

The Nottingham and Nottinghamshire
Refugee Forum

Annual Report

for the year ending
31 March 2004

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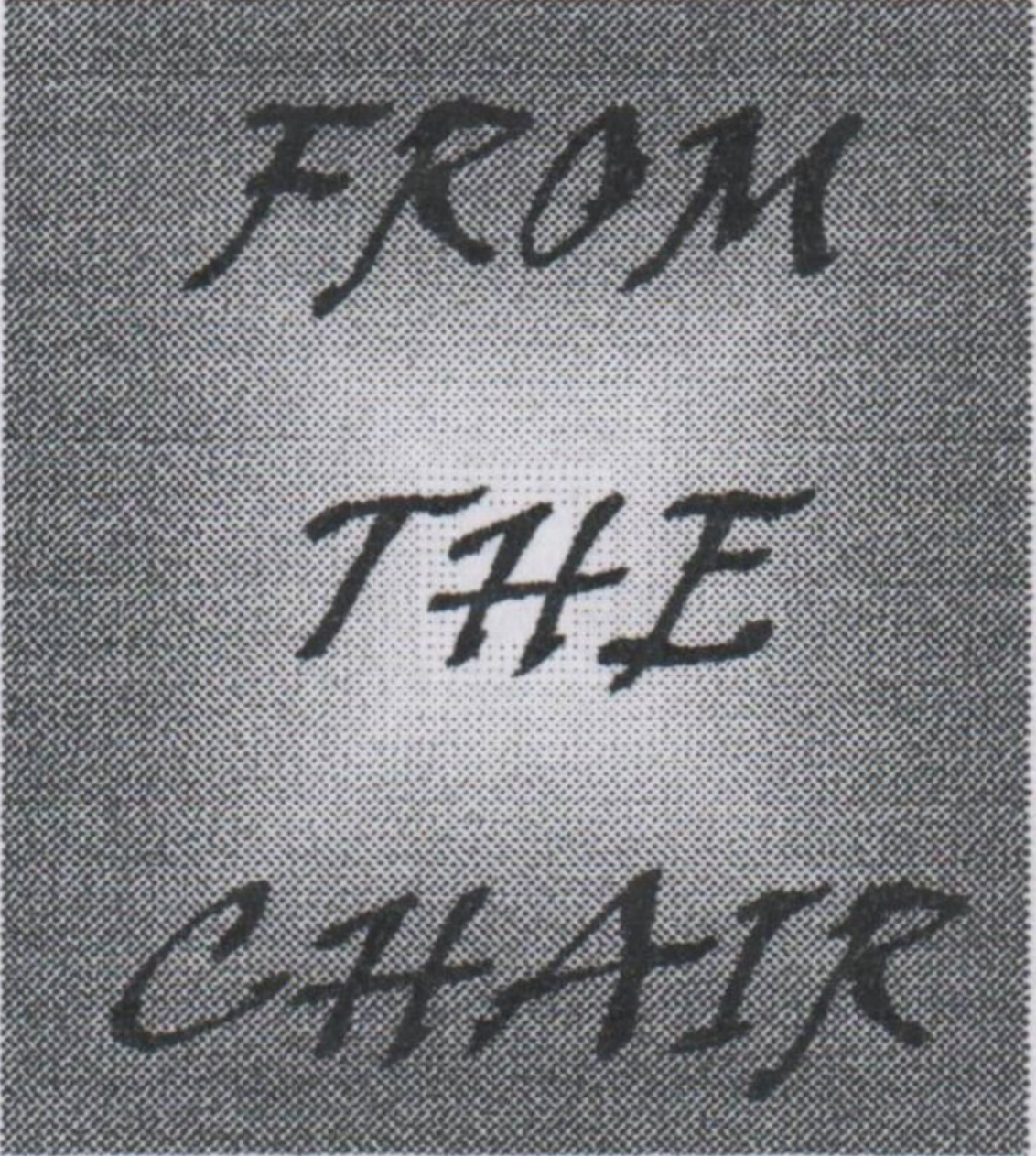
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BYELENION

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FROM
THE
CHAIR

Throughout 2003-4, NNRF has continued to try to offer both practical support and a rare space in which the human rights of asylum seekers and refugees are recognised and defended in Nottingham; and there is ample evidence in this report of the hard work, commitment and enthusiasm of our staff, volunteers and activists.

Over the year we have expanded hugely. Our staff now includes specialist advisers on health, education and housing; benefits; and employment and training. Our tenancy support team has given excellent service to refugees moving into council tenancies. Recently we took on an office administrator to work alongside our centre co-ordinator and other office and support staff. 118 remains a busy, vibrant and – because of that – sometimes seemingly chaotic place. It has also long since become too small. New premises are a clear priority for us. We owe it to our staff and centre volunteers to be able to provide decent working conditions. We need to be able to offer centre users confidentiality and a place to drop-in to meet friends and have a chat. We also need to be able to offer an organising base and meeting place for other NNRF activities, including the women's and campaigning groups.

Much of our energy this year has been spent searching out new accommodation and coping with the increased number of staff. In June, we engaged a consultant to look with us at our structure and practice. This consultation exercise was a timely invitation to look more critically at how we do things, and one practical consequence has been to develop new policies and procedures to ensure a more effective operation. Like all small community-based voluntary organisations, we are learning as we go; in particular, trying to respond as best we can to the changing legislative climate.

This coming year, we need to reinvigorate our campaigning efforts; there has never been such a need for community based campaigning on asylum and refugee rights.

There are ever more obstacles put in the way of asylum seekers in the UK. Cuts in legal aid; draconian limits on the right of appeal; a shortage of good legal advice; the on-going problem of poor initial decision-making; Section 55; the threat to remove the children of 'failed asylum seekers' into care; the persistent culture of suspicion and indifference; the narrow legal definition of 'refugee' – all this means that making a successful asylum claim is becoming harder and harder. The notion of the 'failed asylum seeker' is a convenient fiction that allows the political and media mainstream to ignore the deeply unjust processes asylum seekers are put through. Rising destitution amongst so-called 'failed asylum seekers' offers a stark reminder of where current government policy leads.

