



Newcastle Asylum Seekers Unit

Annual Report
2006/07

Local solutions to
international problems



Your Homes
Newcastle

2006/07

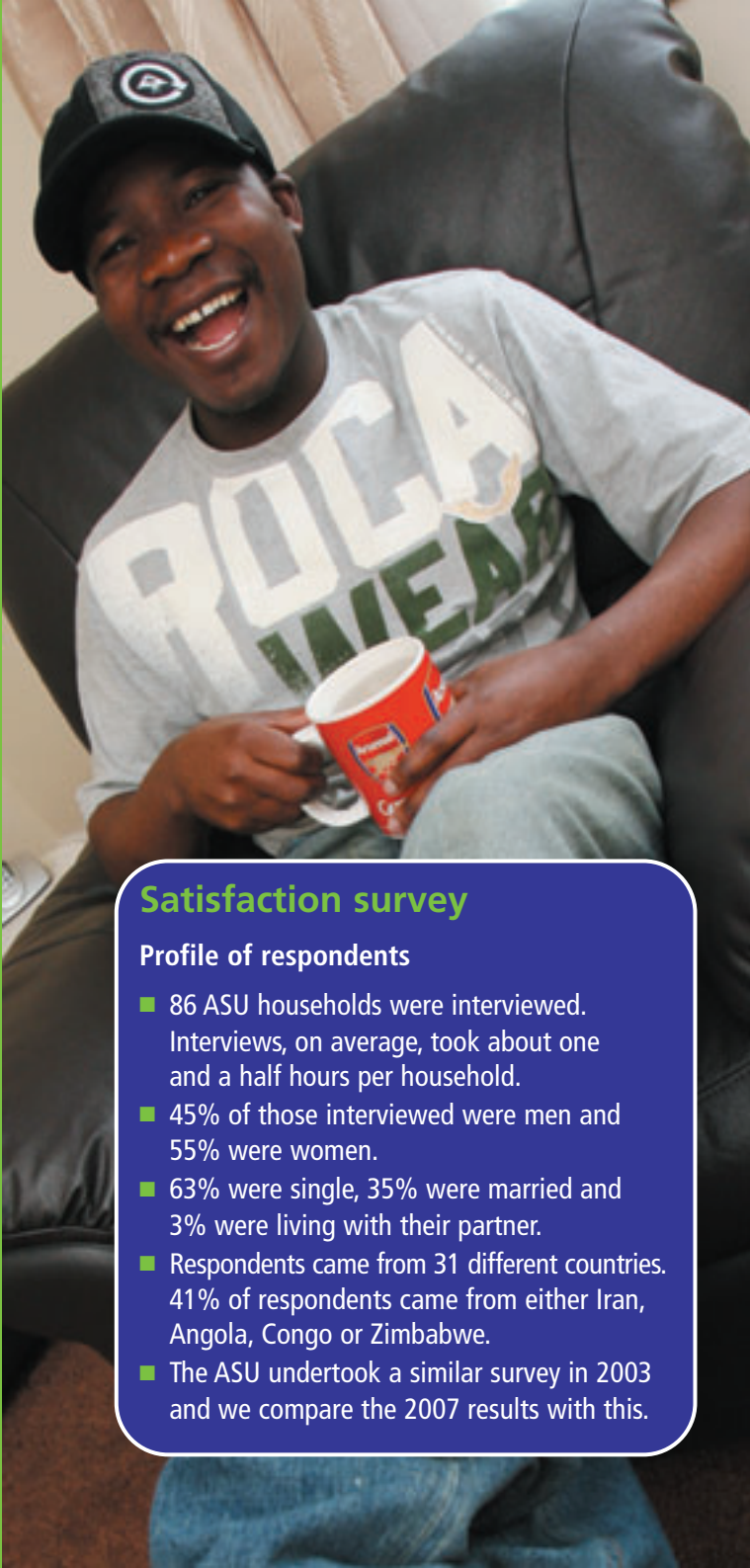
This information is about Your Homes Newcastle's Asylum Seekers Unit and how they make sure that asylum seekers and refugees are not disadvantaged during their time here. If you need this in your language or a different language phone 0191 278 8633.

