

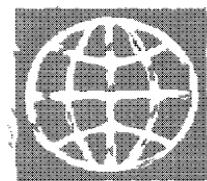
ASP NEWS

No 75

The newsletter for the Asylum Support Partnership April 2008

Welcome to the April Edition of ASP News. This edition features: IAC *Fit For Purpose Yet?* Report, The Vulnerable Iraq Project, SRC's SUNRISE closure, service changes at Migrant Helpline, Cities of Sanctuary, BIA becomes UKBA, Increased Asylum Support Subsistence payments, and BASIS

For further updates asylum support policy and practice changes please visit the following ASP websites: www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/, <http://www.migranthelpline.org.uk/>, <http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/>, <http://www.welshrefugeecouncil.org/>,



**MIGRANT
HELPLINE**

Fit for Purpose Yet? IAC Report

The Independent Asylum Commission (IAC) has produced a 110 page report *Fit For Purpose Yet?*

IAC is conducting a nationwide citizen's review of the UK's Asylum system. They have spent over 18 months gathering evidence and conducting a review of the UK asylum System from beginning to end.

The report's two key conclusions were:

1. The IAC found almost universal acceptance of the principle that there must be an asylum system, and that it must be applied firmly, fairly and humanely. These criteria must be fulfilled for the UK system to be "Fit for Purpose"
2. The IAC found that the UK system is improved and improving, but is not yet fit for purpose. The system still denies sanctuary to some who genuinely need it and ought to be entitled to it; it is not firm enough in returning those whose claims are refused; it is marred by inhumanity in its treatment of the vulnerable.

The IAC commends the effort made by the UKBA to deal with Asylum claims but feels that a "culture of disbelief" still exists among the decision makers.

It also found:

- The treatment of asylum seekers falls below what should be expected
- The detention of asylum seekers is overused
- Some asylum seekers have additional vulnerabilities that are not appropriately addressed

To view the full report please follow this link - <http://www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk/files/Fit%20for%20Purpose%20Yet.pdf>

Migrant Helpline working with UKBA to support Vulnerable Iraqi's

Migrant Helpline is pleased to be working with UK Border Agency to support Iraqi Nationals who have been working for the armed forces.

Migrant Helpline are working very closely with the Home Office and the MoD to develop a reception service that is appropriate for this specific group of people

Migrant Helpline will meet the families upon their arrival in the UK and then bring them to temporary accommodation in the South East

The families will stay with MHL for 2 days during which time they will receive a series of orientation briefings and information about the next stage of their resettlement

MHL is working with the British Red Cross who will be assisting with the reception arrangements

After the groups have rested, MHL will travel with them to their resettlement regions outside of the South East, predominantly to the North of England and Scotland.

MHL will not always be providing an escort. On occasion a representative from the resettlement region will meet the groups and travel with them.

The first group has arrived in the UK under the programme during the second week of April.



**refugee
action**



**REFUGEE
COUNCIL**



**scottish
refugee
council**



Welsh Refugee Council
Cyngror Ffoeduriaid Cymru

Asylum Support
Partnership Team,
The Refugee
Council
240-250 Ferndale
Road
London SW9 8BB

Service Changes within Migrant Helpline.

From 21st April MHL's registered charity address will be:

Charlton House,
Dour Street,
Dover,
CT16 1AT

As of the 1st April 2008 Migrant Helpline's London Offices opening hours are:

Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm

Migrant Helpline Offices are not open at weekends, bank holidays or beyond 5pm

Also from this date Migrant Helpline no longer manages accommodation provider contracts.

In London, the target contract provider is 'Clearsprings'. Any referrals to accommodation will need to be made via the UK Borders Agency (formerly the Border Immigration Agency/BIA).

In London, Migrant Helpline will continue to provide wrap around services including:

- Orientation Briefings
- Completing NASS support applications
- Change of Circumstances
- Referrals/Signposting
- Question and Answer Clinics
- Dispersal Briefings
- Further representations
- Special Needs/Age Disputed Adults referrals
- Sunrise
- Gateway Protection Programme (GPP)

If you have any further queries please contact Migrant helpline or visit their Website:
www.migranthehelpline.org.uk

Scottish Refugee Council's Sunrise Project- Update

The SUNRISE team at SRC are no longer taking on new cases, having exceeded their caseload for the year well in advance.

