

Notre Dame Refugee Centre

working together to build lives



Annual Review 2008/09

Notre Dame Refugee Centre is an independent charity in the heart of London's west end.

Our main aims are:

1. To enable refugees and asylum seekers to be resilient, resourceful and capable in addressing the challenges in their lives and their communities
2. To empower refugees and asylum seekers through the development of personal and professional skills, knowledge and experience
3. To support refugees and asylum seekers to achieve a quality of life and wellbeing.

...NDRC is an organisation that manages to provide so much with very low levels of funding, and manages to do this in a professional and caring way with the client at the heart of what they do. With the ongoing attack on asylum seekers by the UK government through its policy of forced destitution, refugee support agencies such as NDRC are on the front line, dealing with the impact of this policy and are therefore vital to ensuring the survival needs of people rendered destitute continue to be met.

Patrick Jones, Asylum Aid



Our Gardening Group

Message from the Chair and Director

Nothing happens until something moves

Albert Einstein

Imagine a life in limbo. The future is unknowable, the past is traumatic. For many of our clients who are seeking asylum in the UK this is exactly where they are: neither here nor there, waiting to find out whether they can remain here and rebuild a life, or whether they have failed in their asylum claim and this hope disappears.

Some have already gone through the difficult asylum process only to be turned down and are once again in limbo as they make a fresh appeal with support from the Notre Dame Refugee Centre (NDRC).

NDRC has been working with asylum seekers and refugees since 1996. In the last 13 years, the situation encountered by those seeking asylum has deteriorated: they have no right to work; they experience poverty, ill-health, loneliness; there can be no future, imagined or real, while they wait for a decision on their claim. Our Centre's role is to welcome those who are seldom welcomed – asylum seekers are too often regarded as opportunists taking advantage of the UK welfare state. The reality is a far bleaker one of destitution, homelessness and isolation.

Our approach is to enable asylum seekers and refugees both to build a better life in their present difficult circumstances and to make headway towards a better future. [Continued on page 3...](#)



Clients, volunteers and staff sharing lunch in the park

Annual Review & Financial Statements 2008/09

Our supporters

We are most grateful to individuals, groups, companies and institutions for their wonderful support to our work in 2008/09. Our success depends entirely on the generosity of our donors and supporters, who include:



Our energetic sponsored walkers

- City Parochial Foundation
- Church of Our Lady of the Assumption and St Gregory, Soho
- Groundswell
- L'Ecole du Parc, Clapham
- L'Eglise Protestante Française de Londres and the French Huguenot Church of London Trust
- Leicester Square Theatre
- London Catalyst
- London Councils
- Londres Accueil
- M. Jérôme Mangin
- Members of the Taizé Prayer group
- Notre Dame de France Church
- Societas Mariae Provincial office, Rome
- St James's Church, Piccadilly
- St John Southworth Fund, diocese of Westminster
- St Michael and All Angels Church, Chiswick
- St Vincent de Paul Society
- The Austin and Hope Pilkington Trust
- The Besom
- The Dean and Chapter of Westminster Abbey
- The London Churches Refugee Hardship Fund
- The Loreto sisters, Acton, and the Loreto Provincial Centre, Manchester
- The Society of the Holy Child Jesus, London Provincial Centre
- The Swiss Church in London
- West End Counselling Services

A heartfelt thanks to our NDRC Volunteer Team who did the London Legal Support Trust Sponsored Walk and raised £7,000.

Continued from page 1...

Our advice service supports hundreds of people every year through the maze of the asylum application process; our community café is a welcoming space offering food and social contact; our English tutors enable asylum seekers to better communicate; our Counsellor and visiting Health Service help to heal minds and bodies; our emergency support supplies essential resources to those who can least afford food and toiletries.

NDRC makes a difference to people's lives by enabling them to be resilient, resourceful and capable. Our success is due to the invaluable contribution of our funders and donors, and the staunch commitment of our volunteers, Trustees and staff team. They makes us what we are – a sanctuary in a hostile world.

