

# Newsletter



Issue April 2011 – May 2011

## Volunteer Refugee Project

Sadly, 31st March saw the end of our 3 year Refugee Volunteer Project funded by Volunteer England Opportunities for Volunteering Scheme. The Project supported volunteers to enable refugees and asylum seekers to access health and social care services through the Health Advocacy Project and through supporting MRSN's Community Development work and the Forum. Over the 3 years 55 volunteers (43 of whom were refugees or asylum seekers) from 22 different countries speaking 30 languages helped 1,135 people. The Health Advocacy Project helped many disabled and otherwise vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers to access health treatment, social services, benefits and destitution support.

4 volunteers won public awards for their volunteering work, 37 volunteers completed MRSN's Health Advocacy and Advice 4 day training programme and 13 volunteers gained OCN advice qualifications. On 31st March we held an event at Saffron Restaurant to celebrate the work of the Project and appreciate the work of the volunteers who made it happen. It was attended by

volunteers, and staff, management committee members and partners. Volunteers were presented with gold, silver and bronze award appreciation certificates depending on length of service. A very good time was had by all... judging by the performances of volunteers receiving their certificates, the Oscars are only a step away!

We are still seeking funding to continue the work of the Project. In the meantime volunteer co-ordination and the Health Advocacy Project will continue on a smaller scale. The good practice, expertise and skilled volunteer team built up through the Health Advocacy Project will be integrated into the Advice Service as far as possible and continue to provide additional advocacy and support particularly to vulnerable asylum seekers and refugees.

Many thanks, as always, to our wonderful volunteer team for all their invaluable work to support asylum seekers, refugees and the work of MRSN.



*Community Development Volunteer Angela Mendes being presented with a certificate of appreciation by MRSN chair Addisu Tewelde for over 3 years of dedicated voluntary service*

## Parliamentary meeting on ESOL cuts

On Tuesday 29 March, the Refugee Council and the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) hosted a meeting on ESOL cuts in Portcullis House, Westminster.

The meeting debated the proposed ESOL cuts and raised awareness of the unintended impact this will have on women and other priority groups, including asylum seekers and refugees. The meeting was chaired by NIACE's director, Alan Tuckett, and Jonathan Ellis, Director of Advocacy at the Refugee Council, was a keynote speaker.

Other speakers included ESOL learners, Refugee Community Organisations, ESOL tutors and researchers. The meeting was attended by a number of Parliamentarians from both Houses and from the three main parties.

Here is Jonathan Ellis's speech in full:

"Being able to speak English is fundamental for refugees. The people we serve have been forced to come to the UK for protection, often fleeing for their lives. Learning English is a priority for rebuilding their lives here.

"This is the 60th anniversary year of the UN Refugee Convention, an international agreement which, following the horrors of the World War II, sought to provide safety to those facing persecution. This is a year to be proud of what the Convention has achieved, not to introduce policies that will mean refugees struggle to integrate. The government needs to make sure that every refugee can learn English.

"Why is learning English so important? The first reason is that refugees themselves say so. We know this through the people we serve, including ESOL learners in classes run by our amazing volunteers, research that we've carried and the voice of our members – refugee community organisations across the country. The message we get time and time again is that refugees want to learn English in order to speak with their neighbours, support their children in their school work, continue in their education or training and to get a job. But most of all it's about empowerment, becoming independent and rebuilding your life here in the UK. Without ESOL, people need interpreters or community members to communicate and parents may have to rely on their children to translate and interpret for them: this is not fair on the parents and is unfair to the children.

"It is fundamentally important for refugees to be able to start

learning English as soon as they arrive in the UK. We believe that integration starts at day one, the day a person claims asylum. The longer someone is unable to access ESOL, the more difficult it will be for them to learn English. We want to see asylum seekers eligible for ESOL from day one. This is vital as, during the asylum process, people are required to live in towns and cities all over the country, next door to English speaking neighbours. It's important for social cohesion that asylum seekers learn English.

"And there is no way asylum seekers can afford to pay for courses. They are prevented from working by the government and live off poverty levels of support.

