

Annual Summary

2009 to 2010



Introduction from the Chair

It is Christmas Eve at the Bigg Market. The NERS Office will close early, so people can change mode and recreate themselves with the Christmas holiday. But, oh, there comes a crisis. The local post office runs out of money, so a large number of clients cannot draw their meagre allowances, and will be utterly penniless at this critical time. The Bigg Market staff ransack the petty cash, but that's not enough, so they go themselves with their credit and debit cards to the city's cash machines, and thus ensure that their clientele have the money due to them. It takes time, and a lot of paper work and arithmetic, so it is late when they arrive home, as late, or later, than the usual working day.

That is the measure of the commitment of the people of NERS. It happened in the Bigg Market, but it could have been in Sunderland or on Tees Valley; indeed, the people there put themselves out for those who come to them in the same way.

This ethos is one of the two main things that make it so worthwhile to be a Trustee of NERS. The other is the cause, working with those who come to our country looking for safety and freedom from persecution, guiding them through the bureaucratic labyrinth, showing them how things work (or don't), accompanying them through the whole asylum process and offering to go with them beyond that as they cope with a new status, together with racism and general chauvinism, in a still strange land. If that was all, it would be enough, but in addition there comes the pain of trying to ease the agony of those who are refused asylum.

Look at all that this Report contains to see what I mean and to find the scope of the life of NERS. Of course, we do not and cannot do everything, so there are gaps in our provision. We thank goodness for the other organisations in the area, such as Common Ground, West End Refugee Service, The Regional Refugee Forum, the Mary Thompson Fund and a host of other, often quite small, but very effective groups, who look to meet the needs of the refugees in their area, and with whom we need more and more to work very closely. Without them, the outlook would be bleak indeed.

Yes, there is, I'm afraid, a bleakness as we look ahead. There is for the whole of Britain, so we cannot escape it, and we shall, undoubtedly, suffer severe cuts to our grants, and so to the potential for our programmes. We have to find our way through this rough patch, using all our imagination and initiative, from all involved in NERS, and from beyond. Will the Big Society help? I wish I knew what it meant, but it may be good. We wait and see.

We, as a Board of Trustees, owe it to all the staff and clients that we should come to grips with the new situation and work out how to deal with it. Having to think afresh won't do us any harm. There's a verse of poetry which often runs through my head:

*"Not for ever in green pastures
Do we ask our way to be;
But the steep and rugged pathways
May we tread rejoicingly."*



Could be read as romantic guff, but equally as a recipe for development.

It is good to read in the report that we are experiencing improved relations with UKBA. That is good news. However, alongside our conviction that NERS and our sister organisations are right to be doing what they do, we who work in this field cannot help feeling emotions which are a mix of frustration, anger and shame. It is to do with the way that officialdom treats asylum seekers. It is, often, as bad, or worse, than the "cold charity" of the poor laws and work houses of two hundred years ago. Asylum seekers should be forgiven for thinking that they are treated as though they were robots programmed to lie, and the screw

is being tightened all the time. How can we, in a country which prides itself on its justice, enforce a system which denies asylum seekers a single penny in cash? The system which was operating last Christmas has been changed, so that now asylum seekers only have a card which may be used for essential food and toiletry purchases, but there is no way in which they can scrimp and save to pay a bus fare to medical care or to take a breath of fresh air at the sea side – or anything else. Why is it that there are so many initial refusals of asylum claims which are then overturned on appeal? Why are deportations carried out in ways that are reminiscent of the inhumane, totalitarian injustice from which they have already suffered in their own countries? Apart from a denial of natural humanity, at a time of financial stringency, how wasteful such a system is of public money. To be fairer and more efficient would not only be humane, it would be cheaper.

Amongst all the fine and enjoyable work, the year at NERS has not been without sadness. Last April Lawrence Rutherford died very suddenly. He had been a key personality in NERS for ten years, many of those as Daoud Zaaroura's Personal Assistant. He was the cheery person we all saw when we came into the Jesmond Office, and it was to him that we went when we needed information or knowledge. He knew, and was known by everybody. He leaves a great gap and our sympathy goes to all his family.

There are more cheerful notes to end on, however. One, that gives me a bit of false pride, is that the history of NERS is being researched, and will be written up in due course. It is, I am certain, vitally important that we should be able to look back on what was then, and see how it came to be what is now.

More important for the moment, though, is the glory that has been given to NERS on Teesside. In September, the Teesside Office was given the BME Award for Youth Work. Pete Widlinski received it on the organisations behalf, and went on to relax and enjoy the dinner and the company, only to find later in the evening that he

himself had been given a Lifetime Achievement Award for his tireless work for Justice and Community Relations. Fortunately, he still had the legs to go to the rostrum.

