

ONE PLANET



LEEDS

SUMMER 2013



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ONE PLANET LEEDS SUMMER 2013

One Planet Leeds Summer 2013

Welcome to ONE PLANET LEEDS MAGAZINE and our second issue of the year SUMMER 2013. The magazine aims to work in partnership to support refugees and asylum seekers in Leeds. ONE PLANET Leeds is developed alongside Press Gang. Press Gang is an organisation that works with exiled journalist and activists to encourage positive representation of asylum and refugee issues in the media.

Find out more at:

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Special thanks to all that have been involved in writing or helping with this edition; thanks to everybody at LASSN and Press Gang members past and present

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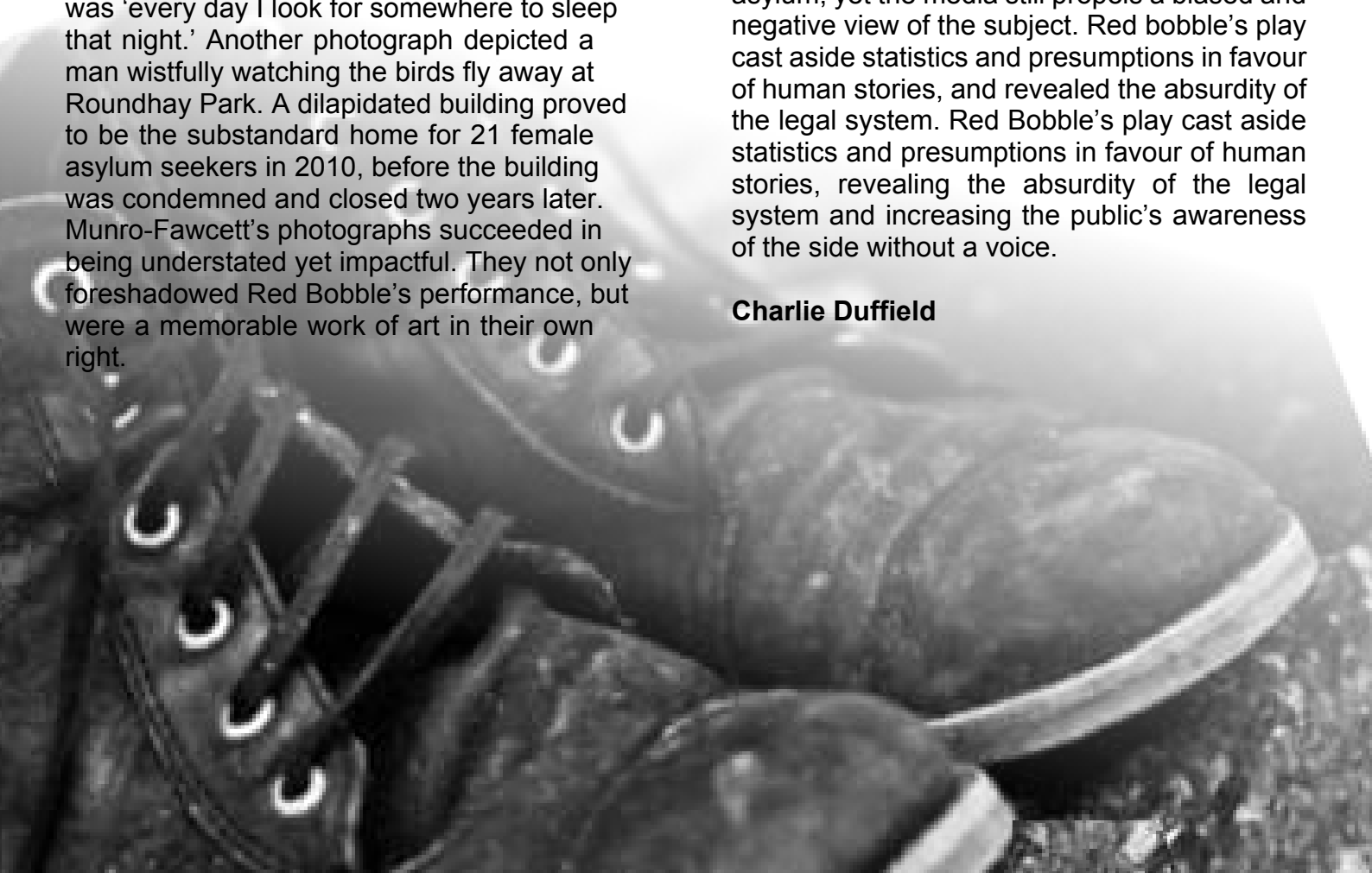
Review: To walk in your shoes