This government has certainly succeeded in reducing asylum numbers. They have played the numbers game, and, as a result, have made themselves less politically vulnerable on this issue. But at what cost? Demonstrably, the principle causes of 'involuntary migration' – conflict and human rights abuse – have not been tackled. Neither has winning the numbers game resulted in a more generous understanding of what causes people seek asylum or of the experience of those who manage to make to make it 'through the wire'.

As we approach the next election, our aim – through the NNRF or as activists in our communities and workplaces – has to be to challenge the prevailing hostility to people seeking asylum. Being anti-asylum seeker has become an acceptable form of racism. The NNRF will continue to play its part in building a wider alliance for change amongst those seeking asylum, refugees and host community activists.

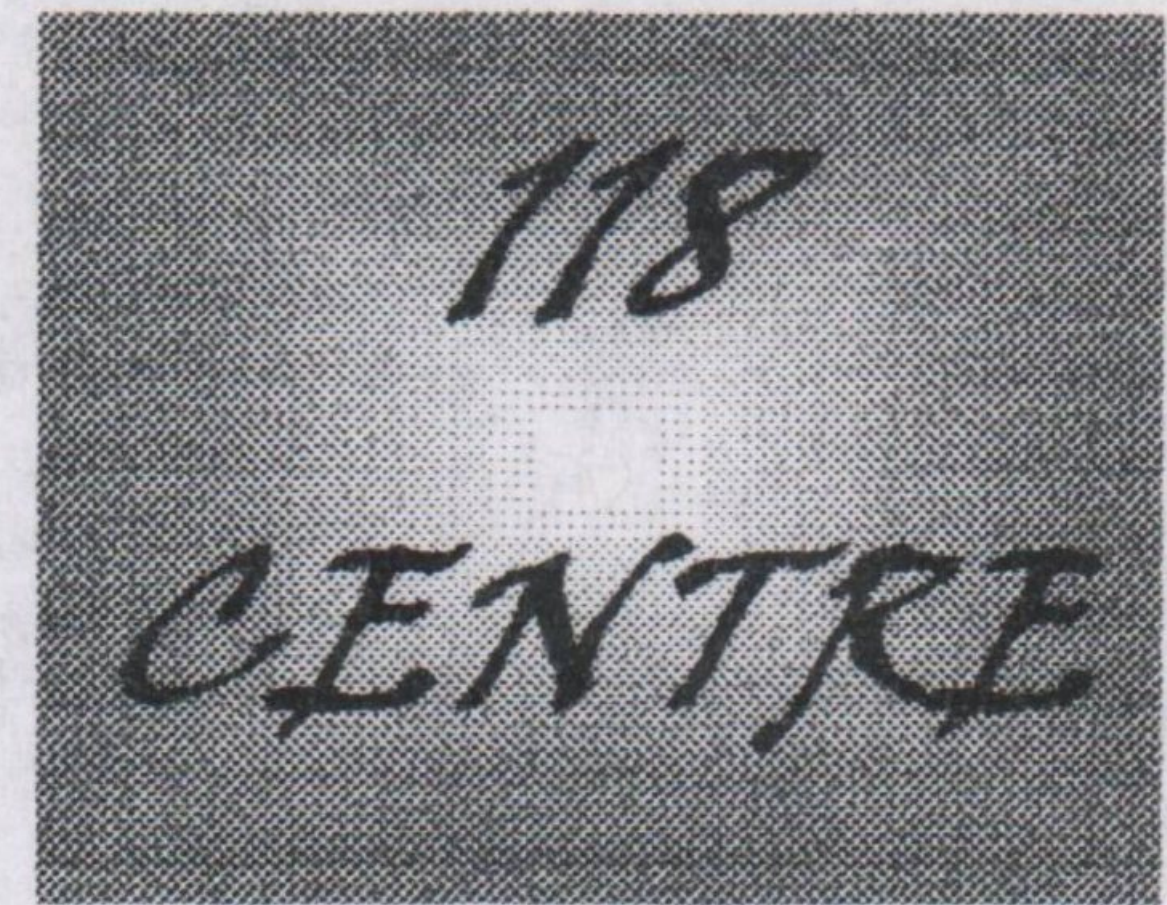
Rob Pentrell

Home Office asylum statistics for the second quarter showed a continuation of the downward trend in applications for asylum to the UK.

In response, Margaret Lally, Deputy Chief Executive of the Refugee Council, said:

"The Government claims to be offering a safe haven to people fleeing persecution. It is therefore extremely worrying that the number of people offered sanctuary here in the UK has fallen so dramatically when we are seeing widespread repression and conflict in many parts of the world.

"The numbers debate is a tired one. A dramatic fall in asylum applications to the UK cannot be celebrated if the world has not become a significantly safer place."



This has been another hectic year at 118, with over 8,500 visits – mainly asylum seekers and refugees, but also volunteers and visitors. We have files on 1,100 people who have received advice and support. Thirty-eight nationalities and fourteen different languages have been recorded. The largest group, as in previous years, has been Iraqi Kurds – roughly 50%, followed by Iranians (including Kurds), Somalis, Zimbabweans and Afghans. Seventeen African countries were also represented in the total. Since 1 May 2004, when the Czech Republic acceded to the EU, a number of Roma asylum seekers, left without support, have come seeking help.

Our capacity to provide a comprehensive and well-informed advice service has been greatly enhanced in the past 12 months by two new projects:

- **Nottingham City Council funded Advice Project** (started June 2003), staffed by Larry McCloskey, who provides advice on local authority services and also health (see Larry's report).
- **Nottingham Works** (started April 2004) with Neighbourhood Renewal Funding, staffed by Clive Woonton as Employment, Training and Education Co-ordinator, and Janet Hannay as Benefits Adviser (see their reports).

The Floating Support Service, for new refugees who are settling into the city, is now staffed by a manager, Maggie Mairura, and four part-time case workers (see Maggie's report).

Other staff appointed in the last 12 months at the Centre are Bahman Mohammed, interpreter for Sorani, Farsi and Arabic, Teresa Pacey-Devlin, and most recently Lizzie Parker as administrators.

Emergency Grants

In addition to referrals for food parcels and the new cash help for destitute asylum seekers, emergency grants have been made for food, travel to Liverpool to claim asylum, and overnight accommodation. Since 1 April 2004, over 40 individual grants have been made.

