

2008/09

Newcastle Asylum Seekers Unit

Annual Report 2008/09

Local solutions to
international problems



Your Homes
Newcastle

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 8620.

Bengali	বাংলায় 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 ৮৬২০
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Farsi	فارسی این اطلاعات در مورد واحد پناهجویان در سازمان «خانه های شما در نیوکاسل» است. این واحد اطمینان حاصل می کند که پناهجویان و پناهندگان در طی مدت اقامتشان در اینجا دچار محرومیت نشوند. در صورت نیاز به این اطلاعات به زبان فارسی یا زبان های دیگر با شماره تلفن ۰۱۹۱۲۷۸۸۶۲۰ تماس بگیرید.
French	français 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 8620.
Kurdish	کوردی سوورانی ئەم زانیاریانە سەبارەت بە بەکەمی پەنابەرانی Your Homes Newcastle و ئەوەی که چۆن دنیای بین که پەنابەرانی و کۆچبەرانی لەو ماوەیەدا که لیژەن هەستەمی و تالی نایژین. ئەگەر حەزتان لەوەرگرتنی ئەم زانیاریانە بە زمانی کوردی یا هەر زمانیکی دیکە هەبە بە ژمارە تیلیفونی 0191 278 8620 پێوەندی بگرن.
Portuguese	português 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 8620.
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Spanish	español 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 8620.

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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 intention 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.

Reflections on the past year

"The sessions are free, fun and if we didn't have our membership cards and group activities to go to we would be bored, unfit and isolated as we wouldn't get a chance to meet other people"

Quote from young men attending The Centre for Sport

Reflections on the past year

Welcome to the Asylum Seekers Unit annual report for 2008/09.

I joined Your Homes Newcastle as Chair of the Board in September 2008 and soon realised the depth and importance of the service our Asylum Seekers Unit delivers. I am delighted to present the work of the unit over the last twelve months.

We have now completed the third year of the five year contract we have with the Home Office. It's been a busy year, and we are already turning our thoughts to the future. However, the main focus and driver of our work over the last year has been consolidation.

To deliver our service effectively we must work with a wide range of partners, including statutory and voluntary organisations. Over the last twelve months, we have developed further our relationships with education and leisure services. We are proud that the support we give to these two sections of the City Council results in children feeling part of the school community and adults and families being able to engage in healthy activities. This, in turn, helps combat isolation, promotes wellbeing, learning and, hopefully, happiness.

We also continue to provide small grants to seed-fund new organisations, as well as to support additional activities more established groups wish to provide. We feel all this work adds value and builds capacity in Newcastle.

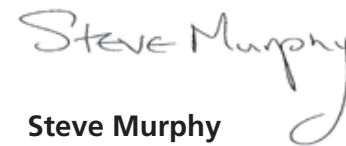
The last year has led us to improve the data we hold about our standards and how we perform. This includes information about how people view us, and the levels of satisfaction clients express about the services we provide. You will see from the report that this shows some very pleasing results. Equally gratifying was that in June 2008 the ASU was again recognised for customer service excellence following a successful surveillance assessment by Charter Mark.

Finally, as Your Homes Newcastle's commitment to our support and care agenda becomes increasingly embedded in all our services, I'm only too pleased to reinforce that our Asylum Seekers Unit is central to this objective.

As Chair of the YHN Board, I'm proud to observe the service the Asylum Seekers Unit delivers on a daily basis and the

difference the team really does make to people's lives. For the Unit, this ranges from handling a client's arrival into our city and into the service, to working with clients and partners until a decision for each individual is reached. This is an "end to end" process for some of our clients, but equally, for others it becomes an "end to a beginning" process, as their lives take a new and important turn when they receive leave to remain.

Our objective remains, as ever, to deliver our service to our clients as comprehensively and as well as we can, recognising that in doing so we are making a significant contribution to the wellbeing not only of the individuals involved, but also to that of the city and the region as a whole. It is public service of the highest order.



