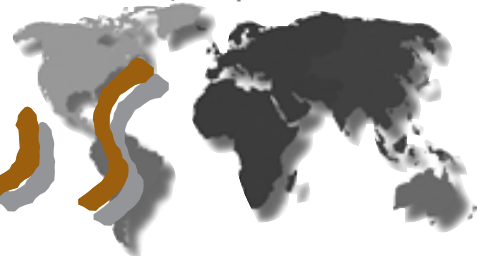


# RCONews



Newsletter from the Community Development Team

## Destitution

As all refugee community groups will know, one of the biggest issues facing asylum seekers and refugees is destitution. For refused asylum seekers this can mean that they literally have no money, nowhere to sleep, nothing to eat. For others, receiving minimal support, such as Section 4, the poverty is almost as grinding. Those with status also suffer from poverty because of unemployment or underemployment.

"Destitute asylum seekers are currently the most vulnerable group of people in the UK. They are not entitled to benefits and they do not have the right to work. Yet the Government would disagree and say that they can apply for Section 4. But this is not voluntary return ... this is like blackmail to make individuals return to their countries," said Edin Hromadzic, coordinator of destitution support services at Asylum Support and Immigration Resource Team (ASIRT) in Birmingham.

Shari Brown, co-ordinator at Restore of Birmingham Churches Together, provides support to refused asylum seekers. She says, "We sometimes reach a crisis point when people we see have nowhere else to turn to." One of their clients was a six-month pregnant destitute asylum seeker who had been staying with a couple, who themselves are asylum seekers but were frightened of what might happen to them if she stayed any longer. The social services would not help her unless she applied for Section 4. "It frustrates me that social services, who have a statutory obligation to support destitute asylum seekers who are pregnant or who have serious health concerns, still tend to deny them support", said Shari.

In 2004-5, Restore commissioned a report\* which looked into destitution among asylum seekers and refugees in Birmingham. When asked what one thing would most help their lives, apart from a change in the fundamental legislation, destitute asylum seekers in the report said that permission to work would make the biggest difference.

Pishtwan Nakshbandy, coordinator for Baran Development Association, a refugee community organisation that supports Kurdish refugee and asylum seekers in Birmingham says, "I know people in our community whose asylum claims are still unresolved six years on; no interview by the Home Office, no refusal, no acceptance, they are in limbo. We see around 20 destitute asylum seekers each week but we often can't help them as we have financial difficulties and they are frightened to give their names or details to us."



Dr. Nasimi, from the Afghan Community Organisation of London, advises a destitute asylum seeker

This autumn, the Refugee Council will be launching a major new campaign to highlight how this misery and suffering is a direct consequence of our asylum system and years of punitive policies pursued by successive governments. We will be continuing our fight to get the right to free access to the NHS restored to all asylum seekers, and we will not let up in our demand for an end to vouchers and the scrapping of the wretched Section 9 policy.

For more information about Refugee Council campaigns, email [campaigns@refugeecouncil.org.uk](mailto:campaigns@refugeecouncil.org.uk) or call **Bob Deffee**, Campaigns and Public Affairs Manager on **020 7346 6712**

\* Destitution of asylum seekers and refugees in Birmingham, May 2005  
[www.asirt.org.uk/destitution/docs/FinalDestitutionReportMay05DBamended.doc](http://www.asirt.org.uk/destitution/docs/FinalDestitutionReportMay05DBamended.doc)



## Focus on media

### How to get your story into the media

by Dominic O'Reilly, Director of Communications Services, Media Trust

Getting media coverage is not nearly as hard as it seems. You just have to know how it works and follow a few basic principles and you'll succeed, especially with the regional media. Most regional newspapers and broadcasters are under-staffed and keen for people in their local community to supply them with stories. Create story ideas and put them across in a concise and snappy way and you're almost guaranteed regular coverage in local and regional radio, television stations and newspapers. You can use them to lobby councils or MPs, change local opinion about refugees and counter any inaccurate articles or broadcasts. Many refugee community organisations (RCOs) rely on umbrella organisations to do media relations on their behalf but there are plenty of free services out there to give them the necessary skills and confidence.

Media Trust is a registered charity that brings together

the media industry and the community and voluntary sector. We're funded through government grants, donations and paid-for services and we help the charity sector with its communications and media skills.

We have many free services to help not-for-profit groups get their message across. With Community Newswire two journalists will help you develop your media campaigns and press releases and then send them to every newspaper and broadcaster in your region in a format that they know, trust and can use for free.