Martin McAnaney, SM, Chair of Trustees
Julie Christie, interim Director



*Fun at our summer
Family Day Out*

NDRC Board of Trustees

Martin McAnaney, Chair
Alan Williams
Aymeric Brochard
Claire Reynaud
Erick Rinner
Faziry Mafutala
Francis Tienga Ngale
Gillian Paterson
John Harrington
Laurence Blow

NDRC Staff team

Christine Diaz, Director
Julie Christie, interim Director
Jean Demars, Centre Coordinator
Brian Mitchell, Senior Advice Worker
Daniel Hadas, Advice Worker
Barbara Gehrels, Counsellor
Fr Jean-Marie Bloqueau,
Chaplin to NDRC

NDRC Partners

Asylum Aid, Foodworks,
Forest Farm Peace Garden,
Leicester Square Theatre,
Lynn Holland and Kevin Greenan,
New Park Road Baptist Church,
Notre Dame de France Church
Prêt-à-Manger, Covent Garden,
Vincent Luttman,
Wandsworth Asylum Welcome,
Westminster Primary Care Trust

*I have met many
compatriots here, with
whom I have shared my
impressions. The
Centre really helps us
to overcome stress.
NDRC client*



Learning IT skills

Examples of help with practical matters include:

- **help with learning everyday English:** volunteers offer regular one to one English classes, following the English for Speakers of Other Languages 'Skills for Life' syllabus. We advise on external courses, helping people to apply and monitoring their progress
- **health advice:** the Health Advisory Service provided through Westminster Primary Care Trust, provides clients with an opportunity to discuss health concerns and support in accessing NHS services. Most importantly, the health practitioners offer time to talk through people's health issues and answer questions in a sensitive way
- **supermarket voucher exchange:** we provide an monthly exchange service for asylum seekers' supermarket vouchers. Those who qualify for government support receive £35 in vouchers per week and we exchange these for cash once a month so that they have some flexibility with their limited income
- **food and toiletries packs:** we make up emergency packs to clients of dried and canned food, as well as soap and toiletries
- **second-hand clothes:** our store of donated second-hand clothing is very popular, especially in the cold weather
- **café lunch and snacks:** twice a week we offer a range of hot lunches, salads, healthy sandwiches, snacks and fruit.

These practical services rely entirely on donations from our supporters and the work of our volunteers.

We support vulnerable people with practical services

Our Community café – a meeting place

Our drop-in centre, open twice a week and focused on our community café, is the hub of NDRC. We welcome clients, new and regular, explain what assistance we can provide and begin the process of helping people to move their lives on.

An essential element of the café is our practical support (see opposite). Thanks to generous individuals and companies, we offer clothes, toiletries – especially important for women – and snacks in the café. We reimburse clients' travel costs to the Centre, to enable everyone who wants to attend. Our advice workers and the Notre Dame de France Church chaplain are a regular presence, explaining our services (described later), and encouraging people to use them.

Just as important, the café has become a meeting place where clients come to see their friends: people from their home country, staff, volunteers. We have built on this to support people in reclaiming control over their lives, through personal, professional and community development. Clients are becoming more involved in the life of NDRC and confident in dealing with the issues affecting their community. During this past year, several client-initiated, led and managed projects have emerged (described later).

Despite the limbo our clients find themselves in for years they show, against formidable odds, the enthusiasm and strength needed to rebuild their lives and shape their community.



Welcome to our café

Enabling people to talk in confidence about their feelings is vital

More people attended the drop-in counselling service last year. The Counsellor worked with over 50 clients in 2008/09 and saw six to eight people each week, some coming repeatedly. Clients are predominantly female, in a ratio of over two to one, and from Africa, mainly from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), with a few from Iran and Moldova.

Most clients have been in the UK for over two years, with a few here for ten or more. The majority are failed asylum seekers, with fresh claims pending, and some are destitute. Many express deep anxieties about being dispersed outside the capital, as they rely on NDRC and on African communities in London.

This year, more clients asked for referrals to the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture or the Helen Bamber Foundation. Several requested a letter to their GP seeking a psychiatric referral. All those accessing the counselling service are, in the view of the professional staff Counsellor, genuinely suffering from depression, anxiety, and some degree of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Most also have chronic physical health problems, notably, head, back and joint pains, diabetes and insomnia.

The economic situation has intensified the mood of pessimism. Since January 2009, greater numbers of asylum seekers are being detained, with some evidence that deportations have resumed. Several clients were detained and given deportation orders, although to date all except one have been allowed to remain in the UK. This led to heightened anxiety and may explain why more people are talking to the Counsellor about thoughts of suicide, although only one person made a serious attempt. Enabling people to talk in confidence about their feelings as well as their experiences is a vital part of what NDRC offers.

We offer counselling, advice and advocacy



*Some of our clients
enjoying a lighter moment*

Our asylum advice service always appeals decisions

Thanks to generous medium term funding, our asylum advice service is now run by four qualified advice workers at the twice-weekly drop-in sessions. This allows us to deal with the many clients who come to seek assistance on issues ranging from finding a way out of destitution to applying for naturalisation. We are able to access a wide range of specialist networks for advice and, if necessary, refer clients for legal representation

The most widespread problem is, quite simply, destitution. The majority of the service's clients are refused asylum seekers, many of whom can no longer access asylum support from the UK Border Agency (UKBA), but have no permission to work or any right to benefits.

