

THE BIRTH OF GARAS



IN THE AUTUMN OF 2015, as their home city was under bombardment in Syria, a family were looking forward anxiously to being reunited with their father, now a refugee in Gloucester. As an act of hope and anticipation Maya created this picture which she then brought with her in her suitcase all the way to the UK. Within a few hours of their reunion the family came to meet us at GARAS and Maya presented us with this precious artwork.

ASYLUM SEEKERS AND THE BEGINNING OF GARAS

1998

JULY In the second half of the year asylum seekers began to arrive in Gloucester, principally from the Balkan states, and found their way to Social Services. To have asylum seekers asking for help was a new experience for that department but after initial confusion it was decided that a responsibility lay under the 1948 Act and one of the senior managers was identified to take things forward.

NOVEMBER First multi-agency Forum for Asylum Seekers met. This brought together the main statutory and voluntary sector agencies in the City; the City Council, Red Cross, Police and the education department amongst others.

1999

By 1999 it became apparent that a non-statutory group was needed to provide some sort of drop-in facility and to be a campaigning voice for asylum seekers. And so a group of interested people from various sectors came together and formed GARAS. (It was agreed very quickly that it should be Gloucestershire Action for Asylum Seekers and Refugees as this new charity should be actively supportive). GARAS first minuted meeting is from July 1999.

At first GARAS provided a friendly drop-in facility but more and more clients were looking for advice and by May 2000 a Co-ordinator and the first Advice Worker were appointed.

2002

Gloucester became a National Asylum Support Service (NASS) dispersal area, and Clear Springs became the accommodation provider.

2003

'The Asylum Seekers Team and GARAS have worked with members of the Multi Agency and have developed formal and informal support networks to ensure that asylum seekers receive the support they need to

integrate into our community... The majority of asylum seekers within Gloucester feel they have been well-received and find the City congenial.'

REPORT TO GCC CABINET

2004

Changes in the legislation meant the role of Social Services reduced and GARAS played an even more crucial part of the support network for asylum seekers. A role that it has continued to expand to this day.

