

North of England Refugee Service : Foundation Project for the IRSS of the Home Office

“Investigating Community groups in the North East of England dispersal area and Community Based Integration Initiatives”

June 2001

Executive Summary

1. The aims of the research project:

- 1.1 To map the established and emerging formal and informal refugee community organisations/structures in the North East Region and identify communities for whom no co-community support structures exist.
- 1.2 To identify the range and nature of support provided by these groups which promote integration.
- 1.3 To identify ‘what works’ and what constraints exist with respect to the organisational development and capacity of such community groups.

2. The Context of the research:

Up until the end of 1997, the North of England Refugee Service (NERS¹) held a regional database of 5,000 individuals who were refugees or asylum seekers. The rate of new arrivals into the region² was around 150 per year. At that time there were 5 existing refugee community organisations/groups, both informal and formal.

During 1998 the numbers of new arrivals increased significantly through activities of Refugee Arrivals Project, who sourced accommodation in the North East for those arriving into the London airports. In 1999 the numbers increased again through the interim dispersal measures operated by Kent and other southern County Councils who had responsibility to support asylum seekers arriving in the southern ports.

Full implementation of the Dispersal system, as provided for in the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, commenced on 3rd April 2000. Between 03/04/00 and 31/03/01, there have been 3,208 confirmed arrivals in the region, representing 16.42% of all national dispersals. Additionally, 319 individuals have arrived directly into the region. This represented a 20 fold increase in the number of asylum seekers arriving in the region, whilst faster decision making and the focus on clearing the backlog of cases has resulted in the increase in the regional community of recognised refugees

¹ The North of England Refugee Service grew from the initiative of an Iranian refugee and was registered as an charitable organisation in 1989.

² The North East region stretches from Darlington in the south to Berwick in the north, and includes the urban areas of Tyneside, Wearside and Teeside.

and those with temporary leave to remain. At the end of March 2001 there were 73 nationalities represented in the region's asylum seeker/refugee community.

The socio-economic environment of the North East present a significantly different settlement context to that of London, which, until compulsory dispersal, has been the focus of the vast majority of settlement. These may be briefly summarised:

- The geographical size of the region has significant implications for effective communication , co-ordination, networking and access for any regional body.
- Decline of traditional heavy industry
- High unemployment rate
- Low graduate retention rate
- Significant housing voids
- Low proportion of BME community (city concentration)
- Recognised social and economic exclusion problems of local community
- Target of national and European regeneration initiatives (e.g.: European Structural Funds)
- Limited capacity & expertise in e.g.: legal services, specialist trauma/torture treatment, ESOL

In addition, Dispersal has directly created new contractual relationships with NASS in the region:

- NECASS (North East Consortium for Asylum Support Services) was created in May 2000. It was the first English Consortium to sign with NASS. It is composed of 25 local authorities and representatives from the statutory, voluntary and community sector (stakeholders). It has two main functions: 1) contract compliance as an accommodation provider; 2) an 'enabling' role to promote the long term integration of refugees
- Private sector accommodation providers (accommodation and related support package)
- 1 Regional Manager of NASS (in post December 2000)
- The One Stop Service, providing a particular set of services to Asylum Seekers supported by NASS until a final decision is made on their case. The OSS is operated in the region by the North of England Refugee Service.

3. Mapping the Refugee Community Groups³

5 community groups were in existence prior to Dispersal, the first being established in 1990. Only one is formally registered as a charitable organisation, while 3 others have constitutions and are working towards registration. Only two have received any funding in the year 2000-2001. These groups have been variously impacted by Dispersal; some facing a hugely increased level of co-community need; others representing episodes of exile relating to past events.

6 'community groups' have emerged in the last year, all being either a direct response to Dispersal – where a few members of the settled community have sought to provide support for newly arriving co-community individuals, or as a direct consequence of Dispersal which has created totally new communities in the region. The structure of these groups ranges from very informal networks of support to groups aiming to be constituted bodies. To date, none of these groups has received any funding.

³ Referred to throughout as RCO's.

In addition, there are 4 significantly large new populations for whom no community group exists or has yet shown signs of emerging. There have also been examples of initiatives to create community groups for new communities which have 'failed' due to the low level of total numbers and the fact that those individuals are thinly and widely distributed throughout the region as a whole.

1 multi-national/ethnic refugee community group, formed of settled refugees, has emerged since Dispersal began, which aims to contribute to integration through performing a research and advisory role in the region.

All existing and emergent RCO's have membership of the Regional Refugee Forum, North East, which has been established in the last year.

4. Nature and range of 'integration' support provided by RCO's

These can be summarised as:

- Opportunities for association with co-cultural community
- Reducing social isolation
- Peer learning and advice (orientation through the British structures, systems and culture, and locality orientation)
- Material support
- Crisis intervention
- Maintaining links with country of origin
- Signposting and referrals
- Educational activities
- Leisure activities
- Circulation of information
- Arts and cultural celebrations
- Meeting and mixing point with local communities
- Reference point for service providers
- Source of expert knowledge on unmet needs and barriers in access to mainstream
- Monitoring of standards/contract compliance
- Support for victims of racial harassment and promoting understanding of equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice
- Source of expert knowledge to inform policy development – what works & what doesn't
- Interpretation, translation and cultural mediation
- Advocacy and representation (individual and community interests)

5. Contribution of RCO's to wider UK National Policy and Practice

5.1. Tackling Racism

- raising awareness and promoting understanding in host community of who refugees are and the contribution they can make to society
- raising awareness within co-community of UK anti-racist policy and practice
- reporting of racial incidents contributes to monitoring and community safety action planning
- contribution to challenging Institutional racism

5.2. Tackling Discrimination

- raising awareness and promoting understanding
- identifying barriers to access in mainstream service provision and offering solutions
- training service providers – identifying unmet needs and promoting culturally sensitive delivery of services

5.3. Tackling Social Exclusion

- reducing social isolation
- building confidence
- meeting point with host community
- allowing the voiced experience of the refugee community to be heard

5.4. Promoting the process of Active Citizenship

- orientation in British structures, systems and culture
- promoting full and equal participation in and contribution to British society

5.5. Reducing the pressure for secondary migration

- preventing drift south
- ensuring potential social, cultural and economic potential is not lost to the region

6. Identifying 'what works' and the constraints existing with respect to the organisational development and capacity of RCO's

6.1. There is evident and urgent need for:

- Community 'places', which allow a sense of permanence and help build confidence
- Resources: appropriate funding sources, not just for deliverables but for core funding
- Information flow and exchange
- Training
- Partnerships: genuine and effective mechanisms/ structures for stakeholder involvement, nationally and regionally
- Support for local and regional strategic networks

6.2. The impact of Dispersal on RCO's: Critical issues identified

- Transformation and reduction of existing RCO's from cultural organisations offering unique integration support to un-resourced adjuncts of NASS contracted system or mainstream. Increased crisis intervention reduces RCO capacity to plan and deliver strategic integration initiatives.
- Increased demand on minimal resources of existing RCO's: acute organisational stress is unsustainable and has the potential to killing off groups/initiatives.
- Rapid increase in unrepresented national/ethnic groups in region: need for additional Community Development Work
- Thin, widespread intra-regional dispersal creates barriers to co-community association: the voucher system & £10 cash presents barriers to travel and start up costs (see National Voluntary Compact understandings)

- Lack of critical mass among ethnic/national groups dispersed to the region perpetuates isolation and associated problems

7. Summary

Integration should be seen as a two way process with intrinsic roles and responsibilities for both refugees and host community/structures. However, this two way process must have a practical reality, with real engagement secured of both parties to the process.

RCO's have a unique and integral role to play in supporting the integration process:

- role as providers of support services (organic and mechanical)
- role in defining how integration strategies are appropriately developed and operationalised and in monitoring the effectiveness of policies
- self-help through community development

RCO's should therefore be seen as integral to best value and not in terms of added value

RCO's experience shows that they are the weakest resourced party and therefore a wasted resource. Their experience is typically of objectification, marginalisation and exclusion in the process and continued organisational vulnerability.

In order to perform this essential role and be active agents in the process of their own integration, RCOs must be enabled and empowered to do so. Therefore:

- Who resources the resource?
- Need to develop effective mechanisms and structures for hearing the voiced experience of refugees
- Need to encourage partnerships that are clear, genuine and inclusive

The value of regional expertise needs to be recognised via:

- Regional devolvement of decision making /implementation
- Building the capacity of regional and local strategic networks

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Full Report

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Terminology used in this report:

It is recognised that the terms Asylum Seeker, Refugee and Integration have an official (Home Office) definition. That is:

- Asylum Seeker – an individual who is still awaiting a final decision on their asylum application
- Refugee - an individual who has received a positive decision on their asylum claim
- Integration – a process beginning from the date on which an individual has received a positive decision

However, we also recognise that it is important to take into consideration certain ambiguities in the meanings embodied by these official definitions:

- from the perspective of those who have sought refuge themselves, they all consider themselves, as people forced to flee their countries of origin, to be refugees and consequently may not distinguish themselves by using the terms asylum seeker and refugee.
- how will those with temporary leave to remain (Exceptional Leave to Remain granted on humanitarian grounds outside) as opposed to full Refugee status under the Geneva Convention be referred to?. The distinction in status has important implications for integration as different entitlements and rights attach to it, as well as the psychological state that temporary status implies.
- Are those who were formerly refugees and now have British Citizenship still referred to as Refugees in the official definition?. How do these individuals define themselves?.
- From the perspective of individuals who have sought refuge in the UK, the process of integration begins from the day they arrive in this country.
- In recognition of this tension with the official definition of integration, other terms are used by RCOs and NGOs, without any formal agreement on their meaning. ‘Immediate settlement’, ‘settlement’ and ‘integration’ are variously used, but all refer to a continuous process recognised by those who have experienced this process themselves.

Therefore it is important to consider that the definition of integration on which policy is founded should embody the meanings of refugees themselves. Policies based on a reduction of the definition risk reducing the effectiveness of any integration strategy⁴.

⁴ For full discussion see report *‘A Transnational Network: Hearing the Voices of Refugees in Policy and Practice in the European Union’*. January 2001. North of England Refugee Service

1. The Settlement Context in the North East

1.1 Timing of the research

Up until the beginning of 1998, the North East region saw the arrival of around 150 refugees and people seeking asylum each year. The North of England Refugee Service had a data base of 5,000 individuals and had successful working partnerships with regional and local statutory and voluntary sector organisations, including 5 refugee community organisations in the region (formal and informal). During 1998 the numbers arriving in the region increased through the activities of the Refugee Arrivals Project, and increased again during 1999 through the interim dispersal system. Individual refugees and those still awaiting a decision on their cases, for example, those who had previously been the sole Kurdish or Kosovan residents in the region, began to see the arrival of significant numbers of co-nationals and became the only source of communication and mediation, as interpreters, between the new arrivals and all the service providers in the region. Others arriving represented completely new language, cultural or ethnic/national groups. The National Asylum Support System came into operation on April 3rd 2000 and saw the implementation of planned dispersal, on a no choice basis, of asylum seekers into the regions and a new legislative framework of support during the processing of applications. Since then, the numbers arriving have increased 20 fold, exceeding 3,000 in the last year⁵. In addition to the increase in numbers of asylum seekers resident in the North East, there has been an increase in the total number of individuals with recognised Refugee status or Exceptional Leave to Remain as a consequence of government policy to make the decision making process faster and to clear the significant backlog of cases, where individuals have been waiting up to 5 years for a decision on their claim.

Statutory agencies have entered into new contractual relationships with NASS which imply new responsibilities for supporting settlement, mainstream service provision is facing the challenge of developing appropriate responses both in terms of scale and range of needs from new service users, while the voluntary and community sector is making significant efforts to include new residents within their activities and support framework. All sectors are facing a steep learning curve. Meanwhile, Asylum seekers are experiencing the impact of a new legislative framework and of being settled in localities which have previously had little or no experience of hosting asylum seekers and where networks of support are absent or under-developed. On a wider scale, the North East as a region has a limited history and experience of multi-culturalism in general, of refugee issues in particular and is a region with significant problems of social and economic exclusion within the host community. The North East also covers a huge geographical area⁶, from Darlington in the south, to Berwick in the North, which has implications for effective communication, networking and linking new arrivals to existing communities and support structures.

These are all regional factors that vary significantly in comparison with the settlement context in London and which should be taken into consideration in any national strategy to promote integration. They are all factors that impact on the capacity for self-organisation and support for the integration process by refugee organisations themselves.

⁵ NASS dispersal figures for April 2000 – end March 2001 show that the North East Region has received 16.42% of all dispersals, totalling 3,208 individuals. Data throughout this report is sourced from Inter-agency co-ordination team dispersal statistics for April 2000 to end of March 2001 and from the North East Region One Stop Service Reception statistics for arrivals directly into the region during the same period.

