

**Empowering Asylum Seekers
Developing Good Practice**

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ASAP – Asylum Seekers’ Active Partnership Work Group 5
Equal Initiative – Asylum Seekers

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Disclaimer
Information about specific countries’ processes and procedures, contained within this publication, were provided by the representative/s from those countries who were involved. We believe that we have taken all measures necessary and within our powers to ensure this accuracy and it is our belief that information contained within this document is correct at the time of publication.

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Part One: Introduction

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Empowering Asylum Seekers Developing Good Practice

The six development partnerships forming the ASAP – Asylum Seekers' Active Partnership – welcome you to discover the ways of developing practice with which we can support the empowerment of asylum seekers.

In the collection to hand we present some of the work procedures where supporting empowerment has taken place in our development partnership within the Equal Initiative Phase Two 2004-2007, Strand 5 working with matters of Asylum Seekers. The writers are workers in partnership organisations of ASAP Partnership and cooperation network in Austria, Finland, Italy, Lithuania, Poland and Scotland, UK. The collection of good practice is a product of the Work Group 5 of the ASAP Partnership; the transnational work for comparing and documenting empowerment work with asylum seekers; which took place from September 2005 to June 2007.

Who Is It for?

With the contributions in this collection we would like to inspire all professionals and volunteers who meet asylum seekers in their work to explore the possibilities of supporting empowerment. We hope that the material will be interesting for a variety of professionals working in education, reception and services for asylum seekers and refugees and in various non-governmental organisations occupied with support services and development projects.

We hope to bring food for thought for people who already work with asylum seekers, as well as encourage the organisations that are in the stage of planning to start activities for this group. The material can be helpful for someone who is starting work with asylum seekers' groups, but the best use of it can probably be made if there is a possibility of work with the material in cooperation with workers who already have experience in this work. The collection can provide ideas for individuals. We particularly recommend it to be used in the work place.

What is there in the Material?

In Section 1 'Introduction' you will find facts about asylum seekers and reception procedures in the countries of the ASAP Partnership: Austria, Finland, Italy, Lithuania, Poland and Scotland, UK. The situation of asylum seekers is sometimes confused with that of refugees or immigrants. We feel that appropriate information is the starting point for anyone in planning activities for asylum seekers. In Section 1, you will also find a short introduction on the work practices of the organisations from whence have been gathered case studies in the publication. The ASAP Partnership organisations represent a variety of non-governmental organisations, reception centres run by the state, municipality or Red Cross (in Finland) and adult education organisations of liberal adult education.

In the Section 2 ‘What Is Empowerment?’ we would like to make you come up with your own definition of what you think empowerment is in the practical work in your own field. It is not the intention to offer an exhaustive theory on the subject. Nevertheless we encourage you to re-examine your basic assumptions about working with asylum seekers. You will find material that can be used individually for reflection, at the work place, or in the training of staff and volunteers. The articles on the various approaches present ideas that have been found successful in empowerment work; mainly activating methods and socio-cultural animation.

We have reported examples that can serve as inspiration for empowerment work in Section 3 ‘At Work with Asylum Seekers’. In the case studies we have made an effort to give detailed descriptions in order to give the readers concrete ideas on empowerment work. We have also asked the workers leading the activities to talk about their experiences and to evaluate them. You will find their views presented in interviews in both Sections 2 and 3.

In Section 4 we have gathered some descriptions of activities that can be used in groups of asylum seekers. The activities can help you to design a structure for the group meetings, emphasizing factors that we have found important for taking into account with asylum seeker groups: how to start up a group, how to work for a trusting and creative atmosphere, how to support the self confidence of participants, or how to evaluate the group work. These activities can be of help whatever the theme of your work might be.

In the Glossary you will find central terms that call for explanation and elucidation. There are differences in how the terms are used in the ASAP partner countries and in how they are used in different work procedures. It is important that we use the terms that are appropriate and not offensive.

Who Can

Empower Asylum Seekers?

The Case Studies in the collection reflect the idea that asylum seekers cannot be empowered by anyone else but themselves. In one way or another, the objective of the activities has been to create forums where asylum seekers can come together, interact, gain and update their skills when taking their life in their own hands. This is not a simple task in a life situation where the future is uncertain and where you do not have many ways to influence decisions that are made about your life by the authorities. You do not know if you are allowed to start building your life again in the country where you have asked for asylum. Asylum seekers need help to see that there are possibilities for maintaining hope and remaining an active person. This assistance and support can be offered in many contexts where asylum seekers are met, or could be met.

The importance of group support is reflected in many of the Case Studies and interviews. Empowerment is by nature something that includes participation in a community and cannot easily be achieved on your own. Therefore it is important that we work for bringing people together, for building communication channels and for developing social skills.

Within the work of development partnerships of Equal Initiative in the ASAP cooperation, asylum seekers have been mostly working in groups of their own on courses and in other activities. Yet it has been one of the objectives to promote the links for asylum seekers with their neighbourhood and the surrounding society. Also, within asylum seekers there are many groups for whom activities have been organised, like women’s groups or language groups.

The workers who can work for empowerment of asylum seekers need support as well. In the Case Studies and interviews you can read about workers who have found that an objective of

empowering the group with whom you work makes the work meaningful. This also applies to experiments with activating methods that have supported both asylum seekers and the workers. These experiences are very important. It is not unusual for people working with asylum seekers and refugees to become overwhelmed and feel helpless in the face of the many human tragedies they observe. With the accounts in this collection, we want to suggest that there is a level where we can support the empowerment of people in all kinds of scenarios.

Start from the Life Experience of Asylum Seekers

There are many asylum seekers who keep their active quality despite the life situations that would sink most of us into passivity. They are an important resource. The ones who are not that resourceful need support. We would like to point out that it is quite natural to become depressed because of the personal crises and still not lose all of your human qualities. We must see that the experience of fleeing for your life, losing your home, relatives and friends together with your roles and statuses in the society is bound to deprive you of hope, motivation and even many of the basic skills – but crisis and suffering is not everything there is in an asylum seeker.

When people develop their basic skills, their capacity for active participation and empowerment anew when they are adults and in a new society, they have complex structures of life to learn. Nevertheless, we are suggesting that brushing up and learning new basic skills can be a way of becoming empowered. Learning raises self confidence and can help you to adapt to a new, active role.

Let us put aside the iceberg model suggesting that there can only be participation and empowerment at the ‘top of the ladder’, when all other needs in life have been fulfilled. Working with asylum seekers, we can assume that they have

a lot of experience of life and hardships that they have learnt in order to survive. We need to think how we can take as a point of departure: an experience from their life, or skills that they already have. We can start by supporting their existing interests and skills and building on them.

You are Walking Along on the Path to Empowerment

We hope that this collection will inspire and provoke you to reflect upon your role in the work that asylum seekers are doing to become empowered. You cannot build empowerment for anyone else but yourself, but you can assist and support in the empowerment process of others. What does this mean in practice? Think of the following points in your work:

- **Where and from whom do the objectives of work originate?**
- **How can you set objectives and plan activities in cooperation with asylum seekers?**
- **What skills and support do asylum seekers need to be able to get in touch with their own selves and their own objectives?**
- **How can you ensure that it is the asylum seeker who is working with the process, with you assisting and not vice versa?**

The work for empowerment did not start when you met your clients/learners and it will not end when they leave you. You can see your work as one moment on the long path. It is important to notice and make visible the small steps in moments of encounter. This is really important for both

asylum seeker and worker. Through different kinds of life and work pressures we can easily forget the small differences we have made. However, we need to remember them to remain motivated.

We sincerely hope that in this collection, you will find ideas for new developments and for making your existing work visible. Let us earnestly hope, that in reading this collection, you keep in the background the question of how to describe the process of learning and change in a clear format. This is so that the process can be validated, evaluated and guided by the asylum seekers themselves: as well as by other people who will continue the work with them.

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ASAP Transnational Partnership

ASAP (Asylum Seekers Active Partnership) is a partnership of six countries working together to find common routes to assist the integration of asylum seekers in Europe. We came together in Round 2 of EQUAL finding common cause in what we were trying to achieve in our national DPs and what we could achieve together transnationally.

We are :

Austria (InPower)
Finland (Becoming More Visible)
Italy (Integra 2004)
Lithuania (In Corpore)
Poland (MUR)
Scotland (ATLAS)

Our aim is to optimize the integration of asylum seekers in our countries. We identified five major areas where we felt development needed to happen and these areas became our core workgroups. They are :

Positive Images: to promote the positive portrayal of asylum seekers in our countries and focus on the enriching contribution that asylum seekers make, through sharing good practice activities

Qualifications: to produce guidelines for developing qualifications to build the capabilities of those working with asylum seekers across the EU

Website: to share information and best practice in working with asylum seekers across the six countries in the partnership

Empowerment: to produce materials to support the empowerment of asylum seekers

Legal and policy: to collate information on the legal aspects of the asylum system across the six EU countries in the partnership

We also produced on-going information materials which acted as progress reports and helped to showcase our national as well as our transnational work. Transnational staff exchanges have been a major feature of our partnership, where staff working with asylum seekers in each of the six countries have been encouraged and assisted to visit different countries to observe and learn from the work taking place.

As a large partnership it took us some time to establish means and procedures to enable us to work productively together but we feel now that we have established a true ‘active partnership’. Our collaboration has produced some innovative results which will be valuable for asylum seekers, those working with them and those making policy. We hope that the products we have created together sharing knowledge, ideas and best practice, will be incorporated into mainstream policies and help the integration of asylum seekers in all member states.

The EQUAL Initiative

The EQUAL initiative is a laboratory for new ideas to the European Employment Strategy and the Social inclusion process. Its mission is to promote a more inclusive work life through fighting discrimination and exclusion based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. EQUAL is implemented in and between Member States and is funded through the European Social Fund.

The process of sharing information and exploiting the results of innovation takes place at project level, via Transnational co-operation partnerships, at regional level and/or at national level via national thematic networks and at European level via several thematic activities.

At national level, many networks are established in order to bring together, discuss and evaluate the most promising practices and outcomes of the Development Partnerships work, and to prepare their dissemination and integration into policies and practice. These networks are gathering Development Partnerships as well as other actors from outside the Initiative (political decision-makers, researchers, associations, social partners) through a variety of means. At European level the objectives are identical. There are around 3.300 EQUAL Development Partnerships.

The activities on Asylum Seekers aim to play a role in the identification and dissemination of good practice and policy lessons to help asylum seekers integrate into society. The asylum seekers theme is closely linked to EU policy on the Common European Asylum Policy (CEAP) being taken forward by DG Freedom, Security and Justice, a policy which goes beyond Employment and Social Affairs. Activities within the theme address a diverse target group living within changing policy and legislative contexts that vary between Member States.

Source: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/index_en.cfm

The European Thematic Activities are clustered around five fields: Employability, Entrepreneurship, Adaptability, Equal Opportunities and Asylum Seekers.



Photo: Tuomo Heikkinen

Where can we support empowerment?

Empowerment can be supported everywhere we work with asylum seekers. The partners in ASAP (Asylum Seekers' Active Partnership) come from various fields of social work, education and non-governmental organization, where empowerment of asylum seekers has been supported from many different standpoints.



A Shelter for Asylum Seekers in Austria

In Austria there are three main Reception Centres located in two border Communities: Traiskirchen and Thalham and at Vienna airport. They are considered transit centres. After an initial screening phase in the reception centres, (in which the asylum seekers' eligibility for entering the asylum process is assessed in a process which takes no longer than three weeks), the asylum seekers are transferred from the reception centres to refugee shelters in the nine provinces of Austria.

Many centres are in remote areas in the countryside, but there are also a number of them which are integrated into urban environments. Most refugee shelters are run by church organizations such as *Caritas* and *Diakonie*, but there are also

privately run refugee shelters. In either case the provisions for asylum seekers are standardized under the *Grundversorgung*, an act which regulates care standards and provisions for asylum seekers:

- **Housing in the shelter**
- **Food or equivalent allowance for food**
- **Access to medical health care**
- **Pocket money for extra expenses**
- **Counselling**

Regional counsellors help in providing support measures and are an interface in organising children's school attendance, access to German courses, contacts with public authorities and offices. The social contacts and the humanitarian aspects of the counselling are equally important.

Social Help and Relief agencies such as OMEGA- Health Care Centre play an important role in the care of refugees and asylum seekers. Providing mobile, on-the-spot community health care to support asylum seekers and also their care givers in the shelters is one example of the role and involvement of NGOs. There are psycho-social support measures for families and study activities for children and adults. They provide counselling and information on many aspects of the integration process from legal aspects to psychotherapy for traumatised victims of violence. This summarises the picture of further support measures provided by Social Help and Relief agencies.

Asylum seekers in Austria are not obligated to take part in any activities offered to them: participation is voluntary. Most asylum seekers do welcome the offers and are active in pursuing their own integration process. The law does not encourage asylum seekers to work. In fact, it is made nearly impossible to get a work permit. However, there is the possibility of taking on small jobs within the shelters, such as cleaning, cooking, caretaker's jobs etc and get some reimbursement for it.



Integration of Asylum Seekers in Lithuania

Successful integration of refugee and asylum seekers to the country of reception mostly indicates that people escaping disastrous conditions in their native country and often being wounded physically and psychologically regain ability and power to swimmingly function in new surroundings.

Integration of asylum seekers to the Lithuanian society is closely related to the system of granting asylum in Lithuania. Integration takes three level procedure: pre-integration stage, preparatory stage for integration, and integration stage. If a person (or family) can get successfully through this formal system of integration, such procedure can be treated as promising opportunity for an individual and a family to re-establish their personal life.

Pre-integration stage continues from 48 hours up to 6 months in Pabrade Registration Center, while decision on a legal status of asylum seeker is made by the Migration Department. During this period, foreigners get only limited services to assist basic human needs: meal, temporary residence and other necessary conditions to prevent person's dignity. Although asylum seekers are provided safety and basic services, they do not feel comfortable in their new surroundings in Pabrade for one reason, seriously treated by them – militaristic environment awakening their fears of war:

All asylum seekers first are refered to Pabrade. Here they can stay for half a year. Workers are dressed in military uniform. I don't like and am afraid of warlike, military colours... After this stage, the integration can be continued anywhere in Lithuania.

[Chechenyan woman, 47].

In Pabrade, asylum seekers also get basic information about their future possibilities of living in Lithuania.

Preparatory stage for integration starts at the Refugees' reception center in Rukla and it might be continued for 6 months. In Rukla reception center refugees are provided with shelter, basic means of living, basic health care, and finances for food and small expenses (aprox. 50 euros per month). Additionally, residents get professional orientation, consultations on legal matters, Lithuanian history classes, and Lithuanian language courses (up to 190 hours). In 2005, additional consultations of psychologist were added. Former resident of Rukla reception center remembers:

There, in Rukla they treated us nicely. There was a psychologist, but she didn't work with us at that time as they didn't have a special project to provide psychological help to asylum seekers.

[Chechenyan woman, 47]

Integration stage: Those who are granted refugee and subsidiary protection status become involved into municipal integration program requiring that a foreign person should prove his/her ability of successful integration (living on their own and being employed) in 18 months period. Participating in the integration process persons should declare their financial and property situation. Lithuanian government provides financial assistance for integration, if one family member gets less than approx. 40 € per month. During integration period, government covers apartment rent, provides single settlement allowance, and every person gets approx. 40 € per month for basic expenses. Lithuanian language courses, qualification orientation services, and help with employment

is continuously provided and supported. Children can go to school and day care services during this period.

Social services offered by Lithuanian government are organized and provided on the formal municipal and non-governmental level. Several municipalities in Lithuanian cities cooperate with Lithuanian Caritas, Lithuanian Red Cross in Kaunas, Kaunas Women's employment information centre, Eupro and other organizations. In Part Three, "At Work With Asylum Seekers", you will find descriptions of two successful examples of Women's employment centre and an established Day Center by the Red Cross.





Reception Centres and NGO's in cooperation in Poland

Asylum seekers in Poland are provided with accommodation facilities in *reception centres* for the duration of the asylum procedure. The centres are coordinated and managed by the Bureau of Organisation of Centres for Aliens Applying for Refugee Status or Asylum BOO. The Bureau is controlled by the President of the Office for Repatriation and Aliens. In Poland, there are 18 reception centres. Three of them are located in Warsaw; others are outside of Warsaw. In December 2006, 3547 asylum seekers were living in reception centres. Three reception centres are owned by the Bureau. Fourteen reception centres are rented. BOO is responsible for granting social assistance to asylum seekers and is in charge of unaccompanied minors.

The staff that manages and coordinates reception centres are officials employed by the Office for Repatriation and Aliens. On the one hand, as civil servants, they are responsible for administration work. On the other hand, they are responsible for providing advice in the capacity of social workers. They are obligated to fulfil two different professional requirements which are contradictory, to some extent.

Additionally, asylum seekers in reception centres are provided with assistance organised by governmental, non-governmental, and international organisations.

The above mentioned organisations provide legal, psychological, social, pre-integration and voluntary return assistance: mainly within the framework of ERF and EQUAL projects co-financed by the European Commission. MUR Partnership 'You can learn how to understand' offers asylum seekers pre-integration activities, such as lessons on refugee and Polish law, integration clubs run by Polish Humanitarian Organization offering quasi-professional activities, Polish language and Polish studies lessons. Additionally, within the framework of the Partnership, IOM is carrying out skills audit in order to assess the skills, professional qualifications, experience and interests of asylum seekers in Poland. IOM will also collect information that could be used as an indicator for preparing pre-integration programme for asylum seekers, integration programme for refugees and persons granted tolerated status, and reintegration programme for asylum seekers who are returning to their country of origin.

- International Organization for Migration
- UNHCR
- Regional Family Support Centre
- Polish Humanitarian Organization
- Caritas of Warsaw Archdiocese
- Caritas of Lublin Archdiocese
- Caritas of Bialystok Archdiocese

- Human Rights Helsinki Foundation
- One World'Association
- Polish Red Cross
- Association of Legal Intervention
- Muslim Union
- Legal Clinic of Warsaw University



NGO network support asylum seekers in Scotland

Scotland does not have reception centres. Living accommodation is provided in the form of private housing for families (usually apartments) and occasionally shared accommodation for single people. Unaccompanied minors are usually provided for in communal living quarters supported by social workers. Scotland has one detention centre where asylum seekers can be detained at any point during their claim and before being deported.

Drop-in centres for asylum seekers are provided by churches and occasionally community housing associations as well as charitable organisations and NGOs. They provide a meeting place to socialise (often with a creche run by volunteers) and may also deliver community learning classes such as sewing and language tuition. Drop-in centres can act as an information hub signposting asylum seekers who attend to other statutory and non-profit services available throughout the city e.g. women's groups, befriending services, volunteering opportunities and cultural activities. An extensive network of NGOs has developed in the city of Glasgow supporting asylum seekers to access legal advice, health and social welfare services and to engage in community projects. Some of the most innovative projects have trained asylum seekers to assist in their delivery, for example, the Citizens Advice Bureau, the Gorbals Initiative Peer Advocacy Project and the British Red Cross' Orientation Service.

**For more information on these
and other projects look at:**

Asylum Matters for Scotland Conference Report
Learning from the ATLAS Partnership conference
15th June 2005
www.ATLAS-scotland.co.uk



The Reception Centres in Finland

There are thirteen reception centres in Finland, providing asylum seekers with:

- **Housing in the centre or in municipal flats**
- **living allowance**
- **medical examinations and necessary health care**
- **guidance in processes of asylum seeking and legal counselling**
- **Finnish or Swedish language courses**
- **organizing children's school attendance**
- **support measures for families**
- **work and study activities for adults**
- **counselling and information on the Finnish society**
- **other required support measures**

Most reception centres in Finland organize work and study activities that are partly the duties of the resident in the centre and partly form the supporting measures for maintaining a reasonable level of activity. Language classes are organized in each centre. Some centres offer workshops of carpentry and textile work, outings, games and gymnastics. Work activities mean either the maintenance work in the centre – like cleaning, cooking, caretaker's jobs etc – or a job outside. In Finland, the asylum seekers are entitled to work without an additional work permit after they have spent three months in the country.



A reception centre in Ruukki, Northern-Finland.
Photo: Tuomo Heikkinen

Reception centres work in cooperation with national non-governmental organisations such as Finnish Refugee Council and The Refugee Advice Centre. Each centre uses a local network of municipal services and local NGO's offering support services for asylum seekers. There is also a variety of educational organisations offering opportunities for studies. Adult education centres have been cooperation partners of the Finnish Equal DP working with asylum seekers, the Becoming More Visible project.

Adult education centres in Finland

offer non-formal, liberal education meaning that the studies do not lead to an academic or vocational degree. People participate on their own initiative.

There are over 230 adult education centres in Finland. The courses are open for everyone; people of all ages, with all educational and professional backgrounds. Forty per cent of the course offer consists of arts and crafts, and the next biggest areas are music (17 %), foreign languages (17%) and subjects like personal development, citizenship, ICT skills (16%) and physical education and health care (10%). The adult education centre is usually owned by the municipality. The work is funded by the state (53 %), the municipality (28 %) and student fees (15 %).

The learner's own responsibility, goals and role as a self-directed learner are emphasized in the learning. Attracting new groups of learners like immigrants and asylum seekers is an important challenge that the adult education centres are facing. There are many more groups in Finland who do not participate in learning in an adult education centre. Most learners are Finnish women who have good educational backgrounds.

There are advantages that an adult education centre has to offer relevant studies for asylum seekers, as well as for many other marginalized groups of people.

▪ **Flexibility in curriculum; the programme of activities can be tailored for the learners.**

▪ **Access; there are adult education centres all over Finland, even in the rural areas. In cities, the centres have outreach classes in suburbs, bringing learning close to people.**

▪ **Facilitators: adult education centres have always been multicultural work communities and can also employ assistant teachers from the immigrant and asylum seekers' communities**

Asylum Seekers and Refugees

A refugee is a person who 'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country...'

The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees

According to estimates made by the UNHCR, there are approximately 20.8 million people in the world today who have been forced to flee from their homes. The majority of them have sought refuge in areas close to their home country, but some have gone further afield.

An asylum seeker is a person who asks for protection from and right of residence in a foreign country. People apply for asylum for many different reasons, including persecution experienced in the home country due to political opinion or bad living conditions, such as poverty, war, terrorism and environmental disasters. An asylum seeker is granted refugee status if he/she has evidence that proves he/she has reasonable cause to fear persecution.

A 'Quota' refugee is a person whom UNHCR has granted refugee status and who has been granted an entry permit within the budgeted limit of the refugee quota.

Asylum seekers

At the beginning of 2006, there were some 773,500 asylum seekers whose individual claims had not yet been adjudicated – including some of the 668,400 people who made asylum applications during 2005. The largest numbers of claims were filed by nationals of Myanmar, Somalia and Serbia and Montenegro. More than half of the new applications were lodged in Europe.

PERSONS OF CONCERN TO UNHCR -		2006
Region		Total
Refugees	8,400,000	
Asylum seekers	773,500	
Internally displaced	6,600,000	
Returned refugees and IDP's	1,600,000	
Stateless people	2,400,000	
Others	960,400	
		Source: UNHCR

Over the last half century, several million people have been granted asylum worldwide, but in recent years the number of claims has been dropping steadily. Asylum applications in a grouping of 50 industrialized countries, for example, fell sharply for the fourth year in a row in 2005, reaching their lowest level in almost two decades.

PERSONS OF CONCERN TO UNHCR - BY REGION		
Region	1 Jan 2005	1 Jan 2006
Asia	7,230,100	8,603,600
Africa	4,855,200	5,169,300
Europe	4,426,400	3,666,700
Latin America &	2,070,800	2,513,000
Caribbean	853,300	716,800
North America	82,600	82,500
Oceania		
TOTAL	19,518,400	20,751,900

Asylum in ASAP Countries

On the following pages you will find information on the asylum seeking process and conditions of asylum seekers in the countries that have been represented in the ASAP – Asylum Seekers' Active Partnership : Austria, Finland, Italy, Lithuania, Poland and Scotland, UK.

Asylum Seekers in Austria

1. How many asylum seekers come to Austria each year?

2004 total of 24.634 applications. 2005 total of 22.461 applications- equals a decline of 8,82%. This trend is continuing because of stricter asylum laws: in January 2006 there were 1302 applications for asylum, as opposed to 1352 applications in January of 2005.

Source: <http://www.bmi.gv.at/publikationen/>

2. From which countries do they come?

The rest is either negative or not yet decided (as of February 2006). The figures show that refugees from the countries of the Russian Federation (mainly Chechen people) and Afghanistan had and still have the highest chances for positive decisions on their asylum applications.

Source: <http://www.bmi.gv.at/publikationen/>

3. What kind of financial or other living support is given to asylum seekers in Austria?

The support asylum seekers receive includes: accommodation, food or equivalent allowance for food, pocket money (€ 40, only at organised accommodation), health insurance plus costs for medical expenses not covered by health insurance, free transport for pupils, material for school, clothing contribution, travel costs for getting to appointments at public authorities, some leisure activities in organized accommodations, support and travel costs for voluntarily return and psychosocial care.

4. What kind of accommodation does Austria provide for asylum seekers?

Housing in reception centres during the first screening phase, then refugee shelters (Caritas run or private) and occasionally private accommodation for the duration of the asylum procedure.

5. What kind of healthcare does Austria provide for asylum seekers?

Asylum seekers are health insured by the state (Federal Government or provincial government) equally to Austrian citizens. Necessary medical services not covered by the public health insurance are granted after review of the individual cases. (Basic Welfare Support Agreement).

6. Do asylum seekers have access to the education system in Austria?

Yes. In Austria there is compulsory schooling for children between 6 and 15 years independent of status and language knowledge. According to the Basic Welfare Support Agreement which regulates the provisions for asylum seekers, the government takes over the costs for transportation to schools and material for school. (200 € per child per year for material and school activities.) Usually children are successfully placed in an Austrian school. There are some difficulties in placing them in the appropriate grade and level.

7. What proportion of asylum seekers are granted asylum in Austria?

45 % of accepted applications were answered positively. On average, 25% of all applications are answered positively.

Top ten countries are:	Nr. Of Applications in 2005:	Nr. Of Positive Decisions
Serbia	4403.	470
Russian Federation	4355	2467
India	1530	1
Moldavia	1210	7
Turkey	1064	71
Georgia	954	59
Afghanistan	923	538
Nigeria	880	7
Mongolia	640	3
Bangladesh	548	0

Source: http://www.asyl.at/fakten_8/stat_2006_01.htm

8. Are there different kinds of status granted?

- **Asylum, convention status**
- **Residence permit, temporarily unable to return because of the situation in the country of origin (non-Refoulement)**
- **Residence permit, individual humanitarian reason**

9. What happens to asylum seekers who are refused the right to stay?

After the first decision in the normal procedure, the asylum seeker has a right to appeal to the Federal Asylum Review Board and after a negative decision to the Supreme Administrative Court. If the court's decision is negative again, the temporary residence permit is revoked. The asylum seekers are asked to leave the country. If they fail to do so they can be taken to deportation prisons and be deported.

10. What is the asylum process in Austria?

a.) Application

The applicant has to express the intention to apply for asylum to a member of the police force /police authority. The applicant is taken to one of the reception centres and can apply for asylum.

b.) Admission procedure

In the admission procedure the asylum seeker is accommodated in one of the reception centres. The admission procedures consist of two interviews, in which the eligibility of the application to the regular asylum procedure is checked i.e. reasons and grounds for flight as well as responsibility of Austria. Further components are: a health check, a luggage check, the taking of finger

prints and comparison of data in EU-databases to check the applicant's particulars regarding identity.

In a positive case the application is submitted to the regular asylum procedure and the applicant is transferred to a shelter in one of Austria's nine provinces. They are taken care of under the Basic Welfare Support Agreement for the duration of the procedure.

A negative decision from the admission procedure leads to immediate deportation.

c.) Regular Asylum Procedure

The regular asylum procedure is composed of two levels of jurisdiction: The Federal Asylum Office (BAA, 1. level) and the Federal Asylum Review Board (UBAS, 2. level).

In a first questioning by the Federal Asylum Office: reasons and grounds for leaving the home country, the flight route and the exposed dangers in the home country are heard and analysed. After the background of the case is sufficiently checked and cleared, a decision is reached:

Positive: Acknowledgement as a refugee under the Geneva Refugee Convention with entitlement to all rights and provisions under the Convention.

Negative: Refusal of refugee status, revocation of residence permit, or Subsidiary Protection permit with limited right to stay (§8), if a deportation to the home country is not possible or not ethically justifiable (e.g. in case of war).

d.) Decision

Positive: Acknowledgement as a refugee under the Geneva Refugee Convention gives entitlement to all rights and provisions under the Convention.

Negative: Refusal of refugee status, revocation of residence permit.

Subsidiary protection: Permit with limited right to stay (§8) if a deportation to the home country is not possible or not ethically justifiable (e.g. in case of war).

e.) Appeal

Appeal is possible within a period of two weeks after the first decision. The case is then reviewed by the Federal Asylum Review Board (UBAS, 2. level). A second decision is reached, which in the case of it being negative, can be appealed one more time. The case is then considered by the third and last possible level, the Supreme Administrative Court. Its decision is final and mandatory.

Asylum Seekers in Lithuania

1. How many asylum seekers come to Lithuania each year?

The Lithuanian population is approximately 3 400 000 inhabitants.

Number of Applications for Asylum Accepted in Lithuania							
Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Number of asylum applications	425	546	644	458	410	459	47

Source: http://www.migracija.lt/MDEN/stat_ben.htm

2. Which countries do they come from?

According to the country of origin, asylum seekers come to Lithuania mostly from Chechnya (Lithuanian statistics indicate Chechens as being of Russian nationality). They also come from Afghanistan, Iraqi, Pakistan, Somali, Belarus, and various other countries. The majority of these asylum seekers are Chechens: mostly men with women and children or widowed women with children. There are also cases when unaccompanied minors arrive. Most asylum seekers are Muslims.

3. What kind of financial or other living support is given to asylum seekers in Lithuania?

Support is provided for state language classes, education, employment, accommodation, social security, health insurance, and child day care. Support for the foreigners who

have been granted refugees status and foreigners who have been granted subsidiary protection is commenced in the Refugees Reception Centre.

During the support in the Centre foreigners get allowance for food and other means (necessary clothes, items for personal hygiene, house wares): Bachelors or unaccompanied minors get approx. 50 € per person; spouse/child – 45 € per person.

The resources for the institutions implementing integration of foreigners granted asylum is provided according to different needs for different means: one-off settlement allowance (approx. to 1000 € per spouse or up to 400 € for a single person); rent and heating of the accommodation, cold and hot water, gas, electricity, other utilities; allowance for necessary needs, Lithuanian language training, allowance for school equipment, support for pre-school children education in the kindergarten, allowance for children under 3 years old, (if they don't attend kindergarten), health insurance, support for the integration administration and other means of integration.

4. What kind of accommodation does Lithuania provide for asylum seekers?

State support for integration into the municipality is provided until twelve months since the departure of the foreigners granted asylum from the Refugee Reception Centre, but not longer than the expiry of permission for living in the Republic of Lithuania or until departure from the Republic of Lithuania.

For the first six months the asylum seeker lives in the Refugees Reception Centre until accommodation is found in the territory of municipality. Whilst living in this centre, a resident is provided with clothes, footwear, bedclothes and personal hygiene items. Residential premises are equipped with most basic furniture. The Refugee Reception Centre organises the move to residential premises in municipal territory and the transit of the asylum seeker's belongings.

5. What kind of healthcare does

Lithuania provide for asylum seekers?

Health insurance provided by the Lithuanian government allows asylum seekers to use universal and necessary health services.

6. Do asylum seekers have access to the education system in Lithuania?

The refugee reception centre offers language and computer classes and day care for children. Attendance of Lithuanian language classes is compulsory. If an asylum seeker living at the reception centre repeatedly refuses participation in training activities without justified cause, they may lose part of their social support. An asylum seeker who intends to work must obtain a work permit in the Republic of Lithuania.

http://www.migracija.lt/MDEN/asylum/trumpai_engl.htm

7. What proportion of asylum seekers are granted asylum in Lithuania?

In 2006, there were twelve granted asylums under Geneva Convention, mostly to Russian nationality (nine Chechens) and to three Belarusians. Subsidiary protection was granted to 385 asylum seekers, mostly from Chechnya (343) and Afghanistan (23). Terminated cases also indicate Chechen asylum seekers (10).

8. Are there different kinds of status granted in Lithuania?

The forms of asylum granted in the Republic of Lithuania according to the procedure established by this Law and other legal acts are as follows:

- 1) **refugee status;**
- 2) **subsidiary protection;**
- 3) **temporary protection.**

9. What happens to asylum seekers who are refused the right to stay in Lithuania?

The decision on the granting or refusal of refugee status is taken by the Migration Department in Lithuania. People, who cannot gain temporary territorial asylum or who were denied refugee status, must leave the country.

If an asylum seeker's temporary residence permit is revoked, temporary residence permits of the asylum seeker's family members, living under their roof are also revoked: except in cases where they are entitled to reside in the Republic of Lithuania on other grounds established by the Law. Started in mid-1990s, the Lithuanian IOM return program offers migrants the possibility and means (75 € to return to their home country safely: if they agree to do so voluntarily.

Number of Granted Refugee Status in the Republic of Lithuania, by Nationality

Nationality	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Afghan	3				
Russian (Chechen)		1	2	12	15
Ukrainian			1		
Total	3	1	3	12	15

http://www.migracija.lt/MDEN/stat_ben.htm

10. What is the asylum process in Lithuania?

Refugee status shall be granted to the asylum applicant who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of their nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of their former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it, unless there are conditions specified in the Law.

In Lithuania subsidiary protection is granted to an asylum seeker who does not qualify as a refugee but who can not return to his/her country of origin because of the fear of torture, inhuman treatment; or serious danger to his/her basic rights or fundamental freedoms will arise because of the prevailing violence in that country, a military conflict or other situation that causes systematic violations of human rights.

http://www.migracija.lt/MDEN/asylum/trumpai_engl.htm

Granting Asylum in the Republic of Lithuania

Year	Geneva Convention status granted	Subsidiary protection granted	Rejection of application for asylum	Examination of application terminated
1997	6	-	53	-
1998	28	-	116	108
1999	11	-	171	104
2000	15	80	113	200
2001	3	266	58	97
2002	1	287	37	55
2003	3	485	56	230
2004	12	407	50	91
2005	15	328	30	7
2006	12	385	29	
Total	94	1853	684	892

Asylum Seekers in Finland

1. How many asylum seekers come to Finland each year?

A total of 2,316 persons sought asylum in Finland in 2006 (3,574 in 2005). Proportionally to the year 2005 the amount has decreased by 35 %.

2. From which countries do they come?

Most asylum seekers come from

- **Bulgaria**
- **Iraq**
- **Serbia and Montenegro**
- **Russia**
- **Belarus**
- **Afghanistan**
- **Somalia**

Nowadays, most of the asylum seekers are single men. Families, which used to be a major part of the AS, currently do not end up in Finland.

3. What kind of financial or other support for living is given to asylum seekers in Finland?

Basic services for the period during which the asylum application is being handled are arranged for the asylum seekers in the reception centre where they are registered. Asylum seekers are entitled to a living allowance, which is intended to cover all living expenses including food and clothing. It does not cover accommodation, which is provided free of charge in the reception centres. Asylum seekers are not entitled to child benefits or any other social benefits. If necessary, legal aid and interpretation services are provided in connection with the handling of the asylum application.

4. What kind of accommodation does Finland provide for asylum seekers?

After having submitted an application, the asylum seeker will be accommodated by the authorities in a reception centre. There are thirteen asylum seekers' reception centres in different parts of Finland. Centres are run either by the local municipalities, the state, or by the Finnish Red Cross. Asylum seekers can also be privately accommodated outside the centre. In such a case, the costs of living are not covered.

In connection with the reception centres, there are group homes, which accommodate unaccompanied minor asylum seekers. Asylum seekers, and other foreigners who have been taken into custody on the basis of the Aliens Act, are placed in a custody unit.

5. What kind of health care does Finland provide for asylum seekers?

Upon their arrival, all asylum seekers undergo a basic health screening. They have access to municipal health care – and in special cases also to private care if they require urgent medical treatments or essential dental treatment. These services are free of charge. Some of the centres have a resident nurse. Asylum seekers in need of urgent treatment due to torture may also go to Helsinki to the special Rehabilitation Centre for Victims of Torture.

6. Do asylum seekers have access to the education system in Finland?

Reception centres offer language courses in either Finnish or Swedish. Attendance is not compulsory. However, an asylum seeker who lives in a reception centre and repeatedly refuses

to join training activities without justified reasons may lose part of their benefits.

Children of asylum seekers are entitled to attend Finnish comprehensive school. In many schools, children are enrolled in special preparatory classes for foreign children where they are first taught Finnish or Swedish before going into a normal school class. Adult asylum seekers are also free to apply for a place in any school, institute or university. It is up to the school to decide whether or not to accept. Asylum seekers are not entitled to student financial aid.

7. What proportion of asylum seekers are granted asylum in Finland?

In 2006 thirty eight people were granted asylum: mostly Russians and Iraqis. A residence permit was granted to six hundred asylum seekers. A temporary leave to stay (B-status) for rejected asylum seekers who were temporarily unable to return to their country of origin was granted to three hundred and sixteen people from Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia.

8. Are there different types of status granted?

- **Asylum, as defined by the Convention**
- **Residence permit, for need of protection**
- **Residence permit, for individual humanitarian reasons**
- **Residence permit, for a family member**
- **Residence permit, rejected asylum seekers who have been granted a temporary leave to stay (B-status)**

9. What happens to asylum seekers who are refused the right to stay?

If the decision is made following normal procedure, the asylum seeker has a right to appeal to the Administrative Court and possibly to the Supreme Administrative Court. If the court's decision is negative, the asylum seeker will be deported from Finland to the country where they have first sought asylum or to the country from which they have departed.

10. What is the asylum process in Finland?

When an asylum seeker enters Finland, they should submit their asylum application to the police or the passport controller. Following this, the authorities will accommodate them in a reception centre. The Directorate for Immigration makes a decision on the asylum application following an asylum interview. If the decision is positive, the applicant is usually granted either a refugee status or a residence permit for need of protection.

A negative decision can be made following either a normal or an accelerated procedure. The application can also be left unprocessed. The choice of the procedure has consequences e.g. in the way the asylum seeker could be expelled after having received the decision.

Source:
Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Work Permits. 18.10.2006. Asylum Seeker in Finland.
Refugee Advice Centre, 6.2.2007
<http://www.pakolaisneuvonta.fi/files/Procedure.pdf>

Asylum Seekers in Scotland

1. How many asylum seekers come to Scotland each year?

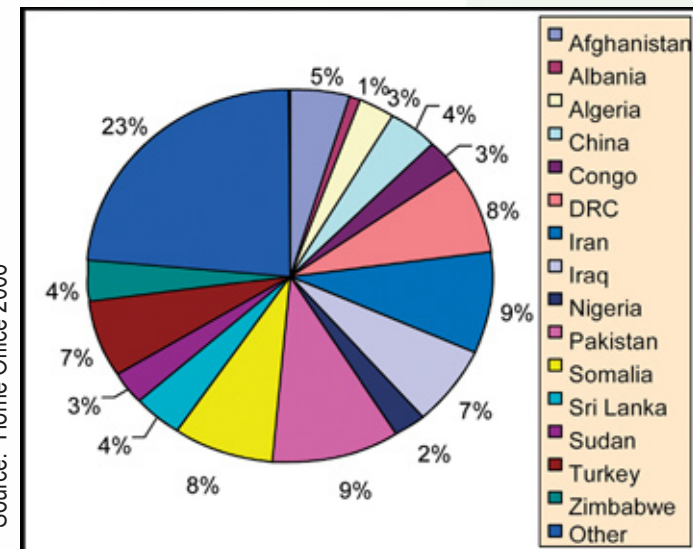
In 2005 25,710 people (30,840 including dependents) applied for asylum in the UK as a whole, a 24% decline in numbers since 2004. Of the total figure 2,965 applications were made by unaccompanied asylum seeking children under 17 years of age. Glasgow is currently home to 5000 'dispersed' asylum seekers, a further 80 are living with friends or relatives in other parts of Scotland.

Sources: Home Office Statistical Bulletin 14/06, Home Office 2006 and COSLA Asylum Statistics Glasgow 2006

2. Which countries do they come from?

The asylum population in Glasgow is very mixed, however over one third of asylum seekers come from just four countries: the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iran, Pakistan and Somalia. Source: Home Office 2006 and COSLA Asylum Statistics Glasgow 2006.

Chart Showing the Nationalities of Asylum Seekers living in Glasgow



3. What kind of financial or other living support is given to asylum seekers in Scotland?

Asylum seekers do not have permission to work in the UK. There are some exceptions to this rule but the majority of asylum seekers are not. They are provided with basic accommodation and a living allowance that is 70% (100% for children) of the income support benefit an unemployed British citizen receives (currently £40.22 per week for a single person aged 25 or over). The justification for this reduced sum is that utilities are paid for by NASS (see below). Every asylum seeker is issued with a photographic ID known as an Asylum Registration Card (ARC), this card must be presented at a local Post Office to obtain the financial support provided by NASS.

Source: Dispelling the Myths, Telling the Facts. Home Office, 10 Jan 2007

4. What kind of accommodation does Scotland provide for asylum seekers?

Legislation regarding the provision of accommodation, living allowances, healthcare and education etc asylum seekers is determined at a UK-wide level and not the Scottish government.

Asylum seekers are provided with accommodation through the National Asylum Support Service (NASS). They are sent to live in specific cities across the UK where a contract has been agreed between the local council and NASS to provide housing. Glasgow is the only city in Scotland providing NASS accommodation. Homes are furnished but basic and are spread throughout the city. Many asylum seekers live in high-rise apartments between 12 and 21 storeys high. Single asylum seekers are occasionally required to share accommodation. 81% of the accommodation is provided by Glasgow City

Council, the remainder is provided by a commercial organisation and the YMCA.

Unaccompanied minors are supported by the government Social Work Services rather than NASS. They are usually housed in care homes with support workers or occasionally, where there is an elder sibling over the age of 16, in independent apartments.

5. What kind of healthcare does Scotland provide for asylum seekers?

Asylum seekers and their families are entitled to use the state-financed National Health Service (NHS) while their asylum application is being considered. If their application is refused they may only have access to free emergency medical treatment if proposed legislation comes into effect.

4. Do asylum seekers have access to the education system in Scotland?

The children of an asylum-seeker have the right to primary school (5-11 years) and secondary school 11-16 /18 years) free of charge even when their parents' asylum claim has been refused. Children with little or no English are sent to schools which have a language support unit to assist them.

Children aged 3-5 are also eligible for part-time nursery school but the shortage of places means that some do not get this opportunity of early education.

Adult asylum seekers can study part-time up to 16 hours per week in further education colleges. They are encouraged to study English as a Second Language (ESOL) which is provided by colleges and classes in community settings, however, their

can often be a waiting list. Adults with sufficient English can apply to study most other subjects free of charge according to the availability of places and at the college's discretion. In addition some colleges provide travel expenses.

Asylum seekers are not entitled to student financial aid which makes attendance at university virtually impossible because of the high cost of tuition fees.

Most asylum seekers do not have the right to work. Some asylum seekers whose claim has not been processed within 12 months of arriving in Britain can apply for a work permit. There are others who arrived before the Right to Work was withdrawn by the government in 2002 and who still retain their work permit.

7. What proportion of asylum seekers are granted asylum in Scotland?

Of the 25,710 people who applied for asylum in the UK during 2005 approximately 31% were granted some form of asylum: 8% Limited Leave to Remain, 12% Humanitarian Protection or Discretionary Leave and 12% in allowed appeals. Figures specifically for Scotland are not available.

