



MRCF Newsletter

Migrant and Refugee Communities Forum

Elections and the Immigration Debate: Do the Right Thing!

We are all struggling with the uncertainties of economic recession, job losses and funding cuts. But certain vulnerable groups in society are struggling even more, and the experiences of some migrants and refugees have been grim and tragic:

- 80 women have been on hunger strike in protest against their detention at Yarl's Wood Immigration Detention Centre for several weeks now;
- a damning report is published on the detention of children in February;
- in March, a refugee family committed suicide by jumping off the 15th floor of a building in Glasgow once their application for asylum was refused;
- a former UK Borders Agency employee blew the whistle on the culture of disbelief and discrimination amongst the staff making decisions about the lives of people seeking sanctuary;
- more than 3,000 overseas dentists registered with MRCF still struggle to find training and support to pass their verification exams. They all have a right to be in the UK, work in menial jobs to survive, many would be willing and able to pay for training. They study very hard and can't wait to become productive citizens but continue to be ignored by policy makers, health authorities and the media;
- meanwhile, the government spend time and resources making up schemes such as 'probationary citizenship', turning volunteering into a compulsory activity for citizenship applicants.

As we approach the general election, at least one thing is certain - immigration will feature in the election campaign. It is important and necessary to talk about immigration, but we deserve an honest debate and a clear position on all other issues that are not directly talked about.

Behind the overblown rhetoric on immigration, there are some profound 'silences'. For example, the welfare system is very often talked about in relation to immigration. The perception is that migrants are putting pressure on social housing and public services, taking unfair advantage of these at the expense of non-migrants. In reality, only 1.8% of all social housing occupants are immigrants (Source: Institute for Public Policy and Research).

The debate focuses on immigrants, but fails to probe the real reasons behind the shortage of social housing, or what the possible solutions could be to meet the demand. Immigration control in general is focused on 'porous



The MRCF Team at London Citizens' Assembly

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borders', but discussion of the role that Europe plays in the number of people coming to the UK is often ignored. Freedom of movement is a right of all EU citizens – British and Polish alike. Similarly, other issues such as unemployment, public services cuts and the impact of an ageing population are sidetracked into a discussion that focuses solely on immigrants, who do not have a voice. One could argue that at present in Britain there is no meaningful debate about immigration. The citizens of Britain, including migrants, are caught up in a cross-fire of mixed messages that does not increase understanding about immigration nor of the issues most important to them.

We are asking all candidates to act responsibly in order to dispel the fog of prejudice that still shrouds this debate, and that is constantly illustrated by opinion polls which tend to be based on irrational fears rather than facts.

In this issue of our newsletter we bring you some of the facts and figures that could help inform the debate. We bring you examples of the hard work we and our colleagues, supporters and volunteers are doing to assist individuals and communities whose lives are affected by migration and whose integration is made so much harder by a poorly informed debate and the prejudice that is the result of such misinformation.

It is important to bring out the facts in the run up to the general election, but we believe that it is equally, if not more, important to continue the work of educating and engaging our elected representatives, as well as the general public, about the contribution that refugees and migrants continually make to British society.

Over the next few months, MRCF will be re-launching its website to provide space for migrants' voices to help balance the debate. We are also launching training that will build the capacity of community leaders to have their say about issues that concern them.

So watch this space.

Zrinka Bralo, Executive Director

Perceptions vs. Facts: Immigration in Numbers

British people believe that too many immigrants are entering the country, according to a poll by Angus Reid Public Opinion conducted last year.

68 per cent of respondents think the number of legal immigrants who are allowed to relocate in the United Kingdom should decrease.

However, this perception is not supported by numbers. The figures released at the end of 2009 tell a different story. Net migration – the number of people who come to live in Britain minus the number who move abroad – fell by more than a third to 163,000 in 2008, its lowest level since Poland joined the European Union.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) said the fall from 233,000 in 2007 was mainly driven by a rise in emigration to a 17-year high: 427,000 people left Britain to live abroad, up from 341,000 the previous year. That increase was mainly due to the number of Poles returning home.

Immigration reached 590,000 in 2008, with the largest single group comprising 85,000 British citizens returning to live in the UK. That total compares with 574,000 in 2007 and 596,000 in 2006.

Asylum figures show a further fall in the number



MRCF Executive Director Zrinka Bralo (on the right) at the MRCF Volunteering and Active Citizenship Meeting



of fresh claims for refugee status between July and September this year to 5,055 – a decline of 24% compared with the same period in 2008. The top three countries of origin for asylum seekers were Afghanistan (790), Iran (540) and Zimbabwe (525).

