

## The age of wisdom?

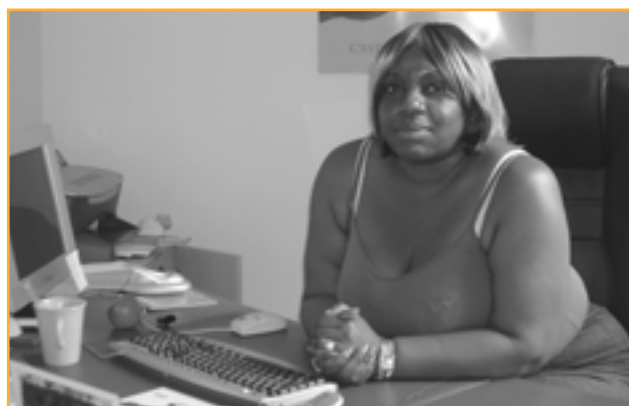
Legislation to stop age discrimination (the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations) came into force on 1 October 2006. This means it is now illegal for employers to discriminate against or harass employees because of their age, both old and young. This is a welcome piece of legislation and one that may positively influence older refugees' chances of gaining employment.

As part of the Older Refugees Programme<sup>1</sup>, the Refugee Council, in partnership with Age Concern England recently hosted the first London listening event for older refugees at City Hall. The event provided an opportunity for more than 70 older refugees in London to hear, share and learn from each other's experiences and most importantly, to shape and influence the development of the Older Refugee Programme. One of the issues that came out of the event was the difficulties older refugees face in communicating their needs to service providers and not being able to understand their rights and how to access services.

Many asylum seekers and refugees arrive in the UK with a limited knowledge of English but a wealth of experience. The Refugee Council believes that integration starts from the time of arrival and supports the right to work and training for asylum seekers<sup>2</sup>. If an asylum seeker or refugee is excluded from access to education, employment and training, this will have a long term damaging effect on the individual's social and economic inclusion into UK society.

As part of a successful refugee integration process, it is crucial that asylum seekers and refugees have access to free ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes so that they can understand their basic rights, access information, education and employment. The National Institute of Continuing Education (NIACE)<sup>3</sup> says that immigrants with fluent English are 20% more likely to be in employment, and earn approximately a fifth more than those with underdeveloped language skills.

The Refugee Council is concerned about the recent changes in the Learning and Skills Council's (LSC) funding priorities. From next year, ESOL classes will no longer be free for adult asylum seekers. Currently, NASS supported asylum seekers are eligible for LSC funded ESOL courses up to level 3. The funding priorities announced for 2007/08 mean that asylum seekers aged 19 and above will no longer be eligible for free LSC funded ESOL classes or subsidised further education of any kind. Only refugees who are unemployed or receiving income-based benefits will be eligible for free ESOL courses.



*Amba Bongo, Project Director for Active Women (see page 3)*

"In light of the current debate around integration, and in particular the Prime Minister's comments about the importance of learning English, it seems utterly contradictory to cut funding for English classes," says Anna Reisenberger<sup>4</sup>, acting Chief Executive of the Refugee Council.

"How is it going to be possible to promote social inclusion, which the Learning and Skills Council states is a priority, when people are unable to talk to each other, and newly arrived asylum seekers find it a struggle just to go into local shops and buy a pint of milk?"

*continued on page 2...*

<sup>1</sup>Contact Jorge Sanchez-Chiara at Age Concern London on 020 8765 7714 or Elaheh Rambarzini at the Refugee Council on 020 7346 1160 for information about the Older Refugees Programme

<sup>2</sup> Permission to work briefing, Refugee Council June 2006, [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/policy/briefings/2006/permissiontowork.htm](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/policy/briefings/2006/permissiontowork.htm)

<sup>3</sup> NIACE executive summary report on the state of ESOL provision, [www.niace.org.uk/projects/esol-enquiry/documents/ESOL-Inquiry-ExecutiveSummary.pdf](http://www.niace.org.uk/projects/esol-enquiry/documents/ESOL-Inquiry-ExecutiveSummary.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> The Guardian, 24 October 2006, <http://society.guardian.co.uk/asylumseekers/story/0,,1929456,00.html>

*continued from page 1...*

There is great wisdom in introducing age discrimination legislation which may open previously closed doors to many people. But where is the wisdom in reducing asylum seekers' and refugees' access to training and employment?

The Refugee Council and London Refugee Economic Action (LORECA) will be publishing a briefing paper on the cuts in ESOL and wider Further Education funding in December 2006. This will be available on our website, [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk)

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## BASIS Project update

The Refugee Council and Refugee Action are working in partnership on a project to help Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) build their capacity to access and manage funding. The development phase of this project is funded by the Big Lottery Fund under their Building and Sustaining Infrastructure Services (BASIS) programme and we are now more than half way through this phase.

