

Forum supports new refugee tenants

The relief of being given a new tenancy can rapidly evaporate when refugees face the harsh reality of trying to set up a new home for the first time after leaving NASS accommodation. Sorting out gas, electricity and water supplies, Housing Benefit, Council tax, applying for grants, acquiring furniture, etc. are difficult enough for English speakers, but for many refugees, almost impossible without assistance.

The Forum had been providing this type of help in a piecemeal and unsatisfactory way during our regular, busy advice sessions. Since

December 2002, we have provided more comprehensive support to over 40 tenants, initially under a Housing Benefit-funded transitional contract. In April this was transmuted into a 'Supporting People' contract with guaranteed funding for two years.

So far, support has been provided mainly by experienced refugees employed on a sessional basis. However when the size and amount of our new contract have been confirmed, we hope to appoint two half-time posts to manage the project and lead the casework. ■

Summer programme 2003

Last summer, the Forum ran a very successful and popular programme of sporting, educational and social events with a grant from the Home Office's 'Purposeful Activity for Asylum Seekers' fund. This year we will be working with the City's Sports' Development team to promote their sports activities for young adults and family asylum seekers.

If you can spare any time to help out, contact Patsy Brand: patsy_brand@hotmail.com

Contact us

Tel/Fax 0115 985 9546
refugees@tiscali.co.uk
www.nottas.org.uk

Centre Coordinator: Sam Azad

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Membership fees: Free unwaged / low waged £5 waged individual £10 organisation

Please tick as appropriate:

- ☐ I / we would like to join the NNRF
☐ I / we would like to renew my / our membership of the NNRF
☐ I / we would like to make a donation to NNRF

and enclose £.....

- ☐ I / we would like more information on how we can help NNRF

Name:

Address:

Email:

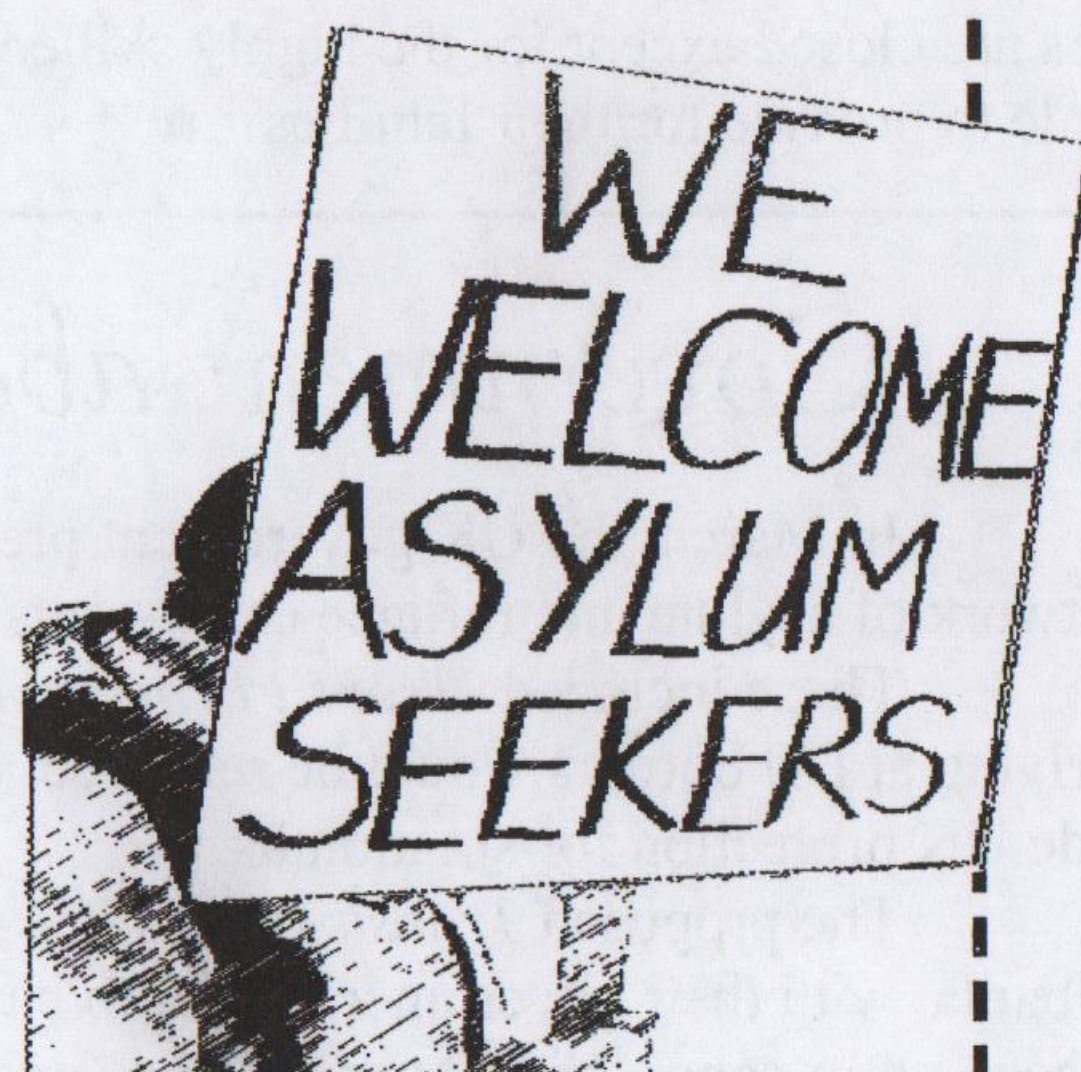
Home phone: Work phone and/or mobile:

