

# refugee

## New horizons

When Clementine fled from the Democratic Republic of Congo three years ago, she left behind a job she loved. Before she was caught up in Congo's bloody war, Clementine had worked as a midwife in a busy hospital.

Today, as an asylum seeker, she is banned from working, but has spent the last two years volunteering in the maternity unit at Stepping Hill Hospital in Stockport, Greater Manchester, though Refugee Action's Horizons Project which matches asylum seekers and refugees with volunteer placements.

Clementine said: "I was so pleased when I was accepted at the hospital, because I have been unable to use my skills while I've been waiting for my asylum claim to be processed. My English was not good, so when I first arrived I would just sit in the house, frightened to go out. Now it has improved a lot."

Since it was set up five years ago, the Manchester-based Horizons Project has seen 458 asylum seekers and refugees from a huge range of backgrounds, from teachers and journalists to construction workers and business people. Last year the scheme received a grant from the government's Goldstar Programme for exemplary volunteering projects.

photo: Claudia Janke



Our Horizons project helps people like Clementine to use their skills in voluntary work

### Volunteer of the year

Clementine said: "When I started volunteering I worked with the elderly, but soon I was allowed to work on maternity. I make the beds, give out tea and coffee and talk with the mothers about how they are feeling and how their child is. Volunteering has also meant I have learned about midwifery in Britain so that hopefully, when I am granted refugee status, I can work for the NHS."

In 2007, Clementine became one of Stepping Hill Hospital's Volunteers of the Year, and was presented with a certificate. Sally Cassini, the NHS volunteer co-ordinator for Stepping Hill Hospital, said: "We are delighted to have Clementine and to give others a chance to work with someone from a different culture. She is a lovely person, lively, loyal and committed to the hospital and has become an invaluable member of the team. We also have a good

partnership with Horizons and have taken on several volunteers."

### Using skills wisely

Jo Quinn, manager of the Horizons Project, said: "The vast majority of asylum seekers are not allowed to work, but many are professionals and are highly skilled. If they are not able to practice their profession for a long time, many can become de-skilled and lose confidence. Refugees can also find it difficult to find employment if they have no work experience in the UK."

"Horizons has addressed these problems by matching refugees to voluntary work placements that relate to their experience or interests. We have seen our volunteers go on to employment and that has been very rewarding."

>> For more information about Horizons and other projects visit [www.refugee-action.org.uk/ourwork](http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/ourwork)

# Thank you

Thank you so much to our lovely supporters who have raised money for us recently.

A group of singers in Nottingham, Simply Singing, raised a fantastic £472 by holding three concerts. A huge thank you to Sarah and Ruth for organising and hosting the events and to everyone who took part.



Joe in Sheffield organised FroZac a musical evening featuring music from all over the world in May 2008 and raised £75. Thank you Joe and everyone who attended.

A wonderful team of runners raised almost £3,000 for Refugee Action in the London and Liverpool 5km Women's Challenge run in September 2008. A big thank you to Catherine, Claire, Esme, Flavia, Jenny and Katie for all their hard work training and fundraising!



>> Join Refugee Action's running teams for 5km runs in 2009

Regents Park, London – 10 May  
Heaton Park, Manchester – 28 June  
Womens Challenge – 6 September  
Places are limited so sign up now!

Call Emilie on 020 7654 7705 or email: [emiliep@refugee-action.org.uk](mailto:emiliep@refugee-action.org.uk).

# Helping parents in Liverpool



photo: Claudia Janke

Advocacy worker, Samwin, spoke to us about the Refugee Parenting Project in Liverpool and how the project has helped one such mother, Helen.

Our Refugee Parent Project supports refugee and asylum seeking parents to cope with difficult circumstances and face challenges. Parents who are bereaved, single, have mental health issues or who have lived through conflict, are given advice from case workers and encouraged to get support from others in similar situations.

The project helps parents to deal with difficult issues to reduce personal stress, incidents of domestic violence and abuse. Set up in March 2005, the Refugee Parent Project has already provided advice and support to more than 100 families. Some parents come directly to the project for help while others are referred to the project by our asylum advice team.

## Bringing parents and services together

Helen fled from Yemen due to fears for her children's safety among the violence. Now living in Liverpool with her four young children she is happy she can offer them a brighter future and fair opportunities in life. Helen was concerned that her children weren't getting the support they needed at

school. We put her in contact with Liverpool City Council Children's Services who helped her to make informed choices about local schools and gave her information about the transition process between stages of schooling.

"The Refugee Parent Project has helped me find out about child and adult education and housing. All I do is give the project a call and they'll do every thing to get me the right information. This is why the project is my first port of call."

Many parents find that the project provides an important link for them, enabling them to meet other parents.

## Providing advice and friendship

Helen said "Some of the people I have met through the project are my best friends now. I don't feel alone or isolated anymore. We share information and support each other, and we're not shy when we are together because we have the same situation."

Helen wanted to improve her English so we helped her enrol on a local English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) course. She is enjoying the class as it is giving her the confidence to meet people and become part of her community. She is now looking forward to seeing her children progress in their education too.

>> To find out more about the Parenting Project please visit

[www.refugee-action.org.uk/ourwork](http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/ourwork)

## Did you know?

Nearly half of all refugees are hosted by Asia, while Europe hosts 16 per cent.

## Spotlight on...



### **Mani Thapa** Basis Project Organisational Development Officer

#### When did you become involved in working with refugees?

I started working for Refugee Action in January 2002 after a manager at my local job centre in Leeds saw that my qualifications and skills matched those advertised for the role. I was so pleased when I got the phonecall telling me I'd got the job. The staff at the job centre didn't know I was a refugee from Bhutan and now I'm happy that I can use my skills and knowledge to benefit other refugees like me.

