

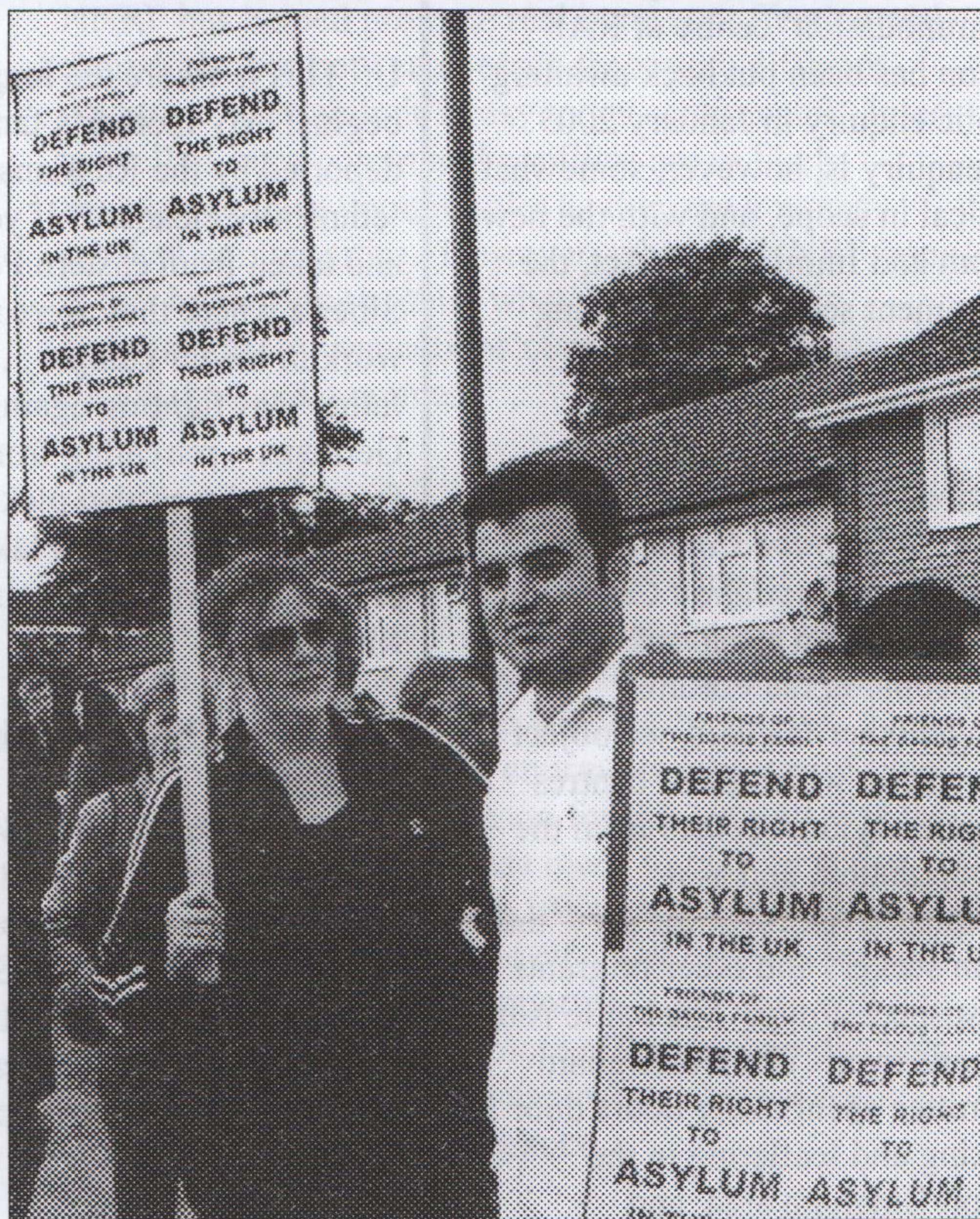
The Nottingham & Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum

Campaigns reveal 'arbitrary' process

Following a campaign opposing their detention and deportation, the Daoud family were able to return to Nottingham while waiting for their appeal to be heard by the High Court. A number of other anti-deportation campaigns are now in progress, involving families and individuals from places including Turkish-Kurdistan, Iraq, Eritrea, and the Congo. Some of these are more in the public eye than others. We are in contact with the Roberts Family campaign group based at St. Stephen's Church in Hyson Green. One common theme emerging as we work through these initiatives is the arbitrariness of the legal process in recognising the validity of people's asylum cases, and the shortage of good legal support.