Premises

The high level of activity and rapid increase in staff has created great pressure on space – unfortunately leading to a suspension of non-advice activities. The search for new premises with disabled access, and social, educational and child-friendly spaces started in summer 2003. A great deal of effort was put into plans for a property on nearby Huntingdon Street, but the deal collapsed this summer. This situation is now urgent and several other premises are being investigated.

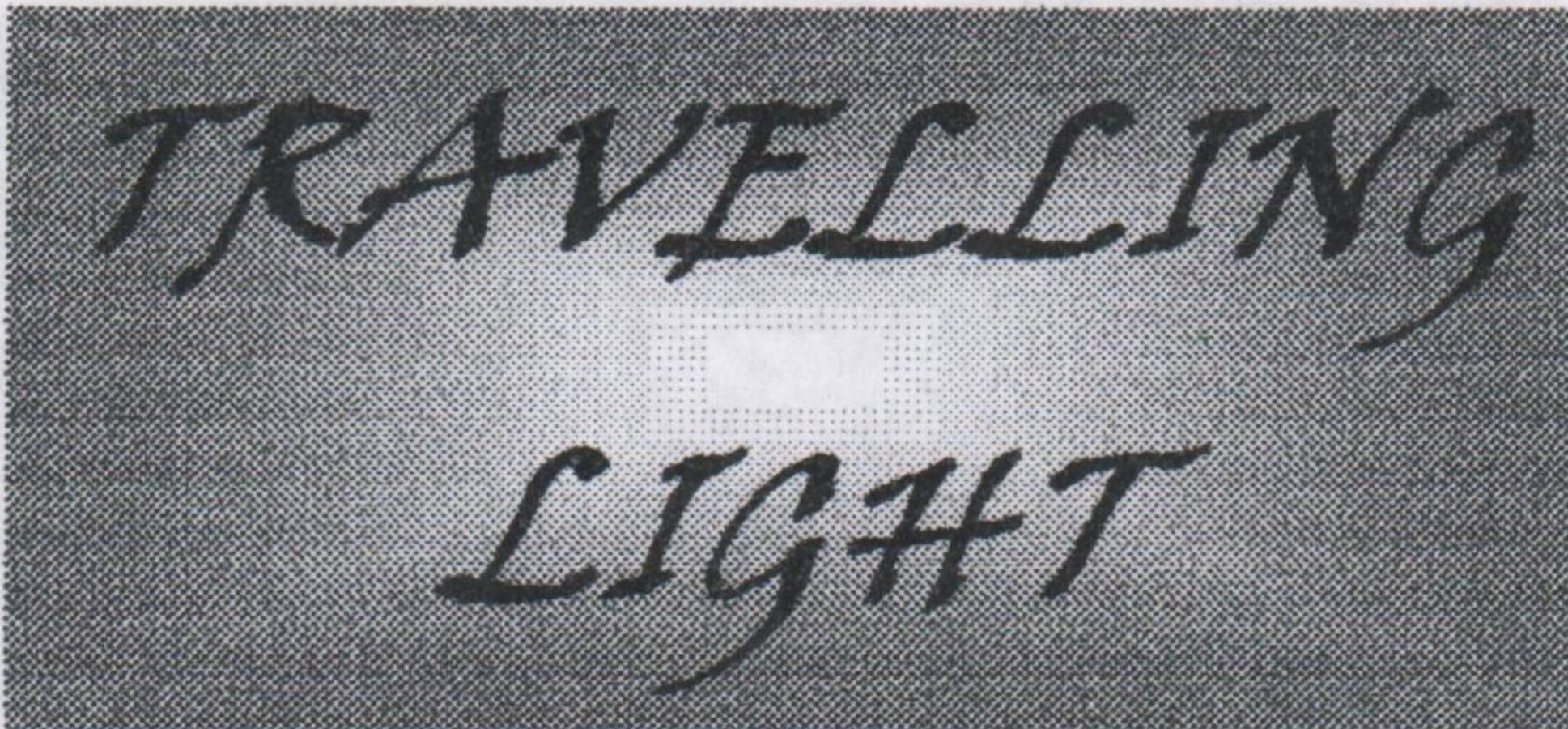
Volunteers have continued to play vital roles in the Forum and especially at the Centre where they run the advice afternoons – as advisers, receptionists and

interpreters. Many are refugees or asylum seekers themselves from Iraq, Iran, Sudan, Somalia, Pakistan, Burundi and Chad.

Legal Advice

In order to provide any legal advice or support, organisations must be approved by the OISC (Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner). Barrie Ward and Sam Azad have made an application on the Forum's behalf, and we have recently been 'visited'. We expect soon to be approved at Level 1, and then can progress to higher levels with appropriate training and supervised practice. The need for this has increased dramatically over the past year because of the shrinking of legal services provision for asylum seekers in the Nottingham area – and the reductions in legal aid for asylum appeals.

Sam Azad (Centre Co-ordinator) and *Patsy Brand* (Chair, 118 Committee)



Travelling Light was formed in 2002 to support refugee artists living in Nottingham and the East Midlands. So far this year we have organised a series of training workshops for artists interested in working in schools as well as programming an open air music event in the Arboretum to celebrate National Refugee Week.

Other projects currently underway include:

- a short film directed by San Saravan, a local Kurdish film maker, which looks at the treatment of women in Iran and their claims for asylum in Britain;
- a photography and video project that will document the work of the Refugee Forum to create a touring exhibition;
- a visual arts display to compliment the Anne Frank exhibition showing in Southwell Minster throughout October.

Stuart Brown



In January 2004, the Refugee Campaign Group organised a successful 'fast against destitution' involving asylum seekers and refugees as well as local supporters. This was the first of a series of events co-ordinated with groups across the UK. The fast received widespread local media coverage. The Campaign Group also held two public meetings. Arun Kundnani of the Institute of Race Relations spoke on racism and asylum. The second meeting focused on anti-Roma racism and the speakers were the historian and long-standing campaigner for Roma rights, Donald Kenrick, and Ladislav Balos, a former Czech MP and chair of the Trans-Europa Roma Federation.

