



February 2022

Can your Church help give someone a new start?

Dear Reverend,

As the evenings become brighter and we look forward to the new life of Spring, I trust this letter finds you well. After the challenges of the last two years, perhaps more than ever we are ready to embrace the spirit of hope which we associate with Easter.

Many of the clients that we support in Simon Community come to us with feelings of despair, having been through very traumatic times. Our staff work tirelessly to motivate self-belief and the confidence that everyone can have a brighter future, just like Eskander.

While studying electrical engineering at college in 2010, in his home country of Ethiopia, Eskander took part in a student protest to oppose the treatment of the Oromo people: a large minority ethnic group who have been subject to political oppression and state violence. The military arrived and opened fire on the protest group and arrested forty to fifty students - Eskander was one of those students. From there, and without his family's knowledge, he was sent to an underground prison and was tortured.

Soon after he was released, his mother sold her possessions to raise funds to help Eskander escape Ethiopia. This was the beginning of a decade long journey that saw Eskander become the victim of slavery, human trafficking, and homelessness before finally boarding a bus, in April 2019, to seek a new life in Belfast.

Upon arriving at one of our hostels, Eskander remembers feeling nervous and depressed. However, Simon Community Support Staff worked with him to form a trusting relationship and ultimately help him gain refugee status. Over time, he formed a new group of friends and under advice from his doctor was encouraged to join a local running club to manage his trauma.

Reflecting on his very first race, a competitive 10k where he came in first place, Eskander said:

"I ran my first race with no training and I ran eighteen minutes for 5k. I wore thin shoes from Lidl."

Aware of the positive benefits running was having on his mental health, staff arranged for Eskander to move to another of our hostels that was closer to his running club. Support Workers at the project helped Eskander establish



his new life in Northern Ireland by working with him to adjust to his new hometown and gain a driving licence, so that he has a form of photo ID.

Now settling into Belfast life, Eskander wants nothing more than to find a job and a home he can call his own. Speaking of his experience with Simon Community, he said:

“I am so thankful to the Simon Community for the help and support they’ve given me. I am very happy to be living in Northern Ireland and look forward to finding a home. I’m so grateful for this new opportunity.”

Timothy Anderson, Simon Community Senior Practitioner said:

“Eskander has been an absolute joy to work with during his stay with us. Eskander has such a heart breaking story yet to see him now so happy, content, and grateful for all he has is an inspiration to us all. We are all very hopeful for Eskander’s future and it has been an honour to be part of his journey and help in whatever way we can.”

The staff of Simon Community NI have changed the lives of many people from all walks of life, people who have been through dark times. **On average we support 636 people every day in Northern Ireland.** We couldn’t do this without the support of our local communities.

Please can you help us to change lives and give hope to vulnerable people in Northern Ireland by supporting our Easter Appeal.

Could you hold a collection, make a donation or have a soup lunch/coffee morning this Lent or Easter? If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to get in touch. I can be contacted by phone 028 9023 2882, mobile 07935 850116 or email amandascott@simoncommunity.org

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Amanda Scott

Community Fundraising Manager



Can you help someone like Eskander?



£10 could help provide emergency food or clothes to those who arrive at our doors with little or nothing.



£47 could help us to continue to provide shelter and support each night for those with no home.



£60 could help fund specialized support for those who need help with addiction or poor mental health.

All your donation is used here in Northern Ireland and for each £1 we receive, 94.8p goes directly to our front-line services.

You may contact us at anytime to unsubscribe from our communications. Please call us via 028 9023 2882, email us via info@simoncommunity.org or write to us at the following address; 4th Floor Arthur Place, 24-26 Arthur Street, Belfast, BT1 4GF.