



# READING REFUGEE SUPPORT GROUP

ANNUAL REPORT  
2011-2012

# Chair's Report

Yet again, as anticipated, a busy and challenging year ! This is the typical scenario for the voluntary sector. Despite this, Reading Refugee Support Group continues to provide support and learning for our clients.

Volunteers are an integral part of RRSRG. With the staff shortages we have suffered, volunteers have made a significant contribution to the operational side of the organisation.

We have also seen trustees resign due to other commitments. This has put increased pressure on the remaining trustees but they still continue to provide expert knowledge, without which RRSRG would be in a worse condition. Thank you to the management board.

The office staff (Yasmin Bador, Nina Luger, Julie Marshall, Amal Mohammed and Alison McQuitty) have worked tirelessly. Their passion, commitment, good natured approach and hard work have not gone unnoticed. In so many ways they have all far exceeded their roles. The trustees are grateful.

As you may remember, RRSRG launched an appeal last year at the AGM. To date we

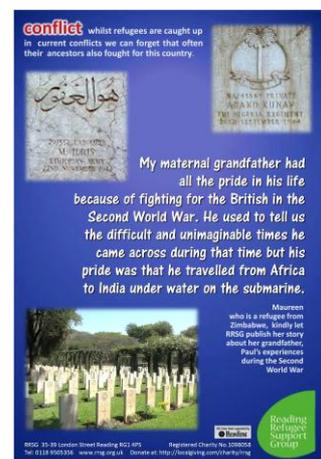
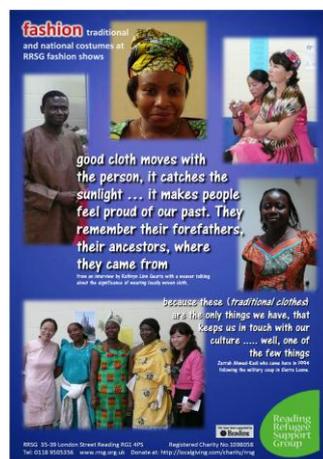
have raised £2,500. We are still looking to achieve the target figure of £50,000 but unfortunately, due to staff cuts, fundraising is slow and we desperately need more volunteers with or without fundraising experience to get this crucial project on the road again. The priority for the coming year is both to raise money but also to expand our local support base and increase membership – **so join up now !!**

Thanks are particularly due to Jo Morris who brought to our attention the EU project “Women Learning Together” and initiated links with Ruskin College and Dorchester Abbey. Thanks also to all those who have worked hard to make this project and the Thames Valley Women’s Network a success.

Our gratitude to all our benefactors, grant-giving bodies, statutory, corporate and individual funders and to Reading Borough Council who provide the majority of RRSRG funding.

Shamin Zafar

## POSTERS USED DURING BLACK HISTORY MONTH 2011



# Treasurer's Report

The financial year ended up with a deficit of (£7,171) compared to last year when we ended up with a small surplus of £1,474. This is a reflection of the extremely difficult financial climate in which we are operating.

## Income

Total income for the year 2011-12 was (£78,4046) compared with last year income of £119,652 a decrease of 35% and this is due primarily to the ending of Paul Hamlyn Foundation Grant and the sudden cessation of the UK Border Agency's "Refugee Integration and Employment Service" (RIES).

The audited accounts shows a total income of (£74,146): the difference is due to an historical overstating of the reserves which the Group's Accountants have now rectified to show true view of the financial position of RRSB.

Reading Borough Council continues to be our main funder providing (£47,0156) of income.

The other main sources of funding were from the EU Grundtvig Lifelong Learning Programme (£17,690) to cover the "Women Learning Together" Project of which £3,482 was spent during the year and the balance carried forward to 2012/13. Lloyds TSB Foundation contributed (£10,950) to cover the employment costs of a Volunteer Co-ordinator/Administrator and the Allen Lane Foundation who contributed (£10,000) towards the costs of our core services.

