



Refugees Welcome Here Campaign
A Final Report
April 2006

Launched as a reaction against the negative portrayal of asylum seekers in the media, the campaign signed up over 100 organisations to a pledge, launched a website, created an exhibition and promoted the benefits of refugees to the people of Greater Manchester



working with refugees to build new lives

The Pledge is Born

On World Refugee Day, 20 June 2002, a new campaign was launched jointly by Citizens Advice Bureau, Oxfam Campaigns in Manchester, Manchester Council for Community Relations and Refugee Action, to strengthen the welcome given to refugees in Greater Manchester.

Refugees and asylum seekers bring many economic, cultural and social benefits but the media is overwhelmingly negative. We wanted to counteract this negative publicity and get across the truth! We wanted to remind communities that refugees were vulnerable people whose lives had been shattered, and that being welcoming was the only humane response. We needed to decide what we could do with limited resources and limited time.

The approach we decided upon was to develop a 'pledge', a list of commitments that organisations large and small would be asked to formally sign up to, that detailed how organisations might 'promote positive interaction between refugees, asylum seekers and their host communities and reduce levels of racial harassment'. A pledgepack was written that described the campaign, with a tear-off form to be completed and signed by an authorised representative of the organisation.

Organisations were asked for an action they would take to further the campaign and, on signing, were sent a set of plaques to show that refugees were welcome to their organisation. We didn't realise then how hard it would be to get organisations to sign up!

Keeping it Going

Many hundreds of packs and leaflets were sent out, many cold calls were made (a particularly hated job), and emails and letters sent. Presentations were made at meetings, conferences, and events. Every one was worth doing, even if the organisation didn't sign up, because we were getting the message out that refugees should be welcomed. Newsletters were written to keep all the members of the Campaign updated.

Based at Refugee Action's office, the bulk of the work was undertaken by volunteers, two to three at any one time, who gave one day a week. The amount of work on the campaign grew and shrank depending on how many volunteers there were. A key volunteer came soon after the campaign started and stayed for almost the entire length of the campaign. Without him it would have been impossible to maintain the continuity.

"We pledge to welcome children of refugees into our school community and help them in any way we are able" *St Peter and St John RC Primary School*

Members

Add A Voice ALL FM 96.9 Amicus (Gtr Mcr Community Branch) ASHA Bolton Community Homes Bolton CVS Bolton Methodist Church
Cheetham Hill Advice Centre Chorlton Central Church Chorlton Workshop Citizens Advice Bureau Manchester Central Comm
Crumpsall Methodist Church D.A.S.H./Positive Futures Development Education Project EMAS (Manchester) Friendly Faces M
of Disabled People Hanifah Community Initiative Holy Cross and All Saints School Holy Innocents Church Hopwood Hall Col
Manchester City Council Manchester Council for Community Relations Manchester Diocese Board of Mission & Society Manche
Victims of Torture Methodist Centre NCADC Network - People and Churches Working Together Oldham District CAB Oldham
Organisation PCS DWP Manchester branch PEMBEC Pendleton College Persian Society Quakers Bolton Quakers Wythen
Bureau Salford Diocese Salford Diocese Faith & Justice Commission Salford Museum and Art Gallery Save the Children Sh
Anthony's RC High School St. Boniface RC Primary School St. Brigid's R.C. Primary School St. Clement's Church St. Crispin's
RC High School St. Mary's RC Primary School St. Oswald's RC Primary School St. Paul with Emmanuel Parish St. Peter and St
Thomas Church Werneth St. William of York RC Primary School Stamford High School Stockport Advice Stockport CAB Sto
Tameside Traveller Refugee Asylum Seeker Support Team Union Chapel United People's Church Voluntary Action Manchester

Making it Happen

There were long discussions about who would be the best organisations to approach. Who would the general public take most notice of – GPs, local voluntary organisations, football clubs, supermarkets? We learned the hard way that without contacts it is difficult to get noticed, especially with such an unpopular subject as refugees. What would persuade these organisations to take the pledge to their management committee? In the end, what worked best was a committed individual in the organisation who was

willing to keep pushing until it happened.

A total of 107 organisations signed up with many more saying that they were intending to but never quite following through. The organisations ranged from a toddler group to a borough-wide housing association, from a small independent youth theatre to a Trades Union Council. Practical actions ranged from refugee awareness training for staff to producing leaflets and giving money.