A total of 7,110 people were held in immigration detention between July and September 2009, more than half of them asylum seekers. They included 315 children, 240 of them under 11. Of those detained, 365 had been held for more than 12 months.

The controversial ONS estimate that the UK population would pass 70 million by 2025 was based on a forward projection of the 2007 net migration figure.

The sharp reduction in that figure for 2008 means it is likely the projection will be revised downwards when the next set of long-term figures is published after the general election.

The rise in emigration was largely due to an increase in non-British citizens leaving the UK for at least 12 months; 50,000 of them were Poles going back home.

Applications for British citizenship have also shown a marked decline in recent years, as economic turmoil and government shake-ups have had an impact on the numbers attempting to settle in the UK. The number of citizenship applications granted fell by 35,000, to 130,000, in a single year up to 2008.

However, the increased prominence given to the race/immigration issue appears to have emboldened some people to use it as an excuse for conflict: after a general decline, racist attacks have gone up by 20,000 in 2009.

According to Home Office reports, in 2006/07, 61,262 racist incidents were reported to the police, an increase of 3.7 per cent over the previous year, and a 28 per cent increase over the past five years.

Approximately half the police forces in England and Wales reported an increase in racially and religiously motivated incidents.

Myth and reality: Sorting the facts from the fiction on immigration

In the run up to the general election and yet another emotional, heated and misinformed debate on immigration, we bring you a reminder of the key myths and facts as published by *The Independent on Sunday* at the end of last year:

'Migrants are taking our jobs'

The myth: 'Nearly all the jobs created in the UK since 2001 have gone to immigrants—not British-born workers,' claimed Sir Andrew Green, the chairman of Migration Watch.

The reality: The economic forecasters Oxford Economics said: 'Migrant workers now account for 11 per cent of UK jobs. Within Europe, the UK has a lower overall migrant employment share than many developed countries, including Spain, Germany and Ireland.'

'Immigrants get priority housing'

The myth: 'Well-meaning welfare programmes have been exploited to become nothing more than a free handout to scroungers, foreign and local,' said the BNP.

The reality: A study for the Equality and Human Rights Commission (July 2009) found that 1.8 per cent of social tenants had moved to Britain within the past five years. Nearly 90 per cent were British-born.

'Britain faces an immigration crisis'

The myth: Roger Martin, chair of the think-tank Optimum Population Trust, said: 'Britain's population increase is out of control; we are on-course for a high-density, low-quality future.'

The reality: Before the recession, the number of migrants coming to Britain was roughly on a par with the number leaving Britain. The ONS immigration statistics for the year to December 2008 showed a total of 395,000 people emigrated, up 24 per cent on the year before. They included 237,000 non-Britons, mainly Eastern Europeans.

'Money is being wasted on translation services'

The myth: Translation has been used too



frequently and without thought,' said the then-communities secretary Ruth Kelly in 2007, and people should be encouraged to learn English.

The reality: The former head of the CRE, Trevor Phillips, said: 'Translation is a way of helping people in transition to integrate into our society.'

'Immigrants are responsible for violent crime'

The myth: Many newspaper articles claim crime is caused by immigration. *The Daily Mail* said in August that one in every five killers is an immigrant. In 2008 the *Daily Express* quoted the Chief Constable of Kent, Mike Fuller, as blaming "migration surges" for a 35 per cent rise in violent crime in the county.

The reality: Over a three-year period ending in 2006-07, the Government reported 23 racially



Ruth Grove-White, Policy Officer at Migrants Rights Network, speaking at the meeting on volunteering and citizenship

motivated homicides. In Scotland and Northern Ireland, attacks on new immigrants from within the EU continued to be reported at a high rate. Racially and religiously motivated offences totalled 39,643 in 2007-08, the last year for which UK statistics are available.

Zimbabweans nearly one in four amongst UK asylum seekers

UNHCR, the United Nations refugee agency, reports that asylum applications in the UK during 2009 declined by five percent in comparison with the previous year, with 29,800 people seeking protection as refugees, the third lowest figure in 15 years.

The number of asylum claims by Zimbabweans seeking protection in the UK rose by more than 3,100 over the previous year, to the highest level ever at 7,420. This dramatic rise was partly offset by the lower number of Eritrean and Iraqi asylum seekers seeking refugee status in Britain.

Overall, the latest UNHCR figures covering 44 industrialised countries in Europe, Asia and North America ranked the UK fourth worldwide. When ranked by asylum claimants per 1,000 inhabitants, the UK drops to 16th amongst European states, with 0.5 asylum seekers per 1,000 inhabitants, well behind Malta, Cyprus, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland, which comprise the top five recipients of asylum seekers per 1,000 inhabitants.

