

nottingham & nottinghamshire refugee forum anti destitution group

Report Destitution (Cash) Group 2007

The Tuesday morning (Cash) group has continued to distribute cash, lunch tickets and referrals to the Food group throughout the year. It has now done so for a total of 167 weeks, during which time it has distributed nearly £60,000!

Destitute asylum seekers whose claims have failed, and who have no other means of income and are not allowed to work, are given £10 per month (£20 if they have severe health problems), plus a choice of referral to the Saturday Food Group or tickets entitling them to two hot meals a week in community restaurants.

In March there was a crisis, as the consequences of spending more than we had coming in could no longer be ignored. At the end of February 2007, our average monthly spending (for cash and lunch tickets) had been £1920 over the past 12 months. The Destitution Fund also had to fund the Food group, and the monthly standing order income was around £800. Despite some incredibly generous additional one-off donations, this was obviously not sustainable. The money was running out, and we had to do something.

We were faced with telling people who have nothing that they could lose the only help they still get. We felt that the Food Group could continue, as the help they give is particularly cost-effective and, because of participation by asylum seekers, empowering. However, we had to rethink the cash support. Having even a tiny amount of cash is important for human dignity, affords people some level of choice, and helps with phone calls or bus fares or other special needs.

Our first approach was the obvious one: further appeals to our members, accompanied by other fundraising efforts. Once again, members responded magnificently, with some very large one-off donations, and standing orders increased to now total around £1100-£1200 per month. Luckily, we also received Gift Aid from the taxman at around this time. So, thanks to everyone, our coffers were no longer completely empty, but we still had to address the huge amounts we were handing out.

We explained the situation to people who came for cash. A system of regular interviews for everyone was instituted. This meant that we could target the support more precisely at those who most needed it. When this system started, several people stopped coming for cash – we hope that it was a self-selecting group of those who could manage without our help, perhaps because they had enough support from a church or their friends. So the numbers we were supporting dropped from about 130 to about 80 per month. The intention was also to identify other needs people had, which we might be able to help with. So some people have had help with prescriptions and medical needs, and been put in touch with social groups and events if they were feeling isolated, for example.

A computerised database was also established, so we could keep a better watch on who was getting what. It now feels as if the project is sustainable into the foreseeable future – but only if the standing orders continue at the current or greater rates, and the one-off donations continue to roll in!

In the past year (from start September 06 to end August 07), we have:

- Made 1336 separate payments
- Handed out £17,725 in cash payments
- Handed out 1140 lunch tickets (costing us £2.50 each) costing a total of £20,575.

Finally, we'd like to extend our warmest thanks to everyone who has contributed, and made it possible to continue supporting people who, after suffering in their own countries and during their dangerous journeys here, now are condemned to destitution. Continued on following page

IT MAYBE SMALL CHANGE TO YOU



but for 100's of refugees in Nottingham that's all they have to live on each week!

www.nottsrefugeeforum.org.uk



www.nottsrefugeeforum.org.uk

SOLIDARITY NOT CHARITY

It's been a busy year for the Food Group we have found that more and more refused asylum seekers are being left without the basic means to survive. After their claim is rejected, the Home Office gives them 28 days notice to leave their accommodation. Unless they are prepared to sign up to return voluntarily to their country of origin all financial support will stop. For many the idea of voluntarily returning to countries such as Iraq, DR Congo and Zimbabwe is too frightening and they are forced into destitution as they are not allowed to work or claim benefits.

We've also found that we've had an increasing number of asylum seekers (about 25%) that have been left destitute because of failures in the system. This could be because their Section 4 payments or NASS payments have stopped in error or there have been delays in these payments starting.

In the year to 31.08.07 the food group distributed over 2,800 food parcels and we supported over 100 different asylum seekers every month.

Due to changes in referral process (see previous page) The numbers of asylum seekers using our group have slightly decreased over the year from 54 per week (average) at the beginning of the year to an average 47 per week at the end of the year.

This year we've been able to slightly increase the amount of food we give out and thanks to the support of local green grocers Thompson Brothers we've been able to also increase the amount we give out of fruit and vegetables too.