Rob Pentrell

The sponsored fast

Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum / Nottingham Refugee Campaign Group held a 48-hour Sponsored Fast against Asylum Destitution from January 9th until January 11th 2004.

At least 37 people fasted, half of them asylum seekers or refugees. The rest were from the host community, including retired people and one person with diabetes. £2,837.20 was raised. The money raised went into the NNRF destitution fund

The Fast was a protest against Section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, which had been in force for one year. This denied all support to asylum seekers without dependants who do not make their asylum applications as soon as "reasonably practicable" on arrival in Britain. It was also in protest against all destitution of asylum seekers. Most destitution now seen in Nottingham is caused by people having their NASS support withdrawn after a number of weeks, months or years, after their applications for asylum have failed.

The Fast was based in St Peter's Centre, belonging to St Peter's Church in Nottingham city centre. About 12 people slept there overnight. It was warm, and we had a room for activities and a quiet room where people could sleep during the day. We held stalls outside St Peter's for most of the daylight hours during the fast. Food was collected; we got signatures on the petition and handed out so many leaflets we had to have a reprint. Two banners hung from the church railings, calling for solidarity with destitute asylum seekers.

We made useful contacts, both in Nottingham and with other cities, where people took up the idea of the fast (including Oxford, Sheffield, Leeds, and Cardiff). Alan Simpson MP came to offer solidarity and helpful advice. We had considerable media

coverage, including three times in the Nottingham Evening Post, a substantial item on Central TV and an interview on local radio.

We kept a diary, in which fasters, supporters and well-wishers wrote in their own languages. At the end, we were provided with free food by *Food Not Bombs* (associated with *Veggies*), and also by a group of Kurdish women who spontaneously decided to cook for us. It was a very sociable end to an intense 48 hours.

The Fast was made possible by many people working hard and contributing energetically: people fasted, sponsored, helped with publicity and media work, organised activities, fed us afterwards, provided materials and contributed ideas. It would be impossible to name them all, but we would like to thank the Revd Canon Andrew Deuchar of St Peter's Church for all his support, particularly in providing premises which enabled us to fast together in community. And thanks to everyone else, too.

Chris Cann

Hot meals project

Following the Sponsored Fast, a number of people joined in discussions on ways to help destitute asylum seekers.

Food Not Bombs (associated with *Veggies* and the Sumac Centre), offered to provide free hot meals. It was felt that this was too good an offer to refuse, but also that some refugees might like to cook for destitute asylum seekers. The arrangement was therefore that the two groups would cook on alternate weeks.

We were unable to find a central location for the meals, but Dr Joan Barks kindly allowed us to use the hall at the Methodist Bridgeway Centre in the Meadows. Friday lunchtimes were the only times when everyone involved was available. Unfortunately, with hindsight, perhaps the venue was too far for people without bus money to get to, and Friday lunchtime was not the best time for such a project. After about four or five weeks, we decided to discontinue the project because of the lack of take-up – on average, only about four asylum seekers turned up to each meal (although one week these numbers were supplemented by a desperate family due to be deported the next day).

While the project lasted, some delicious food was cooked by Ronnie and *Food Not Bombs* (provided free by them), and by the Alpdogan Family and friends. We would like to express heartfelt thanks to them, and to Dr Barks and Malcolm at the Bridgeway Centre, and to Meili for her hard work in organising the project.

Chris Cann

PRACTICAL SUPPORT

In the past year, asylum seekers in Nottingham have become destitute in one of two ways:

- They were never given NASS support under Section 55 of the asylum and Immigration Act 2002, which refused support to those not applying soon enough after arriving in the country.
- Their NASS support was withdrawn if they had been refused asylum and come to the end of any legal process. Support is withdrawn even from those who cannot be returned to their countries because the situation is too unstable.

In Nottingham, the majority of those destitute fall into the second category. Many have been in this situation for months. When NASS support stops, this means housing as well as financial support. Some people manage by staying with friends, usually also asylum seekers, though this often means moving from place to place and sleeping on the floor. This may be manageable for those who are young and fit – but it is extremely difficult for people who have become unwell. It is difficult to keep track of what happens to people who become homeless, but we do know that there have been people who have been forced to sleep rough. It is, inevitably, the most vulnerable and isolated people who have to do this.

Until now, it has almost always been those without children who have been left destitute. A new Asylum and Immigration Act is about to come into force, however, which will stop support to families with children, whose cases have come to an end. This will create even more suffering and will stretch further the resources of those voluntary organisations which try to help.

What is being done to help

Until last year, food was given out by the Social Responsibility Office of Southwell Diocese, at St. Catherine's Church. When they moved to Southwell last summer, Dr. Joan Barks of Life at the Centre, a project based at the Methodist Mission in Parliament Street, stepped into the breach. Food parcels have been distributed there on Tuesdays and Fridays since July 2003. This involves not only buying and distributing the food, but also raising the money to fund it. NNRF now contributes £200 a month (until recently the contributions were more irregular), but the rest has to be raised from local churches.

In March and May of this year, meetings were held with representatives of local faith and community groups to discuss the problems of destitution and what could be done to help. One of the concerns is that not everyone is able to use the food which is given out, since it is mostly dry goods and needs to be cooked. It is also not possible to store fresh food at Life at the Centre. In June this year, a new scheme was started to 'top up' the food parcels with £5 a week and 2 meal tickets a week. The idea is that people should be able to buy some fresh food and get 2 hot meals a week. Five

community cafes/restaurants have agreed to take part in the scheme: ACNA, the Pakistan Centre, the Indian Community Centre, The Chase Community Centre and Queens Walk Community Centre lunch club. The meal tickets are redeemed by NNRF. The money, tickets and referrals for food parcels are all given out at 118 on Tuesday mornings.

Numbers of people receiving food parcels between October 2003 and July 2004

Approximately 60 individuals came at least once to Life at the Centre. Of these, 17 people have returned on a regular basis, the average being about once a month. They come from many countries: Afghanistan, Albania, Cameroon, Czech Republic, Eritrea, Iran, Algeria, Angola, Bangladesh, Burundi, Congo, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Jamaica, Kenya, Malawi, Pakistan, Palestine, Poland, Russia, Somalia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.

