

## **Asylumlink Merseyside**

Asylumlink Merseyside provides assistance and support to asylum seekers in conditions of hardship or distress in Merseyside and the surrounding area. 150-180 people are received per day – 4,000 per year – and these benefit from a wide range of different support services, ranging from practical advice and destitution relief, to creative wellbeing programmes including gardening, group conversation club, social and befriending activities, and physical health promotion with workshops on TB, HIV/Aids and drug use.

Asylumlink focuses in particular on building confidence and independence in its clients, aiming to build up social support networks and develop skills in order to reduce dependence. This is achieved through encouraging engagement in local activities including volunteering; 30 of the organisation's 80 volunteers are asylum seekers, while the board and staff include many refugees who have undergone the same experiences as the client group.

The atmosphere and social side of the work at the organisation is particularly successful, especially the activities focused around food, and staff use these more sociable aspects of the work as a counter point or 'antidote' to the sometimes grittier sides of the casework undertaken. Meanwhile, funding remains the key challenge facing the organisation, with 2014 being a 'bad year' and all plans for future growth put on hold until mere survival can be assured.

### **Key words:**

Asylum seekers/refugees

Merseyside

Isolation

Holistic