The cost of the food distributed is currently about £200 per week

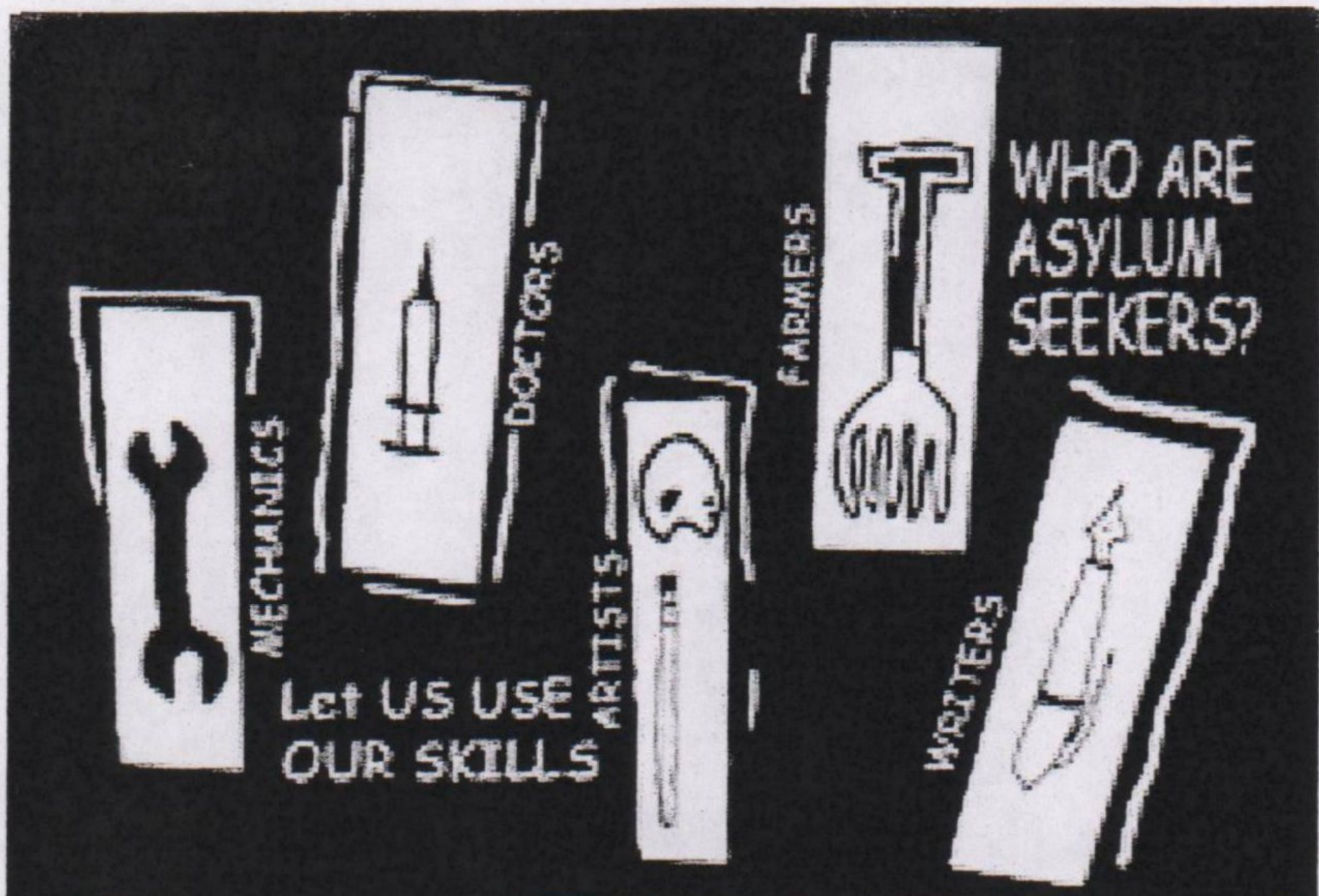
Volunteering

We have tried to include the asylum seekers that use our group in all the aspects of our work. Over the last year we have encouraged them to volunteer and to get involved. This meant at times some of the host community volunteers (including myself) having to take a back seat or develop new elements to our work.

As only about 20% of our users are women, we felt important that we should try and encourage women to volunteer with the group too. Presently we have 3 women that volunteer with the group, One helps with the food distribution and the other two work in the kitchen preparing the hot meal.

Currently we have more asylum seekers volunteers than host community volunteers and most of the work done now is by asylum seekers for asylum seekers. Generally the host community volunteers are only there to meet Health & Safety legislation.

As their confidence grows, we found that they have got more involved in making decision as well as the day to day running of the group.



Cash Group Report Continued

During the year the Destitution Group have helped several hundred refugees from over 30 countries including:-Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, China, Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, India, Iran, Iraq, Ivory Coast, Israel, Kenya, Kosovo, Liberia, Malawi, Moldova, Mongolia, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, Palestine, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Somali, South Africa, Sudan, Turkey, Uganda, Zimbabwe

To give a clearer idea of the current situation: in August 2007 (the last month for which we have full data) we supported:

Afghanistan: 3 people, **Algeria:** 5 people, **Angola:** 1 person, **Cameroon:** 1 person, **Cote D'Ivoire:** 1 person, **DR Congo:** 15 people, **Eritrea:** 3 people, **Guinea:** 1 person, **Iran:** 24 people, **Iraq:** 4 people,, **Kenya:** 2 people, **Liberia:** 1 person, **Malawi:** 1 person, **Pakistan:** 2 people, **Palestine:** 1 person, **Sudan:** 1 person, **Turkey:** 2 people, **Ukraine:** 1 person, **Zimbabwe:** 8 people, **Unknown origin:** 1 person

Of these:

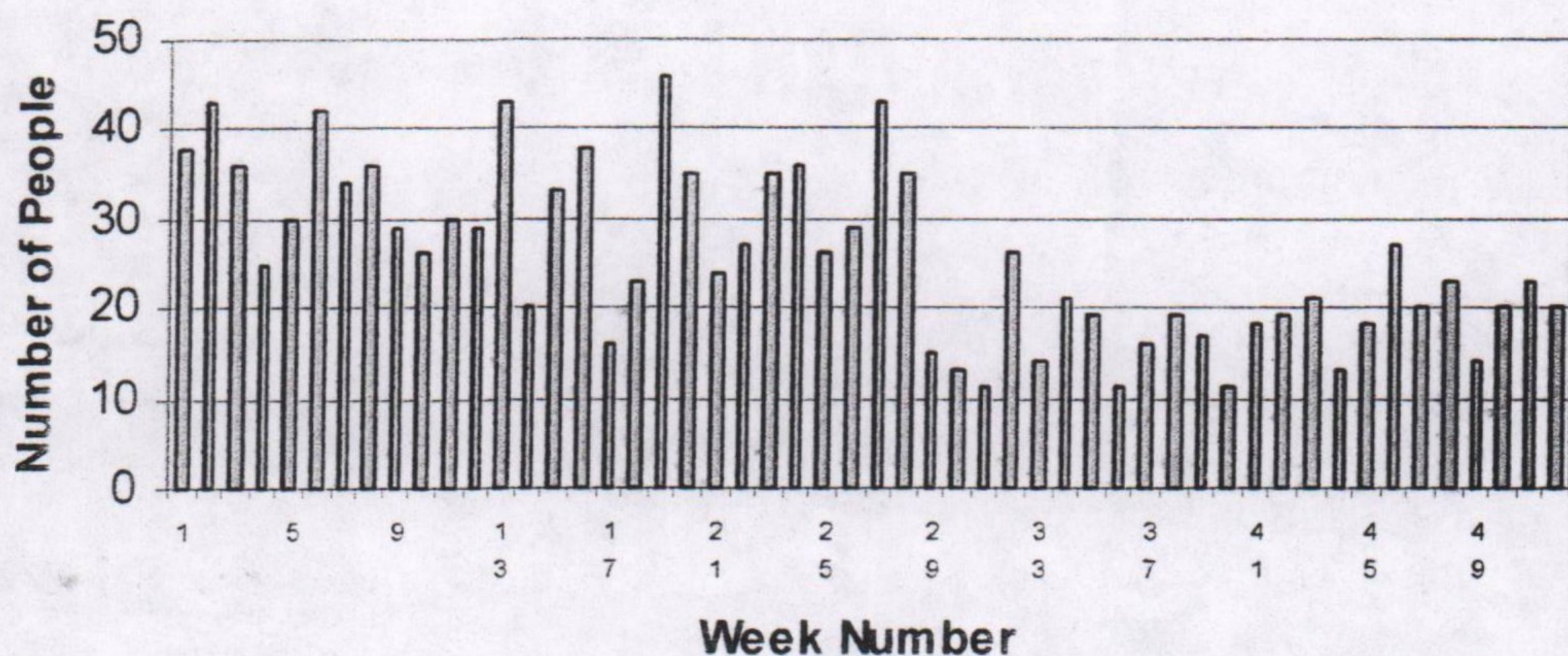
2 were born in the 1940s, 4 were born in the 1950s, 14 were born in the 1960s, 42 were born in the 1970s, 15 were born in the 1980s, Unknown: 1

11 were female and 66 were male.

