

Refugee Week Briefing

Different pasts: shared future



© Chris Bull/UNP

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. It started in 1998 as a direct reaction to the hostility that was reflected in the media and society in general towards refugees and asylum seekers.

Refugee Week takes place in June every year from the Monday to Sunday of the week around World Refugee Day on the 20th of June.

Why the Red Cross supports Refugee Week

The Red Cross plays a key role in supporting vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers and helping

them adjust to UK life. Refugee Week is an opportunity to celebrate the contribution made by refugees and bring greater understanding and overcome hostility.

How we support refugees

The Red Cross has a long tradition of providing practical and emotional support to vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. As a leading humanitarian organisation, we often need to respond quickly and effectively to crises.

Celebrating Refugee Week in Northern Ireland

Throughout Refugee Week we will be delivering our Positive Images workshops as part of our ongoing educational offer to schools and youth groups.

Did you know ...

- The UK asylum system is strictly controlled and complex. The decision-making process is extremely tough and many people's claims are rejected.
- The Red Cross in Belfast dealt with over 360

- vulnerable migrants seeking help last year—this did not include dependants.
- Most asylum seekers are living in poverty and experience poor health and hunger.
- Almost all asylum seekers are not allowed to work and are forced to rely on state support – this can be as little as £5 a day.

What we do in Northern Ireland

The Red Cross provides support to asylum seekers and refugees in Belfast. It also provides a humanitarian education programme in schools and youth centres.

Destitution Support

In recent years, there has been a rapid increase in the number of asylum seekers facing destitution. From new arrivals to refused asylum seekers, each year thousands of people find themselves cut off from financial support in the UK, leaving some people entirely dependent on charity organisations such as the Red Cross.

In Northern Ireland we provide short-term assistance to asylum seekers or refugees who are destitute, ordinarily those with no recourse to public funds or those who experience a delay in accessing public funds.

Our support can be: food vouchers or food parcels, essential clothing, short-term accommodation costs, essential travel costs, signposting to other service providers and casework to resolve issues causing destitution.

Orientation Support

This helps help vulnerable and newly arrived refugees adapt to life in Northern Ireland. We provide assistance using our: *Welcome to Belfast* information guide, provision of clothes through the Red Cross shop in Bangor, signposting, befriending service, assistance with integration into Belfast, volunteering opportunities.

Other services we offer include: international family tracing, family reunion travel assistance, assistance for vulnerable women.

Youth Education

The British Red Cross youth education programme includes anti-stigma education in relation to refugees and asylum seekers, for example, dispelling myths and stereotypes, developing understanding of the realities they face and promoting positive images.

Involvement of asylum seekers/refugees

Refugees and asylum seekers participate actively in local services of the British Red Cross in Northern Ireland thus supporting our mission of helping people in crisis, whoever and wherever they are.

In 2011, less than three per cent of the world's displaced came to the UK

In 2012, just 36 per cent of asylum decisions made by the Home Office resulted in a grant of status, allowing the applicant to remain in the UK.

In the eyes of much of the UK public, the terms 'refugee', 'asylum seeker' and 'migrant' have almost blurred into one. This is far from the truth (and far from helpful) so here's a handy guide to help you understand the different terms.

Asylum seeker:

- > flees their homeland
- > arrives in another country
- > makes themselves known to the authorities
- > submits an asylum application
- > has a legal right to stay in the country while awaiting a decision.

Refugee:

- > has proven to the authorities that they would be at risk if returned to their home country
- > has had their claim for asylum accepted by the government.

Refused asylum seeker:

- > has been unable to prove that they would face persecution back home
- > has been denied protection by the authorities
- > has been told to leave the country.

Economic migrant:

- > has moved to another country to work
- > could be legally or illegally resident, depending on how they entered the country
- > may or may not have a legal work permit

If you would like more information about our refugee services or any of our other services including what we do in your constituency, or would like to arrange a visit, please contact:

Rob Phipps, Policy and Public Affairs Officer
RPhipps@redcross.org.uk / Tel: 07957 888966

**REFUSING
TO IGNORE
PEOPLE
IN CRISIS**

redcross.org.uk

About Law Centre (NI)

The Law Centre's purpose is to promote social justice and provide specialist legal support to advice giving organisations and disadvantaged individuals. We provide specialist legal services to members in community care, employment, immigration, mental health and social security law. We support the work of advice agencies through advice, casework, training, information, publications and policy work.

Through our work in immigration law, we advise and represent asylum seekers and their families. We also represent victims of trafficking, some of who are also asylum seekers.

Our work with asylum seekers and refugees

The Law Centre provides legal advice and assistance to asylum seekers and refugees. The experiences of the asylum seeking and refugee community directly informs the Law Centre's policy work. Examples of working closely with the refugee community to influence policy include:

- Joint work between the Law Centre, Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS) and Bryson Intercultural resulted in the Department of Employment and Learning agreeing to provide free English classes for asylum seekers.
- Ongoing joint work to highlight some of the difficulties (e.g. in relation to housing, accessing employment, claiming benefits) experienced by recently recognised refugees. This resulted in the Home Office changing its practice in issuing status documents and also to the Belfast City Council commissioning a Transition Guide to aid with this process.

Benefits for the Law Centre

By drawing on our casework expertise and by working closely with the refugee community, we are confident that our policy work meets real needs and addresses tangible concerns and problems experienced within the community.

Representatives from NI Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers and the Horn of Africa People's Aid bring their first-hand experience of issues affecting their communities to the OFMDFM convened Immigration Sub Group of the Racial Equality Panel, which is chaired by the Law Centre. This group brings together a range of statutory agencies and voluntary and community organisations and has proven to be an effective forum for change. All members value the contribution of the refugee representatives, who bring a unique perspective to discussions.

Benefits for others

Much of the work of the Law Centre, in conjunction with the refugee community, is aimed at securing positive measures to assist with integration. For example, the English languages classes funded by DEL and provided by the Belfast Metropolitan College have proved to be invaluable in terms of integration. The Law Centre takes the view that the integration of minority ethnic communities brings benefits not just for the individuals themselves but also for wider society as it helps foster greater understanding and community cohesion.

Furthermore, elected representatives – including both MLAs and MPs – have used policy materials produced by the Law Centre (with assistance from NICRAS and other organisations) during



parliamentary debates and committee sessions on topics such as destitution, human trafficking, access to healthcare, etc.]

Support for Refugee Week

The Law Centre is delighted to support Refugee Week again this year and we congratulate the Assembly for hosting this debate.

Further information

If you would like further information, please contact: Liz Griffith, Law Centre, Tel 028 9024 4401



ACSONI

1. Introduction

The African and Caribbean Support Organisation Northern Ireland (ACSONI) is an independent community-based organisation formed in 2003 to identify and address specific civic, socio-economic needs of individuals from Africa, the Caribbean and other individuals of African descent who reside in Northern Ireland. ACSONI office is based in Lower Crescent, South Belfast.

2. Involvement of asylum seekers and refugees

ACSONI provides programmes for development and social inclusion for asylum seekers/refugees to be integrated as part of the society. They play an integral part in their communities and within the organisation. We have provided asylum seekers with volunteering opportunities and a platform to voice their concerns and develop skills within workshops, seminars and in the area research. Children from refugee/asylum seeker families also have key roles participating in cross community activities. The arts and cultural awareness initiatives are developed through the assistance of the cadre of talented individuals who are Refugee and Asylum Seekers.

3. Benefits for ACSONI

Thanks to our refugee/Asylum Seeker Volunteers, we were able to successfully deliver the first year of our MEDF Integration programme with many successes, antiracism and diversity workshops training in over 12 schools and community groups. We have delivered 5 major cultural awareness festivities during Caribbean Week, Africa Week, Community Relations Week, Media programmes with UTV & NvTv and also a Belfast response commemorating the life of the late Nelson Mandela in a huge partnership event with Belfast City Lord Mayor Office/Dean of Belfast. We have successfully delivered a 3year partnership (Africa Centre Dublin, Africa Centre Slovenia) EU development Education programme with their continued assistance.

4. Benefits for other communities

Working directly with Asylum Seekers especially from Africa provided a unique opportunity for culturally competent development of both the volunteer and people in the local communities and schools. Children and adults had the opportunity to be inquisitive and learn more about other cultures and countries and in effect are challenged to address racism, tension, and stereotyping and break barriers while think about the importance of refuge/asylum seekers. The communities also became opened to dialogue and better understood the challenges, human rights violations and situations that often force Asylum Seekers/Refugees to flee their home countries.

5. Case studies

Mimi from Congo and an ACSONI volunteer assisted in WIN-A women's project in ACSONI for a few years and has developed her skills and has become a great advocate and a good example for/Refugee/Asylum Seekers/ethnic women here in Ireland. She has also volunteered in many other organisations including, NICEM and NICRAS advocating on behalf of other refugees/asylum seekers and ethnic minority women. With the empowerment received she was selected in July 2013 to join a delegation of BME women from Northern Ireland to be presented in front of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in Geneva. Mimi is now integrated and not only part of the organisation that she still serve as a volunteer but also an integral part of this society.

Wilson is a Musician who flees his country to Northern Ireland because of conflict and has volunteered in cultural arts in ACSONI for many years. This year Wilson was voted artist of the year by Community Arts Partnership (CAP). Wilson has become a corner stone for cultural arts in this region. Ronald also a former volunteer of ACSONI has completed his formal degrees / qualifications in immigration law is contributing to life here in Northern Ireland.

Justin dedicates all his time volunteering selflessly to provide strategic leadership and needful support to the asylum seekers /refugee led organisation NICRAS. He assisted many families who have found themselves isolated and desperately in need of basic support.