Recently, Sarah Cutler, from the organisation BID (*Bail for Immigration Detainees*), led us in a discussion on the problem of asylum-seeker detention. She was joined by Sara Daoud and her nine-year-old daughter Huda, who described their family's experience of five weeks' detention in Harmondsworth Detention Centre. Sarah made the point that whilst the detention of asylum seekers is justified as a measure to prevent absconding, there is no evidence that detention has any

Continued on page 2



Above: Friends of the Daoud family show their support outside the former family home in August. The Daouds spent five weeks in detention in Harmondsworth after being taken from their home. At time of press the family was back in Nottingham, waiting for the High Court to consider their case.

NNRF receives Community Fund grant Refugee Forum must move to new building by Spring

Members and supporters of the Forum were delighted by the recent news that the Forum's grant application to the Community Fund has been successful.

The Refugee Forum applied for a grant to support our resource centre at 118 Mansfield Road. This funding will enable the Forum to continue and extend the Centre Coordinator's hours, and to hire an administrator for the 118 Centre office.

With the winning of this grant, however, comes a new challenge. The initial funding from the Community Fund is for a period of six months. Further funding will only be available if the Forum moves to a new building that is disabled accessible.

The Forum is keen to find a new space that will enable us to be more welcoming to people with physical disabilities. While we have not been in the 118 Mansfield building for very long, already we are beginning to outgrow it. At a recent Away Afternoon, Forum members discussed the need for a larger, more suitable space.

The Forum is now urgently seeking a new building before the six-month funding comes to an end. If you know of affordable premises in a central, accessible location, please contact the Forum by email at refugees@tiscali.co.uk or by post at 118 Mansfield Road, Nottingham, NG1 3HL. ■

Campaigns

From page 1

impact on the absconding rate and that it is recognised, even within the Home Office, as a purely political measure.

Meanwhile, the planned 'accommodation' centre at RAF Newton has been put back awaiting a public enquiry in January 2003. This enquiry is, however, somewhat technical in scope, and with the new Asylum and Immigration Act, the Government seems set on rolling out its accommodation centre programme.

NNRF has made its objections to the proposals clear, as has the *Nottingham Committee Against Accommodation Centres*, an ad hoc campaign group set up by some people in the Forum.

Amongst other features, we object to the way in which these centres segregate asylum seekers from the host population, and as a consequence reinforce the view that asylum seekers and other migrants are a suspect group. The battle is by no means over. The Nottingham Committee spent many hours door knocking and leafleting in the Newton/Bingham area, and campaign work is to restart in the New Year. ■

Summer Fun

West Midlands Safari Park, Whitepost Farm and Rufford Park were destinations for coachloads of asylum-seekers and refugees leaving from the 118 Centre as part of our Summer Fun programme. Over 200 children and adults took part in the programme, which was funded by the Home Office and Nottingham's Health Action Zone (HAZ). Many thanks to all the volunteers who made it possible by organising, publicising and accompanying the groups. We hope to continue with some of the local activities this autumn with the assistance of the HAZ grant. If you can help out please get in touch with Sam, Siya or Nawzad at the 118 Centre. ■

1944: A child-refugee

This is an edited extract of an interview with Urszula Ghee which took place on the 27th September. Urszula came to the UK as a child-refugee shortly after the Second World War.

U: This is where the long story begins! My mother's family was deported by the Russians – 'ethnically cleansed' if you like – and taken from eastern Poland to Siberia where they were made to work in labour camps. . . . My father was fighting against the Germans – retreating from the front – and was also picked up by the Russians. He was taken to a prisoner-of-war camp, also in Russia.

