

Working together to build a powerful movement that meets the needs of refugees

On Tuesday 28 April 2009 we convened a conference to explore a new way of working together. We decided to do this as a result of the feedback we had received from many refugee organisations about the need for the Refugee Council to develop new, stronger and more inclusive models of leadership.

As the first conference of its type, we piloted a format which we hoped would ensure inclusivity and strong participation by all involved. The new format was based on the principles of Open Space. At Open Space conferences the issues that are discussed are not decided in advance. Rather, the people who turn up are provided with a central theme and then decide on the topics for discussion. The central theme for the day was drawn up by the RCO and NGO trustees of the Refugee Council, so that it reflected issues members might like to discuss. The theme was:

How can we work together to build a powerful movement that meets the needs of refugees?

The question generated a lot of debate and we were fortunate to have a good mix of organisations which provided a broad range of views on topics related to the central theme. I was particularly impressed by the breadth of subjects we were able to cover during the day. For example, we considered ways we might work together to:

- stop the practice of children being held in detention
- end destitution amongst asylum seekers
- foster good understanding amongst each other
- challenge negative stereotypes of asylum seekers; and
- ensure that gender specific refugee experiences are given equal focus in campaigning and lobbying.

I think we've all been to conferences which have been incredibly interesting and thought provoking but which haven't given us enough time to share our ideas and experiences with colleagues. The



Participants at the Open Space conference

general consensus of the conference seemed to be that the Open Space format moves us away from those limitations. Everyone had ample opportunity to both contribute to, and facilitate, discussions around topics of interest to us. Throughout the day I was inspired by the depth of experience and knowledge we have to draw from when we work together.

A report is available which summarises the day's discussions. If you would like a copy, please contact the Chief Executive's Office at the Refugee Council on **020 7346 6709** or at chief.executive@refugeecouncil.org.uk. At the Refugee Council we are currently looking at ways that we might best use the report to inform our own work. My hope is that you will also consider it as an organisational resource to inform the development of local, regional, and/or national strategies.

As this year's conference was a pilot, we limited attendance to our member organisations, and a few guests they invited. Following the success of the conference we look forward to hosting an annual event and broadening participation. We hope you will join us in the future to continue to build on the strength of our sector in advocating for, and meeting the needs of, refugees and asylum seekers.

Donna Covey
Chief Executive

Policy and campaigns update

Refugee Council "Let them work" campaign

The 'Let them work' campaign to push for asylum seekers to be given the right to work after six months is beginning to develop real momentum. We now have 22 Trade Unions in support together with RCOs, faith groups and other charities such as Shelter, Banardos and STAR.

And a growing number of people and organisations have signed our campaign pledge – have you signed yet?

All of this pressure is building up to a national lobby of MPs in their constituencies on the weekend of 26 - 27 June 2009. We want to identify as much support in Parliament for this campaign as possible across all of the political

parties for a concerted effort to give asylum seekers the entitlement to work.



Please visit our website to get the latest on this campaign and for the briefing pack to help you lobby your MP in June <http://tiny.cc/HjjWA> – do please get involved today!

For more information please contact **Jonathan Ellis**, Policy Director jonathan.ellis@refugeecouncil.org.uk or **Tom Viita** Regional Campaigns Officer in Leeds tom.viita@refugeecouncil.org.uk

Campaigning together against destitution

Introducing the Refugee Council's Refugee Empowerment Project

Many refugee community organisations (RCOs) deal with the consequences of UK government policy on refused asylum seekers as destitute people turn to them for support. So this is one of many areas where RCOs are well-positioned to campaign. Why? Because they are working at a grassroots level.

With this in mind, the Refugee Empowerment Project, funded by the City Parochial Foundation, will bring together 18 individuals from RCOs based in the London boroughs of Brent, Barnet and Camden in a one year campaigning project that aims to tackle the problem of destitution of asylum seekers. In a series of workshops delivered by campaigning specialists, the 18 campaigners will build on their skills, look at different campaigning tools, develop their own campaign strategies and, through active campaigning against destitution, learn together what works and what doesn't.

This exciting project aims not only to take steps to tackle together the underlying causes of destitution, but also to explore how RCOs and the Refugee Council can jointly pursue common campaigning goals in the future.

For further information contact **Anna Musgrave**: anna.musgrave@refugeecouncil.org.uk / 020 7346 6744

OutCry! – Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID) and The Children's Society are working together to end immigration detention of children.

Every year around 2,000 children in the UK are detained for the purposes of immigration control. Detention can have a devastating impact on children who have little understanding of what they have done to deserve being locked up.

We believe detaining children is damaging, expensive and unnecessary and we will be campaigning under the banner OutCry! for the Government to change its policy so that children are no longer locked up in detention centres.

We are also working directly with children and families affected by immigration detention -

providing legal support to families to get out of detention and welfare support to families who are detained. Our services are free of charge.

If, like us, you think detaining children is unacceptable please add your voice to the campaign by signing up at www.biduk.org or www.childrenssociety.org.uk/campaigns

To refer a family for support to make a bail application contact BID on 020 7650 0724 and for welfare support contact The Children's Society on 01234 348 954.

Sharing experience

Haringey Somali Community and Cultural Association

Mohamed O Maigag, Director of Haringey Somali Community and Cultural Association talks to RCO News about RCOs' contribution to community cohesion and securing funding in challenging times.