8. Are there different kinds of status granted?

(Limited) Leave to Remain: From September 2005 all asylum seekers whose claim for asylum has been successful are granted a temporary stay of 5 years as refugees (previously people were given indefinite leave to remain). Refugees with Leave to Remain have all the same rights as British citizens.

Discretionary Leave to Remain or

Humanitarian Protection: This status is granted for a period of 3 years when it is considered too dangerous for an individual to return to his or her country. People given this status have the same rights as British citizens.

9. What happens to asylum seekers**who are refused the right to stay?**

An asylum seeker's right to accommodation, adult education and state-funded health care changes once their asylum application is refused. The living allowance provided by NASS is cut within 21 days once an asylum seeker's final claim has been refused. They will be eventually evicted from their homes. According to government policy the asylum seeker should be returned to their country as soon as possible. However, an estimated 155,000-283,500 refused asylum seekers are still living in the UK. A minority of this group are eligible for short term financial support called 'Section 4' or 'hard case support' made up of supermarket vouchers and hostel or similar accommodation. Eligibility depends on (i) having a serious medical condition, (ii) there being no voluntary travel route back to their country or (iii) signing up for the government's Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme (VAARP). In June 2006 only 6,145 applicants were in receipt of Section 4 support. For more information on this subject see The Destitution Trap published by Refugee Action at www.refugee-action.org.uk.

Sources: National Audit Office, IAP News No 63.

10. What is the asylum process in Scotland?

Between May 2005 and April 2007 the UK government has introduced a 'New Asylum Model' (NAM) to process asylum claims more quickly. There is still a backlog of old cases with some people having waited for six years for a decision.

These 'legacy cases' will be considered under the old process. Under NAM people must claim asylum at a 'port of entry' (such as an airport) immediately on arriving in Britain. They are given a screening interview with an immigration officer who will gather information about their journey, record their name, take photographs and fingerprints. An initial interview follows with a NAM caseworker and a first decision regarding the claim is made within two weeks. The number of appeals an asylum seeker can make has been reduced and the goal is to process claims within six months.

Asylum Seekers in Poland**1. How many asylum seekers come to Poland each year?**

In 2006, 3134 applications for granting refugee status representing 7093 persons (including dependents) were submitted. The number of asylum applications submitted in 2006 increased in comparison to 2005; however it decreased in relation to 2004.

Number of migrants who applied for refugee status in Poland, 2004-2006

Period	Total number of persons	Men	Women
2004	8079		4484 3595
2005	6860		3699 3161
2006	7093		* *

* Data has not yet been published

2. From which countries do they come?

The majority of asylum seekers in Poland come from the Russian Federation (Chechnya in particular). Their religion is Islam.

Period	Number of asylum seekers from Russian Federation who submitted an application	Total number of applications submitted
2004	7183 (Men: 3744, Women: 3439)	8079
2005	6248 (Men: 3242, Women: 3006)	6860

Many asylum seekers from the Russian Federation do not perceive Poland as a country of settlement. For a number of them Poland is simply a transit country on the way to Western Europe or Scandinavia. As a result, every year asylum seekers are readmitted, on the grounds of the Dublin Regulation

issued in 2003, from other countries to Poland. Poland is also perceived by some as a place of temporary stay until the situation in Chechnya improves.

3. What kind of financial or other living support is given to asylum seekers in Poland?

Asylum seekers in reception centres are provided with the following benefits:

- full board in canteen,
- tickets for public transport,
- pocket money,
- clothing and shoes,
- Polish language lessons,
- health care
- access to public schools (minor asylum seekers)

In special situations, asylum seekers have the possibility of living outside the reception centres. In these cases, they are entitled to financial support equivalent to the costs of accommodation and meals which they have to organise on their own.

4. What kind of accommodation does Poland provide for asylum seekers?

Asylum seekers are provided with accommodation facilities in reception centres. There are eighteen reception centres for asylum seekers in Poland. In December 2006, 3547 asylum seekers were living in reception centres.

5. What kind of healthcare does Poland provide for asylum seekers?

Asylum seekers are entitled to public health service just like Polish citizens.

6. Do asylum seekers have access to the education system in Poland?

The children of asylum seekers have the right to attend primary schools (7-12), middle schools (13-15) and secondary schools (16-18) free of charge. Asylum seekers housed in reception centres are provided with educational equipment for children. Asylum seekers are also provided with free Polish language lessons and basic materials for learning Polish. In Poland all children under the age of 18 are obligated to attend the schools. This regulation is compulsory for asylum seekers as well.

7. What proportion of asylum seekers are granted refugee status in Poland?

Decisions on granting refugee status issued by the President of the Office for Repatriation and Aliens (1st Instance), 2004-2006.

Type of decision	2004	2005	2006
refugee status granted	10 persons	23 persons	*
refugee status rejected	647 persons	2135 persons	*
application dismissed or left without examination for formal reasons	80 persons	180 persons	*
refugee status rejected, tolerated status granted	14 persons	24 persons	* Data has not yet been published

Between 2004 and 2006 the number of people granted refugee status per year increased from three hundred and five in 2004 to four hundred and twenty three people in 2006. Similarly, the number granted tolerated status grew from 826 in 2004 to 2048 in 2006.

Appeals to the Refugee Board (2nd Instance)

In 2004, 1636 asylum seekers appealed against the decision on granting refugee status to the Refugee Board. In 2005, the number increased to 3671

Decisions on granting refugee status issued by the Refugee Board (2nd Instance), 2004-2006

Type of decision	2004	2005	2006
refugee status granted	305 persons	312 persons	423 persons
refugee status rejected	2002 persons	2284 persons	936 persons
application dismissed or left without examination for formal reasons	2763 persons	4413 persons	3 875 persons
refugee status rejected, tolerated status granted	826 persons	1832 persons	2 048 persons

8. Are there different kinds of status granted?

Tolerated stay:

In the decision on refusal of granting refugee status, an asylum seeker can be granted Tolerated Stay, which is a subsidiary form of protection. Asylum seekers who have been granted a permit for tolerated stay have the right to work, education and health care. However, according to the Act on Granting Protection to people

granted tolerated stay are not supported by the state integration programme as opposed to persons granted official refugee status (see Glossary).

Asylum:

An asylum seeker may be granted asylum in Poland upon his/her request when it is essential to provide him/her with protection and when it is in the interest of the Republic of Poland.

Between 2003 and 2005, twenty six people applied for asylum in Poland. No one was granted asylum.

9. What happens to asylum seekers who are refused the right to stay?

In the decision regarding the refusal to grant refugee status, an asylum seeker shall be granted the permit for tolerated stay or ordered to leave the territory of the Republic of Poland within the time limit specified in the decision, not exceeding 30 days. If an asylum seekers appeals against the decision on refusal of granting refugee status, the appeal authorities shall specify the new time limit, not exceeding 14 days, for leaving the territory of the Republic of Poland. Unsuccessful asylum seekers have the possibility of voluntary return assistance provided by the International Organisation of Migration (IOM) within the framework of the Assisted Voluntary Return Programme on the grounds of an agreement between IOM and the Ministry of Interior and Administration. Additionally, unsuccessful asylum seekers who return to their countries of origin may be offered reintegration assistance (within in the framework of the projects co-financed by the European Commission and implemented by International Organization for Migration).

10. What is the asylum process in Poland?

An asylum seeker shall submit an application for the granting of refugee status to the President of the Office for Repatriation and Aliens. This happens through the commanding officer of the Border Guards, whose territorial scope of activity includes the city of Warsaw, or through the commanding officer of the Border Guards' checkpoint. A foreigner who is not authorised to enter the territory of the Republic of Poland shall submit an application for granting refugee status at the border control upon entry to the Republic of Poland. This is done through the commanding officer of the Border Guards.

The authority admitting the application shall inform an asylum seeker in a language understandable to him/her about the procedures and principles of the proceedings for the granting of refugee status; as well as rights vested to him/her, his/her obligations, and legal effects of non-performance of these obligations.

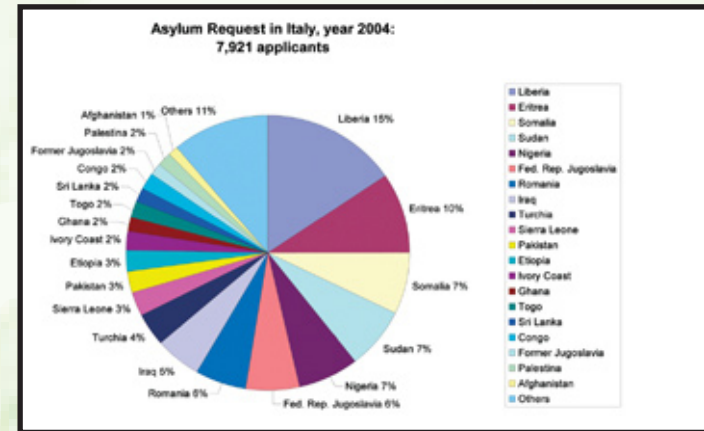
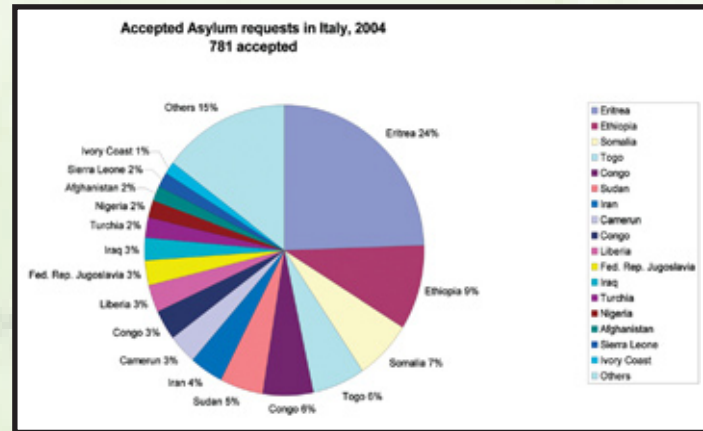
According to Act of 13 June 2003 on granting protection to asylum seekers within the territory of the Republic of Poland, decisions on granting and withdrawing refugee status shall be rendered in the first instance by the President of the Office for Repatriation and Aliens within six months of the submission of the application. An asylum seeker has the right to appeal against the decision to the Refugee Board within fourteen days of receiving the decision issued in the first instance.

Sources: www.uric.gov.pl

Act of 13 June 2003 on granting protection to asylum seekers within the territory of the Republic of Poland

Directive on the rules of residence of asylum seekers in the reception centres: issued by Minister of Internal Affairs and Administration on 12 August 2003

Act of 7 September 1990 on education system.



Asylum Seekers in Italy

1. How many asylum seekers come to Italy each year?

In Italy the data about the number of AS is confusing. A uniform official number does not exist. In fact, Italy is the only EU country that doesn't divulge official data on Asylum requests. The last available unofficial data tells that in 2004, 'some' 14,000 people applied for Asylum.

2. Which countries do they come from?

The greater part of AS accepted as Refugees in Italy come from Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea, due to historical reasons.

Nationalities of Asylum Seekers accepted in Italy, year 2004

Data from Central Commission for Refugee Status
Data from UNCHR is slightly different, but the common figure is that only 10% of applications are accepted.

5. What kind of financial or other living support is given to asylum seekers in Italy?

Italy remains the only EU Country that has not got an organic, systematic law on Asylum matters. This is despite the Italian Constitution being one of the most advanced documents on caring for people who have escaped from violations of their fundamental rights. Asylum rules have always been part of laws on generic immigration, never having been discussed in a complete and exhaustive way.

In Italy, an allowance of 18 € a day is granted to an asylum seeker. Six months after the Asylum request has been made, the asylum seeker has the right to work in Italy.

4. What kind of accommodation does Italy provide for asylum seekers?

The Italian Protection System, for asylum seekers and Refugees (formerly the PNA), does not offer enough accommodation places. The system foresees good quality integration programmes, but at the same time, some asylum seekers who do not find accommodation in these programs, are sent to so called Identification Centres, from where, in some cases, it is not possible to leave (as in a prison).

5. What kind of healthcare does Italy provide for asylum seekers?

Asylum seekers and their families are entitled to use the state-financed National Health Service while their asylum application is being considered.

6. Do asylum seekers have access to the education system in Italy?

The children of an asylum-seeker have to attend primary school (6-10 years) and secondary school (11-16 years) free of charge.

Asylum seekers have the same rights to attend University as Italian Citizens. They have the same rights to be exempted from paying University taxes as Italian Citizens living on welfare.

Adults have access to Italian learning programs, financed by local authorities.

Different programmes are financed in different Italian regions.

7. What proportion of asylum seekers are granted asylum in Italy?

Only ten per cent of Asylum Seekers are granted asylum in Italy. Currently, seven application centres of application examination are set in Italy.

8. Are there different kinds of status granted?

Refugees Status: leave to remain for two years, renewable. Refugees have the right to leave Italy and the right to family reunification. Asylum seekers do not have these rights.

Humanitarian status: leave to remain for two years, but family reunification is not allowed.

9. What happens to asylum seekers who are refused the right to stay?


They have to leave Italy within fifteen days. They can ask for a review of the decision or appeal to the Court: in the latter case they have the right to free legal assistance.

During this period the AS legal status is confused, once again due to the fact that there's no precise law on the matter in Italy.

10. What is the asylum process in Italy?

Asylum has to be requested within eight days of arriving in Italy, through a Police Station in the city where the asylum seeker chooses to live. The whole procedure should take no more than 40 days, but twelve to eighteen months is the normal time the asylum seeker has to wait for an answer.

The Commission calls the asylum seeker for an audition; the asylum seeker has the right to be assisted by a lawyer in the hearing (free of charge). After the hearing the Commission should decide within three days.



Part Two: What Is Empowerment?

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I Confidence, Self Management... Empowerment

Self consciousness and self confidence, self management, active attitude, basic skills, participation... all of these concepts can describe the kind of features that the ASAP partnership has set about to promote. In the beginning of their work, the work group looking at practice of self management made a decision to move from the concept of self management to empowerment, deciding that it was clearly the process of empowerment that should be promoted with asylum seekers.

In the first section of Part Two you have an opportunity to process on your views about empowerment. Instead of defining the concept of empowerment in an exclusive way, we invite you to think from a pragmatic point of view what empowerment can mean in your field of work. The question you can think of is 'what do I work with when I work with empowerment'.

In this section, you will also be introduced to the fields of activities of the ASAP partners; to the work at reception centres, supporting NGO's, and adult education. You will read about how the basis of empowerment can be formed – but you will also read about the many questions and difficulties on how empowerment of asylum seekers can be supported.



self management > life management > empowerment

The three concepts are close to each other. What differences do you find in these terms? Write in the box or discuss this with a colleague.



Sociological empowerment often addresses members of groups that social discrimination processes have excluded from decision-making processes through - for example - discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender – and a temporary or permanent life situation.

What is empowerment?

How can you tell that someone is empowered?

If you had to make a list of indicators showing empowerment, what would you suggest?

Write in the list . . .

Did you suggest one of these?

**participation
initiative
activity**

Empowerment is not a synonym to good life, or coping in life. You can have good life and cope well without really participating into the society around. Empowerment is dynamic, active, and includes interaction between individuals and communities.

It is often hard to say from the outside when a person is empowered. Do you think that after all it might be because empowerment could be

an individual feeling of being in the centre of your own life

Professor Aaron Antonovsky (1923-1944) did research on the health of different ethnic groups in Israel, and to his surprise found that among the groups there was one that had a remarkable ability of maintaining health and good life; the group of women who had survived concentration camps in the Second World War. He started to ask what causes health instead of asking what causes illness, giving foundation to the term salutogenesis. Antonovsky found three elements in forming the salutogenic factors. The ability of problem solving and finding solutions is essential to individuals and communities. Where salutogenic elements can be found, there are generalised resistance resources that help people to move in the direction of positive health. And last, Antonovsky named a global sense in individuals and groups; the sense of coherence (SOC).

Think of contexts where you could support the problem solving capacities of individuals and communities to support empowerment. Write in the box below or discuss this with a colleague.

Handwritten-style lined paper for notes.

What kinds of resistance resources can people have and which one of those can you support in your work?

Handwritten-style lined paper for notes.

In addition to resources and skills that individuals and groups of people may have, predictability is important to comprehend the world around. You also need motivation in order to have a feeling of leading a meaningful life.

What you feel inside is essential to feelings of managing life and being empowered. Exterior conditions give possibilities for your inner feeling to be born, and on the other hand, limit the possibilities.

Richard S. Lazarus (1922-2002) refers to exterior life management, as a set of means a person has to decrease the damages to self in a conflict situation. You can have emotionally related means that help you in processing the suffering experienced and personal conflicts. Secondly, there are the problem solving related means that you will need in your attempts to actively change the situation.

Rarely do you meet a person who would be empowered in all areas of life, and would be that permanently.

Empowerment is not a stabile status

In which areas of your life do you feel empowered, and in which ones do you need to fight for your empowerment?

Write in the box below or discuss this with a colleague.

Handwritten-style lined paper for notes.

Which events and conditions in your own life have added up to your feeling of empowerment?

Write in the box below or discuss this with a colleague.

Handwritten-style lined paper for notes.

Which ways and means do you have for adding up to your empowerment?

Write in the box below or discuss this with a colleague.

Handwritten-style lined paper for notes.

empowerment – power – empowerment

**Is empowerment about having power?
Giving power? Getting power?
Taking power?**

On what can asylum seekers have power over in their life? Are there areas where an asylum seeker can be empowered?

Write in the box below or discuss this with a colleague.

Can asylum seekers be empowered in a life situation where they do not have power to decide over their destiny?

Write in the box below or discuss this with a colleague.

Handwritten-style lined box for notes.

Topics for discussion in your work community

- How much can empowerment be an individual feeling when outside conditions deprive you from human rights?
- Is empowerment living according to norms?
- Is it possible to manage life? But to live life?
- Where and how can members of your working community and close network support the empowerment of asylum seekers?



Text: Teija Enoranta

Supporting Empowerment of Asylum Seekers

In the previous section you reflected the concepts of empowerment and life management. In this section, we suggest some questions that you can use in trying to find ideas about how empowerment can be built and supported with people who are in a life situation of refuge and seeking asylum. We ask you to refine these ideas to plans that you can try in your work and other activities – you can find room for your notes on these pages.

You can modify and use these questions in face-to-face as well as group consultation, in study groups or free time activity groups or any other contexts where you meet asylum seekers.

Make an effort first to talk about why you are working with these questions. You do not want people to feel that they are screened in any way. What we are suggesting is an opportunity for asylum seekers to reflect their own views and own situation, and they should remain the agents of the work all through this process.

About how to create a trusting atmosphere in a group, you can find ideas for in the Part Four: Activities, of this book. Try working in small groups, use discussion in language groups. In group work, their answers may stay within the group if they like. Try activating methods like picture work, or modifications of applied drama, to give people also non-verbal means for finding some answers.

Question	Area to be supported
Who am I?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reflecting the identity ("new" and "old") • self confidence • ways of telling about oneself, expressing identity
Where am I?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dignity in the new situation • information about the new country, asylum process, benefits, work and study opportunities
What can I do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • finding the opportunities; experiencing that they are for you • motivation to act
Why should I?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • motivation to act for a change, with set objectives for improvement of your own and collective situation

Having

If you can help an asylum seeker to ask some of these questions, together you may find concrete activities that you can support. You cannot walk the route to empowerment for them, but you can help people to design their own map about the journey.

The cornerstones of life management and empowerment can be called, according to the Finnish sociologist Erik Allardt, *having, loving, and being*.

The aspect of having includes not only material comfort measured by goods, but also health and security.

Describe the situation

1. Material standard of living

Where do you live?

What are your everyday needs and how can you fulfil them?

2. Taking care of your health

What health care services are available to you? Do you know where to find the services? If not, where can you ask?

How do you take care of your health (exercise, sports, hobbies, studying, self help...)?

3. Feeling of security

What brings security in your life right now?

What are the threats and fears you experience?

How can you help asylum seekers to reflect on the following:

What standard of living asylum seekers do have? How do they experience this? How have the conditions to maintain health, security and material wellbeing changed due to their refuge?

To which standard of living do they compare theirs – to the one they had before or to the one that is common in the surrounding society?

How can they influence their exterior conditions? Is there something they can do to improve any of the three points above? What support and help do they need for this, where can they get it from?

How do they feel about their situation; do they feel frustration, anger, bitterness, gratitude, indifference?

How do asylum seekers express and process their emotions?

Where and with whom can they do that?

Loving

The community asylum seekers live in creates loving. The community consists of interior and exterior relations between people.

Describe the situation

1. What is your closest community?

Who are the people you live with? Which ones of your closest community do not live with you and how can you keep in contact with them?

2. With whom do you interact from the outside of your closest community?

Where do you meet people of your own choice; cafés, clubs, church, study place or work? Which of these contacts are your private ones and which are authorities?

How can you help asylum seekers to reflect on the following:

Is the community they live in chosen by themselves or by other people? Are there other asylum seekers, own family members, workers who they meet daily in their living surrounding? What in their community do they feel supportive and what is challenging?

Which means do they have to express their feelings in the community and process for instance the conflicts they feel?

Do they feel lonely? Are they ready to try and create new contacts? Which places can they think of to create new contacts with people? Are there study groups or hobbies that you can recommend?

How do they keep in touch with their family and friends abroad – can you think of new means that could be used?

Being

In the dimension of being human we talk about the expression of one's identity. It is difficult to talk about your identity directly, so we often describe relations to closest people and family, work, and the society and culture around.

An asylum seeker has few links to society around and few opportunities to be active. Rather, they have been given a new type of identity against their own will. Asylum seekers carry the status of a refugee since they have fled their home country – but they may not have the rights of a refugee. They carry the identity of an immigrant representing a foreign culture in their new country – but they may not have the acceptance to be an immigrant from the people around or from themselves.

Being active does not mean only to participate in studies, work life or taking care of everyday things in the community. Lots of activity happens inside people. For many, spiritual life is the most supporting and hope-giving area in life.

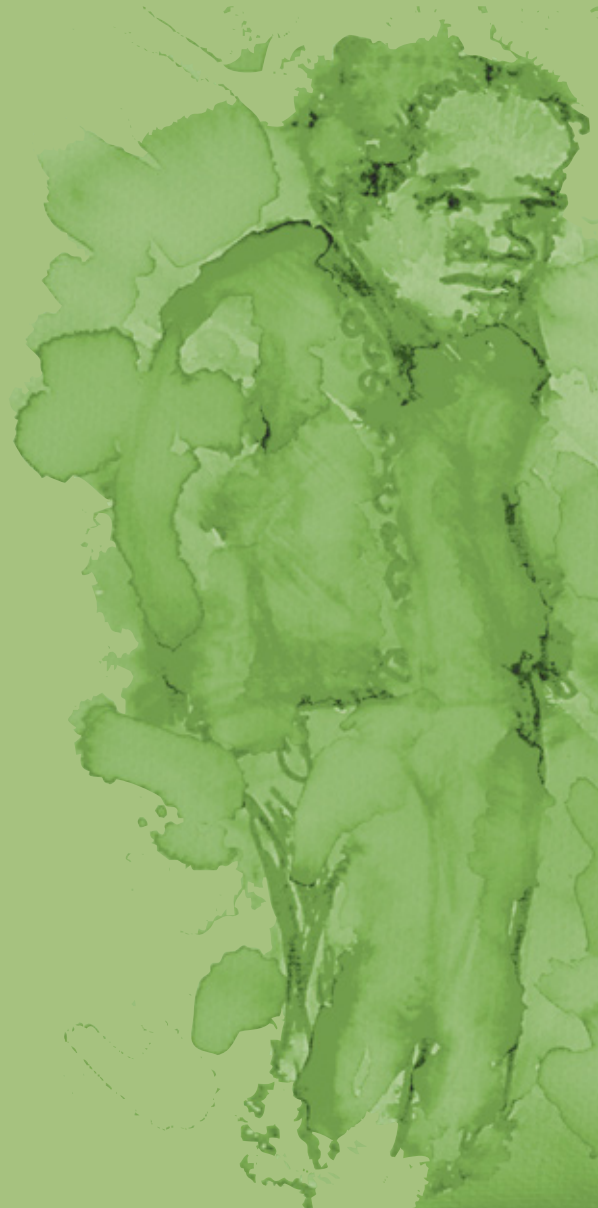
Describe the situation

Where and how can you do things that make you feel a member of a community?

Which area in life brings you most activities; taking care of your asylum process (meeting lawyers and authorities), taking care of everyday things (work, school, shopping, cooking, taking care of children), meeting people, or staying in on your own?

Do you hope you had a chance to be more active in the community you live in? How could that be arranged? Is there an area where you could arrange activities for other people?

What in your cultural and spiritual background helps you to live in this situation? What resources and strong points of yours can you use for the benefit of yourself and perhaps for others? How and in which situations?



Supporting strategies of survival

Although empowerment is about much more than just surviving, strategies of survival can lead us to open a path that can lead to empowerment. Sometimes empowerment may seem an unrealistic objective but it can be found through concrete things in people's life.

One way of finding the areas where you can start working from is to ask:

- How can you cope in this situation?**
- Where do you get the strength?**

Look at the strategies for survival together and think which ones can be applied in this difficult life situation, how can they be used and where can an asylum seeker get support to use this strategy?

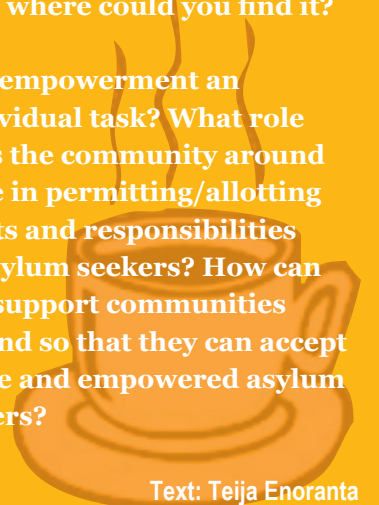
None of the strategies is very good if used exclusively. If one strategy is very strong it may lead you to misuse, exaggeration, and to forgetting other possibilities. The more strategies there are at use, the better. Think which ones are already used and which ones could be practiced.

Strategy of survival -	What can you support to develop the strategy
Spiritual -	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ expressing personal values, comparing values with others ▪ expressing ideologies, comparing ideologies ▪ expressing and practicing belief, learning about other religions
Emotional -	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ to get in touch with own emotions (e.g. in a study group) ▪ expression of emotions (e.g. in a study group) ▪ processing of emotions, talking and using active methods ▪ channelling emotions into action (e.g. collective projects and campaigns for self and for others)
Social -	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ keeping contact with friends and family ▪ making new contacts, meeting people ▪ participation in groups for studying and hobbies ▪ receiving and giving support
Creative -	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ "interior world", creative powers, imagination, dreams ▪ sharing emotional and spiritual experiences ▪ arts, listening to music, reading, dancing... ▪ artistic activities, handicrafts, carpentry, cooking, decoration
Cognitive -	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ acting ▪ searching information, making action plans ▪ setting priorities
Physiological -	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ sleeping, eating, dieting, drinking, using drugs and medication, exercising

Topics for discussion with your colleagues:

▪ **Look at your local network. Where can asylum seekers find support for their survival, life management and empowerment? Is something missing in your network, and where could you find it?**

▪ **Is empowerment an individual task? What role does the community around have in permitting/allotting rights and responsibilities to asylum seekers? How can you support communities around so that they can accept active and empowered asylum seekers?**



Text: Teija Enoranta

Information is the First Step towards Self-Management

Asylum seekers awaiting the decision on refugee status face the problems of lack of control over their lives and mobilizing themselves to be active and to integrate into Polish society. In many cases they become depressed and apathetic. Living in reception centres, within their own cultural groups, they become more and more dependent on the social welfare system. However, when a decision on granting refugee status, tolerated stay or leaving order is issued, asylum seekers are asked to leave reception centres and start living on their own. In many cases, they are unable to adapt to the new reality and to take control of their lives.

In October and November 2005, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) conducted a qualitative research examining self-management of asylum seekers. Ten interviews were carried out with employees of reception centres and NGOs working with asylum seekers. The aim of the interviews was to assess:

- 1) How 'self-management of asylum seekers' is understood by professionals working with asylum seekers in Poland. How asylum seekers manage their lives.
- 2) How often self-management was manifested by asylum seekers in Poland.
- 3) Is self-management of asylum seekers perceived by staff working with them as a positive or a negative phenomenon?
- 4) Should self-management of asylum seekers be strengthened?
- 5) What factors strengthen self-management?
- 6) What are best practices in strengthening self-management?

Efforts for self-management

As mentioned above, asylum seekers face the problem of passivity during the asylum procedure. They seldom manifest a proactive attitude to life. Nonetheless, some of them do try to be active and take control of their lives. They search for information relating to asylum procedures, in order to learn about their legal status and their rights. Consequently, they come into contact with legal clinics which provide them with assistance. Asylum seekers try to adapt to their new social environment in many different ways. They come into contact with Polish citizens and study Polish language and culture. Young asylum seekers integrate with the Polish society through state run schools, some attend universities.

Asylum seekers make an effort to fit into the labour market. However, according to Polish law, they are not permitted to work. Therefore, they try to find employment on the black market: mostly in construction, agricultural and retail trade industries as unskilled workers. Some take steps to renew their driving licences. In order to earn money, women undertake cleaning work in reception centres. They also sell goods at the market.

'The women were not satisfied with the food that was served in the canteen. They collected the food that they did not like and sold it at the market. They offered lower prices than the shops did. Then they bought potatoes, carrots, oil and onions, and prepared Chechen food they liked.'

(Interview with a representative of NGO working with asylum seekers)

Some asylum seekers organise cultural events for other asylum seekers and indigenous Poles.

Assertiveness is manifested by those asylum seekers who want to live in Poland. Others who do not treat Poland as a place of permanent settlement are mostly passive. For many of them, Poland is considered to be a transit lounge on the way to Western Europe. This is one of the reasons why many asylum seekers are unwilling to learn Polish. Their activities are limited to organising their transfer to Western Europe or their return to their country of origin.

Lack of money, dependency on social benefits, psychological problems as well as conditions in reception centres (where asylum seekers live in homogenous cultural groups separated from the host society) are important factors strengthening the passivity of asylum seekers and depriving them of any initiative to become active and to manage their lives. The attitude of Polish society to asylum seekers, whether xenophobic or tolerant, can either limit or strengthen the possibilities of proactiveness in asylum seekers.

Active attitude helps adapting to the new environment

The attitude of the staff working in reception centres and NGOs to independent attitudes in asylum seekers is generally positive. In their opinion, a proactive attitude towards life is the only way to adapt to their new environment. Only those who are proactive and who want to take control of their lives, have a chance to find success in the labour market and to start a normal life in Poland. Alternatively, they can return to their country of origin in the case of a negative decision on refugee status and tolerated stay.

A controversial issue is the activity of asylum seekers on the black market.

'Illegal work on the black market is a negative phenomenon for both the state (...) and asylum seekers because it forces them to break the law. They often have to work in inhuman conditions for a very low salary and are forced into involvement in criminal activity.'

(Interview with a representative of NGO working with asylum seekers)

In the opinion of respondents, independence of asylum seekers should be encouraged. The proactive attitude of asylum seekers to their lives brings benefits for all: asylum seekers themselves, as well as social workers assisting them. According to social workers, active asylum seekers are outgoing and open to new ideas and challenges. They are much more conscious of their legal and social status than asylum seekers who are passively waiting for a decision on refugee status.

Strengthening of self-management

Self-management of asylum seekers should be supported by relevant NGOs, international and governmental organisations, as well as staff working in reception centres through every day assistance and projects targeting asylum seekers. The first step towards strengthening self-sufficiency in asylum seekers should be the addressing of their information needs regarding their legal and social situation, as well as current and future possibilities for social and other assistance and employment prospects. The integration meetings, in which both asylum seekers and representatives of Polish societies take part, could be a good practice supporting independence.

As mentioned above, in the opinion of the respondents, independence of asylum seekers should be supported. Generally, a proactive attitude to life for asylum seekers brings benefits for both asylum seekers and the host society. Nevertheless, most respondents claim that they do not know any activities that could be considered good practice in the empowerment of asylum seekers.

Text: Janina Owczarek



Is There a Way to Develop Self-confidence in Asylum Seekers?

One of the dictionary definitions of empowerment is to 'to give somebody a sense of confidence or self-esteem' (Encarta World English Dictionary). However, is it possible to raise an individual's confidence through education, training and other learning opportunities?

Self-confidence derives from an inherently unstable relationship with our own beliefs. We define it as a singular term but it is a multi-faceted quality encompassing self-esteem, assertiveness, self-assurance, self-

reliance, self-worth and even a positive, optimistic attitude towards life.

The Centre for Confidence and Well-being in Glasgow delivered Action Research training in 2006 to give participants the skills and tools needed to devise projects to build self-confidence in clients. The training explored how to define and measure self-confidence, recognising that engagement with change occurs when people believe in themselves: Improved self-confidence is both a mechanism for change and the desired outcome of an intervention or activity.

Dr Elaine Duncan, Principal Consultant Psychologist for the Centre, prefers to use the term 'subjective well-being' rather than confidence based on a person's own judgement of their emotional health. She suggests there are nine conditions associated with a state of 'subjective well-being'. These are outlined below. We can foster some of these 'conditions' as we work with people, by encouraging a change in attitude or approach. Others must be generated internally by the individual. I have, therefore, separated them loosely, into categories of 'being' and 'doing' - to emphasise how we can propel change through our actions in supporting others.

The Correlates or Indicators of a State of Subjective Well-Being (SWB)

Conditions Relating to Being

1. Balance of Emotion – Subjective well-being is not the absence of negative emotions but an ability to maintain a sense of equilibrium during periods of adversity.

What is empowerment

2. Positive Emotions - An ability to harness positive emotions in periods of distress or grief is a powerful indicator of well-being and will enable the individual to adjust more easily to life's difficulties. Positive emotions enable superior coping strategies and help to build resilience (Broaden-and-Build Theory, Barbara Frederickson). Neuroscientists have demonstrated the cognitive broadening power of positive emotions which expand our attention and so improve our cognitive ability to solve problems.

3. Social Support and Strong Interpersonal Bonds - Personal well-being is enhanced when an individual is trusted and respected by family, friends, community or work colleagues. Only one or two quality relationships are necessary to considerably improve a person's state of well-being.

4. Appreciation and Gratitude – Being thankful and savouring the small pleasures in life is associated with improved quality of life and satisfaction. Proponents of 'positive psychology' advocate exercising our sense of gratitude (Positive Psychology is a movement instigated by Martin Seligman to focus on mental 'wellness' rather than mental illness, i.e. what is right with people rather than what is wrong with them.).

Conditions Relating to Doing

5. Flow – A state of 'flow' is more than concentration. It is a state of total involvement and absorption in an activity, which then induces a sense of satisfaction and achievement. Therefore, in working with asylum seekers any intervention, task or activity introduced needs to be set at just below or just above their threshold of achievement to create a state of flow. An individual must be sufficiently competent in a task to face

the challenge it poses. If the level of activity embarked upon is below or beyond their current capacity it will cause anxiety and boredom, both of which result in stress. Flow cannot be facilitated if the asylum seeker attempting the activity is:

- (i) underskilled and overchallenged = no flow
- (ii) underchallenged and overskilled = no flow

6. Goal Attainment – Many people have wishes, aspirations and desires but fail to set tangible goals. As a result they have no clear outline of the steps they must take to realise their goal and no record of incremental achievement to motivate them to continue. To achieve a state of subjective well-being it is necessary to set short, medium and long term goals that act as clear indicators of progress.

7. A Meaningful and Engaged Life – The state of subjective well-being has been shown to be stronger in people who feel connected to a wider community, who have a sense that they contribute to a bigger whole beyond the immediately individual. This correlate is so strong that the British National Health Service is exploring promoting the benefits of engaging in voluntary work.

8. Intrinsic Motivation - Intrinsic motivations need to be fostered to help create a sense of well-being. Devising activities that have prizes and rewards might be appropriate at the outset to encourage people to join in, especially where self-confidence is very low. A prize is self-affirming because the person is reminded of their competency. This reinforcement helps them build a strategy for further learning and development. People, however, will eventually become accustomed to receiving an external benefit so it ceases to act as an incentive. If you want those you work with to sustain activities which cultivate a sense of well-being, you need to help them find intrinsic motivators. For example, Scottish

school children are given gold stars for good behaviour or performance (an external reward) versus ‘golden time’ where the pupil is allowed to spend time alone doing an activity they choose and enjoy (internal reward). Both provide an opportunity for external recognition of achievement but golden time is directly and intimately connected to the child’s pleasure.

9. Being Physically Active - Research indicates that physical exercise substantially increases a person’s sense of well being on a variety of levels. There is a pharmacological impact through the release of hormones (endorphins) during exercise. This provides an opportunity for an enhanced self-concept of our bodies and an increase in motivation as we gain a sense of achievement in mastering a new technique or sport. People suffering from clinical anxiety or depression and post-traumatic stress syndrome have shown measurable improvements after engaging in exercise. In fact, just thirty minutes of walking a day will make a substantial difference.

Methods of working to develop confidence or subjective well-being

“Confidence is to performance as batteries are to a flashlight.”

Using the metaphor of the flashlight: when the confidence ‘batteries’ run out we need to re-charge them - but how? To raise self-confidence Dr Duncan believes you have to raise self-efficacy, enhance self-esteem and develop a positive attitude to life. Small measures to induce these qualities should be seen as building the social, psychological and intellectual resources necessary to make positive changes to a person’s emotional wellbeing. Progress will be incremental and possibly momentary but eventually the benefits will begin

to accumulate if the suggestions below are repeatedly used. Remember you can help to make a percentage change with everyone you work with.

1. Nurture Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is the belief that we can influence our own thoughts and behaviour to achieve results, whether it performing a new or difficult task or coping with adversity. A perceived sense of one’s own value and effectiveness can improve the investment and effort an individual makes, their chance of success in achieving goals is then increased and a determination to overcome obstacles develops. According to research, confidence and performance can be boosted by 25-40% depending on the method deployed. However, the strongest growth in self-efficacy is achieved by ‘enactive mastery’ i.e. doing something, successfully engaging in a task.

To develop self-efficacy:

- Provide as many opportunities as possible to enable individuals to practice a new skill and demonstrate their accomplishment. Avoid being ‘the doer’ yourself but allow them to do and fail and so build a culture that is not based on fear of failure.
- Create opportunities for vicarious experience. People learn by watching and modelling others, so introduce informal mentoring with a coach or ‘buddy’. Work shadowing, for instance, is an example of learning through observation. Watching until the individual feels confident enough to do the activity themselves offers time for reflective learning.
- Use verbal persuasion. Consider the language you use when you give feedback about activities that the individual has undertaken. Use language that is nurturing and affirms what has been done well first, then suggest what might be improved. Deliver constructive comments using the sandwich technique: insert a negative statement only after a positive and finish with another positive.

2. Develop Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is the global concept we have of ourselves which might be favourable or unfavourable. It is a much broader concept than knowing what we are good at (efficacious in) something. It has a fundamental impact on performance. The benefits of having an internalised sense of self-esteem are likely to be enhanced initiative, pleasant feelings and an increased sense of well-being.

To develop self-esteem:

- Explore what people believe they need to be or do to have value and worth as a person. What expectations do they have of themselves and what are the external demands placed on them? How much room is there for change in their life?
- Encourage people to talk about their actual accomplishments so that they can see where self-esteem is warranted.
- Focus attention on goals that demonstrate the contribution the individual makes to others so that they develop a global understanding of themselves. For example, an athlete who loses a limb is in danger of losing all self-esteem if they relate their self-worth entirely to their profession.

3. Cultivate Positive Emotions and Optimism

Optimism is associated with good physical health, less likelihood of depression, a longer life, a better quality of life and greater happiness. Research suggests that optimists are more likely to engage in health-promoting behaviours such as regular exercise and healthy eating. They are less likely to be socially isolated and tend to be better at problem-solving, planning and coping with difficulties. An optimist has a more hopeful positive style of thinking. He or she believes they can control important outcomes affecting their future and that the outcome is likely to be pleasant. Life’s bad events are due to external and transient factors. Like confidence, optimism is not a static quality but a continuum.

To foster an optimistic approach:

- encourage individuals to anticipate that their efforts will yield success.
- pay attention to external factors that may have contributed to a negative situation rather than the individual’s own behaviour
- help them to recognize and censor their internal critic
- encourage individuals to describe positive experiences through talking, writing or drawing will generate more positive expectations of the future and help people feel better about themselves. In turn this should assist in incrementally reducing depression and learned helplessness.

To stimulate positive emotions:

- discuss the person’s best positive past and invite them to think about their best possible present.
- ask directly about positive emotions relating to their progress or growth.
- set goals that help focus the individual on the future and indicate a direction even if it is simply a date for a return visit or a plan to make a phone call.
- support individuals to find meaning in what has happened. Have they learned anything/changed priorities as a result of what has happened?
- support individuals to develop a ‘sense of coherence’. People who are not adjusting well to trauma or change describe their experiences in fragments, often referring to the physical sensations of what they heard, smelt or saw. Encourage the individual to talk about the situation using a timeline so that it has a beginning, middle and end just like any story. Describing a narrative can help them [achieve detachment?] and assimilate the experience.

- encourage individuals to reframe their experience through the eyes of someone else. How might they consider it in a different way?

Text: Suki Mills

Acknowledgment: I would like to thank Dr Elaine Duncan and the Centre for Confidence and Well-Being for permission to use this material.

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Photo: Hilma Bukareva

Developing an Empowering Practice

communities to develop confidence and skills while empowerment as a process requires consulting and involving beneficiaries throughout the project's lifecycle (design, delivery and evaluation).

“As a product, empowerment will increase the confidence, self-esteem and skills of individuals and communities. As a process, empowerment will create more accessible and focused services, based in actual rather than perceived needs.”

The real challenge of empowerment is, however, that it signals a major move in the balance of power, away from those in positions of control (for example, partnership board members and project managers) and towards the intended beneficiaries. Communication must be honest, open and widespread; relationships must work on the basis of trust and freedom, with those involved able to take risks and try things out, even where project staff may suspect that the activity will not be successful. So you will find it useful to think of the following:

- What have you learnt?**
- Are you developing understanding, knowledge and skills to support empowerment?**
- Does information in your project flow in a clear, accessible manner?**
- Do you recognise people as equal partners and involve them in the making decisions?**
- Do you recognise diversity in project design and development?**

The British Equal Support Unit, Ecotec, has produced a useful guide on empowerment for development partnerships that includes practical suggestions on developing an empowering service. The guide explores how we define empowerment, its component parts and the barriers to meaningful empowerment. Ecotec uses the following definition for empowerment:

....the development of capacity and the opportunity for individuals and groups to play a full role in society in general, not only in economic terms but also in social, psychological and political terms, with those involved in the activities also taking part in decision making.....

The guide distinguishes between empowerment as an outcome and empowerment as a process but advocates that projects attempt to cultivate both. Empowerment as an outcome concentrates on interventions that support individuals and

Identifying an empowering service

How you decide to incorporate the suggestions above will vary depending on the nature of your own project but Ecotec suggests the following checklist as a guide for service deliverers.

Indicators of success

Broken down into

Reception, including environment and staff

- Welcoming staff.
- Orderly and welcoming environment.

Accessibility

- Satisfactory opening hours.
- Information provided on the services and their availability.
- Physical location.
- Access for people with disabilities.

Positive attitude of staff such as advisers

- Show empathy.
- Flexible appointment times.
- Friendliness.
- Good communication skills (verbal, written and approachable).

Effective organisational policies

- Equal opportunities.
- Family friendly.
- Confidentiality.
- Open, accessible.

Active follow-up

- Monitoring people who have left.
- Giving further support.