Bengali	এই তথ্য হল ইউর হোমস নিউক্যাসল এসাইলাম সিকারস ইউনিট সম্পর্কে এবং এই ইউনিট এসাইলাম সিকারস (রাজনৈতিক আশ্রয়প্রার্থী) এবং রিফিউজিদের (শরণার্থী) এখানে অবস্থানকালীন সময়ে যাতে কোন বঞ্চনার শিকার না হয় কিভাবে সেটা নিশ্চিত করে সে সম্পর্কে তথ্য। এই তথ্য যদি <বাংলায়> অথবা অন্য কোন ভাষায় প্রয়োজন হয় তাহলে এই নাম্বারে ফোন করুন- ০১৯১ ২৭৮ ৮৬৩৩
Chinese (simplified)	这是有关 Your Homes Newcastle (您的纽卡斯尔住房) 寻求庇护人士部门的信息, 内容解释了他们如何确保寻求庇护人士和难民在这里生活的期间内得到良好的生活条件。; 或其它语言版本, 请致电 0191 278 8633 索取。
Chinese (traditional)	這是關於 Your Homes Newcastle (您的紐卡素住房) 尋求庇護人士部門的信息, 內容解釋了他們如何確保尋求庇護人士和難民在這裏生活的期間內得到良好的生活條件。 其它語言版本, 請致電 0191 278 8633 索取。
Farsi	این اطلاعات در مورد واحد پناهجویان در سازمان «خانه‌های شما در نیوکاسل» است. این واحد اطمینان حاصل می‌کند که پناهجویان و پناهندگان در طی مدت اقامتشان در اینجا دچار محرومیت نشوند. در صورت نیاز به این اطلاعات به زبان فارسی یا زبان‌های دیگر با شماره تلفن ۰۱۹۱۲۷۸۸۶۳۳ تماس بگیرید.
French	Ces informations concernent l'unité des demandeurs d'asile de Your Homes Newcastle et la façon dont ils s'assurent que les demandeurs d'asile et les réfugiés ne sont pas désavantagés pendant leur séjour ici. Si vous avez besoin de ces informations en français ou dans une autre langue, téléphonez au : 0191 278 8633.
Kurdish	ئەم زانیاریانە سەبارەت بە یەکەمی پەنابەرانی Your Homes Newcastle و ئەوەی کە چۆن دنیای بین کە پەنابەرانی و کۆچبەرانی لەو ماوەیەدا کە لێرەن هەستەمی و تالی ناچێرن. ئەگەر حەزتان لە وەرگرتنی ئەم زانیاریانە بە زمانی کوردی یا هەر زمانیکی دیگەر هەبێت بە زۆمارە تیلیفۆنی 0191 278 8633 پێوەندی بگرن.
Portuguese	Esta informação refere-se à unidade de Requerentes de Asilo da Your Homes Newcastle e à forma como garantem que os requerentes de asilo e os refugiados não estão em desvantagem durante a sua estadia cá. Se precisar desta informação em <português> ou noutra língua, queira ligar para o 0191 278 8633.
Russian	Информация об отделе по вопросам беженцев и их благоприятного пребывания здесь. Если Вы нуждаетесь в этой информации <на русском> или другом языке звоните по тел. 0191 278 8633.
Spanish	Ésta es información sobre la Unidad de Demandantes de Asilo Político Your Homes de Newcastle y de cómo se aseguran de que dichos demandantes y refugiados no vivan en condición de desventaja durante su estancia aquí. Si necesita esta información en español o en otro idioma, llame al 0191 278 8633.

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Photograph on page 7 taken by Alfredo D'Amato and supplied by Panos Pictures.



Satisfaction survey

Profile of respondents

- 86 ASU households were interviewed. Interviews, on average, took about one and a half hours per household.
- 45% of those interviewed were men and 55% were women.
- 63% were single, 35% were married and 3% were living with their partner.
- Respondents came from 31 different countries. 41% of respondents came from either Iran, Angola, Congo or Zimbabwe.
- The ASU undertook a similar survey in 2003 and we compare the 2007 results with this.

Mission statement

The aim of Your Homes Newcastle's Asylum Seekers Unit is to provide a supportive environment to clients.

We recognise that all of the people who have arrived in the area have had to leave their homes in their own country, because of the grave concerns they have and of fear for their lives. We also accept as a reality that many will not remain with us for long.

Our aim, to provide a first class service, will ensure that respect for the individual is top of our agenda. We will continue to work closely with other agencies, both internal and external, to provide a service which people will call on as they need, secure in the knowledge that we will make a positive response and provide a local solution to what are international problems.



POLITICAL MAP OF THE WORLD

Satisfaction survey

A Geordie welcome

In 2007, as in 2003, the most common thing people liked about living in Newcastle was the friendly people. 34% of respondents said that this was something they liked.

"I really like living here. It feels like home. The people are friendly. The community is great."

Foreword



Welcome to the Asylum Seekers Unit annual report for 2006/07.

It has been another productive and successful year for the Unit; satisfaction with the service is higher than ever and customers have benefited from an improved range of ways that they can influence their service. These are very pleasing results that show that the Unit has worked hard to respond to the needs of their customers.

Behind the positive performance statistics however, there is a more sombre tone in this year's report. Let's make no bones about it - this remains a

challenging sector to work in and there's still much to do, but what is important is that we are facing up to the challenge.

I welcome the Unit's decision not just to limit its attention to those clients currently seeking asylum, but to try and extend its influence into improving the lives of unsuccessful asylum seekers that have been left to fend for themselves. Recent reports indicate that destitution has become a blunt tool to encourage unsuccessful asylum seekers to return home; but all too often (as one of the case studies featured in this report demonstrates) people genuinely have no place to go. They are in clear danger of 'falling through the cracks' and disappearing. I commend the Unit for raising awareness of the plight of these people and I hope that their partnership with other agencies in Newcastle brings results.

Changing prejudices built up over generations is more difficult and some of the results of this year's satisfaction survey of clients demonstrates that there is no overnight fix. Anti-social behaviour and harassment remain unwanted problems for too

many clients, who clearly have enough to deal with as they await the verdict of the Home Office.

The best way that we can change this is to keep challenging preconceptions and misinformation around asylum. Let's keep the focus firmly on the stories of the customers that the Unit helps. Stories that are by turn horrific, mundane, dramatic and repetitive. Stories where life changing events seem to happen in seconds, just to be followed by endless months of limbo. Because these stories are, more often than not, transformed via the help and support that the ASU provides. And that's something none of us should forget.

I hope you find this report interesting and stimulating.

Thank you

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Midgley". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Bill Midgley
Chair

Destitute and desperate

The ASU has always been concerned at the high number of single, adult clients who are refused asylum and who may become destitute, roofless and dependent solely on handouts.

Satisfaction survey

In 2003 just over 70% of respondents with children living with them said that their children had not been harassed and bullied whilst either travelling to or in school. However, 23% said that their children had been harassed/bullied in school and 4% whilst travelling to and from school. Disappointingly, this time (2007) over 45% of respondents with children said that their children had suffered some form of harassment or bullying either in school or travelling to or from school.

