

IAP NEWS

No 8

The newsletter for the Inter-Agency Partnership

April 2001

Welcome to the April edition of IAP News! This edition features information on Migrant Helpline, the Housing Associations Charitable Trust, the OSS Managers Away Day, an Update on NASS related issues and the Bulletin Board.

Migrant Helpline (MHL) have submitted over 12,500 NASS Applications on behalf of asylum seekers between April 2000 – February 2001. They have expanded from a team of eight in January 2000 to ninety eight staff now covering Kent and Sussex. Roy Millard, Operations Manager tells IAP News about what has been happening at MHL.

Where are the majority of your clients from and what are the main issues being presented?

The largest single client group we see are Iraqi Kurds, closely followed by Iranians & Afghans. 75% of these referrals are in-country arrivals, having arrived largely in the backs of lorries, although this year we have seen a seven fold increase in referrals from the Channel Tunnel. The method of entry into the UK is hazardous & often follows a period in the Red Cross centre in Sangatte (Calais).

The majority of our clients are referred from the Immigration authorities and have been granted temporary admission. When they arrive with us they frequently only have the clothes they are standing up in, are tired, hungry, and often have medical problems. They are concerned for their families 'back home', anxious to know what is going to happen to them & often suspicious of us as the only contact they have had up this point has been with authority (immigration, police, security firms etc).

How are you managing to work with such large numbers of asylum seekers?

In order to work with the numbers involved we work a 7 day week from 08.00 - 00.15hrs, accommodating clients and addressing immediate needs, and arrange an appointment to complete a NASS application usually for the following day.

The flexibility, dedication and professional staff we have at Migrant Helpline are the key to us managing numbers beyond our funding (sometimes working until 3 a.m. to ensure every client is dealt with).

What geographical area does Migrant Helpline cover with the OSSs and what are the main issues being presented?

During the year we have expanded the advice clinic at Dover and we now have offices and drop ins in Margate, Folkestone, Canterbury, Hastings & Brighton. The main issues presented are voucher related problems, immigration interviews, housing, employment & education.

How has Group Dispersal worked for Migrant Helpline? What have been the main issues?

We have Emergency Accommodation in three main centres locally with dispersal teams dedicated to each. They run daily clinics and carry out briefings. The Group Dispersals have presented their own problems with large numbers of clients being taken off the lists by NASS which is deeply frustrating not to mention the strain on Emergency Accommodation, but we are assured this will improve!

What changes to the NASS system would improve the process for asylum seekers?

My wish list for the future includes the abolition of the voucher system, an improvement in communications between NASS and ICD (more realistic interview dates and locations, e.g. not Liverpool when clients are in Dover!), greater consideration of special needs cases and the ability to ensure friends and family can stay together.

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asylum
support
programme



**MIGRANT
HELPLINE**



refugee
action



refugee
arrivals project



**REFUGEE
COUNCIL**

scottish
refugee
council



WELSH
REFUGEE
COUNCIL

Azim El-Hassam
introduces:



hact

*The Housing Associations
Charitable Trust*

The housing associations charitable trust (hact) is the UK's only specialist housing trust. As a development agency, its mission is to "develop solutions promoting people's well-being, enabling them to live in their homes and communities with dignity and independence".

For almost a decade **the support of refugee communities has been a priority for hact**. Since 1993, we have provided over **£900,000 of funding for refugee community organisations (RCOs)** developing housing and related support projects, making hact the largest refugee housing support funder in the UK. In the process, hact has established strong links with RCOs and gained valuable insights into the housing needs and aspirations of asylum seekers and refugees.

It is in response to these needs that hact established **The Refugee Housing Training and Development Project (RHTDP)**, a three year Lottery funded project which provides free advice and training to the housing staff of RCOs. Since its launch in 1998, RHTDP has trained more than 80 refugee housing workers in London, the Midlands, North West, and South West. Forthcoming events in April include a seven day intensive course in housing issues facing refugee and asylum seekers for North East RCOs (**run in collaboration with NERS**) and fund-raising training and one-to-one support for RCOs in the Midlands (**run in conjunction with Refugee Action**) which will take place in Birmingham.

