



West End Refugee Service

strength through support

Issue 56 January 2014



Welcome to the January edition of the WERS newsletter!

The Hardship Fund and Festive Week

We have all been overwhelmed by the extraordinary generosity of our supporters since launching our hardship fund appeal in the Autumn. We thank all those individuals and groups who have set up standing orders, made one-off donations, and organised fund-raising events. WERS has also been awarded grants for hardship from a number of charitable trusts. WERS was Charity of the Month at Price Waterhouse Coopers in December and we received a cheque for £1500 and dozens of beautiful bags of gifts.

Bill MacLeod, incoming senior partner, PwC Newcastle, said:

“Supporting local charities and the wider community plays a key role with our staff here at PwC, with helping others being made even more poignant at this time of year. We are delighted to have been able to support this wonderful charity that do so much for asylum seekers and refugees in the region. We hope the donation and gifts will make a real difference to those people helped by (WERS) and that it helps to make their Christmas just that little bit brighter.”

All this, combined with many messages of encouragement and good wishes have spurred us on and we are much more confident that we will be in a position to continue to give financial support to those who are in such need.

Thank you, too, for the wonderful array of gifts Festive Week. Over 100 bags containing a woolly hat, scarf and gloves, socks, underwear, toiletries and chocolates were given to the destitute clients.

Are you female? Do you have time to give? Are you looking for a role that is rewarding, challenging, interesting and fun? Brilliant! We are looking for volunteer female befrienders to provide vital support and friendship to asylum seekers and refugees in Newcastle.



“This has been one of the most rewarding schemes I have ever belonged to. We can donate money to favourite charities, which we know would collapse without people’s generosity – I believe the befriending scheme acts in the same way, by ‘donating’ people to support refugees, offering friendship and a sense of belonging”

We currently have a number of female clients waiting for a suitable befriender. As a befriender you will receive full training and support. Further information is available on our website www.wers.org.uk or please contact us via wers.volunteers@yahoo.co.uk.

Home Office immigration policy and practice – an all-time low

Earlier this week I read the depressing and shocking news that, according to information received under freedom of information laws, 'Home Office Officials are being rewarded with shopping vouchers for helping to ensure failed asylum seekers lose their attempt to stay in the country' (Guardian 15/01/14).

It appears that immigration workers have been set a target of winning 70% of tribunal cases where refused asylum seekers are appealing against the Home Office decisions that they should return to their country of origin. If the target is reached, or indeed exceeded, immigration workers have been given shopping vouchers.

It is outrageous to think that crucially important decisions whether or not to send back refused asylum seekers are being influenced by an incentive scheme, where success is measured by the number of asylum seekers forced to leave the UK. Where is the justice and fairness in that?

James Packer of Duncan Lewis solicitors said: 'We believe these measures are unlawful as well as immoral and have written to the Home Office making it clear that we will bring a legal challenge unless these incentives are withdrawn.'

There is a body of well-documented evidence of asylum seekers, sent back to their countries following a negative decision from the Home Office, having been tortured and persecuted again. Catherine Ramos's Unsafe Return report on asylum seekers returned to the Democratic Republic of Congo details the post return experience of nine of ten asylum seekers removed between 2006 and 2009, all clients of the Teeside organisation Justice First. The tenth person never made contact. The report can be found on the Justice First website: www.justicefirst.org.uk.

Tearing families apart

Just before Christmas, an African woman, whose application for asylum had been refused, was forcibly removed back to her country. She was happily married to a British man. Two and half years ago they were married at a ceremony at Newcastle Civic Centre and WERS was delighted to be represented at the wedding.

For the last 21 months since her asylum refusal WERS had supported her with weekly payments from the hardship fund and had got to know her well. On the day she was taken into detention, she had gone to report at Immigration North Shields. She had been in the WERS office earlier that day and had said she felt frightened and didn't want to go to report. She went, however and was arrested and taken to a police station. Her husband was distraught and went to the police station hoping to see her. He waited 4 hours and was eventually told he was not allowed to see his wife.

She was taken to a detention centre near Glasgow where she remained until she was moved to Manchester. The next day she was taken to Yarlswood and then to Heathrow where she was put on a plane.

Her husband is devastated and bewildered. Being married to a British citizen does not give anyone the right to remain in the UK. One gets the sense that the Home Office assumes that anyone who marries a British citizen is entering a sham relationship in order to stay in the UK. The fact that two people love each other is not considered important.

The lives of these two people have been ruined by UK immigration law. It is a disgrace.

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