R: So your parents met in Russia?

U: No! At some point Stalin decided to let Polish soldiers go free again so that they could go and fight the Germans. So my father travelled through Iraq, Persia – and eventually ended up as part of the Allied Corps in Italy.

R: And your mother?

U: She'd been very ill. She'd been left for dead several times. But her family helped her get out, saying she was the 'dependent' of a soldier – which, in fact, she wasn't. So she managed to stagger onto a ship – was de-loused (!) – and eventually found herself in Italy too, also in the Army, serving as an auxiliary nurse. So that's where my parents met. This was 1944.

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R: Why didn't you all go back to Poland?

U: My father was granted refugee status because if, as an officer in the Polish Army, he went back to Poland – which was still under Russian rule – he would have been killed. Because of that the British government gave the whole family

refugee status.

R: What are your first memories?

U: I don't remember Scotland. My mother was depressed because it was so cold – because we'd just come from a hot country. My first memory was of looking for houses in Manchester.

R: Were there lots of Polish people there?

U: There was a complete Polish community. A Polish doctor, a Polish dentist, Polish Saturday school, Polish churches, restaurants, community halls. So my parents weren't really taught much English – even now their English isn't very good!

R: When you went to school were you aware of having this very different background?

U: Completely! We would have a Polish Christmas, Polish Easter... we celebrated saints' days instead of birthdays.

R: Were you happy about that?

U: As a child I was not happy. It was an extra burden. Now, at my age, I've reaped the benefits. But then it was hard – you wanted to be English, but you weren't – and you couldn't be English because every time you went to school they couldn't pronounce your name!

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R: Do you feel more Polish than English?

U: I would say I'm Polish, even though I have a British passport. Because it's so *in* you. You see we were always going back to Poland. Our life here was only ever meant to be temporary. It wasn't until I was twenty-one that I got a British passport. . .

Richard Goodson



Notes from our chair

Talking about 'being on a learning curve' is a bit of a cliché, but in the case of the NNRF it's true, in so many ways.

Our volunteers are learning the complexities of the asylum and the wider benefits systems. This is hard enough for those born in the UK, but it represents a big challenge for refugee volunteers for whom English might be their third, fourth or even fifth language.

We're still learning how to organise effectively in ways that allow people of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds to work meaningfully together.

We're also learning to negotiate the pitfalls of being a voluntary organisation, conscious that organisations of well-meaning people can get trapped in a culture of "grant-grubbery" or can fail because things don't get sorted.

We're learning as we go how to combine offering advice and advocacy, with maintaining an outspoken and principled campaigning perspective - one that vigorously and openly defends the human rights of those escaping oppression or conflict. The last thing we want is to develop a practice of charitable "do-goodery" that clientelises refugees, and does nothing to address the reasons why people seek asylum or the hostility towards refugees shown by large swathes of the political and media mainstream.

Finally, those of us fortunate enough to have grown up in a fairly stable part of the world are learning more and more about just what people have to contend with elsewhere, be it the frustration of endemic poverty or outright political oppression.

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Recently some of us celebrated the successful asylum claim made by one of our volunteers, Huda, a Sudanese women's rights and democracy campaigner. The party brought together a houseful of Sudanese refugees with Iranian, Iraqi, Kurdish, Yemeni, Ethiopian and English friends. Clearly, there is a small Sudanese community in the making, but one linked into other refugee communities. To some extent at least the NNRF has helped promote real bonds of affection and shared identity between people from very different countries. Certainly it's easy to get sentimental. Inter- as well as intra-communal conflicts are as likely amongst refugee communities as they are amongst resident communities. However, what the NNRF hopes is that by working around what refugees have in common, these connections may become well-established and genuine.

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When we called the first meeting of the *Friends of the Daoud Family* campaign, we were encouraged by the way in which local groups and individuals rallied around to support the family. This has given the campaign an enormous resource of time, energy and talent. One reason for this support was the massive effort the family has made to play an active part in local community life. We want to continue to spread our work through the city, and help to create a network of contacts and supporters. Not only will this make our campaign work more effective, but also help mobilise minds and bodies against the "moral panic" over asylum and asylum seekers.