⁶ The North East region covers: Tyneside (including the urban areas of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Gateshead, North Shields and South Shields), Wearside (Sunderland, Washington), Teeside (Middlesbrough, Stockton, Redcar, Hartlepool and Darlington), and the counties of Northumberland and Durham.

The North East is the target of national and European regeneration initiatives⁷. The promotion of long term settlement of refugees in the region will not only benefit refugees themselves but has the potential to be in the best interests of the regional community as a whole. Settled refugees have already made a proven social and economic contribution to the region. Asylum seekers dispersed to the region represent a valuable potential asset for the North East; many bring with them much needed skills and have backgrounds within enterprise cultures. This has been identified as lacking in the region, given its employment history as a region of heavy industry⁸. The North of England Refugee Service believes that the dispersal policy should be seen as an opportunity for welcoming and receiving people with skills and experience who have a contribution to make to the region. However, unless we can ensure that those who have been dispersed into the region feel that this is a place where they can stay, make their home, become self-supporting and play a full part in the community, then they will be lost to the region. This will also be counter to Government hopes. Promoting long term settlement/integration in the region will ensure that this potential social, cultural and economic contribution is not lost to the region and will minimise the pressures for secondary migration⁹.

1.2 Overview: The Socio-economic environment of the North East ¹⁰

- Decline of traditional regional industries
- high unemployment rate
- low Graduate retention rate
- Regional social and economic exclusion /poverty indicators
- Region is the target of specific Regeneration initiatives to combat social and economic exclusion.
- Significant voids in housing
- low proportion of Black and Ethnic minorities
- underdeveloped infrastructure to support settlement (expertise / knowledge / awareness), excepting The North of England Refugee Service and 5 existing RCOs
- low total Refugee numbers prior to interim dispersal commencing September 1999

1.3 Overview: The legislative framework of the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act

- Dispersal on no choice basis
- Voucher system and £10 cash per week. Level of support set at 70% of Income Support
- Increased rate of arrival of asylum seekers
- Now over 73 nationalities represented in the North East at end March 2001
- Private sector and public sector involvement in contractual relationships with the Home Office (NASS) for the first time
- NECASS (North East Consortium for Asylum Support Services) was the first English Local Authority Consortium to sign with the Home Office (NASS) for the implementation of dispersal policy
- Statutory sector learning curve in response to arrival of new user groups

⁷ The North East is the recipient of European Structural Funds (ERDF and ESF) which are managed by the North East of England European Partnership at the Government Office for the North East. Structural Funds are the main way in which the EU offers support to areas undergoing structural change or decline. The UK uses these funds to promote development and reduce inequalities between regions and social groups. A large part of the North East is currently entitled to funding under the Objective 2 Programme, which helps regions to adjust to economic and social change. It also receives assistance from the Objective 3 Programme, which uses ESF to improve the situation of young people, those in the community who are disadvantaged, and the long-term unemployed.

⁸ For example, see the North East of England European Partnership Objective 2 programme, launched 5th March 2001 by the Government Office for the North East.

⁹ The pressures to migrate do not only affect refugees. For example, the North East also traditionally suffers from a poor rate of graduate retention.

¹⁰ In comparison to National Average

- Establishment of the One Stop Service for the North East in April 2001
- Emergence of Voluntary and community sector response
- Increased demand on and for Refugee Community Organisations – established and emerging
- Changing profile of Black and Minority Ethnic population and as a proportion of the regional population
- Asylum seekers settled for first time in new localities: attitudes and response of local communities towards first contact
- Increase in regional statistics for racially motivated crime
- Under-developed infrastructural support: eg: legal services, interpreting facilities, mental health provision, co-community support networks
- Negative national media coverage and political environment

2. The Research Project

2.1 Aims of Research Project

The project has sought to undertake a mapping exercise of the established and developing, formal and informal refugee organisations/structures in the North East of England, and to identify 'what works' with respect to both organisational sustainability and service/support provision aimed at facilitating integration in the region.

The project provides evidence about:

- the number and nature of refugee community groups that exist in the North East region
- the range and nature of services provided by these groups, that have emerged in response to the diverse range of needs, to facilitate integration
- partnerships in service provision with other organisations
- gaps in integration support, for example, the identification of un-represented/new communities in the region with unmet needs
- problems in resourcing and capacity and sustainability and an assessment of the opportunities for/barriers to emerging structures of support
- the effects of legislation on the capacity for self-organisation, the range of need, and the operational effectiveness of RCOs
- ways forward that would promote the facilitation of integration in the region

2.2. Methodology:

The project was designed as a participatory and collaborative piece of research by members of the Regional Refugee Forum for the North East and was co-ordinated by NERS's staff researcher in conjunction with the University of Sunderland. As such, reference to 'integration initiatives' embodies refugees' own self-definition of what integration means, what it involves and how it happens, based on their own experiences of settling in the North East and of supporting others to settle.

A questionnaire was developed which included all areas requested as focus of research:

- i. Aims and objectives of @ group
- ii. Structure of @ group
- iii. Process of group's establishment and through which it has been sustained
- iv. Funding basis of @ group

- v. Services provided by @ group which will facilitate integration
- vi. Shared services or partnerships with other organisations
- vii. Gaps identified
- viii. Effects of recent legislation
- ix. Suggestions for improvements /a way forwards

All known Refugee Community organisations / informal networks were asked to consider the questionnaire prior to a consultation meeting with NERS's staff researcher.

New communities un-represented/supported by any community organisation or network were also identified via contact with NERS's Team Leaders, Support Workers (who refer clients to appropriate co-community support) and Outreach Worker and through contact with Interpreters, who are often an important source of evidence for un-represented/supported language groups.

In total 8 questionnaires were sent out. 5 were fully completed within the period of research and 5 individual group consultations were carried out. In addition, informal discussions were held with 8 informal or emergent refugee community groups.

A note on Budget Expenditure : In accordance with its methodological principle and practice as a participatory piece of research, 60% of the budget allocation of £5,000 was used to cover all direct expenses incurred by community organisations themselves, including consultation fees. Consultation fees are based on recognition that members of RCOs give their time voluntarily, their time is valuable given the level of demand they are presented with and limited resources they have to deliver support. Consultation fees also give recognition and respect to the expertise within the community sector and contribute to the important sense of collaborative working, trust and ownership.

3. Findings

3.1 Mapping the groups

12 community groups were identified. See Table 1 for summary details of each group identified. Full details are included as Appendix 1. Detailed case studies demonstrating examples of community organisations/projects at different stages of development and demonstrating the differential impact of recent legislation (the implications of the 1999 Immigration & Asylum Act) are included as Appendix 2.

5 of the groups identified were in existence prior to Dispersal, the first being established in 1990. Only one is formally registered as a charitable organisations, while a further 3 have developed constitutions and are working towards registering with the Charity Commission. Only two have received any funding in the year 2000-2001, this being sourced from Local Authorities to cover basic running costs associated with use of an office or community rooms. As Table 1 shows, these groups have been variously impacted by Dispersal. Some groups, such as the Iranian Centre (see Case Study 2) and The Iraqi Community Association face a hugely increased level of co-community need. Others, such as the Bosnian Club (see Case Study 1), are for the most part unaffected, as these communities were built in response to episodes of exile relating to past events.

6 'community groups' have emerged in the last year, all being either a direct response to Dispersal – such as the Spanish Speakers' Support Group, where a few members of the settled community have sought to provide support for newly arriving co-community individuals (see Case Study 4) - or

Table 1: Mapping the Groups (summary)

Community represented	Begun	Arrivals 00-01	Funding	Source	Staffing	Area
Albanian speakers community	2001	181	0		Voluntary	Teeside
Angolan community	2001	87	0		Voluntary	Tyneside
Bosnian Club 'Ljiljan'	1994	1	£2000	Local Auth.	Voluntary	Tyneside
Iranian Centre	1998	977	£3000	Local Auth.	Voluntary	Tyneside
Iraqi Community Association	1990	299	0		Voluntary	Teeside
IFIR (Iranian)	2001	977	0		Voluntary	Wearside
Spanish Speakers support	2000	44	0		Voluntary	Tyneside
Romanian Community	2001	145	0		Voluntary	Teeside
Sri Lankan Community	1997	85	0		Voluntary	Tyne & Wear
Sudanese Society	1995	2	0		Voluntary	Tyne & Wear
Zimbabwean Community	2001	80	0		Voluntary	Teeside
Kurdish	X	?	X		X	X
Afghan	X	401	X		X	X
Czech	X	325	X		X	X
Congo	X	104	X		X	X
ReACT (Multinational: research & advisory body)	2000		£2000	Charitable Trust	Voluntary	Tyneside

as a direct consequence of Dispersal which has created totally new communities in the region, such as the Zimbabwean Community in the North East (see Case Study 3). The structure of these groups ranges from very informal networks of support to groups aiming to be formally recognised constituted bodies. To date, none of these groups operate with any external funding.

Of the 73 nationalities now represented in the region, there are 4 significantly large new populations for whom no community group exists or has yet shown signs of emerging, these being individuals from the Kurdish community, Afghanistan, Czech Republic and Democratic Republic of Congo.

In addition, an attempt to establish The Palestinian Cultural Society demonstrates how an initiative to create community groups for new communities have 'failed' due to the low level of total numbers in the region and the fact that those individuals are thinly and widely distributed throughout the region as a whole. (see Case Study 5).

A multi-national/ethnic refugee community group, ReACT (Refugee Advisory Committee on Tyneside), whose members are settled refugees, has emerged since Dispersal began. Its members are settled refugees united by their common aim to make a contribution to promoting the early and successful settlement and integration of all refugees in the region through taking part in research, participating in National and European dialogue around integration, and performing an advisory role in the development of policy and practice in the region. Start up funding has been accessed from a Charitable Trust. (see Case Study 6)

All existing and emergent RCO's have membership of the Regional Refugee Forum, North East, which has been established in February 2001.

None of the groups identified have any formal contractual or informal relationship with NASS or the Home Office. None of the groups identified have any core funding for the post of Co-ordinator or Development Worker. All work is carried out on a purely voluntary basis.

The only NGO to have a contractual and funded relationship with NASS, via the Refugee Council, is the North of England Refugee Service, which operates the One Stop Service (OSS) for the region as one part of its total operations. The One Stop Service gives a bounded service of support to asylum seekers who have applied for support from NASS, covering both those who have been dispersed to the region and those arriving directly into the region. Support from the OSS ceases once a client has received a positive decision on their asylum application. Once a positive decision is given, these clients have 14 days to move out of NASS-contracted accommodation ('move on'). Thereafter these individuals are entitled to support from the mainstream benefits system and there is no further specifically designed or funded integration interventions from the Home Office. IN There is no further official support from the Home Office or any other statutory source for adults whose applications for asylum have received a final refusal and who have not been deported from the country.

3.2 Identifying the nature and range of 'integration' initiatives provided by RCO's

The nature and range of support provided by RCO's that contributes to integration is fully detailed in the Case Studies in Appendix 2. They can be summarised as:

- Opportunities for association with co-cultural community.
Providing the opportunity for one's cultural identity to develop and be a lived experience is self-identified by refugees to be an essential component of successful integration.
- Reducing social isolation

Important emotional support gained through association with those who share the experience and trauma of exile. Opportunities to relieve stress through social activities such as picnics and family outings. Also conduit of introduction to wider host community through opportunities for meeting and mixing via referral to eg: locality based women and children facilities/community centre activities.

- Peer learning and advice (orientation through the British structures, systems and culture, and locality orientation)
- Material support
Even the donation of a radio can have a huge positive impact for isolated individuals, as can access to own language books. Clothing relates very personally to identity and the inability to afford new clothing precludes the opportunity to maintain one's appearance, confidence and respect.
- Crisis intervention
Early identification of problems and appropriate intervention prevents the incidence of longer term problems with their cost implications both in terms of mental well-being and delayed full social, cultural and economic contribution to British Society.
- Maintaining links with country of origin
Many individuals and families are arriving from areas of continuing conflict and are desperate to gain information on events in their country of origin. In addition, many carry the hope that they will one day be able to repatriate.
- Signposting and referrals to wider community support and mainstream services
- Educational activities
Range from preparatory English alphabet and language classes for pre-ESOL entry, to mother tongue language classes for children. Also, initial classroom support for children entering schools and accompanying parents to parents' evenings or meetings.
- Leisure activities
For example, football teams that also play friendly matches with the wider community. Activities for children and young people that keep them off the streets. The streets are often self-identified as dangerous places as accommodation is often in localities which suffer problems associated with social exclusion.
- Circulation of information
For example, information on employment or training opportunities via notice boards.
- Arts and cultural celebrations
Celebrating festival days or music events allows the visibility of cultures and give the opportunity for the host community to gain understanding and built trust through shared enjoyable experiences.
- Meeting and mixing point with local communities
For example, giving talks to schools or community/residents groups. Direct face to face meetings are the fundamental way of revealing common human identities.
- Reference point for service providers
The most marginalised communities are the hardest sector of the community to reach for service providers. RCO's organise bridging access to, for example, those tasked with delivering community wide health promotion initiatives e.g: advice on HIV and breast cancer prevention.

