



**West End Refugee Service**

*strength through support*



### Issue 60 January 2015

Welcome to the January edition of the WERS Newsletter and a very Happy New Year to you all!

#### **Festive Week – a big thank you!**

WERS received a wonderful array of gifts from many churches and individuals. As a result, 109 bags of gifts were given out to the destitute clients: 93 men and 16 women. We sent as many thank-you letters and cards as we could before Christmas but we may inadvertently have missed someone and I would therefore like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their great kindness and generosity. WERS also received a lot of gifts of money during December and this enabled us to give all the destitute clients an extra cash payment too. The clients very much appreciated the bags of presents and extra money.

#### **WERS joins Still Human Still Here**

Those of you who attended the WERS AGM in the autumn will have heard the inspiring talk given by Mike Kaye from Still Human Still Here.

WERS is now proud to be a member of the SHSH coalition.

(stillhumanstillhere.wordpress.com)

#### **Geographical discrimination**

The Home Office are changing the process for making further submissions on asylum and human rights cases which means that from 26 January they will require all refused asylum seekers who are making further submissions to make an appointment and then present their submission in person in Liverpool. In addition, the Home Office made clear at a meeting with Still Human Still Here members that there would be no assistance provided to asylum seekers who could not afford to travel to Liverpool to make their submission.

WERS is currently supporting around 90 destitute clients with a little weekly money for food but none of them would be able to afford the cost of travelling to Liverpool.

In the next few weeks WERS will be meeting with other agencies in Newcastle to discuss this issue and explore possible ways of helping asylum seekers wanting to submit a fresh application to get to Liverpool.

It is grossly unfair to discriminate against asylum seekers living at a distance from Liverpool; no asylum seeker should be denied the right to make fresh representations.

#### **St Nicholas Cathedral**

I was both surprised and delighted to learn that I had been nominated as an Honorary Ecumenical Canon of St Nicholas Cathedral.

I regard myself as immensely fortunate to have had the privilege of working at WERS for the last fifteen years. Numerous churches and individuals have given WERS the most fantastic support and this has been key to WERS' development and survival in a challenging social and economic environment.

It has always been the extraordinary commitment and encouragement of WERS' staff, volunteers and supporters which has enabled me to lead the organisation and keep going! It has been great that different denominations have come together in a common cause supporting asylum seekers and refugees, giving WERS both material and moral support and sending out the clear message that their presence is welcomed and celebrated in the northeast.

Lindsay Cross

WERS has been very fortunate over the years to have had a succession of excellent social work students from all over Europe on placements and internships.

In September we welcomed Josefine, a Swedish student, who has been outstanding. She has just returned to Sweden and we will all miss her very much.

Here she writes about her time with us.



'It was a Tuesday in late February. I had just received an email response from West End Refugee Service, an organisation I knew nearly nothing about. All I really knew was that it worked with refugees and asylum seekers somewhere in Newcastle upon Tyne. I had to read the email at least three times before I could believe it: "...it may be well possible to offer you a placement at West End Refugee Service this autumn". I was absolutely thrilled - dancing around, singing to myself in my small student accommodation in the cold north of Sweden.

The hopeful spirit stayed with me and from the very first day, a bright and clear September morning, I have been absolutely certain that I never could have come to a better organisation for my placement. It has been the most amazing experience to learn about the work of WERS and all that that includes.

Not only have I learnt a lot, I have also met a whole bunch of fantastic people over these months. Some go under the name "clients" others are called "staff" and "volunteers". One thing that all these people have in common is the shared will to make a change, whether it is to one's own situation or in terms of helping and supporting others. That, dear readers, is a very inspirational environment to work in. However, it has not always been easy; there have been days when everything has seemed too frustrating and hopeless. It is just that field of work, I suppose, where such feelings occur now and then.

Yet what have truly helped through those moments are Lindsay Cross's wise words from one of our supervision sessions. She encouraged me to focus on the things that I can do, rather than thinking about all the things I can't do anything about. I will definitely carry those words with me, as I am now one step closer to becoming a professional social worker. This focus, or strategy if you like, will surely improve my own chances to make a difference to this world.

My time at WERS will forever be a wonderful memory, as it is likely to be the best thing I have ever done in life so far. I would now like to thank you all for making this placement feasible, as it now draws to an end. Thank you so much. '

Josefine Hallner

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