

STAR News

THE QUARTERLY UPDATE FROM STUDENT ACTION FOR REFUGEES

Issue 37 Spring 2008



SPEAKERS, SAMBA AND SLEEP DEPRIVATION: ACTION DAY 2008

18 sleepouts, 41 groups involved, hundreds of students sleeping out, thousands of petitions signed and not much sleep... All this can mean only one thing, a truly magnificent Action Day 2008!

What a day it was. From samba workshops in Brighton to living like a destitute asylum seeker in Leeds or even the 130 brave students who slept out in Oxford city centre, Action Day 2008 was huge. Here's a selection of reports from across the country.

Oxford STAR teamed up with local refugee organisations Refugee Resource and Asylum Welcome to hold a mega day and night of events. There was a performance from a local youth group, poems and songs from former asylum seekers, a performance from a student band, talks from Refugee Resource and Asylum Welcome, some street theatre and a dance group – and all this by 8pm!

Meanwhile in London, several STAR and Amnesty groups from universities including LSE, SOAS, KCL, UCL and Imperial College held a high profile sleepout at St Paul's Church in Covent Garden. There were several great speakers including Tim Finch (Refugee Council), Lisa Nandy (Children's Society), Simon Hughes MP, representatives from UNHCR and a former asylum seeker. On a cold night it was fantastic that around 50 people slept out.

Elsewhere, Sheffield STAR came together with Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam Amnesty, holding a stall and collecting signatures on their Still Human Still Here petition.



Sleepers in London, Covent Garden

Leeds STAR held a mammoth 28 hour event that finished at midday on 6 March. Sussex STAR had banners and myth-busting facts daubed on cardboard boxes to attract attention all over campus to let everyone know what they were doing. Warwick STAR kept everyone warm with a samba lesson and capoeira performances, as well as serving traditional teas.

There was plenty of media attention for Action Day all across the country from articles in newspapers to photo-shoots to radio interviews – we did it all! There were positive reactions from local and student media across the country. A big congratulations to EVERYONE involved with a truly memorable Action Day 2008, after a long cold night STAR activists left knowing that they had been heard.



Sheffield



Drummers kick off the sleepout in Oxford



Simon Hughes addresses the crowd in London



Banners in Sussex

TAKING ACTION • TAKING ACTION • TAKING ACTION • TAKING ACTION

MORE ACTION DAY: A few quotes from the day:

"It's amazing what people will do for a good cause... All I can see is rows and rows of bodies in front of us."

Natasha Peach, a reporter on BBC Radio Oxford

"You wouldn't actually know but quite a lot of the people at the Common Place are actually destitute. There are elderly people as well as young people and people with children all in this position. There was a lady who was 7 months pregnant and who was living in a phone box."

Leeds STAR volunteer talking about the The Common Place, which provides support for destitute asylum seekers.

"It gives people hope, I think a lot of people ask whatever happened to Student activism? But coming here you think, good on them, there are still students who care about other people."

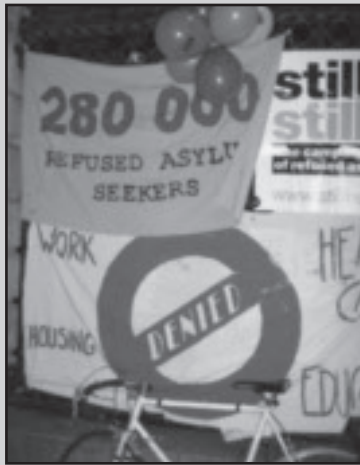
Tim Finch, Refugee Council

"It is not the sort of thing you normally see in Covent Garden. Normally you see performers, tourists, not people making a statement about destitution. As I came down I saw all the designer shops, and then in the distance some students huddled together on a piece of cardboard, the contrast was really striking."

Verity Coyle, Amnesty international

"You always realise that you can have a shower in the morning and have some food, destitute asylum seekers can't."

SOAS member



ASYLUM MONOLOGUES AND BRISTOL STAR

A powerful piece of theatre depicting the woes of the British asylum system; a packed theatre of students and Bristolians; well attended workshops... A really inspiring evening put together by a coalition of societies including Medsin, Stop Aids and Aegis, held together and motivated by STAR's very own Abeel. This is the second year in a row that students in Bristol have arranged a performance of Actors for Refugees' *Asylum Monologues* and we've managed to engage with new people each time. The performance is delivered by three actors reading from a script, using the testimony of real asylum seekers; a very simple idea but all the more effective for it. The range of societies that takes part mean that we reach audiences who are usually less conscious of asylum issues and *Asylum Monologues* is the perfect way to engage with them. It's also a great chance for us to get together and talk about joint concerns, such as the denial of healthcare element of Still Human Still Here campaign. Different societies arranged workshops afterwards to explore issues such as mental health and asylum in more depth, including a very popular appearance from Dave Neita, who committee members met at the STAR national conference.

