



**West End Refugee Service**

*strength through support*



## Issue 75 October 2018

### **WERS AGM**

**Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> November**

**6pm**

**(coffee and cake from 5.30pm)**

**Westgate Baptist Church**

**366 Westgate Rd, Newcastle upon**

**Tyne NE4 6QD**

**Guest speaker:**

**The Revd Prof. Nicholas Sagovsky  
(Chair of WERS Trustees 2001-2002)**

**'What I have learnt from asylum  
seekers and refugees'**

**Everyone very welcome -**

**It would be great to see you there!**

## And it's goodbye from me....



Many of you will already know that I am retiring at the end of November, so this is the last newsletter that I will be writing and my last AGM as Director. I find it hard to believe that I have written 75 newsletters and we have never missed an edition! The first issue of the newsletter went out in March 2000, just a few months after WERS became a registered charity and while we were working out of a room in West End United Reformed Church, with our clothing store housed in the loft area of the Cornerstone Project in

Benwell. The split site arrangement was not ideal and we were all very pleased when we were able to move into St Philip's Vicarage the following year.

What was happening back in 2000?

The dispersal of asylum seekers to Newcastle had begun late in 1999 and Angel Heights Hostel opposite Newcastle General Hospital was controversially providing accommodation for around 200 asylum seekers. There were huge concerns about the hostel and the draconian and unimaginative rules and regulations which the Angel Group had put in place for the residents. The Newcastle Citywide Asylum Seeker and Refugee Support Group had just been established – it is still meeting every two months – and the new Asylum and Immigration Act was about to come into force.

WERS has grown and developed so much over the years. Its success thus far has been down to the hard work and support of hundreds of people – staff, trustees, volunteers, churches, schools and numerous individuals - who continue to give their time, skills, donations to the store, money and encouragement to enable us to develop our services for refugees and asylum seekers.

I have worked with asylum seekers for around 20 years and, as you can imagine, my feelings are very mixed about the prospect of leaving an organisation that I have run for such a long time and which has been such a huge part of my life. However, I think it is the right time to start a new chapter in my life with maybe not so many funding applications!

The AGM will afford me the opportunity to say a bit more, but I want to thank you for the amazing support you continue to give WERS.

**Lindsay Cross**

## ... And hello from WERS' new director, Steve Cowen

My name is Steve Cowen and I'm absolutely thrilled to be joining the WERS staff and volunteer team as Director. What attracted me to this role was the fabulous work of the organisation, the passionate team of people who work here and of course the opportunity to continue our work to ensure people who are seeking asylum and refugees feel welcomed, safe, supported and able to thrive in our city.

For the last 12 years I have been working in the voluntary sector supporting people with a range of health and social care needs. For the last eight of these I have been the Chief Executive Officer of Gateshead Carers where we have developed our services to ensure that they are accessible to and meet the needs of BME communities in Gateshead including asylum seekers and refugees. My first career was in education as a lecturer in Social Psychology and then progressing through to a senior management role at a college of further education in Bristol.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the amazing work Lindsay has done over the last 20 years in her association with WERS. She is leaving a highly regarded organisation which has grown and developed because of her passion and commitment. I know she will be missed by everyone and I wish her every happiness in all her new adventures.

I will be commencing my role on the 10<sup>th</sup> December and I look forward to meeting you all.

Best wishes

Steve

## Welcome, too, to Hazel!

WERS is delighted that Hazel Bloor has joined the team as assistant volunteer co-ordinator.

Hazel brings a wealth of experience of working in volunteering development, volunteer co-ordination and befriending schemes, and will be working with Hannah on all aspects of our Volunteer Project. Hazel is at WERS on a Wednesday, Thursday and Friday.

*'The team at WERS have been really welcoming; I'm enjoying meeting the clients and volunteers and seeing what a positive difference the volunteer project makes'*



## Festive Week Appeal

We will be collecting donations to give to all the destitute asylum seekers during Festive Week, 10-14<sup>th</sup> December, and would be enormously grateful for any of the following for the 120 male clients WERS is currently supporting:

Socks	Men's shampoo
Chocolate	Toothbrushes
Men's shower gel	Toothpaste
Men's Deodorant	

We are also supporting 10 female destitute clients and so women's shower gel, shampoo and deodorant and chocolate for them would also be great.

If we could have them by the end of November, that would give us time to sort all the gifts.

Thanks very much!

### Office details:

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