



# RCD Women's News

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## Why refugee women?

By Violet Dickenson and Rachel Cooling – Northern Refugee Centre

Gender sensitive services specifically targeting women seeking asylum are crucial for several reasons. These include: in any refugee population women make up to 50% of the population; women who flee their homes in search of safety can also have gender specific needs which are not always addressed by the asylum system and related services.

The Refugee Women's Development Project (RWDP) at Northern Refugee Centre was set up in 2006 to advocate for and support refugee women. Its women centred approach emphasises that refugee women bring a range of skills and knowledge that should be supported in any work; they should also be valued and fully integrated within the community.

To carry out its work effectively the RWDP works in partnership with a wide range of organisations locally, regionally and nationally as well as 25 women advocate volunteers from 15 different countries. The volunteers have many skills and experiences, advocate for women within the community, and support the project in a wide range of ways. Most volunteers have been through or are in the asylum process.

The RWDP achievements include: setting up women-only conversation clubs throughout Sheffield and a women-friendly advice service; delivering workshops, events and raising awareness of the effects of the asylum process on women and the impact of gender based violence to over 300 regional mainstream organisation participants. The RWDP collaboratively campaigned on issues affecting refugee women including no recourse to public funds, childcare at asylum interviews and increasing the gender sensitivity of the asylum process.



*Women advocates at 'End Violence against women and girls'*

We are particularly proud of our inclusive approach constantly inputting women's ideas to shape the future vision of the project. Women led on initiatives including *'Women's Voices: Different Cultures, One World'* a book and webpage project which will soon be launched at a citywide arts and literature festival. Several women are also currently discussing setting up as a small independent group following involvement in the RWDP.

Sadly, the RWDP has to close due to lack of funding. Cuts and increased competition for limited funding are having a negative impact on many specialist services. Services including women-only conversation clubs and women-friendly advice are struggling economically and with a policy climate where women-only services have to justify their existence. The impact of further closures would be immense as these services are vital for women who are often unable or unwilling to access mainstream services.

Fortunately there continues to be valuable support for refugee women. This includes organisations such as Asylum Aid, Refugee Council, campaign groups, women's centres and community groups to name a few.

There continues to be many small groups formed by women themselves who do not get the recognition or funding they deserve but continue to do vital work to support women.

We hope that in the future we will not need services like the RWDP to advocate for women. Women seeking asylum will be recognised, respected, valued and treated with dignity by all. For more information see [www.nrcentre.org.uk/](http://www.nrcentre.org.uk/)

## Training and resources

### **Forced marriage – gaining protection through the law**

London - 20 October 2010 at NCVO, N1 9RL

Forced marriage is an abuse of human rights and a form of violence against women. This half-day course will enhance your knowledge of the law and enable you to support women and girls at risk of, or who have experienced, forced marriage.

You will receive a copy of *Pathways to Justice: BMER women, violence and the law* and the Government's *Multi-Agency Practice Guidelines*.

See [www.rightsofwomen.org.uk/training.php#5](http://www.rightsofwomen.org.uk/training.php#5)

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### **Women's Therapy Centre taster sessions**

Women's Therapy Centre provides information and taster sessions on mental health and psychotherapy to refugee organisations. It is a free service, in a place of your choice.

If you are interested to arrange a session for your clients (women only) or staff please contact Seda Sengun at [s.sengun@womenstherapycentre.co.uk](mailto:s.sengun@womenstherapycentre.co.uk) or on

## Funding news

### **Women's Fund Grant**

Established in 1999 this fund supports third sector organisations in Tyne & Wear and Northumberland that enable women to play a full and active part in the community. They award grants of up to £5,000. For more information contact **0191 222 0945** or e-mail [dn@communityfoundation.org.uk](mailto:dn@communityfoundation.org.uk)

Application deadline is 30 September 2010

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### **Foyle Foundation –Small Grants Scheme**

The Small Grants Scheme supports smaller charities in the UK (less than £100,000 annual turnover) particularly those working at a grass roots level. They award grants of between £1,000 and £10,000 for one year to charities that can demonstrate that this money will make a significant difference to their work.

No application deadlines

See [www.foylefoundation.org.uk/small-grants-scheme/](http://www.foylefoundation.org.uk/small-grants-scheme/)

## New research

New research by **Rights of Women** has expressed serious concerns about how the UK Border Agency (UKBA) responds to violence against women.

The research, *'Measuring up? UK compliance with international commitments on violence against women in England and Wales'*, says that:

"It is our view that the UKBA has not adopted a gender sensitive approach in its responses to women at risk of or experiencing violence. UKBA policies do not adequately meet the needs of asylum-seeking women, women with an insecure immigration status experiencing violence, women who have been trafficked or women who are at risk of forced marriage."

Among the report's recommendations is that the government ensures that asylum seeking women are guaranteed a comparable standard of treatment to women in similar situations who are British or settled here as set out in Asylum Aid's Charter of Asylum Seeking Women. *'Measuring up? UK compliance with international commitments on violence against women in England and Wales'* can be downloaded free of charge from [www.rightsofwomen.org.uk](http://www.rightsofwomen.org.uk).

If you would like to submit an article to *RCO Women's News* about your RCO's work, or would like to write about a topical issue, please email [development@refugeecouncil.org.uk](mailto:development@refugeecouncil.org.uk).