Other small grants and donations listed at the back of this Annual Report of which (£1,770) was received through Fund raising activities.

On behalf of the Reading Refugee Support Group (RRSB), I would like to thank our main benefactors for their continued support and indeed everyone who made financial contribution towards our work for the past year, whether big or small.

## Expenditure

The total amount spent this year was £81,317: a decrease of 31% compared to last year's expenditure of £118,179.

The main expenses were staff costs (£54,189), and premises (£8,463). There was a significant drop in payments for refugee welfare due to cessation of the Youth Project for under-eighteen after-school activities.

The Trustees have reviewed and changed the Auditors which led to a net savings of £397.

Previously, payroll support had been provided by Reading Borough Council but due to cuts in their budget the RRSB bookkeeper has now taken over this role.

The group ended this year with a deficit of £7,171. This coming year is extremely challenging as it is for the voluntary sector as a whole and the group future is still uncertain. However, the Trustees are committed to ensure that the refugee community in the Reading area continues to be able to access vital advice and support services.

John Turay

# Director's Report

**Last year was tough.....but we survived. We drew on the qualities of resilience, perseverance and patience that RRSG clients exhibit every day.** While the total number of new clients has decreased, the needs remain pressing and are rarely met within a short period of time. The services we offer can be life-changing for the individual and cost-saving for statutory authorities and the community as a whole. It is worth looking at the content of those services in more detail:-

- Through our advice service we provide accurate and reliable legal advice so that there is a prevention of exploitation and/or entry into the criminal justice system and abuse of immigration regulations. By explaining the healthcare system and the role of the GP as “gatekeeper” to the NHS, inappropriate use of hospital A&E resources can be avoided while our clients can access the healthcare to which they are entitled.
- The support service is designed for the most vulnerable: those who are destitute, homeless and hungry; but also for those who are on the road to making a new life. We work with the Red Cross and the faith communities to provide food and clothing; with volunteers and the London Metropolitan College in Reading to provide English & Life Skills support and with other agencies e.g. Barnado’s to offer targeted support to families with young children.
- Our public-awareness service and the telling of refugee stories contributes to greater understanding amongst the general public, voluntary and statutory organisations in Berkshire of the needs and experiences of this community. The friendships and contacts fostered by such a programme engender future cross-community approaches to particular issues and services: this in itself is the marker of an integrated society.

The exciting new developments this year have been within the support service. We are now able to offer a small homework club through an informal partnership with Abbey School: many thanks are owed to the staff and students for their enthusiasm and ideas to make this idea a reality. This report contains an account of the women’s projects that have developed over the year: “Women Learning Together” and the Thames Valley Women’s Network which are both inspiring in their achievements to date and their potential for the future.

I am very grateful for the logistic advice and support we receive from Reading Borough Council officers and Reading Voluntary Action. RRSG is equally grateful to all the grant-giving bodies, statutory, corporate and individual funders who financially support us: details are listed on the back-cover. 2011-12 was very challenging and without the commitment and dedication of the staff (Yasmin Bador, Nina Ligor, Amal Mohammed & Julie Marshall) and volunteers, it would not have been possible to contemplate this challenge and to them I, the Trustees and clients owe great thanks. The number of Trustees has been low this year and I would like to express gratitude to those who have had to take the strain !

**Alison McQuitty**

# Our Advice Service.....

We continue to provide front-line advice services to asylum-seekers, refused asylum-seekers and refugees, in spite of having to reduce the number of employed caseworkers because of funding cuts. In 2011-12 we attended to over 740 separate requests from over 190 clients.

