

Back to school!

In November 2005, an article appeared in *RCONews* describing the plans of the Refugee Council's Inclusive Secondary Schools Project. Nearly four years on we would like to highlight the research findings of the project, and highlight the resources* that have been produced by the project to support refugees in education.

The project finished at the end of 2008, and explored the experiences of refugee communities in relation to secondary schooling in England. We were particularly interested in exploring the ways in which schools engaged with parents/carers from refugee communities, and how they worked with RCOs and other types of community organisations. There were several different parts to the project including:

- Surveys of RCOs, schools and local authorities to find out the types of support they have in place to help refugees engage in secondary education.
- Interviews with young refugees and asylum seekers, parents and carers, RCOs and schools to find out their experiences of schooling. These identified barriers to education and involvement, and examples of ways of working that support people from refugee communities.
- The establishment of four partnerships between schools and community/supporting organisations who worked together on initiatives to better help parents and carers and young people engage with learning.

The research found that there were major obstacles preventing refugees from getting the most out of education, these included:

- Severe delays in accessing school places.
- Bullying and racism.
- Financial difficulties preventing families from being able to support their children to participate in extra-curricula activities.
- Schools and RCOs lacked resources to be able to provide the best support.
- Difficulties with the English language, particularly for parents and carers.

- Experiences of trauma and flight, and the disruption and uncertainty of the UK asylum determination process.
- The confusing nature of the English education system.
- Lack of partnership working between schools and organisations that support refugee communities.

The survey and interviews with RCOs revealed the wide variety of work done by community organisations to support education and learning. Some RCOs described the difficulties they had finding funding for projects, and how it was difficult to make links with schools to develop joint working. The pilot partnership phase of the project showed that schools and community organisations can work together successfully to improve the experiences of refugee young people and their parents/carers. Some examples of the work undertaken by the partnerships include:

- Running ESOL classes for Somali mothers of pupils in one of the schools, which also taught them how to support their children and engage with the school.
- Individual case work support for young people and their families provided by a refugee forum on school premises.
- A mentoring project for refugee parents from one of the schools to help with integration.
- Refugee awareness sessions delivered by a supporting organisation in a school.
- A film made by newly-arrived pupils to highlight the experiences of being a newcomer and the affect that others' attitudes can have on young people.



The resource pack produced to help schools and RCOs work together

*See: www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/inclusiveschools.

A summary of 'Beyond the school gates' report is available in 18 different languages at: <http://languages.refugeecouncil.org.uk/>

When promoting the findings of the project, we have been emphasising to schools that working with RCOs can help to improve the experiences of some of their most vulnerable pupils. Schools now have a duty to promote community cohesion**, and we believe that forming partnerships with RCOs will help them to link with refugee communities and better enjoy their education.

Policy and campaigns update

Refugee Council and Job Centre Plus working together

The Refugee Council and Job Centre Plus have published a joint statement on working together. It outlines a number of areas where JCP will work to provide personalised support for refugees. This includes work-focused volunteering, intensive English language early on and assessing skills and experience gained outside the UK.

Although the statement is signed by the Refugee Council, it also covers JCP's work with other services and organisations to support refugees into training and employment. We are pleased to get this commitment from JCP and hope it will be useful working with JCP advisers to ensure the best support for refugees. The statement can be found at:

www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/policy/briefings/2009/jobcentreplus.htm

Government cuts support to asylum seekers awaiting a decision

Support to single asylum seekers aged over 25 is to be reduced to just £35.13 each week, from October 2009. £5 per day to cover anything that an individual might need while waiting for a decision on their claim. To help change this decision you can write to the Home Secretary, Rt. Hon. Alan Johnson MP, to ask him to reconsider urgently:

www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/campaigning/takeaction/stopcuts.htm.

News

My week at the Refugee Council - By Luljeta Nuzi, Coordinator at Shpresa***

I was recently involved in a mentoring scheme at the Evelyn Oldfield Foundation and my mentor was Jonathan Ellis, Director of Policy and Development at the Refugee Council. After a while, I asked Jonathan if I could shadow him for a week as I was keen to understand how national organisations operate and see the driving forces behind them. He was very keen to create this opportunity.

During my week at Refugee Council, everyone was really friendly and helpful. On Monday I was involved in a meeting with Barbara Woodward, the International Director UK Border Agency. It was a really productive meeting, and we were joined by Gemma Juma, the Manager of International, and UK Policy team.

On Tuesday I took the opportunity to attend the Migrant Impact Forum (MIF), as an observer, where the impact of migration on health and social care was discussed. Three ministers were present and the only representative from the third sector was the Refugee Council. I then met with David Clark, Organisational Development Manager for the Basis Project who asked me for my views on effective RCO support. We are very pleased

with the support that Shpresa is receiving from this project and finding it really helpful.

Wednesday started at a REAP conference entitled 'Allowed to Remain! But...Allowed to Belong?' where Jonathan was a guest speaker. The confession that Jonathan made as part of his speech was very striking: "we had it wrong in the past, we lost touch with organisations and networks such as REAP. We are actively working to improve our working relationship with others and work more in partnership". Through talking to Jonathan, I learnt how important it is to be open and honest with staff and stakeholders. During my last two days, I took part in two internal business meetings, one discussing the Refugee Council strategic plan, and a regional meeting which gave me an idea of how the day-to-day business is run at the Refugee Council.

I was ready to leave on Friday because I started to fall in love with the place. However it was time to take the learning back to my team at Shpresa and continue our much needed work.

If you would like to do something similar, please contact [Jonathan Ellis](mailto:jonathan.ellis@refugeecouncil.org.uk) at: jonathan.ellis@refugeecouncil.org.uk.

