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Business Plan 2006/2008

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1. Summary

Asylum seekers and refugees are a uniquely disadvantaged group in British society. In addition to the social exclusion, which results from their poverty, refugees and asylum seekers usually face language barriers, alienation from society and, very often, have a fear of the authorities.

The NNRF was set up in June 2000 to help combat these disadvantages for the many refugees and asylum seekers who have come to live in and around Nottingham. A group of committed volunteers, including a number of refugees, set up the Forum. Their aim was to help asylum seekers access local services and to provide a channel between refugees and the host community.

As a result of a successful application for charitable and other grants, in October 2001 the Forum was able to take on the lease of its own building and employ a paid staff co-ordinator.

This Business Plan aims to describe the achievements of the NNRF to date and set them in the local context. It also aims to set out a detailed plan of work for the coming year and a clear strategy for following two years. The plan aims to demonstrate why the work of the NNRF is so important and why there is a need to develop this work over the next three years. The Business Plan will also demonstrate why the NNRF is the best placed organisation in the Nottingham area to deliver a range of support and activities run with and for refugees and asylum seekers.



2. About the NNRF

The Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum (NNRF) is a voluntary organisation set up to enable interested local organisations and individuals to work in partnership to help meet the needs of refugees and asylum seekers. The Forum was established as a response to the government's policy of "dispersing" asylum seekers around the country. Nottingham has become one of the "top ten" provincial cities to receive the highest number of asylum seekers dispersed by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS).

The NNRF was constituted at an inaugural meeting on 22nd June 2000, which was addressed by Alan Simpson MP and Usha Sood, a barrister specialising in immigration law. The NNRF's constitution stipulates that at least 3 members of the management committee must be refugees. The central purpose of the Forum is to help refugees and asylum seekers feel welcome and give them a local "voice". The Forum is committed to maximising the involvement of asylum seekers and refugees in the running of the organisation.

In 2005, the Forum has a membership of 451 individuals and 98 organisations. A wide range of religious and political organisations and companies have affiliated.

Individual members pay an annual subscription and are kept informed and involved in the work of the Forum. Many of these members often contribute practical help to the work of the Forum through a range of sub-committees and as volunteers.

The NNRF was registered as a charity on 8th June 2001 (Charity number 1086962).

Because of the increasing numbers of employees, and financial commitments, in 2004 the Management Committee decided to make the Forum a company limited by guarantee. NNRF Limited was registered by Companies House on 4th February 2005 (Company Registration number 5352679). The directors of NNRF Ltd are Rob Peutrell, Patricia Stoaat and Leo Keely.



NNRF's Aims and Objectives

Aims

- To help asylum seekers feel welcome in Nottingham
- To facilitate the "voice" of refugees and asylum seekers on issues that affect them
- To assist the integration of refugees into the local community
- To promote public awareness and a better understanding of asylum issues
- To enable interested local organisations and individuals to become actively involved in meeting the needs of refugees and asylum seekers
- To improve access to statutory voluntary sector services and raise awareness in the specific needs of refugees among service providers.

Objectives

- To establish a community and resource centre where asylum seekers and refugees can obtain information, support and practical help
- To employ staff who can use a wide range of skills to support and assist refugees and asylum seekers in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire
- To set up a network of volunteers to befriend and support refugees and asylum seekers. It is intended that many of these volunteers should themselves be refugees
- To mobilise the skills of NNRF members into practical assistance for asylum seekers and refugees
- To involve directly refugees and asylum seekers in the running of the organisation
- To encourage statutory organisations to fulfil their obligations and to provide refugees and asylum seekers with as much support as possible.



Views of Local Organisations

Jon Collins
Leader
Nottingham City Council

We are pleased to be able to support the Nottingham & Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum in this bid. The Forum provide invaluable services to refugee / asylum seekers in Nottingham. We currently fund them through our 'Supporting People' budget to provide housing support services to refugees. We also fund an Advice Worker who provides Health, Education, Social Service, Housing and Education advice. Additionally, we fund two workers through 'Nottingham Works' to provide Benefits Advice and specialist Employment and Training Advice.

Graham de Max
Asylum Seekers and Refugees Co-ordinator
Nottingham City Council

NNRF has gone from strength to strength in the last few years, and is now a key partner of Nottingham City Council in the development of services for asylum seekers and refugees in the City. These partnerships include:

- A 'one-stop' advice and information service
- A Supporting People contract to provide floating support for refugees
- A project to capacity-build within refugee community organisations.

These projects demonstrate the trust and confidence in the organisation which exists within the City Council. However, it should be noted that the funding which the Council has provided is for dedicated projects and does not contribute to NNRF's mainstream costs.

The management committee of NNRF exhibits great commitment and professionalism, and the organisation has made an enormous contribution in ensuring that dispersal has worked in Nottingham. There remain, however, significant gaps in services for this client group, which only the voluntary sector can fill. NNRF has done this to great effect over the past five years and it is vital that it is able to continue to do so.

Keith Grayson
Manager
Refugee Action - Nottingham

Refugee Action was involved in the setting up the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum (NNRF) in late 1999 in preparation for the dispersal of asylum seekers to the Nottingham area.

NNRF, over the last 5 years, has developed its services to asylum seekers and refugees and become a strong lobbying group on the issues facing asylum seekers and refugees in the area. We have worked together on training initiatives, the Building Bridges (library) project and Refugee Week.

Refugee Action and NNRF have worked together in terms of attempting to meet the needs of asylum seekers and refugees in Nottingham. We continue to co-operate in terms of providing advice options for service users in Nottingham, and in recent months have worked together to share the workload created by an increase in Section 4 applications for failed Iraqi asylum seekers.

We value the pioneering work done by NNRF on support for destitute asylum seekers.

Stuart Brown
Chair
Travelling Light

Travelling Light is an organisation run by and for refugee artists to develop arts projects and training initiatives. Projects to date include; photographic exhibitions, school workshop training and short creative films.

Since 2002 we have been working closely with NNRF, who have been extremely supportive, and we sincerely hope that the relationship will continue in the future.

Steff Webber
Chase Action Group

We have been working in partnership with Refugee Forum for the last four years.

They played an invaluable role in the development of services and resources that we have running from the neighbourhood centre, offering ongoing support to our advice worker.

In our opinion they provide one of the best and consistent support services for refugees in the City, if not the County.

We have no hesitation in signposting people to their services and look forward to more partnership work in the future.

Paul Watkins
ESOL Manager
People's College

NNRF continues to provide support for many of our refugee and asylum seeker students. These students face enormous difficulties in rebuilding their lives in the UK. Without the NNRF's willing assistance and support, our ability to respond to the needs of our students would be much diminished. Not only are our ESOL team able to refer students in need of support to the NNRF, but we have appreciated visits to the college by their employment and Benefit advisers.

I am particularly pleased that former and current students have become active in the NNRF; as members of its management committee, as workers employed

by the Forum, as voluntary community organisers, as artists, or as volunteers working with women refugees.

The NNRF remains crucial to refugee integration in Nottingham, and our active and ongoing student and staff links with that organisation offers a practical and valued extension to our pastoral and social role as an ESOL provider.