What if you were given one hour to flee your country? I doubt many of us have ever entertained such a premise, yet for many of those not as privileged as ourselves, the reality of such a situation is far from an absurdity. This was the tag-line for the Red Bobble Theatre Company's production of 'To Walk in your shoes'; a piece of verbatim theatre, performed at the bustling creative hub of Seven Arts Café in Chapel Allerton on the 10th May, which explored and exposed the real stories and testimonies of asylum seekers in Leeds.

Prior to the start of the play, audience members could peruse Rachael Munro-Fawcett's documentary photography exhibition in which 20 different individuals were photographed; in spite of the importance of anonymity for the subjects in ensuring their right to remain in the UK, Munro-Fawcett's work was intimate and thought-provoking and offered an insight into the daily plight of asylum seekers. One photograph of a destitute asylum seeker was captioned 'what do you do each day?' to which the poignant response was 'every day I look for somewhere to sleep that night.' Another photograph depicted a man wistfully watching the birds fly away at Roundhay Park. A dilapidated building proved to be the substandard home for 21 female asylum seekers in 2010, before the building was condemned and closed two years later. Munro-Fawcett's photographs succeeded in being understated yet impactful. They not only foreshadowed Red Bobble's performance, but were a memorable work of art in their own right.

'To Walk in your shoes' was divided into scenes depicting a different scenario and revealing home truths and a foreign insight; in 'let's talk about love' asylum seekers at a support group tossed a velveteen heart cushion between each other whilst declaring what they love about England. The monologist in 'Leg's out' discussed her quest for freedom and the lack of women's rights in her home country. Another woman explained how she came to England with the intention to study. She fell ill and authorities attempted to send her home where there was no job for her or prospect of treatment. Moreover, an administrative assistant within the asylum system bitterly revealed how asylum claim was a dispassionate search for evidence. The harrowing tales of women subjected to female genital mutilation impressed the desperation of so many who flee to escape barbaric conditions. Red Bobble's expert acting succeeded in relaying the testimonies of Leeds' refugees with great empathy; the play proved humbling, captivating and hugely insightful. Almost a decade ago the Press Complaints Commission issued guidance to address the pervasive inaccurate reporting on the issue of asylum, yet the media still propels a biased and negative view of the subject. Red bobble's play cast aside statistics and presumptions in favour of human stories, and revealed the absurdity of the legal system. Red Bobble's play cast aside statistics and presumptions in favour of human stories, revealing the absurdity of the legal system and increasing the public's awareness of the side without a voice.

Charlie Duffield



Football - A shared sense of belonging?

My favourite part of Refugee Week is undoubtedly the Refugee World Cup, particularly in a year when there is no Euro or World Cup to dominate football in the summer.

This year though, there is another event that will share centre stage in my diary that week - 'Football – A shared sense of belonging?' - a conference in Sheffield on "the role of football in the lives of **refugees** and **asylum seekers**". There I will hear the findings from three years of research by Football Unites Racism Divides (FURD), lead by Chris Stone, and focusing on three areas: recreational football, structured leagues, and the professional game incorporating fans' perspectives.

The name FURD does not crop up too frequently in the vast quantity of column inches that the mainstream media devotes to the England football team, but perhaps it should.

After all, they are the ones who discovered Kyle Walker – once of Sheffield United, now of Tottenham, and in Roy Hodgson's squads for England's most recent World Cup qualifiers. But even off the pitch, FURD are not far from the forefront of some of the biggest stories that England fans have digested in the last year or so.

When last year's European Championships in Poland and Ukraine were preceded by concerns about ugly racism, FURD were busy travelling around the countries with *Streetkick* – an inflatable pitch that can be set up anywhere and has provided opportunities for different groups to come together and get to know each other.

