



sent to Haslar detention centre to await removal. The detention notification stated that he "had tried to obtain money by false pretences using a credit card". Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID) obtained a bail hearing and contacted the police who had no record of his committing the offence.

Colin Firth claims that Pierre's latest detention notice included a number of unsubstantiated charges: "You have previously failed or refused to leave the UK when required to do so." There is absolutely no evidence of this. It also reads: "You have not produced satisfactory evidence of your identity, nationality or lawful basis to be in the UK." Well, people who flee their country never do.

Colin Firth said that instead of making use of Pierre's nursing skills, our government is prepared to connive in his murder.

### **What Next?**

At a vigil in Leeds to remember those who have been returned to DR Congo, a member of the Congolese community told those present that at least one of those returned on the flight had been imprisoned and a bribe demanded before they would be released. Contact has been made with Aseng who tells us that all the men on that flight have been detained. This is something the Home Office denied would happen.

A Special Envoy for Returns has been appointed to speed up removals of failed asylum seekers. Yet another family supported by LASSN, this time from Algeria, has been deported. In February. Jack Straw held talks with Algeria on a deportation agreement or Memoranda of Understanding (MOU's). The Home Office Country Information and Policy Unit report used for assessing asylum claims, details the use of torture in Algeria. International law prevents removal to countries where there is a risk of torture. MOU's provide diplomatic assurances from the offending government that they will not mistreat returned asylum seekers. However, an executive director of Human Rights Watch has said that "These MOU's will not prevent torture ...On the contrary, they are tacit admissions that torture is practiced and that these individuals are at risk."

It is apparent that MOU's are a strategy to increase the number of refugees removed from the UK. News of people being detained in preparation for deportation is now commonplace, with families being an easy target.

On 28 March 2007, a Country Guidance Tribunal was to be held in a challenge to the Home Office. It will demonstrate that those sent back to the DR Congo face imprisonment, ill-treatment and violation of their human rights.

Leeds No Borders provides practical support to those at risk of deportation. They meet most Wednesdays, 7pm at The Common Place, 23-25 Wharf Street, LS2 or can be contacted on 07748 010691 or email [leedsnoborders@lists.riseup.net](mailto:leedsnoborders@lists.riseup.net).

## **Cuts to ESOL Classes**

Recently the government announced that there would be no more funding for free ESOL Classes at FE Colleges for asylum seekers from September. It is predictable given that the Home Office state that under the New Asylum Model (NAM) a final decision is given within 8 weeks and there is now no need for asylum seekers to have English lessons. However, the government has revised their decision in response to lobbying. Free classes will be provided to Asylum Seekers who have been waiting for a decision for 6 months or more and for young people under 19 years of age.

Charitable service providers have started offering free classes during the present academic year. LASSN itself is preparing to offer two classes twice a week as from September 2007. Below is a list of those service providers offering classes this year:

### **St Georges Crypt**

Mon, Tue, Wed and Fri 10am to 12.30pm

### **St Georges Church**

Thursday 6.00 to 7.30pm at St Georges' Centre

### **Hamara Centre**

Beeston, Tue and Thu 10.00am to 12.00pm

### **St Aidan's Church**

Harehills, Thu 10.00am to 1.00pm

### **Archway**

For 16-25 yrs, Fri 2.00 to 3.30pm 0113 383 3900

### **The Common Place**

Sat 1.00 to 4.00pm 07816842708

### **St Vincent's Centre**

Amitoj Kaur, Coordinator. 0113 248 7698

Mon 10.00am to 12.00pm for Entry level 1

Tue 10.00am to 12.00pm for Entry level 3

Wed and Thu 10.30am – 12.30pm Pre-Entry level

Fri 10.30am to 12.30pm for Entry level 2

Classes start on 1 May

### **Harehills Children Centre**

Surestart Harehills, 0113 2951595. Basic Courses with crèche.