Other innovative hact refugee projects include:

HASROCS Project (hact asylum seekers and refugee outreach community support) has seen hact funding and bringing together London based RCOs to provide outreach support and advice as well as community development in dispersal areas. Moreover, we are developing a refugee **art project** which seeks to improve the group's access to housing by bringing together community groups and housing associations, and contribute to the creation of a positive climate for refugees by demonstrating the skills and talent existing within the communities. Hact is also researching RCOs access to **Deposit/Rent Guarantee Scheme** to improve refugee access to the private rented housing sector.

Funding for Refugees has been boosted with a grant from the European Refugee Fund administered through the Home Office. The overall aim of work funded is to enable Refugee Community Organisations to enhance their work on integration and the delivery of effective and sustainable services. Funding through hact will be used to develop housing advice services and new initiatives in housing delivery, with priority given to RCOs operating outside London.

For further information please contact:
hact, 78 Quaker Street, London, E6 3QQ
tel: 020 7247 7800. Email: info@hact.org.uk
Website: www.hact.org.uk

The Inter-Agency Co-ordination Team organised an Away Day for One Stop Service Managers in March – Katie Horsley reports back on the day.

OSS Managers from across the Partnership came together in March for the first time, in what is hoped to become a regular event. The purpose of the day was to air and share good practice as well as grievances, and an opportunity for managers to meet their counterparts from different regions.

Many issues came out of the day. In looking to improve the quality of the Service, everyone was invited to come up with a definition of a OSS. 'Signposting' was probably the most frequently used term here, insofar as assisting asylum seekers access their entitlements; directing them to other statutory and non-statutory agencies; and providing them with advice. While it was agreed that the OSSs provide a centre of value-added expertise, there was general consensus that the OSS should not, for example, be issuing travel warrants. With restricted budgets, the OSSs cannot provide services for which they are not funded.

Good practice did not only include how to best assist clients but amongst all the managers, there was concern for their staff. Many staff, committed to their jobs, work long hours and everyone was keen to discuss how to avoid burn out in the face of pressure and stress, and to keep staff motivated. Thus, good leadership, incorporating realistic expectations of what can be achieved, time out for staff development and good communication within a team were all considered to be vital.

It was acknowledged that although there are regional differences, a Terms of Reference for the OSS would be extremely useful. This would seem to be a sensible next step and ICT is hoping to implement this shortly. Other proposals put forward were for inter-agency staff secondments and, this must be a good sign, there were requests to hold another Awayday in 6 months' time.

UPDATE

The future of the Asylum Support Programme

The Inter-Agency Partnership consists of Migrant Helpline, Refugee Action, Refugee Arrivals Project, Refugee Council, Scottish Refugee Council and the Welsh Refugee Council. The agencies signed a two year Grant Agreement from April 2000- March 2002 to provide the Reception Assistant service and the One Stop Service aspects of the Asylum Support Programme. NASS were committed under the Grant Agreement to inform the voluntary agencies of their intention to conduct an open tender procurement exercise for the provision of the reception assistant service and the one stop service by March 2001.

Ministers have now considered the issue of tendering the Programme and NASS have informed the Inter-Agency Partnership of the following:

- To allow for a period of settling of new procedures in NASS, subject to satisfactory performance, the **Grant Agreements will be extended for a period of six months until 30 September 2002**
- It is intended that from 1 October 2002, the provision of the Reception Assistant function in the South East (those areas currently covered by Refugee Council (London), Migrant Helpline and Refugee Arrivals Project) will be subject to an open procurement exercise, starting towards the end of this year
- **The provision of the One Stop Services across the United Kingdom will not be tendered** and will remain with the current providers. The Grant Agreements will be renegotiated with a presumption that the new agreements will be for a minimum of three years
- **Reception Assistant functions and the provision of emergency accommodation outside the South East will not be tendered** and subject to similar renegotiation of the grant agreements for a presumed three years
- At this stage there is uncertainty as to whether the emergency accommodation within the South East should be part of the same tender as the reception assistant service or a separate tender possibly preceding in advance of the main tender exercise

The news to delay tendering and to not tender outside of the South East gives the Inter-Agency Partnership time to seriously consider what aspects of the Grant Agreement need to be renegotiated and to put a comprehensive tender together, as appropriate. Input from all involved in the Programme is actively encouraged for this process.