Steve Murphy
Chair, Your Homes Newcastle



Building capacity and adding value

We know that our partners in the statutory, voluntary and community sectors provide a range of valuable services to ensure that people arriving in Newcastle receive appropriate services. The ASU is able to help partners deliver projects through a special budget which allows us to award grants to support worthwhile activities which make people feel welcomed in Newcastle. Please read on for some examples of how our grants have helped local projects over the last year.



Starting school

We asked Oscar Gates, Newcastle City Council Education Welfare Service, Newcastle City Council, what difference is made as a result of the grant that we give to them every year. He told us:

"The education grant from the ASU specifically helps children to culturally adjust and thrive at their first school in

Newcastle. People seeking asylum are usually not allowed to work while their asylum claim is being considered. This grant greatly assists those families who cannot afford some of the basics needed for schooling.

"Each family is visited at their home once contact is made with Newcastle Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) to assess their needs. Two staff in particular are exclusively employed to support all international new arrivals. Learning places at playgroups, nurseries, schools and colleges are found and start dates are negotiated with school admissions officers.

"The grant pays for interpreters at the initial interview and first school admission meeting if the required language does not match our volunteer's range of languages. EWOs bring families to school meetings to welcome them and to ensure a greater understanding of school life and structures.

"In addition the grant pays for one school uniform and a welcome pack

consisting of a school bag and stationery set. This means that children go to school well prepared, equipped and appearing as everyone else does on their first day. Last financial year travel passes were also purchased for those children living far away from their school.

"In summary, the grant has helped to ensure that all asylum seeking children obtain a school place, school uniform and stationery within 28 days of being referred to the EWOs. This maximises their learning, wellbeing and future work opportunities.

"In 2009/10 the grant will support ongoing volunteer training and development opportunities for volunteers working alongside EWOs. In turn, this generates better understanding and knowledge of schools and the school processes and structures across many local communities. Volunteers are a vital cultural bridge helping break down barriers between schools, communities and local services."

Reflections on the past year

"The Education Welfare Service have been so helpful. Because we have little money we could not afford expensive uniforms. The children are all very happy with their schools."



Iranian family with children at St. Joseph's RC Primary School and St. Mary's RC Secondary School



Getting active

We asked Tamela Davison about how our grant for leisure activities helps people. This is what she told us:

“My name is Tamela Davison and I am a Sports Development Officer for Newcastle City Council. I have been co-ordinating and delivering the Asylum Seeker/Refugee Leisure Project since 2000.

“My involvement in the project started when I realised that there was a sudden increase in people seeking asylum coming to the area with a lot of time on their hands and little money to access facilities. I began to apply for small amounts of funding to deliver activities in the West End where the majority of clients were based.

“Initially we were successful in three Home Office bids, securing three years of Purposeful Activity Funding (2000 – 2003). This funding allowed the project to invest in a mini bus, extra coaching staff and to sustain an extensive leisure programme citywide, aiming to stimulate physical and mental wellbeing and to help promote and advance social inclusion of asylum seekers across the city.

“Since then the project has received continued funding from YHN’s Asylum Seekers Unit. Without this funding clients would remain excluded on financial grounds from many of the leisure activities we are now able to provide. This in turn combats isolation, promotes healthy living and generally adds value to people’s lives helping them to integrate into the communities in which they live.

“The project strives towards maintaining partnerships with other agencies and sports providers. It strikes a balance between the enabling role and direct service provision to continue to balance social objectives with financial objectives.”



“In 2008/09 I organised many activities. Some examples of these are:

- Helping the ASU to organise their summer event at The Lightfoot Centre
- Working with the Angel Heights Hostel to involve the residents in a range of activities including swimming, table tennis and football
- Working with individuals on a one-to-one basis by referral because they have particular physical or mental health needs
- Organising health walks with Common Ground in Walker
- Running team building events at Kielder
- And much more.