Fiona Vale
BEGIN

BEGIN (Basic Educational Guidance in Nottingham) has worked in close partnership with the NNRF since its inception in 2001.

The NNRF provides essential support for BEGIN's management of the central ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) placement service in signposting refugees and asylum seekers to language classes and vocational opportunities. It serves as a vital focal point for the wider issues involved in the integration and resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers, both for its client group and for the wider network of other agencies working to improve their welfare.

Its responsiveness to local needs has been demonstrated by its ability to adapt, improve and expand services, and to continually raise awareness of the issues faced by the people dispersed to Nottingham and Nottinghamshire.

We unreservedly support this bid for lottery funding for NNRF.



3. Asylum seekers and refugees in Nottinghamshire

Terminology

An **asylum seeker** is someone who has applied to the Home Secretary for permission to remain in the United Kingdom. This may be because they have a fear of persecution or have endured other intolerable circumstances in the country they have fled. Asylum seekers are mainly supported by NASS (National Asylum Support Service), which is a division of the Home Office. Asylum seekers are not allowed to work for at least 1 year and may apply for subsistence payments and accommodation. Asylum Seekers under the age of 18 (minors) are the responsibility of Social Services.

A **refugee** is a person who has received a positive decision about their asylum application following investigation by the Home Office. As such, they have been granted either full refugee status with no limit on the time they can stay in the country, or exceptional or discretionary leave to remain, which has a time limit of up to four years, after which the individual can apply for the right of settlement. Refugees can receive state benefits, are allowed to work and may apply for social housing.

The Asylum Seeker and Refugee Population in Nottinghamshire

Asylum Seekers

The 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act initiated the government's policy of dispersing asylum seekers around the country in order to reduce the workload of overstretched support services in London and the South East. Nottingham is in ninth place in the ranking of provincial cities to receive the highest number of asylum seekers under the dispersal scheme which started in April 2000. The number of dispersed asylum seekers in Nottingham can be up to 1,434 at any one time (0.5% of the City's population). There is, of course, constant turnover, so the total number of individuals per annum is considerably higher.

The Asylum Seeker population is the largest in the East Midlands. The great majority of asylum seekers live within Nottingham City Council's boundaries, but there are a small numbers living in the Mansfield, Newark and north Notts areas.

Although numbers of asylum claims have decreased nationally, dispersal to Nottingham is expected to continue at the current rate because the Home Office has reduced the number of dispersal areas in the UK. Derby, for example, is no longer accepting asylum seekers.

Refugees

The number of refugees who have remained in Nottingham once they have received a positive Home Office decision since 2000 is not recorded. Some estimates put this figure at around 600 households (including dependants,



possibly around 1,000 persons).

Refugees who have been granted leave to remain must leave their NASS-provided rented accommodation within 14 days. Nottingham City Council is receiving applications for rehousing from this group at a rate of at least 10 per week. Only families with dependent children and especially vulnerable adults are classed as 'legally homeless'. All others have to join City Council or Housing Association waiting lists, even though they possibly have nowhere to live.

A conservative estimate of the number of asylum seekers and refugees in Nottingham in 2005 would be 2,500. All these people could potentially benefit from the work of the NNRF's Resource Centre.

Refugees with EU citizenship

Over the past two years, an increasing number of Somali families who gained refugee status in Holland and Denmark have moved to the East Midlands, the majority to Leicester but also increasingly to Nottingham. They experience many of the same problems as other refugees with additional issues caused by the Habitual Residence Test.

Who are the refugees?

Since 2000, approximately 45 nationalities have been represented among asylum seekers in Nottingham, speaking over 30 languages. The majority of refugees and asylum seekers in come from Iran, Iraqi Kurdistan, Afghanistan, Turkey (Kurds), Zimbabwe, Somalia and Sudan. In addition, there are smaller groups from a number of African States (Burundi, Rwanda, Congo, DRC, Chad, Liberia, Uganda, Cameroon, Eritrea and Ethiopia).

Between 2000 -2003, about 70 per cent of asylum seekers were single men, mainly Kurds from Iraq. There are currently around 200 families with around 550 children (350 of whom are of school age). Asylum seekers usually have few or no possessions on arrival. Many of them cannot speak English. They have often fled their countries in fear, with no time to prepare for the journey. They often do not know the whereabouts of their families and have fears that their friends and relatives may be dead.

Asylum seekers in Nottingham come from very varied backgrounds. They include doctors, engineers, actors, teachers, airline staff, relatives of government personnel, skilled and unskilled manual workers.



Problems faced by refugees and asylum seekers in Nottingham

Difficulty in accessing services

The basic routines of daily life can be difficult for people who have no local knowledge and who struggle with language. Asylum seekers have no status as citizens and it can be hard to access even the most basic services, such as the health service. In many statutory organisations, front-line staff may lack knowledge of asylum support issues, which can add to the confusion. Interpreters can be hard to access and expensive.

Many asylum seekers have found that their problems have been compounded by being moved away from London, where many support networks are already available.

Poverty

Most asylum seekers are provided with the basic necessities of life by NASS. Accommodation costs are covered by contracts between NASS and private or social landlords. For everything else, asylum seekers receive only 70% of Income Support levels. Food, clothing and other necessities must all be purchased from this. For newly arrived asylum seekers, there may be delays in receiving NASS support and bureaucratic errors may result in its non-payment for periods of time, leaving them destitute and totally dependent upon the goodwill of local people. For those with subsistence support, amounts are very meagre. It is difficult to fund more expensive items, like clothing, from the weekly allowances, of about £39.

Inactivity, isolation and anxiety

Many asylum seekers are fit, young and active. They are not allowed to work until they have been waiting more than a year for their case to be determined. They are permitted to engage in voluntary work, but at present the opportunities to do so are limited for those without a good grasp of English. Asylum seekers cannot afford leisure pursuits or to buy a television. Boredom, loneliness and fear for their future may lead to depression. Many have been through physically and mentally scarring experiences and need emotional support and access to counselling or therapeutic services. It is therefore important for them to make links with other asylum seekers for companionship and to engage in social activities.

Lack of English Language

Most asylum seekers are very keen to learn English. This has the benefits of occupying them constructively, of enabling them to better understand the process of their asylum applications and their circumstances more generally, whilst reducing the need for (and cost of) interpreter assistance. Access to appropriate courses can be difficult to obtain without good advice. Most can only take up other courses if they receive charitable grants for travel, books and stationery.

The funding system for higher education is more complex than for further education. Many skilled asylum seekers and refugees hoping to take courses



which transfer qualifications at a higher level or those wishing to embark on a higher education course will encounter many difficulties with eligibility and fees.

Integration

Asylum seekers' problems are not always resolved by the receipt of a favourable outcome to their asylum application. Once they have achieved Leave to Remain, they are given only 14 days to find their own accommodation and apply for state benefits. This can be a traumatic process without support from specialist advisory services.

Views of Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Leyla

I am Somali and sought asylum here with my four children. When we were dispersed to Nottingham I missed my Home Office interview because we were travelling here that day and was refused because of this. Refugee Forum helped me to get legal advice to sort this out.

For over half a year I could not get school places for my 15 year-old twins, until Refugee Forum negotiated places for them at Greenwood Dale. The following year they helped them to move to Clarendon College to do A levels. When one of my sons had problems at school with bullying, the forum talked to the staff and sorted it out.