Julian Prior from the organisation City Church, who is active in this area of work, also showed concerns about the way some clients were left to fend for themselves once they had been refused asylum.

Julian Prior and our own Julian Whitley met and agreed that the ASU, on behalf of YHN, would part-fund research that City Church were to carry out and this led to the production of 'Destitute and Desperate'. This report shows that around 300 people in the city are roofless and reliant on others for support at any one time. The question then is how many people are in the same position across the UK and what is the Government doing to fix the problem?

As a result of the 'Destitute and Desperate' report the Anglican Bishop of Newcastle, Bishop Martin Wharton asked those who had shown interest, how they could support these people and how the issue should be dealt with. YHN and Newcastle City Council are both key partners and have helped to identify some of the specific areas of work needed to support the organisations that are already working with destitute asylum seekers. These areas of work are:

- Housing
- Health and wellbeing
- Food and toiletries
- Community
- Communication, publicity and lobbying
- Strategic overview



More work is being done on the project and results will be given in our next annual report.

Julian Prior comments "It has been extremely helpful to have the support of the ASU in trying to understand these issues that affect so many people in our city.

"The challenge is to see how we can work together with as many interested parties as possible to make a difference to the lives of those people who do not know where they will be sleeping tomorrow."

If you would like a copy of the report then please e-mail julian.prior@opendoor-ne.org

Satisfaction survey

Racism is still a problem

As in 2003, the main issues that respondents did not like about living in Newcastle were linked to crime, harassment, racism or problems with anti-social behaviour of either adults or children in their area. Altogether 38% of respondents cited these kinds of issues as being something they do not like about living in Newcastle.

"Newcastle people do not like foreigners and they are really racist (severe). The fact that I am black means I am looked at like an animal. Walking on the street results in insults."



How we performed in 2006/07

We continue to collect information that helps us assess how we have performed over the year, in relation to the targets we set ourselves at the beginning of the year. This information is used to celebrate our successes and to identify areas where we need to improve. Read on to find out how we did.

Satisfaction survey

A helping hand

In 2003 94% of respondents were satisfied with Support Officer visits; just 3% were dissatisfied. This has increased to 98.6% of respondents satisfied with the support worker visits, and just 1.4% dissatisfied.

"It's a good service, the people who come to the house are very kind, they talk to me nicely - quite often I have worries and they talk to me about my worries."



CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

ASU service plan

Our service plan lays out significant targets we aim to achieve in the year. The table below indicates how we performed against these targets.

Target	Outcome
Achieve 87% customer satisfaction by March 2007	91.67% customer satisfaction achieved
Develop two new ways for people to be involved in developing/delivering the service arising from stakeholder feedback by 31/03/07	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased participation in the Operational Group from the voluntary sector and Refugee Community Organisations • Reviewed and improved the ASU consultation plan
Introduce a system of charges for people who stay in properties after the notice to quit date by 31/10/06	System introduced and substantial efficiencies gained as a result
Retain Charter Mark status following 12 month review by 31/03/07	Charter Mark status retained but not by the target date - this happened in April 2007
Ensure repairs and maintenance contractor receives void keys within two days of work being processed	This was achieved throughout the year

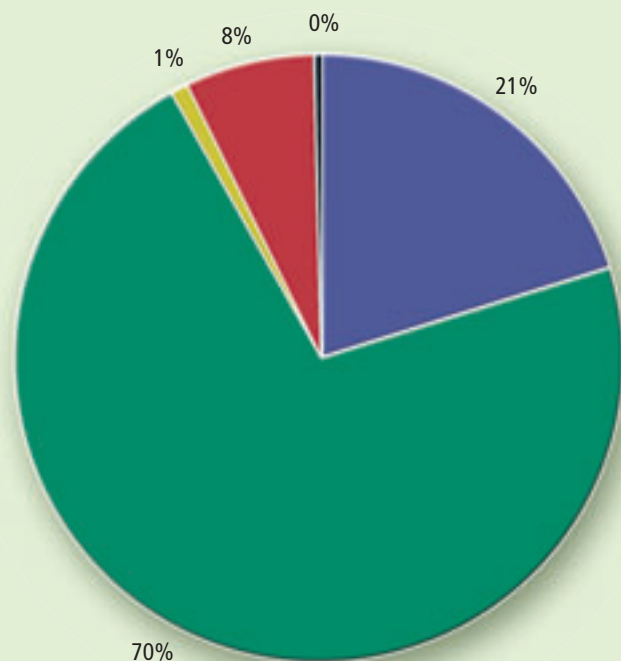
Compliments, complaints and comments

We see all compliments, complaints and comments as an opportunity to improve our services. In 2006/07 we received three formal complaints. One was in relation to people seeking asylum being rehoused, when the complainant did not perceive her relative to be offered appropriate rehousing. This complaint was not upheld. The other two complaints were from clients about our service delivery. One complaint was not upheld and the other was. In relation to the upheld complaint we apologised to the person concerned and put measures in place to ensure similar incidents did not happen again. The client

was happy with our actions to resolve the problem.

We are always pleased when people give us positive feedback or just give us a general 'thanks' for the work we do. During the year we received 37 letters from agencies expressing their gratitude to us. This included work like delivering awareness raising, taking part in joint initiatives, raising funds for projects and donating clothing for people in need. Also during the year 16 clients wanted to write to us to thank us for the support we gave them. It is always nice to know that our work is appreciated and it gives us all a boost when we receive such letters.