“I believe that the essential element of the programme, namely leisure activities, plays a vital role in bringing people of different cultures and communities together and adds to the increasing vibrancy that Newcastle as a major city is experiencing.”

Building capacity through Grant Aid

We have been running a Grant Aid scheme since February 2002. We award grants to voluntary and community projects which benefit people seeking asylum or those with refugee status living in Newcastle. Our Grant Aid has made sure that new projects have been set up in addition to making sure that other projects have been able to continue. Projects have also been able to put on additional activities promoting a range of issues such as those below and in the text boxes throughout this report.

We received 25 applications in 2008/09 and awarded 21 grants. The average grant award was £1935. We detail here some examples of how our Grant Aid has made a difference.

How Grant Aid makes a difference

Who? Open Clasp Theatre Company

How much? £2000 for performances of 'Stand n' Tan'

The difference? Roma Yagnik told us:

"The grant from Your Homes Newcastle's Asylum Seekers Unit enabled us to provide 2 free performances of Stand 'n' Tan, an eye-opening play raising awareness of the realities of seeking asylum – one in the east of the city and one in the west. Through the grant we were also able to provide drama workshops to accompany the performances allowing communities to explore the issues further. The feedback we had from audience members was overwhelmingly positive."

Who? Sports for Youth Academy

How much? £1627 for running costs and promotional materials.

The difference? Gerard Mboungo wrote to us to say:

"The grant from the ASU combined with funding from the Football Foundation

enabled us to run a comprehensive football project. It also paid for essential insurance and display boards to publicise our activities. This resulted in us attracting more members. Finally, the grant helped us to acquire the use of office accommodation."



Who? African Community Advice North East (ACANE)

How much? £1000 for healthy living sessions.

The difference? We asked Gaby Kitoko how he used the grant we awarded. He told us:

"The grant paid for healthy living sessions. This attracted mainly women and we visited historical sites and went for healthy walks. It also helped with crèche costs and promoted healthy eating and good mental health. The grants from the ASU have, over the years, helped us to deliver our objectives in meeting the needs of our members and other service users. This support has also aided integration and facilitated interaction between refugees and other members of the community."

If you would like to find out how to apply for a grant from the Asylum Seekers Unit, please contact Julian Whitley on 0191 278 8606.



Photograph taken by Phyllis Christopher.

Reflections on the past year

"We now feel as though we are part of the school, you have saved us so much trouble in finding the money to buy school clothing."

Zimbabwean family with children at Byker Primary and Heaton Manor Schools

Updates on the 2007/08 annual report

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

1. Section 4

We have continued to raise standards within our properties. The services we provide to our Section 4 clients are now consistent with those we provide to all other clients. In March 2009 we tested this by asking all Section 4 cases what they thought of our service (see page 12 for more on this).

2. Charter Mark

In June 2008 we underwent a 'surveillance' assessment to ensure that we were still delivering excellent services to our customers. The assessor was pleased with our submission and confirmed our Charter Mark award.



CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

Reflections on the past year

"I go to the gym in Byker every weekday. It is very important to me to get bigger muscles and to stay nice."

Iranian man from Walker

3. Destitution

We organised a food collection to mark this year's Refugee Week in June 2008. We collected food for two voluntary projects in Newcastle to distribute to destitute people who have had their claims for asylum refused. We also used this occasion to raise awareness around the issues of destitution. You can visit our website to find out how we did this.

The collection was greatly appreciated and as a result we intend to make this an annual event. We have also continued to work with our partners in the voluntary sector to help them achieve their goals to tackle this issue. In June 2008 we contributed to the call for evidence from the Human Rights Commission regarding the application of the Human Rights Act 1998. We used this as an opportunity to raise issues regarding destitution in the region.



