



Message from our Chair

Elham Ahmed

It has been my privilege and honour to Chair the RRF since our last AGM in January 2020.

The challenges of the Covid pandemic have dominated this period. I'm so immensely proud of how our members united in response. Through your selfless dedication and commitment to helping others, and your unique reach into co-communities, you very quickly organised a range of support for some of the most isolated and vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers across the region. I know many of you are exhausted, but you continue your calling.

And I want to thank my fellow Trustees and our staff for their hard work in helping steer the RRF through those testing

times. Now we face the challenge of punishing changes to the UK's Asylum law.

With a heavy heart we say goodbye to Herbert as he returns to Zimbabwe to start a new and exciting phase of his life. We'll all miss him greatly - for his true friendship and for his invaluable contribution to the RRF over 14 years, from

joining as a member in 2005, then serving as a Trustee and from 2008 as Project Manager of all our community empowerment projects. I know I speak for us all when I say we wish him every happiness and success.

But now we've all got used to Zoom - see you on your farm soon Herbert!



Sadly, we say farewell to Herbert

Celebrating 20 years of collective advocacy

The RRF's story began 20 years ago with the idea of creating a forum to unite the region's diverse refugee-led community organisations (RCOs) in a peer to peer network to share and compare their experiences and build a collective advocate voice for change. Our AGM in January 2020 was a great celebration, reuniting members who've played a central



Founder members reunite 20 years on



Youth Voice - all grown up

role in our journey. We were delighted and honoured to be joined by 10 founder members, 7 former Chairpersons, 19 former Trustees, and leaders of our 'Let Us Work' and 'Skilled' campaigns and Youth Voice. And we celebrated the new generation of community mobilisers now active in the RRF through our empowerment and collective voice programmes. To explore our journey over 20 years you can read our past reports at www.refugeevoices.org.uk



New resources for new arrivals

Back in 2014 our Stronger Families Working Group—Sazi, Jugal, Nisha, Sara and Pamela—began advocating for all newly arriving families to have information to help them adjust to unfamiliar systems, laws, social norms, expectations, rights and responsibilities around being a parent in the UK, which could prevent families being torn apart. Well, we don't give up on a good idea!. In 2020 the North East Migration Partnership commissioned us to make 'Parenting and Schools in the UK'.

44 members from 23 RCOs and 20 countries of origin dedicated 283 hours of their time to develop the content, based on what they wish they'd been told when they first arrived here. They also contributed to two further sessions on 'Looking After Your Health' and 'Laws & Life in the UK'. Members then translated the scripts into 10 languages most common to the RAS community and recorded the sessions as videos. Anyone can access and use the resources to support new arrivals. They're ideal for the New Arrivals Pathway now rolling out across the region. You can find the videos and information leaflets at www.nemp.org.uk/resources/ and on our RRF website and YouTube Channel.

In Albanian, Amharic, Arabic, Cantonese, English, French, Kurdish Sorani, Pashto, Spanish, Tigrinya and Urdu



Parenting & Schools in the UK



Looking after your Health



Laws and Life in the UK

WELCOME TO THE UK

Free video guides about life in the UK

Are you new to the UK? For example, are you a Refugee or an Asylum Seeker? When you arrive in a new country there are many challenges. You need to adjust quickly to unfamiliar systems, laws, social norms, expectations, rights and responsibilities.

We have 3 useful guides to help you understand the UK. People who are refugees and asylum seekers collected this information to help you. And they translated it into other languages.

You can watch the 3 videos in English and other languages here:

[Regional Refugee Forum North East YouTube Channel](https://www.nemp.org.uk/resources/)

And also here www.nemp.org.uk/resources/

Parenting and schools
Looking after your health
Laws and Life

These videos are part of the North East Migration Partnership's Welcome & Induction Program for newly arriving Refugees and Asylum Seekers and are made in partnership with the Regional Refugee Forum North East.

Promoting routes to employment

Improve your English and BUILD YOUR NEW CAREER.

