

# one PLANET



## LEEDS SPRING 2013

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# ONE PLANET LEEDS SPRING 2013

**W**elcome to ONE PLANET LEEDS magazine and our first issue of the year SPRING 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 organization 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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Edited by Jessica Duncan

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If you would like to contribute to the next Summer Edition or the Press Gang online Blog, please get in contact by emailing [pressgangleeds@hotmail.com](mailto:pressgangleeds@hotmail.com)

**To advertise in this magazine, please contact Richie on 0113 373 1759 or email [richie@lassn.org.uk](mailto:richie@lassn.org.uk)**

## Befriend a Refuge... Be a Friend of LASSN

Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network receives help from numerous volunteers and donors, enabling us to do the essential work of befriending, teaching, hosting and championing asylum seekers who seek refuge in Leeds. Without you, we can't carry on making a life changing difference to the people who most deserve our help.



This Spring, we are launching a new bulletin dedicated to the Friends of LASSN. It will bring you news about the difference our intervention has made to the lives of some of the most vulnerable in our community.

If you regularly donate to LASSN, we will send you the bulletin automatically. If you would be interested in becoming a Friend, please contact Richie on 0113 373 1759, [richie@lassn.org.uk](mailto:richie@lassn.org.uk) or visit [www.lassn.org.uk](http://www.lassn.org.uk)



# PAFRAS

## Ten Years Anniversary

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Valentine's Day 2013 marked ten years of Positive Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers. The past decade has seen enormous changes in with many new people coming to Leeds and bringing with them new perspectives, new customs and new ideas. Leeds has changed enormously, and for the better, as a result.

PAFRAS was originally set up as a welcome project, aimed at helping newly dispersed asylum applicants adjust to life in West Yorkshire. Since 2005 we've focused on combating destitution, mainly amongst people refused asylum and forced into poverty and homelessness as a result of deliberate government policy. Sadly this policy is one thing that has not changed in the past ten years.

In the past decade we've had donated to us and distributed between 70 and 80 tonnes of food in more than 20,500 food parcels to destitute asylum seekers. Our volunteers have prepared over 35,000 meals to feed the 42,000 visitors to our drop-in. Despite fairly consistently falling numbers of asylum applicants since 2003, the numbers of people accessing our services have risen steadily and been checked only, it seems, by our limits to our capacity to support people.

Destitution amongst refused asylum seekers remains a huge problem in our society today. There are no solid figures of number of destitute asylum seekers in Leeds, but in 2012 alone PAFRAS had 261 visits from new, destitute, service users.

In 2008, Iain Duncan Smith's Think Thank, the Centre for Social Justice, produced a report which was highly critical of the policy of forcing refused asylum seekers into destitution as a means of making them leave the country. The report argued that the policy was neither humane, nor effective and yet the policy continues under the coalition government.

Week in week out at PAFRAS we encounter people who have come to the UK seeking protection that they have been told they do not need. Many of these people would prefer face long-term destitution than risk return. But even those who might reconsider, if given the time and space to think, are not able to make those choices because their lives become consumed by the need to ensure their day-to-day survival in the context of declining physical and mental health which is the inevitable consequence of destitution.

The work that PAFRAS does is focused on providing practical and emotional support to these people, with the aim of enabling them to take stock of their situations and retake some control over their lives. This most frequently means supporting them to refocus their efforts on securing asylum in the UK.

Our survival over the past ten years has been largely dependent on the support of our funders and the people of Leeds and surrounding towns who have donated food, clothing toiletries and money for our service users. On our 10<sup>th</sup> Birthday, we'd like to say thank you to everyone who has given so much to our organisation and to the people we work for.

### Editor's Notes

- 1) Each food parcels weights between 3.5 and 4kg
- 2) All figures for 2006-present. We started distributing food in 2005 but figures for that year are missing.
- 3) More than 2,500 individuals have attended.
- 4) In 2012 PAFRAS provided 6,740 meals and 4,013 food parcels to 8,128 visitors to its drop-in. We have 261 first time visits by destitute asylum seekers.
- 5) In 2012 an average of 124 people attended PAFRAS drop-in sessions each week.

