

NNRF – WHAT'S THAT?

The NNRF is the Nottingham and Notts Refugee Forum. It was set up in 2000 by a mixture of concerned individuals, religious and student groups and trade unions, after the government decided to disperse refugees and asylum-seekers around the country.

We are a democratic, independent, voluntary organisation of local people, asylum-seekers and refugees, offering advice, practical assistance and friendship, regardless of race, religion or political opinion. We are run by a volunteer Management Committee and, while we do have some paid staff, we rely to a great extent on the time, dedication and enthusiasm of volunteers from both a refugee and host community background.

We defend the rights of asylum-seekers and refugees and support them in practical ways in their efforts to rebuild their lives in a safe and secure place. Our work is designed to improve their mental and physical well-being and life-chances.

WHAT DO WE DO?

The services we provide include:

- Practical advice, eg. explaining correspondence, making phone calls, form filling
- Liaison with statutory and other agencies on behalf of users
- Referrals to partners giving ESOL (English language lessons), training and work advice
- Social and cultural activities to enable people to mix and work with the host community
- A social centre with free Internet access
- Supporting the Refugee Women's Group
- Assistance to people who are destitute
- Advice and assistance to Refugee Community Groups

We are also a hub for other organisations working locally with refugees and asylum-seekers, eg. Refugee Action, Red Cross, Refugee Council, Tuntum Housing and Host Nottingham.

WHY ARE WE NEEDED?

The Geneva Convention lays down obligations on all countries to support refugees and asylum-seekers but, in reality, many countries spend more time trying to get out of them than in making proper (and humane) provision.

This is very much the case in Britain, where unscrupulous politicians and newspapers pretend that the social problems many of us face – poverty, poor housing, unemployment – are the fault of migrants. This allows them to conveniently distract public attention from their own failures and/or greed.

So, according to some, migrants are actually responsible for the financial crisis caused by the big banks, the unemployment caused by the dismantling of British industry and for “taking our jobs” while claiming state benefits and lazing about at the same time! It would be a real joke if so many people didn’t take it seriously.

The reality is, of course, that asylum-seekers are not allowed to work and get considerably less than the poverty-line benefits received by Britons. Those people and families refused asylum but unable to return to their own country because it’s too dangerous for them (how can that possibly make sense?) receive no money or support of any sort and are actually destitute.

The Government’s infamous “bedroom tax” and the recent changes to Council Tax rules mean that even more pressure has been put on those least able to resist it or stand up for themselves. In this disgraceful situation, the NNRF needs to be there to support them and, if necessary, stand up for them. We are needed now more than ever.

These divide and rule tactics try to set Nottingham people against newcomers. We need to keep pointing out that refugees and asylum-seekers are human beings, not problems and that we should all do whatever we can to help them settle in their new home. They didn’t want to be driven away from everything familiar and we would certainly want no less if we were in the same position.

WHO ARE THE REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS?

In the last year there have been over 8,000 visits to the NNRF base, The Square Centre.

The majority of visitors are male, but there are an increasing number of women and families with children. The main countries of origin depend very much on current crises in the world and change all the time: at present, they are Iran, Eritrea, Iraq, Zimbabwe, Sudan and Afghanistan. There are a total of about 60 countries represented at any moment and perhaps 25 languages spoken.

WE NEED YOU!

Become a Supporter!

NNRF is a charity, which exists because a group of local people saw a need and decided to do something about it. To achieve anything, we need people to get involved: if you support our aims, join us!

Our members elect the Management Committee at the Annual General Meeting and contribute whatever they can to the Destitution Fund, which supports people in the most desperate situation – those with no access to public funds of any description.

Without the generosity of our supporters, asylum-seekers who have been refused permission to stay in the country but can't be deported – usually because their country of origin is too dangerous for them to return to – face actual starvation on the streets of Nottingham.

As you will read elsewhere on this page, this crisis is getting steadily worse, as a result of government policies. The NNRF is at the forefront of the campaign to defend asylum-seekers, but their need is always greater than our resources. Please check out our website for further information, an Application Form and to set up a Standing Order.

Become a Volunteer!

There are over 800 current asylum-seekers and more than 8,000 refugees in the Nottingham area. Many of them have long-term problems and will need continuing support from NNRF over months or years.

As we are a small organisation with few paid staff, much of this work is done by volunteers. Could you be a volunteer? We need people to help out with general advice and advocacy, housing advice, healthcare support, anti-destitution work, admin work and other areas.

Not got the confidence or experience? Don't worry, all volunteers are given training and day-to-day support from our Volunteer Co-Ordinator: you won't be expected to do anything until you feel ready! Our current volunteers are ordinary people like you who had some time to spare and wanted to make a real difference. You don't need lots of time – a couple of hours is fine, as long as it's regular. It's reliability that's needed, not a blank diary.

Ring up for an informal chat (0115-941-5599) – we really do want to hear from you!