This has led to a large number of refugees recently granted status seeking advice and assistance from an already critically overstretched One Stop Shop team.

To deal with this demand the Sunrise team have been delivering group seminars providing the essential information required.

The seminars have proved very popular with many booked out weeks in advance. They are also undeniably an effective way of communicating to a number of clients at a time and an efficient use of limited specialist staff resources.

Groups of around 15 clients are addressed by a team of two caseworkers with interpreters present wherever required. The seminars cover critical information such as how to access benefits, the housing options available and advice on utilities. Clients are then referred to Job Centre Plus, Housing Associations and our own OSS team for further assistance. Staff from Job Centre Plus have also observed and participated in a number of these seminars.

National Migration Coordinating Team (NMCT) has been disbanded.

From the 31st March 2008 the NMCT, formerly the National Consortia Support Team (NCST) has been disbanded. This decision was made following the Home Offices decision to cease funding due to the realignment of Home Office funding Streams with regional priorities, and a subsequent inability to secure alternative funding.

The team, which has been functioning for five years has provided key support and advice to the nine English regional Strategic Migration Partnerships, and to those in both Scotland and Wales, coordinating and representing the Regional Migration Partnership Network, formerly the National Consortia Coordinating Group (NCCG), at a national level.

Functions previously undertaken by the Team, including the weekly newsflash and other policy and research briefings, will, where possible, be undertaken by individual Partnerships and will reflect regional issues.

The 'Cities of Sanctuary' movement is growing across the UK

City of Sanctuary is a movement to build a culture of hospitality for asylum-seekers and refugees. Their goal is to create publicly recognised cities of welcome, safety and hospitality for asylum-seekers and refugees throughout the UK.

City of Sanctuary was formed in October 2005 from a meeting between many of the voluntary and faith groups working with asylum-seekers and refugees in the city of Sheffield. They identified the need for a common vision for the city as a whole, and formed the nucleus of a network of supporters that now includes 81 local organisations, including schools, community projects, Community Forums and student groups, as well as most of Sheffield's main faith communities.

In September last year Sheffield became the UK's first official 'City of Sanctuary' for refugees and asylum-seekers, with support from over eighty organisations across the city, including the City Council.

The idea was inspired by the success of the 'Fairtrade Cities' movement, but it is built on the friendships that have grown up between local people and asylum-seekers in Sheffield and many other British cities over recent years.

Becoming a City of Sanctuary means that local people are proud to offer a place of safety to people whose lives are threatened. It also involves a commitment to continue building relationships between local people and asylum-seekers.

Now the idea of Cities of Sanctuary is taking off around the country, with groups in towns and cities from Leeds to Bristol starting their own campaigns for official status.

On 4th June Sheffield will host the first national conference for City of Sanctuary supporters from over a dozen towns and cities, including Leeds, Leicester, Coventry, Oxford, Manchester, Nottingham, Bradford and Bristol.

Organiser Craig Barnett says, "The aim is for people to share their experiences about how local communities can welcome asylum-seekers. Then they can take these ideas back to their own cities and start building their own local City of Sanctuary movements."

For further information about the City of Sanctuary movement, or to book a free conference place contact craig@cityofsanctuary.org or visit www.cityofsanctuary.org

Migrant Helpline - Alternative to Detention (A2D) Pilot - Update

There are currently 3 families accommodated in Ashford, Kent under the Alternative to Detention pilot with another 5 planning to arrive in the week commencing 14th April.

A medical team of 2 doctors and 1 nurse are now also on site four days a week to assist families with medical needs.

Internet access has now been made available to the families to help them stay in touch with friends and family as well as gather information in regards to their asylum claim, or to check on the situation in their own country.

Failed Asylum Seekers are Entitled to Free Healthcare

A high court ruling on the 11th April 2008 ruled that restrictions on NHS healthcare were unlawful.

The court ruled that all failed asylum seekers, until their removal from the UK, should be considered by law to be ordinary residents and entitled to NHS care.

Now this ruling will ensure that all asylum seekers who have cooperated with the Home Office, but cannot yet return home, have a right to be cared for in NHS hospitals.

BIA Becomes UKBA

The UK Border Agency was officially launched on the 3rd April 2008; Border, immigration, customs and visa checks are now united in the country's new UK Border Agency.

