

How to volunteer . . .

Now that the 118 Centre is up and running, Sam is contacting those who've already offered help, with specific jobs in mind. Volunteers are still needed for the following:

- Providing friendship, practical support and possibly advocacy to individuals and families (daytime or evening)
- 118 Centre duties (daytime) eg. welcoming visitors, answering the phone, dealing with queries, form-filling, socialising, sorting donated goods - and tidying-up!
- English language teaching and conversation - one to one or small groups.
- Saturday playscheme.

If you can help, ring 118 and talk to Sam.

How to give us money. . .

Take out your chequebook and write a figure, then add lots of zeros.

More realistically:

Fill out a standing order form to make a regular contribution each month. This is great for us as it enables us to make predictions. If you are a member of NNRF there is a form enclosed with this newsletter. If not, ring the centre and ask for one to be sent - or better still join us.

Send us a cheque, made payable to NNRF.

Offer to organise a fund-raising activity.

Contact us

0115 985 9546

Refugees@tiscali.co.uk

www.nottas.org.uk

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please tick as appropriate

- ☐ I would like to become a member of NNRF.
(Membership is £5 waged and free for those who are unwaged/low waged.)
- ☐ I do not wish to become a member at present but would like to be kept informed.
Please put my name on your mailing list.
- ☐ Please send me information about how I can help refugees and asylum seekers in Nottingham.
- ☐ I would like to make a donation to NNRF and enclose a cheque for £_____

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....



Cheques should be made payable to: NNRF- Please return this form to: Linda East, Secretary, NNRF, 118 Mansfield Rd, Nottingham NG1 3HL

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

Busi's story

where in the East Midlands, finally moving to Nottingham in early December.

Busi likes Nottingham and has found her neighbours quite friendly but they are not around much. She has found some voluntary work helping other refugees and is very committed to this. Her oldest daughter is hoping to go to college in September and the 2 younger children are at school. She is slowly finding her way around. One of the most difficult aspects is having to use vouchers for shopping which she finds demeaning and embarrassing.

Busi's husband had to go back to Zimbabwe because his father died in September, and he had to help his mother. He is hoping to join them but it has so far been impossible for him to get a flight ticket. As the situation in Zimbabwe gets closer to the elections, political and economic instability is increasing so this is an anxious time for Busi and her family. •

Badge and picture making

We're getting very creative. A week after the centre was opened, the floor was covered in bits of paper and glitter as people, from 4 up to - a lot older - made various weird and wonderful badges, wands and decorations. Thanks to Jane Gill for leading the session and providing the inspiration.

Allotments again

NNRF is continuing to flex its green fingers. We have several more requests for allotments and as we all know, in order to grow you need to dig and in order to dig, you need something to do it with. We recommend that you all treat yourselves to new spades, forks, trowels and any other new tools you fancy and pass on your old ones to us so that we can help Nottingham's refugees carry on greening the city. If you can help, give us a ring on 985 9546. •

Newsletter No. 5 February/March 2002

Nottingham & Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum

WORKING WITH REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS



Bill Morris, General Secretary of TUC and NNRF chair Mike Scott celebrate the opening

Bill Morris does the honours

But the opening of the Mansfield Road building is only a start

When he opened the Forum's new drop-in centre, Bill Morris described it as a symbol and as a place of hope and support. A building is only a start, so we need volunteers willing to give their time and skills, as well as financial support. One of the aims of the Forum is to plug some of the gaps in provision for asylum seekers and refugees in the area.

Another equally important aim is to challenge the 'common sense' that sees asylum seekers and refugees as a problem. We need to challenge the obstacles that get in the way of a civilised approach to asylum - one that refuses to criminalise asylum seekers or reinforce the culture of suspicion that surrounds them. Partly, this involves a process of self-education. What do we know about Iraq, Iran, Kurdistan, Sudan, Togo,

Yemen, Zimbabwe or the other places from which asylum seekers come? And if some people are using the asylum laws for reasons of "economic migration", what do we know about the social and economic conditions that force people to seek a better life elsewhere?