Finally, the guide introduces a useful acronym for **EMPOWER** as a reminder for the work we do:

- E**ngage communities and partners
- M**otivate and support
- P**articipative and inclusive
- O**wnership and influence
- W**ork to build capacity
- E**valuate and communicate effectively
- R**espond to needs and adopt a creative approach

The Bridges Programmes used the framework described in the Ecotec Guide to design a Personal Development Course for women asylum seekers. In Part Three of this book, 'At Work With Asylum Seekers', you will find a description of the course.

Text: Suki Mills

Source: Empowerment – a guide for Development Partnerships (GB Equal Support Unit Priestley House, 28-34 Albert Street, Birmingham B4 7UD, UK, Phone: +44 (0)121 616 3660 Fax: +44 (0)121 616 3662, www.equal.ecotec.co.uk)

Nowhere, perhaps, is the meaning of wage labour for people's lives in the industrial world so clear as in the situation where two strangers meet and ask each other 'what are you?' They do not answer with their hobby, 'pigeon fancier', or with their religious identity, 'Catholic', or with reference to ideals of beauty, 'well, you can see I'm a redhead with a full bosom', but with all the certainty in the world with their occupations: 'skilled worker for Siemens'. If we know our interlocutor's occupation then we think we know him or her. The occupation serves as a mutual identification pattern, with the help of which we can assess personal needs and abilities as well as economic and social position.

Ulrich Beck, Risk Society (1992)



Work Shadowing as a Route to Employment and Empowerment

In many contemporary societies we not only define our identity by the work we do but build a social network with colleagues which helps to give our lives meaning and establish our 'place' in society. This opportunity is closed to the majority of asylum seekers in Britain who do not have permission to work. If you have ever had the misfortune of being involuntarily unemployed you may recall the sense of detached isolation as you watched others engage in the rhythms of a working life. The protracted periods of unemployment imposed on asylum seekers can have a detrimental impact on confidence and self-esteem. At a practical level it can lead to a loss of skills and 'readiness' to enter the workplace if they are eventually given leave to remain

Bridges Programmes

Bridges has been working with the asylum and refugee community in Glasgow since 2002. Our core activity is to arrange work shadowing opportunities - matching people by profession. We have worked with almost every employment field including teachers, doctors, electricians, bricklayers, veterinary surgeons, hydrologists, payroll supervisors, graphic designers, architects, computer network specialists, chefs and hairdressers.

Bridges works in partnership with three regional council authorities, many other NGOs and approximately twenty private companies to provide placements. Through our work we are able to showcase the skills profile of potential new citizens to employers as well as help to dispel the sense of threat, misconceptions and prejudices about asylum seekers

What is empowerment

that are often provoked by their negative portrayal in the media. However, this is not the primary motivation for the shadowing programme. Through the promotion of integration in the workplace, we hope to maintain and enhance the existing skills of those asylum seekers we work with and improve their English speaking ability, confidence and motivation.

"When you come to this country as an asylum seeker, you watch all your confidence running out of your hands....You start to believe you will never do anything, that you are stupid and you get depressed. Since completing my studies and going on placement, I now know that there are so many things I can do, I can help myself and my family, but can also encourage and support other women too and that makes me feel good."

A Community Development Worker from Kenya

Our shadowing programme enables asylum seekers to understand how their occupation is practised in Scottish society while awaiting a decision on their asylum claim. If the individual is granted refugee status they will have some understanding and experience of how their chosen career operates in this country. Conversely, if their asylum decision is negative they will at least have had an opportunity to maintain or extend their professional skills in preparation for employment elsewhere.

Through Bridges I got a shadow placement at St Paul's Secondary School. I went on Fridays for 15 weeks. I shadowed 3 different teachers across the timetable. It's been a fantastic time, I've really enjoyed it. The best thing about the placement was that because I love Maths I had the chance to help

children with maths and it was my joy to help them. Not to stay home doing nothing. Even if I wasn't paid, I was happy to do something.

A Maths teacher from Burundi

What is work shadowing?

It is an opportunity to shadow someone through their normal working day; observing the routine tasks and responsibilities they undertake. The person being shadowed might provide an opportunity for the 'shadowee' to join in with these tasks and gain hands-on experience. However, the shadowee is never left unsupervised or asked to perform work that the person being shadowed would not normally undertake. Employment is not the central focus of a work shadowing placement. In the case of asylum seekers, the primary aim is to keep people engaged with their professional field, to maintain their skills and to improve their understanding of their previous professional role within a Scottish context.

Work shadowing differs from most voluntary work in that it has a limited timeframe and is organised around a work plan agreed between the host company, Bridges and the shadow. This work plan might include looking at specific professional knowledge areas or personal development goals such as becoming more confident, learning English vocabulary associated with the role or having the opportunity to use a specific software package. Placements normally run for 6-12 weeks (1 or 2 days per week) and both the client and the company are fully supported by a member of the Bridges staff. The scheme enables asylum seekers and employees who might not normally meet through other circles of life to share common knowledge about a vocation or profession. There are benefits on both sides:

For Asylum Seekers, work shadowing is an opportunity to:

- re-enter the work and professional environment from which they might have been excluded
- gain an insight into the working culture of the country in which they are now resident and take the first steps towards integration
- develop and maintain skills whilst waiting for a decision regarding their claim
- gain first hand experience of time pressures and workloads and enhance their understanding of their profession
- understand employer expectations and the rights and responsibilities of employees
- prepare asylum seekers and refugees for their return to work, both through work experience and the chance to gain references
- build confidence and self esteem
- apply the English language they have been learning in the classroom to a real situation

Becoming re-engaged with the world of work has also been shown to have a positive effect on physical and mental health.

Benefits for organisations who offer a shadow placement

Many of the organisations who work with Bridges use shadowing as a continuing professional development tool or to support attainment of recognised quality initiatives such as Investors in People or the Charter Mark. Offering shadow placements can also help staff to develop their confidence in working alongside colleagues from other cultures and

coaching others. In recruiting organisations to participate we try and emphasise the following:

- staff learn aspects about how the relevant profession is practiced in another country
- staff learn coaching and mentoring skills
- a shadow can act as a catalyst for the organisation to review and revise procedures or tasks
- provides an avenue to introduce and establish best practice on diversity issues in the workplace
- shows a commitment to community, partnership working and social justice and is therefore useful in demonstrating a genuine fulfilment of corporate social responsibility objectives

Recruiting Companies to Participate

This is certainly the hardest part of our work, particularly in encouraging commercial companies to participate in the scheme. The most successful approach is usually when a personal approach is made through acquaintances from social and business networks. We have tried direct mail including a professionally printed brochure but the response rate is low considering the time it takes for a small operation such as ours to prepare such a publication. Recruitment pages of local newspapers are a useful source of leads and often give some indication of the company's approach to staff development and corporate social responsibility. If there is a named individual it is worth telephoning them to try and arrange an appointment. Finally, larger public sector organizations often have diversity and equalities policies which encourages them to take positive action to involve socially excluded groups and so are more willing to support the project.

Steps in Setting up a Shadow Placement:

1. The introductory visit

The initial visit is an opportunity to meet key representatives and learn more about how the organisation functions in terms of its work culture, management structure, size, location and facilities. It serves to:

- outline the benefits and responsibilities of offering a shadow placement
- discuss which departments/job roles would provide suitable shadow opportunities. (If a specific placement is discussed at this stage, then a job description and person specification for the post act as a useful aid to the matching process.)
- gather background information and materials (staff handbook, annual report, organisational chart, working conditions and benefits) about the organisation which can provide contextual information for a potential shadow
- assess the organisation's motives for participating in the programme
- check any legal compliance requirements (health and safety, insurance, equal opportunities etc.)
- discuss any specific requirements such as clothing or equipment

Many companies provide student work experience placements but 'work shadowing' is less familiar. We find it helpful to take along examples of clients' Cvs: preserving anonymity at this stage. Also useful are brief pen portraits demonstrating the range of qualifications and experience they possess in relation to the organisation's work. Previous examples of work plans are also a useful way to make the concept of shadowing more concrete and develop the host's confidence to participate. The organisation should be invited to consider how they might arrange:

- An induction to the organisation, department and key members of staff
- An induction to health and safety protocols
- Who will be responsible for supervising/supporting the student and who will be the main point of contact with the Bridges' caseworker
- Where the shadow will be located (is a separate desk/computer/telephone required?)
- Informing other staff beforehand about a potential shadow
- Involving the shadow in meetings, training sessions or activities
- Timetabling a weekly, half-hour

feedback or supervision session for the shadow over the duration of his or her placement

- the procedures to reimburse the shadow's travel and lunch expenses.

2. Information and awareness training for the host staff

Bridges offers an awareness training session to organisations joining the programme which includes a video, a quiz, a presentation and a general discussion. In our experience many people are confused by the terms 'asylum seeker', 'refugee' and 'migrant' and know little about asylum seekers' rights. An informal question and answer session is a helpful way to satisfy curiosity before the shadow arrives, ease fears about what the shadow placement will involve and counter misconceptions.

A shadow placement is a mix of hands-on experience and observation, but the shadow should always be guided. The shadow can observe the work of just one or of many people within an organisation to see how the entire operation fits together. If the shadow is to move through many different work departments, there must always be one point of contact or 'buddy' with whom

they can discuss concerns. The buddy is responsible for helping the shadow settle, introducing them to other staff and the explaining the context of the job within the wider professional field.

3. Finding a match

It is essential that staff volunteer rather than are coerced into hosting a shadow. Matches are 'needs-based' as well as aligned to the interest and skills of the asylum seeker. For instance we invite companies to be open (but realistic) about their expectations: if they would prefer someone with an outgoing assertive personality, plenty of initiative and experience of a certain software package then we try to accommodate those criteria. Similarly, if our client has specific support needs or clearly identified goals, we attempt to find an organisation that can meet these requirements. Where possible we would try and match someone who has performed well on a previous placement with a new company to help ensure a rewarding and positive first experience.

4. The introductory meeting

A three-way meeting between the proposed shadow, Bridges and the organisation is arranged. It is vital that the person to be shadowed is present at this meeting as well as the line manager, placement supervisor shadow 'buddy'. Here, the shadow and host have an opportunity to get to know each other and once the conversation turns to professional interests a rapport is usually quick to develop. The work plan should be discussed and how it might incorporate the shadow's personal learning goals. This is also a good time to do a tour of the building and make some introductions so the shadow's first day is not completely unfamiliar and daunting. The practical aspects of the placement must also be discussed: which days of the week will the shadow come? For how long? Are there childcare arrangements to consider in relation to the hours worked? What is the easiest or cheapest mode of travel? And so on.

5. Paperwork

Bridges has tried to keep the paperwork required of participating companies to a bare minimum. We ask that the placement supervisor complete a short 'distance travelled' assessment of their shadow in the second week and at

the end of the placement. The client also completes a distance travelled assessment and is given a diary to record and reflect their learning experience. The host is asked to complete attendance sheets and ideally make comments against the tasks set in the work plan.

6. Ongoing support

Once the placement has begun, a Bridges' caseworker is always available to offer support and help resolve any difficulties that arise for either party. Depending on the wishes of the shadow the caseworker can accompany the client at the beginning of their first day and will normally arrange a mid-placement review visit to find out how things are going.

The placement ends with an individual evaluation session with the Bridges' shadow and the staff member who has been shadowed. The organisation is asked to evaluate the experience and invited to give feedback regarding Bridges' service. A certificate signed by Bridges and the host organisation is presented to the client and some organisations choose to honour this occasion with a small, informal ceremony to wish their shadow well.

Sample excerpts from a blank Shadow Placement Diary

Work Shadow Placement Diary

What is a shadow placement diary?

Some of the things you see and do while you are on a shadow placement will be useful to describe in future job applications and interviews. Writing down the tasks you have done each day will also help you reflect on how doing this job in Scotland is different (or the same) as in your home country. It is also important to write down how you feel about doing particular things as this may help you decide on future career choices.

Please fill in the diary during each shadow day.

Before you begin your work shadow placement

- Please write down your thoughts and feelings about beginning your shadow placement.
- Do you have any concerns or worries about the placement? What things do you think you will enjoy? What questions would you like to ask?
- What do you want to find out about?
- What are you hoping to learn from the work shadow experience?



The First Day

Date: _____ Time: _____ From to

1. Describe how you were introduced to the company and the people in it. Were any special arrangements made to introduce you to your new colleagues?

Please use the rest of the diary to describe what you did each day. Write down any new skills or vocabulary you have learned, how will this be useful to your area of work in the future?

2. Did people make you feel welcome?

3. What health and safety procedures must you follow while shadow working here?

4. What should you do if there is a fire in the building where you are working?

5. Describe what you did during your first day?

2nd Day

Date: _____ Time: _____ From to

At the end of your shadow placement:

What new skills do you feel you have acquired as a result of your placement?

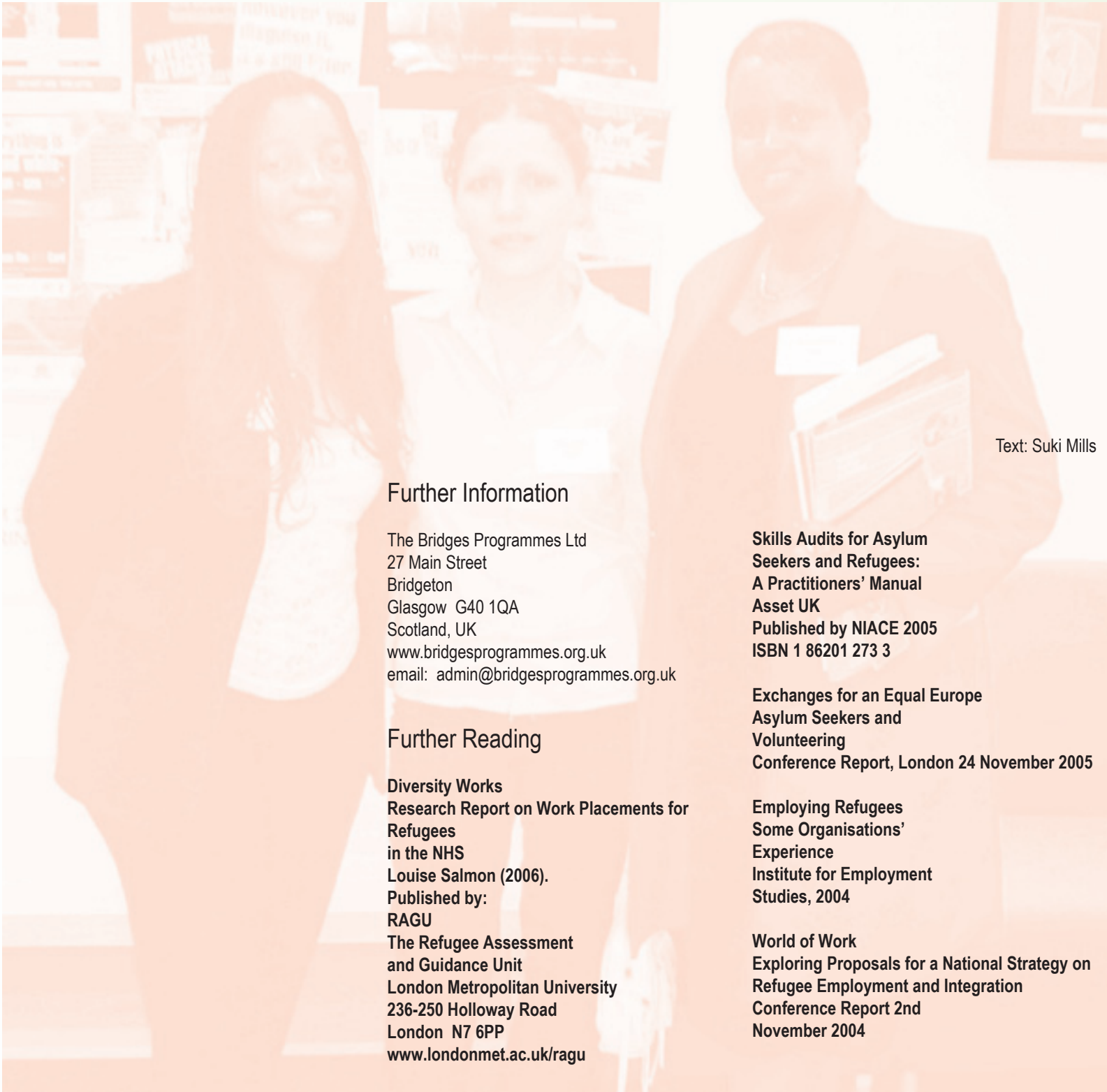
Reviewing your progress

It is normal to be good at some things and not so good at others. It is also normal for organizations to spend some time and effort to get people a bit better in areas in which they are less proficient. Where do you and the person you are shadowing think you might improve and what could you do to make this improvement? (e.g. practice, studying, training, reading and research, communicating etc.). Fill out the table below.

What happens next?

You will be invited back to Bridges Programmes to meet your caseworker to chat about how the placement went and the next steps to helping you further with your career. You may be asked to complete a short evaluation of your placement and a final 'Distance Travelled' form.

Improvement needed	Why? How will this help me do the job better?	What can I do to help myself improve in this area?



Text: Suki Mills

Further Information

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Glasgow G40 1QA
Scotland, UK
www.bridgesprogrammes.org.uk
email: admin@bridgesprogrammes.org.uk

Further Reading

Diversity Works
Research Report on Work Placements for Refugees in the NHS
Louise Salmon (2006).
Published by:
RAGU
The Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit
London Metropolitan University
236-250 Holloway Road
London N7 6PP
www.londonmet.ac.uk/ragu

Skills Audits for Asylum Seekers and Refugees: A Practitioners' Manual
Asset UK
Published by NIACE 2005
ISBN 1 86201 273 3

Exchanges for an Equal Europe
Asylum Seekers and Volunteering
Conference Report, London 24 November 2005

Employing Refugees
Some Organisations' Experience
Institute for Employment Studies, 2004

World of Work
Exploring Proposals for a National Strategy on Refugee Employment and Integration
Conference Report 2nd November 2004

Advice for Work Shadow Host

Copy of one of the documents given to organisations offering to host a shadow placement



If English is not your shadower's first language, avoid slang, idioms and excessively complex phrasing. If necessary, give instructions in advance, both orally and in writing, to give your shadower time to figure out what needs to be done.

Sit down with the shadower on their first day and draw up a detailed programme of activities. This will make it easier for the placement to run smoothly, and for both you and your shadower to get the maximum benefit from your time together.

Include the shadower in your entire daily working day. For many refugees, the social side of the work shadowing can be as valuable as the professional side.

Take time to explain how your profession works in Scotland. If possible, give contact details for your professional or trade body.

Take time to learn about your shadower's background and culture. Shadowing should be a two-way learning process.

If you feel that your shadower is lacking some vital skill, then please pass this information on to the Bridges Programmes so that we can ensure the shadower is referred to the appropriate college course or training route.

At the end of the placement, please give a reference. Lack of references is one of the main barriers for refugees trying to enter employment. Taking the time to write a short letter could make all the difference to your shadower's future.



Do not give the shadower a large and unsupervised task, which you would otherwise pay someone else to do. This would breach Home Office legislation, and could result in your shadower being sent back to their home country.

Do not make assumptions. Just because your shadower was a professional in their own country does not mean they will understand how the same job works in Scotland. Jobs can vary vastly between cultures, and feeling comfortable with the basics could make a large difference when your shadower moves back into the workplace.

Do not ask the shadower why they left their home country. Some refugees' experiences have been extremely traumatic; they may not choose to disclose why they are seeking asylum. Please respect their privacy unless the information is volunteered.

Try not to underestimate how much of a leap moving into the workplace is. Although your shadower may have been a highly respected professional in their own country, they will probably never have been in the Scottish workplace before and may have been unemployed for many years due to the protracted asylum process. Under such circumstances, returning to the workplace can be a daunting experience even for the most confident individual. Friendly support and a non-threatening environment will make all the difference.

Basic skills as a Basis for Empowerment

Do you think that empowerment can be learned and practiced?

Discuss this in your work community, or write here your own ideas.



When you are looking for opportunities for living a meaningful life, you need to have skills to make the best use of them.

Basic skills can be learned and practiced to create and reinforce a basis for empowerment.

What are the basic skills?

What would you say are the basic skills an asylum seeker needs to have in order to become empowered in the context where you work in / in the society where you live?

Discuss this in your work community, or write here your own ideas.

concepts

are all very closely related to each other, and as learning tasks can be very similar to each other

· **basic skills**

· **key skills**

· **core skills**

· **key competences**

There is no agreement on what are the most important basic skills. These vary according to the context. For everyday survival you need a different set of skills than the one necessary for being an active member of your society, for learning, or in your work life.

Basic skills can be learned at all levels and at all ages. They can be taught and practiced in many contexts of life. School and education are important in creating the basis for learning. However, non-formal and informal contexts are most efficient in updating skills, especially in adult age.

Asylum seekers do not need to learn basic skills in a course. Their basic skills can be supported wherever we work with them.

Basic skills form the necessary basis for empowerment. Basic skills are transferable skills that can be built on existing skills.

The basic skills that can be supported in many contexts are:

- **learning to learn skills (setting objectives and planning, self management and initiative, critical thinking, evaluation)**
- **communication skills (literacy, language skills, group work skills, information technology skills)**
- **participation skills (expression of and learning from identity and culture, learning from the society)**

The European Parliament and The European Council have given a recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning.

(Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council, of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning (2006/962/EC))

- 1) Communication in the mother tongue;
- 2) Communication in foreign languages;
- 3) Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology;
- 4) Digital competence;
- 5) Learning to learn;
- 6) Social and civic competences;
- 7) Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship; and
- 8) Cultural awareness and expression.

At different times and in different societies, different types of basic skills are being emphasized. In all societies, part of the population has better basic skills than others. The educational background and culture of the family are important; however, people can also learn basic skills when they are adults.

Basic skills are not static. People with good education may lose part of their skills in a crisis – such as fleeing for refuge often is. No one has got good basic skills in all areas, neither is it probable that a person may lose all basic skills at once. Usually there are some skills, some strong areas and personal interests that can be built upon and used as starting points for ”polishing” basic skills.

Skills will be expressed through concrete action, which can be supported and studied in many contexts. Motivation will be developed when supporting activities are planned in cooperation with professionals who know about the life situation of asylum seekers – be it asylum seekers themselves or people who work with them.

Why to learn basic skills?

”to understand the surrounding world and to act upon it”

Getting an opportunity to practice and polish your basic skills after a crisis such as fleeing for refuge can also be an empowering experience in itself. Learning to cope, and even more, learning to be an active citizen in a new society, may start to look less like an abstract task when you can practice the skills it requires.

When you can learn and polish basic skills, you can build on existing skills to develop

- interaction and social skills
- cooperation and conflict management skills
- participation and citizen skills
- analyse information, processing into personal knowledge and skills

The work objectives can reach much further than the learning of the actual basic skills. You can set the objectives for learning in practicing

- Strategies for participation; learning models to actively find out about and influence the society around
- Negotiation of meanings; you are interested in other cultures and other ways of life, and you will find ways to tell about your own
- Processing prejudice; you will recognize your prejudice and start learning how to deal with it
- Tolerating differences and uncertainty; how can we manage in situations where we realize that people around us think differently and are different from us – and life is not predictable
- Acting in different situations and with different people; instead of just bearing the differences, how can we learn to work with other kinds of people
- Initiative; take the initiative in your own hands instead of waiting for others to make the decisions
- Dedication; to find the energy and passion to make your life meaningful

What can we do when we are practicing empowerment?

It is hard to practice empowerment directly, but if you are planning activities to support empowerment of asylum seekers, you can think of how to work in different areas that constitute empowerment:

self expression

- Communication and interaction skills are important for practical reasons such as taking care of everyday matters, employment and studies – but asylum seekers need these skills also for being able to express themselves in a new society; to tell about themselves, their situation and their feelings, and about their own culture
- Learning a language is also learning a code system of a culture
- Without self expression skills asylum seekers have to accord to others’ views and meanings; they must be able to speak for themselves, to formulate their opinions, and to tell about their feelings
- Asylum seekers need channels to express themselves also non-verbally; remember that visual/musical/kinaesthetic communication are just as culture-bound as languages

belonging

- A feeling of belonging is abstract but it is not static; people can have a feeling of belonging to many kinds of communities also beyond national or family boundaries
- Make use of things that asylum seekers share to support the feeling of belonging to communities other than their countrymen or relatives

- Talk about home country and family – even if it hurts, asylum seekers need to talk about what they have lost or what they may lose
- All expressions of belonging build up one’s identity; it is much easier to talk about where you belong than about who you are, isn’t it?
- A feeling of belonging includes highly developed skills for managing the dynamic and changing norm systems of communities – all people have these basic skills
- Belonging is not only an individual skill; if you want to belong somewhere the community must accept and receive you. As a worker, trainer, volunteer or educator, you need to work with the receiving communities as well.

interactive negotiation of meaning

- All existing and new basic skills are used to open up for learning new things. In their life situation, asylum seekers need all the support they can get to become empowered and move away from the victim role.
- You know you are learning to negotiate when you notice that you are able to change your views
- Applying existing and new knowledge and skills in interaction supports learning
- Instead of trying to imply your culture and your views, you may find it easier and more rewarding to open up for listening to new views asylum seekers develop when they ”de-code” a new culture. It is a new voice, a new interpretation – and it is interesting! Many voices and many values in interaction help. Just start with identifying and validating the many voices, views, faces and stories.

tolerance

- As well as asylum seekers, people who work with them need to understand differences
- As well as asylum seekers, people who work with them need to be open
- This way, as well as asylum seekers, people who work with them learn to validate different cultural characters
- As well as asylum seekers, people who work with them will find room to be creative

identity

- You can organise forums where asylum seekers and members of receiving communities can tell their stories. You will find that all people have different stories about "How did I become me?"
- It is difficult to "express your identity", but it is easy and fun to tell about yourself, your past and your future plans, your family, friends and interests
- Identity is really nothing but a reflection of human relations and social situations – when there is a place for this reflection, there is place for expressing (or even building up) identity
- Every single person goes through identity changes. Asylum seekers are experiencing a forced change. A forum to process this change may help to survive it, to put it in proportion and find how you can steer the changes
- Some asylum seekers feel a fear of or a feeling of scattered identity. Could roles and stories come to help? If identities are narrative (made of reflections, stories, memories, social relations and situations, plans and possibilities), could they be fortified with narrative?

II Crossroads of Approaches: Common Goals, Different Methods

The Development Partnerships in ASAP include cooperation networks of organisations from reception of asylum seekers, social work and health care, NGO's and adult education. In addition to exchange of know-how and making visible the good practice of each organization in particular, the networks have found new forms of supporting empowerment in the cooperation.

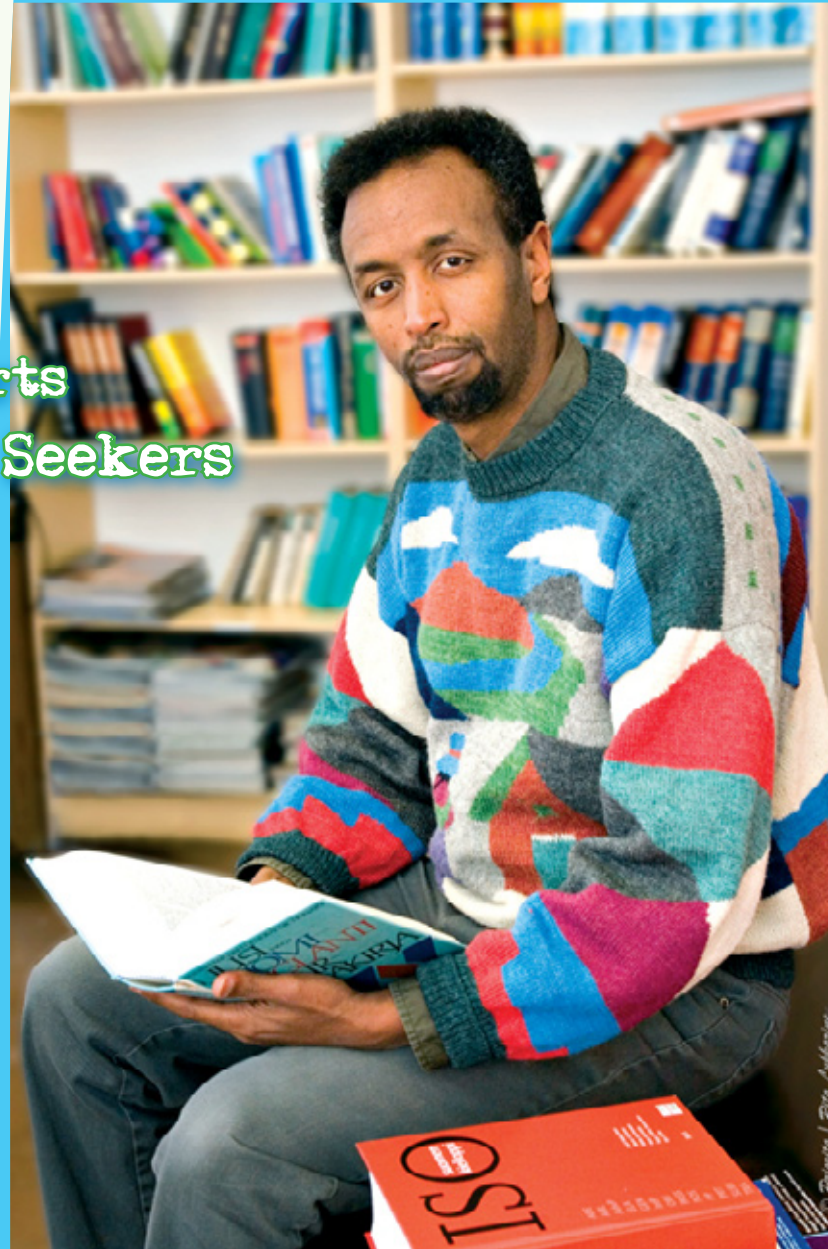
In the cooperation all parties have found the know-how of empowerment work in their core expertise. Examples in this section demonstrate how the basis of empowerment, the basic skills of asylum seekers, can be supported in various contexts. The prerequisite for succesful cooperation has been to plan the activities in cooperation. This has meant that all cooperation partners have faced a challenge to learn in the exchange.

A Refugee Counsellor Supports Basic Skills of Asylum Seekers

The counsellors at the Finnish reception centres have the task of supporting asylum seekers in their daily lives. The counsellors' work is diverse and they can have different areas of responsibility.

Ahmed Jama worked for three years at the Vaasa reception centre as a counsellor and assistant Finnish language teacher. In addition, he regularly tutored the literacy class, as well as teaching the basic computer course.

- The counsellors' work includes allocating asylum seekers flats or rooms in the centre. Asylum seekers are informed about their rights and obligations and receive guidance in practical things. The counsellors organise asylum seekers' appointments with social and health care workers and advise on how to handle various issues in the city. An identity card is prepared for each client who is then registered on the data system of Finnish reception centres. As for work and study activities that are planned together, individual needs are taken into consideration, says Ahmed.



'When peace prevails, all other issues may be resolved', says Ahmed Jama.
Photo: Rita Lukkarinen

How could work and study activities be planned since clients may change locations in a very short period of time?

- Courses have to be planned for the short term. I have also tried to motivate asylum seekers to take up courses also for social reasons – it is better to take part in a group activity even though language studies may seem difficult. In the Vaasa reception centre, we organized basic and intermediate level Finnish language courses, as well as literacy courses. Basic computer skills were taught to language groups, and a regular English conversation course was organised. Work activities were organized in woodcarving, building, or sewing. We also played football and floor ball together.

In your opinion, what are the basic skills an asylum seeker needs?

- Asylum seekers need skills that allow them to manage their lives in a new environment e.g. how to do the shopping and how to handle various issues. It is therefore necessary to speak the language and be independent. In the reception centre, work and study activities aim at teaching useful skills with no regard as to whether the asylum seeker will remain in Finland, or whether he or she will obtain a negative answer to the resident permit application. It is important that asylum seekers become conscious about their own skills and that those skills are mapped.

What are the challenges met by the counsellors?

- Regarding rejected asylum seekers who have been granted a temporary leave to stay, a 'B-status', it is difficult to motivate them to study. They may also direct their anger

at their B-status towards workers. They are frightened by the possibility of being removed from the country after the temporary leave to stay terminates, and they feel desperate about their unequal status compared to others who do have a residence permit.

In your opinion, what are the keys to one's self management?

- Finding meaningful things to do during the waiting period and participating in education. **In my opinion, self management means autonomy in every day life and the development of self-confidence.** Education has a major importance in the prevention of conflicts.

When peace prevails, all other issues may be resolved. Life is not temporary, and there is hope, says Ahmed who came to Finland as an asylum seeker from Somalia at the beginning of the 1990s. He is now a Finnish citizen with a university degree.

Text: Anne Vihelä

In a reception centre, there is a multi-professional working community including a director, a social worker, a nurse, a secretary in charge of benefits, counsellors and other workers. Often, that working community is multi-cultural as some counsellors have an immigrant background. Their knowledge of various languages and cultures is very useful.



For her professional graduation thesis at the Tampere University, Tiia Viljakainen has interviewed teachers and facilitators who work with asylum seekers in adult education centers and in reception centers. She was interested in learning about the teachers' personal experiences in how they support empowerment of asylum seekers in education and how they perceive themselves as multicultural workers. Tiia Viljakainen refers shortly to her theoretical reflection on the complex concept of empowerment and life management, and presents some empiric results of her study.

How can Education Support Empowerment of Asylum Seekers?

"The classroom is filled with the murmur of so many languages. The students have dressed up. They have brought flowers and pastries for the teachers. The atmosphere is cheerful, with a touch of sadness. Our course is over and they must go back to normal life again. What to do when they have no 'real' daily routine anymore?"

This is a description of the final day of a course for immigrants and asylum seekers which I taught a year ago. I spoke to an asylum seeker who described the void opening before him after the course. I understood that the course gave them a lot more than just a language. To have a place to go to: a place where people are interested in you, a place which can give you faith and hope for the future. This later element raised an interest in the experiences of other teachers, and led me to start the research.

I already came across the concept of life management in the framework of many employment courses and in preparatory courses for vocational studies. I realized that I had developed a critical point of view towards life management. What does it mean? Who can manage life? However, while researching, I found analysis giving another kind of view on the concept. It is not about completely managing or controlling life. I found researches in social studies, in health care, and only some in pedagogy. Hardly any research had been previously done on the empowerment of asylum seekers.

Knowing that there are teachers working with multicultural groups of asylum seekers, I wanted to research their views on multicultural work as well. Multiculturalism is another broad term with many interpretations, always depending on the purpose and context of the definition.

I interviewed nine teachers and facilitators who work in adult education centers that offer liberal adult education and in reception centres that mainly teach Finnish. All teachers interviewed had worked for the 'Becoming More Visible' project, or had participated in training organised by the project. The Finnish Association of Adult Education Centers had set an objective to develop pilot courses that would support the empowerment and basic skills of asylum seekers, while the Becoming More Visible project supported the networking between adult education centers, reception centers, and NGOs.

The adult education centres took the initiative in developing educational curricula that would support empowerment through the Becoming More Visible project. Until today, reception centers had the main responsibility to support asylum seekers.

Control, Life management and Empowerment

Research has dealt with empowerment and life management, mostly in the context of exclusion and coping with problems in life. Life management is usually divided into interior and exterior life management, the exterior referring to material factors like work, home and money. Rotter (1996) defines exterior life management as events in life outside the scope of influence an individual can have. The interior life management links with experiences, needs and personal characteristics that will help you in a crisis.

Empowerment is in the communication between the individual and the surrounding community. Both parties have an influence on empowerment. You can look at empowerment

What is empowerment

from two angles; personal experiences and sense of empowerment, as well as exterior characteristics and markers.

In psychology, there is unanimity on the human need for a sense of self-control (Ojanen 2001). Most likely people are contented when having a sense of self-control. Being oppressed or having a feeling of not being able to control the world around you causes discomfort. The Finnish researcher Annika Forsander talks about learned helplessness caused by the lack of power to control. When you feel that your actions have no meaning or you have no power to control your life, you become passive. This can cause depression. Forsander refers to Solheim's notion of the client syndrome of asylum seekers, describing it as the process in which asylum seekers lose a grip on their life as other authorities make decisions for them. Solheim describes this as a situation where a worker takes up an even greater responsibility for the asylum seeker.

Teachers interviewed see the lack of power to control life in the anxiety of the asylum seeker. Asylum seekers do not know what follows and who will decide over their case. The teachers thought that it was very important for each to have the power to decide over their lives. Asylum seekers may have a different concept of this though, due to their different values and cultural backgrounds. Values are central in defining criteria of good life. In Finland and in western countries we value individual freedom and personal control of life. During interviews, opinions were divided on how important cultural values are in building sense of empowerment. While appreciating the individual experience, many teachers think

In an education group a framework can be created for the asylum seeker to keep up every day routines and build a sense of continuity in life.

that a basic set of important elements in life remains the same for people all over the world.

Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs was referred to during interviews; how physiological and safety needs (once fulfilled) create a basis for further needs like need of love and belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization. A question was raised on whether a need of belonging to a community and self-esteem could be fulfilled in an education group. On the bottom rung of the hierarchical ladder an asylum seeker may still sense insecurity. **In an education group a framework can be created for the asylum seeker to keep up every day routines and build a sense of continuity in life.** The teachers also suggested that taking into account everyone's cultural background in an education group could help preserve cultural identity and fulfill one of the basic human needs. It was also pointed out that motivation to learn a new language is hard to achieve in a situation where basic needs in life are not fulfilled.

Experiencing empowerment

The Finnish researcher J.P. Roos (1987) divided life management into exterior and interior aspects. The exterior aspect referred to the person's ability to eliminate unexpected upsets in life and to relatively continuously accomplish personal goals and dreams. The interior aspect allows the person to adjust within the prevailing conditions and to look ahead.

What is interesting is how interior aspects of life management or empowerment do not show. The person's experience of meaningful

The person's experience of meaningful life can be subjective.

life can be subjective. For example, western women would reject a veil, whereas there have been experiences of feeling secure having been cared for from women in cultures where a veil is used. Here, we cannot claim that a veiled woman is not empowered, although a western woman in that situation may feel that way.

During interviews, the teachers were cautious on evaluating the influence of education on the empowerment of asylum seekers. If exterior life management could be seen from the outside, it could lead one to think that with asylum seekers, upsets in life have not been eliminated and that the achievement of one's own goals was interrupted by the crisis caused by leaving the home country. This interpretation sounds uncomfortable. I am inclined to Rotter's (1966) interpretation of exterior life management, which states that **exterior life management includes matters that are not within the reach of an individual.** There are limits to how much you can control events in life and this is true for asylum seekers. In the secular western thinking, it is hard to accept that we cannot control everything. In difficult situations, it is probably a prerequisite for a feeling of meaningful life in order to accept one's own limits.

Individualistic and collective views on empowerment and culture

In western cultures, it is common to conceive life management as an individual characteristic, or the ability to cope in life. In other cultures, life management may be seen as a collective task.

Exterior life management includes matters that are not within the reach of an individual.

Bhurga has looked into the meaning of cultural identity in the wellbeing of immigrants. Bhurga does not use terms 'empowerment' or 'life management' directly. However, we can look at Bhurga's definitions on differences in elements of wellbeing in two types of cultures to understand how we could support the empowerment of people coming from collective cultures.

Differences in collective and individual communities. Bhurga 2005.

Collective	Individualistic
Us -thinking	Me -thinking
Us -consciousness	Me -consciousness
Collective identity	Autonomy, independency
Dependency	Emotional independency
Group loyalty	Individuality
Sharing responsibility	Right to privacy
Sharing duties	Right to search for personal satisfaction
Stable/preconditioned bounds	Right to secure economy
Collective decisions	Specified bonds
Focus: roles/responsibilities	Individual choices and decisions
Sharing of material and immaterial goods	Focus: orders/laws/rules
"My family expects me to be friendly"	Loose bonds btw individuals
	"I am friendly"

The teachers interviewed emphasized the concept of a collective community for asylum seekers. In collective cultures the individual defines self, desires, needs, skills, characteristics and bonds through the community. When leaving the home country, losing the community is highly challenging for identity. Identity, to my mind, is indisputably important for life management, and empowerment. Cultural background and identity are important in the same way as any individual habits, customs and personal characteristics in forming your empowerment. Entering an individual culture from a collective one sets a double challenge for finding a balance in life management.

How can education support empowerment

" Education is a path to life. Education will always help you to understand. You cannot cope with the world without education. You cannot tell how far you can reach with it, but whether you learn or not, it is always worth trying." **Zarina Razai, The Refugee**

Woman of the year 2006 in Finland.

(Interview in the newsletter of the Finnish Refugee Council in 21.3.2006)

Zarina Razai now has gained residency in Finland and can speak convincingly for education. I think it is important for an asylum seeker or for a refugee to get an early experience in the field of education in order to ensure routes to education in the future. On the other hand, it is good to remember that education does not solve everything, and that everyone has the right to decide on what is essential for a good life.

The teachers working with asylum seekers presented dual views on the influence of their work on empowerment; the range of their evaluations varied from positive to skeptical. As for the main benefits from education for an asylum seeker, the teachers mentioned:

- experiences of success
- temporary relief from everyday life
- meeting other people
- participation in regular activities
- formation of everyday routines
- peer support in the study group
- feeling of security
- feeling of liberation, e.g. using active methods
- learning and understanding of a new language and culture

All of this creates a simple foundation for everyday life. In this special and difficult life situation, these are important things for asylum seekers, although teachers may emphasize that no big expectations are to be set for education. Teachers report that they do receive positive feedback from their course participants, but they find it hard sometimes to judge whether asylum seekers give positive feedback simply due to cordiality and respect for their teachers.

What is Multicultural Work?

Asylum seekers come from cultures that are different from the one into which they arrive, for example in Finland. According to Geert Hofstede’s theory of cultural dimensions, Finland is described as a feminine culture with a small power distance index. The change of roles from a student to a teacher is not a problem for Finns and people from similar cultures. In a masculine culture, a teacher, and expert, must act clearly within his role, and it is not natural to move from one role to another. When these cultures meet in the classroom, we face a multicultural setting. Both teachers and asylum seekers face new meetings of cultures, not only one new culture.

There are many training courses for teachers and other professionals on ‘multicultural competencies’, referring to the individual’s ability to react and act appropriately in different situations. Nevertheless, multicultural situations cannot be tackled with tricks. There are no simple solutions for a complex social question like the meeting of cultures. Rather, we are challenged to an open dialogue on the principles of living together in a multicultural society (Huttunen, Löytty & Rastas 2005, 23). There are more detailed strands in competencies that are defined as teacher’s multicultural competence, teacher’s intercultural competence, ethno-teaching, culturally sensitive teaching or culture of immigrant work.

Although many teachers did face problems due to the heterogeneity and diversity of their groups, they still approached the problems disinterestedly from the multicultural point of view. During interviews, not many teachers defined their work as multicultural.

Working in a multicultural context was everyday routine and it was not emphasized as anything special. According to the teachers, multicultural competencies are similar to the ones needed in all types of work with people; understanding the life situation and culture of others and recognizing own attitudes towards different people and cultures. All in all, **cultural differences do not seem to define the situation in education as much as does the life situation of the refugee.** It was mentioned in one example, that an educational course may be seen as a route to obtain residency. Therefore, asylum seekers tended to control their behaviour even more than ordinary immigrants enrolled in education.

Coping with many languages in the classroom was not considered a big problem. There was no great need identified for in class interpreters. On the contrary, teachers found it easier to just use the language to be taught. The lack of common language is a challenge for the teacher’s creativity. A lot of visual material is being used, and there is still a need for more suitable materials. Visual literacy is not universal either, and it depends on former educational and cultural backgrounds.

