

RCD News



Newsletter from the Community Development Team

Cultural Diversity - Celebrating arts and cultural activities from refugee communities!

Refugee communities contribute a rich variety of arts and cultural traditions to life in the UK. Different communities offer a dazzling range of music, poetry, dance, painting, photography, drama, film...the list goes on! This includes concerts, performances and exhibitions by professional artists, and also work carried out in community settings. Many Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) develop arts projects to bring people together and encourage participation and learning. Some organisations develop dance and music groups in which young people learn about their cultural traditions from other members of the community. Other RCOs organise cultural celebrations with performances from famous artists within their communities. Or they may organise projects that tap into new technologies like web-site design or video editing to encourage artistic expression amongst young people.

There are many difficulties facing refugee artists who wish to develop themselves professionally. The arts world is competitive and you may need funding and support in order to develop your ideas. Artists also need to find places in which to perform or exhibit their work. Sometimes art forms from different communities do not fit easily into the classification systems used by UK arts funding bodies. Refugee artists can also have difficulties understanding how the arts sector works in the UK, as it may be different from in their countries of origin.

Diversity is becoming increasingly important in the arts and cultural sector. Last year the London Mayor published a cultural diversity strategy for the capital. Diversity is now a priority for the Arts Council, which has undertaken to ensure

that UK cultural institutions and funding schemes reflect the range and diversity of audiences and performers in the UK. Also, many projects have been established to work with refugee artists. The Refugee Arts Initiative was set up in 1999 by the Arts Council London office (formerly known as London Arts) to promote and support refugee artists. It organises networking events to bring together refugee artists and mainstream arts organisations, and has undertaken research on the needs of refugee artists. For more information, contact Karen Drezgic on 020 7608 6119.

Arts and culture are also valuable ways to promote understanding on refugee issues amongst the wider population. Everybody can enjoy good music together! Refugee Week (16 - 22 June) is an opportunity to share arts work from different communities and project a positive image of refugees (see postcard for more information). Why not start planning your event now!



Inset: Cultural event organised by Horn Reflections



Government announces new proposals for asylum system

Last month the Home Secretary David Blunkett outlined proposals for changes to the asylum system, similar to plans for "safe havens" or "Regional Protection Zones", leaked to the press in early February. The stated aim is "better management of the asylum process globally" starting from an assumption that the current global system is not sustainable. There are two main ideas.

The government's first proposal is to develop Regional Protection Areas (RPAs) near areas of conflict. The published document does not state exactly where, but media reports have suggested Northern Iraq, Morocco, Iran, Northern Somalia and Turkey. The Government claims this proposal builds on existing UNHCR efforts to provide protection nearby for those fleeing conflict or persecution and assist return and resettlement in their home regions.

The second idea is to develop Transit Processing Centres (TPCs) in co-operation with UNHCR along major transit routes to the EU, close to EU borders. Asylum seekers arriving in the UK or another EU member state would be transferred to a TPC where their asylum claims would be processed. It is not clear whether asylum seekers intercepted en route to the EU would also be sent to the TPCs. Failed claimants from TPCs may also be returned to RPAs if their country of origin remains unsafe. If their claim were successful they would be eligible for resettlement within the EU on a 'burden-sharing' basis. Media reports suggest that Albania, Russia, Ukraine, Croatia and Romania are being considered for TPCs.

The Refugee Council recognises some positive elements in the proposals, such as, the recognition of the international dimensions of refugee protection, including the UK's global responsibilities. The proposals also acknowledge the need to address the root causes of forced displacement through poverty reduction and conflict prevention, and the need for better protection within regions of conflict and for increased resettlement to Europe. However, the Refugee Council believes that this kind of action must be in addition to and not in place of the UK's legal obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention to those who arrive here independently.

The core ideas of transit processing centres and safe havens ("regional protection areas") attempt to shift responsibility for asylum seekers onto already over-stretched developing countries, which support 70% of the world's refugees. The initiative sends a dangerous signal to the rest of the world about the UK's commitment to international protection and human rights, undermining the 1951 Convention and jeopardising the global asylum system. The proposals raise complex questions of international law, are likely to be extremely costly and are practically unworkable.

Refugee Week 2003 Community Chest!

Refugee Week has been awarded a small fund by the Association of London Government to distribute amongst Refugee Community Organisations based in London. Grants will be for £500 or less, and must go towards the costs of holding an event during Refugee Week 2003 (16 - 22nd June).

The deadline for completed applications is Friday 26th May, and successful organisations will be notified very shortly after. For an application form and details of how to apply, please call 020 7820 3055 or e-mail Razia.Bilimoria@refugeecouncil.org.uk at Refugee Week.