Reflections on the past year

"The Grant Aid funding we have enables us to employ a financial administrator. This helps us to monitor our finances and plan our work - it also makes sure that our project users have quick and easy processing of bus fares for attending the garden, removing one of the barriers they might have for participating in the allotment groups."

Jayne Butler from The Comfrey Project



4. Legacy

'Legacy' refers to asylum claims made prior to March 2007 which have still to be decided upon. The initial phase of Legacy was concluded in Newcastle without a single household becoming homeless! This was due to the hard work and commitment of the ASU and others. Moving forward the United Kingdom Border Agency has stated that they want to conclude all outstanding cases by 2011. Our work to date suggests that by working with our colleagues in the Advice and Support Service and the City Council we can ensure homelessness is avoided and alternative structures put in place so clients can find settled accommodation reasonably quickly.

5. Operational

Because of changes to our service, like Section 4 and Legacy, in September 2008 the whole team took a day out to look at how we work. This proved to be a valuable exercise and helped us to plan successfully for the next 12 months.



6. Awards

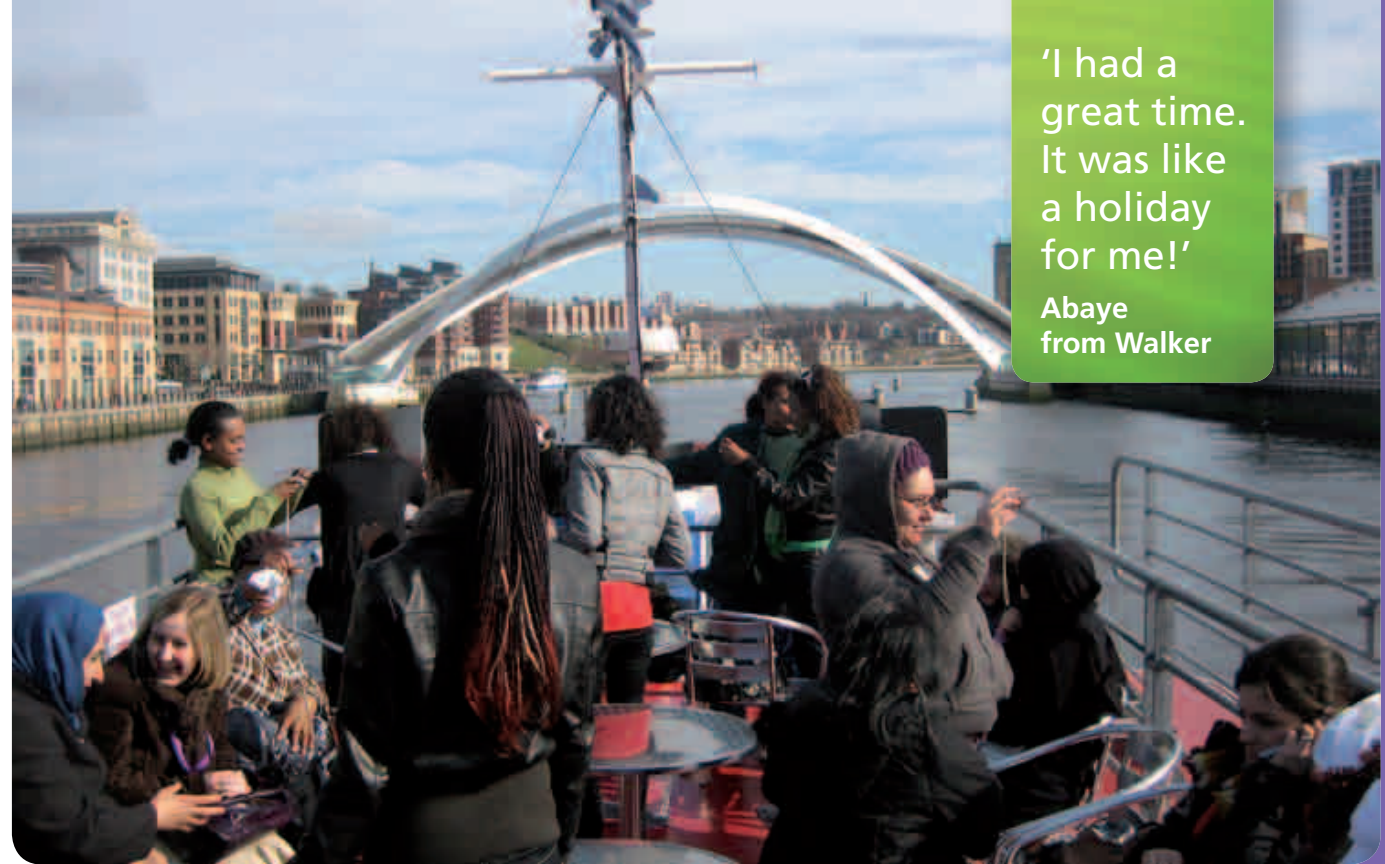
Over the years we have been nominated and shortlisted for several prestigious national awards. 2008 was no exception as we were shortlisted as a finalist at the UK Housing Awards in the category of 'Creating integrated communities'.