The Forum also helped me to sort out my benefits and assisted me when I moved into a council house. I have health problems and Forum staff have helped me to get treatment.

I have become a volunteer with the Forum. I interpret in Arabic and Somali, translate leaflets and help with Reception and at advice sessions. I also help to organise Women United. We have held a party for women and plan to have more activities for them when we move into our new premises. I also visit women at home, accompany them on appointments to GPs and hospitals and other agencies.

In October 2004 I joined the Management Committee.

Without the Forum I would have been lost. It has made so much difference to me; it has made me feel I belonged here and that I have friends to support me.

Ahmad

I am an Iraqi Kurd, with Refugee Status. I am here with my wife and 3 children. We were dispersed to Scotland but suffered racial abuse and moved to Nottingham to be near friends. It was difficult to find accommodation here but with the help of the Forum we were given a Housing Association house. The Forum sorted out schools for my children, and support for us in moving in. - such as gas, electricity, doctors and benefits.

This help has made our lives so much easier. It would be very difficult to find anyone who would help us as much as the Forum.

Karim

I'm a single man aged 24 from Iraq with Leave to Remain in the UK. I have a council flat, which the Forum helped me to settle into. But I got into rent arrears after I worked for a short time and lost Housing Benefit. I had to go to Court about this. The benefit adviser at the Forum got them to agree to a payment plan to pay off the arrears at £5 a week.

The Forum has made a great deal of difference to my life in Nottingham. With the help of your advisers I have been able to resolve all my financial problems. Without this help I would have lost my home and my job.

I have told my friends where you are and the facilities you provide.

Mohammed

I am 30 years old and am a refugee from Sudan.

The Forum has helped me with many things - getting a flat, sorting out the utilities, benefits, application forms for work.

It has made living here much easier, being with nice people. They have made me more confident with everyday things - and to go out and do things on my own.

Without the Forum's help I wouldn't know where else to go - I wouldn't know what to do without you.

I have told other people to come here to get help.

I would like the Forum to have computer classes and English classes - and to help people to do things that they have never done before.

Mahmoud

I am a refugee from Somalia. I am now 18; when I arrived in the UK to claim asylum I was 17 and was supported by Social Services in Sheffield. When I got my positive decision I had to move out of my accommodation but could not get anywhere to live in Sheffield. I moved to Nottingham mainly because I had heard about Refugee Forum. They helped me get a place in a NACRO hostel where I'm very happy. Without this help I would have been homeless. I don't know what I would have done without the Forum.

Current Support Arrangements in Nottingham

Refugee Action has been commissioned by NASS to be the lead agency in support services to refugees in Nottingham. Its work can be summarised by the following services:

- Reception assistance - i.e. providing advice to newly-arrived asylum seekers
- Help with applications for NASS support
- Sorting out NASS support problems
- Liaison with local organisations and accommodation providers.

The support needs of newly-arrived asylum seekers can be overwhelming and



Refugee Action often has difficulty in meeting all of the advice needs of its clients.

Housing - NASS has entered into contracts with a number of accommodation agencies and landlords to provide accommodation for asylum seekers. A large proportion is through private landlords. Refugee Housing Association is acting as the key social landlord for NASS by leasing council and housing association property to house asylum seekers.

There have been significant problems with some of private landlords' accommodation. Some has been of a poor standard and there have even been a few incidents of harassment of asylum seekers by landlords' agents. NNRF has been active in liaising with the Police and private providers to try to ensure that these problems are resolved and do not recur.

Nottingham City Council's Housing Department has an Asylum Support Team which manages asylum seekers' dispersal and the integration of refugees in the City. Its Co-ordinator chairs Nottingham's Multi Agency Forum bringing together service providers.

Social Services - Nottingham City Council and Nottinghamshire County Council both still support destitute asylum seekers who arrived in their areas prior to August 2000. They also support unaccompanied minors seeking asylum.

Education - Nottingham LEA receives some additional resources for the 350 school-age children of asylum seekers. This amounts to around £500 per pupil per year. A number of adult education providers and colleges provide ESOL (English as a Second or Other Language) courses.

The **gaps** in current support arrangements for asylum seekers and refugees have therefore resulted in the following needs:

- Emergency food and supplies when NASS support stops or is not available
- Practical help to obtain the more expensive necessities of life, e.g. clothing, travel costs, furniture
- A focal point to allow language groups to meet, socialise and provide mutual support and self-help
- Social, sporting and creative activities
- Provision of advice and advocacy to allow refugees and asylum seekers better access to local services
- Resettlement and integration support for refugees, including housing, education, employment and benefits
- Interpreting and translation
- Awareness-raising among statutory and voluntary sector service providers of specific needs of refugees and asylum seekers
- Access to ESOL and vocational training.

4. Work and achievements 2000 - 2005

The work of the NNRF has been targeted at filling the gaps outlined above. During the Forum's first year of existence from June 2000, its major achievements can be summarised as follows:

Summary of Achievements 2000-2001:

- **Achieving charitable status**
- **Successful funding bid** to Comic Relief and the Lottery Community Fund to enable employment of a worker and lease of a building
- **Building relationships between refugees and the host community**
- **Emergency assistance**
- **Nottingham Refugee Club:** Provision of informal support to refugees through a social club and activities for children and young people.
- *Seeking Asylum in Nottingham:* an **NNRF conference** held in Nottingham on 17th February 2001
- *Celebrating Sanctuary. Refugee week 2001* A programme of cultural events in Nottingham to celebrate National Refugee Week
- Holding monthly **committee meetings**
- **Campaigning and media work**
- **Gift Voucher Donations.**



Achievements 2002 – 2005

2002 – 2003: Establishing the 118 Centre

Lottery Community Fund grant enabled NNRF to put infrastructure in place – a centre, a co-ordinator, and a part-time administrator – allowing the development of a wide range of activities to support refugees and asylum seekers and to attract service-providing projects.

After operating for 18 months without premises, the Forum's Resource Centre at 118 Mansfield Road was formally opened in January 2002 by Bill Morris, the then General Secretary of the T&GWU.

Having a base for our operations has enabled us to provide:

- Thrice weekly daytime open advice sessions, staffed by the Co-ordinator and a team of volunteers
- Children's room for play and creative activities
- Access to computers
- ESOL classes in partnership with New College Nottingham
- Interpreter training with NCN
- Volunteer training, e.g. on asylum procedures, housing and benefits
- Space for committee and inter-agency meetings
- Distribution of donated clothing
- Creative activities – 'Travelling Light' refugee arts project
- Bike distribution project (assisted by Nottinghamshire Probation Service)
- Summer activities for families and young people
- A base for the Refugee Community Network.

Open advice sessions

Operating on three afternoons per week since January 2002, these sessions have been the mainstay of the Forum's support for both asylum seekers and refugees, and are greatly appreciated by those who use them. Word of mouth has spread news of this service beyond Nottingham and we often see people from other parts of the Midlands, East of England and beyond, so desperate for support they cannot get locally that they are prepared to travel considerable distances.