Rob Peutrell

Volunteers train as interpreters

The local need for competent interpreters in a wide range of languages has grown enormously since dispersal began.

In response to this, a Public Service Interpreter training programme for refugees started at the 118 Centre in August and ran until December. It was funded by New College Nottingham and the City's Adult & Community Learning Team (using European Refugee funds). The course, which covers interpreting skills, language, and public service information, leads to a certificate that is recognised by local interpreting agencies.

Other training

New College Nottingham restarted ESOL classes after a summer break. A crèche is now provided on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings and there are also afternoon classes on these two days.

Peoples College will be running a Community Support course on Thursday afternoons. Its aim will be to train refugees to know their way around local support systems and how to access services - with a view to them helping fellow asylum seekers and refugees. ■

New help with housing issues

The Forum has received funding from Nottingham City Council's Supporting People initiative to give practical support and guidance on housing issues.

The funding will enable us to provide help with housing issues to asylum seekers who have been granted refugee status.

We will be able to support twelve individuals at any one time because of this initiative. ■

Can you help? Do you know someone who can?

- **Football Training:** We have balls etc but no trainers/coaches – either for young adults or kids. The sessions would need to be at weekends and anyone working with the under-16s would need to have been police checked.

Contact: Patsy Brand at 118 Centre, Tel. 985 9546

- **Monday evenings:** Carl could use some extra help on Monday evenings at the 118 Centre (6.30-9pm). This could include both helping at the centre as well as some off-site activities such as bowling and ice-skating for the energetic!

Contact Carl at 118 Centre, Tel. 985 9546

- **Clothes and goods at 118:** A real challenge this! We need a team of brave souls to get together one evening or on a Saturday to sort out what clothes and other items we've got, dispose of what isn't usable, and make the rest easily accessible to those in need.

Offers to Sam Azad please! ■

General Meeting to be held in January

The NNRF will hold an extraordinary general meeting of its members in January to discuss making changes to our constitution. The meeting will take place at the YMCA on Saturday, 18th January 2003 from 2:30 pm to 4 p.m. Put this date in your diary! Members will be sent further information prior to the meeting. ■

Grants for outreach, bikes project

We have been successful in obtaining smaller grants for the following projects:

- **Nottingham City's Adult & Community Learning** have provided us with an office computer and printer, and also short-term funding for outreach, administration, and educational advice, to build our capacity to signpost clients towards education and training opportunities.
- **Nottingham Community Chest** is funding a project to produce information leaflets and a newsletter aimed at refugees and asylum seekers. The money will enable us to buy multilingual word processing software and to translate materials.
- A **Health Initiative grant** will pay for locks, lights and helmets for those who have received bikes from the Probation Service's bikes project. It may be possible to arrange for cycle maintenance and road safety courses as well. ■

Appeal from St Catharine's House

St Catharine's House is still providing emergency food and toothbrushes to asylum seekers and refugees who fall through the gaps in the system. We welcome donations, in cash or kind, to keep this work going. We need volunteers with cars who can shop for us from time to time, as well as volunteers able to come in on Tuesday or Friday afternoon to help with distributing food.

Call Patricia or Marian on 0115 958 5517 for more information - and thanks!

Organisations supporting NNRF include:- Nottingham and District Racial Equality Council; **Refugee Action;** Refugee Housing Association; **Nottingham City Council;** Student Action for Refugees; **Diocese of Southwell Social Responsibility Group;** Notts County Unison; **Nottingham City Unison;** East Midlands Socialist Party; **Lady Bay Baptist Church;** Jewish Socialists' Group; **Notts Socialist Alliance;** Oxfam; **Nottingham Amnesty International;** Medical Foundation (Nottm); **Nottingham City Arts;** Bestwood Parish Church Council.

Contact us

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www.nottas.org.uk

Centre Coordinator: Sam Azad