- Source of expert knowledge on unmet needs and barriers in access to mainstream
- Monitoring of quality standards and contract compliance
Through evidence from members. These concerns can be voiced if the community has a recognised representative body.
- Tackling racism through support for victims of racial harassment and promoting reporting of racial incidents, which contributes to the development of community safety action planning by the authorities. Link working with Police Community Safety and Beat officers. Racism is one of the biggest barriers to integration faced by refugees. RCO's also promote understanding of equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice within their own communities.
- Source of expert knowledge to inform policy development – what works & what doesn't
- Interpretation, translation and cultural mediation
- Advocacy and representation (individual and community interests)

However, responses provided through the questionnaire and consultation process identified that the impact of Dispersal had been to transform and reduce the activities of existing RCO's from being cultural organisations offering unique integration support to being un-resourced adjuncts of the new NASS system. This is reducing their capacity to plan and deliver proactive and strategic integration initiatives. Faced with increasing demand for crisis intervention from new arrivals, they feel strongly that their work is increasingly taking on the nature of performing a compensatory role for the operational performance and resourcing of the NASS system. For example, much time is now expended on problems arising from:

Accommodation: making representations to accommodation providers on housing conditions, relating to, for example, health, outstanding repairs, child safety measures. Also, apparent poor contract compliance relating to securing access for clients to GP's and legal services. These concerns relate almost exclusively to accommodation contracted from particular private sector operators. RCO's have also been called on to intervene in crisis situations arising in Hostel accommodation relating to acute stress and volatility.

Legal Services: tackling stress created by lack of capacity in region, where clients have been concerned over inadequate case preparation. Also concerns over lack of expert knowledge in terms of background country detail among providers of legal services in the region. Whilst capacity has been expanded in the region, firms taking on immigration & asylum work for the first time are on a steep learning curve.

Vouchers: assisting with distress and material problems caused by lost, delayed or undelivered vouchers.

3.3 Identifying the Contribution of RCO's to wider UK National Policy and Practice

The work of the RCO's can also be seen to make a positive contribution in the wider interests of the regional community as a whole through their contribution to wider UK National policy and practice on promoting social, economic and cultural inclusion, multi-culturalism and positive race relations.

3.3.1 Tackling Racism

- raising awareness and promoting understanding in host community of who refugees are and the contribution they can make to society
- raising awareness within co-community of UK anti-racist policy and practice
- reporting of racial incidents contributes to monitoring and community safety action planning
- contribution to challenging Institutional racism

3.3.2 Tackling Discrimination

- raising awareness and promoting understanding
- identifying barriers to access in mainstream service provision and offering solutions
- training service providers – identifying unmet needs and promoting culturally sensitive delivery of services

3.3.3 Tackling Social Exclusion

- reducing social isolation
- building confidence
- meeting point with host community
- allowing the voiced experience of the refugee community to be heard

3.3.4 Promoting the process of Active Citizenship

- orientation in British structures, systems and culture
- promoting full and equal participation in and contribution to British society

3.3.5 Reducing the pressure for secondary migration

- preventing drift south
- ensuring potential social, cultural and economic potential is not lost to the region

4. Understanding the role of Refugees as active agents and partners in promoting the process of integration:

The development of the understandings in section 4 is detailed in full in the report, 'A Trans-national Network: Hearing the Voices of Refugees in Policy and Practice in the European Union' (January 2001) (JAI.1999/D.4/1011) funded by the EC, for which the North of England Refugee Service was the lead agency.

4.1 Understanding the necessity of co-community support in the process of integration

Refugees need the support of their co-national/ethnic communities and peer support from people who, as refugees, share some of the experiences of exile and settlement.

“For a sense of well-being we need to be brought together as Refugees.”

“We feel that we are different, and other people always see you as different all the time and it is painful. I have been to social events and knew they were trying to make me feel welcome. But whatever I do I always feel different. Even when they like me. Inside it hurts.”

“We need support from each other emotionally. If we don’t come together and talk about social problems then we feel our heart is tied and we want to talk to someone.”

“I feel more secure here than in my home country, but I don’t feel settled. I want to be able to speak in my own language, and to communicate with my own people. There are no proper contacts with other people from my country; no proper communication with your own language and culture. Language has to be constantly used to be remembered. We can forget expressions in our own language. When new people arrive we don’t understand the current jokes. It’s heartbreaking.”

“You get pressure from your children to be equal, and not different here. But still you want them to know their own culture. Meeting other people from the same country helped to maintain their roots, and reminded the younger ones of their culture and country of origin, even if they felt incorporated here at the same time. This is also important as, for many, there is a hope that one day we may be able to return to our country”

“Refugees do prefer to go to areas where there are some existing communities, so that they don’t feel total strangers. It is important to have a sense of community to settle, to feel comfortable.”

“I was the only Kurdish person in the whole North East for 10 years. My feeling of isolation continued until just this last year, when the first Kurdish people were sent to the region (dispersed), and I got involved in helping them. That changed my life. Something like a veil lifted from me, some chain was broken. It opened up something in myself. Now I feel more comfortable. Its comforting.”

“Refugees settling in another country need to and try to rebuild the same model of community as existed in their own country, which are mostly based on family, or extended family. But where they have no family here, they try to identify commonalties as a way of filling the gap left by the distance of separation. At least co-nationals or co-ethnic people have points of commonality. So you try to replace members of your own family with members of one’s own national community.”

“In England there is such a history of immigration and of the way that patterns have developed and the way that communities have stayed together at the beginning and gradually moved on and moved out. As an Irish person living in Newcastle, as an immigrant, at first we lived around and amongst the Irish people for years and we went to the Irish centre. We spent a lot of time with Irish people and whilst we gradually got to know other people this focus was important as just being with other Irish people was making up for the loss of your extended family which had been the focus of your life. Although you might not have had anything in common with them had you still been living in Dublin. But others from your community replaced the extended family at the beginning of the process of integration began. Now the Irish centre is not the centre of our existence.”

(Agency Worker)

“If there is an integration model then it is a community one.”

“Refugees do not know many things that they are entitled to and it is important to have someone using the same language to explain these things for accuracy. This is what the new Iranian Centre is providing.”

“If we knew at the beginning what we know now, it would have helped us, and it would have been much easier for us to integrate.”

However, the particular divisive circumstances of exile, the events that caused people to seek refuge from their countries, mean that refugees need the opportunity to re-establish relations of trust with other co-nationals. Sometimes they are afraid that others may be spying on them, or that uncovering their identities will endanger their families remaining behind in the country of origin. If co-community cannot find the reassurance to unite itself then refugees are divided against each other and the host community.

4.2 The role of refugee communities in the Two Way process of integration

Integration has been defined as a Two Way Process, with intrinsic roles and responsibilities for both refugees¹¹ and the host society/community. It must, however, be a two way process in practical reality with the real engagement secured of both parties to the process.

Refugees themselves have an integral and focal role to play in supporting the process of their own integration and in defining how inclusion strategies are appropriately developed and operationalised for the integration process to be successful:

Provide cultural and emotional support and opportunities for developing one's own identity

- Refugees provide a vital source of emotional, cultural, social, educational and advisory support through establishing community organisations where people who share the refugee experience and culture can meet and support each other.
- Within a very short period of time people feel stronger if they have the opportunity to meet in this way, support each other and celebrate their cultures.
- Such community groups and organisations can also provide points of contact with host community groups and afford refugees the chance to confer about local cultural rules, and give the host community a chance to understand the ways of different cultures.

Provide expert and regional knowledge to inform policy development

- Refugees are the voice of experience. If these voices are heard they will identify the needs, tell of the problems created by inappropriately designed policies and will offer solutions.
- Refugees themselves have a focal role to play in defining what inclusion strategies are appropriate for them in relation to their self-identified needs
- Refugees should be targeted for consultation processes to improve the effectiveness of existing services, identify gaps and develop new initiatives, thus ensuring the effectiveness of integration strategy

¹¹ We use the term ‘refugee’ in this section to denote both persons with recognised status (ILR & ELR) and asylum seekers awaiting a decision on their case.

- Policy making committees need to be established that include policy makers, service providers, Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and Refugee community organisations (RCOs)
- Refugees can compare each others' experiences in integration across Europe to identify examples of good practice from other national or regional contexts

Deliver practical assistance

- Refugees know what constitutes essential advice and the orientation problems that the particular configuration of the host system presents to people from their own countries.
- Refugees provide interpretation, communication and cultural mediation across Information gaps and problems in access to and delivery of services.
- Refugees can deliver training to service providers in awareness and understanding, which will ensure that services are equally accessible and culturally sensitive

Raise awareness and understanding and promote positive attitudes in the community

- Having direct contact with and participation in the community – getting to know people personally and as individuals, breaking down barriers through 'meeting places'
- Forming social groups for interaction, organising workshops, film shows, seminars, talks and dramatic and musical events so that the host community could get to know more about refugees and their backgrounds. Social events, like barbecues, are very important– where people can eat and drink and party together
- Through school visits by refugees, and events organised so that children get to know people who are refugees
- Through representing themselves at meetings with community leaders, organisations and local authority committees
- Through talking to the media about their personal stories, achievements, and contributions
NB: The willingness to engage in this activity is limited in practice by the fear of public identification by racist elements in the community. Where the media has been willing to film or publish positive stories, or where an opportunity to speak has been offered, many refugees have felt unable to offer their own personal experience through concern that they, their family or their businesses become the target of racist attack. In addition, they fear identification could compromise the safety of their families in countries of origin.

4.3 The experience of community groups in performing their role in the Two Way Process

It is important to recognise complementarity in the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders to the two way process of integration, necessitating the development of effective partnership working. The roles described above are an important resource and valuable asset for any truly effective integration policy. However, refugees can only perform this role if there is a commitment to developing effective mechanisms and structures for hearing and enacting their voiced experience, and for ensuring that refugee community organisations are practically enabled and empowered to be active agents in the process of their own integration rather than merely the target or object of it.

However, the voiced experience of refugees also shows that, too often, they are the weakest resourced party to the integration process. They are a wasted resource through lack of practical empowerment to apply their expert knowledge and to use their skills as active agents in the process of their own integration. Their experiences are more typically of objectification and exclusion in the process. Their experiences of marginalisation, vulnerability and insecurity are compounded by offers of partnerships that turn out to be neither genuine nor one's based on equal stakeholder involvement. This is neither enabling nor empowering. Findings show that these exclusionary processes, whether 'witting' or 'unwitting', lead to refugees experiencing added frustration, exhaustion, de-motivation and scepticism.

That is, in the two way process of integration, refugees are denied active participation by:

- Objectification, marginalisation and exclusion
- Consultations that lead to hijacking of ideas (i.e.: their expertise is only resourced through its appropriation by others)
- Offers of partnerships that turn out to be disempowering because they are neither genuine or inclusive
- Resources that are wasted on ineffective initiatives before refugees are called upon to identify the specific problems to be solved
- A lack of 'orientation' knowledge of host country systems, structures, funding and rights
- A lack of funding to NGO's and Refugee Community Organisations to enable self-development and relevant support based on self identification of need
- A cashless systems
- The 'hidden' costs of volunteering
- An absence of influential networks
- Frustrated efforts, demotivation, exhaustion, scepticism and consultation fatigue, which all reinforce isolation and social exclusion

In practice then, while refugees are seen as one half of the equation in the two way process of integration, in reality they are not practically enabled and empowered to perform their part.

The policy document, 'Full & Equal Citizens: a strategy for the integration of refugees into the United Kingdom'. (Home Office, National Asylum Support Service. November 2000) offers the opportunity for these recommendations to be operationalised in practice through the prospect of greater involvement of refugee communities themselves: quote: "this strategy will evolve to meet the needs of refugees as the regional approach grows in dynamism and effectiveness. The Home Office needs to know from the communities around the country who are accepting refugees and from the refugees themselves how this strategy should be developed. We look forwards to continuing consultation and dialogue with all of those involved – other Government Departments, the voluntary sector and refugees themselves....".

5. Commentary on the Critical Issues identified

5.1 Critical understandings drawn from findings

1. The presence of community organisations greatly contributes to early and successful immediate settlement of new arrivals and also to their longer term integration. Through identifying and addressing problems at the earliest opportunity, their work contributes to preventing longer term problems and the costs associated with these. They are recognised as having a unique and essential role to play. That is, the inclusion of community organisations in integration processes should be recognised as integral to Best Value rather than framed in terms of added value.