# Interview with Isa Turkoglu on the Just Play Football Programme

**By Steve McVeagh**

There are lots of people like me who enjoy football but sometimes our own skills never get seen because we can't find either a team to join, or the time to make the commitment.

For us, the FA's Just Play scheme is ideal. As the name suggests, you turn up and you Just Play. It is run nationwide, using local support, such as that provided by Leeds Refugee Forum.

I asked former international and professional coach, Isa Turkoglu, about Just Play and about his own journey too.

## **Can you explain what Just Play is all about and how you are involved?**

"Just Play is a national scheme, run by the FA, which aims to get people playing and enjoying football."

Anyone can set up a group. The FA will pay for the group leaders to become qualified coaches at Level 1 and will provide a starter pack of kit such as footballs, training vests, cones etc.

Leeds Refugee Forum worked with East North East Homes Leeds, the local Arms Length Management Organization (ALMO) to register for the scheme with the FA. I am helping them as a coach."

## **So have you coached before?**

"Yes I had coaching qualifications for children and young people from Asian FA in 2000. And last year, I have also qualified as a coach with the FA in Leeds."

## **So your coaching goes back a long way. What about you're playing days?**

"In Iran I was a professional footballer and played for many South Azerbaijani football clubs Motogen, Atlas Pood, Machinsazi, Tractorsazi, Saipa FC and South Azerbaijani youth and the under-21 national team. I was a student of PE at the University of Iran in Orumiyeh, and a football coach, training children and young people. This was from 1996-2002 but I started playing football when I was 6 years old."



“

***My name is Isa. I was born in Tabriz, the capital city of South Azerbaijan, which is in the north west of Iran. I came to the UK in 2007 settling in Leeds after escaping from prison in Tabriz, Iran, because I could have been killed whilst being tortured.***

”

### **Quite a career, any favoured memories?**

“My earliest memory was when I was 8. We were playing an under-12 final. There was a lot of snow. We finished the first half and went to the changing room. When our coach finished his speech I said we should wear our socks outside our shoes as the pitch will be icy. The second half started and we were playing easily, our opponents were slipping. We won 5-0. They couldn't control themselves or pass the ball to each other, but we were playing better than them.”

### **OK – so, what is it you like about football and what can other people gain from Just Play?**

“It is different for everyone; I enjoy the physical exercise, the competitive atmosphere and the team setting, also to make friends and a second ‘family’. One of the greatest rewards of being a football player is feeling like you are part of a ‘family’.

What I love about Just Play football is that it brings people together across religious divides, geographical divides, and political divides.

The game of football can always provide someone with an opportunity. It always gives people that feel like they have nothing, something to hope for.



# Book Review: Refugee Boy by Benjamin Zephaniah



Alem's English was quite good but he had never spoken English to an English person until he arrived in the UK with his father. Refugee Boy begins with Alem's journey from Ethiopia but the bulk of the book deals with his experience after he has been left by his father to claim asylum in the UK and enter the care system.

There are wonderful differences in culture and customs as Alem interacts with Home Office officials, judges, schools, social workers and foster parents. The story shows some of the incredible frustrations experienced by most people claiming asylum; the frustration of not being believed, the frustration of waiting, the frustration of enforced idleness and living in limbo. The book also illustrates the support many asylum seekers get from ordinary people in the UK.

The book is an easy read covering a difficult subject.

Although the book was written over ten years ago, Refugee Boy is being reborn for theatre in an adaptation by Lemn Sissay, poet, playwright and performer. It will be fascinating to see the stage adaptation and what Lemn brings from his own experience of being born to an Ethiopian mother, but raised in Foster Care in the UK.

Refugee Boy will be running at the West Yorkshire Playhouse from 9th – 30th March. On 9th March there is an opportunity to hear Benjamin Zephaniah in conversation with Lemn about the stories that inspired the book. There are also open days featuring a Question Time, cultural delights and a chance to meet refugee organisations on 16th and 23rd March.

