



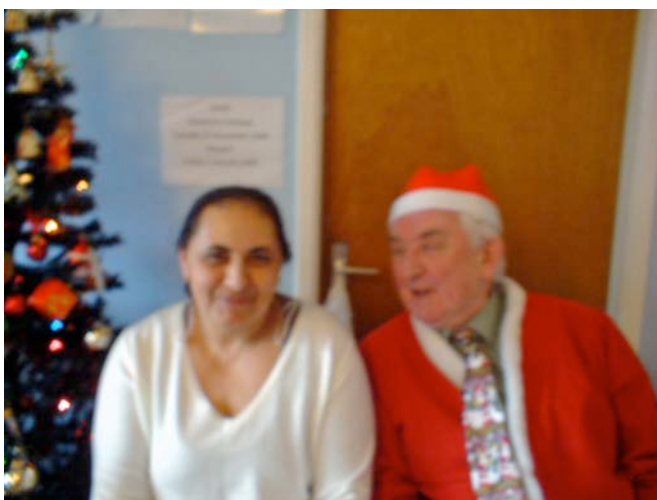
Welcome to the January edition of the WERS newsletter

A very Happy New Year!

Festive Week 2008

Festive Week was a great success with Santa Claus giving out over 500 bags of gifts to clients and their families. Due to the extraordinary generosity of our supporters we were also able for the first time to give a £30 bonus and a big box of biscuits to 83 destitute clients.

Thank you all so much for all the donations of sweets, toys, toiletries, warm clothing and money. Thanks also to all the volunteers who worked so hard sorting the gifts and helping during the week. Particular thanks to Colin for his sterling work as Santa. By Friday lunchtime he was certainly ready to pour himself a stiff drink and put his feet up!



Slavica and Santa, who is enjoying a break from wearing his very itchy beard!

WERS awareness-raising, training and education programme. A look back at 2008.....

During the year WERS gave 36 talks and training sessions to a wide variety of audiences. WERS was pleased to continue providing sessions for Northumbria Police probationers and 5 training sessions on asylum issues were delivered in the year. Talks were given as part of the city's Holocaust Memorial events and WERS also worked in partnership with Give Racism the Red Card, including an education day at John Spence Community College in North Tyneside. WERS links with Newcastle University Medical Schools were further developed and a session was given to Geography students from Northumbria University.

Talks to various community groups gave the opportunity to dispel some of the myths and negative perceptions of asylum seekers promoted in certain sections of the press and in the BNP's local election propaganda. These talks, challenging at times, have been very effective, giving many people the opportunity to hear a refugee's story first hand and to pose any questions they might have.

WERS staff members see these talks as an important part of their work and are always happy to come to a group to speak or deliver a training session. If you are part of a group who would like such a talk, please contact the office. The talks and sessions are given free of charge.

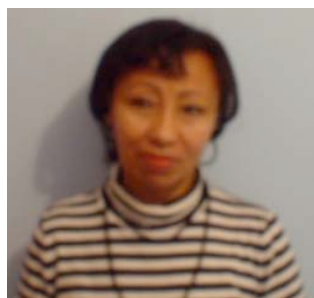
Holocaust Memorial events 2009

This year WERS has been very pleased to join forces with the City Council in delivering awareness-raising sessions in schools across the city. Education days are taking place in three primary schools in the east end of the city and three in the west. The work will culminate in an event at the beginning of February at the Tyneside Cinema for all the children who have taken part.

Ali has been telling his story to Key Stage 2 children as part of the programme and Lindsay led a session on asylum issues for the staff at Hawthorn Primary School in Elswick. It is hoped that this new partnership with the City Council will continue to develop.

A New Year brings new faces to WERS

We are delighted to welcome Claire Agwu and Genet Berhe to the WERS team. Claire has taken over as Clothing Store Supervisor and Genet is the new admin worker. WERS counts itself very lucky to have them both!



Genet and Claire

Hopes raised for the right to work?

Some of you may have seen an article in the Observer back in December concerning a High Court ruling which could lead to some asylum seekers being given the right to work. The High Court ruled that the current laws preventing an Eritrean asylum seeker from working were incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights.

The Eritrean has been in the UK for seven years while his case is being considered by the Home Office. Mr Justice Blake ruled that denying asylum seekers the right to work was 'unlawfully over-broad and unjustifiably detrimental to claimants who have had to wait as long as this claimant has.' He said the Home Office's policy breached article 8 of the Human Rights Act, which guarantees the 'right to respect for private and family life.'

The campaign for asylum seekers' right to work has been gathering momentum up and down the country.

A Zimbabwean asylum seeker living in the south of England eloquently described his own situation:

"The Home Office has said I cannot work. That deprives me of a lot of things as a human being – especially my dignity. But this policy has meant that the great skills I brought with me to this country have become rusty over the past 5 and a half years. Not only is this a tragedy for me, and wasted potential for the UK economy – it is a disaster for my country."

He ended poignantly: "When it is safe, I would like to return to Zimbabwe to help rebuild my great nation and recover my shattered dreams and ambitions. How can I do that if I have lost my skills and work experience?"

This High Court ruling may well have a bearing on the circumstances of many other asylum seekers in the UK.

Mark Wilson

We were greatly saddened to hear of the tragic death of Mark Wilson of Greggs Trust. He was 31 and had been battling against leukaemia. He will be much missed.

Lindsay Cross

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Office & Clothing Store Opening times:

Mon, Tues, Thurs, Fri: 9.30am – 1pm

Wednesday: 11am – 1pm