Over 1800 individuals (not including spouses and children) have attended these sessions, many returning frequently and with new people arriving each week. An average of 25 -30 persons attend each session for a wide range of advice and practical support.



Issues dealt with on a regular basis at the drop-in sessions include:

- NASS (National Asylum Support Service) queries, e.g. payment and accommodation problems
- Translating and explaining letters, forms, bills
- Phone calls, e.g. to solicitors, Home Office, City Council, Hospitals, GP's
- Registering with GPs
- Applications for jobs, benefits and grants
- Lost documents
- Travel document applications
- Explaining options after asylum refusal
- Signposting to legal advisers
- Family reunions
- Referrals to charities for food, clothing, furniture, etc.

Social & Cultural activities

- **Weekly social evenings** have enabled refugees, asylum seekers and local people, including a number of University students, to meet in an informal environment. Volunteers organised play activities for the children, including art and craft sessions, and took teenagers to bowling, ice-skating, swimming and the cinema.
- **Summer holiday activities** have been organised in partnership with Refugee Action and the City Council's Sports Development Team, with Home Office funding and Ecoworks. These have included family outings, barbecues and picnics, football, horse riding, swimming and multi-sports sessions.
- **A Saturday play-scheme in Hyson Green** has been supported by the Forum.
- **Allotments:** The Forum has paid rent for several allotments for the use of asylum seeker families to provide them with useful activities and an opportunity to grow their own vegetables.
- **Film:** Block bookings have been made at Broadway Cinema for films of special interest to refugees. Sam Azad, the Centre Co-ordinator, has spoken at several of these events on the situation of asylum seekers in Nottingham.

Local refugees and asylum seekers, including a member of NNRF's Management Committee, have produced short films with the support of Intermedia, with showings arranged at Broadway.



• Travelling Light

NNRF has supported, financially and in other ways, and its members participated in, the local refugee arts group 'Travelling Light'. Activities have included:

- an exhibition of the work of local refugee artists
- music events
- a current photography and video project documenting the work of the Forum. This was supported by an 'Awards for All' grant.

Women United

The majority of asylum seekers dispersed to Nottingham have been single men, but there is a significant minority of women in couples and single women, some with children. These women may experience problems of isolation, domestic violence, desertion, specific health issues and pregnancy – and be unable to access advice and support. Although some do attend the Centre, we are aware that many do not have the confidence to do so, often for cultural or religious reasons, especially in the crowded male-dominated premises we have at present.

While Refugee Action had a women's worker for two years, NNRF supported her activities. When this project finished, a group of NNRF women volunteers, both refugees and locals, formed 'Women United' to support the interests of refugee and asylum-seeker women.

The volunteers have received a grant from the Forum to organise social events; a party in summer 2004 attracted over a hundred women from ten communities. They also provide a support service for individual women, escorting them to appointments, referring them for specialist advice from Forum staff and acting as chaperones and interpreters where necessary.

These activities will be extended when the new premises are occupied and greater privacy can be provided.

Alleviation of poverty

This has been an important part of the Forum's work since 2000, and our financial contribution has been made from members' donations and fundraising activities.

Referrals for this support are made by Forum staff, volunteers and other agencies, including Refugee Action, NASS accommodation providers and Social Services.

a. Distribution of essential supplies to people in need

Our volunteers have been involved since 2000 in the weekly distribution of food, toiletries and baby supplies first at St Catharine's House (part of Southwell Diocese) and later at Life at the Centre (a Methodist Church), where the Forum also provided financial aid to the project. In April 2005 we took over this activity completely.

b. Small cash payments and meal vouchers

The Forum started to make regular small cash payments to impoverished persons in June 2004, at the same time offering them vouchers for a hot meal each week at any of three local community centres.

This work has been funded by donations from members and supporters, and by several small grants.

c. Emergency grants

Small one-off grants have been given to asylum seekers and refugees for such things as: food, travel to claim asylum or to meet with their solicitor and – in exceptional circumstances – for overnight accommodation.

Between April 2004 and May 2005, a total of 293 individual grants were made.

Education and Training

a. Until pressure on space at the Centre in 2004 prevented their continuation, **ESOL** classes were held several times a week, with classes for women being especially successful.

b. **Interpreter training** in partnership with New College Nottingham led to certification for 11 interpreters, speaking five different languages. The majority of the group have since put their skills to good use at the Forum as staff or volunteers, and for solicitors in the area; one set up his own interpreting agency and employed other refugees.

c. Doctors' group.

For several months in 2003 an experienced teacher of English worked on a voluntary basis with a group of refugee doctors to help them prepare for the exams required to be registered to practice in the UK.

d. In 2002-3 the Forum administered a **small grant scheme** in partnership with the City Council's Department of Adult & Community Learning to provide financial support to college students to help with the costs of course equipment (e.g. for Catering and Hairdressing), books or exam fees.

Campaigning, public awareness and education:

Since 2000, members of the Forum have been active in campaigning and lobbying locally and nationally to counter the negative images of asylum seekers and refugees, and for their rights to fair and decent treatment.

In 2002, a carefully researched report into the housing conditions of asylum seekers dispersed to Nottingham uncovered serious deficiencies and malpractice by one NASS accommodation provider. The report's publication and subsequent discussions, in which we were involved, led to dramatic improvement in the performance of the company concerned, to the benefit of all their asylum-seeker tenants.

NNRF has continued to maintain a campaigning profile in the city. This has included:

- supporting a campaign committee which meets regularly
- organising public meetings with speakers from other organisations, including Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID), the Institute for Race Relations and the Roma Civic Forum
- publishing and distributing material on issues such as destitution and deportation, and challenging popular misconceptions about asylum
- organising publicity events, including a 48 hour Fast Against Destitution (January 2004) and numerous stalls in the centre of Nottingham
- NNRF members speaking at meetings of other organisations, including political organisations, trades unions and churches
- Forum members appearing in local media, including radio and press
- Local MPs being lobbied regarding both individual cases and general issues, including destitution and the lack of legal representation for asylum cases in the area
- Setting up an NNRF website – www.nottas.org.uk – and maintaining e-membership lists.

NNRF is developing links with the local academic community. It is supporting three PhD theses on issues around refugee settlement in the area. In June 2003, we co-organised a conference 'A Borderless World?' with the Institute for Cultural Analysis, Nottingham (ICA,N – Nottingham Trent University) and we have links with the schools of Critical Theory and History at the University of Nottingham.

NNRF maintains close contact with local MPs and city councillors.

Legal Support

After an inspection, the Forum has been, approved by the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC), to provide immigration advice at Level 1.

The decreasing availability of local legal services dealing with asylum cases is seriously threatening the chances of fair and just outcomes for many asylum seekers. NNRF is committed to achieving Level 2 and then Level 3 approval in order to address this worrying situation.



New Developments: 2003-2005

Two major factors have influenced the development of the Forum's work since 2003, viz:

1. Shift in the 'client' group

Many asylum seekers who were dispersed to Nottingham and subsequently gained Refugee Status or Exceptional Leave to Remain for up to four years have settled in the City. There are no accurate figures for these or for others who have chosen to move to the City to join family or be near friends, but the City Council estimate is around 600 households.

In addition over the past two years there has been a small influx of refugees, mainly Somalis, who have been granted refugee status in another EU country and are entitled to free movement to the UK.

