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One World Leeds

WORLD LEEDS



WINTER 2013/14



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Editorial

The heat is on: Get involved

Hello dear Readers,

Greetings and welcome to another edition of your magazine. To keep up with the pace and proximity in our work, we have decided to change from *'One Planet Leeds'* to *'One World Leeds'*. Our vision remains the same; provide a platform for the voiceless to air their views, tackle prejudice in all its forms, promote a positive understanding on asylum and refugee issues, change perceptions of what some mainstream media are portraying and provide asylum seekers with an enabling environment. Thanks to your collaboration, we have been able to come this far.

With UK elections in the pipeline, the last couple of months have been hot on topics related to immigration, asylum seekers and refugees. We followed with great interest from the ephemeral 'Go Home or face arrest' van adverts, to the new immigration bill, and several political debates, most of them with the intention to create a hostile environment for migrants. *One World Leeds* mirrored into some of the contradictory arguments regarding the contribution of migrants to the economy. On the one hand, there is the argument that immigrants come to the UK to get fat on tax payers' money while another school of thought holds that immigrants come to 'steal' all the available jobs.

So, the question we ask is, are immigrants lazy or hard working people? Are our politicians running away from the factual realities that immigrants are more of an asset than a liability?

According to statistics by the Refugee Council, most asylum seekers come to the UK without any prior knowledge of the benefits system. Most of them are simply running for safety. Thus, it would be wrong to assume that they risk their lives through challenging journeys just for the sake of eating off other people's sweat. Going by the words of George W Bush, 'Immigrants are hardworking people; they come with new skills and new ideas and work very hard for a better life'. Thus, it is time we give everyone a chance so that together we can be one people, in this one world, here in Leeds.

In this edition we take a ride through the life of some refugees living in Leeds, the challenges they went through and the contributions they have been making in the community. If you are unsure of how immigration laws in the UK can have an adverse effect on the life of someone, get on board and let the Yarl's Wood prison visit paint you the realities. These and more are what we have served for you in this edition. We hope you won't just enjoy reading, but will also have a change of perception and join our cause.



Wishing you happy end of year celebrations in advance.
Vital N.

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One World Leeds

Challenging negative perceptions of refugees

By Rachel

Frank, a refugee living in England, tells of his personal experiences of fleeing his home country and discusses the positive contributions he, and other refugees and asylum seekers are making to their new community.*

The negative perceptions of refugees and asylum seekers which often reverberate through the media and shape many people's views seem to be eating up the good side of our community these days. In recent years, there have been many debates, mostly looking at the negative effects of immigration, with emphasis on asylum seekers and refugees. Unfortunately, we often fail to see the great inputs being made by these groups of persons in our community. It is not a surprise to find refugees giving support in various walks of life today. This is thanks to the skills and experiences they brought from their homeland and the willingness to reshape them, so as to give back something to the community. A good example of those who have gone through this reshaping process is Frank, a refugee living and volunteering in Leeds.

Frank gained a Master's degree from the Leeds Metropolitan University. He has been volunteering with several charities including the Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network, the Red Cross' International Tracing and Message Service and Yorkshire Mediation, where he helps to settle workplace disputes. This is a true example of giving back something to the community. Despite being a refugee, he didn't just sit on his problems but went out to improve himself by gaining a valuable qualification which has enabled him to volunteer.

Apart from volunteering for charities, Frank and some colleagues have also set up an organisation dealing in conflict resolution and mediation which he describes as "...a social enterprise with charitable objectives". "We should be looking at rehabilitation [of young offenders] rather than punishment", says Frank. The organisation looks at the reasons individuals commit crime, looking at the development of a model of restorative justice where the offender and

the victim meet, which Frank hopes will provide victims with closure.

