

A place for refugee friends and family...

JRS-UK has been facing an increasing number of asylum seekers (over 140 a week) visiting the office on Tuesdays and Thursdays in the past few months and our office had become overcrowded on Tuesdays in particular. This had led to the atmosphere being less welcoming than we would have. This is why we took the decision to open a new centre on Tuesdays in the East of London to better meet our and the refugees' needs. Godfrey Veerasammy, a Jesuit Scholastic on Regency placement with JRS UK, now gives his first impressions of the new drop in centre, which only opened on 8th April.



Picture from the centre

My first impression as I walked through the door of Grosvenor Centre was 'I like this place!' I had a view of the garden beyond the door and Wow! This kitchen is really spacious! To which came the reply "...wait until the children start running about!"

The Grosvenor Centre is part of a complex owned and operated by the Ursuline sisters. On the same site there is a large school, a convent and the centre itself, which is normally used for conferences, meetings, etc. It is near Forest Gate train station and several bus stops.

This drop in centre was set up specifically to meet the needs of parents with children and people with mobility problems, as the office space for JRS at London Bridge does not allow for access to these groups in particular. The ground floor layout makes it easily accessible.

So far we have been able to conduct assessments, offer ongoing support, give travel grants, exchange vouchers, make grant applications and make referrals to other organisations. So it is very much business as usual! On a given day, we see close to fifty adults and sometimes as many as twenty young children.

Since its opening a month ago, we have found that almost everyone who visits us there has a positive word to offer about this new facility. Here's a sample of some of the comments.

'I must commend you all for a wonderful place, I like it very much.' 'This place is uplifting.' 'The children can play.' 'It's a bit far... but I can sit in com-

fort ... it lifts my spirit'. 'This is spacious!' 'The kitchen.... It would be lovely to have one of those in my house when..."

We have a team of twelve [slightly more than a cricket team] including refugees themselves who help to manage the operations and see that everything functions well. Some of these tasks include setting up the play area for the children, shopping for food for a shared lunch, befriending the refugees who come to the centre, and trying to keep the children engaged in some positive activity.

Over the next few weeks we will face some challenges at the site, not least of which will be organising activities to keep school age children occupied – as well as the younger ones – during the summer break! In addition the knock on effect at our London Bridge

Office has been increased usage of that office on Thursdays (around hundred refugees visit us on a Thursday there now making Thursdays as unmanageable and unwelcoming as Tuesdays were previously). We are looking for an alternative venue for the Thursday drop-in services too! Do let us know if you can think of a venue in London we might be able to use.

In the meantime if you want to visit the new centre at Forest Gate we are open from 10:30 am to 4:00pm on Tuesdays! You would be very welcome!

Marathon

While Jan was on track (no pun intended) he unfortunately suffered an injury to his left leg after 5 miles (happily nothing serious). He therefore had to drop out of the



Picture from BBC website
Jan is in the middle

marathon at that point. We are really grateful to him for making this effort.

He put in a huge amount of preparation work and with a bit of luck will raise his target of £1,000 regardless. He has already raised more than £850. Well done both to Jan and to all those who have supported him (you can still support him on <http://www.justgiving.com/janforjrs> or send a donation by cheque to the JRS office). **Any funds raised in this way will be used directly for our refugee hardship fund.**

Test your knowledge before the refugee week!

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Different Pasts, Shared Future



Refugee Week takes place from 16-22 June 2008.

There will be hundreds of events taking place round the country to try to promote positive images of asylum seekers and refugees and to bring more people into contact with refugees and asylum seekers.

Refugee Week is focused on allowing as wide a range of people as possible to come into contact with each other – an excellent way to raise awareness about refugee issues and to promote good local community relations!

If you would like more information about how to organise an event or if you would like to find out what is happening locally to you for Refugee Week, please check on their website www.refugeeweek.org.uk or telephone the JRS office for a print out of the events calendar.

In recognition of the coming Refugee Week, we asked two asylum seekers we have worked with, to tell us how The Jesuit Refugee Service UK has helped them?

Blanchard: "I am pleased to say thank you to JRS because you recommended me to complete a course in human rights advocacy with Education Action International from 24 September 2007 - 28 March 2008. I have successfully completed this training so I am very happy. Now, I can do something for myself, for other charities or persons, for my country and also for UK where I am living. I would like to take this opportunity to inform you I am working as a volunteer in ASIRT (Asylum Support and Immigration Resource Team - see www.asirt.org.uk) in Birmingham, to where I have been dispersed.

I wish all asylum seekers could do some training. They would profit from increased skills in many areas and could help others as well as it being better for their lives in the future. Thank you."

