



**Action for Refugees
in Lewisham**

AFRIL News

Spring 2009

Welcome to the first issue of AFRIL News...

AFRIL has come a long way since we first opened to the public in 2007. We began by providing a free advice service for refugees and asylum seekers, as well as a supplementary school (Rainbow Club) for children aged between 5 and 11. We are happy to celebrate our second year in operation, and the fact that we are now working with over 200 families in the borough.

In 2008, we secured funding for the second year of Rainbow Club, as well as funding from the Community Learning Programme of Lewisham Council for Computer and Family ESOL Classes. We started both of these classes in September 2008, and we have since enrolled over 100 students.

Our AFRIL Advice Service is getting an increasing number of referrals, and we see an average of 5 clients on Thursdays and Fridays. We are also pleased to announce the launch of two monthly outreach services. One will run on the third Friday of the month at Lewisham Library; the other will occur on the last Friday of the month at the Rushey Green Group Practice. Both outreach services start at 10am and finish at 1pm.

In October 2008, we opened our Wednesday weekly day centre, which initially offered sewing classes and a hot lunch. However, in February 2009, we started providing English Classes, thanks to funding from Awards for All. We welcome new clients here every week with an average attendance of 25 people from many nationalities and backgrounds.

Our challenge for this year is to find the funding to employ a Co-ordinator and increase the hours of the Advice worker. We also need to recruit more trustees for our Management Board and always need volunteers to assist in our projects as classroom assistants and in our office with the administration and advice services. If you have spare time please do volunteer as there is always a vacancy.

As we work with an increasing number of destitute clients we also always need food, nappies, toiletries, bedding, etc.

Your help as ever is very much appreciated.

Many thanks,
Iolanda Chirico (Coordinator)

In this issue:

Advice Service 2

Case studies from Sri Lanka and Burma

Rainbow Club 4

Pupils flourish at Supplementary School

ESOL Class 6

"One student didn't know her alphabet, but now she can read and speak English"

Wednesday Club 7

Students learn to make skirts, bags and other accessories

IT Class 8

Students learn how to apply for jobs online

Helping Refugees and Asylum Seekers Access Legal Entitlements

AFRIL's Advice Service seeks to enable refugees and asylum seekers to access legal and social rights and entitlements.

By providing advice and information on asylum support, benefits, housing and employment and referring to more formal legal advice, we work to promote inclusion and integration among recently arrived communities.

We officially started work in December 2008 and formalised a volunteer-run

service that had been in high demand. Since December, the Advice Service assisted with 61 different appointments, and achieved 65 positive results. In the first three months, we secured over £5000 for refugees and asylum seekers and helped people access housing, benefits, goods and services. We also provide specialist asylum support advice and have helped destitute asylum seekers access support from the UK Border Agency.

We have seen people from all

over the world, including: Albania, Kosovo, Angola, Algeria, Cameroon, Uganda, Nigeria, China, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Ecuador, Bolivia, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Ghana, and more.

If you would like advice or information on any of the issues mentioned above, please make an appointment by calling **020 8690 4683** or **020 8256 5269**. The Advice Service is open from 10am-3pm on Thursdays and Fridays.

Sri Lanka: at a glance

The Sri Lankan Civil War has claimed the lives of 70,000 people, and is one of the world's deadliest ongoing conflicts.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (L.T.T.E) have been fighting for an independent homeland for the country's marginalised Tamil community; this cause is at odds with the majority Sinhalese community. Both the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tigers have been accused of humanitarian abuses and the situation is very perilous for the civilians caught in the cross fire. Since April 2009, over 100,000 people have fled the northern war zone, flooding hospitals and overwhelming displacement camps. Many are forced to live in makeshift tents; the elderly and young children in particular are suffering due to the lack of food. The UN estimates that another 50,000 civilians are still trapped in the war zone, where the government is advancing on the last remaining Tamil Tiger forces in the region.

Case Study- Aahna's Story Aahna turns to AFRIL

Aahna* is a Tamil refugee from Sri Lanka. Her son joined the L.T.T.E without her consent and, in the hopes of finding him, Aahna and her husband agreed to assist the L.T.T.E. Aahna aided the group by cooking food, stitching clothes and caring for the wounded. She hoped that by doing this, she would learn more about the whereabouts of her son, and hopefully get a chance to see him again. She later learned that her son had deserted the L.T.T.E, so her and her husband gradually withdrew from the organisation. The Sri Lankan army discovered their involvement with the L.T.T.E, and they both were detained in the prison camp. Aahna was imprisoned in a dark cell for nearly three months. During this time, she was severely beaten with various objects. She was not given anything to eat, and was left to starve. Aahna's husband later managed to escape. With the help of an agent, he bribed an army officer into freeing Aahna from her cell, and arranged for her to leave the country.

