



Providing free advice and support to local refugees, asylum seekers and minority ethnic communities

# AFRIL NEWS

Issue 5

Summer 2010



Dear Readers,

As ever I report on an eventful past three months. All our provision continue to see good attendance as follows: Talk shop now has an average of 20 clients each week, baking classes see 15 whilst the day centre a healthy 35 each day! Family Esol and Family ICT have around 12-15 students each class; Rainbow Club about 16-20 children. Overall we work with a minimum of 190 clients per week, across 36 nationalities with at least 5 new clients weekly! Staggering numbers with still limited core capacity as we

only have funds to employ a part-time Advice/Outreach worker and Manager assisted by a invaluable team of 45 volunteers.

We are planning to move to a bigger and more central office at the Leemore Community Hub in Bonfield Rd in July, which will enable us to run all our provision under one roof.

I have been privileged to work with Claudia Demuth, a consultant employed by LVSTC to assist me with Business and fundraising plans. We have also developed links with the Area 2 Children Centre and plan to run joint activities in the future. Furthermore, we have started a weekly counselling service with a counsellor from Carer Lewisham and a monthly health advice/advocacy service with the Refugee Health team. We have also just secured donations of food from Sainsbury in New Cross to distribute to the many local destitute clients we are assisting weekly.

As ever thanks to all our supporters, volunteers and local organisations we work with. Happy reading!

Iolanda Chirico

Manager



New cooking class takes place. The first lessons were a success with lots of students making their own cakes.



Feedback Frenzy! Students across our classes tell us what they think.



Rainbow Club Kids draw artwork for new recipe book!

## Highlights

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# ADVICE SERVICE

## More and More clients each week!

Over the past few months AFRIL's advice service has continued to grow and develop. We work with our clients to reduce poverty and isolation by enabling them to access their legal and social rights and entitlements. We are pleased to announce that the advice service has been awarded new funding from Scottish Power and Lewisham Council to allow us to in-

crease the number of home visits. We hope this will make us more accessible to our most vulnerable clients who have difficulty getting to our office, such as people with help problems, lone parents and carers. To develop our presence throughout the borough, the Advice Service has started a regular outreach session at Simple Business Solutions in Clifton Rise, New Cross. We are work-

ing in partnership with Simple Business Solutions, who provide a popular employment advice session for clients in our offices. To further enable people to access our services, AFRIL will be starting another outreach session at Lewisham Homes, Holbeach Road in July 2010.

The last few months have seen a steady increase in demand, with growing num-

bers of new clients. Over the last

year the advice service provided over 400 appointments. We have also seen increasing diversity among our client group, with people from 36 nationalities now using our services.

## CASE STUDIES



© Brice Blondel, flickr

Hello, my name is Bahati Nkechi and I'm from Africa. I first came to the UK as a visitor but was later here on a student visa. I have been living in the UK for nine years now. I have since applied for asylum but was refused.

I currently live in South London with my husband and disabled son. I've also got three grown up children back in home. We all live in a cramped room – my husband and son share the bed and I sleep on the floor. The room we board is above a restaurant which we rent for £400 a month. Sometimes there are other people living next door and they take away stuff from our cupboards. I came here in hope of a better life but find it is even worse.

The first time I became homeless was when the landlord locked me out. I stayed with friends for awhile but it happened again a year later. There was no hot water or heating and at the end, the owner removed the cooker. I couldn't prepare any meals for my disabled son anymore. I worry most about housing – having a stable place for my son and me so we are not left out on the streets.

The Disability Team from the Council assessed me a couple of times but there was still no money coming through until AFRIL intervened. I should be getting £34 every two weeks from next week but other than that, I have some friends who help me and sometimes I get food from AFRIL. I occasionally do some work cleaning but it's not much money as I have no right to work or any recourse to public funds. In 2008, I contemplated suicide.

I first heard about AFRIL through Lewisham Carers and came to it for help with immigration and financial support. The advice they gave was very helpful. I was given enough time to explain everything and really felt that that I was cared for and listened to. The advice worker Abi was very concerned about my situation.