7. Other significant achievements throughout the year

July 2008

We decided to hold a fun event for our clients in the summer school holidays rather than during Refugee Week as we have traditionally done. With the help of Tamela Davison from Leisure Services we hosted another very successful event for our clients. This took place at the Lightfoot Sports Centre and over 200 people attended. Activities included dance mats, badminton, football, rollerblading, salsa lessons and massage therapies.



'I had a great time. It was like a holiday for me!'

Abaye from Walker

December 2008

As in previous years we distributed presents to our clients. These were donated by staff at Your Homes Newcastle, Newcastle City Council and Unison. This year we distributed 300 individually wrapped presents.

March 2009

On a sunny Friday 6 March, women supported by the ASU enjoyed an afternoon cruise down the river Tyne from Newcastle quayside to the coast in celebration of International Women's

Day. Nearly 100 women enjoyed a buffet lunch, raffle and a chance to leave all responsibilities behind for just a few hours! For many women it was their first time on a boat and glorious weather ensured a memorable day for all.

International Women's Day is the global day connecting women around the world, inspiring them to achieve their full potential and celebrating the collective power of women past, present and future.

We thank all the women who helped us celebrate this event.

How we performed in 2008/09

It was another busy year at the ASU and, as in past years, we have assessed our performance against a variety of measures. Read on to find out how we did.

ASU service standards

We provide service standards to all our clients so they are clear about what levels of service they can expect to receive from us. In 2008/09 we either met or exceeded all our service standards. Next year we plan to involve clients and stakeholders in reviewing our standards. If you want a copy of our service standards then please contact us or visit our website.

ASU service plan

In 2008/09 we had 18 service plan targets to meet. We fully completed 16 of these targets. We partially met the target for responding to letters or complaints. We

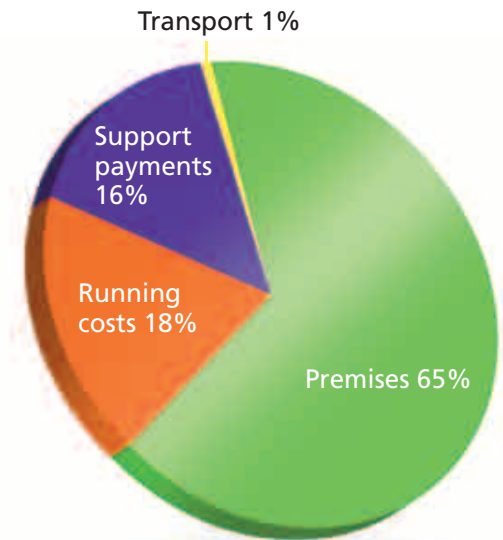
narrowly missed the target of responding in five days to one of the many issues raised in the year. We also partially met our service plan target to meet all our equality targets set in the year. We met 65% of our equality targets and plan to meet the remainder in 2009/10.

