

The Collective Voice
of the North East region's
Refugee community



REGIONAL REFUGEE FORUM NORTH EAST

Annual Review November 08 to December 09

Message from the Chair Bini Tesfai Araia

It has been my privilege and I feel very honoured to have Chaired the RRF this last year. You will read about our progress during the past year in this report— about support for established and new RCOs, which we know play such a unique and vital role; about the achievements of our Subgroups, where members contribute to and lead our Collective work to evidence the barriers, gaps and inequalities we must address if we are to become full and active citizens in this region, our home. I want to take this opportunity to thank our membership for their contribution, my fellow Trustees for their support and dedication to serving the membership, and to our staff for their hard work this year.



This coming year we will be planning an event to mark the RRF's 10th Anniversary. The RRF was founded by 5 RCOs in February 2001. We now have 58 member organisations, who have receive customised support from us, and in the last year

165 people from 26 nations worked together in our Subgroups, to deliver our Collective Voice, nearly double that of the previous year. I think we feel justifiably proud of what we have achieved, of the unique model we have built. We believe it works. RCOs in other parts of the UK are asking us for guidance on how we did it. We hope all our members will get involved in planning this event, reflecting on the journey we have all shared so that we can help make it work for others too.



Right to Work Campaign

Our campaign Subgroup continued to develop and lead the region's contribution to the national campaign to restore permission for Asylum Seekers to work. We co-ordinated our work closely with the Refugee Council's national strategy team, who saw our action as '*a model for the rest of the country*'. We filmed a 2nd campaign DVD with our partners the Northern TUC, hoping to spread the message and model to other asylum seekers and refugees across the UK to add their voice to the campaign. After the Church of England backed a change in policy, we approached the NE's Church's Regional Commission. We are delighted they have joined our partnership. They said "*This campaign is a truer representation of North East values, of British values, than the policy being implemented by the establishment. It's a policy that thrives in darkness and in ignorance. This is being done in our name. It is not acceptable. We will stand with asylum seekers as they struggle with this system*"

Samouka Dore continued to lead the Subgroup with dedication and energy, this year making presentations to House of Commons Select Committee, TUC Congress and to the House of Lords. Subgroup members gathered hundreds of signatures for the petition and successfully lobbied MPs in the region to sign EDM960, helping to bring parliamentary support for a change in policy to more than 100 MPs. Communities Minister Shahid Malik MP accepted our argument that exclusion from work threatens the Community Cohesion agenda, and spoke about this at the Labour Party Conference fringe event. letuswork@refugeevoices.org.uk



Subgroup members with
Chris Mullin MP



Sam with Communities Minister,
Shahid Malik MP

Report from the Treasurer Gaby Kitoko

I am pleased to report to you on our latest accounting year 1st Aug 2008 – 31st July 2009

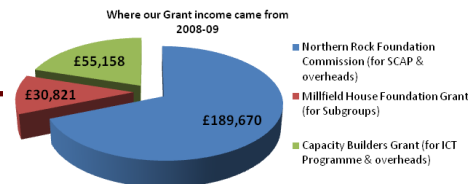
Our income rose to from £240,881 in 2007-08 to £290,414 this year. Grants were received from the Millfield House Foundation to support our Subgroups programme (£30,821), from Northern Rock Foundation to support SCAP (£189,670), and from Capacity Builders for our ICT project (£55,158).

Our total expenditure was £274,151. The balance of £16,263 represents grants spanning our accounting years.

Staffing represents 76% of our expenditure (£204,253) as our main resource for delivering our work programmes. Activities costs — (such as expenses refunds for

members' participation in our Subgroups, learning exchange visits, events and activities such as the RCO Celebration events, our campaigns materials and DVD and photographic archives) have risen this year, demonstrating an increasing level of activity of the Subgroups, SCAP and the ICT project. These are all positive signs of greater participation and increased activity by the membership.

Governance costs were £4,662 (2%), which includes £1,337 re-funded to Executive Committee members for travel and childcare expenses incurred in carrying out their duties. £34,096 (12%) of our expenditure went on our overheads – that is the cost of keeping our two offices running.



Our 3 year grants for the Subgroups programme and SCAP come to an end in June 2010. We have been listening to feedback from the SCAP reflection exercise and from Subgroups, and are currently fundraising to support work that responds to your needs and ideas.

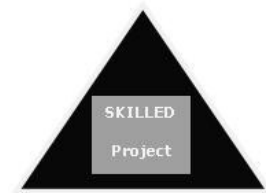
As part of responsible management, we have developed a reserve policy so we can maintain full operations for at least 3 months if we face any funding gap in securing new resources.