### **Choto Moni**

Bankside Primary School Tracy. 0113 239 2689/ 248 4603. Basic Courses with crèche.

### **RETAS**

0113 2407320. Fri 12.30 to 2.00pm for Entry levels 1 and 2.

### **United Free Church**

Malvern Road, Beeston. Mon 10.30am to 12.00pm.

### **East Leeds Health for All**

5 & 6 Boston Towers, Tom Bailey 0113 248 3900.

Tue 5.00 to 7.00pm and Fri 3.00 to 5.00pm, for Conversation Drop-in; Thu 9.45 to 11.45am.

For further information, contact Gerard Godon, English at Home Co-ordinator on 0113 380 5692.

## Moving on: from Destitution to Contribution

The Commissioners report resulting from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust inquiry into destitution among refused asylum seekers, was launched at Westminster on 28 March.

### The research behind their report has revealed:

- Refused asylum seekers are the largest group of destitute asylum seekers living in Leeds
- Reliance on community support although invaluable can be very precarious and sometimes even exploitative
- Rough sleeping is unexpectedly high: 29 out of the 118 questioned said they had slept out the previous night, 3 were women
- Support from local agencies is a vital lifeline
- Staff and volunteers from local agencies feel demoralised and energy is diverted away from refugee integration focused activities

### Recommendations by the Inquiry

#### Commissioners state:

- People should be given a license to work which will be revoked once they leave the country or there is some other resolution to their case
- Those unable to work should get support
- There needs to be acknowledgement that a sizeable minority of refused asylum seekers cannot be returned
- Voluntary return should be at the heart of the system
- People whose cases remain unresolved and have been here several years should be regularised (i.e. given status and permission to work)
- Everyone should have access to health care
- Detention should be used as a last resort only
- While the work that local agencies is invaluable, the most effective difference will only come by a change in asylum policy
- Asylum myths need challenging including the relation between numbers arriving and treatment in the UK.

An event is being planned in Leeds on 8 May to report back on the destitution inquiry for Leeds.

*The Red Cross may be able to provide proof for refugees who have been imprisoned abroad. This evidence can be used to support their claim for asylum. Contact Kate Tetley on 01274 223291 for further details*

## Be Prepared!

Measures to take before detention

### What you need:

- Solicitors and campaigners need easy access to your Home Office documents.
- A solicitor's letter which shows at what stage you are with your asylum claim.
- Phone & fax number for your solicitor and MP.
- A letter from the Medical Foundation, counsellor or health practitioner which states why you should not be detained.
- Familiarise your MP with your case ASAP.
- Written permission for someone to liaise with the solicitor, MP, Home Office and perhaps press.
- Always have a charged mobile phone in credit with you, that lists emergency numbers, especially when you report to an Immigration Office.
- A phone card for use in detention.
- A paper copy of contact numbers.
- Get someone to accompany you when reporting to an Immigration Office.
- If detained: insist on calling a friend; ring your solicitor or ask for one; seek help from the Chaplain and visitors group; do not sign anything.

A more comprehensive Guide Against Detention and Deportation is available from LASSN.

John Reid has admitted the Government acted "unlawfully" in relation to the detention of young asylum seekers

## Section 9 Pilot

The results of the Home Office evaluation of the Asylum and Immigration Act 2004 Section 9 pilot is due to be released in the next few months. Section 9 has been piloted in Leeds and has led to some families having their NASS support withdrawn and many people leaving their homes in fear that they will be detained and deported.

Immigration staff have concluded that Section 9 has failed in its objective of encouraging voluntary returns. However, Immigration Minister Liam Byrne said he was reluctant to abandon the policy "it may be something that could in some circumstances be important to have." Section 9 deprives unsuccessful asylum seekers of benefits, which can potentially lead them into destitution and result in their children being taken into care.

