



Manuel Bravo Project

Legal assistance for people seeking asylum

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Annual Report 2015

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Introduction

The Manuel Bravo Project provides free, high-quality, independent legal advice to asylum seekers who are appealing a refusal or seeking to lodge further submissions. We help those who cannot access legal aid.

We employ four OISC-qualified caseworkers to advise and represent clients, and their work is augmented by lawyers from leading Leeds firms acting on a pro bono basis. This unique model ensures we reach the maximum number of asylum seekers. In addition to our work on appeals and fresh claims, we offer outreach sessions at partner organisations throughout the Leeds area. We also offer a specialised service for asylum-seeking women and girls.

Our small staff is supported by a wide network of volunteers, including solicitors and barristers offering pro bono services, as well as volunteer interpreters, court support volunteers, researchers, and outreach hosts.

After becoming an independent charity on 11 March 2014, we have entered into a new phase of growth. Grants from AB Charitable Trust, the Barings Foundation, the Big Lottery Fund, Comic Relief, the Allen Foundation, and Hilden Trust have helped us develop our professional capacity.

In the coming year our challenge is to meet increased demand for services whilst continuing to grow sustainably.

Our Ethos

We will work with people seeking sanctuary who are unable to find legal representation, to enable them to help themselves.

We will be open and respectful to all and sensitive to the spiritual, emotional and social needs of our clients, staff and volunteers, whatever their religion or beliefs.

We are based on the Christian understanding of love and justice; working to transform society by helping those without a voice to be heard, and speaking up for justice and fairness.

We are committed to working in partnership with and offering a model to other asylum support organisations and faith communities which support those seeking sanctuary in the UK.

Key Facts for 2015

We prepared cases for 110 new clients in 2015.

23 of our clients were granted leave to remain or secured legal aid for the continuation of their claims.

We screened and provided one-off advice to 150 asylum-seekers in 2015, in 50 screening/outreach sessions.

The Project now employs seven part time staff and benefits from around 110 volunteers.

History

Many people in Leeds from the legal profession, faith communities, refugee organisations and universities were unhappy with the gradual but relentless erosion of the rights of those seeking asylum in this country. In April 2005, Christians organised a demonstration in Millennium Square to voice their concerns.

At a follow-up meeting, recognising the desperate need for free legal advice, representatives from churches across the city formed a working group, out of which the Project emerged. The Project was officially launched in January 2007.

Why Manuel Bravo?

Manuel Bravo was an asylum seeker from Angola who lived in Armley, Leeds. He fled to the UK after pro-democracy activity led to attacks on his family. At his asylum hearing in 2002, his solicitor failed to attend and he was forced to represent himself without notice or preparation.

He did not learn that his claim for asylum had been refused until he and his son, Antonio, were detained for deportation in an early morning raid and taken to Yarl's Wood Detention Centre in Bedford. Within 24 hours, Manuel had taken his own life after telling his son 'be brave, work hard, do well at school'.

By taking his own life he hoped to ensure that his son would be allowed to remain safely in the UK.



Asylum: The Facts

Asylum seekers are those seeking to be recognised as refugees in the UK. The legal standard of a “refugee” is a person who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country...”

Article 1, The Refugee Convention 1951

In 2014, 59% of asylum applications were initially refused. The majority of refusals are appealed. 28% of appeals were eventually allowed.

Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford, Briefing, Migration to the UK: Asylum, August 2015

Asylum seeking women who are destitute are vulnerable to violence in the UK. More than a fifth of women accessing our services had experienced sexual violence in the UK.

Refugee Council; The experiences of refugee women in the UK, 2012

There were 25,771 asylum applications from main applicants in the year ending June 2015, an increase of 10% compared with the previous year (23,515). The number of applications remains low relative to the peak number of applications in 2002 (84,132).

Home Office National Statistics on Asylum, published August 2015

[In 2015] over a million desperate people made the hazardous journey into Europe seeking sanctuary. The numbers are huge but each one is a person: a brother, a mother, a daughter, a loved one. The Government’s response to this crisis in Europe has been lacklustre at best, mean spirited at worse. In the face of such levels of human need the Government needs to do more to provide a safe haven.

Penny Lawrence, Oxfam's Deputy Chief Executive, in an open letter to David Cameron dated 3 January 2016

Chairman's Report

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Manuel Bravo Project has had an exciting year, overall positive although with some big changes. Most notably there were some significant financial challenges, as faced by most organisations in the sector, which were to some degree alleviated by successful outcomes to some significant grant applications. Whilst we are not in any sense complacent, it is very pleasing that the project has some breathing space to continue, and indeed develop, its work without simply managing short term security.