HSCCA was established in 1989 to provide welfare advice to Somali refugees in Haringey following the Somalia civil war in the 1980s. We now offer a range of pan London services to Somali refugees and other nationalities. Our services include: a weekend supplementary school to boost Somali children's educational achievement levels; a health project to support refugees' access to health services; a legal advice project*; and our Supporting People Project, which helps vulnerable Somali adults to access health and welfare advice, and to ensure that they do not become homeless.

We have just been successful in accessing funding from The Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund, to run a two year Education and Advice Support Project, which will help Somali parents to better understand the UK education system. We will do this by organising seminars on key educational issues, mentoring – by matching Somali graduates with Somali students, and by working closely with the Local Education Authority.

The key to successful funding is to be genuine and to articulate the need. Your RCO needs to be connected, by this I mean working with your local authority, participating in local community forums and networking. There are cultural issues that can prevent RCOs from networking. In Somali culture networking feels uncomfortable because it involves an element of boasting. We say "a person who boasts is like a goat that sucks its own milk". But we have to work on this and understand how networking can benefit our communities.

RCO leaders are the engines behind their organisations and should be crowned for the work they do, including marketing, fundraising, managing, recruiting and so on. Despite their

workload, RCO leaders can't wait for things to come to them. Funders will often ask: what partnerships are you involved in? How well connected are you to your community? However funders do need to take a chance on those RCOs that may not have a track record, but that do great work.



Receptionist, Fadumo Ahmed and Director, Mohamed O Maigag

I believe RCOs like ours play a huge "bridging" role in contributing to community cohesion. There is no evidence based research to support the Government' proposal to stop funding single nationality groups (SNG). As we say in Somalia: "barasho kahor ha i nicin" – don't hate me before you know me. For example a young member of our community was murdered in 2000. He was just starting out in life and about to enrol in college. We worked very closely with Enfield police and the youth community and managed to calm community tensions. If we hadn't intervened, there would have been chaos. As a result of this experience, the Enfield police respect our relationship with the Somali community and are keen to work with us in the future.

Please contact us on **020 8801 1307** or email hscca@btconnect.com to find out more.

Funding news

Sport England Small Grants Programme

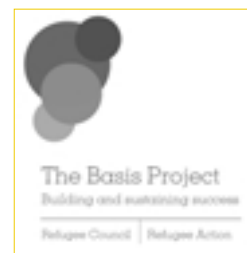
The Sport England Small Grants Programme has been set up to support local community sport projects which seek to increase or sustain participation or develop opportunities for people to excel at their chosen sport. Grants are available for activities such as, helping a sports club to buy extra team kit or pay additional coaching fees, or initiatives to get more young people playing sport. For more information see:

http://funding.sportengland.org/funding_programmes/small_grants/want_to_apply.aspx

*This project is part of the BME Advice Network led by Advice UK see: www.adviceuk.org.uk/DisplayPage.asp?pageid=12820

What's new on the Basis Project?

The Basis Project team is now back to being a fully staffed team. We recently recruited a new Training and Development Support Officer (Alain Munyangabe) and Organisational Development Manager (David Clark). Excitingly, we have also recruited an additional London based Organisational Development Officer (Sharmarke Diriye) which will enable us to support a greater number of London based RCOs. See Who's Who at Refugee Council to find out more about some of our new staff members.



Take a look at the Basis Project website which is dedicated to RCOs' organisational development needs at www.thebasisproject.org.uk.

The Project will update readers in the next issue about other new staff members joining the team.

Surviving the recession

NCVO have put together a guide for voluntary and community organisations on surviving the recession. Get advice on issues including recession proofing your organisation, tightening up your financial systems, staff management, strengthening crucial relationships, focusing on

your mission, demonstrating your impact and making your organisation financially sustainable to help your organisation survive the recession. To visit NCVO's recession resources see: www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/recessionresources.

Refugees included as priority for ESOL

The Government recently issued its strategy for English for Speakers of Other Languages.* There is no extra funding for ESOL and the current Learning and Skills Council guidance on learner eligibility still apply (e.g. unemployed, on low income). However, in the future certain learners will be prioritised for ESOL provision that strengthens community cohesion – 'tackling isolation, facilitating integration and increasing understanding between different communities.' Refugees are the only specific group ('characteristic') to be included as priority learners nationally.

This is a step forward and one that the Refugee Council has been lobbying for. It should also strengthen the voice of RCOs. Asylum seekers are not specifically mentioned but can be included under some of the other 'characteristics' (2.8, page 10). Guided by these national characteristics, local authorities will say which learners in their local area should be prioritised. The Government expects community organisations to be involved in this process.

Who's who at the Refugee Council?



**Alain Munyangabe –
Training and
Development Worker
(the Basis Project)**

I have recently joined the Basis Project. In my new role I will be supporting Organisational

Development Officers (ODOs) to ensure that they have access to sufficient expertise and training materials. I will also be developing and managing a bank of training resources for the Project's use. I have a great deal of relevant experience - in my previous job, I was a support worker for the voluntary Sector Refugee Network in East of England (VSRN-EE) and I'm also delighted to have recently completed my MA in Refugee Care. I'm looking forward to continuing my involvement with RCOs.



**David Clark –
Organisational
Development Manager
(the Basis Project)**

I have come from Help the Aged in their international section working on a capacity

building project in Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans. I'm also a trustee of a homelessness community organisation. I'm really excited to be taking on the role of Organisational Development Manager which entails managing Refugee Council's team of Organisational Development Officers as part of the BASIS project. It's great to be joining at this exciting time. You can go to www.thebasisproject.org.uk for more information.

*See: www.dius.gov.uk/~media/publications/E/esol_new_approach