



# Protecting Devon's landscape



Gathering natural objects for the workshop: below, from left, Wesam, Suaad, Waqar, Asia and Roya; Asia (above); Roya (bottom left)

*The members of the Women's Outreach Project are taking part in a project which aims at caring for Devon's landscapes*

The project is called 'Turab', meaning 'Earth' in Arabic, and is organised by the Phoenix Arts Centre. We are working with Devon United Women, a group which aims to empower women from minority ethnic backgrounds, and is about responding to the landscape of the county.



Last week we, in the gales and rain,

went to Bicton College and planted ash trees, at the time when the sleet was at its most biting, and collected natural objects.

Those objects, branches, stones, cones, willow branches for example, we brought back to use in three workshops over the coming weeks to create art installations. The installations and the videos and photos taken will make up the exhibition at the Phoenix on March 8<sup>th</sup> to celebrate International Women's Day.

Do come along to the Phoenix from 11am to 1pm on March 8<sup>th</sup> to share our work, enjoy the activities, have tea or coffee and cakes and look at or buy Afghan Gold Dozi work which our women have made. [FJ]



## *Government drive to clear up asylum claims*

*In December the Government announced that thousands of asylum seekers whose cases had been undecided, in some cases for years had been granted permission to remain in the UK. It seems likely that many more will gain similar permission in the next few years. The Government insists that this is not an amnesty. Just for once, it seems they are right.*

The decision followed John Reid's announcement in 2006 of a scheme, involving 900 Immigration staff,

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## *Also in this issue*

Poem by Sharif Rezai; and trustees report (next page)

Meanwhile in the office (page 3)

New row on immigration and the 'e-Borders' programme (page 4)

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### RSG trustees

Next meeting is Wednesday  
12th March in Wat Tyler  
House (see above), 6.15  
p.m. (note new time). Eve-  
ryone welcome. For infor-  
mation 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 be-  
fore the meeting, please.

*NB views expressed in this  
newsletter are not necessar-  
ily those of the Refugee  
Support Group Devon*

## A Wish

### Sharif Rezai

***Fran Jenkin writes: We have published before po-  
ems from various sources but here we have one writ-  
ten by one of our own RSG users, Sharif Rezai. He is  
working towards producing a small book of his work  
but you will be the first to see his works in print!***

After long waiting	Being given away for a
After the sunset	moment to see you
After the passage of time	My love.
After the oldness of years	2007 ending, the waiting
After tiredness	for 2008. Congratulations!
After chucking away the voice	Yes
of laughter	From the last breath
From chests	2008 was born
After every moment	Happy Birthday to him too.
Which is hiding another mo- ment	With the last breath of time.
There is a wish.	2007 was going to stop
It's forever for you:	And the last rays of sun
Don't grow old	Were going to disappear.
Become adult, don't get tired	2008 started to move
Don't get plastered either.	And everything started
Wish to meet	from the beginning
It's a strange wish.	The wheel of your life
Like a fish in a wheel of ex- pectancy	In the passage of time
It's fresh.	Never stops moving
All my waitings	My love
With all my wishes	

## Asylum clearup

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to clear up the estimated 450,000  
'legacy' cases then thought to be  
on the Government's books.

These, some dating back to 1994,  
involved thousands of electronic  
or paper files. By December 18  
2007 a total of 52,000 cases had  
been examined. Of these 16,000  
had been deemed 'failed' and the  
applicants had been deported. A  
further 17,000 had been deleted.  
The reasons for this last varied:  
some were simply errors, some  
duplicated other files, some  
claimants had died and some were  
people who had since achieved  
EU citizenship. The chief execu-  
tive of the Borders and Immigra-  
tion Agency, Lin Homer, said that  
the system was 'riddled' with er-  
rors.

That left 19,000 whose cases had  
been examined and who had been  
given permission to remain,  
which means that they can get  
jobs, earn a legal wage and con-  
tribute to the tax system. This is  
indeed not an amnesty, which  
means being forgiven for break-  
ing the law. These 19,000 have  
not broken any law. On the con-  
trary they have done nothing  
wrong but have been seriously  
victimised by a system which  
even the Home Secretary said was  
'not fit for purpose'.

Meanwhile many of those whose  
claims were disallowed and were  
deported are still seen by their  
supporters as the victims of mis-  
takes by Immigration, including  
people like Ali Shakib and Abdul  
Karim (see last issue) and X (see  
June/July last year).