How we spent our budgets in 2006/07



■ Running costs	£806,059 -e.g. staff salaries, grant giving, stationery
■ Premises	£2,641,875 -e.g. rents, council tax, furniture
■ Transport	£29,961 -e.g. minibus hire, car mileage
■ Support payments	£286,341 -e.g. social service clients support payments
■ Central recharges	£12,120 -e.g. office costs

Other indicators of our performance

YHN sets a target which requires staff to answer at least 90% of phone calls within five rings and to use the exact corporate greeting at least 90% of the time. We are tested every month on how we perform against these targets. We achieved the following:

- We answered 94.25% of all calls within five rings
- We used the exact corporate greeting for 95.4% of calls.

As part of our contract with the Home Office we have to meet stringent timescales and quality targets on a large range of issues. For example, most significant defects to a property need to be rectified within 24 hours. We also need to move arriving households into accommodation within a specified period and we need to brief households when they arrive. Whilst we have failed in a very small number of targets - four failures around significant defects and one around receiving a substantiated complaint - we did not incur any financial penalties.

We also have staff attendance targets. Our target for this period was to reduce staff absence due to sickness down to 10.2 days per full time employee. We managed a figure of 11.69 days which was largely due to long term sickness of two members of staff.

In 2006/07 we visited our clients well over 6000 times. In addition to this our Building Surveyor, Alan, undertook over 1000 visits to inspect the condition of properties. In the same period we managed the arrival of 151 new households and the move on of 190 households.

We also measure how quickly we respond to letters, how we administer grant aid, the number

of staff supervision sessions/appraisals undertaken, how we contribute to corporate targets on equality and diversity and Audit Commission Inspections. In addition we have internal action plans that we use to improve our service. For more information on any of these issues please contact Vin Totton at the ASU.



Satisfaction survey

Area differences

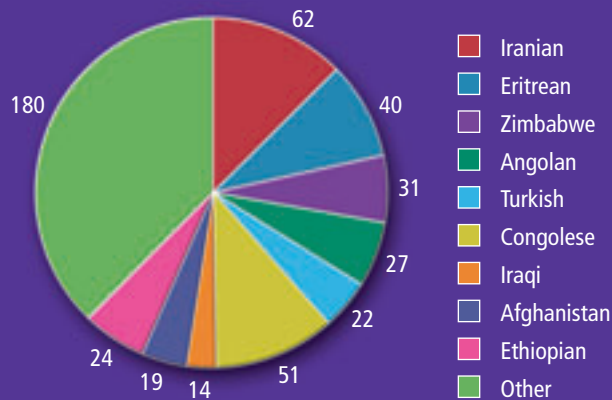
In 2003 68% of respondents were satisfied with the area in which their accommodation was located. 21% were dissatisfied. In 2007 satisfaction has increased slightly to just over 70%, although the proportion of respondents indicating they are dissatisfied with the area in which they live has increased to 26%.

"It is very clean. The area is very calm."

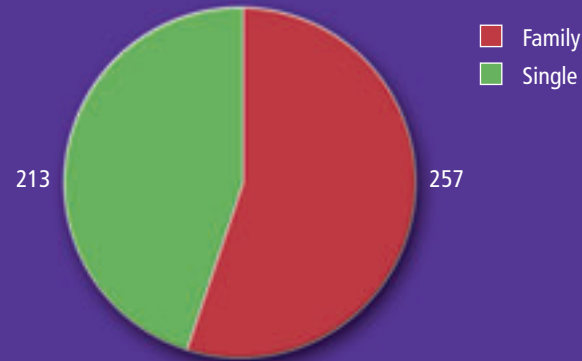
"There is a lot of racism in this area. Everyone is racist. They broke the door to my garden. They stole the children's bikes."

Statistics

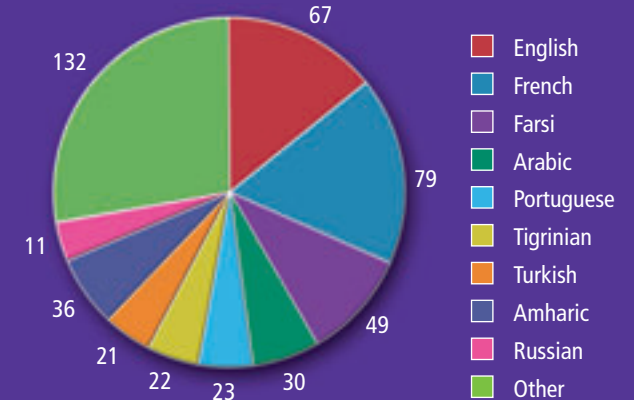
1 Number of households supported by the ASU by nationality



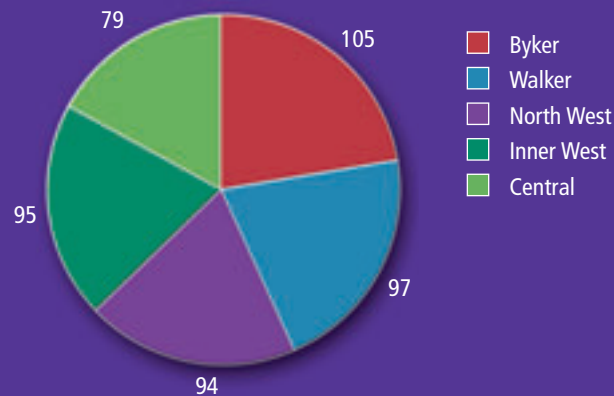
2 Number of households supported by the ASU by household type