6. Support for Refugee Week.

ACSONI will be hosting two events during Refugee Week 2014– The events will raise awareness of issues faced by Refugees and Asylum Seekers and how to tackle these issues. The event on Saturday 21st of June includes a launch and workshop addressing hate and conflict relating to migrant/Refugees/Asylum Seekers. The other event on Wednesday 18th of June will focus on youth participation /integration. ACSONI will also provide support to NICRAS at events.

Contact

African and Caribbean Community Support Organisation, Northern Ireland
(ACSONI)
First Floor
9 Lower Crescent
Belfast
BT7 1NR
Northern Ireland.

For general enquiries please email us at: info@acsoni.org



028 9043 4090



Amnesty International Support for Refugee Week 2014

1. Introduction to Amnesty International

With over three million members worldwide and thousands in Northern Ireland, Amnesty International is the world's largest grassroots human rights organisation. We investigate and expose abuses, educate and mobilise the public, and help transform societies to create a safer, more just world. We received the Nobel Peace Prize for our life-saving work.

2. Involvement of asylum seekers and refugees

Refugees and asylum seekers from various countries attend group meetings, regional conferences, anti-racist demonstrations, letter writing activities (Write for Rights), and other events. Over recent years, some asylum seekers and refugees (notably from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Sri Lanka, Sudan, and Somalia) have given talks to the monthly group meetings of Amnesty's local branches in Northern Ireland about their experiences. We have campaigned alongside refugees and asylum seekers to ensure their human rights are respected in Northern Ireland, particularly with regard to asylum decision-making, detention conditions and forced removals.

3. Benefits for the organisation

The interchange with asylum seekers and refugees has educated Amnesty International activists and members about the human rights situation in various countries around the globe and underlined the importance of our work to prevent human rights violations around the world. Hearing the stories and learning about the situation in different countries has fed into the activism, solidarity and education for group members. We have learnt more about countries that Amnesty is working on from a human rights perspective and the involvement has been enriching. Also, our members and supporters have learnt more about the different communities living in Northern Ireland and the cultural variety and richness of lives herein.

4. Benefits for other communities

Interchange, participation and human rights campaigning has helped to foster solidarity to all involved and has improved inter-cultural relations and has educated people in Northern Ireland about the human rights situation in countries around the world.

6. Support for Refugee Week

Amnesty International activists will provide information and resources at various events during Refugee Week.



Contact

Amnesty International
397 Ormeau Road
Belfast
BT7 3GP

Tel: 028 90643000

Email: nireland@amnesty.org.uk

“Improving the quality of life for local people”.
“Building a strong community spirit and a tolerant society”

Annadale Haywood Residents Association (AHRA), founded in 1998, is a community organisation situated in the Ballnafeigh SO Ward. In the last 10 years approximately 48% of housing in the area has been occupied by families and individuals from minority ethnic background, largely Chinese. This relatively rapid demographic change had a major impact on community relations in, what was, primarily a single identity neighbourhood. Annadale has the largest concentration of Chinese community in NI (48%) The demographic changes were compounded by socio economic factors and the existing divides between the catholic & protestant communities emerging from 30 years of conflict. A Community Audit commissioned by DSD/NIHE in 2010 highlighted an urgent need to address: community cohesion; the PUL community feelings of being disfranchised from the rest of society and, and feelings that their culture was being diluted; local capacity building and the breakdown in relationships with the statutory agencies.

The focal point of The Associations work is the Super Output Areas of Ballynifeigh, which is ranked within the top 25% of the most deprived SOAs. The community remains at serious risk of further decline. In 2010 DSD/NIHE appointed a Community Development Worker (CDW) to support the work of the present committee in addressing the needs of the local community. Our core work is Community Development which is essential to support this marginalised community in South Belfast, which has not benefited from investment from Neighbourhood Renewal due to its location within the wider, significantly more affluent area of Ballynifeigh / Stranmillis, there is also the unique, complex and difficult issue to develop greater community cohesion and reduce tensions.

Working towards a shared future, our key priority is to help children & young people from different cultural / religious backgrounds to be prepared for our diverse world, by:

- introducing multicultural learning from a very young age, basic language skills e.g. meet & greet words & opportunities for interaction with people from different backgrounds.
- Using arts-based programs, photography and educational websites, our multicultural learning targets children as young as 3 via our multicultural after-schools club, junior youth club & senior youth club. Our children & young people get the opportunity to engage in a range of cultural diversity activities / programmes designed to improve community safety and good relations. Activities explore issues of cultural, political and religious diversity, single identity, and cross-community projects.
- The community garden is used as platform: for community cohesion events, to engage new & established communities, and provides a safe environment for children to play.
- Our children and young people & family members take part in other cultural celebrations like Belfast Mela, Chinese Dragon Boat Festival, Festival of Colour (Holi), Chinese New Year & World Police & Fire Games.
- Our projects include building relations between police and community. We seek to address the core needs essential to achieving a positive impact on multiple deprivation and improving community relations and build on previous projects that have been successful, aimed at diffusing tensions, resolving local issues, improving community safety and tackling issues of inequality.
- Currently we are working in partnership with NIHE and representatives from the local community on a re-imaging project -to free the area of signs of division and sectarian symbolism, encouraging people to explore alternative ways of expressing culture to reflect the community in a more positive manner.

Our Shared Space: The **Community Garden**, is used as a platform to host a calendar of events throughout the year, to bring people together. These events attract a diversity of people. Here residents can grow their own vegetables & flowers, celebrate, meet new friends and let the children play. The Community Flat, which is now seen as the hub of the local community is used to: promote equality, ensure access to mainstream services, overcome language barriers, resolve local issues such as housing, reduce tensions, improve community safety, capacity and build on community cohesion..

Our Children & Young People: Our Play, Learn & Grow Together Project, was the Belfast Area Winner for an NIHE Good Relations Award and monies awarded was used to purchase a range of children’s outdoor play equipment for our MiniLand Project. MiniLand, which is located in the Community Garden, has proved to be a valuable resource to parents throughout the year and during the summer, when schools and nurseries are closed.

Our Multicultural Afterschool Club opens twice a week with Chinese, Asian, Somalia, Polish, African and indigenous participants. Using educational websites and an interactive world map, children aged 3-8 years, get to explore different countries & cultures around the world, and enjoy a range of cultural arts & crafts activities. These fun interactive workshops enable children to be more prepared for our diverse world, by being taught not only to tolerate but to recognise and respect difference, and to appreciate other cultures. Language skills have been embedded into this learning, which they can use to welcome friends into their communities. Our multicultural after schools club imbeds multicultural learning using a variety of tools e.g. multicultural arts-based programs, educational websites, skills photography workshops, music, and dance. Some of children that have been attending our multicultural after school’s

are now attending our junior youth club (8-11 years) and in a couple of years time will be joining our senior youth club (12-18 years).

Our youth club contributes to the PSD of young people, ensures access to mainstream services, and diverts young people away from negative behaviour. Our young people play an active role in building good relations, shaping our cultural diversity / cross-community projects, engaging in intergenerational activities, and conveying a message to the wider community. Our junior youth club, which runs 4 nights a week is attended by young people from the Chinese, Somalia, Polish, African, German, Asian community. Most of these young people have progressed via our multicultural afterschools club.

Our Cultural Expression: Our cultural diversity projects that our children & young people are involved include: "Living Within A Diverse Community", "Challenging Hate Crime", and run parallel to our Single Identity Workshops, Cross-Community projects "Bridging Divides". Children and young people and parents have also participated in World Police & Fire Games, Belfast Mela, Festival of Colour (Holi), Chinese Dragon Boat Race. All of these projects promotes mutual respect and understanding, is strengthened by its diversity and where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced. The programme will allow this work to continue and be built on.

On Our Shared Community: It is important to know that these children come from diverse communities e.g. include children from the catholic & protestant community, Chinese community, South America, Asian, African and Polish community. This in itself reflects the diversity of people and richness of cultures living within Annadale and the wider Ballynafeigh Community. Annadale is home to the largest concentration of the Chinese Community in Belfast (48%).

Our wide range of programme activities are designed to divert young people from taking the wrong path in life instead; they will get to play, learn & grow together and the door will be open to a lot more opportunities. It will be the "norm" for these children & young people to be interacting with others from different cultural/religious backgrounds it will enable them to grow up with a understanding about the different cultures, and the need to embrace one another's uniqueness. This in return will go a long way to building a strong community spirit and tolerant society, improve community safety, reduce tensions and hate crime. Our children & young people also have had the opportunity to establish a good rapport with their community policing team via a range of activities organised by ourselves or community policing team. Working in partnership with BELB will open the door to more training, work placement & volunteering opportunities, cross-community and international projects and lead to employment as they progress through their OCN Youth Qualifications, end up employed by BELB or within their community. The opportunities are endless!! At the same time this project will be giving them the opportunity to engage in cultural diversity, single-identity and cross-community projects in partnership with young people from other communities.

Cultural expression: It is hoped that by changing attitudes & mind sets that these children & young people will have no interest in getting caught up in e.g. in incidents relating to hate / sectarian crime, interface clashes, flag protest, or antisocial behavior, which takes on many forms. Instead these children & young people will be a new generation, and providing that there is no peer pressure / negative influence from family members / others during this journey and guidance to their teens, they will have the potential to do well. Equally it's important to know that these projects / process of engagement with children & young people cannot happen in isolation instead we need to address the socio economic / multiple deprivation factors which impacts on the ability of a community to move forward.