On behalf of the whole Board, many congratulations, and thanks without measure to all staff, volunteers and supporters.

Ben Hopkinson

Chair, Board of Directors and Trustees.

Youth and Community Projects

Our projects have gone from strength to strength this year.

In October our New All Points North project, supported by the Big Lottery Fund, began its work to develop a structured programme of training for young people aged 16-25 around mental health, culture and citizenship. It has been a really successful first year with groups running in Middlesbrough, Sunderland and Newcastle in partnership with organisations such as Tyne and Wear Museums, Sunderland University and Headliners.

Also in October we began our new integrated women's project supported by Communities and Local Government – Aspen Culture – which has brought women together from around the world to look at all kinds of arts and culture activities culminating in a new website and an exciting new research report into women and cultural inequality. The women are looking forward to their residential during the summer at Ford Castle, Northumberland where we will be developing and looking at the second year of the project.

September this year also saw the development of our Equality and Human Rights Commission capacity development project which aimed to map integration work in the Tees Valley and support the development and the future of new integration networks, and support existing projects. This completed in March this year after a fantastic youth integration conference in Tees Valley which looked at groundbreaking new ways of doing integration work.

In December we took over the management of the Brighter Futures campaigning group from Save the Children. The young people in the project, supported by Forward, have been developing a project around awareness raising and research into Female Genital Mutilation and we are hoping that this will have a key impact on the communities with which we work.

The V project has continued this year with the development of Brighter Futures and arts work in the Tees Valley and also with our environmental youth work in the north of the region. We have also developed a new project around mental health mentoring which will support asylum seekers towards more resilient strategies for mental well-being.

We have also begun to develop the NERS Research Unit this year after our success in gaining funding from Communities and Local Government for research.

We have had many new students and interns this year as well as the volunteers who have continued to support our projects and I would like to offer a big thank you to everyone who has worked with us. We hope that the next year will be as successful as the last and that we go on to an even brighter future.



Community Belongings Project

This project, funded by the Northern Rock Foundation and now in its third and final year aims to strengthen a sense of belonging among refugees, new communities and migrant workers, by enabling them to play an active part in the community and to locate themselves within wider society as informed socially responsible citizens.

This year we have run 25 classes on aspects of British Culture ranging from women's suffrage to popular British hobbies, cultural stereotypes to housing policy. Visits have also been made to local attractions including Durham Cathedral and North Shields Fish Quay and Ferry. Students from 31 different nationalities have attended.

We have also been promoting volunteering amongst the students and a number have taken part in environmental, cultural and other projects helping them to make friends, gain useful skills and settle more fully into the community life of the region. Our partnerships with Crisis Skylight, the Ouseburn Trust and Newcastle Library Service have proved especially fruitful.

The final part of the project will aim to seek accreditation for the classes in partnership with a recognised learning organisation.

One Stop Service

Bigg Market, Sunderland & Tees Valley

In the financial year 2009 – 2010 yet again we responded to many crisis situations and despite these external difficulties we managed to provide a very good service in assisting our clients in meeting their needs. The team saw continued high demand for information and advice from clients who have been experiencing destitution or the threat of immediate destitution on a daily basis.

Delivering services in a spirit of responding to clients needs meant that the team again, year after year, managed to go way beyond our contractual number of contacts and advice sessions with clients. In addition to an endless number of S4 applications (support for people refused asylum), there has been a considerable number of NASS1 (new or renewed support applications) being submitted as well as various changes of circumstances requests to UKBA. The continual changes in legislation have had an impact on our workload by bringing large numbers of clients into the borderline for meeting UKBA's support criteria. We were very busy with a high number of appeals being submitted to the Asylum Support Tribunal: with a good success rate of appeals there has been a large number of clients taken out of homelessness and into support. Cross-referrals between NERS and different departments of Social Services have been an ongoing positive experience in which both parties were giving priority to clients' needs as much as possible.

All this hard work from the team unfortunately could not help some of our clients, who have been coming to NERS seeking help, having been left street homeless. The best we could do for some was to provide money for food, mainly as a one-off payment, or help with travel for reporting at the local UKBA office. Thankfully we are not the only organisation in this field, so charities such as West End Refugee Service, Common Ground and others were actively fundraising to provide food and some money on a weekly basis. But still, with the best efforts of charities involved, there were some clients that could not be referred to any of them due to their limited funding.

