refugee Centre (NDRC) supports asylum seekers and refugees experiencing severe poverty and hardship. It offers a twice weekly drop-in with cooked lunch and refreshments; advice on immigration, welfare rights, money and debt and housing; counselling; English, IT and art classes; emergency support; and donated clothes. Last year NDRC registered 5,000 visits to its drop-in services.

The Application

NDRC seeks three-year funding for: (a) one and half days' salary costs of its 0.6 FTE Director who coordinates the drop-in's services; (b) salary costs of a new 0.5 FTE Advice Worker; and; (c) 2.5 days per month services from a solicitor from Camden Community Law Centre (CCLC) to triage complex immigration cases.

The Recommendation

NDRC draws support from several quarters, especially London's francophone, faith and business communities, resulting in cost-effective, quality services that mitigate and reduce poverty for a large number of people in need. The recommendation is:

£94,900 over 3 years (£28,380 £32,880; £33,640) for 1.5dpw of the Director's salary; for a part-time (2.5dpw) Advice Worker's salary; and to meet the costs of external, expert, legal support to triage complex advice cases.

Funding History

None

Background and detail of proposal

NDRC registered as an independent charity in 2007. Prior to that, it was a project of Notre Dame de France Trust Society of Mary (NDFT), which was set up by priests and parishioners of Notre Dame de France Church of Leicester Square following legislation which removed welfare benefits for certain groups of asylum seekers. NDFT continues to support NDRC by providing free accommodation and administration and also annual cash donations. The two charities have a few trustees in common.

One of three elements of this application seeks funds to meet 50% of the salary cost of NDRC's Director. She manages a large pool of volunteers providing frontline services, and enlists donations and in-kind support from several sources. Alleviating immediate needs such as providing meals is acutely important, as most beneficiaries live in abject poverty. For example, Asylum seekers are not permitted to work, and instead of benefits receive far lower levels of support (currently £36.62 per person per week), not sufficient to survive in London, one of the world's most expensive cities.

The other two elements of the request relate to advice activities. These cover a range of issues, but focus on immigration, given that obtaining leave to remain in the UK is essential to enable users to seek paid work and access welfare benefits, and therefore to exit severe poverty. NDRC seeks funds for the salary of an extra 0.5FTE Advice Worker to cope with rising demand resulting from closure of key refugee services. The organisation now sees more callers from around the Globe, in addition to French-speaking African refugees (its traditional user group). NDRC also seeks funds towards expert input from a solicitor (2.5 days per month) to support callers with complex cases and is needed because immigration law is very intricate and constantly changing. The charity has secured 50% of the costs of this outside expert help in the current year.

NDRC's drop-in provides a lifeline for some of London's poorest people. The charity has Advice Quality Standards accreditation, and its two part-time Advisors are regulated and certified by the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) to ensure competent, fit for purpose, advice services. Expert immigration input from CCLC would further assure that users receive high quality legal help.

Financial Information

Total income in the current year 2014/15 is forecast to be £201,920, of which £160,709 (79.6%) was confirmed as at 17 April 2015. Total income in the following year is forecast to be £213,653, of which £96,600 (45.2%) was confirmed as at 17 April 2015.

The reserves policy is to hold free unrestricted funds equivalent to 3 months' worth of expenditure excluding administrative and accommodation costs, which are covered by donations in kind received from Notre Dame de France Trust (2013/14 : £68k).

The cost of generating income is not reported in the accounts. The figures shown below are estimates, which the charity has agreed to disclose in its 2014/15 annual accounts. These estimates do appear low, however the charity has confirmed that the Director carries out all fundraising and the values shown represent one third of her wages, which is the proportion of her time spent on this activity.

Year end at 31 August	2013/14 Audited Accounts	2014/15 Current Year Forecast	2015/16 Following Year Forecast
	£	£	£
Income and Expenditure			
Income	194,354	201,920	213,653
Expenditure	191,528	201,920	212,158
Unrestricted Funds Surplus / (Deficit)	(2,922)	0	13,680
Restricted Funds Surplus / (Deficit)	5,748	0	(12,185)
Total Surplus / (Deficit)	2,826	0	1,495
Surplus / (Deficit) as a % of turnover	1.5%	0%	0.7%
Cost of Generating funds (% of income)	7,855 - 4.0%	8,760- 4.3%	-
Free unrestricted reserves			
Unrestricted free reserves held at Year End	32,373	32,373	46,053
How many months' worth of expenditure	2.0	1.9	2.6
Reserves Policy target	30,882	33,355	35,889
How many months' worth of expenditure	1.9	2.0	2.0
Free reserves over/(under) target	1,491	(982)	10,164