

New research on refugee integration

The Refugee Council and the University of Birmingham recently launched their new integration report at an event in London. The report contains powerful findings from a two-year qualitative research project of *Refugees' Experience of Integration* carried out in partnership by the Refugee Council and the University of Birmingham.

The aim of the study was to explore social aspects of refugees' integration particularly in relation to how these were experienced in two different localities (Haringey and Dudley) with contrasting histories of refugee settlement. The project examines refugees' own experiences of the integration process, what integration means to them, focusing on their aspirations for life in the UK and how they try to achieve these aspirations.

Interviews were conducted with a diverse range of refugees in terms of: gender; age; ethnicity and country of origin; length of time in the UK; and family status. The interviews were carried out by a number of community researchers who were all refugees. Each community researcher first attended accredited training in social research methods at the University of Birmingham. As part of this training, they looked at other similar projects and learnt about the effect that the interviews might have on both participants and interviewers and the ethics around this.

Ata Salih and Hameed Hakimi were two of the community researchers involved in the project. They gave fascinating presentations at the launch event, speaking about their experiences of conducting interviews for the research study and really bringing their community research experience to life!

Ata Salih came to the UK after fleeing Iraq in 2000. He said: "As a new dispersal area (Dudley), it was quite difficult to find interview participants for the project. Finding the right space and the right time for participants was also really challenging; I had to do one of the interviews in a car!" He added: "I found this research experience very humbling and



Ata Salih – Community Researcher

inspiring, and I really want to ensure that not just these, but all refugee voices are heard."

Hameed Hakimi came to the UK just over four years ago from Afghanistan. He said: "I thought it would be easy, refugees talking to refugees, but it was scary! This was proper, professional work. The only interview I'd ever had was with the Home Office and I don't think it was done like this!" He added, "the training we received taught us how to 'be' in the interviews, you know, how to respect participants' cultural differences and asking permission to record them. This was so important, as it helped respondents to trust us.



Hameed Hakimi – Community Researcher (standing in front of a poster depicting life for some Afghans living in the Kabul hills)

"On a personal level, this community research experience has changed my perceptions of research. There is so much involved to ensure that interviews are done ethically and professionally. I really feel that I have improved my social interaction skills. It was a fantastic and unique opportunity, sometimes filled with laughter and most definitely sadness."

The report provides an important contribution to the debate about integration and settlement into Britain. To download *Refugees' Experience of Integration*, go to www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/news/press/2007/october/20071018.htm or email Lisa Doyle at lisa.doyle@refugeecouncil.org.uk for further information about the research and/or a hard copy of this report.

Conferences

Older refugees - from isolation to integration

Wednesday, 9 January 2008 at City Hall, London SE1 2AA

This ground breaking conference will be the culmination of the Older Refugees Programme - a two year partnership initiative, funded by Lloyds TSB, between Age Concern England, the Refugee Council, Age Concern London and the Greater London Association of Older Women (AGLOW), focusing on the issues, challenges and service needs of older refugees and asylum-seekers.

The conference, hosted by the Greater London Authority, will present the findings and key messages from the programme. It is aimed at an audience of service providers and policy makers responsible for addressing the needs of older refugees and asylum-seekers. The day will be a

unique opportunity to explore how existing and potential initiatives can help to reduce the isolation experienced by many older refugees and promote their integration into the local community and wider society.

To register your interest in attending this free conference please email refugees@ace.org.uk or call **020 8765 7523**.



An older refugee who came to the UK from Colombia in 1997

Museums and refugees

Museum in Docklands, London, 13-14 March 2008

Voices of refugees are rarely heard and often misrepresented in the media. This international conference will explore the changing shape of community cultures and how museums and heritage agencies respond to complex historical, ethical, legal, social and political issues. Some of the questions that will be addresses are:

- How do museums, the heritage sector, refugees and asylum seekers engage with each other? How can we encourage innovative policy and programming?
- What do refugees and asylum seekers want from museums?
- How can we establish partnerships, two-way conversations and together respond to the increased global focus and effects of forced migration and facilitate social inclusion?