People are on the move claiming persecution due to human rights abuses and conflict in their home countries," said UNHCR Representative

to the UK Roland Schilling. "Whereas the majority of those who are uprooted remain in their regions, the increasing inability to find adequate protection as refugees forces many to seek safety far from home."

The United States was the largest single recipient of new asylum claims last year with some 49,000 individuals seeking protection as refugees, followed by France with 42,000 applications, Canada with 33,000 and Germany in fifth position just behind the UK with 27,600. "Despite efforts amongst EU member states to harmonise asylum systems, the fact that some states recognized only as few as one percent of all asylum claims forces many refugees to travel across multiple borders so they may get a fair hearing," UNHCR's Schilling declared.

"UNHCR would like to see stronger UK support for the refugee agency's efforts in developing asylum system in other countries. We are facing the dilemma that countries like the UK expect that persons in need of protection remain in transit countries whereas many of these countries fail to provide sufficient protection and necessary support," Schilling said.



UK Border Authority's consultation on Reforming Asylum Support – Extract from Liberty's Response

Currently, a person who makes a claim for recognition as a refugee is given no right to work while awaiting a decision on their claim. Without a means of lawfully providing for their own subsistence, refugee claimants must necessarily rely on the support of the Government. Under the current rules the Government provides support for those awaiting a determination who would otherwise be destitute, in the form of accommodation and subsistence. It also provides assistance to those who have not been recognised as refugees in certain limited circumstances.

In general, refused adult asylum applicants without children are provided with assistance only where it is shown that they are taking reasonable steps to leave the UK or there is a specific reason why they cannot leave (i.e. because their country of origin will not allow re-entry etc). The assistance provided is currently in the form of accommodation and food vouchers or supermarket payment cards.

In practice, this policy has resulted in the destitution of thousands of people who are left without any lawful means of supporting themselves. There are countless stories of failed refugee claimants becoming homeless and forced to resort to begging, irregular working and even prostitution, to survive.

Of particular concern is the proposal in the consultation to 're-enact' section 55 of the *Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002*. This provision prevents access to support for those who have not claimed asylum as soon as reasonably practicable, unless it is necessary to provide access to support in order to prevent a breach of a person's rights under the *Human Rights Act 1998*.

In 2004 the Greater London Authority reported that 'around 10,000 asylum seekers a year, or 200 per week, are likely to be made destitute by Section 55 in London'.

The policy when it was first introduced was to generally deny support if a person had not claimed asylum within at least three days of arriving in the UK. It takes little imagination to see how a person fleeing persecution who arrives in the UK may not speak any English, may have no knowledge of UK law; may be traumatised, tired, hungry; and may therefore not be in a position to lodge their claim

for refugee protection as soon as they arrive.

When section 55 was first introduced it was not consulted on and had a rocky passage through Parliament. Once it was enacted it led to numerous court challenges and administrative burdens on UK Border Agency staff (who must determine if a person has lodged their application within the appropriate time, and whether a person has reached the required level of destitution).

Most importantly, and unsurprisingly, it led to thousands of vulnerable people being left destitute at the hands of the State, many of whom were later recognised to be refugees. The fact that the House of Lords found that the actions of the State breached Article 3 demonstrates the very real inhumanity of the application of section 55.

The Government further proposes that the planned Immigration Bill should grant the power to set a fixed 3-month time limit for how long it will provide support to people whose asylum claims have failed and who are taking steps to leave the UK. The effect of this would be that if the supported individual had not left the UK at the end of the three months there would be no right of appeal once support stopped. Any applicant experiencing genuine difficulty in leaving the UK (for a list of specified reasons such as physical disability, ongoing judicial review, no viable route of return etc) might make a reapplication for support, on the basis of the evidence provided as to the barrier to leaving, before the end of this period.

In addition to the concrete proposals in the consultation, we have further concerns about its tone. Despite the consultation relating solely to the provision of support for asylum claimants and failed applicants, it states that the Government must balance the needs of those seeking protection with the importance of a practical and robust system of immigration control, and that 'when people come to the UK they enter into a deal with the UK – to work hard, play by the rules and earn their right to stay'. To employ such a phrase in a consultation on asylum support is both confusing and concerning – the right to seek asylum is fundamental and does not need to be 'earned'.

Read the full response by James Cross and Anita Coles, Liberty at <http://www.liberty-human-rights.org.uk>



UK Borders whistleblower witnessed general hostility, rudeness and indifference towards people seeking protection

Louise Perrett, who worked at the Border Agency office in Cardiff for three and a half months last summer, claims staff kept a stuffed gorilla, a “grant monkey”, which was placed as a badge of shame on the desk of any officer who approved an asylum application.

