

## Do you know who your prospective parliamentary candidate is?

Do you have a burning desire to change something in your local area? Well this is a great time to do something about it! Before 3 June 2010, there will be a UK-wide General Election. Candidates in over 550 constituencies across the country will battle it out to win votes – including yours. The most likely date is 6 May 2010, as local council elections are already set for that day.

### A unique opportunity

The General Election provides a unique opportunity for campaigning. Everyone standing in the election (known as 'prospective parliamentary candidates' or 'PPCs') - including current Members of Parliament (MPs) who want to be re-elected, and people who are standing for the first time – will want to know what local people are concerned about. They know they have to listen and respond if they want to win votes.

So, it is a great chance to tell people from the major political parties that you want the rights of refugees and asylum seekers to be respected.

### The Asylum Election Pledge

Working with Liberty and the Scottish Refugee Council, we will be asking candidates from the major political parties to pledge to protect the right to asylum. The pledge calls on candidates to reject racism and to remember the importance of refugee protection in debates about asylum and immigration policy.

We have written to candidates from the main political parties to ask them to sign the pledge but pressure from voters is vital. Parliamentary candidates are most likely to respond to the concerns of local people, whose votes they need to get elected. So it is very important that they are aware that people in their constituency reject xenophobia and racism, and believe that the right to seek asylum must be protected.

We are asking all Refugee Council supporters to contact their candidates about the pledge. You can do this at the Refugee Council website at [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/campaigning](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/campaigning)



Houses of Parliament

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### How do I find out who my candidates are?

Find out which constituency you are in and who your current MP is at:

[www.findmympparliament.uk](http://www.findmympparliament.uk)

Find out who your Parliamentary Prospective Candidates are for the three major parties at:

Conservative Party:

[www.conservatives.com/People/Prospective  
\\_Parliamentary\\_Candidates](http://www.conservatives.com/People/Prospective_Parliamentary_Candidates)

Labour Party:

<http://www.labour.org.uk/ppc/constituencies>

Liberal Democrat Party:

[http://www.libdems.org.uk/in\\_your\\_area](http://www.libdems.org.uk/in_your_area)

### The Asylum Election Pledge

There is no place for racism and xenophobia in modern British politics. Nor is democratic debate advanced by the denigration of the most vulnerable in our country, including children and asylum seekers who do not enjoy the right to participate in elections.

I promise to remember the importance of refugee protection, even in free and wide-ranging debates about immigration policy. I will never play fast and loose with the proud tradition of a nation that must always offer succour to those in genuine fear of persecution.

## Policy and campaigns update

### London based RCO campaigns for access to health services for refused asylum seekers

As a member of the Refugee Council's Refugee Empowerment Project (REP), African Swahili Community Project (ASCOP) is an RCO with a mission to campaign. Their focus is the lack of access to health services faced by refused asylum seekers in their community; their aim is to lobby for change. Working with their REP mentor, Refugee Council Director of Policy and Development Jonathan Ellis, ASCOP are currently putting together an evidence-based report on the members of their community who have been denied access to health care. Once completed ASCOP hope to use this to lobby their local MP and affect change in their community. In fact ASCOP campaigners have already secured a meeting with Jeremy Corbyn MP (for Islington) and will use this meeting to discuss the welfare implications of people, refused asylum seekers or not, being denied NHS services.

The Department of Health (DoH) currently recommends that refused asylum seekers appealing their case are entitled to both primary and secondary care without charge. For refused asylum seekers whose appeals have been exhausted, GP practices can use their discretion to accept registrations – this is in the same way that they can do for any individual (however secondary care would be chargeable). Clearly there is no central government directive preventing refused asylum seekers from accessing primary health care, and yet ASCOP have documented cases of people being refused on the ground. Watch this space for ASCOP's progress in the next issue of *RCO News*.....

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## News

### Chance or choice? Understanding why asylum seekers come to the UK

In January 2010, the Refugee Council published a major independent research study that investigated the decisions made by asylum seekers who come to the UK and explored the extent to which these decisions are a reflection of chance or choice.

