

Working with Disabled Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Information Workshop for Refugee and Social Care Practitioners

Monday 18th March 2002
10.30 am to 3.30 pm
Westminster Central Hall, London

Workshop Leaders : Dr Keri Roberts and Dr Jennifer Harris

Contact Details

Social Policy Research Unit

University of York

Heslington

York

YO10 5DD

Tel: 01904 433608

Fax: 01904 433618

Text: 01904 432626

E-mail: kr5@york.ac.uk / jh44@york.ac.uk

Project Website: <http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/research/summs/refugee.htm>

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List of Participants

Keri Roberts	Research Fellow
Jennifer Harris	Senior Research Fellow
Ghow Ratnarajah	Project Interviewer
Sian Moles	National Information Forum
Ann Darnborough	National Information Forum
David Haralambidis	Artsline
Megan Lloyd (PA to above)	Artsline
Neil Zambett	Mencap
Jane Reid	Migrant Helpline
Helen Murshali	Refugee Council
Jackie Matharu	Redbridge Refugee Forum
Ruth Renvoize	African Health for Empowerment & Development
Fidea Mahmoud	Migrant and Refugees Community Forum
Tavga Rashid	Iraqi Community Association
Janet MacGeorge	London Borough of Kingston
Sakib Podgoric	Bosnia Herzegovina Assoc. in Hertfordshire
Abdulkadir A Farah	Somali Disability Association
Bob Miles	London Borough of Hillingdon
Mohammed Hagi Munye	Somali Bravanese Community in Newham
Margaret Lester	Newcastle Upon Tyne
John Kilvington	Somali Cultural Centre
Wafa Shaheen	Scottish Refugee Council
Leanara O'Garra	London Borough of Barnet
Mavis Abadji	London Borough of Brent
Patricia Ross	London Borough of Brent
Asefa Qayyum	Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture
Michael Jeewa	Asian People with Disabilities Alliance
David Hughes (PA to above)	Asian People with Disabilities Alliance
Jane Abdulla	RNIB
Laura Luckhurst	National Centre for Independent Living

List of Participants – Continued

Geraldine O'Halloran	GAD CIL
Shirlyn Beetham (Interpreter)	Just Communication
Mike Ballinger (Interpreter)	Just Communication
Sunitta Karwal	Leeds
Richard Knight	Nottingham
Sead Masic	North Of England Refugee Service
Emma Garner	HBADP
Pathy	Tamil Relief Centre
Guy Butterworth	Disability Alliance

Workshop Timetable

10.30	Introduction and welcome
10.45	Quantitative research findings
11.05	Exercise 1 Lost in the System: Identifying disabled refugees and asylum seekers
11.40	Feedback
11.50	Disabled refugees and asylum seekers experiences
12.10	Exercise 2 Identifying barriers to participation in everyday life
12.50	Feedback
1.00	Lunch
2.00	Legal entitlements to social and welfare services
2.20	Supporting disabled refugees and asylum seekers - service providers experiences
2.40	Exercise 3 Improving your service to disabled refugees and asylum seekers
3.05	Feedback
3.15	Closing remarks
3.30	Finish and coffee.

Introductions and Welcome

Dr Keri Roberts and Dr Jennifer Harris both work at the Social Policy Research Unit, University of York. Keri has day to day responsibility for the Disabled Refugees in Britain research project, while Jennifer helps manage this and other research projects. Ghow Ratnarajah is one of the interviewers who worked on the project.

The Disabled Refugees in Britain research project is a collaboration between the Refugee Council and the Social Policy Research Unit. We are funded by the National Lottery Charities Board and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and we began our work in September 1999. We are due to finish work on the project in July this year, and a report on our work will be launched by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in September.

The full title of the research project is *Disabled Refugees in Britain: entitlements to and needs for social and welfare services*. We have

- carried out a survey of disabled people's and refugee organisation to investigate the numbers and characteristics of disabled refugees and asylum seekers in Britain
- interviewed 38 disabled refugees and asylum seekers about their experiences
- interviewed 11 reception assistant organisations and 7 local authorities about their experiences of providing services to disabled refugees and asylum seekers
- monitored changes in the entitlements of disabled refugees and asylum seekers.

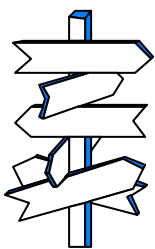
The purpose of the workshop today is to bring social care and refugee practitioners together so that you can hear about our research findings and spend time thinking about how you can

- sensitively identify disabled people in refugee and asylum seeking communities
- empathise with the difficulties and challenges faced by disabled refugees and asylum seekers
- assist disabled refugees in obtaining services
- improve service delivery to this client group.

We expect to learn from your experiences and hope that you find the day useful.

Finally, we hope you enjoy the workshop.

Keri and Jennifer.