2. The success of the Dispersal system, both in terms of support for immediate settlement and in terms of overcoming transience and a drift away from the dispersal region, depends, to a significant degree, on the existence and capacity of the community sector to support settlement.
3. Refugees wish to be active agents in promoting their own integration as opposed to being merely the targets of policy. In addition, evidence from the Government's Social Exclusion Unit acknowledges the cost of involving all people who are marginalized within society in a process of active citizenship.
4. Early and successful settlement is not only in the best interest of asylum seekers/refugees themselves, but also in the wider interests of the regional community as a whole and in terms of Government policies on promoting inclusion, multi-culturalism and positive race relations.
5. Community organisations are uniquely placed to offer forms of support that reduce social isolation and promote the opportunity to maintain one's cultural identity, which are self-identified by refugees to be essential elements in successful integration
6. This is especially pertinent in the new dispersal regions, where the settlement environment is underdeveloped in terms of awareness, understanding, expertise and tradition of multi-culturalism.
7. The sustainability and development of community organisations has been impacted by the implementation of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. There have been significant problems in the operational efficiency of the NASS system in its first year of functioning. Clarification and transparency is required over the contractual responsibilities and standards set for the private sector accommodation providers.
8. Established community organisations have experienced a reduction in their capacity to pursue a proactive and strategic approach to settlement and integration in proportion to the increase in demand for crisis intervention created through non-compliance or limited resourcing in the contracted sector, barriers in access to mainstream services, and limited capacity and expertise in the provision of specialist services.
9. There is a need for wider awareness in all sectors and greater clarification over the entitlements and rights of asylum seekers and refugees under the new legislative framework. The new legislative framework is radically different and its full implementation has been phased over time.
10. Community organisations cannot and should not substitute for appropriately developed and delivered services in the statutory /mainstream sector.
11. The community and voluntary sector is quicker to respond to emerging and additional or unmet needs, and in filling gaps in service provision. There is a time delay in the development of an appropriately designed and operationalised response from the mainstream sector towards identifying unmet needs and barriers to uptake and access of services amongst new community of service users.
12. Community organisations cannot and should not substitute for appropriately developed and delivered services and support from the contracted sector, unless they are themselves resourced to do so in partnership arrangements.
13. Although processes of community 'association' are critical for support, they also require active 'participation' in processes of regional policy development in order to influence the structural

and political change necessary to advance real integration or inclusion in British society¹². Community organisations need to be included in partnerships that are genuine and ones of parity.

14. The refugee community sector faces constant vulnerability, fragility and exhaustion. They face a wide range of demands with very little resources. The social and economic value contributed by the voluntary and community sector, and the barriers to volunteering and community action that disproportionately affect the most socially and economically members of the community are highlighted in the National and Regional Voluntary Sector Compacts¹³. The activities of most community organisations have been resourced through (settled) members' donations. This fragile source of resourcing is not a possibility for newly arrived and emerging communities.
15. Dispersal is creating new communities that have no prior existing peer community support networks.
16. Community building can only occur where there are sufficient numbers. The dispersal of small numbers of any nationality to the region precludes possibility of community building and the uniquely valuable support a community organisation can offer.
17. The thinly spread dispersal of nationalities throughout a region of significant geographical size creates problems in terms of access to support from co-national community organisations. This is exacerbated by the barriers to travel presented by the voucher system¹⁴. This contributes to segregation and works against integration.
18. New community organisations that are emerging in response to newly arrived communities require development support interventions for their success. There is an urgent need to address resourcing of the critical role of community development work.
19. Emerging community organisations established and run by recent arrivals, which provide critical support to the newly arrived communities, are additionally vulnerable due to the transience of their members. Transience presents a specific problem for developing the sustainability of the organisation's structure.
20. Transience can also be a direct result of dispersal that is unsupported by community organisation. Without community, those who receive positive decisions are far more likely to seek to leave the region in the wish to join and share in community elsewhere. This feeling is compounded where the settlement context offers less opportunity for integration through economic inclusion.

5.2 Critical issues identified: constraints to organisational development

Findings have evidenced the need for appropriate support for the continued sustainability and for furthering the process of development of both those established community organisations and newly emerging community groups.

¹² See 'Voices of the Poor', World Bank 2000 and also 'A Trans-national Network: Hearing the Voices of Refugees in Policy and Practice in the EU', NERS 2001

¹³ See for example, Draft Code of Practice on Volunteering and Community Action NCVO Consultation Document, May 2000. Compacts are also currently being developed for the Black and Ethnic Minority voluntary sector and community groups and organisations.

¹⁴ NASS cash support for Asylum Seekers is £10 per week. The cost of a return rail fare from Stockton-on-Tees to Newcastle upon Tyne is £7.10.

5.2.1 Need for community buildings

- a) as a meeting place to gather the community together, especially in view of the large geographical size of the region and spread of community throughout the region
- b) as a place in which community activities can take place
- c) that have some security of tenure to give an important sense of permanence after the experience of exile and upheaval
- d) to give identity to the community
- e) the above require adequate capacity

5.2.2 Need for resources

- a) Community organisations are reliant on volunteer working. Any activity involves direct costs, and these are met out of the pocket of a few volunteers. (see point 14 above). While upholding the principles of voluntary action, lack of funding creates organisational stress and vulnerability to exhaustion and precludes the possibility of strategic development. The pressures of fire-fighting and crisis intervention reduce the time available to investigate and identify funding.
- b) Community consultations are increasingly being used as the mechanism through which voices of the community are heard by policy makers. However, without a dedicated worker and resources to cover expenditure on travel it is proving impossible to participate in such events, while the group is blamed for not taking up the opportunity offered.
- c) There is a lack of information of funding opportunities and changes to funding structures that relate to refugee community groups e.g: lack of awareness of new streams of funding such as Refugee Community Fund and Challenge Fund. Information about shifting European funding streams are difficult to access and require assistance with submissions.
- d) Funding is more often targeted at project activities that are based on deliverables, rather than essential core funding for co-ordinator/development worker post and administration. Critique of project based approaches to community development; there is recognition that projects should really be seen as time-limited pilot measures that will be adopted by the mainstream, whereas community organisations need permanence rather than constant vulnerability to enable strategic planning and development.
- e) Funders increasingly require match funding. Timespan between announcement of funding stream and deadline for submission is tight.

5.2.3 Need for appropriate development support, training and circulation of information to support development in capacity

- a) Need for an appropriate training package to cover, for example, setting up a community organisation (constitutions – requiring orientation to understand the recognised British structure of community organisation), management of community buildings, funding, effective operations of management committees.
- b) Also need for clear information on the operation of the NASS system, the role and responsibilities of contract holders, and the rights and entitlements of asylum seekers and refugees under new legislation (e.g: to further education and training)
- c) Need for community development support in early stages of emergence. This will also support and build on motivation.

5.2.4 Need for genuine and effective partnership working, both nationally and regionally

- a) If the role of community organisations in settlement and integration is recognised as a vital component of Best Value rather than added value, then it requires clarity in the nature of partnership working envisaged in both national and regional policy.

- b) Community organisations need to be enabled and empowered to perform their role in this partnership working

5.2.5 Need for local and regional strategic networks

- f) In order to promote the development of capacity in community organisations, and to ensure co-ordination and effectiveness of actions, they need to be drawn into local and regional strategic networks. Such networks can deliver many of the support needs identified above. These networks are most effective if they develop organically within the region.

5.3 The North East: initiatives promoting the development in regional capacity and local and regional strategic partnerships

5.3.1 The role of the North of England Refugee Service (the Regional Refugee Council for the North East)

NERS itself has developed from the initiative of an Iranian refugee who, in 1982, arrived in the region and was faced with a lack of knowledge of rights and entitlements or any specialist or community support network. From these beginnings, NERS was registered as a charitable organisation in 1989 and now has a staff of 40 and many committed volunteers. NERS exists to meet the needs and represent the interests of asylum seekers and refugees who are settling or have settled within the North East. The organisation acts as an agent of positive change in order to improve the conditions of life for its clients and promote social and economic inclusion by facilitating their integration and equitable participation within British society. Individuals with direct personal experience of becoming refugees and settling in the region are represented within all levels of the organisation, as volunteers, as support workers, team leaders, chief executive and members of the Board of Management.

- NERS has continued to develop a holistic package of specialised support services for asylum seekers and refugees, which are accessible to all asylum seekers and refugees in the region on a drop-in and appointments basis at its 4 area offices ((Newcastle West, Newcastle East, Sunderland, Middlesbrough).
- An outreach worker provides additional support to those identified as most vulnerable.
- NERS has worked to build understanding within the mainstream and voluntary sectors to ensure equality of access for its clients and to promote the development of appropriate service responses to the range of needs of its clients.
- Since April 2000, NERS has also been operating the One Stop Service (and Reception Assistant function) for the North East from its four area offices.
- NERS also undertakes social research, with an emphasis on participatory research methodology, which underpins its own development and assists in promoting the development of evidence-based policy and appropriate service responses in the region.
- In partnership with Refugee Council, NERS has been progressing the framework for Regional Refugee Councils.
- NERS works with both host¹⁵ and refugee community organisations to build capacity and promote inclusion of asylum seekers and refugees within their activities. It provides direct support and contribution in kind for the establishment of new refugee organisations¹⁶ and for capacity building with emerging community organisations and networks of support.

¹⁵ For example, it has been instrumental in the development of the West End Refugee Service and the East Area Asylum Support Group and continues to provide training and advice to such groups

¹⁶ For example, ReACT (Refugee Advisory Committee on Tyneside) and support in accessing appropriate training and funding sources for RCOs.

- It has developed successful partnership working with Local Authorities, the statutory sector, private sector and the voluntary and community sector.
- It has worked in partnership with NECASS (North East Consortium), NASS (Regional Manager) and NASS contract holders to help establish effective ways of operational working of the NASS system and promote the establishment of Best Practice that assist the settlement of those dispersed to the region and work in the best interests of the region as a whole.
- It has sourced charitable funding to facilitate and co-ordinate the formalisation of the network of RCOs as the Regional Refugee Forum for the North East.
- NERS operates an Interpreting resource

However, despite this regional input, NERS has itself experienced the continuing vulnerability of voluntary sector working. It has also been significantly impacted by the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. Its 40 staff are now dealing with an annual client case load of 6,000.

NERS has operated the OSS from its 4 area offices, giving a wider access to clients throughout the region and establishing closer and more supportive relations with clients and thereby reducing the risks associated with isolation. Each team works, with other resources, to implement the organisation's aim of promoting integration from day one of arrival. However, the ever increasing pressure of demand from the increasing numbers dispersed to the region – both in terms of operational problems in the NASS system itself and variation in the quality of contract compliance in the contracted sector – has forced NERS to try to ensure the success of dispersal through support from its own resources, with consequent pressure on its capacity to continue its own valuable operations beyond the OSS. Meanwhile, other OSS in the UK have been forced to close their doors to clients.

In recognition of the valuable contribution of community organisations, and faced with the evidence of a significant and immediate need, NERS has increasingly stepped in to provide an enabling and supporting role to those community groups seeking to establish themselves in the region. This community development role is currently unresourced, relying on contribution in kind by NERS and a small level of support from its administration of a Hardship fund through arrangements with the Tyne & Wear Community Foundation (an association of Charitable Trusts). It is also making this work through its partnership working practice (see 2 below).

The same issues of resourcing as outlined in 3.4.2 (2a,d,e and 4) above are faced by NERS.

5.3.2 The role of recently established regional strategic and support networks

Recent events demonstrate the importance of the emergence of regional networks of support and partnership working between these networks, which will serve to co-ordinate and develop the capacity of the voluntary and community sector in the North East. In early June, two sub-regional sector events (Tyne & Wear, and Tees Valley) for the refugee & asylum seeker assisting voluntary and community sector were hosted by a partnership of seven organisations towards this aim. Those seven organisations were:

NECASS North East Consortium for Asylum Support Services – established May 2000 under contract from NASS. Comprises all the 25 local authorities in the North East together with other statutory, voluntary and community sector bodies. NECASS's two main functions are contract compliance as an accommodation provider and an 'enabling role' to promote the long term integration of refugees in the region.

BECON Black and Ethnic Minority Community Organisations Network - established 1999 and funded by the Active Community Unit of the Home Office October 2000. Key aim: to strengthen the capacity of BME voluntary and community groups in the region. Members will have access to training, workshops and advice on key issues.

NERS North of England Refugee Service, formally established in 1989. (see above). To become the Regional Refugee Council for the North East.