She also alleges that one official boasted to her that he tested the claims of boys from African countries who said they had been forcibly conscripted as child soldiers by making them lie down on the floor and demonstrate how they shot at people in the bush.

One method used to determine the authenticity of an asylum seeker claiming to be from North Korea was to ask whether the person ate chop suey. She claims the tone was set on the first day when one manager said of the asylum-seeker clients: ‘If it was up to me I’d take them all outside and shoot them.’ Another told her this was to be expected, adding: ‘No one in this office is very PC. In fact everyone is the exact opposite.’

One of her cases involved a Congolese woman who had the right to remain in the UK. Perrett says a superior nevertheless decided the woman and her children should be removed, and asked officials whether there were any grounds to remove them. Frustrated, she approached a member of the legal team. His reply, according to Perrett, was: ‘Umbongo, umbongo, they kill them in the Congo.’

Louise said interviews were conducted without lawyers, independent witnesses or tape recorders. If a case was difficult, she was simply advised to refuse it and ‘let a tribunal sort it out’.

Only cases raised by MPs appeared to be dealt with properly. Perrett said she was given the power to make legally binding decisions on whether asylum seekers

were granted or refused asylum after just five weeks’ training. She also had the power to detain individuals and families for up to 28 days. She told the Guardian: ‘I witnessed general hostility, rudeness and indifference towards clients. It was completely horrific. I highlighted my concerns to senior managers but I was just laughed at. I decided to speak out because nobody else was saying anything and major changes are needed at senior management level.’

The home affairs select committee chairman, Keith Vaz MP, has called for an investigation following these allegations that officials expressed fiercely anti-immigration views and take pride in refusing applications. He said: ‘I am deeply concerned by a number of ex-UKBA workers who have spoken out about flaws in the points-based system and behaviour such as this. I will be writing to the chief executive, Lin Homer, to discover what steps are being taken to remedy this culture of disbelief and discrimination.’

Refugee Family Commits Suicide

Serge Serykh, 43, along with his wife and 21 year old stepson, threw himself off a Glasgow tower block on Sunday 7th March.

The family of three felt so helpless that they chose to jump 150 feet to their deaths, rather than be sent back to their country of origin.

The eight-block complex in Glasgow has been home to thousands of asylum seekers, despite being earmarked for demolition.

Many of them have fled horrors that are incomprehensible to the rest of us. For some, survival is still a daily battle - cramped into the housing unfit for the rest of us, not allowed to work, waiting for months, sometimes years to hear about their applications, isolated from mainstream society.



Should volunteering be turned into a currency for immigration status?

Last year, the government introduced yet another new set of immigration rules, this time for ‘earned’ citizenship which in a nutshell would shorten the application process for ‘probationary’ citizens by two years if they volunteer. This would—the government claims—also help with community cohesion and the integration of migrants.

Such a scheme appears to be a good idea, but the problems emerge once you start looking at the practicalities of these proposals, or the lack of them. MRCF turned to its members and, together with the Migrant Rights Network (MRN), held a conference on 3rd February. The meeting, which was attended by over 45 people from 24 different countries, was called to discuss how to respond to government proposals to initiate a scheme whereby migrants who volunteer for a certain number of hours would be able to speed up their naturalisation process by approximately two years.

The meeting was addressed by Mike Locke, Director of Public Affairs at Volunteering England and a member of the government’s Active Citizenship working group; Steve Symonds, Legal Officer at the Immigration Law Practitioners’ Association (ILPA); and Ruth Grove-White, Policy Officer at the Migrants’ Rights Network (MRN).

The proposals concerning the volunteering scheme are contained in the *Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009*, but are not due to come into effect for several months. To date, little attention has been given to how the scheme will be administered.

Participants at the meeting raised a wide range of concerns and questions about the proposed plans including:

- Will volunteering for a community organisation be valid?
- Migrant domestic workers are already over-worked. How can they be expected in the short periods they have off to find time to volunteer?
- What about single mothers, the elderly and the ill?
- How will the voluntary sector cope with a surge in the number of people seeking volunteer placements?
- The scheme will kill the soul of volunteering. How will those undertaking ‘compulsory

volunteering’ be perceived by other volunteers and staff?

- Will ‘compulsory volunteering’ leave migrants open to yet more abuse?

But the strongest message from the meeting was that migrants and refugees already volunteer huge amounts of their time to support their own and other communities to integrate into the UK, and feel very passionately about volunteering.

