

MEETING: 18/03/2016

Ref: 12984

ASSESSMENT CATEGORY - Reducing Poverty

Asylum Support Appeals Project

**Adv: Sandra Jones
Base: Tower Hamlets
Benefit: London wide**

Amount requested: £135,000

Amount recommended: £135,000

The Charity

Asylum Support Appeals Project (ASAP) was established in 2003 to reduce the destitution of asylum seekers by defending their legal rights to food and shelter. This is done by providing free legal advice and representation at tribunal to asylum seekers who have been refused support or had their support discontinued by the UK Border Agency. It also runs a second tier Advice Line and training on asylum support law and appeals, and undertakes some social policy work. In 2014/15 ASAP's Duty Scheme assisted 674 asylum seekers at the Asylum Support Tribunal (AST), with 64.5% of the refusals to support being overturned or remitted.

The Application

ASAP is requesting funding towards its advice and capacity building service which provides free legal advice and representation to London based destitute asylum seekers who are appealing against a refusal or discontinuation of support. A second tier advice line will also be run 3 times per week for agencies that come into contact with asylum seekers. The advice line is for queries on access to support for asylum seekers and is run by the charity's expert legal team. A googlegroup will be facilitated in which members can share queries and receive updates on the law. Quarterly network meetings will also be held to share updates and information. The funding will cover 50% of the Solicitor, 40% of the Duty Scheme Co-ordinator and 10% of the Director Post with associated running costs.

The Recommendation

ASAP has built an excellent track record in supporting destitute asylum seekers and has a good reputation in helping organisations working with asylum seekers, including the Home Office. The funding will enable the charity to: advise and represent 140 destitute asylum seekers living in London; answer enquiries from over 55 organisations advising asylum seekers in London; and facilitate the London Destitution Advice Network, a network of 220 persons from 80 organisations working in London.

£135,000 (3 x £45,000) over three years towards 50% of the salary costs of a Solicitor; 40% of a Duty Scheme Co-ordinator; and 10% of the Director's salary; plus associated running costs.

Funding History

None

Background and detail of proposal

Asylum seekers arriving in the UK are not in a position to work or access mainstream benefits and therefore must apply to the Home Office for support. This support is available to those who can prove their destitution; however this is often refused or terminated. ASAP offers free tribunal representation through its one paid solicitor

and a number of solicitors and barristers who offer their time to the charity for free. The demand for ASAPs services has increased over the last year as Home Office contracts to the Refugee Council and Refugee Action to provide advice has ceased, and the contract with the new provider excludes advocacy and representation. This has led to an increase in the number of referrals to the charity as well as an increase in the calls from small inexperienced advice organisations.

Managed by the charity's Director, the project will be delivered partly by ASAPs four legal advisors plus 40 duty scheme volunteer advocates. The solicitor is responsible for overseeing the representations, and duty advocates the Legal Team to ensure the quality. The Co-ordinator is responsible for recruiting, managing and supporting the volunteer advocates who provide daily representation at the Tribunal along with those involved with the advice line, network meetings and newsletters.

Financial Information

Forecast income for the current year to 31 March 2016 is £346,069, all of which had been confirmed as at 11th February 2016. Budgeted income for the forthcoming year 2016/17 is £501,337, of which £216,084 (43%) had been confirmed at the same date. Income and expenditure is budgeted to increase in 2016/17 due to a pending application with the Big Lottery Fund for £150,000 per year for 5 years. This funding is for a specific project that will not go ahead unless funds are confirmed.

ASAP has advised that the cost of generating funds is based on time spent by the Director on this activity, which is two days per month. This equates to £4,384 which for 2014/15 was 1.6% of the organisation's income. The charity advises that its Board of trustees reviews the generation of funds annually and currently considers its efforts to be adequate, as the Director has a good track record of securing funds. Your officers have advised the charity that the calculation of this cost should be reviewed as it should not only include officer time, but also a proportion of related running costs to arrive at the full cost of the activity e.g. office accommodation costs, heating, electricity, etc.

Year end at 31 March	2014/15 Audited Accounts	2015/16 Audited Accounts	2016/17 Budget
	£	£	£
Income and Expenditure			
Income	276,888	346,069	501,337
Expenditure	284,797	323,507	484,894
Unrestricted Funds Surplus / (Deficit)	(8,109)	22,562	16,443
Restricted Funds Surplus / (Deficit)	0	0	0
Total Surplus / (Deficit)	(8,109)	22,562	16,443
Surplus / (Deficit) as a % of turnover	(2.9%)	6.5%	3.4%
Cost of Generating funds (% of income)	4,384 (1.6%)	-	-
Free unrestricted reserves			
Free unrestricted reserves held at Year End	144,964	167,526	172,640
How many months' worth of expenditure	6.1	6.2	4.3
Reserves Policy target	142,398-213,598	161,753 – 242,630	242,447- 363,670
How many months' worth of expenditure	6.0 – 9.0	6.0 – 9.0	6.0 – 9.0
Free reserves over/(under) target	2,566 – (68,634)	(5,773) – 75,104	(69,807)– (191,030)