I've been back to AFRIL since then for help concerning my disabled son, as well as for counselling. It's a good organisation – helping people in need and giving advice. I'm very grateful to AFRIL for helping me through such difficult situations. It's been good coming here. I wouldn't know where else I could go for such help. It would be better if AFRIL could offer more classes in IT and sewing and more trips as I'm at home doing nothing when I could be out learning a useful and productive skill.

I want to be granted leave to stay and also the right to work so I can work as a carer again. The Home Office should help us. We don't mean any harm and want only good for the UK. It's not about getting benefits but finding a stable place to live. I'd like to see the government treating people with disabilities and their carers as more of a priority.

"People need help and I didn't know where to go. I couldn't believe it!"

Hi, my name is Harshan Muttiah and I moved from Sri Lanka to the UK three years ago. I used to be an asylum seeker but have now been given refugee status. I sometimes suffer from back pain. At the moment, I live in shared accommodation in North East London. I don't know how many people in total live in the house as I only rent one room, of which is paid for with Housing Benefit. I currently support myself with Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA) but I find it difficult to get by on this alone.



© Meaneat Indian, flickr

I heard about AFRIL through the Citizens Advice Bureau. My first visit in was to fill in a housing application form. The advice was very clear and helpful and Abi, whom I spoke to, gave me plenty of time to speak as I don't speak English very well. I also received some food from them. When I left, I was happy.

Now I always come here for help with things such as letters because my problems are always solved when I come. AFRIL is a good organisation, helping people with every kind of problem; housing, food, clothes, learning, education and ESOL. I want it to continue with its work and to continue providing help to people. I would also like AFRIL to provide employment opportunities and accommodation.

When I first arrived in the UK, it was very difficult for me because I couldn't speak English. It's now improved since then but is still not ideal. I want to find work. I used to work as a craftsman and taxi driver before. I would like to become a taxi driver again but at the moment, I will take any work to first earn enough money for the taxi drivers' license fee.

I've like the Home Office to give people refugee status because as an asylum seeker, you cannot work so, everything is difficult and you begin to have mental health problems. I would like the government to give refugees British Citizenship so that they don't have to go back to their countries of origin,



## NEW! Coping Strategies Group !

An emotional support and counselling group for people to share their problems and issues with friends.

**When:** Every Thursday,  
1.30- 2.30pm

**Where:** St Mary Centre, Ladywell Road, Lewisham SE13 7UW.



My name is Asari Esohe. I am from Nigeria and have been in the UK for 10 years. Currently I hold refugee status with limited leave to remain, which has not changed since. I have a son and daughter. I suffer from several health problems including HIV, severe depression and difficulties with walking and self-motivation.

© Jared Broad, flickr  
At present, I live in a one bedroom flat in East London. I find it very crowded because I share with my entire family. I've been homeless before and have also lived in a B&B; it was very messy, noisy and uncomfortable.

I now depend on the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). Without it, I cannot hope of supporting myself due to the state of my health.

Before AFRIL, I found it very hard to meet my living needs as at that time, my visa had expired so I had rely on whatever I could get. After coming to AFRIL for help, I was able to apply for my current status and that has helped me meet my needs.

AFRIL will help you with questions about benefit, immigration status and finding out how you can get further help (for example, a family lawyer). You can also get advice on how you can be helped in your daily life.

I was referred to AFRIL through my lawyer and came to them for help with council tax. The advice they gave was very clear and helpful. I was also given enough time to explain and felt relieved when everything was well explained and I was kindly cared for. I have since come back for help in my disability allowance and also for my son's tuition fees. It is a good thing that AFRIL provides English classes, childcare and food for the homeless.

I think it is better now than when I first arrived in the UK. I have benefited from my access to AFRIL and feel motivated and look forward to other things to come, now knowing where I can go to get help. In the future, I want to be able to solve my health problems and go back to work. I still worry about accommodation, my health and getting my son to school.

If the Home Office saw people's individual problems and understood all this, it would be more helpful. I'd like to see the government secure people accommodation and deal with problems faster. If they dealt with my situation more swiftly, I could have moved on my life rather than miss out on an education or go to prison.