When Aahna arrived in the UK, her troubles were not behind her. As a result of her torture, she suffers from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and other health problems. Aahna was destitute and in extreme need of help. Her Section 95 support had stopped and, unable to pay the rent, her Landlord asked her to leave. With no means of supporting herself, Aahna was faced with the looming threat of homelessness. Aahna approached AFRIL for financial support and help with her asylum application. AFRIL applied to the Home Office on her behalf, where she was successfully awarded Section 4 Support, a weekly allowance and new accommodation. AFRIL also provided her with a weekly bus pass, so that she could attend the AFRIL ESOL class. What's more, she was referred to a local Tamil community group as well as a support organisation for victims of torture.

*names have been changed to protect identities

Case Study- Rushani's

Rushani* is a Tamil refugee from Sri Lanka. Her husband was a member of L.T.T.E, who defected to a rival organisation. He was labelled a traitor by the L.T.T.E and later killed. Rushani had also been helping the rival political organisation and her life was threatened by the L.T.T.E. She was terrified as she also had a baby to look after. The rival organisation arranged for a travel agent to send Rushani and her baby out of the country. The agent arranged her travel documents and they travelled through transit to different countries. When Rushani arrived in the UK, she was detained at an Immigration Reception Centre for one week. She was confident

that the agent would take her to the correct destination and she did not ask him about the transit countries. However, the agent left Rushani shortly afterwards, taking her travel documents with him. Rushani believes that the Sri Lankan army and the police will investigate her if she returns, as she was a high profile propagandist for the rival political organisation.

Rushani turns to AFRIL

When Rushani and her daughter came to AFRIL, she had various needs, which were exacerbated by poor mental

health. AFRIL Advice Service was able to help by escorting her to the local Job Centre, as well as applying for Income Support, once she received Refugee Status. AFRIL also helped Rushani to open a bank account and book an urgent appointment with the doctor. She was also given a free bus pass, courtesy of Lewisham Churches for Asylum Seekers, to attend AFRIL's free ESOL classes. Her daughter also joined the AFRIL Rainbow Club Supplementary School and continues to benefit from the extra lessons in English and Maths.

Burma: at a glance



(Refugee children in Burma)

Burma, also known as Myanmar, has been ruled by the State Peace and Development Council for the past 19 years. The country has been under military rule for 47 years. There is considerable ethnic tension between the majority Bamar, and minority ethnic groups such as the Karen, Shan, Rakhine, Mon, Chin, and Kachin. This tension has fuelled intermittent separatist rebellions. Military offensives against those who oppose the rule of the State Peace and Development Council have uprooted many thousands of civilians. So far, in the past ten

years, over 3,200 villages have been destroyed in eastern Burma. There are over 600,000 internally displaced people. Most of which belong to the ethnic Karen, Karenni, Shan, Tavoyan, and Mon. There are well over a million who have fled to other countries. What's more, human rights violations in Burma have been reported by the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, NGOs and other groups. Such violations include, murder, rape, forced labour and detention without trial.

Case Study: Khin's Story

Khin* is a Burmese refugee with a family to support. He sought advice from AFRIL, because he was being charged with overpayments of Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and Income Support in excess of £5000. He also had

more than six months worth of rent arrears. When we met Khin his household income, supporting five people, consisted of £110 a week. This was made up solely of Child Benefit and Child tax credit. The AFRIL Advice Service appealed successfully against Lewisham Council's decision to charge Khin overpayments for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. We were able to cancel nearly £3000 of his debt. We also managed to get these benefits reinstated to Khin. There is now an ongoing appeal against the DWP's decision to claim back Income Support overpayments. AFRIL has also helped Khin's family. Khin's wife suffers from various medical conditions, which leaves her unable to work. AFRIL is helping her access healthcare in order to obtain a diagnosis of her condition and sufficient treatment.

*names have been changed to protect identities

Rainbow Club-2009...Onwards and upwards!

The Rainbow Club began in 2007 thanks to grants from the Lewisham Children Fund and the London Network Fund. At the beginning, it was very difficult to get things going and it was slow as we tried to overcome a few teething problems. We continued to persevere; motivated by the knowledge that such a service is unique in the area. The AFRIL Rainbow Club is the only supplementary school for refugee and other ethnic minorities of all nationalities and religion. We have been

fortunate to attract over 40 people since we started, from eight different nationalities. The provision is still free thanks to a second year grant from the London Borough of Lewisham Children Fund. Initially we could only offer Maths as we could not find a permanent English/Maths teacher. However, in February 2009, we were very happy to appoint Sana Dost to that role. We have been offering English, Maths, Drama and

swimming classes (10-2pm) and we are planning to offer Art, Music and sport in the summer term. There are still places for more children to join!