Belfast city mission

Our involvement with refugees and those seeking asylum began around 7 years ago helping a small number of people practically. That changed when we organised a campaign to stop a Somali girl called Fatuma from deportation. The campaign was extremely successful and resulted in many people coming to our centre for help. We introduced a Christian solicitor to people who were coming to us so that we avoided giving wrong advice to anyone. That solicitor continues to have a large number of asylum seekers and refugees as clients. We have a very strong relationship with the Somali community which grew from that time and continues to this day. This relationship is in itself one of the most positive things we are involved in as they are conservative Sunni Muslims and we are conservative evangelical Christians. There has never been any difficulty and this relationship is on the level of many close friendship and interdependence. We have provided a large amount of practical support for people through our connection to the wider church in Ireland north and south. The provision for those seeking asylum is totally insufficient and is in need of serious review. We provide education in particular for those who will not be able to access education because of family commitment. We have also provided funds along with other organisations to allow a number of young Somali girls to educate in the field of health and social care. We have five classes a week for Somali women as well as homework club twice a week for Somali children. We staff these and fund them ourselves and have never sought any kind of funding from government or any other agency. We are also involved in lobbying in the cases of a number of asylum seekers whose cases have been refused. We have received help from all parties but to a greater degree from DUP Sinn Fein and Alliance. The first minister's door has been open to us as well as a number of DUP MPs. We would also single out Alex Maskey from Sinn Fein and Catherine Curran of Alliance and Jimmy Spratt of the DUP who have been particularly helpful. We have a large number of asylum seekers and refugees who worship at our church. They come from Nigeria Zimbabwe Congo Ghana and Iran. They have made an amazing difference to our congregation in terms of integration. Their presence has contributed greatly to the whole community around the church which was traditionally working class protestant. We have seen a great change in attitudes in the local community and I feel we could provide a model to deal with racist attitudes which are a throwback to the radicalisation of the protestant working classes by political unionism.

The contribution of refugees and asylum seekers is something we are proud to have had a part in. we have helped young asylum seekers through education and into voluntary work in healthcare. Our church bus driver is an Iranian refugee his wife is a nurse in a local nursing home. We are so glad to have helped them into these roles. Within our congregational life we have Nigerian leaders in worship and Bible study. We are very encouraged to see Muslims and Christians working together practically in the upkeep of our building and in serving the elderly within the church. The progress of many Somali women in being able to act independently is also something which we are thankful to have been involved in and which we see as a practical advantage to our society as more and more they can engage with schools and hospitals etc. without the need of translators. The very presence of many decent but damaged individuals within communities should not be underestimated. I see

individuals acting as ambassadors and showing local communities the richness of diversity. I would single out Somali women as deserving special mention in this type of work.

Any scheme to deal effectively with prejudice against those from other countries should consider education rather than condemnation. As I have mentioned working class protestant communities continue to have difficulty in dealing with refugees and asylum seekers because of a systemic radicalisation of those communities. The irony is that many of the people they feel threatened by have had to flee from radicals in their own countries. Some efforts could be made to create a better understanding of those within these said communities. This would be an area where refugees would be willing to again play a positive role. Anti-radicalisation must play a part in any programmes that the executive has in dealing with race hate and who better to help in that than the many refugees and asylum seekers who have resisted extremism and maintained their identity.

We are happy to speak to the media during refugee week we are happy to take part in any debates we have contact with all parties concerning refugee matters but in particular the constituency office of the first minister.

Contact

The Belfast City Mission is an evangelical outreach serving local people and communities throughout the city of Belfast. Our goal is to see God glorified and souls won for Christ Jesus. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you need help, support or advice.

William Cowan

Address: Belfast City Mission, 5th Floor, Glengall Exchange, 3 Glengall Street, Belfast BT12 5AB

Phone: 028 9032 0557

Fax: 028 9031 1793

Email: info@belfastcitymission.com

Website: www.belfastcitymission.com



Coiste na nIarchimí
10 Beechmount Avenue, BELFAST BT 12 7NA
Tel : +44 (28) 90200770 Fax : +44 (28) 90435445
E-mail : info@coiste.com Website : www.coiste.ie

Coiste na nIarchimí
10 Ascall Ard na bhFeá, BEAL FÉIRSTE, BT 12 7NA
Guthán : +44 (28) 90200770 Facs : +44 (28) 90435445
E-mail : info@coiste.com Website : www.coiste.ie

Coiste Na n-Iarchimí is the Republican political ex-prisoners' organisation, funded under the European Peace III Programme (S.E.U.P.B.) to deliver conflict transformation and peace building initiatives throughout the island of Ireland.

Part of this work is delivering anti-sectarian/anti-racist and host awareness training programmes, within local communities, youth organisations and schools, across the island of Ireland.

Coiste began working with NICRAS (Northern Ireland Community for Refugees and Asylum Seekers) back in 2009, when I attended and completed the 'Host Community Training Programme' through the Integrated Neighbourhood Project. This training involved Coiste, local residents and members of 'Refugee and Asylum Seekers' community participating in a joint awareness programme.

NICRAS have been guest speakers at events such as workshops, conferences and training programmes with young people and community activists. They have been instrumental in the awareness work we do with communities, sharing their own personal experiences and stories of where they came from, the hardships they face living here and what the future holds for them. Their input into our work adds a new dimension to it, exploring broader issues alongside sectarianism, identity and culture. It brings a whole new meaning and value to the discussions and debates taking place across this island.

Since the 'Host Awareness' training has been completed, I have delivered the awareness training to dozens of community and youth organisations across the country, in the company of NICRAS members. It is currently an integrated part of Coiste's delivery of programmes and we will be expanding on this, in terms of training and developing capacity within our national network groups, to deliver to a broader audience.

NICRAS have been involved in organising annual celebrations aimed at integrating their members into our local community and helping us to create all inclusive neighbourhoods. We have held a number of major festivals in the Falls Park, with hundreds of people in attendance, including refugees & asylum seekers, local community, youth, police and emergency services, cultural and sporting organisations.

NICRAS members are in high demand from community and youth clubs. We (Coiste and NICRAS) have recently been working with, a number of these centres will be actively participating and organising in events for 'Refugee Week'. The more Coiste and NICRAS engage and deliver to our communities, the wider and bigger the audience get, who are genuinely interested in integration and supporting the Refugee community.



Coiste na nIarchimí
10 Beechmount Avenue, BELFAST BT 12 7NA
Tel : +44 (28) 90200770 Fax : +44 (28) 90435445
E-mail : info@coiste.com Website : www.coiste.ie

Coiste na nIarchimí
10 Ascall Ard na bhFeá, BEAL FÉIRSTE, BT 12 7NA
Guthán : +44 (28) 90200770 Facs : +44 (28) 90435445
E-mail : info@coiste.com Website : www.coiste.ie

In a recent programme Coiste and NICRAS hosted a workshops for 6 youth centres from greater Belfast at the Balmoral Hotel, Belfast. The event was a series of interactive workshops, which looked at community mapping with the groups, identifying key facilities and people within their own communities, and looking at the resources they provide. We then had a group of young people from NICRAS and one of their leaders, Justin, and through a number of interactive and very challenging exercises, we explored the issues of assumptions and myths, mis-information that we hear about in our communities and the media. After a very successful debate and question and answer session, the youth centres all agreed that they would do 'something' within their clubs for 'Refugee Week' and develop their contacts with NICRAS and its young people.

Coiste will continue its work with NICRAS and the many other ethnic groups that contribute to life in our community. They are a fantastic community resource, especially in terms of educating our community and young people of the need for diversity within our community.

Danny Murphy
Youth Development Co-ordinator
Coiste Na N-Iarchimi





Common Grounds Café

a: 12-24 University Avenue, Belfast, BT7 1GY

t: (028) 90326589

e: café@commongrounds.co.uk

w: www.commongrounds.co.uk

4 June 2014

Common Grounds cafe began as a desire to reach out to the local and global community. We are a not-for-profit business, giving away our profits to support humanitarian projects in the developing world while seeking to raise awareness of issues that affect the global poor. To date we have given away over £60,000, while forming a vibrant hub in the centre of the Holylands area of south Belfast. We are a place for relationships to develop and difference to be appreciated, while seeking to reflect the values of hospitality, justice, generosity and compassion that are central to the Christian faith.

While we employ a number of staff, and see that as an important part of investing in the local community, Common Grounds could not work without the contributions of many dedicated volunteers. Over the past (nearly) 10 years we've been running, a large number of our volunteers have been either asylum seekers or refugees. While we accept that there may be benefits from volunteering in terms of training and building relationships, they offer us far more than we can possibly offer them. In many cases they have gone far beyond the call of duty, showing a real dedication to the work we do and and loyalty to our organisation.

One example would be an Asylum seeker who has been volunteering with us for the past 4 years. Let's call her N.

N often calls Common Grounds her second home and speaks passionately about it at every opportunity. N loves people, and an extension of that is shown through her love for Common Grounds and our aims of fostering a true sense of community around our cafe. Many other volunteers have come to work with us through links with N, who are now also part of our extended "family". However this isn't the only voluntary work N takes part in, as she takes every opportunity to be involved and to give back to the community in Northern Ireland which she sees as home, from stewarding for large events and festivals, to taking part in cultural learning experiences for school children. N is a hardworking, giving member of our community, and we need more people like her.

With Jesus Christ as our example, Common Grounds Cafe seeks to foster a loving local community that works to bless and serve the global poor



Common Grounds Café

a: 12-24 University Avenue, Belfast, BT7 1GY

t: (028) 90326589

e: café@commongrounds.co.uk

w: www.commongrounds.co.uk

N is just one example of a volunteer with asylum seeker or refugee status linked to Common Grounds who we know is offering a huge amount to our society both with us and elsewhere.

We at Common Grounds wholeheartedly support refugee week and believe it is a vital part of our community continuing to move forward in terms of embracing our diverse cultures and appreciating each other through our differences.