We try to find a way out of this quagmire by encouraging clients, where possible, to make fresh representations to UKBA if new evidence can be found. We are then able to request hard case, 'Section 4' (S4), support. Unfortunately, this provides only very basic support and accommodation, and the recipients often have to accept very poor accommodation far from London.

Section 4 is also available to pregnant women, sometimes failed asylum seekers, who are or become homeless and to those awaiting proceedings at the High Court.

From time to time our S4 application is rejected. In such cases we immediately appeal to the Asylum Support Tribunal, citing the appropriate Immigration and Asylum Act or the Human Rights Act. During this past year we have an almost 100 per cent success rate at the subsequent hearing.

The Centre has supported me throughout and brought me a freshness I had not found in a long time. NDRC client



Celebrating national play day

We have a wide range of live projects at present, including:

- a **centre newsletter and blog**, which have been enthusiastically received by clients and supporters alike. The Newsletter is written, edited and designed by a group of clients and is a vehicle for sharing information on asylum issues as well as offering a voice for those seldom heard. Our Blog is a window on the NDRC world, giving up to date information on our services and events at <http://ndrefugeecentre.canalblog.com>
- an **african textiles design and make group**, which has become an established part of the Centre's activities programme. It grew out of a women's sewing class and succeeded in hosting a wonderful Fashion Show during Refugee Week 2009. The group has plans to diversify into European fashions, accessories, jewellery and perhaps even soft furnishings
- a **community garden**, which is an inspiration to us all. An allotment that is part of the Forest Farm Peace Garden in east London is being developed by a group of committed clients who wanted the opportunity to grow and share their own food. For our clients, the community garden allotment is a fabulous opportunity to create something from their own efforts
- the **centre's children and family days**, which are always excellent fun. They provide an opportunity for clients visit places they would not ordinarily go to, such as a London park, Brighton or a city farm. On our Family Play Day in August 2009, clients of all ages enjoyed the sunshine in Hyde Park. The children had fun at the Princess Diana Memorial Playground, with the pirates, fairies and games, and the grown-ups relished a rare moment relaxing and enjoying London.

We enable the building of community

Community development emerged as a key element of our Centre during 2008/09. Our intention is to empower the communities who use NDRC services with the skills and confidence to make positive changes in their own lives.

The essence of community building is to help people to help themselves, to enable a sense of responsibility and self-determination to take root. We work to nurture self-esteem among the refugees and asylum seekers who come to NDRC, encouraging them to feel they can have some control over their lives, and can do something towards overcoming their poverty and disadvantage, as well as the depression that goes with it.

We want to enable the communities we serve to take part more fully at the **grass roots** in the wider society of this country. Our approach is to encourage client initiatives so that they turn into projects that are led and managed by clients, with support from NDRC. Our current projects are described opposite.

My contribution is to seek to be available to all our clients, welcoming each one as someone important, someone of value, and this at a time when all their dealings with the authorities, through NDRC or elsewhere, have hit a 'no'. This makes them say they are 'ghosts' in a society that refuses them a place. The challenge facing us all at here is to rebuild individuals who have been wounded, scoffed at, denied their humanity, often violently. The essential first step is to believe that everyone can rebuild their lives, that a new future is possible. It's in the looks and words exchanged at the drop in centre that this renewal can begin.

Fr Jean-Marie Bloqueau, priest at Notre Dame de France, chaplain to NDRC



Developing sewing skills

Who we served – some figures

From September 2008 to August 2009, we had 5,521 visits to our Centre for advice, to access our other in-house services and to meet and make friends in our community café. Our service continues to serve predominantly French-speaking people who make up 94 per cent of our clients.

- **Advice and advocacy:** during the year, 2,233 clients attended our Centre for advice and they made up 40 per cent of our client group. Our service specialises in welfare benefits, housing and immigration advice for asylum seekers and refugees.
- **Counselling:** our counsellor worked with 52 clients over the year. Of these, 37 were women and they made up 71 per cent of counselling clients. Over half of our clients were aged between 31 and 45 years old.
- **English tutoring:** we had 218 client visits for English classes and tutoring. Every week our two volunteer English teachers saw between seven and 10 clients, and on average two were new.
- **Supermarket Voucher Exchange:** in an average month, we exchanged vouchers for cash for 106 clients, totalling over £3,500 per month.
- **Clothing:** we had 1,023 visits to NDRC to collect good quality second hand clothing; on some days as many as 25 people chose clothes from our store.
- **Community café and socialising:** many of our clients attended the Centre simply to meet up with friends and enjoy a warm welcome. During 2008/09, we had nearly 1,000 visits to our café by clients.



