



**Action for Refugees  
in Lewisham**

# AFRIL News

Autumn 2009

## Welcome to the third issue of AFRIL News...

Dear Readers,

As Christmas draws near and our thoughts turn to celebrating another year, we can be very proud of our achievements here at AFRIL.

We have been awarded £6000 from the LBL Faith Fund and £5000 from the Church Urban Fund towards two extra days at the Day centre. We will start these two extra days in November once we manage to recruit new ESOL and Yoga and/or cookery teachers.

Our English classes are over-subscribed and are making a real difference to the lives of our clients, making it easier to integrate in the community, make friends and find work.

The advice service is now expanding to support a case worker from Southwark on Friday afternoons to advise clients. This work is supported by SELMA.

The Wednesday sewing class goes from strength to strength and will soon be selling its bags and Xmas items on a stall in Lewisham Market.

We are thanking our many volunteers who continue to offer essential support with a Christmas party on Saturday the 12<sup>th</sup> December where as well as celebrating our first year it will be a chance to meet and share experiences in all areas of AFRIL work. Our AGM is on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> of November 11-2pm. Please do try to join us.

Talkshop at by the Salvation Army desperately needs more volunteers for a crèche so that young families can benefit from the informal English lessons and family atmosphere created on Monday afternoons. Thanks to Captain Martin Cordner who is offering the hall free of charge.

I wish everyone a happy new year and many thanks for all the hard work and effort which has gone into AFRIL and made it the success story it is today.

Iolanda Chirico (Voluntary Coordinator)

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## AFRIL's Advice Service helps more refugees and asylum seekers

AFRIL's Advice Service works to reduce poverty and isolation by promoting access to legal and social rights and entitlements. The service has now finished its second quarter, and has developed quickly, providing more advice, information and guidance to asylum seekers and refugees in Lewisham and surrounding boroughs.

In our third three months, the Service **provided assistance on 78 different issues. We secured more than £1500 for our clients, and helped prevent homelessness and access asylum support, benefits and assistance from social services.**

We have been working closely with other organisations to promote access to advice, and will soon begin partnerships with Southwark Refugee Project and the Nia Project to increase the provision of services and help prevent poverty and isolation.

The monthly drop-in advice sessions on the third Friday of each month, at Lewisham Library and on the last Friday of the month are at Rushey Green Group Practice on Hawstead Road are going well and attracting more clients who are need advice on a wide range of topics

Like our normal advice sessions, the outreach drop-ins are free to use, and can be accessed by anyone from an asylum seeking or refugee background, or by people of ethnic minorities.

If you would like to use the Advice Service, please call 020 8265 5269 or 020 8692 4683 to make an appointment, or drop in to one of our outreach sessions. The Advice Service is open from 10am-2:30pm on Thursdays and Fridays.



*Zimbabwe Police use water cannons to disperse protestors*

### Zimbabwe: at a glance

The fortunes of Zimbabwe have for almost three decades been tied to President Robert Mugabe, the pro-independence campaigner. He wrested control from a small white community and became the country's first black leader.

Until the 2008 parliamentary elections, Zimbabwe was effectively a one-party state ruled over by Mr Mugabe's Zanu-PF. A power sharing deal has raised hopes that Mr Mugabe might be prepared to relinquish some of his powers, but in the meantime he presides over a nation whose economy is in tatters, where poverty and unemployment are endemic and political strife and repression are commonplace.

### Zimbabwe Case Study: Ms A Story

Ms A is originally from southern Africa, but came to the UK with her husband and two children after securing citizenship in Germany. After several years in the UK, relationship broke down, and Ms A's husband left the family.

Ms A came to AFRIL's outreach service at Lewisham Library because she was unable to support herself and her children on her part time job. AFRIL helped her establish the benefits her husband had been receiving on behalf of the family and separate the claims.

### Nigeria Case Study: Ms A Story

We then secured the correct amounts and transferred payment to Ms A's bank account. We also helped her begin a claim for Working Tax Credit, and advised her on securing child maintenance from her husband. In addition, we referred Ms A and her children to AFRIL's Rainbow Club, a supplementary school for children.

\*names have been changed to protect identities

## Case Studies Continued

### Nigeria: at a glance

After lurching from one military coup to another, Nigeria now has an elected leadership. But it faces the growing challenge of preventing Africa's most populous country from breaking apart along ethnic and religious lines. Political liberalisation ushered in by the return to civilian rule in 1999 has allowed militants from religious and ethnic groups to express their frustrations more freely and with increasing violence.

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The imposition of Islamic Law in several states has embedded divisions and caused thousands of Christians to flee. Inter-faith violence is said to be rooted in poverty, unemployment and the competition for land. The government is striving to boost the economy, which experienced an oil boom in 1970's and is once again benefitting from high prices. But progress has been undermined by corruption and mismanagement.



Group of camp children at Oru Refugee primary school.

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## Nigeria Case Study: Ms B Story

Ms B is from West Africa. She and her husband have three children and the youngest has severe autism. She is unable to speak and requires continuous care. The family has an outstanding claim for leave to remain currently being considered by the Home Office. As a result, they do not have recourse to public funds and cannot access benefits or help with housing and they are not allowed to work.