You can also contact the Community Development Team on 020 7820 3076 or email devan.kanthasamy@refugeecouncil.org.uk

Funding News

UnLtd Millennium Awards

UnLtd Millennium Awards is a new scheme for individuals or informal groups setting up projects to benefit themselves and their local communities. Level 1 Awards (£500-£5000) are for new projects and ideas, and Level 2 Awards (£5000-£15000) are for projects that are already developed or to pay for living expenses of those involved in a project. There are no deadlines. For further information contact 0845 850 1122 or visit www.unltd.org.uk

Connecting Communities

This is a Home Office scheme to build strong minority ethnic community networks. Priorities for 2003-2006 are; (1) supporting community networks and connecting communities with services providers, policy makers and funders; (b) access to employment, (c) creating positive images. The deadline is 25th June 2003. www.homeoffice.gov.uk/comrace/race/grants/index.html

Tudor Trust

This focuses on small organisations. Current areas of support include youth, older people, housing and communities. Refugees are a priority area. There are no deadlines for applications. For more information contact 020 7727 8522 www.tudortrust.org.uk

Fast Forward Grants

This is run by Greater London Enterprise for organisations with no more than 2 paid members of staff (or the equivalent) and no more than £60,000 income. The grant aims to help people access employment. The target group includes refugees and asylum seekers with permission to work. The maximum grant is £10,000 and the deadline is 30th May 2003. For more information contact 020 7940 1515

www.gle.co.uk

Sharing Experiences

Mowes Adem, director of Horn Reflections, talks about the importance of supporting arts and culture. "Horn Reflections was set up in 1999 to promote arts from the Horn of Africa communities. We organise cultural festivals to promote and enjoy our artists, and also run theatre activities for young people, who have performed in theatres across London. Cultural organisations like ours are necessary because arts activities are obviously not the priority for most RCOs, which need to look after people's immediate needs such as housing, employment etc. However, arts and culture are very important in supporting people to integrate into society here. It can help refugees to come to terms with their experiences and explore their identity. Also, we can contribute our arts and culture to the wider UK society and use them to explain who we are as people. Arts allow people from different communities to learn about each other and communicate; we can show ourselves as people so that the label 'refugee' becomes less important. Horn Reflections aims to support Horn artists to develop themselves and access the opportunities available to them. Refugee artists face many difficulties but we encourage them not to give up.

The theatre activities we run with young people are great at improving their confidence, creativity and teamwork skills. They realise they can do anything they want to do! We teach them traditional arts from their communities as we believe this helps them to explore their identities. We give them the tools but it is up to the young people how they use them. Culture is always evolving and changing. I believe the Horn communities have a lot to offer the UK cultural scene. I think we have potential to develop more music, theatre, films etc that provide good entertainment for Londoners."

For more information contact Mowes Adem on 020 8960 7086.





Get involved in health planning!

Since the beginning of this year, NHS strategic health authorities (SHA) and primary care trusts (PCT) have new legal obligations to consult and involve communities. Section 11 of the 2001 Health and Social Care Act requires them to consult patients and the general public. Any consultation now needs to cover ongoing service planning and delivery, as well as new proposals. Consultation on new proposals needs to include the development of the proposal. This is a good opportunity for RCOs to get involved and publicise the health needs of their communities. For more information contact your local SHA, or call the Refugee Council health policy advisor Helen Murshali on 020 7820 3108.

Publicise your event!

Do you have an event you would like to publicise? You can now post information directly onto the Refugee Council website. You can also search the diary for details of other events related to asylum and refugee issues. Go to the "diary" section on www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

CRE seminar

The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) wants to refocus its work on asylum and immigration issues and would like to hear the views of RCOs. The seminar will discuss a framework for the CRE's work in this area, and look at how community organisations can get involved. It will be held on Tuesday 3rd June, 11:00 - 1:30, at St Dunstons House, Borough High Street, SE1. Please call Alrick Bernard on 020 7939 0176 to reserve a place.

Women's voluntary sector

On 27th May 2:00 - 4:00 the Women's Resource Centre, Latin American Women's Rights and other organisations are holding a meeting to discuss how to develop strategic action to increase the sustainability of the women's voluntary sector. Come to Tindlemanor, 54-56 Featherstone Street, EC1. Contact Beth Follini on beth@wrc.org.uk to confirm.

Mental health training

The Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture is holding a series of free training sessions on mental health for RCOs working with torture survivors. For more information contact Paula Robinson on 020 7813 7777.

Useful web-sites

www.artscouncil.org.uk

The national development and funding agency for arts in England.

www.culturalco-operation.org

Go to "Diaspora" section to enter your details on a searchable data-base of artists from different communities

Meet the team



**Lucy Crompton,
Refugee Week National
Co-ordinator**

Lucy started in December as the National Co-ordinator for Refugee Week. Although she is based within the Refugee Council, Refugee Week is actually led by a Steering Group made up of a number of organisations from the refugee sector, the arts world and other major non-governmental organisations. Lucy's role involves providing support, information and publicity materials to event organisers, co-ordinating the delivery of Refugee Week and managing the administration and development of the project. She is keen to encourage participation from RCOs. Before Refugee Week Lucy worked for various major arts organisations.

Please see the enclosed postcard for details of how to find out more about Refugee Week 2003.

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