Media Matching pairs charities with experienced communications professionals who want to volunteer their skills for either one-off projects or ongoing work. We are running a series of training seminars around England on new media, between now and April. You can also download free online guides, which can be used as reference material. For further information on all of these free services visit [www.mediatrust.org](http://www.mediatrust.org) or call 020 7874 7610.

### Supporting RCOs' media work

The Refugee Council is reviewing the support it can give to RCOs with their campaigning and media work. We know that many RCOs are keen to do more to fight back against government policies and to get their message into the papers and onto the airwaves. We believe the Refugee Council has an important role to play in this area, given our campaign and media expertise. But we have limited capacity and we do not want to duplicate support provided by others. So in the coming months we will be inviting RCOs to workshops to advise us on a strategy. For more information, email [campaigns@refugeecouncil.org.uk](mailto:campaigns@refugeecouncil.org.uk)

### Take Action!

If you or your organisation are involved or interested in refugees and the media in London there is a new information-sharing network facilitated by the Exiled Journalists Network and Oxfam UK. Next meeting: **5 October** at the Greater London Authority. For more information call **Forward Maisokwado** on 07919 894 900.

[www.askCHARITY.org.uk](http://www.askCHARITY.org.uk) is a new database of charity contacts specially designed for journalists. It is a free service and any charity that would like more media coverage can register by filling in an online form at [www.askcharity.org.uk/signup.php](http://www.askcharity.org.uk/signup.php).

### Reporting Asylum - the London Press Awards 2006

Each year in December, the Mayor of London awards individuals, to recognise the good practice of London's newspapers in covering refugee and asylum issues and to showcase reporting that is fair and accurate. London's press covers: local, regional, faith or Black, Asian and minority ethnic newspapers.

To enter a newspaper for the awards, you need two positive examples from a 2006 London newspaper

in any of these categories: 1. news reports; 2. comment articles; 3. visual material e.g. photos, cartoons, headlines; 4. any of these in a faith or Black, Asian or ethnic minority newspapers. For details on how to enter, visit [www.london.gov.uk/mayor/equalities/pressawards](http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/equalities/pressawards) or call 020 7983 4511.

**Closing date Tuesday 31 October.**



## Sharing Experience

### Afghan Community Organisation of London

*Dr. Nooralhaq Nasimi, Co-ordinator of Afghan Community Organisation of London (ACOL) talks to RCO News about their services and what the UK government could do to reduce destitution among refugees and asylum seekers in the UK.*

I came to the UK with my family in 1999 as a refugee and set up ACOL in 2003 to provide advice, information and support to the Afghan community living in the UK, particularly refugees, asylum seekers and elderly people. I wanted to help Afghan new arrivals to adapt faster to their new environment and feel less isolated by giving them the opportunity to learn English and to exchange information and share problems with others in their own community.

Two decades of war in Afghanistan has meant that many people from my country, particularly young Afghans, have not had access to education. At ACOL, we strive to raise awareness of the importance of education and to improve the level of education in the Afghan community. Two of our most successful projects are ESOL classes for Afghan women and our Afghan Supplementary School for children. Every Saturday, our volunteer teachers help young Afghan children, many of whom are unaccompanied children, with their homework and English language difficulties. We are planning to expand our services by providing an after school club and job search facility.

Our quarterly magazine: *Afghan Initiative Magazine* helps to inform readers about the services we provide, upcoming events and news from Afghanistan.

We provide citizenship courses to those who are permanently settled in the UK which I think is integral to the integration process. We also regularly organise a variety of free cultural and social events; this is a fun way of showing the local community what our culture is all about and enhancing integration.

Afghanistan is not a safe country and understandably, people whose asylum claims have been refused do not want to return to an unsafe country. Every month we see about fifteen destitute asylum seekers and refugees. We advocate on their behalf by writing to their local MPs for support or refer them to the Refugee Council, local authorities or other relevant agencies depending on individual cases. I think the Government could reduce destitution by giving asylum seekers the right to work, access to health care and adequate benefits. Asylum seekers should be able to retain their dignity and be given cash to buy necessities and not vouchers.