My name is Kaleb Dahnay. I am from Ethiopia and have been in the UK for nearly ten years. I have refugee status with temporary leave to remain. This has not changed since I came. I have four grown up children back home. I also looked after my nephew over there. I have several health problems such as knee and shoulder pain, high blood pressure, and shortness of breath.

I currently live in South East London. I live by myself but there are 6 -8 people living in the same building and the noise from upstairs bothers me a lot. My bathroom is so small that it only has a shower booth and with no lock, I don't feel comfortable using it. Apart from this, I dislike the fact that police sirens are constantly going off outside. I find this is not good for my heart.

In the past, I've been homeless for a long time. I felt it was very dangerous and that I was risking my life everyday like that. I hardly ever slept during that time of my life.

The church and 'friends' usually gave me money. I don't think there is any other way to support myself. I always found it hard to meet my living needs. Usually, I wait for money to come. Sometimes I get money when I sit at a bus stop.

I heard about AFRIL through people and friends and heard they help people like me (in my situation), so I decided to come. The service of this organisation is very helpful and Abi took me to a lawyer, and advised me what I needed to do. Abi gave me enough time to explain, listened to me very well and was very polite.

This organisa-

tion helps you a lot. If you are in need and you ask, they will direct you appropriately. Even now, I come back for my accommodation and health issues.

Through AFRIL, I feel much better than before. Abi encourages me to be more active, so I've started taking a computer course now. If I hadn't come to AFRIL, I wouldn't have gotten anywhere.

I want to work and open my own business in a shopping mall. I don't want to be useless. What I would like is that AFRIL provides more

Thank you so much. I'm so glad I picked up your leaflet – it transformed my life. It was the first step towards changing my life.'

New Administrative Volunteer Keiko Ito talks about the Advice Service:

"I have been volunteering for AFRIL since April 2010. I have come to realise what an important impact our work has on the local community. Our organisation is standing up to support asylum seekers and refugees, finding appropriate access to services and contributing to social empowerment. I am very happy to be involved in this work."

Full details of our Advice Services can be found on page 8.



XOX



## Tons of classes, activities and outings!



Family cooking class



Family art classes



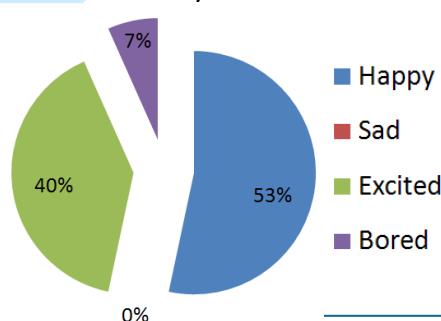
English Class



English Class



How does Rainbow Club make you feel?



## RECIPE BOOK

Children at Rainbow Club get creative and help out by drawing their own little masterpieces for our new Recipe Book. Their artworks can be seen to the left.

## KIDS & ADULTS GO ON TRIP TO CREEKSIDE



On 20th March, the Rainbow Club took a field trip to Creekside Centre Trip.



## Rainbow Club Kids tell us what they think

10 Rainbow Club students took a questionnaire on what they thought of the Club. Here are the results:

Majority of students were happy and excited about Rainbow Club.

**Maths:** 56% felt more clever and 44% more interested.

**Drama:** 36% excited, 29% happy, 21% confident with 14% feeling shy.

**Dance:** 36% tired, 29% happy, 21% confident with 14% dislike.

Most popular activities included Maths, Drama, Art and Playing with Dancing as the least favourite.

58% wanted more outings, whilst 26% wanted toys and 16% games. 50% would actually read if there was no Rainbow Club.

50% preferred Rainbow Club over school, saying that people were friendlier.

# TALK SHOP

**One year on! Still as popular and successful as ever!**

Talk Shop is proud to announce its one year anniversary! It first opened a year ago in June in collaboration with the Salvation Army.

Every Monday afternoon refugees, asylum seekers, and ethnic minorities come to learn English in a more practical manner. We have been fortunate enough to attract about 20 people each week from many nationalities, including Sri Lanka,

Bangladesh, China, Congo, Pakistan, and Cuba.

