

RAPAR

(Refugee and Asylum seeker Participatory Action Research)
*C/o Faith and Justice Commission, Cathedral House,
250 Chapel Street, Salford, M3 5LL*

Date and Time of Next Meeting:

Tuesday 12th November

4pm

Cathedral House

250 Chapel Street

Salford

Minutes of the Information Sharing Meeting

Tuesday 15th October 2002, Salford Cathedral House

Present:

Nilofer Shaikh (RAPAR Chair) Ameen Hadi (Community safety, Salford City Council), Rhetta Moran (Revans Institute, University of Salford), Fazil Jamal Mustafa (Salford RAPAR Community Development worker), Cath Maffia (Health Visitor, Salford PCT Asylum Seeker Health Team), Colette Emerson (Salford PCT Asylum Seeker Health Team) Reza Moshiri (RAPAR Doctors group), Maria Thornton (R&D Manager Salford PCT), Donna Hewitt (Project Manager, Salford RAPAR)

In Attendance: Karen Whittaker (Minute taker, Salford PCT), Mike Scantlebury (Salford Community Network), Nicky Vincer (Pendleton College), Steve Conway (Development Officer, MARIM), Tim Hilton (Wellbeing Development Worker Refugee Action), Martin Smith (Council of Christians in Commerce)

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Shanaz Lavel, Bogusia Temple, Hermione Lovel, Lisa Cooper, Zeinab Mohamed, Phil Greenham, Louise Kay and the Salford Action Team.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

2.1. The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted as a correct record.

2.2. From the minutes of the last meeting, Steve Conway from the Multi-Agency for Refugee Integration in Manchester (MARIM) was invited to report to the group about the current situation in his area.

Steve spoke about the need for support mechanisms to be developed in the North and east of Manchester – areas which are traditionally mono-cultural and predominantly white. Areas in east Manchester, such as Gorton have a high number of asylum seekers dispersed there, but fall between the regeneration zones of East Manchester and the A6 Routes partnership. Gorton is of increasing concern because of the high number of racial attacks, both recorded and unreported that are occurring in the area, however, recorded racial attacks are on the increase in South Manchester as well.

As local authority housing stock in traditional multi-ethnic areas is at a premium the council will begin to rehouse new refugees on the housing list to non-traditional areas raising concerns about educational, health and community isolation, safety and support

Steve suggested that RAPAR could support the work around an east Manchester drop-in project, and become involved in the consultation and development process for the drop-in.

Action: Steve to contact Drop In and issue an invitation to RAPAR to attend the consultation day on the 21 November

Black and Minority ethnic communities have historically had problems in accessing healthcare, being accepted into the community and experiencing racial attacks. *A further complication for refugees and asylum seekers is the expectation placed on active individuals within communities to work in partnership with a multitude of different services and organisations, to be “capacity built” – as well as develop their community. The expectation that developing communities need “capacity building” to deliver partnerships with service providers, in the absence of an approach which allows and encourages communities to develop at their own pace actually undermines the development of sustainable communities by burning out those committed individuals. Linking with members of other communities around specific project work such as housing or harrasment could be a way of strengthening their position. With dispersal taking no account of ethnicity language or culture, asylum seekers and refugees being dispersed anywhere and everywhere, building national, ethnic or cultural communities in this context can be difficult. Additionally, there is an underlying assumption in community building that refugees and asylum seekers come from homogeneous communities in the first instance.

Steve suggested that the positive and constructive work that has already been established for example the Somali Mental Health project in Sheffield, should be disseminated as an example of a good asylum seeker led initiatives.

Developments around the Strategic Partnerships and Community Networks in Manchester could and should be seen as more than facilitating a refugee and asylum seeker voice into the community plan. It provides a forum and an

opportunity for refugee voices to be heard on a range of issues including housing and mental health

Action: Steve to keep RAPAR informed of the progress on these developments

A point was raised about community safety and how far the police were involved. Greater Manchester Police are organising an internal conference about asylum seekers for their officers to explain the processes of arrival, deportation issues surrounding their treatment and the implications for policing.

It is a concern that the police have not approached RAPAR for a consultation about the main issues that face asylum seekers and advice on the content of their conference.

3. Report From EMTAS

A report has been compiled by EMTAS regarding the education of school aged asylum seekers in Salford. After a discussion it was decided that the report should not be circulated through RAPAR networks prior to amendments that have to be made. These amendments are concerning the title of the team that have been appointed in Salford as a result of RAPAR being awarded SRB5 money. In the report the award of funding is described as the result of a joint local authority and health service bid. This is incorrect. RAPAR, as an independent company and in the process of becoming a registered charity, both developed, and has been awarded, the bid. Secondly, the report describes a 'support' team rather than a 'community development' team. The Salford RAPAR team is a community development team with the brief to develop evidence about need and action in services in Salford. It has not been created to substitute for mainstream service delivery or support to refugees and asylum seekers. With this correction, the meeting welcomed the report.

4. Matters Arising

4.1. Abdulla Ramatullah

Rheta Moran reported that she has received a response from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) stating that they were unable to take any direct action, however they have informed their office in Vienna asking them to maintain a watching brief.

Abdulla sent Rheta an email regarding a conversation that took place on 30th September 2002. Present were Michael Bubik, refugee support for the Anglican church, the head of the Austrian Federal Asylum Agency, a representative for the Austrian Home Office and the head of the UNHCR in Vienna. They explained that the United Nations (UN) were offering €2,000 to any Afghani people who would return to Afghanistan. They also explained that if an Afghan did not want to return to their country, they would have to have a good reason and in some cases prove that they had a job and they are earning money. He stressed that there was great pressure from the UNHCR and the Austrian Authority to go back to Afghanistan.