2 received no cash; 45 received £10; 28 received £20; 2 (with children) received £30. The chart below shows the numbers of people coming for cash each week; it is clear that the numbers dropped at week 29 (in March) after our crisis, when we started the new system of regular in-depth interviews.

Chris Cann

Destitution Fund (start Sep 06 - end Aug 07)
Number of People Receiving Cash Support





This extra help has enabled us to look at other aspects of work we can do.

In March & April we worked with DR Congo asylum seekers in organising two protests against the forced deportation back to the Congo. In May our volunteers joined the May Day protest march in support of asylum seekers rights.

Social Events

During the summer Frank and David (an asylum seeker) started playing guitar in the hall on a Saturday. Joining up with two other Asylum Seekers (Maluse & Assuman) they formed a band and after only two rehearsals played at the African night party in June. Unfortunately, David had to leave Nottingham, but not before he helped us establish fortnightly music workshops.

We assisted the football team to get started by helping them to produce posters and leaflets advertising their events.

In August, our volunteers raised the money to purchase a pool table, which we use on a Saturday, this is very popular with both volunteers and asylum seekers.

We wanted to build a social side to the work we do, so in March and April we organised two parties at a Kurdish Restaurant to celebrate the birthday's of two of our long standing young volunteers Azad & Awara.

We followed this up in June with an African themed party that we helped to organise. This party was for all the staff and volunteers at the forum, and was a great success. Long Journey Home gave us some financial support, which enabled us to organise an African mask making workshop.

In August, we worked with the Women's Group to organise a Family Fun Day. Over 140 people turned up at this event.

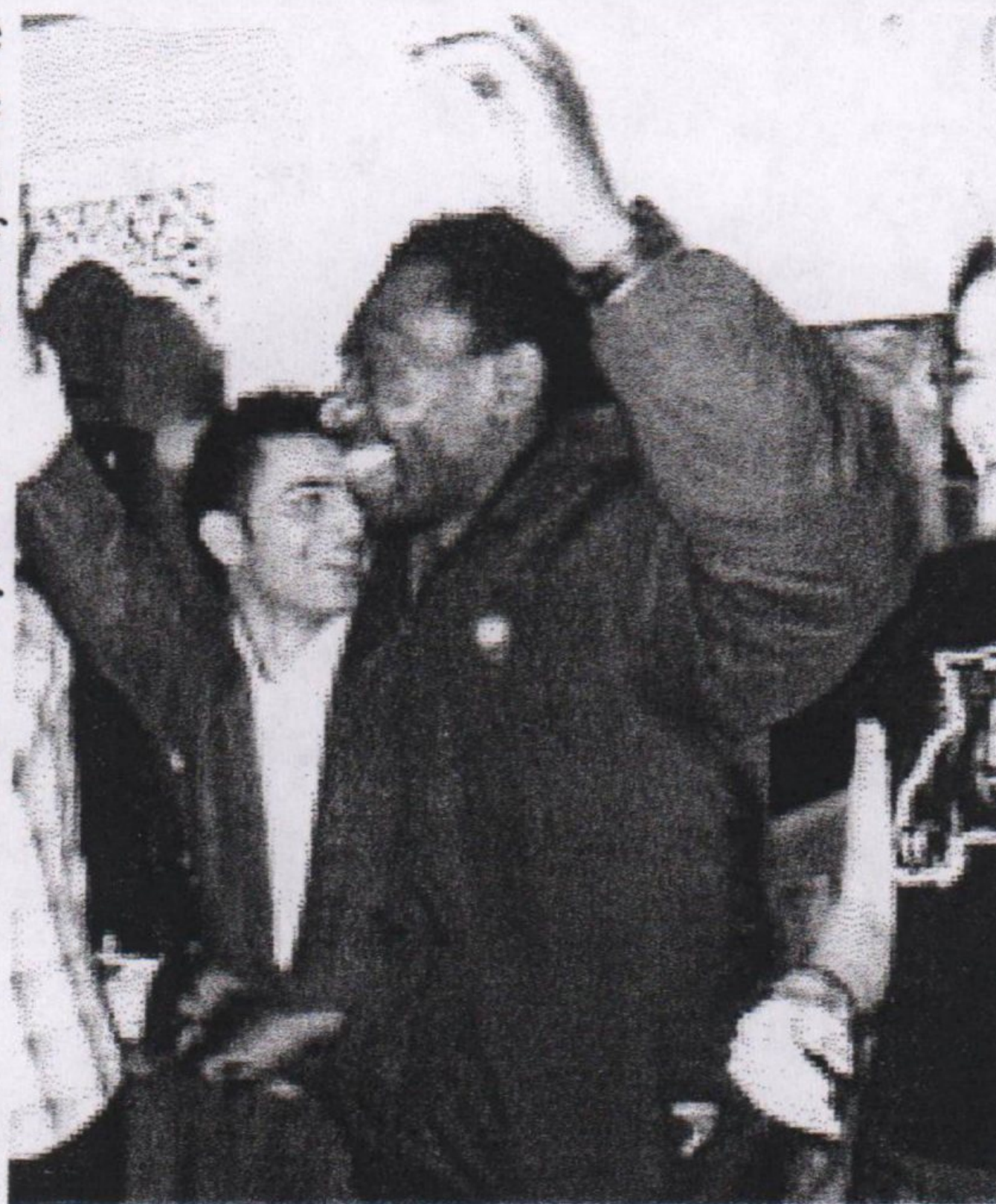
In September, Ruth and Berhan two of our volunteers from Ethiopia and Eritrea organised a very successful party to celebrate Ethiopian New Year. The event was attended by both the Eritrean / Ethiopian community as well as the host community and involved a very moving coffee ceremony.

Finally

We've tried hard to make Saturday's food distribution a friendly and informal atmosphere. We encourage everyone to get involved. We do not want asylum seekers to be merely the passive recipients of charity. Instead, we have seen asylum seekers become happier, more fulfilled and confident as they have been given purpose, dignity and opportunity.

Solidarity not Charity!

Bill Walton



“ Blissful Support

The creation of the NNRF has been without a doubt the bliss that destitute asylum seekers will always remember.

