

RCO News



Newsletter from the Community Development Team

Inclusive Secondary Schools Project

Refugee and asylum seeker children and young people are amongst the most vulnerable pupils in schools. In addition to this, their parents and carers often lack a solid understanding of the English education system, including the teaching and learning methods used in schools. In an effort to address these issues, the Refugee Council is undertaking a three-year action research project called Inclusive Secondary Schools Project (ISSP) funded by the KPMG Foundation. This work will increase the inclusion and raise the achievement of refugee and asylum seeker children at English schools. The project will be based in London, the West Midlands, Yorkshire and Humberside and the East of England region.

The ISSP aims to research and pilot new ways of working that link secondary schools and Local Education Authorities (LEA) with refugee parents, carers and refugee community organisations (RCOs). Lisa Doyle, the Inclusive Schools Research Project Co-ordinator says: "Our ultimate goal is to engage and empower refugee parents, carers, RCOs and children and young people through active participation, research and development."

The first stage of the project will investigate the current relationship between RCOs, schools and LEAs through a postal survey and consultation events. The project team will also conduct interviews and focus groups to explore the expectations, barriers and issues identified by refugee parents, carers, children and young people, RCOs and schools.

The findings from the first stage will help the team to focus on the needs of parents, carers and RCOs and identify successful ways of working. This information will then be used to guide four partnerships of schools and RCOs through one-year pilot projects. The outcomes of the project will be disseminated through a report, regional seminars, a national conference and a toolkit for RCOs translated into key community languages.



An early learner who attends Light Project International's Saturday homework class

How can you get involved?

RCOs know what barriers refugees and asylum seekers face, and what practical assistance may be of use. It is therefore crucial that RCOs are involved in this work and that refugee views and concerns about current policy and practice are heard. The project will support RCOs in helping their service users to engage with schools and therefore improve the experiences of refugee and asylum seeker children.

If you are a refugee parent, carer, an RCO or work within education, your experiences and expertise are crucial to the success of this project. For more information on the project and to find out how you can get involved, please contact **Calvin Armstrong** on: 020 7346 1162 or e-mail: calvin.armstrong@refugeecouncil.org.uk

Never too old to learn!

At the age of 96, Bernard Herzberg has been awarded the official title of **England's Oldest Learner**. A former refugee from Germany, Bernard recently completed a Masters degree in Refugee Studies at the University of East London. He said 'I'm now making use of my studies by going on demonstrations and trying to improve the situation of refugees adapting to life in this country: "For the full story visit: www.uel.ac.uk/news/latest_news/stories/96.htm"





Radical new strategic body to give a greater voice to the refugee sector on refugee employability

A groundbreaking new London wide project, London Refugee Economic Action (LORECA), which will develop a strategic plan to support refugees into employment, training and enterprise, was officially launched on 12th October 2005. LORECA seeks to increase refugee communities' influence with government, by serving as a voice for the sector on employment issues. The project has strategic backing from London government agencies and aims to work with both government and the private sector, including employers and others to promote the contribution that refugees can make to London's economy. LORECA was established in order to challenge and overcome the numerous barriers encountered by refugees who wish to participate to their full potential in London's economy.

Initially, LORECA will strengthen the capacity of services aimed at refugees by mapping existing provision and developing targeted resources for the refugee sector. LORECA is developing a network of organisations engaged in these issues, which will share best practice and consult on policy matters. LORECA's website: www.loreca.org.uk will host much of this information.

At the launch, Andy Burnham MP, the Home Office Minister responsible for refugee integration delivered the

keynote speech and introduced the **LORECA Employment, Training and Enterprise Directory** and wished LORECA every success in bringing co-ordination and strategic leadership to the many organisations concerned with the employability of refugees in London. Other speakers, including Lee Jasper, for the Greater London Authority and Simin Azimi, Director, Refugee Women's Association endorsed this position.

The Directory will be a key resource for the London refugee sector as it contains over 850 entries of organisations delivering services on employment and training to refugees. It can be downloaded **free of charge** from the LORECA website or ordered in hard copy (exclusive of £7.50 post and packing) from the Resource Information Service 020 7939 0641 or e-mail ris@ris.org.uk

LORECA's partnership consists of Off the Streets and into Work, Refugee Council, Refugee Women's Association, UK NARIC and Resource Information Service (associate partner). The European Social Fund, Learning and Skills Council and the London Development Agency fund LORECA.