Compliments and complaints

During 2008/09 we received two formal complaints. One complaint was about the conduct of a member of staff and the other regarded dissatisfaction with a policy decision. Both complaints were responded to within 10 working days and neither complaint was upheld.

Also during the year we received 30 written 'thank yous', seven of these were from clients, 11 from community or voluntary groups, five from external agencies and seven from others. It always gives us a boost to receive such letters, so thank you to everyone who goes out of their way to send them to us.

How we spent our budgets in 2008-09



- Transport £36,406** - e.g. minibus hire, car mileage
 - Premises £3,313,801** - e.g. rents, council tax, furniture
 - Running costs £908,987** - e.g. staff salaries, grant giving, stationery
 - Support payments £836,765** - e.g. social service clients support payments
- Total: £5,095,959

Reflections on the past year

"The grant enabled the group to undertake a specific volunteering activity which they chose. None of them had ever done any volunteering activity before. The gardening benefited the young people who attended, as well as helping the garden staff and volunteers. The work will also be appreciated by the wider community when visitors come to the garden."

Hannah Gibbin on behalf of Kumasi

Customer satisfaction

Throughout 2008/09 we sent our clients supported under Section 95 regular surveys to measure their satisfaction with our service. We did this after people had been with us for one month, and again after six months. We then sent a final survey when people left our support. Unless requested by the client, ASU staff are not involved in the completion of these surveys. We are delighted to report that our satisfaction rates remain high – see table right.

	Satisfaction rate	Dissatisfaction rate	Net satisfaction
First month survey	92.9%	2.4%	90.5%
Sixth month survey	95.4%	Nil	95.4%
Exit survey	100%	Nil	100%
Total or average	96.1%	2.4%	93.7%



In addition to the results above we asked different questions on each of our three surveys. We are pleased to report that 100% of respondents were happy with the service provided by their Support Officer; 100%

confirmed that their Support Officer visited them every month; 100% felt their Support Officer had been helpful and 100% felt their Support Officer had treated them with respect. The 2008/09 responses did raise some issues about the furniture we provide, racist incidents, problems with properties and general neighbourhood issues. We will develop actions to respond to all these issues.

In March 2009 we asked our Section 4 clients what they thought of our service.

This was after one full year of the ASU directly supporting them. There was a clear difference between those clients who transferred across to our direct support in March 2008 and those who have become our clients since then, with more recent clients being more satisfied – 76% compared to 93%. Generally 82.4% of clients were satisfied or very satisfied with the service provided to them. On greater analysis much of the dissatisfaction was with the voucher system, something over which we have little control. When asked if we provided a friendly service that treated clients with respect and also whether we behaved professionally and politely 98% of all respondents answered yes to both questions. Again we will develop actions to respond to issues raised.

Reflections on the past year

“The Grant Aid ensured the young people had a healthy lunch. Many of the young people were from low income families, thus it ensured all had access to fresh, hot food. The ‘ethnic’ foods provided a talking point and thus fostered integration of the two social groups. It also provided the young people with an opportunity to sample a new cuisine.”

Clare Fearn, NERS cultural awareness day

Reflections on the past year

“I really enjoy Byker gym. I am happy that most things there are free especially in the winter when I eat more – it helps to stop me from getting fat.”

