

PAFRAS NEWSLETTER



Positive
Action
For
Refugees &
Asylum
Seekers

In 2008 PAFRAS had

6,112

visits from 'service users' needing to access services. The majority of these clients were asylum seekers who, as a result of government policy, have been forced into destitution: Homeless, not allowed to work, and vulnerable to exploitation.

Case workers administered **1,292** one-to-one sessions with PAFRAS clients in 2008; securing legal representation for over **50** people. Further, this case work also involved working with people in detention, torture victims, individuals with medical health concerns, elderly people, and children.

5,610 free hot meals were served at the PAFRAS twice weekly drop-in, and **2,840** food parcels were given to those most in need.

Britain is the fourth richest country in the world, but for some people, the food that PAFRAS provides staves off starvation.

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November - December 2008

A message of thanks to all those who have supported PAFRAS in 2008

2008 has been an especially busy year for PAFRAS. Policies that foster destitution certainly show no sign of abating and, as research published by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust earlier this year emphasised, an increasing number of people are being forced into homelessness. Furthermore, indications suggest that these trends will continue. The rights of asylum seekers continue to be fundamentally eroded and, as just one example, in November the New Labour government reinvigorated proposals to reduce avenues of appeal for those whose claims for asylum have been initially refused.

It is against this backdrop that PAFRAS

conducts its work, and much of this work would not be possible without the wide ranging support that we receive from across the country. We would consequently like to thank all of those who have, and continue, to give their time, assistance, effort, and energy throughout this year.

PAFRAS has benefited enormously from the incredible generosity of a range of Churches in West Yorkshire. Donations of food and financial

contributions from Churches have been vital for the services that we offer and we would like to thank each and every one that has supported us. The fact that there is not the space to individually acknowledge each Church is testament to the level of support that they provide.

Similarly, we would like to show our gratitude to the schools who have collected for us in 2008.

The work of our volunteers is integral, and we would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to the tireless energy and commitment that they show.

PAFRAS, quite literally, would not

be able to operate without them.

PAFRAS works with a range of organisations locally and nationally and this cooperation is vital for the work that we conduct. We would like to acknowledge LASSN, the Leeds Health Access Team, the Refugee Council, the Asylum Support Appeals Project, St. Georges Crypt, St. Vincent's Support Centre, East Leeds Health For All, RETAS, Alison Lord, Sue Matthews, Black Health Initiative workers

Steve Derrick and Ansall Broderick, Tim Dawtry of Stop Hate UK, Mike Richardson and Rosie Foster of BTCV, Rob Schiffrin, Kate Parker of the Mayisha Project, Art facilitator Kasia Baczkowski, the Feel Good Factor, Dot Read of the NHS PCT, St. Aidan's Church, Frances Creegan Touchstone, VSO, Amnesty International Leeds Group, Shelter, Park Ranger Daniel Malster, Nick Edwards of Solace, the Red Cross, FareShare, the various Quaker groups that have supported us, the Leeds Asylum Team, Skyline, Magiarí Díaz Díaz, Tangram Housing, St. Vincents Group, and the PAFRAS band.

It is further important to mention the work of those lawyers – most of whom are based outside Leeds – who have taken on the cases of PAFRAS clients. PAFRAS is funded by a range of organisations including the Henry Smith Charity, the Department of Health, the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, the LankellyChase Foundation, the Church Urban Fund, the funders for the Healthy Living Project, and the Funding Network. This funding is essential, and underpins our work. Finally, we would like to offer our thanks to the PAFRAS service users who, each and every week, teach us the true meaning of dignity.

PAFRAS 'healthy living' project

At the end of 2008 PAFRAS finished the 'healthy living' project that had been running throughout the year. This popular and influential project sought to improve the health and general well-being of destitute asylum seekers by providing a range of activities and services. These included health advice sessions, relaxation activities, and complimentary therapies. In January 2009 PAFRAS support worker Fidelis Chebe will have completed a review of the PAFRAS 'healthy living' project, which ran throughout 2008. This report will be discussed in more detail in our next newsletter. If you would like a copy of this report please ring Fidelis on 0113 2484147.

PAFRAS Briefing Paper Number 8

PAFRAS Briefing Paper 8 – *No direction home* - analyses the political context of returns policies in the UK.

Deportation has emerged as a central pillar of asylum policy under New Labour. Removals from the country are increasing at frenetic pace, often causing harm and injury (see below). However, removing people to conflict ridden areas, known for human rights violations, relies on a complex set of political and legal apparatus that is prepared to assert judgements regarding 'safe' routes of return.

Briefing Paper 8 subjects this framework to critical examination. In doing so it considers the manner in which countries are designated as 'safe' for refused asylum seekers on the one hand, whilst on the other defined as 'failed', repressive states. Briefing paper 8 argues that these decisions occur in a political context, and at times reveal more about foreign policy and international relations than they do about concerns for the human rights of those requiring asylum.

In order to set out this analysis, attention is given to the establishment of memorandums of understanding between countries regarding the safety of returnees; and the role of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in returns policies. For more information ring PAFRAS on 0113 2484147, or download this and other briefing papers at www.pafras.org.uk

Outsourcing abuse

Jon Burnett reports on a public meeting held to discuss the findings of 'Outsourcing abuse'; an influential dossier published in July, exposing the harms committed against asylum deportees and detainees by private companies.