During the meeting volunteering was described as something ‘which comes from the heart’, ‘a moral belief’, a way of ‘showing solidarity’ and of ‘supporting and speaking up for people who are unable to help themselves’. For many community organisations volunteers were described as their lifeblood without whom they would not be able to function. Volunteering was spoken about as a way of giving something back and a means for learning new skills, making valuable contacts and feeling like you belonged.

Serious concerns were raised that a compulsory volunteering scheme would devalue volunteering, deprive communities of volunteers, discriminate against those who cannot volunteer and stigmatise migrants further as they might be seen as second class volunteers who were only taking part because they had to.

MRCF and MRN are currently writing up the findings of the meeting and a subsequent online survey into a short report which will be used as a basis for talking to policy makers. If you would like to add your voice to this report please contact Beth Crosland at MRCF e: beth@mrcf.org.uk t: 020 8962 3042.



Mike Locke, Director of Public Affairs at Volunteering England took part in the meeting on volunteering and citizenship



Good Practice for Access and Well Being Programme

In the past year, a unique project coordinated by MRCF brought together six BME community projects to address the recommendations of the *Primary Concern* report by the BME Health Forum.

The project aims to increase communities' knowledge of accessing and using health services, and to assist them in engaging and developing relationships with a number of GPs and dental practices.

In order to meet these aims, the programme identified members of BME communities experiencing barriers to accessing primary care services and engaged them in this project to work on bettering their access.

MRCF also worked with six projects to develop a written guide on interpreters, informing patients of the availability of official interpreting services and the risks of using unofficial interpreters. All community projects also helped to identify and develop good practice in relation to providing interpreting support.

All six projects have developed their capacity, knowledge and skills in the area of primary care health provision. During the first four months, 300 BME patients were surveyed about their knowledge and experiences of primary care services in Kensington & Chelsea and Westminster. Each project recruited 15 members to a total of 90 people, as a control group to monitor their interventions which have included advocacy, signposting, referrals and interpreting.



Each project ran focus groups and health information sessions to meet the specific needs of their communities and by the end of the programme will have run sessions on PALs, Complaints and the NHS Constitution.

A further 300 questionnaires will be completed during March and April 2010 to measure whether there has been increased awareness and understanding of health services and how to access them, the impact of interventions and other general changes.

The information gathered during the first stage of surveys formed the basis of the Factsheets, six sets in five community languages and English. Each set is designed to represent one of the communities.

Alongside the Cards is the Good Practice Guide to Interpreting, a publication designed to inform communities about the appropriate use of interpreting services. The Guide will be replicated in the five community languages and English, and the key message is not to use children to interpret in health settings.

The publications will be launched on Wednesday 31 March at the BME Health Forum's Quarterly Membership meeting at Paddington Arts, Woodfield Road, London W9. This month's meeting will focus on women's health issues, in recognition of International Women's Day 2010.





Holocaust Memorial Day Commemoration in Islington

Holocaust survivor Jan Goldberger was the guest of honour at a multi-faith Holocaust Memorial Day event held at Islington's Assembly Hall on Tuesday 26 January and hosted by The Mayor of Islington Councillor Anna Berent.

The 82-year-old escaped death in five labour camps in Poland, Germany and Czechoslovakia from 1942 - 1945, after being separated from his family and put to work making ammunitions and laying railways.

Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) commemorates the tragic loss of life in the genocides of World War II, in Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda and Darfur. HMD is held each year on 27 January, the anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camp at Auschwitz-Berkenau.

Jan Goldberger spent the winter of 1942/43 in Plaszow camp - featured in the movie *Schindler's List* about the life of Oskar Schindler. He said:

'People have called me a hero but the truth is I survived the camps through sheer luck. I feel it's now my duty to tell my story - if not me then who else? There's so few of us left.'

Zrinka Bralo, MRCF's Executive Director, spoke about her experiences of war in Bosnia and about the need to extend sanctuary to people fleeing persecution. Protecting people's human rights and promoting their opportunities is a key part of Islington's Equality and Cohesion Charter which ensures everyone in the borough has an equal chance in life and discrimination is tackled at every level.

Cllr Ruth Polling, Islington Council's Executive Member for Equalities and Diversity, joined the others in reading a statement of commitment. She said: 'Today, we make a commitment to build a safer and stronger borough by rejecting all forms of dangerous prejudice, the building blocks of genocide.'



Zrinka Bralo, Mayor of Islington Cllr Anna Berent and Jan Goldberger



Zrinka, Jan and Cllr Ruth Polling with pupils from St. Aloysius School



Merinde with his mentor Didier, both from the Democratic Republic of Congo, at MRCF last month celebrating Merinde being granted refugee status after eight years as an asylum seeker.