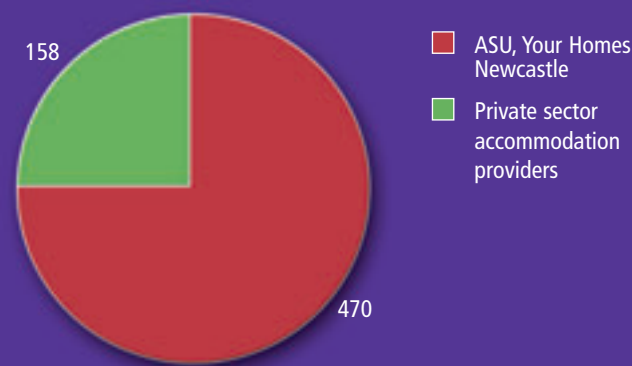
3 Number of households supported by the ASU by language



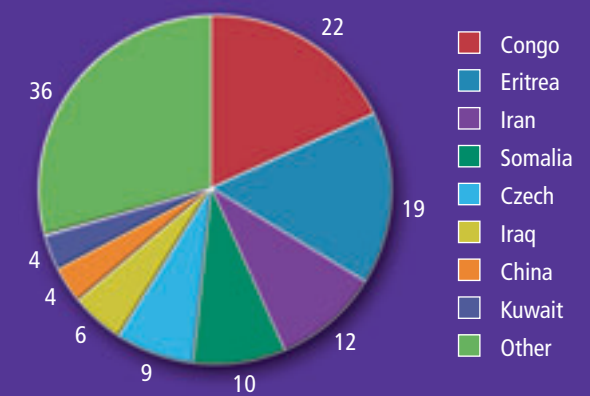
4 Number of households supported by the ASU by area



5 Number of households by accommodation provider



6 Number of new households supported by the ASU Move On Team by nationality



The data in graphs 1 to 4 was correct at 31/03/07. Graph 5 is an estimate. Graph 6 shows data for the whole of 2006/07.

Updates on the 2005/06 annual report

In the last annual report we committed ourselves to six future action points. Here's what we achieved:

1. Satisfaction survey

In March 2007 our latest satisfaction survey was completed, which involved face to face interviews with 86 of our clients. The results can be compared with a similar large scale survey undertaken in 2003. Highlights from the latest survey are featured in the purple boxes throughout this report. We are delighted that the already high satisfaction rate with our service has increased from 84% to 91.67%.

2. The way we work

We did not take on responsibility for people on Section 4 support for refused asylum seekers within the past year. We anticipate this will happen by July 2007. We did continue to support Social Services clients, with numbers being supported increasing to 118 households by March 2007. We also, as promised, reviewed our way of working. We recruited an additional Support Officer and temporary Administration Assistant and moved from four patches to five across the city, each covered by two Support Officers. As part of this review we incorporated support to our Social Services clients in this new arrangement. For some clients this did mean a change in their Support Officers but for many it remained the same. We believe these changes will lead to an improved service to all.

3. Action planning

We have developed a number of action plans this year based on feedback from customers,

stakeholders and the Charter Mark assessor. As a result of these action plans we have, for example:

- Redesigned the consultation questions we ask our clients on a regular basis. We have also improved the methods we use to analyse results.
- Responded to issues raised by the Charter Mark assessor resulting in our award being confirmed at its first review.
- Increased participation from the voluntary sector in our Operations Group.

4. Support for refugees

Last year the Refugee Move on Team appointed a Senior Support Officer to increase capacity and management support within the team. We have been working with partners on the EQUAL project to test barriers into employment experienced by refugees. This is ongoing and we will be able to report on this fully in our next annual report. As indicated in our last report we did provide a six month Support Officer work placement for someone with refugee status. Patricia became a valued member of our team for the six months she was with us and took away many new skills to help her secure further employment. She said "The ASU is a fantastic place to work because it is about giving asylum seekers and refugees support and making sure they are getting as much help as they possibly can." We wish Patricia well for the future.

5. Continuing the good work

The ASU continues to provide high quality services to all our clients. We increased our drop-ins from four to five sessions as part of our patch reorganisation. We were able to continue to provide grant aid and we awarded 15 grants this year at an average of £1505. We also provided 24 awareness sessions to



210 people. Part of our work under the Home Office Contract requires us to visit our clients and

over the last year we have undertaken at least 6000 visits. "Well done to the Support Officers in managing such a high workload".

6. External verification of our service

During the year we were nominated for two major awards. We were finalists in both the Public Servants of the Year Awards Team Award run by Public Finance, and the UK Housing Awards - Excellence in Delivering Mixed Communities Award run by the Chartered Institute of Housing. We were delighted to receive national recognition for our work. This also raised the profile of asylum issues nationally and as a direct result of this we were invited to run a workshop at a national Community Cohesion Seminar in Edinburgh. In addition we had our Charter Mark status confirmed which recognised our continued excellence in customer services.

Satisfaction survey

Accommodation

In 2003 73% of respondents were satisfied with their accommodation overall. 14% were dissatisfied. The level of satisfied clients has now risen to 74% in 2007 although 15% now indicate they are dissatisfied.

"The area, the school, the size of the flat are all very good I am very satisfied."

"I don't like the carpet. I have to wash it to stop the amount of dust causing a problem for my son."

7. Other significant achievements during the year

May 2006 - the ASU, as part of the North East Contracting Consortium for Asylum Support (NECCAS) played a vital part in the negotiation of a new contract awarded by the Home Office. The Target Contract has been awarded to NECCAS following a fully tendered submission and negotiation period and has been awarded in the face of tremendous competition from the private sector. The new contract runs for a period of five years from May 2006 with a one year's extension option.