Different needs and educational backgrounds in the group caused more problems for teachers than differences in cultures and languages. In education, asylum seekers are often classified as one group, which they are not due to their diverse educational needs.

Cultural differences do not seem to define the situation in education as much as does the life situation of the refugee.

The teachers saw themselves as teachers and educators and felt that their resources were insufficient to deal with students who had serious mental problems and trauma. The teachers clearly saw that their professional role was to be only teachers. They were willing to accept the role of listener, but within their own limits. It is important to know where to direct the students that are in need of mental health care. Teachers with a long experience of working with asylum seekers mentioned about a ‘touch’ that they had developed for detecting mental problems a student might experience. In these cases, the teachers felt that to recognize these problems was a challenge in their work.

Working in study groups for asylum seekers demands great personal resources and creativity. Since the teacher’s personality is used in work as one of the essential tools, their working capacity is challenged. **Even when results are often small and almost invisible steps, teachers need to have the strength to go on.** They hardly get any feedback or reward for their work. At times there was some tendency to reduce one’s work input, and on other occasions signs of cultural shock that a worker with foreigners faced. In the beginning there is great enthusiasm and the need to help people, after which people may get frustrated, exhausted, and lose their motivation until they redefine the meaning of their work. The teachers seemed to be aware of the demands and the character of their work, and were able to analyze them.

Even when results are often small and almost invisible steps, teachers need to have the strength to go on.

Teachers and facilitators of asylum seekers can work in diverse contexts: non-governmental organisations, educational institutions and reception centers. There are no traditional work descriptions that could be used as guidelines, and many teachers find themselves alone in reflecting on the conditions and the meaning of their work.

”I see a familiar face in the street. Someone is waving – it is my ex student who wants to tell me about a new study place in a local education institution. He seems happy. He still addresses me as teacher - I am pleased to have met him and seen that our work has had some influence.”

Text: Tia Viljakainen

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'Adult education centre and reception centre became close cooperation partners in the Becoming More Visible project', says Anne Kilponen.



Adult Education Centre Learns from Working with Asylum Seekers

Tampere Adult Education Centre is one of the cooperation partners of the Becoming More Visible Equal Partnership in Finland, and has developed studies to support the empowerment and basic skills of asylum seekers. Although the centre has experience of immigrant students, asylum seekers have been a new target group to design activities for. Centres of liberal adult education traditionally organize lots of activities to support the basic skills; in the development work with Becoming More Visible this tradition has been validated, evaluated and redirected for asylum seekers' needs. Anne Kilponen, the educational planner, writes here about the challenges and results of their development work.

When the Tampere Adult Education Centre was established in 1899 as the first adult education centre in Finland, its ideology was based on strong patriotism and its aim was to raise the spirit of nationalism. The adult education centre was mostly attended by factory workers who had moved from the countryside to the city following work availability.

But when hundred years later the adult education centre started organizing education for asylum seekers to support their life, it was no more about raising the spirit of nationalism. However, the same values were and are still prevailing today in the background. We emphasize freedom in our activities i.e. the student's independent right to choose why and what to study, and also the liberty of the adult education centre to organize the kind of education that is best appropriate for

each situation. Pluralism and impartiality are important for us. We endeavour to support people's psychological, physical and social wellbeing.

In the past, the centre has organized Finnish language groups for women with children in cooperation with the Immigration Office and the Reception Centre. Language courses and general language examinations intended for immigrants also increased our experience.

First, we organized many courses with a certain number of hours for asylum seekers: 30 hours of Finnish language, 30 hours of Information technology, 30 hours of English, and 30 hours for the Women's group. The Women's group was a course introducing the Finnish way of life by means of methods based on activities. In the Women's group, we noticed that the reserved time was not sufficient at all. We reduced the number of courses, extended their duration, and focused more on their content. Sufficient time was given to participants in the Women's group to get to know each other better and to do various things together. Groups that were created were reflections of their participants. In the Finnish language and Information technology courses, the goal was to teach basic things. Concerning some computer courses, teaching started slowly as students were arriving late or leaving too early. But learning the course rules on one hand, and seeing the progress of the teaching on the other, quickly motivated the students, and most of them wished at the end of the course that it would continue. In these courses, our aim was to teach students things that would facilitate their integration and their own life. Even little things such as the use of e-mail and knowing the numbers could help in many ways. Fortunately, the free of charge Sampola Library Net

The collective spirit at the adult education centre made it possible to get help from other full-time teachers, while part-time teachers were also requested to cooperate.

What is empowerment

Square and other Internet points of the city gave students the possibility to pursue their training on Internet usage once the course was over.

During the Becoming Visible and Becoming More Visible projects, we organized a total of seven women's groups, ten basic computer courses (four of which were for specific language groups), three English language courses and four Finnish language and culture courses. During those years, seventeen teachers and assistants were teaching in courses related to the projects. Ten of them had an immigrant background. For many of them, the course was their first employment in Finland. A teacher with an immigrant background can also better guide and advice those who have been in Finland only for a short period of time. There was a strong aspect of peer tutoring prevailing in the groups.

What have we learnt?

Today, I have the feeling that with the Becoming More Visible project, I have entered into a project that would not end one day but which has to be pursued as long as necessary. Initially, the project was easy to start as funding was guaranteed. In the future, funding has to be secured from other sources or the project has to be funded as a training service purchased by the city itself.

One person cannot carry out this kind of work alone. **The collective spirit at the adult education centre made it possible to get help from other full-time teachers, while part-time teachers were also requested to cooperate.** The project contributed to strengthen the

collective spirit. It was encouraging to see how part-time teachers, as well as the registered student association of the Tampere Adult Education Centre positively joined the project. We tried various short workshops with the Women's group such as performing drama, mask-making in the fine arts classroom, woodcarving, felting, cooking in the premises of the home economics department. We also made an excursion, during a pleasant summer day with rain showers, to the summer resort of the students' association where we had a sauna bath and a barbecue with sausages and pancakes. Part-time and full-time teachers took pleasure in guiding workshops in their own areas of expertise. Afterwards, they mentioned how nice and different those workshops were. Teachers were given immediate and positive feedback regarding their work. Surely, many had the strong feeling that they did help their neighbours to cope with their difficult life situation.

Immigrants and asylum seekers are a particularly challenging target group. Their cultural backgrounds, languages, learning skills and experiences are diverse. Their knowledge of Finland, of our culture and of our learning concepts is limited. Time must be sufficiently allocated for learning, and the targets must be realistic. **One objective of the training was to present asylum seekers something different to think about and to give them the possibility to withdraw for a while from daily life at the reception centre.** Simply reaching that target was worthwhile. It would be interesting to learn in a couple of years, how the participants have succeeded in integrating their environment, and whether they think that the courses were useful for them, and in which way.

During the project, we did learn more about asylum seekers, their situations, as well as work at the reception centre. Also during the course of the project, the scope of the work related to immigrant target groups was enlarged.

The experiment of distributing study vouchers to immigrants was an example of how educational organizations could work for the benefit of the target group instead of being in competition.

One objective of the training was to present asylum seekers something different to think about and to give them the possibility to withdraw for a while from daily life at the reception centre.

An international theatre course was added to the usual curricula of the Adult Education Centre. Every autumn, the group is reconstituted and joined by new immigrants and Finns. One of our goals for this group – bringing together Finns and immigrants around a common hobby or studies – has been successfully reached. Indeed, the project made asylum seekers and immigrants more visible in our institute.

The Tampere Adult Education Centre has done quality work since the 1990's, under the direction of Sirkka-Liisa Häyrynen, Senior Teacher of Social Sciences. Quality work at the adult education centre is based on developing and evaluating activities. The work done in cooperation with the entire full-time staff reinforced the collective spirit. For the work focusing on immigrants' education, we were rewarded the 2006 Quality Award of the Adult Education Centres.

Text: Anne Kilponen
Educational Planner
Adult Education Centre of the City of Tampere

Interview:

Computer classes as a psychosocial educational group activity



Psychosocial Computer Class for Children

Computer classes at OMEGA, Austria, were first launched in the context of a psychosocial project in 2001. By 2007 more than 450 people, many of them young people from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, had participated in various classes. The courses are not designed as solely computer training classes, but rather employ a psychosocial educational approach.

In the atmosphere of a safe group, problems other than those of a technical nature can be voiced and dealt with. In a group approach we reach out to more people and cause a synergistic effect. For the group members regular meetings are a way of

tackling their isolation, meeting people, making friends and forming support networks.

Psychosocial projects have a long history at OMEGA. They are meant to offer to the participants the chance for learning and personal development in an atmosphere of safety and cultural equality. For example, the lack of German language skills is no longer seen as a defect or barrier towards learning and integration. Rather it is cultural diversity experienced as a personal asset and a welcome advantage. The value of each and every culture is highlighted and experienced by the group participants. Our work aims at increasing the migrants' awareness or their respective cultural identities and promoting

respect towards other cultures as an important step towards integration and inclusion.

M. Daniel Adimkew was born in Ethiopia, studied in Moscow, and later migrated to Austria. M. Adimkew has been working at OMEGA- Health Care Centre as Network administrator and Computer class trainer since 2002. He speaks Amharic (his mother tongue), Russian, German and English fluently.

**Computer classes in a health care centre?!
Sounds unusual, what is it all about?**

– We offer free computer classes to migrants within the framework of different projects. These serve as a further training measure to teach them not only how to use the computer but also (depending on the respective project and group involved) how to write your CV on a computer, do an online job application, surf the web, etc. There are open classes anybody can join such as a class for adult beginners or children and teens etc. Priority for those classes is our client group in counselling at OMEGA. Learning new skills and getting involved in activities offered by the community is an important step in the integration process and is beneficial to the health and general well-being of the participants, explains M. Daniel Adimkew.

**Computer classes as socio-pedagogic activity?!
What are the goals of this approach?**

– The main goal is to offer some breathing space for people who are otherwise constantly confronted with their problems, memories of traumatic experiences and stress caused by the many difficulties they have to face in their everyday lives as refugees. In participating in a class, they can free their minds by concentrating on a topic which is not related to their personal situation. Many see the computer classes as a relaxing experience. It is also an opportunity for them to get out of the shelter, meet others and communicate, exchange ideas or simply hang out together. In this way they tackle their personal isolation.



M. Daniel Adimkew teaches at the free computer classes of Omega.

Another advantage they gain by participating and developing computer skills is the prestige which in the minds of many is still connected to being able to work with a computer. This is especially important when we think of the decrease in status refugees have to face after their escape from terror. They save their lives by fleeing their home countries but for a very high price: the loss of family ties, friends, jobs, their possessions. In the host country they start from zero having to build everything from scratch.

The psychosocial educational aspect and approach is that in the informal setting of the computer classes at OMEGA it is possible to build up trust and a personal relationship to a certain degree. The maximum number of participants in a class is ten. In the class we always include a round of discussion about how everybody is, what the activities were in the past week since our last meeting etc. Team work and group activities are another good method to get people to communicate and work together.

– As an adult education trainer with my own history of migration, I take close note of the psycho-social situation of each individual participant and include them in my report in the clients' database: accessible to all counsellors at OMEGA. If I see that a client is in counselling at OMEGA I might talk to the respective counsellor to exchange information or add some observations I have made, like 'XY seems unable to concentrate at the moment and is easily offended/ is reacting aggressively again. He has told

me his next interview in the asylum procedure is coming up next month. Are you seeing him before then?', says M. Daniel Adimkew.

The computer classes are also a good opportunity to reach out to people. When necessary we refer clients who open up and talk about their problems in the course of the class to other counsellors or aid and relief organisations. They can then receive appropriate treatment, support and help.

Text: Nicola Baloch

Doing Together Is a Way of Supporting Empowerment

The Finnish liberal adult education system provides many work forms that can support asylum seekers in their life management and empowerment, offering a "soft landing" to Finnish culture and Finnish people, says Tuija Arina-Sundelin, an arts teacher from the Vaasa Adult Education Centre. Together with her colleague Anne Viinikka they took the challenge and designed two courses for women asylum seekers in Vaasa.

This was the first time that courses for asylum seekers were organized at the Vaasa Adult Education Centre. The two arts teachers decided to build the course programme in relation to their core expertise; handicrafts and plastic arts. Activities aiming at supporting self-confidence,



'Working with asylum seekers has been an opportunity to renew my methods of arts teaching', says Tuija Arina-Sundelin.

Photo: Rita Lukkarinen

identity and empowerment started with meeting other women and creating something beautiful for one's self. The women tried out ceramics, silk painting and jewellery.

The nature of the course was similar to leisure time activities, yet with the aim of supporting empowerment. How can teachers tell if the course was useful to participants?

– You have to read the weak signals on people's faces. You can see a smile and happiness. I think that expressing feelings is important. I can judge things by seeing that the women came every time, and that sometimes it was hard to make them have coffee breaks.

– Although we made things with our hands, we did not want to attach too much importance to the end product. We tried to shift the emphasis to meeting with others, doing things together, getting to know each other and learning some language along the way. We learned that handicrafts are not equally appreciated everywhere in the world. Here, it is common that many people knit and sew, but elsewhere handicrafts may be left to professionals, Tuija explains.

The teachers commented that they have learned a lot from this experience. They also participated in the training at the Becoming More Visible project to learn facts about asylum seeking in Europe and to develop methods of working with asylum seeker groups.

– A group where we had no common language was a challenge for my teaching. I discovered that our culture is very verbal. Although I am an arts teacher, I explain a lot with words. Now I had to think how to do differently. This has been an opportunity to renew my methods, says Tuija Arina-Sundelin.

Text: Teija Enoranta

What is liberal adult education?

Adult education centers, study centers, summer universities and folk high schools offer courses and activities of non-formal education where students participate on their own initiative. Studying leads to no degree.

What is Socio-Cultural Animation?

- Working with people and groups so that they participate in and manage the communities in which they live
- Social practice oriented towards consciousness raising and the development of the repressed, deprived or latent potential of individuals, small groups and communities.
- People are viewed as participants, subjects and active agents. Workers take care of the environment and interaction.

Socio-Cultural Animation Creates Encounter and Dialogue

In the Becoming More Visible partnership in Finland, staff of reception centres and adult education centres participated in common training about supporting basic skills and empowerment. One of the frameworks in the training was socio-cultural animation.

Four animators and trainers speak here about how they can use socio-cultural animation as a framework when working with asylum seekers. What are dialogue, encounter and animation in every day work?

“How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.”

Anne Frank

KA (Kai Alhanen): What is important for you in socio-cultural animation? Is it a philosophy, is it a method or is it a value?

JS (Jarkko Soininen): For me, the belief in human capacity to act for the good of one’s own life and close environment is central to socio-cultural animation. I believe that with my work I can improve people’s life and society. Dialogue and ‘being there’ for others are my important points of departure for work that help me to understand other people and the world around me. To think that my work really has a meaning gives energy to my encounters with people.

MK (Marko Kangas): The way dialogue is described in animation is beautiful and deep, and I want to strive for that. I am especially thrilled by the belief in personality and in



Olli-Pekka Ahtiainen (left), Jarkko Soininen, Kai Alhanen and Marko Kangas of the Aretai Training and Education Co-operative discuss about how socio-cultural animation can offer a framework for empowerment work with asylum seekers. Photo: Anne Nisula

possibilities for continuous human growth in relation to other people. It is important to work with communities; not only with individuals, believing that all people can make an impact on their community. Animation is about making the world a better place, yet starting with very small changes.

OPA (Olli-Pekka Ahtiainen): Yes, making the world better gives a deep meaning to the work. Particularly in the western world, people are forced into situations where they are not as free as they should be. Animation supports people in becoming freer to be what they are: to participate in their own lives and society.

KA: Is socio-cultural animation equal to empowerment?

OPA: There are many similar elements. Of course we must ask what empowerment is in practice. **As an animator I enjoy the questioning and the growth with the people I work with.** I don’t think that empowerment can be a one-way process, either. As an animator I participate in our shared process, yet not becoming a permanent part of other people’s

**As an animator
I enjoy the
questioning and
the growth with the
people I work with.**

life. I gain something myself and not only give from something that I possess.

MK: An animator must be prepared to change in the process, too. Professional vocation and commitment are central.

OPA: The worker must value a concept of the 'personal human' and make it visible in the work and respect the different views that others may have.

JS: The concept of a dialogical encounter includes the idea of interaction between people and their values. **In a dialogue, something new is born from the interaction, produced by both parties.** It is not one-way. I think that in this two-way encounter we can find the difference between animation and empowerment work.

OPA: Of course 'dialogue' is a lofty concept and in practice, it is extremely challenging to create a forum for a dialogue to take place. Anyhow, I think that we must accept diverse expressions of a dialogue in different kinds of encounters, if we think that all people are unique and all encounters are special.

MK: If you read textbooks written about animation, you may find it hard to understand whether dialogue can happen in everyday work at all. A philosophically determined perfect dialogue may be very rare. You do not have to think that in

everyday work, a process of socio-cultural animation should come off as determined in literature.

JS: It is not important what labels we give to our work and how we call it. It is more important to look

at your attitude. **Do you really want to meet people? Do you believe that your work has an importance?** Do you think you can make the world a better place?

KA: Are you saying that animation is more about values than methods?

JS: You could say that it is about appreciating people, in a situation created by the animator.

OPA: In a seminar I listened to a story of an asylum seeker woman from Somalia, who had arrived at the Finnish border from Russia not even knowing in which country she was arriving. She asked for asylum and was surprised by a guard who looked at her, smiled and said: 'Welcome to Finland'. At that moment, that was enough to make her feel safe. It was a small deed, but you can say that there was a true human encounter.

MK: I am inclined to think that an encounter, a dialogue, sharing in a community and change can all become true in many different and very small ways. In theory animation can be frightfully elevated, suggesting that an animator gives spirit and integrity to people, or builds a community where people can realize their personality in all of its valuable forms. An animator should help people to reach a level of critical and deep interpretation of their problems, to escape from their passivity. Often this is difficult or practically impossible. Still, if you pick up the core message about the attitude towards other people, it will help you to carry out the ideas of socio-cultural animation even in the briefest encounters.

Do you really want to meet people? Do you believe that your work has an importance?



It is good to realize that taking others into account is the simplest and most meaningful deed of animation that can take place anywhere.

We cannot act alone.

KA: Do you need a theory of socio-cultural animation at all, if people can best realize this in their everyday assignments?

JS: A theory can help you to become conscious of the effect of your everyday deeds. A theory can also light up the passion and understanding of the meaning of your own choices. **It is good to realize that taking others into account is the simplest and most meaningful deed of animation that can take place anywhere.**

MK: It is wonderful that people can find how meaningful small things like a smile can be.

OPA: I have had to struggle to abandon my own objectives for the change that other people are reliving. I catch myself from hoping their changes would be the ones I think are valuable. I used to imagine that I had to be able to point out the ways for a change, or that the changes needed to be big and visible to be meaningful. I try to trust more in the importance of the slightest of changes, to respect them and to celebrate them.

The most important thing is that the change starts from within yourself.

MK: In socio-cultural animation, there is a message for the modern individual that reminds us about our social nature. **We cannot act alone.**

KA: There is a strand of animation drawing from the thoughts of Paulo Freire, emphasizing the critical changing of society. Do you find that social criticism is meaningful?

MK: It is important for me, in terms of political awakening and recognizing your own position. I need to think what I can change and what I cannot. The process of animation can enhance people's awareness, to their mobility and encourage active participation in the development of their society.

OPA: I need to challenge myself to remain critical towards my own thinking. To be able to empower or animate others I have to stop and make clear what I think myself. I try to get rid of my way of classifying people, or at least to become conscious of my prejudice.

JS: To me a critical attitude means that I will not accept the role of bystander in my own life. An active life means bringing in diverse opinions. You have to open up and bring forth different views. To me, animation without criticism is meaningless. Criticism does not have to mean that you have to change everything; it can also help you to defend what already exists.

In a dialogue, something new is born from the interaction, produced by both parties.

I stress the 'how to do' instead of 'what to do'.

KA: How do you express socio-cultural animation in your work with asylum seekers and immigrants?

OPA: I hope to carry an attitude of animation in my spinal cord to the extent that it will be expressed in all of my work, in whatever I do with people.

KA: Even if you play football with asylum seekers? What makes it socio-cultural animation?

OPA: Football can become animation if I work with people with the objective of using methods that are meaningful to these particular people. Working with asylum seekers, I would start by doing together something that they feel comfortable with. Playing football, people get exercise. They meet each other and do things together. For me as a worker it gives an opportunity to meet people in another forum to talk about things that would not come up if we were sitting in classroom.

JS: Yes, socio-cultural animation can mean that you have a holistic attitude in encounter with people, and it will be reflected in all of your work.

KA: How can you detect that a worker has this attitude and some do not?

OPA: If we think about the football example, I can either think that I will arrange a football match so that people will not just sit indoors. I give them the ball and say: 'Play'. As an animator, my motive to get people to play would be to answer the need for interaction and assembly. Whatever I arrange, I arrange after I have listened to people and found out what could be important and reality for them.

MK: I have tried to stick to openness in the processes where I work. **I stress the 'how to do' instead of 'what to do'.** This does reflect animation more as an attitude or value. People need experience of being able to act on the world around and of being able to make at least some changes in their lives. Whatever I have planned as a method to get people to talk about themselves, for instance, can be replaced by playing football. Then, I believe, people will get an experience of having affected what happens to them. It is a prerequisite for other elements of animation to begin functioning.

JS: To conclude, we can say that it is important that people participate and explain things that are important to them. Then we can move to a dialogue about the present situation and come to an understanding of ourselves and others. Animation can create trust and hope in the meaning of each moment of life – even the moment when you are waiting for the decision made by others in an asylum seeking process.

KA: Can you give some examples of methods that you have worked with?

JS: I have worked with asylum seekers on an excursion where we have lived together. We stay together and do everyday things together; cook, talk, and play. I use a lot of picture materials to help with languages. We use pictures to express where we come from and what we hope from life now. We learn a little bit of language, but it is the most important thing to just be together, in a pleasant surrounding away from the everyday problems of the reception centre.

KA: When you work in this kind of a context, how can you see that you are in a middle of a process of socio-cultural animation?

For me the degree of openness in everything we do is the indicator.

MK: **For me the degree of openness in everything we do is the indicator.** First, we talk about expectations the participants have and really try to take them into account in what we plan. We make room for everyone to connect with each other and to tell about their situation. This constitutes the first phase of animation, where you make visible the reality in which people live. This phase can be carried out with a very critical attitude, looking for both personal and social needs for development.

I keep track of the group process and what new comes up in the group as they work together. All the time we examine the realities and objectives of the participants themselves. We spend time sitting in a circle and listening to each other. In small groups people mix and create new contacts and through new dialogues look at themselves from another angle. This is the second phase of the process and it adds up to an understanding of the surrounding reality. In the third phase we look for ways to start changing some of the things in life. We always stress that the road to a better future is long and winding.

KA: You may sound vague when explaining that socio-cultural animation is not about methods but about attitudes.

OPA: I agree. Still, animation can only start from objectives that have been recognized and determined. Objectives may change along the way but they always determine what we do in practice. What group we work with determines what kind of methods can be used. A group that is starting work together needs different methods from the one already proceeding in planning action together. The methods that lead us to our objectives need to be suitable for the group and for me as a worker. If we need



methods with which I cannot work, I ask for help.

JS: It is magnificent, although challenging, to start from what asylum seekers are good at and then build on that. We can make our common time meaningful when people take charge of things they are interested in and enjoy doing; like cooking, arranging games or playing instruments. On a course for asylum seekers we spent an evening playing and singing songs that were important for us, and many remember that as a wonderful moment. We were united by the feeling of sharing through expression, where status did not matter.

MK: We can encourage people in everyday things that are typical for our culture but new to them; like the time concept, or women presenting their views. I tell this to the group openly saying that these things are important for me. This way I can help them to understand our ways.

OPA: A learning task for me is to understand that I am not Jesus Christ for others, and I am not here to save anyone or to change their life. I am only temporarily visiting their life. This is also liberating. I can accept that I am only dealing with matters that affect their life here and now. Still, I need to get to know people and find out what is important for them. What are they thinking? What do they long for? An asylum seeker wants a residence. I cannot give that, and I need to be honest about it. Instead, with an asylum seeker I can concentrate on how we can make the waiting time as good as possible. **What can we do right now?** I also have to accept the situation if someone does not want to act on changing things from the way they are.

MK: In my experience, it is hard to get away from being a ‘Jesus’. On a course for asylum seekers, the teacher is often the one with all the knowledge and contacts. In the eyes of the students, the teacher is a potential rescue.

What can we do right now?

KA: Do you find that when you work as an animator with asylum seekers, your work is different from the work you do with other groups?

MK: Yes. The animator should work towards awakening critical thinking, for empowering the community and leading the energy for change. Working with asylum seekers, you sometimes think that these tasks are false. Asylum seekers may have hopes related to their everyday life, but the major change in life they hope for is to return to their home country – were it safe, or else be able to stay in Finland. Everything else is secondary. The most important decision of their life is made elsewhere. The process of socio-cultural animation cannot affect the decision in any way. This may create a contradiction for the worker. Some of the participants may also feel that I am

betraying their hopes, but I just have to accept their feelings of deception.

OPA: Sometimes I work in a situation where I don’t know if people in the group of asylum seekers are telling the truth for us workers. I have to think how to act in that situation. What is the quality of our encounter when I have to think that I am not hearing the truth? Can I still believe in the person facing me, and understand that there is a reason for hiding something.

KA: Can a dialogue exist if people are lying?

MK: I think this is the point from which we have to start working, if that is at all possible. Asylum seekers may well see us as figures who need not know everything. We must engage with lies if it is all we have. There is a person facing us, with a story of her own.

KA: Is it possible for a worker to say aloud that they suspect someone of lying?

JK: You can be direct and transparent. I can say that I think you are lying but I can still face you and go on with our dialogue.

OPA: What is my attitude towards this person? What do I have to know about an asylum seeker I work with? It is not up to me to decide whether a life story is true or not. The animator is in the situation then and values what is important and true for people here and now. We must ask what we can do now.

KA: In socio-cultural animation we work with groups and communities. How can the community of asylum seekers coming from the four corners of the world become a community that can produce empowerment instead of conflict?

OPA: The status of an asylum seeker is not enough to unite people. We want to create forums for encounter; courses, gatherings, things to do together. Then we can observe how people connect to each other naturally; women, and men – do people connect with others of their own cultural background, or perhaps with others with the same professional background? Empowerment work will be forced if you try to connect people to communities of which they do not feel part .

Text: Kai Alhanen, Olli-Pekka Ahtiainen,
Marko Kangas & Jarkko Soininen

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Activating Methods for Empowerment

Methods derived from applied arts and drama, action methods (psycho- and sociodrama contexts) and use of creativity can come to help when we design work structures to support the empowerment of asylum seekers. Activating methods are powerful, but their use with asylum seeker groups needs to be planned well. Even though expressive methods are non-verbal and can be used with groups of all levels, they are no short cut to empowerment.

What is the applied use of arts?

- Applied drama processes
- Community arts and community theatre processes
- Applied plastic arts, photography, digital arts, picture work
- Use of stories, story-telling

Examples from techniques of picture work

- Looking at pictures (photos, postcards, clips, paintings), using pictures to talk about self/own situation, sharing, or story-telling
- Making pictures; painting, drawing, clip mosaic, collage, photography and snapshots, photogram, digital manipulation
- Installations; props, everyday objects, nature materials (stones, sand, flowers, leaves, twigs, food...)

Examples from techniques of applied drama

- Installations, statues, cartoons (talking or silent)
- Props, dress-up and make-up
- Puppet theatre and shadow theatre
- Pictures become alive

Why use activating methods?

All activating methods in group work and/or learning

- build holistic participation through doing and experiencing together
- help all group members to participate in the work
- build up and keep clear the channels for interaction
- help people to work together
- help in dealing with important and difficult themes
- motivate people to learning through interaction
- help the work in heterogeneous groups
- help to make everyone heard
- bring up diverse views
- help to use not only the brain, but also the body and the emotions
- help people to get in touch with their own feelings
- deconstruct the hierarchical positions in the group

Where can you use activating methods?

- Recruiting participants
- Motivating
- Setting objectives
- Learning to learn
- Group dynamics; starting up a group, dealing with conflicts
- Evaluation of group work
- Development of work community, evaluation and quality work

REMEMBER

– Ask yourself: ‘Why do I want to use activating methods?’

– Plan the process – set the objectives – choose the methods according to your group, yourself, and the objectives that you have set (ideally together with your group)

- Use expressive methods, but emphasize the process of doing instead of the end product.

- Give people time to get used to activating methods. Give everyone the space and the time they need without putting pressure on anyone.

– Activating methods are not the issue, but a means to an end and a part of a process

– Activating methods work well when they serve for reaching the objectives for work

- Activating methods activate also the emotions and experiences of participants. Be prepared to process emotions, reserving sufficient time.

- Agree on using activating methods with your group. Prepare them and warm them up. Give your group information on the work forms you use, explain your objectives.

- The task of the group leader/facilitator is to animate, encourage and support the group

- If you enjoy working with activating methods, you can use them successfully

- Make experiments, apply, make combinations. Use your personality and your talent!

REM

How to apply activating methods?

You can make use of diverse activities that you and your group find interesting. You can cook a meal together, you can try role play or making a song to solve problems in the group. You can make an installation of your future hope. You will find the best ideas within yourself and lots of inspiration in literature and courses. You can find some ideas for applying activating methods also in the Part 3: “At Work With Asylum Seekers” and in the Part Four: “Activities” of this collection.

Whatever the method and whatever the theme at your work, you can make use of steps that help you to build a group meeting. For each one of these steps, you can plan an activity where you can make use of activating methods.

1. Getting to know each other
2. Starting up and tuning in
3. Group work, pair work and feedback
4. Presentation in the big group
5. Reflection and feedback
6. Evaluation of group work
7. Concluding the group session.

How can applied arts give you new angles to look at the world around and your own life situation?

The power of stories and drama is present in surprisingly many contexts of everyday life. You can say that life is a narrative. Asylum seekers need to tell their story: about where they came from, what their life was like before, what happened then, how they ended up in where they are now. In

the same way that you use stories to look back and remember, you can use them to look ahead. Story-telling, arts and many activating methods are powerful in building up identity and self-confidence here and now. They are efficient in designing a change and setting objectives for the future.

The main objective is to add up to the resources people will have in building their world.

In addition to hearing asylum seekers tell their life stories, you can help them to use stories, drama and expression also for:

- Critical reflection of their situation today**
- Motivation to initiate a process for change**
- Searching information**
- Documentation**
- Interaction**
- Expression**
- Learning**
- Decision-making**
- Validation**
- Evaluation**

Using activating methods, you can create spaces where ‘stories of the future’ can be told. You as the listener will be the active partner in encouraging people to start. bell hooks talks about giving a voice to describe the process where we can help people to start telling their own story.

Sharing and understanding does not happen automatically. As the facilitator of the group, your task is to support the group in learning to listen actively, to communicate, to create a dialogue, to associate. Encourage people to use metaphors and symbols that applied arts bring within everyone’s reach. We may begin to deal with things that are too difficult to

utter in words. Still, only I know the deepest meaning of the symbols and metaphors I use in my story. Make sure that all interpretations are left to the speaker or author of the story. This means that you must sometimes actively stop other members of the group – or yourself – from presenting an analysis of someone else’s account. Sharing and giving feedback is not analyzing.

First steps in story-telling are:

- Process your own identity and understand that we are different
- Take each other seriously
- Try and want to reach an understanding of each other’s meanings
- Listen to both speech and silence
- Recognize each other as they are
- Sympathize and put your soul into other people’s stories; don’t suffocate them with nursing

Use people’s stories to direct the creative power for seeing hope and planning the future:

Contents

Memories
Self
Difference
Difficulties

objectives

integrity
identity
place
hope

Text: Teija Enoranta



In the *Becoming More Visible* project, staff from reception centres, adult education and NGO’s experimented activating methods in shared workshops. Photo: Sanna Kantosalmi

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Part Three: At Work with Asylum Seekers

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I Supporting Empowerment in NGO Work, Adult Education and Reception Centres

In many of the practices in ASAP Partnership empowerment of women has been a special emphasis. For many reasons female asylum seekers have needed special support. For cultural reasons and for family reasons it has not been simple for many women to find opportunities for contacts, for work or for studies.

In the partnership projects of ASAP, men have not been forgotten but it is a fact that in the area of empowerment, less activities for men have been arranged. For experiences on practice with good results, see Section III of this part.

In the Section I of this part, you will find experiences on activities that have started from the initiative of an organisation working with asylum seekers; in reception centres, adult education or NGO work. In these practices, empowerment has been an objective, and organisations have been learning about planning empowering practice.



Kristiina Teiss feels that common human feelings unite women from all over the world. Photo: Hilma Bukareva

Asylum Seeker Women Become Visible

The Adult Education Centre offers liberal adult education and all-round education for clients of all ages. In Tampere, the local adult education centre has been an active partner in developing adult education for asylum seekers. Empowerment of asylum seekers has been supported through women's groups and ICT courses for men. The activities have been planned in close cooperation with the Becoming More Visible partnership.

The participants on the women's courses come from different countries, with different backgrounds, experiences, and various levels of basic skills. Usually there are about 20 women and they may come from more than 10 different countries. The size of the group varies from meeting to meeting. Sometimes there can be just five or six participants. The age range of participants also varies from young to retirement age. The average age is probably 30 but neither the age nor the date of birth is asked during the course.

For an adult educator, the situation where the size and composition of a group varies is new. Asylum seekers may move to other towns, they may leave the country, and new participants join the group in the middle of the course. Group work is also influenced by the participant's length of stay in Finland. They may have stayed from a couple of days up to three years. The course content can be determined in detail only after the course has started, once the life situation of participants has been charted. Children are also taken into consideration. Mothers often come with their babies and toddlers. Childcare is not always organised, or mothers may not be prepared to leave their children. The teacher must then think of whether children should be involved in activities, and what kind of activities could be planned for women with children.

Some women find it hard to join a group shortly after their arrival to Finland, but in other cases they may find it helpful; especially if they find speakers of their own language in the

group. A serious traumatic life experience can create a barrier for participating although women's backgrounds, or their difficult life situation, do not emerge strongly and their handling is not a target of the group.

Group leaders

When possible, two group leaders as well as assistant teachers co-operate in women's courses. Assistant teachers are asylum seekers or immigrant women, or women with similar background, and who speak languages most common in the group. As for other languages, the group's own "relay interpretation" works well.

It is important for various people to take part in group activities in a natural way. Participants gain a number of positive contacts and possibilities to communicate. The reception centre's nurses and instructors, as well as other staff members of the adult education centre, take part in group meetings or in their planning. During visits, they meet a number of Finnish people working in different services.

Objectives

The women's group goal is to get women asylum seekers out of their homes, or the reception centre, to meet the Finnish society and to help them to find their own strengths that would be useful in their new life situation. The group also aims at creating a supportive network that links women asylum seekers to other women.

The course activities resemble free time activities in order to keep the threshold low. Although they come to an adult education centre, using the word course may create confusing expectations. The understanding of the "teacher – student" concept makes women passive at the beginning

even though group activities require from each participant a rather active role.

For the women's groups, two types of activities were planned:

- Activity-based meetings aiming at strengthening women's own know-how and team work
- Visits, information research and contacts with the society around to find out opportunities for independent action.

It is important to expand the life circle of women asylum seekers and not to keep the group within the walls of the adult education centre.

The visits were not only for seeing but to be seen as well. The large, colourful, courageously chatting group of women (and children) walking down the streets, entering shops and museums, is therapeutic both for the women and people in town.

The activities are planned in advance with room for ideas to grow along the work. It is not a good idea to ask the women about their expectations during the first meeting. Most participants come from cultures where a teacher is an authority on whom people totally rely. It is only after several sessions that own expectations and ideas start emerging.

Meeting Place

At the City of Tampere Adult Education Centre, the meeting place was a small but cosy classroom, with a sofa corner, a kitchenette, and a toilet. We try to either start or finish the meeting in our own meeting place, although other premises

The visits were not only for seeing but to be seen as well.

are also been used, and lots of visits are organised. Besides our own meeting place, we use the handicraft workshop, the classroom for household economics, the cooking instruction kitchen, the library and the Net Square, and the music room.

Recruitment

Recruiting participants is the responsibility of the reception centre. We try to work out in cooperation how to present the course contents and the activities. The project workers and the reception centre staff use interpreters during information sessions to present the courses. It has been efficient to also inform participants of the previous groups who have been asked to invite newcomers.

Duration of activities

Every week, there are two meetings of four hours each. The total length of the course is 56 to 60 hours. The number and duration of meetings vary depending on activities and places to visit. The meetings last from two to seven hours. Extra hours have to be planned carefully in order to take into consideration childcare and other obligations asylum seekers have. They often have medical consultations or meetings with social workers and lawyers. A teacher can just accept absences within the women's group and celebrate at times when group members are able to participate while fully focused.

People from different cultures have different concepts of time. The introductory phase often overstretches by half an hour. It might be a good idea to try a half-an-hour for regrouping during which participants already present could have a coffee along with making some handicrafts, (providing that necessary material and eventual guiding for first-timers are available), write/draw on the course report book, or write up issues of the

previous meeting, which might facilitate feedback at the end of the course. In my opinion, it is not recommended to “remind” participants of the women's group for always being late. Integrating the Finnish conception of time management is not one of the course's main targets. Women asylum seekers are experiencing a confusing period of their lives, and our course is certainly not the most important issue to worry about.

Visits and excursions

When you think of possible places for the group to visit, think:

- What does the place to visit tell about the local society and its culture?
- Does the place to visit provide an opportunity for asylum seekers to be active in their everyday life?
- How long does it take for the group to get there and how much does it cost?
- What preparatory work/information is needed?
- Do participants have their own suggestions about places to visit?

Suggestions for possible visits:

- shops and markets
- health care centres
- schools and educational institutes
- libraries and museums
- meeting places and courses for immigrants
- churches

The topic on food and shopping at the grocer's is very popular. This visit can lead not only to cooking or having a meal together and learn about foodstuffs, but also to do exercises in which food is only a mean to achieve something else.



The women's group has been shopping, and have prepared buns and pastries in the kitchen.

Museums and exhibitions offer possibilities to organize thematic events, or free visits – they trigger imagination and discussions. In this kind of heterogeneous and multicultural women's group it is also easy to find new and fresh ideas for exhibition themes. An exhibition remains unclear and its theme rather distant if it is not possible to link it with a personal experience or life story.

Excursions are good means to learn to know each other in a different and more relaxed way. Shorter or longer trips may be undertaken to the surrounding nature or some other city. Our groups have made various excursions such as the one to a neighbouring forest in early autumn, which ended with a camp fire, a sausage barbecue and a croquet game; and a winter excursion with an opportunity to try toboggan sliding and skiing in a freezing wind (actually only one woman took the risk).

About the teacher's role

The teacher has the main responsibility for organizing the course although working in cooperation with various partners. The teacher needs to access all possible information, even the most insignificant one as it may appear to be important at a later stage. The teacher plays the role of a coordinator who seeks assistance from many experts and finds out interesting places to visit. The teacher has to know the WHY of doing, whereas others know HOW to do.

At the beginning the teacher is leading activities and tells participants what to do, while participants follow her instructions. At a certain time, the relationship can be turned into cooperation. Even though participants need the teacher's counselling and support for certain practical things, they do take initiatives and express their opinions. The teacher

should enjoy that and pay attention to participants' advices and wishes.

In women's groups, interaction between the participants and the teacher started to function after a slow start. Activities were undertaken together and some things were also designed together. During some activities such as the cooking session for the closing group meal, participants were the experts whose advice had to be carefully observed. For example, a Chechen dish nearly failed when the teacher thought that she knew what kind of granulated cottage cheese was required instead of checking it with the women who were the chefs.

Women asylum seekers are a challenging group, particularly when the objectives are related to self-knowledge and empowerment. The teacher deals not only with a heterogeneous group of women in which every woman has probably her own traumatic experience, but also with a large mixture of languages and cultures. Some women have just arrived in Finland and are hardly prepared to understand the goal of the course, whereas others have been asylum seekers for a long time and start to lose hope. The future seems to be covered by a grey shadow, and even though they become familiarized with life in Tampere and Finland, it should be remembered that all might not stay in Finland. Many places to visit were discarded if judged being too early to be known about, or if they seem to give too much hope...

In spite of all that, joys and stories, kids, women's interests and everyday life with its sorrows and delights, crying and laughing; all those common human feelings uniting people did prevail during the course.

Text: Kristiina Teiss,
The Tampere City Adult Education Centre



Photography at workshop
'Discovering ourselves'.
Photo: Pamela So and
Rachel Thibbotumunuwe

The Bridges Programmes Women's Course: Planning an Empowering Practice

'The Bridges Programmes' in Glasgow, Scotland used the Ecotec Empowerment guide to design and deliver a Personal Development Course for women asylum seekers that would support individual and collective empowerment at every stage.

The Ecotec Empowerment guide is referred to in more depth in Part Two of this book in the section, 'Developing an Empowering Practice.'

Bridges Programmes is a non-profit organisation set up to support asylum seekers and refugees make a positive contribution to Scottish society. Our core function is to

provide work shadowing opportunities where asylum seekers can maintain and enhance their existing occupational skills but we also develop ancillary education, training and employment initiatives which support integration. As part of our continuing effort to support some of the most vulnerable members of the asylum community we developed a series of empowerment workshops for women who, by virtue of their poor English, lack of self-confidence and lack of education or work experience were not yet ready to join our main programme of work placements.

ECOTEC's Empowerment – A Guide for Development Partnerships provided some useful indicators of what we hoped the course would offer participants:

Identifying an empowered person

Indicators of success	Broken down into
Confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Determination to achieve goals. ▪ Positive feeling about oneself.
Personal development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Awareness of issues. ▪ Access gained to a desired service or provision. ▪ Better understanding of subjects and issues.
Assertiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ability to make a contribution towards empowering others through knowledge and sharing experience.
Independence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ability to make own decisions. ▪ Show control over own life.

Source: Adapted from Empowerment – a guide for development partnerships. The table was originally developed by INTEGRA, the Refugee Training and Advisory Service (RETAS) and Redbridge Signposting Centre (RSC).

We felt that self-confidence was integral to a feeling of empowerment but that it must be routinely nourished. A goal of the course was therefore to find ways in which the participants could nurture their own confidence once it had finished. Having fun, learning more about themselves as people, recognising their past accomplishments, acknowledging their existing strengths and moving towards their aspirations were the practical methods we deployed to achieve this.

The ECOTEC guide also identifies three key principles of project delivery that can enhance individual or collective empowerment:

- 1) establishing and respecting the choices of target groups**
- 2) recognising the target group’s achievements and experiences**
- 3) building confidence**

We adopted these principles in our construction and delivery of the course and also used them to evaluate how successful we had been.

Principle 1: Establishing and respecting the choices of target groups

Bridges’ usually works with asylum seekers who are referred to us from other NGOs and who have an intermediate level of English enabling them to communicate effectively in the workplace. In contrast, the women we wanted to join our course were not likely to engage with the services offered by NGOs and who would be difficult to involve in a dialogue about the content of the proposed course because of their lack of English. We therefore invited representatives from four existing refugee community organisations to assist us. Women from Scotlanka, Umoja, Karibu and Kaswa and some women who had already participated in Bridges’ work experience placements contributed to the consultation process which was intended to:

- 1. shed light on why some women were not availing themselves of the services, activities and opportunities available to them;

- 2. comment on the proposed course content and suggest alternatives or additions to the workshops;
- 3. provide guidance regarding the women’s needs, for instance, practical matters such as the suitability of the venue, transport and childcare arrangements;
- 4. refer women they knew for the course who would benefit from participating.