Daniel Black - Manager

manager@commongrounds.co.uk

With Jesus Christ as our example, Common Grounds Cafe seeks to foster a loving local community that works to bless and serve the global poor

Falls Women's Centre

IONAD MHNÁ NA bhFÁI

Falls Women's Centre – working with women who are refugees or asylum-seekers

Falls Women's Centre was set up in 1982 as a grassroots organisation run by volunteers, providing support and a safe space for women affected by the conflict, domestic violence, poverty and lack of resources. Today the centre employs 20 staff and its services include training and education, advice and counselling, and crèche and nursery provision. Falls Women's Centre is a feminist organisation, providing a women-only space, and working to empower women to improve their lives and their community.

We have a large number of women from China, Africa and the Middle East who are asylum seekers and refugees using our centre and contributing to it. They take part in our training and education programme, use the advice and counselling service, and are supported with childcare places in our centre. They take part in and contribute to centre events including celebrations, fundraising events and certificate presentations. They participate in focus groups and cross-community projects.

As with all women who use our centre, we find that women from the refugee community encourage others to get involved in our activities. They bring new women along to enrol for classes or simply spread the word about our centre.

More formally, some women volunteer for the centre, as interpreters or group facilitators.

The involvement of women who are asylum-seekers or refugees benefits our centre enormously in our efforts to promote integration and to break down barriers between different communities. Women from many different countries (over thirty in the last four years) use the centre on a daily basis, and this has changed the perceptions of local women, as asylum-seekers and refugees share their knowledge and experience in the classroom and at the coffee break. We have been able to address specific concerns through training provided by the Inclusive Neighbourhood Project, and women were able to share their experiences of conflict in Northern Ireland and other countries in a Peace-building project. Our training floor is decorated beautifully with pieces of art produced by women from different backgrounds working together.

Centre staff have benefited too, developing their knowledge of asylum and refugee issues and links with other agencies, to meet the needs of women and their families.

One woman in particular (A) has contributed hugely to our centre over the past two years. She is an asylum-seeker from Sudan. She first came to our centre to enrol in an Open University course. She is now taking the Level 2 Certificate in Counselling Studies and her tutor is confident she will progress to Level 3. We have supported A throughout her studies and in return she has done enormous amounts to help other women. She volunteers as an interpreter to help women using our advice service or taking part in a group discussion. She encourages women who are new to Belfast to use our centre and other community resources. She is very active in other community groups and she hopes to use her Counselling qualification to extend her work. She is a familiar face in our centre, appreciated by staff and students and a good friend to many.

Falls Women's Centre recognises Refugee Week by organising an event to celebrate the contribution of asylum-seekers and refugees, and highlight their difficult situation. It is especially important in the current situation that we raise awareness of asylum issues, and promote understanding.

Nancy Graham, Project training and education worker, Falls women's Centre. Tel : 028 9032 7672

info@fallswomenscentre.org



Lower Ormeau Residents Action Group (LORAG)

Creating Cohesive Community Project is run by the Lower Ormeau Residents Action Group.

The Creating Cohesive Community Project works in partnership with NICRAS on a number of Community based initiatives including: World Cup Football Tournaments, Community Safety through PCSP and many more development opportunities to build capacity within NICRAS members and develop positive relationships, as an organisation and the wider community of Lower Ormeau and Botanic.

In turn, there are a number of refugees and asylum seekers currently volunteering with LORAG through the many programmes and projects:

Sports:

- trained gym/fitness volunteers
- Fundamental sports trainers
- Park Run Volunteers (weekly 5Km UK wide run in local parks)

Health- trained walk leaders (with BHSCT)

- Volunteers for Cook It programme
- Volunteers for Health events and programmes
- Currently training asylum seekers/refugees as bike leaders (through Public Health Agency)

Community Cohesion

- refugees/asylum seekers host and facilitate discussions at Small Worlds wider community events aimed at dispelling myths/stereotypes and improving positive mutual understanding and good relations.
- Refugee awareness in schools/community- number of volunteers support schools and community education programmes through Creating Cohesive Community Project.
- Festival events- greatly supported by refugees and asylum seekers supporting the events by cooking-facilitating discussion, providing extra support during festival time by helping to set up, break down, practical hands on support with supervising bouncy castles etc..
- Active Citizens- refugees and asylum seekers are currently trained as Active Citizens as part of Creating Cohesive Community project.
- Inter cultural Parenting programmes- currently number of participants on this programme, some of whom are also participating in intercultural facilitation/group work skills, with a view to develop skills to deliver the Inter Cultural Parenting programme (after Training for Trainers programme)



How refugee involvement has benefited LORAG

This involvement has greatly benefitted LORAG as it has ensured that our volunteer base is reflective of the diverse community of the Lower Ormeau and Botanic area.

It has also ensured that we have a diverse volunteer base with a range of languages, cultural identities to ensure that all our services are accessible and 'culture proofed'. This has also benefitted community cohesion as volunteering provides a fantastic opportunity to develop equitable working relationships within a community and foster good relations, in a more sustainable holistic way.

With regards to education/schools work, the programmes (particularly refugee awareness programmes) are far more effective co facilitated by a member of the refugee community and as such, programmes are more experiential and have a much better, lasting impact.

Benefits for other communities

The wider community has had opportunities to not only meet, but develop relationships with refugees and asylum seekers, not from a place of 'pity' or 'sympathy' but of understanding the difficult situations that people have fled from but as fellow members of the community and value their contribution to the community. In addition, refugees and asylum seekers have had opportunities to find out about life in a neighbourhood, the NI context and the impact on the neighbourhood in shaping current attitudes and behaviours.

We have a monthly Strategic Networking Forum and members of the refugee community are active members, including those from the Somali, Sudanese community as well as local residents from a range of countries including Nigeria and Ethiopia, all from the refugee and asylum seeking community. This has afforded opportunities for other organisations- voluntary and statutory to engage and collaborate with asylum seekers and refugees in a professional, structured manner, to develop relationships and possible working relationships.

Case study

Jane (not real name) moved in to the neighbourhood in June last year with her 7 year old son, Peter*. The community cohesion project coordinator received a phone call from the Falls Women's Centre, where the family had been placed in emergency accommodation, to inform her that the family had moved across to the neighbourhood of the Lower Ormeau.*

The family were approached and invited into the centre to get involved. Within weeks, Jane was volunteering during the week long Lower Ormeau festival and volunteered at all the major community events throughout the year. Her son, Peter, who had never been to school before was able to access support from the Children's Project at LORAG and now regularly attends all relevant programmes, including homework support. Initially, due to Peter's lack of socialisation/formal



schooling, there were some emotional, behavioural challenges, but with a support package through his school, LORAG and other agencies, Peter now participates fully in community life as an 8 year old boy; with a wide range of friends and support from other families. He will be performing with other children in the summer festival production of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.

Jane continues to volunteer in the community and after undergoing training with 16 other volunteers from Zimbabwe, NI- CRNI and PUBL communities, Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan and Romania is part of the Active Citizens team in addition to training as a community facilitator. Jane now also refers other vulnerable members of the community to the community cohesion project and offers informal support. In addition to volunteering, Jane cooks for major events, participates in all programmes, including inter cultural parenting and will continue to develop personal as well as professional skills to contribute further to a community of which she and Peter are very much at the heart of.

Support for Refugee Week

LORAG has organised a week long programme of events during refugee week 2014.

Sun 15/06/14: Big Lunch- community Lunch to launch Refugee Week

Mon 16/06/15: Women's Health Event; 'Life as a Refugee Child'-interactive workshop for ages 8-11 years

Tues 17/06/14: Meet Active citizens; 'Forced to Flee' workshop for P7 Children at Scoil an Droichid

Weds 18/06/14: Refugee Awareness workshop with Men's project; Joint healthy cooking session with LORAG/NICRAS children and youth

Thursday 19/06/14: Conversation Circle with Older and Active group (ages 60+) re: refugee awareness; Refugee Awareness sessions with young people ages 12-20 years

Friday 20/06/14: Refugee Awareness sessions with mum's group; Experience a night in a refugee camp for children ages 8-11 years.

Saturday 21/06/14: Basketball tournament with LORAG young women and Somali Young women's group; Family Fun! Sports event; Youth World Cup football Tournament

Sunday 22/06/14: Presentation of drumming/dance as part of refugee week finale

Contact: Ann Marie White at LORAG, Shaftesbury Community and Recreation Centre, 97 Balfour Avenue, Belfast BT7 2EW, T: 028 9031 2377



explore/engage/enjoy

Getting heard during Refugee Week 2014: NI Assembly Debate

In 2013 - 14 funding was provided by DCAL in response to bids based on our approach to tackling poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion. With this funding we were able to deliver 18 different projects and between June 2013 and end of March 2014, almost 14,000 people from a wide range of areas of social and economic deprivation have benefited from National Museums' Social Inclusion Programme.

Under the Partnership and Lifelong Learning arm of the programme we worked closely with a range of strategic partners to deliver programmes for a wide range of socially and economically deprived groups, such as older people, minority ethnic communities, people from socio economically deprived backgrounds and many other non-traditional users. A new partnership was developed between National Museums, the NI Housing Executive (NIHE) Social Inclusion Unit and the Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS). The aim of this partnership was to make a difference to those people who are marginalised from mainstream society by a combination of not having access to or the opportunity to participate in the essential processes of society. Many of the groups have been chosen from areas where incidences of 'Hate Crime' have taken place as identified by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and /or the PSNI.

NICRAS project

The project was set up in partnership with Northern Ireland Housing Executive and NICRAS.

Following on from meetings between NMNI staff, NICRAS and NIHE a day trip to the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum for NICRAS families was organised in August as an initial familiarisation visit. A further visit was organised for Halloween and was enjoyed by approximately 45 participants, during which they were able to take part in traditional crafts and Halloween festivities.