On 14th November 2007, the Prime Minister announced the decision to establish a UK Border Agency, a global organisation to improve the UK's security through stronger border protection whilst welcoming legitimate travellers and trade.

The new UK Border Agency is in place to protect the UK's borders, control migration, prevent border tax fraud, smuggling and immigration crime and implement quick and fair decisions.

The 25,000 strong organisation includes more than 9,000 warranted officers operating in local communities, at the border and across 135 countries worldwide, with wide ranging search, seizure and detention powers.

Over the next four months 1,000 frontline staff will be conferred with both immigration and customs powers and staff in England and Wales will be equipped with police-like powers as set out in the UK Borders Act 2007. A full merger will follow new legislation presented to the House in the autumn.

For more information, please visit the UKBA website - <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/aboutus/>

Increased Asylum Support Subsistence Payments from Monday 14th March

The increased Asylum Support subsistence payments reflects an increase in line with the Consumer Price Index for September 2007, the month used by other Government departments in calculating up rating of benefit levels for 2008-09. It will ensure that all those supported receive an inflationary based increase in benefit. The total support package for adults, including accommodation related costs such as utilities, remains commensurate with income support levels.

This year, the Department for Work and Pensions has made significant changes to payments for those under 18 in order to reflect the child tax credit system. UKBA do not consider that, as part of the tax system, child tax credits are a suitable comparator on which to base payments to those supported via the asylum system. However, they want to ensure that children continue to receive an appropriate level of support and have therefore increased payments for those under 18 by the same percentage as adults.

	2008/9
Qualifying couple	£66.13
Lone parent aged 18 or over	£42.16
Single person aged 25 or over	£42.16
Single person aged at least 18 but under 25	£33.39
Person aged at least 16 but under 18 (except a member of a qualifying couple)	£36.29
Person aged under 16	£48.30

Bulletin Board

We would like to welcome John Wilkes as the new Chief Executive of Scottish Refugee Council

John Wilkes, former Director of the Equal Opportunities Commission in Scotland, has been in post as Chief Executive at Scottish refugee Council since the end of March.

John Wilkes has a long and committed career in the field of equality, social justice and human rights. Previous to his work on gender at the Equal Opportunities Commission, John was Scottish Director of Carers UK and served as a member of the Scotland Committee of the Community fund (now the Big Lottery Fund) between 1999 and 2003, he also worked in the field of HIV/AIDS and is a trustee of Stonewall, the UK's leading campaigning organisation for lesbian and gay equality.

Job Centre Plus working closely with Scottish Refugee Council

Scottish Refugee Council staff and clients have benefited enormously from co-operative work with a particular manager at Job Centre Plus (JCP). Ann Russell, Performance & Culture Manager (Scotland) has been critical to a number of innovations that have greatly improved communication between SRC (especially Sunrise staff) and the various offices of Job Centre Plus.

In particular her work was instrumental in arranging for a number of staff from JCP to come to the office of Scottish Refugee Council and shadow Sunrise caseworkers in their interviews with clients. The feedback from these sessions has been extremely positive with JCP staff gaining insight into the range of problems faced by clients recently granted status.

In Scotland a specialist team was created within the JCP system to meet the needs of the large group of clients granted a positive decision through the legacy review.

Following its obvious success, Ann has also argued effectively for this Move On Response Team to remain open until June this year and to expand their remit to include NAM clients.

Basis Website Launch -

<http://www.thebasisproject.org.uk/>

The Basis Project is a new, England-wide service giving one-to-one support to hundreds of refugee community organisations (RCOs) to help them manage, develop and sustain their work.

It is a partnership project led by Refugee Council and Refugee Action, and funded by the Big Lottery Fund. The project is also working closely with funders and other mainstream bodies to increase their understanding of RCOs.

The project will be working with RCOs based in England that are constituted (i.e. have a management committee and a written constitution) and have the time and capacity to work on developing their organisation.

The Refugee Council and its partner Refugee Action have learnt through their work with RCOs that there is a need for capacity building support. They have negotiated five years of funding from BIG to provide the biggest ever service of support in fundraising, project development, financial management and organisational governance to the RCO sector in England.

For further information on the project please visit the website -
<http://www.thebasisproject.org.uk/>

For more up to date news please visit the refugee council's website –
<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/>

Please send articles that you would like to appear in the next edition of ASP News to:

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