The Pledge

We commit ourselves to support and, where appropriate, take action on the following:

- Raise awareness among our own employees and/or volunteers of the rights and needs of refugees and asylum seekers
- Ensure that the services we provide are accessible to refugees and asylum seekers
- Promote the formation of refugee community organisations, support existing groups and involve them in local decision-making
- Support joint initiatives to help ensure that any cases of racial harassment are tackled promptly and effectively within a multi-agency framework, fully investigating cases and offering support to victims
- Help develop employment opportunities, both voluntary and paid, for refugees and asylum seekers
- Promote positive stories about refugees and asylum seekers in local and national newspapers, radio and TV reporting
- Organise and promote cultural events which encourage better understanding between refugees and their host communities.

Mission Boundary Medical Practice Breeze Hill School –Central Manchester NHS Trust Cheetham Al Hilal Toddler group
Mission for Racial Equality North of England Community Arts North West Community Support Plus Ltd 42nd Street
Mentoring Project George House Trust Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation Greater Manchester Coalition
College International Society, Student Ladybarn Methodist Church Lancashire Educational and Cultural Society (Turkish)
Manchester International Arts MARIM (Multi Agency for Refugee Integration in Manchester) Medical Foundation for the Care of
Manchester Trades Union Council Oldham Unity Campaign to Defend Asylum Seekers Open Arms Oxfam Campaigns Pakistan Refugee
Pashawe Radio Regen Revive Roby URC Church Rochdale CVS Sacred Heart parish Salford CVS and Salford Volunteer
Refugee Shelter Grtr Mcr Housing Aid Signpost Young People's Centre South Manchester Law Centre St. Anne's RC Primary School St.
St. CE Church St. John Fisher RC Primary School St. John Vianney Special School St. John Vianney Upper School St. Joseph's
St. John RC Primary School St. Peter's Church St. Peter's RC Church St. Sebastian's RC Church St. Teresa's RC Church St.
Stockport CVS Stockport Youth Service The Roby Trafford Law Centre Tree-Aid New Sudan Trinity Methodist Church
Wardle High School Wigan & Leigh Voluntary Service Withington Methodist Church Yellow Jelly Youth Theatre Zimden

Extending the Campaign

As the campaign continued we developed new ways of moving the campaign forward. Fine ideas were discussed at length but, frustratingly, turned out to be too expensive or time-consuming, like the time we had to drop a series of posters about fish-and-chips and other inventions created by refugees.

The website www.refugeeswelcomeheregm.org.uk was developed, which had a database of the agencies that joined, positive stories from around Greater Manchester and other information about the campaign (see On the Ball). Writing and publicising positive stories about refugees became an important part of the campaign that led to the development of an exhibition. This exhibition, displayed at libraries, supermarkets, a football club and other places showed refugees who have done something special for the community or excelled in their own field of skill.

The campaign ideas and materials were integrated into the work of other parts of Refugee Action and used by other organisations. If staff were doing training or going out to meet a new organisation or participating in meetings the Campaign was used as a way of talking about the benefits that refugees bring. It is something that every organisation can do even if they are not working directly with refugees.

The Refugees Welcome Here Campaign demonstrated how much can be done with a few resources, committed volunteers and a good idea. Sometimes it was not easy to keep it going when we felt overwhelmed by the day-to-day needs of refugees. But it is at times like these that welcoming refugees into the community becomes most important.

On the ball

This is an extract from a 'Positive Story' on our website. Valdano had been a promising young Angolan footballer. He started playing aged nine and soon joined a local side, going on to train at Benfica in Portugal and to represent Angola at under-21 level. He was forced to flee from Angola following events he finds too painful to talk about.

Since arriving in Britain, he has set up the VG Foundation, an Angolan community organisation in Greater Manchester, with the help of Refugee Action's Wellbeing Project. The organisation has set up a drama group and a football team, which meant Valdano could return to his first love as coach and player. In 2003 and 2005, VG Foundation won the Refugee World Cup, an annual event in Manchester marking Refugee Week. Valdano said: "The World Cup is important because it brings people from across the world together in their shared love of football. When we won I felt like I was lifting the trophy for my country, we were the VG Foundation but at the same time we represented Angola."



picture courtesy of Manchester Evening News

Refugee Action is an independent national charity that works with refugees to build new lives in the UK. With over 20 years of experience in reception, resettlement, development and integration, we provide advice and support to asylum seekers and refugees in 10 regions across England

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