Having identified a number of people who would be interested in getting more involved, a programme of work experience was set up and the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. Under the guidance of a museum Outreach Officer the project gave a core group of nine (and up to 12) refugees and asylum seekers the opportunity to gain invaluable work experience and skills.

The participants came from a variety of African countries including Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Sudan and Algeria. Prior to coming to Northern Ireland members of the group had had the following jobs:- motor mechanic, farmers, pharmacist, bus driver, teacher, mental health nurse, shop assistant.

The programme ran for three days per week from November 2013 to the end of March 2014 and the Museum (funded by DCAL) provided transport and lunch for participants and the main types of work carried out undertaken were:-

- Assisting with preparation for Museum events and for visiting groups, which involved setting out chairs, setting up lunch areas for groups, set up areas for craft workshops, moving costumes to areas as and when needed.
- Stocking up fuel for fires in exhibit buildings.
- Assisting with decoration of the exhibit buildings for Christmas.
- Light cleaning of exhibit buildings before and after events and weddings.
- In February the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum hosted the BBC Stargazing Live programme and the NICRAS group provided invaluable assistance to our Operations team in the set up and clear up required around this event

During the project, Ulster Folk and Transport Museum staff worked closely with the participants, giving them useful insight into their roles and organising interactive activities designed to help them learn about our culture.

The participants had not met each other before becoming involved in this programme and therefore developed an understanding of each other's cultures as well as that of Northern Ireland. Throughout the programme the participants grew in confidence as they learned new skills and saw an improvement in their English. All of the participants had the highest praise for the National Museums' staff and overall the project showed a positive example of working together and improving mutual respect.

Khumbo from Ethiopia has now gained a place at Bradford University to undertake a course in mental health nursing and said that experience gained at UFTM had been beneficial in assisting him to get onto the course.

Majid from Algeria has now gained his residency permit and will be able to practice as a pharmacist in the UK.

This partnership was beneficial to the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum in that the volunteers provided invaluable assistance to the operations team and visitor guide staff in setting up for events and groups visiting. This was a particularly busy season with a large number of groups taking part in the programmes organised under the Social Inclusion Programme. Our staff benefited by broadening their understanding of other cultures.

Paddy Gilmore
Director of Learning and Partnership
National Museums Northern Ireland
Tel: 028 90 395203

NICRAS Volunteers with Outreach Officer at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum





NICEM & Belfast Migrant Centre

1. Introduction

Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities
1st Floor Ascot House, 24-31 Shaftesbury Square
Belfast BT2 7DB
028 9023 8645

NICEM is an independent non-governmental organisation. As an umbrella organisation we represent the views and interests of black and minority ethnic (BME) communities. Our mission is to work to bring about social change through partnership and alliance building, and to achieve equality of outcome and full participation in society. Our vision is of a society in which equality and diversity are respected, valued and embraced, that is free from all forms of racism, sectarianism, discrimination and social exclusion, and where human rights are guaranteed.

Our primary activities are identifying and presenting views of the BME sector, policy, research and information, capacity building for BME Communities, racial equality support services, advocacy and advice services for ethnic minority individuals and families through the Belfast Migrant Centre; and campaigning and networking.

2. Involvement of refugees and asylum seekers

NICEM is a BME led organisation, our Executive Committee is made of representatives from various ethnic minority groups in Northern Ireland. Since its creation 2004, the NI Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS) have been members and involved in our governing structure in different positions, including chair of NICEM.

The chair of NICRAS is one of our current trustees.

Over the years, Asylum Seekers and Refugees have also contributed to the organisation as members of staff (one of them still currently employed) and volunteers in various policy projects (one of our refugee volunteer represented the organisation at the United Nations in Geneva for the CEDAW hearing in July 2013).

NICEM's core ethos is to empower ethnic minorities to fully participate in all aspects of public life and therefore Refugees and Asylum seeking individuals and families have been encouraged to take part in all campaigns, research, trainings, conferences and events that NICEM organises.

Here are a few examples of recent projects:

- In 2013, NICEM collaborated to an anti-racism project for a group of 30 young people over a few months. We have been training ethnic minority individuals, including 2 asylum seekers to deliver anti-racism training sessions to the young people. This has had a very meaningful impact on the young people who took part in the project, but also on

the asylum seekers themselves who gained great confidence and skills that they'll be able to use in their future careers.

- In April 2014, through our BME parliament initiative we organised workshops to develop questions to Ministers. One participant, who is in the asylum seeking process was nominated to ask a question to the Minister of Employment and Learning directly regarding issues affecting ethnic minorities.
- On 22 of May 2014, through the Belfast Migrant Centre and our Belonging Project, we organised a roundtable discussion on integration issues and one of our guest speaker is also currently in the asylum seeking process.

3. How this involvement has benefited our organisation

Refugees and Asylum Seekers provide a core contribution to all aspects of the work of NICEM and of the Belfast Migrant Centre. They bring a richness of experiences and skills that the organisations could not do without.

4. Benefits for other communities

The active involvement and campaigning of the Refugee and Asylum Seeking Community has a great impact on all other communities. The composition of the Refugee and Asylum Seeking community with so many different nationalities and backgrounds, advocate for positive changes for all the other ethnic minority communities.

5. Support for Refugee Week.

NICEM has provided support to NICRAS in organising Refugee Week in Northern Ireland for many years. This year, NICEM is also organising 2 events as part of Refugee Week.



Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS)

1. Introduction

NICRAS is the only refugee and asylum seeker led organisation in Northern Ireland. It has been in existence for 12 years. It was started by NICEM (Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities) who supported its development until it became an independent organisation in 2007.

An asylum seeker is a person looking for a safe place or sanctuary outside their own country because they have experienced war, civil unrest or persecution. A refugee is someone who applies for asylum and is successful in being granted refugee status. Asylum seekers have a legal right to be here while their application is considered because the UK signed the 1951 UN Convention Relating to Refugees agreeing to allow people to enter the country. The UK hosts less than 2% of the world's refugees. It is not easy to have an asylum claim accepted here. Only a small percentage of claims are successful and many people have to appeal. This takes a long time and meanwhile individuals are left in limbo with living in hardship on a very small weekly allowance.

NICRAS activities include provision of advice and support, English classes, drop in and group social activities, educational opportunities, distribution of food and emergency aid to prevent homelessness and destitution, inter community and good relations work, volunteer development, programmes for children and youth people, health programmes, and social policy work to raise awareness about and address the circumstances of asylum seekers and refugees living in Northern Ireland.

NICRAS is a membership based charity. The management committee is elected at the AGM and is composed of asylum seekers and refugees from different countries and advisors with expert knowledge of policy and charities. Membership has increased steadily and there are now almost 330 members.

Somali = 96	Sudan = 75
Zimbabwe = 31	Nigeria = 18
Eritrea = 10	Ethiopia = 6
Kuwait = 6	Iran = 6
Syria = 4	Cameroon = 4
South Africa = 4	Algeria = 3
Ivory Coast = 3	Sri Lanka = 3
Palestine = 3	Egypt = 3
Algeria = 3	Iraqi Kurdistan = 2
Iraq = 2	R D Congo = 2
Liberia = 2	Guinea = 2



Togo = 2	China = 2
Kenya = 2	Jamaica = 2
Malawi = 2	Indonesia = 1
Bangladesh = 1	Pakistan = 1
Morocco = 1	No Country = 4

NICRAS aims to:

- Support and represent asylum seekers and refugees in NI through the provision of services, activities and advocacy to relieve poverty and improve life.
- Further educational opportunities for asylum seekers and refugees through the provision of information and the organisation of educational programme and events.
- Support the process of integration through the provision of services and activities.
- Provide a voice for refugees and asylum seekers in NI and a place of sanctuary for asylum seekers and refugees.

2. How asylum seekers and refugees are involved in NICRAS

Asylum seekers and refugees are actively involved in NICRAS through their role on the management committee, as volunteers, as service users and daily drop in. Thus our members play an important role in the governance and accountability and the daily service delivery of the organisation. They work as advice workers, receptionists, collect and distribute food and aid, organise and assist with educational, health and social programmes and co-ordinate volunteer activities. Members also deliver refugee awareness training/talks to schools, community groups, and youth groups.

Members also volunteer in various organisations, community groups, and events such as Law Centre, NICEM, Citizens Advice Bureau, East Belfast Advice Centre, LORAG, Save the Children, Ulster Folks and Transport Museum, British Red Cross, Belfast Migrant Centre, Common Ground Café, Corrymeela, Police and Fire Service Game, Giro d'Italia.

3. How this involvement benefits NICRAS

This involvement has enabled NICRAS to grow and develop as a place of refuge and support. Without the contribution of volunteers from our membership and from the local community we would not be able to provide our advice and support service, our twice weekly English classes and our social, educational, sports, respite, youth and health promoting activities.



The contribution of our members has enabled us to work with the diversity of our members' backgrounds, cultures, religions and circumstances, to foster mutual understanding and to ensure that all our members have a voice and a sense of belonging.

The majority of NICRAS members are highly qualified individuals with knowledge and expertise in different subjects. Through their involvement and participation in local organisations, community groups, and statutory bodies, the organisation has produced a range of astute individuals who have become experts on asylum and refugee issues and on understanding how to use community development principles to strengthen mutual support and good relations across groups and communities.

Their involvement has enabled us to build partnerships with service providers and those who work in social policy. The last couple of years have seen an increase in local organisations seeking input from NICRAS in their work and our members have contributed to consultations with the Housing Executive, DEL, PHA/BHSCT, and University research. In addition there have been many invitations to deliver refugee awareness and diversity talks and training sessions to statutory bodies, schools, youth groups, and youth workers.

4. Benefits for other communities

Our members work as volunteers in a range of organisations including Citizens Advice Bureau, East Belfast Advice Centre, Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, Corrymeela, British Red Cross, Belfast Migrant Centre, Common Ground Café and volunteer in events such as Belfast Marathon, Police and Fire Service Games and Giro d'Italia.