Costs: about £60-£70 is currently spent each week on food parcels. Just over £2000 has been donated since July 2003, as well as donations in kind from harvest festivals etc.

Numbers attending NNRF office on Tuesday mornings to receive cash 'top-up' and lunch tickets (8 week period from June 22nd to 10th August)

33 adults (including one mother with her baby) have been given support as part of the new scheme. A small number of those attending Life at the Centre and NNRF need only temporary help, as a result of a change in their circumstances leading to a withdrawal of NASS benefits. Reasons vary: a Home Office mistake; a decision to appeal against a refusal decision not being communicated to NASS; the country the person has left now being in the EU and not enough time given to sort out alternative support before NASS benefit ceased. Most people, however, need long-term support until either they receive a positive decision, find other means of supporting themselves, or are deported.

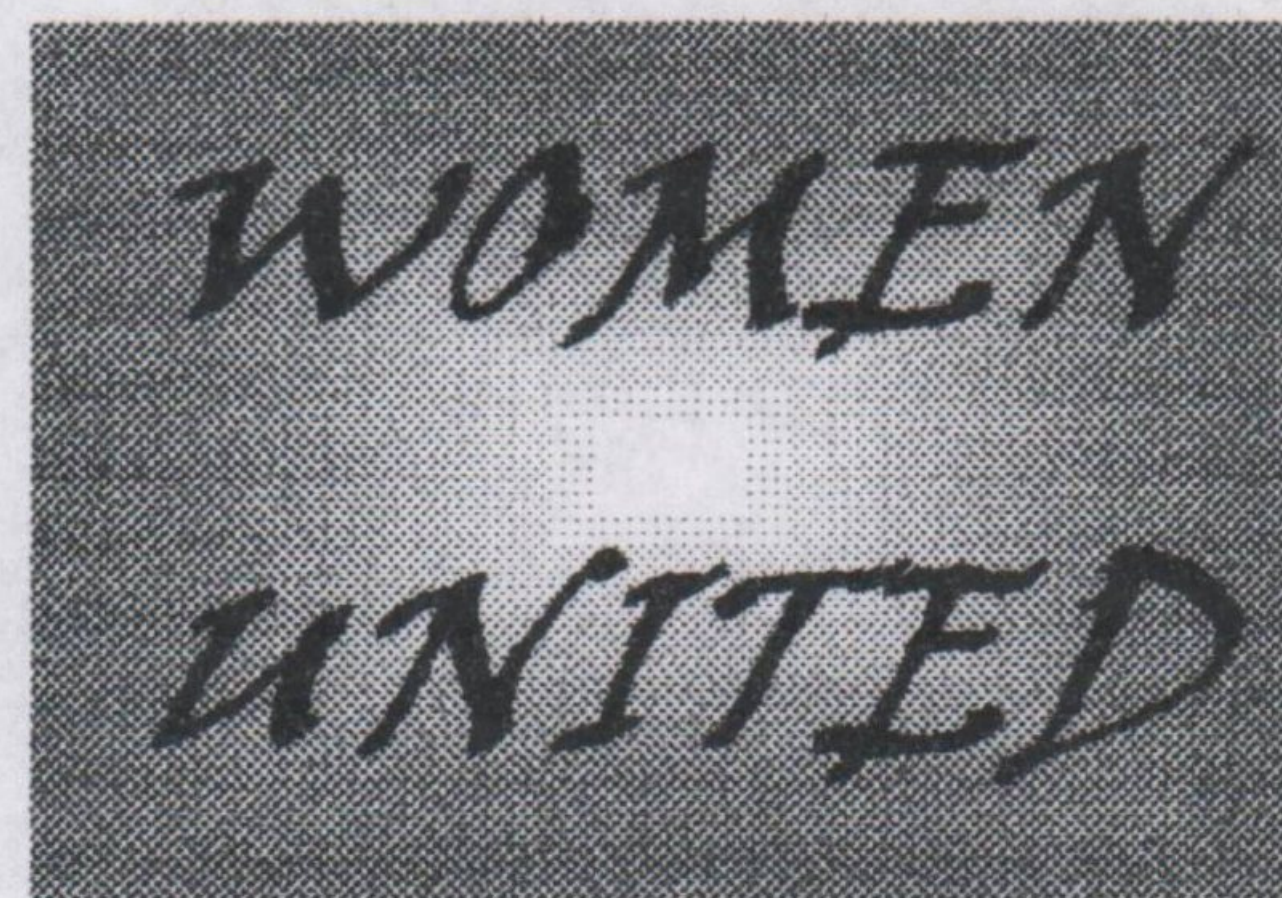
Countries (numbers of people from each in brackets):

Iran (6), Afghanistan (3), Turkey (1), Iraq (9), Angola (2), Latvia (1), Burundi (1), Serbia (1), Somalia (1), Congo (3), Democratic Republic of Congo (1), Palestine (1) Not known (1).

Costs

£980 has been given out in cash the first 8 weeks and £960 in lunch tickets. This makes it an expensive scheme but it is something we should continue to do if at all possible. It feels as if it allows asylum applicants, who have been left destitute, just a tiny bit more choice in their lives.

Myra Woolfson



Women United is a group of women that range from asylum seekers to citizens, of all nationalities, who have come together join forces in order to create a helping institute for women from all walks of life in Britain. It's fashioned to provide aid and support to refugees and asylum seekers alike.

Aims:

- To develop and foster community spirit and provide a collective voice to improve relations between Asylum Seekers and Refugee women.
- To welcome each and every woman and make sure that no one receives less favourable treatment due to race, religion, marital status, disability, age, or sexual orientation.
- To articulate their needs and demands regarding access to local services or otherwise; general welfare, health, education, housing, immigration, etc.
- To organize social events and activities, inviting other organizations to encourage community, integration, and cultural awareness.
- To help build confidence, friendship and mutual support.
- To signpost refugees onto agencies and resources in the city.
- To provide a regular meeting place for women to congregate.

Information:

The idea of forming the group was submitted on the beginning of 2003. The first formal meeting was held on the 2nd of July 2003. Regular meetings were held, and hence the name of the Group was decided in this interval. The gatherings were in 118, café's, houses, etc.