Full accounting details, and our Trustees Report on the RFF's achievements in the past year can be found in our Annual Accounts prepared by Read Milburn & Co.



Skilled Project skilled@refugeevoices.org.uk

unemployment and underemployment of Refugees in our region. It presents the experiences of accountants, IT experts, GPs, pharmacists, geologists, managers, economists, industrial chemists, teachers, telecommunication engineers, university lecturers, musicians and artists — none of them practising their skills here. Their skills, experience and qualifications are being underutilised and lost. We now need more volunteers to join in this project, and give evidence of their personal journey into work, the barriers they have met on the way, and listen to your ideas on how to change this. We intend to work with the region's employment and careers services, and business sector to identify and remove the factors holding people back from being able to fulfil their ambitions and potential to contribute to this region's economy and arts.

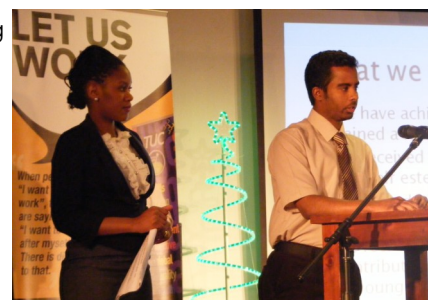


In the pilot phase of this new Subgroups project, 18 volunteers from 12 RCOs have given voice recorded testimony and had a portrait photograph taken by our project leader and photographer Panganai Svtwa. The photographic exhibition has been a great success in humanising and highlighting the issue of



The experience of young Refugees and Asylum Seekers and the issues they face in achieving their vision differs from adults. It's important that the RRF reflects their voice, and supports them to gain knowledge and confidence in managing the RRF, for the future. This year we established the Youth Voice Subgroup. Young people from across the membership have worked together to identify their shared issues and priorities, and developed an action plan to tackle them. They are most concerned

about barriers to progressing their education and careers. So they are working on a campaign for greater access to higher education, and have made presentations to meetings of Careers advisers about their particular information gaps and needs. They have also collaborated with our other Subgroups, contributing evidence to our Skilled Project, and in making our 2nd Right to Work campaign DVD. In December they shared a platform with councilors, MPs, the Bishop of Newcastle, editor of the Evening Gazette and Northern TUC to mark International Human Rights Day. Our thanks and congratulations to Mary, Dana, Lusiné, Abdel, Helen, Shafia, Maria, Humira, CJ, Yush, Tony, Pride, Fayola and Talu. youthvoice@refugeevoices.org.uk



SCAP (Support for Community Action Programme)

SCAP continued to provide 1-1 customised development and capacity building support to the region's RCOs and artists. We have introduced new management tools to professionalise the programme, defining targets and measuring progress and our staff began to apply the national standards of CDW which focus on empowering RCOs. These measures, along with a focus on face to face hours, significantly increased our capacity to take on more cases, which rose from 33 last year to 52 this year. Our SCAP team has helped RCOs and Artists to secure funding worth £128,000 in this last year, as well as other in kind support, and new partnerships and many training and learning opportunities.

The highlight of our year was the two events we organised in De-



ember, in Newcastle and Middlesbrough, to celebrate the achievements and commitment to voluntarism demonstrated by the region's refugee communities — which too often go unnoticed. Speakers from 20 RCOs and our 3 Subgroups made presentations about their work to an invited audience which included 4 mayors, 2 MPs and representatives from many agencies interested in supporting or working with RCOs. All enjoyed good food and the displays prepared by 23 RCOs and artists. Key speeches made by the Lord Mayor of Newcastle, and MPs Dari Taylor and Frank Cook recognised the contribution of RCOs, and expressed their welcome for refugees and asylum seekers as members of the whole regional community. Nadeem Ahmad, Regional Manager of the NE Strategic Migration Partnership, and our Chair gave certificates of achievement and appreciation to RCOs.

We have worked closely with NERS' Quality Assurance Project (QASRO) to promote the programme to RCOs and many have



Afghan Association Newcastle

taken up this training opportunity. We continued to co-ordinate meetings of the 2 sub-regional infrastructure groups.

In October we began co-managing a 6 month project in partnership with NERS, funded by the Equalities & Human Rights Commission, to evidence what works in building the capacity of grassroots organisations working to establish and strengthen relationships between young people from host communities and the new emerging communities in Tees Valley. This will report in March 2010.

