



Turned down

We have now heard that RSG's £250,000 application to the Big Lottery fund has failed. This has plunged us into crisis discussions about the future of the charity.

When RSG was first set up funding was relatively simple: we were doing work which dovetailed with the local objectives of both the Home Office and Devon County Council, and could rely on grants from both. Politically, asylum was a hot issue, well to the top of the public's agenda and therefore of great interest to politicians. With the withdrawal of NASS from Exeter and the decline in numbers applying for asylum this position changed, and so did our funding needs. We secured a large grant from the Community Fund and a smaller one from the Home Office, this time for refugee integration rather than for work with asylum seekers. When the Community Fund morphed into the Big Lottery it was never obvious that it would be willing to renew our grant. It is mainly sheer bad luck that our funding from both the Home Office and the Community Fund ran out at about the same time.

We have now been told that RSG's application to the Big Lottery has not been accepted. This is a serious blow as although RSG is not a large organisation our costs are significant and it is difficult to see how we could raise all of them locally.

The work RSG does consists mainly of advice and help given to individuals. This needs an office, since it would be difficult to offer a space in which people can consult in privacy otherwise, not to mention equipment like telephones, photocopiers and computers which people often need to use. At the moment we employ two paid staff to manage the organisation, and they need somewhere to work, too.

Accordingly rent and salaries make up a large proportion of our costs (just under

60% in fact). Like most charities working with people our operation is fairly labour-intensive.

The cash crisis has understandably generated a good deal of discussion about the future. Last year we had a professional evaluation, which was very complimentary, with some areas for further development. Even if we can secure more funding to carry on as previously it seems likely that debate will continue and we may change our structure. What are the possibilities?

Could we do without paid staff?

We have a number of volunteers, without whom we could not function. One possibility is to work through volunteers only and stop employing paid workers (or reduce the amount, maybe by employing a part-time co-ordinator). We would still need the office (general running costs are only 14% of total costs) but save the cost of wages.

We may have no option but to pursue this course. However it is widely recognised that even small charities generate a need for substantial support work beyond what they actually do for their clients. This includes keeping records (financial being especially time-consuming), servicing the charity's governance, and (not least) fundraising.

Can we raise money from other sources?

This has been a subject of discussion for some months. There are hundreds of fund-giving organisations in the UK, most of them having nothing to do with either the government or the lottery. We

If RSG is closed and they are not there to help it will be more than difficult. Who will help? What can I do? What about families, as well as single people?

Bahram Raad

are already applying to a range of them in the hope that even though few are big enough to fund our entire operation we may be able to put together a coalition of supporters. However this has fairly sharply increased the number of hours that have to be spent on admin, which means our staffing costs will go up rather than down.

Are we really serving the best interests of our service users?

Some argue that we should put much more emphasis on the primary needs of the most deprived part of our client population: asylum seekers whose position for some reason does not allow them to claim any kind of benefit or allowance. This might represent a core operation which could be protected even if other aspects had to be abandoned.

Could we look for funds for separate activities?

Most of the private charitable trusts have specific aims and therefore criteria, and these differ widely. Some want to pay for advice services, for example, while some won't; some like to be asked to pay for

➔ *cont. page 4*

Also in this issue

Role of the police diversity support officer and Love poem and Committee report (next page)

Fran's poetry corner and Much appreciated (page 3)

What do they need? (page 4)

REFUGEE SUPPORT GROUP DEVON

www.rsgdevon.org.uk

Wat Tyler House
King William St
Exeter EX4 6PD

Telephone:
01392 682185

Email:
info@rsgdevon.org.uk

Reg. charity no 1092410

EDITORS

Annette Hughes and Jeremy Cushing

news.rsgdevon@virgin.net

RSG management committee

Next meeting is Wednesday 21st March in Wat Tyler House (see above), 6.45 p.m. Everyone welcome. For information contact the office.

Every meeting starts by considering any proposals or requests put forward by asylum seekers, who are particularly welcome. Agenda items to the office if possible two weeks before the meeting, please.