How to Make Friends and Influence MPs in the New Parliament

Engage to Change is an MRCF initiative to provide our members, as well as our partners who work with migrants and refugees, with an opportunity to get direct answers about relevant issues and to engage directly with policy makers. In the past year, hundreds of community leaders met with more than 50 MPs, councillors, executives of public bodies and other professionals who are involved in decision making, campaigning and research on issues of immigration and integration.

In March, our meeting focused on how to work with newly elected members of Parliament in order to engage, educate and inform them about immigration and integration from your point of view. Every general election is a challenge as immigration is an issue that gets a lot of negative attention. But every election is also an opportunity to develop new relationships with Parliamentarians and to engage them in a positive way. We think migrants and refugees can take up this challenge and work for positive change with the newly elected MPs.

Our expert speakers were Alasdair Mackenzie, Outreach Officer, the Parliamentary Outreach Office and Isabella Sankey, Director of Policy, Liberty, which campaigns to protect basic rights and freedoms through the courts, in Parliament and in the wider community.

They shared their expertise and advice to help us plan how best to approach and work with the new Parliament after the general election, when potentially 250 new MPs will be replacing those retiring, standing down or those who have lost their seat.



Isabella Sankey, Director of Policy, Liberty



Alasdair Mackenzie, Outreach Officer, Parliamentary Outreach Office

The discussion that followed helped us identify some of the strategies for the work on Active Citizenship. It also emerged that more educational work needs to be done with community leaders on understanding the work of the House of Lords and Select Committees.

Refugee Family wins compensation for unlawful detention

Carmen Quiroga, originally from Bolivia, has won a settlement of £100,000 from the Home Office after it admitted falsely imprisoning her and her children at an immigration detention centre. In 2002, she spent 42 days at Oakington detention centre in Cambridgeshire with her son and three daughters, aged between three and 11, in what her solicitor describes as “appalling conditions” that were unsuitable for children, and despite the fact that a judicial review into her asylum plea was continuing for much of that period. The family have all since been granted British nationality.



Detention of Children: 'The very existence of this place shames us all'

These were the words of former children's laureate Michael Morpurgo as he stood outside the Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre in Bedfordshire talking about the treatment of child asylum seekers in the UK.

In February 2010, the Children's Commissioner for England, Professor Sir Al Aynsley-Green published a follow up report to: *The arrest and detention of children subject to immigration control*

The full report can be found at:
http://www.11million.org.uk/content/publications/content_393

End Child Detention Now Campaign

End Child Detention Now (ECDN) is a citizens' initiative which sprang from a successful campaign to release a Barnsley-born toddler and his parents from Yarl's Wood Immigration Detention Centre where he had been held for more than three weeks in July 2009.

Ali was one of the more than 2,000 asylum seeking children that are held in immigration detention centres in the United Kingdom each year. ECDN believes that holding children in detention centres such as Yarl's Wood is cruel and unnecessary and must end immediately.

End Child Detention Now is run entirely by volunteers, it has no paid staff, and no income. There is a good reason for this – ECDN wants its campaign to be one of the shortest in British political history.

Sadly though, ECDN continues to think of ways in which it can stop children being locked up. Some of the things ECDN would like to do they cannot because it costs money. This includes producing publicity materials and buying postage stamps for the handprints campaign.

The Children's Commissioner
for England's follow up report to:

The arrest and detention of children subject to immigration control

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MILLION

February 2010



ECDN's friends at Shpresa have offered to help them by accepting donations in the form of old fashioned cheques. They will then help ECDN to buy things for the campaign.

If you would like to help by making a donation, please address your cheque to "Shpresa Programme" and send it to Shpresa Programme, Mansfield House, 30 Avenons Road, Plaistow, E13 8HT.

With our votes, voices and determination we all have the power to end child detention now together. Please join ECDN by signing the [No.10 petition](#) and by going to the Take Action part of this website.

To offer your support or to find out more please the ECDN campaign coordinators: Esme Madill, Simon Parker, Clare Sambrook, Alexa Kellow, Mary McCormack.

For more details and to sign a petition please visit the website <http://ecdn.org/>



Learning Together from MRCF's Mentoring Project

The mentors and mentees of our Transforming Lives Mentoring Project met with MRCF staff for a day-long workshop to evaluate and discuss the difference that the project is making in their lives.

It was a great opportunity to celebrate the friendships that have been built between refugees, migrants and their mentors, and to understand how helpful this one-to-one support can be for building a happier life in London.