More details about the Disabled Refugees in Britain research project can be found on our website

<http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/research/summs/refugee.htm>

Quantitative Research Findings

Finding data about disabled refugees and asylum seekers is very difficult. Neither the Home Office nor NASS collate information on impairments, and most local authorities can not provide information about the numbers of disabled refugees and asylum seekers they see. The Department of Social Security used to be able to say how many asylum seekers on Income Support received the Disability Premium (approximately 5%), although this source of data has disappeared as most asylum seekers can no longer claim income support.

As there are no official sources of information, we approached disability and refugee organisations with a request for information about disabled refugees and asylum seekers.

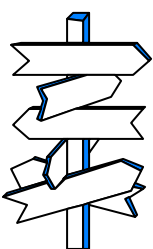
- Forty-four organisations provided details. They were in contact with 5,312 disabled refugees or asylum seekers from countries across the world.
- Most organisations were in contact with only a handful of disabled refugees and asylum seekers, but some organisations were in contact with very large numbers.
- The UNHCR estimates that there are 265,600 refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. If five per cent of these people are disabled, then there may be 13,000 disabled refugees and asylum seekers living in the UK.

Thirteen organisations provided further details relating to 111 disabled refugees and asylum seekers.

- Gender: Sixty percent were male and 40 per cent female
- Age: Ranged from 18 to 91 years but 40 per cent were aged between 31 and 50 years.
- Impairments: 52 per cent had physical impairments, 20 per cent had mental health problems, 13 per cent had sensory impairments, 5 per cent had learning difficulties (sometimes known as mental handicap) and ten per cent experienced multiple impairments.

Details of the cause of an impairment were given for over half the sample. The key point to note is the diversity of experience!

- 18 people had contracted polio
- 16 people had experienced a traumatic injury
- 11 people had been tortured or sustained war injuries
- 9 people had suffered a stroke
- 7 people had arthritis
- 6 people experienced complications from diabetes
- 4 people had eye diseases
- 4 people were diagnosed as having schizophrenia
- 3 people had cancer, 1 person had muscular dystrophy and 1 person had epilepsy.



The full report *Disabled refugees and asylum seekers in Britain: Numbers and social characteristics* is available at

<http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/research/pdf/nlcb1816.pdf>

Or contact the Publications Office on 01904 433608 or by e-mail at spruinfo@york.ac.uk

Exercise 1

Lost in the System! Identifying disabled refugees and asylum seekers

You have 20 minutes for this exercise

In small groups, with your neighbours, discuss these questions

- Does your organisation currently identify disabled refugees and asylum seekers amongst its clients?
- What kind of information would it be useful to record?
- How could you collect and record this information in a sensitive manner?

There will be a few moments for reporting back at the end of this and the other exercises.

Disabled Refugees and Asylum Seekers' Experiences

The project interviewers talked to 38 disabled refugees and asylum seekers. This included

- 14 Somali people, 11 Vietnamese people, 7 Tamil people, 4 Kurdish people, 1 Algerian person and 1 Rwandan person.
- 15 women and 23 men
- The youngest person was 19, the oldest was over 70
- 20 people had physical impairments
 - 6 had hearing impairments
 - 9 had multiple impairments
 - 3 had visual impairments, and
 - 1 had mental health problems
- Refugees, people with exceptional leave to remain, asylum seekers and people who had arrived in the UK as refugees, but now hold British Citizenship.

Key issues to arise

Isolation: Disabled refugees and asylum seekers can be extremely isolated, especially if they live in unsuitable accommodation. Many rely almost exclusively on a relative or acquaintance for support.

Communication Barriers: Disabled refugees and asylum seekers who are unable to speak English face particular difficulties. Deaf refugees can face barriers to learning BSL. Language barriers increase isolation.

Service Provision: Many of the respondents received no help from social services despite facing considerable barriers to participating in everyday life. Confusion about services was common and many people faced multiple barriers to accessing social and welfare services. Dispersal added to the difficulties faced.

Negotiating the Asylum System: Impairment related needs added to the difficulties which some respondents experienced when negotiating their way through the asylum system. E.g. travel problems, access to interpreters, lack of disability awareness.

Aspirations: Although not a focus of the interviews, the majority of those interviewed expressed a desire to either find work or to undergo further education or training.

Exercise 2

Identifying Barriers to Participation in Everyday Life

You have 40 minutes for this exercise

Read the following description.

“Mr Hu is an asylum seeker who is currently supported by the National Asylum Support Service. He speaks some English and lives in a 2nd floor shared flat with 3 unrelated asylum seekers. He would like to improve his English and update his computer skills. He currently receives subsistence vouchers worth £36.54 plus £10 cash a week. Mr Hu suffered a head injury last year. As a result, he now finds walking difficult, has problems with his memory and he frequently has seizures. Immediately after a seizure Mr Hu is generally disorientated and unable to communicate in English. The nearest shop which accepts vouchers is 1.3 miles from the flat. The nearest laundrette is 1.5 miles away. Mr Hu is registered with a local GP whose surgery is 1 mile from the flat.”

