



Welcome to the January edition of the WERS newsletter!

Festive Week 2010 - another great success!



WERS thanks everyone who donated chocolates, toiletries and small gifts to be distributed to clients and their families during Festive Week. Thanks too to the five Santas who gave out the hundreds of bags of presents. The photo shows the Monday Santa, Guy, with one of our clothing store volunteers, Salima. Glad you can breathe with that monster beard, Guy - keep smiling!

Lankelly Chase Foundation: a further grant for hardship

In December, Lankelly Chase Foundation awarded WERS a new £30,000 grant over 3 years. The money, for the hardship fund, is to be used to support destitute asylum seekers.

A big thank-you to Lankelly Chase for continuing to support this crucial work.

New Year Honour

I would like to thank everyone for all the wonderful letters, cards and emails congratulating me on the MBE. The award came as a total shock – but a very nice one! I am delighted and proud that the work of an asylum seeker and refugee support organisation has been recognised in this way. It is a fitting tribute to all the staff, volunteers and supporters who over the last 11 years have helped thousands of clients.

Campaign to save Your Homes Newcastle Asylum Seeker Unit We need your help now!

Just before Christmas we were dismayed to learn that the NE Contracting Consortium for Asylum Support (NECCAS) and specifically Your Homes Newcastle's Asylum Seeker Unit (ASU) had not been awarded a contract by the Home Office to continue to provide asylum seeker accommodation and support in our city. The contract has been awarded to just one provider - a private company called Jomast.

It is unthinkable to imagine Newcastle without the ASU in its role as a provider of accommodation and support for asylum seekers. WERS has worked with the ASU for over 10 years and in that time the ASU has also developed excellent partnership working with many other agencies.

The ASU team has always gone that extra mile for its clients, showing a deep understanding of the many and varied problems which asylum seekers face and this has been much appreciated by the hundreds of men, women and children who have been in their accommodation during the last decade. From our day to day contact with clients and their families it is clear that there is a very high level of satisfaction with the ASU's services.

The excellence of the ASU's service delivery has also been recognised nationally. In 2006 WERS was delighted when the ASU was awarded a Charter Mark award for customer service, the first to be awarded to an entity offering asylum

support, and then in 2009 achieved the Customer Service Excellence Standard.

Numerous voluntary and community sector organisations have benefitted from the ASU's Grant Aid programme. Over the years WERS was awarded a number of grants to fund a variety of work, including the counselling service and the admin worker's post.

I am also personally indebted to Vin Totton and his senior management team for all the advice and encouragement they have given me over the years. I have picked their brains on numerous occasions and they have always taken time to help.

Since 2000, the dispersal of asylum seekers to the most disadvantaged areas of the city has brought many challenges. The ASU has fulfilled a pivotal role in community cohesion in the city. The ASU actively works to avoid homelessness of clients who receive their leave to remain in the UK. Unlike private providers, YHN allows people to remain in properties until they secure permanent accommodation and assists them with advice and guidance throughout this process. We are aware that Newcastle City Council already has concerns regarding the impact of the contract decision on homelessness rates in Newcastle.

Should the ASU close, Newcastle would lose a fine organisation which has provided a first class service. We simply cannot understand how an organisation which has consistently performed to such a high standard and which has been the lynchpin of asylum seeker support for the last decade can have lost out on the contract. How can this decision be justified? Our concern is that the drive to engineer a lower price will result in a deterioration and narrowing of support offered to the client, with local agencies and services having to become more involved in day to day matters at a time of reducing resources.

If you would like to support this campaign, please write to any (or all!) of the following:

Lin Homer
Chief Executive
UKBA (UK Border Agency)
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Damian Green MP
Immigration Minister
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

or greend@parliament.uk

Your MP - <http://findyourmp.parliament.uk/>

Your local Councillors – for Newcastle - <http://democracy.newcastle.gov.uk/mgFindCouncillor.aspx> or visit your local council's website

David Faulkner
Leader of the Council
Newcastle City Council
Members Services Unit
Civic Centre
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE99 2BN

or david.faulkner@newcastle.gov.uk

Lord Shipley
Westminster
House of Lords
London
SW1A OPW

or shipleyj@parliament.uk

Thank you in anticipation!

Lindsay Cross

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Email: wers@btinternet.com

Website: www.wers.org.uk

Office & Clothing Store Opening times:

Mon, Tues, Thurs, Fri: 9.30am – 1pm

Wednesday: 11am – 1pm