My experience as a volunteer with the NNRF's Destitution group has shown me that it has become a pillar for a lot of us to hold onto, as they help us dealing with our desperation week in week out. It's incredible the amount of effort that they put into holding a diversity of social events, which fill the whole group (including women with children) with some hope and belief towards the future.

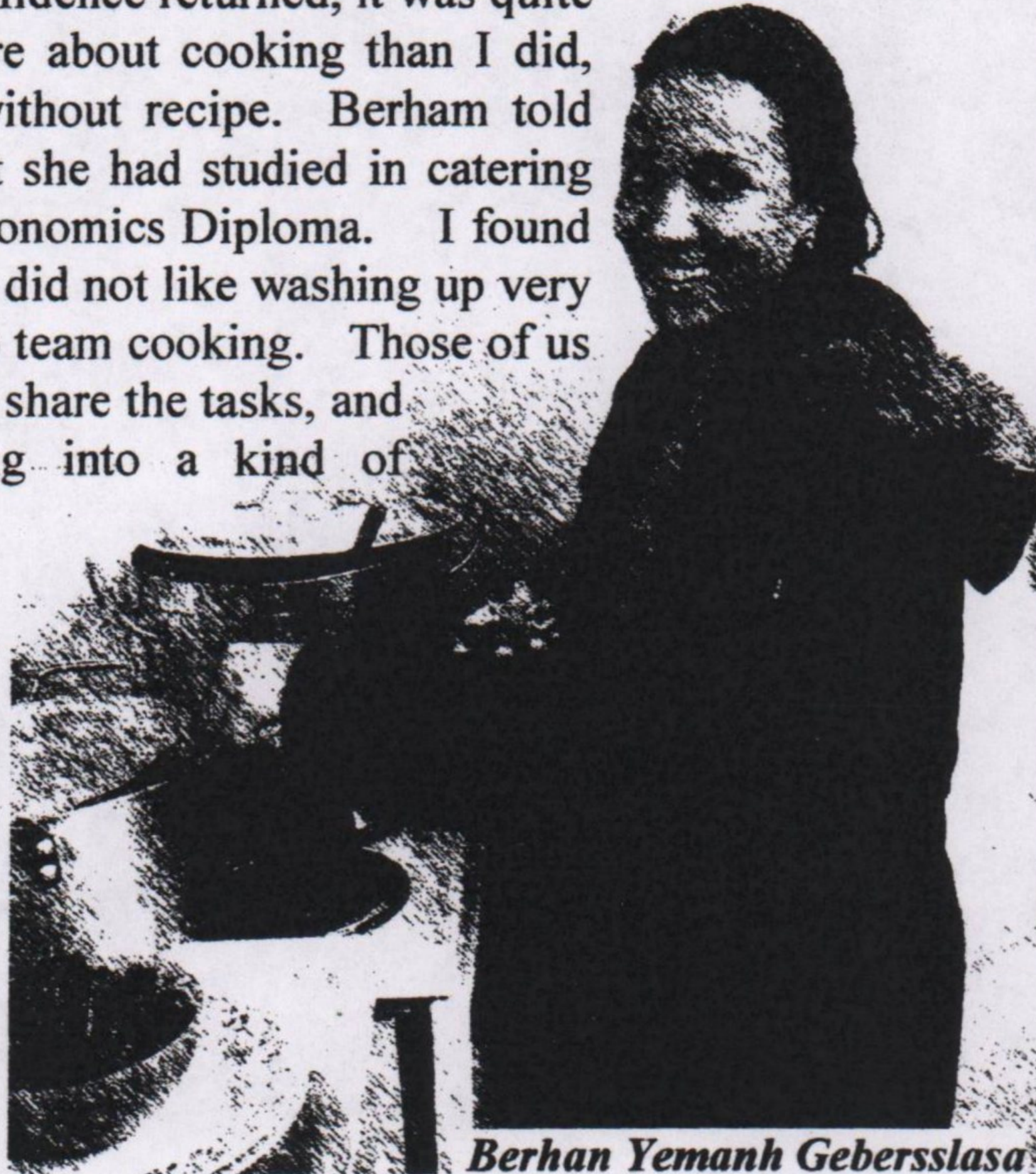
The food that we collect every week and the money (although very little), thanks to the funding somehow, has played a huge part in our lives. There has been a positive change on the food quality since it first began, which gradually seems to be get better and better.

Considering that I've been helped by this group of good people for three years now, I really would like to think that for the sake of us, God will protect the generosity of those who have guaranteed the funding that so far has been.

Many thanks! ”
jd

Can Cook. Will Cook!

Ever since food was first distributed at Forum on Saturdays, it was recognised that a sarnie, helped to fill an empty stomach while waiting in line to collect weekly food rations. Over the last 15 months, this has developed into a kind of buffet, usually with a number of different dishes. My aim over time, since overseeing the food preparation, was to empower the users to take over the Saturday catering. But it takes time for people to find their confidence again. As one Asylum Seeker's confidence returned, it was quite obvious that she knew more about cooking than I did, she cooked instinctively, without recipe. Berham told me almost incidentally, that she had studied in catering college and had a Home Economics Diploma. I found out from her friend, that she did not like washing up very much. So now we are into team cooking. Those of us in the kitchen on a Saturday share the tasks, and it seems to be developing into a kind of vaudeville act at times. Sometimes pans get burnt, and our customers complain, that it spoils their appetite, and we get told off! But we also get told what they like and when it is good. But the skies fall in if there are no pizzas, it is fast becoming an international comfort food here.



Berhan Yemanh Gebersslasa

As I have loosened up, and shown my fallibility, so have they. I have also learned a new word in Tigrane for 'bossy' and when I tell them they are bossy, there is much laughter and giggling from all of us.

But there is a problem that inhibits/interrupts the weekly commitment: one of them does not have a regular place to live and moves between three cities, at first I thought her commitment to Saturdays was half-hearted. But I soon learned it was one hundred percent, but she couldn't always be there. We all need to feel valued and I know that ..

I have now stepped back and can get involved in other things at the Forum.
Richard McCance

What can you do with £10 a month?

Well, without it, you couldn't: make phone calls; get on a bus; buy a stamp; get new underwear or other personal items . . Obviously the list is endless, but we hope we are giving people the chance to do something they need to do, which otherwise they couldn't, and to have a tiny bit of control over their own lives.