As part of the development phase we devised a questionnaire to find out RCO organisational development needs and distributed it to over 1000 RCOs across England. We also developed a questionnaire to find out about the services available to RCOs and distributed it to over 400 infrastructure organisations across England.

We have had a fantastic response, and have reached a 60% response rate for the RCO

questionnaire in London alone, a rate which was helped along by our dedicated researchers: Leda Avgousti, Said Shams, Hassan Adan and Musa Hersi.

The prize of £200 towards the organisational development of one RCO who responded to our questionnaire was picked out of a hat, and the winner is the African Swahiliphone Refugee Project based in London. Congratulations!

We would like to thank our researchers and all those organisations who took the time to respond. This information is invaluable to finding out the needs of RCOs and to identify any gaps in support. We will be producing a report of our findings and will keep you updated on any developments. For more information, contact the **BASIS Project Team** on, **020 7346 1099**

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## Refugee Council publication

### Unaccompanied children

The Refugee Council has published an online briefing, which looks at the impact of the European regulation known as 'Dublin II' on unaccompanied children in the UK. It explains how the regulation works in practice and discusses how the regulation could be implemented differently by the UK to ensure that unaccompanied children receive the protection and care they need. To download this briefing go to: [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/policy/briefings/2006/unaccompaniedchildren.htm](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/policy/briefings/2006/unaccompaniedchildren.htm)

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### Holocaust Memorial Day – 27 January 2007

Holocaust Memorial Day remembers all those who suffered in the Holocaust during World War Two. The day also provides a focus for examining the repercussions of the Holocaust and later genocides. All communities in the UK are encouraged to mark Holocaust Memorial Day in their own way. For more information go to [www.hmd.org.uk](http://www.hmd.org.uk) or call **0845 838 1883**

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## Refugee Befriending Project

St Pancras Refugee Centre (SPaRC) is running a befriending scheme for refugees and asylum seeker clients referred to them by the Traumatic Stress Clinic. The befriending role is only open to refugees. Befrienders will provide individual support to other refugees who are experiencing isolation and are in need of support. The project aims to support clients to cope with life challenges through friendship and empathy and reduce isolation.

Training and supervision will be provided and full expenses will be paid. For more information, contact **Ermias Alemu** on **020 7278 4223** or [ermias.alemu@hcct.org.uk](mailto:ermias.alemu@hcct.org.uk)

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## Assisted voluntary return

The Refugee Council website has an expanded section on information about voluntary assisted returns programmes from the UK. See, [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/voluntaryreturns](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/voluntaryreturns) Please contact either **Gary Bell** or **Jonathan Parr** on **0207 346 1176/1175** at the Refugee Council with any feedback or suggestions about the site.



## Sharing Experience

### Active Women

*Amba Bongo, Project Director and Immigration Case Worker for Active Women talks to RCO News about their projects and services.*

Amba Bongo set up Active Women in 1998 to provide advice and support to French speaking African refugee and asylum seeking women. It was whilst working as an interpreter for a solicitors firm dealing with immigration and asylum cases, that Amba realised there was a need to provide good immigration and asylum advice to refugee women and to ensure that they understood the asylum process well.

Women clients would often tell Amba crucial information relating to their asylum cases, such as experiencing rape, and she would strongly encourage them to tell their solicitors. "I think clients confided in me because they felt more comfortable talking to me than to their solicitor," says Amba. "It was also apparent that clients needed lots of help understanding the UK system, particularly health and housing related issues."

Amba now manages the Asylum and Immigration project, one of Active Women's three projects, which supports refugee women. She assists clients with their asylum application forms and helps refused clients to lodge appeals. "I really enjoy asylum casework, but I am concerned about the increasing lack of solicitors who are available to work on asylum cases, and ensure that clients receive good quality support and advice." says Amba.

The second project, Carpe Diem was set up to enhance women refugees' self esteem by

encouraging them and helping them to find appropriate educational courses and to find better employment. Amba says, "some of the women clients we support have suffered persecution because of their husband's activities, and haven't been able to access education. We helped one such woman who is now in her second year of university, studying to be a qualified nurse; it's fantastic to see!"

Active Women currently employs three volunteers but recently secured funding from Bridge House Trust, to employ an outreach worker on their Active Plus Club project for elderly refugees. Amba says, "Elderly refugees are very isolated in our community; a typical week for them often consists of going to church on Sunday, shopping on Monday and the rest of the week stuck indoors watching television in English, a language that they struggle to understand." The Active Plus Club aims to break this isolation and improve their well being by involving them in a monthly reading club, taking them on trips around London, and other educational and cultural activities.