This has widened the scope of our work to include long-term resettlement and integration support for refugees, whilst still continuing to assist asylum seekers.

2. Partnerships working with statutory service providers

The reputation established by the Forum from 2000 onwards has made us the voluntary sector partner of choice for Nottingham City Council in their efforts to improve access to services for refugees and asylum seekers. As a result, the Forum has hosted and managed several projects, which have enabled us to provide an increasingly professionalized and specialist support service delivered by paid staff. These are as follows:

a. NCC One-Stop-Shop

This project, started in June 2003, is funded by Nottingham City Council. It is based at and managed by Refugee Forum.

The aims of the project are:

- To improve access for asylum seekers and refugees to local authority and NHS services by providing advice and advocacy to individuals
- To work in partnership with statutory service providers and those in the voluntary sector, to raise their awareness of the specific needs of the group
- To improve opportunities for successful integration.

The project is staffed by a full-time adviser, who provides personalised advice and advocacy on housing, education, social services, health, and other local authority services. His services are in great demand; in the three months from October to December 2004 alone, he had 730 visitors and dealt with 145 cases in depth.

As part of the project, advice leaflets on 90 topics were written and translated into 7 languages. These are available on the NCC website www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk



The project has been so successful that the initial 2 year period has been extended for a further year, with the likelihood of further extension subject to the availability of funding.

b. Floating Support (Supporting People)

In late 2002, the Forum was invited by City Council Housing Department to take up a contract to deliver a support service for new refugee tenants, as part of the national Supporting People scheme emanating from the ODPM. The service is named 'Floating Support' because it is provided wherever the tenant lives.

The Forum is paid for a caseload of 29 tenants at any one time and employs 4 caseworkers to provide assistance with the many tasks needed to set up a new home and to successfully sustain a tenancy. This includes registering with Utilities, applying for benefits and grants, acquiring furniture, budgeting, home security, and finding new GPs and schools.

Most of those we support self-refer on signing for their tenancy because of their confidence in the Forum. We do not turn anyone away and support far more than our contracted number. Between January 2003 and March 2005 we assisted over 250 new tenants.

The current contract runs until July 2006, with a strong possibility of continuation.

c. 'Nottingham Works' (April 2004 – March 2006)

Nottingham Works is a partnership project between Job Centre Plus and The City Council to target employment advice and training to vulnerable groups and deprived areas. Funded through the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund, this provides at the Forum an Employment, Training and Education Co-ordinator and a Benefits Adviser.

The ETE role is designed to encourage refugees to take up training and, eventually, sustainable employment and to help them overcome the barriers that many of them experience in achieving these goals.

The Benefits Adviser provides information, assists with applications and guides refugees through the social security and benefits maze. She has also been very successful at sorting out Housing Benefit problems, gaining thousands of £s in back payments and preventing evictions and court cases arising from refugees' lack of understanding of the systems.

Effects of these projects

a. Positive outcomes

Each project has enhanced the capacity of the Forum to provide a comprehensive, professional advice and advocacy service to refugees and asylum seekers, which has transformed the lives of many people. Together they enable us to offer an integrated, holistic approach to supporting individuals and families, and to respond to the many crises that arise in their lives. This could not possibly have been achieved by reliance solely on volunteers.



b. Negative outcomes

Housing the above projects has required increased office space and this has reduced room at the Centre for other activities such as classes, social events and meetings. Some of these have been relocated to hired premises but this has placed restrictions on some activities.

New Premises

Lack of space and the need to provide disabled access have driven the Management Committee's search for new premises for the past 2 years. This has proved very difficult and frustrating, as there has been a dearth of suitable, affordable and accessible property within easy distance of the City centre. After several disappointments and delays, a five year lease was eventually signed in March 2005 on The Square Centre, which is in the same locality as our first centre. The installation of a platform lift and a new toilet will enable us to comply with DDA regulations.

The new, larger building, which should be ready for occupation in July 2005, will have sufficient space to enable the Forum to provide, under one roof:

- Good accommodation for staff
- Advice areas, including private spaces
- Destitution support
- Waiting and social areas
- Separate women's and children's area
- Educational, cultural and social activities
- Access to IT for centre users
- Meeting space.



5. The Organisation

Management and Governance

Outline of NNRF's Committee Structure

The main Management Committee meets on a monthly basis. In order to ensure that committee members are also involved in the day-to-day work of the Forum, a series of sub-committees have been formed.

Each of the following sub-committees is chaired by a member of the Management Committee. Members of each sub-committee include other committee members, NNRF members and refugees and asylum seekers. All of the sub-committees report back to the Management Committee where all major decisions are taken.

The main activities of each sub-committee are as follows:

Management Committee

- Strategy and policy development
- Financial oversight and fund-raising
- Co-ordination and planning

Centre Committee

- Planning and co-ordination of the Centre
- Equipping and running the Centre
- Social activities

Staffing Committee

- Supervising staff
- Drawing up and implementing staff procedures
- Staff planning, recruitment and deployment

Publicity campaigning and Community Liaison Group

- Campaigning
- Generating/responding to publicity
- Community liaison

Volunteer Group

- Selection
- Training
- Support

Destitution Group

- Emergency food management & distribution
- Cash and practical support
- Fundraising

Fundraising

- Preparation and submission of funding bids
- Overseeing local and national fundraising

Women United

- Improving access for women and children
- Organising social activities



Consultancy Report

In 2004, a management consultant was employed to review and advise on management structures and staffing. As a result of this consultancy, the management committee decided to seek funding for a quality and development manager post. This has now been achieved, and recruitment will take place in June/July 2005.

Policies and Procedures

During the past three years, to meet the needs of the rapidly expanding organisation, the Management Committee has developed a set of policies and procedures covering the following:

- Health and Safety
- Lone Working
- Equality and Diversity
- Complaints and Grievance
- Volunteers
- Confidentiality

We are currently developing a Child Protection policy with advice and training from the City Council's Child Protection training team.

With the assistance of the Human Resources adviser at Community Accounting Plus, we have developed a Staff Handbook and personnel procedures.

Membership

The Forum has been a membership organisation since its formation in 2000. In April 2005 the numbers were as follows:

- Individual members 451
- Organisational members 98 (including faith groups, council departments, voluntary groups, political groups, refugee organisations)

Volunteers

Volunteers are central to the Forum's organisation and work. Since 2000, over 200 people have volunteered and supported our work in a variety of ways. Some have remained involved for years; others, particularly students, have stayed for shorter periods. In April 2005 there were 54 on the books, of whom over 30 were regularly active. It has always been the policy of the Forum to encourage refugees and asylum seekers to volunteer. This has been very successful and their contribution has been invaluable. Through volunteering they have gained confidence and increased knowledge and skills. For several people this has led on to employment.

Induction, training and on-going support for volunteers is the responsibility of the Centre Co-ordinator.



The work of volunteers

Volunteers contribute in many ways, including:

- Managing the organisation
- Supervising staff and projects
- Assisting at advice sessions
- Staffing Reception
- Interpreting and translating
- Befriending
- Organising social and cultural activities
- Campaigning
- Providing destitution support
- Fundraising.