Zimbabwean woman from Walker

Other indicators of our performance

Other key areas of performance in 2008/09 were that we:

- answered 100% of telephone calls to the ASU within five rings and used the standard greeting 100% of the time. This is the first time we have reached our aim of achieving 100% in both categories.
- continued to provide monitoring information on time to the Home Office.
- kept our contract penalties to less than 5% of the £10,000 limit we set ourselves.
- carried out more than 7500 visits to our clients.
- effectively challenged, with the help of the Consortium, the UK Border Agency to ensure we received correct payments for the service we provide. In one instance this amounted to £11,000 being reimbursed to us.
- carried out at least one annual property inspection for every property we manage through our Maintenance Surveyor, Alan.
- continued to provide a high quality administration service to the ASU despite a very high turnover of staff.
- attended more than 200 locally based drop-ins in addition to approximately 100 city centre surgeries at the Civic Centre.
- managed the arrival of 327 households and the move on of 331 households.
- awarded 21 grants totalling £40,628 in Grant Aid.
- produced and distributed three newsletters to all clients.
- delivered 10 awareness sessions and provided an information stall at the City for Peace event.
- did not perform well in terms of our sickness. We averaged 24.29 days lost per staff member through sickness compared to the YHN target of no more than 10.2 days. This was mainly due to one member of staff being off for most of the year following an accident.

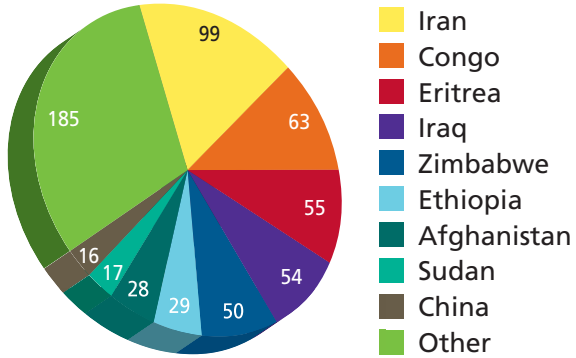
Reflections on the past year

"We couldn't think of buying new school uniform had it not been done by you."

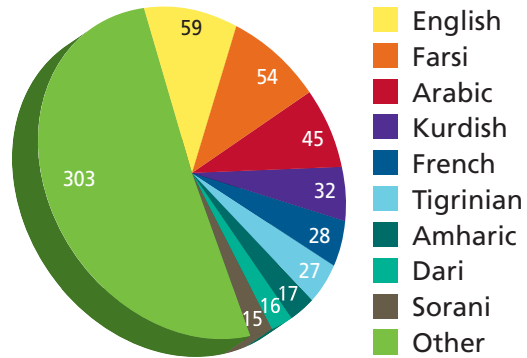
Somalian family with children at St Albans R.C. Primary School

Statistics

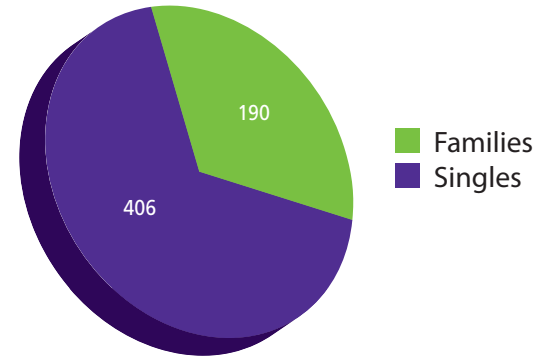
1. Number of households supported by the ASU by Nationality



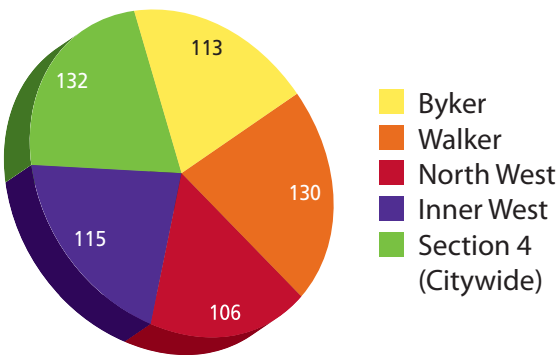
2. Number of households supported by the ASU by language