Despite coming this far, it hasn't been a bed of roses for Frank. He was forced to flee his home country some seven years back, leaving behind his family, friends and his job due to the political chaos that was claiming many lives. 'I had to flee my country as a last resort, because my life was at risk. It was a tough decision for me, but the only decision to ensure I see another day', he adds. Running seemed to have been the last option then, but knowing where to run to was not an option. Frank did not plan to come to Britain, "It was not a situation of pick and choose, you just had to get out", he comments.

Once in England he waited three and a half years for the Home Office to grant him refugee status. Waiting for this length of time was not an easy process as he was not permitted to work. Considering he had left behind a family that depended on him, Frank went through psychological torture imagining how his family was faring without his support. Despite applying a year ago to the Home Office for his family to join him, he is yet to get a reply. Frank is just one out of thousands of asylum seekers and refugees making invaluable contributions to our community, despite their past and present challenges.

He believes that there is still a lot of stigma attached to asylum seekers and refugees due to ignorance. However, he maintains that communication and the provision of credible and verifiable information is vitally important in dispelling these negative perceptions.

Frank's story of positive contribution contradicts the view of people who believe that asylum seekers and refugees are people who basically come into the country just to get fat on tax payers' money. Thus, instead of detention and a long waiting period for the granting of a refugee status, the system should rather be welcoming those who are willing to contribute.

****Frank's name has been changed to protect his anonymity***

The new Immigration bill: A tip of the iceberg

By Vital N.

The new immigration bill, which if voted for in parliament, will become law by spring 2014, has been labeled as the final blow to send 'illegal immigrants' packing. It is intended to make life tougher for them (including failed asylum seekers), thereby rendering it difficult for them to set up homes in the UK.

Besides immigration authorities, the bill provides room for other stakeholders in the community such as landlords, medical practitioners in NHS hospitals and bank authorities, to assist in enforcing some of the clauses. Shelter, access to a bank account and medical facilities are paramount factors to living, thus if cut away, the initiators of the bill believe it will render 'illegal immigrants' helpless to the point where they will have no option than

to go home. The big question is where is home? Someone who has been forced by challenging life threatening circumstances to flee his home basically has no other place to call home than their new found land. With this in mind, it is evident that the bill is set to create more problems than fix them because there seems to be no sign that this is an 'evidence based policy'.

Amongst others, the bill is intended to make it easier for the Home Office to identify immigrants by extending powers to collect and check fingerprints, powers to search for passports, and the powers to examine the status and credibility of migrants seeking to marry or enter into civil partnership. In addition, the bill will make it easier to remove and deport immigrants by cutting the number of decisions that can be appealed from 17 to 4 – preserving appeals for those asserting fundamental rights.

In a bid to make life more difficult for migrants already in the UK, the bill will be requiring private landlords to check the immigration status of their tenants, to prevent those with no right to live in the UK from accessing private rented housing and prohibiting banks from opening current accounts for migrants identified as being in the UK unlawfully, by requiring banks to check against a database of known immigration offenders before opening accounts. These and many more are the major points advanced in the bill, which has so far received great criticism from various points of view.

According to Don Flynn, Director of the Migrants' Rights Network, the new bill has a great potential of creating a hostile environment for migrants in general. Commenting on the BBC online, he criticized moves to restrict access to the NHS, saying: 'There are very small numbers of migrants who come here with pre-existing health conditions and find themselves registering with the health service. I simply do not believe there is any significant evidence that something like the NHS is a pull factor.'

In related comments still on the BBC online news, an organization representing private and public sector landlords said the measures would 'make it much harder for non-British people to access housing even when they have a legal right to live in the UK'. Gavin Smart, director of policy and practice at the Chartered Institute of Housing, said: 'Checking immigration status is complicated, so landlords may shy away from letting to anyone who appears not to be British.'

Some pundits who interact with the common man on a day-to-day basis and understand the realities of life at the lower level, hold that the situation may catapult illicit employment to a significant level, because many 'so-called' illegal immigrants, toil in parts of the economy that will crumble without their contribution. A hostile environment for one group of persons can inevitably mean a trying one for the rest of the population, which shouldn't be the case. Migrants and natives are supposed to live together in a mutually understanding manner, contributing to the growth and development of their society.