They did this in conjunction with Football Against Racism in Europe (FARE), with whom they are closely connected. FARE's most recent spell in the sporting headlines came in April when England fans were accused of racist chants yet this was just a momentary glimpse into their vast store of work done by an organisation who have been backed by European football's governing body, UEFA, for the last decade or more. FURD have also maintained close links with the 'Kick It Out' campaign which has been going for twenty years, in various guises, and is well known by regulars at matches across all the divisions in the English league.



Refugee
Week



Away from supporter issues, as part of their research project, FURD arranged sessions for refugees and asylum seekers to come and play football. On morning I went to see this, and afterward spoke to Leon, who hails from Sudan but is currently based in Sheffield. He has been attending the sessions for over six months, from the days when there were “just three or four people”, until now when they have a full and very competitive game. Leon enjoys this competitive side of it – a chance to “put worries aside for an hour or so, a stress release” - but he also appreciates “the social side, the chance to meet new people, especially from different backgrounds”.

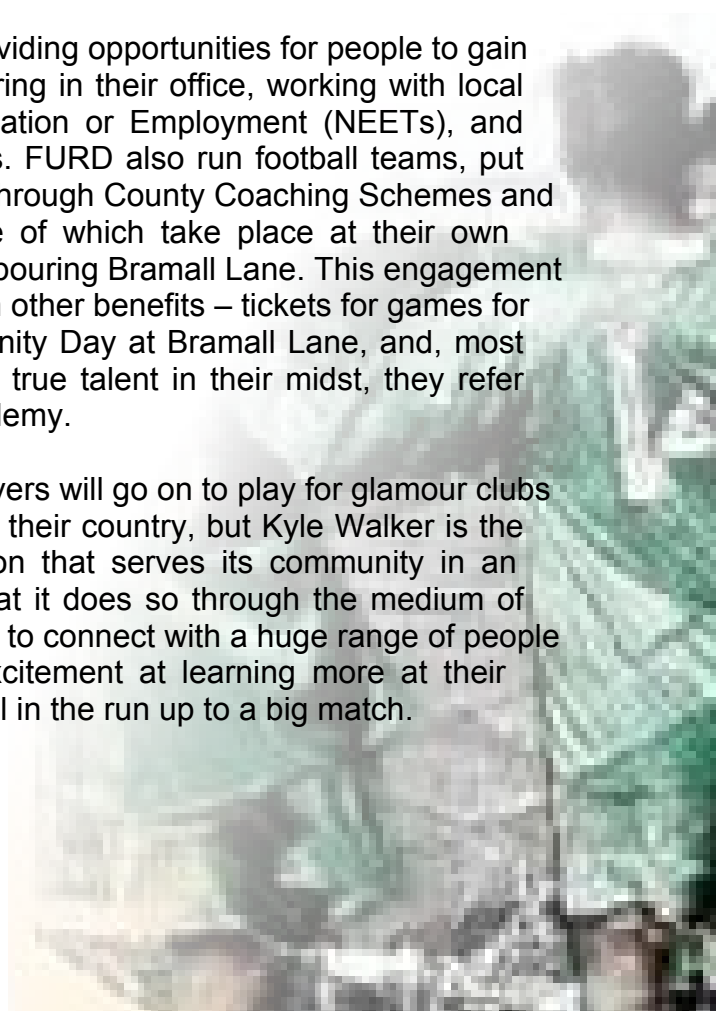


**football
unites**
racism divides

Other endeavours include providing opportunities for people to gain useful skills through volunteering in their office, working with local youths who are Not In Education or Employment (NEETs), and promoting diversity in schools. FURD also run football teams, put members of their community through County Coaching Schemes and run their own courses, some of which take place at their own headquarters, others at neighbouring Bramall Lane. This engagement with the football club has seen other benefits – tickets for games for marginalised groups, Community Day at Bramall Lane, and, most notably of all, when they find true talent in their midst, they refer players to the club’s own academy.

Of course, not all of these players will go on to play for glamour clubs in the top flight and represent their country, but Kyle Walker is the poster boy for an organisation that serves its community in an extensive variety of work. That it does so through the medium of football makes it ideally suited to connect with a huge range of people from all backgrounds. My excitement at learning more at their conference is akin to that I feel in the run up to a big match.