"But making sure asylum seekers can learn English also means that, if a person is granted refugee status, they are able to get on much more quickly without having to start from scratch or wait months before a place on an ESOL course becomes available. Many refugees will be on active and inactive benefits. It is important that all refugees who need English language support are eligible for ESOL funding. And we know it works. Here are three personal examples of people we've worked with.

"Marie Louise is a mother on income support who visited our Birmingham office. She started learning ESOL and after six months found a part time job

Sandra who started off on Entry level ESOL while claiming asylum is now a qualified teacher working in a school

Ahmed has requalified as a doctor but started his retraining through attending an ESOL class.

"There are many more examples like these. But perhaps the strongest reason is that it enables refugees to integrate and become independent. One refugee we work with put it like this:

"I think the most helpful thing for integration is the English language, because if you can speak the English language then you can ask many people a question, and they can tell you about everything that you need to know. In some short time you can be able to speak English a little bit and through courses you can improve until you are ready to have a job or any of these things that you want.

"The most important thing for refugees is to be treated as equals and be able to contribute to UK society. ESOL is key to achieving this and we would urge the government to rethink its policy and make sure all refugees can get the English language support they need."

*Source: Refugee Council*

### Funding

#### Improving Futures Fund

The Big Lottery Fund has launched a new £20 million programme that will fund charity-led partnerships supporting families with vulnerable children. The Improving Futures programme will provide funding for local voluntary sector organisations that work in partnership with public services to help UK families with children aged between five and 10

years old with housing, health, employment and other needs.

The scheme will fund up to 20 partnerships for three to five years, with up to £900,000 for each project.

Applications which are regional or sub-regional will be preferred.

Deadline: 12 May 2011 for expressions of interest, 30 September 2011 for full applications

Contact: Big Lottery Fund

Telephone: 0845 367 0610

Email: [general.enquiries@biglotteryfund.org.uk](mailto:general.enquiries@biglotteryfund.org.uk)

Website: <http://tinyurl.com/6dhu4pl>

#### Sheila McKechnie Campaigner Awards 2011

The Sheila McKechnie Campaigner Awards 2011 are now open for applications.

The awards offer a support and development package for emerging and grassroots campaigners working across a wide range of issues, aiming to equip them with the skills they need to make a greater impact and achieve real change. There are no cash prizes.

The awards are for individuals who are new to campaigning or operating with few resources and who show passion, tenacity and the potential to create change – locally, nationally or globally.

There are nine categories. The closing date is Monday 20 June 2011 at 1.00. More details are available from the website: <http://www.smk.org.uk/campaigner-awards/>

#### European Refugee Fund 2011

The UK Border Agency is inviting charities to bid for the European Refugee Fund 2011 worth £4.5m to set up projects that assist in the resettlement of refugees through the Gateway Protection Programme.

Proposed projects, should last three years, and be involved in medical health assessments and travel arrangements for selected refugees to the UK, and sourcing and provision of accommodation and up to twelve months casework support to a

minimum of 100 refugees per year.

The closing date to apply for funding is 21 April 2011.

More details from the Home Office website: <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/newsfragments/40-erf-gateway>

#### Big Lottery Fund – Awards for All

The Big Lottery Fund (BLF) has a total of £130,000 to allocate to voluntary and community groups across Greater Manchester through a new strand of its existing Awards for All scheme.

The BLF is keen to support projects that:

- help talented people make their ideas a reality;
- allow people to use and develop their skills more;
- enable people and groups to work together better.

Grants will range between £300 and £10,000. Following a review by a BLF panel, a selected number of projects may be put forward to a public vote in the applicant's local area to decide who gets an award.

The closing date for applications is 6th May 2011.

Full information can be found at: <http://peoplepoweredchange.org.uk/manchester/>

#### Foyle Foundation Small Grants Scheme

The Foyle Foundation Small Grants Scheme is designed to support smaller charities in the UK, especially those working at grass roots and local community level, in any field, across a wide range of activities.

Applications are welcomed from charities that have an annual turnover of less than £100,000 per annum. Larger or national charities will normally not be considered under this scheme.