NASS National Asylum Support Service, established 2000 to operationalise Government policy . NE Regional Manager in post December 2000

VONNE Voluntary Organisations Network North East – established early 2000 with funding from the Active Community Unit of the Home Office and the Community Fund (National Lottery Charities Board). Key aim: to facilitate links between voluntary and community groups and other relevant bodies and to promote the role and potential of the sector in regional matters.

British Refugee Council Developing a strategic approach to promote the development of a regional infrastructure to meet the needs of asylum seekers and refugees. Regional Development Worker in post 2001 based with its regional partner, NERS.

Regional Refugee Forum for the North East An initiative taken by NERS to formalise the network of RCOs. Established 2000 with funding from the Community Fund (National Lotteries Charities Board). Key aims: enabling networking of RCOs; to promote the refugee communities' voice and ensure it is heard in the monitoring and development of policy and practice; to establish an organised interface with the wider voluntary, community, statutory and private sectors; to further integration through inclusion of refugee voice in the regional agenda, ie: One North East, Government Office North East, to ensure inclusion of (issues faced by) the community of refugees within social and economic regeneration and development initiatives. Enabling the development of capacity in existing RCOs and also providing important source of support to enable the emergence of new community organisations.

The member-led network organisations all aim to add value to what already exists as effective and valued community support organisations or support bodies.

6. Comparative analysis of the settlement context in the North West Dispersal area of Liverpool¹⁷

6.1 Background

In terms of its socio-economic context, Liverpool has many of the same critical indicators as the North East region. For the past 5 years it has been the recipient of European Structural Funds (see footnote 4page 2) as an Objective 1 area. Regeneration money has been targeted at training; however, employment opportunities are very low and there is drift away.

*Total NASS dispersals to Liverpool April 2000 – end March 2001 = 1,728
(NB: total for Newcastle upon Tyne = 1,147)*

¹⁷ Information on the Liverpool region received from on-going field research carried out as a collaboration between the Evelyn Oldfield Unit (London) and the Charities Evaluation Services, which aims to assess the capacity of RCOs in London and 3 cluster areas. The Evelyn Oldfield Unit is an independent charity established in 1994 to support and strengthen RCOs and the development of skills and abilities among leaders and participants (report to be published July 2001).

Major national groupings dispersed:

<i>Iraq</i>	436
<i>Czech Republic</i>	211
<i>Iran</i>	110
<i>Sri Lanka</i>	104
<i>Congo</i>	87
<i>Afghanistan</i>	83
<i>Somalia</i>	75

Dispersal to Liverpool has involved individuals of 64 nationalities

Established/emerged community organisations:

- Merseyside Somali Community Association: There is a settled Somali community of around 5000 persons. There are 4 community organisations representing the Somali community. Support from City Council.
- Granby Somali Women's Group (Toxteth): established 1994 as a registered charity. 120 members. 2 part-time staff and over 40 volunteers. City Council funding support. Mainly assists settled refugees. Has dealt with 3 female asylum seekers in the last year.
- LLAMA (Liverpool Latin American Migrant Association).(Toxteth). Established early 2001. Voluntary work, applying for charity status. Provide advice, information, advocacy and social and material support to around 15 Latin American families in Liverpool and to Portuguese speaking Angolan community. Members meet one afternoon a week.
- Sierre Leone Association emergent
- REMISUS (Refugee and Ethnic Minority Support Service) Established 2000 concerned with racial harassment and support for victims. Operated from an office space provided by the Police, but as yet without funding. Aiming for registered charity status.
- Nigerian community group, with a community centre
- Ghanaian community group

The North West Consortium (43 Local Authorities across Liverpool, Cheshire, Merseyside, Cumbria, Manchester and Lancashire) withdrew from signing the contract with the Home Office due to concerns about the financial costs, the ability to ensure contract compliance among the private sector accommodation providers, and the appropriateness of selection of dispersal localities. The absence of such a contractual relationship with the Home Office has precluded the development of a strategic and co-ordinated agenda. However, Liverpool City Council is discussing a separate single authority contractual agreement with the Home Office to receive emergency dispersals into emergency accommodation, operating from its Greenbank Reception Centre. These dispersals will only stay on a temporary basis prior to arranged dispersal nationally.

Dispersal is strongly felt to have been accommodation led into localities of already existing significant social and economic exclusion problems. For example, Toxteth and Everton.

The One Stop Service is operated by Refugee Action. Pressure of demand on limited resources has forced the closure of its office to clients 5 months ago. Staff carry out outreach sessions around Liverpool.

Evidence demonstrates that support for the dispersal system is, in similarity to the North East, being heavily underpinned by the voluntary sector, which is providing valuable services to asylum seekers in the city of Liverpool. This need is being generated by issues over contract compliance by the private sector accommodation providers.

6.2 Critical factors identified:

1. Absence of an established regional refugee organisation (council) with regional expertise and partnership network
2. OSS operated by Refugee Action, which is newly operational in the region. Pressure of demand on 4 case workers has forced closure of office and delivery through outreach surgeries.
3. Few refugee community organisations. The majority are informal un-constituted groups without funding. Or they are fragmented structures composed of dynamic individuals.
4. Arrival of new communities through dispersal, with no peer community support eg: the Iranian and Iraqis
5. Similar capacity building needs to those identified in the North East, i.e: fundraising for running costs and paid workers; training on setting up an organisation and management committee; finding premises; setting up office systems; strategic planning; clarification of roles of NASS and the contracted sector. Dynamic individuals need support to enable their energies and skills to be realised in practice. Refugee Action is to employ a Capacity Building Officer to deliver hands on support (April 2001).
6. Absence of any strategic, co-ordinating or enabling role by a regional consortium
7. Absence of developed strategic support network:
Emergent initiatives include:

Liverpool Refugee Support Network (an initiative of Refugee Action), composing voluntary, community and statutory sector bodies. This network was established in recognition that the valuable contribution of the different organisations required co-ordination to maximise effectiveness and establish a strategic approach to settlement and integration support. The aim of the network is to:

- a) Act as a campaign group for both asylum seekers/refugees and Liverpool Refugee Support Network members in order to highlight areas of concern which are affecting the city and asylum seekers/refugees.
- b) Compile a comprehensive list of service providers who are offering services to asylum seekers/refugees within the city
- c) Provide a focal point for the dissemination and receiving of information to and from asylum seekers/refugees and Liverpool Refugee Support Network members
- d) To establish working sub groups from the Network's members and also asylum seekers/refugees on health, education, accommodation, employment, media, legal representation, training, racial harassment, social welfare and faith groups
- e) To arrange training and information days for all Network members
- f) To work with already existing service providers and build their capacity and raise profile
- g) To identify gaps in service provision for people seeking asylum
- h) To foster stronger links with local communities, young people, the elderly and raise awareness of refugee communities development
- i) To promote good practice amongst all organisations working with asylum seekers/refugees

Liverpool City Council Asylum Seekers Strategic Co-ordinating Group

Consisting of the Police, Health service and representatives from other key service areas, including, it is hoped, a representative from the voluntary sector. LCC will be holding a seminar in June 2001 for all those working with asylum seekers and refugees

7. Summary

The findings of this report have highlighted the actual and potential contribution of refugee community organisations to settlement and integration, both in terms of initiatives that support and improve service provision and in terms of self-help through community development. The report has also identified critical issues constraining the organisational development of community organisations and the emergence of new organisations for the newly arriving communities under the system of Dispersal.

A summary survey of the situation in Liverpool suggests that the North East region, while facing a similar socio-economic context, has a more developed infrastructure supporting the settlement and integration of asylum seekers and refugees and the capacity of community organisations to perform their core role in this process. As such, the capacity of the North East may be exceptional in terms of dispersal regions outside of the London and South East. Regional specifics include local and regional knowledge and expertise lying within the voluntary sector, effective networking and genuine partnerships across all sectors.

In addition, evidence which will support the effective monitoring of the dispersal system's operational functioning and which will aid in fine-tuning the operational effectiveness and appropriateness of the system – both in terms of the best interests of asylum seekers themselves and the host community and region as a whole – derives from inclusion of the community of refugees and asylum seekers in genuine partnership working with other sectors.

Integration should be seen as a two way process with intrinsic roles and responsibilities for both refugees and host community/structures. However, this two way process must have a practical reality, with real engagement secured of both parties to the process.

RCO's have a unique and integral role to play in supporting the integration process:

- role as providers of support services (organic and mechanical)
- role in defining how integration strategies are appropriately developed and operationalised and in monitoring the effectiveness of policies
- self-help through community development

RCO's should therefore be seen as integral to best value and not in terms of added value

RCO's experience shows that they are the weakest resourced party and therefore a wasted resource. Their experience is typically of objectification, marginalisation and exclusion in the process and continued organisational vulnerability.

In order to perform this essential role and be active agents in the process of their own integration, RCOs must be enabled and empowered to do so. Therefore:

- Who resources the resource?
- Need to develop effective mechanisms and structures for hearing the voiced experience of refugees
- Need to encourage partnerships that are clear, genuine and inclusive

The value of regional expertise needs to be recognised via:

- Regional devolvement of decision making /implementation
- Building the capacity of regional and local strategic networks

It is hoped that the findings of this project will be directly relevant to best practice in the practical implementation of policy that will be in the best interests of asylum seekers/refugees and the regional communities as a whole. (e.g: Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 and 'Full & Equal Citizens: a strategy for the integration of refugees into the United Kingdom, November 2000). It is hoped that this initial data will enable potential and available funding to be focused on the basis of identified need.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Table 2 Detailed Mapping of RCO's in the North East of England

Appendix 2

Case Studies¹⁸ demonstrating examples of community organisations / projects at different stages of development and demonstrating the impact of recent legislation (implications of the 1999 Immigration & Asylum Act)

Case Study 1: The Bosnia & Hercegovina Club “Ljiljan” – (established 1994)

Established Community Organisation – run by settled community with no/very few new arrivals

Case Study 2: The Iranian Centre (established 1998)

Established Community Organisation - run by the settled community under increasing pressure of demand from new arrivals (Dispersal)

Case Study 3: The Zimbabwean Community in the North East of England (created March 2001)

Emerging Community Organisations - run by those recently dispersed for the newly emerging community

Case Study 4: Support for Spanish speakers

Informal community networks of support

Case Study 5: Palestinian Cultural Society

Un-represented communities /communities without support structures

Case Study 6: ReACT – The Refugee Advisory Committee on Tyneside

¹⁸ Case study findings are reported according to the feelings and perceptions expressed by participants themselves in their response to the questionnaire

Table 2: Mapping the Groups (detailed)

Name of community organisation	Contact address	Telephone number Fax number e-mail	Contact name Position in organisation	1. Status (sector) 2. year begun 3. external funding year 2000 - 2001	1. Membership/clients 2. Potential membership through Dispersal
Albanian Speakers' Community	C/o North of England Refugee Service 27 Borough Rd Middlesbrough TS1 4AD	T: 01642 217447 (c/o Pete Widlinski)	Mr Flamur Jashari	Voluntary Emerging 2001 Unfunded	20 181
Angolan Community	C/o Regional Refugee Forum 2 Jesmond Road West Newcastle upon Tyne NE2 4PQ	T: 0191 245 7311 (c/o Georgina Fletcher)	Mr Joao Francisco	Voluntary Emerging 2001 Unfunded	- 87
Bosnia & Herzegovina Club "Ljiljan"	C/o Heaton Library Heaton Park View Newcastle upon Tyne NE6 5AH	T: 0191 276 5179 bihclub@ljiljanne.free-serve.co.uk	Mr Sead Masic Chairperson	Voluntary Established 1994 Constituted £2000 Local Authority (rent and	150 1

				bills)	
IFIR (International Federation of Iranian Refugees)	C/o 38 Toward Road Sunderland SR2 8GF		Mr Afshin	Voluntary Emerging Affiliated Unfunded	c.100 977
Iranian Centre North East	Callerton House 4 Callerton Place Fenham Newcastle upon Tyne NE4 5NQ	T: 0191 238 6190 M: 07944095896	Ms Roya K Rezae Development Worker	Voluntary Established 1998 Constituted £3000 Local Authority (to provide support & advisory sessions)	300 977
Iraqi Community Association North East	The International Centre 7 Abingdon Road Middlesbrough TS1 2DP	T: 01642 246 604	Mr Amir Nakash Secretary	Voluntary Established 1990 Constituted Affiliated Unfunded	? 299
North of England Refugee Service	2 Jesmond Road West Newcastle upon Tyne NE24PQ	T: 0191 245 7311 F: 0191 245 7320 Web site: www.refugee.org	Daoud Zaaroura Chief Executive	Voluntary NGO Established Registered Charity 1989 & company	5000 3000+

				status 1998 Funding by Charitable Trusts, Local Authority & OSS contract (NASS via Refugee Council)	
<i>Spanish Speakers'</i> Support	195 Melbourn Court Howard Street Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE1 2AT	T: 0191 230 0498	Ms Martha Bernal Ms Caridad Galbraith	Voluntary Informal Begun 2000 Unfunded	44 44
ReACT (Refugee Advisory Committee on Tyneside)	C/o NERS 19 Bigg Market Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 1UN	T: 0191 222 0446 F:0191 222 0239	Mr Sead Masic Chairperson Mr Amer Ratkusic	Voluntary Established 2000 £2000 Charitable Trust (start up funding)	12 founder members
Regional Refugee Forum for the North East of England	2 Jesmond Road West Newcastle upon Tyne NE2 4PQ	T: 0191 245 7301 F: 0191 245 7320 e-mail: gf@refugee.org.uk	Georgina Fletcher Co-ordinator	Established 2000 £25,000 The	13 community organisation members Individuals not represented by other