The research, drawing on in-depth interviews with asylum seekers and refugees, was carried out by Professor Heaven Crawley of Swansea University. The research found that:

- Most asylum seekers had been in fear of their lives in their home countries and had often had to leave within only a few days or weeks.
- Over two-thirds did not specifically choose to come to the UK to claim asylum. Most only discovered they were going to the UK after leaving their home country or even upon arrival.
- Most people fleeing for their lives were helped to leave by an external party or agent, who made the key decisions about their destination and helped to facilitate the journey to safety.
- There is no evidence that asylum seekers came to the UK because of access to welfare or work.

The research revealed that policies which make the lives of asylum seekers tougher after their arrival in the UK have no demonstrable influence over whether people claim asylum in the UK.

The full report and a research summary are available at

<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/policy/position/2010/18jan2010>

### Greater London Authority survey of refugees in London

Last year the Mayor of London launched *London Enriched*, which is a strategy aimed at supporting the integration of London's refugee communities. To help with this work, the Greater London Authority is conducting a survey of refugees in London, to gather information about different issues such as English skills and provision, access to good housing and healthcare and barriers to finding employment.

The GLA have commissioned Ipsos MORI, who are very experienced in conducting research on many different issues (see <http://www.ipsos-mori.com> for more details), to undertake the survey. This survey will be important in highlighting the experiences of refugees in London, and can be used by local authorities and other service providers to better meet people's integration needs.

The interviewers wish to speak with refugees who arrived in the UK after 1990, and who live in London. We encourage RCOs who are based in London to publicise the survey to friends and clients who are eligible to take part. For more information, please contact Tom Frere-Smith from Ipsos MORI on **020 7347 3131** or by email at [tom.frere-smith@ipsos.com](mailto:tom.frere-smith@ipsos.com).

## Sharing experience

### Vietnamese Mental Health Services – London

*Jack Shieh (OBE) Director of Vietnamese Mental Health Services talks to RCO News about refugee resettlement, mental health, and commissioning.*

In 1987 a psychiatrist at Guys Hospital began a research project to look into the mental health issues of young single Vietnamese men, following a pattern of suicides that had emerged in London due to the emotional stress of the Vietnamese War.

Following this, VHMS was set up to provide support to Vietnamese refugees with mental health needs. We offer an outreach and information advice services, drop in, training and support. VHMS relies on 10 full time staff; however unlike many RCOs we struggle to recruit volunteers due to the stigma still attached to mental health.

Whilst working as a resettlement worker at the Refugee Council, support agencies didn't know how to deal with mental health issues. I came across several cases of mental health problems and I didn't know how to deal with them either - due to the stigma back in Vietnam.

In 1988, I became the Director of Refugee Action and continued to support VHMS. I negotiated 2,000 more places for Vietnamese refugees in England as part of the Government Resettlement Programme, which included a resettlement support package.

In 1993 I went to work for UNHCR in Hong Kong to set up social services for refugee camps, and was nominated an OBE for my contribution to refugee resettlement. This award has helped me gain respect and has improved my diplomatic relations. However, I feel the award reflects the work of the whole Vietnamese community.



*Jack Shieh (OBE)*

In 1997 I became the Manager of VMHS, which was a wonderful opportunity for me to continue supporting the Vietnamese community. By approaching Local Authorities (LAs) and the Department of Health, and demonstrating the need for mental health services for Vietnamese refugees, we were able to secure continuous grant funding.

With the recent change from grants to commissioning, RCOs need to diversify their funding approaches and work collaboratively. It is important for organisations to learn about their borough, for example to look at their LA website, and demonstrate how their services respond to its strategies and the

needs of the community. VMHS has successfully been commissioned to deliver services by six London boroughs. Commissioning should not be a barrier to RCOs; with support from second tier organisations they can start small and grow.

Like numerous grass roots organisations, we continue to face challenges. One particular challenge is the Government's Personalisation Agenda\*; social service users are given direct payment with which they have to independently choose the service that best suits their needs. Money is given to individuals instead of organisations, which is not appropriate for our vulnerable clients. To overcome these challenges, it is important to be persistent, and have good negotiation skills to achieve success.

If you would like further information about VMHS please visit [www.vmhs.org.uk/home2/english.php](http://www.vmhs.org.uk/home2/english.php), or contact Jack directly on [jack@vmhs.org.uk](mailto:jack@vmhs.org.uk).