### The need for a real amnesty

Meanwhile campaigning organi-  
sations continue to argue for a  
real amnesty for people who are  
in the country illegally (which in-  
cludes 'failed' asylum seekers, of  
course) and may have been here  
for many years. The arguments  
will be familiar to many RSG  
members (see May issue last year  
for the Strangers into Citizens  
demo). If their status is recog-  
nised they will be able to pay  
taxes, get jobs and generally de-  
velop into useful citizens, which  
is what most of them wish more  
than anything else. [JC]

## Trustees report

RSG's trustees met on 9th  
January and 13th February.  
The latter was also an  
EGM, which accepted a  
new constitution (hence  
'trustees' instead of 'com-  
mittee').

Other issues discussed included  
the allotment's need for a new  
shed. The women's project was  
reported on at both meetings  
and is going from strength to  
strength. Forthcoming events

are a Gold Dozi workshop for  
Devon United Women and cat-  
tering for an Amnesty Interna-  
tional event on International  
Women's Day. Ten women  
have been enrolled in English  
and citizenship classes and two  
have already received citizen-  
ship.

### Fundraising

This was as always a theme in  
both meetings, and it was  
agreed that the training and de-  
velopment project (see page 3)

would be set up as a discrete  
programme, with fundraising  
beginning as soon as possible  
(we only have six months'  
funding at present).

### Monitoring and evaluation

It was agreed that RSG needs  
better internal monitoring sys-  
tems and some kind of inde-  
pendent external evaluation  
process. Previous schemes had  
proved very expensive. If any-  
one can offer any help, please  
get in touch!

# Meanwhile in the office ...

## Newsletter

Firstly, apologies for the very late newsletter! You may understand that the high number of visitors to the office (10 – 20 per day) means we do not have the time to sit down and write up our experiences. What started as a monthly newsletter, we are now aiming to be a bi-monthly newsletter – but oops, it's now almost 3 months since the last one.....

## Rammi

Meanwhile we welcome a new colleague! See below, centre, and right.

## Emergency fund

So what have we been up to in the office then? We still regularly help 15 people with funds from our emergency fund.

These are mainly men who are stuck in this limbo land – no permission to work, no entitlement to benefits and generally no acknowledgement from the Home Office of the status of their application or appeal. Some of these men have been living in Exeter five years or more, and a few of them have 'settled' lives with a partner and children, but stuck in real poverty as they are not even recognised as existing. It is very distressing that these people who so desperately want to contribute to life in the UK are denied the very basic of rights. (See article on the back page.)

We are very grateful for the generous donations to our emergency fund that enable us to help in our small way.

## Families

Other issues that have kept us busy include meeting new arrivals of families to Exeter. These are the wives and children of our Afghan friends who have finally permission to remain here indefinitely. As well as helping to arrange schooling and resolving housing issues, our women's group has been hugely successful in assimilating its members into this new and very different environment (see front page).

## English and citizenship

We are regularly helping people to enrol into Exeter College ESOL courses, and helping those with limited income to apply for the College's learning support fund to help pay for the course (the government decided that these important and necessary stages of education should no longer be free last year).

And for those who are finally 'settled' here – we have had the pleasure of assisting with applications for citizenship. There have been several naturalisation ceremonies now and we are very pleased to welcome our new British citizens! [AH]

## UPDATE ON ALI AND KARIM

Unfortunately we are still concerned about the two men deported last November (see previous issue).

We still have no news about **Abdul Karim**, who was returned to Syria in October. We are hoping this is because he is busy ... although it is a worry ...

**Ali Shakib** from Afghanistan is trying desperately to get help from the American Embassy to make an application to join his mother in America. We have telephone calls and emails now and then from Ali – he misses everyone and thanks RSG for supporting him, particularly for the efforts to halt his removal. Worryingly recent reports from Afghanistan suggest that the security situation is getting worse. 'The conflict has not only intensified but it has also spread over the last few years. Prolonged human suffering is causing real concern in ever large areas' according to the Red Cross in Kabul.

## WELCOME TO RAMMI!

Ramazan Mohammed (Rammi) writes: hellooooooooooooo – I am Rammi, just started working for RSG from end of January 2008, and the objects of my post are, to provide for the physical and mental health needs of refugees and their families; to help refugees and their families access education and training, to provide refugees with an opportunity to integrate with a new community; to raise the awareness of the public about issues concerning refugees and to provide refugees with facilities for recreation and leisure pursuits and to improve integration and delivery of services to refugees and asylum seekers.

The key tasks and responsibilities of my post:

- to provide a direct service to refugees through the RSG enquiry service;



- to recruit and train volunteers to assist in the project (including from the existing volunteer pool);
- to identify specific needs and problem areas for refugees in terms of employment and training;
- to establish links with other service providers and develop inter-agency support and working methods in the interests of furthering the Refugee Support Group's objects and meeting refugees' identified needs;
- to develop and deliver training programmes for volunteers and service providers to promote understanding and integration;
- to develop information systems for consistent signposting through the RSG enquiry service;
- to develop materials to publicise the service amongst refugees and other organisations;
- to maintain and manage accurate computer and manual records;
- to monitor and evaluate the project;
- to undertake any other reasonable duties within the scope of the post.

