



## SOUTHWARK DAY CENTRE FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS

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22<sup>nd</sup> January 2016

### Deputation Report:

Thank you for agreeing to accept a deputation from SDCAS. The context for this is as follows:

- Southwark Council has indicated that it wishes to be perceived as a 'refugee friendly' borough in spite of cuts, and yet has made funding cuts to a number of local Refugee Organisations with whom we work or have worked very closely. The council intends to make a cut of £7,998 in addition to the projected cut of ca. £29,000 funding to SDCAS from Children's Services from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016.
- We feel this cut from Children's Services is part of a very unjust process, for instance, the report to Councillor from [officer name deleted] Children's Services implies that as an Organisation, we had been made aware that the funding from Children's Services for the last three years was 'transitional' and due to expire in March 2016. We have however, this has never been communicated to us. We have asked for evidence that this information was communicated to us and Neil Gordon-Orr has not yet replied to our communication with him on this point.
- The report from [officer name deleted] to Councillors implies that the funding was principally to cover crèche costs. Our Service Level Agreement however refers to a considerably wide range of services including safeguarding issues, emotional and practical support, apart from advice relating to immigration issues and providing crèches. Crèches are not just for children they offer adults time to talk about their situation in confidence, to an advisor without the children listening in on what could be very traumatic situations. Crèches also offer children developmental and language support.
- Moreover, the work done by the crèche cannot simply be excised without affecting other areas of our work. Taking our cue from the Service Level Agreement we have always used the Children's Services funding for key posts so if funding is withdrawn it will mean not only the loss of a Play Leader job but also the closure of that whole daycentre.
- The report from Children's Services also implies that our Community Capacity grant will still continue. It has however been reduced from £53,319 to £45,321. In addition to this both cuts could also adversely affect the grant we receive from the Big Lottery as we always have to notify them of any changes to our income from the council that matches their funding for our services.
- The impact of the funding cut means family Centre Worker (10 hours a week) and Play Leader (21 hours a week) being made redundant. These are key posts. At the Day Centre families receive so much more than advice and support. They have opportunities to gain skills and confidence to become more integrated into the wider community. Without such a channel, isolated and vulnerable families including already traumatised children would cost the borough considerably more than the amount of grant we have received.

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- At our centre families receive more than just advice on their case. They have the chance to gain the kind of confidence and skills which are hard to come by elsewhere. To limit these pathways to integration seems short-sighted, most especially at a time when there is so much concern around tackling radicalisation.
- We currently work with ca. 77 families, all of whom live in a 'limbo-like' situation while they wait often for years for a decision. A wait of 10 years is not uncommon, and it is often even longer. The impact on their mental health can be devastating. We have been providing specialist support that kind of situation demands. Another cost to the borough more than the cut would save. The cuts means that families fail to access mainstream services before reaching crisis point. The cost is likely to be greater in the long term.
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- We are also very concerned at the potential impact of the new Immigration Bill on families. In this context too, the Immigration Bill 2015 focuses on changing entitlement to support for refused asylum seekers, including families with children. If the Bill becomes law, refused families who previously remained on Section 95 support will no longer be eligible for this. Asylum seeking children will also no longer be protected under the Children Act 1989. Instead, two new forms of support will be introduced (under Section 95a and Schedule 3 of the 2002 Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act), forming a confusing and inconsistent patchwork of support which threatens to leave children and their parents destitute.
- The implication of this is that SDCAS will pick up this work and at a time when additional families are likely to be coming into the borough, this does seem a particularly inept decision.
- Given the level of trauma virtually all our Clients experience before they come to us, they are inevitably wary of people perceived to be in positions of authority. SDCAS acts as a 'bridge' to enable families to access mainstream services. And as we have been working in this field for nearly 20 years, we have gained specialist knowledge and trust.
- If this decision of cuts does go ahead, it would make it very difficult for us to continue to support a campaign for Southwark to be considered as a 'refugee friendly' borough.
- Attached are two very recent case studies of families we are currently working with.

Gillian Reeve.

**Chair of Trustees**



# SOUTHWARK LAW CENTRE

Councillor Vikki Mills

15<sup>th</sup> December 2015

Dear Vikki

I am writing in support of Southwark Day Centres for Asylum Seekers as I understand there is a proposal to reduce the funding they receive from Children's Services.

Southwark Law Centre has worked closely with SDCAS for many years and are currently providing monthly outreach advice sessions for street homeless clients in their premises.

SDCAS helps some of the most vulnerable people in our Borough. They provide a service that is seen as safe and welcoming for families who may have been completely off the radar of the statutory services. SDCAS enable us to reach people who need legal advice but do not know how to access it, or have the confidence to do so. Attending SDCAS can also be the first step for families to register with Children's Services and to start the process of integration. This is a vital part of the safeguarding process.

We understand that the impact of the loss of funding will mean that SDCAS will no longer be able to employ a Children and Families Worker for 10 hours per week. The social/economic value of the work of SDCAS is huge and we would say on a cost benefit analysis it is not good monetary sense for the council to reduce their funding. For example SDCAS work closely with Southwark Law Centre and Citizens Advice Southwark to regularise the status of families and apply for the restrictions around 'No Recourse to Public Funds' to be lifted. This helps the council to save money as they will no longer need to support these families.

The Children and Families worker currently liaises around Section 17 support and with the NRPF teams. They coordinate case conferences for families on the at risk register, provide destitution services, food parcels, and hardship money. They help with school issues, and identify parents to attend parenting workshops

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Community  
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The loss of funding will also mean the loss of the crèche service. This will make it much more difficult for parents to attend advice sessions which can lead to a better situation for them and a saving to the Council.

I would urge you to reconsider the cut to the SDCAS funding. I realise that the Council is in a very difficult position and that the likely budget cuts will be at least 25% but this service is vital for some of the most disadvantaged members of our community and the small saving to the Council will not equate to the problems that this reduction will cause.

Yours sincerely

Sally Causer  
Director