The 8th of March was national women's day, and the group attended the national women's day conference that was set up in London. There they have been able to meet other women's organizations.

On the 1st of May 2004, we participated in the 'Workers' Day' celebration.

The first active party was on the 29th of May 2004, in the Robin Hood Chase Centre from 12noon until 7 in the evening. The party was attended by 8 different nationalities. Each Nationality offered and performed their national dances, food and clothing designs. This gave the group the opportunity of getting noticed.

The group attended the Refugee Forum management meetings, which gave the group its shape, funding, and the support the fragile network needed. The Refugee Forum was in agreement to open up a bank account for the group, and a place for the group to meet. They've (refugee forum) managed to provide the Group with its own centre key in order to hold meetings after closing time.

The group has currently been in action, supplying free interpretations, and helping women that are in need of anything it is possible to provide.

The cases in which the group was involved were special and sensitive ones. So far, we've helped a woman whose son was jailed for robbing a house, which he was obviously bullied into. We've helped her with the police case and her youngster has been set free. We've also helped a couple who were asylum seekers to get a place to stay, and many similar cases.

Leyla Ahmed



MEMBERSHIP REPORT

In mid-August, NNRF had 384 members. Of these, 86 were organisations; 46 were Community Volunteers (usually asylum seekers active in their own communities); 102 were listed as NNRF volunteers.

Members are usually sent a reminder to renew their membership a month or two after this has become due, and a steady income of subscriptions and donations comes in from renewals and new members. (79 paying members joined or renewed during the last 12 months.) Please could anyone whose membership is overdue renew as soon as possible. Even members who do not have to pay the £5 annual subscription (because of low/no income, or because they are volunteers) are urged to renew when necessary, so that details can be kept up to date.

I have been trying to record as many email addresses as I can, to make it possible to communicate more regularly with members, and to save postage. If you would like to receive email communications from NNRF and your address isn't on record, please send it to me c/o 118 or to chriscookcann@moose-mail.com. If you have changed any of your details, including your email address, it would help if you could let me know in the same way.

What are the benefits of membership?

- Entitlement to vote at AGM
- Be sure of getting the newsletter when it comes out
- Receive other information by post or email
- Volunteering and campaigning opportunities
- Knowing you are supporting an important cause
- Each voice added to NNRF means we make a louder noise.

Chris Cann (Membership Secretary)

Advice

9

Support

FLOATING SUPPORT SERVICE

Floating Support is about supporting vulnerable people with a variety of housing and personal needs, and is funded under 'Supporting People'. At the Refugee Forum we support refugees, individuals and families in setting up and sustaining their tenancies. It is also about assisting people settle into the community, linking with local community groups/activities. The majority of people are self-referrals; people who have used the Forum for support during their time as Asylum Seekers or in searching for housing. However, we also get referrals from other agencies, e.g. the Job Centre, NASS accommodation providers, Housing department. Since the start of the contract in April 2003, we have supported approximately 150 new tenants, some for a period of up to three months, some for over a year. It is called 'floating' support as people can float in and out of the service when the need arises.

We are a small team of mostly part-time staff. We are Jasim Ghafur, Saeed Hassani, Judith Preston, Julie Whitehead, and Maggie Mairura. Also, because of the language skills of Jasim and Saeed, we are able to provide direct support to Arabic, Farsi and Kurdish speakers. We employ sessional interpreters for the other main languages of French, Somali and Turkish.

So what happens?

Let's tell you the story of Mrs Z and her family. After getting Indefinite Leave to Remain, the family moved from NASS accommodation to a hostel and from there to a Housing Association house. They were referred through the Advice session and allocated a support worker. An interpreter was arranged for the first appointment, which usually takes a couple of hours. Going through the Support Plan, it is explained how initially we will assist them in opening accounts for the utilities, claiming housing and council tax benefit (if required), applying for a community care grant and referring them to a local charity for furniture and other household items. Phone calls are made, forms completed. What about support for school meals and uniform? Another form is completed. Is it possible to get a bus pass for one of the children? Another phone call is made. Mrs Z would like to start English classes. A form for BEGIN is completed and faxed. A date is arranged for a home visit and also to talk about registering with a GP, house contents insurance, the law regarding TV licence and cars. An appointment is made for a benefit check with Janet, our benefits advisor. Mr Z would like to work full time, so an appointment is made with Clive, our employment/training adviser.

Over the next few months, regular appointments will be made to go through any mail that comes through the door, discuss budgeting, link in to any other community groups in the area; maybe we need to ring the landlord to report a repair. We have

even been able to give the family a computer following a request to 118 members, via email, for a computer for another tenant who has just become a full time student! We were given 4!!

This is just one example of how floating support works.