Without the possibility to appeal, there are chances that bad decisions would go unchallenged. With the numerous checks put in place, the probability for cash-in-hand jobs will increase, thereby reducing the amount of money that should have been entering the state coffers. Finally, people should be seen more from a human perspective than from an economic perspective. People who come to the UK for criminal purposes should be fished out and returned, while those with a genuine reason should be given a chance. Thus, it is hoped that an alteration of the bill will enable immigrants to live comfortably in association with the locals and not the other way round.



Joe: Shattered but steadfast to his dream

By Vital N.

If you were to go by individual cases, you would tell that the UK immigration policy has been a big blow to the lives of many asylum seekers. While many of them flee their countries with the hope of rebuilding their lives over here in the UK, to most, it has turned out to be worse than ever imagined. Confined to a dungeon of double trauma (challenges experienced back home and the ones here), there seems to be no way out than to keep hoping.

Joe is an asylum seeker who has been in the UK for the last 10 years now but still hasn't been able to get a legal status. A strong and well-built man in his early 40's, a first impression of him portrays a dynamic, motivated and kind hearted person with the willingness to help others in every way possible. With a constant smile on his face, you would hardly tell that he is undergoing any form of challenges unless you touch on the topic of work.

'I was an accountant back home, making a very good living until trouble struck my country. I saw relatives, loved ones and friends killed in cold blood. I realised if I did nothing to escape, the next time it would be my turn to suffer the fate of death. I decided to leave, not knowing exactly where I was going, and after a few weeks of travelling, I ended up in the UK.'

The drama from his country to the UK, the challenges he went through, the things he ate as food and the shelter he got, is one that can draw pity even from the hardest of hearts. But as fate would have it, Joe wasn't lucky enough despite the fact that he did all he could to convince the immigration authorities of his plight. If luck was based purely on hard work without opportunity, he could have been lucky. Joe was refused asylum and has since appealed the decision, which is yet to come through. 10 years have

gone by since he first stepped foot onto British soil and to date he knows nothing about his fate. Hope is the only thing he hangs on and can't imagine anything better.

'The first few years were horrible as I thought I was going to die of high blood pressure as a result of the traumas I was going through. But I managed to hold on to my faith and gradually started living the best of what I had as a life. I basically had no shelter, neither a source of income nor food. I lived off the goodwill of some kind hearted individuals in the community and charity organisations. I braced up and today I am grateful for the friends who have made it a responsibility to assist me. I was the breadwinner of my family back home but now it is different. I believe that anything that does not kill you, makes you stronger. I have practically wasted 10 years but I am sure that someday I will become more useful to myself and community.'

To keep himself busy, Joe has been volunteering with one of the charities in Leeds as a 'welcome guide' to new asylum seekers and refugees in Leeds. He enjoys doing this as it keeps him busy while making new friends on a regular basis. This is clearly an indication that if he had the status to work, he would be fully active and contributing his quota to the economy. Asking what he would love to do if he does get a positive response from the immigration authorities he smiles broadly and says he will immediately fine-tune his accounting skills and get back to business. *'I am hoping that someday my experience would prove to the authorities that immigrants are a great asset and not a liability as often thought. Most people become lazy only when they are left without a status for too long, but I am determined not to be one of them'*, He concludes.



A Journey into Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre

Personal Experience
Pete Richardson

I've never been locked up or held against my will, but today I will be visiting two women who have both been in detention for around 50 days. I've had to send my personal details in advance and I'm expecting to be searched, photographed and fingerprinted before I'm allowed through the gates. But the people I'm visiting have not committed a crime, have not been charged with any offence, are not waiting to come to trial and pose no threat to Britain. In theory detention should only be used to aid deportation but the experience of many asylum seekers is that detention is used arbitrarily as standard practice often without any rational explanation.