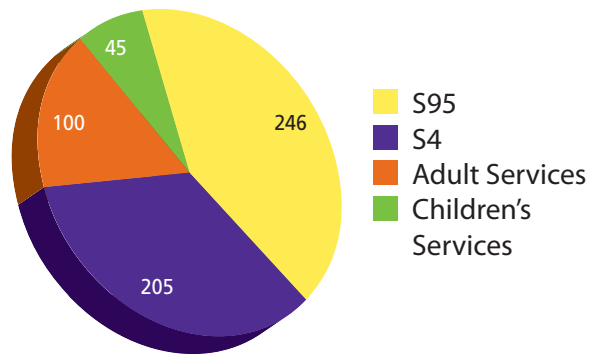
3. Number of households supported by the ASU by household type



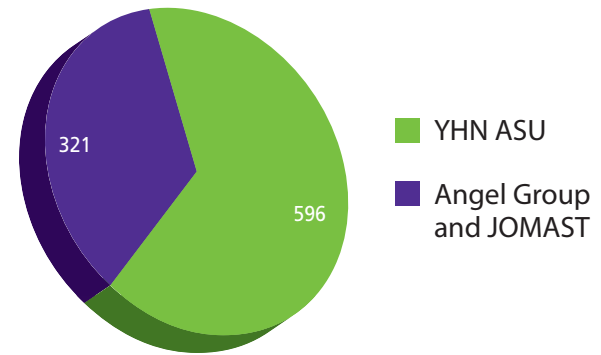
4. Number of households supported by the ASU by area



5. Number of households supported by the ASU by Type of Support



6. Number of households supported in Newcastle by accommodation provider



The data in graphs 1 – 5 was correct at 31.03.09. Graph 6 is an estimate regarding the other accommodation providers.



Looking forward

As another annual report draws to a close, I'm pleased and proud to look back on the achievements of the team and our partners over the last twelve months.

It's been a busy and productive year for us but, as we move into the period 2009/10, it's important to consider the challenges that lie ahead...

Legacy

We anticipate that over the next year we will have to remain vigilant for clients who receive a decision as Legacy progresses. There is an obligation by the UK Border Agency to conclude the Legacy review by 2011. We will continue to work closely with our colleagues in Newcastle City Council over the next year to manage this process as efficiently as possible.

Children and Adult Services

Our relationship with the Adult & Culture and Children's directorates at Newcastle City Council is likely to change over the next year. Our current service level agreement is due for review and we hope to have updated the agreement by the end of the year.

Customer Service Excellence

Charter Mark, the government standard for excellence in customer service, has now been replaced by the Customer Service Excellence (CSE) award. Our thoughts are now turning towards preparing for our first CSE assessment in June. Providing excellent customer service to our clients is a continuing priority for us so we are hopeful of a positive outcome in the assessment.

Future contract

We have passed the halfway mark of our five year contract with the Home Office. We must now start a discussion within the ASU, the consortium, YHN and with

the City Council about the direction a future contract takes.

We also need to consider reviewing the ASU, both internally and in conjunction with our partners, to ensure we are prepared and fit for purpose as the next contract comes around

Reviewing the ASU and preparing for a new contract are huge tasks. It is important that we commence this process now to make ourselves ready for when the new contract becomes available.

Finally, the service we deliver makes a huge contribution to individuals and communities alike. So I offer a huge thank you to all staff, partners and agencies we work with to make the service we provide for our clients as productive and caring as it has always been.

Vin Totton
Manager

Reflections on the past year

"The grant has enabled us to continue to employ the English School Project Manager... Many of the students have been referred to us from Mental Health service providers and some dramatic changes have been seen in some of the students such as the woman from the DRC who wasn't able to speak any English before she came and was so shy and frightened she was unable to speak even in her own language. After a few weeks on the course she has started to make some friends and the social and supportive nature of the classes has seen her (and many others like her) grow in confidence to the extent that she performed a short roleplay/drama in front of the whole class."

Julian Prior – Open Door

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