The practical advice and suggestions for improvement of our newly formed advisory group were invaluable. In the first meeting we explored why women might lack the confidence and/or motivation to leave their homes and participate in social, learning or work experience activities. As we had suspected, poor English (“People will laugh at me.”), lack of self-esteem, retreating to a familiar comfort zone, feeling undermined by the label of an ‘asylum seeker’ and harassment were all cited as typical reasons in addition to the practical obstacles of lack of childcare and the cost of public transport.

Overall the advisory group liked the proposed content but raised a number of points for further consideration. Time and budgetary constraints did not permit Bridges to address every one of these issues in this initial pilot course but two further EQUAL-funded courses will run during 2007 providing us with another opportunity to do so.

Comments, Suggestions and Recommendations from the Advisory Group

Understanding the course concept

How could we ensure the women understood what the course was about if their English was not good? ‘Empowerment’ and ‘personal development’ were abstract concepts to explain and might be quite alien to some cultures. A pre-workshop meeting with the advisory group present to interpret would ensure

the women understood the course aims and did not have unrealistic expectations of what they would be undertaking.

Asylum issues

The group thought it inevitable that women would want to talk about their asylum status and urged us to give more thought to how this topic could be covered and what could be accomplished from it. They felt a planned session where participants could share experiences in small groups (perhaps with a legal advisor with specific knowledge of women’s asylum claims) would be of benefit. Information and knowledge could contribute to the women feeling more in control of their situation and help to alleviate stress.

Managing stress

A useful device for relieving the mind of immediate worries was suggested: participants are asked to write down a list of personal concerns (e.g. having to report to Immigration, progress of claim, financial troubles etc). Each list is then put in an envelope for the duration of the course so the women are free to learn and enjoy without worries intruding. Learning techniques to manage stress and relax that could be practised in the home were considered important by the panel.

Emphasising the learning opportunity to participants

The advisory panel believed that the benefit of formal or informal education should be emphasized throughout the course. Lifelong learning has value regardless of the outcome of an individual’s asylum case. Having too much time on your hands through a protracted asylum case could be turned around to be an opportunity if time is used effectively.

Monetary value of the course

Although the course would be free the advisory panel felt that potential participants should be aware of the monetary value

of the workshops as an indication of the investment being made in their future. This might encourage a more committed attendance.

Follow-up

This was considered essential: individual sessions should be arranged with all participants one month after completing the course to find out how they were progressing with their personal action plans and what further support could be offered.

Racial harassment

This was not an area Bridges had considered directly relevant to the course but our advisors thought it warranted attention. For asylum seekers who had had negative experiences of policing in their own countries reporting incidents of harassment was difficult. One woman described her surprise at how discreetly and sensitively an incident was dealt with once she had reported it to the police and how this had changed her perception of a government institutional authority. The advisory group wanted course participants to learn about their rights, how to report an incident and what action the police would take as a result.

Peer group mentoring

Participants should be encouraged to become mentors to women attending future workshops. Bridges could arrange a 2-3 hour training workshop for volunteer coaches to learn basic mentoring skills.

Course notice board

A notice board for each session advertising local community activities (English, cookery, computing or sewing classes, NGO outreach clinics) might encourage participants to take up opportunities.

Timing of the workshops

The window between 10am and 2pm would be the most suitable time for the workshops allowing mothers with older children time to deliver them - and collect them - from school.

Childcare provision

On-site childcare would be preferable either by hiring a venue with a childcare facility or by hiring extra rooms for a mobile crèche. The group advised that we were likely to need approximately 15-20 childcare places.

We hoped that the contribution of our advisory panel would encourage a sense of ownership. It did so, as was witnessed by their willingness to volunteer as mentors and as interpreters for those with a weaker command of English. We involved the advisory panel further by dedicating time in the session 'on dealing with change' to speak about their personal motivation to become more empowered and their own life experiences as asylum seekers.

Recruiting women to join the course

Our advisory panel representatives took away application forms and were asked to consider who in their wider network of friends and neighbours might benefit from joining the workshop series. We could offer only 20 places but received 16 applications in just two weeks!

Bridges arranged informal interviews to meet the women and to get a general picture of their previous education and employment experience. We asked how confident they felt now and what aspirations they had in life. As predicted by the advisory group, explaining the concepts of 'empowerment' and 'self-confidence' proved difficult but we relied on the following definition:

“ Empowerment means discovering the power within yourself to take control of your life and make choices that are good for you.”

Finally, towards the end of October, the workshops began with a group of 17 women from Sri Lanka (2 Tamil and 2 Sinhalese), Ivory Coast, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, Somalia (both Bajuni and Somali speaking), Serbia, Afghanistan and Algeria.

Course Outline

The course supported personal development by creating a group space where participants had to interact with others, occasionally work as a team and build relationships with each other. Developing the core skills of communication, organisation and problem-solving/analytical thinking were practical foundations of the course and seen as integral part of fostering a growth in confidence.



Reminders of home.

Photo: Pamela So and Rachel Thibbotumunuwe

Session 1 & 6

Exploring Identity

In the first and last sessions the women worked with two Glasgow-based artist-photographers to explore identity: "Who was I in my home country? Who am I now and who might I choose to be?" The artists facilitated 'getting to know each other' by creating a relaxed and fun environment in which to talk about countries of origin. The women were invited to bring along something that symbolised their former 'home' with the objects acting as a catalyst to open discussion and share experiences. The final workshop provided an opportunity to explore how the women saw themselves in relation to their new lives in Scotland. Each woman took home a professional portrait from both workshops as an affirmation of identity. A selection of the photographs produced from Workshops 1 and 2, 'Exploring Identity', was exhibited at the Artists in Exile Gallery, Glasgow, during March 2007 in celebration of International Women's Day.

Session 2

Defining self-esteem and self-confidence

This workshop, led by an experienced facilitator, dramatist and writer used role play to explore what we mean by confidence and how we exhibit it. She introduced relaxation and visualization techniques as well as a motivational script relating to confidence and creativity. The women took turns to sit in 'the compliments chair' and graciously receive praise and kind words from their peers who had to restrict comments to behaviours and qualities rather than external attributes. The group defined a confident woman as:

- Someone who speaks up
- Someone who likes and respects themselves
- Someone who is assertive

and a person without confidence as:

- Shy
- Feeling powerless
- Lacking in self-belief

Session 3

(1) Managing time

(2) Understanding the role of the police

This session explored the benefits of managing our time better and how to balance family and personal priorities especially with a view to building in time for learning and education. Taking time for oneself and learning to relax given the stress of living with a pending asylum decision was considered essential as a means of improving quality of life. This was coupled with a desire to support the women to define which

aspects of their life they could control. Almost all the women were mothers and therefore experienced in juggling different family members' needs, however, workshop three emphasised the importance of looking after oneself. The women said they felt guilty about taking time for themselves but unanimously agreed it was important. Each took responsibility for making a contract with herself to engage in a pleasurable activity, however, being realistic about the amount of time each could spare was essential. A mother of twins allowed herself 10 minutes alone on a shopping trip to choose a nail polish, another woman dedicated 45 minutes to buy a new pair of shoes while a third dedicated 30 minutes to herself each evening for an uninterrupted, relaxing bath. These small actions manifested taking responsibility, taking control and exercising negotiating skills with husbands and children in asserting their right to 'me' time.

Session 4

Taking Action

Using a real-life example the women explored the steps necessary to turn an idea into a reality. The workshop focused on identifying future goals then creating a personal action plan with short, medium and longer term objectives.

We chose to use the example of baking a cake for a special birthday by someone who had no baking experience but wanted to impress and delight. The women were invited to

consider every step required to turn the dream into a reality from the first steps of finding a recipe to the time needed to bring the plan to fruition:

- sourcing a recipe that was easy enough for a novice to attempt
- deciding on a recipe with ingredients they could afford
- saving the money to purchase ingredients
- finding time to shop for the ingredients
- planning for a friend or neighbour to baby-sit children so the cake could remain a surprise until presented at the birthday party
- seeking the help of a friend who was good at making friends
- and finally making the cake

Choosing such a concrete example paid dividends as it was this session of the workshop series where the women reported they had learned the most. We then encouraged the women to apply this detailed, step-by-step approach to consider their aspirations for the future. Given the uncertainty surrounding an asylum seeker's future setting realistic and achievable short term as well as long term goals is vital to sustain the motivation to continue.

Summarised Personal Action Planning Example

What do I want to do?	Study fashion design at North Glasgow College
Why do I want to do it?	To work as a self-employed seamstress when I get leave to remain.
What opportunities will it bring?	The opportunity to be financially independent
What might stop me? What barriers should I anticipate and how might I overcome them?	I am only permitted to study 16 hours a week and a part-time course may not be available. - I can look for courses at other colleges although they may be farther away. - I can study now to improve my English so the college are more likely to offer me a place. Personal barriers = lack of confidence, childcare commitments, not planning my time well enough
What do I need to?	- Improve my ability to speak and especially write in English. - Learn to use computers
What skills/qualities do I need to learn to achieve this?	- I need plenty of practice, patience and persistence. - The belief that I can do it.
What skills do I already have that will make it easier?	- I worked as a seamstress before in my home country and here friends ask me to design outfits for them. - My English is already quite good and I know how to use the Internet and email.
What support do I need to achieve it?	- More opportunities to speak English with Scottish friends. - Support from my family to allow me the time to study. - Support from my Bridges' mentor. - Reassurance that I am getting closer to my goal.
When will I do it?	- Apply to college for a place in fashion design – Dec '06 Improve English – Dec '07 – Aug '07 (ESOL classes and Bridges' Open University Access course) Attend computing classes Jan-Jun '07 Start college – Aug '07

Session 5 Making Your Experience Count

Workshop 5 was led by a lecturer from Glasgow Caledonian University’s Academic Practice Unit & Lifelong Learning Centre. The session was based around recognition of prior informal learning (RPL). Through exercises the group identified and reflected on the learning they had gained through ‘life’ experiences in social and family roles. The aim of the session was to boost participants’ confidence through valuing what they had already achieved in informal environments. The focus was also on finding examples of core or transferable skills relevant to future study and/or employment. Four participants had the opportunity to begin creating a personal profile using the Europass CV as a tool to highlight their core skills.

Principle 2: Recognising the experiences and achievements of the target group

The variation within the group in terms of education and language ability demanded that the course was delivered without relying on the written word, each session involved opportunities to discuss personal experiences. The women created a set of ground rules for working together which covered respecting each others’ opinions, confidentiality and sharing: each was to take responsibility for protecting their own needs by sharing only as much as was comfortable.

More directly Principle 2 was addressed in workshops three and four. Here, the content was only loosely planned so that we could incorporate material in response to participants’ personal aspirations. Session 4 was dedicated to creating a personal action plan but we did not want to make assumptions about what this might include. Until we had met the women we would not know if there were common aspirations; whereas one might have a personal desire to get out the house and socialise more frequently another might have a goal to attend college. In session three, where we explored how the women actually used their time compared to how they would like to spend their time, it became clear that most were keen to undertake some form of learning that would open up career opportunities.

Workshop four, dedicated to recognising prior informal learning, was all about reflecting on life’s experiences and what could be learned from them. Tables 1-3 below illustrate this process.



Discovering 'What I like about Scotland'.
Photo: Pamela So and Rachel Thibbotumunuwe

Table 1 - Activity Handout: Core Skills Exercise Example

Task/Experience: Experience since living in Glasgow				
Breakdown of task/ experience	Communication skills	Personal & interpersonal skills	Problem solving skills	Information-gathering skills
Settling into new home	Understanding legal terms, presenting information orally and in writing	Being patient, tolerant and considerate of others	Being creative about different possibilities	Getting detailed and accurate information about housing, legal situation, education and training programme
Applying for/getting refugee status	Developing oral and written communication skills through courses	Time and money management	Diagnosing problems	Selecting and using relevant information to achieve goals
Undertaking education and training	Communicating with tutors and other students	Negotiating with others	Planning ways to deal with them	
Understanding different culture, language.	Communicating in English language (if not first language)	Working as a team with other students	Improvising when things go wrong	
Completing application forms		Managing your study time and balancing with other commitments	Evaluating success of solution	
		Supporting others Being diplomatic and polite to others: avoiding conflict Working /studying independently		

Table 2: Participant’s Completed Reflective Exercise

Experience: Describe the experience, what happened? What did you do in reaction to the experience?	Felt unhappy with living conditions, discussed it with friends and neighbours. Decided to form a residents' group/association to meet others living in the same building and to try and tackle problems of anti-social behaviour.
Perception: what were your feelings and thoughts at the time of the experience?	Anxious, worried but also happy to have taken action.
Knowledge & Skills: what do you know and what can you do now as a result of this experience? - this might be either improved or new knowledge skills and understanding	Speaking in public. How to deal with people better, be patient and more tolerant.
Reflections: What would you do differently?	Be more prepared.
Application: Think of a different situation in which you could apply what you have learned	Community worker

Table 3 : Participant’s Completed Activity Handout: Core Skills Exercise

Task/Experience: Experience since living in Glasgow of one of the women on the course

Breakdown of task/ experience	Communication skills	Personal & interpersonal skills	Problem solving skills	Information-gathering skills
I helped to form a residents’ association in my apartment building	I used my languages (French and English) to interpret for others	I am tolerant I am sociable	I had to think how to: get others to share their opinions	I made leaflets to promote the residents’ association to get more people involved
I got a group of interested people together	I used oral presentation skills to share my opinions in the group	I can negotiate	make meetings and events more enjoyable e.g. providing food and drink for people	I found out the issues that people would like to talk about
I planned the residents’ association meetings and other events	I helped to direct the meeting so that everyone could have the chance to speak	I have respect for others’ opinions		

Principle 3: Building confidence

Did we succeed in building confidence?

There are few effective quantitative tools to measure a growth in confidence but the Institute of Employment Studies has produced *A Guide to Measuring Soft Outcomes and Distance Travelled* which provides some suggestions. For instance, participants can be asked to self-assess their confidence, self-esteem or motivation at the beginning of a course and again at the end using a numerical ranking. The difference between the two outcomes indicates the ‘distance travelled.’ Climbing the scale makes an increase in progress visible and can in itself give people a huge boost in confidence. Had Bridges had access

to a bigger budget we might have employed translators and interpreters to assist us in creating a tailored distance travelled assessment for the course. However, we needed an alternative and settled for an ongoing review of our learning and a vote in the final session.

Ongoing Evaluation

A mural made from flip chart paper was taped to the wall for the women to draw an image or use a word to describe how they were feeling at the beginning of each session and at the end. A non-language based evaluation would enable everyone to contribute and could include graffiti, humorous

events, catch phrases that had developed during the course and photographs that the women had taken themselves using a disposable camera. The whole surface could be used rather than a linear sequential, pattern with the women marking each contribution with the date and their initials. As three of the group were avid artists with poor English skills this seemed an ideal way to encourage their feedback. We hoped the mural would enable us to ‘watch’ our learning by making visible the relationships between workshop topics and would be useful if the women missed a session to catch up. We proposed using stickers for ‘eureka’ moments to demonstrate a really powerful moment of understanding or learning such as appreciating something about themselves that they hadn’t before, acquiring a new skill, speaking up in the group for the first time, sharing something difficult etc.

In reality the sessions were so short that the mural was rarely used and proved to be an ineffective means of evaluation. It is possible that the women did not fully understand its intended use or that they needed more encouragement to overcome their shyness to draw in public.

Final Course Evaluation and Outcomes

The final evaluation was designed so that all participants could express their thoughts about the course regardless of language or literacy. Large posters were displayed reminding the women in words, pictures and photographs of what had happened in each workshop. The women were then given two sets of different coloured stickers to vote for (1) the workshop in which they had learned the most and (2) the workshop they had enjoyed the most. Any number of stickers could be allocated to a workshop choice but there were only four stickers and six workshops to choose from so the women had to consider carefully which aspects of the course has influenced them personally.

Key Findings:

- Two thirds of the women felt they had learned and practised new skills since the course began, for example, being more assertive in asking someone to explain something (particularly someone in authority such as a doctor, nurse, teacher, lawyer or police officer about a need or complaint), giving a frank and honest opinion, standing up for something they believed in or taking a risk that they would not have considered before. The heavy weighting towards a practical outcome (learning new skills) is not surprising as it is so much harder to look introspectively.

- One third said specifically that they now felt happier about themselves, recognized they were unique and liked themselves more.

- Workshop 4, Taking Action, where the women identified life goals and completed a personal development plan was voted the best learning session.

- Workshop 2, Defining Self-Confidence, which had included music, poetry, drama, play, risk-taking and positive affirmations proved to be the most popular.

- Workshop 5, Making Your Experience Count was the least well-liked session. The concepts explored in this workshop are difficult to convey in English let alone in another language and there was too great a reliance on written materials so the result of the evaluation was not surprising. We intend to simplify the material using images and find ways to approach the topic in a more interactive way next time and also to re-arrange the order so that this session precedes ‘Taking Action.’



Priscilla posing for Pamela So in the photography workshop
Photo: Pamela So and Rachel Thibbotumunuwe

Further Reading and sources

Empowerment – a guide for Development Partnerships
GB Equal Support Unit
Priestley House
28-34 Albert Street
Birmingham B4 7UD
United Kingdom
Phone: +44 (0)121 616 3660
Fax: +44 (0)121 616 3662
Website: www.equal.ecotec.co.uk

Empowering Asylum Seekers
Available as a pdf file from www.asset-uk.org.uk/public/f_emprep.pdf

Written by the Refugee Council of behalf of the EQUAL ASSET UK
Development and Mainstreaming Partnership. November 2005 ©
Refugee Council

Catching Confidence
A report on research into developing confidence
in adult education learning.
Available as a pdf file from:
www.niace.org.uk/funds/ACLF/Catching-Confidence-Final-Report.pdf

Guide to Measuring Soft Outcomes and Distance Travelled
Institute of Employment Studies



Diane Gbakouo was one of the beautiful participants
in the Bridges Programmes empowerment workshop.
Photo: Photo: Pamela So and Rachel Thibbotumunuwe

Interview:



Mia Vaelma and Abdirahman, one of her team players, present the cup their team won in summer 2006 at the yearly football tournament of Finnish reception centres.

Power of Football Is Empowering

Mia Vaelma is not the most typical football coach. Her team is like any football team at least in the sense that the players come from many different nationalities. Mia is a refugee counsellor at Tampere Reception Centre, and as a part of her work she leads the football training for asylum seekers. For four years now, they have taken part in the annual football tournament of Finnish reception centres.

Together with physiotherapist Irma Tähkävuori, Mia Vaelma organizes sports and leisure activities for asylum seekers. They take groups to the swimming hall, where the first visit is paid for. There are bravehearts who even try winter swimming and sauna, where you dip yourself in a hole in the icy lake.

– We try to inform asylum seekers about sports and exercising opportunities in town and some are proactive in finding out about their favourite hobbies

themselves. It is a good idea to go together and see what it is all about for the first time to break the ice. Afterwards we hope that our clients keep on going on their own, Mia explains.

Is it difficult to fit the responsibility of organizing sports activities into your busy schedule of a refugee counsellor?

– Sometimes I cannot make it to the weekly football training because of other duties, but it is good that other workers get a chance of experiencing that, too. I think organizing sports is important for the community at the Centre. I have noticed that even when people have lots of problems they come to football regularly. In the game, it is possible to take on different roles. You may let off steam or you may find that you are good at calming others down in a stormy match, says Mia.

Text: Teija Enoranta



In the dressmaking class.

Poland Opens Communal Rooms for Brushing Up Skills

The Polish Humanitarian Action, as a representative of the MUR Partnership that implements the project under topic I “Support of social and professional integration of asylum seekers” of the EQUAL Community Initiative Program for Poland, and funded by the European Social Fund has opened two integration communal rooms for adult refugees.

The first one was opened in June this year in the Refugee Centre in the village of Linino. It includes a tailor’s room, art room, hairdresser’s room, as well as a black-and-white photography room. It turned out soon that the location of the centre was not conducive to the activities carried out in the communal rooms. The Centre is located in a fruit farming area and a lot of people living here earn extra money by picking fruits. When it comes to choosing between a paid job (which brings concrete money) and activities in the communal room, the participants obviously choose the former one. Therefore, despite, very interesting classes on offer, as it seemed to us,

we haven’t seen much interest in them (the opening date coincided with the strawberry picking period...).

Mainly women attend the classes. They are not interested in learning any particular occupation (which could help them find a better paid job in the future) but rather in finding out how to improve their own looks – how to make a better make-up (make-up course), do their hair (hairdressing classes) or sew a new piece of garment (dressmaking classes).

There are about 350 persons living in the centre. About 20 of them attend classes (the same people participate in the majority of courses). Only photography classes are more popular among men.

The smallest number of people was interested in art classes: women completely misunderstood our intentions and would not participate in any activity. They enjoyed developing plans, e.g. for making jewellery, crocheting or sewing decorative bags but when it came to executing the projects, no one showed up. Women were most interested in the art of make-up. In this case, one may say we have been somehow successful: not only did they ask what cosmetics (and cleaning products) to use on a daily basis, but they also bought them!

The most numerous group participates in dressmaking classes. Sometimes the classroom is buzzing with activity – the participants cut, sew, talk and laugh. One can see that they are satisfied with what they are doing and that it is a pleasure to them. Due merit should be given to the instructor who goes on the end of trouble to share her passion, i.e. tailoring, with them. Unfortunately the participants mainly execute some minor tailoring alterations, such as sewing in a new zip or rolling up trousers, although some make their own designs and execute them. At times, classes are attended by men

(sporadically and individually) who can sew and use classroom sewing machines to make their own alterations. The greatest achievement of the tailor’s room was designing and sewing dresses for a fashion show organized for the opening of the communal room in Warsaw.

The hairdresser’s room was besieged in the initial phase, as it had been treated as a hairdresser’s salon and everyone (particularly men) wanted to get a haircut and were not capable to understand why they could not. Nowadays, three women regularly attend the classes and there is a chance that they will complete the entire course.

Photography classes are probably the most difficult topic. They are the only ones among our offers to have attracted men. The refugees really enjoyed taking pictures and were willing to take each other’s photos. Unfortunately, they quickly became bored with it. Later on, the darkroom and the exact process of developing pictures aroused participants’ interest but here too the enthusiasm died down quite quickly. Whether it is possible to revamp the interest or even maintain it, is an open question... So far it is competing with... apple picking.

Apart from regular occupational classes, a library was opened in the community room. It is run by one of the refugees. Books and magazines in Russian are the most popular – all of them obtained as a donation but unfortunately, they do not cover the quantitative needs.

A lecture on the situation of refugees in France and a training course on how to look for a job in Poland were also organized.

The second communal room was opened on 25 October in Warsaw on Szpitalna street. The opening ceremony was

accompanied by an exhibition of pictures taken by refugees (including technical processing), and by a fashion show prepared by the group working in the Linino communal room. The models looked beautiful in self-made clothes, wearing make-up and hair-do made by their colleagues.

A Polish language course run by volunteers has already started in Warsaw. A “Job club” was also organized, and within its framework the Polish Humanitarian Action supports refugees in looking for a job – writes refugees’ CV’s, helps collect the necessary documents and talks to employers.

In addition, a computer room will be opened in the future and refugees will be able to learn to use a computer or use the Internet for their own needs.

A kitchen room will also be opened and cooking classes will be offered.

We hope that all our activities will be interesting for refugees, especially because various nationalities can participate in classes in Warsaw – not only the Chechens as it is the case in Linino.

Text: Jolanta Binnicka
PAH

I am a woman and I am observing the world of the participants from this perspective. Just as I thought, when teaching concrete things, I also learned concrete things. Namely, that the world, and human mentality in particular, change very slowly.

I feel that I am not only teaching a profession (in fact I am familiarizing the participants with a sewing machine) but also our Polish as well as European mentality. I teach them that if you start something, you have to complete it, if you make a promise, you have to keep it and that sometimes you have to strain yourself to defend your good name. I do not know whether my understanding of life is so great and I am afraid that I am conveying some unnecessary values to the refugees. But I do not get discouraged because I think these values are universal.

The female participants show me a world that overpowers me with its simplicity, a world that is so carefree. They are so full of life, cheerful and good-natured and I wish they had not only contended themselves with learning a narrow section of life that suffices to function as a mother and a wife. What a pity.

At the beginning of my classes the female participants were very curious, some even thought that I was there to hand out fabric and sew for them. Well, but the world is cruel and once my role has been disguised only the most persistent ones stayed as well as the ones who want something more for themselves than just live in the shallowness of a camp life.

I enjoy most those moments when a proud course participant irons an item of clothing sewn by her (most often it is a skirt) and sees that her efforts brought results.

I like joking with them, banter with them and when observing them I feel like showing them the charms of our Polish life, charms of being a European woman, the benefits of emancipation.

My dressmaking course is only a pretext, above all I would like them to get to know their strength, their possibilities, to feel the taste of freedom that they could have with a little bit of effort. Despite the appearances of approval of their role in the Chechen as well as Muslim society, the participants of my courses dream of things that are unavailable to women from their culture, like having and driving a car. I think that dressmaking courses, language learning and other interesting classes will show the female refugees the way to realize their passions and dreams.

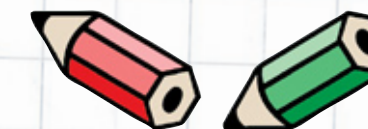
Bożena Sławek
Tailoring instructor



Our cooperation with the refugees staying in Linino started at the turn of May and June. I was really afraid of these classes. Not because of the fact that they were total strangers to me, in all senses of the word. I did not know whether I would be able to convey my skills, my abilities to them. Tomek did much better than me.

The beginning was difficult. Foreign language, different culture, different way of thinking. But there was something in those classes that attracted them, a magnet. This was where opposites met. Our freedom and their expectation of something better. Our culture and their culture and tradition. Language barrier and their openness. Their imagination (which was incredible by the way). Their simple way of looking at things, perceiving them in such a way that you come to wonder why you could not come up with it by yourself. I remember the silent gasp of admiration when Tomek first developed a print with us in the darkroom. This brings a lot of satisfaction. They were eager to take the pictures of each other and their families. They were waiting for us to bring the developed negative and for the possibility to develop a picture by themselves. They asked questions, they were curious. Tomek and I have good memories of that time. Meetings with those people were very interesting. So were the classes, preparation for the classes, organizing the darkroom and the photographic equipment. We had some slight mishaps; at times we were not able to convey everything. But in spite of all, we are satisfied with the classes and we hope that these people learned something and kept it in mind. And that they did not think that time was wasted.

Agata Oleksiak and Tomasz Kula
Photography Instructors



I became involved with the work as an art teacher at the Refugee Centre in Linino in spring this year. I went there thinking that I would have to work with people from a totally different culture which might even make the contacts difficult. However, during the first classes, I did not see any difference. After several weeks I was treated as a familiar person, the conversations became longer and my eyes were opening more and more widely. I was listening about tragedies, disappearances of relatives, atrocities of war, about the truth from their point of view. It became clear that the picture that was reaching us, Poles, was untrue. The most characteristic thing was a different understanding of family and family hierarchy, in particular. I remember when a man came to my classes asking me to draw his portrait. I did this, he left and the women started drawing with more confidence. I understood – this was a test. I was shocked when my eighteen-year-old students married. A girl came up to me once, I told her she was too young. How old are you? I am sixteen but I am married! Meanwhile the interest in art was fading, so finally I came up with an idea of running a make-up course. That was the right choice. Gradually flamboyant make-ups and lips highlighted with dark pink pencil gave way to discreet highlights of frequently dreamlike looks of the Chechens. I started with encouraging them to wash more frequently than once a week... We established bonds, they started asking me how I was. I had problems with attendance, as it was dependent on the time of picking strawberries and apples, on the market opening hours in Góra Kalwaria, and every now and then, another pupil got married. Some had ambitions to educate themselves. Finally, the refugee communal room was opened in Warsaw. We had been preparing for it taking advantage of dressmaking classes, making designs of clothes, working out make-up that would match the dresses, hair-dos and, of course, the occasion. The opening was perfect and it was a great crowning achievement of our work. I will miss the warmth, the wisdom and the distance to events which often resulted from the necessity to cope with suffering – I will remember these qualities most from the contacts with the Chechen refugees.

Justyna Neyman
Art instructor

Legal advice is given to a group of asylum seekers by PSEP volunteers.



Asylum Seekers Learn about their Rights

In Warsaw, Poland, law students and other volunteers gave consultation for asylum seekers in a group. Gradually, the knowledge of their legal situation accumulated to the asylum seekers group, and they started to feel more self-confident. The group consultation has been a learning experience also for the volunteers.

The trainings include wide range of subjects such as the legalization of stay on the territory of the Republic of Poland, refugee status issues, tolerated stay as well as basics of Polish labor, administrative, criminal and civil law, along with civil and criminal procedure. Every part of the training has its

own title, for example, „Who is the refugee?“, „What is the procedure for granting refugee status?“, „What rights do refugees have?“

The information about the trainings was given to the refugee centres by telephone and by written advertisement. Nevertheless, further encouragement to the asylum seekers was necessary in order to convince them to take part in the trainings, as the large part of them had never read any advertisement and had a passive life attitude.

The participants of the trainings live at the refugee centres. They are mostly citizens of the Russian Federation with Chechen or Ingush origin and Sunni Muslims. They are both men and women of various ages. The number of participants

is about 10 per meeting. They are usually newcomers to Poland, rather in good – both psychological and physiological – health. According to our observations, in case of trainings for Chechen, Ingush or other Muslims participants it is very helpful to separate men from women, in order to avoid men's domination (otherwise women may have no chance to raise their own problems).

As it was mentioned above, the trainings take place at the refugee centres. We used club rooms (Polish: „światlica“) for meetings. This room is usually quite suitable for trainings, and it is also used for other courses which are organized at the refugee centers (Polish language lectures etc.). Usually there is only one club room at the refugee centre, so it is necessary to check its availability for trainings. It is also very important to create the training timetable with regard to lunch time at the refugee centre and also to religious holidays or other important dates for refugees (e.g. the date of Dudayev's murder for Chechens).

Polish Association for Legal Education is supposed to conduct 98 trainings from October 2006 up to December 2006 and 14 trainings in February 2007. The total number of trainings is 112. Each training is conducted by 2 tutors and takes 2 hours. Regarding the frequency of meetings, the PSEP volunteers have 6 trainings per week in 6 refugee centres in Warsaw and nearby, so every thematic meeting takes place at the particular refugee centre once a week.

The volunteers

The trainings on Polish law for asylum seekers were organized by the Polish Association for Legal Education (PSEP) for the first time in November 2005 as a part of the Citizen and Law Programme, which was coordinated by the Institute of Public Affairs. Then, the trainings have been continued as a part of MUR Partnership (MUR – Możesz uczyć się rozumieć – You

Can Learn To Understand), which is administrated by the Polish Humanitarian Organization.

Most of the volunteers are students of the University of Warsaw's Law Faculty but there are also young lawyers and PhD students. The recruitment campaign took place at Warsaw universities. The chosen candidates were trained as tutors. In the final stage of the course, they were supposed to prepare the scenarios for refugee trainings. These scenarios were based on a method devised during Street Law programme. The method has been applied by Dr. Monika Platek at the University of Warsaw for many years. In the final step, all teaching materials and methods were discussed and adjusted for the current training requirements by the PSEP volunteers and the Project Coordinator Paulina Wiktorska.

Information for self-confidence

Every training usually begins with an introduction to explain to the participants the structure and the goals of the session. The main goal is to make participants aware of their rights. During the session the tutors explain and discuss the legal terms over, using different methods, such as brainstorming, the sample cases, „jigsaw“ and mini-lectures. It is very important to vary forms of the training from lectures to discussion to keep participants interested and active.

Usually the participants are very active during the training, they exchange their experiences willingly and sometimes they want to dominate the group discussion rising their private problems and asking for legal advice. It may cause conflicts and the role of the tutor is to avoid them. Therefore, it is useful to remind the participants that PSEP has reserved 2 hours per week for individual legal advice only and everybody is welcomed to visit the PSEP office.

Many of the participants have improved their knowledge about Polish legal system. For example, people from one of the groups had never heard about the possibility to appeal a negative decision, though they should have been informed by the public authorities about their rights. In fact, every decision of the authorities has a description of the procedure in Polish but the asylum seekers, especially from Chechnya and Ingushetia, do not speak Polish. They are able to understand the main sense of the decision, i.e. whether it is a negative or positive one, but its justification and main information required for appealing the decisions, are hardly ever even noticed.

At the beginning of the training process the participants' attitude towards the meeting and its goals is rather sceptic but the more they learn about Polish law (especially when they are able to put their knowledge into practice), the more willingly they take part at the next sessions.

All participants, as well as the lecturers learnt much out of the trainings. While becoming more familiar with Polish law, the participants felt more self-confident. The knowledge gained during the trainings gave them opportunity to deal with their affairs on their own but at the same time the courses made them aware that they are not left for themselves – that there are institutions, which they can address for help.

The lecturers on their side, have learned to pass on their knowledge about complicated issues in a simple and comprehensive way and to be patient and tolerant to cultural differences.

Text: Elena Kondratieva-Bryzik,
PhD student of the Institute of Legal Studies (Polish Academy of Science) and
volunteer for the Polish Association for Legal Education in Warsaw.

An example of a session in the Group Consultation for asylum seekers by the Polish Association for Legal Education (PSEP)

Session goals:

1. Knowledge/Information:

Who is a refugee?

What is the procedure for granting refugee status?

What rights do refugees have?

To what extent can the legal situation of the participants be influenced by their awareness of the law?

Fulfilling legal requirements with care

2. Skills:

Completing forms/documents during the refugee status granting process

Realizing and understanding what rights the applicant has

3. Values:

The realization that not everyone can become a refugee

Becoming conscious of the fact that understanding the process increases one's chances of receiving refugee status.

The realization that after receiving refugee status or in the process of applying for refuge the applicant has certain rights

4. Methods:

Brainstorming

Cases

Completing forms, correcting completed forms

Mini-lecture

Group work

Drawing on the board

5. Materials:

Application form for granting refugee status

Paper board

Felt-tip pens/markers

Cases/exercises

Length of one session: 90 minutes

Agenda:

1. Introduction

2. Explanation and discussion of the definition of the term “refugee”

3. How to complete an application for refugee status

4. The rights and responsibilities during the procedure on the refugee status

5. What kind of help is available before obtaining refugee status?

6. The procedure after applying for refugee status

7. What to do if you do not receive refugee status/ you receive a negative decision

8. If you received a negative decision on granting the refugee status/ If you received refugee status

9. Test—exercise

10. Who and on what grounds can apply for integration aid

11. What are the other forms of legalizing one's stay on Polish territory

12. Conclusion

Example of an agenda:

1. Introduction.

The purpose of the introduction is to explain to the participants the structure and goals of the session. The presenter explains the session agenda and its goals, explaining that the purpose of the session is to help the participants with their efforts to legalize their stay in Poland, by making them aware of the rights to which they are entitled. If they are aware of their rights, they increase their chances of obtaining an affirmative decision from the Polish authorities regarding their applications.

WHAT?: Explanation and discussion of the term “refugee”

WHY?: To understand that not everyone can apply for refugee status and that not everyone will be granted this status

HOW?: By using the “brainstorming” method

The goal of the introduction is to become familiar with the term “refugee,” which is the basis of the entire session. We will try to find out how the participants understand this term, and what is connected with it. The goal is to make the participants understand whether they have the right to obtain refugee status. Another goal is to explain that refugee status is also regulated by international law. Therefore, the standard is uniform throughout the world.

Method: brainstorming

Time: 5 minutes

At the beginning we explain the rules of brainstorming and the goals of the exercise to the participants. Our task is to find out if the participants understand the term „refugee,” and whether they have at least a basic awareness of the bases to obtain refugee status. The purpose of this is to familiarize the participants with the term that is the foundation for this session. One of the presenters asks a question about the definition of the term “refugee,” without suggesting the right answers to the participants. Another presenter writes down all suggestions on the blackboard. Once all suggestions have been written down, the presenter underlines those that are closest to the legal definition of the term „refugee.” To summarize this exercise, the presenters provide the legal definition of the term “refugee.”

Method: cases/examples (can be solved in groups)

Length: 10 minutes

First, we explain to the participants the goals of this exercise, which is the practical application of the term „refugee.” The goal is to find out whether the participants understood its meaning. The presenter will write the sample cases on the blackboard and distribute paper to the participants so they can write down their answers. Another task of the exercise is to encourage participation and to convince the participants to apply the information about refugees from the brainstorming session to practical situations, keeping in mind that some of the definitions suggested by them could be incorrect.

CASES

1. Johar left his home and family, because he could not support them financially. After a long journey, he arrived in Poland. Is he entitled to receive refugee status?

Answer: Refugee status cannot be granted to persons who left their native country due to economic reasons.

2. Mehmed and his family had to leave their home due to the danger resulting from a gang war in their village. In order to find shelter, they went to stay with their family in the northern part of their country. Are they considered refugees?

Answer: Refugees are persons who cannot receive protection on the territory of their country, whose citizenship they hold, and therefore they leave the country in order to find protection.

3. Ahmed, his wife Dalida and son Hamid were awakened during the night by an earthquake. Unfortunately their home was destroyed. They had to leave their country. Are they refugees?

Answer: According to the Geneva Convention, refugee status is granted to persons who are persecuted, not those who are victims of natural disasters. Therefore, Ahmed and his family will not be considered refugees.

4 . A person comes to Poland because there is a war in his country between members of two religious sects. This person is a member of the sect whose representatives are put in jail, their money is taken away, and they are not allowed to lead a normal life. He cannot count on any help in his country. Can this person receive refugee status?

Answer: If a person is persecuted because of religious reasons, and is unable to find help from the authorities of his country, this can constitute a basis for granting refugee status.

Extract from the contents script by:
Milena Liszka, Lena Bryzik and Łukasz Bąk



Mentoring Paves Way to Employment in Lithuania

Providing various support for Lithuanian women, Women's Employment Information Centre became aware of empowering new Lithuanian residents – refugee women. The Women's Employment and Information Centre was established in 1994 by UN International Work Organization and Kaunas municipality to fulfil its mission – to work with women and for women. The Centre began working with immigrant women seeking successful integration into Lithuanian society. Project 'Immigrant Women in Lithuania' MIL (funded by the World Bank) was offered to the refugee

women. Thirty two women participated in the project; eighty percent of them became successfully integrated into the labour market.

This project was started when a group of female asylum seekers looked for help at the Centre when their one year integration term was over in Lithuania. Two workers and thirty six volunteers organized the programme. The main idea of the project was to individually mentor female asylum seekers through her more competent Lithuanian female partner.

Seventeen pairs were created from thirty two asylum seekers from Kaunas and other cities and Lithuanian volunteers. Participating asylum women's ages varied from twenty to fifty six years. The majority of them were Chechens and a couple of them said they were Afghans. At the beginning of the project, only six women were employed. Others did not work or took care of their families at home. The University students and women from the women's club 'Crossroad' became volunteer mentors.

Major tasks of the group were formulated as follows. Female mentor is willing:

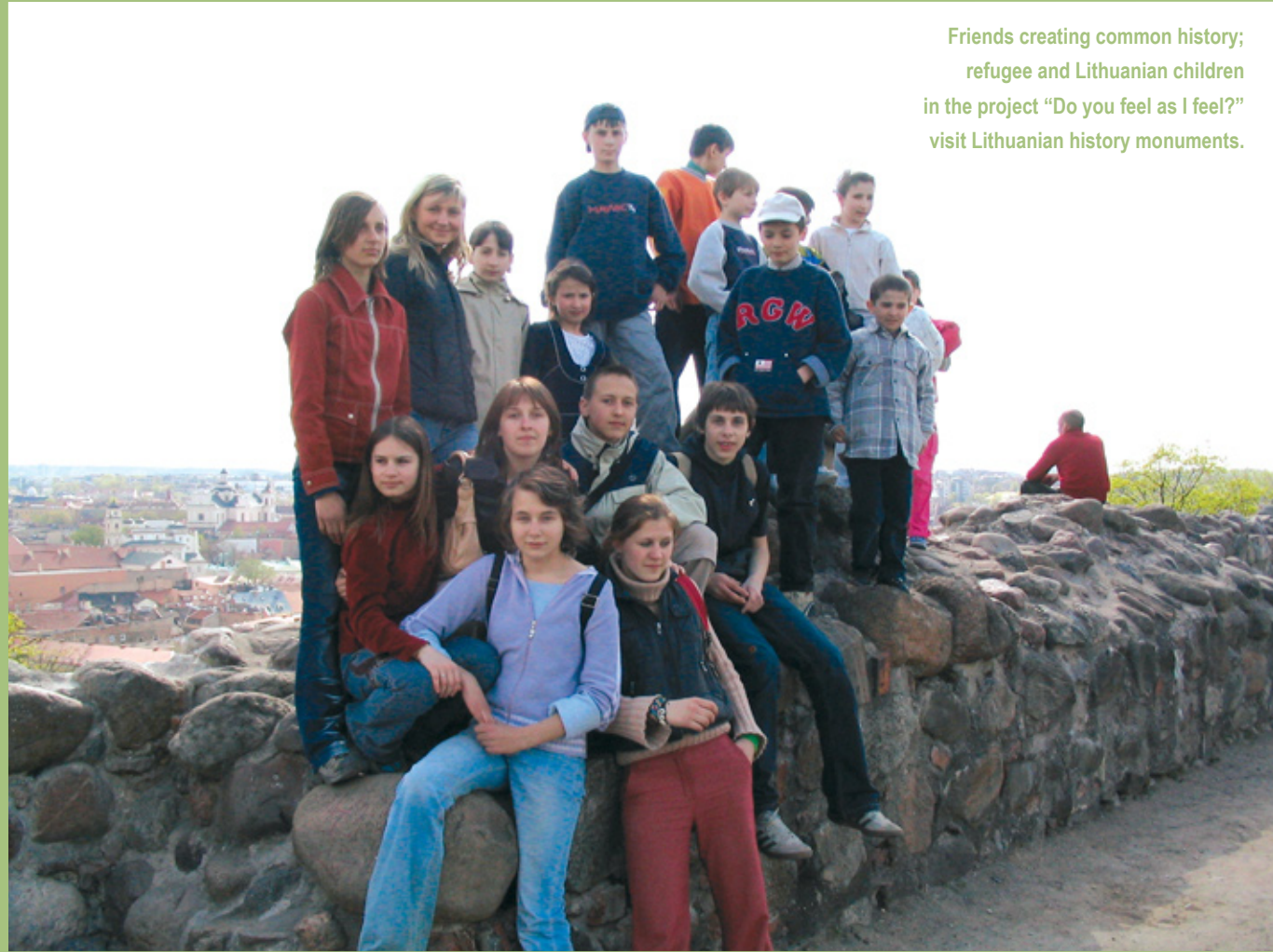
1. To help her partner individually to ascertain her needs and solve her own problems.
2. To discuss and analyze the asylum seeker's positive and negative experiences in a group situation.
3. To provide asylum seeker women assistance in establishing their own organization and supporting their efforts to strengthen this organization.
4. To organize cultural programmes which would help asylum seeker women and their families to foster their self-respect and dignity.
5. To introduce asylum seeker women to other women's organizations and groups functioning in Lithuania.
6. To establish a Lithuanian women NGO network which would cooperate with immigrant women
7. To foster tolerance towards asylum seekers in Lithuanian society.
8. To prepare recommendations about working with immigrant women in Lithuania.
9. To prepare recommendations (including learning material) for other women organizations.

While participating in the project, women were studying Lithuanian and English languages, improved computer skills; four women were able to get hairdresser's skills. While seeking to provide variety of possibilities and prospects for female asylum seekers, Women's Centre organized meetings with Lithuanian businesswomen and invited Iranian Maria Masoomi from Sweden, a successful businesswoman. Meetings and discussions were also organized with Lithuanian mass media representatives. As participants and their mentors witnessed, these meetings had a positive influence to the asylum seekers and to the Lithuanian society.