Unlike our other classes, like ESOL, the Talk Shop is an opportunity to practice English with the help of dedicated volunteers in an informal setting. We discuss things related to everyday life in the UK.

Activities involve general conversation, practicing everyday vocabulary, informal role plays, and games.



## Students recommend Talk Shop

endeavour to continue this outside the class by reading more, watching television and listening to the radio.

When asked how the classes could be improved, students stated that more time is needed for the class.

All students would recommend the Talk Shop to others.

Overall, the Talk Shop has been a great and ongoing success.



Talk Shop is held every **Monday** from **12-2pm** at Salvation Army, 3-11 Albion Way, Lewisham, SE13 6BT.

For more details of our other classes, see page 8.

# ESOL CLASS

## Students recommend English Classes

AFRIL offers free ESOL Classes to refugees, asylum seekers, and local ethnic minority groups. We recently asked students to take questionnaires on what they thought of the classes so far. Here are their thoughts:

Most students who first came to AFRIL spoke very little English and understood even less. Now they have vastly improved their knowledge that they are able to visit new places they couldn't before, like shopping on their own. They also feel more confident to speak to others outside of the class and get more involved with their community.

Reasons for wanting to learn the language included being able to converse and understand people in the community. Also

the fact that English is the native language is also a prompt for them to learn it. One student found the classes as a solution for communicating with their daughter whilst another found it as a way to help their child.

Students also wish to learn the language simply because they find it a subject worth studying.

The classes use a variety of methods in order to teach students how to speak, read and write English. Exercises include

Learning English is a way to integrate into the community



discussing current News, families, interests and playing word games. 55% of students come twice a week, with 22% coming to all three of our English classes.

100% of students found their English has improved since taking the classes. 90% would recommend the class citing that they also want others to benefit from learning the language and like the fact that the class is open to many people. Suggestions for improving the classes revolved around more reading, writing and homework exercises.



## Relax body and mind with Yoga

## DAY CENTRE



Sewing Class

As well as providing sewing and yoga as part of our Day Centre service, AFRIL also holds additional English classes . Here are some of the student's thoughts on the Sewing and Yoga class:



English Class Volunteer



Students have fun!



Students at Yoga Class

### Sewing Feedback

Majority of students joined the class due to like and enjoyment of the craft. They found that the class also helped them branch out and make new friends.

All students could not use the sewing machine before but now can use it autonomously and many are involved with their own projects.

Students would recommend the class to others, with suggestions that more encouragement and practice is needed.

Students find the teachers to be very friendly and patient, which makes them feel more

confident. One student suggested that female clothing should be made in class, which can then be sold for AFRIL.

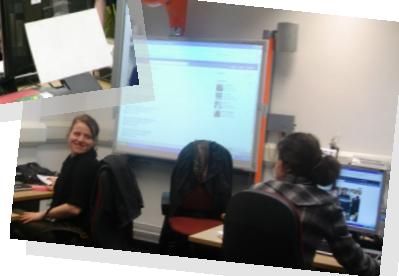
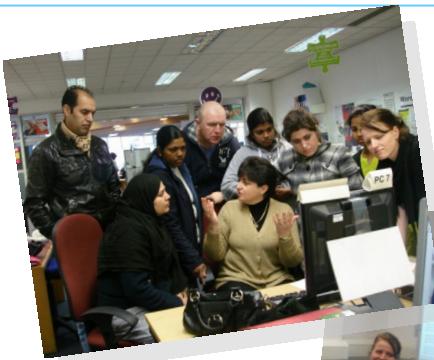
### Yoga Feedback

Students found themselves more relaxed, stress-free and energised after Yoga sessions and would recommend it to family and friends.

They also continue this at home, seeing the mental and physical wellbeing it brings to them.

Concerns for improvement included more space for mothers and their babies.

# ICT CLASS



## Practical IT for everyday

We hold free computer classes for refugees, asylum seekers and people from ethnic minorities every Saturday. The classes provide basic level training in using Microsoft software such as Word, Excel and Access. They also gain practical skills such as navigating the internet, accessing email, preparing CVs and even lessons in social networking sites such as Facebook. The classes

are intended for people with no or little experience using computers and all ages welcome!