Date:

Please make cheques payable to:

The Nottingham & Notts Refugee Forum and return this form to Chris Cann, Membership,
 NNRF, 118 Mansfield Road, Nottingham, NG1 3HL
 Tel. 0115 985 9546 or 0115 9415599

Registered Charity Number 1086962



The Nottingham & Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum

Nottingham City Council funds services advice project

Nottingham City Council is funding a two-year advice service based at the Forum. The aims of the project are to give front-line advice to refugees and asylum seekers on City Council and health services, and to improve access to these by liaising with service providers.

The funding will cover the development of specially written leaflets translated into seven languages and a full-time advice worker.

Larry McCloskey has been appointed to fill the new advice worker post. Larry previously worked for Employment Services and was responsible for setting up and leading a specialist team at Castle Court Job Centre to deal with all new refugee claimants and guide them through the Benefits' minefield. He is therefore known and respected by many refugees in Nottingham and his experience and skills will be a great asset to the Forum. ■

Forum picks up hunger strike struggle

NNRF finds refugees left destitute

Abbas Amini, an Iranian Kurdish poet and human rights activist, spent 11 days on dry hunger strike between 17th and 28th July, after the Home Office decided to appeal against the decision to grant him refugee status. News of his protest was broadcast worldwide. When the court threw out the Home Office appeal,

Abbas initially refused to end his protest, saying that he was struggling for all asylum seekers. Amongst other things, he was demanding a review of

the way asylum applications are refused, and that asylum seekers be treated with dignity.

In support of Abbas, we have been collating information on other cases in which people have been left destitute, had their positive decisions appealed, or where clear errors have been made in their cases. A letter itemising examples of poor treatment from the Home Office has been sent to local MPs.

A recent meeting of the new Refugee Community Network (*please see page 3, this issue*) highlighted a number of issues raising questions of basic justice.

These included

■ The Home Office sending the wrong interpreter, using a language from a different region.

■ Inconsistent decisions about similar situations.

■ Home Office interviewers uninformed about events in the home country.

■ A child being interviewed alone and refused asylum.

Asylum rights activists in Nottingham are concerned about the rising number of destitute asylum seekers in Nottingham. These include people whose cases have come to an end, but who will not be deported because their country of origin is deemed unsafe. ■

Calling all members! The Forum's membership records are now being updated. Help us to make sure your details are correct—please let our new membership secretary, Chris Cann, know about any changes to your contact details. Also, it would be useful to have your email address.