For more information visit, [www.activewomen.be](http://www.activewomen.be) or contact **Amba Bongo** on **020 7793 7758** or **07732 278 360** or email [amba@activewomen.be](mailto:amba@activewomen.be) or [amba@ambabongo.com](mailto:amba@ambabongo.com)



## Funding News

### Charities Aid Foundation

Charities Aid Foundation aims to support the organisational development of small and medium-sized UK charities, through its grant programme. They may for example, help to fill gaps in a charity's funding, or by providing consultancy to assist in developing new income streams or to broaden existing ones. The grants are available through its Consultancy and Training Fund and the Collaborative Fund. The next application deadline is the **2 February 2007**. For more information visit,

[www.cafonline.org/Default.aspx?page=7544](http://www.cafonline.org/Default.aspx?page=7544)

### Henry Smith Charity

The Henry Smith Charity provides grants in the areas of health, disability and community services to charities, community and voluntary organisations. The Charity can provide funding for projects that provide support for communities in areas of considerable deprivation including ethnic minority groups. Other priorities include hospitals and medical care, hospices and palliative care, medical research, disability, elderly, young people, drugs and alcohol, holiday for children. Trustees meet **four times a year** to consider grant applications. For more information visit,

[www.henrysmithcharity.org.uk/default.html](http://www.henrysmithcharity.org.uk/default.html)

## Training update from the Community Development Team (CDT)

### Financial Literacy Project

The second rollout of the Financial Literacy Project was successfully delivered at Stockwell Community Resource Centre, with high attendance and positive feedback from the participants. Five different Financial Literacy courses were delivered in this rollout, targeting participants living in south west London.

The Financial Literacy Project aims to ensure that participants have an opportunity to attend the courses in their local area by delivering courses in different areas of London. The third rollout of the project is being delivered in north east London at Hackney and Islington Refugee Training Partnership.

The following training will be provided: Individual & Employees, Self-Employed on **30 November 2006**; Budget Preparation for individuals on **5 December 2006**; Business Awareness on **7 December 2006**; Cash Flow Forecast Analysis on **18 December 2006**; and Getting to Grips with Finance on **19 December 2006**. Contact **Girma Afley** on **020 7346 1161** or email [girma.afley@refugeecouncil.org.uk](mailto:girma.afley@refugeecouncil.org.uk) for further information about these workshops.

### Training and seminars for refugee community organisations

The CDT free training programme 2006/7 for refugee community organisations (RCOs) started in October with a fundraising seminar in west London. This was followed by two trainings in November: writing better funding applications and working with unaccompanied children. The trainings and seminar were well attended with very positive feedback.

Upcoming training and seminars will include: How is asylum support advice different from immigration advice? **6 December 2006**; Meet the funders seminar in east London **18 January 2007**; Working with unaccompanied children **25 January 2007**; Developing gender sensitive services **31 January 2007**; joint Refugee Council and Metropolitan Police Service seminar focusing on women **15 March 2007**; Bookkeeping and petty cash **22 March 2007** and Meet the funders seminar in central and south London **29 March 2007**.

For more information, email **Penny McLean** at [penny.mclean@refugeecouncil.org.uk](mailto:penny.mclean@refugeecouncil.org.uk) or download our training brochure at, [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/training/rcos](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/training/rcos)

### The Children's Society launch media training for young refugees

A new three-year initiative to help young refugees speak up and put across their own message in the media has been set up by The Children's Society. Funded by the Big Lottery Fund, the Young Refugees' Media Project offers communication and media training to young refugees and asylum seekers, between the ages of 16 and 21.

In a climate where the mainstream media often fails to address these issues in a sympathetic, fair or even balanced way, it is increasingly important that refugees, themselves, develop the skills and confidence they need in order to negotiate with those who provide the services they require and to tell the public about their reality.

Any young refugees and groups who are interested in participating in the project, should contact the co-ordinator, **Gershon Berkowitz** on **07810 796 505** or email [gab@childsoc.org.uk](mailto:gab@childsoc.org.uk).

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

#### Jonathan Cox – Campaigns and Public Affairs Team



There have been five asylum acts of Parliament in the past decade and few of the new measures have been positive for asylum seekers and refugees. That is why my work as the Parliamentary and External Relations Officer is so challenging. I work with

Parliamentarians, Government Ministers, spokespeople and advisers to ensure that the voices of refugees and asylum seekers are heard when political decisions are made.

In the past year alone we have lobbied on a major bill, fought battles against vouchers and section 9, and won significant Parliamentary support for our campaigns to ensure asylum seekers have access to health care, and to stop the detention of children.

However, to make a real difference we need RCOs to work with us to influence their local MPs. Email me at [jonathan.cox@refugeecouncil.org.uk](mailto:jonathan.cox@refugeecouncil.org.uk) or go to, [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/gettinginvolved/](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/gettinginvolved/) to find out more.