Alongside this need for self-education, we need political campaigning - to challenge specific examples of inhumane practice such as the use of detention centres; to invest asylum policy with a sense of decency, respect and an acknowledgement of our common humanity and mutual responsibility; and to challenge the conditions which force people to embark on dangerous journeys across the globe. Central to

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Farewell from NNRF chair

January 19th was the official opening of the Forum's 118 Centre, which will be a base for our activities and a resource for local refugees. The ceremony was carried out by Bill Morris, one of the high-profile critics of the Government's voucher scheme and its treatment of refugees in general. He praised the Forum and our supporters for the work we have been doing and promised to keep up the pressure on Tony Blair. It's also nice to be able to report that he didn't rush off as soon as the photos were taken, but stayed to discuss local issues with refugees and members of the management committee.

Now that the formal stuff is out of the way, the Forum will be moving ahead with a range of projects - if you would like to get involved, now is a good time. (See **How to Volunteer**, page 4.)

I also have to report that, following the successful launch, I am stepping down as NNRF Chair. It's been an exciting two years and I'm proud of what we've achieved to date.

A new phase is beginning and different skills will come to the fore. But, before I go I would like to thank all of you for your contributions of time or money. I know it's a cliché, but we couldn't have done it without you.

Mike Scott

Good news!

Campaigning does work! The Alpdogan family have been given permanent leave to remain in the UK. Although we don't know exactly what caused a change of heart in the Home Office, and maybe they do have one after all, it does seem that all the wonderful support they received from local people played a part. Thank you to everyone who helped. •

Bill Morris

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our work is the recognition that asylum seekers and refugees must be enabled – if they choose – to play a full part in what we do. We need to challenge the dependency culture created by the whole asylum system.

In the meantime, there are two issues that have been at the forefront of our minds. One was the Home Office policy of refusing asylum claims to people from Zimbabwe. This practice was based on out of date assessments of the situation there, and whilst there has since been a freeze on removals, it raises serious questions

about the priorities of the asylum decision making machinery – to meet their humanitarian and legal obligations or to meet deportation targets.

The second issue was the introduction of new procedures for dealing with cases that have been turned down by the adjudicator. These new regulations are discussed elsewhere in this newsletter. In the meantime, there is widespread concern amongst refugee groups about immigration police delivering news of a negative decision and at the same time detaining asylum seekers, who will have the opportunity neither to consult their legal representative nor to put their affairs in order. •

Changes to the asylum system

In late October, David Blunkett finally announced the result of the review of the voucher system. The good news is that it is going to be ended. The bad news is that it will be only slowly phased out by autumn next year and a lot of other changes will also be happening. Details of what will replace vouchers are not clear but it seems unlikely to be crisp five pound notes. Instead there is talk of plastic – which could mean some sort of ID card system creeping in by the back door.

Other major changes are planned for the accommodation of asylum seekers in a series of centres. On arrival they will be sent to Induction Centres, located near ports of entry. Some people may continue to be dispersed from there to cities outside London and the South East, but others will be sent to four new Accommodation Centres, which will each hold 750 people. They will provide all meals plus on-site education for children and basic health facilities. A network of Reporting Centres will be established. 2,100 extra places will be created in Detention Centres for those whose asylum application applications have been refused. Measures are also proposed for “streamlining” asylum appeals process.

It is hard to believe that these

changes are going to improve the lives of those seeking asylum in the UK. It seems more likely that they will reduce choice and dignity even further, by denying some of the kind of freedoms we take for granted, for example, choosing what you want to eat. Even more crucially, those forced to live in Accommodation Centres will lose opportunities to begin to integrate into local communities, to make friends and build support networks and will be unlikely to be afforded much privacy. Those who are granted leave to remain will have to start building their lives here more or less from scratch.

A further change in policy was slipped in during the Christmas holidays when the Government was clearly hoping that no-one was going to notice. This is the excitingly named *Immigration and Asylum Appeals (Procedure) (Amendment) Rules 2001*. The effect of this is that as from 7th January, if an appeal against asylum refusal has been dismissed by the adjudicator, only the Home Secretary will be informed of the decision. Asylum applicants and their legal representatives will not be informed directly. This means that the decision can be delivered in person by immigration officers who are liable to remove the applicant to detention. •

English as a foreign language

One of the most difficult obstacles refugees to Britain need to overcome is mastering English.