## 88% error rate in Section 4 decisions

The report, *Failing the Failed*, published in February by the Asylum Support Appeals Project (ASAP), found that of 117 decisions letters examined in 1996, 88% of NASS decisions did not apply the law correctly or misinterpreted their own policy. Appeals against NASS decisions are made to the Asylum Support Adjudicators but in the meantime, the appellant may end up destitute.

ASAP recommend never to assume Section 4 decisions are correct. Voluntary agencies or Refugee Community Organisations can contact ASAP for free legal representation, advice and information about entitlement to NASS support, including the right to appeal. See [www.asaproject.org.uk](http://www.asaproject.org.uk) or contact their advice line on 020 8684 5972.

## LASSN News

### Farewell to Gill

Gill Gibbons, Manager at LASSN, is leaving in May. We are sorry that Gill is leaving us, but recognise that she wants to move on and wish her well. Her legacy to LASSN is huge. Gill was involved from the very early beginnings when a group of volunteers came together to see how help could be offered in a co-ordinated way to the first wave of asylum seekers in Leeds – a new experience for the North.

Gill as first manager of LASSN has developed it into a project that is widely respected in Leeds, and beyond, for its professionalism and well organised practical support. Her networking and training skills have been greatly appreciated by many individuals and organisations in the city. In order to develop the work, Gill has virtually single-handedly raised well over £1,000,000 for the Befriending, English at Home and Refugee Community Involvement projects as well as the core running and management costs. She has achieved much and will be a hard act to follow. Thank you, Gill. Go well.

### Welcome to Peter

LASSN now enters a new phase, building on Gill's foundational work. Peter Richardson will be joining us from the Regional Forum for Community and Voluntary Organisations, where he is Deputy Director. He brings a wide range of skills and a strong commitment to addressing the injustices and isolation, sometimes destitution, that many asylum seekers face in our society. We are all looking forward to working with him.

**Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network**  
LASSN 233-237 Roundhay Road LEEDS LS8 4HS  
Tel: 0113 380 5690 Fax: 0113 380 5691  
Email: [lassn@lassn.org.uk](mailto:lassn@lassn.org.uk)

## The Asylum Seeker

He sat in his cell, head gripped in his hands  
An outsider – from Zimbabwe  
Or Ethiopia or Somalia or Eritrea or Iran or Iraq or  
Kosovo or Congo  
Or even Turkmenistan (where did you say?)  
Whatever his country, he'd dreamed dreams  
Or thought thoughts or said things  
Odious to the rulers of his land.  
His shop had been trashed by thugs in his street  
Twice he'd been slammed in a verminous prison  
And when he was freed, threats  
Of beatings – or worse – were barked at his back.  
"I must leave. I must leave." He hugged his dear  
wife  
"Be brave," he whispered. "I will send for you  
soon."  
He fled. He came to fair England  
On a plane, with a ticket.  
Alone and homeless, broke and full of hope.  
Kick them out, knee-jerked the Sun  
Bar the doors, bleated the Daily Mail  
Refugees unwelcome, raged the serious Daily  
Telegraph  
Send asylum seekers back, hissed the government  
To its Civil Service staff.

"Hear my story"  
They are liars said the people.  
"I will live anywhere"  
They want our houses said the people.  
"I will work hard"  
They want our jobs said the people.  
"I am afraid to go back"  
They might be terrorists said the people.  
"I cannot go back"  
They cannot stay here said the people.

He sat in his cell, head gripped in his hands.

A popular parable told long ago  
Of a Jew on a journey to Jericho...  
Intently, intently I made myself listen  
Then an echo of "Samaritan"  
Came back to me as LASSN.

by Robin Carmichael.

*For the new Directory  
of Services in Leeds for Refugees  
& Asylum Seekers either email  
[richie@lassn.org.uk](mailto:richie@lassn.org.uk) for a free  
electronic version or send a £15  
cheque for a bound copy, made  
payable to LASSN, at 233  
Roundhay Road, Leeds LS8 4HS.*

This Newsletter  
is funded by the  
**Allen Lane Foundation**