During this period of time UKBA has introduced a few changes and some of them were linked to S4 (Section 4 of the current act) support. Weekly S4 support was changed from weekly food vouchers to the AZ-URE card (a debit-type card but still no access to cash). This change had some positive but also some negative impacts on clients in receipt of S4 support. Further representations (fresh claims for asylum) could no longer be submitted by post. This change was introduced by the UKBA in Oct 2009 and, as a consequence, further hardship was experienced by clients whose initial asylum application was submitted before March 2007, as they were expected to travel to Liverpool and submit their fresh claim in person.

Due to an increase in projects operating out of NERS' Tees Valley office, including Youth, Community, Capacity Building, Integration and Move-On, the team expanded into a new part of Sylvan House during the year, and now have a training and meeting room that is used almost every day, a staff and archived-file room and improved interview space. Unison Northern Region and Erimus Housing provided us with enough free furniture and equipment to fill the entire office space. Many thanks to Unison and Erimus Housing for their generous donations.

Expanding the office has meant a lot more space and networked computers for our volunteers and students, which means more work done for more of our clients. During this period, we increased the number of social work student placements from Teesside University and continued the same level from Durham. Teesside say they receive the best feedback from the NERS placement due to its uniqueness.

Refugee Integration & Employment Service

The RIES provides a standard level of service to new refugees wherever they are living at the time their status is granted. The RIES is available to anyone over the age of 18 who has been granted refugee status or humanitarian protection following a claim handled by one of Home Office's asylum teams in the regions.

It offers a 12-month service to each person granted refugee status or humanitarian protection and it has three complementary elements:

- an advice and support service offering help in addressing initial critical needs such as housing, education and access to benefits;
- an employment advice service to help the person enter long-term employment at the earliest opportunity; and
- a mentoring service offering the person an opportunity to be matched with a mentor from the receiving community.

NERS delivers 2 elements of RIES; advice and mentoring, while our partner A4e delivers employment service.

In 2009/2010 UKBA referred 458 clients in the North East, of whom 421 have been interviewed. 445 clients have been seen by A4e of whom 69 have been successful in getting into employment. We have also matched 61 clients with mentors. The largest number of RIES' clients came from Eritrea (110), Zimbabwe (73) Iran (72), Somalia (32) and Sudan (32).

Move On Advice Project

The project, which is funded for three years by the Big Lottery, began work in April 2008. In its second year, the team (consisting of three advice workers, a project coordinator, volunteers, and social work students on placement) helped 408 clients – including many families – newly granted leave to remain make the transition to mainstream social security and housing provision and address other integration-related social welfare needs. It sees clients at NERS's Bigg Market and Middlesbrough offices, and at outreaches at the West End Refugee Service and Common Ground in Newcastle, the multi-agency asylum-seeker/refugee drop-in in South Shields, and Stockton Citizens Advice Bureau. To meet demand, a second advice post was added in Middlesbrough in late March 2010, giving the project two Move On Advice Workers in Tees Valley and two in Tyneside.

Since the advent of the Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES) in October 2008, the project has catered mainly for people granted leave under the Home Office's Case Resolution (or 'legacy') backlog clearance programme, thereby enabling NERS to offer a move on service to most former asylum-seekers in the North-East given the right to stay in Britain.

Supported Housing Project

NERS' Supported Housing Project is a partnership between NERS, Newcastle City Council and Stonham, A Division of Home Group.

With funding from Supporting People, NERS manages 20 properties in the West and East End of Newcastle. In 2007/08 we provided accommodation and support to more than 30 refugees.

From helping to complete Housing Benefit and Job Seekers Allowance forms, to general tenancy support, befriending, employment and education advice to help with applying for permanent housing the project aims to support refugees throughout the process of moving towards independent living.

The Housing Team works closely with NERS' partner organisations in both the statutory and voluntary sector, as well as NERS' other projects, to deliver a package of support tailored to the needs and aspirations of each individual service user.

International Organisation for Migration

IOM runs two programmes in the UK. Under both programmes IOM arranges flights and onward transportation to the home doorstep and also delivers Reintegration Assistance in the country of return.

Apart from a relocation grant given to each individual returnee at the airport of departure, this assistance is not delivered in cash, but in kind, according to an Individual Return Plan tailored to meet the needs of each returnee.

Targeted payments can be made towards a range of things including: payment of fees for vocational training courses at colleges, for higher education, or for children's schooling; a three month salary supplement for a job placement; housing repair or extension/short-term accommodation; an extra baggage allowance; medical and psychosocial support; or, most commonly, to help buy equipment and supplies to set up a small business.