Mentees and mentors created a Tree of the Project illustrating all the valuable activities they have done together, from taking a walk in the park to participating in MRCF's drama therapy workshops. They shared their opinions and feelings about all the new knowledge, skills and people that emerged from these activities.

The mentees stressed that now, as a result of the mentoring, they feel more confident, more welcomed and more able to make plans for the future. Some improved their English, others started volunteering themselves, discovered new interests or started college.

Significantly, both mentors and mentees agreed that maybe the most beautiful part of the mentoring is how they both learn from each other: they learn to listen but also to talk, to respect diversity, to take one step at a time and to fight against the odds in the oft-difficult journey that is integration in the UK.

As one mentee put it: "I opened up and learned a lot...how to cooperate, how to deal with the situations that have to do with being an immigrant... Now I am stronger, I feel I could be a mentor".

If you are interested in mentoring and volunteering, please contact Francesca Valerio on 02089623048 or email francesca@mrcf.org.uk



MRCF volunteers taking part in the evaluation exercises



Bilingual Mentoring Support at MRCF

The MRCF mentoring project aims to match a mentee up with a mentor in order to provide:

- Language and interpreting support
- Help with social and practical needs
- Increased social connection, and reduced social isolation
- Emotional support
- Help with development of a sense of trust in others
- Support to access community and/or voluntary sector services (accompanying, encouraging)
- Assistance to access mainstream community activities
- Confidence to function effectively and independently within a new community

A volunteer mentor meets once a week with their mentee to go out together and to offer support.

At present we have more male mentors available to provide support and they speak Arabic, Portuguese, Spanish, Hindi, Punjabi, French, Urdu, Russian and all of them are fluent in English as well.

If you are male refugee or migrant who is feeling isolated or if you know someone who might benefit from one-to-one bilingual support, please contact Francesca at MRCF on 020 8962 3048 or email her: Francesca@mrcf.org.uk

New Volunteers at MRCF

In the last few months a number of new volunteers joined MRCF to help with admin and project work such as Mentoring workshops and ESOL.

They are: Penny Keza, Joan Hodges, Francesca Saracchi and Maro Pantazidou and together with Jeff Samuelson, Dr Helen Sapper, Ljiljana Subotinovic and Amelia Brooks, they contribute to MRCF on a weekly basis.



Fabienne, Elton and Valentina



MRCF Volunteer Jeff Samuelson, MRCF Volunteer ESOL Teacher



Nora and Penny attend mentoring training



Francesca, Joan and Maro



The Sanctuary Pledge by Citizens for Sanctuary

Britain has a proud history of providing sanctuary to people fleeing from persecution and tyranny. Our nation provided sanctuary to Huguenots fleeing religious persecution in 17th century France, Jews fleeing the Nazi regime in the 1930s, Ugandan Asians forced out by Idi Amin in the 1970s, Bosnians escaping ethnic cleansing in the 1990s and Zimbabweans seeking a safe haven today.

Our tradition of providing sanctuary is part of what makes Britain great. That tradition is under threat. In recent years the rise of extremist politics, media scare stories, and high profile failings by the Home Office have led to

this issue becoming a political football.

Yet over two-thirds of the public still think it is important that the UK provides sanctuary to people fleeing persecution. We agree. We believe that sanctuary should not just be part of the UK's history. It should be part of our future too.

The Sanctuary Pledge is our response. We need ordinary citizens - like you - to convince your political representatives to sign the Sanctuary Pledge at the 2010 General Election.

Please help us to rebuild support for sanctuary.

<http://sanctuarypledge.org.uk/>

The Sanctuary Pledge



CITIZENS reclaim Britain's proud tradition of sanctuary in the 2010 General election



Help convince your local parliamentary candidates to...

Campaign responsibly, positively and sensitively in the 2010 election

Use 'sanctuary' instead of 'asylum' when communicating with the public

Support policies that will end the detention of children and families for immigration reasons

Promote tolerance and neighbourliness between local communities

Safeguard the long-term future of sanctuary

To find your nearest Sanctuary Pledge Training visit:

www.sanctuarypledge.org.uk

Or to book a place email training@sanctuarypledge.org.uk



Storytelling with MRCF

MRCF hosted a 'spider-themed' storytelling workshop for families with children on Wednesday, 17 Feb.

Together, we learned about Anansi the Spider and read the tale 'Why do spiders have eight skinny legs?' We sang and danced 'The Itsy Bitsy Spider' and then completed alphabet worksheets featuring the letter 'S.'

Afterwards we played an exciting game of spider web hopscotch, created crazy spider party hats, and assembled and ate a delicious 'spider' snack made of crackers, pretzels, and peanut butter.

