

STAR (STUDENT ACTION FOR REFUGEES) PLAN FOR 2009 - 2011

INTRODUCTION

This paper sets out the position of STAR national and its current plans for the next 3 years. STAR national recruited an entirely new staff team in 2008. For the last 8 months this team has been finding out from STAR members, refugees and partner organisations about what STAR should be doing over the next 3 years to make the biggest positive impact on the lives of refugees in the UK. This paper sets out the ideas for our future which have come from those people.

If you are a STAR member, then please read it and let us know what you think by emailing your comments to:

communications@star-network.org.uk no later than 31st July 2009

STAR

Student Action for Refugees (STAR) was established as a society at Nottingham University Students Union in 1995. Since that time it has grown to 29 student groups across the UK with over 2000 members assisting refugees by volunteering in their communities and promoting understanding of and campaigning for the rights of refugees in the UK. These 2000 members reach a further 15,000 students with their positive messages about refugees. STAR groups are independent student societies which affiliate to the STAR charity (STAR national). The charity currently employs 4 paid staff and has offices in London.

STAR is currently funded by:

Big Lottery

To develop the organisation and deliver awareness raising and volunteering activities. This funding ends in December 2009.

Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF)

To work with STAR groups to deliver 16 volunteer projects working with refugee children and young people. This funding ends in March 2011.

STAR groups are independently constituted student union societies. They choose to affiliate to the national STAR network which provides co-ordination, networking, advice, resources, training and the STAR brand. Every group is unique and is subject to certain factors including number of active members, support provided by their union, wishes and desires of the committee, whether there are local refugee projects at which they can volunteer (there are none in York for example). STAR national therefore must provide a customised service to each group which meets their unique set of needs.

STAR AIMS 2009 – 11

- Build and sustain a network of 35 university based groups comprised of students with understanding of and sympathy for refugees in the UK
- Deliver excellent, refugee led, services to refugees in university towns in partnership with key agencies
- Improve access to university for refugees and asylum seekers in the UK

1. Build and sustain a network of 35 university based groups comprised of students with understanding of and sympathy for refugees in the UK

STAR national will:

Support existing STAR groups to continue and grow

- Develop and retain excellent links with all STAR groups providing regular helpful information via email updates, newsletters, the website, Facebook, and one to one telephone and email contact.
- Provide support and training to individual STAR groups to help them run effective groups e.g. advice on working with student union finance systems
- Provide STAR branded resources to support recruitment of students to the STAR network
- Run annual training for committee members on how to run a great STAR group
- Work with each group in spring and summer terms to identify new committee members and ensure all information and resources are handed over. Hold information on all groups to ensure that there is backup if a new committee is not established

Develop new STAR groups

- Establish new STAR groups in universities with high refugee populations. This will enable non refugee and refugee students to meet and learn from each other. It will also support the buddying programme to be developed in the access to higher education work. At present target universities are London Met, Leeds Met, UEL, and Southbank.
- Raise the profile of STAR across the higher education sector by working with individual student unions and the NUS.
- Provide support to students wishing to set up a new STAR group by providing resources, committee packs, training and visiting the groups to help at Fresher's Fairs, meetings etc

Provision of information on refugee issues

- Provide training and up to date web based resources to give STAR members excellent information on refugees in the UK
- Provide training and branded STAR resources to STAR members so they can share their understanding of refugee issues to fellow students
- Diversify STARs membership to include 1. Refugee students 2. Less politically active students

- Identify and work with partner agencies who can provide information and resources on refugee issues to STAR members e.g. Refugee Action, UNHCR

Hold an annual conference

- Annual conference in Autumn term for all STAR groups
- Weekend event, low cost as possible with bursaries for refugee students
- A good mix of inspirational leaders in the field of refugees and human rights
- A high number of refugee speakers
- Opportunity for STAR members to meet, share skills and get new ideas
- Invite funders and potential partners so they can see the wonders of STAR and start to support us

2. STAR groups to deliver excellent, refugee led, services to refugees in university towns in partnership with key agencies

STAR national will:

Support to ensure existing projects continue

- Work with each group to ensure that their existing volunteering projects are sustainable, effective and safe.
- Visit each project and have regular telephone and email contact with key committee members to understand what is happening and find out how we can help by e.g. providing training or resources.
- Issues which are expected to commonly arise are: recruiting and maintaining volunteers, child protection, boundaries and support for volunteers.
- Develop and maintain good links with the partner agencies to understand what is happening and find out how we can help e.g. by providing resources

Develop new projects in partnership with key refugee agencies

- Work with local refugee agencies in areas where there is an existing STAR group to see if the STAR group can help
- Work with the STAR group and the agency to broker the partnership and ensure it is sustainable by e.g. providing training and development support
- Ongoing support will be provided as above.
- Develop 6 new projects in 2009, 8 in 2010 and 8 in 2011, including a significant number with refugee children

Help groups learn from refugees how to make their volunteering really useful

- Provide training to STAR groups on how to find out if their projects are useful and how they can get even better
- When looking for new refugee agencies who might want help from a STAR group, make sure they also ask refugees how best to run the projects
- Encourage more refugee students to join STAR and get involved in planning our work
- Provide resources to groups to help this happen e.g. pay for meals and trips

Develop an English conversation training programme

- Set up a short training for STAR groups on how to run English conversation sessions with refugees.
- Hold these training sessions regularly so that groups doing English conversation can meet and learn from each other

3. Improving access to higher education for refugees in the UK

This work was first presented on 20th June at STAR Committee Training 2009.

STAR national will:

Mentoring support to refugee school children in applying for university

- Set up a new project to help STAR groups volunteer with young refugees and help them apply for university
- Talk to STAR groups to find out what they are already doing in this area (e.g. Bristol) and plan how this can happen in other groups
- Talk to other agencies who are doing this sort of work to see how they can help us
- Find STAR groups in areas with high populations of refugee school children who are keen to get involved
- Give all the support and training needed to make the work really effective

Buddying support to refugee university students

- Help STAR members to support refugee students within their own universities.
- This may include assistance with finding student accommodation, sharing study resources, social activities or assistance with accessing student welfare support.
- Give all the support and training needed to make the work really effective

Campaign for improved access to higher education for refugees and asylum seekers

- STAR national will continue to contribute to the policymaking work led by the Higher Education Working Group of agencies.
- The experiences of the STAR groups in delivering mentoring and buddying schemes will be fed into this group to help inform policy.
- Refugee Council and Praxis will lead on drafting the policy which STAR groups will then campaign on.
- The policy asks will be developed by September 2009 and the campaign is likely to run in partnership with the NUS on campus.

*Emma Williams
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June 2009*