Steve McVeagh



Refugee Boy



Extract from the radio podcast with playwright Lemn Sissay and author of 'Refugee Boy' Benjamin Zephaniah

Press Gang: Could you introduce a little bit about yourself for our readers?

Lemn: Yes! My name is Lemn Sissay I am originally from Ethiopia. My family had to flee Ethiopia in 1975. In Ethiopia my father was a pilot for an Ethiopian airline; he would have been working around the time that Alem's [Alem is the main character in Refugee Boy] father would have been there. A lot of my family had to leave and a lot of my family had to stay. My step father was a minster under Haile Selassie. I write poetry and books, and I am here because I've had the privilege to adapt 'Refugee Boy', a novel written by Benjamin Zephaniah that sold more copies than all of my books put together!

Press Gang:: Why did you want to change the 'Refugee Boy' book in to a play?

Lemn: I wanted to do 'Refuge Boy' primarily because of Benjamin and the subject matter of the book.

Press Gang: Did you read the book before Benjamin was talking with you about it?

Lemn: Yes I did!

Press Gang: Benjamin can you introduce yourself?

Benjamin: My Name is Benjamin Zephaniah. My mother is from Jamaica and my father is from Barbados. I was born in England, but I have an African heart so I'm an internationalist. I speak English, and I speak a little of Burudo and Chinese. I speak love, compassion and friendship to those who reach out to me. When I wrote the book 'Refuge Boy' I was living in East London. I came across refugees all the time, and realised that lots of refugees are taken for granted. It was then that I heard a story of a boy who had a horrific story; he watched his mother and father being killed in front of him, and I thought I had to write something about it. The reason why I chose the Ethiopian Eritrean War was the situation – I didn't want to write about the war itself, just the consequences.

Press Gang: If you wrote about 'Refugee Boy' in 2013 what themes do you think will come up?

Benjamin: Pretty much the same themes because people's attitudes haven't changed that much. All war is wrong; "peace" is the only way to get peace. Unless you have real peace you will only have the absence of war for a short time. We are one people. If you believe in God we are one people and if you don't believe in God then you must believe in humanity.

Press Gang: Did you get feedback from the Ethiopian and Eritrean government officials about this book?

Benjamin: Well I don't know what you call official, but I know that my book went to Ethiopia and was read. I respect that people over there haven't been here, and what happened to their children in Ethiopia was a long time ago.

Press gang: Did you know about Ethiopian life and culture?

Benjamin: This book is not only about Ethiopia and Eritrea. It could be about Bosnia, and it could have been about Christian Muslims in Nigeria or Hindu Muslims in the Indian human story.

Press gang: At the moment Ethiopian and Eritrean community groups here in the UK are living together with no problems. However there are many problems with political leaders and parties – what are your opinions to stop this conflict?

Benjamin: The problem with political leaders everywhere is that they are political leaders; they have power and sometimes we feel like we don't have power. The Eritrean and Ethiopian government and leaders should get together and have more love. In the 70s and 80s there were lots of racist politicians in this country, with stress flowing in rivers of blood.

Press gang: You remember the previous problems - do you think the UK attitude towards immigrants and refugees has changed?

Lemn: I think that when I was born there were such sayings as 'the world is your oyster', 'fly the nest, grow your wings and fly!' Immigration is part of who we are. It's within human nature and therefore it will always cause problems. It's not a racism problem; immigration is part of what it is to be human.

Press gang: Benjamin, do you want to add something?

Benjamin: People have always moved. Human beings are the only animals that can live anywhere on the planet. We are one people – that's the kind of thing you need to keep going.

Press gang: Ok thank you so much for your time

Zewdu Mengiste

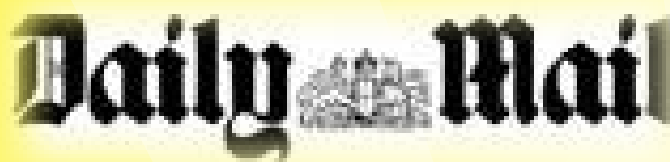


RASA

WAKEFIELD DISTRICT

Media Misperceptions

Through her volunteering work at RASA, Rebecca Shapiro helps to dispel popular myths and assumptions about refugee and asylum seekers



Article 14(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights claims that 'everyone has the right to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution'. Based on this, it would be natural to assume that those fleeing from persecution would be met with courtesy, at the very least. One look at the mainstream media, however, illustrates that this is not the case.

