



**Welcome to the April edition of the WERS newsletter - a little delayed for a very good reason!**

**Excellent Funding News!**



We decided to delay the April newsletter so we could announce our new Big Lottery award! Everyone at WERS is delighted about the latest award which will fund the Project Director's post and the Office Manager's post for the next 3 years. This is the third award: WERS has been funded by the Big Lottery (and its former incarnations) since 2001.



Our new Northern Rock Foundation 3 year award, which funds our full-time support worker, began in January, and further awards of project funding have been received from Lankelly Chase Foundation, Christ's Hospital in Sherburn and Your Homes Newcastle Grant Aid Budget.

For the hardship fund, grants have been received from GoodFund and William Moulton Charity as well as numerous individual and church donations. GoodFund have awarded us a 6 month grant that will pay for all our purchases of food and toiletries. The William Moulton Charity award is to be used for other client requests for financial help which would not meet the usual criteria of the hardship fund.

Due to these 2 awards we are delighted to have been able to increase the weekly cash payments to destitute clients from £5 to £10.

In a climate of such stiff competition for funding, it is most encouraging that WERS' work continues to be recognised and applauded in this way.

What really matters, however, is that all these awards will allow WERS to continue and develop its services for asylum seekers and refugees. A big thank you to all our funders and supporters!

## **ESOL**

In the January edition I wrote about the proposals to cut funding for ESOL classes for asylum seekers. I am very grateful to Julie Day who is a tutor at Newcastle College for updating us on the current situation.

Asylum seekers' funding for courses has been partially restored, but only for those who are able to prove that they have been in the UK 6 months or more. There is confusion as to what proof will be acceptable or indeed how asylum seekers can prove this, as their ARCs (Application Registration Cards) do not show this information. Travel expenses to classes will still be available, but no childcare expenses.

For refugees, ESOL classes will not automatically be free. If refugees are in receipt of any benefits, they will be entitled to free tuition. It is as yet undecided whether or not those on a low income will have the same entitlement. It is of course hoped that this will be the case.

Although it might initially appear that the picture is not as bleak as before, this perhaps is not the case. A worrying aspect of the Government's New Asylum Model (NAM) is the emphasis on quick decisions on claims. Speedy decisions will save money that would otherwise have been spent on accommodation and support. The Government believes that speedy decisions and swift removals are central to the credibility of the UK immigration system. However, the time scales are too short for the proper consideration of claims and access to and provision of legal advice may also be compromised by the speed of the process.

The cases of asylum seekers under NAM will therefore be determined within a few months and so the 6 month criterion for entitlement to free ESOL classes will be largely an irrelevance.

## **Destitution**

The campaign to end destitution of people refused asylum continues to gather momentum nationally. The 'Still Human Still Here' campaign and the Refugee Council's 'Just Fair' campaign are working to persuade the Government to:

- continue financial support and accommodation for refused asylum seekers
- grant asylum seekers permission to work until such time that they leave the UK or are given leave to remain
- continue to provide health care and education throughout that same period

On 9 May the UK Borders Bill 2007 will be debated in the House of Commons. The 'Still Human Still Here' proposed amendment to Clause 17 of the Bill would ensure that refused asylum seekers have access to support. This would end the inhumane treatment of asylum seekers whose applications for asylum have been turned down.

WERS is currently supporting 80-90 destitute clients. Many appear to have given up hope of ever being able to live a normal life and some are losing the will to live. One client, J, has been on the street for over 6 months. He sleeps under one of the railway arches in the city centre and attends Ron Eager House and the People's Kitchen. He visits WERS each week to collect his payment from the WERS hardship fund. J is angry and depressed about his situation and for many weeks went to his solicitor's office every day wanting help. His frustration and anger frequently boils over and he has railed against the WERS staff for not giving him accommodation. He is not considered to be poorly enough to meet the criteria for local authority support. J's unenviable situation and that of many other destitute asylum seekers will not change until the Government changes its shameful policy.

## **On-line donation**

The WERS website ([www.wers.org.uk](http://www.wers.org.uk)) now has a facility for on-line donations.

## **Civic Reception**

Six of our refugee clients attended a civic reception at the Mansion House last week and received a small gift from the city in recognition of their contribution to the city of Newcastle. Those attending the event, which was hosted by the Lord Mayor, also included individuals and organisations who have played an important part in welcoming and supporting refugees in the city. WERS is immensely proud of the achievements of those who, having overcome extraordinary hardship, are starting a new life in Newcastle and using their many and varied skills to the benefit of us all.

## **Clothing store**

Now Spring has sprung, you might want to have a good clear out of your wardrobe! Items of men's clothing are in particularly short supply at the moment, but clothing for all ages is most welcome.

## **Lindsay Cross**

### **Office Details**

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### **Office & Clothing Store Opening times:**

Mon, Tues, Thurs, Fri: 9.30am – 1pm

Wednesday: 11am – 1pm