In small groups, with your neighbours, identify

- the barriers Mr Hu faces to participating in everyday life
- *Hint* Remember to think about his social activities, household chores, personal care needs, health needs and aspirations for the future.

Other suggested activities

Remember that every disabled refugee or asylum seeker will face a different set of circumstances. You might like to think about the additional barriers faced by the following

- A single disabled mother caring for 3 young children.
- A Deaf family who do not know British Sign Language.
- A woman who recently lost her sight and arrived in Britain alone

Legal entitlements to social and welfare services

People with Refugee Status have identical rights to British citizens with regard to social and welfare benefits and services. For example, they may be eligible for

- Income Support (can be backdated to when claim was made for asylum)
- Housing and Council Tax Benefits (can also be backdated)
- Local Authority Housing
- Job seekers allowance
- Social Fund payments
- Disability Living Allowance – a benefit for people under 65 who need help looking after themselves or find it difficult to walk or get about.
- Attendance Allowance – a benefit for people over 65 who need help with personal care or supervision to allow them to remain safe
- Disabled Person's Tax Credit – a means tested payment for working people whose disability puts them at a disadvantage in getting a job
- Community care services from local authorities. 'Community care' refers to interventions which enable people to achieve maximum independence and control over their lives – it can include, domestic services, personal care, aids and adaptations, etc.

- Legislation covering community care includes the
 - National Assistance Act 1948
 - Chronically sick and disabled persons Act 1970
 - Health Services and Public Health Act 1968
 - National Health Service Act 1977
 - Mental Health Act 1983
 - National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990

People with Exceptional Leave to Remain have the same rights as refugees to benefits such as income support, housing benefit and community care help. However, they cannot claim backdated benefits and are unable to apply for their families to join them from abroad. They may also face difficulties when requesting adaptations to their home as they initially receive permission to remain in the UK for only four years.

Asylum seekers

The Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 excluded ***Asylum Seekers*** from most social and welfare benefits and services. However...

Asylum seekers can apply for subsistence and accommodation support from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS).

Accommodation will be provided on a 'no-choice basis' and subsistence levels are 70% of income support levels (i.e. currently £34.62 in vouchers and £10 cash).

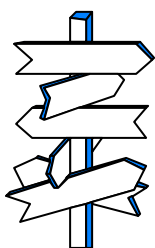
The Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 allows NASS to make '*special payments to meet particular needs (eg to someone whose particular medical condition gives rise to special needs)*'. Disabled or chronically ill

asylum seekers should therefore be encouraged to request such additional special payments from NASS. At present no set procedure for doing this exists.

Asylum seekers are entitled to NHS treatment. NASS supported asylum seekers are also eligible for a HC2 certificate which provides entitlement to free NHS prescriptions, dental treatment, wigs and fabric supports and eye tests, vouchers toward glasses and help with transport costs to and from hospital for NHS treatment.

Certain **Asylum Seekers** are still entitled to apply for local authority support under the community care system. These are:

- **Asylum seekers** with needs arising OTHER than solely through destitution (i.e. including those whose needs arise at least in part from disability or chronic ill health) under the National Assistance Act 1948. This issue was considered in the *Westminster City Council V NASS* court case in April 2001. Neither party suggested sharing responsibility for disabled asylum seekers, and the court decided that responsibility for meeting the needs of the disabled asylum seeker in question lay with the local authority.
- **Asylum seekers** who are leaving hospital after being detained for treatment under the Mental Health Act 1983.
- **Asylum seekers** who have been (as children) in local authority care – see the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.



Detailed information about entitlements can be found in the Legal Action Group's book *Support for Asylum Seekers: A guide to legal and welfare rights*.

Supporting disabled refugees and asylum seekers – service providers' experiences

Eleven people from different reception assistant organisations and 7 people from different local authorities were interviewed about their experiences of providing services to disabled refugees and asylum seekers.

Key issues to arise

Service Roles:

In general, reception assistant organisations see themselves as offering a signposting role, although disability awareness and knowledge of disability and community care services varies greatly. Local authority social service departments make different interpretations of community care law, often related to the numbers of disabled refugees / asylum seekers they see. Good practice in meeting the needs of disabled refugees does not exist everywhere.

Dispersal:

Disabled asylum seekers who challenge dispersal risk getting stuck in emergency accommodation for extended periods of time. NASS does not appear to have set procedures for processing impairment related requests. Dispersal can be particularly traumatic for disabled asylum seekers and can lead to delays in accessing medical and social care.