The Daily Mail regularly publishes scaremongering articles on immigration that portray refugees and asylum seekers as almost subhuman. These vulnerable people are viewed as too dumb to speak English, too lazy to work and on a one track mission to steal all our benefits. Peter Hitchens's Daily Mail feature on the immigration 'invasion' epitomized these stereotypes by claiming that 'they have the jobs, live in the houses, use the NHS'. Unfortunately, this view of refugees and asylum seekers as always taking from the state, and never giving back, is all too common. Even the more reputable publications have begun to follow the coalition's lead in blaming immigration for the multitude of ills plaguing the country. This is both dangerous and misleading.


To clear up a common misconception, asylum seekers are not allowed to work. It is not that they have no interest in contributing to British society. It is not that they are unskilled or unmotivated. It is not that they have gained some bizarre pleasure from filling out the fifty page long income support forms. The government does not let them earn an income for themselves. They are helpless and destitute; the state's meagre hand-out is their only option.

This leads onto a second misconception about refugees and asylum seekers that must be cleared up. They do not receive thousands upon thousands in terms of government support. If the newspapers were correct in claiming that asylum seekers are stealing all the taxpayer's money, then the real concern should be how little money that is. The support available to asylum seekers is minute. Adding up to just £5 per day, it is a mere half of full income support.

I am in a position to clear up these misconceptions with authority after spending the last six months volunteering two days a week at RASA, a small charity in Wakefield that gives advice and information to refugees and asylum seekers. Coming from a sheltered middle class suburb of London, the only preconceptions I had of refugees were the unforgiving ones I had learnt from the media. Thankfully, my experiences could not have found them further from the truth.

Every refugee or asylum seeker I have come into contact with has been a pleasure to talk to. With no qualification in immigration law, my work has been confined to helping with practical tasks such as calling up the border agency on behalf of clients and helping them fill out forms. I have found that everyone I have tried to help has been extremely polite, appreciative and proactive in trying to better their situation. It seems to me that if the people drawing up immigration legislation actually got to know these refugees and asylum seekers, then attitudes could, would and should change for the better.

The kindness of strangers



The words of Martin Luther King Junior are what motivate, Isa, the brown-eyed, six foot something Azerbaijani, whom has a glint in his eye as he talks about change and his homeland. Despite his impressive stature, Isa is bashful and self-deprecating, constantly apologising for what he calls '*terrible English*'. If I was anywhere near as accurate as he is in English, I would be far from apologetic. He stumbles over a few words but largely his pronunciation is clear and charmingly touched with his native accent. His efforts to learn the English language have certainly been successful.

Isa is a refugee. Originally from Azerbaijan, he fled prison where he was sent for teaching his mother tongue, Azerbaijani Turkish, to his community. Whilst in prison he was tortured. However, it was on a visit to hospital for the wounds he sustained that he seized the opportunity to escape. Isa said;

"A young boy helped me. He gave me Kurdish clothes and took me across the border in his lorry". I had no intention to leave Turkey, but I was given some drugs, sleeping tablets, and the next thing I woke up in the back of a lorry on the English motorway."

The long feud between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in 1988, in which some 30,000 people died, reached a ceasefire in 1994. The bloody massacre saw thousands of native Azerbaijanis displaced. Today the teaching of anti-government material is still prohibited and led to Isa's arrest. Isa said, '*I was teaching culture, dance, and mother tongue to my people, but the government didn't like it.*' The constitutional rules in Iran are frequently misinterpreted and harshly enforced, resulting in severe penalties for those considered to be going against government ruling.

"The Iranian regime presented many charges against me, including being a spy. I was sent to prison and would have probably been killed if I hadn't escaped. The Home Office gave me leave to remain in the UK, without having to go to immigration court, as it would be too dangerous to send me back home."

Being in the presence of someone with such a shocking background makes you feel in awe of his modesty and desire to positively impact peoples' lives. In spite of the sensational detail of his life so far, he does not come across as angry, but instead is respectful, charming and even shy.