The project opened individual and group assistance possibilities for the asylum seekers. Asylum seekers together with Lithuanian women shared their worries and search for the best solutions while discussing in a group. This method was effective and helped asylum women to break their shyness, isolation, fear, and distrust. Individual and group talks helped participants to become more familiar with Kaunas city and Lithuania. Women gained more self-confidence, learned to trust more, broadened their experience about Lithuanian society, and formed new social skills necessary for functioning in a new society.

All Chechen women prove that attending MIL was useful for them. They said that their longing for interpersonal relationships was assuaged. Contacts were strengthened among women of their own nationality and new networks were established with Lithuanian women which were both useful and delighting. These women said, that learning directly from Lithuanian women about Lithuanian culture, society and discovering some new facts about the country and society was important for them. Asylum seeker attendees of the project especially appreciated what they learned from Lithuanian

Friends creating common history; refugee and Lithuanian children in the project "Do you feel as I feel?" visit Lithuanian history monuments.



Red Cross Lithuania is An Oasis for Asylum Seekers

Starting in 1996, support for asylum seekers has been successfully provided by the Red Cross Organization in Lithuania. Red Cross and Caritas used to be the only nongovernmental organizations providing services for asylum seekers. Some years later, the Women's employment and information centre, Eupro and other organizations started functioning in the same field and guaranteeing a greater variety of services for the foreign population.

In those ten years, the Red Cross constantly offered good quality services for asylum seekers: a Law clinic for refugees, legal assistance for foreigners, social help at the Reception Centre and cultural activities for asylum seekers and their children.

In 2005, the Refugee Day Centre was established. Two refugees, a man and a woman, are employed as social workers at this Centre. Three people are working full time, and there are fifteen volunteers helping to run various activities at the Centre. Four university social work students also work there to assist the voluntarily attendees and the workers.

The social worker: a refugee himself, characterised his positive role in the Centre and compared Lithuanian worker's limitations to his own experiences:

"There are organizations working for refugees where only Lithuanians are employed and provide services. It's difficult for them to understand an asylum seeker as a person – what (s)he wants and what's not wanted. Here, in our Centre, we don't face such problems. I myself am an asylum seeker. I had to get

women – that there are times when they also have problems and difficulties while living in their own country.

MIL project also provided a possibility of training women as leaders among other asylum seekers. These women became motivated to gather by themselves regularly and to start their own public activities in order to provide advocacy for their native groups to governmental institutions. As a result, an asylum seekers' women's association was established to help

women to solve their problems in a new country. Some courses were offered for asylum leader women in order to understand Lithuanian legal issues regarding establishing, running, and financing NGOs in Lithuanian Republic.

Text: Daiva K. Kuzmickaite

through all that asylum system and I have no difficulty in understanding others. I already know what they want and what I have to do in order to offer them a better help.”

Social worker, man

A female social worker, also a refugee, described everyday life at the Centre. As she pointed out, asylum seekers come and go: they stop by to have a cup of tea and share news about home, relatives, children, and friends:

“We are here not only women ourselves. Approximately, there are thirty five to forty people all the time here. There are women, men and children, although men show up rarely, as the majority of them are working. Children drop in to play computer games. A man from Somalia comes here every day to listen to the news about his country on the radio and relates this to his friends on the Internet.”

Anonymous interview

In only two years, the Centre became 'home' not only for Kaunas asylum seekers, but also for those dispersed all over Lithuanian municipalities. Hospitality and close relationships, cultural and emotional closeness among asylum seekers at the Centre are relocated to the broader society. The attendees treat the Centre as a little oasis for asylum seekers, where they can gather and share their cultural and national heritage:

“For almost a year now we have enjoyed our new situation, as our lives became much simpler when the Centre was established. Our children can already see how adult Chechens congregate, how they relate, how we greet each other and how we say good-bye to each other. Our children see all this and we find out how it becomes less complicated to teach them our traditions and customs.[...] It became easier for us to live and our relationships became more frequent, when the Centre was opened. We were thirsty for meeting each other and speaking in our native tongue. Now we have a chance to come here, meet each other, and discuss our problems and our common joy. That helps us a lot.”

Chechen woman, 38 years

Cultural and social activities, meetings with representatives of governmental and municipality institutions regarding integration issues are organized at the Centre. Religious festivities, important historical ethnic groups' events, the Refugee World Day were commemorated. Kaunas' Muslim community members visited newcomers at the Centre. Youth activities, such as sport competitions, national food evenings, and even asylum seekers' weddings are taking place at the Centre.

All Chechen women proved that interpersonal relationships in an informal manner became significant for them. As one of the women explained, in a war they lost their family members and close relatives. Coming to Lithuania meant being alone and not

having even friends, so gatherings with people from the same nation and the same culture become of greater importance. These gatherings compensated for lost social networks and helped remove negative feelings and worries.

Such a longing for community forced some women into taking more public actions, e.g. standing up for Chechen asylum seekers in various governmental institutions. Affinity and re-established communal relationships motivated female asylum seekers to gather into women's organizations: “After some time asylum seekers and immigrants' associations were organised.”

Lithuanian social worker

We can guess that such an idea to create a new association came into being not without cooperation between NGOs. A MIL project offered by the Women's employment and information centre nurtured the initial idea of banding together.

Parents who know that they can now provide their children with their traditional culture and history are especially happy about the Centre:

“We gather at the Centre often. We dance... dance our national dances. We have our own music, our own songs. We turn on this music

and dance, and sing, and do everything..[...] We keep our tradition alive in order to show our children that those dances are ours, and that dances are needed to relax... And we know that our children would teach their own children these dances [and traditions] later.”

Interview, Chechen woman, 39 years

Currently workers and asylum seekers plan to organize religion classes and summer camps for their children. In September 2006 (Chechen language) and history classes for twenty Chechens and three Afghan children were offered:

“Women started to talk about Chechen history classes on Saturdays. Who would teach? Hampasha, the blind man, who came to the Centre. He has a good memory. He studied at the Institute in our country”.

Excerpt from the participant observation notes. 2006

The Day Centre functioning to provide services for refugee and asylum seekers, also serves as an effective tool to ease their traumas and empower them to function better in their new country. A safe environment and close relationships among these people guarantee empowerment and self-confidence gradually.

Text: Daiva K. Kuzmickaite



Refugee women's sewing classes were offered by Vilnius Caritas.

Caritas Training is a Path to Integration

Since 2005, Vilnius Caritas has run the project to promote integration through training in social and professional skills. On the basis of that project, Caritas now organizes sixteen week sewing courses for ten women asylum seekers. Nine women were successful and achieved a qualification as a seamstress-operator. Women were supplied with the sewing machines granted by the project. At the same time, women were instructed about legal aspects – laws and regulations of employment. Eight women were successful at the Lithuanian language exam and five women started to work.

Excerpts from interviews with asylum seeker women

“I’m always saying that many things depend on who is our coordinator. The coordinator must be loyal, active and offer many things to asylum seekers. They must be accurate, gather all the information regarding our concerns and sort that information: what is good for us and what is not useful. [...] The coordinator has to know what is good for us, (s)he must be willing to be on our side and be willing to help us to become

At work with Asylum seekers

better integrated. If that person is not responsible enough, the asylum seeker feels that (s)he is not wanted and is not needed there.”

Chechen woman, 39 years

“For me relationship, understanding and willingness from the workers’ side are the most important[...]. When I get clear information patiently provided ... it was important for me that they approached me in such a human manner.”

Chechen woman, 38 years

“We always ask: ‘What kind of project is offered to us?’ Almost every project is oriented towards women. Nothing was offered for men. We don’t

need similar projects offered in several places. If someone is interested in the offered subject, they will find them and attend the project. If there is no interest, you can offer hundreds of those projects, but they won’t attend even one. Our men need some projects. If we can ask for something: ‘Please, provide one project for men, for instance – welding. It’s not impossible.’“

Chechen woman, 47 years

Text: Daiva K. Kuzmickaite



Zalmai Hussain Ali Naved and Ziba Elahi are interested in the information about study vouchers, distributed by Eeva Visala (on the right) and Annina Mäkinen (in the centre).

Photo: Tarja Repo

Immigrants and Asylum Seekers Study with Vouchers

The city of Tampere granted to immigrants and asylum seekers 200 student vouchers corresponding to 150 euros each in the frame of an experiment grant from the Ministry of Education. Vouchers could be used to study Finnish and leisure time activities in educational institutions participating in the experiment, according to the choice of the student.

When the experiment ended in 2005, 225 immigrants had studied by means of vouchers in 447 courses. A total of 250 vouchers were granted to students representing 65 different nationalities. For many immigrants, a voucher gave the

opportunity to speed up Finnish language learning and have leisure time activities, which would otherwise not have been possible.

The presentation brochure about the student voucher was translated from Finnish into five other languages. Information about the voucher was disseminated through newspapers, local news broadcasted by immigrants, and by individual face to face during Finnish language courses. The information expanded slowly, and initially some immigrants had difficulties to understand the actual meaning of it. The simple fact of presenting some other educational options beside Finnish

was a challenge, as studying for an aim other than a concrete vocational training (i.e. for a diploma) was a strange idea. A student voucher in the form of an A4-paper was considered old-fashioned and poorly illustrative. Its management proved heavy. For a person not knowing the language, the value of an A4- paper was not always clear.

As a whole, the experiment was successful. The number of distributed vouchers was bigger than originally estimated. The voucher beneficiaries got to know at least one educational institution that provides adult education. They received information on possibilities for education and free time activities. Moreover, many immigrants found their way to student groups of which most students were Finnish, and consequently, the Finnish had the possibility to become acquainted with immigrants, which was one of the targets of the experiment in Tampere. The personnel of the participating educational institutions and international meeting points created a network and learnt much more about each other's work and about opportunities especially offered to immigrants. This cooperation will continue after the experiment and will provide an offering that corresponds better to the demand in Tampere.

Text: Anne Kilponen, Educational Planner
at the Adult Education Centre of the City of Tampere

Tales from the Village Storytelling Centre Glasgow



Asylum seekers
in the play 'Flats'.

At work with Asylum seekers

Everybody has a story to tell. Required apparatus? Imagination and an audience of one. Reading, writing, props and equipment are unnecessary for this inclusive art form which helps to explain the success of the Village Storytelling Centre:

“Volunteers and participants within the Village Storytelling Centre demonstrated significant growth in self-confidence and self-awareness as well as understanding and the capacity to challenge racism and sectarianism.”

(A recent government inspection on community cohesion praising the Village for its innovative work. Source: HMI Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) 'How good is our community learning and development')

Housed in a local (and still active) parish church in a Glasgow suburb the Village has been designed to stimulate 'flights of fancy'. It is split over two levels, with a large boat upstairs and an old shop front and a kitchen range downstairs to remind visitors of bygone Pollok. In the early days the Village worked with elderly people in reminiscence sessions and provided drama classes for school children. However, as more asylum seekers and refugees have come to live in the neighbourhood the centre's activities are reflective of a 'global village.'

In 2003, responding to a need to make members of the new community feel welcome and valued, Liam Stewart, a writer and storyteller, was employed to run a story collecting project. When he took the job Liam decided it would be 'safer' to gather traditional stories rather than explore 'real' stories with a group of people who did not yet know each other.

- Boundaries are difficult. In creative writing there is a need to be careful not to lure people into telling you things they might not otherwise. You have to respect the emotional vulnerability that sharing personal stories can expose, Liam says.

The first workshops (which were also an informal English class!) earned trust between the group and generated *Buffalo Horns: Stories from Around the World*. In a follow-up series Liam encouraged the group to write the stories themselves. He would prompt discussion with a topic to get the creative juices flowing and then advice on grammar or structure as needed. Apparently 'shoes' was a very popular theme (Learning and Teaching Scotland)!

The group continued to evolve and performed a short drama using one of the stories. Their appetite for performance now whetted, they asked Liam to write a script. He recognised that there was 'a real story going on here and now' and consulted the group in order to incorporate material that people had shared about conflict with neighbours, integration, class issues, fears of deportation, dawn raids and domestic abuse.

Violence against women created the key storyline but the experience of being an asylum seeker is interwoven throughout. In the latest play, *Flats*, the story told is a true experience of a woman suffering domestic violence, She is comforted by a neighbour (an asylum seeker) and comes to understand that they are both seeking refuge from a persecution of sorts. The play is successful because it uses a universal theme to expose the real and everyday experiences of asylum seekers.

Meriem, a performer describes the process of gathering and contributing material:

– We spoke to Liam individually about our problems, our lives, every part of the script is real. When Liam and Catrin, the director, asked who wants to do this drama I told them I have never done anything like this before but I want to do it because it is our situation! We are not going to act, we are going to show our concerns as asylum seekers and women. The play includes lots of our own language and ideas. Everything in it is true.

The performers met one evening a week for two hours over six months, a crèche was provided and transport arranged to collect people from a central location. Some of the group were asylum seekers and refugees but others were local Scottish residents.

The play has now been performed six times in well-known city venues; to great acclaim. There have been problems, not least the cost of a crèche and transport to rehearsals. Working with a cast from seven countries, each with different English capabilities was overcome by recording the script on a Dictaphone. This allowed the performers to learn the words by listening rather than reading. The subject matter too, raised concerns. The play invoked controversial issues which would have made the project unattractive to future funding opportunities if it had been too radical in its presentation.

One reviewer commented on the paradox of allowing an audience to enjoy a play where - as asylum seekers - the performers might not have been allowed to stay in the country. In fact,



Asylum seekers protest in the play.

knowing that Immigration officials might suddenly detain the leading lady was a genuine concern!

Just as the play's theme explores understanding and tolerance, the performers themselves have come to be more accepting of each other. By performing together they have come to know each other better, dispelling the stereotypes and negative attitudes regarding class, status and colour that were prevalent both in both the receiving community and between asylum seekers themselves.

I asked Liam about his thoughts on empowerment and if he thought The Flats had brought any change to those who performed in it?

– Yes, one woman is now campaigning for asylum rights. Another from Sierra Leone who doesn't read or write is now active in all kinds of community work but perhaps the network, the group they have built between themselves and at a wider level too is the most empowering thing. Many are involved with the Greater Pollok Integration Network. Still, you cannot separate empowerment from poverty – and not just material poverty – poverty of rights. These people may feel more empowered in a group because they have nothing on their own; they have fewer rights than anyone else in our society.

Text: Suki Mills

See 'Activating Methods for Empowerment' in Part Two – What is Empowerment, and 'Applied Drama and Picture Work' in part Four – Activities.

Meriem's experience of Empowerment

“The first time I went to the Village Storytelling Centre it was a very difficult time for me, I was very upset and had lots of problems. I met [name] at a Christmas party and he encouraged me to become involved with the community because I didn't know anyone where I was living. He said it is better than just being upset and staying at home. He told me you will become knowledgeable, you will learn about your rights and he told me they are doing many activities at the Village Storytelling Centre. The Village has helped me. When I met [name] I was very depressed and I went to my GP who made an appointment for me to see the psychologist but it takes a long time. I have not had the appointment yet but if they called me to go now I will tell them I don't need your help, I have helped myself, I found another way! There is not just one-way to get better - going to the psychologist is not the only way- like myself I found this community. You can make power for yourself, you don't need someone else to give you power. You can do something to change your situation.

Soon I moved to Kennishead. At first I didn't like the area because it is so far away from everything but I liked the community; the people here are more active and involved. Now I am working as a volunteer and I am secretary of the Pollok Integration Network. I think I am more confident now. I feel I've changed. It started with the Flats and Pollok Framework for Dialogue and then I got involved in other things.

I started to work with Alison as a volunteer for the Rainbow Elderly Daycares Centre. Alison is my 'partner', she is 73 years old and I take her out because she is disabled. I feel very happy when I make her smile. I felt very happy last December because before this she had always had to give other people money to buy the Christmas presents she gave to friends and relatives. This Christmas I took her to the shopping centre and she bought many things by herself. She was so happy. She told the taxi driver and her neighbour how grateful she was and then she took me to see her friend who said, 'It's so nice to see you out!' Alison said, "I am out because of Meriem!"

I think of myself as stupid now after doing the play. I feel that I have lost many years without doing anything, if I had found this opportunity before maybe I would have done more; maybe I would 'be more.'

There are things that are disempowering about living as an asylum seeker, two things I hate! I hate to go to the Home Office to sign and I hate to go the Post Office to collect money to live. Going to the Post Office makes you feel like you can't do anything, you just get some money to help you to eat. But we are able to work! We are not old! We are not disabled! This is a great shame for me; it is very embarrassing. I never go on Monday when it is busy; I wait until Tuesday or Wednesday and go in the afternoon when it is quiet so not many people will see me. I don't like Scottish people looking at me, seeing me and thinking she came here to get money. Also, the

fact that we have to sign feels as though we have done something against the law. Why are we made to feel this way when all we have done is claim asylum? Sometimes it feels as though we are treated like criminals."



Anne-Marie's experience of Empowerment

An extract from the Village Storytelling Centre's Doors Open, Anne-Marie Smith in conversation with Liam Stewart the Editor

Born in Pollok the youngest of a family of seven, Anne-Marie is a community activist and an advocate for working class people: she is a volunteer worker with One-Plus and the Poverty Alliance and recently the founder of a women's drop-in group in Priesthill. In addition to all this and bringing up her three children, she has found time to start a college course in Psychology and Sociology, and to take part in the Village Drama Group production, 'The Flats'. Before this, she describes herself as being as racist and uninformed as the next person. It was her involvement in the play that was a turning point for her. In her role as a single-mother in flight

from a violent husband, she is initially hostile to her Algerian asylum-seeker neighbour, but ends up befriending her. The success of the play owed a lot to the power and conviction that Anne-Marie brought to her performance. Here she is in conversation with the editor.

When I was asked to play a part in a play with a group that was mainly asylum seekers, I wasn't too sure what to expect. It was exciting to be in the show, and to have to play such a big part. But before the play, it wouldn't have been my choice to mix with asylum seekers. Where I grew up, the only people of different colour were Asian shopkeepers or people whose father had maybe been a black American serviceman. My views were like the view of most low-income people, believing the stories from the papers, thinking it looked as if they got more than they got. I didn't realise what they had come through and how they could be an asset in the community. They're generous honest people and, in spite of what they've been through, happy. They tolerate a lot of racism, just because they feel safer here than the country they were fleeing from. They don't want to be seen to be causing trouble. At the end it was difficult just to walk away from it, because I got emotionally attached to the rest of the cast. Working with the drama group, I got a great sense of community. Seeing all the kids together in the crèche was part of it. I don't think kids see colour.

Another thing about the play was I had really never done any acting before! Except in a sketch in Women Together Day. Emily Pankhurst came into our time and met a modern day woman, and that

was me. I didn't feel I had any talent as an actress. For one thing, I can't remember a shopping list. But, it was a play about how people would react in real situations. People were shocked at the scenes involving Gerry, who played the violent husband. But I could relate to it. I've gone through it. Hardness was a protection. If you looked like a victim you would get treated as such. In my scenes with Gerry, I didn't hear everything he said. I just blanked out. It's a way of coping with it. I had to remember to stop greeting. But I got so much support from the cast, cuddles when we met and so on, and that helped a lot. To think, at first, even sharing a bottle of water was strange. Maybe I'm not as racist as I thought. Some people have giggled about me being involved in acting, you know, the thespian/lesbian bit. But it's been good for me. Things change. I can let my racist friends go.

I'm also involved in anti-deportation activity with friends from the play. At a recent campaign meeting, I was asked to speak and I found myself saying we shouldn't see Glasgow so much as a melting pot but as a place that has developed its own tartan: it's got strands of many different colours running along beside each other and sometimes across each other, but together it makes a beautiful tartan."

(p.146-8, Doors Open. 2006. Copyright: The Village Storytelling Centre)

An Excerpt from The Flats © Liam Stewart 2006

SCENE 16

In AICHA'S house, episodic, they tell each other about their lives, as they sit and drink coffee. They react sympathetically to each other's stories.

SUSAN. He was alright at first, quite funny. Then the violence started.

.... I had to protect my daughter.

AICHA. We had a good life... my family ran a law firm... one day, men came and threw in petrol bombs. My brother is terribly burnt.....

SUSAN. The worst was a broken jaw, four cracked ribs, a dislocated shoulder and a detached retina.....

AICHA. They say if I step out without a hijab they will beat me and my husband....

SUSAN. The booze blots it out... I had to protect my daughter

AICHA. After the second bombing, we have to escape....

SUSAN. I don't think he'll leave me alone till one of us is dead

AICHA. Five years.. My daughter is born here. Five years not working. Five years fighting to stay. Now they tell us we can go back... So my husband has gone to London to hide.

SUSAN. What was that you shouted at Stevie? Was it a curse?

AICHA. Oh no. I just told him if he came here again I would stick... stick...

SUSAN. Stick the heid on him!

AICHA. Yes.

They laugh. Then we see SUSAN leave AICHA's flat. A friendship is possibly beginning.

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Further Reading

Buffalo Horns: Stories from Around the World
Liam Stewart, Editor
© 2004 The Village Storytelling Centre

Village Stories
Liam Stewart, Editor
© 2005 The Village Storytelling Centre
ISBN: 0-9547491-1-1

Doors Open from Plantation to Pollok from Kabul to Kennishead.
Liam Stewart, Editor
© 2006 The Village Storytelling Centre
ISBN: 0-9547491-2-X



Bernadette Bigirimana
Photo: Pamela So and
Rachel Thibbotumunuwe

II Peer Support in Women's Self-organised Groups

The importance of peer support is reflected in the cases described in section II. In these cases, empowered women have spread their energy in their peer community, and women have organised support for each other from their own initiative. The cases are good examples of how women have found ways of supporting each other in the shared life situation, in spite of not having common language and culture.



Rendang Daging - Indonesian Dish from the Portobella Recipe Book.

Self Organization in Women's Projects at Omega

A great number of cultures have in common that women have the task of bringing up children, of being at the side of their husbands and partners, and to take care of other family members. How women manage this is defined within their cultural framework, which in turn can widen or limit their opportunities. Flight and migration change the roles and patterns of behavior within the family, so that traditional responsibilities can more easily be overridden by new demands. For many foreign citizens it is above all seen as a psychological handicap to accept help from outside

the family or own cultural group, that is, from private and public institutions. Therefore, it is a major objective for organizations in the field of refugee counseling to reduce this type of anxiety by empowering women to build and develop own initiatives and assisting them in their self-management efforts.

On the basis of these assumptions and on the initiative and commitment of migrant women right from the start, a project was developed for the integration and counseling of foreign

women and, consequently, their families. The women involved voiced their need for the establishment of a “safe room”, with the underlying aim to give women the courage to talk about their experiences and problems, to exchange experiences with other women, to get information about the host country, to talk about issues like health, education, advanced education and the job market, to get to know women from other cultures, and to meet and make new friends. A warm and relaxed atmosphere should be the frame for women creative activity and promotion of individual skills. The implementation of the psychosocial women’s project happened step by step. Experiences and ideas gathered from many women marked these steps.

Women’s Café

The women’s Café developed in co-operation with the “Frauenreferat”, the City of Graz public office for women, and is held once a week in the premises of the OMEGA Health Care Center. The establishment of the women’s Café was the first step in the implementation of the psychosocial women’s project. Discussions with visitors to the Café gave new impulses for the development of the project and new aspects were added.

Women from different cultures meet just to talk to each other or to join the informative talks and events with the main topic being health in a broad sense (stress, conflict resolution, intercultural communication, hygiene, HIV-AIDS prevention, Hepatitis, as well as healthy nutrition). Speakers are professionals from different institutions as well as professionals working at OMEGA. In



addition, integration into the labour market was facilitated through jobs as cleaning assistants with personal support and guidance from Austrian women.

In the frame of the women’s Café, many workshops were organised with and for women, also in the refugee shelters. These workshops combined Craft skills and relaxed get-togethers. Products such as jewelry, pottery, candles, felt, and wall carpets could be taken home by the women as proud producers.

The Portobella team members contribute by giving the place a warm atmosphere.

In summer 1998 the booklet “Foreign women in Graz” was published in co-operation with the City of Graz “Frauenreferat”. The main idea and contents of the booklet have their origin in the women’s Café - that is, the life of women in different cultures.

The Second Hand Shop and the Day Workshop Portobella

In summer 1997, the idea was developed to create a multicultural meeting point for women in order to make possible another form of exchange apart from the women’s Café. This concept of a “safe room” for women, *Portobella*, fitted well into the frame of the *European Union URBAN project*. It gave the women the possibility to meet other women, to hunt a little through second hand clothes and things, and to join creative activities. At the same time, it was ideal to approach women and inform them about psychological and psychosocial counseling offered and available for free at the OMEGA- Health Care Centre.

Culinary Portobella

To cook became an important element for the women involved in the Portobella project.

“When cooking, I feel like at home” the women say. They learnt to regard and present their culture as an additional qualification and personal resource, to see preparation of food as a cultural bonding, raising their self-confidence and gender-specific independence. With their presentation of cultural dishes, they also took their first steps towards integration into the labour market. Since 2001, regular multicultural lunches have been offered, for which women from the refuge shelters cook culinary specialities from their homelands for friends and guests of OMEGA.

The cooking of dishes and eating the meal together is of vital importance for every family. Each culture has its specialties and gives tribute to them in their own way. In summer 1998 the Portobella team members and a great number of women befriended through the project began to prepare buffets for various public events. They presented these buffets in the form of a “culinary cultural exchange”, a part of their culture. This kind of cultural exchange awakened a lot of interest and became very popular. The Catering-Service was officially licensed to operate as a catering business and buffets were offered to up to 4000 persons per year in the frame of congresses, official events and private parties.

A further result of these activities is the cookbook “Culinary Portobella - recipes from all over the world”, published in 2004. The good collaboration between women from 19 different countries, in co-operation with the City of Graz and other institutions, made possible the publication of this cookbook. It can be ordererd at OMEGA- Health Care Centre in Graz.

The focus of this project is to integrate foreign women through these activities, to show that creative work in an atmosphere of trust could develop further their abilities. Time after time women from Iran, Yugoslavia, Ghana, Turkey, and two women from Bosnia as well as four from Austria worked at Portobella. We were able to integrate many migrant women into the domestic labour market, which is also an important objective of this project.

The women co-operate to prepare the buffets and run cooking workshops once a week. Under the guidance of a teacher and other professionals, education in the following fields is given: Hygiene, professional clothing, food supplies and food handling, service, labeling of food, information on different cleaning agents, separation of waste, maintaining a clean work environment, time management and professional vocabulary.

Also basic knowledge about PC is part of the education. The goal of this project is to qualify migrant women to facilitate their entry to the labour market thus allowing them to become financially independent and build up a professional future.

Text: Nicola Baloch

Women's projects in figures

During all these years, over 400 women originating from 14 countries came to the regular women's Café. On 26 occasions informative events were held on health issues. Employees of Portobella recorded 1,637 visitors in the past years. So far, 188 women have attended the 24 creative workshops.



The number of participants at the self-organized women's group called 'Frauencafe' founded in 1999 differs from meeting to meeting. Some meetings are attended by more than 20 women, others by only 8. The minimum number of participants is 8 women. The majority of these women are asylum-seekers, some of them having lived in Austria for just a few months and others for at least three years. The women come from different countries: Egypt, Afghanistan, Iran and Chechnya.

The age range is from 18 to 50. In their countries of origin, the women have worked in different professions: among them are doctors, nurses and teachers.

The women's group meets twice a month in the premises of the OMEGA - Health Care Center association. The meetings address the women's everyday problems, such as child care, kindergarten, school, health care, healthy diet and cooking, working and living, in the form of lectures on selected topics

held by guest speakers. If necessary, interpreters from the participants' cultures do attend. Many women attend the meetings in the role of both a participant and an interpreter. Topics are also covered in the form of workshops. These workshops deal with different problematic situations or are creative workshops such as working with Tiffany glass, during which women can learn new skills. These workshops are very popular.

The meetings do not only deal with problems, they also offer a culinary aspect. At each meeting, one participant brings a typical dish of her country of origin and reveals its recipe to her colleagues.

The OMEGA association (Health Care Center and Organization for Victims of Violence and Human Rights Violations) is managing this project with one of its employees as project coordinator, who has herself an immigrant background. Her duties consist of organising monthly meetings and find the required interpreters if necessary, of inviting speakers for lectures, of managing workshops,

and of initiating contacts with other organisations. The person in charge is occasionally assisted by participants who have been engaged in these activities for years, and by interpreters.

There is also co-operation with the Danaida association that offers German language courses to the participants.

The women's group is open to all women, both Austrians and non-Austrians. Most women learn about the project from friends or cohabitants in refugee quarters where they live.

The most important material for the women's group is the readiness to be together and be open for multi-cultural exchanges, as well as the readiness to talk about problems and to jointly work out solutions.

One of the roles of the OMEGA- Health Care Centre Graz association (Organisation for Victims of Violence and Human Rights Violation) is to advise and assist asylum-seekers in the Styrian refugee quarters. Apart from medical, psychological and psychotherapeutic consultations and assistance, the association also offers psychosocial support through different projects. As it is mostly families and single women with children that are in need of such support, the association's employees strived to offer it to make it easier for these target groups to live in their quarters and support them in overcoming their problems.

The facilitator's opinion is that participants feel being in good hands in these settings and are becoming increasingly self-assured and self-confident in the sense of 'Empowerment

of Immigrants'. Lectures, exchanges with their colleagues, and workshops on different topics give the women the opportunity to gain important skills and experiences in different areas. They are very happy to be offered the chance by the women's group not to feel left on their own, and to be able to share their fate with others.

The participants like coming to the meetings and make very constructive contributions.

It is evident that they are undergoing positive changes. The group offers them contacts with other women, both from their own and from other cultures. In these settings they have the opportunity to talk to each other about their personal history and to jointly find solutions to their problems. They learned and are still learning a lot about Austrian society, its way of life and laws.

Text: Abdeselam Mahmoudi



Savithri Wickramasekera.
Photo: Pamela So and
Rachel Thibbotumunuwe



*“O, ye daughters of Africa,
awake! Awake! Arise!
No longer sleep nor slumber,
but distinguish yourselves.
Show forth to the world
that ye are endowed with
noble and exalted faculties.”*

Maria W Stewart, Production of
Mrs Maria W Stewart 1835

UMOJA women
in a drumming
workshop

UMOJA: Friendship and Support for the Most Vulnerable Families

UMOJA INC is a weekly support group for African lone mother asylum seekers and their children. It was set up by Glasgow human rights activist and campaigner, Vicky Grandon.

UMOJA means friendship in Swahili while the ‘INC’ stands for ‘Including New Communities. Since its inception in 2000 the group has forged numerous links with other organisations to offer suitable support for particularly vulnerable women and children: most of whom have reached the end of the asylum process. In Vicky’s words, they ‘come from terrible backgrounds, including rape, trafficking, female genital mutilation and domestic violence amongst others. A typical UMOJA member has only been able to flee with a few of her

children, leaving the rest behind. These women have survived against the odds in their home countries, but face tremendous struggles against isolation, racism, poverty, exclusion and loss in their new lives in Glasgow.’

UMOJA INC has evolved from the experiences and knowledge gained in five years of developing activities in which the women can take part. It has attempted to address the range of complex issues the women face through ongoing capacity building workshops on children’s rights and parental responsibilities, as well as information on asylum law, housing, education, training and health.

Vicky adopts ‘themes’ to tackle these issues, the themes provide consistency for the weekly two-hour Saturday meetings

- health and wellbeing particularly looking after yourself and your family in winter
- a series of workshops on Scottish heritage, culture and use of dialect and colloquialisms. These are followed by a visit to Stirling Castle where there are costume drama, juggling and sweetie making activities. These are linked to Black Environmental Network Heritage Project and Black History Month
- crafts for gift-making
- African poetry in translation and original language written by women
- positive parenting workshops with discussion on ‘teenage issues’ including a four week training course presented by Single Parent Action Network
- ‘Spinning the Web’ - research via the internet to inform members of other African Women’s groups and networks throughout the UK, and beyond and the development of a website: Mothers in Africa, sisters in Scotland (MASS)
- Time for Families - how to use the clock to our advantage to allow us to spend more enjoyable time playing and laughing with our children instead of too much rushing. This was included in Parents Week October 2004 allowing an opportunity to discuss the challenges the women experience as mothers far away from home and without extended family to look after their children.
- drumming and dance workshops culminating in an outdoor performance at the New Lanark World Heritage Site where the women also braided the hair of willing volunteers from the audience!
- workshops on helping children cope with change and loss using Virginia Ironside’s famous story, *The Huge Bag of Worries*. (The Huge Bag of Worries. Virginia Ironside (1994). Children 1st (Royal Scottish Society or Prevention of Cruelty to Children)
- African cultural traditions where the women wrote and illustrated *The Little Book of African Food* (2006) and *An African Nest Egg: A wealth of Tales and Experiences of African Motherhood* (2007) which have both been cheaply published and are now sold to raise money for UMOJA INC.

regardless of erratic attendance. Themes cover practical issues, creative workshops and self-development, for example the above:

UMOJA offers help with travel costs and provides a crèche staffed by unpaid volunteers. For the first four years UMOJA survived on the support of donations but in January 2006 it was awarded charitable status and has been successful in raising short term funding to support member activities. Text: Suki Mills



UMOJA
organised
costume role
play for children
at Stirling Castle

Excerpt from An African Nest Egg: A wealth of Tales and Experiences of African Motherhood.

© UMOJA INC 2007.

Introduction

“Motherhood bonds women from every class, caste, religion and race. Throughout the world we are united by the experience of carrying, giving birth to and raising our children. As mothers, we can empathise with a heavily pregnant woman seeking shade from the angry sun. ... It matters not whether the land she stands upon grows African violets or Scottish heather.”

Heidi D. Wilke, recorder, collaborator, editor



Food and Cravings

“Every year in Somalia we have a rainy season; the monsoon. I was pregnant during the monsoon when it would rain heavily for hours every day. As the rainy season finished and the land began to dry out, the smell of the hot, damp sand made me feel so hungry that I wanted to eat it!”

Celebrations and Rituals

“In parts of the Ivory Coast, when a newborn is brought home from hospital for the first time, the child is taken into the family home and welcomed by having the tip of its head touched to the walls. As the head touches the wall the family will say, “Welcome to your new home.”

Confinement and Rest

“In my country (Zaire) it is often required for mother and child to stay indoors for at least two months, sometimes even six months. If it is absolutely essential for a child to be taken outside during this time, for example, because it needs to attend a hospital appointment, the child’s eyes must be covered.

When I had my child, I was so bored with having to stay indoors that after two months I decided to take a risk and sneak out. Unfortunately for me, my husband found out and was furious!”



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UMOJA women at a drumming workshop.



UMOJA women perform at New Lanark Heritage Centre.



Sabina Etchu, founder of KASWA worked as a mentor with the Bridges Women's Personal Development Course
Photo: Pamela So and Rachel Thibbotumunuwe

KASWA Brings Asylum Seeker Women Together: 'You Need to Be Able to Share!'

Sabina Etchu is an asylum seeker from Cameroon and founder of KASWA, an informal group created to support other asylum seeker women living in her neighbourhood.

KASWA, or the Kennishead Asylum Seekers Women's Association, is nearly two years old. The twenty or so women who belong to KASWA live in the five high-rise tower blocks that stretch alongside a railway line and dominate the skyline. Sabina lives here with her husband and two children.

Kennishead is a Glasgow suburb approximately six miles from the city centre and south of the River Clyde. There is a frequent bus service into the city centre, but the journey can take thirty minutes or more, giving the neighbourhood an impression of being remote and isolated. Kennishead is in the larger

district of Pollok. Sabina's husband is a member of the Pollok Integration Network which helps to facilitate community relations by organising cultural and social activities where local residents can meet asylum seekers and refugees. There are now nine regional integration and resettlement networks operating in the city.

KASWA has had an organic evolution, as women from the flats passed word to one another at the bus stop about the first meeting. Now KASWA are at a transition stage where future funding may depend on becoming more formally constituted: which seems to contradict the character of the group.

Why did you start KASWA?

– Myself, being an asylum seeker and being a mum, I was stuck in the flat and getting depressed. When I gave birth to my son – my second child – it was very difficult for me without my family here. I did not have their support like I

did when my daughter was born. I thought if I am feeling like this there must be others like me. I knew there were a lot of single mothers here and I thought why not try and get together? It was summertime and out of the blue I decided we should go an outing. I asked a couple of women I knew, I told them, 'I want to form this group...' They spoke to others, word spread via the bus-stop and it seemed like everyone had just been waiting for something to happen!

Do you think there are particular problems that women asylum seekers face?

– Yes, I think women get stressed more than men because they are more likely to be stuck in the house looking after children. They are more likely to be isolated. It is much more difficult for single mums. If they fall sick who is going to come in and help? Who will look after the children and cook food for them? That is what KASWA is all about offering emotional, practical and moral support to each other. For instance, Maryama just had a baby. When she went into hospital we looked after her two boys between us. Even now I take one of them to nursery with my own son because she cannot go out. Another woman is disabled and we often go and clean her house.

Why do you think you initiated the group rather than another woman?

– I don't know but I think I have a strong community spirit. In Cameroon my mum was like that. We used to have local meetings. People from the same village would gather and if, for example, someone was bereaved we would have to contribute to help bury the person. At the first meeting, I made this proposal: if one of us gives birth we can give £2 each to buy a big present. If someone is ill and in hospital we will send someone to visit and someone else to look after their children and cook food for them. This is how

it is back home. All the women liked the idea and this is what we do.

Where did the first meetings take place?

– The first meeting was in Maryama's house. There were nine of us. The next meeting was at my house. We didn't know each other to begin with but now we are all good friends. I made doughnuts and we all brought our children. My idea was that we would get to know each other personally and host the meeting in each other's homes because I thought there wouldn't ever be any money for us.

– Now we meet every fortnight at a nearby church and childcare is provided. We have a keep fit class sometimes and we want to do dancing. We have had a stress management day where we learned breathing techniques and how to massage our hands to relax; everyone was given a bottle of lavender oil. We also did a fashion show for a community event.

What challenges did you face in setting up KASWA?

– Childcare was a problem. Soon we were too many to meet in each other's houses and finding a place to meet was hard.

Have you had any support in developing KASWA as a group?

– We were lucky because of my husband's involvement with the Pollok Integration Network I was able to get in touch with community support organisation called the Healthy Living Initiative (HLI) This is a mix of statutory agencies like the police, social work and the health service. They saw that KASWA could help to reduce the stress facing women asylum seekers and arranged for a community

social worker to come to our meetings. They hired a place for us to meet and organised a crèche

The Healthy Living Initiative suggested we become a subgroup of the Integration Network which is a registered charity so that we could apply for funding. We come under their constitution and their bank account.

– There is pressure to make KASWA more formal to get money to support our activities but the women want to keep it informal because there are already too many laws ruling our lives as asylum seekers. We should take photos and make reports to build a picture of what we do and attract more funding but the whole point of the group was to have fun. If you make it formal then you have to consider religious and cultural aspects. The way we are now it is just open: no hierarchy. All are equal. I don't stand as the founder. Women bring other women along and they don't even know who founded it! I am happy that it is a success but I don't want to be thought of as the founder.

How many nationalities are there in the group and does this ever cause any friction?

– Now there are as many as twenty of us sometimes. There are women from nine different countries: Afghanistan, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Algeria, Sierra Leone, Kosovo and Burundi - and it doesn't cause any problems. We have different religions too: Muslim, Hindu and Christian. We have a lot of laughs; it's like a very long informal conversation!

How would you define 'empowerment'?

– Empowerment is confidence. Through their asylum status most women have lost their confidence. Empowerment is about getting this back. As an asylum seeker you have boundaries which you cannot cross and which will affect your confidence. You need to be able to share! It is very important for the women to meet; even if we [KASWA] cannot take the problems away it is important to share them. Sharing the problems helps to alleviate stress.

Do you think KASWA has achieved what you set out to do, to help women feel less isolated and depressed?

– Yes absolutely, I think all of us were stressed at the beginning, especially one lady who was always crying and complaining. Now she is very outgoing and confident. Another woman who didn't have any formal education in Sierra Leone now chairs community meetings and does asylum awareness raising training in local schools, she even talks to the media about the work she is doing.

Text:
Suki Mills

Interview:



UMOJA arranges childcare during their activities for mothers.

Asylum Seeker Women Need Confidence to Access the Services

Vicky Grandon, founder of UMOJA INC, what moved you to set up UMOJA INC?

– In Glasgow and the West of Scotland there have always been people keeping an eye on refugee issues at different human rights, political and grass roots levels. Leading up to 2000 a group were expressing anxiety about the contract that Glasgow City Council had signed with the Home Office's Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND), the government body responsible for providing support to asylum seekers, and were thinking about how they might respond. At the time I was Vice Chair of the Scottish Human Rights Centre. A group of us formed Glasgow

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Asylum Rights Campaign (GARC). We constituted and met weekly and asylum seekers came to those meetings.

– I began to think about the challenge of marrying our goodwill and effort at the policy level with the people needing a personal response. I decided I was going to prioritise children, given the finite time and opportunity and I would do this by working with the mothers who were the least confident and the most open. I thought about the sort of people we would have the privilege to meet and made an arbitrary but reasonable conclusion that the men had more potential to link up with each other, to resources and to information and help.

Why did you think the men had more resources and opportunities available to them?

– They were mobile. They had amongst them people who were very articulate. Not all spoke English, and not all were comfortable in the new environment but they were already grouping. There were already community leaders who were articulate in English and clear about that which they should be asking for on behalf of themselves and their brothers. They weren't excluding women but they couldn't take everything on. The Refugee Action Group (RAG), which they helped to form, tended to be dominated by educated men and they had to work hard to enable and empower women to take a stronger and more active role in this group.

Where was the first meeting?

– We met in one of the asylum seeker's flats. There were five of them, They were from five different countries: women who were all alone with children, scared, isolated, cut-off, ill or under-educated and who had never been on their own before. I described my idea to them in the following way: I cannot get you legal status and I cannot get you money. What I can do is support you meeting together on a regular basis if you think that will be of benefit under the circumstances. It's not the priority but a chance for the children to share and link with their African identity and so on. They were very positive and keen for this to happen but wanted me to be involved. I talked to them about how I could support them from behind the scenes but they could lead. I was offering to find the resources but they were not remotely comfortable with taking the lead. So that was their choice and I was trying to keep them engaged and collective at that starting point. As I learnt more about their individual circumstances and the cultural mores in terms of tribal attitudes and trust I began to appreciate their version

of women's solidarity as opposed to the Western one and why they were not comfortable being the one to stand up and say, 'Let's get together in my flat.'

How did you cope with the language barrier?

– I just didn't think of it as a problem. There was a linguistic divide: women and children without English and women without a lot of education but there had to be ways round it. It just worked because we did it in such a low expectation, let's try it way. We didn't structure it, we just tried it!

How did the group grow?

– At no point did we accept referrals but the women started to speak to other women at bus stops, and at the post office queue and during the very horrible ordeals they had to go through begging for money. I started by saying these are the things that I ask all groups I work with to think about (I have been doing community development for a long time!): 'Today you probably feel that you wouldn't want to exclude or turn anybody away but tomorrow you might have 20 people because they've heard there is something good going on for free.'

– I asked them a series of questions; so are you going to have men? Oh no, that wouldn't be a good idea. Do you want people who aren't single parents? Oh no. Do you want people who aren't African? No. So, even though people say we wouldn't want to exclude anybody, in my experience, it doesn't turn out that way. They agreed to guidance rather than a hard and fixed rule which was reflected in the constitution and the very early equal opportunities policy created for a structure of sorts. The group was to be only for Africans: lone mothers who had a child with them (rather than those who had left children behind), who did not have status and who had been dispersed to Glasgow. Thirty families would be the absolute maximum because we had

to be mindful of the legal permutations of lots children for volunteer supervision.

