



Annual report 2015/16



A little girl who travelled to the UK last year as an unaccompanied minor. She now lives with her mum and little sister and is in Year 3.

Highlights

This year a key challenge has been the time limit on the visas our clients are issued. Each entry visa allows travel for 30 days from the date of issue.

As there are increasingly fewer places for people to get funding from for family reunion travel and it can sometimes take them longer to find us. It means that when they apply they might have less than a week for their family to travel.

This means the family's options are limited and we are forced to book flights at short notice which costs us more than it would otherwise.

However we are pleased that our process has allowed us to be quick and flexible in responding to these clients with the greatest urgency with the vast majority of people receiving a decision on whether we can progress their case or not within 24 hours.

Our aims

Our vision is that all refugees living in the UK seeking to be reunited with their family are not prevented from doing so by financial circumstance or lack of support. We also aim to make the reunion process as easy as possible and improve safety during the trip, providing assistance where needed and ensuring no hardship is caused by the cost of the process.

We support the delivery of this vision through providing two core services:

- Our family reunion service provides a comprehensive means tested service for families in need of more support.
- Our travel service offers a light touch approach for clients who are able to self-fund their family's travel or who have sourced alternative funding.

“I have got my children with me now my life is complete its full now I am free of all stress and anxiety after this reunion.”

Income and expenditure

Total income: £6207

Total expenditure: £7028

Restricted income: £5577

Unrestricted income: £630

Main sources of income:

- Fundraising £2669
- Personal donations: £2367
- Payments for travel Service: £662
- Other: £510

Breakdown of expenditure:

- Case expenditure: £6687
 - Project expenditure: £258
 - Other expenditure: £83
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“It is unimaginable to lose a visa for lack of transport money.”

30 day entry visas

Something that has really shaped the way we deal with cases is our clients being issued with 30 day entry visas. This means they have a 30 day window to enter the UK. Whilst this might sound like enough time many people take time to find the right service to help them and we often have people come to us with a week or less left on their time.

Many countries also require an exit visa. These can last for a few months or a few weeks and the application process can be long and expensive.

Clients are put in the position of applying for both visas at once, at great expense and risk, then hoping that the time periods for each one overlap.

When they do achieve this they then need to make the necessary arrangements and find the money for flights for their family.

For people living off very little, supporting a family unit split across two countries this is no easy feat.

For us this means arranging flights at short notice in less than ideal circumstances. This drives up costs and can increase risks for the family.

Help from strangers

Our clients are resilient and independent people who have gone to great lengths to protect their loved ones.

When they travel they do so independently unless special assistance is required. We are always at the end of a phone to provide support and issue them with a print-out containing key information and emergency contacts.

In one case we were forced to book tickets at the last minute for a family whose entry visas were due to expire in a couple of days.

The father travelling had very limited English and had with him three small children.

Unfortunately at Heathrow he missed his connection and was lost in the airport. We received a phone call from a member of airport staff who had found the family and recognised they were distressed.

We were able to explain their situation and identify where in the airport they were. We then spoke to the family member contact who was able to call and explain to the husband what to do.

This member of staff stayed with the family giving them a drink and then helping them find their way to the taxi we'd arranged for them.

Throughout this she checked on them and handed over to another member of staff when she went off shift. This was not in any way part of her job and without her assistance getting them safely home would have been very much more difficult.

We'd like to thank this member of staff for making a difference to this family's experience of arriving in the UK.

“As you know that living without or away from your kids is just like a fish without water a body without soul.”

Demand

We have had 6* enquiries on behalf of 18 people needing to travel that would have been eligible for our support. Funding these cases would have cost in the region of £8000

An additional 33 enquirers' family members would have been eligible once they had received their family reunion visas. Supporting these families would have cost in the region of £15,000

Requests for assistance that we would have been unable to meet largely included people looking to be reunited with family members who are not eligible for family reunion including; parents, siblings, cousins and grandparents.

We also received a few enquiries from people who had relatives in camps in Calais and were looking for them to travel to the UK.

*This is despite our website saying we are not currently accepting applications.

Our cases

This year five families travelled through our family reunion service including:

A wife travelling from Syria to be with her husband, making her way to Beirut alone to be able to make her flight before her UK entry visa expired.

A man being reunited with his wife who travelled from Iran to live with him in the North of England.



You can read this family's story in full on our website.

Two children who were reunited with their mother, step father and siblings in Manchester in a case that took six months after their time limited UK entry visa combined with exit visa requirements meant they couldn't make the original flight held for them.

A lady travelling from Sudan to be reunited with her husband. She was able to enter the UK less than two days before her visa expired.

A husband bringing his wife from Sudan a few days before her visa expired.

Three families used our travel service:

A father and his three sons coming to be with their wife and mother in the UK. Again the family had been issued with a 30 day entry visa and by the time the case came to us they had less than a week left to enter the UK.

We arranged flights for a father whose two daughters had previously travelled using our service and was bringing his third child to be with him in Scotland.

A father paid for most of the cost of the flights for his wife and son to join him in the UK. We were able to top up the money he had allowing them to enter the UK before their visa expired. Before they were reunited they'd been apart for over 10 years.

In a pilot we also funded DNA testing to support a visa application by a mother from the Democratic Republic of Congo for her three young children. Their visa was issued later in the year.

“I have no words to describe when I first saw them.”

Why can't our clients afford the travel themselves?

Our clients might be living on Employment Support Allowance, Job Seekers Allowance or on very low incomes.

On Employment Support Allowance they receive £73.10 per week.

A flight for one person might cost £450.

A taxi to the airport in their home country might cost £20.

Departure tax might be £40.

Travel for the person meeting them to get to the airport might be £10

Taxi home from the airport for them both might be £30.

This is a total (and conservative) expenditure of £550.

There are many other travel 'necessities' – for example would you have enough bags and suitcases to pack all the clothes you needed to move to another country forever? Would you need a new coat or shoes if you were moving to somewhere much colder? Do you want to provide a special meal when you have family over?

On Employment Support Allowance the cost of this trip is almost two whole months' income.

With 30 days notice could you find the equivalent of two months' salary?

“We are feeling like we got our lives back and we have started living with our younger brother and sister and we are very very happy. We are all together now. Wow.”

Plans for the next year

Over the last year we have identified additional parts of the family reunion process that we may be able to support.

As well as continuing with the travel and family services we plan to investigate expanding our work into these new areas.

Our Connected Families project highlighted a need for parents to be able to support their dependent family back home whilst they sought asylum. As a result of this and with agreement from Awards for All we were able to carry out a small pilot for a new programme addressing this need.

We hope to be able to refine and extend the pilot in the next year.

We have also identified other areas of the visa application process we might be able to support people with and will trial this approach on some cases.

Thank you

This year we'd like to thank:

Steve Burgess

Staff at Diversity Travel

Staff at the Freedom from Torture Manchester office

Staff at the British Red Cross

Everyone who has made our donated or fundraised on our behalf.

The friends and relatives of our clients who have done everything within their power to help their family members be reunited with loved ones.

Registered charity: 1138256

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