NB views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Refugee Support Group Devon

The role of police diversity support officer

My name is Kelly Haggett and I am the Diversity Support Officer for the Exeter area, working for Devon and Cornwall Police. My job is mainly to support victims of hate crime. By hate crime I mean anyone who has been targeted, harassed, bullied, verbally abused or suffered

damage to their property because of their race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or because they have a disability. If a person feels they have been targeted due to any of these, this is a hate crime and will be treated very seriously by the police.

It is my role to support such victims through the police investigation and possible court case. This ensures that such crimes are accurately reported, repeat victims are quickly identified and overall victim satisfaction is improved. In essence this is because it has been rec-



ognised nationally that victims of hate crime might require that bit of extra support. As I am sure you appreciate hate crime can have a devastating impact upon a person's life.

For this reason it is important for people to know that if they are ever subjected to it, the police need to know about it to be able to form a better understanding of the levels of racist abuse in Exeter and act accordingly. Furthermore the police will investigate and wherever possible will prosecute. It is during this investigation that I will become involved and work

Love poem

Welcome to the land of my heart there is a land in my heart

Specially for you, I will put you there and I will lock the door behind you, and then I will put the key in the sea and you will be in my heart

For ever and ever

[Written by Mr Sidiki]

alongside the investigating officer to provide support and advice to the victim. There are many ways in which I can provide this support and it really depends on the level of interaction and assistance a person would want. In the first instance I will usually write to the victim and follow this up with a phone call. I can then, according to need, make a visit with the investigating officer and in conjunction with the victim, identify the best methods by which to offer support. For example I can arrange for a police crime prevention officer to visit and offer guidance and advice on basic security measures. I also have close links with support

➔ *cont. opposite*

Committee report

The RSG management committee met on 21st February. The main issues discussed were the progress of the new women's project, staffing and fundraising.

The women's project had secured a grant of £9000 for a year's operation. This included a contribution towards the cost of the office of £5800. It was hoped that the project might organise the setting up of a

business using the skills women in the project had identified.

Staffing

This was discussed in the context of current financial shortfalls. It was decided that we would be able to continue to employ a full-time co-ordinator until the end of July 2007 with existing funds. By that time we might have secured enough funding to continue; if not, a compromise might be to employ Annette (who kindly agreed to this) part-time until the

end of 2007. The women's project funding required us to employ a part-time staff member to work on admin and finance.

Fundraising

This was naturally a major concern. A steering group had met to discuss future policy. A number of major bids were being prepared (three already sent), and individual trustees were drafting bids for particular projects. Two of these (including the women's project) had al-

ready been successful.

Fundraising in future would be much more complicated than in the past, with major bids being prepared (for the time being) in the office but bids for discrete projects being the responsibility of trustees engaged in them. This would make record-keeping a major challenge. It would be vital to build and maintain good relationships with a range of funders so that we could achieve stability of funding (no one funder could plunge us into crisis by withdrawing) and the possibility of funding widely differing activities.

Fran's poetry corner

Occasional poems chosen by readers

My Friend is a Refugee

My friend is a refugee
 He just wants to be
 Just like me
 A normal kid
 Playing in the park
 No hassle from ignorant people
 Because he has a different culture
 But my friend turned around
 Picked himself off the ground
 And told them,
 'Put yourselves in my shoes and think
 How it was for me to get here.
 I don't get the treatment you get.
 I just want to forget what happened
 And give you another chance.
 'Please take it.'

[Daniel Bowes]

Refugee Girl

She is very lonely, has no one to look up to.
 She doesn't know anyone, she is very scared.
 She has left everyone behind, she is missing
 her family
 Every time she closes her eyes,
 She can just see machines and guns shooting
 everywhere.
 Everything is different, but she is glad she
 made a friend.
 Now she has someone to look up to, she is
 very happy.
 Now she has a lot of money, she has fixed her-
 self.
 She has started a new life which she depends
 on.
 Now that I know her properly, I take her to my
 house.
 She has come for tea, we have a lot of fun.
 I take her to shops, I give her a new look.
 Now she looks like one of us, she never gets
 pushed and shoved.
 Now the war in Afghanistan has finished, she
 has gone back.
 She was very happy to see them at last.
 In the end she came back to England again
 To start a new life with her family and friends.