June 2006 - refugees and asylum seekers went back to the roots of the North East, when the ASU organised a trip to Beamish Open Air Museum to mark International Refugee Week. 250 people came on the trip along with community workers and individuals who have helped people feel at home. Shebab, from Fenham enjoyed the day, "We had a great day out. We were very surprised at how England was 100 years ago and learned a lot. My children especially enjoyed the old school house. There was so much to see and do."



July 2006 - we were lucky enough to be approached by a local company who were aware of a factory outlet that had gone bust and needed to dispose of a large amount of children's clothing, soft toys and art sets. We seized this opportunity and travelled to Yorkshire, loading up two large vehicles full of new merchandise. On our return to Newcastle we distributed the goods to our clients and 12 other local charities/schools supporting people across the region. North Moor Sure Start were delighted with our donation telling us; "It has provided a rare opportunity for us to provide new clothing to very needy families in this area of Newcastle, where parents often struggle to meet their families most basic needs. This clothing has made a real difference to the families we are working with."

November 2006 - Vin Totton, Manager at the ASU was invited to attend a visit by Her Royal Highness, Princess Alexandra at the West End Refugee Service. This raised the profile of the plight of people seeking asylum in Newcastle.

December 2006 - as part of YHN's wider Advice and Support Team the Refugee Move on Team was assessed by the Supporting People Commissioning Team. This team use a Quality Assessment Framework to measure the quality of services they fund. The Refugee Move on Team moved from a level C assessment to an improved level B. This demonstrates significant improvement in the service as a level B is considered to represent a high quality service. The team aims to continue to provide excellent services and are striving to achieve a level A in the future. Well done to everyone who has contributed to this significant improvement.



Also in December the ASU staff were able to distribute 700 gifts to clients as part of our annual Christmas appeal. As always we were delighted with the response knowing that it brings smiles to many faces. A massive thank you goes out to many people within YHN and outside the organisation who have helped make Christmas a time of remembering others less fortunate than ourselves.

March 2007 - again we organised a large event to celebrate International Women's Day. The day was an opportunity for women of various nationalities to come together and celebrate what being a woman means to them. The women enjoyed pamper activities, lunch, dancing and creative arts. Few women went home empty handed, leaving with plants, raffle goodies and their own art creations.

In February 2005, the Government published a five year strategy for immigration and asylum. This announced the development of the New Asylum Model (NAM). The aim of the New Asylum Model is to introduce a faster, more tightly managed asylum process with an emphasis on rapid integration or removal. The Home Office began implementing the NAM in May 2005 and is now processing all new asylum cases within the new model as of the 5th March 2007. We will be keeping a close eye on how this new process affects our clients and our way of working.



Satisfaction survey

Cause for celebration

In 2003 84% of respondents were satisfied with the service they received from the ASU, with regard to receiving help with their problems; 12% were dissatisfied. In 2007 the overall satisfaction with the service received from the ASU has increased to 91.67% with only 2.78% dissatisfied.

"They are the ones that make the community come together. They provide us with activities."

Types of support

In our last stakeholders survey some people said that they would welcome a description of the types of support we provide. Please read on to find out more.

Home Office Support

As part of the North East Contracting Consortium for Asylum Support (NECCAS) we have signed a contract called the 'Target Contract' with the Home Office. This requires us to provide accommodation and support to people seeking asylum. We do not provide immigration advice as part of this. The contract lays down stringent performance criteria including demanding timescales in which we should accommodate people and respond to repairs and other significant issues. The primary legislation underpinning this support is the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.

Financial support is provided direct to the client by the Home Office. This is paid via Post Offices.

Support to Social Services clients

If people claiming asylum have their claim refused by the Home Office then, for those with care needs, they can apply for assistance from Social Services. Social Services conduct a thorough individual Community Care assessment of everybody who applies for this support. People awarded this type of support have to have care needs over and above destitution. Social Services apply Section 21 of The

National Assistance Act (1948) when deciding on whether they support someone. People awarded this type of support are still subject to removal from the country by the immigration authorities.

Social Services commission the ASU to provide accommodation and other support to them. We support these clients in a very similar way to how we support our Home Office clients, believing that all clients should, as far as possible, have the same high level of support.

Mike Brooks from the ASU has been responsible for providing this support since 2004. One of his clients told us her experiences:

"My mother was born in Eritrea and my father in Ethiopia. I lived in a Red Cross Refugee Camp in Ethiopia. I then moved to Bahrain as I was promised good work there. The work was not good and I was taken advantage of and abused. I had to escape the situation but I couldn't return to either Eritrea or Ethiopia as there was a lengthy war between these countries and each country stated that I should settle in the other country." (The May 1998 - June 2000 war alone resulted in 100,000 deaths) "So I paid someone to get me to safety.

"I didn't know where I would end up but eventually I arrived in England where I claimed asylum. I was supported by a private accommodation provider in the North East of England. After three years I was told that the Government did not believe my story and they refused my claim for asylum. The Home Office stated that I should leave the country but I had no country to go to - nobody

would have me. I had no food and no home, I desperately needed help and a man said I could stay with him. He was a very bad man and he treated me very badly - I had to leave. I became very ill and was in hospital for two weeks with pneumonia and other complications. I am still very ill today. I was advised to apply for support from Social Services and they accepted my care needs. This meant they could give me support and I was very grateful for this.

"I was taken to a very nice council flat where I met Mike. Mike showed me around the flat and I am very happy with it. Mike is a good man, he always helps me when I need him to. He was the first person to help me complete a HC2 for free health care. I know he helps a lot of people - not just me.