## Funding news

### Development Innovation Fund (DIF)

Launched by the Department for International Development (DFID) in January 2010, this fund is targeted at small community-based organisations involved in providing specific small scale, one-off support that directly targets poverty in the developing world and includes a significant development awareness component in the UK.

This Fund will be operational for an initial 16 months from 2010. The DIF will provide funding up to £60,000 for one-off projects lasting up to one year. DFID defines small organisations for this fund as any organisation or group with an average annual income over the past 3 years of less than £500,000. For more information see [www.dfid.gov.uk/Working-with-DFID/Funding-Schemes/Funding-for-not-for-profit-organisations/Development-Innovation-Fund-DIF/](http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Working-with-DFID/Funding-Schemes/Funding-for-not-for-profit-organisations/Development-Innovation-Fund-DIF/)

\* See [www.dh.gov.uk/en/SocialCare/Socialcarereform/Personalisation/index.htm](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/SocialCare/Socialcarereform/Personalisation/index.htm)

## What's new at the Basis Project?

### Peterborough African Community Organisation (PACO) secures over £100,000 grant from The Big Lottery.

Learning points by Shpetim Alimeta



PACO's community radio project will be free to broadcast on-line and periodically hit the airways over the next two years, thanks to an important boost from the Big Lottery's Reaching Communities Programme. As a close adviser to PACO, via The Basis Project\* for the last two years, I have been involved in supporting PACO during this fundraising process and wanted to share a few learning points here:

- If an organisation is rooted within its community's needs, the chances of surviving the financial winter are higher.
- Any organisation that focuses on its strengths and unique services, just like PACO did with its "star project", will be saving that valuable energy and be more likely to get a positive response from funders.
- A well-connected organisation with local stakeholders can succeed in keeping its head above water and hope for a better future, when all looks bleak.
- Trying to work in partnership with other organisations will help you to get through the difficult times.
- An organisation that responds well to external pressure by striving for internal improvements on areas like: improving its governance, developing realistic budgeting forecasts, establishing better financial systems, consulting with its community and partners, planning responsibly for the future - just like PACO did - will be in better shape to make stronger funding bids.

## Refugee Council conference

*David Hirst, Basis worker for Birmingham, follows an RCO to the Refugee Council national conference: From theory to practice: how asylum policy impacts on the refugee experience held in central London on 5 February 2010.*

Abdirahman Ali, from the Afro-British Support Services – 'IMPACT'\*\*\* participated in the afternoon panel discussion and a workshop entitled: *After status – transition to mainstream services*. 'IMPACT' was formed in 2004, primarily to address the employment and training needs of refugees and asylum seekers from Africa and new communities (asylum origin) from Eastern European countries who migrated to Birmingham.

The organisation has recently secured contracts with the Local Authority to deliver employment and training outcomes for the Working Neighbourhood Fund. However there are many challenges and pressures associated with Service Level Agreements. Very often as Key performance Indicators, 'the soft outcomes' cannot be evidenced -and therefore payment for such interventions cannot be obtained.

Abdirahman said: "How can we turn away any person who comes in with a neighbour who just happens to live across his/her street because their post code is not included in the WNF criteria?"

Like many Third Sector Organisations engaged in this area of service, there continues to be a real challenge on the organisations' capacity to deliver these much needed services as resources are stretched to the limit during the worst economic recession in 70 years.

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



#### Anna Musgrave – Parliamentary and Campaigns Officer

With a general election on the horizon this is an exciting time to be starting in the Refugee Council Parliamentary and Campaigns team.

Part of my role will involve keeping an eye on what is happening in Parliament and identifying opportunities for us to influence the debate on asylum. But I will also be working with our network of supporters who campaign for the rights of refugees and asylum seekers at a grassroots level. We are really keen to work with RCOs and to hear what you think we should be campaigning on. So please do get in touch with me if you would like to get involved in Refugee Council campaigning or if we can support you in your campaign work. You can ring me on **020 7346 1031** or email me on [anna.musgrave@refugeecouncil.org.uk](mailto:anna.musgrave@refugeecouncil.org.uk).

\* See [www.thebasisproject.org.uk](http://www.thebasisproject.org.uk)

\*\* See [www.afrobrish.org.uk](http://www.afrobrish.org.uk)