Since the Anti Destitution Group began three years ago, we have given £60,000 in cash and a further £12,000 in lunch tickets to destitute asylum seekers with no other means of support. This has been from a total number of 4,000 visits. Some people have been destitute for a long, long time. If we continue to spend at the current rate, we will need £12,610 in the next year, plus more for food and small grants.

The project is run entirely by volunteers, so all donations are used to support destitute asylum seekers and not to fund running expenses. Our heartfelt thanks go out to everyone who has helped and who is helping by volunteering, fundraising and donating.

Chris Cann

“ I first came to the Food Group in March this year. I had been on Section 4 but NASS stopped my accommodation and my housing. I came to the Refugee Forum to see what I could do and they told me about the Food Group.

When I first came I was ashamed and I cried. It was such a shock to me because I never knew this place existed. Everybody needing food. But I met the volunteers and I knew everyone was in the same situation. As well as giving me food I met new people & new friends, and they encouraged me to become a volunteer. I don't know what I would have done otherwise.

I've found changes in myself. Now I come to do cooking and I'm in the women's group too, and we sort clothes for people On Thursday. On Saturday we cook food and share it together. This was such a big change for me. I feel better. ”

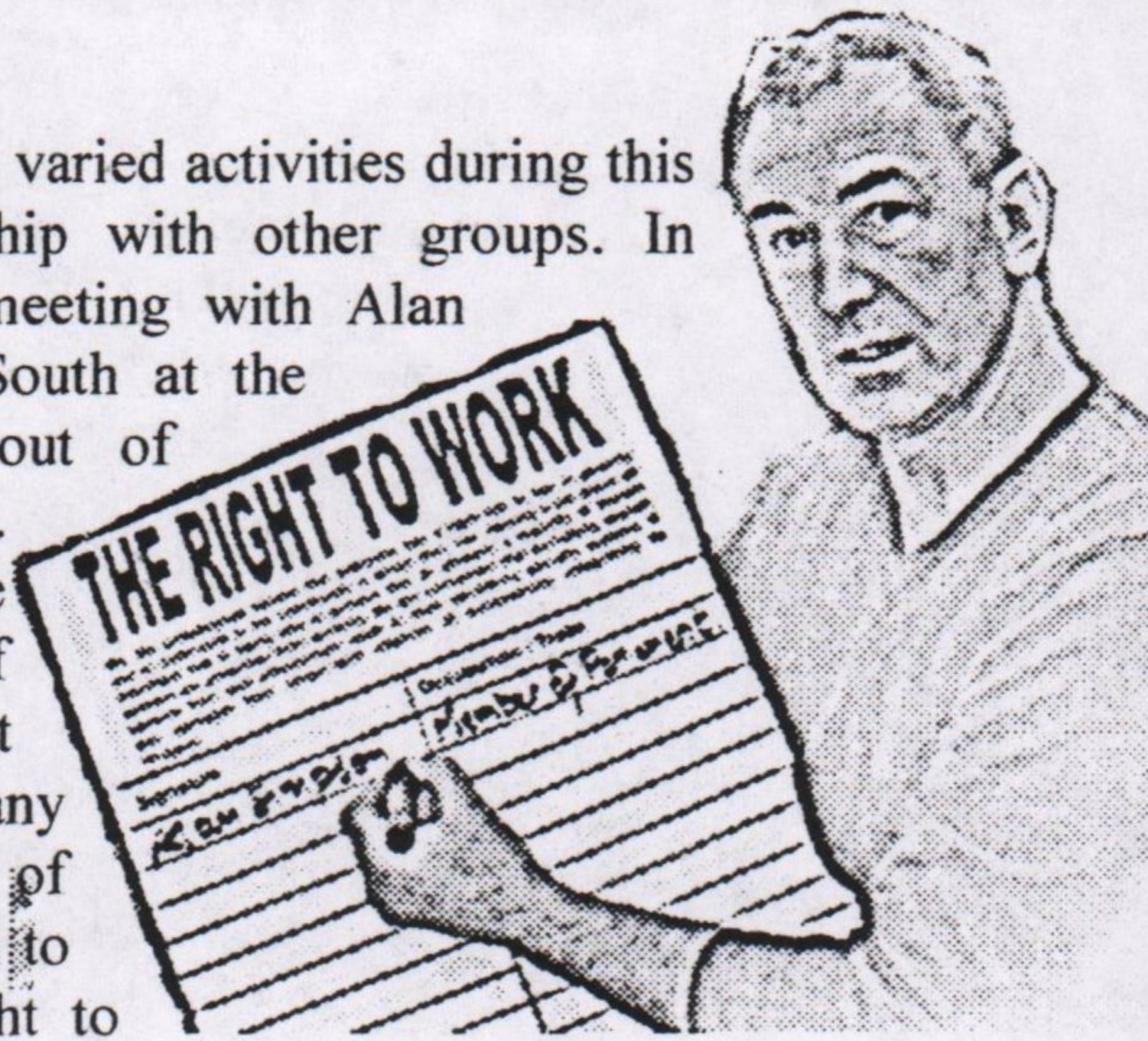
Ruth
Female Asylum Seeker

“ I'm learning English, but my friends all speak Arabic. I meet new friends here and practice my English on a Saturday.

