



Welcome to the October edition of the WERS newsletter

Festive Week 2008 15-19 December

It will soon be time for WERS volunteer Colin to dust off his Santa suit and to spend the week distributing presents and glowing beneath a very tickly white beard! (He loves it really!) WERS is once again collecting sweets and chocolate (no nuts, please), toiletries, small toys, woolly hats, gloves and scarves to give to clients who visit the project during Festive Week.

Donations are most welcome at any time from now on. If they could be brought to the project by the 9 December at the latest that will give the volunteers time to sort them and prepare the bags ready for the start of Festive Week.

If you can offer some time to help sort the gifts please contact Carol, the WERS Volunteer Co-ordinator.

Goodbye and Good Luck!



Robert l'Anson, the Clothing Store Manager for the past 8 years, recently left WERS for pastures new. He will be much missed by everyone, especially the team of volunteers who help run the store and distribute the food parcels. Everyone at WERS wishes him happiness and success in his new job.



Bill Brooks, Chairman of Governors at Sherburn House Charity presenting Lindsay Cross with a cheque for £5,000. A grant of £15,000 over 3 years was awarded to WERS towards running costs.

Independent Asylum Commission

At the recent WERS AGM, Canon Professor Nicholas Sagovsky, one of the IAC commissioners, spoke about the nationwide citizen's review of the UK asylum system. The Interim Findings were published in March of this year and the UK Border Agency(UKBA) then responded to the findings. The Commission have now published 3 reports of conclusions and 92 recommendations for reform: Saving Sanctuary, Safe Return and Deserving Dignity. These excellent reports can be found on the IAC's website:

www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk

Each of the 3 reports includes UKBA's response to the findings, the Commissioners' assessment of UKBA's response and the IAC's recommendations. It is interesting to read in UKBA's responses that many policies and practices exist to ensure humane and appropriate treatment of men, women and children in the asylum process. Evidence collected by the Commissioners, and also the experiences of WERS' clients, seem to suggest however that there exist significant differences between UKBA policy and actual practice.

The third report, Deserving Dignity, addresses issues around detention, the right to work, the treatment of children within the asylum process and the particular needs of women, torture survivors, those with health needs and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) asylum seekers. This report is of particular relevance to the experiences of WERS' clients.

The IAC concludes that the responsibility for the fair and humane treatment of people who seek sanctuary in the UK lies with the UK Border Agency, but also with politicians, the media and individual citizens. Nicholas urged everyone to be proactive in urging government urgently to engage with recommendations.

Section 21: recent developments

Until now, many people whose asylum claims have failed have been able to apply to Newcastle Social Services for accommodation and support under Section 21 of the National Assistance Act 1948. To qualify for this support, needs over and above destitution have to be established. WERS has a significant number of clients with serious mental health problems who are currently in receipt of this support. Over 200 asylum seekers are currently supported in Newcastle under Section 21.

A recent decision in the House of Lords however means that in future it is going to be much more difficult for clients to get this support. It is estimated that between 50% and 70% of clients (100-140 people) currently supported under Section 21 may lose that support. This is extremely worrying. The WERS clients who are receiving support are all ill and vulnerable people and it is unthinkable that they could find themselves destitute. This development will have a significant impact on WERS, East Area Asylum Seeker Support Group and the Asylum Seekers and Refugees Project, all of whom are already struggling to support destitute clients.

Donations for the Clothing Store

WERS asks that donations for the store are not left outside the project when the offices are closed.

A significant amount of stuff has been left recently, some of which sadly has been spoiled by the rain.

WERS is concerned that items left outside could also be a fire risk.

Thanks very much for your co-operation in this matter.

Lindsay Cross

Visiting Advice surgeries at WERS

Drop-in sessions

Monday 10.30am-12.30pm
BME Welfare Rights

Monday 1pm – 4pm (by appointment)
North of England Refugee Service Move-on

Tuesday 9.30am-11am
Victim Support

Thursday 9.30am-12pm
Your Homes Newcastle Move on Team

Thursday 10am
Community Safety Unit, Northumbria Police

Friday 10am -12noon
Newcastle City Council Education Welfare
(Term time only, see poster at WERS for dates)

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