One year grants of between £1,000 and £10,000 are available to charities which can demonstrate that such a grant will make a significant difference to their work.

There are no deadlines for submission.

Applications will be received at all times but it may take up to four months to obtain a decision from Trustees.

For further information and to apply, visit: [www.foylefoundation.org.uk/small-grants-scheme](http://www.foylefoundation.org.uk/small-grants-scheme), or 020 7430 9119, or email: [sgs@foylefoundation.org.uk](mailto:sgs@foylefoundation.org.uk).

#### Big Lottery Fund Appoints Improving Futures Delivery Partner

Local Government Improvement and Development (LGID) will help deliver the £20 million programme by providing support to potential applicants. BIG's

Improving Futures programme aims to give vulnerable young children across the UK a better future by supporting their families. The programme will help families by offering tailored support from local voluntary sector organisations working in partnerships with public services. LGID will help organisations get involved in the programme and support them to develop their partnerships and projects, liaising with their equivalent organisations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to deliver this support.

One on one support will be available to each applicant who reaches the final application stage.

Oonagh Aitken, National Adviser for Children and Families at LGID said: "LGID are delighted to be working in partnership with the Big Lottery Fund on the Improving Futures programme and look forward to supporting applicants through the expression of interest and full application processes. We feel this role is crucial in supporting applicants to fully understand and demonstrate in their applications the emphasis being placed on good partnership working; evidence of existing good practice already happening linked strongly to need in the area; and how they will demonstrate that their interventions are having an impact on improved outcomes for children and their families."

Peter Wanless, Big Lottery Fund Chief Executive said: "We welcome LGID's involvement in the programme. Their input will be invaluable in ensuring that we not only reach some of the most disadvantaged children and families across the UK but that wider lessons are captured and shared as a result of the ways in which they will be supported."

#### Smaller charities invited to apply for party Conference Bursary Scheme

NCVO is inviting smaller charities to submit applications to its Party Conference Bursary Scheme.

The scheme, which started in 2007, gives smaller organisations the chance to send a representative to either the Liberal Democrat, Labour or Conservative Party conference.

Participating groups get the chance to put MPs on the spot, attend fringe events and discuss key issues such as the Big Society or the impact of spending cuts on their organisation at a special roundtable discussion.

The scheme is open to voluntary and community organisations with an income of less than £500,000. NCVO

members will be given preference. Winners receive a two-day conference pass, one night's accommodation and reasonable travel expenses. Deadline: Friday 20 May. Contact: Alison Evans, Media and Parliamentary Assistant, NCVO Telephone: 020 7520 2473 Email: partyconference@ncvo-vol.org.uk Website: www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/partyconferencebursary

### **Friday 27 May 2011 is Manchester Neighbours Day. Why not apply for a grant of up to £200 to help you organise a celebration or event?**

The aim is to strengthen local communities by encouraging groups of neighbours to meet and get to know each other better, by arranging street parties, environmental projects, fun days or any small local event that brings people together.

Manchester Neighbours' Day is part of the council's 'Be Proud Love Manchester' initiative to improve neighbourhoods and increase local pride. You and your neighbours could get together and apply for a grant (up to £200) to help organise an event or project on or around 27 May 2011.

Funding can be for costs of small items of equipment, materials, room hire, decorations, or any reasonable costs for carrying out a project celebrating Manchester Neighbours' Day. For further information or to apply, visit: [www.manchester.gov.uk/info/500006/community\\_engagement/5074/manchester\\_n...](http://www.manchester.gov.uk/info/500006/community_engagement/5074/manchester_n...), or contact the Customer and Community Engagement Team, on 0161 953 2751 or 0161 953 2553, or email: [campaigns.team@manchester.gov.uk](mailto:campaigns.team@manchester.gov.uk), or write to: Pink Bank Lane, Manchester, M12 5QN. Deadline for applications: Friday 29 April 2011

## **Events**

The MARIM Team is organising the next MAF to be held on 11 May from 9:00 am to 12:30 pm, at Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount St, M2 FNS. A number of speakers will deliver presentations and workshops on a wide range of interesting and relevant topics such as Immigration Advice, Women Asylum Seekers, Mother/Infant Mental Health, Working with Men Asylum Seekers, the Roma Communities, and Victims of Torture. To register please contact Emnet Araya on 0161 868 0857 or email: [e.araya@manchester.gov.uk](mailto:e.araya@manchester.gov.uk) by Wednesday 20 April 2011.

