

Asylum Support Appeals Project Strategic Plan 2014–2019

'I hope ASAP can continue to give its first class support
to advisers and their clients, as the need is great'

Advice service working with ASAP, August 2013



Introduction

ASAP's strategic plan for 2014-2019 is rooted in a series of consultations carried out by ASAP in 2013. We consulted with a wide variety of stakeholders including current and previous staff, volunteers, management committee members, funders, the Asylum Support Tribunal and people using ASAP's services or working closely with us.

In total we received feedback from 30 stakeholders. The consultation assessed ASAP's strengths and weaknesses, the challenges facing the sector and the needs of our service users. We listened to the views of all respondents on where ASAP should focus its energy in the future.

Summary of key findings from consultation

The consultation clearly showed that ASAP is a well-respected niche organisation. Our work at the Tribunal is valued greatly. Over half of respondents also saw the value in our evidence and policy work. They highlighted the importance of this over the next five years, as other agencies begin to lose capacity to focus on this area.

For the future, agencies requested more support and training in asylum support and appeals work. A quarter of respondents highlighted the impact of reductions in funding and the need for increased partnership working, particularly around training and support and on specific policy issues.

Our vision and values

- We believe in human rights and the rights of all people seeking asylum in the UK to have shelter, food and support and not to live in destitution.
- We believe in access to justice, holding the Home Office and Tribunal to account and the importance of ensuring dignity and equality for the people we serve.
- We believe in maintaining our independence.
- We believe in collaboration with other organisations, and value openness and transparency.
- We value listening to the asylum seekers we work with, helping them to explain their perspective and experiences within a complex and intimidating system of support.

What we do

We reduce destitution among asylum seekers by protecting their legal rights to food and shelter.

Who we work with

We work with people who have been forced to flee their home countries and seek safety in the UK, who then find themselves destitute and in need of food and shelter. We also work with organisations around the UK who come into contact with asylum seekers who need support.

Goal 1. Increasing quality representation and dignity at the Asylum Support Tribunal for all asylum seekers

- ✓ Ensure that all asylum seekers attending the Tribunal have the option to receive either advice or representation for their hearing.
- ✓ Improve access to the Tribunal for vulnerable people with additional needs.
- ✓ Develop a quality standard for advice and representation at the Tribunal and implement a system to measure it.
- ✓ Develop the information, support and training for volunteer advocates so that we maintain a high standard of representation.

'ASAP's work is vital in helping to keep asylum seekers out of destitution and street sleeping in the UK. The British Red Cross knows of no other organisation who can provide adequate legal representation'
Red Cross respondent, August 2013

Goal 2. Ensuring asylum seekers across the UK have access to quality advice and information in relation to their legal rights to food and shelter, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable and excluded

- ✓ Develop new ways to improve advisers' knowledge of asylum support and increase our capacity building and training.
- ✓ Improve refugee sector coordination in relation to asylum support through a national network of advisers.
- ✓ Increase the knowledge of asylum support within organisations that work with particularly vulnerable groups.
- ✓ Increase and expand the use of our second tier advice line.
- ✓ Develop our legal team's capacity to give advice on support provided by Local Authorities.

'There is likely to be a significant area of need as a result of changes to Home Office asylum support advice contracts. Advice providers will have less capacity to do advocacy work. It would be very useful to have an independent organisation with expertise such as ASAP linking with advice providers strategically on a regular basis to provide updates, training, advice and support for staff and clients'

Advice service working with ASAP, August 2013

Goal 3. Tackling the root causes of destitution through policy and litigation

- ✓ Continue to build on our strong evidence base. Use our work at the Tribunal to lobby for positive changes in asylum support policy and practice, holding both the Home Office and the Tribunal to account.
- ✓ Be proactive in our work with the Home Office, using a policy strategy that is solution focused and aims to reduce destitution.
- ✓ Strengthen our policy and lobbying by working together with relevant organisations, and by improving our links with those who have the power to make change happen.
- ✓ Identify policies and practices which increase the destitution of particularly vulnerable groups and lobby to improve them.



Goal 4. To develop a well-resourced and purposeful organisation for the benefit of asylum seekers and agencies supporting them

- ✓ Achieve a recognised quality standard.
- ✓ Create a robust salary structure and a competitive benefits package.
- ✓ Raise our public profile, increasing awareness of ASAP in order to increase our funding opportunities.



Our history

In 2000 the government removed asylum seekers' entitlement to mainstream benefits, restricting them to a lower level of housing and welfare support (known as 'asylum support'). While decisions to stop or refuse this support could be appealed, the rules on legal aid meant asylum seekers could not access legal representation at their appeal hearing. As a result, people with little English and no legal knowledge were left to make their own case for support.

In 2003, ASAP was set up to fill this void. Initially run by volunteers, we have grown from strength to strength over the past ten years. Since 2009 we have operated a daily duty scheme which provides free legal representation and advice at the Asylum Support Tribunal. More recently, we have added a policy remit to our work and expanded the advice and training services we provide to frontline organisations.

Since the duty scheme began, we have provided more than 3,000 asylum seekers with advice or representation. The scheme has enjoyed annual success rates of over 50%. An independent study of our work has shown that receiving representation from ASAP can materially increase a person's chances of success in their appeal.*

* Supporting justice: the case for publicly-funded legal representation before the Asylum Support Tribunal (CAB, 2009)

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