"I have been through some bad times but things are ok now. I am going to college and I like Newcastle - this is my home."

Satisfaction survey

Here to stay

In 2003 the vast majority (87%) of asylum seekers, if given refugee status, would consider a tenancy with Newcastle City Council. In 2007 this has increased to over 90%.

"My daughter loves Newcastle, she has many friends. I would like to stay in a council flat."

Support to refugees

YHN's Refugee Move on Team is part of YHN's Advice and Support Team. They support people with refugee status who want to live in Newcastle. They can assist with applying for accommodation, claiming benefits, sorting out utilities, giving budgeting and minor debt advice, and a whole range of other issues including accessing employment and training. Support lasts for as long as it is needed up to two years but this usually lasts about six months.

Section 4 support

This relates to section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. It is policy of the Government that unsuccessful asylum applicants must return to their country of origin as soon as practicable. However a form of short term support exists for those applicants who are unable to return due to factors beyond their control or medical reasons. This is called section 4 or 'Hard case' support. People granted section 4 support were due to be incorporated into the Target Contract support this year. This did not happen and we anticipate that it will happen by July 2007 when the ASU will start to support these people.

The above types of support are delivered by the hard work of all in the ASU. The work of the team could not be carried out without the efficient work of our Administration Team - Hilary, Brian and Kevin. Their attention to detail and ability to constantly hit tight timescales keeps the whole ASU running smoothly and is one of the reasons our satisfaction rates have reached an all time high.



Satisfaction survey

Healthy views

In 2003 90% of respondents were satisfied with health services. Just 8% of respondents were dissatisfied. In 2007 74% of respondents are satisfied with the health services, 14% indicating they are not satisfied.

"The service is good but I get paracetamol no matter what the problem is."

Accommodation standards continue to improve

It is no accident that the standard of accommodation provided by the ASU is high.



Most of the properties used as accommodation under our contract with the Home Office and our agreement with Social Services has been procured from Newcastle City Council stock, following consultation with staff at Community Housing Offices.

As a result, electric and gas services are checked regularly and facilities meet suitable standards.

Newcastle Furniture Service also provides the furniture needed to allow clients to live comfortably and this is checked regularly by the Support Officers for that area.

Within the ASU the person who is responsible for ensuring building and maintenance standards are upheld is Alan Bailey, the Maintenance Surveyor.

Alan's skills in technical building support are still needed where properties are supplied by the City Council and any problems that occur are dealt with by our repairs contractor. Where homes have been provided by private landlords, Alan's skills and experience ensure they are brought up to a suitable standard. This is increasingly the case as

we have had to use more private sector properties due to the growing demand.

Where landlords haven't agreed with this approach we have stopped using their property, but many have taken our comments on board and made improvements to their properties and services.

Alan inspects all properties used by the ASU every six months and assists the Support Officers with any day to day maintenance issues. Alan, who has worked for the ASU for three years, said "My aim is to ensure that clients live in a safe environment in properties of a good standard. I achieve this by working with Neighbourhood Services, YHN's Technical and Maintenance section, the ASU Support Officers, private landlords and the clients themselves."

We have found that more and more landlords are happy to work with us. They understand the responsibilities that we require of them to keep properties at a good standard - and encouragingly they are helping us to increase these standards across the city.

Long may it continue to improve.

Satisfaction survey

Reporting crime

Just over 43% of all respondents said that they had experienced a crime or other incident that they had not reported to the police.



Satisfaction survey

Repairs

In 2003 84% of those respondents who had used the housing repairs service were satisfied with the service received. 12% were dissatisfied. In 2007 this has reduced to 74% satisfied and 13% dissatisfied.

"Quick response and repairs done properly."

"It can take a long time for them to come out but have had good and bad service from different people who have come out for different repairs."

The future



It seems that a year doesn't go by without a fresh set of challenges we need to face as a team. I already know that 2007/08 will be no exception to this and I am confident that we will continue to succeed, as we have done in the past, with all the tasks that we undertake to provide a high quality service.

Satisfaction survey

In both 2003 and 2007 the vast majority of respondents with children were satisfied with their children's progress and learning at school; there has been a slight drop in the proportion of respondents satisfied as there were 98% satisfied in 2003 compared to 90% in 2007. "The teachers are very good, they help them to learn English."

In 2007/08 the main challenges facing us are:

1. New Asylum Model (NAM)

We are currently unsure how this new process will affect our clients and ways of working. We welcome the introduction of single case ownership where a named Immigration Officer is responsible for the case progression. We also welcome the improved training given to these staff and in some areas some improvement in the flexibility of appointments for clients. We do, however, have concerns about the very short timescales available to applicants to gather and present their evidence. We are also concerned about what written evidence applicants will be able to present and how segmentation may operate in practice. We do hope that the NAM will speed up decision making and we will try to ensure that the upheaval caused to our clients is limited.

2. The Target Contract

We anticipate that in July 2007 we will commence Section 4 support for refused asylum seekers. Decisions will need to be made on how we approach this in terms of whether we choose to contract out this service or do it ourselves. Over the forthcoming year we will also find out through our work with the new Border and Immigration Agency (BIA) how the contract will be implemented in practice. We need to assess how the performance management processes set up by the BIA will impact on our service.