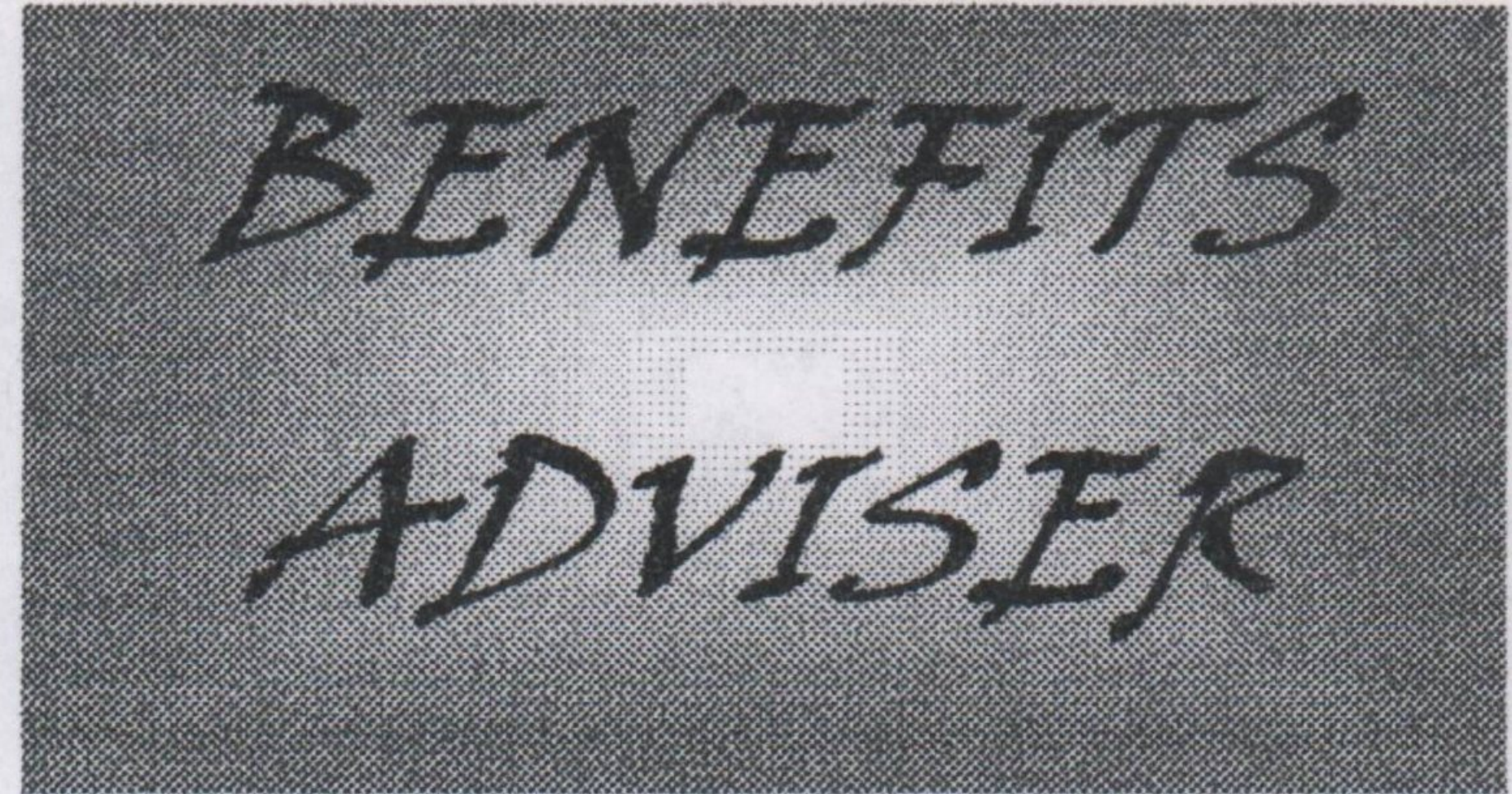
Maggie Mairura



Logo designed by Jasim.

Kop Dendri

those seeking asylum, refugees and host communities activists. The UNHCR will continue to play its part in providing a wider alliance for change amongst seeking asylum. Being an asylum seeker has become an acceptable form of racism. Communities and workplaces - has to be to challenge the prevailing hostility to people as we approach the next election, our aim - through the UNHCR of as activists in our



Since commencing employment with Refugee Forum, I have been able to resolve many Benefit and Housing Benefit queries. These arise due to language problems and the complex rules and regulations of the Benefit System. Refugees are often unable to resolve these problems and can miss out financially due to this. As a consequence, refugees can land themselves in debt, money which they can ill afford to repay.

Case Study One

Mr W was in full-time employment and, due to an accident, was unable to work.

The appropriate forms were completed for Income Support and Housing Benefit. I discovered that, as Mr W had worked for his employer for some time, he was covered by his employer's insurance, which was more beneficial to him than Benefit.

Housing and Council tax benefit were also applied for on the grounds of low income.

Compared to the weekly rate of Income Support, Mr W was far better off.

Two cheques were received from his employer's insurers, amounting to over £1000; housing and council tax were also paid, and Mr W had no further problems and was able to concentrate on making a full recovery.

Case Study Two

Mr A called into the Forum, as he had received letters from the council threatening court action for rent and council tax arrears.

Mr A was in full-time employment, and I was able to negotiate with the council to suspend all court action to seek possession of his property.

Mr A agreed to pay his rent plus a small amount off the arrears. The same applied to council tax arrears.

If Mr A keeps to his agreement he will have no further problems with the council and he will have no fear of the council trying to repossess his property.

Janet Hannay

ETA CO-ORDINATOR

The role of Employment, Training and Education Co-ordinator for Refugees is primarily to increase and identify the quantity and quality of information, resources and support for refugees wanting help within any of these areas.

This takes two main forms; firstly, working on a one-to-one with individuals in helping them to identify their issues/needs, to devise individual action plans and then put them into action. Secondly, my role is a strategic one, identifying available resources/supports in the areas of Employment, Training and Education, looking at areas of need and working with other individuals and organisations to look at ways of improving services and meeting any identified gaps in provision.

To illustrate an area of my work and to highlight the complexity and level of difficulty experienced in supporting refugees into work, I have detailed a case study below.