Cost: £50 (voluntary/community organisations). A limited number of free places will be available to RCOs on a first come first served basis. To book a free place contact **Melanie Pay** on **020 7814 5613** or email mpay@museumoflondon.org.uk

Resettlement assistance to Iraqi employees

The Government has announced an 'ex gratia'¹ package of assistance to be provided for Iraqi interpreters and other locally employed staff working for British armed forces and civilian missions in Iraq. In a Foreign and Commonwealth Office blog (12 October 2007), the Foreign Secretary, David Miliband said: "Our Iraqi staff have given brave and selfless service in the most difficult of circumstances." Those who are eligible can choose to either apply for a one-off package of financial assistance, for exceptional leave to enter the UK or for resettlement under the UK's Gateway refugee resettlement programme.

See 30 October 2007 statement by the Foreign Secretary, David Miliband at www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Servlet?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029391629&a=KArticle&aid=1193597484124 See the response from concerned NGOs at www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/news/press/2007/november/20071119_b.htm

Information sheet on age assessment procedures

The Immigration Law Practitioners' Association (ILPA) has released an information sheet on age assessment procedures for asylum seeking children. It builds on the May 2007 ILPA report, *When is a child not a child? Asylum, age disputes and the process of age assessment*, by highlighting the findings in the report and developments in this area.

To access the information sheet go to www.ilpa.org.uk (update sheet 7)

¹Beyond the limits of what is lawfully and contractually required. The assistance does not recognise an obligation, or imply a commitment, to assist locally-employed staff in other countries, past, present or future.



Sharing experience

Lambeth Community of Refugees from Vietnam

Huong K Le, Community Development Manager of Lambeth Community of Refugees from Vietnam (LCRV) talks to RCO News about the needs of the Vietnamese community.

Our RCO was established in 1983 to primarily serve the needs of the Vietnamese community and became a charitable company in 1987. Not so long ago we employed six to seven paid staff who ran a variety of services including: a youth project; a management project and an information and advice project. Now, due to funding difficulties we have to use our reserve costs to fund my post one day a week and one part time sessional worker to co-ordinate our very well attended women's group.

After eight years working in other organisations, I returned to LCRV last year in an effort to fundraise and rebuild our RCO once again. On average I spend fifteen days working on one funding application, so much of my time is spent voluntarily trying to raise funds for the organisation. I think this is the case for many small RCOs like ours.

Although many of the Vietnamese community have been in the UK since 1979 when the first quota of 4000 was approved by the UK government, they still do not feel integrated into UK life. Due to the long lasting Vietnam War there is a high illiteracy rate among my community. According to a recent user survey, only 10% completed secondary school in Vietnam. This is in part because many of the Vietnamese who came to the UK were from rural backgrounds so education levels were generally quite low.

A great number of the first generation Vietnamese community still cannot speak English, as when they first came to the UK, many were busy bringing up their children. Many also continue to suffer from flashbacks and need mental health support after all these years. Our community continues to face many challenges but we strive

to support them in overcoming these.

We currently run a very active and popular elderly association which gives our elderly members the opportunity to socialise and meet for lunch on Fridays and Saturdays. Our eldest member is 94! We also run ESOL classes.



Learning together at Lambeth Community of Refugees from Vietnam

For the future our aim is to facilitate more access to education, work and training opportunities to members of the Vietnamese, Hong Kong and Chinese community. We would like to offer more Food Safety and Hygiene courses for those who wish to start up catering businesses and continue our women's groups which meets monthly to share ideas and to learn to read and write.

I did not have the opportunity to serve my country, so now I try to serve my people as much as I can and pay back the British people and government for their generosity and 'open arms' in receiving a number of refugees from Vietnam. We are hopeful for the future.

