

The Collective Voice
of the region's
Refugee community



REGIONAL REFUGEE FORUM NORTH EAST

Annual Review December 2007

Report from the Chair

Dr Mohamed Nasreldin

I am very pleased to report to you that we are now able to begin two major programmes of work aimed to help us all in our commitment to improve the lives of the refugee community and show what we can contribute to this region that is now our home.

We all recognise that RCOs are doing so much valuable work, but they have been struggling to find the right kind of development support. Our new Support for Community Action Programme is designed by RCOs for RCOs. We hope that its special package of one to one support, peer learning, project visits and training will help RCOs to access the funding they need and achieve their

true potential. So we welcome our six new SCAP staff members, and hope that, through our second office in Middlesbrough, we will have a closer relationship with our members in the Tees Valley.

Secondly, we are able to progress work on producing our Collective Voice so that it can be heard by key regional and national Policy makers and Service providers. Through our issue based Expert Groups we can all work together to address the root causes of disadvantage that our communities face. I want to thank our region's funders for their commitment over the next 3 years: the Northern Rock Foundation for commissioning the SCAP programme, to the Arts Council North East,

and to the Millfield House Foundation for supporting our work to influence policy through our Voice.

Lastly, I want to give thanks to Georgina and Joe for all their hard work and to my fellow members of the Executive Committee for the many hours they have voluntarily dedicated to securing the future of the Forum through to 2010 so that it can fulfil its aims and support the unique role RCOs play in our region.



Watch this web-space!

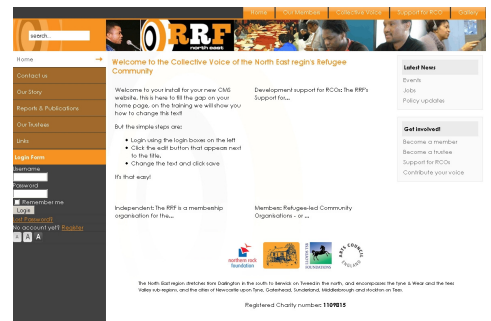
With the increase in our activity, the Forum's website will become a vital communication tool for us all. So our website is currently being completely redesigned, with assistance from the Community IT Academy (CITA). It will be re-launched very soon. Your RCO can have its own email address and

own webpage so that you can present information about your activities. And if you need, you can have help on how to construct your page. The website will also give you up to date information on support for RCOs, calls for your evidence on policy and services, news on legal and policy changes

and events coming up. Please do contact our Admin Officer, Joe, on joem.kamanga@refugeevoices.org.uk, and also contribute your ideas and recommendations on the content, functions and navigation of the new website so that it can work best for us all.

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Our new website coming soon.....

Report from our Treasurer Gaby Kitoko

In our last accounting year (1st Aug 06 – 31st July 07) our total income was £110,000 while our expenditure was £81,000. The difference being grants extending over into the current financial year. Our funding from the Big Lottery, which has provided our core costs for the last 3 years, ended in November.

Looking to the future, I am happy to report that we have successfully secured funding for our two key functions - using our Collective Voice to influence policy and RCO development support – through to 2010. This will bring our income to £220,000 per year. In line with our principle not to apply for funding streams which could be accessed by our members, this new funding comes from grant programmes reserved for 2nd tier organizations

and regional-level policy focused work,

80% of our income will pay for our team of 6 full-time and 2 part-time staff. 73% of our staff capacity will be dedicated to providing development support to RCOs so that they can realise their own visions



Deputy Treasurer Eugenie Muhayimana and Treasurer Gaby Kitoko

for their organisations, and access the funding they need. 14% is to support our Policy Work via the Expert Groups, and 13% to fulfil our general management and communications functions. We now run two offices, and these overheads & running costs will comprise 14% of our total costs. We have up to £18,000 this coming year to support all the learning, training and research activities of SCAP and Policy work, our committee meetings, general meetings and AGM.

