



## Regional Refugee Forum North East

### Report by the Chair of the Board of Trustees, Karen Kavivi Harrison Regional Refugee Forum North East

to the membership at the organisation's  
Annual General Meeting held on  
27th November 2014



## 1. Who from the community has been involved in our work this year?

**45 RCOs** (Refugee led community groups) across the region

**256 volunteers** within these RCOs

From **26 countries of origin**

- 25 of our members, from 19 different RCOs and 13 countries of origin became the founding members of our 3 issue-based Working Groups on Health, on Community Safety and on Strengthening Families
- 191 members from 28 RCOs (15 working in Tees Valley and 13 in Tyne & Wear) took part in our events making sure our Voice is heard by target agencies delivering local services
- 58 women from 18 countries of origin and from 23 RCOs took part in our Missing Link women's enterprise project
- 40 ex-detainees took part in 2 detention hearings
- 30 Tees Valley members met with the Home Office and Migrant Help
- 17 RCOs received development support, including opportunities for Peer Learning

## 2. What activities have they been involved in?

### Our 3 themed Working Groups

- met a total of **23 times** to plan, rehearse and review actions
- delivered a total of **9 'up-skilling' sessions** to increase the knowledge, skills and competencies of people who will deliver local services
- delivered **5 'engagement' events** to make the collective voice heard by those who make decisions about local services (1 event focused on Community Safety, 2 on Health, and 2 on education choices and opportunities)

### Our Missing Link ladies took part in

- **32 themed workshops**, group learning sessions and visits to business resources
- **A final event** hosted by Teesside University at its Centre for Enterprise
- Activities involved **speakers from 21 business related agencies** (including UKTI, banks and networks) and small business owners

**40 people with experience of detention took part in 2 hearings** about the use of conditions immigration detention with national campaign coalitions Detention Action and Detention Forum

**30 members of Tees Valley RCOs met with the Home Office** Immigration & Enforcement community engagement team and **Migrant Help**

## 3. Who has heard our Voice this year?

- **Staff from 50 target mainstream agencies** relating to Health, Community Safety, Economic Inclusion and Strengthening Families and the Asylum system
  - Including 3 police forces, Crown Prosecution Service, Healthwatch teams, Local Authority Education departments, 3 Public Health departments, Home Office Immigration and Migrant Help
- **850 students** studying at the 4 Universities of Teesside, Sunderland, Durham and Newcastle and **65 teaching staff and practicing professionals**
  - Post grad and undergrad students of Medicine, Nursing, Social Work, and Youth & Community Work
- The first ever all party **Parliamentary Inquiry on the use of Immigration Detention in the UK**
- **Home Office Immigration & Enforcement and Migrant Help**

## 4. What issues have we been tackling through our work with local services and universities?

### Health

- Managing diet and weight gain
- Deteriorating mental health and substance abuse
- Access through a 2<sup>nd</sup> language
- What makes a good nurse and a good doctor

### Community Safety

- Hate Crime in local neighbourhood and in schools
- Ways to report hate crime
- Relations with the police force

### Stronger families

- Families falling apart under internal and external pressures
- Interventions by social services and children taken into care
- What makes a good social worker
- Navigating through the English school system

### Economic inclusion

- Unlocking enterprise ambitions and making links to business support and networks
- Preventing destitution at Move-On
- Recognising prior qualifications and routes back to learning
- Impact of Zero hours contracts
- Experiences of work and access to work in the region

## 5. What issues have we been addressing in the Asylum system?

### Detention

- Detention without time limit
- Conditions in detention
- Impact of detention on people's lives

### Access to independent specialist advice and advocacy

- Continuation of NERS service and role after ending of the One Stop Service contract
- Support services for refugees and asylum seekers in Stockton

### Impact of Immigration Act 2014

- How charging for services will be implemented and impact on health
- Challenging discrimination in access to health services at point of delivery

## 6. What else have Trustees & Staff and been doing?

- **Contributed to the work of the North East Migration Network** – our region's migration stakeholder structure
  - Our **Chair co-chairs the regional migrant economic inclusion subgroup**, and our **CEO co-ordinates** the subgroup's meetings and activities, in collaboration with the DWP (Department of Work & Pensions)
    - We **organised 4 meetings in which 31 workers from 22 agencies** participated, including Jobcentre Plus and CABs.
    - Focus on practical actions to make sure new status refugees can Move-On to the benefits system without a gap in support when their NASS support stops
    - And impact of Welfare reform measures. Maurice Wren, CEO of the Refugee Council was keynote speaker at a regional event organised about Welfare reform.
  - Our CEO contributes to the work of the **Network's Core Group and to its Migrant Health subgroup**, raising issues about the Immigration Act 2014 and its potential impact on access to health services
  - Our Project Manager attends the **7 local multi-agency groups** that aim to resolve issues at a local level or escalate them to the regional subgroups

## 7. What else have Trustees & Staff and been doing?

- Worked with professional media consultant to **develop and pilot the use of Social Media** (facebook and twitter) as advocacy tools
- Contributed to the development of the national **City of Sanctuary** movement through representation on their Board.
- **Governance** : besides being active in our Working Groups and other work, our Trustees oversee the development and implementation of our Annual Plan and ensure that the organisation is run according to its Constitution and the Law, and within its financial means and the agreements made with our funders.
- In addition our Chair was a panel member at the British Refugee Council's AGM and represented us at the national Sanctuary Summit in Birmingham
- Staff have responsibility for **day to day management** of activities and expenditure, for reporting to Trustees and informing strategic planning, and for reporting to our funders and raising new funding to resource agreed actions.