AFRIL's ICT classes are very flexible to each student's individual requirements. For instance, there is a free crèche facil-

ity 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. For class schedules, please see page 8.

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

Menda,

AFRIL IT Teacher

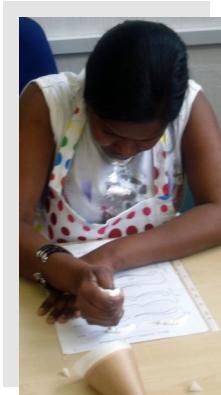


**NEW!**

## BAKING CLASS

### First Ever Baking Class Launches and is a Success!

AFRIL is happy to introduce a new baking class to the already long list of activities on offer. The first class took place on the 27th April. The students learned how to make a sponge and moist lemon cake and also decorated it using sugar icing.





## Action For Refugees In Lewisham

Room F3  
3rd Floor  
Leemore Central Community Hub  
Bonfield Road  
Lewisham SE13 5ES  
Tel: 0208 690 4683/ 265 5269  
Fax: 0208 690 4683  
E-mail: iolanda@afril.org.uk  
www.afril.org.uk

Action for Refugees in Lewisham (AFRIL) is an independent charity which seeks to relieve the poverty and isolation, advance education and increase awareness of rights and needs of refugees and asylum seekers.

Open to the public in 2007, we began by providing a free advice service, as well as a supplementary school (Rainbow Club) for children aged between 4—12. Due to the success of these services, AFRIL now works with over 200 families in the London Borough of Lewisham and provides more classes and more advice services a week.

It is our mission to help refugees help themselves by:

- Accessing all the services they are entitled to
- Empowering them to acquire the required skills and knowledge
- Creating volunteering opportunities across sectors

For any further enquiries, please call 0208 690 4683/ 265 5269 or email iolanda@afril.org.uk.

## Programme of Activities

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
<b>Talk Shop</b>  12 – 2pm 	<b>Baking &amp; Cake Decoration</b>  10am – 12pm 12:30 – 2:30pm 	<b>English at Entry 1 &amp; Sewing classes</b> with lunch  10am - 2:30pm 	<b>English at Entry 2 &amp; Yoga classes</b> with lunch  10am - 1:30pm 	<b>ADVICE OUTREACH</b> In collaboration with Simple Business Solutions 2nd Friday of the month 10am – 1pm 	<b>Family ICT Classes</b> 9 -11am & 11am -1pm 
		<b>EMPLOYMENT ADVICE &amp; BUSINESS SUPPORT</b> Fortnightly Wednesdays 12 – 2:30pm By appointment only 	<b>ADVICE SERVICE</b> On welfare benefits, NASS support, housing, healthcare, employment, solicitors, schools and much more 10am – 2:30pm By appointment only 	<b>ADVICE SERVICE</b> On welfare benefits, NASS support, housing, healthcare, employment, solicitors, schools and much more 10am – 2:30pm By appointment only 	<b>Family English Classes Beginners</b> 9:30am -11:30pm Entry 2 11:30am— 1:30pm 
			<b>COPING STRATEGIES SUPPORT GROUP</b> 12:30 – 1:30pm 	<b>ADVICE OUTREACH</b> In collaboration with Lewisham Library 3rd Friday of every month 10am - 1pm 	<b>rainbow club</b> <b>English, Maths, Dance, Drama, Art (For Children)</b> 10am – 1:30pm 



Salvation Army,  
3-11 Albion Way,  
Lewisham,  
SE13 6BT



Community Business  
Centre, 6 Clifton Rise,  
New Cross, SE14 6JP



St Mary Centre,  
Ladywell Road,  
SE13 7UW



c/o Volunteer Centre,  
H E Olby, 307-313  
Lewisham High Street,  
London, SE13 6NW



Lewisham Central  
Library, 199-201  
Lewisham High  
Street, SE13 6LG

To book an appointment, call 0208 690 4683/ 0208 265 5269 or email abi@afril.org.uk