				Community Fund (Co-ordinator's post)	groups
Romanian Community	c/o Convoy Aid Romania 10 Fauconberg Way Yarm TS15 9QN	T: 01642 790810 F: 01642 613106	Ms Gabriella Jones	Voluntary Emerging Unfunded	- 145
Sril Lankan Community Association	C/o 16 Wanless Terrace Durham DH1 1RU	T: 0191 384 1687	Dr Rajendran Candasamy	Voluntary Established 1997 Unfunded	37 85
Sudanese Society	C/o NERS 3 rd Floor, Forum House The Forum Wallsend High Street Tyne & Wear NE28 8LX	T: 0191 200 1109 Dr Mohammed	Dr Mohammed	Voluntary Established 1995 Unfunded	150 2
Zimbabwean Community in the North East of England	C/o Into Work Project 7 Cromwell Avenue Victoria Stockton-on-Tees TS18 2EF	T: 01642 602528 / 730644 F: 01642 730644	Mr Ben	Voluntary Emerging 2001 unfounded	16 80

Other major national groupings unrepresented by a community organisation					Numbers dispersed or arrived directly into the region , April 2000 – end March 2001 (73 nationalities in total)
Kurdish					(unspecified in figures of Iranian and Iraqi nationals)
Afghan					401
Czech					325
Congo					104
Name of community organisation	Facilities	Activities (all have membership of the Regional Refugee Forum for the North East)	Paid worker or unpaid voluntary work		Primary location or area of activity within region
Albanian Speakers' Community	Occasional use of room in the International Centre, Middlesbrough	Informal network operating English language classes	unpaid		Middlesbrough
Angolan Community	None	Informal network	Unpaid		Gateshead

Bosnia & Herzegovina Club "Ljiljan"	4 rented rooms in privately owned community building	Social and cultural events. Mother tongue classes for children. Sports. Outward bound activities. The Bosnia Room. Photography club. Summer play scheme. Racial harassment reporting. Orientation. Advice , information and advocacy.	unpaid		Newcastle
IFIR (International Federation of Iranian Refugees)	None	Informal network operating. Organised demonstrations and petitions / police liaison on racially motivated attacks.	unpaid		Sunderland
Iranian Centre North East	Office IT & telephone	Advice, information and advocacy. Social and cultural events. Health promotion activities. School liaison and support. Sports access. Orientation.	unpaid		Tyneside

		Taking up cases of racial harassment. Preliminary ESOL classes.			
Iraqi Community Association North East	Office IT & telephone	Advice, information and advocacy. Library. Regional newspaper. Mother tongue classes for children. Social and cultural events.	unpaid		Middlesbrough & Tees Valley
North of England Refugee Service	Regional offices: Newcastle x 2 Wallsend Sunderland Middlesbrough	Advice, information and advocacy. Outreach to vulnerable individuals. One Stop Service. Reception Assistant. Regional Refugee Forum. Community development. Hardship Fund. Volunteer co-ordination. Training. Research. Policy development. Partnership working. Regional Refugee Council. Interpreting facility	44 full-time paid staff. Volunteers		The North East region
Spanish Speakers' Support	None	Advice, information and advocacy.	Unpaid		Tyneside

		Material support. Introduction to social network.			
ReACT (Refugee Advisory Committee on Tyneside)	Office Telephone	Multi-national refugee organisation. Research consultants. Inform policy development.	unpaid		Tyneside
Regional Refugee Forum for the North East	Office IT	The consumer voice of refugees. Co-ordination of actions. Circulation of information. Monitoring of practice. Evidence based development of policy & practice. Good practice exchange. Partnership working. Support for newly emerging community groups. Organised interface with wider voluntary and community sector and statutory and private sector.	1 full-time paid co-ordinator		North East region
Romanian Community	None	Material and social support	unpaid		Tees Valley

Sril Lankan Community Association	None	Advice, information and advocacy. Material support. Social support (1 to 1). Orientation/familiarisation. Taking up cases of racial harassment. School liaison and support.	unpaid		North East Region
Sudanese Society	Rented room until sale of community building 2 months ago IT equipment	Advice, information and advocacy. Social gatherings. Mother tongue classes for children Material support new arrivals 2 football teams.	unpaid		North East Region
Zimbabwean Community in the North East of England	Meeting room in community project Access to IT	Advice and social support through network. Information gathering on entitlements, education, training and employment opportunities. Networking through the region. Participation in regional cultural events.	unpaid		Stockton & Middlesbrough

Appendix 2

Case Studies demonstrating examples of community organisations /projects at different stages of development and demonstrating the impact of recent legislation (implications of the 1999 Immigration & Asylum Act)

NB: Statistics show arrivals of individuals since April 2000 (both those dispersed and those arriving directly into region) up until the end of March 2001.. They do not show the pre-existing population totals prior to full implementation of dispersal (eg: those arriving through dispersal by Refugee Arrivals Project 1998-9, Interim dispersal measures 1999 and the pre-existing refugee population and those still awaiting decisions)

1. Established Community Organisation – run by settled community with no/very few new arrivals¹⁹

Case Study 1: The Bosnia & Herzegovina Club “Ljiljan” – (established 1994)

The number of Bosnians dispersed to NE under NASS system April 2001 - end March 2001 is 0. 1 new applicant for NASS support arrived directly into the region.

i. Background to Ljiljan

The organisation was initiated in May 1994 by a group of Bosnian refugees who had initially been housed in a reception centre in Gosforth, Newcastle. They wanted to have a place (premises) where they could meet together for mutual support, assistance and where activities could be organised. This would also allow the group to maintain the lived experience of Bosnian culture and language.

Support for the group's establishment and development came primarily from the co-ordinator of the North of England Refugee Service in the form of identification of needs and advice on the constitution, with additional support from the Community Development Worker of the People's Centre in Wallsend. This year the group is about to become a registered charity.

ii. Activities of Ljiljan

The objects of the group are (from re-drafted constitution):

1. To provide relief for all persons from Bosnia and Herzegovina residing in the North East of England and their dependents in the UK and overseas who are in conditions of need, hardship or distress.
2. To preserve and protect the physical and mental health of such refugees and dependents
3. To advance the education and training of refugees and their dependents in need thereby enabling them to advance in life and assist in their rehabilitation within their adopted country of residence

The importance of a having a community venue at an early stage was strongly emphasised by the group. It allowed the children to meet, play together and use and continue to be taught their mother tongue. At the time it was begun, the conflict was still on-going in the Balkans, so it was also important to be able to meet to exchange latest news on what was happening in Bosnia. In addition, it allowed co-ordination of the effort to collect aid to send to Bosnia for those still trapped

¹⁹ Case study findings are reported according to the feelings and perceptions expressed by participants themselves in their response to the questionnaire

and suffering in the war. In the early days of the organisation, the North of England Refugee Service used to run outreach advice sessions at the Bosnia Club once or twice a week.

It is strongly felt that the organisation is now primarily a cultural association, rather than a 'refugee' community organisation. Current membership is around 150 and is composed of family units, excepting 5 single men, with an even spread of ages. The club rents 4 rooms (3 of which are for its own exclusive use) in the Heaton Library, which are open 3 evenings a week and each evening around 30 members gather. The Bosnian community is localised within the region, living in Newcastle and Gateshead. The furthest distance travelled to the club is from Washington.

The Friday evening mother tongue classes are regularly attended by 30–40 people. A summer play group scheme operates. The younger adults meet to socialise and play pool and table tennis. A photography group has built and equipped a dark room. Festival days are celebrated in a traditional fashion and parties are held. The whole community put much effort into recreating a 'Bosnia Room', where one club room was completely transformed into a Bosnian interior. This was acknowledged to have been a very successful social project as an activity and the result was appreciated by all. Now that people have been here a while, they can help each other with advice. They have continued to give peer advice to newer arrivals, on housing, welfare, writing letters etc and referred newer members to NERS and other appropriate service providers. The club has a notice board giving information on training opportunities or job vacancies/employment opportunities. The club also has a football team, and has arranged outward bound activities such as a skiing trip to Scotland and water sports on Kielder Water.

The Bosnian refugee community was one of the first major identifiable groupings in the Newcastle area. Bosnians experienced racial harassment and community safety is still an issue as are equal opportunities and discrimination. The club liaises with and participates in the Racial Harassment Support Group so that racial incidents are reported, contributing to monitoring and community safety action planning. They have noticed that, since Dispersal began and the area has seen the arrival of other refugees/asylum seekers with darker skins, those groups have now become the targets of abuse, harassment and attacks. The club has also worked within the Bosnian community to raise awareness about multi-culturalism in the UK, racism, anti-discrimination and equal opportunities legislation and principles. While Bosnians obviously have experience of the issues of ethnicity and multi-culturalism derived from the Balkan conflict, a multi-racial environment is relatively new to them.

While "Ljiljan" acts as a social and cultural resource to reduce isolation of individuals and families and also to promote links with British society. It links with schools and other agencies and groups, and the circulation of information within the organisation helps understanding of access to them. It also informs other service providers and agencies of the barriers to access or uptake of their services that are experienced by newly arriving and settling communities.

For many of the Bosnian community the issue of British Citizenship is imminent given the time they have been here. Through the group's activities and links they have been continuously informing themselves of British structures and systems.

iii. Structure and Funding of Ljiljan

In terms of structure, the Management Committee of 11 members holds regular meetings to raise issues and decide action, usually based on consultations with different groups (children, women, young people) on their self-identified needs. There is no paid co-ordinator or staff. Instead the club is run by 15 active volunteers who contribute their time, which has put pressure on family life.

In its first years the club was successful in applying for funding from such sources as Newcastle City Council (basic running costs), ward committees (travel expenses), Princes Trust (outdoor activities), National Lottery (photography club facilities), Education department (mother tongue

classes). The club has managed to resource its rooms with a well equipped (IT) office, dark room, and sports equipment.

iv. Critical Issues for sustainability and future development

▪ Need for a Bosnian Community Building

The group emphasised the importance of having a community *place*. However, there is a persistent sense of vulnerability over an assured, permanent premises. The club has had to move premises 4 times, and last month had to vacate their most recent home when the library was sold. This entailed dismantling the 'Bosnian Room', which created a great sense of loss and upheaval - again. They have now re-negotiated access with the new owners. However, their deepest wish is to have a 'Bosnian place' that is open 7 days a week and has security of tenure. This would give them a sense of permanence and confidence. In order to have their own community building they need to raise significant funding for purchase or long lease (c.£100,000).

▪ Need to access Resources / Funding

Activities and projects that initially received funding have had to continue on an unfunded basis. The only funding the club now has is a £2000 annual grant from Newcastle City Council which covers basic survival costs (room rent, telephone). The group estimates that it requires, at the very least, double this amount annually to sustain the club as an active centre. For maximum impact and effectiveness of the club, funding for the post of a co-ordinator is required. This post is seen as vital for the continued development of the club. However, whilst project based funding has been identified in the past, funding for a co-ordinator's post is difficult to source. It is felt that only with a paid co-ordinator will the community have the capacity to develop further as wished: for example, to identify funding for and organise a proper programme of activities, to establish community/co-operative enterprises. In addition, a dedicated co-ordinator would enable a greater degree of participation in the many community consultation events that are the preferred mechanism through which regeneration initiatives and health schemes are designed. The attendance of a co-ordinator would ensure that the group has someone to speak on behalf of the community. The importance of having their voice directly heard by local and regional policy makers was strongly felt; in particular the importance of establishing a more influential role in developing policies aimed at promoting settlement.

▪ Training needs

Identified training needs were specified as training for the management committee, health and safety training (related to running a building), and childminding.