At ASIRT Blanchard is putting his human rights advocacy training to good use, as he is helping other asylum seekers by giving advice there and has been given further training so that he can give media interviews about refugee issues.

Diana: "JRS helps us with contacting solicitors by phone and it refers us to different charities for future support.

For those who don't speak English they find the interpreter to book GP appointments. JRS also helps individuals by contacting their MPs to let them know how long the asylum claims have been held with the Home Office and ask the MPs to write to find out what is happening. JRS also helps us to know our rights as asylum seekers while waiting for the decision to be made by the Home Office.

JRS takes a lot of care about our education - helping us find ways to pay course fees and providing books and materials for study. JRS also pushes us to learn English so that we can understand properly. They visit us if we are detained. They support us to meet our daily appointments for example to do with our immigration matters.

And when we meet at the centres JRS runs, they welcome us as their children; they encourage us to interact socially with each other."

Close encounter with two new JRS-UK staff



Margaret

On the 7th April 2008 two new staff members joined JRS-UK: **Sister Anne Elisabeth De Vuyst (Belgium) and Sister Margaret Baxter (UK)**. They will be (once training is complete) in charge of coordinating JRS-UK work in detention centres (in particular the volunteer visitors) and will also be involved at the new drop in centre in Forest Gate. **Indeed many other tasks are waiting for them!!**



Anne Elisabeth

Where do you come from? We belong to the international Congregation of the Sisters of St. Mary of Namur. Together, we have, clocked up some 14 years working with JRS, embracing the ethos of befriending, serving and advocating on behalf of refugees and displaced people.

What is your experience with JRS, Anne Elisabeth? My experience with JRS goes back many years beginning in Mexico, during the early part of the 1990s, working among the Guatemalan refugees. 1996 brought me to the Grand Lakes Region of Rwanda where I joined the first JRS team serving the refugees who fled from conflict in the east of Congo. In 2001 I undertook a new mission for JRS Malawi, as Country Director, where I worked among refugees from Rwanda, DRC and Burundi coordinating a variety of educational and social programmes.

And you Margaret? I joined the JRS team in 2007, in Malawi, as a language trainer preparing students for the International English Language Testing Service (IELTS) examination which would enable them to continue their higher education in Canada.

And now what are you expecting? 2008 has brought us together, once again, to join JRS UK. Here in the UK the team very evidently belong to a 'shared cause which gives rise to work for the common good and service of asylum seekers and refugees.'¹ It is our desire to adopt this principle and unite in mind and heart with the members of JRS UK who recognise the need to 'see and respond with the eyes and heart of love'.²

1) God in Exile -Jorge Eduardo Serrno SJ 2) God in Exile - Varkey Perekatte SJ—Copies of the book, *God in Exile*, are available from the JRS office



TEST your knowledge before the refugee week

1) What is a refugee?

- a) A foreign person in a country
 b) A person who has fled their country for fear of persecution
 c) A person who has moved to a new country for a better job and more money

2) Which country's suffering has produced the most refugees in the world?

- a) Palestine b) Iraq c) Somalia?

3) Applications for asylum in the EU have been increasing over the last 25 years.

- a) True b) False

4) How many applications for asylum were received in 2006 in the UK?

- a) 1 million b) 240,000 c) 24,000

5) What percentage of asylum seekers in the UK are given permission to stay?

- a) 75% b) 43% c) 18%

6) Proportional to its population, the UK receives the most asylum seekers in Europe.

- a) True b) False

7) From which country do the majority of asylum seekers to the UK came from in 2006?

- a) Iran b) Afghanistan c) Eritrea

8) Refugees in the UK are less educated than the UK population.

- a) True b) False

9) What is the link between Einstein, the scientist, Andrex of toilet paper fame and Lucien Freud, the artist?

Answers

1) b—according to the 1951 Geneva convention art. 1 (A)2
 (http://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3b66c2aa10.pdf)
 2) a (there are more than 4 m. Palestinians refugees)
 3) b (this figure is falling year after year)
 4) c (this figure is falling year after year)
 5) c
 6) b
 7) c
 8) b
 9) They were all refugees and made a huge contribution to their societies.

Working with JRS Colombia – by Luciana, JRS Volunteer

Holá! My name is Luciana Caffarelli and I'm currently working as a volunteer for JRS Colombia in the northern city of Barrancabermeja.

My role as a volunteer involves managing and coordinating the Youth Prevention Project for 2008. The project accompanies 40 young people from the ages of 13 to 23 who live in suburbs of the city - where there's a high presence of drugs, prostitution and unwanted pregnancy in girls as young as 14 years old. The project's main aim is to prevent these youngsters from getting involved in these illicit activities and, more importantly, from being recruited by illegal armed groups. Some of the youngsters are displaced but the majority grew up in Barrancabermeja, a city which has been ravaged by massacres, extortion, gasoline theft and kidnappings.