Several members have not yet renewed for 2003; please remember to do so. A membership form is on the back page of this issue of the newsletter, or can be obtained from NNRF or by email from chriscookcann@moose-mail.com



NNRF AGM and Conference

Around 100 people attended this year's AGM and 'A Borderless World?' conference on July 5th. The conference was organised jointly with the Nottingham Institute for Cultural Analysis at Nottingham Trent University, and provided an opportunity for members and supporters of the Forum to discuss key issues around asylum.

The speakers included Liz Fekete, of the Institute for Race Relations, on 'managed migration'; Eleonore Kofman, of the NICA on globalisation and asylum; and Jerry White, a cultural historian, on the experiences of refugees in the 19th century. We were also pleased to welcome Dorothy MacLauchlan, a worker with the Cranhill Community Project in Glasgow, who talked about their experiences of supporting asylum seekers. There are plans to collect the conference papers into a small booklet later in the year.

Farewell Bob...

Bob Crane stood down as Treasurer at the AGM after two years in the job. Bob's contribution to the Forum has been superlative. He has had to cope with a significant growth in the Treasurer's role since we were launched.

Actually, Bob isn't going far. He agreed to be co-opted onto the committee as ex-Treasurer. The new Treasurer is Leo Keely, who brings not only his sharp numerical skills, but also his experience of voluntary organisations, and fighting for a host of other unpopular community and trade union causes.

Other new members of the management committee include a number of people who have worked or are working as 118 centre volunteers - Maggie Mairura, Razia Kingston, Mustafa Barak and Bez Amini. The Management Committee has a number of working groups dealing with the 118 centre, campaigning, fundraising and publicity. Contact us if you're interested in getting involved. ■

After the war: a refugee speaks out

When the talk about the war in Iraq - the toppling of the regime in Iraq, weapons of mass destruction, freedom, democracy and other moral objectives - started, it had a very bad effect on Iraqi refugees all over the UK, since they could feel what could happen to their families, relatives and loved ones.

Most of them had experienced the so-called smart bomb. The whole world might have recognised that these bombs do not distinguish military targets from civilian targets. Unfortunately, the British media played a great role in persuading the nation that it was a justified clean war that would target Saddam Hussein and his regime only. The media had a very negative impact on Iraqis in the UK, as it was very selective in its coverage of the battle, showing coalition victories without showing what was happening to the Iraqis on the ground.

At the same time, Iraqi refugees and residents suffered from the hostile acts of some people, just because Britain was in a war with Iraq. They had to bear harassment and other psychological stresses just for being Iraqis, when they had thought that they were living in a friendly, developed society. They did not expect any sort of discrimination or negative attitudes from people living in a democracy. These people were encouraged to act like that because the refugee issue has been in the media.

The latest Home Office legislation concerning the Iraqi refugees does not consider these risks, and relies on false facts

Added to this, a new Home Office regulation raised their anxiety as they fear deportation while the country is still in chaos, and when the security situation could be worse and unsafe especially for Iraqi Kurds. I personally have been asked by lots of them what their fate will be?

Most of these Iraqi Kurds fled the country because of both the Kurdish-regime conflict of 1991, and the local Kurdish-Kurdish conflict, as in both cases their lives were at stake. Their families were suffering a miserable, risky life under the two Kurdish ruling parties who were in control of the northern protected zone, before the toppling of the Saddam Hussein regime 2003. Now the power of those conflicting groups has expanded into wider regions of the country, even Baghdad, risking the lives of more families and causing more people to migrate seeking safer havens.

The latest Home Office legislation concerning the Iraqi refugees does not consider these risks, and relies on false facts, causing more trauma and exposing these people to the deportation without any support or assurance of safety.

As the country still does not have a legitimate government, and consequently lacks policing power and proper security systems Iraqi refugees cannot think of the return journey to their home country - yet at the same time they suffer from their uncertain status in this country and other EU countries. The Home Office should take the above facts into consideration and be more humane in their decisions concerning refugees of countries suffering disasters.