The other significant change has been that our longstanding Project Manager, Catherine Beaumont, left midway through the year. Catherine has been such a critical part of the Manuel Bravo Project since its very start and helped drive so much of the strategic and day to day work for so many years. Her moving on was always going to be a massive loss to everyone involved, including the clients, staff team and Board. We very much want to thank her again for all of her fine and dedicated work and wish her all the best in her future plans.

Regarding the Board itself, we have continued to steer the project, primarily through quarterly meetings and discussions directly with the staff team. A critical task this year has been to recruit the new Project Manager. This was so important to us to get right and we are delighted to welcome Lauren Butler into the role, who started towards the end of the year. Lauren has certainly hit the ground running, with lots of enthusiasm and development of ideas, and we look forward to supporting her in her work over the coming year.

In the coming year we will try to balance consolidation, of our existing programs and work, with ongoing development, of new ideas and projects. This will range from day to day improvement to IT and casework management systems to consideration of more significant strategic moves, about new work and geographical development. In all of this we will work closely with the staff team and volunteers, listening carefully to our clients, so that the Manuel Bravo Project operates in a way that best suits those who use our services.

As always I would like to formally state on behalf of the Board that we are highly proud and appreciative of the work carried out by the staff team and our many great volunteers. We continue to be very appreciative to them and of course to all of our funders and other supporters who together help the Manuel Bravo Project provide such a fantastic service. We look forward to providing this service in the coming year and thanks again to all who have previously, or will be, involved in helping make all this great work continue to happen.

Ben Chastney
Chairman

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Project Manager's Report

In a recent report, the International Organization for Migration has observed that 2015 brought the largest flow of refugees since World War II. At the same time cuts to legal aid have reduced access to justice for those seeking protection in the UK.

In this context the Manuel Bravo Project has had a dynamic year. In the first quarter of 2015 our funding situation was precarious and we feared having to make a reduction in services. However with the support of partners and volunteers we garnered donations to keep us going. Then two major grants from Comic Relief and from the Big Lottery Fund came through in March 2015, allowing us to increase our outreach and in-house casework by nearly 60%.

As we develop our in-house professional capacity we continue to work with pro bono partners, including solicitors from leading firms such as DLA Piper, Eversheds, and DAC Beachcroft, as well as barristers providing pro bono representation. This unique partnership allows us to reach the maximum number of clients. We are very grateful to our colleagues and friends at these firms for their sustained support.

In August 2015 we passed an audit by the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner. During his visit the auditor praised the high quality of our casework and file management.

In October 2015, with the assistance of our consultant John Callaghan, we had a thorough update to the Organisational Strengths Review carried out in 2013-2014. During this period of growth, we are committed to developing a broader funding base, improving our IT systems to increase our efficiency and data security, and continuing our volunteer partnerships.

We have welcomed new staff in 2015. Our new casework assistant Jack Dingley has passed the bar course and brings extensive legal and technical skill to his role. Nina Whitston, our new senior immigration caseworker, is a dedicated and experienced legal professional with a particular skill in appeals. Emma McKee has come on board as our volunteer manager, covering for Jacinta Kent's maternity leave. Emma's background in refugee and human rights organisations has enriched our work immeasurably. And finally I was the most recent new starter, having taken up the position of project manager in November 2015. My background is in immigration law and development, and I am honoured to be part of this project.

Staff and volunteers at the Manuel Bravo Project have boundless energy and an unflinching commitment to providing access to justice. With the support of a dedicated management committee, we intend to continue providing high-quality legal advice whilst ensuring our organisation grows sustainably.

Lauren Butler
Project Manager

Volunteer Manager's Report

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Jacinta Kent has been on maternity leave and I have been covering her post since May 2015. Since beginning in post I have met some amazing volunteers and have done my best to maintain and develop a fantastic volunteer project.

We have recruited many new volunteers in our non-legal roles, including researchers, case coordinators, interpreters, and court support volunteers. We are so grateful to these volunteers—new friends and old friends alike--whose dedication and expertise are essential to our work.

We'd like to thank our partner firms DLA Piper and Eversheds whose legal volunteers are regularly taking on cases for us. Both firms have prepared successful appeals in the last year so congratulations to all involved in those cases. Jennifer Deakin from DLA Piper received the Law Works national pro bono award for best contribution by an individual, largely for the work she does for Manuel Bravo Project. Congratulations Jen!

