



RCD Women's News

Issue no: 29, July/August 2008



Working to assist survivors of sexual violence – New **Rights of Women** Project

By Catherine Briddick - Legal Officer at Rights of Women

Rights of Women is very pleased to announce the start of a new project, funded by Comic Relief, that will benefit asylum-seeking women who have experienced sexual violence as well as the organisations that support them. Rights of Women has worked for over 30 years to support women who have experienced violence by providing them with free legal advice and information. Rights of Women has two advice lines, one on family law, which provides legal advice on issues like domestic violence and relationship breakdown and the other on sexual violence. The legal advice lines are staffed by women solicitors and barristers who are able to provide free, confidential legal advice. In addition to the advice lines Rights of Women has a range of free information sheets as well as publications like **Pathways to Justice: BMER* Women, Violence and the law** which covers immigration and asylum law, domestic violence, trafficking, forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

The new project has enabled us to open up our Sexual Violence Legal Advice Line to asylum-seeking women and women who have an insecure immigration status. The Sexual Violence Legal Advice Line will now be able to take calls on general immigration and asylum law as well as sexual violence, criminal law and procedure. Individual women can call the line for advice as can organisations supporting these women who want advice on particular issues or individual cases. The advice is free and confidential. In addition to the new line we will be producing a range of new and revised information sheets on sexual violence and asylum law. These will be available to advice line callers as well as to download free of charge from our website.

Recent statistics from the British Crime Survey indicate that 24% of women in England and Wales have experienced sexual violence since the age of 16. A refugee or asylum seeking woman may have experienced sexual violence in her country of origin or in the UK, the person who was responsible may be a woman's partner, friend or family member. Alternatively the perpetrator could be someone in a position of authority such as a police or army officer or a member of a criminal gang. A woman who has experienced sexual violence may have a number of questions about her legal position. She may be considering making a claim for asylum or be awaiting a decision in her asylum claim. Alternatively, she may want to know how she can leave an abusive relationship and what her rights are. Rights of Women hopes that by providing free and confidential legal advice to women who have experienced sexual violence and the organisations that support them, more women will have the information they need in order to make informed decisions about their situation.

To support the new line and in partnership with the **Asylum Support Appeals Project (ASAP)** Rights of Women has developed a new one-day training course on asylum law and procedure and financial support for asylum seekers (including failed asylum seekers). The course will run in central London on 22 September 2008. The course is open to men and women and would be useful for refugee community organisations (RCOs) and other groups who support asylum seeking and refugee women. For further information about the courses and the Sexual Violence Legal Advice line please visit our website at **www.rightsofwomen.org.uk**.

*Black and minority ethnic, refugee and asylum-seeking women.

Funding news

The Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund has launched grants aimed at organisations providing services or advocacy for young refugees. The project is run by the fund's Refugee and Asylum Seekers Initiative, which wants to change policy to meet international standards on children's rights.

The fund is available to any not for profit organisation, charity or company in the UK that is working with children and young people under 21 who are refugees or seeking asylum.

Minimum grant available: £3,000 but most grants are expected to be around £50,000. The money is available for organisations to build support for young refugees and help the groups to provide advocacy at a local level.

Deadline for applications: **12 September**. Go to www.theworkcontinues.org or call **020 7902 5500** for more information.

Endorse Women's Asylum Charter

The Refugee Council is delighted to work with Asylum Aid in co-ordinating support for the 'Charter of Rights of Women Seeking Asylum'.

The Charter is an outline of principles aimed at persuading the UK Border Agency (UKBA) to take both a strategic approach to the needs of women seeking asylum and to put in place the operational procedures and safeguards that will remove the discriminatory barriers they face.

The Charter is the result of an extensive consultation process with asylum seeking women and agencies across the refugee, women's and human rights sector.

Organisations that support the Charter commit themselves to promoting those aspects that relate to their work (for example a detention NGO would promote actions relating to detention).

To endorse the Charter, send an email stating this along with your organisation's name to charter@asylumaid.org.uk. For more information, contact **Debora Singer** at DeboraS@asylumaid.org.uk.

Training and support

The Women's Therapy Centre has been offering individual and group psychotherapy to women since 1976.

The Centre is committed to making psychotherapy accessible to women who traditionally do not have equal access to psychotherapy, including women from black and ethnic minority communities, refugees, asylum seekers, young women, disabled women and women on low income.

- They offer therapy in languages other than English.
- We offer some practical advice and support to women who are refugees or asylum seekers alongside psychotherapy.
- We provide information sessions on what is psychotherapy for community groups.
- Our skilled and experienced therapists who work with a wide range of mental health problems including: eating disorders; trauma; domestic violence; childhood sexual abuse and self-harming.

For more information email d.gungor@womenstherapycentre.co.uk or call **020 7263 6200** or go to www.womenstherapycentre.co.uk/

New research on trafficking

A new research report about trafficking has been produced jointly by the **Poppy Project** and the **Refugee Women's Resource Project at Asylum Aid**.

Good Intentions: A Review of the New Asylum Model and its Impact on Trafficked Women Claiming Asylum considers all the asylum claims made by women who were trafficked into the UK and subsequently supported by the POPPY Project during 2007 and who went through the New Asylum Model process.

Whilst improvements were found on procedural issues such as providing female case owners and interpreters, the rate of success at appeal showed that the quality of initial decision-making remains an issue. The report can be downloaded at www.asylumaid.org.uk.