ESOL for Construction

We are currently working with employers in the construction industry to recruit and train their new team members due to a high demand in this sector.

If you're currently unemployed and looking to improve your English and gain a CSCS card, this course is a great opportunity to get back into work.

FREE CSCS card

NORTH OF TYNE COMBINED AUTHORITY

BUILD ONE

Construction is a growing industry in the region, yet our members provided evidence of specific barriers which prevent refugees finding meaningful work in the sector. As Chair of the North East Migration Partnership's Move on & Economic Inclusion Sub-group we've championed action and worked with the DWP, Refugee Employment Network, infrastructure contractors and Gateshead College to promote bespoke training for refugees. We're really pleased to report the first 6- week ESOL for Construction Course for refugees began on 18th May! And recruitment for the second course has started.

We collaborated with the National Careers Service (North) and the North East Hong Kongers Club to develop a workshop to help people new to the region's job market understand its growth sectors, the transferable skills and qualities valued by employers and maps out pathways to gaining new skills and career-based employment. The NCS is offering the session to all refugee communities and employability projects.

We've long advocated for a levelling up of the integration support offer made to refugees granted status from asylum claims to match provision for resettled refugees. So we actively contributed recommendations about what works to the Home Office's RTOF consultation process and celebrate that our region now has one of the 4 national pilot programmes—The North East Refugee Integration Support & Employment programme (NE RISE) began delivery in November 2021. To join the programme go to www.northeastrise.org/



Testing arts based methods for social research



could use their voice to challenge and change the outcomes. To see a short film of the North East workshops and a toolkit go to <https://fass.open.ac.uk/research/projects/pasar/publications-and-resources>

In October 2020 we partnered a national project run by The Open University which explored using participatory theatre methods for social research and civic engagement. Over 12 months, 15 members took part in 11 interactive online training workshops and a weekend of face to face workshops facilitated by experts in using Forum Theatre to explore social issues. Members unpacked their experiences of discriminatory treatment in shops, on public transport, in the street and in accessing higher education and explored how they



Empowering Community Mobilisers and Activists

Since we last reported to you at our AGM in January 2020, we've welcomed a further 41 participants into our **Community Action Project (CAP)**. It means we've supported over 100 participants since we began in delivery in June 2019. They are active in 45 RCOs across the region, 17 of which emerged during the project.

Originally from 33 countries of origin across Africa, the Middle East, South East Asia, South America and Eastern Europe they now live across all 11 Local Authority areas accepting dispersal in the North East. All share the calling to help others and are full of ideas on how to support their communities. Our role is to help them turn those ideas into practical action, to build their knowledge, skills and confidence to be effective community advocates, and support them to increase their networks of influence.

We've empowered them through a combination of elements. We held

- over 500 1 to 1 support sessions to help them build and deliver practical action plans;
- 23 peer learning visits for participants to other RCOs to learn from their experience and see what can be achieved;
- over 100 'Learning Community' meetings for group learning on issues they identify, with key agencies attending for mutual learning. Themes included advocacy pathways in the asylum system, covid vaccinations, pathways to employment, cancer awareness, maternity provision, changes to UK asylum law
- 43 participants completed our bespoke online training designed in response to the Covid context, on how to use their evidence and be an effective Community

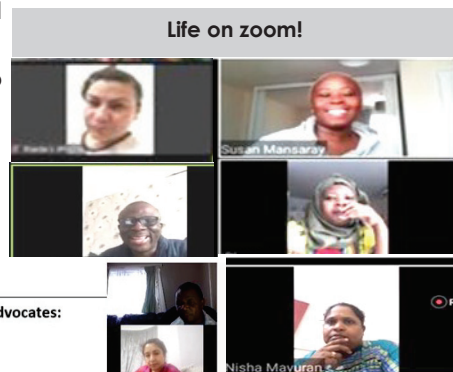
Advocate in online multi-agency meetings, to ensure their voices could still be heard. We also commissioned ICT training on using online tools to assess communities' needs and priorities, and on managing online security.

And we enabled them to contribute their voice to numerous consultations across the region.



