



**Welcome to the January edition of the WERS newsletter.
Happy New Year!**

Thank you so much for the many Christmas gifts of sweets, chocolates and toiletries for Festive Week. Father Christmas was ensconced in the clothing store each morning distributing gifts. 100 goody bags and the most enormous bag of soft toys were given to the Hubbub drop-in for their party and a similar number of gifts were taken to the Dolphin Street drop-in party. Large tins of biscuits were given to all our destitute clients along with their weekly support. We tried wherever possible to give cards and letters of thanks to everyone who brought sweets and toiletries down to WERS but some days the donations were coming so thick and fast we could not keep up!
Thanks again!

Royal Visit



On 14 November we were delighted to welcome HRH Princess Alexandra to WERS.

It was rather a surreal experience to see the large silver Mercedes sweep into the driveway of St Philip's Vicarage and the Royal party emerge – not our usual sort of Tuesday morning!

A number of clients past and present were invited to attend and they very much enjoyed chatting to the Princess, who was visibly moved as she listened to their stories and experiences.

The WERS website is here!

The WERS website is now live at www.wers.org.uk

Do visit it and let us know what you think! There will shortly be a facility to donate online on the How to Help page, in addition to the usual ways of setting up a standing order or gift aiding a donation.

Save ESOL! Stop cuts in English language rights

Concern is mounting over new funding restrictions on English as a Second Language.

The proposed changes are:

- * Existing universal entitlement to free ESOL training up to level 2 removed
- * Fee remission available only to people receiving means-tested benefits and tax credits
- * Asylum seekers aged 19+ no longer automatically eligible for publicly funded FE provision from 2007/08

Learning English has always been a top priority for asylum seekers and refugees. Dozens of WERS' clients attend classes at local colleges several times a week. For many asylum seekers prevented by the Government from undertaking paid work, the classes represent the main focus of their weekly routine and students study hard, determined to improve their English language skills which are so vital in the integration process.

The Government has consistently reiterated the view that anyone coming to live in the UK needs to be able to communicate effectively in English. As Roger Kline, UCU (University and College Union) head of equality has stated:

'These changes fly in the face of the government's stated concern for integration and social cohesion and will make life even more difficult for thousands of vulnerable people.'

The effect of withdrawing the opportunity to study English will have a devastating effect on WERS' clients. Not only will they be denied the opportunity to improve their written and spoken English; asylum seekers need the social interaction and challenge of academic achievement that attending college provides.

WERS fears that clients' well-being and mental health will be seriously affected.

What you can do to help

A campaign to fight the cuts will be launched in London on 15 February. Write to your MP, asking them to sign Early Day Motion 383, or get your MP to ask a question in parliament. (At the time of writing the only local MP to have signed is Jim Cousins.) To find out how to get in touch with your local MP, visit <http://www.theyworkforyou.com>. Look out for the progress of the campaign in the press and support it in any way you can.

WERS funding situation

Those of you who attended the AGM would have heard about the difficulties that WERS is currently experiencing. WERS was delighted to hear just before Christmas that the application to Northern Rock Foundation had been successful. There is still a long way to go but this has given us all a tremendous boost while we await the outcome of all the other funding bids that we have submitted in the last few months. Since the AGM, WERS has received many donations, including a number of large donations: 2 of them anonymous and the others from local churches.

This has greatly helped the situation and we are most grateful to those concerned – whoever they may be!

Raise funds for WERS when you shop online

If you shop online there is now a simple way for you to support WERS.

Easyfundraising is a shopping directory listing many online stores. Over 350 popular retailers are participating including Amazon, Tesco, Thorntons, Toys'R'Us, DELL, John Lewis, Comet, HMV and Vodaphone.

All you need to do is use the links provided on the **easyfundraising** site whenever you shop online, and at no extra cost WERS will receive a donation with every purchase you make.

Why not raise money for WERS by using this completely free service?

Visit <http://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/wers>

Lindsay Cross

Office Details

Tel: 0191 273 7482

Fax: 0191 256 7862

Email: wers@btinternet.com

Website: www.wers.org.uk

**West End Refugee Service
St Philip's Vicarage
St Philip's Close
Arthur's Hill
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE4 5JE**

Office & Clothing Store Opening times:

Mon, Tues, Thurs, Fri: 9.30am – 1pm

Wednesday: 11am – 1pm