

Improving information for refugees and asylum seekers who have recently arrived in Newcastle

Findings report

“I think, some people are really glad to help me. And I get more help here than in London”

“I get more help in Newcastle than in south of England”

“We lack support in our daily activities – we don’t go out”

“We don’t know where to go (to meet people who live in Newcastle)”

Introduction

A group of people are working to improve some translated information about health and social welfare information for newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers. The group sent out a questionnaire early in 2004 to act as a back up to discussions with the North East Regional Refugee Forum. We asked about the use and access to information and what people would tell someone who has just arrived in Newcastle or England.

Key findings

- Many people mentioned that things were very hard settling into Newcastle until they started ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages) classes. “Finding ESOL, fellow asylum seekers and refugee organisations” is the advice they would give to someone who has just arrived in England or Newcastle.
- Importance of ESOL classes is paramount and learning English was stressed as essential for contact with Newcastle people and integration.
- Organisations such as NERS, WERS, The Chat Shop HUB and Dolphin Street were mentioned the most frequently as places to go for help.
- There is an apparent need for emotional support especially among women, and for more community gatherings for people to meet other refugees and Newcastle citizens.

Responses

The findings are the responses from approximately 50 people, 41 of whom filled in questionnaires (individually or in a group) and some who held group discussions.

Languages

The languages people said they would like spoken or written information in were:

English	Turkish
Amharic	Kurdish
Tamil	French
Somali	Farsi
Russian	Swahili
Tigrinia	Lingala
Portuguese	Kinyarwanda (spoken)

Health Welcome Packs

All of those those in the groups and seven of the individuals stated that people had not had the health welcome packs. 12 individuals had had the packs (out of a possible total of 41). One mentioned that there was no pack in 2000.

Some people mentioned getting a lot of help information and maps from the Asylum Seekers Unit (ASU), but still had not had the health welcome packs.

Getting about

What helped finding the way around Newcastle?

- Friends, (nearly all said this)
- Centre (Drop in)
- Rose Lodge
- NEST (once there was a referral by the social worker)
- Fellow asylum seekers,
- NERS
- Chat Shop
- The Comfrey Project
- ASU
- A-Z map/map with pictures of buildings
- Refugee community organisations

One of those who had not had a pack said they were given maps but they did not help, as they did not know the roads or streets. Some people mentioned landmarks including:

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| • St James Stadium | • The Gate |
| • Monument Station | • Westgate Centre for Sport |
| • Central Station | • West Gate Road |

- Bike shops
- Post office
- Numbers of buses
- Road signs

Advice

Places people would go to included:

- Centres/drop in centre
- NERS
- Refugee Council
- Chat Shop
- Dolphin Street
- The HUB
- Friends from the same country
- Newbiggin Community Project
- WERS
- Right Project
- Brian Roycroft Centre
- NEST
- ACANE
- Regional Refugee Forum

All but two mentioned NERS as the key place for help. The two mentioned other refugee community organisations.

Getting friends and enjoying yourself

It was apparent that some people are extremely isolated. Some mentioned that they looked forwards to starting ESOL to breach the isolation. Others did not know where to go to meet local people and some found the lack of money prevented them from going out. Some people stayed in, as they are afraid of racism.

However others did go out, often for something arranged specifically for or by refugees. Some used the Centre for Sport; others walked and went around parks. College was mentioned a lot, and church frequently.

There seems to be gender difference. Although there was no question about gender, reading all the information in the forms shows that those going out and meeting people on streets or walking in parks were male and those isolated and staying in/not knowing where to go were female without children. Some women mentioned support from church women's groups and women's refugee organisations.

Asylum seekers without children are accommodated in hostels, isolated from Newcastle people and without the contacts that people make when children are at school.

Health

Most people knew to contact a GP rather than emergency services. Hospitals and clinic were mentioned appropriately. In one of the letters there is mention of using a homeopath.

There was also a pragmatic turning to friends or the bible for worries rather than ill health. Several people seemed or said they were unhappy, isolated and depressed.

It was clear that those who had not had a health welcome pack wanted information on getting a GP, dentist, and where health services are.

General – what would make it easier?

The general comments were most revealing of the absolute importance of the ESOL classes. Many mentioned that things were very hard settling into Newcastle until the ESOL classes and people stressed that learning English and finding fellow asylum seekers and refugee organisations would be their advice to new arrivals.

A couple of people mentioned difficulty over the Geordie accent. Some people found racism.

There were also many suggestions about what would make things easier, including

- Need for more community gatherings for people to meet other refugees and also Newcastle citizens (Or publicity about existing events)
- Maps to show parks
- Information about shop opening hours
- How to use bus timetables
- Leaflets in people's own languages
- African language leaflets
- Telling people about ESOL, NERS, ACANE
- Information about community centres and voluntary organisations

Some people expressed great unhappiness at having to live in a hostel with meals prepared by the hostel and of the use of frozen food.

“Life is not easy, people here NOT ALL are very racist”

“Going to College will help us integrate with Newcastle locals”

“Newcastle city is harsh the first month then okay when well settled. It's a good city with a lot of prospects”

If you want more information about the work or the group do contact
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How the research was done

We sent 10 copies of the questionnaire and a letter asking projects to help in completing them, to over 100 voluntary, community and faith groups, including refugee community organisations.

We have responses from approximately 50 people, and of those about 41 people who completed all the questions.

There were 19 returned questionnaires that appeared to be completed by individuals, although people who discussed it with each other in a group and then wrote very similar responses completed five. Several of those that appeared to be by an individual referred to 'we' in their responses.

People in groups of groups of 4, 6 and 12 completed three questionnaires.

The three groups were in hostels and others seemed to be in houses. The West End Refugee Service and the Comfrey project sent written responses about the questionnaires and discussions that they had held.

Most of the respondents were recent arrivals, and there seemed to be an even mix of gender although this was not asked about. There were comments that many people struggled with the questionnaire in English and even when there were voluntary interpreters it was hard to translate words such as 'enjoy'. An 11-year-old child completed one form, as the adult could not read it.

The numbers of asylum seekers speaking any particular language are small and so the report findings are not tied directly to particular languages as individuals could be identified. This work is continuing and a discussion will be held at the North East Regional Refugee Forum.

Group members

The group doing this work includes:

- Pam Jobbins, Newcastle CVS
- Susan Donnelley, Newcastle Primary Care NHS Trust
- Denise Briddon, Newcastle Interpreting Service
- Kath Patton, CSV Training and Enterprise North East
- Sead Masic, North of England Refugee Service
- Dr Mohamed Nasreldin, North of England Refugee Service