For more information, contact **Jon Williams** on 020 7089 2728 or email jon@loreca.org.uk

Disadvantage, Disengagement and Discrimination in London's Labour Market (3Ds Research Project)

The 3Ds Research Project lists and analyses London initiatives that have been designed to tackle the barriers to labour market participation experienced by disadvantaged groups. The two-year London-wide research project is being carried out by the Working Lives Research Institute at London Metropolitan University and is funded by LSC Pan-London Objective 3 Co-Financing.

The aim of the project is to enhance the employability of individuals from disadvantaged groups including refugees and asylum seekers. Feedback from these groups has been collated through a questionnaire. A database has been created which lists all the questionnaire responses, which will be made available to all stakeholders together with an

analysis of the results and good practice case studies. If you would like to be involved in developing an accurate London-wide picture of existing activities, please fill in the on-line questionnaire or download it in a pdf format from our webpage www.workinglives.org./disadvantage.html.

Interviews and focus groups will also be conducted as part of the research. If you would like to be interviewed about your experience in helping to tackle the barriers to labour market participation, or would like to nominate potential interviewees, please contact us either, **Monika Beutel** on 0207 320 1371 or **Anna Paraskevopoulou** on 0207 320 1351 or email m.beutel@londonmet.ac.uk or a.paraskevopoulou@londonmet.ac.uk

Support Refugee Integration for London

Mayor of London Ken Livingstone is committed to helping London's refugees and asylum seekers to play their full part in the life of the city. From April 2006 he will take strategic leadership of work on refugee integration across London. His Greater London Authority is looking for someone to develop and deliver consultation with communities and other key

stakeholders on this new model for refugee integration - for four months from December.

Salary £33,099 pro rata.

Closing date for applications is noon 28 November 2005. Full details and application form at www.london.gov.uk/jobs.jsp or call 020 7983 4557



Sharing Experience

Light Project International

“RCO News talks to Micheline Ngongo, Chairperson of Light Project International about improving refugee children’s integration into the British education system.”

The Light Project International (LPI) was established in London last year in order to provide educational and recreational activities to help young African and Caribbean refugee and asylum seekers reach their full potential both in and out of school. All of our 20 staff members are volunteers who are committed to raising community awareness about issues affecting young African and Caribbean refugee and asylum seeker children. They provide advice, information and counselling on a variety of issues including health and education.

We run a Saturday homework club for children aged 5 to 16 which is funded by the Community Chest fund, focusing on subjects like Maths, English and French. Islington Local Education Authority has been very supportive by training up our homework club volunteer teachers. The classes are very popular and once the children come a few times, they really reap the benefits. Stephen Kalama, a 10 year old boy who attends says: ‘The first time I went to this Saturday homework club, a teacher gave me two test sheets to do, to understand what stage I was at in my school work. At first the work was very hard for me to do but a teacher came and helped me. This Saturday club has also helped me a lot in my exams at school.’

During the school holidays, we run a play scheme where the children can take part in dancing competitions, music workshops and sports activities.

The play scheme enables the children to discover hidden talents, improve their skills and ultimately boost their self-confidence. We also organise regular school holiday excursions to London museums and parks to combat isolation and to raise children’s cultural and environmental awareness.

Many refugee parents are frustrated because they struggle to help their children with school work due to language barriers and a lack of understanding about the British education system. We like to involve parents in all our activities in an effort to motivate and help them to get more involved in their child’s personal and educational development. I think schools should forge stronger links with refugee parents by organising workshops to discuss and inform them about major issues that may affect their child’s education. There are many highly educated refugee parents who would willingly contribute ideas to improve refugee parents’ participation in their child’s schooling. LPI will shortly be holding workshops for refugee parents looking at how children learn and how we can motivate them to learn.

By improving and developing our current services, we aim to promote cohesion between the diverse cultures in our community, introducing people to new activities and ultimately encouraging community members to take a more positive view about the rich contribution that refugees and asylum seekers make to UK life.