Our Fashion Show models

We manage our funds with care and transparency

Accounts

2008-9 Financial Statement (with pre-audit figures)

Incoming resources

Donations from Supporters and Organisations	34,493
Donations from Supporters with Gift Aid	11,661
Trusts and Foundations	37,086
Government and public bodies	18,724
Legacies	32,000
Bank interest	360
Total incoming resources	134,324

Resources used - Direct charitable expenditure

Services delivered through Community café and Drop-in	48,960
Counselling	4,912
Advice and advocacy service	34,117
Management and administration	9,720
Cost of generating funds	7,157
Total resources used	104,866
Net income/(expenditure)	29,458

These are summary accounts prepared by our interim Director. Our financial year runs from September 2008 to August 2009. Full audited accounts showing the split between restricted and unrestricted funds and accompanied by detailed notes will be available on completion of audited accounts by Buzzacott Chartered Accountants. Please contact our Director on 020 7440 2661 or email christinediaz@notredamerc.org.uk.

Our Volunteers

Our volunteer team is 30 strong and they are the backbone of the Centre: they enable us to provide a wide range of quality services. The annual value of volunteer time is in the region of £46,000, a remarkable contribution to NDRC and beyond price to us. A significant minority of our volunteers are clients who volunteer at the Centre to give something back to NDRC and to improve their own skills and knowledge. All of our client volunteers are trained and supported in their role at the Centre: this can be anything from serving in the Café, supporting projects or registering new clients. One key piece of work is the peer to peer community evaluation of our services: this is undertaken with the clients by client volunteers, to tell us what clients think and feel about our Centre and what we can do better or differently. We are incredibly grateful to all those who worked with us in the past year:



Our volunteer team and friends

Albertine Osti
Ally Lavy
Anca Ionescu
Anne Bonavero
Anne Cavell
Anne-Marie Sharman
Blandine Lautard
Bebe Tshibengi
Boni Kasai
Christiane Sonier
Claire Reynaud
Danielle Razafiman

Elene Omolongo
Eleonore Mensah
Fiona Tremethick
Gilberte Regnard
Gillian Paterson
Helene Lantere
Jean Lundu
Jean Murat
Julienne Favre
Karamba Muhigirway
Magali Daillencourt
Massandje Kone

Maureen Lynch
Michelle Bourdier-Foss
Nana Say Bilo
Papy Mboniama
Ruth Kitching
Sammy Reuter
Severine Monvoisin
Solange de la Tour
Sophie Pillois
Therese Mangin
Virginie Malissard
Yvonne Kijoo

Our staff and volunteers work together to build lives

At Notre Dame Refugee Centre we offer:

- A twice weekly community café and drop-in centre, providing a warm welcome and a meal for up to 100 refugees and asylum seekers on any one day
- Professional advice on immigration, benefits, welfare and health
- Help with translation, form filling, telephoning, making enquiries
- English tutoring in small groups and as one to one
- Food parcels and clothing for clients who are destitute
- Counselling services
- Regular health advice from Westminster Primary Care Trust
- Monthly legal advice surgery with Asylum Aid.



Editing the Centre's newsletter

We are helped by four part time staff and a team of 30 volunteers at NDRC. We are also supported by the staff at Notre Dame de France church.

We are supported financially by private donations, fundraising events, contributions from church and other organisations and generous giving by our friends.

What can I do?

Make a donation to NDRC

- If you are a tax payer, you can gift aid your donation. This means that for every £1 you donate to NDRC, we can receive 28p making the total value of your donation £1.28.

Leave a legacy

- Remember NDRC in your will.

Donate goods

- Soap and toiletries are particularly welcome
- Printer cartridges are sold to recycling companies to raise money for our work.

Become a volunteer

Do you have skills that would be useful in our work? Could you:

- Join the volunteer team running the community café and drop-in centre on Mondays and Thursdays from 11am to 4pm
- Support our community projects and client-led initiatives
- Support our fundraising efforts and help organise events.

Notre Dame Refugee Centre

5 Leicester Place, London, WC2H 7BX; tel: 020 7440 2660/61;
e-mail: drop-in@notredamerc.org.uk; blog: <http://ndrefugeecentre.canalblog.com>

Opening hours for drop-in centre: Monday and Thursday 11am to 4pm
Annual Review available online at www.notredamechurch.co.uk/eng/chris/outreach.html

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