

This edition of the STAR newsletter was edited by Hannah, with special thanks to Tim, Sile and Voices from Detention, in particularly Patricia.

Would you like to write for or edit STAR's newsletter? Tell the network about your STAR experiences, what motivates you to be involved with STAR or share examples of things you have done that have worked well. It's simple and you can get help from the team. Contact Hannah, Katherine or Natasha to have a chat about it. The next newsletter will be after STAR national conference and the deadline will be 21st November. Email: communications@star-network.org.uk or call 0207 840 4443.

A voice from detention...

"I came to England for protection, but the torture and persecution I fled from in Zimbabwe I experienced it in England as it is an offence to claim asylum. We came to seek protection not money. The uncertainty and fear of deportation are extremely stressful. In Yarl's Wood life was not easy for me. It was survival of the fittest for the seven months I spent there. You are searched like nobody's business. You are called by room numbers or figures. It is called a detention centre but, frankly speaking, looking at the security network will show you that it is the same as Belmarsh Prison. You ask yourself what crime I've committed to be locked up in such a place. From reception to the wing there are thirteen doors, always locked. The sound of doors slamming and the constant keys echoing around the wing; footsteps up and down the corridor keep you awake thinking they are coming for you, because you are

moved without notice. Life without freedom is a high price to pay. Being kept without charge, not knowing how long the sentence is. It's a question with no answer for you don't know what they are planning to do to you. Every day you live in fear, not knowing how long you can survive it. ...

In Colnbrook I was locked up in a proper cell. The stress of being locked up, having cameras everywhere and not being able to make and receive calls will show you that there is no difference to the Mugabe regime. In my country I was raped and tortured, now I'm being burned front and back..."

The above is part of an account by Patricia Mukandara, in a collection called "Voice from Detention 2", available by e-mailing liz.peretz@aol.com or writing to Voices from Detention, 60 Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6AX.

STAR NATIONAL CONFERENCE 28th & 29th October 2006 Liverpool University Guild of Students

You can't buy much for £18 these days but that's how much (or should we say how little) the STAR conference will cost you.

It covers food, crashpad accommodation, live music & entertainment, speakers, exhibitions & workshops on all refugee-related topics ranging from detention & destitution to UK foreign investment, access to higher education and much, much more.

Most importantly STAR conference is a chance to meet up with 200 like-minded people from across the country and find out what they've been doing to support and campaign with refugees in their area. This year's conference slogan is 'Asylum: A global issue in your backyard' and contributors include UNHCR, Refugee Council, IPPR, Anti-Slavery International, Church Action Against Poverty and Refugee Action.

Conference will be held at the Liverpool Guild of Students, on 28th to 29th October. E-mail admin@star-network.org.uk for more information and/or to reserve a place or ring 020 7840 4442. The fee is £18 for students, £13 for STAR youth members and free for anyone with a refugee experience.

Tim Flatman, Volunteer Conference Organiser

Dates for your Diaries...



21st September: International Day of Peace

30th September: Demonstration at Campsfield Immigration Detention Centre, Langford Lane, Kidlington (www.closecampsfield.org.uk for further details).

1st-31st October: Black History Month

10th October: World Day Against the Death Penalty

14th October: National Conference of Barbed Wire Britain, Human Rights Action Centre. E-mail Gill at Leonard.baden@which.net if you wish to attend.

18th October: Asylum Monologues, Croydon, London. Check www.iceandfire.co.uk/actorsforrefugees for further details.

24th October: United Nations Day

27th October – 25th February: Belonging: Voices of London's Refugees, Museum of London: Major new exhibition of photos, interviews, objects, art & film.

28th-29th October: STAR national annual conference, Liverpool Guild of Students. All welcome to attend.

1st-7th November: Youth Work Week

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The National Newsletter of **STAR**

STUDENT ACTION FOR REFUGEES

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STAR members show MPs that Age Matters!

STAR fun size lobby of Parliament



David Wright and Chris Ruane MP pictured with STAR members Peter, Anna & Kate and Katherine & Natasha from National Office.

On 18th July STAR members were supported by the national office to lobby their MPs at the Houses of Parliament in London. STAR members spent the day meeting their local MPs to discuss the Age Matters! campaign, debate the issues around age disputed separated children seeking asylum and promote the Early Day Motion STAR introduced earlier this year.

One of those attending the lobby was STAR youth member, Peter Mwangi. It was Peter's first visit to the Houses of Parliament, and he was excited about the opportunity to meet his MP. "I enjoyed it because it was the first time meeting my MP and I had been looking forward to it for days. It was great to get experience of how to put matters across to an MP."

