



Welcome to the April edition of the WERS newsletter



15-21 June

Different pasts, shared future

Refugee Week is a UK wide programme of events which celebrate the contribution of refugees to the UK.

The Newcastle Citywide Asylum Seeker and Refugee Support Group is planning once again to run awareness-raising activities in Newcastle city centre during Refugee Week. A stall is planned in the new City Library on the afternoon of Wednesday 18 June and at another city centre venue on the Thursday afternoon. Volunteers will be needed for both afternoons and we would be very pleased to hear from anyone who could spare an hour or so giving out promotional material. This one of the few activities that takes place out in the city amongst members of the general public and as such is an extremely important element of Refugee Week.

WERS 10th Birthday Celebrations!

This autumn will see the 10th anniversary of West End Refugee Service. It's hard to believe that we have been going that long! We are planning to combine our AGM with a special birthday celebration and this will be held on Thursday 22 October at Westgate Baptist Church starting at 7pm. We are delighted that one of our patrons Bishop Martin has agreed to speak. More details later.

An outstanding achievement!

Our colleague and friend Susan Donnelly has recently stepped down from her job as Clinical Nurse Lead for Asylum Seekers. Over the years she has done a fantastic job establishing and developing services for asylum seekers and refugees within Newcastle Primary Care Trust.

Susan came into the job when the dispersal of asylum seekers to Newcastle was in its infancy. She was appointed as Specialist Health Visitor for asylum seekers and refugees in February 2000.



At this time asylum seekers were being dispersed predominantly from Kent to properties owned by private landlords. Newcastle City Council had not yet started to provide accommodation and consequently asylum seekers were being housed exclusively within the private sector.

Within a couple of weeks of Susan's appointment, 200 asylum seekers had arrived at Angel Heights, the hostel owned by the Angel Group. With no consultation with the local authority or health service, no strategic planning had been done to prepare for the subsequent impact on services. GP surgeries struggled to cope with the arrival of so many people in such a short time scale. There was also the problem of language: Newcastle Interpreting Service was geared up for the traditional Asian community languages but not the new languages of the asylum seekers.

Susan responsibilities were many and wide-reaching – a combination of face-to-face work, meeting with families who had just arrived in Newcastle to give them information and help them access services, setting up the new service within Newcastle Primary Care Trust and networking with all those involved in asylum seeker and refugee support. A formidable workload for a team of 1!

Susan worked with GPs and health visitors supporting and encouraging them in their work and providing them with the tools they needed. In 2000, working with the Rights Project, she put together a Welcome Pack for asylum seekers, available in some of the new languages, which explained how to register with a GP, how to call an ambulance, how to claim back travel expenses for hospital visits, how to get free prescriptions and other useful information on how the health service operates.

Everywhere she went Susan raised the profile of asylum seekers, asking challenging questions (which were not always popular!) and working tirelessly to ensure that the clients received the best possible service.

In 2003 Susan's work was recognised by a change in role to that of Clinical Nurse Lead for Asylum Seekers. She also set up the Regional Nurses Network and her work has been recognised nationally as excellent practice. Her passion and commitment are as strong as ever.

Susan says:

'It has been challenging work, but an enjoyable challenge.

You are constantly fighting against systems, trying to enable asylum seekers to have equal access to services.

As long as people are in this country we must try to keep them as healthy as possible.'

Everyone at WERS thanks Susan for her outstanding work and all that she has achieved in improving the health and well-being of asylum seekers and refugees in Newcastle.

A new venture for WERS!

WERS now has an additional space to use for events and meetings. We have rented a small unit just round the corner from the vicarage and hope to initiate activities to bring WERS clients and local residents closer together. We have never had enough room at the vicarage for clients to stay and have a cup of coffee after seeing a support worker or visiting the clothing store and we are hoping that the unit will fill this gap. If you would like to offer to help serve drinks sometimes, do get in touch with Carol our volunteer co-ordinator.

A 'Post'script

There have been a number of occasions recently when post has gone astray and we have never received it. If anyone sends a letter or cheque and does not receive a receipt and thank-you within a couple of weeks, please contact the office and let us know.

Many thanks for your help.

Lindsay Cross

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Office & Clothing Store Opening times:

Mon, Tues, Thurs, Fri: 9.30am – 1pm

Wednesday: 11am – 1pm