



**West End Refugee Service**

*strength through support*

**Issue 55 October 2013**



Welcome to the October edition of the WERS newsletter!

**Confused, frustrated and exasperated with Home Office immigration policy and practice? We certainly are..**

Inconsistencies of approach, offensive initiatives and incompetence are nothing new in the Home Office. We were appalled by the 'Go home or face arrest' campaign trialled in a number of London boroughs over the summer months. A few weeks ago, despite numerous complaints, the Advertising Standards Agency, in an extraordinary deliberation, decided that the campaign slogan was not offensive although the statistical information, also displayed on the side of the van, regarding the number of arrests that Immigration had made in those areas which was rightly deemed to be misleading and inaccurate.

We hear today that the Home Secretary has pulled the plug on this campaign as it was proven to be ineffective - the pilot campaign is not to be extended to other parts of the country. However, once again there is no consideration given to the damage and offence already caused by this inflammatory scheme.

Last week many thousands of people received text messages from the Home Office telling them that they were in the UK illegally. I watched an interview on breakfast television with a man with leave to remain in the UK, and indeed British citizenship, who had lived here for 50 years and had received such a message. He described the distress that it has caused him and his keenness to discover exactly what inaccurate information about him was being held at the Home Office, and why. He had, at the time of the interview, received no answers to his questions.

There are still WERS clients who are in the Case Resolution programme, sometimes called 'Legacy'. The programme which aimed to resolve many of the old asylum cases officially ended 2 years ago. How long

will those whose cases remain unresolved have to wait before their uncertainty and anxiety comes to an end?

**And the real irony in all this.....**

What about the clients who have applied to go back to their countries voluntarily under the Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) scheme and yet have been refused permission to go back?

A few of our clients who have been refused asylum but who have been trying to get new evidence to support a fresh asylum claim reach a point when they cannot tolerate their situation anymore. They decide that they would rather risk the dangers associated with returning to their country than continue to live the miserable life of a destitute asylum seeker in Britain.

WERS has witnessed the efforts of clients who try to find out why their applications to go back voluntarily have been refused. Often the answers given are inconsistent and in some cases incomprehensible. We have a client who was refused AVR but denied further financial support in the UK on the grounds that he had not taken enough steps to leave the country! In desperation he has tried 3 times to leave the UK on a ferry and has been stopped each time, the last time arrested then detained for 48 hours before being released. This tale would verge on the comical if it was not so sad.

**And will the future be any better?**

In the last few weeks the Home Office has introduced new legislation to reform the UK immigration laws to, amongst other things, 'reduce the pull factors which encourage people to come to the UK'. The proposals include requiring private landlords to check the immigration status of their tenants and doctors receptionists to do the same. One wonders how many will turn black people away 'just in case'.

And now to matters where WERS and its supporters can make a real difference....

## Festive Week – gifts for destitute clients

Once again WERS is collecting gifts to be given to destitute asylum seekers during Festive Week.

At the moment the hardship fund is supporting many more men than women – 13 of the destitute clients are women and the remaining 90 or so are men – so we hope to collect enough suitable gifts for everyone. This year we are collecting:

Men's and women's toiletries: shower gel, toothpaste, shampoo, conditioner, deodorant, body lotion, eau de toilette (no razors)

Men's boxers

Women's briefs

Woolly hats and gloves

Socks

Chocolate and sweets (no nuts, please)

Biscuits

If WERS could have donations by Friday 6 December that would be brilliant.

## WERS AGM

This year's AGM was combined with the launch of our film 'Home' produced in collaboration with Newcastle University. 79 people attended the evening and we were particularly pleased that David Campbell, the film maker and all those who had participated in the film were able to be there.

The film was very warmly received and Ali, Evelyne, Dadou, Khirad and Janet were presented with a copy of the film and a small thank-you gift.

Everyone at WERS is extremely proud of them and recognise the wonderful contribution they each have made to our awareness-raising and education programme.

For those who were unable to be present, the films can be found on YouTube (search for West End Refugee Service).

WERS is enormously grateful to Newcastle University for providing funding for the launch and it was great to welcome a university contingent to the proceedings.

## Bike riding for WERS - brilliant!!

A message from Clive Davis, cyclist extraordinaire....  
*'Just to let you know that we did our bike ride fund raiser in aid of WERS on the weekend. So far we have raised £3,447.20. It's more than this because one or*

*two other cyclists set up their own just giving website too and the money is still coming in.*

*Not content with just getting sponsors in for the bike ride, several of the cyclists did their own additional mini fund raisers (cake and coffee, Mike's band, cocktail evening, curry night, ceilidh etc.). The ride itself was a great experience. As I say on the website, we did this ride over 20 years ago and we are not as fit as we were. But many others joined us and the good thing was that several young people joined us.'*



**CHRISTMAS OFFER!**

**BAGS OF SUPPORT FOR WERS!!**

Long or short handled - an attractive jute shopping bag.

All profit from the bags goes to the hardship fund supporting destitute asylum seekers.

Bags cost £5.  
P&P if you need it is £3.

Ring or email now to order.

## Do you have a car and could spare a couple of hours sometimes?

WERS often receives calls from people who have clothes and other items for the store to donate but cannot get to the project. We are very short of volunteers to pick up donations and bring them to WERS. If you could help us in this way, please contact Jo or Sarah.

Lindsay Cross

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