Thoughts from the teachers- “We are so proud of



The English and Maths classes have gone from strength to strength, since teaching began in 2007. The classes first started with just a few children (three on one occasion!) The Rainbow Club now has regular class sizes of 12 or more children. Our Rainbow Club song more or less says it all: we are there to ‘learn and to have fun’. I believe that the children can and will learn if they are motivated and enjoy the experience. So we do our reading, writing and maths in all sorts of ways, including learning our times tables using a very funky CD! Ultimately, we are trying to support the work that the children are doing in their schools and at home, so that they develop into confident readers, writers and mathematicians!

Enomwoyi Damali,
Rainbow Club Teacher

Lewisham Children’s

Since, 2002, Lewisham Children’s Fund (LCF) has facilitated local partnerships between local voluntary organisations and statutory partners with the primary aim of developing preventative strategies for school aged children and young people at risk of social exclusion. Part of this work involves supporting the development of supplementary schools in the borough. Since July 2007, the Rainbow Club has been running a valuable supplementary school in Lewisham. The Local Authority looks forward to working with this organisation in the future. Well done for a great year!

Caroline Hirst-
Children’s Fund Manager

The Rainbow Club Talent Board

“ Most of the children who attend the Rainbow Club come from refugee backgrounds and have faced hardships, yet they are still very dedicated to their lessons and work extremely hard. We are very proud of them.”
 Julia-Volunteer

Dreams by Sakina Begum

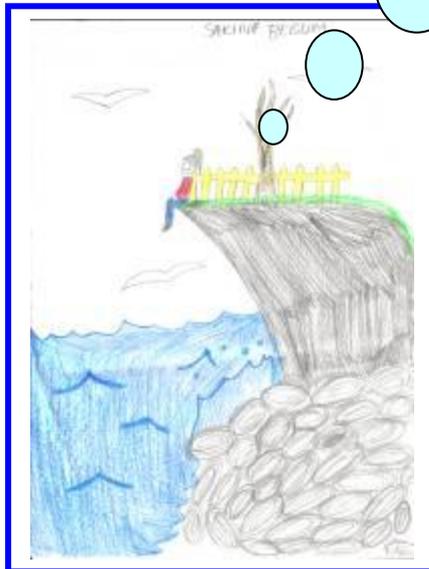
Dreams can be red
 Dreams can be blue
 Dreams can be any colour
 As long as its you
 Dreams can be dark,
 Dreams can be light
 Dreams can be also black and white.
 Dreams can be good,
 Dreams can be bad
 Dreams can be nothing but good or bad.
 Dreams could be love,
 Dreams could be weird
 Dreams could mean anything
 That could be right.



by Lina (above)

My Dreams By Fatima

I was in my room
 Dreaming about a Hole
 In my wall
 A hole
 Which I dug up deep
 That I did in my sleep



by Sakina (above)



by Tangila (above)



Students to take ESOL exams this summer

AFRIL offers free ESOL Classes to refugees, asylum seekers, and local ethnic minority groups. These classes were initially funded for seven months, by LBL Community Education Lewisham, with just one beginner's class a week. Due to increasing demand, we are now able to offer three classes a week: the beginners ESOL in the morning, taught by Paul Lee; the Saturday intermediate classes, taught by Sandra George; the

Wednesday morning intermediate class, taught by Michelle. These classes go a long way towards helping to combat social exclusion. Students can gain their ESOL qualification, which will greatly improve their educational and employment prospects. This year, students are working towards their ESOL Level 1 and Level 2 exams, which they will take in the summer. They also have the

opportunity to go on fun trips. For example, students have had a tour of the local library, attended a story-telling and writing workshop, and visited the Lady Diana Memorial Playground in Kensington. Students recently visited the Stephen Lawrence Centre where some engaged in music classes and beauty therapy sessions.

“One student didn’t know her alphabet, but now she can read and speak English”



Students at the ESOL classes.



Paul Lee (above)

I have been teaching at the AFRIL ESOL classes since September 2008. I get a great sense of fulfilment from teaching, especially when I witness each student progress. For example, Hatice joined the Beginners class before September 2008 and did not know the English Alphabet, but now her English literacy has improved significantly and she can now read and speak English.

Paul Lee-ESOL Teacher



Simon Watson (above)

Simon has been volunteering as a Teaching Assistant, and has found it a rewarding learning experience, he says, “the aim is to get students to the point where they no longer have to think about how to say a certain word or phrase, to the point where it is natural; in doing so, they will gain greater control of their environment and will feel more confident when applying for jobs, conversing with the doctor, going to the bank, or going to college.”