Nic Alderson, ICT

GOOD NEWS ON VOLUNTEERING FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS

New guidance clarifying ministers' wish for asylum seekers to be able to volunteer while awaiting a decision on their applications for refugee status was published on 12 February 2001.

The new guidance confirms that the government **'does not expect asylum-seekers to be left out of pocket because of their volunteering'**, and that they can be reimbursed for normal volunteer expenses. Interim guidance from last April, removed the previous ban on asylum seekers undertaking 'unpaid work', but had left some confusion about reimbursement.

The guidance states:

'We are keen to see asylum seekers and recognised refugees take an active interest in the welfare of their own communities and the local community by undertaking voluntary activity while they are in the UK. But it must be borne in mind that, in the case of asylum seekers, they may not be given the right to remain here. They should therefore not be led to believe that voluntary activity is regarded as a step towards refugee status being granted.'

The following guidance may be of help when organisations consider offers of voluntary activity from asylum seekers.

- Care should be taken to ensure that the activity being undertaken by an asylum seeker is genuinely voluntary and amounts neither to employment nor to job substitution
- We would not expect the asylum seekers to be out of pocket as a result of volunteering. Reimbursement should be made for meal or travel costs actually incurred, not as a flat-rate allowance.'

For general information on volunteering go to the National Centre for Volunteering website at: www.volunteering.org.uk

BULLETIN BOARD

ROMANY SUPPORT GROUP AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

It is our intended objective and commitment to improve the quality of life for Romany asylum seekers and refugees through **English language classes; advocacy ; interpreting and translating services; job enhancement schemes; organised activities and cultural events involving music, dance, poetry and art.** It is also our objective to make the public aware of the discrimination and persecution that the Romany people face in Eastern Europe.

At present we have three centres where we operate from: White City in Hammersmith and Fulham; Manor Park in Newham and South Tottenham near Stamford Hill.

The functions of these centres involve:

- Information on entitlements and rights in regard to social services, housing, education
- Supportive network of Romany members who have already experienced the adaptation process and who are able to assist newcomers in their contacts with local authorities
- Language support for those who seek services
- Liaison with educational authorities as a means to ensure smooth adaptation of Romany children into local school environment
- Maintaining and expanding of our resource centre, namely material regarding Roma peoples situation in Eastern Europe

The organisation also plays an integrative role within the Romany community. This is achieved by:

- Creating a social forum for the members to come and exchange information
- Language classes for adults
- Play groups and art classes for children which include outside activities (organising trips and museum visits etc.)
- Workshops of Romany culture, for Romany people as well as local sympathisers
- Cultural activities including, music, dance etc.
- Co-operation with other Romany organisations in England

ROMANY SUPPORT GROUP APPEAL FOR VOLUNTEERS

The Romany Support Group needs volunteers to join and support its efforts. Anyone who volunteers will be welcomed to contribute whatever their skill and interest can be best applied to. We are a young, expanding organisation whose range of activities strictly depends upon the input of individual volunteers. Everyone can make a difference. In general we need volunteers who can help us with fund-raising; music promotion; event organising; interpreting and translating, advocacy and advice; recording music; gathering and finding documentary material on the situation of Roma people in Europe and Britain; representing the Romany Support Group at meetings related to refugee and asylum seekers issues; work with Romany children such as crèches, trips, workshops.

For further information call on 07949 089 778 or write to the Romany Support Group, P.O. Box 23610, London E7 OXB.

The National Information Forum have produced a new information resource for Asylum Seekers

Signposts – Information for asylum seekers and refugees. It brings together concise guidance related to the practical needs of asylum seekers and refugees in everyday living including:

- A key range of services
- How to access services
- Practical information on living in the UK

**For further details contact the National Information Forum, Post Point 10/11, BT Burne House, Bell Street, London 5BZ
Tel: 020 7402 6681 email: info@nif.org.uk**

Please send articles or letters that you would like to appear in the next edition of this newsletter to:
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