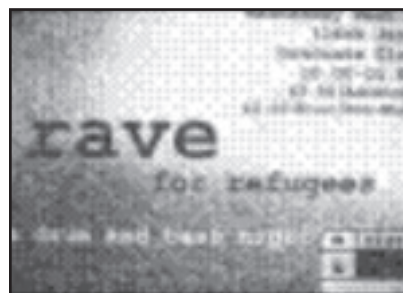
It's easy to arrange: professional actors volunteer to come read the monologues; all you have to do is cover travel costs and provide a venue and a few stools and lecterns.

www.iceandfire.co.uk/actorsforrefugees/
Oonagh Skrine, Bristol STAR

WARWICK STAR RAVES FOR REFUGEES

After several successes in the last year, Warwick STAR organised an always popular Rave for Refugees in January. With some of the most talented Drum and Bass DJs the university has to offer, the night was a hit with both activists and party goers.

The Rave for Refugees is not only a good opportunity to fundraise from ticket sales, but is also a chance to raise awareness of the plight of refugees. Branching out a little from the previous Raves for Refugees and aiming to raise awareness on the Still Human Still Here campaign, we also set up an informative silent film which was projected onto one of the walls during the event, which people could see from both the tables and dance floor. Without distracting people from having a good time, it served as a reminder of the purpose of the rave and kept the focus on Warwick STAR's aims.



Rave for Refugees Poster

Despite being relatively early on in the term, the Rave for Refugees raised money for both the Coventry Refugee Centre and Peace House. With preparations for the Rave being easy and relatively inexpensive, the event relies on a solid set of DJs and most importantly, strong advertising around campus and amongst the student body.

This means that in the future the Rave for Refugees will continue to raise awareness on refugee issues, fundraise and increase the presence of STAR on campus.

Cat Bourne, Warwick Star

NATIONAL SUPPORT OFFICE UPDATE

UPDATE FROM THE STAR NATIONAL SUPPORT OFFICE

There are several changes happening at STAR over the next few weeks and months. Here are some of the big things.

In the past year STAR has done a lot of thinking about how to ensure STAR uses its resources to make the biggest difference for refugees.

A number of pressures informed our thinking:

- The reduced availability and increased competition for funding to support STAR activities.
- Our interest in changing the world – all at once, setting ourselves realistic objectives
- Feedback from groups about interest in more targeted and specific support from the National Support Office.

STAR's new strategic plan lays out how STAR will work to make the biggest impact in the next three years and support and develop the network of STAR groups to do that. When the plan is finalised it will be available on the STAR website.

STAR will continue to focus on delivering high quality support to the student network. At the same time, STAR has made a decision to change the emphasis of our work with young people from nationally led activities for young people, to supporting groups to engage with young people, from all backgrounds in their local areas.

As a result of reduced funds and a new plan for our work, two staff will be leaving the STAR National Support Office. Sarah (Youth Outreach Officer) and Emer (Development Officer) have taken up offers of voluntary redundancy and will be leaving STAR in March / April. Both have worked really hard and contributed enormous amounts of energy to STAR over the past year. We are all sorry to see them leave and wish them all the best!

Katherine, (Chief Executive) has decided to hand over the reins and will be leaving STAR mid-May to find a new challenge. Recruitment for STAR's new Chief Executive is underway.

Sarah, Emer and Katherine say a sad farewell



DCSF SHOWS STAR THE LOVE ON VALENTINE'S DAY

Great news! On February 14 STAR was successful in securing £415,000 from the Department for Schools, Children and Families to support the work of the STAR network providing practical support to young refugees.



The grant will be used to support STAR groups in running 3 types of projects that benefit refugee children and young people; specifically homework and social clubs, sports clubs and in school 1-2-1 support. The project is funded for 3 years and initially will run in 8 dispersal and settlement cities across England.

This project application was successful because it was based on the experiences the STAR network has had in supporting refugee children. From the homework and social clubs of St. Georges or KCL STAR, to the 1-2-1 support projects DeMontford STAR are involved in, STAR groups have demonstrated the benefits these projects have brought to the lives of young refugees. Securing this project is great news for the STAR network because, by supporting STAR groups to continue to deliver – and to develop - such projects, the network has the potential to bring even wider reaching benefits to a greater number of refugee children across the country.

