

RCD News



Newsletter from the Community Development Team

Refugee Week 2004 Communities celebrate and break down prejudice

Congratulations and thank-you to everyone who contributed an event to Refugee Week 2004! The week, which run from 14th-20th June, was a great success! Literally thousands of events were organised around the country, ranging from music concerts, cultural evenings, football tournaments, barbecues, art exhibitions, debates and seminars. Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs), refugee agencies, arts organisations, schools, local authorities and many more all took part. The Celebrating Sanctuary festival in London launched the week with a huge celebration of music, food, art and culture from London's refugee communities, held on the South Bank. Over 15,000 people attended over the day, in glorious sunshine. Elsewhere across the UK, cultural festivals also celebrated Refugee Week in style.

Refugee Week aims to celebrate the contribution that refugees make to life in the UK and educate the public about the reasons why people need to seek sanctuary. This year there was a particular focus on illustrating the impact of war and conflict on the lives of people around the globe. For example, an art exhibition and debate with senior media figures examined the reasons refugees had had to flee from Eastern Europe. Refugee Week is such a success because of the amazing skills and effort of people organising events. The participation of RCOs is vital to the ongoing impact of the week, and the Refugee Week organisers are keen to support and develop ways of encouraging RCOs to get involved. The funding available from the Refugee Week Community Chest was increased this year in order to facilitate RCO involvement, although there were still more

applications than it was possible to fund. RCO events are extremely important as they encourage communities to mix and get to know each other on a local level. Contact Gabriella in the Community Development Team on 020 7820 3070 or Lucy at Refugee Week on 020 7820 3105 if you would like to discuss RCO participation for next year.

European Social Forum (ESF)

The third ESF will take place in London 14-17 October. It aims to create a space where individuals, community groups, organisations, trade unions and campaigners can discuss how to achieve global social justice for all and make "another world possible". There are likely to be debates relating to refugee and human rights, as well as cultural and art performances. To find out about the ESF refugee network contact Elane Heffernan on esfrefugeenet@tiscali.co.uk or if you want to get involved in the cultural and arts side, contact Doug on doug@abelard.org.uk, or 07949714965. For more information go to www.fse-esf.org

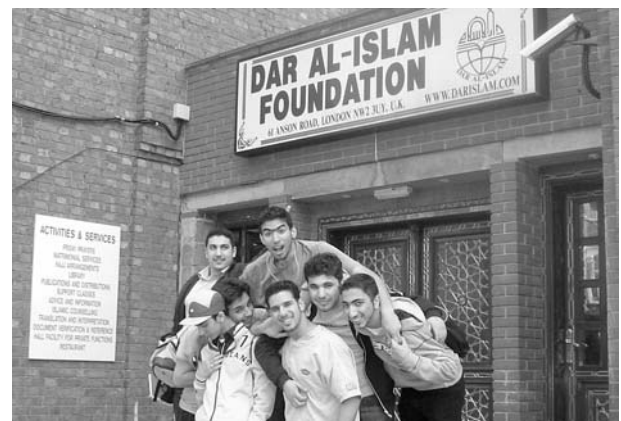


Photo: Shabab al Mehdi encourages youth participation.



Asylum seekers win back their rights to basic food and shelter

The Home Office has decided to reinstate basic levels of support to asylum seekers, even if they do not make their asylum claim immediately. This follows a massive campaign by the Refugee Council, RCOs and other refugee agencies to force the Government to revise the controversial Section 55 legislation, which denies basic food and housing to asylum seekers who did not make their claim for asylum at ports of entry such as Heathrow or Dover.

The Home Office's decision was prompted by a ruling from the Court of Appeal last month, which found that in the case of three destitute asylum seekers their human rights had been breached. The Government has stated its intention to challenge this ruling in the House of Lords. However, the Refugee Council welcomes the decision as it currently stands. "Hungry and Homeless", a Refugee Council report published earlier this year, found that of 130 organisations working with asylum seekers, 74% had seen clients who experienced hunger, were sleeping rough and lacked basic essentials like clothes and toiletries, as a result of Section 55.

Update on new Charities Bill

On 27th May, the Home Office published the draft Charities Bill, which proposes wide-ranging changes to charity legislation. The Bill is based on proposals outlined in the "Private Action, Public Benefit" report that was released for consultation last Autumn. The main changes include new definitions of what are charitable purposes and a proposal for a new organisational structure.

Nothing which is currently defined as charitable will stop being so in the new Bill. The Bill proposes 12 charitable purposes. These are advancement of: education, religion, health, citizenship or community development, the arts, heritage or science, amateur sport; human rights, conflict resolution or reconciliation; environmental protection or improvement, and animal welfare. Also included are: prevention or relief of poverty; the relief of those in need due to youth, age, ill-health, disability, financial hardship or any other disadvantage; and any other currently charitable purpose.

The Bill also creates a new organisational structure, the Charitable Incorporated Organisation. The aim is to allow organisations to become charities and to become incorporated (ie companies) in one procedure. Organisations currently have to register both with the Charity Commission and with Companies House. Further changes are clauses to make it easier for individual charity trustees to receive payment for providing an additional service to the organisation.