Our members also participate in local community groups and activities including Sure Start projects, LORAG and ACSONI, and work closely with local support organisation and service providers including Law Centre NI, NICEM, Barnardo's and Save the Children. Some members have been trained by LORAG's Creating Cohesive Community Project as active citizens and facilitators to help new members and members of the local community to foster integration;

The involvement of NICRAS with local communities has been beneficial for both NICRAS members and the local communities by fostering mutual understanding and respect for differences in the community, schools and local services frequently used by refugees and asylum seekers. NICRAS members come from many different countries and we have brought global issues to life for communities other. This has created a sense of perspective and a wider understanding of the impact of intolerance, abuse of power and resilience. We



are able to dispel myths about people from other parts of the world and images of people from Africa as powerless and uneducated. We bring different perspectives and experiences to communities here which have themselves experienced hardship and conflict. We provide opportunities for people to learn about countries, people and cultures outside of Northern Ireland.

We provide opportunities for volunteers from other communities to express their compassion in practical ways by helping our organisation and individual members.

Case Study 1

Justin came to Belfast in 2009 from the Ivory Coast. Like other asylum seekers he went to NICRAS for support and then got involved in volunteering.

Justin wanted to use his background in management to support and develop NICRAS. He spent time volunteering in the organisation and learning about community development and governance. He trained with other organisations and made great efforts to find and listen to the advice of experts in finance, HR and community group governance. He built up a strong cohesive management committee in NICRAS with a range of experience and from a range of countries, alongside local advisers, and initiated an extensive membership consultation process which gathered views from more than 60 members and 10 partner organisations. His leadership has developed NICRAS to another level - a member led organisation, committed to good governance, participation and mutual support and high quality services.

Justin knows that integration and progression are crucial for asylum seekers and refugees. Within weeks of his arrival, he engaged with the Inclusive Neighbourhood Project (INP) and participated in accredited training as a community facilitator. From 2009-2011, he continued to engage with INP, co facilitating workshops and delivering training sessions to the wider community and orientation training for newly arrived asylum seekers.

He understood the importance of advice to enable all citizens to be part of society and he trained with CAB to become a volunteer adviser and a tribunal representative. He then undertook further training with Law Centre NI and Housing Rights Advocacy.

As chairperson of NICRAS since October 2010 Justin learnt that, in order to create positive change for asylum seekers and refugees, the organisation needed to raise



awareness about their circumstances. He became an active member of the Assembly All Party Group on BME Issues, the Refugee and Asylum Forum, the Immigration Sub-Committee group, the Public Health Agency BME Health and Wellbeing, and the Strategic Networking Forum of the Creating Cohesive Community Project. Justin contributed to a number of statutory agency consultation processes. He was a member of the advisory council for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation research on Ethnicity and Poverty in Northern Ireland.

He is also active in ACSONI and the Lower Ormeau and Botanic Consortium and a member of NICEM's management committee. He has been a guest speaker at various events and seminars organised by NICEM, EMBRACE, British Red Cross, Coiste, Public Health Agency and local churches. He continues to develop NICRAS partnerships with key community organisations including Coiste and LORAG as well as educational institutions.

Justin's contribution to the communities in Northern Ireland was recognised this year when he won the first Stephen Pitman Award for Social Justice organised through the Community Foundation NI.

Case Study 2

Mohamed came to Belfast in June 2012 from Ethiopia looking for a safe place to live. He was very sad to leave his country but after finding safety for his family amongst civil unrest, he had to flee or risk further danger. He really wanted to be part of community life in Belfast so he volunteers every day with NICRAS. He speaks 5 languages so he is really good at working on reception, welcoming people to the centre, helping with interpreting and telling people about local facilities. He also helps with distributing food, making sure that people feel valued and having a laugh with them. He's been living in the Holyland area for over a year and has found it really difficult to get to know people here so he trained as an Active Citizen with Creating Cohesive Community Project at LORAG, offering his support to everyone in the community and helping people to feel that they belong. Volunteering is really important for Mohamed as it enables him to contribute and means that he's not alone in his flat all day as he suffers from post traumatic stress disorder.



5. support for Refugee Week.

Refugee Week has been central to NICRAS since its beginning. It was launched during Refugee Week 2002 and NICRAS continues to organise events to celebrate this week. The Refugee Week is a UK wide event to celebrate the positive contribution of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK and NI locally. Every year a theme is chosen by the NICRAS Management Committee which may be different from the rest of the UK.

Refugee Week is highly valued by our members who have developed its focus from awareness raising about the presence of asylum seekers and refugees, to highlighting the need for change to enable them to have a better quality of life and the opportunity to make a bigger contribution to society here. This reflects our members' enthusiasm to raise awareness with other communities, decision makers and politicians of the problems which make life worse for us and of our potential to make a contribution to life here.

Refugee Week can also be seen as an indicator of how NICRAS has developed. It has expanded from one event to celebrate International Refugee Day to a week long programme of events. For the last two of years, NICRAS has led a group of partner organisations and community groups in the development of a wide ranging programme throughout Belfast and the region which attracts people of all ages and interests to lively and interesting events organised in local communities to celebrate and welcome refugees. It is the highlight of our year.

Contact:

Tel: 02890246699 Email: info@nicras.org.uk Website: www.nicras.org.uk

Address: 143a University Street, Belfast, BT7 1HP



N I C R A S

Northern Ireland Community of Refugees & Asylum Seekers

May 2014

Welcome to our second newsletter of the year.

1 Activities since our last newsletter....

Mohamed, Khumbo, Winnie and Abdi took place in a four day **Mental Health Awareness Training** programme delivered by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. They are now working towards an Open College Network certificate.

A new **Community Safety Programme**, run in partnership with LORAG's Creating Cohesive Community started in February. There were 6 sessions including Personal Safety, Understanding Your Rights, Domestic Violence. The opportunity to meet the local Belfast City Council Community Safety Team was very popular. 25 members attended at least one of the sessions.

Madjid led a group of 9 volunteers who took part in work placements in the **Ulster Folk and Transport Museum** twice a week as part of the partnership with Ulster Museum. The activities included cleaning and repainting, decoration, photocopying, and working as visitors guide. Thanks to Arlene Bell and Nicola Thompson for organising this programme and for providing bus passes for participants. NICRAS members valued the opportunity to meet new people, to learn new things and to get a reference for their placement.

Child Protection Training, organised by LORAG's Creating Cohesive Community was attended by 7 NICRAS members and completed by 5 of them including Favour, Anna.

Young people from NICRAS were part of a group of 25 young people from 5 different youth groups in Belfast who took part in a **Diversity Programme** organised by Coiste. The venue was the Balmoral Hotel and Yasmin, Adam and Shuj attended.

Fatuma, Emad, Adnan, Ahmed Sharif, and Mohammed took part in **mediation training** organised by the Creating Cohesive Community project at LORAG and received a certificate.

Lots of members trained to be **Active Citizens** to help welcome newcomers to the Botanic and Lower Ormeau area. This is an initiative of the Creating Cohesive Community project in LORAG. Congratulations to Ahmed, Mohammed, Favour, Adnan, Ahmed Sharif and Emad.

NICRAS organised the **Refugee World Cup 2014**; members took part in the World Cup programme along with teams from Wave, Springvale, City Church, Fitzroy Church, International Meeting Point, the Friendship Club, Somalian Association and the Sudanese Association. This IFA programme includes an opportunity for 2 people to undertake First Aid training and 10 people to take a course in grassroots coaching (which starts in June).

Ahmed, Favour and Fatuma took part in **Facilitation Training** – inter-cultural dialogue - a 6 week programme designed to gain skills to facilitate groups, organised by Creating Cohesive Community project in LORAG.



N I C R A S

Northern Ireland Community of Refugees & Asylum Seekers

2 Current activities and groups

The BELB programme for young people continues with activities on Monday evenings for teenagers.

English classes continue to run on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12.00. The new policy of focusing on NICRAS members is working well. New resources have been provided and attendance is good. We have recently introduced an attendance register. We are planning a celebration at the end of June for this year's students and volunteers.

Our English classes are tailored to meet the everyday needs of our members. They cover issues like visiting the doctor, the dentist and the optician, catching a bus, houses and landlords, opening a bank account and leisure and recreation. There is lots of conversation and information exchanged. A popular topic is food – what's in it, shopping and healthy eating. Instead of a tea break, we have an orange break and one week we had a porridge tasting session. Many of our members know a lot about crops and animals.

Members have different needs from the English classes. Some people can't read very much in their own language and have had very little schooling. We have reading books from the library to help them learn. Some people can read and want to practice conversation – words and phrases and vocabulary which are useful in their day to day lives. And some people are interested in grammar. Our classes are designed to meet all these needs. We are able to do this because of the commitment and skills of our volunteers.

Classes are relaxed and we have a laugh. Members and volunteers share information about their different customs and ways of life. Our students find it much easier to learn and progress when they come regularly to the classes. We would like more men to come along.

Classes finish at the end of June and resume on Tuesday September 2nd.

Photography project A photography student called Richard who is studying HND in photography has been working with a group of 8 – 10 NICRAS members since November. He is working with our members to produce a series of photographs for display in a gallery in Northern Ireland and also an article to get published in a newspaper or magazine. He aims to highlight the difficulties faced by refugees and asylum seekers with the hope of trying to highlight the prejudice that they face. The exhibition of the work will open in the [Red Barn Gallery, Rosemary Street](#) on [Thursday 5th June at 6](#) and it will run until for one week until [14th June](#).