Our Admin Officer, Joe, maintains our book keeping system and reports to committee, and our annual accounts are independently examined by Read Milburn & Co Accountants. I am grateful to my colleague Eugenie for her support as Deputy Treasurer.

Work on the Regional Strategy for Refugees & Asylum Seekers

The RRF has secured membership of the Regional Strategic Co-ordination Group (RSCG) of the North East Strategic Migration Partnership (NESMP). Through the work of our Expert Groups we can bring your evidence to the table and contribute to the development of the Refugee Integration Strategy for our region and monitor support services to Asylum Seekers. We meet with the BIA (new Home Office department) and key officers from the region's Local Authorities, Government Office North East, One NE, NE Assembly, regional health authority, police forces, Job Centre Plus, TUC, LSC, housing providers and NERS – all agencies that have a statutory or contractual responsibility to deliver support to asylum seekers and refugees in our region. We were also one of 66 organisations nationally who contributed a detailed response to the Home Office's consultation plans for new Refugee Integration Services in England.

As part of the RSCG we are able to influence how these services will be

delivered in our region from April 08. We have helped plan a major conference for February 20th 2008 to highlight the role the voluntary & community sector has played over the past 7 years to support asylum seekers and refugees, and to encourage the statutory sector to work

in partnership with us. Forum member, Abdoulaye Ghalapoum, is making a film about the unique contribution of RCOs, which will be screened at the conference. More details and an invitation to the conference will be sent to you soon by NESMP.



Networking with other Refugee Forums across the UK

Following on from our close relationship with sister organisations Refugee Voice Wales and the Leeds Refugee Forum, we have this year made links with the Manchester Refugee Forum and the Scottish Refugee Policy Forum. Together, we have held two meetings, in Manchester and in Gateshead, to exchange ideas and discuss how we could build on each other's work towards producing a 'Big Voice' to influence national policy and practice. Our next meeting is in Cardiff in February.



RCO Support: Support for Community Action Programme

Our new SCAP team has arrived! They bring us significantly more capacity to support our members. 'SCAP' was designed by the Forum to provide members with dedicated step-by-step help to develop their organisations.

The Project has been commissioned by the Northern Rock Foundation, and supported by the Arts Council North East, in recognition of the particular difficulties that RCOs face in understanding UK systems and obtaining funding to deliver activities and services.

The Forum is keen to help groups with whatever support they need—and we are also working hard to build links with other helper organizations. If we can't provide the training or advice you are looking for, we will make sure that we find another organization with that specialist expertise.

The full team has been in post since October. Project Manager Helen Attewell, Arts worker Sneita Kaur and Community Develop-

ment Worker Nasrin Ahmadi are based at our Gateshead office and CDWs Tresor Bukasa, Anoushka Key and Andrew Jackson are based at our Middlesbrough office.

The team has a wide range of skills and experience built up from previous work with funders and community organizations. Nasrin, Tresor,

- Develop a new project
- Plan a new campaign
- Obtain funding to support your work
- Write reports and evidence your work
- Visit other projects to learn from them
- Develop your artistic skills and activities

CONTACT OUR SCAP TEAM.....

Anoushka and Andrew are all accredited funding advice workers and are part of a Funding Advisors' Network organized by Funding Information North East. Their aim is not just to support groups in making successful funding applications, but to help with any aspect of project management—from establish-

ing your group and activities to using monitoring and evaluating to plan future work and record your projects' achievements.

One of the team has a special brief. Sneita Kaur will provide consultancy support for groups who want to develop visual arts and performance projects, or to get more involved in arts activity in the region. For example, she can provide links to arts facilities and arts support agencies, and to funding for you to work with professional artists and increase your skills.

Contact:

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Influencing Policy through our Collective Voice

We all know that access to the right type of learning and skills training is a vital route to the economic independence of our communities.