I remember the time a friend from church was wrongly detained. Police and immigration officials arrived at her house in Leeds early in the morning and bundled her away in her pyjamas. She was released two days later, because her asylum application was still ongoing. She was lucky that no one had been assigned her room in the shared house in Leeds. Many people come out of detention and end up in a new town or city away from any community or support they have built up while in the UK. My friend returned to Leeds with additional emotional scars caused not by her experiences of persecution in Africa but by her treatment here in the UK. Luckily, she's been granted refugee status and is busy working at Leeds University having just completed a degree.

I arrive at Yarl's Wood in the company of a Yarl's Wood Befriender. It's striking that wherever you get asylum seekers you always get support groups and charities springing up ready to mitigate the appalling situations many people face. It clearly demonstrates how many people in

Britain believe in justice and value our society for our positive Human Rights.

The Immigration Removal Centre is not an easy place to get to. Serco, the private company who hold the detention contract with the Home Office, do provide a bus to the station every two hours. The Centre is attractive with half-brick, half yellow walls and a light grey low-pitched roof giving it the appearance of a modern office block. Entering the buildings is not such a welcoming experience despite the staff being polite and helpful. First stop is the visitor's reception where I am photographed, have my finger prints scanned and my ID checked. I also have to leave all my belongings apart from coins in a locker before I can proceed.

Walking across the visitor's centre, I'm still expecting high walls and barbed wire but that's all hidden away from visitor's sensibilities. We walk again to a second check point. Only one person is allowed in at a time to preserve their dignity while being searched. After the search, my finger print is scanned again before I'm allowed through the air lock type doors.

The visitors centre itself is a light spacious room that has perhaps been consciously designed to look like a Starbuck's café. There are large windows on one side looking out onto a small garden with bright murals that attempt to hide the size and blankness of the walls. There are low armchairs sprinkled around coffee tables and in one corner there are vending machines where visitors can treat themselves or the detainee – which explains why I should have kept hold of my coins.

I'm meeting two women detained under the immigration act. Their cases are different but I quickly discover two things they have in common. Despite it being mid-afternoon neither woman has eaten and both of them talked about difficulties sleeping. The first woman is a couple of months pregnant and it cannot be good for her health to be incarcerated with so little self-determination. She described in limited English how sad she was. I only saw one smile from her, which ironically was when she talked about Gujarat food, before continuing to comment on how the meals provided were not appetising.

The befriender told me that many pregnant women have real difficulties with food and sleep. Meal times are set and don't take account of the difficulties caused by morning sickness and don't provide the flexibility for women to eat when they need rather than when they're told.

The second woman I met spent much of the time with her hands clenched on either side of her neck. Again the smiles were few and mostly reserved for when she talked about how much difference a visit makes to her. She described how, "In the dinner hall you see people crying - you cry. How can you eat?" Those tears are caused by desperation and depression and previously she has been "on watch" -with someone keeping her in constant sight because of fears of self-harm. This week she is due to present her appeal before a judge but has no solicitor to represent her and no medical report to provide evidence of the physical persecution she has suffered.

She'd spent the previous night doing paperwork to fax to the court this morning. She'd expected to sleep for a few hours in the morning but was

called for a medical appointment. Having waited in the medical wing for over an hour she was finally informed that the appointment had been cancelled because the medic was off sick which they could have told her when she first arrived.