The family relies on their church and friends to pay for rent and food, but they find it difficult to meet basic living needs and the youngest child gets no special provisions to encourage her development.

AFRIL worked with Social Services and arranged for the Children with Disabilities unit to assess the family. Social Services have accepted that the child needs extra care and are now concluding a destitution assessment, which

will determine the extent of the support the family receives. Although the situation is outstanding, it is likely that the family will receive monetary support to prevent destitution and that their home will be adapted to facilitate the youngest child's development.

\*names have been changed to protect identities

## Rainbow Club art classes as well as cookery, sports and music

The Rainbow club now has 21 children ranging from as young as 4 to 11. Extra funding would enable the club to have 'INFANT' and 'JUNIOR' groups enabling the children to learn at their own pace. The Maths and English lessons are enabling the children to 'catch up' in the regular schools and feel part of their UK peer groups.

Zoe a volunteer has organised Art classes this term and the children are enthusiastic and have made masks this term.



## IT Classes on Saturdays

Every Saturday beginners and improvers sit behind their PC and learn valuable IT skills. Noma who in middle age had never used a computer has discovered a whole new world. She can now email her friends, write letters and keep simple household budgets.

The ESOL classes are now all full and have a waiting list. Students work in groups at their own pace and learn writing, reading and conversation skills which are recognised by employers and schools alike. The students enjoy seeing their hard work rewarded by good exam results and can

## Many nationalities coming together to talk and have fun



The Talk Shop is based at the Salvation Army signposted in Lewisham High Street. The numbers have now grown to over 40 on the registrar and each Monday men and women of all nationalities join in writing and reading lessons followed by songs and games, Help with everyday activities like visits to the dentist or doctors are discussed and vocabulary games help people learn the names of every day objects,

The success of this group has meant that more volunteers would enable a much needed crèche to form. Then young families with small children could also come and make friends in the community and build their confidence in speaking English.

*“More volunteers would mean we could offer a crèche facility for the many young families in the Lewisham area”*

## Students study English at all levels

The ESOL classes are now all full and have a waiting list. Students work in groups at their own pace and learn writing, reading and conversation skills which are recognised by employers and schools alike. The students enjoy seeing their hard work rewarded by good exam results and can now chat easily in English.

## Achieving ESOL standards are a way of integrating into the community

Family ESOL and ICT classes on Saturdays are generously funded by LBL Community Learning Programme. Our pupils are very grateful for their support which is helping make a real difference to their lives.

Rosario Mincher – Teacher

I teach ESOL for beginners on Saturdays from 9.30am – 11.30am. I have thirteen registered students from China, Albania, Turkey, India and Sri Lanka. At the start of the term, we agreed on our learning contract, and the terms include: the students will come regularly, on time and will practice speaking in English at home and with friends. As their teacher I will work hard, to organise varied activities and issue regular homework.

My students are very keen to improve their English and are looking forward to a year of speaking, reading, listening and writing in English. I use creative and innovative methods so that their learning experience becomes interesting, enjoyable and memorable. A range of outdoor activities will also be organised to build the students' confidence in buying tickets for buses and trains, looking at train timetables and going around in London. These activities will also involve young members of their family so that they share the same experience of learning. This is the main aim of the Family Learning programme that we will also implement this year. The Family Learning programme encourages family members to work together and learn from each other and hopefully pursue further learning. The programme aims to build and strengthen harmony in the house and integration in the community

*“Coming here has meant I can read simple forms and join the library”*



## AFRIL Day Centre students make bags and Xmas items for sale at Lewisham market

On Wednesday afternoons a group of beginners and more experienced sewing ladies get behind their sewing machines and produce bags, Xmas table runners and numerous small gifts. These will be sold on a market stall at Xmas to raise money for AFRIL.

Colourful material and all kinds of felt and ribbon have been donated and will be made skilfully into small and large Xmas gifts by these clever ladies. These classes are funded by Awards for All and the Church Urban Fund.



*Iolanda with a bag*

## Fortnightly Business Employment Support

Each fortnight on a Wednesday AFRIL now offer advice and guidance to people seeking employment. Help with CV's and letters to employers are all part of the service to assist getting back to work and being able to support themselves and their families.



*Ladies sewing*

## 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**

## Our Services:

### ADVICE:

Information, Advice & Support:

Thursdays: 10am -2.30pm

Fridays: 10am -4.30pm

(By appointment only: call 020 8265 5269) Volunteer Centre

### 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

(Rainbow Club):

Supplementary School:

Saturdays: 10am-2pm

St Mary Centre,  
Ladywell Rd, SE13 7UW

### 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

St Mary Centre,  
Ladywell Rd, SE13 7UW

### Day Centre:

Wednesdays 10-2pm

St Mary Centre,  
Ladywell Rd, SE13 7UW

### Talk Shop:

Mondays: 12pm-2pm

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

### BUSINESS EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT:

Fortnightly

Wednesdays 12.30-2.30pm

St Mary Centre,  
Ladywell Rd, SE13 7UW

## EVENTS

AGM Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2009 11 - 2 pm St Mary's Centre

XMAS Party Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> December 2009 11 – 2pm St Mary's Centre  
Bring a dish of food for the buffet all are welcome



**Action for Refugees  
in Lewisham**

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