Over the years NERS has been very keen to make sure that our clients have the highest standard of support no matter what situation they find themselves in or what choices they make. That is why the decision was made to work with IOM. After all, if a client weighs up all of their options and decides that their best option is to return home and re-establish links with their community, family and friends, they should be helped to do so.

To that end we have been quite busy this year – from April 2009 to March 2010 we handled 357 client enquiries, attended 175 meetings throughout Newcastle, Gateshead, North and South Shields, Sunderland and the Tees Valley, and we also completed 100 applications for voluntary return.

Volunteering

From April 2009 – April 2010, the volunteering project recruited, trained and placed 950 volunteers and more than half of these were from the community of refugees. This figure represents an increase of about 18% over the previous year and this is attributed to probably the slowing down of activity on the job market and the need for people to re-invent themselves and gain new skills. During the same period, there has also been a significant increase in student volunteers making a contribution, particularly in Mentoring, One Stop Service, and the Youth projects. Volunteers made a total contribution of 39553 hours, translating

into approximately £156000 in monetary terms. We are proud to report that statistics continue to show that slightly below half the advice sessions in the One Stop Service during the period under discussion were carried out by our trained and experienced volunteers. As our success lies in providing an innovative, professional and yet individual service, we continue to give time to each recruit and recognise skills and potential in all. It is also worth noting at this point that although we lost all of our experienced Volunteer – Volunteer Coordinators, in all our outlying offices just before the beginning of the year in review, we have managed to replace the two at Sunderland and Middlesbrough,

but the Bigg Market still has a vacant position. We continue to work tirelessly with NERS' Senior Management Team to search for secure funding, which will enable the project to stand alone, be viable financially and recruit more paid volunteer managers and administrators. We take this opportunity to salute and thank all our valued volunteers, who continue to flavour the organization's work and without whom, perhaps, we could not offer the excellent, holistic service that NERS provides.



Northern Revive is a community interest company started with the prime aim of supporting the development of local communities. It does so by involving local communities in the services it provides. The main driving factors are excel-

lent service, commitment to support local communities, continuous improvement, and competitive price. Northern Revive provides the following services: Interpreting and Translation, Catering and Cleaning. The interpreting and translation service is a pioneer in its field in the North East. As a specialist provider of professional languages, it has over 70 languages and a network of more than 250 qualified interpreters throughout the North East providing a quality service.

Our catering is unique and the first of its kind in the North East, offering an authentic multi-cuisine buffet from many different countries such as Bosnia, Africa, India, Italy, France, Czech Republic, Lebanon and many others. We cater to general meetings, away days, conferences and training events to private businesses, refugee community organisations, voluntary and statutory organisations and educational institutions.

We provide community cleaning service to offices, hostels, pubs and bars, community organisations, and other businesses. The service includes floor and carpet vacuuming, dusting, door cleaning, kitchen and toilet cleaning. We provide 24/7 service at a very competitive price.

Northern Revive is also recruiting interpreters, professional caterers and cleaners to join the business. Experience is preferred but training will be provided whenever needed. Volunteers are very much welcome to join.

Capacity Building Project

NERS' Capacity Building Project (CBP) has delivered Quality Assurance training programmes for Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs), new migrant communities and second tier organisations which has improved access to mainstream support services.

The project has two full time workers covering the North East region whose remit is to facilitate capacity building training sessions, provide awareness raising training and organise seminars for youth and women's networks. CBP workers have also provided individual advice, signposting and information on QASRO (Quality Assurance System for Refugee Organisations) and completed a mapping exercise of migrant communities and second tier organisations in the North East.

NERS is aiming to provide sustainable and long term support services and structures in the region. This is being achieved by providing capacity, training and awareness to the main frontline statutory and community support services.

The conference entitled 'We Come 1', was organised jointly by NERS' Capacity Building Project and Equality and Human Rights Commission project workers and aimed to identify the capacity building and developmental needs of youth groups, organisations and projects in the North East by posing questions such as: 'What are the issues of setting up youth groups/projects?'; 'What are the barriers for these groups/projects in accessing the services available to them and how these could be overcome?' NERS will strive to address the findings of the conference at a strategic level with the support of its stakeholders.

The project is also delivering very successful cultural awareness raising sessions to local authorities, housing and welfare teams, Job Centre Plus and social services.

Quality Task Group

The purpose of the QTG is to formulate a vision of what NERS hopes to achieve by applying the quality process. The group is monitoring the implementation of quality standards of NERS in line with the quality policy and the quality framework of the organisation.