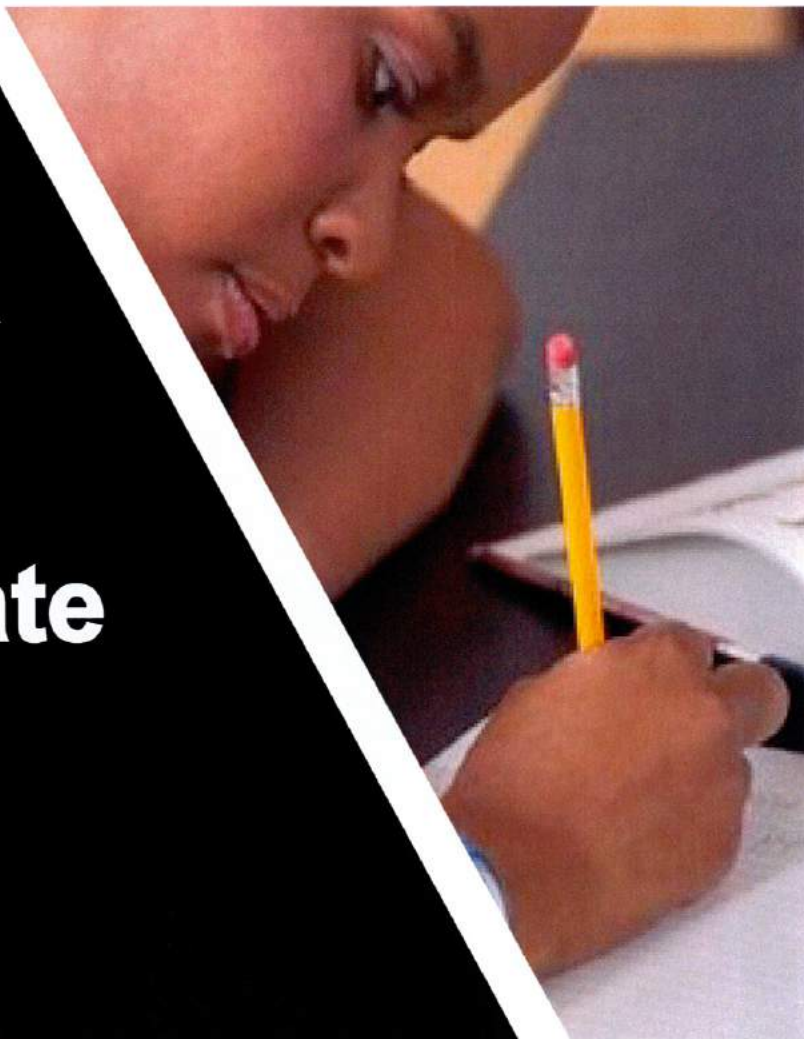
I'd expected to be intimidated by high walls, barbed wire and a security check that is more onerous than when visiting a prison. The five-metre, razor-topped walls of Yarl's Wood are safely hidden behind the friendly front face of the building and polite and efficient attitude of staff to me as a visitor. The two women I met had no control over their lives, had little hope and were totally isolated with the Yarl's Wood Befriender as their only visitor. One of them explained that during her asylum claim no one believed her and that meeting the Befriender made such a difference and gave her hope.

I've been working with asylum seekers for over six years and I am still astonished by how badly we treat them and how much they are vilified by the press and by politicians. My experience today has only deepened my concern about how the UK treats people who come here looking for protection. I long for the day when politicians would be brave enough to stand up for immigration and take a lead on promoting British values of fairness and concern for those in need.

If you live near one of the UKs twelve Immigration Removal Centres (Bedford, Gatwick, Heathrow, Strathaven, Hampshire, South Lanarkshire, Oxfordshire, Lincolnshire, Dover, Antrim, Manchester), why not consider volunteering. If you live near Leeds then come and join us at Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network and perhaps you can be the person who brings hope.



'English at Home' programme: An appropriate formula for integration



The Experience of Steve McVeagh.