Although it was his first time taking part in a lobby, with support from STAR national office staff, Peter felt confident that he could communicate the issues to Croydon MP, Andrew Pelling. "He was ready to listen and wanted to understand more about the issues he was asking lots of questions about the campaign. I felt that he was willing to know more about it."

Peter was so successful in convincing his MP of the need to tackle this issue that Andrew later added his signature to Early Day Motion 2280

'Age disputes for separated children seeking asylum', taking our current total to just under seventy signatures. STAR Regional Representative Anna Beardsley also met with her home MP, David Wright. Although David was unable to sign the EDM as he is a Parliamentary Private Secretary, he promised to write to the Minister for Immigration, Liam Byrne following our meeting to take up our concerns with him.

The motion was tabled by the Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, Neil Gerrard MP and has gained cross party support. It raises awareness of the rising number of age disputed separated children seeking asylum, the reasons for them seeking asylum and the failings of the current system. It calls on the government to take action and demonstrate – through replacing the present process of deciding the age of a separated child seeking asylum with an independent decision making body – that every child including those seeking asylum really does matter.

STAR is calling for change because the current process of age assessment is subjective and difficult to make rigorous, with appearance often being used as a deciding factor. The system often results in numerous appeals, which consequently undermines its effectiveness and the reputation of UK asylum system with practitioners and public alike.

The day wasn't all hard work: after the meetings lobbying members were treated to tea on the House of Commons terrace by Chris Ruane MP. Peter summed up the day, "I'd love to meet my MP again, I really enjoyed it... STAR should let their members know what lobbying is all about."

Thanks go out to all those MPs who took the time out to meet STAR and also to Chris for his hospitality. For more information in lobbying your MP or the Age Matters! Campaign contact campaigns@star-network.org.uk You can also get some tips on lobbying, campaigning and working with your local MP at this October's STAR national conference. See p4 for details of STAR conference.

Sile Reynolds, Volunteer Campaign Co-ordinator

YOU CAN STILL GET SUPPORT FOR THE STAR EDM!

There is still time to get your MP to back EDM 2280. MPs return to the House of Commons on October 9th after the long summer recess and there will then be a couple of weeks left to add more signatures to the motion. It's really important to get as much support as we can so act now and write to your MP at the House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA urging them to back the motion. Find out who your MP is by visiting www.locata.co.uk/commons. You can check out if your MP has already backed the motion by going to <http://edmi.parliament.uk/EDMi/EDMDetails.aspx?EDMID=30823&SESSION=875>

STAR PARTY IN PARLIAMENT!

On 15th June supporters of STAR got together at an event in Portcullis House at the Houses of Parliament to reminisce about STAR days gone by, to marvel at how far STAR has grown and to look to the future with enthusiasm and confidence!

Despite a clash with a certain football team playing in a particular tournament on the same evening, the event was well attended by members of the current 'Friends of STAR' network, student members that have now graduated, STAR trustees, organisations that STAR has and continues to work with, as well as, MPs, journalists and a wide range of other supporters.

In true STAR style, the event didn't follow the normal formalities of a typical parliamentary reception – guests were randomly stopped on entry and quizzed by our 'immigration desk' manned by STAR youth members Guinah and Etienne. Neil Gerrard MP, Chair of the All

Party Group on Refugees and long time supporter of STAR gave an eloquent and supportive speech but the real star speakers were STAR members themselves. STAR student members James (Warwick STAR), Kate and Rachel (both from Leeds STAR) talked passionately about their involvement with STAR at their respective universities followed by youth member Etienne who moved everyone in the room when he detailed the positive impact of being involved with STAR.

In the words of one attendee, Kevin Maguire, Associate Editor (Politics) of The Mirror, the STAR speakers' "enthusiasm was infectious, reminding occasionally jaded people like me that change is possible." All in all, the event was both fun and informative, allowing attendees to catch up which one another whilst getting up to speed on the work that STAR is doing. Thanks goes out to all those who were involved in making it happen, from our



Above: STAR Student member James impressing guests and below: Neil Gerrard MP getting quizzed by STAR Immigration Officials.



speakers, the fantastic 'catering' and 'serving' staff (!), volunteer helpers and Mark Tami MP who sponsored the room in Parliament.

Not a student or under 26 but want to play your part in STAR's important work? Then become a Friend of STAR. Friends of STAR receive a copy of STAR's quarterly newsletter, STAR publications, get discounts on STAR merchandise and invitations to STAR events. Find out more by emailing friends@star-network.org.uk

'JOURNEY TO SAFETY' – STAR REACHING OUT

STAR staff, volunteers and members undertake outreach work with young people and we have a number of programmes suitable for young people and students. Outreach takes place at



Oxford sixth formers being led to safety...

schools, youth clubs and other similar organisations with various different age groups. 'Journey to Safety' is an integral part of STAR's outreach programme and is a simulation activity that puts the participants through the experiences of asylum seeking families as they make their journey from their home country to a place to safety.