Nawzad Awchi

Editor's note: The Government plans to start returning people to Iraq, arguing that now Saddam is gone the country is safe. Asylum seekers have been forcibly returned to other unsafe countries. The Nottingham Refugee Campaign Group launched an anti-deportation campaign in July to challenge these plans. For information: Nottsantideport@aol.com

Refugee Community Network launched

In May we held the first meeting of the Refugee Community Network. The idea for this network came out of the fact that many refugees and asylum seekers were themselves networking and supporting each other informally. We wanted to find ways of supporting this informal activity. It was agreed, therefore, that this network would aim to

- support refugees and asylum seekers who are themselves supporting others in their communities;
- bring people together from different communities and different parts of Nottingham;
- share information.

At our second meeting, there were 28 people from 10 countries, including Congo Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq, Kurdistan, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Sudan.

At the end of these meetings a newsletter was put together from notes at the meeting and copies distributed to those who came along. In turn, these would be distributed to other refugees. This way, it is hoped that a wider network can be established, including refugees from different language and national groups. With luck, we will soon be able to have the newsletter translated. ■

Activist blasts 'managed migration'

Frances Webber is a barrister specialising in immigration law. She is associated with the Institute for Race Relations and a member of the CARF (Campaign Against Racism and Fascism) collective. Frances came to Nottingham in early April to speak on the 'asylum clampdown' at a meeting organised by the Refugee Campaign Group. Below are excerpts from an interview with her.

You discussed asylum policy in the context of 'managed migration'. What does this mean?

FW: 'Managed migration' is just what it says. It's the opposite of freedom of movement. It means fine-tuning immigration according to the UK's economic needs. If you look on the Home Office's work permits UK website, you'll see that there are special rules for 'highly skilled migrants' and for people in 'shortage occupations' who are actively encouraged to come. Although the government denies it is 'cherry-picking' the skilled and highly educated people who are needed in their own countries, this is exactly what it is doing. Meanwhile, exceptional leave to remain has been abolished and the criteria for remaining on humanitarian/compassionate grounds greatly tightened.

Do 'bogus asylum seekers' ruin it for 'genuine refugees'?

FW: 'Bogus' asylum seekers don't ruin it for genuine refugees - it's the Home Office refusal to recognise genuine refugees when they are staring them in the face that ruins it for them. More to the point, it's policy which is built around the idea of abuse, rather than the idea of rights (compare EC law, which is based on rights). On another level, 'bogus' asylum seekers provide a pretext for crackdowns, but don't forget that it's the globalisation process which has ruined it for millions of people all over the world, who are forced to migrate - and why shouldn't they? And when (as has been the case since 1973) all doors are closed except for the highly skilled/educated, how else are people to provide for their families? ■

Government abandons 'transit centres' plan

In March, the UK government presented proposals to the EU Justice and Home Affairs Committee for a network of asylum and refugee camps outside the EU borders.

These included 'Transit Processing Centres' in countries bordering the EU, to which all asylum seekers arriving at EU borders would be removed, and 'Refugee Protection Zones' in areas of conflict, which would provide UN protection for six months.

The proposed *Transit Processing Centres* were to be set up in countries such as Croatia, Romania and Albania, with their governments paid to have centres on their territory. The plan was for asylum seekers to be processed in-camp, with those given refugee status being offered resettlement in the EU. *Refugee Protection Zones* would be set up in places such as Morocco, Turkey and Iran.

Refugee and human rights groups pointed out that these new plans were shaped by a government asylum agenda principally concerned with managing numbers, not with giving protection. They argued the plans would:

- undermine international agreements on protection;
- place the burden of care with UNHCR which lacks the resources to guarantee adequate protection; and
- leave women particularly vulnerable.

It would appear that that the Government has backed down on this particular act of fence building, denying, for example, allegations that a military camp in Croatia was being prepared as a 'transit centre'. Other EU countries, notably Germany, have been sceptical of the plans. However, the intent is very, very clear. ■