Students from the AFRIL ESOL class



Niroshan is a 14 year old boy from Sri-Lanka. He has been in England for one year and found out about the AFRIL ESOL class from his Aunt, who also attends the lessons. His English level is intermediate, yet he is eager to improve. Students like Niroshan can benefit from AFRIL's ESOL classes as

they can gain more confidence in communicating in English. For example, in Niroshan's case, he will be able to ask his school teacher for help or make verbal contributions during classroom discussions and presentations. Niroshan will also be studying for his GCSEs soon, so it is very important for him to attend these classes, and improve his sentence construction and word order. AFRIL ESOL classes help people like Niroshan who can benefit from smaller class sizes and one to one tutoring.



Gracia is a refugee from Angola, and she really enjoys attending the AFRIL ESOL classes. She is a very eager to improve her English, as she would like to be a caterer in England. She hopes to develop her English further and do a catering course at Lewisham College, next year.

English sewing and cooking at the Wednesday club

The AFRIL Wednesday Club has a range of different activities. The day begins with ESOL classes in the morning, which is taught by Michelle. This is then followed by a hot lunch, prepared by Stella Jeffrey, Chair of LEWCAS. This is followed by a fun sewing class taught by Celine Jenkins, who has been teaching the sewing class since September 2008, and Alberta Atolla, who joined early this year.



Gracia displays the bag she is making



Hasnan made these pin cushion at sewing class



Celine Jenkins and Hasnan



Michelle at her first day teaching the new Wednesday ESOL classes

AFRIL's IT class "opens up a whole new world" for students

AFRIL's beginner's IT classes are primarily attended by local refugees and other ethnic minority groups. Most students do not have access to computers at home; some have never even used a computer before and so they had to learn from scratch. Students are taught basic skills in Microsoft Office Professional packages, such as Word, Excel and Access. They also benefit from sessions on internet usage, and learn such skills as Google searching and email.



"Some students are so eager to learn that they stay for hours"



Leah Oyenemi-IT Student (left);
Monda Mula-IT Teacher (right)

I feel a great pleasure when students are so dedicated; some of them are so motivated to improve their computer skills that they stay for hours. I am particularly inspired by the children who do not have computer access at home, and who come to the AFRIL IT Class to do their homework, or revise for their GCSEs.

Monda- AFRIL IT Teacher

AFRIL's ICT classes are very flexible to each student's individual requirements. For instance, there is a free crèche facility for children under 5, so that parents with younger children are free to participate in the classes. What's more, students with high literacy needs can receive extra support in English writing and spelling.

Case study: Leah- "I learned how to apply for jobs online"

Leah Oyenemi had very limited computer literacy before attending the AFRIL ICT classes. However, after attending classes for three months, she has a greater knowledge and new-found confidence in using IT applications, and believes this will really boost her job prospects.

In the past, she was intimidated by the modern application process when applying for jobs. Filling out online forms and using Microsoft Word to write out CVs was a daunting prospect. Now, having learned a great deal about Microsoft packages, she can now

apply for jobs with confidence, and navigate her way around different sites. Most importantly, she now has the ability to search and apply for jobs using the internet, and she is currently working on formatting her CV.



**Action for Refugees
in Lewisham**

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Registered Charity:
1116344

About Us:

Action for Refugees in Lewisham is an independent charity which seeks to:

- **Relieve the poverty and isolation**
- **Advance education**
- **Increase awareness of rights and needs of refugees and asylum seekers**

Registered charity: 1116344
Company Limited by Guarantee:
5819537



Our Services:

ADVICE:

Information, Advice & Support:
Thursdays and Fridays: 10am – 2.30pm
(By appointment only: call 020 8265 5269)

ADVICE DROP-IN:

Information, Advice & Support:
Third Friday of the month: 10am-1pm
Lewisham Library, 199-201 Lewisham High Street SE13 6LG
Last Friday of the month: 10am-1pm
Rushey Green Group Practice, Hawstead Road SE6 4JH

LEARNING FOR CHILDREN:

Supplementary School:
Saturdays: 10am–2pm
St Mary Centre, Ladywell Rd, SE13 SUW

LEARNING FOR ADULTS & FAMILIES:

Basic IT:
Saturdays: 9.30am–11.30 & 11.30–1.30
Lewisham Central Library, Lewisham High Street, SE13 6LG

Family ESOL:

Saturdays: 9.30am–11.30pm, 11.30–1.30pm
The Crypt, St Mary the Virgin, Lewisham High Street, SE13 6NW

Day Centre:

Wednesdays 10-2pm
The Crypt, St Mary the Virgin, Lewisham High Street, London SE13 6NW