The resource explores themes such as reasons why people leave their countries and become refugees, the hard choices refugees make as they leave their country and what awaits them in the country where they seek asylum. Journey to Safety creates an environment where the participant gains factual information that enables him to empathize with refugees.

STAR and British Red Cross has developed a Peer Education



and facing tough immigration interviews

resource that complements Journey to Safety, which is used by to train young people on how to run Journey to Safety with their peers. This training can be delivered in school and youth group environments. Volunteers are provided with training and support from group members, regional representatives or the STAR national office.

Other outreach resources include 'Refugee Rights', an interactive quiz, and 'Their fate in your hands', where groups are given a case study of someone claiming asylum and have to make a decision about whether they should be allowed to stay in the UK explaining their decision to other groups. All outreach programmes aim to increase participants awareness and knowledge of refugee issues as well as developing empathy with refugees.

For more information on STAR outreach work, whether you want to get involved with delivery or know somewhere who would like STAR to do some work, email youth@star-network.org.uk

DO YOU WANT TO GET INVOLVED WITH STAR COMMUNICATIONS?

The STAR newsletter is produced quarterly and goes out to STAR student members, youth members, Friends of STAR and a wide range of other supporters and external contacts, including MPs, Ministers and journalists. This newsletter is the first of Academic Year 2006-7, another will be produced towards the end of this semester with one to follow in semester two and a final edition as the academic year draws to a close. The aim of the newsletter is to keep members and supporters up to date with STAR National Office news, general developments in the asylum and refugee field and other interesting snippets, plus information on what student groups and youth members have been getting up to on campus and within the local community.

CALLING STAR MEMBERS TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEWSLETTER

Ideally, each edition of the newsletter is guest edited by a STAR youth or student member – a job which can be done by coming into the STAR office for a couple of days or online from home. STAR is able to help with expenses in relation to this. In addition, we are always on the look out for article/feature ideas from members as well as the latest news from your group, area or similar.

TELL US WHAT YOU WANT – A NEW NAME AND A NEW LOOK FOR THE NEWSLETTER

Over the coming months STAR is looking to develop the newsletter to improve both its content and look. One of the first things we are looking for is a more creative name than 'The National Newsletter of STAR'!

We want to know what sort of ideas you have and what sort of things you want to read about in the newsletter, for example, regular interviews, information from STAR trustees, an area specific for members to speak out and so on

NEW MEDIA, NEW DIRECTION

Keep your eyes peeled for the new look STAR website coming in the next few months which will be more dynamic, interactive and feature an area for groups and individual members work as well as plenty of room for discussion.

If you want to get involved, have some suggestions or just a simple query then contact Hannah Blythyn on 0207 840 4443 or communications@star-network.org.uk

STAR Summer Training 2006

Just days after 'Friends of STAR' met in Parliament, around twenty STAR youth and student members met up for the STAR's annual summer training event in Bristol. The weekend of 17th-18th June saw members and staff come together to listen to external speakers, take part in workshop based training and participate in STAR's very own mini-olympics.

Summer training is an opportunity for members to come together and gain practical skills in volunteering, campaigning, awareness raising and making the most out of their involvement with STAR. It's also a great way to meet other STAR members, have fun, share ideas and generally start the new academic year with a bang! There were workshops to appeal to everyone, with topics ranging from working with

the media, finance and fundraising, building and sustaining a volunteer project to working with asylum seekers and refugees in your community.

Aside from the workshops, participants listened to two interesting and motivational talks from Melanie Gower of Asylum Aid and Latif Ismail, a refugee and entrepreneur based in Bristol. Light relief was the order of Saturday evening (although the people doing the carrying during the piggy-back race may take issue with the light!) as everyone took part in the STAR mini



Olympics. The games saw the revival of those classic primary school games such as the sack race, egg and spoon race, and wheelbarrow race.

If Saturday was focused on learning and building on the skills required for effective awareness raising, campaigning and volunteering, then Sunday provided delegates with an ample, not to mention, enjoyable, opportunity to put their skills and commitment



into practice as they volunteered at Celebrating Sanctuary in Bristol. As is the case in many cities across the UK, Celebrating Sanctuary is the opener to Refugee Week and saw STAR members helping in the film tent, assisting with the bouncy castle, serving up tea and coffee, playing musical instruments from around the world and much more.

For further information on Summer Training and other STAR activities email students@star-network.org.uk. Additionally workshop notes are available from STAR National Office.