## NEW CLIENTS

This year there was a reduction in numbers of new clients [49] compared to the last 2 years [2010 – 99 and 2009 – 113]. A reason for this may be that previously many of our new clients came from the Zimbabwean community whose asylum status has now been resolved. However, the majority of the new clients this year still came from Zimbabwe (16%) with significant minorities from Pakistan (8%); Afghanistan (6%); Algeria( 6%) and Ghana (6%). The new

clients comprised 39 individuals, 5 families and 5 single-parent families: this is further broken down by gender as shown in the table below. We continue to see single men dominating the overall number of new clients. New clients were seen for several types of queries; top of the list were asylum-related issues (24%), destitution (15%) and NASS emergency support (10%).

Family Composition	Percentage
Single	80%
- Male	55%
- Female	25%
Family	10%
Single Parents	10%
- Male headed	2%
- Female headed	8%

## ALL CLIENTS

In total we provided support and advice services to over 190 clients this year. Most came from Zimbabwe (16%) followed by Sudan (9%); Afghanistan (8%); Pakistan (7%); and Iran (6%). The range of queries that clients make who have been registered with RRSg for more than a year reflects the differing stage of asylum/integration-process that they are in. As well as asylum and destitution assistance, issues

such as family reunion, granting of travel documents, naturalisation, extension of Leave to Remain (18%); information about accessing health-care (7%); information about accessing accommodation (5%) are included. Each request takes a varying amount of time to resolve and the process may take many months as the case study below demonstrates.

*Client X and his family are from Democratic Republic of Congo and registered with us in November 2011 needing help to extend their visa as their refugee status was expiring in December. The client was advised to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR); this was applied for in December 2011. In January the client approached us again since he was having problems with his employer who was requesting to see proof from the UK Borders Agency (UKBA) that he had indeed applied for Leave to Remain. We called UKBA who advised that we check Royal Mail website for proof that the application had been received at UKBA. We printed the proof of receipt, gave this to the client together with a letter from RRSg to give to the employer explaining that the client has the same rights to employment as under his previous refugee status. We suggested that they call UKBA to confirm this. The client was allowed to continue working with the employer after this intervention from RRSg. He received his ILR documents in April 2012.*

**Nina Lugor**

# Making a New Life.....

**A key step that leads to speedy and successful integration is both the ability and the confidence to use English. This is the focus of our 1-1 English and Life Skills programme.**

This year we can celebrate a range of successes achieved by individual clients. Client L, despite his very limited language abilities, found ways during the sessions to communicate jokes that we both laughed at. Client M, a brand new arrival with no English, learnt to count and communicate with assistants in shops. Client X enjoyed reading and discussing a simplified reader of *David Copperfield*, proving to himself that he can appreciate literature in the language of his new country. Client Y felt able to visit a GP with her sick child without her husband to act as interpreter, a first for her. Client Z felt confident enough to move from our one-to-one sessions to a formal language class at the local college.

For each one of these clients there was a moment when they realized, 'Yes, I've done this and now I can take the next step'. The individual circumstances are different for each client, but the boost in self-confidence is there for each one. The satisfaction for a tutor is in working with the client to enable him or her to experience that sense of achievement.

Within this programme, an interesting development is being trialed in the coming year: a series of sessions is being held in which a mother and her two primary school-aged children attend together. The tutor can then work with the children on any areas of weakness, either subject-based or language-based. At the same time, the tutor will be able to work with the mother, helping her to understand the requirements of the primary school system and how best to support her own children to achieve their best in it. It is hoped that working with the family in this way will maximize the impact of the ESOL Project on clients' ability to communicate and function effectively in society.

In addition, RRSg has established links with London Metropolitan College based in Reading. They have offered several free places for our clients to study English for Speakers of Other Languages as well as places in IT classes.