Staffing

The acquisition of the projects described in Section 3 above, have brought extra members of staff to the Forum as advisers, support workers, and interpreters. There has been an increase from a Co-ordinator and half-time administrator in early 2003 to a total of 5 full-time and six part-time workers in 2005.

By September 2005, as the result of a bid to City Council's Housing department to deliver a capacity building service, the Forum will gain a new manager's post. This post-holder will:

- Manage staff delivering the current advice projects.
- Develop and lead on quality assurance processes to ensure high service standards are developed, monitored and maintained.
- Lead on improving access to services for women and families, including the use of befriending volunteers.
- Help raise the capacity of refugee groups to support their own people
- Co-ordinate liaison with service providers to raise awareness of the needs of refugees and asylum seekers

Refugee involvement in the Forum

One of the aims of the Forum has been to work *with* asylum seekers and refugees, not only *for* them, and to involve them as much as possible in the work of the organisation.

a. Volunteers:

In addition to the volunteering as interpreters and translators, individual asylum seekers and refugees have acted as advisers, organised social and sporting activities, run art and craft sessions for children, accompanied others to appointments, and supported other refugees and asylum seekers in many other ways.

b. Management Committee:

The number of refugees and asylum seekers on the management committee has gradually increased from the constitutional minimum of 3, to 7 in 2004-5, representing 6 different ethnic communities and a co-option from Heri Kwetu (an African refugee organisation).

c. Staff

The Centre Co-ordinator is a refugee from Iran, and five other refugees have joined the staff of the Forum, working on the Tenant Support project and as interpreters. In addition, others have worked on a sessional basis as interpreters, translators and case-workers.

d. Refugee Community Network

NNRF has been instrumental in drawing together an embryonic network of key people across a range of refugee communities in the area, to enable them to share information and experiences, and to be able to keep their community members well-informed on issues that concern them. We plan to further develop this model in the future.

Networks and partnerships

Refugee Forum was formed partly by an alliance of people from many different organisations. These have continued to support our work, but in addition we have developed links and working relationships with many statutory and voluntary sector organisations.

The Forum is also a member of the Multi Agency Forum convened by the City Council's Asylum Co-ordinator and of the East Midlands Consortium for Asylum and Refugee Support (EMCARS).

There are, so far, only a few refugee community organisations evolving in Nottingham but there are many informal groupings. NNRF has brought together active people from a range of ethnic backgrounds into a network. This will be further developed in the coming year.

All these links have been important in terms of:

- Setting up joint activities
- Improving access to services and activities
- Raising awareness of the needs of refugees and asylum seekers in the area.

See Network List overleaf...

Network List

Statutory Sector

Nottingham City Council:

Housing Department
Supporting People Team
Housing Choice
Housing Associations
Social Services Asylum & Child
Protection teams
Library Service
Education Department
Individual schools
Housing Benefit Office
SureStart
Sports Development
City Arts
Area Committees

Notts Constabulary

NASS East Midlands
EMCARS
NASS Accommodation providers

Health Service:

Primary Care Trust
Health centres, including
the Meadows HC
Mary Potter HC
the Arboretum HC

Health visitors
The Health Shop
Nottingham Positive Care Team
HIV Drop-in Centre
Mental Health teams
Drug rehabilitation teams
CAMH teams

Connexions
FE Colleges
BEGIN

Job Centre Plus / job centres
Nottingham (Working) Links
Work Directions

Voluntary Sector

Faith groups, including:

Southwell Diocese –
Social Responsibility Office
Life at the Centre (Methodist)
The Quakers
The Reformed Synagogue
The Vineyard Arches project
The Friary
Salvation Army
YMCA

Family First
Refugee Action
Refugee Housing Association
NACRO
Hostels Liaison Group
Shelter
Gay Switchboard
The Chase Community Centre
The Women's Centre
Women's Refuge
CAB
Co-operative Community Action

BUILD
Ecoworks
Groundworks(East Midlands)

Refugee Community

Organisations:

Heri Kwetu (African refugees)
The Horn of Africa group
The Somali Association
Afghani Community group

Recording, Monitoring and Evaluation

The Forum's monitoring, reviewing and evaluation tools have been developed gradually over the past three years.

General Centre monitoring

- Daily records are kept of attendances at the Centre.
- Individual files are maintained on each Centre user, recording advice and support given.
- A database is maintained of Centre users, including gender, age and country of origin.
- A more detailed record and analysis of centre use is carried out for one week in every quarter.
- Annual surveys of opinion are conducted by questionnaires, for users, volunteers and stakeholder organisations

These records are used to compile quarterly reports of Centre activity for the information of the Management Committee. They have also been submitted quarterly to Nottingham City Council, together with accounts as part of a Service Level Agreement.

In addition, each of the current projects, viz: the One Stop Shop Advice project, the Floating Support service and the Nottingham Works project have separate and different recording and monitoring requirements, with quarterly reporting to the funding departments concerned.

Annual reviews are carried out with reports to The Lottery, Nottingham City Council and the membership at the Annual General Meeting.

The Floating Support contract requires the application of a Quality Assurance Framework (QAF), emanating from the Department of the Deputy Prime Minister.

It is the intention of the Management Committee to develop a similar, comprehensive and co-ordinated QAF across all aspects of the Forum's work in 2005-6. This will be facilitated by the appointment at the Forum of a Development & Quality Manager, funded by NCC Housing, in the summer of 2005.

We will be considering working towards PQASSO standards.

6. Fund-raising 2001 - 2005

In addition to the advice and tenant support projects detailed above, in the past three years NNRF has been active in applying for additional resources for core funding and to fund specific activities and has been successful as detailed below.

GRANTS		
Year	Funder	Purpose
2001	Fast Forward	Equipping new centre
2001-02	Comic Relief	Core costs and pt Co-ordinator
2002-05	The Lottery Community Fund	Full time co-ordinator, pt admin, core funding
2002-5	NCC Housing	Running costs
2002	Home Office	Summer activities programme
2002-03	Health Action Zone	Activities for young persons
2003	Community Chest	Translation and distribution of information
2004	Community Chest	Interpreters
2005	Awards for All	Photographic project
2005	Co-op Dividend Fund	Destitution support

Projects & Service Contracts		
Years	Funder	Purpose
2002-06 (continuation expected)	Nottingham City Council	One Stop Shop Advice service
2003-06 (contract expected to be renewed)	Supporting People (via NCC Housing)	Floating Support Contract
2004-06	Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund	Nottingham Works Project
2006-08 (with possible extension)	Nottingham City Housing	Capacity Raising Contract

7. The Future

Long-term Strategy: April 2005 – December 2008

The nature of the work of the Refugee Forum means that future plans must be flexible, permitting quick response to changes in Government policy as well as to changes in the world that give rise to new waves of people seeking asylum, primarily wars and civil unrest.

The key objectives of the Refugee Forum in the next three years will be:

- to build on the work already done, making use of the new premises;
- to offer a wider range of services to asylum seekers and refugees;
- to develop and improve the quality of advice work, including legal advice;
- to build on existing networks by extending collaboration with refugee community groups, and statutory and voluntary sector organisations,
- to put in place a quality assurance framework to ensure that all the services offered by the Forum are delivered to a consistent and high standard.