As a member of the Learning & Skills Council North East's (LSC) Implementation Group we are working closely with the LSC and Job Centre Plus on a Regional Strategy to Meet the Learning and Skills Needs of Refugees and Asylum Seekers over the age of 16 in our region. Over the next 6 months they want to ensure that you have proper information about all their learning and training programmes available. And they are waiting to listen to your evidence about how effective those programmes are for your community, and what needs to change. 16 – 18 year olds are to

be treated as a priority.

We will also work together to see how RCOs can develop partnerships with learning and training service providers so that courses can be delivered in ways that suit your community better, and also at how your capacity to deliver support can be developed further.

We have also been invited to join the JCP's Regional Customer Advocate Group, where we can provide our evidence directly to JCP policy makers about what isn't working and what works best across the region.

***Make the voice of
your community
heard***

Do you have someone within your RCO who wants to work with other Forum members to take this plan forwards, and tackle issues such as ESOL, IT, literacy, college courses, course fees, childcare, web based learning, mentoring, vocational courses and preparation for Citizenship? If so they are very welcome to join our 'Expert Group' and be an active force for change

that will benefit everyone. Please contact our Co-ordinator Georgina for more information.

Contact

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We are grateful for the support of our funders



Supported by



The objects of the Association are the advancement of education and relief of poverty, distress and sickness amongst asylum seekers and refugees in the North East of England and to that end to provide a mechanism for hearing the Voice of asylum seekers and refugees by bringing together in council representatives of Refugee Communities working in the area of benefit. RRF Constitution 4th March 2003

Executive Committee serving October 06—December 07

<i>Chair</i>	<i>Dr Mohamed Nasreldin</i>
<i>Deputy Chair</i>	<i>Albert Myambo</i>
<i>Treasurer</i>	<i>Gaby Kitoko</i>
<i>Deputy Treasurer</i>	<i>Eugenie Muhayimana</i>
<i>Secretary</i>	<i>Bini Tesfai Araia</i>
<i>Deputy Secretary</i>	<i>John Baptiste Karaha</i>
<i>And</i>	<i>Sarah Ahmadi, Amir Al-Nakash, Verron Munda</i>

Committee members are elected by the membership from the membership. They are elected on the basis of their personal skills, experience and knowledge and their commitment to serve in the interests of the whole refugee and asylum seeker community. The Committee met ten times, organized an Away Day, formed two Recruitment Panels which appointed 6 new members of staff and two General Meetings of the Forum took place.

Refugee Week 2008

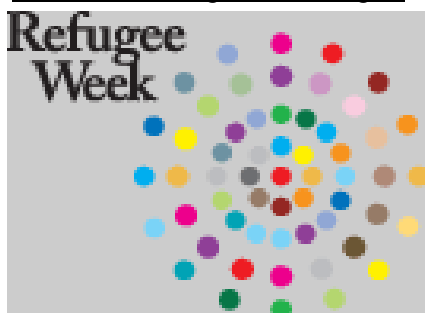
Do you want to get involved in the 10th anniversary of Refugee Week? It will take place from 16th to 22nd June 2008.

This is your chance to make sure the week reflects your lives.....

- You could get involved in planning the programme of events in your area
- You could organize your own event or performance, exhibition or debate
- You could get involved in planning the Forum's contribution to debate on protecting the

Geneva Convention and the rights of refugees

This year the Forum's SCAP team is there to help you. Please contact our SCAP team Arts specialist, Sneita Kaur on sneita.kaur@refugeevoices.org.uk



"Refugee Week is a UK-wide programme of arts, cultural and educational events that celebrate the contribution of refugees to the UK, and encourages a better understanding between communities.

The purpose of Refugee Week is to deliver positive educational messages that counter fear, ignorance and negative stereotypes of refugees, through arts, cultural and educational events that celebrate the contribution of refugees to the UK, and promote understanding about the reasons why people seek sanctuary.

Refugee Week was first held in 1998, and was created in response to the increasingly negative perceptions of refugees and asylum seekers held by the general public in Britain. It remains the only UK-wide event that promotes the importance of sanctuary and the benefits it can bring to both refugees and host communities".