**Helen Fraser & Nina Ligor**

## **CLIENTS STORY**

*My name is Ibrahim Idriss from Darfur Sudan, I am a refugee. When I first came to UK and claimed for asylum everything was looking strange for me, so it is a great challenge for me to start style of life totally different from what I used to in my back home country. The first challenge is the English language; the way people speak here was too fast with different accent, with much vocabulary, so to get in touch with people was not easy. With the daily needs of a person is to do so for example in shopping, or buses or trains. Also I found myself in need of keeping touch with many organizations related to my asylum claim like solicitors, refugee councils, medical sectors and the most important one is how to prepare for my substantive interview. But the fact that should mention is the polite way people treated me and the helpfulness they offer me during my journey from Huddersfield to Stockton on Tees to Reading, so finally I would like to thank everyone who offer me these hospitalities and those moment could remain in my mind for a long time.*

# Women Learning Together.....

Late in 2011, RRSG was successfully granted two years of EU funding, to work with other European countries such as Denmark, Belgium, Netherlands and Wales to set up a learning partnership for women refugees and organisations that support them. The partnership goals are primarily aimed at improving pathways into work.

The general purpose of this project is to enable women refugees to further their skills through communication and participation with other refugees from the countries mentioned above. Currently there have been four visits to our partner organisations. So far twelve women, including staff and volunteers, have been involved in these visits. **Reading hosts the visit in March 2013 !!** The network that this project intends to create is very valuable for refugee

women as it allows them to value their own strengths, raise their self-confidence and empower them to achieve their goals and provide better conditions for themselves and their families. RRSG has now launched the Thames Valley Women's Network (TVWN) to mirror the opportunities and benefits the EU Project brings.

Reading Refugee Support Group

TVWN has been funded by

EU Skills and Learning Programme

ruskin

refugee action

## Women Learning Together

An EU project involving Reading, Cardiff, Utrecht Antwerp & Copenhagen.

### Changes in Reading Refugee Support Group

We have started to develop the Thames Valley Women's Network which is a mirror of the European partnership.

Together we have fun, we learn and we give each other strength.

Informal learning and organising the TVWN

*I had the opportunity to be part of a group of 28 women that took part in Antwerp visit as part of this project. My experience was a very moving and influential one. This visit was designed in a story telling master class, where through storytelling, women broke the barriers between them and were able to tell their own stories and listen to those of the others. This was an incredible bonding experience because by hearing everyone's stories we quickly realized how connected all of our struggles had been. This provided for us an incredibly comfortable and heart-warming atmosphere having gone through the same general struggles and found a way to overcome them.*

**Flora Roshi**

# The Volunteers' Pages.....

As always the contribution of our volunteers is absolutely crucial for the amount of support we can provide for our clients. This year has been a busy year for recruiting and training volunteers. As part of the volunteering recruitment drive, RRSG attended the Student Volunteering Fair at the University of Reading and a well-attended Volunteer Induction Evening was held.

In total 16 volunteers gave the equivalent of 46 weeks of a full-time worker to the group contributing to a wide range of services including:-

- Reception services
- Administration services including managing the delivery of food parcels to clients
- One to one English tuition to clients
- Peer tutoring from the Abbey School students
- Casework advice
- Assistance at community events
- IT, design and fundraising support
- Coordinating “Women Learning Together” & the Thames Valley Women’s Network



Yasmin Bador

*“As a volunteer at Reading Refugee Support Group, I have been given a chance to experience various cultures, meet new people and explore a world outside of what I knew. From the very first day I got to interact with people and understand the processes that occurred: this included shadowing caseworkers and researching immigration laws. This quickly moved on to me giving advice to clients while supervised by a caseworker. This has all eventually led to me taking steps to become an OISC (Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner) qualified caseworker. As a student it pushed me outside my comfort zone as it pushed me beyond the theoretical level of law I had previously experienced. I would recommend that any student or person looking into becoming a solicitor or working in the immigration advice field volunteer at this organisation. It simply gives you a higher real world example of what it will be like to work in this field with a great support network.”*

## How We Celebrate Diversity.....

**RRSG plays an active role in community events including the Caversham Festival and Black History Month.** Over 150 children took part in the African Drumming & Story-Telling Workshops that were part of the Children's Festival and gave the frequent cry of *"how can we have drumming all the year round?"*