This event was a nice opportunity for both parents and their children to socialize with others and enjoy a family outing during the holiday school break. Fun was had by all!

The New MRCF Photo group

Most people keep photographs around, but have you ever paused to really think about why? For participants of the new MRCF photo group, we have begun to explore that very question.

Photographs are visual reminders of everyday moments, and can serve as natural bridges for accessing, exploring, and communicating feelings

MRCF's New Team Members

As we are saying our goodbyes to Isis Amlak who is leaving MRCF in April upon the successful completion of the Good Practice in Access to Wellbeing Project we are also welcoming two new members of our team. Kristina Hemon joined MRCF in February as part-time and Policy and Voice Officer coordinating our engagement events, research and strategy for the future. Wirya Hassan joined MRCF in March to Coordinate our exciting new Digital Access Training Project which is funded by the Equality and Human Rights Commission. Wirya will also be coordinating development of MRCF new interactive website and will be contacting many of you soon to let you know more about the upcoming Digital Inclusion Training.

and memories about our daily lives. Every fortnight, participating MRCF mentors and mentees are provided with digital cameras and basic instruction as they are encouraged to use photography as a way to explore their physical environment and inner thoughts.

Group members work in a supportive setting as they engage in creative decision-making and sharing, both in their picture taking and in the wording of the accompanying captions. During our photo group sessions, photos are not just passively reflected upon in silent contemplation, but also actively created, posed for, talked with, listened to, reconstructed and revised to illustrate and re-tell new narratives about the MRCF photographer.

The purpose of our group is to allow clients to better reach, understand, and express parts of themselves in ways that were previously not possible.

The photogroup will continue until mid-May and will culminate with a group exhibition. This workshop is led by Joan Hodges. She is a Masters student studying Refugee Care in a partnership program between the University of Essex and the Tavistock-Portman Clinic in London.



Wirya Hassan and Kristina Hemon



In Memoriam: Isabel Howland White Kenrick

Dr Isabel Kenrick, who has died aged 83, was a noted historian and social activist who worked closely with her husband, Bruce, the founder of the influential housing group Shelter.

Isabel Kenrick was one of those very bright and lively American intellectuals who brought great joy and energy to both her family and those who worked with her. After the Second World War she came to France on a programme with the dubious name of Experiment In International Living, and worked for a refugee organisation. She continued to support refugees for the rest of her life, volunteering her time and expertise to support individuals and to champion the work of MRCF.

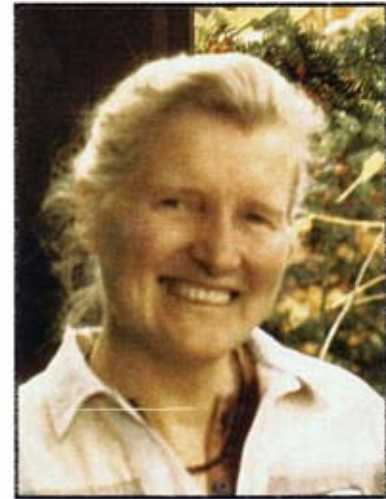
Born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, she was the daughter of an investment banker and a community worker who home educated her in a former Shaker village. She graduated from the Cambridge School of Weston and then earned her PhD from Bryn Mawr College after a Fulbright Scholarship to Edinburgh. It was there that she met Bruce, with whom she formed a strong bond.

During their years together, they worked in some of the most innovative and dynamic social experiments in the west, mostly in New York, Calcutta and in London where their groundbreaking work with the Notting Hill Housing Trust and then Shelter caught the imagination of much of the nation.

No slippers for her when she retired. She spent two years at the School of Oriental and African Studies learning Bengali and then returned to her beloved Calcutta to volunteer as an archivist in a seminary for a year. Back in London, her unbounded energy led her to join committees to rebuild her church, to help refugees and asylum seekers, and to tackle climate change. In December, she attended the Wave demonstration for Copenhagen, in London, despite painful burns sustained in a recent accident, and her dodgy feet.

ISABEL HOWLAND WITTE KENRICK

13 May 1926 – 22 January 2010



It was simply out of the question that she could feel strongly about a subject and not do something about it.

She is survived by her four children and nine grandchildren. In her memory, MRCF will name the Study Room in our resource centre the Isabel Kenrick Room, to remember this remarkable woman and let her life story inspire refugees and migrants who are studying English, or preparing for medical and dental verification exams.

We are very grateful to Isabel's family and friends for the generous donations made in her memory.



Isabel Kenrick Room at MRCF