Training to be effective community advocates: Making the most of meetings Part 2

1. Refresh ground rules
2. Introductions – let's do that again!
3. Learning aims today
4. What makes 'good' evidence?
5. How does our *tone of voice* impact on the change we want to see?
6. Are we at the right tables to make the change we want?
7. Reflection on what we've learned today
8. What further training do we want?



We've engaged an external consultant to research what works in empowering RAS to turn their ideas to support their communities into action. We'll be sharing findings later this year.

What is a Community Mobiliser? They mobilize a community to action leading to increased empowerment and self reliance.

What is a Community Activist? A member of a community who is voluntarily working with others from that community to achieve common aims (Delivering Change)

However you define your role, we support you.

Training front line workers

We delivered training to over 400 front line staff, including social workers, early help teams, adult social care workers, GPs, nurses, mental health practitioners in primary care networks, crisis teams, post-graduate and undergraduate students, police and grant managers. Our sessions help them gain insight into specific challenges to family resilience, mental health and healthy living faced by asylum seekers and refugees and what works in supporting them. We successfully adapted our sessions for online delivery during Covid restrictions.

Congratulations and a special thanks to our members Sazi, Suraiya, Rama, Nisha, Pako, Ellen, Rohey, Sylvia and Nawa for their excellent delivery.

Feedback demonstrates how these sessions can positively affect the way trainees engage with and support the community.

ORRF
REGIONAL REFUGEE FORUM
The Collective Voice

Learning Aims

1. To give insight into the challenges faced by asylum seekers, 'refugee', 'resettled' and other countries
2. To explore implications for professional practice

Feedback from trainees

- "I've never heard first hand experiences like this before so it was really eye-opening"
- "I'll show more empathy, avoid preconceptions, and be non-judgemental"
- "I didn't know how much I didn't know"

Asylum Seekers and Refugees Living in the UK

Delivered by a team of 'experts' from the community

A 3-hour training session specifically designed for professionals with a role in safeguarding and support

Attendees will:

- understand the dynamics of family life
- understand the challenges and other countries
- what makes a good evidence from the perspective of the community
- useful resources including online information and local agencies that can provide support

For more information contact
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Regional Refugee Forum North East is on
Facebook and YouTube



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

A big thank you to these members who were elected to serve on the Board of Trustees and held 10 meetings in this period.

Chair	Elham Ahmed
Treasurer	Alice Mupaya
Deputy Treasurer	Printha Muthukumar
Secretary	Suraiya Riyaz and Nisha Mayurathan (Co-optee)
With	Ramatoulie Saidykan, Larry Amadi-Emina, Latifa Shomari

Staff:

Chief Officer	georgina.fletcher@refugeevoices.org.uk
CAP Project Manager	herbert.dirahu@refugeevoices.org.uk
CAP Support Officer	suraiya.riyaz@refugeevoices.org.uk

Finance Officer Terry Docherty

And our thanks to Amani and Nasrin who both moved on in 2020. We wish them every success.

See our independently examined Annual Accounts at <https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search> under Charity Number 1109815. We sincerely thank the following who have generously supported our work for change during the past 2 years.



Welcome to new members

We give a very warm welcome to 7 more hard working refugee-led community organisations (RCOs) who became full members of the RRF.

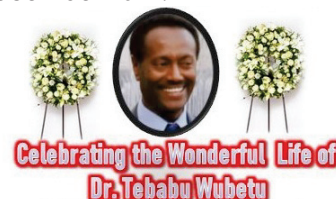
We wish them every success in their work to support their communities and look forwards to the valuable contribution we know they'll make to the Collective Voice.

A total of 117 RCOs supporting communities across the North East of England have joined the RRF since we began.



A Tribute

We give thanks for the life and works of esteemed member Dr Tebabu Wubetu, founder of The Ethiopian Community in Newcastle, who so sadly passed away in December 2021.



It has been a privilege to know and work with him. We will greatly miss his friendship and the wisdom and experience he brought to the RRF for the benefit of the whole RAS community.