2 Established Community Organisation - run by the settled community under increasing pressure of demand from new arrivals (Dispersal)

Case Study 2: The Iranian Centre (established 1998)

NASS dispersals of Iranian Nationals to NE April 2000 - end March 2001*

<i>Newcastle upon Tyne</i>	<i>322</i>	<i>South Tyneside</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Sunderland</i>	<i>321</i>	<i>Redcar & Cleveland</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Gateshead</i>	<i>108</i>	<i>Stockton on Tees</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>North Tyneside</i>	<i>76</i>	<i>Middlesbrough</i>	<i>16</i>
		<i>Darlington</i>	<i>5</i>

**unspecified if Kurdish*

Number of New Arrivals directly into the region via One Stop Service Reception function, April 2000 - end March 2001 = 39

Total new arrivals April 2000 - end March 2001 = 977

i. Background to the Iranian Centre

The Iranian Centre, which is based in Newcastle, works with all Iranian Nationals and their dependents in the North East, including newly arriving asylum seekers. The Iranian Community is one of the oldest and largest refugee communities in the North East as, prior to the Revolution, Iran had historical links to the region through ship yard contracts and University places. That original community was highly mobile and many are successful business entrepreneurs. Prior to 1998, the community had not established a formal or fully developed structure, but, through the efforts of a few individuals, had through the years organised a number of cultural events, particularly to celebrate festivals. In July 1998, a group of residents, who had been involved in previous attempts to establish a community structure, organised a focus group to discuss the way forwards for the community. It was felt that the community needed development to articulate its needs and plan action and solutions, as it had reached a degree of size and maturity that required development. In September 1998 the focus group published its findings and the consultation for setting up an Iranian Community Organisation began. A steering group of 7 people was formed to work on the main aims and objectives and draw up a Constitution for the Iranian Centre. The Constitution was adopted at the first meeting of the Iranian Centre on 10th October 1998. The steering group became the Management Committee to progress activities necessary for laying the foundations of the organisation.

The aims of the Centre were to assist the settlement of any Iranian national living in the North East by providing advice, advocacy and the opportunity for social and cultural expression, and to empower the Iranian community to articulate its needs in order to influence the agenda of local and regional policy makers.

Office space was located in Newcastle and, through negotiation with Newcastle City Council, access was secured with the use of office equipment (telephone/fax and 2 drawer filing cabinet), which remains the property of the building.

ii. Activities of the Iranian Centre

Over the past 5 years, in particular with the implementation of interim dispersal, and then Dispersal since April 2000, over 1000 Iranian nationals have arrived in the region. Their needs are very different from the settled community. Lack of familiarity with the English Language, severe isolation, and a change of regulations covering their status and entitlements have meant that they are in need of more urgent and higher degree of assistance and support from. In particular, the elderly, ill and disabled, the young, and single mothers need much support, advice and direction.

Immediate settlement advice work has become the most overwhelming demand faced by the Centre. From its small office, the Centre operates open access (drop-in) surgeries on Monday mornings and Wednesday afternoons. In addition, telephone or faxed advice is given to Clients unable to travel to the office. The volunteer Development Worker also acts as an outreach worker, being contactable by mobile phone. Client files now number over 300. The vast majority of advice given concerns problems with:

- Legal services: lack of capacity and expertise in the region. Serious issues of confidentiality and personal safety where inappropriate interpreters used by solicitors (eg: Iranian students in the UK).
- Housing problems: inadequate support from certain private sector accommodation providers. Significant problems associated with Hostel accommodation where conditions create acute stress and volatility. The Iranian Centre have been called upon a number of times to perform an important role in diffusing volatile situations.
- Welfare problems: general disarray in the operation of the voucher system combined with generally low level of income
- The NASS support system still being operationally developed and occasionally breaking down
- Lack of information: on rights and entitlements. Existing mainstream services do not have the capacity to deliver information or deliver it in an accessible form. Serious lack of translated literature and inaccurate translations
- Lack of capacity in interpreting sector
- Racial harassment and attacks

The combination of these factors has created a context in which acute stress, isolation, distress and depression are increasingly common. Consequently, there is ever greater demand placed on the Iranian Centre to provide a range of support: advice, advocacy, social and cultural.

Most beneficiaries of the centre are housed in Newcastle itself, due to the ease of access (walking distance). However, the Centre is concerned that it is unable to offer a support across the region – both in terms of its own limited capacity, and in terms of the barriers to access through cost of travel from other localities. The Centre would like to run outreach sessions in the other major localities (Gateshead and Sunderland), but has no resources (time and money) to fund this.

The necessity to directly support the dispersal system is impacting on the capacity of the Centre to organise those other activities that could be defined as promoting longer term settlement. The Centre has a wide range of such initiatives which provides essential support for integration. For example:

- Families: organising picnics, social evenings and cultural events. Liaison with the Tyneside Arts Cinema to show Iranian films.
- Women: established a health group which delivers health awareness sessions each Friday. Link working with other projects (eg: Sure Start) and community wide health promotion initiatives eg: Breast Cancer and HIV awareness. This involves bridging access to these services where service providers have found no way of reaching into the Iranian community or are unaware of their needs; interpreting at sessions; translating literature. Creches organised. Also weekly aerobics session in Church hall.
- Children: ensuring school enrolment by escorting parents to schools for meetings with head teachers about place availability; accompanying families to Parents Evenings to interpret and make sure parents understand children's progress and their entitlements for information from the school; ensuring that families understand the school timetables and holidays; presence to support children's first few days in the classroom; take up issues of racial harassment in schools.

- Men: health awareness sessions organised eg: HIV and Aids awareness. Arranging special access to sports facilities which are normally only accessed with a student's card or via benefits concession. Referral to sports facilities is made through the Iranian Centre so that use of facilities is co-ordinated and helps mixing in the wider community. The Iranian Centre also assists individuals who have special sporting skills (competition standard) in finding outlets for them.
- Orientation: sessions to explain the British way of life: introduction to UK social, political, legal structures that affect their lives.
- Empowerment: encouraging members to be active in planning activities that address their own self-identified needs. Encouraging planned and collective response.
- Racial Harassment: raising the confidence of clients to encourage them to report incidents of racial harassment in order that individual cases can be addressed and also that the level of racist incidents is properly known so that action can be planned. Addressing community safety with authorities. Explaining the role of anti-racist organisations and the responsibilities of the police towards their protection. Sessions have been organised where the Police have come to address the community to explain ways to challenge racist behaviour.
- English language learning – by special arrangement with ESOL, twice a week preparatory classes for Iranians who have no English and must learn the roman alphabet prior to entering mainstream ESOL classes.
- Cultural events: Iranian New Year – 300 Iranians came to the traditional jumping over the fire activity held in the Park. Demonstrates large numbers involved despite the fact that the event was only advertised in the 2 local language colleges after the police requested no wider advertising due to caution about the impact of large numbers in a public space. A second New Year Event, an evening dinner at the Royal Station Hotel, was filled to its capacity of 200 people, with a queue of 1km length of those still wanting to join in.

The Iranian Centre believes strongly that this work speeds up the process of settlement and helps to prevent longer term problems. Such work ensures that trust is built up at a much earlier stage, problems are identified and addressed at the earliest opportunity. It also works hard to provide opportunities that allow mutual social and cultural understandings to develop between host community and Iranian nationals. Major cultural events, such as the New Year celebrations, are an important aspect of regional multi-culturalism as they allow the visibility of Iranian culture and for that culture to be shared /experienced by others, while being an essential expression for Iranians themselves.

iii. Structure and Funding of the Iranian Centre

The 7 members of the management committee meet monthly and the volunteer development worker reports to them on activities and client statistics. Members (around 200 presently) meet every 3 months at the General Meeting, at which feedback on activities and progress is gained from which an evaluation of priorities for the next 3 months can be decided. Every 6 months there is an open meeting for the whole community.

The volunteer Development Worker can often work a 50 hour week. There are 4 part time volunteers supporting the Centre. In the face of continuing increase in demand, the level of input from and effectiveness of the unpaid Development Worker is now considered to be unsustainable in its current form.

Last year, the Centre received a £3000 grant to 'provide support and advisory sessions' from Newcastle City Council. The donated office space and access to IT/phone is covered under the

umbrella of SRB funding which the community building receives itself. The only funding for activities comes through a small amount of donations from the Centre's members and significantly from the volunteer workers themselves.

iv. Critical Issues identified

- **Reduction of the Centre's settlement / integration activities to that of "bread and butter issues"**

The implementation of the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act has transformed the nature of the Iranian Centre from a cultural and community organisation into an adjunct to the NASS support system. The Centre is having to step in to provide information, referrals and interventions that should be made by those who are contracted by NASS, in particular certain private sector accommodation providers, or those who have a statutory responsibility towards issues of access and uptake of mainstream services. The Iranian Centre does not want to be forced into duplicating services, but wants to offer unique settlement support. The Centre wants to be a partner in supporting settlement rather than the supporting the system itself, which it sees as relying on the un-resourced work of the voluntary and community sector.

The Community organisations also need to know where contractual responsibilities for the NASS support system lie so that they ensure that those who are funded to carry out that work are in fact doing so, rather than relying on the community sector, with its limited capacity and resources, to provide it. If, however, it is the intention of the Government to involve the community organisations in immediate settlement support, then the Centre believes that NASS should provide support for community organisations that are providing support services for asylum seekers dispersed into the region. However, the Centre feels that there should not be any pressure placed on those community organisations to accept or endorse Government policies per se.

Being forced to do the 'bread and butter work' limits the Centre's capacity to develop and deliver more strategic initiatives on settlement and integration. Increasingly, the Centre is being pushed further into being a reactive service based on crisis intervention.

- **Voluntary basis**

The Centre and its activities are run on a purely voluntary basis. It is now felt that there is imminent danger of the organisation collapsing through ever widening gap between resources and demand.

The Centre emphasises the value and principles of voluntary work. However, given the already existing and constantly increasing level of need through the programme of Dispersal, it cannot be envisaged that the Iranian Centre will cope with demand based on voluntary work alone. In order to provide consistent, reliable and properly planned action it requires a full-time paid worker.

The situation is creating exhaustion among the voluntary workers, who must also find time for their own paid work to support their own families and to develop their own skills and talents (for example in enterprise and as recognised animator), which themselves contribute to the cultural and economic fabric of the region. In addition, there is the significant personal financial costs of volunteering: eg: travel costs and mobile phone expenses.

It is understood as critical to sustain and develop such a community organisation. For example, this March three separate events to mark the traditional Iranian New Year celebrations were organised. Such events are an important aspect of promoting the Iranian culture to the host population and for allowing the lived expression of Iranian culture. Since the events of 1979 in Iran, the country has lacked an environment in which community action is encouraged. Rather, it has been discouraged and suppressed. Confidence in independent action has to be fostered again. As such, reliance on effective voluntary work falls on a few individuals.

▪ **Funding**

The Centre is only supported by a grant of £3000 from Newcastle City Council to 'provide support and advisory sessions'. The range of activities are not funded, nor volunteer expenses, nor the important link working or bridging to allow other service providers to deliver their information/assistance which they have specific project funding or statutory responsibility for (ie: interpreting at meetings and translating of leaflets). Often funding for activities organised by the Iranian Centre ends up being accessed by other organisations rather than the centre itself. For example, when organising health awareness training for the women, a crèche facility was needed, and it was another organisation that accessed the funding to provide crèche facilities.

There are several barriers to accessing funding:

- The Centre is forced to respond in the form of crisis intervention, which precludes time to investigate and identify funding sources.
- Until the recent establishment of the Regional Refugee Forum for the North East, there has been a major lack of information/circulation of information on appropriate funding sources. For example, the Iranian Centre had not heard about the new integration funding – Challenge Fund and Refugee Community Fund - from the Home Office.
- Assistance/advice is needed for completion of complicated application forms (e.g.: European sources)
- Where information on a funding source is accessed or circulated, the time span between call for proposals and deadline for submission is too short.
- Raising match funding is increasingly a condition of funders
- Project based funding is based on deliverables, but does not cover core funding for the post of a development worker

▪ **The need for an Iranian Community Building**

The identifiable presence of the Iranian Centre is currently its small office in Newcastle. The community urgently requires its own Community Centre, with the capacity to deliver advice and social support on a larger scale, thereby reducing isolation and would allow the development of activities on site.

▪ **Training needs identified**

- Volunteer workers require the opportunity/time to achieve recognised qualifications in community work, which might be the conditions of employment if funding for a co-ordinator/development worker is sourced.
- The organisation would benefit from training for the Management Committee
- While the voluntary sector offers modules of training such as time management, fundraising, equal opportunities, health and safety, until now they have not been delivered as a single package, which would be more useful and accessible.

▪ **Significant size of the region**

The North East region is a huge geographical area. Dispersal is taking places into pockets spread out across the region and clients do not have the financial resources to travel to a single regional centre. The prospect of other local authority areas entering into the dispersal scheme (Durham , Northumberland) will increase this problem further.

v. Ways Forward

1. The Iranian Centre's most pressing need is for resources, which would enable an increase in capacity and the development of a strategic approach to further development. Funding is needed to cover direct costs of the activities and the related increase in administrative load, as well as the production and dissemination of information to clients, such as a regular newsletter.