This year Refugee Week was marked by awareness talks in places as varied as Battle Library and Abbey School accompanied by posters (see Chair's report). The 2011 AGM, at which various short information films were shown, was held in the presence of the Mayor of Reading, Cllr. Debs Edwards who commented: *"I would like to see the films you showed be made more public. There must be a whole community of lost legitimate refugees in the UK, who haven't been legally represented properly. Lost voices and lost souls."*

# Reading Refugee Support Group

## INCOME & EXPENDITURE

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2012

	2012 (£)	2011 (£)
<b>Income Resources</b>		
Grants, Donations	74,113	119,584
Membership Fees	0	0
Interest	33	68
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>74,146</b>	<b>119,652</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>		
Wages & Salaries	54,189	73,057
Freelance & Consultancy	0	5,485
Administration Costs	6,147	8,443
Training	1,227	4,826
Travelling	349	170
Premises	8,463	8,396
Publicity & Publications	94	59
Events	4,793	5,653
Refugee Welfare & Expenses	2,783	7,137
Office Equipment	2,036	2,863
Membership Fees & Subscriptions	483	859
Refurbishment & Maintenance	0	0
Bank Charges & Interest	24	36
Professional Fees	729	1,126
Sundry Expenses	0	67
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>81,317</b>	<b>118,179</b>
<b>Excess of Income Over Expenditure</b>	<b>(7,171)</b>	<b>1,474</b>
<b>NET ADDITION TO RESERVES</b>		
Opening Reserves	21,231	19,757
Closing Reserves	<b>14,060</b>	21,231

# The Back Page.....

## **Trustees**

Shamin Akthar ( Chair)  
Victor Koroma  
Bet Tickner  
Andy Primrose (–resigned July 2011)  
Nyasha Taru (Hon. Secretary – resigned  
May 2012)  
Milcah Moindi (Hon. Treasurer - resigned  
Jan 2012)  
Owen Muganda (resigned Oct. 2011)  
Asaad Moosa (resigned July 2011)  
Lorna Duncan (resigned Dec. 2011)

## **Staff**

Alison McQuitty (Director)  
Nina Luger (Casework Manager)  
Amal Mohammed  
(Administrator/Volunteer Co-ordinator)  
Yasmin Bador (cover for  
Administrator/Volunteer Coordinator)  
Julie Marshall (Bookkeeper)

## **Volunteers**

Andy Primrose  
Jo Rado  
Puja Gurung  
Lucy Robinson  
Flora Roshi  
Tomson Chauke  
George Buchanan

Stephen Cook  
Helen Fraser  
Liz Bailey  
Vanessa Yarde  
Wayne Cole  
Nick Davis  
Alice Chigumira  
Jo Morris  
Greta Jackson  
Chloe Smith  
John Binama  
Keti Kobiashvli  
Rosita Atherley  
Elaine Edge  
Joanne Allum  
Robyn Appleton  
Tutu Melaku

## **Funders – for organisation**

Reading Borough Council  
The Grundtvig Life Long Learning  
Programme - EU  
Lloyds TSB Foundation  
The Allen Lane Foundation  
Berkshire Community Foundation  
Dorchester Abbey Tea-Room Fund

## **Funders – for clients**

The British Red Cross  
The Faith Christian Group  
John Allen Fund  
The Friends Meeting  
Feed the Children

Reading Refugee Support Group  
35-39 London St.  
Reading RG1 4PS  
Tel: 0118 950 5356  
Email: [info@rrsg.org.uk](mailto:info@rrsg.org.uk)

Visit us at: [www.rrsg.org.uk](http://www.rrsg.org.uk)  
Donate at: <http://localgiving.com/charity/rrsg>

Our vision is for inclusive communities where refugees and asylum-seekers of diverse cultural backgrounds are treated with respect; where their essential needs are met; and where they are enabled to play a valuable role within the wider community.

**Registered Charity No. 1098058**  
**Company No. 4515238**