## **Job Opportunity**

### **FORUM DEVELOPMENT WORKER Manchester Refugee Support Network**

(Charity No. 1109990)  
Salary: £24,646 - £26,276 (NJC Scale SO1 SCP 29-31)

Hours: Full-time (35 hrs per wk)  
Contract: Fixed term until 31st March 2012 (under review)

We are looking for a highly motivated, energetic individual to provide campaigning expertise and development support to a progressive forum of refugee community activists.

You will be an experienced campaigner and trainer, with a background in developing the skills and confidence of others to engage with decision makers. You will be able to effectively balance the competing demands of a diverse job role in a busy environment.

We are a dynamic refugee-led charity running a community development project, advice and advocacy services, and the Refugee and Migrant Forum Manchester. We aim to support refugee communities to run their own projects and services and achieve self-reliance.

This is an exciting opportunity to bring about lasting change in the lives of refugee communities in Manchester. Download an application pack from [www.mrsn.org.uk](http://www.mrsn.org.uk) or contact us on 0161 202 8910 or at [siamak@mrsn.org.uk](mailto:siamak@mrsn.org.uk) for a hard copy to be sent out to you. DEADLINE FOR APPLICATIONS: 5pm, Thursday 5th May 2011. Late applications will not be considered.

## **Volunteering opportunity**

### **Marketing and PR Trustee Volunteer Needed**

Creative Hands Foundation in Manchester is aiming to expand its board with someone with marketing and PR background to assist in the development of a marketing strategy for the organisation. We are looking for creative and innovation person who will be committed to promote the aims and aspiration of the organisation to stakeholders. We will expect the person to have good IT knowledge and skills who is keen to use their skills and experience in the voluntary art sector to help develop and grow this visual art charity based in Manchester.

This role is flexible to suit your own commitments however you must be attend board meeting and networking events to promote the organisation. You will work to establish wide contacts, produce and distribute e-news and events bulletins and up-date and maintain the organisation website.

If you would like further information or are interested in the role please contact Michelle or Joseph on 0161 226 1912 or [info@creativehandsfoundation.org](mailto:info@creativehandsfoundation.org)

## **Resources**

### **Support for accessible places and services**

Advice and guidance on making premises or services more accessible to disabled people is available from Manchester Disabled People's Access Group (MDPAG).

Although better known as a campaigning group made up of disabled people in Greater Manchester, MDPAG also provides a full range of access and training consultation services – including access audits, design and access statements, show-and-tell surveys and disability action training.

For more information, Tel: 0161 273 5033 Visit: [www.mdpag.org](http://www.mdpag.org)

### **FREE Quality Assurance System for Refugee Organisations (QASRO) now available online Cutswatch – add your organisation**

A new collaborative website aimed at crowdsourcing information on the cuts has launched. The site, [voluntarysectorcuts.org.uk](http://voluntarysectorcuts.org.uk) is for voluntary or community groups who have been told their statutory funding will be reduced.

To participate just fill in the simple form on the site to share your experiences and the impact the cuts will have on the people who use your services.

Cuts that you share here will be made available publicly in a Google spreadsheet. The information can be submitted anonymously.

QASRO is a practical resource and toolkit to help refugee organisations ensure they are well run and deliver high quality services. QASRO contains three key sections (Standards in 12 key areas of organisational development; Guidelines for delivering key services; Sample policies) that make it uniquely suitable for refugee organisations. It can now be downloaded for FREE from the Refugee Council's website at [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/practice/support/quality](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/practice/support/quality)

### Community Development Project

The project continues to support Refugee Community Organisation (RCOs) to access information, training, funding, office space, and meeting room. Since the last Newsletter we have supported Bosnian Supplementary School Manchester, MACO, Angolan Community, Her Sed Youth Group, Eritrean Community, ZIWO, Zimbabwean Community and AFIP with work funding advice and information, end grant report and accessing meeting space.