Joint working:

Successful joint working between reception assistant organisation and local authorities frequently depends on good personal relationships between key staff and a clear commitment to improving the conditions in

which disabled refugees and asylum seekers live. Relations can be strained,

- when local authorities with limited budgets receive increasing demands for community care assessments from disabled asylum seekers
- either party adheres to the view that asylum seekers are 'economic migrants'.

NASS

Reception assistant organisations and local authorities both experience considerable difficulties when communicating with NASS about disabled asylum seekers. The flow of information is frequently flawed.

Community Care Issues

Knowledge of community care entitlements and the procedures for requesting an assessment varied between reception assistant organisations. Some local authorities viewed asylum seekers claims as urgent, responded quickly to requests, and waived fees for services; others dealt with asylum seekers' claims strictly in turn and stated that they did not have the funds to provide services.

The role of voluntary organisations

Some reception assistant organisations approached disability and refugee charities for assistance in meeting the urgent needs of disabled refugees and asylum seekers. Local authorities were less likely to draw on the expertise and knowledge of voluntary organisations.

Exercise 3
Improving your service to disabled refugees
and asylum seekers

You have 35 minutes for this exercise

Remind yourself of Mr Hu's circumstances

In small groups, with your neighbours

Other suggested activities: Disabled refugees and asylum seekers are a diverse group of people, in terms of their age, gender, impairments, cultural background, religion, education and employment history and family circumstances etc.

- Consider whether the service offered by your organisation is accessible for
 - A young Muslim woman who has had no formal education and has mobility and dexterity difficulties
 - An elderly Vietnamese man who had an army career before fleeing his homeland and now has diabetes and a visual impairment
 - A single parent from Kosovo who is a wheelchair user and wants to go back to his teaching career

Summary Notes

Key points to remember!

Every disabled refugee and asylum seeker is an individual who will have unique needs and circumstances.

Do not expect to be an expert: Complement your own area of expertise by seeking advice from colleagues and organisations which have expertise in other areas.

Negotiate working alongside other agencies and organisations to provide a holistic service to disabled refugees.

Try to keep up to date with developments such as court cases, new legislation and advice offered by NASS. For instance the recent White Paper - *Secure Borders, Safe Haven* suggests yet more changes to the support system for asylum seekers – the scrapping of vouchers and introduction of induction centres. You may find the websites listed later in this workbook useful for keeping up to date.

Disabled Refugees Project – Future Plans

Work on the project is now almost complete and we are currently writing the final report. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has agreed to publish the report and it should be available in September 2002. We will send you details when they become available.

This research project focused on disabled adults in refugee and asylum seeking communities. There is a possibility that we may carry out research relating to disabled and chronically ill children and young people in refugee and asylum seeking communities in the future.

Useful Publications

Audit Commission (2000) *Another Country: implementing dispersal under the immigration and asylum act 1999* London: Audit Commission.

Disability Alliance (2001) *Disability Rights Handbook: A guide to benefits and services for all disabled people, their families, carers and advisers - Edition April 2001 – April 2002* London: Disability Alliance 26th

Disability Now *The monthly campaigning newspaper*

Dunstan, R (2002) *Process Error: CAB clients' experiences of the National Asylum Support Service* London: National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux.

Hayfield, C. (2001) *Signposts: Information for asylum seekers and refugees* London: National Information Forum

Home Office (2000) *Full and Equal Citizens: A strategy for the integration of refugees into the United Kingdom* London: IND Communications Team and Home Office Communication Directorate.

Home Office (2002) *Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with diversity in Modern Britain* Norwich: The Stationary Office.

Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 Norwich: The Stationary Office.

Willman, S., Knafler, S., and Pierce, S. (2001) *Support for asylum seekers: A guide to legal and welfare rights* London: Legal Action Group

Useful Websites

<http://www.asylumsupport.info/bulletins.htm>

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk>

<http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/>

<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/>

Research Works Information

Research Works is a series which provides details of the Social Policy Research Unit's research findings.

The purpose of the series is to

- Alert busy professionals and policy makers to research relevant to their work
- Direct readers to more detailed research reports and how to order them

Each issue of **Research Works** is posted on the SPRU website at <http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/>. Join SPRU's mailing list and you will receive notification when each new issue of **Research Works** is posted on the Unit's website. To join the mailing list visit our website or contact

Lindsey Myers (Information Officer)

Social Policy Research Unit

University of York

Heslington

York

YO10 5DD

Tel: 01904 433608

Fax: 01904 433618

E-mail: spruinfo@york.ac.uk

Working with Disabled Refugees and Asylum Seekers Feedback Sheet

We would like to know what you thought about today's workshop.
Please use this sheet to give us your comments or to pass on
information which you think we would find useful. You may choose
whether or not to include your name on this sheet.

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Please return to:
Dr Keri Roberts, Social Policy Research Unit, University of York,
Heslington, York, YO10 5DD.