



Welcome to the January edition of the WERS newsletter and a belated Happy New Year to you all!

First, a big thank-you....

Festive Week 2009 was a huge success with over 500 bags of presents given out to our clients by our trusty Santa. None of this would have been possible without the generosity of all those who brought gifts to the project. THANK YOU EVERYONE!

WERS' current funding position

This newsletter is all about money! WERS newsletter readers are used to the regular appeals for hardship funding to support WERS' destitute clients and the response has always been magnificent! Now there is also the need to flag up a big challenge in the coming year to raise money for salaries.

The current funding for three of the seven paid posts at WERS comes to an end between May and June this year with the end of both the Big Lottery grant and the current Northern Rock Foundation grant. The three posts involved are the support worker, the office manager and the project director's. Careful strategic planning by the trustees and staff has resulted in a further application to the latter being submitted along with a raft of other applications to other grant-giving trusts which we hope will be successful. This process will continue and will be the main focus for the work of the project director for some time to come!

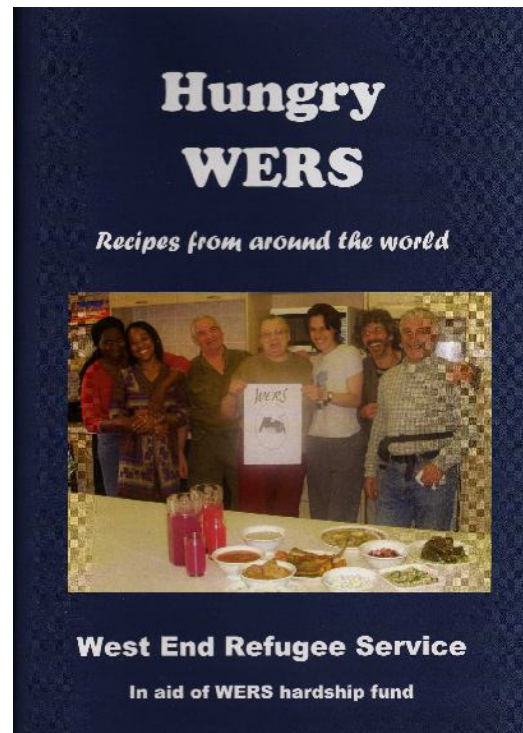
You will all be aware that, the voluntary and community sector has taken a battering during the economic downturn and a number of projects in the city have folded due of lack of funds. Competition for funding is keener than ever before and WERS therefore recognises that donations

from individuals and groups which support its work are going to play an increasingly important part in the charity's survival.

In the 10 years that WERS has been operating it has become one of the key players in the area of asylum support. Many organisations have told us that they could not do their job without WERS and the devastating effect on the asylum seeker and refugee clients should WERS cease to exist does not bear thinking about.

Please help us to raise the funding needed to continue our vital work.

Hungry WERS – the new fundraising recipe book!



Cathy Mabhena, one of the contributors says:

Welcome to 'Hungry WERS'!
We have put together a selection of recipes from our home countries for you to prepare and enjoy.
All proceeds from the sale of this book will go to the WERS hardship fund which supports over a hundred destitute asylum seekers. So by buying this little book you are helping to feed them too!



Hungry WERS was launched shortly before Christmas and £1000 has already been raised by sales of the book which costs £5! Information on how to order can be found on the website www.org.uk on the News and Events page or give WERS a ring on 0191 273 7482.

Changes to Section 4 support: the Azure card

On 1 February asylum seekers in the north east supported under Section 4 stopped receiving supermarket vouchers. A jolly good thing, you might say, to get rid of the vouchers that stigmatise and restrict asylum seekers' choice of where they can do their shopping. But.....

Enter the Azure card. Asylum seekers have been issued with a card which is topped up each week with their support. Only certain supermarkets have signed up to the scheme and unfortunately Morrisons stores, where so many asylum seekers do their shopping, were not ready to start, although they hope to be ready by the end of the month.

It had been hoped that smaller shops where clients can buy their food more conveniently and with a greater choice of the sort of food that they want to eat, would sign up but this has not happened as yet.

The UK Border Agency, in their briefing on the Azure card, stated that they recognised that vouchers were stigmatising, but are we missing something here? The Azure card is only issued to asylum seekers, so what exactly is the difference?

Many people are of the opinion that it is impossible to live without any cash. Travel on buses and the metro is impossible, for example, and asylum seekers often have to walk miles to get to the shops or the support agencies. UKBA rightly stated that the Azure card rules out any exploitative voucher exchange. WERS was aware that such exploitation did exist where asylum seekers were forced to exchange their vouchers for less than their value just to get a little bit of cash. However, many churches and other groups set up ethical voucher exchange schemes where asylum seekers could exchange a voucher for cash. The Azure card rules this out too and WERS has already had clients coming into the project asking how they can manage without any cash at all. We have no answer for them.

There are also concerns around the security of the card. There is no pin number so a stolen card could be used easily in the supermarket. Also, asylum seekers have to keep a tally as to how much money is left on the card. There is a phone line where they can find out what their balance is but we have learned that the number of calls to this line has been much, much larger than UKBA anticipated.

Not a brilliant state of affairs, then! It is obviously very early days and WERS will monitor how the scheme develops, but undoubtedly this new system will bring even greater hardship to the asylum seekers involved.

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Office & Clothing Store Opening times:

Mon, Tues, Thurs, Fri: 9.30am – 1pm

Wednesday: 11am – 1pm