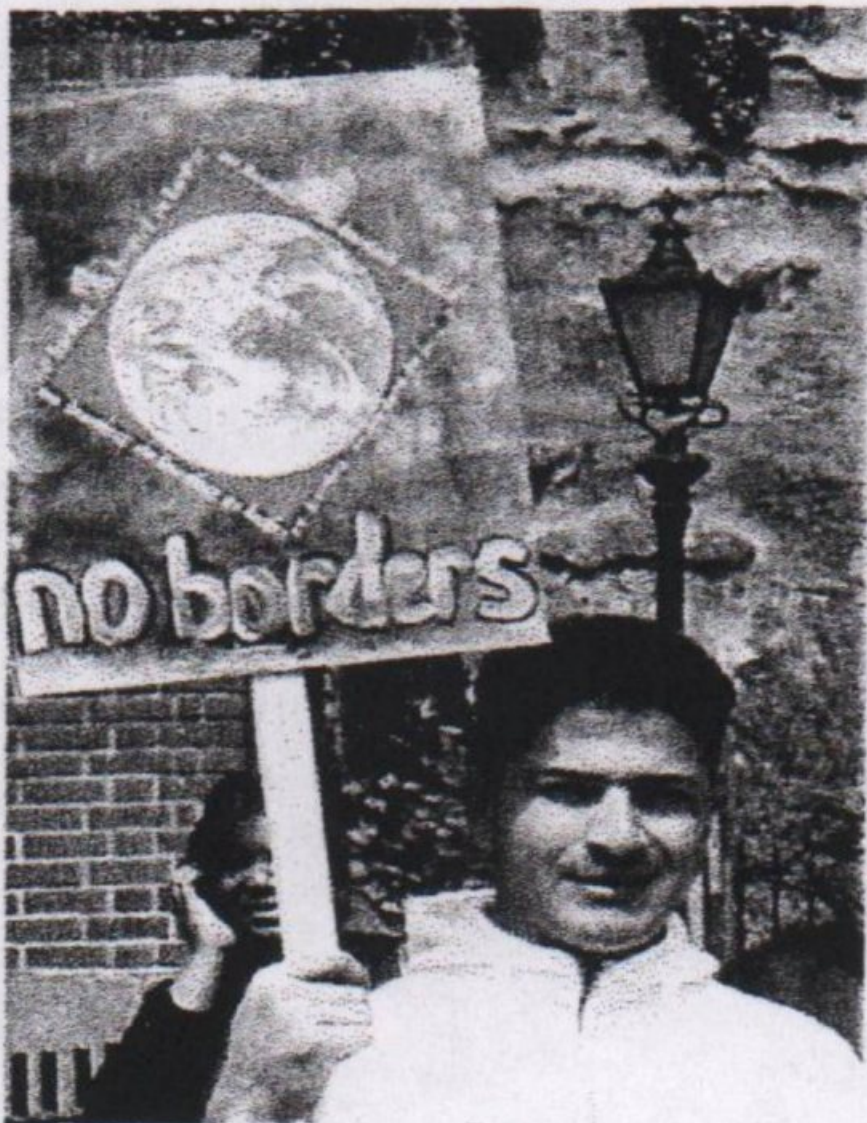
”
Palestinian
Asylum Seeker

Campaigning

Campaigning has meant many varied activities during this past year, often in partnership with other groups. In November we organised a meeting with Alan Simpson M.P. Nottingham South at the Square Centre with a turnout of about 30 asylum seekers. Alan was very clear that he could only help individuals if they were his constituents, but was interested in supporting any research regarding housing of asylum seekers and very keen to help a campaign for the right to work.



In March, volunteers helped to organise an overnight a vociferous protest outside the Bridewell, police holding station, when three Darfurians were picked up for deportation (one of them a former food group volunteer). We were ably assisted by the Aegis Trust and its newly formed Nottingham Trent University student group on this occasion, as well as other concerned colleagues.



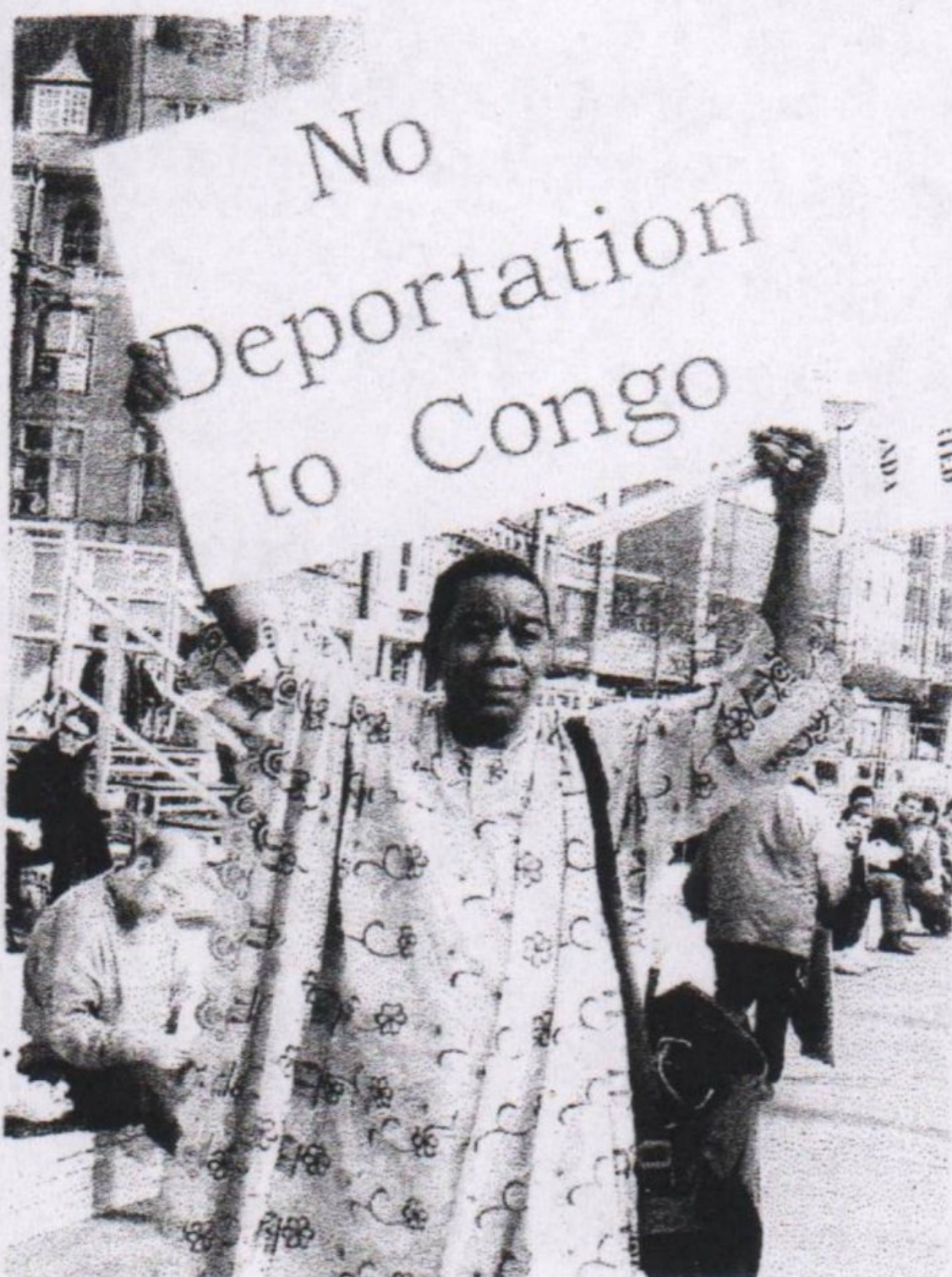
In May nearly 20 of our volunteers joined the May Day march with the beautiful posters created by asylum seekers.