The members of the QTG meet on a bi-monthly basis to ensure that policies and procedures are developed to ensure the efficient and effective management of the organisation and the services it delivers, as well as measuring the impact of the quality process on the organisation

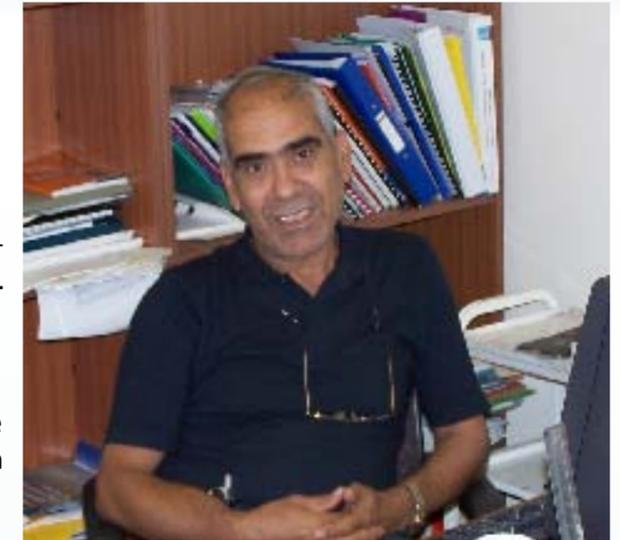
One of the aims is to keep the Board of Directors, staff and volunteers up to date with the progress of the quality process in the organisation, and developments on quality matters in the sector.

Members of the QTG are also actively involved in organising self assessment days and this helps the group to produce and implement our annual quality action plan.

From the Chief Executive

Last year, 2009-2010, NERS focused on the quality of its services, raising staff skills and responding to service users and community engagement requirements. Through a stretched One Stop Service, our staff and volunteers delivered beyond their targets. Our staff, along with volunteers and student placements, responded to a higher demand of support from clients who were left temporarily without support or those who were left in destitution.

The Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES) provided timely support and worked closely with the regional United Kingdom Borders Agency (UKBA) to enable refugees to access employment and to achieve a smooth settlement within a reasonable timescale.



Our Youth Projects provided a strong platform for our young people, across the North East, to lead their communities into active engagement and to build a brighter future for our younger generation.

Other services and projects of NERS provided a practical contribution towards longer term settlement and creating a feeling of belonging to our region and towards our diverse British society.

Our volunteers provided practical and emotional support to our clients and without them, we could have lost our ability to claim that we are adding significant value to our services.

The Northern Revive staff and services are trying their best to use our skills and networks to generate added resources and ensure that our services are viable. They are operating in a very competitive environment and they need every support from all of us.

Our partners supported NERS' status and its ability to campaign for a fair and supportive asylum system.

At the end of such a year where we feel strong and viable, came a sense of uncertainty because of the state of the economy and the global financial crisis. However, with such a reserve of skills, passion and support, I am confident that we will ride the storm and use our strengths to continue developing quality services, practical support and positive engagement with our clients and stakeholders.

Thanks to our stakeholders, volunteers, and hardworking staff for making NERS a successful, vibrant and dynamic organisation.

And special thank you to my Board of Directors, my colleagues in the Senior Management Team and our programme/project leaders for their passionate and professional support during a period of challenging priorities.

Daoud Zaaroura
Chief Executive Officer

Company Information/Acknowledgements

NERS' Trustees/Directors

Ben Hopkinson	Chair	Appointed Oct 2009
Warren Adams	Vice Chair	Appointed Oct 2009
Sunny Humphrey	Treasurer	Appointed Oct 2009
Rick Bowler		
Tony George		Appointed Oct 2009
Steve Hill		
Philip Latham		
Saeed Mohamed		
Amir Nakash		
Emily Porter		
Dr Candasamy Rajendran		
Graham Taylor OBE		
Jane Yugire		Resigned Feb 2010
Daoud Zaaroura		Company Secretary

NERS thanks its funders and partners for their support in 2009 to 2010

Refugee Council, UKBA, North East Strategic Migration Partnership, the local authorities of Newcastle, Middlesbrough, Redcar, Darlington & Sunderland, The Big Lottery Fund, Northern Rock Foundation, Capacitybuilders (Improving Reach), Supporting People (Newcastle), Equality and Human Rights Commission, Communities and Local Government, Harmony Initiative, Connecting Communities, V, Forward, Regional Refugee Forum, Stonham, A Division of Home Group, Your Homes Newcastle, Children in Need, National Youth Voluntary Scheme

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