The 'English at Home' project is an initiative by the Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network (LASSN), with the intention to support refugees and asylum seekers, who are unable to attend English classes, due to reasons of caring, disability or gender and other barriers. Consequently, these classes are taken to the door-steps of those who require them. Steve McVeagh is one of the volunteer teachers assisting in making this project a success. After studying a course in 'English Language Teaching' at Leeds Metropolitan University, he joined the project with the intention to expand his skills and also provide a beneficial service to refugees. He shares his experience as an 'English at Home' volunteer. Excerpts:

Many asylum seekers and refugees who arrive in Britain are equipped with qualifications and abilities but are held back by language barriers. I strongly believe that through learning English they can unlock the door to new prospects and become active members in their communities. I was slightly apprehensive when I first became involved with the program, worried that I would encounter the grim realities of life as a refugee and say the wrong thing or touch on a taboo subject that could be offensive

in light of terrible experiences. LASSN, however, dispelled my anxieties through training that prepared me for all eventualities. This preparation was invaluable and provided me with many instructive teaching tips to use in the sessions.

One student of mine, Ali, shared with me his story, where he was from and the circumstances that led him to flee his country. One student of mine, Ali, shared with me his story, where he was from and the circumstances that led him to flee his country. He also told me of his hopes for the future, in the near future he wishes to secure more permanent accommodation and in the long-term to return to the world of business. Through my personal connection with Ali, I was able to shape my lessons to reflect his specific needs, discussing matters that were relevant to him in order to improve his conversational English.





I approached the situation with Ali as I would any other situation requiring tactfulness and delicate handling. Ali however is just one student and LASSN helps many refugees who have very different many refugees who have very different circumstances and outlooks. What I would stress is the individuality of every student, always considering their hopes

and their fears, and shaping the lessons accordingly.

A volunteer's role in the 'English at Home' project is not just a matter of being able to teach a lesson but also, perhaps more importantly, being sensitive, considerate and building a rapport with those whom you teach. By giving just one hour a week to provide someone with English support, you are providing an invaluable service. You do not have to be a trained counsellor or English teacher; you simply have to be open, caring and understanding, leaving preconceptions behind.

both the students and the volunteers. I hereby encourage anyone with the interest in volunteering to come on board and get started. It is an experience you would never forget.

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experience

After one year of volunteering on this project, I have come to realise that it has been a very positive and enriching experience, beneficial to



INERTIA IN ODYSSEY

By Talent Charura

From my humble African cradle
A steady soft rhythm and rhyme
Echoing over mountains, and paths overgrown
Travelling through ages of time
Faces I see, times I've known
Brooks and lilies, this life song of mine
When we swayed and danced in the wind that's blown
When we sang and laughed till day break dawns

Like the full moonlight, our little minds were sure
To engrave such plight, a broken heart could cure
As a star filled night, our intentions pure
Clutching a vision, no evil could lure
But soon we grew and thought we knew
With zeal and ambition to shake off the dust
And amidst the many were, we the few
Refused our little minds, the corrupt of youthful lust

Until unpredictable inevitable, of what is and is to be
The genesis of a dilemma of an unknown destiny,
One day without tramp, warning or sound
Shadow of death encompassed us around
Then the trees would not sway
Nor the flowers bloom
And the sun shone not its ray
And it darkened at noon...

Guns, knives, cannon and war
Wails, screams and cries
Blood, lives, fire and foe
Dead bodies, vultures and flies

In that darkened, doomed noon night
A little boy shivering, all alone
Chocking in emotional torment and fright
Heart ache and grief gnawing at his bone

Though today, I no longer hold my beloved drum
Sometimes I hold a guitar played by the strum
The rhythm is mental torture and cactus pain
My lyrics are subdued silence and tears like fire on rain

Although guns, knives and cannon are gone
And I escaped like an arrow from an archer's band
From that moment, my mind still can't find morn
It lives with me, like the bow that remains in his hand

This poem attempts to show the ordeal of a victim of war. The use of the small boy is symbolic to the extent of vulnerability that an adult can face in a situation of terror and war. This poem is titled Inertia in Odyssey to express the crippling state and failure to move on with life regardless of the best help being offered, due to being haunted by past experiences, hence the victim in his state of odyssey to move on. The victim is inert in that past moment of terror. Although the victim may have survived a lot of physical, psychological and emotional torturous experiences he still appears to laugh and move on with, everyone else. Sometimes all those experiences will still remain on his mind, crippling him to live a fulfilled life or to reach his fullest potential and cannot be easily brushed away as the world would expect.

