

Refugee Community Network

Newsletter 3 • July August 2003 • Nottingham & Notts. Refugee Forum (NRRF)

Making a community

At the July network meeting, we talked about the ways different communities are starting to organise to support themselves. Everyone agreed that it was also important for different refugee communities to support each other. The more asylum seekers stand together the stronger they will be!

The **Somalian** community now have an office in Hyson Green, and some financial support for rent, a phone and a computer. The community group has a management committee and have set up a **Somalian Women's Group**.

The **'Turkish' Kurdish** community organise on an informal basis. There are strong networks between families and individuals across the city. In March, the community organised a combined wedding and Nawroz [New Year] celebration at the Chase Community Centre in St. Ann's. An important example of successful community organising happened when a Kurdish family lost their NASS support. From their own limited resources, the community raised a large sum of money to support the family until NASS support was restarted.

People from the **Sudan** now meet monthly at Lenton Community Centre. The group includes refugees and asylum seekers and also Sudanese residents in Nottingham.

Other groups who meet informally include those from the **DRC Congo** and **Ethiopia**. It was thought that there were about 45 Ethiopians in Nottingham. The church has been an important meeting place for both groups.

But...

Starting community networks and groups can present problems. One problem is who to trust.

One person from Togo in East Africa talked about how only government supporters were given scholarships in the UK. He described how the brother of a journalist living in the UK was arrested in Togo, after the journalist was reported to the government by compatriots living in the UK.

Have you been offered a council tenancy?

If you have, please come and see us at 118. We may be able to help you settle in. We may be able to help with gas, electricity and phone connections, sorting out housing benefit and more.

Aims of the network

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

Next meeting

Saturday 13th September
2.00pm

YMCA, Shakespeare St.
Arthur Johnson Room

- Larry McCloskey (now Education, Housing and Health advisor at 118) will be giving advice tips at 4.00.

Continuing 'Abbas' Campaign'

At the June network meeting, it was agreed to send a letter to local MPs with examples of cases where people had suffered because of Home Office errors or where people had been left destitute. This letter has now been sent and a copy of it [with names and reference details removed] sent to members of this network. **Continued over page.**

'118' CENTRE OPENING HOURS

Tuesday, Wednesday and
Thursday afternoons 1 to 5:
DROP-IN ADVICE SESSIONS

Monday evening 6.30 to 8.30:
SOCIAL

118 MANSFIELD ROAD
0115 9859546

Interpreters

Interpreters are still an issue of concern for asylum seekers in Nottingham and elsewhere. There is concern about the impartiality and independence of some interpreters, who may be politically loyal to the government from which the asylum seeker has had to flee. The example was given in the July meeting of people feeling under pressure to change their story when talking to their GP about their experiences, and stories being twisted in translation.

Translators speaking a different dialect is another worry. This can lead to confusion, misinterpretation or the Home Office not believing an asylum seeker's claim to have come from a particular country.

Although asylum seekers have the right to change interpreters if they are not happy with them, they find it difficult to exercise their right. Asylum interviews are very stressful, and asylum seekers often feel vulnerable.

A final concern is the standard of English of some interpreters, especially in situations where there is a shortage of qualified and registered interpreters.

Asylum claims stand or fall mostly on the story asylum seekers tell. The 'burden of proof' is already high. The combination of formal interview and translation makes the task facing asylum seekers – i.e. persuading the Home Office that they are telling the truth – even harder.

Regular meetings

Womens' Welcome drop-in: Fridays 10am – 3pm at St. Peter's Church in the city centre. Open to all women refugees.

Refugee women interested in meeting other women to discuss campaigning, culture, politics, issues affecting women – anything you like: contact Huda, Abigail, Leila, Mel or Maggie at 118 Mansfield Road [leave your name and address]. Planning meetings Thursdays at 5.30pm at 118.

Health professionals group: meets on Tuesday evenings for English practice at 6pm at the 118 office

Refugee Campaign Group meets first Tuesday of the month. Campaigns include campaign against deportation to Iraq and Afghanistan.

Asylum update

In the last newsletter, we said that the government seemed to have backed off on their idea of 'transit centres' for asylum seekers outside the EU. However, this tells us where the government asylum policy is going. We're waiting to hear more about the plans to build a so-called 'accommodation centre' in Newton, 10 miles out of Nottingham.

Locally, we're worried about the number of people being left destitute after coming to the end of their asylum claim. Community support is going to be very important for these people.

For regular information see

*Refugee Council www.refugeecouncil.org.uk Asylum Aid www.asylumaid.org.uk
National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns www.ncadc.org.uk Institute of Race Relations www.irr.org.uk and Amnesty International www.amnesty.org.uk*

Continued from front. We need to keep collecting information and agreed at the July meeting to try and organise a delegation to meet local MPs and others after summer, probably in October.

We can also use this information in general campaigning.

If you're willing to speak at local meetings about your country, asylum etc (interpreters if needed), contact Rob at 118.

Driving

The law on driving in the UK is very clear. You need a current driving license, insurance, an MOT and road tax.

If you haven't got any of these things don't drive. The risks are to others as well as yourself!

IMPORTANT + IMPORTANT + IMPORTANT + IMPORTANT
NNRF TO MOVE PREMISES !!

We are about to move. Most likely we'll be moving to the top of Huntingdon Street – behind Mansfield Road. Watch out for information.

Solidarity has NO borders