I believe our organisation is a success and I am optimistic for the future. We welcome and support people irrespective of their race, sex, gender or faith. ACOL's future development relies on the continued commitment and involvement of our community. For more information contact **Dr. Nasimi** on 020 7358 8200 or email [nooralhaqnasimi@btinternet.com](mailto:nooralhaqnasimi@btinternet.com) or visit [www.afghancommunity.co.uk](http://www.afghancommunity.co.uk)



## Funding News

### Support for work with refugees and asylum seekers (UK)

The LankellyChase Foundation has announced that from August 2006 onwards it will amend its support programme for refugees and asylum seekers by focusing its support on those agencies which work within detention centres or whose prime aim is

combating the destitution faced by asylum seekers who have been refused leave to remain in this country. Eligible organisations can apply for revenue grants of between £5,000 and £15,000 per annum for periods of up to three years as well as one off capital grants of up to £10,000. Applications can be made at any time. For more information visit [www.lankellychase.org.uk/bulletinboard.htm](http://www.lankellychase.org.uk/bulletinboard.htm)

## Capacitybuilders: new funding for marginalised groups

Improving Reach is a new funding programme which aims to improve access to capacity building and support for a range of frontline organisations that may not have been reached in previous ChangeUp programmes. In particular the programme is aimed at: black and minority ethnic

groups; refugee and migrant groups; faith groups; and isolated rural groups. Improving Reach is open to all charities, voluntary or community organisations. For further information, visit [www.capacitybuilders.org.uk/fund](http://www.capacitybuilders.org.uk/fund)



## Refugee Teacher Development Project

It is estimated that there are hundreds of refugee teachers in the UK who want to work in the education sector, but meet significant barriers and have difficulty accessing information. The Refugee Teacher Development Project (RTDP) hopes to change this.

The RTDP is a national project, with a focus on London and Birmingham, which aims to provide an ongoing information, guidance and training service for teachers hoping to work in the UK. The project is led by the Refugee Council, and will signpost potential teachers to various forms of training available through our partners and other providers. Teachers will be

asked to register on our database, and their details will be used to map and monitor the distribution and number of teachers in the UK, and allow us to give specific training advice and referral. The final aim is to get teachers to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) or other suitable classroom roles.

For enquiries about the project, please contact the project manager **Fiona Prendergast** on 020 7346 1233 or [Fiona.prendergast@refugeecouncil.org.uk](mailto:Fiona.prendergast@refugeecouncil.org.uk). If you would like to register, please contact **Juliette Stevenson** on 020 7346 1166 or [juliette.stevenson@refugeecouncil.org.uk](mailto:juliette.stevenson@refugeecouncil.org.uk)

### ESOL classes

The Refugee Council Learning & Integration Unit is running free ESOL Entry 3 classes for refugees from mid September. Course duration: 14 weeks, four days per week (10am till 4pm). Venue: Vauxhall, South London. Travel and childcare expenses are available. For more information call **Vesna** on 020 7840 4488 or email [training@refugeecouncil.org.uk](mailto:training@refugeecouncil.org.uk). Eligibility criteria: Refugee status (ILR/EL/HP)

### Free classes for asylum seekers

The College of North East London is offering free classes to asylum seekers in North London in: basic IT skills; Life in the UK; Literacy and language skills; ESOL and health services. All courses start September 2006. Free crèche, travel allowance (bus pass) and student book allowance. Proof of asylum seeker status (e.g. IND card /letter) is required. For more information, call **Charmaine** on 020 8442 3576 / 07736 126 492

### Media event

**askCHARITY.org.uk** is organising an event in London called *Snapshots... on Race, Refugee and Asylum* issues in partnership with the BBC in November 2006. The aim of the event is to introduce 30 charities working with refugees to 30 BBC Radio 4 programme makers. If you are interested in having your organisation represented at *Snapshots*, email **Flora** at [flora@askcharity.org.uk](mailto:flora@askcharity.org.uk) or call 020 7785 6392.

### Who's who at the Refugee Council?

#### Mavis Kazichi – Children's Panel

I started working with the Refugee Council in 1994 as a Panel Adviser for unaccompanied children. My job is to help separated children find their way through the asylum procedure, and to help them integrate into UK life. This may mean visiting children who have been wrongly detained; liaising with legal representatives to ensure that children get good quality legal advice, liaising with social services departments to ensure that children are getting the support they need and a variety of other professionals.



Over the years I have worked with more than 500 children. With most cases I have enjoyed helping the child to overcome their difficulties and settle in the UK, but sometimes I have shared their sadness as we have not been able to get a positive outcome for them.

If you would like to speak to any of the Advisers in the Children's Panel, please call our **Advice and Referral Line** on 020 7346 1134.

### Fighting poverty in the UK

The Refugee Council will be co-ordinating the sector's involvement in national initiatives being launched to fight poverty in the UK. In December, a major conference focussing on poverty will be held in London, with the Refugee Council as a key partner. A coalition of organisations including: trade unions, faith groups and NGOs is also being established to ensure that UK poverty is one of the top issues addressed by the political parties in the run up to the next general election. For more information email [campaigns@refugeecouncil.org.uk](mailto:campaigns@refugeecouncil.org.uk)