The Community development Project will continue to address the needs of emerging groups/communities and that of established communities in Greater Manchester to be able to provide service for their communities.

If you know of any refugee community that needs help to set up or develop a group, please do refer them to us or if you are already an established group and need some support, do not hesitate to contact us on 0161 202 8915 or email; [belay@mrsn.org.uk](mailto:belay@mrsn.org.uk)

### MRSN Advice Centre

**MRSN Advice Centre, 129 Princess Road, Moss Side, Manchester M4 4RB.**

Mondays from 10.00 am to 1.00 pm  
– Drop in sessions

Tuesdays – Appointments only

Wednesdays from 10.00 am to 1.00 pm  
– Drop in sessions

We can usually arrange advice in Arabic, Swahili and Somali, and with our dedicated volunteer interpreters in French, Kurdish, and Farsi.

To arrange an appointment you can call at the advice centre on Mondays or phone us on 0161 868 0777

### Refugee and Migrant Forum Manchester

#### Awareness Raising:

MRSN is working to raise awareness about the reality of seeking asylum in the UK. Through this free training we give recipients insight into the asylum process by focussing on the personal impact of seeking in Britain.

The sessions aim to highlight the contribution of refugees contribution to the UK, while also exploring the global and UK contexts of forced migration. Emphasis is placed upon the personal accounts of those who have sought protection in the UK.

The Refugee & Migrant Forum has delivered successful training to schools, different union groups, Rotary clubs, children's and youth services and community groups.

#### Consultation Event:

The Refugee and Migrant Forum and the Community Development projects of MRSN periodically invite Refugee Community groups and individual refugees and asylum seekers to come together to discuss common issues affecting them in their communities.

Each event will focus on a different issue depending on key developments in local, regional or national policy or service provision as well as any priorities identified by the participants.

The aim of the consultation event on 5th April was to present the current work of the forum and to find out from the groups what are the key issues they would like the forum to campaign on for refugees and asylum seekers.

The event was well attended a number of important issues were raised for the forum to campaign on in the future. A lot of evaluation forms were completed with very positive feedback.

#### Update of the current Forum work:

The forum is currently working on the Let Them Work campaign together with Refugee Council and TUC (Trade union Council) to fight for the right to work for asylum seekers who have been waiting for more than six months for a final decision on their claim and the delay was not the applicant's responsibility.

The Asylum Rights campaign group after consulting with RCOs have campaigned to improve conditions at Dallas Court Reporting Centre in Salford through negotiation with the UKBA North West.

The forum is also running three one-year Community Leadership Programmes between 2009 and 2012. These pro are funded by The Big Lottery Fund and accredited by Manchester Metropolitan University as a ten credit module of their BA in Youth and Community Work. There are 20 places available on the programme and advertisements for the final year programme will be sent out some time in May 2011.

#### Destitution Sleep out:

STAR (Students Action for Refugees) students in Manchester joined forces with the Boaz Trust and MRSN (Manchester Refugee Support Network) to sleep on the steps of Manchester University Student Union on Thursday February 24th.

The sleep out was one of hundreds that took place across the UK to raise awareness of destitution suffered by thousands of asylum seekers. The events were organised by Amnesty International and STAR.

Attendance was very good At one time there about 200 people, but 52 people slept out through the night until 8am on the steps outside the Students Union on Oxford Road.

Kate Green, Labour MP and John Leech, Liberal Democratic MP for Withington, joined the group and stayed until 8am.

John Leech had this to say, "I have chosen to sleep out for one night to highlight the plight of thousands of destitute asylum seekers, many of whom are now forced to sleep rough every night of the week. This is an unacceptable situation in a democratic, western society."

And Dave Smith had this to say about the plight of Boaz clients: "This winter our night shelter has been full almost every night with men who had nowhere else to go. Some nights it has been as cold as minus ten. Denying them access to accommodation and food is the equivalent of signing a death warrant."