

IAP NEWS

No 11

The newsletter for the Inter-Agency Partnership July 2001

Welcome to the July edition of IAP News. Features include: EA North, Day Trips for Asylum Seekers, Extending the RCO Pilot Sub-contracts, Clearing the Voucher Enquiry Backlog, and Training for Local Community Groups and RCOs.

CHANGES TO THE VOUCHER ENQUIRY TEAM AT NASS

As of Monday 25 June there is a new low-cost number for all voucher related enquiries which has been introduced in conjunction with a new system for dealing with voucher problems. As you are aware, there have been many occasions when asylum seekers have not received the vouchers to which they are entitled, and have ended up destitute through no fault of their own. One Stop Services, RCOs and other voluntary sector advice agencies have been extremely busy with voucher problems since the beginning of the dispersal system, often having to resort to the distribution of donated food parcels in order to meet clients' basic living needs.

NASS and the voucher distribution company Sodexho have not managed to set up a reliable system whereby all asylum seekers receive the vouchers to which they are entitled and this has caused great hardship in many cases, including families with children. However, the new procedure is intended to allow NASS to **respond to voucher enquiries within 24 hours and to allocate four weeks worth of emergency vouchers per person** as a quick fix measure to avoid further hardship or destitution. This means that following the registration of a voucher problem each person on the NASS application form will receive £120 worth of emergency vouchers.

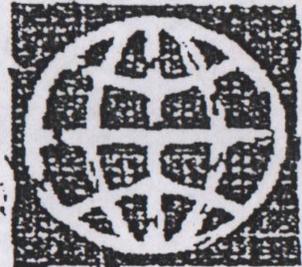
This is also meant to give NASS enough time to find out the root cause of the problem and to rectify it within four weeks by setting up the process whereby regular vouchers will be sent to the nearest Post Office taking part in the Sodexho scheme.

The new voucher enquiry number is: 0845 6000 914

When you or your client phones this number you must be able to give the following information: name and contact number of caller; name, address, DOB and NASS reference of client; nature of the problem including the date on which vouchers were last received. Although this new initiative may help alleviate some of the immediate problems of people without vouchers, it does not address the root cause of why so many asylum seekers are being left destitute post dispersal. The IAP will therefore continue to advocate for a regional distribution system whereby local solutions are available for people in this situation. In addition to this, the Refugee Council along with many partner agencies such as Oxfam, the Body Shop and the Trade and General Workers Union continue to advocate for the abolition of the entire voucher scheme. Results of the new Government's voucher review are expected later this summer.

For more information about the new voucher enquiry please contact ICT on 020 7840 4347/8/9.

asylum support programme



MIGRANT HELPLINE



refugee action



refugee arrivals project



REFUGEE COUNCIL



WELSH REFUGEE COUNCIL

Scottish Refugee Council's Excursion to Edinburgh

The SRC organised a day trip for a group of clients from Glasgow to Edinburgh on 23rd May. The trip was funded by two public donations. The group of 35 asylum seekers included families and singles, people still in Emergency Accommodation, people dispersed from Dover months ago, and also some recent arrivals under group dispersal. Members of SRC's Women's Group and Open Group attended the trip, accompanied by seven volunteers and two members of SRC staff.

First stop was the Museum of Scotland, where staff were extremely welcoming and friendly, followed by a picnic lunch and an afternoon spent relaxing in the beautiful Royal Botanic Gardens. A great day out was had by all and according to the staff at SRC who organised the trip, it provided a unique opportunity for clients to get out of their usual environment, to spend some time together in a group and get to know each other better. Clients also really enjoyed the chance to learn a bit of Scottish history and share information and experiences with fellow asylum seekers.

A Time of Celebration – Celebrating Sanctuary

We're nearing the end of Refugee Week already, and it's the most successful ever held.

More events than ever before have been organised all over the UK to get across the message that this is a time to celebrate the valuable contribution refugees make to British society. And in this spirit, many of the parties and festivals up and down the country have taken the title "Celebrating Sanctuary".

In London, there was a party atmosphere. The festival site on the bank of the Thames was full of people, the smell of food, the beautiful costumes of dancers and a wide variety of music from the three stages.

In Birmingham, the crowd was entertained in Centenary Square with music and dance from refugee communities, ethnic food stalls, face-painting for the kids and a brilliant interactive exhibition which gave a chilling taster of what escape and arrival in the UK is like for refugees.

Nottingham, Cardiff, Bristol, Leeds and many other cities and towns throughout the UK all held their own celebrations, determined to show people just how much refugees enrich our society with their culture and skills.

The next edition of IAP News will contain more feedback on the various events in Refugee Week 2001.

A big thank you to all those who got involved and made Celebrating Sanctuary such a success.

Report by Abby Rudland, Events Officer, Refugee Council

TRAINING FOR LOCAL GROUPS IN HULL

The RCO Development Project has recently facilitated a number of training and information sessions in Hull in conjunction with the Inter-Agency Co-ordination Team, Refugee Arrivals Project and the Refugee Outreach and Advice Partnership.

Hull is now a main dispersal area but prior to this had a very small ethnic minority population. The arrival of asylum seekers in the city has seen new support groups emerging and the sessions were arranged after consultation with them.

Two sessions were held for workers in the voluntary sector. The Refugee Outreach and Advice Partnership conducted training on Asylum Law and Procedures whilst the Inter-Agency Co-ordination Team and Refugee Arrivals project held a joint training session on NASS.

The Refugee Outreach and Advice Partnership provided two sessions for Asylum Seekers living in Hull, with information and advice available in Sorani, Arabic, Farsi, Albanian and French.