Over the next 3 years the Forum's forward planning will be based on currently-predicted numbers for asylum seeker dispersal to the Nottingham area, on which the City Council are also basing their planning.

The work plan that follows is intended to show the key events and target dates in the coming year by reference to the intended outcome. The outcomes are derived from the Forum's objectives but they also describe the benefits of the work being done with and for users and organisations. The process describes what will be done in order to achieve each outcome.

See Action Plan 2005-2006 overleaf



Action Plan 2005-2006

Aim	Action	Outcome	Time Scale
Maintain and develop existing services	Promote use of the new NNRF Centre Appoint a Development & Quality Manager Increase numbers of women and children using NNRF services Make appropriate space available for women at the new Centre. Continue to support Women United as an independent support group for refugee women	New Centre open and in use D & Q Manager appointed 50% increase in use of Centre by women and children / women's refugee groups	Summer 2005 By September 2005 By June 2006
Extend work with young refugees & asylum seekers in partnership with Nottingham City Council	Work in partnership with Nottingham CC on purposeful activities programme Work with New Deal for Communities on sports programme	Summer activities programme Regular sports activities, e.g. skating, football	Summer 2005 and 2006 Ongoing from autumn 2005
Encourage use of NNRF services by: • new groups of refugees • refugees from Africa	Develop publicity materials in relevant languages	Materials available in relevant languages as required	Ongoing
Support development of English skills including conversation and reading groups	Work in partnership with colleges to provide English classes Work in partnership with libraries to develop reading groups Provide opportunities for English conversation practice	2 English classes meeting regularly (with New College Nottingham) 2 reading groups meeting regularly (with Nottingham City Libraries) 2 conversation groups meeting regularly Interpreters' course	By end 2006 By end 2006 By end 2006 One course delivered by end 2006
Support self-help in local refugee communities	Help new Refugee Community Organizations (RCOs) become established and build capacity Maintain and develop formal and informal links with RCOs Develop network, bringing together refugee activists from different refugee communities Organise a conference for RCOs to discuss common issues and develop links	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular meetings with RCOs • Training for RCOs in relevant skills • RCO newsletter • Information available about RCOs Network meeting regularly Conference held	Ongoing By end 2006 October 2006

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Campaigning, public awareness and education on asylum and refugee issues	Publish newsletters and use email and website to publicise NNRF activities and raise awareness Organise quarterly public meetings on refugee and asylum issues Provide speakers for organisations and events Organise a conference in co-operation with academic institutions on refugee issues	Quarterly newsletter Website maintained and up to date Quarterly meetings Conference organised with Nottingham Trent University	Autumn 2005 Ongoing Autumn 2005 onwards Ongoing October 2007
Develop volunteer strategy	Recruit and train more volunteer advisers/interpreters Recruit and train specialist reception volunteers for new Centre Recruit and train local and refugee volunteers to befriend and support newcomers	10+ new volunteers recruited and trained 5+ volunteers recruited and trained 10+ new volunteers recruited and trained	End 2006 Spring 2006 Summer 2006
Legal services	Secure funding for and appoint a qualified legal caseworker Gain OISC level 2 certification Gain OISC level 3 certification	Funding secured Caseworker appointed Level 2 certification gained Level 3 certification gained	October 2005 January 2006 December 2006 December 2007
Improve links to statutory and other services	Develop stronger links with statutory mental health services Develop stronger links with specialist counselling services Continue to work with City Arts and Travelling Light and similar groups to support refugee arts and cultural projects	Easier and quicker referrals as required 2 projects annually completed	Ongoing
Develop and implement quality assurance strategy	Using PQASSO or a similar scheme; implement a QA framework for the Forum, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > General advice and information work > volunteering Forum user satisfaction survey Partner satisfaction survey Volunteer satisfaction survey	QA framework implemented Survey completed Survey completed Survey completed	September 2006 Annual Annual Annual

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Financial forecast for the period 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2009
Years ending 31 March

Overall	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009
Ordinary Income/Expense				
Income				
Bank Interest Received	1000	1000	1000	1000
Contributions	6000	6300	6615	6946
Grants	326015	179219	175360	154826
Lottery Application	23771	87100	63941	49732
Interpreting Work				224544
Membership Dues	0	0	0	0
Miscellaneous Income				
Total Income	356785	273619	246917	212504
New Building expenses	15000			
Expense				
Bank Service Charges	12	9	9	10
Books and Publications	58	42	44	46
Contract Labour	520	373	392	412
Insurance	2053	1476	1550	1627
Total Miscellaneous	5361	3854	4047	4249
Office Supplies	10182	7097	7452	5916
Payroll Expenses	232408	190887	193669	179413
Postage and Delivery	944	679	713	749
Total Premises	14339	11770	12359	12977
Printing and Reproduction	519	373	392	412
Total Professional Fees	3961	2596	2726	2862
Recruitment	520	546	573	602
Rent	28650	28650	28650	28650
Total Repairs	316	227	239	250
Software Expense	32	23	24	26
Subscriptions	123	88	93	97
Total Supplies	140	101	106	111
Total Telephone	8691	5992	6292	6607
Training	2908	2091	2196	2306
Translating	5911	4250	4462	4685
Total Travel & Ent	3473	2489	2614	2744
Utilities	3432	2468	2591	2720
Volunteer Expenses	5677	3983	4182	3555
Contingency	11500	9000	9000	9000
Total Expense	356730	279065	284373	270025
Excess/Shortfall	55	-5446	-37457	-57522

It is assumed:

- 1 That our Supporting People contract is renewed and continues throughout the period.
- 2 That the Nottingham Works contract ceases on 31 March 2006.
- 3 That the Housing Grant for the Project Manager runs for two years.
- 4 That the One-Stop Shop funding ceases on 30 June 2006.

The forecast is based on the further assumptions that the posts of Centre Co-ordinator, the Centre Administrator, Clerical support and the two Receptionists/interpreters continue throughout.

This makes it essential that we secure funding for these posts in order that the shortfall is met. These costs have been largely met by funding from the National Lottery Community Fund, which expires on 31 January 2005. A continuation bid amounting to approximately £220,000 is being prepared for the National Lottery Big Fund, and the above is based on the hope that the bid will be successful.

The Lottery Bid allows for tapering that reduces the actual bid by 75% and further sources of funding will have to be found if this bid is not successful and, if it is successful, to make up for the tapering and to fund the Legal Scheme if this proceeds.

Case studies

Family H.

A middle-aged Iraqi couple with 4 children with Indefinite Leave to Remain. During the earlier part of 2003, an intensive amount of Floating Support was provided when they were granted a Council tenancy. There have been many problems since then in regard to Benefits and Health issues. Both parents have health problems and the father is receiving Income Support. The youngest child (now aged 3 years) is disabled and requires a lot of attention. We assisted them in applying for Disability Living Allowance for this daughter and chased this up when the papers were 'lost' in the system! The same daughter has been receiving medical treatment at both QMC and The City Hospital. Our advisers often interpret and explain medical correspondence, make doctors' appointments and arrange interpreters to be present at appointments.