[Masuma Begum]

*Taken from 'In Our Shoes: the Refugee
 Experience' by young people from six
 secondary schools in Tower Hamlets, March
 2004*

Diversity officer

(continued from page 2)

agencies in Exeter whom I can sign-
 post people to or make contact with at
 their request, such as victim support.
 But it is important to note that I will
 always tailor my services to to meet the
 needs of the individual, as I am all too
 aware that a holistic approach to prob-
 lem solving is usually better and will
 ultimately have a more lasting and far-
 reaching effect.

How can you report an incident of hate crime?

There are a number of ways to report
 hate crime:

Phone the police – If you feel threat-
 ened, are injured, the offender(s) is
 nearby or immediate action is required,
 call 999. To report a non-emergency
 incident – an incident which does not
 require immediate attention – call
 08452 777444. We have access to in-
 terpreters in over 150 languages 24
 hours a day, 7 days a week. When you
 contact the police, you will need to
 state the language you would like to
 speak in and wait 60 seconds until you
 can be connected to an interpreter.

Self-reporting – There is a special self-
 reporting form contained in the 'True
 Vision' packs, which RSG will have
 copies of and which RSG can help you
 fill out if you want. (Or see www.report-it.org.uk.)

Tell RSG – who can report the incident
 on your behalf.

Finally I would want you to remember
 that hate crime is ANY OFFENCE
 committed against a person or a per-
 son's property which is motivated by
 the offender's hatred of people because
 they are seen as being different. Hate
 crime hurts, it can be confusing and
 frightening. By reporting it, you may
 be able to prevent these crimes from
 happening to someone else. Reporting
 makes a difference, to you and your
 community.

Don't suffer in silence.

**There is also a diversity support offi-
 cer, Julie Dixon, working in the North
 Devon area.** [KH]

MUCH APPRECIATED

Dear Sir or Madam

*I'm writing with regard to say thank
 you for every help and advice I have
 received from RSG DEVON since I
 came to the UK as refugee.*

*The RSG they did help me to pay my
 course fee few times when I had a
 part time job. They bought an Eng-
 lish book, and also did give me ref-
 erence when I need it, for several
 matters.*

*They always been kind and friendly
 to me. I'm also saying thank you
 very much for those who help and
 fund this organisation.*

Yours sincerely

[Name provided]

REFUGEE APPEAL

Are you a member of a local
 religious congregation?

If so maybe you would like to draw
 to the attention of your fellow con-
 gregation members RSG's appeal
 for help with the emergency fund.

One of our most vital and basic
 functions is to help asylum seekers
 who for one reason or another, and
 through no fault of their own, find
 themselves destitute or homeless (or
 both) in Exeter.

Even small donations will make a
 big difference. Regular donations
 (maybe also profiting from gift aid)
 are especially welcome as they en-
 able us to plan.

*Copies of the appeal are available
 from the office, or from the
 Newsletter.*

CAR BOOT SALE

In support of a university
 place – 11 am, Sunday 25th
 February, St James football
 ground, Exeter. Please help!

Turned down

(continued from first page)

overheads, others don't. And so on. It's a complex world. Maybe we should apply separately for separate aspects. However discussions on ways of identifying discrete projects (the allotment? citizenship or English teaching? women? recreation? the emergency fund? advocacy?) tend to come up against the need for an office with paid staff to support them. This means we either go back to asking one funder to pay for the 75 or so per cent which the office represents, or divide it among the projects and represent it as a share of RSG overheads. This latter is an approach many funders increasingly like.

Could we raise more money locally?

The answer to this is probably yes, but it would require an enormous amount of work, which would have to be kept up year in and year out. Fundraising in this sense is notoriously labour-intensive. It also – unfortunately – rarely brings in enough to run even a small charity like RSG. So this would only be an adjunct to fundraising from trusts.