2. In addition to sustaining or expanding its existing services, the Centre wishes to:

- provide a 5 day service
- provide a Farsi library
- provide a free telephone help line
- publish a newsletter which will link the settled and newly arriving members of the community. (requires the purchase of software producing Farsi script)
- organise regular sessions for promote self-confidence
- organise different group based sessions for the elderly, for children, a youth group to occupy their spare time. This is seen as particularly important for the children and teenagers/young adults in the effort to avoid the dangers of the streets in which they live. Many dispersal localities (accommodation locations) are areas with social exclusion problems, with drugs, drink and criminal activity on the street.

3. In the last year, the community development agency Banks of the Wear, accessed £5000 from SRB5 on behalf of the Iranian Centre in order to conduct a feasibility study for a larger Iranian Centre.

4. There is a need to continue to develop the capacity of the existing Regional Refugee Forum for the North East.

The Regional Refugee Forum provides the opportunity for the development of a specific regional community development strategy, based on partnership working. It aids the co-ordination of community organisation actions, promotes the exchange of best practice, provides peer support and ensures circulation of information. The Forum also ensures that the evidenced experience of the community organisations is directly 'voiced' and heard directly by policy makers in advance of policies being developed. It also contributes to monitoring the effectiveness of existing policies. It allows community groups to be consulted in a meaningful way.

3 Emerging Community Organisations - run by those recently dispersed for the newly emerging community

Case Study 3: The Zimbabwean Community in the North East of England (created March 2001)

NASS dispersals of Zimbabwean Nationals to NE April 2000 - end March 2001

<i>Newcastle upon Tyne</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>South Tyneside</i>	<i>0</i>
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<i>Sunderland</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>Redcar & Cleveland</i>	<i>4</i>
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<i>Gateshead</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>Stockton on Tees</i>	<i>8</i>
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<i>North Tyneside</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>Middlesbrough</i>	<i>4</i>
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<i>Hartlepool</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>Darlington</i>	<i>0</i>
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New arrivals directly into the region via One Stop Service April 2000 - March 2001= 2

Total new arrivals into region April 2000 - end March 2001 = 80

The newly emerged effort to create the 'Zimbabwean Community in the North East of England' is a direct result of the dispersal system, which has seen the arrival of Zimbabweans into the North East for the first time. Dispersal has meant the arrival of new communities for whom no existing co-language or co-community exists. As the statistics show, small groupings of Zimbabweans are scattered around the region in isolated pockets. The incentive to create an identifiable and active community group arose from the initiative of two individuals dispersed to Stockton, who wished to take action to reduce the isolation they felt themselves. It was also a response to the need to take an active role in informing themselves of their entitlements and rights both pre-decision and post-decision, so as to empower and enable them to take the earliest possible steps to rebuilding active and engaged lives.

Objectives and Aims of the group (from draft constitution)

1. To gather and avail legal and other information to Zimbabweans living in the North East of England (eg: immigration, housing, education and training, healthcare)
2. To build confidence in asylum seekers and refugees
3. To provide social support to all Zimbabwean refugees and asylum seekers living in the North East of England
4. Interaction with other organisations, all races, tribes and create friendship
5. To promote the preservation of African culture and values
6. To promote a positive settlement environment (to improve the quality of life for refugees and asylum seekers by reducing poverty, unemployment, stress and isolation)
7. To ensure that the freedom and human rights of all Zimbabweans, regardless of race, creed, religion or political beliefs are upheld by the Government of England.

The group has to date written a constitution, has a management committee, and have managed to secure access to the free use of a room in the Stockton 'Into Work Project', where they can also access IT and internet facilities. These arrangements are temporary, as the host organisation is unsure of eligibility under its own funding sources (ONE North East – SRB, ESF, Stockton on Tees Borough Council). The North of England Refugee Service has provided support for the development of the group and for its participation in a wider network of Black & Ethnic Minority and African social and cultural activity. eg: NERS has supported the group with: visits, circulating information and contacts, ensuring the new organisation is on appropriate mailing lists, providing resources from a specially arranged Hardship Fund for travel by group representatives to regional sector events. Through its membership of the Regional Refugee Forum for the North East it has been drawn into a network of information flow, contacts and regional events.

The critical issues they faced were:

- No peer support as a new national community

- Only one individual has Refugee status, the others are still awaiting decisions. This feeling of transience creates insecurity about future planning and creates reliance on a few individuals.
- The need for a community meeting place: how to access community buildings
- The need for communication across the region: phone costs / postage. Initially, certain individuals carried all the costs involved in achieving the foundation of an organisation
- The need to overcome the financial barriers to travelling to a meeting place (under the voucher system only £10 per week is received in cash. The cost of return rail travel from Stockton to Newcastle, for example, is £7.10.)
- The need for create information leaflet (access to IT), photocopying (costs) and circulate it (costs) to accommodation providers, and points of contact for new arrivals.
- The need for information / training on organising a community group
- The need for information and advice on funding opportunities to support the group/start up costs/activities/sustainability
- The need for information on entitlements and rights, and on other services and projects eg: advice on education, training and employment
- Desire to become part of a wider refugee or black and ethnic minority community network, in particular make links with any existing African associations or networks. (information and costs of inclusion).

These issues will be faced by all emergent new groups.

The need for information and development support is crucial, but its availability is problematic because:

- The capacity of those with specialist knowledge is severely limited: For example, two young men have been offered places to study BSC Engineering at Teeside University. They needed advice on whether they were eligible for grant funding (pre-decision and post-decision, and the implication of ILR and ELR). Neither the University nor local services had this specialist knowledge. Only the Careers Advisor from the Tyneside TEC/Careers Service, who by special arrangement has appointments with clients two days @ week at NERS's Newcastle office, could offer telephone advice on possibilities of part-time study. Such specialised knowledge is not diffused throughout the region and access to it is restricted for those in newest dispersal localities.
- Other community projects, such as the Stockton 'Into Work Project' are also seeking information on, for example, the eligibility of asylum seekers to access certain training courses and whether their NASS support would be compromised.

Discussion with the group highlighted how the existence of a community organisation was also important for a sense of security and confidence that mutual meeting and support would provide. There was a strong feeling that dispersal had been imposed on local communities and that this put asylum seekers at risk. They needed to feel secure in the community and be a part of the community.

4. Informal community networks of support

Case Study 4: Support for Spanish speakers

Spanish speakers dispersed to the region since April 2000 = 44 (mostly family groupings)

Three individuals from Latin America have increasingly become active in the support of Spanish speaking asylum seekers in the Tyneside area. This work is a voluntary and un-resourced contribution, with the volunteers becoming increasingly exhausted and unable to develop their own lives. Contacts with 'clients' began whilst working as interpreters. They now form the fulcrum through which all social contacts are made, although lack of finances mean that they are unable to meet as a group. In addition to reducing social isolation experienced by isolated families dispersed throughout the Tyneside area, they provide advice, information and advocacy and also material support. Most of this work is of a compensatory nature relating directly to the operational performance of the NASS system.

- Housing: for example, representations to accommodation providers over housing conditions, outstanding repairs, child safety measures. These concerns relate almost exclusively to private sector accommodation. The 'group' is so concerned that it is producing a report, based on interviews with clients, which will highlight the disparity in quality of accommodation and support between public sector and private sector contract holders.
- Legal Services: advocating on behalf of those who are distressed by perceived lack quality and expertise in their legal representation eg: lack of case preparation. Assisting members in preparation of country background information. Dispersal has necessitated the rapid expansion in legal services capacity. Since interim dispersal there has been a chronic lack of capacity in solicitors firms franchised to handle asylum cases. Existing solicitors often had to close their books to new clients for 2 months, leaving a waiting list and enormous stress. IN recent months there has been an expansion in capacity, but newly established firms and those expanding into the field of immigration and asylum case work have a steep learning curve and their knowledge of country information is derived for the most part from the expertise of their clients, from NERS and the RCOs.
- Housing: taking up and referring issues of housing conditions and also lack of support in terms of locality orientation, contacts, GP registration, etc. Advice on bills and budgeting for those in move on.
- Vouchers: assisting with problems and distress caused by potential destitution through lost vouchers and delays in receipt of vouchers (the operational efficiency of the voucher system and access to NASS query line has been particularly problematic). Also, approaches made to retail food outlets with culturally appropriate food supplies to arrange for entrance into the Sedexho scheme.
- Material support: provision of household items and toys for children

5. Un-represented communities /communities without support structures

Case Study 5: Palestinian Cultural Society

NASS dispersals of Palestinian Nationals to the NE April 2000 - end March 2001

Newcastle upon Tyne 2 Sunderland 1 Darlington 5

New arrivals directly into the region via One Stop Service April 2000 - March 2001= 2

Total new arrivals into region April 2000 - end March 2001 = 10

The initiative to develop a Palestinian Cultural Society emerged from two individuals who were dispersed to Newcastle. They approached NERS with their ideas for developing a society, based around a community building, that would help build promote communication and cultural understanding/exchange between Palestinians and the local community, as well as providing a meeting place for Palestinians to celebrate their own culture and provide mutual support. However, they have been unable to put these ideas into action through lack of critical mass of numbers of co-nationals, with only 10 Palestinian nationals dispersed to the NE. These 10 are spread thinly between Newcastle, Sunderland and Darlington. The cost of travel involved has acted as a barrier to their meeting up or the feasibility of having one regional centre. As such, they remain isolated from each other and from any affiliation/organised interface with the wider Palestinian community in the UK.

Others national groups, numbering over 100 individuals, for whom no community organisation exists in the region:

(Totals = NASS dispersal figures April 2000 – end March 2001 plus new arrivals directly into the region via One Stop Service)

Kurdish community	(unspecified among the statistics for Iranian, Iraqi and Turkish nationals)
Afghan	401
Czech	325
Albanian speakers	181
Romanian	145
Congo	104

Total number of nationalities dispersed to the region: 73

Future Developments:

- Albanian Speakers' Community Group: emergent in Middlesbrough but in need of development support
- Romanian Community Association: a Romanian national, already running a charitable organisation that provides convoy aid to orphanages in Romania wishes to establish a community centre for Romanians in the North East. Intended primarily to provide a space for educational activities for the many children and health advice and information for the women. In need of development support.

Other groupings of communities of interest

For example:

The Angolan Women and Children's Group – Newcastle. Searching for access to community space

(Multi-national) Men's group (Gateshead) – creating a safe environment in which to explore sexuality; meetings arranged with HIV projects etc. This group is supported by a community development worker.

6. Case Study 6: ReACT – The Refugee Advisory Committee on Tyneside

ReACT is an independent group of 12 refugees from 7 different countries of origin or ethnic groups who have direct personal experience of the process of integration in the North East of England. Its members are all involved in different professions and occupations, but are united by their common aim to make a contribution to promoting the early and successful settlement and integration of all refugees in the region.

ReACT began as a group of volunteer participants in a trans-national research project funded by the European Commission and co-ordinated by the North of England Refugee Service in partnership with Access Ireland (refugee social integration project based in Dublin) and Associazione Rieti Immigrant, Italy. The project provided a forum for collating and comparing Good Practice in Ireland, Italy and the UK in relation to the effective involvement of Refugees themselves in processes of policy and practice formulation and implementation centred on the issue of Integration.

Since then, ReACT have formed themselves into an independent organisation and continued development is supported through a contribution in kind from the North of England Refugee Service and a grant of £2000 from the Millfield Foundation, which wishes to support the development of direct representation.

Their aims are:

1. To promote the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in the North East through playing a full and active role in integration policy development.
2. To advise agencies working with refugees and asylum seekers and to assist in monitoring the quality of services they provide, highlighting any unmet needs and promoting the establishment of Good Practice.
3. To provide a range of quality services to service providers in order for them to gain a better understanding of the needs of refugees and asylum seekers in the North East.
4. To participate in research that will inform the evidence-based development of integration policy and practice.

ReACT members have given presentations of their findings and recommendations to Local Authority select committees and at Training Workshops for service providers. In addition, ReACT representatives have been participants at:

- The European Conference on refugee participation in local policy making (ECRE). Nuremburg, May 2000
- Refugee Integration: The European Context (EU Network on Integration). London, October 2000.
- The 4th European Conference on the Integration of Refugees in Europe (Greek Refugee Council). Athens, December 2000.

Through being enabled to participate in National and International dialogue around the integration of Refugees, they provide valuable input into the Regional Refugee Forum for the North East. They have recently been invited to participate as consultants in two regional action research programmes ; the first being research into the mental health needs of asylum seekers by the University of Sunderland Department of Health Sciences for the Sunderland Health Authority and the second being a research initiative to identify the most appropriate Second Stage Housing ('move on') by Banks of the Wear in partnership with North of England Refugee Service and the University of Sunderland Social Policy Department.