** See: www.teachernet.gov.uk/docbank/index.cfm?id=11635 *** See: www.shpresaprogramme.com



Sharing experience

The Nile African Development Organisation - Bradford

David Ndiwanyu, Director of the Nile African Development Organisation talks to RCO News about being a social enterprise.

The Nile African Development Organisation was set up as a charity in Bradford two years ago to help refugees and asylum seekers and international students from Africa arriving in West Yorkshire.

We help refugees and asylum seekers by signposting to services, offering advice and support and by helping them to access mainstream services. Having come into the UK as an asylum seeker and gaining refugee status, I knew that there were things other refugees needed to help them. I realised there were many agencies in Bradford to help people, but very few focussed on refugees and asylum seekers. That's why I and other members of the community, who are all refugees, decided to set up the organisation.

As well as accessing trust and statutory funding, we run a social enterprise to bring in extra money.

We run a small shop selling beauty and hair products to the African communities and anyone who wants to buy them. Also, we sell exotic foods – African foods – and we are thinking of setting up a money transfer system and a shipping agency to help people ship goods back to Africa.

All that is just a way of generating some income that will come back to the community.

Hussein Mahamed, THE REFUGEE COUNCIL Basis Project Organisational Development Officer who has been working with us has been very supportive in developing our organisation. As Hussein has said, social enterprise is not only

about making profit, it adds value in terms of learning business skills and negotiation skills.

Although the language around social enterprise might be new, the principle behind what we're doing is not. Social enterprise may be something people are talking about now but in Africa, coming from Uganda, people definitely did that a long time ago.



Working together - David Ndiwanyu (on right) with Hussein Mahamed

I remember my mother and a group of women contributing money and giving it to one person and that person sets up a business and that business supports the whole community. Up to this day people in the grassroots of Africa are doing the same thing. So if we tackle that seriously here also, it will change lives and change a lot of things. So it's a very serious thing that we have to follow through.

For more information please email us at: nileafrica@africanachievers.com or visit: www.nileafrica.org.



Funding news

Raynes fellowships for refugees

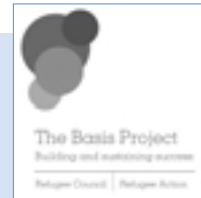
Each year, five refugees with Big Ideas will be able to apply for up to £15,000 to be spent on personal development, training or education, resources, expert advice, one-to-one mentoring or attending networking events. Applications are open to all ages, 18-25's are particularly encouraged. Deadline is 14 October 2009. For more information please visit: www.praxis.org.uk/index.php?page=2_28.

BBC Children in Need

BBC Children in Need general grant programme is open to organisations working with disadvantaged children and young people 18 years old and under. The next deadline is 15 October 2009. For more information visit: www.bbc.co.uk/pudsey/grants/general_grants.shtml.

What's new on the Basis Project?

To find useful resources including blog interviews and online videos about RCOs' work, take a look at the Basis Project website. This website is dedicated to RCOs' organisational development needs. See: www.thebasisproject.org.uk.



Training and resources

Creating new income streams

The Development Trusts Association is accepting applicants for their free Community Sector Trading course in the autumn. Community Sector Trading aims to support small organisations to understand how they can develop their trading activities to diversify their income streams. For more information visit www.communityst.co.uk or contact **Haoming Yau** on: **020 7336 9438** or email: h.yau@dta.org.uk.

University of East London, Bursaries and Scholarships 2009/2010

The School of Humanities and Social Sciences at UEL is offering bursaries to postgraduate students doing research, PHDs and Masters, for 2009/10. Masters Bursary includes MA Refugee Studies, MA Cultural Studies, MA International Social Work and Community Development, and many others. For further information contact: **Mr Phil Rees** at: ssmcsadmissions@uel.ac.uk.

DVD release of *In This World*

In This World, directed by Michael Winterbottom, follows a journey fraught with danger and human smuggling illustrating the lengths people go to in an effort to reach freedom. The moving and powerful film is released on DVD on 21 September 2009. The DVD costs £12.99. For more information or to order a copy contact **Debbie Murray** at Aim Publicity on: **020 8292 2818** or email: debbie@aimpublicity.com.

Refugee Council Information Service goes online!



The Refugee Council Information Service is a comprehensive, regularly updated information resource covering the entire asylum process, support and entitlement. Previously produced in hard copy the service is now available online. The benefits of taking the service online include easier access for teams, as all team members can log into the service at the same time and more frequent and timely updates. The Information Service Online is easy to search by topic or keyword, ideal if you are using the service to give advice to those in the asylum process. We've also added a link to other useful services including organisations that provide support to our client group. Saving the best till last, the move online has also meant that we have been able to reduce the annual cost of the service to just £10 (+ VAT) for RCOs. If you would like more information about the Information Service Online go to: www.rcis.org.uk or email: subscriptions@refugeecouncil.org.uk.

Who's who at the Refugee Council?



May Macnair – Project Assistant for the Basis Project

I've been working for the Basis Project*, at the Refugee Council for about a year. Previously I worked for a Development Education charity in Manchester.

What I enjoy most about my work is the variety: I have helped set up a trustee volunteer scheme; I am creating an RCO commissioning process; I am developing a new database; and I am meeting with RCOs to discuss how we can support their work. This is the bit I like most. I like to find out about all the different organisations and the interesting work that they do, and I get to meet new people.

Outside of work, I am a keen photographer (behind with the times and still using film), I cycle everywhere and am also a refugee mentor. If you have any questions about the Basis Project, then feel free to contact me at: may.macnair@refugeecouncil.org.uk or: **020 7346 1293**.

*See: www.thebasisproject.org.uk.