The focus of the accompaniment is in the training of these 40 young people in issues such as human rights,

personal development, spirituality and orientating them to develop their future careers, whether that involves creating a micro-business or finding a job that will help them secure a regular income. The project focuses on teaching the youngsters that there is a better future out there for them, a future which is different from the armed conflict, violence and poverty they know all too well.

I knew very little about Colombia before I came out but I imagined it to be beautiful, to have different landscapes and the people to be friendly. In Barrancabermeja I imagined seeing extreme poverty and the paramilitaries patrolling the streets.

The reality was not so different. The displaced communities live in precarious conditions. Many arrive in the slum areas and build their own shelter with plastic sheeting and pieces of wood. Access to water and electricity is scarce but these people

manage to find a way. As for the paramilitaries, they are not to be seen patrolling. But Colombians are open, warm and generous and will offer you food and water even when they don't have enough for themselves.

I enjoy working with young people and they have taught me so much about their culture and I have got to know their families and visited them in their homes. I have learnt the importance for them to express themselves about the problems that are ever so present in their communities. These young people need to believe in themselves and that they have the potential to secure a better future.

This year, the JRS Youth Prevention Project supported 4 young people with income-generating activities.

If you want to volunteer with JRS please contact our office on 020 7357 0974.



Jesuit Refugee Service, 6 Melior Street, London SE1 3QP

Tel: 020 7357 0974 Fax: 020 7378 1985 uk@jrs.net

www.jrsuk.net

www.jrs.net

www.jrseurope.org

www.detention-in-europe.org

What does JRS do?

The Jesuit Refugee Service is an international Catholic non-governmental organisation, at work in over 60 countries, with a mission to accompany, serve and defend the rights of refugees and forcibly displaced persons. In the UK JRS works mainly with detainees and destitute asylum seekers.

Accompanying: being with the individual, befriending him or her but also in some way enhancing that person's dignity and personal growth.

Serving: offering some practical assistance while being with the person.

Defending the rights of refugees: working towards changing qualitatively the person's life for the better by influencing public opinion lobbying and raising awareness about the real hardships that asylum seekers and refugees face in the UK today.

Values

JRS is grounded in Catholic social teaching and draws on the principles of Ignatian spirituality in discerning with whom we work. All members share a common set of values and principles concerned with justice, the dignity of the person and a responsibility to carry out the social mission of the Church.

Our Annual Report is available

Previously we have reported our work as part of JRS Europe region and within the British province of the society of Jesus. This is our first step in reporting more regularly and in more detail to our donors, our refugee friends, our supporters and our colleagues. The report explains in some detail the work of JRS UK and shows that the majority of our resources goes on direct provision for the refugees we accompany and serve, those left destitute by the asylum process and detainees.

We have posted copies of our annual report separately from this newsletter. If you have not received a copy and would like one (or would like an extra copy) please contact the JRS Office and we will be pleased to send you one.

Statistics from the office (March 08)

- Number of people who visited JRS: 80 men, 142 women, 35 children with an average of 142 adults visiting JRS per week.
- Refugee Transport grants: £3,386
- Refugee subsistence grants: £3,300

DIARY 2008

14th June : JRS Refugee Party at Stamford Hill Parish—27 High Road, London N15 6NZ. From 12pm to 5pm.

Join us for a good time together with food, drinks and games! Hint: one of the games may need a good knowledge of geography...

Come along, RSVP to the office for catering purposes!

16th-20th June: JRS is going to Wimbledon College to raise awareness on refugees and asylum seekers to students in Year 10.

20th June : international Refugee day

If you are interested in running a day around refugee issues at or around the time of Refugee Day 2009, please contact the JRS UK office. We may be able to help with speakers, ideas, contacts.

18-20 July 2008: National Justice & Peace Network conference "Hear My people cry" JRS will be running a stall with art craft and cards. Come and see us!

Did you like this newsletter? Spread the word and pass it on to someone who does not know JRS. You can also email us at uk@jrs.net to receive more copies. When you have finished reading it, recycle it!



Support our work



What should you do?

If you want to send a donation:

by cheque (payable to Jesuit Refugee Service) or cash: Fill the information in the box on the right and send it back by Post to: JRS, 6 Melior Street, London SE1 3QP

Or make a secure payment on: <http://www.justgiving.com/jesuitrefugeeservice/supportus>

If you want more information please contact us on 020 7357 0974

Please add me to your mailing list

Donation enclosed Amount: £ _____

I am a UK taxpayer and would like to gift aid my donation to JRS (*Gift aid increases the value of your donation to us at no extra cost to you. JRS receives 28p in every pound*).

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____