**By Peter Richardson**  
**Director**  
**Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network**

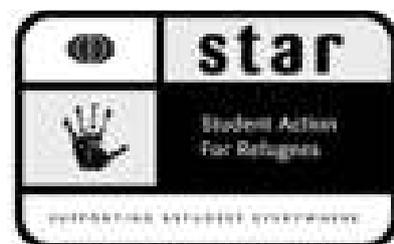
# Amnesty International and STAR Sleep Out

In the UK every year thousands of asylum seekers and refugees are refused asylum by the UK government. As a result of government policy they are forced into a life of destitution in order to encourage them to leave the UK. Asylum seekers and refugees are one of the most vulnerable groups in our society, fleeing from horrors such as war or persecution. Instead of receiving the UK government's support they are faced with destitution, leaving them penniless and potentially homeless if their asylum application is refused. Groups all across the UK have come together to raise awareness about this issue, pushing towards a future where refugees and asylum seekers are provided with some financial support and help from the UK. Amnesty International are working with the 'Still Human, Still Here,' campaign (<http://stillhumanstillhere.wordpress.com/>) to try and provide better living conditions and a fair asylum system in a manner of ways. This aims to be done by researching aspects of asylum policy and practices, coming up with ideas and proposals on how to improve these, and putting forward these proposals to the government.

Student groups all across the UK have also been staging sleep outs and the Leeds University Union Amnesty International Society recently worked with the student group STAR (Student Action for Refugees), braving Leeds' blustery winter weather in hosting their annual Sleep Out outside the university union last Monday. The aim of this

event was to raise awareness, money and donations of essential items (such as food, toiletries and warm winter clothes) for those refused refugees and asylum seekers who are not provided with any help and support from us in the UK. The idea of our evening was to create a fun and social event whilst still focusing on the immoral and unjust way thousands of people fleeing to the UK are treated each year. The night was a huge success, with Street Dance, Folk, Circus and Acapella Society all giving us wonderful performances, an incredibly energetic lesson in swing dance from Swing Soc and moving speeches from Laurie Ray from PAFRAS (Positive Action For Refugees and Asylum Seekers), Hannah Lewis Research Fellow from the School of Geography and Kaveh Azarhoosh, from Regional Asylum Activism. Students shivered shoulder to shoulder with non-students, happily giving up their night in solidarity with destitute asylum seekers. Even armed with layers of warm clothes, blankets and sleeping bags the night reached sub-zero temperatures and the freezing cold and hard ground greatly impacted those who spent the night attempting to sleep in such uncomfortable conditions, trying to gain just a tiny insight to what it is like for those scared people who merely seek a little help and support from us and our country.

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



# Leeds Kirkgate Market and the arrival of Leeds Needs

## How refugees and asylum seekers contribute and become a positive part of our society.



**K**irkgate Market, a popular and recognisable fixture in Leeds, welcomed a new

shop into the fold in September 2012 with the arrival of Leeds Needs, the result of a partnership between the Refugee Education, Advice and Training Service (RETAS) and St Luke's CARES. The Market is a vibrant hub of independent shops, stalls and food outlets in contrast to the chain stores and high street brands nearby. Leeds Needs is staffed by volunteer refugees and asylum seekers and so far 10 RETAS clients have undertaken a voluntary placement at the shop. According to Chris Brooks of RETAS, working in the shop is a "stepping stone" for refugees and asylum seekers. He explains that there has been a "dramatic change in terms of confidence [of Leeds Needs volunteers], the way they relate to the public and their English language ability". Volunteers learn vital retail skills and provide a service to the community in the heart of Leeds while securing a valuable source of income for the charities during a time of economic uncertainty.

A few who once used the services at RETAS Leeds have gone on to have successful volunteering experiences and participated in the receptionist placement scheme. After gaining refugee status they have gone full circle to now work for RETAS, helping new clients and identifying their needs. Many refugees know of the uncertainty when arriving and exploring a new place, which can be a daunting experience. The Welcome to Leeds project is invaluable for newcomers and now

those who are more established welcome others to the city and offer the important avenues to branch out and meet people. The initiative and entrepreneurial spirit of refugees and asylum seekers is evident also in other projects which aim to engage with the wider community. The UMOJAA Drumming project has held drumming sessions as a means of therapy for people suffering from mental health problems.

These are all achievements, both personal and social. In spite of these successes what can often stand in the way of further progress for some refugees is the language barrier.