His past makes his present accomplishments all the more humbling.

The man behind the glinting brown eyes and teddy bear smile has quite a résumé. Since arriving in Leeds in 2007, Isa has set up a community support group for asylum seekers, helping them with their own transition into English culture. He also teaches Azerbaijani Turkish to those who, like him, have fled Azerbaijan. He has organised community meetings with the Mayor of Leeds Judith Elliot, and president of the world Azerbaijani Congress Professor Tabrizi, and is an active campaigner. Isa explains;

"I am a political activist I believe change can only come through education...giving people the knowledge to make their own minds."

His ambition to see equality not just politically but for women, children, and religion creates the feeling I can only imagine being surrounded by the likes of Martin Luther King Junior, and Nelson Mandela. Isa single-handedly is determined to stop the impact of the Iranian regime for his country escalating. As he talks his hands animate his biography.

"Together with Amnesty International Leeds we launched a petition and organised a demonstration to stop the Iranian regime stoning women in Iran. Any society that does not recognise women's rights...is doomed" he says.

Soon we came to the sensitive topic of family. Much like a conductor in a calm section of music his gesticulating stills as he strokes his beard thoughtfully. Isa's family and friends are in danger for merely being acquainted with him, and his brother is in jail. Isa said *"I feel terrible because I know after my experience in prison he will also be experiencing the same...my mother and father tell me not to come back. I hope one day, in a few years, I can bring them all over to England"*.

But he is hopeful that Azerbaijan will one day be free.



'When the Mullahs are toppled, hopefully by my kind contribution,[and] a democratic regime is installed...when it becomes safe for me to go back, I would love to go back and help build the country further.'

For now he must continue in the UK, something that hasn't been without its challenges. During the home office interviews there was no one to interpret Isa, which he described as an alienating and vulnerable feeling; *'I was worried because I wasn't understood'*. A short while after moving into his home, the BNP also sent a 'disturbing' leaflet through his door defaming Turks.

However, he dealt with such challenges thanks to his inner strength, and those working in asylum and refugee organisations.

Isa said how he *'also had the support of LASSN'*. Leeds' Asylum Seekers Support Network (LASSN) offer a range of support including hosting and befriending the destitute and homeless, teaching English, and rectifying the many misconceptions surrounding asylum seeking. Indeed, research suggests 72 per cent of people overestimate numbers of asylum seekers entering the UK. In reality, Britain receives only two per cent of the overall population of those fleeing their country, as four-fifths escape to their neighbouring state.

With the help of LASSN, Isa has enrolled on college courses for community development, English, and IT. Isa helps out as an Azerbaijani Turkish interpreter for fellow asylum seekers at the Home Office in Croydon, and is hoping to progress to university to study cultural development.

Isa's gesticulations start up again and the broad teddy bear grin spreads once more across his face. When I ask if he is enjoying life here, his reply is suitable eloquent and apt; *'In my own country I feel suffocated. Here I feel I can breathe'*.



By Jennifer Gibbon

United Voices

Members of Asmarina Voices have faced difficult times yet have fantastic uplifting attitudes and show that through their smiles and singing their hearts out every Friday. Asmarina means “united” in Eritrean and that’s exactly what you will get from the women, even after only spending such a short amount of time with them you can immediately see the beautiful souls these strong women possess. Asmarina Voices Women’s singing Group was part of the Welcoming the World programme for West Yorkshire Playhouse’s production of Refugee Boy and received funding from the Home Office to promote wider engagement with the region’s refugees and asylum seekers. The singing group has continued to flourish with women from all over the world coming together, forgetting their troubles and belting out songs.

The group comes together every Friday from 1pm 2pm and runs until the 19th July. They are currently in preparation for their performance for the Wonderful Women of the World at the West Yorkshire Playhouse on Friday 21st June at 10.30am-2.30pm as part of 2013’s Refugee Week. Asmarina Voices will be performing Taylor Swift’s Safe & Sound and We Are Family by Sister Sledge.



West Yorkshire Playhouse, alongside with the Refugee’s Council’s Health Befriending Network and the women’s group in Leeds, offer weekly singing sessions for refugee and asylum seeking women with professional artist and musician Sophie Jennings who leads the choir.