We are now planning to celebrate NEWROZ, and we would like to know if anyone would like to participate or can do any activities on that day. Please get in touch: my contacts are 01392 682 185 or 07719300520. [RM]

# New row on immigration figures

*Uprou developed when the Office for National Statistics announced last September that they had revised their figures for net immigration, producing a 31% increase over the previous estimates. The previously quoted figure was 145,000 surplus of immigrants over emigrants. This was now changed to 190,000.*

Embarrassingly for the government, this appeared to justify figures for population growth put forward in 2002 by the website Migrationwatch. At that time the Home Office was quoting 135,000 as a typical figure, arguing that the 180,000 figure for 2000 was a blip. MW disagreed and calculated that on the basis of an increase of 180,000 a year the population would rise by about 10m over ten years. The new figures quoted by ONS now seemed to tally with MW's prediction.

ONS seemed to confirm this in October by issuing new population projections of an increase of 10m over 25 years: less than MW but considerably more than the projections they had issued in 2005.

MW emphasised the effect of immigration, arguing that the net immigration figure would go up as immigrants were joined by family members and had more children than the indigenous population. ONS more or less agreed. The expected population increase would come partly from an unexpected increase in the birth rate among British women (it's turned upward again recently after declining for some decades), partly from people living longer and partly from immigration. If you only count people who have actually entered the country, ONS predicts that immigration will contribute 47% of population increase. If, however, you count their children born after they come here, this rises to 70%.

## **Government embarrassment**

The Government itself faced criticism when the Home Secretary confessed that whereas previously it had given a figure of 800,000 for foreign workers, this figure had to be increased to 1.1m. Almost immediately the Conservatives unearthed an ONS statement that it was actually 1.5m, leading the opposition to claim that official figures were hopelessly unreliable. If true the new figures meant that of the 2.7m new jobs Labour claimed to have

created since 1997 around 40% had actually gone to foreigners, which made nonsense of Gordon Brown's 'British jobs for British workers' speech.

## **Public services**

The figures undermined the Government's position in another ongoing row, with local authorities. The main burden of public services dealing with immigrants – housing, health, education, transport – fall on local, not central, government. Councils had been claiming that the ONS figures on which government grants to them were based were 'perverse' and seriously underestimated the strain on local services.

These claims were supported by figures for work permits and national insurance numbers, which tended to indicate higher numbers of immigrants.

The Statistics Commission claimed that it had been pressing the Government to put more resources into official immigration statistics for years. The Home Secretary apologised for the Government's failure.

The councils' claims echoed long-term arguments by right-wing and anti-immigrant organisations that immigrants exploited public services to the detriment of the native population. The Local Government Association claimed that immigration contributed 'more than £40bn per year' to the economy, but that very little of this extra income was actually being spent on the associated costs.

The Government denied that the extra 400,000 supposedly discovered by the Conservatives were actually foreigners: they were the foreign-born children of returning British nationals. And many people questioned the whole assumption that high immigration was bad in any case. The ONS population projections predicted a much higher number of elderly people – by 2030 there will be 2m more pensioners than children under 16, and 8.2m people over 75. Without immigration our society would be unable to cope. [JC]

## *The 'e-Borders' programme*

*One of the main causes of the Government's continued embarrassment at its inability to produce reliable information about who is and who is not in the UK is the way we collect information about travellers. This is currently done by a passenger survey which involves questioning a tiny sample of passengers at a tiny sample of ports (there are hundreds of ports and airports in the UK, mostly unmonitored) and relying on their telling the truth.*

*This is all going to change. New proposals remove the safeguards in the 1988 Data Protection Act and involve the police, immigration and security services sharing a wide range of information about passengers. Your details will be collected, and your movements tracked. A 'profile' will be prepared, and widely shared. On this basis your travel can be banned.*

*Whereas in the US civil liberties organisations succeeded in paring down the US Government's initial proposals for universal surveillance, in the UK all the original US ideas are to be introduced to the fullest extent. Instead of checking passengers against a list of known suspects (as happens in the US), every citizen who travels will be included in the scheme. Expensive (and doubtless unreliable) surveillance technologies and massive computer systems will be deployed. This will be done not merely for the purposes of countering terrorism but also for crime.*

*The scheme is far more intrusive than anything suggested by the EU, and there is reason for concern about what legal limits will be set on the way the information can be used, how long it will be kept or how mistakes will be remedied and the victims of mistakes compensated. Information is also likely to be shared with the US.*