Look out for [Refugee Week](#) on 16 – 22 June this year. The theme will be Children and Young People's contribution. The programme is attached. There is a wide range of activities on health, human rights, sport, family fun, cooking, photography, conversation and story telling and awareness raising.

3 Recognition for asylum seekers in Northern Ireland

The [BBC Radio Ulster](#) programme on the issues affecting asylum seekers and refugees in Northern Ireland was broadcast in March. The programme was positive and informative. It included interviews with Mimi, Stanley, Norma, Khumbo, Ayat, Jamal, Justin and Winnie. We would like to thank Chris Page and Peter Coulter for their work in producing such a constructive and educational programme. It resulted in a number of calls from local people offering help and donations.

The following day Wendy Austen followed up on the issues asylum seekers and refugees on the Talkback programme. Again the programme was constructive and raised awareness. It included a panel of people of experts from the Law Centre NI, Bryson and Justin Kouame.



N I C R A S

Northern Ireland Community of Refugees & Asylum Seekers

Our management committee members and volunteers work hard in the Government [All Party Group on Ethnic Minorities](#) and with our partners to improve services and quality of life for all asylum seekers and refugees in Northern Ireland.

4 OFMDFM Support

The management committee has had a series of constructive meetings with advisers and officials from OFMDFM to brief them about the organisational developments which have taken place in NICRAS since the member's consultation and organisational review.

5 Staff members

Our Finance Officer left his post in March and we are grateful to Nuala from NICEM for contributing her help and expertise to our financial work. OFMDFM has approved our draft job descriptions for a full and part time adviser and the posts have been advertised.

6 Advice and support service

The advice and support service continues to operate daily on a drop in basis from Mon - Thurs, with appointments made for form filling which requires a lot of time. The service is currently being run by a trained CAB Adviser. Legal advice is being provided on a sessional basis by John, who is a qualified barrister. On average 50 people a week are attending the advice service, including 10 – 15 people for emergency support.

Members have been supported with applications for Income Support, Housing Benefit and Job Seekers Allowance, Crisis loans and Integration loans, as well as references for accommodation and referrals to Storehouse. Since February, there have been 3 successful applications for Disability Living Allowance and 1 for Employment Support Allowance and one successful DLA appeal. Two applications have been submitted for families with young children to the Buttle Trust. The 2 applications submitted to Prisoners of Conscience were unsuccessful.

Justin participated in Law Centre NI training on Universal Credit.

Emergency Support. St Martin in the Field Vicar's Fund has agreed to renew our grant of £5,000 to provide emergency support for the next 6 months. When we receive this grant, we will contact members who need this kind of support, to review their needs. Our funders impose a limit of **£250 per person per year**. Unfortunately earlier this year, a number of members reached this limit and had to seek help from other sources.

Food continues to be distributed every week. He also helps our members, providing lifts to doctor's appointments and interviews. We had a useful meeting with Storehouse at which we updated them about our distribution system and advised them about members' food requirements.



N I C R A S

Northern Ireland Community of Refugees & Asylum Seekers

7 Work to change government policies.

Campaign on NASS support – looking positive.

Refugee Action's case against the UK Government, which argued that the amount paid to destitute asylum seekers is unlawful because it is insufficient to meet their essential living needs or to provide a dignified standard of living, was heard on 11 to 13 February 2014. On 9 April 2014 Mr Justice Popplewell handed down his judgement which stated that the Secretary of State's decision to freeze the rates of support for asylum seekers was 'flawed' and that: "She [Secretary of State for the Home Department] failed to take reasonable steps to gather sufficient information to enable her to make a rational judgment in setting the asylum support rates for 2013/2014."

The Secretary of State was ordered to retake the decision as to the level at which asylum support should be set, in accordance with the guidance contained in the judgement.

So, the current NASS rates have been held to be unlawful because they are too low. We don't know yet how the government will respond and we will have to wait for some time but it looks like eventually they will have to increase NASS levels, if only slightly.

DSD Crisis Loans

Justin attended an information meeting in March in the Social Security Agency to find out about a new Financial Support Service in Jobs & Benefits Offices and Social Security Offices, being offered initially to customers that apply for Social Fund Crisis Loans.

People who have complex requirements and circumstances, who might benefit from external specialized support, will be given contact details of specialist services and organisations. NICRAS has been identified as one of the main independent organisations involved in providing specialist advice and support that the Social Security Agency will be signposting customers to. The new Financial Support Service is being piloted in three benefit offices - Falls Road, Omagh and Strabane.

Access to healthcare.

NICRAS continues to work with Law Centre (NI) and Red Cross to lobby for access to free healthcare (both primary and secondary healthcare) for all asylum seekers. The relevant government department (DHSSPS) has agreed to consider the issue but has not yet issued its response.

Assembly Committee

Members of NICRAS, Red Cross and Law Centre NI met Mike Nesbitt, the Chairperson of the OFMDFM Committee on 7th May and made a number of proposals to improve life for asylum seekers and refugees here. Following the meeting, the Committee wrote to OFMDFM to seek information on:

- when the Crisis Fund will start and how it will work
- The launch date for the consultation about the new Racial Equality Strategy which incorporates the Refugee Integration Strategy.
- The issue of permitting MLAs to make representations to the Home Office on immigration matters and if OFMDFM have or would consider making representations to the Home Secretary on specific NI cases.

The Committee also agreed to sponsor a debate on Monday 16 June on Refugee Week and Community Relations Week which both fall on the same dates and to seek an Assembly Research and Information Service paper on asylum issues.



N I C R A S

Northern Ireland Community of Refugees & Asylum Seekers

8 Members

NICRAS is the only refugee and asylum seeker led organisation in Northern Ireland. This means that the organisation is led and managed by a management committee made up of asylum seekers and refugees. They are supported by advisers with expertise in management.

The current management committee is:-

Justin Kouame, Chairperson,
Mimi Unamoyo, Treasurer
Asma Alijunaid
Nomzamo Mahlangu

Noha Olbi, Vice Chair,
Sabah Hasaballah, Secretary
Issa Altom
Eric Koungou

In February there were 306 members of NICRAS, and an estimated 17 users who are not members.

Somali = 96	Sudan = 75
Zimbabwe = 31	Nigeria = 18
Eritrea = 10	Ethiopia = 6
Kuwait = 6	Iran = 6
Syria = 4	Cameroon = 4
South Africa = 4	Algeria = 3
Ivory Coast = 3	Sri Lanka = 3
Palestine = 3	Egypt = 3
Algeria = 3	Iraqi Kurdistan = 2
Iraq = 2	R D Congo = 2
Liberia = 2	Guinea = 2
Togo = 2	China = 2
Kenya = 2	Jamaica = 2
Malawi = 2	Indonesia = 1
Bangladesh = 1	Pakistan = 1
Morocco = 1	No Country = 4

We began the membership renewal process in March and this year, for the first time, members are being issued with membership cards. This process should be completed by June and we will then publish the update the table of members' countries.



N I C R A S

Northern Ireland Community of Refugees & Asylum Seekers

9 Thanks to all our partners and volunteers

A big thank you to our partner organisations, especially NICEM, our funders, our donors including the Family Magistrates Court and individuals.

Thanks also to:-

- Our members who have supported us through a period of organisational development.
- Sister Anne for her sterling work over the years in the English classes and to all the other English class volunteers for their commitment.
- Matbuli, who collects the food from Storehouse and delivers it to NICRAS.
- MLA's and Councillors and officials who have supported our policy work and our organisation.
- OFMDFM advisers and officials who have supported us through a period of change.
- Mohammed Hassen, our volunteers and management committee members for their commitment.
- Staff in the Alliance and Sinn Fein offices for the help they provide to our members.
- Allen Lane Foundation for their grant of £2,000.
- St. Martin in the Field Vicar's Relief Fund for their support to our members who are at risk of being made homeless, are homeless or vulnerable.
- Jennifer Yu, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust for her help and encouragement.
- Jim Weir BELB for his work with our young people.
- Anne Marie and the staff at LORAG for their support with community development work.
- Law Centre NI for helping to address delays in benefits and for support with social policy work.
- Individual Donors of goods and foods.

Margaret Donaghy

We were very sad at the sudden and untimely death of Margaret Donaghy who worked at Bryson Intercultural and was a good friend to NICRAS over the years. We extend our sympathy to her family, friends and colleagues.

Contact address

143a University Street, Belfast BT7 1HP
E mail: info@nicras.org.uk

Tel: 028 90246699
Website: www.nicras.org.uk



Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership: Contribution of asylum seekers and refugees

Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership

The Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership (NISMP), is a cross-party partnership which works across the spheres of government and between the public, private and social sectors to ensure that Northern Ireland effectively welcomes, supports and integrates new migrants in a way which helps support future economic growth and vibrant, cohesive communities.

The partnership provides a regional advisory, developmental and consultative function, which enables our partners and stakeholders to develop an appropriate Northern Ireland migration policy structure and works to ensure that Northern Ireland's needs and concerns in respect of immigration are recognised within the constraints of related UK wide policy.

Involvement of asylum seekers and refugees in the work of NISMP

The work of NISMP is determined by the NISMP Board and progressed by the NISMP secretariat in tandem with time-bound, thematic working groups established, where relevant, for this purpose.

In 2013 the NISMP secretariat was charged with producing a rationale for a refugee integration strategy. Although numbers of asylum applicants in Northern Ireland are small relative to other regions, they are increasing year on year. Northern Ireland is currently the only region within the UK or Ireland which does not have a coordinated approach to the support of refugees.

It was essential in the production of the Refugee Integration Strategy Proposal that the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers were captured, as well as those of statutory agencies and support organizations. NICRAS were invaluable in this, helping to setting up focus group interviews with asylum seekers and refugees and providing a venue in which these interviews could take place.