'Outsourcing abuse: The use and misuse of state-sanctioned force during the detention and removal of asylum seekers' was published in July 2008. Co-written by Birnberg Peirce & Partners, Medical Justice and the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, its findings portrayed a litany of harm, violence, and abuse. Nearly 300 cases were detailed of allegations that private 'escorts', contracted by the Home Office to administer the control of asylum seekers, had beaten and assaulted their 'clients'. Yet mechanisms of accountability were fundamentally weak. As the authors of *Outsourcing abuse* asserted: 'We consider the evidence in this report reveals what may amount to state sanctioned violence, for which ultimate responsibility lies with the Home Office'.

On 10 December a public meeting, chaired by Lord Avery was held to discuss the findings of this report. Dr Frank Arnold, a medical expert who worked on this research, explained the



'Heathrow Escort' by Lucy Edkins—
illustrator of Outsourcing Abuse. Image
reproduced with her kind permission
<http://www.lucyedkins.com/>

range of injuries he has seen. Discussing that 'assaults meeting civil standards of proof occur regularly, and continue to occur'. These activities, as detailed in the report, have led to a catalogue of damages including organ damage, fractures, and dislocations. The most common form of harm was 'handcuff injuries'.

In a packed room in the House of Commons, David Wood – Strategic Director, Criminality & Detention Services Group, of the UK Border Agency – acknowledged the findings of the report, whilst rebutting some of its findings: claiming that he could 'not accept' allegations of 'systematic abuse in the asylum system'. By way of a response, Mafungasei Maikokera, an alleged assault victim, went on to reiterate her account of experiences of violence and abuse. Whilst a number of former detainees also asserted that they too had been victimised.

As Dianne Abbott MP made clear 'the test of a truly civilised society is how it treats minorities, and some of the most marginalised people'. On the evidence of this report, the UK is falling far short of these standards.

Outsourcing abuse is available for free download from <http://www.medicaljustice.org.uk/images/stories/reports/outsourcin%20abuse.pdf>

Zimbabwe Case Judgement

In November 2008 a legal ruling was made that Zimbabweans, unable to return home, may be able to receive protection.

Refused Zimbabwean asylum seekers have long occupied a Kafkaesque political space in the UK. Prime Minister Gordon Brown has been vocal in his condemnation of the country's rule, going as far as showing fellow G8 leaders a photo of the mutilated body of a victim of the Zanu-PF regime in order to press for urgent action. However, as has been pointed out by a range of organisations, the New Labour government have nevertheless allowed untold numbers of Zimbabweans in the UK to live in destitution – claiming that it is safe for people to voluntarily return back to the country.

Deportations to Zimbabwe were stopped in 2005 as a result of the deteriorating situation and the government was prevented from resuming forced removals earlier this year – despite attempts to do so. The November 2008 ruling then states that Zimbabweans who are unable to show their loyalty to the regime will face unacceptable ill-treatment if they return. Further, as a result of a general deterioration in conditions, Zimbabweans may be able to claim humanitarian protection.

PAFRAS are not qualified to give legal advice, and we strongly recommend seeking registered legal assistance if this ruling applies to you. For more information on this ruling, see the discussion by Frances Webber at <http://www.irr.org.uk/2008/november/ha000030.html>

Donations

You can now make a donation by debit/credit card on our website. Your donation can go further with the online gift aid function, with the Inland Revenue giving us an extra 28p for every pound you donate. Please go to www.pafaras.org.uk and click on 'Making a Donation'.

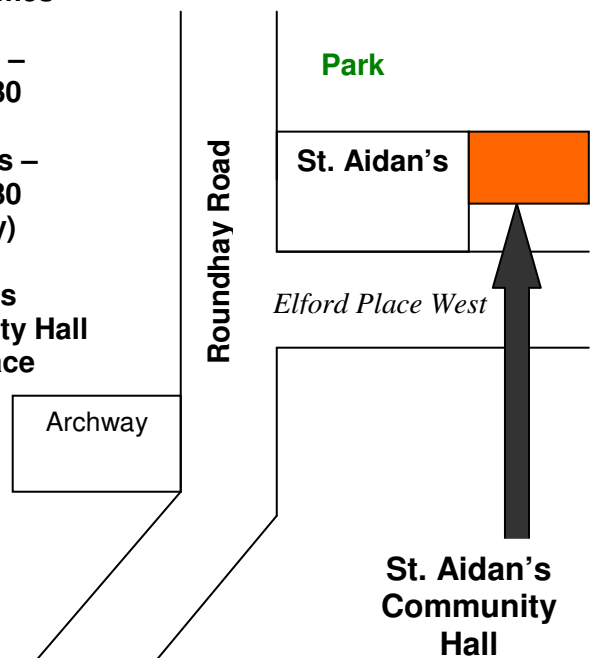
PAFRAS drop-in details

Drop-in times

Tuesdays –
10.30-12.30

Thursdays –
10.30-12.30
(food only)

St. Aidan's
Community Hall
Elford Place
West
Harehills
Leeds
LS8 5QD



Just Fashion

On 12 November the Refugee Council hosted a fashion show and auction. The event was designed to promote 'alternative images of refugees and asylum seekers', and featured designs from eight designers as well as models from around the world.

The hugely successful event was well attended by over 200 people, and attracted both local and regional interest. The funds raised were split equally between the Refugee Council and PAFRAS.



For more information on the fashion show, see <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/news/news/2008/november/20081124.htm>

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Just Fashion – 12 November 2008

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