Sophie says “My idea is to have fun on a Friday and I always feel happy when I leave. Some of these women only come to this during their free time, so I want to continue encouraging them to come and have some time for themselves. The songs we sing have not got too many words so there is no language barrier and it makes the sessions relaxing.

”Shreena Gobey a Youth and Community work student at Leeds Metropolitan University did her placement at West Yorkshire Playhouse and currently helps with the voices singing group. Shreena says ‘The group is open to everyone; it doesn’t matter if you can’t sing it’s all about enjoying music and having a bit of a social’.

Kadija Ollow

*“I always
feel happy
when I
Leave”*

Leeds Women's Refugee Group



In preparation for Refugee Week, the Refugee Council's women's group designed and painted a poster for the 6th Annual Leeds Refugee World Cup! The Leeds Refugee Council Women's group aims to provide a warm, safe, and fun environment where women can feel free and relaxed. The women's group offers English lessons and fun activities; during Refugee Week they are making rice flowers and having stories from around the world. Women can also learn new skills, such as first aid, which are empowering and help build their self-confidence. The Women's group runs every morning between 10 and 12 at the Refugee Council, and all refugee women and their young children are welcome so come along!

*a warm, safe, and fun environment
where women can feel free and relaxed*





All at Abigail Housing are enjoying the summer sun – well, the little flashes of it that we get every now and again. As regular OPL readers will know, Abigail provides supported housing for 2 groups of people - new homeless refugees and refused asylum seekers. We do the refugee work in Leeds and the asylum seeker work in Bradford. We plan to recruit a new Housing Support Worker over the summer, so watch out for that on our web site – www.abigailhousing.org.uk We'll be looking for a car driver / owner with some experience of doing housing support.

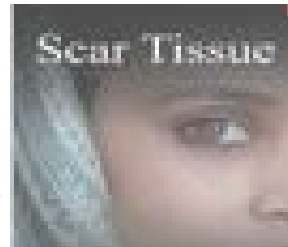
Our refugee project is looking forward to taking on 2 new 4 bed houses over the summer. This will take us up to 60 bed spaces in Leeds.

The project could really do with a volunteer to look after our bedding / household stores. We have stores in our Leeds office and in a basement of one of our houses in LS6. Please contact us via the web site if you want more info. The job would only require a couple of hours a week.

Welfare reform continues to be a challenge to us – in particular the ending of the Social Fund in March. We're slowly getting use to the new Leeds City Council Local Welfare Support Scheme (difficult to make into an easy acronym). For those who have applied and been successful, this has proved a great help, but the scheme doesn't recognise new refugees as vulnerable per se, which we regret.

John Hebden

David Skivington has just written his first book. *Scar Tissue* is a crime thriller which raises awareness of human trafficking and also the caste system in India. David was an English at Home tutor for LASSN and managed the project until going to India to teach in an orphanage school. His book has just been published and is available on amazon.co.uk and kindle and can be purchased through our website <http://lassn.org.uk/> giving us a donation of up to 5% of the sale price



Volunteer Interpreters Needed!

Do you speak another language fluently and want to work with asylum seekers in Leeds? If so you would be most welcome at the Manuel Bravo Project! You would be interpreting for asylum seekers at their appeal or fresh claim-related meetings with legal advisors and in order to do this you would work alongside office staff, legal advisors, clients and other volunteers.

In order to carry out the role Interpreters would need to speak at least one language from the list below fluently, in addition to fluent English. You must be able to maintain client and Project confidentiality and observe appropriate boundaries at all times. You may also be called upon at short notice to attend a client meeting. These meetings usually take place on a Tuesday evening from 6 pm in Leeds city centre but Interpreters are sometimes required at other times in the week.

Languages required: Lingala, Tigrinya, Amharic, Arabic, French, Farsi, Kurdish, Urdu, Dari, Pashto, Somali, Swahili, Chinese*, Ndebele*, Shona*, Korean*

* Infrequently required

If this sounds like something you'd like to get involved with, please download an application form via the website at www.manuelbravo.org.uk by clicking through to the Volunteers' page and send it to jacinta.kent@manuelbravo.org.uk Full training and support will be provided and agreed travel expenses will be covered.

Jacinta Kent