Finally the main purpose is not only to depict a problem but also to advocate for the importance of mental health support.

About Talent

I am a 26 year old legal advocate and trainee therapist of African descent. My inspiration for my creative arts is influenced by my work which involves supporting refugees, asylum seekers and other marginalizes individuals within West Yorkshire.

Sports and Leisure:



Leeds Refugee World Cup: Celebration of diversity through Football By Steve McVeagh



The 6th edition of the Leeds Refugee World Cup was celebrated at the Thomas Danby College with the Eritrean team emerging victorious, after a series of entertaining competitions. The day, which was organised by the Refugee Council, had as objective to bring together various Leeds-based refugee communities to celebrate diversity through football.

As a result, the games saw the participation of community teams from Iran, Azerbaijan, Uganda, Angola and Kurdistan. In addition to these were teams representing the Red Cross and the Refugee Council. The form of play was seven-a-side, with an 8 minute play time. In the final, the Eritrean team outplayed the Upendo team to win 4-0 and carry the day.

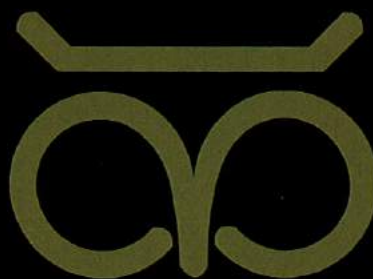
Remarkable about the event, was the fact that it reminded the participants and the entire Leeds community of the powerful extent to which football's appeal spreads across social, cultural, geographical and political boundaries. The event offered participants the opportunity to celebrate a series of activities both on and off the pitch, as a means to ease the worries, challenges and other difficulties they may be encountering in their lives. Men, women and children alike participated in these activities that featured plenty of chanting, laughter, happiness and an overall positive atmosphere.

The competitions could be judged a success on all fronts. In the wider context, the richness of Leeds' cultural diversity shone brightly and the manner in which all parties came together to contribute to the day allowed the city to trumpet the benefits of cohesive co-operation. Meanwhile, on the pitch, the truest test of any sporting competition was passed with flying colours. The contests were hard but fair,



there was quality aplenty to thrill the crowd and, when the drama finally came to a close, the best team won.

The overall success of the day came about, thanks to the different organisations that supported in various ways. Aston Villa Football Club provided banners, flags and programmes to enhance the atmosphere, Thomas Danby College played hosts to the event, the Leeds-based sports centre 'Sport in the City' provided equipment and all the games were expertly adjudicated by a team of qualified and volunteer referees.



One World Leeds



Adam Leake.

I am 23 and studying my Master's degree in Conflict, Development and Security at the University of Leeds. My research focuses on Turkey, Kurdistan and the Middle East. I spend my spare time closer to home - exploring the Yorkshire Dales and checking out local gigs.



Hannah Conway.

I am 20 and currently in my third year of a History undergraduate degree at the University of Leeds. My final year research is focused on Soviet history, specifically 'Late Stalinism'. When I am not studying I enjoy getting involved in press activities both university and Press Gang.



Peter Richardson.

I am a freelance writer who enjoys writing fiction for adults and children but during my six years of managing a charity supporting refugees and asylum seekers. I discovered that writing about real lives and real people could be just as interesting and much more



Rachel Flynn.

I am 22 years old and a third year journalism student studying at Leeds Met. My passions and interests lay with news and feature writing, along with travelling and learning about other cultures across the world. Along with this I am also a keen cyclist with a love for baking cakes.



Steve McVeagh.

I am 40, came to Leeds to study English Language Teaching after many years travelling and working abroad. I first joined LASSN as a teacher and now write for One World. My main interest is sports and I have produced several articles on refugees' participation in this area.

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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