## 8. What difference are we making?

### Impact of engaging with local services

- collaboration with DWP, JCP, Home Office and front line support agencies is making step by step progress to prevent problems in Move-on for new status refugees
- collaboration with Teesside University has secured more free ESOL, helps people recognise prior qualifications and access courses, and helps parents make informed decisions in their children's education. See film screened during Refugee Week 2014 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a13uY5Al6Zo>.
- Working Group's influence on the design and delivery of services: for example, evaluation from agencies engaged by our Health Working Group activities show they have :
  - Heard that health information and services are not sufficiently known, despite all the printed and digital information. Agencies will now seek direct forms of engagement with the community through key volunteers.
  - understood that messages promoting healthy eating have not resonated with the community as they do not reflect their unique dietary and exercise issues. Agencies will now revisit their health messages
  - Understood the different negative cultural interpretations of the term 'mental health' that create avoidance of these services by the community. They will consider using alternative terms such as emotional wellbeing to market these services to the community.
  - Healthwatch Middlesbrough arranged further consultations with our members. Findings and recommendations from the resulting report are now embedded in the current strategic priorities and will inform commissioning of services so that they respond to the specific needs of these local residents.
  - Middlesbrough Healthwatch are now training 11 of our members as Community Health Champions, as part of their new communications strategy to ensure information reaches into the community

## 9. What difference are we making?

### Impact of 'up-skilling' students (Nursing, Medicine, Social Work)

Sessions were designed to go beyond awareness raising to deliver key messages and recommendations that can be directly translated into the students' future professional work.

Written evaluations from all students attending the up-skilling sessions demonstrate:

a) that *attitudes* towards asylum seekers and refugees have been changed: Attitudes determine behaviour of front line staff so directly affect access, the service given, and outcomes. For example, Social Work students said:

*"These are some of the strongest people we've ever met. They deserve more help and respect for what they have been through"*

*"I didn't realise that people had full and successful lives before they fled"*

*"They are totally individual, with individual needs"*

*"The truth about asylum seekers is totally different to what you read about in the press"*

b) that students gained *specific understandings* of recurring and shared issues that are unique to asylum seekers and refugees which they can directly apply to their future work. Social Work students said:

*"They don't know things that British people think are common knowledge. Social workers need to be aware that they may not know the law here"*

*"Understand the impact on the children – how they compare themselves to other children and other parents. There can be tensions within families"*

*"Family cultures are still highly important. People dream of returning home if possible. They want to try to preserve them even when British culture makes it difficult. It's important for social workers to respect this"*

## 10. What difference are we making?

### Impact on Working Group members

Evaluation by our Working Group members reported change at a personal level too. Their feedback demonstrates they gained:

- increased self-confidence and self-respect through recovering '*who they really are*'
- feeling that their voice and experience is valid and legitimate
- increased confidence in public speaking
- increased skills in advocating for change and tactics to use (focusing on shared experience and recurring issues rather than rely on individual stories)
- increased confidence they can make a difference to people's lives, through step by step practical actions
- increased ambition and sense of purpose and achievement
- more knowledge about issues being addressed and how to manage them
- more knowledge about services available locally to support them and their community
- Direct connections to local services

## 11. Further opportunities for influence or change we've created out of our work this year

We now have representation on

- Regional Hate Crime Scrutiny Panel run by the Crown Prosecution Service
- Cleveland Police Stop and Search Scrutiny Panel
- Durham University's Centre for Social Justice and Community Action Steering Group

We have requests from the 4 Universities to repeat the upskilling sessions to the new students

11 members have volunteered to be Community Health Champions in Middlesbrough and will be trained on how to share information about health and health services with their communities

## 12. Looking ahead to the future

- Continue to **support and further develop** our **issue-based Working Groups** as drivers of our collective action and voice, helping them work systematically towards improvement in local services.
  - We will apply the learning gained, offers secured, and practical actions and good practice identified through their work in the last year to maintain momentum towards resolving specific challenges.
  - We will support members representing the Working groups at different panels and platforms
- **Support more members to join in our advocacy work via our new social media tools**
- Work to **maximise the potential for change that can be delivered via the North East Migration Network** (or soon to be Strategic Migration Partnership)
  - Mobilising the evidence of our membership and engaging it strategically
  - Enabling the evidence base and advocacy voice of the refugee-assisting voluntary sector to engage with it effectively
  - Actively Share learning about what works across SMPs to promote the transfer and scale up of good practice
- **Support the emergence of self-organising** within newly arriving communities and newly establishing community groups through peer learning opportunities, **promote their inclusion within our activities**, and link them to mainstream capacity building support
- **Contribute to regional and national advocacy** aimed at improving Asylum policy, procedures and support services
- Secure the resources needed to deliver this work

## Thank you

**All our members** for their contribution to the work and achievements of the Regional Refugee Forum over the past year.

### Fellow Trustees serving this year

- Panganai Sivotwa
- Susan Mansaray
- Catherine Tshezi
- Mustafa Othman
- Shafia Saeed
- Ibrahim Diallo

**Staff team:** Georgina & Herbert

### Professional consultants:

- John O'Brien and Karen Langdon from DEAL Group, trainers for Missing Link
- Elvis Katoto : development of social media tools

### Our funders

The charitable foundations and grant making bodies who have supported our aims and made our work possible





**Hearing the Voice of Refugees in Policy and Practice**  
Collective Advocacy by the North East region's Refugee and Asylum  
Seeker community

[www.refugeevoices.org.uk](http://www.refugeevoices.org.uk)



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**RRF\_NE**

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eaBGcNZmyJQ>