Those attending the sessions included Refugee Lifeline, Global Friends, HASSG, Safe Haven Yorkshire, Humberside Law Centre and Hull Al-Noor Community Project, along with various individuals. It was felt that the sessions were successful and beneficial to those involved, with much positive feedback being received.

For more information and details of further training opportunities, please contact:

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EXTENDING THE RCO PILOT SUB CONTRACTS

The Refugee Council supports the principle of working with Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs). To this end, the Asylum Support Contracts Team (ASCT) set up a sub-contracting programme last April. The aim was to find out:

- whether the RCOs were able to achieve funder outputs and deliver a quality service in a contract environment,
- whether asylum seekers would prefer to access services through community organisations in their localities (rather than travel to Refugee Council offices); and
- whether other Refugee Council services could be outsourced to RCOs in the future.

About 60 RCOs were interested in taking part – 26 of them submitted proposals for providing a reception assistance service to newly arrived asylum seekers by the June closing date.

12-month pilot sub-contracts were awarded to the following organisations: East London Somali Assoc. (ELSA); Ethiopian Community in Britain (ECB); Refugee Advice Centre (RAC); South London Tamil Welfare Group (SLTWG) and Tamil Relief Centre (TRC).

It was estimated during the bidding proposal stage that an RCO would serve a minimum of 200 newly arrived asylum seekers per annum. However, all contracted organisations reached 200 NASS applications in the first quarter. In the first 6 months, RCOs completed 1581 applications (approx. 15% of the total number of applications completed by Refugee Council between September 2000 and February 2001). Communication between the Refugee Council teams and RCOs is working effectively but RCOs would like to see an improvement in the referral system.

All sub-contracted RCOs have established efficient systems and procedures in order to fulfil their contractual obligations - they are providing a good quality, client-centred service. However, RCOs feel that they are struggling to meet user demands with current funding and would be able to increase their quality and quantity of service with additional funding.

This project has been very successful and the Refugee Council would like to widen sub-contracting to other RCOs and devolve more resources to sub-contractors. However, the implementation of EA North may significantly affect the Refugee Council's Grant Agreement. Therefore, it has been that funding of current sub-contracts should continue at the same level until March 2002 but not to extend the number of RCOs involved at this stage.

Gulnur Akturan, Refugee Council

GOVERNMENT RE-SHUFFLE

Following the recent General Election there have been several changes to the Government, which are of significance to the refugee sector:

David Blunkett the previous Secretary of State for Education is now Home Secretary.

Lord Jeff Rooker whose previous ministerial positions include: Treasury and Environment followed by his appointment as Minister of State at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in the party's first term in office in 1997. This position saw his profile raised due to his outspokenness and his opinions on the BSE crisis and has now been appointed as Citizenship and Immigration Minister.

Angela Eagle MP since 1992 has held two posts as Parliamentary under Secretary – one in the Department of Environment and most recently in the Department of Social Security. Her new role will see her deal with asylum questions in the House of Commons

EA NORTH UPDATE

EA North was initially intended to go live on 4 July as reported in last month's IAP News. However, partly due to concerns raised by the Inter-Agency Partnership particularly in relation to the lack of provision for special needs and access to legal advice, the project has been postponed until September at the earliest. Furthermore, it is now being called Reception Accommodation Network (RAN) and will probably consist of a network of 100-200 bedspace reception facilities around the country. No further information is available at this stage but next month's edition will have a full update.

Millie Barrett, Programme Secretary of the Inter-Agency Co-ordination Team, is on the RAN Board – 020 7840 4348, millie.barrett@refugeecouncil.org.uk

Useful Contacts and Websites

Accommodation Issues

- **Shelterline 0800 800 4444** This is a 24 hour helpline staffed by trained housing advisors. They are familiar with the NASS system and a language line facility is available. The number is free to call from a landline phone.

Benefits Entitlements

- **Benefits Agency 020 7712 2171** The Public Enquiry Line is open from 9am – 5pm
- see website www.dss.gov.uk

Info on Legal Services, Advice Agencies etc

● **Community Legal Services Directory Line**

- **0845 608 1122** This provides general information and advice on local services available
- see website www.justask.org.uk

Citizens' Advice Bureaux Information

- **NACAB 0151 282 9000**
- see website www.nacab.org.uk
- **Refugee Council OSS Advice Line 020 7346 6777** This is open from 10am – 1pm, 2pm – 5pm, and is able to offer advice on issues such as benefits, reunion, documentation, education, housing, legal issues and RCOs
- **Refugee Council Information Line 020 7820 3085** An answer phone service is provided from 10am – 1pm. It responds to general queries about refugee & asylum issues and the Refugee Council
- see website www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

● **Maternity Entitlements**

All queries about applications for maternity payments must be made in writing to the following address:

F.A.O Erica Chapman, Assessment Section, Voyager House, 30 Wellesley Road, CR9 2AA. Alternatively fax: 020 8633 0213

ASYLUM STATISTICS

MAY 2001:

The Home Office received 5,290 new asylum applications in May 2001, 14% lower than in May 2000 (6,185). The total number of new asylum applications received so far this year is 28,005.

The Home Office received 8,000 asylum appeals in May – the total number of appeals increased by over one quarter between April and May. This brings the total number so far this year to 49,810.

Main Nationalities of Asylum Applicants: May 2001

Nationality	Number
Afghanistan	700
Sri Lanka	445
Somalia	420
Fed Rep of Yugoslavia	375
Iraq	295
Iran	295
Turkey	270
Pakistan	220
China	135
India	130
Sierra Leone	110
Zimbabwe	110
Romania	100
Albania	100
Other Nationalities	1,290

NB: All figures are provided and rounded – Source Home Office

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

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