–We moved to a community centre premises where the children had a separate room with wherever possible a separate group of volunteers watching them. And that had all kinds of ups and downs and more people came, and more people came, and more children came!

Did you set up formally as a group from the very beginning?

– Yes, within a couple of weeks. It's good practice. You can't have your cake and eat it too, if you are going to ask to be taken seriously enough to use somebody's premises, if you are going to ask to be taken seriously enough to be given a start-up grant you need to play by some of the rules some of the time. You need a mailing address and a contact number and so on.

Have you encountered any problems or obstacles in setting up and running UMOJA INC?

– We had a befriending network where at one time every family had a resident (usually Scottish) family that befriended them but it was very labour-intensive for me in terms of offering support, in fact it was exhausting. The befrienders kept coming up against a cultural barrier that they just couldn't tolerate: working with a completely damaged, dysfunctional community of random families was nothing that fitted the pattern of their own history. It wasn't catastrophic; it was worth doing at the time. There was a rationale for everything and every project that was started at that particular time because there were no alternatives, now in 2007 there are lots of agencies providing activities but I am talking about an era when it was stuff that I was coming up with or nothing.

The first asylum seekers arrived in Glasgow in 2000 after Glasgow City Council signed a contract with IND agreeing to provide accommodation and support. The statutory services (e.g. schools, health service, policing, housing providers) took time to refine their provision and there was very little NGO activity early on to supplement this. Now in 2007 there is a strong network of NGOs working together with the local government organisations to refer asylum seekers to the most appropriate service. The NGOs provide a variety of support including orientation, befriending, voluntary work opportunities, language classes, community education and training programmes, interpreting services and practical advice in regard to housing, education and health needs.

– I've also had dozens and dozens of volunteers who have come and go but found it too intense, one said to me, "I just didn't know they would be so needy." That was her description of why she didn't feel comfortable and there is nothing I can do about that because that is the reality.

– Coming from a refugee family I have real issues with the politics of integration. I draw a distinction between resettlement and integration because integration is a certain amount of taking on the new culture. One of the permutations of resettlement is that you need to have at least a sentient awareness of what you are settling into, otherwise you will be brick walling your head every two seconds. If you don't understand that people speak in clichés, metaphors and platitudes instead of literally, if you don't notice that some people have very tribal relationships which are connected to football clubs, churches, family clans, even neighbourhood streets, if you choose to be hostile or ignorant of all this you are going to find resettlement hard.

– You can cast your net but people need to be up and ready for change. Misery gets comfortable. Being depressed, being cut off, being rejected whether you like it or not forms its own pathology; it becomes a way of life, a routine, a habit. We've talked about 'access' to services but the issue is confidence to access the services. It's whether once you are on your own you can present yourself for the opportunity rather than having someone push you to it. It's the confidence to take up the access, there is always something available but you have got to have the self-esteem to present yourself for it.

– Everybody who has children is so resourceful because you can't have children without being scared you are going to die or scared that they are going to die and having to be awake for 24 hours at a time! The only people who are as resourceful as this are the unaccompanied minors I have met. So they [the women] have these ferocious life experiences but it hasn't given them confidence because nobody's valued them, nobody has said, "That is a triumph over adversity! That is more than an awful lot of educated and rich men and women in any society could do! To have your baby and other children and be hiding in the bush." It's not the access that is the issue because these women have come from African countries in conflict and they have got themselves here; they have all these resources but need confidence to take up new experiences.

– The thing that dismayed me about the group and made me worry about their future is how little curiosity they make an effort to express because I think that is part of survival and resettlement. Not one of the women in the UMOJA group realises that I have lost my job, not one of the women understands that we are not paid to work with them or for them on a Saturday. And not one of the women knows

where the other women in the group are from because they don't express curiosity. And we can make a perfectly sensitive and acceptable acknowledgement that this is all about danger, paranoia about the community, about not feeling settled and not quite knowing what will happen next but its more than that, these are damaged women.

– The anomy, the cut-offness is awesome and bodes ill for resettlement. These are the women who have fallen through the net, these are the women who haven't made a go of it, and these are the women who have not found things to engage with and ways to pull themselves up. Some of them show a flash of what they could be were they willing to run the risk of taking full responsibility for the situation but its too risky so they seem to regress into a very childlike interaction and role.

– The reason that this is such an issue is that in the current legislative climate of dawn raids and removal people can't wait until the axe falls to mount a campaign to save themselves, they need to put it all in place beforehand. For the Somali women and some of the other cultures this is absolutely anathema because they can only relate to today, God looks after tomorrow. And I'm saying, but today you have to prepare everything you need because if you are dawn-raided and removed to a detention centre you can't fight your case from inside. But if they're working from a worldview that there is no tomorrow, they don't take responsibility for tomorrow; the ones from the world of "Insha' Allah" say but God looks after tomorrow (it used to be a man, now its God).

– The UMOJA women I work with are not likely to have a real turnaround in terms of a positive outcome (in regard to their status) but it's not in vain. The children gain, they

have a group identity and consistent affection and positive regard from the Saturday UMOJA volunteers who look after them and their mothers have a safe place where they get invited to outings and events with other groups such as the African-Caribbean Women's Association, the parenting workshops, etc.

– We talk about child development, about how separate a child's needs are and how you have to support a child in understanding that it is not their fault that you are all now living in a place that you didn't choose to live, that you sometimes feel afraid, it's not their fault that their dad is not around. Some of the women have begun to participate in community groups such as the Ivorian Coast Women's Association and the Somali group, some have gone on to college and so on. They have found their way to more dynamic action groups.

Text: Suki Mills



UMOJA children learn computing.

Interview:



Karibu women in a fashion show.
Photo: Courtesy of Karibu

Karibu

Women Together Facilitating Integration

Karibu was established in 2003 by a group of African asylum seeking and refugee women living in Glasgow ‘to act as a voice for women who are not heard.’ It is a formally constituted organisation with an elected management structure and approximately 50 members who pay a nominal annual fee and have voting rights. The management committee has undertaken training to learn the legal obligations of running an effective organisation in Scotland but Karibu’s success stems largely from the prior professional experience and commitment of its leadership team. Like many organisations run on the goodwill of volunteers, Karibu struggles with sourcing financial support and finding a suitable space to provide services and carry out administrative duties.

Karibu operates at different levels to achieve its aims but is in need of financial and administrative support to make these considerable efforts sustainable. It has created strategic partnerships with other Glasgow NGOs as a means of broadening the services it can provide and sought involvement with national forums to promote change.

One-to-one and Peer Support

At a practical level Karibu has organised some of its members to provide a ‘clinic’ offering advice and support. About two women are attended to each week. Each consultation is individual and can take from one hour to several meetings over some weeks. Much of the work involves translating and explaining legal letters and documents that the women receive, including facilitating telephone link ups for various appointments. More recently, Karibu has established a monthly drop-in clinic with a crèche provided as a platform for women to meet, share ideas, identify needs and discuss options for solving their problems and access to services.

Scottish women are also invited to bring together people living in the same community.

Building a fund for a revolving loan scheme or credit facility is one Karibu’s aspirations. The group has made progress in setting this goal in motion with an award from Groundswell UK of £500. Loans are available to members facing a crisis and are repayable in small amounts on a weekly basis. In the UK an asylum seeker’s status can make it difficult to open a bank account let alone access standard credit facilities.

National Campaigning

The organisation is now highly regarded and regularly contributes to national debates concerning integration by articulating the real issues affecting women asylum seekers and refugees. Karibu is represented on the Scottish Refugee Integration Forum (SRIF), a government-led consortium responsible for creating a national integration action plan, the Women’s National Commission Asylum and Immigration Subgroup which informs policy makers on areas that require change and the steering group for Praxis, an association who work at a UK-wide level to assist refugee community organisations (RCOs) with capacity building through information exchange programmes and training.

Awareness Raising

By working with the Oxfam Asylum Positive Images Network project Karibu has been able to further its primary aim to promote better understanding between Scottish and African cultures. Integral to this aim is raising awareness: voicing the reasons why people seek asylum and why they have arrived in Glasgow. Karibu has put together an education pack which they will deliver in schools to discuss asylum issues. The pack includes Henriette’s Story about the eviction of French Congolese children from Belgian Congo in 1964 and the Cold War alliances that set neighbouring countries apart but its power is in showing the repeating patterns from her

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grandfather’s day to the present oppression of well-known multi-national corporations.

“I was 12 years old when I was told I was being sent to a country I had never seen. I was to leave the Belgian Congo and travel to Congo Brazzaville. Why was I going there? This was the question. I went to ask my grandfather.

He told me about when he was a young man, 20 years old; he lived in a village called Zinga-Bela in the South East of the French Congo. There he made a living from fishing and farming the land through the seasons. One day, agents from the Colonial Administration arrived. ... These agents forced my grandfather and many young men to walk over 100 kilometres to Mindouli. They were beaten if they tried to run away. “Why do we have to leave?” my Grandfather asks, echoing my own question. “To build a railway” they are told....

Diamonds, minerals, timber, rubber This was why a railway was constructed by forced labour! But hadn’t slavery been abolished?

My Grandfather told me he escaped, Mindouli was close to the South of the Belgian Congo, and so he fled to Kinshasa and made a life there as a free man.”.

Text: Suki Mills

Acknowledgement: Thank you to the members of Karibu’s Management Committee for their support and contributions.

Further Reading and Sources:

Karibu Annual Report, January 2005 – March 2006



Karibu women voting. Karibu offers workshops to practise decision making.

Karibu Gives Support in Problem-Solving

Henriette is an asylum seeker from Congo Brazzaville and founder of Karibu, a Glasgow women’s association for African asylum seekers and refugees.

In Swahili ‘karibu’ means welcome; in Glasgow, Karibu is the name for an association of fifty African women. Together, they work to make the city a more inviting environment for future asylum seekers from their continent.

What is Karibu?

– Karibu’s logo is a hut. It is like saying ‘you are always welcome’, and we are always open! This is the place to come

and share your problems and concerns about integrating into this new environment.

Why did you start Karibu?

– For me, the language was a huge barrier when I came here. My first idea was to help French-speaking women with no English.

What do you think are the particular problems that female African asylum seekers face?

– The African woman asylum seeker is just sitting at home. She doesn’t call her lawyer. We tell her, ‘Your lawyer has hundreds of clients; it is up to you to call him and get an update on your case. Maybe you have received a letter from

the Home Office of which your lawyer is not aware or your lawyer has some new information.’

– We urge the women to take responsibility for themselves and maintain regular contact with their lawyers. They are not used to making decisions or being pro-active in this way. I can give many examples. 70% - even more - are in this situation and take a passive role in dealing with their case. They need to learn how to be assertive for themselves and to learn how to take control of their lives.

– In Africa the woman has many responsibilities that revolve around the internal needs of the family. She has power over the family’s internal management: she might work and earn money as well as feeding and caring for her children and husband. However, it is the husband - the man - who plans for the future, who makes all the decisions that relate to the external world. It is he who will decide when they will move house or even buy a bicycle. Of course there are exceptions to this rule. There are always exceptions but this is the reality for the majority of women.

– The stress of the asylum system is immense and ever present. On top of this burden is the unfamiliarity of the new environment and adaptation to a culture that is so foreign to many African women’s experiences of gender. These are extra stresses that lead many women to get depressed. Here, you are asked to be in control of things but you haven’t learned to live independently. You don’t have your extended family here to help. Add to this that now, as a single parent and asylum seeker, you have to make decisions about yourself and your children. You may never have had to make decisions before! In Africa it was always the uncle, the brother or the husband making

decisions but here you are everything: uncle, dad, brother, husband!

How would you describe an ‘empowered’ person?

– This is someone who can express his needs and think of solutions to his problems. When women come [to the drop-in centre] with problems we need to analyse their problems with them: help them assess the pros and cons. Sometimes people know they have a problem but they don’t know how to define it. Once you have defined it you can start to manage it. We help the women define the problem, then when she can see it clearly she can look for her own solutions; She can find the power within herself to change it.

Would you describe yourself as an empowered person? Do you think empowerment and confidence are connected?

– Confidence comes from your parents. Yes, I am already empowered. I am one of the exceptions! My mum and my grandma were not the type of people a man could say ‘Do this! Do that!’ to. My mum didn’t allow me to cry. At six I could cook, at eight I could sew. I was responsible for taking care of my brothers; allowing my mum to go off and do business. I did the housework, I cooked and I fed my dad and my brothers, but at the same time I got a lot of love from my mum, my dad and my grandma. My dad always called me ‘maman’, never Henriette, in respect for all that I did in the house. I knew I was loved! At ten my grandma bought me a sewing machine. This was a big thing in Africa. Can you imagine how expensive? It was all her savings so I knew I was loved. In Africa there is a saying for a woman like me: ‘Putting on the trousers.’ I always put on the trousers; even my own brothers told me that!

How do you manage to balance your own needs with the work of Karibu especially with the all worries that you must face in your asylum claim?

I keep the two things separate. Community development is my passion so Karibu can be hard work; but it is important to me. A long time ago I thought, 'If we sit at home crying nothing will change, we need to do something about it!' I support other women through Karibu but I have my own support network when things are tough: I know there are people here, Scottish friends, who I can turn to.

You have substantial experience of community development work in Africa, has this helped you in setting up Karibu?

Yes, I am an empowered woman and I came here with experience, but there was still the language barrier and I had to learn how to apply my skills in a new environment. I had experience of working to empower communities. I was trained in project management with the US Peace Corps, so I learned about working with other host country nationals. There have still been obstacles. My status is an obstacle in developing Karibu. For instance, now I have a vision to create a structure which will alleviate financial exclusion for asylum seekers, but Business Gateway (Business Gateway is a government-financed organisation that supports the development of small enterprises

through training and grants) cannot help.

Also for Karibu, we could not have opened a bank account without the help of the Scottish Refugee Council. We needed their intervention to access funding because you cannot apply for a grant without a separate bank account.

Text: Suki Mills

Self-help women's group in Kapfenberg

The self-organised women's group is made up of eight active asylum seekers and immigrants all having lived in Austria for between three and eight years. The group offers information and advice in all matters; they help women to enrol their children in kindergartens and schools, accompany them on their visits to authorities and doctors or for examinations in hospitals. They also organise German language courses as well as multi-cultural events and festivals.

The women's group is supported by the municipality of Kapfenberg, providing rooms since May 2005, and a modest subsidy. Different NGOs supply information regarding legal and other matters. An Austrian assists the group with her broad experience in the field of self-organisation. She is paid a fee by the municipality of Kapfenberg and assists the women in the preparation of concepts and project descriptions.

The women's group is open to all women, non-Austrian and Austrian. All women can join the group and become active in it. Word-of-mouth recommendation ensures that there are always more women joining. Most women contacting the group need advice and assistance; some of them are also active in the group.

Due to many questions one of the initiators of the self-organised group had to deal with during her first years in Austria, she decided herself to provide support to other women in one way or another. She consulted an employee of the municipality of Kapfenberg, who advised her to organise and found a women's group. The initiator joined forces with other foreign women who favoured her idea.

The women's group was founded at its first meeting in May 2005. At the following meetings, issues such as financing, rooms and fields of responsibility were discussed. Shortly after, they submitted an application for subsidy to the municipality of Kapfenberg for the organisation of German language courses for women. The municipality promoted this idea by granting a subsidy for the year 2005 and providing a room for the group's activities.

The women's group is very proud of everything it has achieved to this date. Taking stock of that, the women realise the value of their help and assistance to many women in Kapfenberg and its environment in their daily struggle to resolve their problems. They also had the chance to discover their own potential and resources and to reassert their self-esteem. Another plus for them is to experience the positive response of the local population during their events and festivities. They think that this process is considerably contributing to their own integration and the integration of fellow citizens from other countries.

The initiator of the self-organised group says:

"Since I have been working in the women's group I am very proud of everything I have initiated and have become more self-confident in my daily activities. I have been able to gain many experiences in this process and discover many resources in the women. The women have shaken off their passivity and become more active".

Her main wish is that all immigrants will follow suit and take their concerns into their own hands so that they can find a purpose for their lives in Austria and facilitate their integration into the Austrian society.

Text: Abdeselam Mahmoudi



Self-organised Child Care

The group of four women asylum seekers organises child care in the asylum seekers' shelter. The group's permanent members are asylum seekers that have been living in a hostel for two years. The Austrian Development Partnership offers this accommodation within the scope of the Equal qualification measures and the Empowerment of Asylum Seekers.

As part of InPower/Equal, the Danaida association offers German language courses with child care for women. The women have come to appreciate this easing of their burden as it gives them time to do something good for themselves.

This has encouraged them to organise their own child care apart from the one available during their German language courses and other activities, with the support of the association OMEGA - Health Care Center.

Child care is offered twice a week for three hours under the supervision of two women. Activities depend on weather conditions. If the weather is bad, the women and children stay in the hostel, in a room made available by the owner. Playing, drawing and having stories told to them are the children's indoor activities. Weather permitting, the women and children go to the village playground or for a walk.

An employee of the OMEGA - Health Care Center association in particular, and the association itself in general support the self-organised childcare group. The OMEGA employee provides support in the elaboration of the care schedule and in other issues, while OMEGA provides the group with the material required for child care. The hostel owner provides a room for child care within the building.

The fact that most women in the hostel come from cultures where men traditionally participate very little in household and childcare, as this is considered the sole responsibility of women, results in women often having very little time for themselves. This project encourages other women to join the group in order to gain more time for themselves, while their children are taken care by a neighbour and cohabitant.

Austrian laws do not permit asylum seekers to work and therefore condemn them to wait inactively for the outcome of their asylum application. The effect is that asylum seekers

suffer massive psychological problems and feel that their own lives have no purpose due to the lack of professional and mental activity.

The women's group is very proud of its work, as the women concerned were given the chance to do something useful for themselves, their children and to each other. After having observed the women's group process the tutor noted that the women – apart from enjoying the project – had more time now for themselves and to relax.

III Peer Support for Men in Media, Arts and ICT

In the Section III of Part Three you will find experiences where the empowerment of men and youth has been supported with encouraging results. For all of the cases in this section it is characteristic that men have been addressed as active and self-orientating persons, and peer support has a significant role.

Nevertheless, even if male asylum seekers can generally be regarded as more outgoing and active than female asylum seekers, men do need support in their integration and empowerment processes, for the following reasons that have been derived from the feedback in the ASAP Partnership projects:

- It may be an illusion that men are mobile and will independently find their opportunities for work and studies, and contacts in the new society. The asylum seeking process can make men, too, passive and cause difficulties in maintaining an active attitude. This is the case often when the legislation stops asylum seeker men from working or studying.

- Even though it is easier for men to go out and create contacts within their ethnic/peer community, it is difficult to create contacts to the new society. Being active within your own community is important, but it will leave asylum seekers within their own circles and the danger is that they will be isolated. In creating links to the new society even men need information and support – and in the receiving communities, a lot of anti-racist work needs to be done.
- The new society can be considerably different from the one asylum seekers have left behind, and men will have difficulties in finding a new role. The differences are reflected in two areas especially: 1) In the European countries information and communication technology skills are required in almost all of the jobs, and lacking these skills will create the so-called digital divide. ICT skills are considered a part of literacy. 2) Women are active in all areas of society. Asylum seeker men need support in relating to the active role of women.



Baodo artist

Baodo – Back to the Roots

In the year 2000, the self-organised group “Baodo” made of eight to ten unaccompanied male minors seeking asylum, was founded. The founding members were between 15 and 17 years old, coming from Afghanistan, Nigeria, Senegal and other countries. In the early days of the group, all participants were newcomers to Graz. Their psychological and physical condition was very poor due to their experiences in home country including political persecution, maltreatment or civil war, and hardships during their long escape.

The group consisting of twenty-eight active participants offers asylum-seekers psychological and social support for the problem of ‘being a stranger’. The group actively works in the “African time” Radio Station and in the inter-cultural “Café Nil”. “Café Nil” is a venue for Africans and Austrians as well as a cultural and communication centre with the objective of bridging the gap between Africans and Austrians. This cultural centre offers PC courses, workshops on different topics such as e.g. Austrian laws, art, etc. It is also a venue for forums, exhibitions, small concerts, DJ lines and performances as well as weddings and birthday parties. The self-organised group gave birth to two music groups playing African music and performing at different events throughout Austria.

The self-organised group has been an active member of the arts society since the year 2000. The society has an executive board headed by the artist Veronika Dreier. It is subsidised by the Styrian provincial government and the city of Graz.

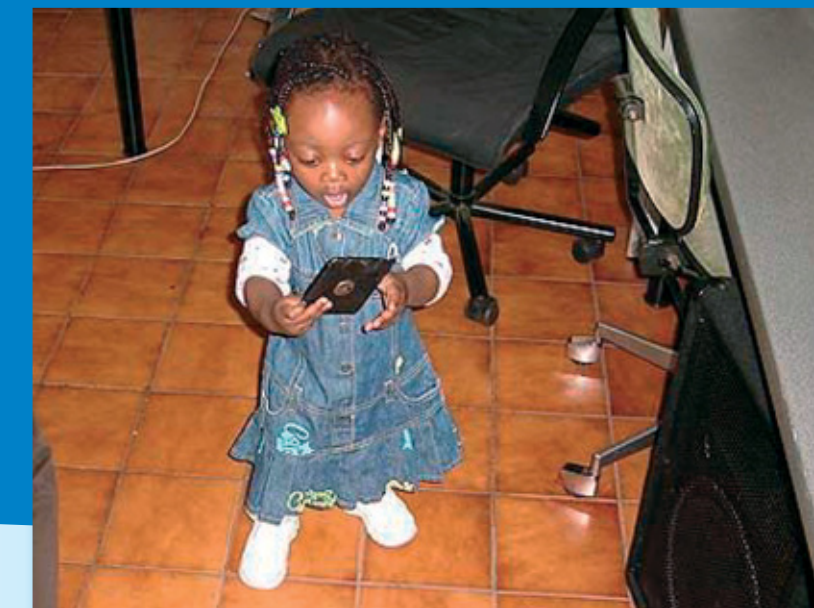
The chairwoman of the society is in charge of the process. She is responsible for fund raising, concept development of different projects, and the organisation of all arts events. Joseph Dim, a Nigerian member of Baodo, is in charge of running the “Café Nil”. Two people are responsible for computer courses and some asylum-seekers from the group are in charge of different tasks.

All meetings and almost all events take place in the Café Nil. This building used to be a service station and today, it’s a place where people can thrive on culture and art. The Café is equipped with good infrastructure that offers three rooms: one arts room, one room for offerings of food and beverages, and a third one equipped with work tables, chairs and eight computers. The rooms are ideal for different activities. And last but not least, an architect has artfully designed the rooms.



Baodo class at Nil.

Youngest Student at Computer Class- Baodo Nil



Participation to activities of the arts project is open to all asylum seekers and Austrians. Many newcomers and asylum seekers learn about the project through the radio program “African time”, word-of-mouth recommendations, and public announcements of activities.

How did Baodo get started?

The group used to be made up of traumatised and unaccompanied minors from Africa and Afghanistan seeking asylum. Today, it has 28 active participants (asylum-seekers and immigrants) from different West-African countries such as Sierra Leone, Senegal, Gambia, Mali, Togo, Cameroon, Angola, Congo and Nigeria.

In a project of the Austrian Department of the Interior called “Welcome”, initiated in 1997 and caring for unaccompanied minors seeking asylum, a psychotherapist of the Zebra association started to provide assistance to traumatised asylum-seekers in the Clearing Site (a refugee quarter of Caritas). Apart from therapeutic assistance to individuals, weekly group meetings were held in the premises of the association allowing an exchange between the asylum-seeking minors from different nationalities. The psychotherapist worked with creative methods such as painting, dancing, playing music and cooking together. She invited an artist – an acquaintance of hers - to attend a meeting. During the meeting the artist suggested to organise a painting workshop with the youngsters. Pictures painted during the subsequent meeting were of such an impressive artistic quality that the artist wanted to show them to the public. The number of exhibitions increased. Orders became more and more extensive and even



Nil- The Location

came from outside Styrian borders. The increase in activities of the group led to the idea of setting up an association. This is how the “Baodo = back to the roots” association came into being. Within the scope of different activities, an African beverage called “Baodo” was brewed with the help of a beverage manufacturer.

The members of the self-organised group gained a sense of self-worthiness and have become more self-confident. They received the opportunity to make use of their resources and skills. They have no difficulty understanding the new Austrian system and are integrated into the Austrian society.

According to the head of the project, there is a very good co-operation with the participants. The group members highly contribute to the development of the project with their new ideas and suggestions. They enjoy their work and are very proud of the goals the project achieved. Their psychological condition is continuously improving.

Both the group members and the group receiving support are very fast in learning German and basic computer skills. During information events, they learn important things about Austrian laws and the Austrian way of life. And as far as arts are concerned, a valuable exchange is taking place between African and Austrian artists.

Text: Abdeselam Mahmoudi



Baodo artwork exhibit.



Theatre Performance- Baodo



In the Recording Studio
- Radio Helsinki-
African Time

African time is the Eye and Ear of Africa in Graz

“African time“ is a group organising a programme with the private radio station “Radio Helsinki” of Graz. A group of fifteen members create in turns the two-hour programme. Members are between 16 and 28 years old. Most of the project members have been living in Austria as asylum seekers for six to eight years. There are also a few newcomers in the group.

Programmes deal with different topics of interest to the African community, and are broadcasted every Sunday.

They have dealt with e.g. the Austrian health and school systems, jurisdiction in Austria, traffic regulations, function

and work of the police. Information was also given about specific laws concerning immigrants such as the Austrian Asylum Act, the Act on the Employment of Foreigners, the Aliens Act, the Registration Act, the Citizenship Act, and the Rent Act concerning the search for accommodation.

Experts and authorities in the field of a given topic are invited to the programme to answer questions and give detailed information. In addition, news from Africa and commentaries on African minorities throughout the world are broadcasted. Naturally, the programme includes also music from different African countries. Recreational activities are announced and organised, such as e.g. football tournaments and African festivals.

The group “African time“is supported by Radio Helsinki, providing the infrastructure, broadcasting time and trainings for the presenters. Another supporter of the group is the “Baodo” association, a self-organised group of Africans from different African countries that is being active for already seven years. The group co-operates with many African associations at national, federal and trans-national levels. They also co-operate with other African, European and American radio stations.

The self-organised group is managed by an initiator and co-founder of the group, who himself is a former asylum seeker. The group receives outside support from the “Baodo” association as well as from other NGOs from Africa and Graz.

Programmes preparations and other activities take place on the premises of the Radio Helsinki Radio station’s office which moved to Griesgasse in the heart of the city in 2007.

New members are recruited by means of the programme, word-of-mouth recommendations, posters and flyers made available by immigrant associations and NGOs involved.

Dissemination of information through above-mentioned channels has considerably contributed to the increase of audience (both Africans and Austrians) in the last few years.

The team members are very proud of their work and feel that they are making a very important contribution in terms of facilitating the lives of Africans in Graz, by giving the African community the possibility to listen to their own music and news from their native countries, as well as providing the community with important information regarding Austrian laws and cultures.

The members involved and integrated in the “African Time” team have benefited by finding a new purpose for their lives in Austria. They feel needed by their fellow countrymen and women as their radio programme allows them to support Africans in their integration into the Austrian society. Despite having to wait a long time for the outcome of the asylum procedure, they experience reassurance through their work for “Radio Helsinki”, show active commitment to their work, and make an important contribution to their own development and their integration in Austria in line with the “Empowerment of Immigrants”.

Text: Abdeselam Mahmoudi

Empowerment Brings out the Best in People

Joseph Diem is Managing director of Café Nil and staff member in the projects Baodo and African Time in Graz, Austria.

Joseph, what is your concept of empowerment?

If you want to empower somebody you need to have the means of empowering that person, you need to give in order to create and motivate interest and commitment. Empowerment is about giving material to somebody, material that this person can use to develop. The material can be information, skills, connections, etc.

Are Baodo, Nil and African Time examples of empowerment? They certainly are. African Time for example offers information to people. You should not forget that many refugees and Africans who arrive in Europe come from very difficult situations and backgrounds at home. They often had little chance to get schooling, good education or professional training. As a consequence they are not informed about what is going on. African Time reaches out to the people in their homes and offers valuable information on important cultural, educational, health- related and political issues.

What is the “material” that the art project Baodo offers to young people?

Through Baodo we offer young people from different cultural backgrounds the possibility to make use of their resources and develop their skills. Baodo is a project in which they can express themselves through various forms of art and projects. It is an outreach project which operates at grass root level, brings out the best in people and lifts them to higher grounds on which they can get connected, express themselves and thus get a voice that may be heard by others. Many young artists taking part in Baodo have been “discovered” by other artists, bands or projects, and are now active, rooted and well integrated into the Austrian society and beyond.

Nil on the other hand offers a place and space to which many people can relate to and where our guests feel comfortable. Apart from the many activities we offer at Nil we provide a space for associations to hold their meetings, do networking, or simply hang out, chill and chat. The Nil has the atmosphere of a living room in a friendly home, with friends visiting, children playing while adults are engaged in discussions, using the opportunity to eat local African dishes, listen to the latest Afro-music, etc. Maybe because anybody is welcome, everyone, including Austrians, feels at ease and at home in Nil.

What is your role in the project, why are you so active and what is in it for you?

I originally come from Nigeria and arrived in Austria as an unaccompanied minor refugee. Through the Welcome – Project I got in contact with Baodo and became a member and participant of the Baodo group. You know, I can drum very well and I have a talent for painting. In a radio workshop Baodo organised we got interested on the idea of broadcasting our own show and providing news and information to the African Community in Graz. When Radio Helsinki offered us free broadcasting time we took up the opportunity and started Radio African time. From there we have come a long way.

I can truthfully say that I have been myself empowered by the project. Today I am a worker in the two projects, African time and Baodo, and I run Nil. The projects work gives me the opportunity to use my resources, to do what I am good at, which is to bring together people from a wide range of ethnic groups, organisations and professions and organise interesting and meaningful activities. Through the years of my involvement in the projects work I have met many new friends and made valuable contacts. I believe that our networks are the motor of our progress. Creating networks of contacts is essential in our integration process. I would not want to miss this experience in my life.

What are your plans and future visions for 2007 and beyond?

As much as we, the Radio African Time team, are grateful and owe to Radio Helsinki we are hoping to be able to realise our

dream and have our own radio station in 2007. This would give us the opportunity to broadcast on a 24 hours basis, have more radio shows, and cover more issues. It is a way to become more visible.

There is another dream we would like to realise in cooperation with other organisations active in the field of social services and integration such as OMEGA- Health Care Centres. With the help of Austrian organisations and political institutions, we Africans living in Europe would like to reach out to our brothers and sisters in Africa in need of help and support. We believe that project involvement of Africans who are living in Europe, and have experienced and came to understand both the African and the European systems, can be very fruitful for the success of the effort to meet the people’s needs and guarantee that the aid and support measures reaches the demand directly.

We are planning small-scale project work in rural regions of Africa. To start with we would like to concentrate on a Malaria prevention project with an information campaign, but also actual relief through access to medication and other preventive measures at affordable cost for the people.

For all we have received by an ever more open society in Europe we would like not to forget our roots and families back home and help them as much as possible in the frame of our possibilities.

Text: Nicola Baloch



Peer Tutoring for ICT and Internet Skills

To make the ICT skills training more useful for asylum seekers accommodated at the hostel Lagelmühle, the In Power/Omega computer course instructor encouraged an asylum seeker with very good IT knowledge to support other asylum seekers. A 22-year-old asylum seeker from Mongolia is now in charge of this self-organised project “PC and Internet”, assisting asylum seekers wishing to improve their PC skills and have access to the Internet. He has become the in-house organiser of the entire project. The computer course is held once a week for three hours.

The asylum seekers participating in the activities are between 16 and 50 years old. The offer is taken up both by asylum seekers having lived here a long time and by newcomers. The number of participants changes from day to day.

This self-organised project gives interested asylum seekers the chance to use the computers in the hostel at any time in order to improve their skills and to make their stay more meaningful. The peer tutor is responsible for unlocking the room, maintaining the computers and assisting the participants in their study and practice activities, creating e-mail accounts, chatting and any other IT related matters, according to the respective level of knowledge of each participant.

The course is held in the hostel and is open to all interested asylum seekers. It is possible to join at any time, as the requirements are different from person to person. Many participants want to practice what they have learned in the computer course modules and other want to surf on the Internet, send e-mails etc.

As long as the volunteer peer tutor wishes to continue his activities, and the module 1 within the scope of the Equal

project is still active in the hostel, the project will continue. We hope that the infrastructure and the material (computers) will be made available to the asylum seekers after the Equal project will be completed, which would allow the project to be continued on a long-term basis.

The peer tutor is very proud of his volunteer activity. He feels very useful to his cohabitants. He feels it is now easier for him and not as demoralising to wait for the outcome of his asylum procedure. As he is not an IT expert but a person with many talents, he also paints in his spare time besides his IT activities (he is particularly interested in graffiti), speaks five languages, has craft skills, and is always ready to help anyone in need. As he is very busy with his many activities he is very content with his life in the hostel.

The participants learn more than their colleagues who only study the official computer course modules. Many of them

are seeking access to the outside. They get information from the Internet and gain contacts with their home or other countries.

The computer course instructor realised that the participants joining in the self-organised activities on offer, rapidly improve their skills and have less learning difficulties.

In general, we can observe that asylum seekers participating in different activities offered within the scope of InPower are very content and feel that their stay in the hostel is now more pleasant than before the InPower project started.



Peer Tutors Know How to Motivate Asylum Seekers

Among the asylum seekers arriving to Finland many already have a vocational training or an academic education, a work experience or specific skills. Since asylum seekers are allowed to work after they have spent three months in Finland, adult education organisations and non-governmental organisations can employ them. Organisations could exploit the know-how of asylum seekers much more than they do now.

In addition to a professional know-how, asylum seekers can contribute with their knowledge of the particular life situation of being an asylum seeker. Living as a member of the asylum seekers community gives them the advantage of gaining trust, and access to other asylum seekers. Working with an asylum seeker gives Finnish teachers and counsellors a learning experience that will help them adjust to society and work life that are slowly changing towards multiculturalism in Finland.

At the Tampere Municipal Adult Education Centre, and at the Tampere Municipal library Net Square, asylum seekers have been employed as peer tutors for ICT basic courses, women employment courses and client service at the Net Square

Kemfon Ekwere helps English-speaking clients at the Sampola Net Square of Tampere Municipal Library.
Photo: Hilma Bukareva.



Ibrahim Al-Rashid tutored Arabic-speaking asylum seekers at the Net Square.
Photo: Hilma Bukareva

close connection to their everyday life. I introduced some metaphors that made it easier for participants to learn.

Although communication worked well between the Finnish teacher and the group peer tutor, asylum seekers who worked as peer tutors missed the interaction with the community of teachers of the adult education centre and some briefing to the types of work and goals of the institution.

What did the experience of working as a peer tutor give to you?

– It gave me a great opportunity to get into a new kind of interaction with the group of asylum seekers that I knew from the reception centre. I shared my experiences with them and they shared theirs with me. I felt good about being able to give something to others. This kind of work really makes you feel good. The only negative aspect is that when I earned something, my social benefits were cut off for three months. I understand it if you are in a steady job, but if you only work short periods these cuts cause problems, says **Ibrahim Al-Rashid**. Ibrahim taught basic skills courses to Arabic-speaking asylum seekers at the ICT and at the Net Square. He is an archeologist from Iraq.

The materials for ICT and Internet skills tutoring have been developed by the peer tutors in Arabic, English, Farsi and Somalian. The materials can be found at www.becomingmorevisible.net

service point. The recruitment and training of peer tutors was done in cooperation with the Becoming More Visible project and the Tampere asylum seekers reception centre.

Kemfon Ekwere, originally from Nigeria, explains what in his past helped him in working as a peer tutor.

– From child I have lived side by side with many cultures and religions. I have learnt to meet different people as friends, respecting them, and this helps me in groups of asylum seekers. I am not a professional teacher but I remember teachers that I have admired and try to copy from them. When I consult asylum seekers in using a computer, I am helping a friend rather than teaching a student, says Kemfon.

How did work distribution function with the Finnish teacher?

– We had a good relationship based on mutual respect. I was assisting the head teacher, and he did benefit from languages that I shared with participants and from my



Photo: Sanna Kantosalmi

Part Four Activities

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I Starting up a group

In a group where many languages are spoken and people come from different backgrounds, it is a good idea to start with activities that make it easier for group members to get to know each other. This is important even if the group spends just a short time together. The starting up activities can create a cosy atmosphere where telling about yourself is not frightening. It is probably easier to start by telling about the neighbourhood, about people who are close to you, and only gradually to start talking about yourself.

Here you will find some activities that usually work well in groups where you may not have a common language. You can try these and modify them according to the group you work with. Feel free to try your own ideas!

Greetings in your own language

Ask all participants which languages they speak and make a list of them on a flip chart. Ask everyone how people say hello in their language. You can ask people to write on the flipchart, or just repeat the greeting a couple of times.

Ask everyone to stand in a circle. Start yourself; make eye contact to the person opposite, ask her to meet you in the centre of the circle. Say your name and say hello in your language. You can shake hands, hug, kiss or whatever you usually do in your culture to greet people. Ask her to tell her name and say hello in her language. Greet, and learn the two greetings in two languages, as well as the two names. Everyone can repeat them. Now, return to your place but ask the person you greeted to stay and invite the next person to the centre to exchange greetings in her language. This will be repeated until everyone has been in the centre of the circle to tell her name and her greeting. You can repeat everyone's greetings and names, and repeat the whole activity in the beginning of the next meeting.

Spider Web

Ask people to stand in a circle. You will need a ball of yarn (e.g. a ball of colourful and thick wool). Call someone you know by its name, greet her and throw her the ball while keeping hold of one end of the thread. Ask her to throw the ball again to the next one but still keep the thread in her hand. When the ball will have been thrown to everyone you will have formed a spider's web.

You can ask people to rewind the thread by throwing it again for the one who gave it to you, and saying the names again.

If you have a common language, you can ask people to tell their name and something they like, starting with the initial letter of the name: "I am Sally and I like snow".

Family Portrait

Prepare for the meeting by drawing a family portrait of your own family. Show it to the group and tell the names and ages of the family members. You can learn together the words for the family members.

Ask the group participants to draw their own family portraits. They can sit in (language) groups and tell about their family either while they are drawing or after it. Next, move from small groups to the big group and ask everyone to show their family portraits, or you can pin the portraits on the wall. Encourage people to present their family but keep the situation informal. Reserve enough time for sharing.

Maps

Reserve a 1,5 hour meeting for this activity or divide it into two parts. Start by showing city maps – you can project one and point out some central/familiar places. Ask everyone which places they know, where they have been to, heard of, or would like to visit. Next, draw a map of your own on a flipchart. In this map, mark only the place where you live and important places in the surroundings. Where do you go to daily? You can draw the supermarket, the library, the swimming pool...

Ask participants to draw a map of their own and encourage them to mark places that are important for them. Where do they go to every day? Are there some places they like? Do they know people who go there too, or work there? People can work in language groups or small groups. In addition to colours and paper, you can encourage people to use clippings from magazines, rags and ribbons, even papier maché. At the end, pin all maps on the wall and give people time to share.

Portraits

Depending on your group, you can choose from various methods of making portraits. You may ask people to work in pairs and draw a portrait of each other. If your group has IT skills, you can try making digital photos of everyone and let people manipulate their portrait. You can make the group their own home page with their portraits in it.

You can work further with portraits, whichever we they are made. You can let the group make beautiful frames for their pictures, or you can make colour photocopies of the portraits and ask the group to make a poster with everyone in it. You can use the photocopies in a poster where the group members can make their individual poster; they can use paper cuttings, colour pencils, drawing pens, water colours and present in the poster for instance what is important for them in life, or what are their hopes and dreams.

Whichever way you choose to work with the portraits, reserve time for sharing at the end of the working session. Give people time to comment on their own self-portraits but agree with the group that the portraits of others will not be commented.

II Supporting Self-confidence

Self-confidence is needed in all learning, and survival of everyday tasks in the new environment. In group work, you can encourage group members to give each other positive feedback that will support self-confidence. When you have tried one or two activities especially designed for giving positive feedback, the group can be encouraged to give positive feedback in other contexts as well.

Pay attention to planning all of your activities according to the level and objective of your group members. This way you can plan opportunities where people will have experiences of having succeeded well. These experiences are very important for the growing self-confidence. Please remember that it is difficult to succeed if the objective is beyond your skills, or beyond your personal targets.

Happy shower

Prepare a list of adjectives that describe characteristics that are positive in a group work and in human relations – taking into account the level of language knowledge in the group. Even with beginners you can use a list of 10 – 20 easy adjectives that you go through together with the participants first. Print the adjectives on cards or on lists that you can give to each participant.

Before starting the activity talk together about what these adjectives mean – what is an accepting person like, what does a person like that do etc.

Tell everyone that you will need a special T-shirt for this activity; one that you will show how to make from flipchart paper. Fold the paper and cut an opening for the head, after

which you can put the shirt on. Each participant now has the flipchart T-shirt, the list of adjectives and a felt pen. Ask people to get up, walk around freely in a space that you have marked for instance with a circle made of chairs, and write positive adjectives to the backside of everyone's T-shirt. Encourage people to write in 'first impressions' – it does not matter if people do not know each other well. Ask people to write as many words as they can, using the ones in the list. Put some music on the background.

When everyone has had time to write adjectives and everyone has some words on their T-shirt back, ask participants to form two lines facing each other. The T-shirts are turned over and the person facing you will read you what other people have written about you saying: "Leyla, you are creative, you are reliable..." etc., and then the participants change turns and the other one will hear what was mentioned about her.

To end the activity, ask everyone to sit down in the circle of chairs and say something about how they felt during the activity. How was it like to hear such nice words about yourself? You can elaborate the activity further by asking people to choose one of the adjectives that they would like to be more, one that they would not like to be etc.

This activity was used in the Tampere asylum seekers' women group. The group teacher, Kristiina Teiss, says:

This activity created delight and happiness in the group. Although it was a simple game, it showed that many were sincerely and confusingly pleased with the beautiful words they got.

Adjectives

Accepting	active		
artistic	authentic		
aware	capable		
careful	caring		
cheerful	clever		
colourful	competent		
confident	cooperative		
courageous	creative		
devoted			
	earnest		
easy going	efficient	empathetic	
energetic	expressive		
fascinating	flexible		
forgiving	friendly		
funny	gentle	giving	
good-hearted	good-humoured		
good listener	happy		
hard-working	helpful		
heroic			
honest	humorous		
	idealistic	imaginative	
inspiring	independent	interesting	
Just	kind	lively	logical
lovable	loving	natural	
objective	observant	open-minded	
organised			
patient	perceptive	polite	
practical	rational	reliable	
responsible	self-reliant	sensitive	
sincere	skilful	sociable	
spontaneous	supportive	sympathetic	
tender	trusting		
unbiased	understanding	unique	
Unselfish	warm		
warm-hearted	wise		

III Working Together

These activities tune people into working together in a group. If the composition of the group changes a lot it is a good idea to give time for the group to re-formulate from time to time, using one of these and 'Self Confidence' activities, to create a constructive atmosphere.

Exchange market of skills

All of us have such skills that others do not, and perhaps there are many things we could learn from each other.

Ask the members of your group to think what are things they can do, and perhaps things they think they can do well and could teach others. Encourage people to think of everyday things by giving an example of you:

"I know how to clean my house and I know how to use the sewing machine to change zippers. I am good at making cakes. I like doing shoulder massage, and sometimes I also do a make-up for my friends. I have taught several people how to open an email account and send email."

Give some time to think and encourage people not to be too modest about themselves! You can ask people to write one thing they can do on a piece of card or paper slip and write their name on each one of the cards. Next, everyone can go around in the group, ask what are the things people can do and if they find something they would like to learn, they can pick up that card for themselves. Give sufficient time.