As ever, we are also very grateful to our legal specialist volunteers, who bring detailed knowledge and experience in immigration and asylum law. Becky Pickering put lots of hard work into developing our basic legal training last year which was very well received, and Shazia Khan recently represented a successful appeal prepared by Eversheds, so that case proved a great success story for pro bono work!

We continue to provide specialist training for all of our volunteers, including sessions about court support, asylum law, and most recently a day-long seminar on gender-based violence provided by Freedom from Torture.

We are looking forward to a year of continued success and growth.

Emma McKee
Volunteer Manager

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OISC Caseworker Report



2015 was a year of change for Manuel Bravo Project in general but also for me personally. I began working for the Project on a full-time basis in August 2015 and I am the first ever full-time employee!

My time is split between my existing role as a specialist Caseworker for women who have been affected by gender-based violence and a brand new Outreach Caseworker role, kindly funded by The Big Lottery fund for 1 year.

I attend a number of community centres, pre-existing drop in sessions and partner organisations, providing free and impartial legal advice, signposting and referral for the Manuel Bravo Project service. I see approximately 50 clients per week and deal with a wide variety of issues including overstaying, fresh claims for asylum and human rights matters. I also run a number of specialised 'trauma aware' drop in sessions for those who are not able to attend a more generalised (and usually extremely busy!) drop in session. This kind of extremely visible and consistent presence in the community has helped many of our drop in clients to feel empowered about their legal matters and to re-engage with the legal process (one recent client had left their case dormant for 9 years due to a fear of the process and poor initial legal advice!).

I feel that outreach work has become an integral part of the Manuel Bravo Project service. The savage cuts to Legal Aid provision have left many people without access to legal advice, causing many to fall into overstaying and destitution. Access to free, independent legal advice before an application is made could prevent many of the problems my drop in clients face. I am proud of the work Manuel Bravo Project is now able to do and of the part I play within it.

Rebecca Rayment
OISC Senior Immigration Caseworker

People

Management Committee

Chair

Ben Chastney

Treasurer

Lee Wilkinson, Price Waterhouse Cooper

Committee Members

Shamiso Sisimayi, client representative

Pinder Saggu, volunteer representative

Paul Stone, DLA Piper

Kingsley Dowling

Amna Rashid

Staff

Lauren Butler, Project Manager

Emma McKee, Volunteer Manager

Maddy Anderson, Level 3 (OISC) Immigration Caseworker

Rebecca Rayment, Level 3 (OISC) Immigration Caseworker

Nina Whitston, Level 3 (OISC) Immigration Caseworker

Holli Spencer-Boulton, Level 2 (OISC) Immigration Caseworker

Jack Dingley, Casework Assistant

Volunteers

We could not function without our volunteers whose roles include casework, training, research, court support, hosting, interpreting, administrative support, and publicity.

2014 Accounts: please see in a separate documents the audited accounts for 2014.

2015 Accounts: Audited accounts for 2015 will be available in May 2016. However in the meantime, for your reference, here is an account summary of December 2015:

Budget

	Budget FY14	Actual FY14	Budget FY15*
Income:	£80,124	£77,494	£154,892
Expense:	<u>(£96,940)</u>	<u>(£81,654)</u>	<u>(£156,768)</u>
Deficit:	(£16,816)	(£4,160)	(£1,876)

***Revised to reflect Lottery and Comic Relief**

Our fundraising goals for 2016 are:

- 1. to build on our current success through careful, sustainable development, and**
- 2. to increase unrestricted funds.**

Funders and Partnerships

The Manuel Bravo Project is grateful to all of our funders for their Support: Comic Relief, The Big Lottery—Reaching Communities, AB Charitable Trust, Allen Lane Foundation, Barings Foundation, and Hilden Trust.

We are also grateful to all of the individual donors and churches in Leeds who give regularly and generously via standing order.

Partnerships

Many thanks to those who work in partnership with us:

DLA Piper, Eversheds, DAC Beachcroft, Henry Hyams LLP, BPP Law School, The University of Leeds, Stewarts Law LLP, and St George's Church

Referrers

A huge thanks to all of our referrers:

RETAS, PAFRAS, LASSN, British Red Cross, Solace. Refugee Council, Palm Cove, The Children's Society, Beacon Bradford, Bradford Action for Refugees, Bradford Rape Crisis, Meeting Point, and many more.

Lastly, our warmest thanks go to all of those who give their time so willingly to the Project. Without your support the Project simply could not exist and we continue to be astonished by your generosity.



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