As a hub of multiculturalism, Leeds is teeming with volunteers ready to teach English much like the Leeds University students of Student Action for Refugees (STAR). English classes are important for refugees to gain "exposure to native speakers and to build bridges" in the local community, as Chris Brooks explains. The Little London community centre transforms itself into a haven for learning on Saturdays. I went along to help one weekend and found the appetite for knowledge and eagerness to use English very palpable. According to Chris Brooks, learning English is "one of the top priorities for our clients, it is integral to integration". As English native speakers we are fortunate to have a skill that is very much in demand. While many students travel the world to take up positions teaching English as a foreign language, we can also put our skills to very good use by volunteering at home.

**By Felicity Sylvester**

# What is your map route of Leeds City?

## A collaboration between **A Quiet Word** and **LASSN**

# A Quiet Word

*A Quiet Word*, a performing arts company based here in Leeds, are greatly interested in working with people and where they live to explore places which are off the beaten track. In June 2011 they collaborated with a wide range of people to create a performance project called the *City Walk* as part of the *Ludus Festival Leeds*.

As a company they like to investigate the potential of working outside conventional theatre spaces, with the company name *A Quiet Word* reflecting the kind of work they create. The word is there, but it is quiet, it is not the primary driver of the pieces they make – that is the stories of the people they work with.

The *City Walk* explored the connection between the University of Leeds and Leeds city centre, highlighting the everyday life and kaleidoscopic history of Leeds. Here they were particularly interested in the signs and symbols which represent our city - the Owl for example. As part of a new project Alison Andrews and Matthew Bellwood, two members of *A Quiet Word*, are looking to explore the map of Leeds further. Inspired by the story of Joseph Priestly, the founder of the Leeds Library who was forced to flee his own country in 1791, Alison and Matthew are looking to collaborate with the *Leeds Asylum Seekers Support Network (LASSN)* to think about the ways in which people who are displaced within Leeds experience our city.

*A Quiet Word* wonder if it is possible to create new maps of Leeds that represent those stories and areas that are not represented on the map that you can pick up at the Tourist Information point. The project will run from now until the summer of 2013 in the first instance, potentially concluding with a performance that takes

audience members on these new walks, similar to the structure of the *City Walk*.

*A Quiet Word* would like to invite you to become a part of this process. They would like to meet you, listen to your stories and ideas either through interviews or simply accompanying you on the walk that represents *your* Leeds. Everyone within our city is important and everyone sees our city in a different light. It is these aspects that *A Quiet Word* would like to shout about, by providing this platform for stories to be heard that would usually be left untold. *A Quiet Word* hopes to present the city through a range of different perspectives.

If you are willing to tell your story or present your personal map of Leeds please contact Alison Andrews via her email [alisonandrews@mac.com](mailto:alisonandrews@mac.com) and contribute to what is sure to be an exciting collaboration. It is you and your ideas which will make it happen.

**By Georgina Wilkinson**





(Musab Elsanosi)

# Interview with members of the Debt Free Project

**By Rachel White**

Musab Elsanosi was born in Sudan and arrived in England as a refugee three years ago. He has been an activist for human rights in many other countries, in particular campaigning for rights for refugees. He has been working with the Debt Free Project for five months.

Solomon Kidane was born in Eritrea and has now lived in Leeds for three years. He has been helping various refugee charities in Leeds and founded the Debt Free Project in 2012.

I was lucky enough to be able to interview both on their work and experiences with the Debt Free Project.

## What are the aims of the 'debt free project'?

**Solomon:** "The main aims of the debt free project are to help refugees and asylum seekers understand their financial problems, and to help them live within their means."

## How did the idea for the project come about?

**Solomon:** "We noticed that we were speaking to a lot of people in the community who were reluctant, or didn't know how to deal with their financial problems. Often the problems were not big; they were things that could be sorted out with a simple phone call or letter. So we decided to set up a project that would show people how to deal with their financial problems."

## What are the most common problems that you come across?

**Musab:** "The language barrier is one of the biggest problems facing refugees. In many cases it prevents them from understanding their bills, or what benefits they are entitled to. It can lead them to misunderstand contracts, which in turn can lead to disputes and fines. Although the Citizens Advice Bureau can offer advice, many people do not feel comfortable talking to these officials."