For more information, contact **Micheline Ngongo** on 07944 722 212 or email michellesafi@yahoo.co.uk

Funding news

Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (JRCT)

Joseph Rowntree, the founder of JRCT was an active philanthropist, and social innovator who believed that the world’s injustices should be solved by focusing on the root of the problem and not by providing temporary measures of relief. The JRCT continues to promote Rowntree’s progressive beliefs by providing funding to individuals and projects that contribute towards political equality and racial justice. This includes empowering black and minority ethnic people to engage in decision making and policy development, and work which monitors and challenges racism and racial injustice whether relating to colour or culture. The Trust also funds work addressing issues and

policies that affect **refugees** and **asylum seekers**. Examples of past funded projects can be found on the JRCT website. Applications can be submitted at any time, however bear in mind that the Trust has only three grant cycles each year. Closing dates for applications: **3rd January 2006, 10th April 2006, and 4th September 2006.**

For more information contact: **Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust** The Garden House, Water End, York, YO30 6WQ. Tel: 01904 627810 or visit: <http://www.jrct.org.uk/default.asp>



Searching for two Afghan film stars!

Dreamworks is searching for two boys to star in **The Kite Runner**, a film based on the novel by Khaled Hosseini and directed by **Marc Forster** (Finding Neverland). It is an epic tale that spans the final days of Afghanistan's monarchy up to the brutal reign of the Taliban. The film focuses on the friendship between two boys, Amir and Hassan.

Dreamworks is looking for two Afghan, fluent Farsi speaking boys for the role of **Amir** and **Hassan** who

should look between the ages of 10 and 11. These are lead roles but the children do not need to have had previous acting experience. Filming is due to start around **April 2006**.

If you are interested and would like more detailed information about required characteristics for these roles, contact **Kate Dowd, Casting** on 0207 491 2090 or email katedowdcast@aol.com

Financial Literacy Project

As outlined in July's RCO News, the Refugee Council in conjunction with Services Against Financial Exclusion (SAFE), the HM Inland Revenue and One London, is conducting a new financial literacy project supported by HBOS Foundation. The courses will be targeted at financially excluded individuals with refugee backgrounds. Following the questionnaire that was sent out to survey clients' training needs and to identify appropriate course topics, we are pleased to inform our clients that we have selected 5 topics which will be delivered as pilot courses in **December 2005** and possibly **January 2006**. The topics are: **Business Awareness**,

Financial Planning, Would you credit it? Individual Budget Preparation and **Individuals & Employee, Self-employed**. We would like to thank those of you who completed our training needs questionnaire and look forward to seeing you at the training. Please book early to avoid disappointment.

If you would like to participate in the training and need further information, please contact **Girma Afley** 020 7346 1161 or **Sara Milocco** 020 7346 1095 at the Refugee Council or email sara.milocco@refugeecouncil.org.uk

London Wide Training 2006

The Community Development Team (CDT) will be running its winter London Wide Training for RCOs and other organisations from **January to March 2006**. A training brochure will shortly be sent to you, outlining courses, dates and fees. For any **CDT** training enquiries, contact **Penny McLean** at the Refugee Council on 0207 346 1052.

New publication

The National Information Forum has published a guide entitled: **How to Access Disability Services**. The guide has been produced primarily for refugee community organisations in London who need help when dealing with queries received from disabled refugee or asylum seekers or those who care for them. It is also a vital resource for *any* service providers in the refugee, disability and statutory sectors. Topics include: community care, health services, money, equipment, housing, education, employment and leisure. **Price:** £12.99 each (statutory agencies); £5.99 each (voluntary agencies).

To order call the **National Information Forum** on 020 7402 6681, fax on 020 7402 1259, email info@nif.org.uk or order online at www.nif.org.uk

Meet the team! Maryan Cisman – Volunteer

I am Somalian and came to this country three and a half years ago. I have been volunteering with the Community Development Team (CDT) for nearly four months. It has been an amazing opportunity for me to meet incredible people, give something back to the community and



to show employers that refugees have a lot to contribute and are willing to work no matter what it takes. As part of Year of the Volunteer, I was interviewed on BBC Radio 4 and very nervously talked about volunteering and how it is helping me to get experience, improve my English; in other words, to hopefully get a job offer not far away in the future! My ideal job would be to have my own importing and exporting business which would allow me to travel a lot and learn more about different cultures and ways of life.