As part of the development of the strategy proposal NISMP organized a stakeholder workshop for approximately 30 stakeholders, of which it was intended that half would be from the statutory/support sectors and half would be from the asylum seeker/refugee community. It was acknowledged that securing the hoped for number

of asylum seeker/ refugee participants could be difficult, firstly because the workshop was being held in Oxford Island, some distance from Belfast and secondly because language and other logistical factors made communication less straightforward than with other stakeholders. However, the asylum seeker and refugee participants proved to be extremely proactive in ensuring full attendance at the workshop. They networked to ensure that there would be sufficient numbers represented at the workshop and coordinated with the NISMP secretariat and other attendees to arrange lifts to and from the venue. On production of the first draft of the proposal, two of the asylum seeker/refugee participants met with an NISMP officer to give feedback and further comment.

How this involvement has benefited NISMP

The support of NICRAS and the involvement of participants from the refugee and asylum seeker communities in the production of the strategy proposal undoubtedly resulted in the production of a much richer and cogent document.

Benefits for other communities

The adoption of the proposal for a refugee integration strategy will benefit not just refugees and their families but also the communities into which they are integrating and the wider Northern Ireland economy and society.



Belfast Friendship Club (BFC) provides a safe space in which to form meaningful connections with others, regardless of background or identity. It has welcomed 3000+ people from all walks of life and from all over the world in the five years since it began. On average, 40-60 people from 15+ nationalities attend its weekly meetings in the heart of south Belfast, the most diverse ward in NI. In April and May 2014, we have welcomed at least 73 newcomers.

BFC is a project within South Belfast Roundtable (SBR), a membership organisation that exists to tackle racism and promote diversity. The 85 SBR member organisations are drawn from the statutory, voluntary and community sectors and all work collaboratively to this shared agenda.

Contact: Stephanie Mitchell (BFC coordinator)

Email: stephanie.mitchell@sbrtr.org.uk

Tel: 07548 938508

This work is currently funded by OFMDFM until end of June 2014.

Role of asylum seekers / refugees

Our membership has always prized the key role that asylum seekers and refugees have played in the development of Belfast Friendship Club from the outset. As highly pro-active members and setting a great example to others, their contribution has been invaluable and includes taking responsibility for:

- guiding the development of the club through participation in the steering group
- actively 'hosting' the club on Thursdays (welcoming newcomers and existing members)
- supporting BFC events open to the public (planning / setting up / catering / hosting / clearing up)
- organising and leading events and activities for BFC members (picnics / parties / sports)
- volunteering in support of numerous other organisations including:
 - Site restoration of Ardaluin House, Newcastle, for Belfast Activity Centre
 - Deep cleaning an industrial kitchen for Global Kitchen
 - Painting new premises for Homeplus
 - Refurbishing premises for a Habitat for Humanity shop
 - Outdoor work for Conservation Volunteers
 - Numerous bag packs for other charitable causes
 - Conservation work for Belfast Hills Partnership
 - Kitchen assistance / serving for Common Grounds Cafe
 - Community gardening for City Church Belfast

Small Worlds workshops

More significant than these, however, is the crucial role that many have voluntarily played as 'table hosts' in the Small Worlds workshops that we have delivered across NI since 2009. These café - style events are designed to introduce 'difference' in a safe and carefully facilitated environment and have had a powerful impact in settings across the country ever since to hundreds of people.

Delivered to primary schools, youth groups and community, faith-based organisations, business leaders etc. at all levels, they create the chance to engage personally with those seeking refuge, hear their stories and identify, perhaps for the first time, on a human level with persons who have fled their countries of origin, endured racist abuse or race hate crime and may live impoverished lives of great uncertainty here in our midst.

'Reality came to visit: I had no idea such hardships could be endured' (participant)

Universally, the written feedback confirms that this important work represents a 'wake up call' by dignifying the person behind the superficial 'difference', allowing workshop participants a glimpse into the damage caused by racist remarks, media stereotypes and how Belfast can be seen in a very positive light, compared to other parts the world. This works directly at the interface of attitudinal change and our volunteers play an essential role in carrying it forward. This work is currently funded by OFMDFM until end of June 2014.

'Volunteering as fast track to integration' Stephanie Mitchell, Belfast Friendship Club coordinator

From the viewpoint of trafficked individuals seeking asylum, the opportunity to volunteer can be of immeasurable benefit both to the community and to themselves as in the following case study:

Asylum seekers and victims of trafficking, Tony and Adam, were brought along to BFC by Migrant Help support workers one Thursday evening. As luck would have it, an announcement was made about a volunteering opportunity on the following Saturday to help with the refurbishment of shop premises for Habitat for Humanity in a nearby town. These victims were able to join a large team of others from BFC and contribute their skill and expertise, which was considerable, as well as enjoying the opportunity to feel supported and included by new friends. As a result, they went on to join the work of Conservation Volunteers the following week.

The chief executive of Migrant Help later commented:

'The Belfast Friendship Club is a pretty mind-blowing initiative...an inspiring movement that encourages community cohesion (and so much more) across social class, faith, nationality and ethnicity. Very moving and effective work within a fragile community. The values communicated by this wonderful initiative rippling out into the community are – care, love, tolerance, support, share, celebration – I could go on. They create bonds across many barriers built on respect that have the potential of lasting for life.' Robert McCrea, Chief Executive, Migrant Help

Refugee Week 2014

We will be (a) delivering a Small Worlds event for the Good Relations team of Derry / Londonderry City Council to a community group in the Creggan estate and (b) hosting an event to celebrate the irreplaceable contribution made by those seeking asylum in our midst.

Suffolk & Andersonstown Citizens Advice



RECEIVED
- 30 MAY 2014

208 Andersonstown Road
Belfast
BT11 9EB

FAO
Elisabeth Griffith
Law Centre Belfast
124 Donegal St
Belfast BT1 2GY

Telephone (028) 9062 3594
Facsimile (028) 9062 3594

29th May 2014

To Whom It May Concern

Re: Mr Justin Kouame

I can confirm that I have known Mr Kouame for several years now in my capacity as Advice Co-ordinator in Citizens Advice Belfast. Mr Kouame is a long term volunteer in our North Belfast office.

During my time as Advice Co-ordinator in North Belfast I found Mr Kouame to be a very capable, reliable and trustworthy adviser who worked very hard on behalf of and for the benefit our clients. Many of our clients have benefited from Justin's hard work.

If I can be of further assistance in this matter please do not hesitate to contact me again.

Yours Sincerely

John Curran
Advice Co-ordinator

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Curran".



World United Contacts:-

Reginald Vellem (Chairperson) | email: r.vellem@kainos.com
| Mobile: 078 94239132
Aruna Djalo (Secretary) | email: a.djalo@nicem-interpreting.org.uk
Paul Moffet (Football Manager) | email: Paul.Moffett@dfpni.gov.uk

World United is an inter-cultural football club made up of people from minority ethnic groups including local players from both the Catholic and Protestant communities. It is a voluntary organisation which has been serving minority groups in Northern Ireland for 10 years now through helping them integrate into their local communities. The involvement of Northern Irish players from both Catholic and Protestant communities has helped break down barriers and tackle sectarianism and racism issues, not only in the World United context but also to the various teams and organisations we work with.

As many 100 players from at least 20 different nationalities have come through World United over the years and indeed some of these are refugees and asylum seekers. The involvement of these individuals as World United players has benefitted what World United stands for, a belief in shared space and positive attributes of diversity in local communities. World United, beyond providing “football for all” and championing the “respect” message as in the UEFA Respect campaign, has also rolled out an educational programme based on awareness and tackling racism and sectarianism issues in our communities through conducting workshops with community groups and young people. This work has been carried out in partnership with local authorities, PSNI, IFA, MLAs and schools right through Northern Ireland.

It has been beneficial to have refugees and asylum seekers as speakers at these events, giving a first-hand account of their experiences as people from different backgrounds living in Northern Ireland, relating the challenges faced living here as well as positive experiences of being welcomed in local communities. This contribution has helped build bridges and in-roads in community relations. Feedback received from community groups has shown the positive impact of such interaction and in most cases, these speakers have been invited back to take part and share in other similar programs of a similar nature.

A case study is provided on one individual working with World United.

Reginald is originally from Zimbabwe and arrived in Belfast in 2002. Reginald has been through the asylum process and has since become a British citizen. He has been involved with World United since its inception 10 years ago and is currently serving as the organisation’s Chairperson.

Reginald has done considerable work helping the integration into local communities of new arrivals into Northern Ireland, through the work of World United, something which he has also benefited from being a World United player over the years.

Reginald was one of the group of World United players trained in conducting educational workshops by Show Racism the Red Card charity, a leading UK anti-racism educational charity based in Scotland. Through that training, Reginald, together with other World United players, has led and conducted workshops working with many community groups in different parts of Northern Ireland.

These workshops have proved to be an important aspect of teaching and enabling a sensible understanding of and discussion about people coming to Northern Ireland from their native countries for a variety of reasons including fleeing persecution and unrest. Such interaction with these groups has provided local people with an understanding of the diverse cultures now found in Northern Ireland and allowed a sharing of the benefits and contributions brought by such diversity.

On a personal level, Reginald is a graduate of the University of Ulster, attaining a 1st class pass in a BSc degree and going further to achieve an MSc with the same institution. He is currently in full time employment with a local software company, contributing to the local and wider economy.

Reginald's involvement with the community extends beyond just World United, he has also served on the management committee of NICRAS (Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers), a unique organisation serving the ethnic community in Northern Ireland. He is also part of a local group of Zimbabwean and Northern Irish musicians (the Afresh Band who also conduct music workshops in schools and community groups on international music and cultures. Such work has helped young people and adults alike learn about other countries. This group has helped in local charity fundraising events to support local causes such as homelessness.