Now all members of the group can tell others what things they would like to learn, and who is the person who can teach them. You can make a schedule to agree when the two people will meet to share that skill.

A variation:

Instead of skills to teach and learn, you can exchange jobs. Ask people to think what they could do for others, for instance 'taking care of children for 2 hours', 'taking children to playground for 1 hour', 'go shopping for you', 'dye your hair', 'mend clothes', 'help to write a CV or job application', 'teach English' etc.

A tip:

"I also distributed pictures of free time activities, professions/work/activities, which could be used at the exchange market if ever someone's vocabulary was insufficient. This activity took a lot of time. At the end, we examined again all participants' skills and discussed things which participants would like to learn from each other."

Kristiina Teiss, teacher of the Tampere asylum seekers' women's group.

Who's talking?

Sometimes there is a lot of noise in a meeting and people chat away in many languages. Usually it is appropriate, but sometimes you want to make sure everyone can hear what others say. Some of the participants may also find it difficult to concentrate if it is very noisy all the time. In the beginning of your meetings, you can present an object that you can call 'Speech Bone' or 'Key to Speech' or 'Microphone' or 'Loudspeaker'... Your imagination is the only limit on what can act as the magic object. Tell everyone that anyone in the group can take the 'key' from the place where it is kept at any time in the meetings. Ask the group members to talk only when they are holding that object in their hand. As the group leader, you can see to that it is not overused.

Rules of the group

You may want to draw up a short list of group rules at the beginning of your series of meetings, especially if you work with a group that has common languages, or can use interpreters during the first meeting.

You can start by giving a couple of examples of what you need from a group to feel comfortable and to be able to work with others e.g. listen to each other, not laugh at/mock what others say, when criticising give grounds, come on time, keep mobile phones switched off unless expecting an important call.

Ask everyone to think what kind of rules they would like to have in this group. On the first round, make sure that you list all suggestions on a flipchart. After hearing everyone's suggestions, discuss and choose together the ones that you feel are important for this group. If you like, you can print out the rules and sign them together. The rules are good to have on the wall of your meeting room. If the rules are ignored, everyone has a right to refer to the rules.

Different roles in a group

You will have participants in your group who take more space as well as people who withdraw. You may want to give the participants different roles in which they can take turns, to ensure that the more silent members also get their message across and learn to take responsibility. Here are some suggestions for influencing the communication, roles and hierarchies in a group:

1. Choose a chair for each meeting. Go through the tasks of the chair clearly so that everyone knows what is expected from them. Keep the tasks simple. For instance, the task of the chair is to take care that the 'Key for Speech' is always used when conflicts arise, or to ensure that you keep the breaks at an agreed time. On visits the chair may be the person to introduce your group. Depending on the group, you can call the chair also a host or a hostess, or by another name.
2. Give space for all group members during the series of meetings. If appropriate, each one of them can teach others a skill they have (See 'Exchange Market for Skills'), or speak about a topic. You can send group participants in pairs or small groups to find out about themes in the neighbourhood – for instance about services or free time activities that could be interesting for others as well, and then present them to the group. Gradually, give group members an active role in the meetings and try to move away from Teacher – Students roles.
3. In each meeting, arrange work in small groups (also in language groups) and pairs to give everyone an opportunity to speak. Avoid long sessions in a big group where one person speaks and others listen.
4. Arrange opportunities to meet asylum seekers/former asylum seekers in active roles. Employ them to work as assistant facilitators in the group and visit places where they work. They are excellent role models and examples.
5. Once you have achieved a good level of mutual trust in the group, use role play in activities. Encourage people to express themselves non-verbally.

Setting objectives

Asylum seekers have a lot in their personal lives to take care of and to worry about. Learning new things may not be one of the most pressing needs they have, in spite of the fact that it might help in relieving the pressure. It may be unclear which institutions and NGO's deal with which matters, so you need to make clear with whom you are working.

When you start work with asylum seeker groups, you must reserve enough time and resources – for instance language help – to make clear what the objectives of work are, and which ones of their other objectives can be dealt with here, and which ones cannot.

You can ask the participants to think of the following questions, and write notes. Give enough time for everyone to write and think. Afterwards, look at everyone's objectives together and reserve sufficient time to go through everyone's output. Talk about open questions and clarify which of the needs can be answered in these meetings.

What are the three (to five) most important things that I want to work with in my life right now? Write them down.

What help do I need to work with these things? Where can I get it?

How can these meetings help in the work?



The women's group in Tampere prepared bases for masks and decorated the masks. Group members with their assisting teacher, arts teacher and refugee counsellor (right).

IV Evaluation

In order to be empowered, the group must be able to draw a picture on what they have worked with so that they can evaluate their own share of the process. It is important to look back and see what has happened in the process and what has been your contribution in it. This way, all group members have a chance of 'owning' their share of the process instead of addressing all gratitude to – for instance – a dedicated teacher!

Evaluation and self-assessment is challenging for any group. A couple of tips that will help you to find the ways of evaluation that suite your group of asylum seekers: Do not set too high objectives for evaluation. Think of it as one of the activities that allows you to look back and open up to reflection and questions that this retrospective will produce. Use methods that allow people to tell stories – in words or in pictures – about what has happened. Avoid the kind of assignments that ask people

to produce an analysis on their process. Set the emphasis on looking at the contribution of the group. This will prepare people to take responsibility on their own processes, and also to enjoy their achievements. If you use continuous evaluation, do not ask people to evaluate external elements that you cannot change.

Diary

Whatever your meetings are dealing with, independently of whether it is a course for learning a specific area, or meetings concentrating on supporting asylum seekers, it is a good idea to introduce a diary where the participants can write a short note in every meeting. The diaries can be written at the beginning of a meeting, remembering what happened last time. People can write in whichever language they feel comfortable, since the diary is for them. If you meet for a longer period, you can ask people to produce summaries on a specific question from time to time, or only at the end.

Our Path

At the end of a series of meetings, it is good to look back at what has happened along the way. It is an opportunity for group members to reflect what has possibly changed in their life during that time and, especially, how they have contributed to that change themselves. Group members will evaluate their own process and return to reflect the questions the themes raised.

Reserve one meeting to go over the themes that you have dealt with and places you have visited in a display that you build in your meeting room. Make sure that for the display, you collect brochures or other items and take pictures in your visits and meetings. Themes you have dealt with can be briefly described with a couple of key words, pictures, or objects that you have used/produced in that meeting. Arrange the materials for instance on posters on the wall or on the floor. Mark the dates, and leave space around each theme.

You can prepare tags or pictures on paper slips or post-its and give a pile of these to each participant. Ask them to use the symbols or pictures you have selected to mark each meeting with a tag that best describes their impressions and feeling on that theme. The tags can contain things like 'joy', 'not happy', 'questions' – or more complex impressions according to the language level of the group. Encourage people to think of their own feelings and impressions, things they found and new things they learned. Give people enough time to go around and look at posters from each meeting and then attach their picture or symbol. In the end you can just go around together to look at the general feelings or you may want to ask people to say more about what they felt and for instance what questions they are asking about that theme.

A variation:

After attaching the tags in the posters, you can ask the group to write about new things they have learned, things they have found, and questions they still have on the themes with which you have worked.

A tip:

You may want to have your group prepare the posters, giving each small group or pair one meeting to prepare the poster.

Kristiina Teiss, teacher of the Tampere asylum seekers' women's group tried a variation of this activity at the end of the women's group.

"That was a surprisingly successful exercise, since feedback had earlier been requested by means of a boring form. It was rewarding to recall all things we had done and the places we had visited during the period of two months, to refresh memory and compare, how each one is remembering things and which things have remained in mind as important ones. Generally participants are kind and thankful for everything and bring up positive things in their feedback in a polite way. True feedback has to be obtained by other means."

Draw Your Experience

All group members are asked to draw about their experiences during the series of meetings. Use large sheets of paper and make sure everyone knows that it is not about 'drawing well', but about remembering, and marking on the paper what you remember by symbols, colours and key words. You can leave the assignment this open, or you can ask the group to draw e.g. three things they remember as positive/interesting/enjoyable/useful and three things that were confusing/frustrating/uncomfortable/worrying.

Ask the group members to concentrate on their own thoughts and do this assignment in silence, or use soft music on the background. Give enough time – you will find that more things come up while you are drawing.

You can use drawing as a variation of the previous evaluation activity; instead of using tags and symbols, you can walk around in the display first and then start drawing.



Picture work can be used as a method to express oneself when there is no language, and also to touch on issues that are difficult to talk about.

Photo: Teija Enoranta

What kind of person am I?

What am I?

What kind of life do I have here?

What can I do?

V Applied Drama and Picture Work

You can use applied drama activities, picture work and many kinds of activating methods to build up self confidence also in groups of asylum seekers. The ‘Activating Methods for Empowerment’ section in Part Two- What is Empowerment will help you to think what you must take into account in planning of the activities.

Self Portrait

In a group of asylum seeker women in Tampere, a whole body picture was made on a big paper roll. Kristiina Teiss explains the procedure and experiences.

– ‘I brought in paper in a big roll, colour pencils, drawing pens, water colours, picture material, and glue. I suggested that we draw the outlines of each other on a big paper and fill the inside of the picture with various things relating to the person and her life. Things can be expressed in an

abstract way by colours but also by pictures and texts. As an example I brought my own picture where I had described

- My thoughts written in the area of the head
- things that I have seen written on the level of the eyes
- words to say written in the area of the mouth and the neck
- feelings in my heart written in the area of the heart and chest
- things that I have achieved written on the hands
- things I had to protect written on my lap.
- where I had come from and places I had visited marked on my feet.

In the workshop, women were divided into pairs. They took turns in drawing each others’ outlines on the paper. To help with concentration, music was played on the background. Working took some two hours, after which we calmly looked at

all the portraits and everyone could describe her own portrait. The portraits were hung up in the exhibition of the Tampere Reception Centre during the Refugee’s Day organised by the Finnish Red Cross. ‘

Masks and Beauty Contest

Kristiina Teiss writes about how role play was applied at the group of asylum seeker women.

‘During many sessions, we had been concentrating to observe ourselves and find answers to the questions: ‘What kind of person am I? What am I? What kind of life do I have here? What can I do?’ Now the idea was to create something novel – a new kind of character, a different Me or a fancy character. We tried this by making masks and drama play; adapting different roles, feelings and thoughts.

Mask bases had already been prepared from plaster ribbon and balloons. Acrylic colours, feathers, spangles, cloth and other handicraft material were necessary to work out the masks, which became very personalized. Their construction took one hour approximately. This activity was adopted with enthusiasm and delight by all women, who concentrated on making elaborate masks.

During the coffee break, a drama teacher arrived and became acquainted with the group. With her guidance we made all kinds of improvisations expressing feelings. We learned pantomime wearing our masks with music playing on the background. At the end, we constructed a catwalk, on which we organized an improvised beauty contest. Miss Turkey, two Miss Chechnyas, Miss Iran, Miss Bosnia, Miss Macedonia, Miss Congo, Miss Cameroon, and also Miss Estonia and Miss Finland took part in it. The winning beauty queens finally found their role as a flirting and laughing group.

Drama exercises created relaxing fun and pleasure. This would not have been possible at an earlier stage. I think drama should be used in the group many times. Although some women were shy at the beginning and hardly dared do anything, we were finally able to perform the exercises and roles rather quickly. The presence of the drama teacher, the French-born actress Mèlanie Gourdon, probably had a positive impact.’

*Suki Mills of the Bridges Programmes comments:
– ‘In workshop 2 of Bridges’ women’s personal development course we had an external tutor called Mila who came to deliver a session on confidence. She is a writer by profession but also teaches assertiveness training using drama and creative writing techniques. Mila used drama role-play with our group and I was surprised that it worked so well. The Muslim celebration of Eid which was predicted to be on a Monday was announced for Tuesday clashing with the first of our workshops! This meant quite a few women were suddenly unable to attend so in workshop two they were meeting for the first time. I thought they would be too uncomfortable and shy with their limited English language to try role play from which most British people would run a mile from! Incredibly, they were not! They totally got into character and had fun acting out people who were and were not confident. After each mini performance the rest of the group gave feedback about why they perceived the actor as confident - physical gestures, stature, voice, knowledge of subject etc. It quite amazed me that they enjoyed it so much, were willing to try and had only known each other an hour or so.’*

See ‘The Bridges Programmes Women’s Course: Planning an Empowering Practice’ in Part Three – At Work With Asylum Seekers.



Photo: Hilma Bukareva

Afterword About Supporting Practitioners in Empowerment Work

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Afterword – About Supporting Practitioners in Empowerment Work

Introduction

In this collection, you have read about good practice as well as the questioning, doubts and difficulties in supporting empowerment of asylum seekers. We hope that these examples have encouraged people who work with asylum seekers to take into use work procedures that would promote empowerment.

In this last chapter, we would like to point out that it is now up to you to find the practice and the methods that you will find successful in your own field of work. In this sense we hope that this book can serve as a beginning to a learning process. We also hope that there will be a community of colleagues to share the learning process with you.

‘What does it take from me to work so that I could support empowerment?’ is the question that you may have after reading about the practice we have presented here. In many of the pilot courses

and experiments made in the ASAP Partnership, practitioners have found that the best results have been achieved when they have been able to use some of their core know-how. Teachers, facilitators, counsellors and NGO practitioners have found that they already use empowering practices at their work, and they have gained a lot from documenting and evaluating these processes. They have not felt a need to learn so much new, but rather, a need to open up for the process of empowerment.

Considering the process of empowerment as a two-way process is one of the key elements in designing an empowering practice. What does it really mean in practice? You will admit that setting the objectives for an empowering practice must be done in cooperation with the people you are going to work with. You will listen to your clients – asylum seekers, in this case – actively; and how

will you manage that? You will be a person working on the side of another person – and in this case, the other person is in need and in crisis. You must be aware of the need to protect yourself from exhausting yourself in the process. If you are going to be empowered in the process, as well, then you must not let yourself be oppressed. You must be prepared to take care of yourself, and to use your resources in a sustainable way.

Empowering practice can be a route to sustainable working procedures, but this learning process needs support just like any other. Practitioners cannot be left alone with the task of discovering and evaluating empowering practice. We recommend that as a form of supporting the practitioners, each work place could apply a support procedure - one of the following or a new adaptation to respond to the special nature of a learning process that targets to developing empowering practice:

- continuous training of staff
- peer workshops
- supervision or counselling at work place
- peer counselling
- training programmes for new workers
- training programmes for volunteers
- cross-sector, local workshops

Not all those who work with asylum seekers are trained to deal with the possible trauma and symptoms caused by the asylum seekers' traumatic background. For instance, professional teachers in adult education may have developed their knowledge on this area by experience; people who are only starting work wish that they could have a coach to learn from and not have learn' the hard way'.

You meet asylum seekers in many contexts, and sometimes it can be demanding for you to make clear – to yourself and to your client - where and how you can support asylum seekers, and where you have to signpost them to other services.

Even though you may not deal with traumatized people directly, you may feel helpless and overwhelmed by appealing destinies asylum seekers recount to you. How can you prevent exhaustion? How can you protect yourself from counter transference of trauma? How can you take care of your own resources and boundaries? How can you take care of your own energy so that it will suffice in empowerment work? Is an empowering approach more demanding?

We asked experts in Finland, Austria and Poland about setting the limits and what helps to achieve that.

Interview:



Tiina Karra encourages work communities to use coaching on the job.
Photo: Hilma Bukareva

Workers Need Support and Coaching

Tiina Karra is the executive director and crisis worker at the Osviitta Crisis Centre in Tampere, Finland. At the crisis centre anyone can ask for help free of charge, and lots of immigrants and asylum seekers are their clients.

– We combine the help of volunteer support persons and professional workers. We train all support persons, independently of their professional background. During the training the support persons learn also to understand the risks an immigrant or asylum seeker faces. We want to emphasize that expertise is needed in extreme trauma cases, but immigrants also have common problems just like anyone of us, says Tiina Karra.

At the Osviitta Crisis Centre, volunteers complement the professional help, they do not replace it. A volunteer is someone who walks along with you and can help you in matters where personal knowledge and life experience is sufficient.

– If you personally use strategies of life management, you have better chances to prevent exhaustion caused by absorbing the problems of your client. You can help others if you have life experience and have experienced crisis of your own. It is important that you have processed your own crisis before supporting others.

Many workers and volunteers may start working with immigrants and asylum seekers with great humanism, following a vocation to help everyone with an attitude that could be called altruism. How does this vocation turn into a burnout and exhaustion?

Tiina Karra explains that workers who work with immigrants go through the same phases as immigrants do on their route to integration. First comes enthusiasm, a feeling of power and energy, until you become slowly frustrated and aggressive, and may go through exhaustion and depression.

– I believe that coaching is the method to prevent exhaustion. First, it is important to listen to yourself, to pay attention to the small signs before symptoms of exhaustion occur. If you know that there is the possibility to get coaching and consultation at work along the way, it is easier to keep up the process of observing yourself, Tiina Karra explains.

Coaching can help professional workers and volunteers to find their own unique way of acting as a support for others, to find the possibilities for personal growth and to see the result of development. In coaching support persons we can look at what is required from them, how they are managing the tasks, what limits and possibilities there are.

Tiina Karra has a background of working with asylum seekers at a reception centre before moving into crisis work and therapy. She says that she has gone herself through the phases from enthusiasm to exhaustion at her work various times. It happens to many people, and it is perfectly normal. Still, Tiina expresses the hope that more and more professionals and volunteers working with immigrants could benefit from coaching on the job and get support on their path rather than just learn by experience.

– Working communities assisting asylum seekers need good leadership and continuous staff training to follow up the situation. Today there are experts available to provide good coaching, Tiina Karra says.

Regarding setting the boundaries, the Osviitta Crisis Centre offers clear rules and support for their workers and support persons. Since some support persons establish an individual support relationship with immigrants/asylum seekers, visiting

their homes and accompanying them to services, they write an agreement on the support relationship between the client and the support person. They agree on whether or not phone numbers are exchanged, where and how they meet, and what to do if problems arise. The support relationship is followed up through regular consultations.

– The support persons need to have a clear idea about the nature of the support relationship already in the early stages, way before they need to get a secret telephone number. This is also necessary to protect the immigrant clients.

What advice would you like to give to a worker who starts working with a group of asylum seekers or meets them occasionally?

– The most important thing is to know where to turn to and who to contact for expert consultation. Get in touch with this contact when you think one of your clients or students need special help. You do not have to manage problems that are beyond your professional know-how. To know that there are limits to what you can do and must do is a good way to prevent exhaustion, says Tiina Karra.

A strong professional identity is important as well, however, according to Tiina Karra, it includes the ability to be open to learn and to reflect – not to close yourself from reflecting on situations you encounter.



'Shadowing an experienced expert and learning from them can help you to rethink the approaches you have at your work, says Emir Kuljuh (in the picture with his daughters Aida and Lina).

Give Time to Listening to Yourself and Learn from Mistakes

Dr. Emir Kuljuh is a neurologist and psychiatrist by profession: an expert on trauma and burn-out. He has been Managing Director of OMEGA-Health Care Centre since October 2006 with great experience in counselling migrants and refugees. Dr. Kuljuh came to Austria fifteen years ago as a refugee from the Bosnian war with his two then still small children. He ended up staying and was among the founders of OMEGA- Health Care Centre, where he has been active ever since, committed to working with and for clients.

Dr. Kuljuh, could you explain your approach to counselling?

– In my work as counsellor for clients I generally experience that the clients' problems do not present themselves separately but are connected. I am a very practical, down-to-earth person and I strongly believe that psycho- social

counselling and care with regard to how a client can cope with every day reality is just as important as finding out the underlying causes of psychological problems.

What would be the prospects, challenges and limits of your method of mother tongue counselling?

– The beauty of mother tongue counselling is that it allows the client to express him/herself and be understood in the respective mother tongue. This facilitates accurate and subtle expression and description of emotions. It helps towards a professional relationship between counsellor and client, based on trust and understanding.

The downside of this approach in counselling is that the counsellor is constantly challenged to be aware of professional distance and boundaries. If not, the counsellor runs the risk of allowing himself to become part of the process by identifying subjectively with the client's issues, thus giving up professional distance and objectivity.

– It is therefore crucial to connect the client's experience with a broader reality, and encouraging the client to deal with his/her problems in connection with actual reality. In any case the counsellor should not identify with the client but rather show the support by expressing empathy.

Talking about establishing a sense of reality, how is it done in practice?

– On the aspect of reality it is important to communicate transparency. I always try to gather as many actual facts on different topics which concern the Balkans as well as European aspects of legal, political and social realities. I use those facts in the counselling process.

– Self protection and professional distance are important aspects of counselling. Which advice can you give from your professional experience to prevent workers from exhaustion or even burn- out syndrome?

– I believe that self observation and reflection is an excellent method to prevent exhaustion. I try to look at myself from a distance and ask myself questions like: How do I sleep? What are my topics (am I obsessed with a topic, experience, line of thought...)? Do I project this obsessive concern onto my surroundings (friends and family)? If honest answers to those questions show me that I am already at risk, I will in a following step help myself by making use of the resources at hand to re-establish the balance of physical and psychological energy within me. This can be anything from getting away from the stress by doing any kind of sports, to involving myself in psycho-social activities (on a very practical level) for our clients. Doing sports, for example, demands concentration and restores inner calm and balance.

Exchange of ideas and knowledge with colleagues and other professionals can also be very helpful. By listening to the observations of others and taking them seriously I get a feed back on whether or not I am still on the right track or

if I have to make some corrections in my course of action. Last but not least, I recommend professional coaching.

Which corrections of course have you had to make in your own career?

– I started my work with great enthusiasm and idealism. I was sure that I would work so well, that none of my patients/clients would die. Of course people did die despite my great efforts. Negative experiences are an integral part of anybody's life. What time and experience taught me was that, despite all disappointments, we can not give up trying. Life goes on; despite all difficulties.

What interdisciplinary advice would you like to give to newcomers in counselling?

– My advice as an old hand in this profession to the next generation of those active in our field of work would be that, after the initial phase of enthusiasm, idealism and Storm and Stress when you have moved to the next phase of first conflicts and frustrations allow time for the client's and your own personal development. Have patience with yourself and your counselling's progress!

– At this stage it can be helpful to identify an experienced professional expert and learn from them by shadowing them. It may lead to reflection on or even a rethinking the approaches you have studied and learnt. This will add the quality of flexibility to your work. And one more piece of advice, if you still care to listen: Keep in mind that we all have the right to make mistakes. If we do not acknowledge this fact we grow rigid in our attempt to be flawless. This may lead to a defensive attitude with little room for development. Be open minded about making mistakes and utilize them for your personal growth.

Self-reflection Protects against Emotional Exhaustion

Agnieszka Fiedosewicz has worked in Siekierki reception centre in Warsaw for two years. She is responsible for counselling and administration. In this interview, Agnieszka Fedosewicz speaks about how social workers can protect themselves from 'burn-out' to work effectively with asylum seekers.

Do you think that a person who works with asylum seekers is exposed to the potential of 'burn-out' because of the clients' traumatic experiences?

Why is this so?

– Yes, of course. In every job with people as clients practitioners are exposed to the emotional exhaustion. It is an inseparable component of this kind of work. I am working here for eight hours per day, five days a week. There are two hundred asylum seekers living in this reception centre. Some of them I see once a day, others a few times a day. I am an official who often transmits to them the bad news saying “no” on behalf of the Polish state. Asylum seekers want to hear “yes”. This is a problem.

How do you protect yourself against emotional exhaustion?

– I cope with it through self-reflection. I am aware of the phases a practitioner working with asylum seekers goes through so I recognize them. They are quite easy.

Can you describe these phases?

– First you feel excited about your work. You think that you will be able to answer all the questions an asylum seeker will ask you. You think that you can settle every issue and deal with every problem. You are sure that you will treat

every problem seriously. In my case, this phase lasted a long time.

– Then you are confronted with reality. You find out that asylum seekers cheat you sometimes. They come to you with childish problems. Next, you start to feel irritated and get tired of working with asylum seekers. Finally, these thoughts can turn to self-reflection. Every asylum seeker should be treated individually because people are different.

When I feel burnt out, discouraged, and irritated by my clients I keep my distance through self-reflection. It helps me to deal with the family problems of asylum seekers. In this reception centre there are women with their families who experience violence. In these cases, you may automatically identify with your gender. The first time I had to deal with the problem of violence against women, I desperately wanted to rescue her. I called the police and did everything I could. Then the woman reconciled with her husband and they left Poland together, but their asylum procedure had been divided on the basis of her separate application. I was shocked. I had behaved too emotionally. Now I keep my distance in these situations. Everyone has to make their own choices; they have the right to decide and the right to change their mind.

– Sometimes asylum seekers come to me with their problems one after another without a break; then it can be almost impossible to find the time for self-reflection.

Can education or training help to support people who work with asylum seekers? Do these people get any vocational training in the field of social work or psychology?

– First of all, a person who wants to work with asylum

seekers should be extrovert and enjoy working with people. Professional education is also helpful. My social science studies provided me with the educational background required. I studied psychology and anthropology. Sometimes, I am reminded of the subjects of my studies. In my opinion a lack of relevant professional education can be made up by participating in professional workshops. Everything comes out during personal contact with a client.

– In my opinion the anti-predisposition to the work with asylum seekers is idealistic, a desire to “rescue the world”, a feeling that you want to (and that you can) help everybody. Through total idealism, a person working with asylum seekers can be hurt or leave the field very quickly. It often happens that a ‘volunteer idealists’ comes to work wanting to help asylum seekers. They leave after a few days without any explanation!

– I am not an idealist. I know that asylum seekers sometimes cheat and I am not disappointed by this fact. I decided that I prefer to be cheated by my clients than to ignore important information the clients share with me. I am conscious of my choice and its consequences.

Are workers in reception centres provided with support from a supervisor? Are they given opportunities to participate in professional workshops?

– Some workshops are organised for us but there is no support from a supervisor. Recently, I had a traumatic experience at work and there was no psychologist to assist me. I was provided support by my boss who really helped me. The best support I receive is from my colleagues. They know how peculiar this job is. Every one of us has to manage with the negative emotions that can appear.

How can a person working with asylum seekers manage negative emotions?

– I like the staff meetings where we talk about our work, I find this supportive. We can complain to each other and

throw out negative emotions that have accumulated. After work I concentrate on everything except my work!

Excuse me, I have to pick up the phone (...)
(...) That was an asylum seeker. He was living outside the reception centre, but was told that he had to leave his apartment and he has no money.

How did you assist him?

– I told him what were the possibilities. He is a grown-up person, he has a wife and he is responsible for his life.

– Our professional responsibilities are complex. On the one hand we are social workers but on the other we are officials representing the state. Most of the day we are busy doing time-consuming administrative work. It is stressful for the asylum seekers who need to speak to us in length. Unfortunately, the time we can share between counselling and our administrative work is limited; as a consequence both asylum seekers and workers in the reception centres are stressed and irritated at times.

What advice would you give to future colleagues?

– You can give good advice but not everybody will respect it or use it. When I started working, I knew theoretically all the stages of the ‘burn-out’ effect but practical work experience is the most important. It is a kind of a “vaccine”. A person has to do the job to learn how to keep their distance and how to protect themselves from emotional exhaustion.

– Asylum seekers are adults; a worker in a reception centre provides asylum seekers with counselling but cannot take responsibility for them. The task of a practitioner in a reception centre is to clearly explain the rules and inform asylum seekers of their options and the potential consequences of their choices. The client has a right to use this information in the way they want or think is best. Asylum seekers have a right to decide and must take responsibility for their own life.

Glossary of Terms

Many different terms are used to describe asylum seekers and refugees. Some of the terms have particular legal meanings, whereas some may have implications or inferences which might be offensive. Using terms properly is an important part of treating people with respect. It is a way to encouraging an informed debate on the issues.

Refugee

A refugee is a person who has a well-founded fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. They are not safe in their own country and thus have to seek protection outside its borders. The refugee status is granted by UNHCR to people who fulfil the requirements defined by the Geneva Convention of 1951.

Asylum Seeker

An asylum seeker is a person who has fled from his or her native country but does not have refugee status. These people have a right to stay in the country until a decision has been made on whether or not they will be sent back or given permit of residence.

Quota Refugee

A refugee living outside of a certain country can be resettled there after agreement with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), or a similar international organisation. This person is a refugee from the arrival in the recipient country. He/she is not an asylum seeker.

UNHCR

Established by the U.N. General Assembly in 1950 during the 20th century to provide protection and assistance to refugees.

Immigrant

An individual who has willingly left his or her native country: for example to work in a foreign country and to stay there permanently.

Emigrant

A person who leaves his/her native country to settle abroad. There are many reasons why people might choose to leave their country. Some leave for political reasons and some might have found a spouse in another country.

Migrant worker

A person working in a country that is not their native state, who is not planning on staying in the country permanently.

Internally displaced person

A person who has left his/her residence by reason of real or imagined danger but has not left the territory of their own country.

Stateless person

A person who is not recognized as a citizen by any state. Some refugees may be stateless but not all are. Similarly, not all stateless people are refugees.

The Non-refoulment Principle

The principle of non-refoulement is seen by most in the international law arena, whether governments, non-governmental organisations or commentators, as fundamental to refugee law. Since its expression in the Refugee Convention in 1951, it has played a key role in how states deal with refugees and asylum seekers. An expert in refugee law defines it as the idea that 'no refugee should be returned to any country where he or she is likely to face persecution or torture'. At its most basic level, the principle prevents the government of State A from returning refugees from State B, where there is a valid concern that they could be in danger should they be returned (eg if there is an ongoing war in State B).

Family reunification

A refugee or a person who has a residence permit for the need of protection has a right to get his/her family reunited. Family members who have the right to receive a residence permit in the family reunification procedure are the spouse and the unmarried children who are under eighteen years of age.

Detention

If the identity of the asylum seeker or his/her travel route is unclear, it is possible that the police might put the asylum seeker in detention. Also the asylum seeker who has been given a negative decision can be detained before deportation. Source: Finnish Refugee Council

Detention

Asylum seekers in the UK can be confined at any stage whilst their claim is being processed. They may be detained until their identity or the basis for their asylum claim is established or before being deported. Detention centres are also known as 'removal' centres. Dungavel is the only detention centre in Scotland. It has the capacity to hold one hundred and ninety four people, including families.

Deportation

Procedure for removing a person from the country. If an asylum seeker possesses, or has possessed, a residence permit but a decision has been made to remove the person from the country, he or she will be deported.

Refusal of entry (Deportation)

Procedure for removing a person from the country. When an asylum seeker has not been granted a residence permit and a decision is made to remove the person from the country, he or she will be refused entry. Source: Finnish Directorate of Immigration

Humanitarian Protection

May be granted where there is a real risk of death, torture, or other inhuman and degrading treatment that falls outside the terms of the 1951 UN Convention.

Residence permit

A right to stay in a country from which one has sought asylum.

Temporary residence permit,

B-status (Finland)

Status decision for rejected asylum seekers who have been granted a temporary leave to stay.

Temporary residence permit (Lithuania)

A document granting an alien the right for a temporary residence in Lithuania for a period specified therein.

Source: Law "On the Legal Status of Aliens" Migration Department (Lithuania)

Tolerated stay (Poland)

As part of the decision on refusal of granting refugee status, an asylum seeker can be granted tolerated stay, which is a subsidiary form of protection. Asylum seekers who have been granted permit for tolerated stay have the right to work, education and health care. However, according to the Act on Granting Protection to Aliens, persons granted Tolerated Stay are not supported by the state integration programme (as opposed to persons granted refugee status).

Temporary protection (Poland)

Foreigners arriving in Poland in great numbers, who have left their countries of origin due to foreign invasion, war, ethnic conflict or other gross violation of human rights, may be granted temporary protection. This is regardless of whether or not their arrival was spontaneous or aided by the government of Poland or by international community.

Residence card (Poland)

A document issued to a foreigner who has been granted a residence permit for a fixed period of time, a permit to settle, a long-term resident's EC resident permit, a refugee status or a permit for tolerated stay.

Refugee Board (Poland)

Refugee Board is a public administration authority examining appeals against the decisions and complaints against the rulings rendered by the President of the Office for Repatriation and Aliens in the cases of granting or withdrawing refugee status.

Source: Act on Granting Protection to Aliens within the Territory of the Republic of Poland, Act on Aliens Subsidiary protection (Lithuania)

Subsidiary protection is granted to an alien who does not qualify as a refugee but who cannot return to his/her country of origin because of the fear of torture or inhuman treatment. There is also the possibility that serious danger to his/her basic rights or fundamental freedoms will be created because of the prevailing violence in that country, a military conflict or other situation that causes systematic violations of human rights.

Temporary protection (Lithuania)

Temporary protection is a form of protection that is granted by the decision of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania in the event of mass influx of aliens. An alien himself/herself has no right to apply for this kind of protection.

Dispersal

Since April 2000 asylum seekers needing accommodation are sent to cities throughout the UK to relieve the pressure on services in London and the southeast of city. Glasgow is the only place in Scotland to accept asylum seekers under the dispersal scheme. Dispersal accommodation is provided by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS).

National Asylum Support Service (NASS)
The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) coordinates the provision of accommodation and financial subsistence for asylum seekers who would otherwise be impoverished or 'destitute'. It is a division of the British Immigration and Nationality Directorate; the government department responsible for processing all claims for asylum.

Destitution

To receive accommodation and essential living expenses under the National Asylum Support Service, an asylum seeker must prove that they are penniless. The term destitution also applies to asylum seekers whose claim has been refused and their NASS accommodation and living expenses withdrawn. Refused asylum seekers cannot legally work and can find themselves homeless and without access to any form of financial support at all.

Further sources of information for British terminology referring to asylum seekers can be found at: <http://www.refugee-arrivals.org.uk/> <http://www.icar.org.uk/>

Reception centre employees (Finland)

The reception centre employs, among other staff, a manager, a social worker, a public health nurse, a hospital nurse, refugee counsellors (reception support workers) or instructors, an office secretary and a person in charge of benefits.

Identity card (Finland)

Reception Centre's client card given to an asylum seeker. For some of the asylum seekers it is the only proof of their personal identity.

Liberal adult education (Finland)

Adult education centres, folk high schools, study centres, physical education centres and summer universities offering liberal adult education that does not directly lead to a degree. Participation in liberal adult education studies is voluntary.

Socio-cultural animator, animator

(Finland) A socio-cultural animator works with a group of people as a facilitator.

You may also hear...

Political refugee and Economic refugee – these terms have no meaning in law and can be confusing, as they incorrectly suggest that there are different categories of refugees.

Illegal – this term is similarly problematic, because it transfers the illegality from the status to the person. Its use has provoked as a response the slogan 'no one is illegal'.

Alien – this term is used in some countries, to designate non-citizens. Many people find the term dehumanizing.

Illegal migrant / illegal immigrant

– these terms are considered problematic because they criminalize the person, rather than the act of entering or remaining irregularly in a country. Using the term can also have the disadvantage of prejudging the status of the person. If a person is fleeing as a refugee, international law recognizes that they may need to enter a country without authorization. It would therefore be misleading to describe them as illegal migrants. Similarly, a person irregularly in the country may have been coerced by traffickers: such a person should be recognized as a victim of crime: not a wrong-doer.

Development Partnerships in ASAP Asylum Seekers Active Partnership

Austria: InPower

The Equal Development Partnership "InPower", equally financed by the Austrian Ministry of Economics and Labour and the European Social Fund, had been striving from July 2005 to June 2007 for a regionalization of support measures for asylum seekers in the Austrian federal province of Styria. Innovative actions and programmes aimed for an improvement of the situation of asylum seekers in rural areas of Styria. 3 interlocked project modules offered general support, qualification and job counselling.

The Styrian districts of Feldbach, Hartberg, Judenburg/Knittelfeld and Mürzzuschlag where many asylum seekers are accommodated were chosen to implement these support measures. Module 1 focused on trainings and workshops on self-

organization, job orientation and qualification delivered directly in the lodgings where asylum seekers were accommodated. Module 2 tried to establish contact between the local population and the asylum seekers. Informational meetings, school workshops, community work, or festivities were means to achieve a better understanding for each other. Module 3 finally was based on training 4 women to become job counsellors for asylum seekers. Through their help and advice many asylum seekers found seasonal jobs in the vicinity of their lodgings.

Inpower was coordinated by MIND CONSULT & RESEARCH GmbH. Strategic partners were the Styrian Regional Government, the Styrian Chamber of Commerce, the Labour Service of Styria

and the Chamber of Agricultural Workers (all of them public organisations). Local NGOs that had been working with asylum seekers for many years were to conduct the support activities: ISOP Innovative Social Projects GmbH, Danaida, Helping Hands Graz, Omega Health Care Centre Graz, Zebra Intercultural Centre of Counselling and Therapy. For further information please refer to: www.inpower.at

Finland: Becoming More Visible

ways of supporting self management of asylum seekers and promoting multicultural society.

Becoming More Visible is a development partnership created by four Reception centres (Turku, Tampere, Vaasa and Kajaani) and The Finnish Association of Adult Education Centres (FAEC). Each partner has its own sub-project in order to try out different approaches towards the overall goal of the whole project. The BMV project is administrated by Red Cross Finland, Southwest District.

The Becoming More Visible project creates new models to support empowerment of the asylum seekers. The project offers training, short-term courses, different ways of learning Finnish or Swedish language, and also tries out forms of teaching democracy, human rights and gender issues. The project provides different educational material, workshops and teaching and guidance material packs for Supporting Empowerment and Basic Skills of Asylum Seekers, and offers training for personnel of the Reception centres and Adult Education Centres. The project project strives to promote interaction between the local population and asylum seekers.

In Finland asylum seekers are allowed to work after three months of submitting their petition for asylum. The project creates contacts with employers and informs both parties about workers' rights,

duties, legislation etc with co-operation between trade union, tax and employment offices and other authorities. For further information please refer to: www.becomingmorevisible.net

Italy: Integra 2004

INTEGRA 2004 is a Development Partnership (DP) created by seven partners: Cisl Campania - Trade Union Corporation, E.F.S.A. –Artisans' Education and Development Organization, ANOLF – Beyond Frontiers National Association, Confapi Campania - Regional Association of small and medium industries, A.N.I.M.I – National Association for Southern Italy's Interests, Benevento Chamber of Commerce, Caserta Chamber of Commerce.

The Integra2004's objective is to create an integrated welcoming system for Asylum Seekers and Refugees. The project aims at organizing guidance centres offering legal assistance, assistance to compile asylum application documents, information on the acceptance structures the territory, personal and vocational skills analysis, professional guidance and educational activities to learn the Italian language, computer trainings and to improve the skills useful to carry out activities in Italy related to agriculture and nursery gardens as well as hydraulics, mechanics and electricity.

In Italy Asylum Seekers can work if there is no response after 6 months to the submission of the asylum application and the AS is not responsible for the delay. The project offers the opportunity to get in touch with enterprises to increase the job opportunities of newly trained people and to inform both parties about their own rights and possibilities.

For further information please refer to <http://www.integra2004.it/>

Lithuania: “In Corpore” Development Partnership “In Corpore” is a

unique partnership in Lithuania, connecting eight partners all working with the matters of asylum seekers and refugees. These are NGO's: Lithuanian Red Cross Society, “Caritas”, public institutions: “EUPRO” and Social Economy institute, also the university of Mykolas Romeris, and governmental organizations: Foreigners Registration Centre and Refugees Reception Centre. The managing partner of this DP is the Department of Social Services supervision under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour.

The project “In Corpore” tries to develop a system of social and professional integration of foreign nationals who have been granted asylum in Lithuania based on methods of raising awareness of asylum seekers, personnel working with asylum seekers and the general public opinion, as well as through providing career counselling for asylum seekers aimed at facilitating social and professional integration of asylum seekers.

As in Lithuania asylum seekers cannot work before they get the asylum, this DP by providing different services and activities is helping them to integrate into society ; to learn Lithuanian language, to acknowledge their legal rights, to understand themselves and others by participating in various consultations, also to show the important role of their culture and traditions in their lives by presenting them to local community. DP “In Corpore” creates the tools for asylum seekers and those who have granted asylum in Lithuania for better wellbeing in a new environment.

For further information please refer to: <http://in.corpore.lt/>

Poland: MUR – You Can Learn To Understand

MUR development partnership is a network of seven organizations and institutions: Office for Repatriation and Aliens, Bureau for the Organization of Centres for Asylum Seekers; Halina Nieć Human Rights

Association; Polish Association for Legal Education; International Organization for Migration; Mazowsze Voivodship Office, Social Policy Department; Institute of Ethnology and Cultural

Anthropology, Warsaw University; Polish Humanitarian Organisation Foundation (DP Managing organisation).

The partnership's objective is to create an effective system of social and occupational activation for foreigners seeking refugee status, set up a system to support the integration of this group of foreigners in local communities and improve the competitiveness of this group in the local labour markets.

The project provides various activities in two day centres (founded as a part of a project): polish language courses, vocational and computer trainings, legal courses. Additionally, partners would conduct beneficiaries' ability assessment, and according to them, voluntary internships.

For further information please refer to: www.inpower.at

UK, Scotland: ATLAS

(Action for Training and Learning for Asylum Seekers)

The ATLAS (Action for Training and Learning for Asylum Seekers) Development Partnership was established to provide support to asylum seekers and to assist organisations to be better equipped to support the asylum seeker community. The DP operated on a Scottish-wide basis, although the vast majority of the activity took place in Glasgow. Glasgow City Council was the lead partner and other key partners included Scottish Enterprise Glasgow, Colleges of Further Education, SQA, voluntary and community groups. The DP was needed because around 12,000 asylum seekers have been dispersed to Glasgow and dispersal would continue for a further 15 months. The rationale for the ATLAS DP was

to develop appropriate models of integration so that asylum seekers were well positioned to seek employment should they become eligible. The overall aim therefore was to undertake integration work with a focus on developing models of good practice that could then be rolled out and mainstreamed to enhance capacity for integration. The programme activity covered the spectrum of asylum seekers needs, from the point of arrival of an asylum seeker in Scotland and covering access to appropriate information, orientation programmes, ESOL, educational opportunities, employability schemes. The key outputs included new educational and guidance models to young asylum seekers, new mentoring, volunteering and befriending schemes, citizenship modules, capacity building models, orientation programmes and a new ESOL framework and qualifications. An abbreviated version of the DP's strategic objectives were to:

- Increase opportunities for young asylum seekers.
- Pilot new ways of targeting the support needs of women and families.
- Develop mentoring, volunteering and befriending.
- Promote citizenship amongst asylum seekers.
- Develop links to the labour market appropriate to asylum seekers.
- Build the capacity of asylum seekers and indigenous communities.
- Promote positive images of asylum seekers.
- Develop new ESOL framework and qualifications.
- Develop orientation programmes.

Further research identified:

- the need for more high quality information for asylum seekers
- the need for organisations to be better prepared for their arrival
- Asylum seekers had a strong desire to gain access to work and to train in preparation for this.

The partners were: Anniesland College, British Red Cross, Careers Scotland, Glasgow City Council (lead partner), The Initiative, The Institute of Contemporary Scotland - Bridges Project, LINKES Community Group, Oxfam UK, Scottish Qualification Authority, The Prince's Trust, The Wise Group, Save the Children.

The broad project themes were; promoting the delivery of effective language support, developing support in the form of orientation, information and guidance, improving community integration, developing pre-vocational support, developing initiatives which present positive images of asylum seekers.

The DP satisfied the leading principle of equal opportunities by eliminating discrimination and encouraged participation by disadvantaged groups in partners' employment practices and service delivery. Innovation was achieved through the development of new model products and models of service delivery or by adding value to existing activities. The DP empowered asylum seekers, partners and indigenous communities. For further information please refer to: <http://www.atlas-scotland.co.uk>

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