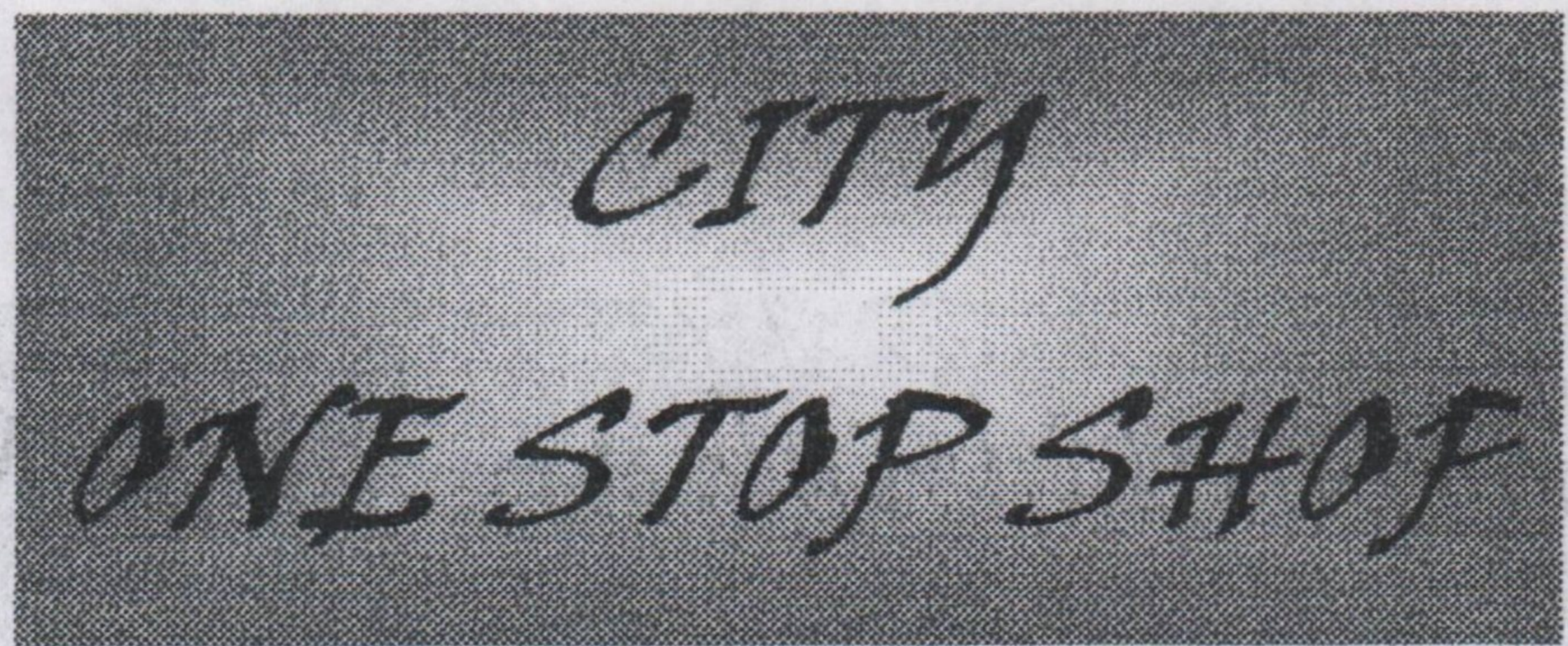
I have worked with an Iraqi Doctor for over a year in the process of qualifying to practice medicine in the UK. All parts of the process are complex and expensive, with no practical or financial support being available from the NHS. You will see the NHS travelling all over Europe to recruit badly-needed Doctors, but it won't offer support to those already here from non-EU countries.

Initially, we had the hurdle of his IELTS English exam; I initially arranged IELTS lessons at a local college for a maximum of four hours per week. Given the high level needed to pass, I put together a package whereby we obtained the cost of the exam, £78 pounds, from Nottingham Links and other funding charities, to have a local Language School provide intensive, specialised lessons.

Next was PLAB stage one, and although the exam was free, he had to self-resource himself for books, study materials and travel costs to London for the exam. There appears to be no support groups for doctors in this position, and he was very much self-supporting throughout this period. Next came PLAB 2, where he funded the exam himself; however, I was fortunate to find a training organisation in Manchester who ran an 8 week course with mock exams. I managed to obtain weekly travel tickets to attend the course from Next Step, and he obtained a small resident grant from the Meadows 1 stop shop for books etc.

I also managed to get funding for an intensive course in London from Next Step, just prior to his final exam. Although he passed this exam, it had taken him in excess of two years and he couldn't have achieved it if he hadn't had the internal resources to succeed, even with the various agencies and organisations that helped. This also doesn't mean he will get a job, and will now be facing additional barriers Refugees find when trying to obtain any form of employment in the UK.

Clive Woonton (Employment, Training and Education Co-ordinator)



The project is focused on three main areas:

- i. Health
- ii. Education
- iii. Housing

It has been up and running for 18 months and has proven to be effective in assisting refugees and asylum seekers using the Refugee Forum.

The help provided can be very simple or very complex; I have a caseload of up to 30 people at any one time with varying degree of need. I will give examples of this with two case studies.

As well as the above, I work very closely with other staff members on various projects some examples are detailed below:

- In the month of August, Janet Hannay and I obtained £14,400 in unclaimed Benefits for refugees. The majority of which was unclaimed Disability Benefits.
- By working closely with Social Services and volunteers at the Forum, I have been successful in getting direct payments for disabled refugees. Social Services now do initial interviews of refugees at the Forum.
- Maggie Mairura and I have instigated Sexual Health Training for staff and volunteers; our long term goal to have the Forum registered so we can give advice and issue condoms.
- Due to a number of refugees and asylum seekers coming to the Forum with injuries sustained at work, Sam and I have had an informal meeting with ACAS to obtain advice and guidance. Four refugees are now taking their employers (all agencies) to court.

Case Studies

1. Mr A and family arrived from Glasgow fleeing racial abuse; they contacted the Forum asking for help. They are a family of five and were living in a one-bed roomed flat. At first the city council refused to help, as they deemed the family had made themselves intentionally homeless, but due to lobbying from the Forum they were placed in a hostel. I then assisted the family with doctors, dentists, schools, housing applications and general support. General support can vary from teaching the mother how to shop, instructing her about a balanced diet for the children, money management, paying bills and teaching the parents how to play with their children. One child needed extra help as she was disabled; with the support of the Allocations Team at the Education Dept, we forced a school to admit the child, albeit reluctantly. At this point the family moved to their own home and the process began again. I also involved an Educational Psychologist to assist the family obtain the best for their disabled child. The child was eventually placed into

[Handwritten signature]

a special school and is doing well. The family are now coping reasonably well and both parents are attending college to learn English.

2. Miss B is a failed asylum seeker who is homeless and destitute. She is HIV positive but is not receiving any medical treatment, as under the new rules she is not eligible. After a series of interviews with her, I overcame her initial reticence; she told me that she manages to survive by having sexual relationships with three men, one in Stoke, one in Coventry and one in Leicester.

I placed Miss B on my caseload and obtained permission from her to contact other agencies to discuss her needs. Firstly, I contacted Nottingham Positive Care Team and arranged an interview with their Social Worker to find out what was available for failed asylum seekers with HIV. Unsurprisingly, there is nothing, but she was willing to meet Miss B to discuss safe sex, offer support and whatever help she could give. I then contacted the 'Buddies' positive support voluntary group in Stoke. They were very concerned and wanted to meet Miss B, which I arranged. They then contacted voluntary groups in Coventry and Leicester; between them they have set up a complex and extensive support package.

Larry McCloskey