**Solomon:** "Also in many communities being in debt is seen as something to be ashamed of, so these people are reluctant to ask for help. The benefit system is very complicated, especially for those who do not have a high command of English. There are translation services but these do not extend to things like filling out online forms, so these areas can become problematic. Often people only come to understand the system through a process of trial and error."

## So where do you come in?

**Solomon:** "There is less of a psychological barrier for people when they come to talk to us, and they feel more comfortable. We help them to understand their bills and debts by translating documents and explaining the system to them. We negotiate with the companies with whom they have debts and help to arrange manageable payback plans. We also make people aware of what benefits they are entitled to, and help them to fill out the forms needed to claim these benefits. The problems that people face are usually a question of misunderstanding, and so once we have explained to them how the benefits system, or a contract works, they are able to manage their own finances."

**Do you think that the recent welfare reforms will pose new problems for the people that you work with?**

**Musab:** "Absolutely. The people we work with already have money problems and these reforms will undoubtedly make things worse. Benefits payments will soon come monthly instead of fortnightly, which will make it harder for people to manage their money. Also because of the language barrier many people will not understand or be fully aware of the changes that are going to affect them."

**What do you plan to do to help this transition easier for the people you work with?**

**Musab:** "We have arranged a Q&A session with a member of staff from the job centre to help explain the reforms and the effects they will have. Of course we will also be there to help guide people through the changes."

**What changes do you think could be made to make things easier financially for refugees and asylum seekers?**

**Solomon:** "Simplifying the benefit system would make a real difference. The way the system is structured makes it very difficult for people to work out what they are entitled to, and often they have to put in extra application forms to obtain certain benefits. These benefits should be automatic."

**Do asylum seekers and refugees get enough help and support from the government? Or does this help come from outside parties?**

**Solomon:** "We are very appreciative of the government and the help they have given to this project. They do provide services to help asylum seekers and refugees, but many people we meet find these services daunting. We act as an intermediary between the government and the people. We can relate to their problems, having experienced some of them before ourselves, and this means that we can provide effective help."

**Do you feel positive about the financial future for refugees and asylum seekers?**

**Musab:** "The recession and the cuts are going to make things difficult for everyone. Yet we believe that because of the journey they have had to get to where they are refugees are risk takers."

**Solomon:** "Yes, and recessions have advantages for risk takers. Now is the time for small business and we hope that refugees will adapt well to the new system and start businesses of their own."



# Abigail Housing

shelter for those fleeing persecution abroad

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The Abigail Housing Destitution Project is currently housing and supporting eleven men and four women, who are working towards submitting fresh asylum claims. After submitting a new round of funding bids during the autumn, 2013 has started with three new pledges of funding, which we hope will allow the project to continue at least until the end of the year.

Abigail Housing's Refugee project is supporting 55 new refugees in a mixture of temporary and long term housing. It is bracing itself for the next round of Welfare Reforms. This will see the end of the Social Fund as we know it, Council tenants losing Housing Benefit if they have spare rooms and many people having to pay Council Tax for the first time.

Manuel Bravo Project is a charitable organisation which helps asylum seekers who are unable to find adequate legal representation. The Project is coordinated by a small team of paid staff and our services implemented by barristers, immigration specialists, solicitors, case workers, law students and other individuals who volunteer their time. We seek to complement our legal advice by referral to and working with other organisations serving asylum seekers.

We prioritise appeals but will deal with fresh claims when capacity allows.

For more information on referrals or volunteering, please visit [www.manuelbravo.org.uk](http://www.manuelbravo.org.uk) or call 0113 350 8608. Please note that the office is not staffed on a Wednesday.



Organisation for  
Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation

The OCRR is a local non-governmental organisation, which settles disputes by peaceful means and unites parties for sustainable peaceful coexistence. Our vision is to promote out of court settlements of disputes and minor crimes. We aim to reduce the level of criminalization of offenders of petty crimes by addressing their root causes through education and counselling.

To find out more please visit: [www.ocrr.org](http://www.ocrr.org)  
Or call us on: 01133731757