3. Action planning

As in the previous year we will undertake an action planning approach to deal effectively with emerging issues, to ensure that we can properly manage service improvements over the year. One important task will be to examine the results and comments from our recent satisfaction survey and act on these. This will include encouraging a number of other services to look at their service provision in light of comments made by clients. Another important area we will develop over the next year is to work with Newcastle City Council's Energy Centre to develop an Energy Efficiency Strategy. This will result in efficiencies for the ASU in addition to reducing our carbon footprint. Other areas where action planning will occur will result from our Charter Mark annual review, communication plan, consultation plan and service delivery plan.

4. Support for refugees

We will be able to report on how our work to assess the barriers to employment for refugees through the EQUAL project has progressed. We also hope that YHN's Refugee Move on Team will be successful in achieving level A in their Quality Assessment Framework inspection.

5. Destitute asylum seekers

We will remain at the forefront of tackling this issue and we are optimistic that 2007/08 will bring additional resources to improve the situation for the many people who have to struggle to survive in this city. See page 6 for our progress in this area.

6. Business as usual

We take on all these additional challenges willingly. We do not let these impact in a negative way on our day to day work of supporting people seeking asylum and those awarded refugee status. I continue to remain impressed by the workload my staff get through in a week - from the data management work of our administration team through to the daily contact the Support Officers have with clients, the maintenance of properties and the management of much of this by the two Senior Support Officers. We will continue to deliver awareness raising sessions, provide grant aid, organise events, consult clients, attend drop ins and provide easily accessible means of communication. This is all achieved within a partnership approach with the many agencies and individuals we work alongside. Please feel free to contact me or any member of my team should you require further information about this report or any other matter relating to our service. Here's to another eventful year at the ASU.



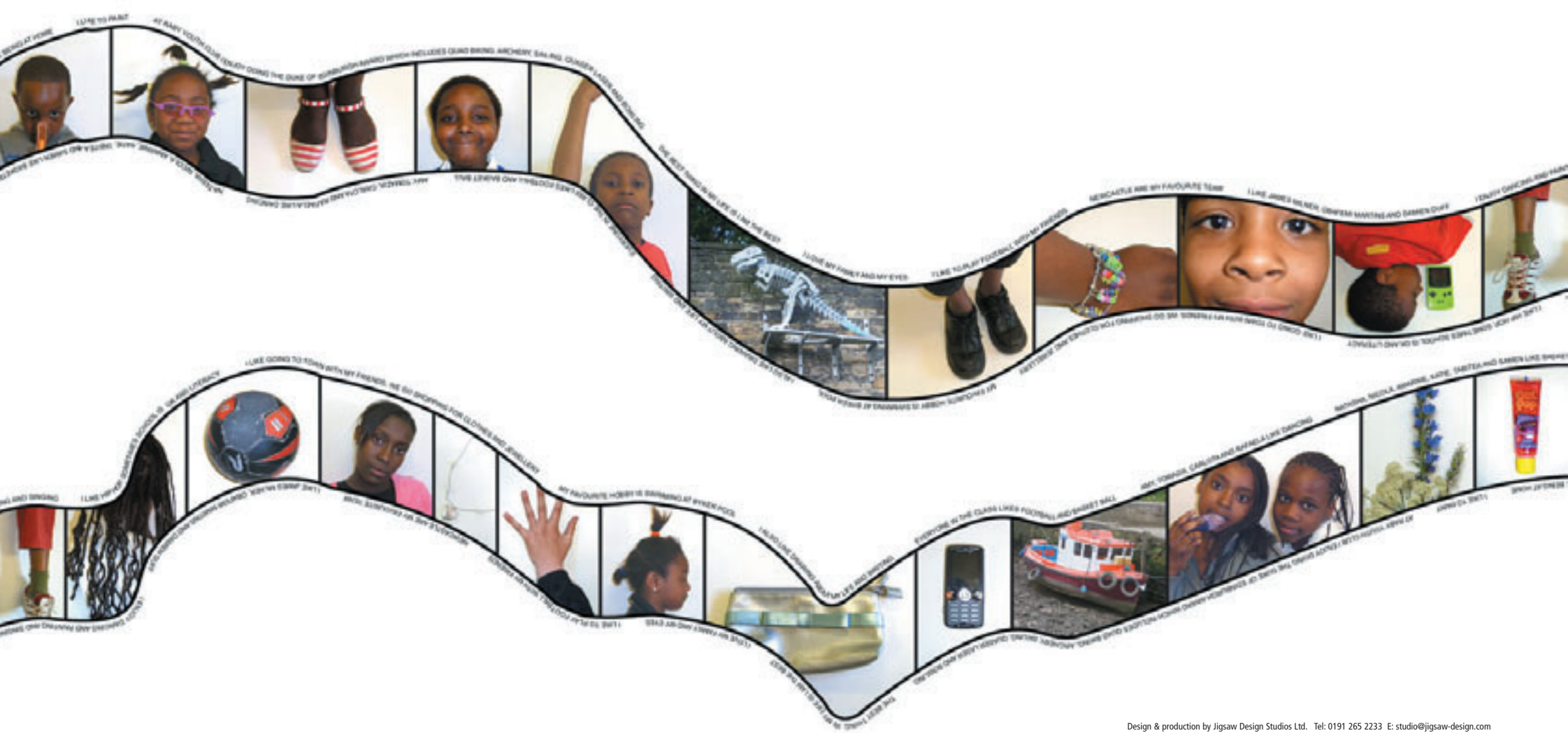
Vin Totton
Manager



Satisfaction survey

You said, we will do ...

The ASU will be examining all the detailed responses to our survey. We will draw up an action plan regarding any service improvements. We will also liaise with our partners to share positive and negative comments about their services. If you would like a copy of the survey summary report then please contact Julian Whitley at the ASU.



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