For more information, please contact **Huong K Le** on **020 7622 2119** or email **lambethcrv@yahoo.co.uk**.

Funding News

Big Lottery Fund's Advice Plus

Big Lottery Fund's (BIG) Advice Plus funding programme is open for phase 2 applications. This final phase of the Advice Plus funding programme aims to fund projects that deliver **all** of the following outcomes:

- People in greatest need have better access to legal advice.
- People in greatest need receive timely, accurate and effective legal advice that is quality assured and joined up with other services.
- People in greatest need avoid disadvantage because commonly encountered legal problems are identified and prevented.

The funding is open to voluntary and community sector organisations and there are three programme themes: partnership working, quality standards, and sustainable benefits. Grants range from £10,000 to £500,000 for revenue projects for up to five years, including up to £50,000 of capital expenditure. Closing date: **2pm, 1 April 2008**. For more information, visit **www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/prog_advice_plus**.



New community safety website

The Community Safety Advisory Service (CSAS) has recently launched a new website to support all small and medium sized voluntary organisations that wish to engage in community safety and crime reduction work.

The new website features news and information to support all organisations working within their communities to reduce crime. We hope it will support you in getting involved in local decision making and in setting up and running your own crime prevention projects.

Special pages have been dedicated to current issues including: guns, gangs and knives, anti-social behaviour and community cohesion. Visit the new website at www.csas.org.uk

Revised online directory

The second edition of the LORECA Employment, Training and Business Support Directory is an easy to use online tool which lists service providers based in London for refugees and asylum seekers in the areas of: employment, training, and business support. Many provide specialist support targeted at refugees and asylum seekers. Others are open to the general public. Please note that due to limited circulation, hard copies are only available to organisations. Individuals are invited to use the online directory. To request a hard copy of the directory, contact Resource Information Service on **020 7939 0641**. You can find the online directory at <http://directory.loreca.org.uk/>

New book on unaccompanied asylum seeking children

A new book, *Working with unaccompanied asylum seeking children: Issues for policy and practice*, has been published. The book explores the challenges and possibilities of working with asylum seeking children and young people, including the different aspects of resettlement, and development and sustainability of good standards of practice. Price: **£19.99**. To order a copy, go to www.palgrave.com/products/title.aspx?PID=274448

Online tool for refugee teachers

A new tool for refugee teachers has been launched by the Refugee Council and its partners. The Refugees Into Teaching website provides comprehensive information for refugee teachers, educational institutions and providers. The site is the online hub for the Refugees into Teaching project, which aims to get refugee teachers back into teaching. Go to www.refugeesintoteaching.org.uk

Who's who at the Refugee Council?



Emily Kippax – Project Manager, the Basis Project

I recently joined the Refugee Council to lead the Basis Project, which you may have read about in previous issues of RCO News. For those who haven't, Basis is a new

project funded by the Big Lottery Fund focused on helping refugee community organisations (RCOs) succeed in achieving their goals. I am so excited to be working for the Refugee Council and on this project, which I think will provide much needed support to RCOs across England in five key areas: organisational governance, fundraising, financial management, project management and organisational development.

One of our key goals is to help at least 85% of the 400 RCOs we will work with to fundraise successfully: so we won't be hiding behind what we do – we have to help you succeed!

You won't have heard much from us over the last couple of months because we have been working hard on developing the Basis 'model', that is, how we will work with RCOs, as well as developing training and information resources including a dedicated Basis website. We have just appointed the Organisational Development Officers (ODOs) who will be working directly with RCOs in every region. Look out for updates in RCO News and on our temporary Basis website page, www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/basis, for more information about your nearest ODO contact.

We want to start working with RCOs from the beginning of 2008, so if you are interested or would just like more information, please contact **Judi Thompson** on **020 7840 4486** or at basis@refugeecouncil.org.uk. If you are not an RCO and would like to discuss the project further, please contact me on **020 7840 4487**. We are all really looking forward to working with you and learning from you.