#### What is the aim of the Basis project?

'Basis' means Building and Sustaining Infrastructure Services. It's an England-wide service that gives one-to-one support to hundreds of refugee community organisations (RCOs) to help them manage, develop and sustain their organisations. It's funded by the Big Lottery Fund and run together with the Refugee Council.

We support RCOs by advising them on governance, financial management, project development and fundraising. Many of the people in RCOs are volunteers so they don't have the time to look at all these issues, so Basis can provide this vital support.

For example an RCO may think a children and women's project is a good idea but haven't the expertise to research funding or to see if the project is the best way to help.

#### What's a typical day's work for you?

It depends very much upon the availability of the RCOs. I have to fit my

time around them – so it varies a lot. I spend a fair bit of time in the office researching new groups that might like some support from us. Other times I have scheduled meetings with RCOs to discuss development plans and needs' assessments.

#### Can you tell us about a refugee community organisation that Basis has helped?

One of the local RCOs, the Leeds Sudanese Community Association (LSCA), needed a Development Worker and I helped them recruit a new staff member, Heather. I then helped Heather identify goals and outcomes for the organisation and gave her regular funding advice.

Many refugees and asylum seekers become isolated and lose contact with people in their community so we identified this as a need. We agreed that it would be a good to set up a luncheon club as an opportunity for people to meet and socialise in a warm, safe environment.

Heather successfully raised almost £6,000 for the luncheon club and a keep fit class, and the LSCA is now going from strength to strength.

#### What do you enjoy most about your job?

Helping RCOs who are very committed to their cause. I help them get the work done and help their community. I particularly like it when people stick to the timetable and engage effectively.

>> To find out more about Basis visit [www.thebasisproject.org.uk](http://www.thebasisproject.org.uk)

## In Brief

### Citizens for Sanctuary

We are backing a grassroots movement creating a network of towns and cities proud to be places of safety. The Citizens for Sanctuary movement wants to create a culture of hospitality across the UK for people fleeing persecution and war. Citizens for Sanctuary was launched in January 2009 to implement the Independent Asylum Commission recommendations for asylum reform.

>> To find out more visit:

[www.citizensforsanctuary.org.uk](http://www.citizensforsanctuary.org.uk)

### Refugee Integration and Employment Service

We are really pleased that the UK Borders Agency has chosen us to run a support service for new refugees in the Northwest, South West and South of England. Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES) plans to help 900 refugees find housing, employment and access other essential services in the next year.

### Welcome to Britain

Last summer nearly 1,000 people wrote a postcard to welcome refugees to the UK. These cards will be exhibited during Refugee Week in June 2009. Supporters at the Greenbelt festival told us what they would do to make a refugee feel at home when they arrived.



photo: Jon Mackay

# Why I support refugees



## Tanita Tikaram

Twenty years after her debut, Tanita's music continues to captivate audiences

**What made you first become concerned about the situation for asylum seekers and refugees?**

I can't remember when I first became politically aware or concerned about refugees - it just seems natural that a compassionate society would provide a swift and fair asylum system. It should not invest so much time and resources into making that process such a complicated, long and degrading one.

**How do you feel about the way asylum seekers and refugees are treated by our asylum system and the media?**

I don't know how policy is shaped - whether the government is reacting to the negative image of asylum seekers presented in the media or whether it helps to create that image to renege on its responsibility to those who are most vulnerable. Either way it is despicable.

Maybe because I am the daughter of immigrants I'm sensitive about how easy it is to demonise certain members of our

community. I can't imagine how a rational person reading any of the stories documented on the Refugee Action website could have any other reaction than to welcome refugees and be supportive of a fair and humane asylum process. But it would appear the media is more interested in preying upon our irrational fears: it usually presents asylum seekers as taking something away from us and threatening our social stability. When of course helping people who need protection, treating them with dignity and respect can only enrich us.

**Are there any particular experiences or people you met that particularly moved you?**

Not directly. But it saddened me to read some of the personal testimonies on your website and see the suffering that refugees have already endured in their home countries and the further suffering that they have experienced in the UK because of the harshness of current government policy.

Refuge is a biannual newsletter to keep Refugee Action supporters updated on our work and refugee issues in the UK.

We try to keep the cost of our communications down. But please let us know if you would prefer to receive *Refuge* by email.

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## factfile: Democratic Republic of Congo

- The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) gained independence from Belgium in 1960 and currently hosts the UN's largest peacekeeping mission.
- It is the size of Western Europe and has almost half of Africa's forests as well being very rich in minerals.
- Most Congolese live on less than \$1 a day as decades of misrule and two civil wars have destroyed the economy.
- In 1965, Joseph Mobutu seized power and renamed the country Zaire.
- In 1997 anti-Mobutu rebels captured the capital, Kinshasa, making Laurent Kabila president. The country was renamed the Democratic Republic of Congo. A rift between Kabila and his

former allies resulted in massive conflict, with rebels controlling large parts of the eastern DRC.

- Groups involved in the war signed a ceasefire in 1999 but fighting continued.
- An estimated four million people have died from violence, disease and malnutrition between 1998 and 2006.
- In 2006 Joseph Kabila won the first free presidential election for 40 years.
- Fighting restarted in 2008 in eastern DRC when Rwandan Hutu militias clashed with government forces. Over a million civilians have fled.
- Human rights abuses are occurring on a massive scale with high levels of sexual violence towards women and children.



- It is estimated that between 1997 and 2008 40,000 women and girls were raped.
- Between January and June this year 185 Congolese applied for asylum in the UK. Refugee Action believes these people should be given a fair hearing.