Campaigning also means helping to change attitudes towards our lamentable asylum policies, for example, a talk given to a church group stressing the need to raise destitution and deportation as political issues carried out in our name by the government. Working with a young Iranian and a woman from West Africa, we spoke in two different senior schools to

stimulate interest and understanding in asylum issues.

Short talks followed by discussion with students were also undertaken on several occasions at Nottingham University, as well as some discussion about possible student activities in 2007/8. Contact with Nottingham University also resulted in the reliable assistance of a student on Thursday mornings with our expeditions to Asda to buy food!

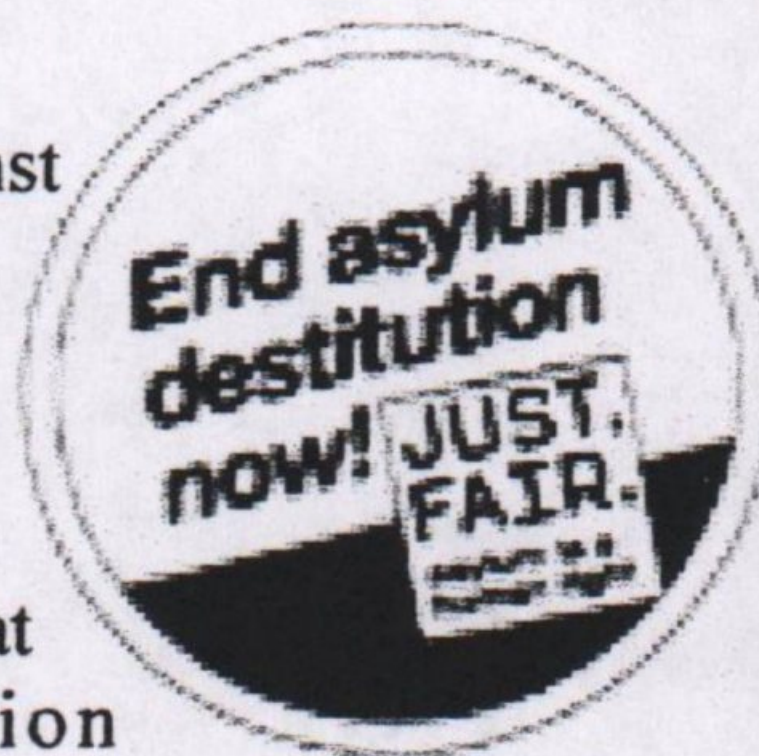
We joined in a Refugee Council campaign against destitution by encouraging as many people as possible to send postcards, were able to respond to invitations for brief interviews on local television.



We were delighted when, at a demonstration against deportations to the DRC, some members of the Congolese community finally felt able to speak directly with the BBC TV reporter.

There is ongoing work collecting critical information about the asylum process and making recommendations on how to improve it for the Independent Asylum Commission whose national findings will be used to report to and negotiate with the government in early 2008.

Konnie



“ I volunteer because I have no job and not allowed to do any job. So I come to help other Asylum Seekers and to meet new friends, and practice my English. I enjoy this and making music with others in the group.

I have problems with my depression, so I don't like staying at home ”

Sudanese Asylum Seeker Volunteer

“ I enjoy helping at the food group, but I'm homeless and I live at friends houses for a few days then I have to move to another friends house. I move all the time.

Sometimes I can't come as the place I'm staying is too far away. My NASS accommodation stopped 2 years ago, and I've lived like this ever since.

I hope to reopen my case but It is difficult when I have no home. ”

Eritrean Women Volunteer

If you can help with finding accommodation for this volunteer please contact Richard or Bill from the Food Group

“ I find this group helping a lot of people who are needy. What I have discovered is that from being a food group it has gone further than that. From it people have made friends, there is a music workshop that takes place some Saturday's as well.

There is a lot that people get, during food distribution, those hungry get hot food prepared for them which is a very vital aspect of life. Where there is no food people perish.

Socialisation is one important factor of this group. It is where people from different back grounds organise activities like parties together.

I anticipate a lot more activities in the very near future which will enhance true integration. ”

Zimbabwean
Asylum Seeker

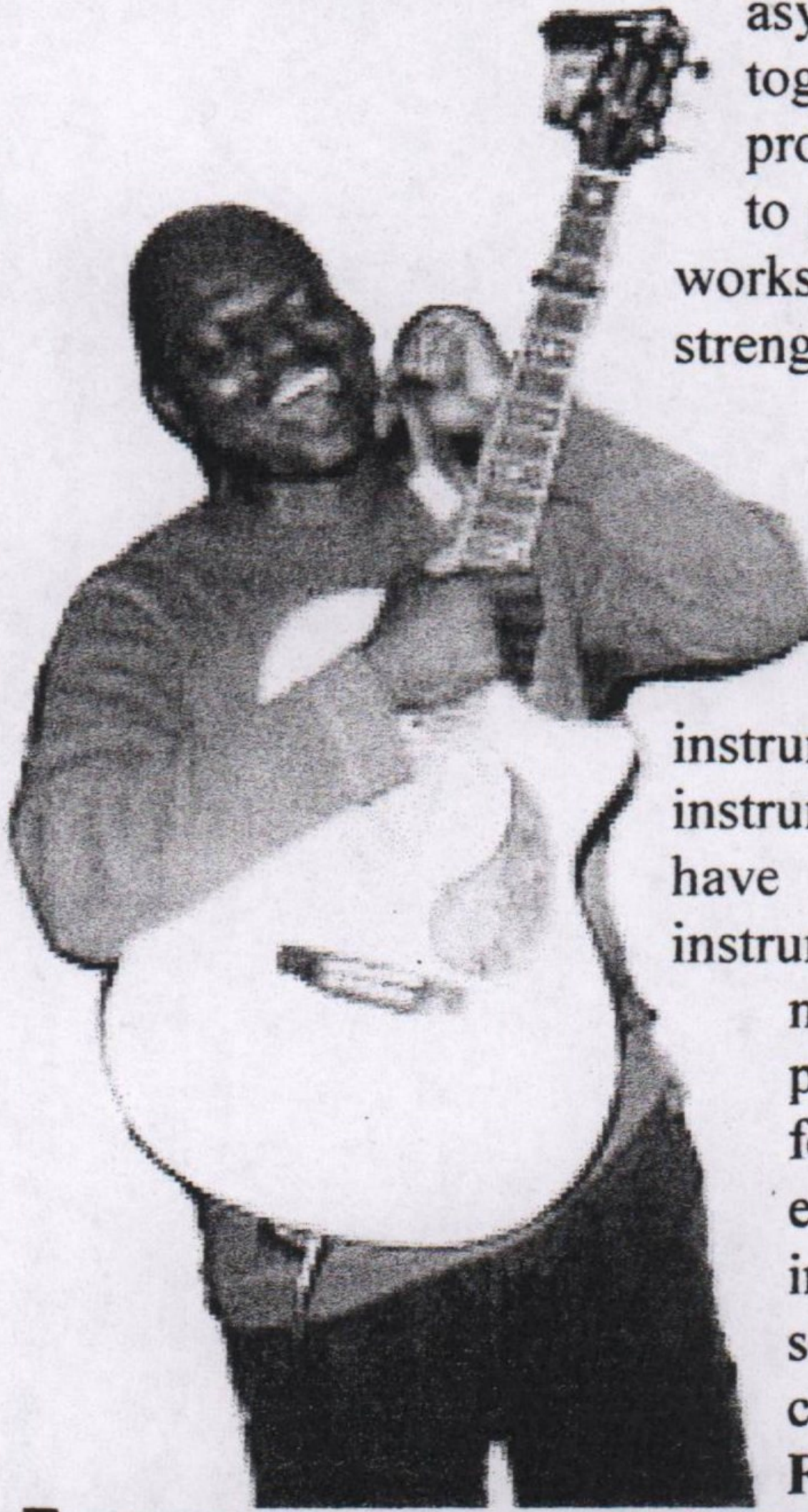
★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★
★ **BIG THANK YOU** ★