We are not alone

In a recent report produced by the Charity Commission the dangers of over-reliance on state funds are starkly revealed. Politicians love charities, for various reasons (some more creditable than others). However charities (and especially small ones) need to sup with a very long spoon. One reason is that small charities can rarely afford sophisticated accountants (RSG was without a treasurer until last month). This often results in their failing to charge their funders with the full cost of their activities (of which book-keeping, and fundraising itself, are not the least expensive). Another is the likelihood that big statutory funders will suddenly withdraw their support (as happened to RSG) or change their criteria at short notice. It is not possible for small charities to call big funders to account, and they then have to bear the costs of readjustment. They may have to dismantle the expensive structures they have built in order to deliver the services the big funders wanted, and do so at relatively short notice. This can lead not only to loss of confidence, from volunteers, the local community and also the public at large, but also to more serious problems such as debt. Whatever the outcome of RSG's current difficulties this must be avoided. [JC]

What people need

When the government decided not to send any more asylum seekers to the south west Devon refugee organisations like RSG might have been seen as redundant. Instead, both here and in Plymouth what has happened is that numbers of refugees have increased and at the same time the ethnic mix has got more complex.

This inevitably means more varied needs. And to add to the changes in the ethnic mix we are seeing more women (the original asylum seekers were all young men) and consequently families. Between 1991 and 2001, the proportion of black and minority ethnic (BME) people in Plymouth went up by 88%. The proportion in Exeter went up by 74%: Plymouth catching up perhaps but Exeter still well ahead (in 2001 Exeter's proportion was 2.33%, Plymouth's 1.62%). Of Exeter's total population 6716 (6%) were born outside the UK. Of these about two-thirds (4256) were born outside the EU. This does not mean the same as refugees, of course (still less asylum seekers).

Nor is it the same as 'minority ethnic'. But in fact Exeter still has a higher proportion of BME people than any other place in Devon (including Plymouth, as detailed above). Out of a population of around 110,000 at the last census 1644 people described themselves as other than 'white' – black, Asian, Chinese and 'other'. There were 2066 people whose religion was not Christian (the largest group was Muslims).

These numbers are small compared with what you might find in a place like London. But some of them are recent immigrants and some need help. RSG is receiving more and more enquiries.

In the six months to September last year the office fielded over 1200 enquiries. The largest proportion was still from Afghans (52%) and Iranians (21%) but we also had visits from Iraqis (9%) and 17% were 'other'. The overwhelming majority (97%) were still from men, but we are not sure what this means. The new women's project may enable us to find out. Whatever we discover seems likely to require new approaches.

There is thus more and more variety in

the kind of help needed, and no sign of this diminishing. In fact, we expect it to increase, with consequent pressure on the office to come up with more and more expertise. (And sometimes, people just come for a chat ... I noticed plates of chocolate cake the other day.) The largest number of visitors (29%) needed to use the office facilities – computers, the Internet, phones, photocopying and so on. Third biggest was asylum queries (14%), followed by education (10%), the emergency fund (9%) and employment (7%). Second biggest, however, was 'other', suggesting that the range of enquiries is too great to categorise easily. (And 'other' had risen by 190%, suggesting that the variety of needs is increasing.)

One piece of good news is, as you can see from the above, RSG's record keeping is improving. However we still have to make confidentiality our first priority, so records are not kept by name, a difficulty familiar to many charities dealing with vulnerable people which makes it difficult to account to our funders.

The emergency fund

The problem of extreme hardship among asylum seekers has not diminished, and is not likely to as long as current hard-line government policies continue. Around six enquiries a week currently relate to this, and numbers have gone up over four times over the half year. We received some donations over Christmas, for which we were most grateful. But we will still need to raise more money for this fund. As announced in the last issue, a working group has been set up to discuss this. Any suggestions you have would be very welcome.

This is especially so since our enquiries suggest that the need is even greater than appears from requests made to our office. If we are to be proactive in helping this group of people in extreme need we will need to improve our fundraising. [JC]