The father is one of our most frequent visitors and regularly brings in all the mail he has received for us to explain and sort out. This often involves phone calls or letters in reply. His knowledge of spoken English is weak and he doesn't read it at all. We have tried to encourage him to attend classes but his many problems and responsibilities make this unrealistic at present.

Mr H

A single man with ELR who came to the attention of Larry McCloskey (NCC Advice worker) in August 2003. At that time he was living in Alexandra Court, where he was finding it very difficult to cope. He was suffering from the effects of torture and trauma and displaying signs of mental disturbance with paranoid delusions. He expressed his frustrations with violent outbursts and had been excluded from his G.P. His main activity was drawing complex diagrams of electrical circuits and car engines.

He was granted a City Council tenancy in the Autumn and we allocated a Floating Support worker who, together with Larry, helped him to set up a new home, apply for relevant benefits and grants and cope with day-to-day chores and budgeting. In addition, Larry liaised with the following agencies in order to develop a package of support and activities:

- NHS Patient Services
- Greenfields Medical Centre
- Dept of Work & Pensions
- New College Nottm
- The Library service
- Trent University Chess Club

Mr H is now stable and is attending ESOL and IT training. He comes regularly to the Forum where he feels safe.

Mr A

Mr A is a highly qualified and experienced Laboratory Technician from the Sudan who had had to wait an extended period of time when he was prevented from continuing with his profession. Once given his status, he initially wanted to continue his studies and he achieved a place on a Masters Course at Nottingham University. However, due to funding difficulties he was unable to accept.

He became quite depressed at this time, having to deal with the rejections and barriers feeling all his attempts to move forward were being blocked. However, we continued to work with him, focusing on finding work to help establish him within the NHS and allow him to develop his career.

With my help, he achieved a position as a trainee biomedical scientist, and since he has started work he has saved up to get married. His wife arrived in the UK in summer 2004 and his job is going so well they are putting him forward for a training programme, which leads into a specific career structure.

This is a good example of how the first steps, although difficult time-consuming, can lead to changes in all aspects of the individuals life.

Clive Woonton
ETE Co-ordinator for Refugees at NNRF

Ms S

Ms S came to UK alone from Iran. She is a Christian and had been threatened by the Islamic regime.

She was placed in NASS accommodation with several other women asylum seekers who did not speak Farsi and who brought men into the house at night. The lock on her door was broken and twice men forced their way in. The NNRF Co-ordinator guarded her at the house at night over a weekend and then put pressure on Refugee Action to get her moved to a safer environment.

Six months later, her 17 year-old daughter arrived in the UK and also claimed asylum. She was going to be dispersed by NASS elsewhere in the country but, as a result of interventions from NNRF and her solicitor, was eventually allowed to stay in Nottingham with her mother.

Their asylum claims were rejected and they are now appealing. The Forum helped them to obtain necessary evidence from relatives in the USA to support their case by using the fax machine and liaised with their solicitor on several occasions. The Co-ordinator also attended the court hearing with the daughter.

Their case is still unresolved.



Mr K

Mr K called into the Forum with several problems. He had had an accident at work and I completed the relevant forms to claim Income Support and Housing Benefit.

During our conversation it became clear that due to his accident at work he was also entitled to a payment from his employer's insurers, which would equate to 80% of his wages.

Mr K was extremely worried about his rent falling into arrears, and to prevent him further worry I contacted the Council on his behalf and was able to suspend all action until his benefit and insurance payments were forthcoming.

I managed to secure Mr K payments from his insurance of £1100, which was far more beneficial to him than Income Support. I also managed to obtain full Council Tax benefits from his first day of sickness. Mr K was more than happy, and my reward – two more friends introduced to the Forum for me to resolve their problems!

Janet Hannay
Benefit Adviser

Mr D

Mr D arrived from London in mid December 2004. He is a single parent with three children, (12, 8 and 4), the youngest of whom has a learning disability (Fragile X Syndrome). He came to Nottingham to seek help from his brother who is an Asylum Seeker dispersed here by the Home Office. He approached Housing Aid to apply for emergency housing but as he had accommodation in London was refused. His brother brought him to Refugee Forum for assistance. By coincidence I had been working towards obtaining houses from the private rented sector and had just had a breakthrough. I set up a meeting with a Lettings Agent and the family which proved to be successful and Mr D was offered a tenancy on condition that I remained their support worker for the near future and ensured the smooth running of their relocation. They signed for the property on the 7-01-05, three weeks after arriving in Nottingham. The Agent was willing to waive the deposit and the month's rent in advance until the family could raise it themselves.

I assisted with change of address for the various Benefits and referred them for Floating Support. Patient Services were contacted to get a new GP. I was able to obtain, through donation, a new television and various items of furniture and electrical items.

I contacted Education Admissions at the Sandfield Centre and applied to local schools for the two eldest children. I arranged an appointment to see the Head of the Nursery at Bluebell with the father for the youngest boy.

Mr B

Mr B. 18, was kidnapped (taken would perhaps be a better description as his family knew where he was) at 12 by the Taliban and after being repeatedly raped, he was sold on as part of a land deal at 13, and for the next year he was



passed around various men to be used as a sex toy. He ended up with a sadistic man who tortured him. At last, unable to stand any more, he fought back and was bayoneted twice in the groin. The family then got the ransom together and obtained his freedom.

He fled to the UK as an Asylum Seeker and was cared for by Social Services as a minor.

Confused and terrified, he only began to speak about his past in the last couple of months to his Psychiatric Social Worker, who suggested that he might wish to meet me as part of his coming-out process. I expressed concern at the label 'gay', because as an abused child I strongly believed that he had never had a safe, non-judgemental space in which to explore his sexuality. He was so obsessed with secrecy and fear that he may be identified as 'gay' that his life had come to a standstill.

He had been experimenting with picking men up in public toilets and on the Forest Recreation Ground, both illegal and highly dangerous practices. I arranged to have the Forum empty one afternoon over the weekend and he came with his support worker. It proved to be a useful, constructive meeting. He requested assistance and support with his education and with a serious medical condition, which is not being addressed by his present doctor. I signposted him to relevant organisations to help him come to terms with his sexuality.

Larry McCloskey



Appendix B

Officers, Trustees and Staff 2005

Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum

Officers

Robert Peutrell (Chair)

Rob teaches English at People's College, Nottingham.

Patricia Stoa (Secretary)

Patricia is director of social responsibility for Southwell Diocese, and has been a civil servant and management consultant.

Leo Keely (Treasurer)

Leo is a retired Inspector of Taxes.

Trustees

Abigail Hailu

Amdani Juma

Chris Cann

Gary Freeman

Leyla Hassan Ahmed

Lynda Wilson

Meili Hawthorne

Myra Woolfson

Patsy Brand

Paul Carroll

Pete Loewenstein

Rody Oliver

Siya Sabir

Suleman Mohammed





Staff

Sam Azad

Sam is a refugee from Iran and has been 118 Centre Co-ordinator since 2001.

Lizzie Parker

118 Centre Administrator

Teresa Pacey Devlin

Secretary

Supporting People Team:

Taher Hassani

Julie Whitehead

Jasim Ghafur

Specialist Advisers

Larry McCloskey

Janet Hannay

Clive Wooton

Interpreters

Ismael Alwan

Bahman Mohammed