★ The Anti Destitution Group ★
★ would like to thank all our ★
★ friends, supporters and volunteers ★
★ for all their help over the last ★
★ year: We would specially like to ★
★ thank:- ★
★ ■ All the staff at Playworks, for ★
★ supplying us weekly with tons ★
★ of free toiletries, and also for ★
★ the their help with the Family ★
★ Fun Day. ★
★ ■ Thompson Brothers for getting ★
★ us the best deals on the Fruit ★
★ and Vegetables, plus all the free ★
★ or very cheap stuff we usually ★
★ could never afford to buy. ★
★ ■ Finally to the staff at ASDA for ★
★ putting up with us all every ★
★ Thursday. ★

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IF MUSIC BE THE FOOD OF LOVE, PLAY ON

The Food Group at the Refugee Forum have organised fortnightly music workshops for destitute asylum seekers. The workshops developed from



asylum seekers and volunteers playing music together at the Food Group every Saturday, which proved very popular and enjoyable. We wanted to provide more time to develop the music. The workshops started in July and have gone from strength to strength. The workshops have given asylum seekers the opportunity to learn to play a musical instrument. We have given asylum seekers access to musical instruments so that they can practice at home. Many asylum seekers want to learn to play an instrument but do not have the money to buy an instrument or pay for lessons. In the workshops I have seen people getting to grips with playing instruments, particularly playing the guitar, becoming more skilful and confident. The workshops take place in a relaxed environment and are suitable for people of all levels of musical ability and experience. We still need more musical instruments so that people can practice at home, so if you have any spare musical instruments contact Frank on 07905 322813

Frank McMahon

SNAPSHOTS OF OUR WORK

In October and November 06 we tried to keep a record of the diverse ways we help Asylum Seekers on a Saturday. Below are just a few examples from of our notes:-

A donated Suitcase (with wheels) was given to a heavily pregnant Congolese woman.

Two asylum seekers (from Palestine and Iraq) came for bedding. They had moved to Nottingham in the last few days and had very little bedding. Were able to give them quilts and blankets.

Coffee maker donated to the group was given to an Iraqi man with a disability. It was originally given to an Serbian man, but he thought the Iraqi man needed it more.

Two young Congolese men turned up quite late very hungry. They took some hot food and came back for three or for portions more. The last portion they shared between them.

Pregnant woman (baby due in 1 month) came and took some baby clothes, she put aside some items for next week as she couldn't carry all the items.

In one week we gave away more than 40 items of clothing, this included 4 shirts to a homeless asylum seeker, trousers to a disabled Iraqi man. 2 pairs of shoes.

An Eritrean man who was referred to the group for two weeks came in early and helped our volunteers put out the food.

Ethiopian woman volunteered to cook the food for next week, a Kurdish man volunteered for the following week

Group of women asylum seekers came in and sorted through clothes that had been donated this week. They put the clothes out in the main hall.

A Palestinian man need a winter coat. We were able to give him a leather jacket and a light weight coat. He also took a radio and some shirts.

FOOTBALL CRAZY

Football is a sport which includes everyone whether you know how to play it or whether you have never played it. It is a sport for fun and also helps your physic. Here at the Refugee Forum Food Group, we began our team in early March in order to build bridges and also to help us escape the tortures of everyday life as destitute asylum seekers. We got our volunteers and also the destitute asylum seekers coming on the Saturday for the food to volunteer and we had great response.

To our amazement football went really well and in our first game we had around 20 players. From that moment on we got to know each other better and built some trust with each other.

Unfortunately, we lost some of our determined players because since being destitute they have been moved and we don't have any contact details for them any more.

Our main aim was to build bridges between communities and with us and we have achieved that successfully, we have seen a tremendous change in both the volunteers and also the asylum seekers as more and more have been willing to get involved with this project.

I would like to say that the football project has been really successful and also been fun because the players that we have, some of them are from a professional background which we didn't know about, and others are just committed beginners.

We would like to go ahead and take a step further by registering in a local five a side football tournament. We applied for a grant in July which, sadly was turned down. I would also like to take the opportunity to ask for any help towards funding or being our manager or any kind of support which will assist us. Other than that I on behalf of the team would like to thank those who have supported us and those who will continue with their contribution.

Ravi



Our Newsletter

The Food Group started it's own newsletter in January, we've found it's useful way of communicating information to the asylum seekers that come to the group on Saturday.

After some training one of our volunteers from the Congo was able to help us with layout of the newsletter. We try and get contribution from all our volunteers and users of the group. Each issue has pictures from the events that we have helped to organise or attended as well as adverts of events that are going to happen in the coming month.

In the last issue, we had a report and photos from the music workshop, a report on the Congolese community demonstration against deportations, an advert and article on Nottingham LGBT Pride Festival.

We also featured a poem by one of volunteers, which we hope to make a regular feature of our newsletter.