4.2. Welcome Event in Pendleton

Ameen Hadi reported that as part of the new deal, St Thomas' church had become available to arrange functions; in particular, it would be available to hold a

welcome meeting for the asylum seekers and refugees. The venue was arranged and then withdrawn because local councillors thought that it would cause resentment amongst the local people, because asylum seekers were using the facilities that would be considered 'theirs' which could be seen as special treatment.

The point was raised that the event could have been handled and advertised differently so as not to cause offence. The event could have been advertised as an event for people on low incomes, which would not alienate the local residents.

The meeting was organised by Geoff Kirkman and Susan Hindle and was well attended. However, there have been concerns raised that this meeting was used as a forum to pursue an ulterior agenda. There is a concern that this event was used as a consultation event and asylum seekers and refugees were asked to agree or sign something that they might not fully understand. It was suggested that a letter should be sent to the Greater Manchester Police Authority to raise the concerns. It was also suggested that the people who attended the group should be brought back together to find out what the content of the event was.

Action: RAPAR trustees to send letter to GMPA

4.2. Community Fund

A bid submitted to the Community Fund research stream has been peer reviewed. The fund has asked Dr Temple for some further information about management arrangements and their final decision is awaited.

4.3. Policing

A pilot session was held to inform asylum seekers and refugees on legal matters, and personal safety. Cath Maffia, Ameen Hadi and Fazil Jamal Mustafa attended the pilot along with a group of asylum seekers and refugees. Cath and Ameen offered their help in the consultation, however the police declined explaining that they had their own policies.

The ethnic community were portrayed as trouble makers not victims, with emphasis placed on the idea that race is not the main cause of the attacks - rather, they are the result of the local young men feeling threatened by new young men coming into their communities. It was reported that the audience gave a reaction of disbelief at the comments that were being made.

The positive things that came out of the experience were that they provided food for all who attended, and the small section on personal safety was of some use.

It was agreed that the external agencies who hold these types of event need to link more closely with RAPAR to make sure that the facts that ethnic communities are given are correct and appropriate. Fazil, Cath and Ameen are to produce a report denoting the positive and negative points of the pilot.

Action: Fazil, Cath and Ameen

4.4. A reverend based in Wigan was referred by Refugee Action to RAPAR when he contacted them about an Iranian asylum seeker who has been imprisoned for 18

months in North Manchester. Concern was expressed that referrals of this nature were being made to RAPAR. However, from the research point of view, RAPAR is prepared to support the reverend in his visiting this young man and finding out how he has ended up in prison. Accordingly, RAPAR member Ali Namegoshaye Fard has agreed to visit this man with the Reverend.

Action: Ali to report back to the next meeting

5. Banner Theatre Company

The Banner Theatre Company has received a grant from North West Arts to produce a play about the Kurdish experience. To make the play as realistic as possible, they would like to interview Kurdish people to discover their thoughts, feelings and experiences.

Action: Simko Brooska to liaise with Banner Theatre on behalf of RAPAR

6. Home Office actions leading to social exclusion

Copies of a Home Office letter informing a number of Iraqi Kurdish single men in Salford that their benefits have been stopped, they are being evicted and they will be returned to their country of origin was circulated, along with a covering note sent by Rhetta Moran to Bob Osborne at Salford City Council drawing the Home Office action to the council's attention and asking for action from the council on this matter.

On the 23rd August a Salford Council summit meeting was held. RAPAR will be invited to the follow up meeting on 28th October.

Action: Rhetta Moran will attend.

Men who attend the community classes at college have failed to attend because they feel that they are not allowed to be there because they are being returned to their country. Nicky Vincer from Pendleton College stressed that she did not have a problem with these men attending her classes and would not turn away Kurdish students.

It was suggested that the college could write to RAPAR and state that they will not turn these students away. If one organisation can lead the way, they will encourage other organisations to pursue their own social inclusion agendas. Nicky will have a meeting with the relevant people at College to discuss this step.

Action: Nicky Vincer

7. RAPAR Special Resolution Meeting

This meeting for all RAPAR members will be held on 28th October 2002 at 1pm at the Angel Healthy Living Centre.

8. Update on Salford RAPAR Team

Donna Hewitt reported that the team are undergoing an induction through training and team building. The team are expected to be ready to be operational, and plan to launch after the Christmas holidays.

An issue was raised about what would be in operation until the team were ready, leading to further discussion about the role of the team as a community development rather than a support team.

It was reported that the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) can give a certain amount of assistance, but local people become agitated because they feel that asylum seekers and refugees are given preferential treatment.

Ameen Hadi explained that he and his colleague Louise give out their mobile numbers if people need to contact them but there is no formalised system of referral – people are referred to other agencies and passed from pillar to post with no monitoring system.

Ameen is to produce a report that highlights issues facing the Immigration Aid Unit, the housing situation, Refugee Action and the PCT.

Action: Ameen

9. Housing Issue – Joan Thompson, New Prospect Housing Ltd

Joan Thompson circulated a letter to the group, that had been sent from Joan to RAPAR explaining that New Prospect Housing Limited (NPHL) wanted to consult with the black and ethnic minority communities in Salford to establish their experiences of access to housing and information about housing. A discussion day has been arranged for 30th October 2002 at Buille Hill Park to facilitate this.

It was proposed that Donna Hewitt prepare a written submission about the accommodation issue on behalf of RAPAR and in liaison with asylum seeking people who are RAPAR members.

Action: Donna Hewitt to prepare report

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