The project has also come at the right time. With recent changes to the support provided to unaccompanied asylum seeking children resulting in their dispersal across the country, such support is often lacking in new dispersal regions and is much needed.

We have recently launched the STAR website forum. One of the main aims of the project is to involve project users – refugee children and young people – in having their say as to how they want these clubs and support projects to look like.

For more information contact
volunteering@star-network.org.uk



ALSO COMING SOON...THE STAR NETWORK FORUM.

Connect with other STAR volunteers...share ideas and experiences...post queries and interesting tidbits of information...find out about upcoming events...discuss the latest development in refugee issues...all using the STAR forum!

We have recently launched the STAR website forum. To contribute to the forum you must be a registered member of the STAR website. So if you do not already have login details then contact your STAR committee.

Dates for your Diaries...



8 May
World Red Cross Day

9 June
STAR Committee Training Leeds
14 June
STAR Committee Training London

20 June
World Refugee Day

June 16 - 22
Refugee Week 2008

Throughout the Summer: STAR will be at festivals as part of the workers beer company!

RefugeeMap

STAR has launched a new interactive online resource for young people. RefugeeMap is a collaborative Wiki providing easy and accessible information for volunteers, especially young people, working with refugees in the UK. The site seeks to gather in one place easily accessible information on refugee situations, news and policy, and volunteering opportunities around the UK.

Built by volunteers, for volunteers RefugeeMap hopes to be 'an all singing, all dancing, one stop shop of information for anyone interested in refugee issues and volunteering with refugees!'.
www.star-network.org.uk/refugeemap

WILL YOU, ARE YOU OR HAVE YOU BEEN ON A STAR GROUP COMMITTEE?

Then STAR Committee Training 2008 is the event for you!

- Meet students involved in STAR from all over the country
- Listen to key speakers talk about important issues affecting asylum seekers and refugees
- Learn practical skills to help you run your STAR Group (including project management, fundraising, working with other organisations and much more)
- Attend specialist sessions related to your role (for example, Chair/Presidents, Secretaries, Volunteer Project Coordinators and Treasurers will have their own workshops)
- Get some great ideas for developing your STAR group over the next year
- Get fully clued up on the new national STAR campaign that will launch in September

IT'S FREE!

Places are limited, so please book early to avoid disappointment. Deadline for booking places: Monday June 2nd

Contact STAR at students@star-network.org.uk for more info and booking forms or visit www.star-network.org.uk/training



Students at STAR training last year

IT'S TWICE!

**SATURDAY JUNE 7TH,
LEEDS**

**SATURDAY JUNE 14TH,
CENTRAL LONDON**

NEWS IN BRIEF...THE LATEST ON ASYLUM AND REFUGEE ISSUES

The government published its 'Path to Citizenship' paper at the end of February. This suggests substantial reforms to the immigration system. Under the proposals there would be three routes to citizenship and three stages to every journey. There are concerns from Refugee organisations that the new proposals will merely place extra and unnecessary barriers in the way of refugees attempting to gain protection. Donna Covey from the Refugee Council states, 'Now, these new rules will mean that refugees, along with other migrants, are denied full membership of this country until they have passed a number of unnecessary tests, met standards not applied to others, and waited for many years - including time on "probation", an inappropriate term usually applied to law breakers. We don't see how integration and community cohesion are advanced by making it harder for people to become citizens and feel they belong.'

More than 1,400 rejected Iraqi asylum seekers are to be told they must go home or face destitution in Britain as the government considers Iraq safe enough to return them, according to leaked Home Office correspondence. The Iraqis involved are to be told that unless they sign up for a voluntary return programme to Iraq within three weeks, they face being made homeless and losing state support. They will also be asked to sign a waiver agreeing the government will take no responsibility for what happens to them or their families once they return to Iraqi territory.

A five-year downward trend in asylum applications in industrialized countries was reversed in 2007, largely because of an increase in the number of Iraqi asylum seekers, according to provisional statistics compiled by the UN refugee agency. The UNHCR says the Iraqi refugee crisis - with 4.5 million people uprooted by the conflict - continues to represent one of its biggest challenges.

STAR (Student Action for Refugees)

STAR will be moving later this spring. In the meantime, all National Support Office contact details are available at Web: www.star-network.org.uk

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