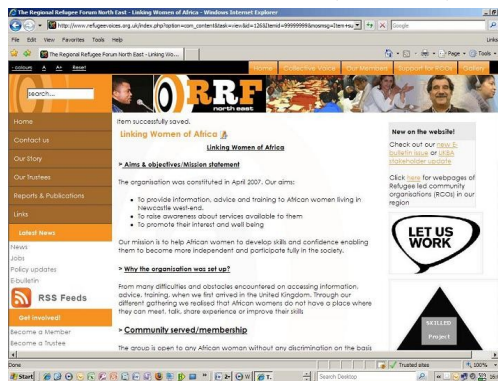
In August, we carried out annual reflections with RCOs, artists and staff, which were observed and evaluated by our Trustees. This review has shaped the design of our work plan from June 2010. Over the next few months we will start the transition to this work.

ICT Project— building our media library and webpages for RCOs

Our ICT project is playing a very important role in evidencing the contribution to settlement, integration, diversity and equalities being made by the RRF and RCOs. We now have a DVD camera, digital cameras and voice recorders for Subgroups and members to use, and have been busy building a media library of completed films, video, photographs and voice recordings. We have set up a YouTube not for profit account so we can begin to upload this media on our website to broadcast evidence from our issue-based Subgroups and about the great range of RCOs' work.

We have continued to develop our Subgroups webpages including blogs, to keep members informed of progress and so they can add their voice, Our

monthly e-bulletin sends out information about policy, consultations, services, events and training opportunities.



We have helped 21 RCOs to open a webpage hosted on our website, so that potential new members and other agencies understand the work they do, such as ESOL, IT, health, arts, with children - and get in touch. We hope this will encourage more agencies to think of ways of working in partnership with RCOs.

In 2010 we will help 10 RCOs to build their own websites, provide guidance to RCOs on their ICT

needs, and help them access training opportunities to develop their own ICT functions.



REGIONAL REFUGEE FORUM NORTH EAST

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info@refugeevoices.org.uk

We are grateful for the support of our funders



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 from November 2008

Chair Bini Tesfai Araia
Treasurer Gaby Kitoko
Secretary Maimouna Breka

And Dr Mohamed Nasreldin, Sarah Ahmadi, Eugenie Muhayimana, Silas Chikhengeza, Hastings Ndlovu, Julius Mugabo, Ben Chisanga, Samouka Dore

7 Committee members are elected by the membership from the membership at the AGM. The committee elects the officers at its first meeting. Committee are elected on the basis of their personal skills, experience and knowledge, and on their commitment to serve in the interests of the whole refugee and asylum seeker community. The Committee can co-opt 2 further members.

In this reporting period Committee held an Away Day and met 9 times. Committee members also represented the RRF at meetings the Regional Strategic Board of the North East Strategic Migration Partnership, the North East Migrant Health Group, and the LSC Regional Strategy Group, and meetings of emerging refugee led forums outside the North East. executive.committee@refugeevoices.org.uk

Staff: Subgroups georgina.fletcher@refugeevoices.org.uk CEO
RCO support herbert.dirahu@refugeevoices.org.uk SCAP PM
ICT Project: joem.kamanga@refugeevoices.org.uk Project Officer
SCAP Team: Andrew Jackson, Anoushka Key, Nasrin Ahmadi, Sneita Kaur, Tresor Bukasa

Welcome to new members

A very warm welcome to those newly established RCOs who have joined the Forum's membership this year, bringing our membership to 58 RCOs.

ACOLINE (African Community Organisation living in the NE)

Afghan Association Newcastle

Golgotha Assembly

HAWAR Association of Education

Nawroz Community

Sport for Youth Assembly

Sisters Together

Tees Valley Congolese United

Tees Valley & Co Durham Mano

River Union

Tees Valley Iranian Community

Tees Valley Sudanese Community

Voices for Change

We recognise the great range of support they are providing for their communities through their dedicated volunteering and we wish them every success with their plans in the coming year. We are sure that they will make a very valuable contribution to the RRF's aims and we value the knowledge, commit-

ment, skills and ideas that these organisations brings with them. We know that each and every RCO has a unique understanding of the issues facing the community and many good suggestions on what needs to change. We look forwards to working alongside them, for their help in ensuring the RRF is an organisation that responds to the needs and ideas of its membership, and their contribution to our Subgroups working towards change in policy and practise that will support all refugees and asylum seekers in the region to become full and active members of the North East community.