

TRUSTEE EXPANSION MEETING

Minutes of the meeting held on 11th December 2002 at the Angel Health Living Centre, Salford.

Present: Hermione Lovel, Zeinab Mohamed, Zohreh Golmakani, Mohamed Nazri, Ali Al-Hakeem, Tej Purewal, Maeve Keeney, W. Seddon, Mohamed Ismail, Fazil Jamal Mustafa, Ali Namegoshaye Fard, Hanif Bobat, Rhetta Moran, Donna Hewitt, Laurel Goss, Francis Kaikumba, Steve Conway, Cath Maffia, Nilofer Shaikh.

Apologies: Maria Thornton - Treasurer of RAPAR, Phil Davies - Refugee Action, Dr B Temple - University of Salford.

Nilofer explained that the main reason for inviting people to attend today's meeting was to explain about RAPAR that was set up one year ago in Salford. Because of the need to set it up very quickly PCT employees took on the roles of Trustees, who now feel the need to expand the group into Manchester and Trafford, and involve Refugees and Asylum Seekers and other organisations, particularly the community sector, onto the Executive Committee.

1. HISTORY/BACKGROUND OF RAPAR

Rhetta expressed how pleased she was to see so many people at the meeting. She explained that people have been working with refugee communities for a very long time, but a couple of years ago there was a qualitative shift in how these people were treated when arriving in the UK. They were forcibly dispersed around the country and consequently felt very alone and uncared for. RAPAR (Refugees and Asylum Seekers Participatory Action Research) group came into being because of different peoples' experiences with refugees, to see if there was a gap where people could communicate with each other and gain responses as to what was going on 'on the ground'. It was felt that, because of the large incidence of asylum seekers and refugees in Salford, this was the place to start. A meeting was held in July 2001 to form RAPAR.

One of the first actions was to put in a bid for funds to supply mobile phones so that people from Somalia and Afghanistan arriving in this country could communicate with each other. Unfortunately the events of 11 September 2001 in the USA put an end to this bid. Another bid was put to the Community Fund, but they required any bids to come from groups with charitable status. This is how the Trustees came into being.

Since that time there has been an escalation in the raft of policy and implementation of policy in relation to immigration and asylum seekers. There is increased evidence of tension and of asylum seekers being spoken of in a very negative manner. There is now a quality of communication between the members of RAPAR and the refugees and asylum seekers. We were invited to apply and were successful in obtaining Social Inclusion monies, so that we have been able to set up a Community Development Team to assist and advise refugees and asylum seekers with their problems. We now want to invite people to become members of the management board of RAPAR so that the organisation can be broadened into Manchester and Trafford. Rhetta finished with a plea for everyone to consider becoming a member of RAPA to take the organisation forward and help to make it international.

2. MOHAMED AND FAZIL - HOW THEY HAVE BEEN SUPPORTED

Fazil explained that he had arrived in the UK last year and was encouraged by Cath Maffia to get involved as a volunteer to work with RAPAR, helping other refugees and asylum seekers from the Kurdish community in Salford with their problems. There was no help in Manchester and it was very difficult for refugees and asylum seekers who do not speak English to understand the system.

Mohamed also arrived last year. Again Cath enlisted his help by informing him that there was going to be a meeting and they needed an interpreter. He now works for the Salford RAPAR project with asylum seekers and refugees in Salford and Higher Broughton, helping them to obtain housing, etc.

3. PRESENT TRUSTEE STATUS

The present trustees are all PCT staff, the only people who were qualified to be trustees at the time, since people who wanted to be Trustees could not take up employment within RAPAR. There was now a need to expand from the PCT but new trustees will be supported by the existing ones.

4. REASONS FOR BECOMING TRUSTEES

It was explained that trustees will be doing some very valuable and rewarding work. The fact that you are involved in helping the disadvantaged would look good on your CVs. You will be given training by the Council for Voluntary Service. More trustees means less pressure on individuals. External help will be bought in to assist with financial and secretarial services.

Rhetta pointed out that anyone actually employed and paid by RAPAR might find it a conflict of interest to be a trustee but could still be on the executive. If at any time a trustee became a paid employee they may need to resign from the Board at that time. The Salford RAPAR Community Development Workers are not exempt from becoming trustees because their funding comes from elsewhere.

5. VOLUNTARY NOMINATIONS

Today is just to find out who is interested in becoming a member of RAPAR and to explain technical details. An AGM would be needed to nominate people to be trustees or executives.

Steve Conway asked if the Charitable Status was limited by guarantee. Rhetta confirmed this and Steve explained that this meant that trustees were only liable for £1 if there was a deficit and the group was wound up.

Nilofer explained that monthly meetings are held at the moment.

Rhetta stated that Dr Temple had expressed a willingness to be membership secretary.

Hermione Lovell suggested that the Executive group should meet after the information network meetings.

Zainab Mohamed asked about the situation in Manchester. Steve Conway said there was a crying need for RAPAR to work closely in Manchester.

Felicity Green, Director of Public Health in Manchester is proposing to set up a Special Interest Group in Manchester to help asylum seekers and refugees.

Salford City Council have a Scrutiny Committee to investigate the situation regarding asylum seekers and refugees and this was set up because of the RAPAR initiative. This needs to be extended to Manchester.

Hermione explained that many people have moved from Salford to Manchester (Gorton) and their needs need to be taken up by Manchester. Steve Conway said that this was part of his role, drawing in the various communities of asylum seekers and refugees and to get various agencies

involved. Salford is unique in that individuals in various agencies have been prepared to work together to address the situation. This is not the case in Manchester at present.

It was unanimously agreed that different overlapping groups need to come together in Manchester and form support groups there through RAPAR.

It was agreed that a public meeting should be held in February to look at Manchester committees that we want to engage.

Nilofer asked people who were willing to get involved to complete the form provided indicating their interest on the executive committee.

She asked the Manchester people to meet after this meeting to discuss how they could take forward developments in Manchester.

Friday 24th and Friday 31st January 2003 were put forward for training sessions for executives and a further two dates will be arranged for February.

An AGM will be arranged in the New Year.