Siya and Thaer are Iraqi Kurds who have been in England for a little more than a year. Both learned English at high school, while Siya continued at university, where he specialised in theatre and film. For Siya, learning the language also provides insight about British culture, not least the difference between the British culture he learned about through classic literature and

Mahmut says that being in class reminds him of being a little boy at school

everyday English and culture. With a better command of English he hopes to continue his career in film and theatre production, so he now attends 10 hours of classes per week at People's College after taking a course at New College Nottingham. When a Home Office decision about his status went against his application, he found it very hard to study for a time. Since then he has obtained permanent leave to remain.

Thaer trained to become a teacher of Arabic, though conscription prevented him from teaching before he fled Iraq. Now he is the one being taught, in 10 hours of English classes per week and in a 2 hour art class, both at New College Nottingham. Thaer still has difficulty understanding the teacher in the art class, but follows what is being done practically. The art class is another aid to communication, because Thaer sometimes draws what he wants to

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English . . .

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say, such as when explaining a problem to a doctor. Thaer also uses humour to make contact, such as putting new words he learned before Christmas to the tune of *Jingle Bells*. Mahmut Alpdogan is a Turkish Kurd who has been in England for one year and two months. (See news item on the Alpdogan family.) He arrived with almost no knowledge of English, so had to rely entirely on interpreters and body language at first. He studies 6 hours a week at Hyson Green community centre, and learning English is his main goal, even though he thinks it will take him another 3 years. His wife and children are also learning English. Mahmut says that being in class reminds him of being a little boy at school when he answers questions such as: ‘what are you wearing today?’

Both Siya and Thaer would welcome the chance to speak socially in English with more local people, while Mahmut would like more classes each week. As I was talking to Mahmut among his family and friends, they suggested holding English classes at the 118 Centre. As they say, they have time on their hands, so any time, any day would suit them.

Jon Simons

New Year's party enjoyed by families

Hyson Green Youth Centre was the venue for a new year party for children and their parents on Saturday 13th January. A colourful, decorated restaurant area, social room and a big hall were in a flash crowded by an amazing number of families and kids.

The entertainment was principally for the young guests: face-painting, games, music, stilts-walking, craft-area, and there were presents... but also some parents joined the activities.

Unfortunately when the food was served, it turned out that we did not have enough for such a big number of guests. For all that it was certainly a good start to the new year.

Many thanks to all the volunteers and helpers like the Alpdogan family, who prepared once again such delicious food.

Hella Schlee

Busi's story

Busi arrived in Nottingham in mid-November with her 3 children, the oldest of whom is 18 and the youngest 7. Until August 2001, her home was in Zimbabwe, in a small community of mainly white farmers. Busi is of Indian origin and she worked on the farm for 7 years as an administrator, living in one of the farmhouses. Her husband spent much of the time away in Tanzania, working in the gold mines. They are both members of the opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change. Since the community was small, there were only junior schools and so Busi's 13 year old daughter was away at a boarding school.

In August last year, the farm was put on a list of those allocated for the Government to take over. Almost immediately a group of “war veterans” came and camped outside the gates and gave everyone 2 days to vacate the farm. The farmer tried to reason with them, but it seemed to make them more angry. That evening they went on to the homestead and started terrorising the local black workers, burning and looting their homes. Then they came to Busi's house, 2 kilometres away. They were outside screaming and throwing things through the window. Eventually her daughter said she should open the door in case they burned the house down. They were shouting names at

her like “white man's slave” and “racist pig”. She wanted to ring the farmer to ask what she should do but they had cut the phone lines. They started kicking and punching her though they didn't harm the children who were hiding under the beds. They took her possessions if they liked them and smashed those they didn't want or took them outside and made a bonfire. They threatened her and her daughter with rape. Then they said she must get off the farm the next day, and left.

She and the children went out of the farm the back way to a neighbouring farm which had not been listed and was not attacked. They stayed the night there. The police were not interested in what had happened. The next day they went to the town where her daughter's school was and stayed there with well-wishers until they had obtained passports for the 2 younger children and had bought plane tickets to come to England.

The family left Zimbabwe on the 4th October, saying they were going on holiday. Although they were not allowed any foreign currency and she was afraid they would be stopped by immigration when they said they had no money, this did not happen. On arrival at Heathrow, they were met by Busi's brother who has been living in Leicester for the past 15 years. He took them to his solicitor who advised them to claim asylum. They were initially housed in Leicester and then told they would be moved to some-

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