The Bill is currently being discussed by a special committee made up of members of the House of Lords and the House of Commons. The committee will examine evidence relating to the Bill over the Summer and will publish a report in the Autumn. The Bill will then begin to go through Parliament. Organisations which are already registered as charities will continue to be so and will not need to take any further action.

For more information contact the Charity Commission on 0870 333 0123,
www.charitycommission.gov.uk

Funding News

Big Lottery Fund

Last month the Community Fund merged with the New Opportunities Fund to become the Big Lottery Fund. However, the Community Fund priorities in London remain the same: older people and their carers; refugees and asylum seekers; developing infrastructure and building capacity of small BME groups. For more details go to www.community-fund.org.uk or call 020 7587 6609.

Refugee Community Development Fund

This provides grants of up to £5,000 to organisations that work with refugee communities. Applications are particularly welcome from smaller grassroots organisations and emerging groups. Projects must be for

work with those who have achieved full refugee status, or those given protection on humanitarian grounds or discretionary leave to remain in the UK. The deadline is the end of the year. For more information go to <http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/default.asp?PageId=3294>

Microsoft Community Learning Awards 2004

Microsoft will distribute 25 awards of £2,000 to community organisations who are tackling digital exclusion by providing opportunities for disadvantaged young people and adults to learn about IT through community-based technology and learning centres. The deadline is 9th August 2004. For more information go to www.microsoft.com/uk/community/community/awards/

Sharing Experiences

RCO News talks to Shabab al Mehdi about increasing youth participation

Shabab al Mehdi was set up by a group of young Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers in 2001. They run activities and events to provide support, leisure and learning opportunities and increase employment for young people from many different communities. Key to their philosophy is the aim "to be run by youth for youth" and so young people volunteer regularly and are represented on an executive committee that discusses activities, objectives and priorities, and feeds into management committee meetings. This facilitates the participation of those who are under 18 years old, and young people who are not able to commit to being on the management committee itself.

According to Mustafa Fields, the Chair, many young refugees and those from minority ethnic communities feel extremely isolated, especially those who are in the UK alone. Some live by themselves in hostel accommodation and do not know what support and services are available to them. Shabab al Mehdi (which means Youth of the Future) aims to inform them of available opportunities and provide them with support and a sense of community. Education and employment are very important, and the organisation runs basic skills training and CV workshops in partnership with other local agencies. Leisure opportunities are also key to combating isolation, and Shabab al Mehdi runs weekly sessions of pool, boxing and tai kwando, as well as regular trips. They also organise weekly debates, in which around 70 young people gather to eat, listen to speakers and discuss. The young people take turns as speakers, thereby building their confidence.

Shabab al Mehdi believe the organisation is a success because the young people are so involved in choosing and running activities. This also gives them valuable experience and boosts their self-esteem. The organisation would like to encourage other refugee community organisations to consider ways of increasing youth participation.

For more information contact Mustafa Fields on 020 8452 7633 or 07946515987.





Jobs at the Refugee Council

The Refugee Council is an equal opportunities employer and actively encourages job applications from refugees and asylum seekers. All vacancies are advertised on the Jobs in Charities website, which can be found via a link from the Refugee Council web-page at www.refugeecouncil.org.uk.

The Community Development Team will shortly be recruiting for a new fundraising worker.

Inland Revenue Seminar

On 27th July the Community Development Team is holding a training on Inland Revenue services, such as taxes and PAYE. For more information and to book a place, see the flyer enclosed with this newsletter.

Medical Foundation Training

The Medical Foundation runs free training for people working in RCOs on the mental health needs of refugees and asylum seekers who have experienced torture and organised violence. Courses in September look at counselling and depression, and in October and November focus on health and setting up groups. A one-day conference will be held on 18th December. For more information contact Paula Robinson on 020 7697 7824, probinson@torturecare.org.uk

Useful web-sites

www.commedia.org.uk

The Community Media Association supports grassroots community-based media initiatives, such as community radio stations.

www.governmentfunding.org.uk

Provides information and updates on current funding sources available from the Government.

New guidelines on Charity trustees

The Charity Commission is currently consulting on draft guidance on Checking the Eligibility of Charity Trustees. The Commission believes that trustee eligibility is crucial to good charity management, especially for charities which are dealing with vulnerable clients. Most charities should have a clause in their governing document relating to disqualification of trustees, and the Commission recommends that all charities ask new trustees to sign a declaration confirming they are not disqualified.

In addition, charities that work with children or vulnerable adults and can carry out Criminal Records Bureau checks on trustees are strongly advised to do so, even when it is not a legal requirement. If the poorly-judged appointment of a trustee leads to a serious error or event, the Commission would look to see if other trustees had carried out proper and relevant checks before the appointment. The guidance also gives suggestions for recruiting new trustees and stresses the importance of proper induction and ongoing training.

The Commission welcomes comments on the new guidance, to be submitted before 20th August 2004. In particular, it would like to know if organisations think the guidance provides enough protection to vulnerable beneficiaries and clients. Also, for organisations which already carry out CRB checks, will the new guidance have any adverse effects on this?

A full copy of the draft guidance can be found on www.charitycommission.gov.uk All comments should be sent to sue.smith@charitycommission.gsi.gov.uk

For further details, please contact the Community Information Adviser on 020 7820 3070 or visit our website at www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

