



*North of England*  
**REFUGEE SERVICE**

# Volunteers Induction Pack 2011/2012





“NERS acts as an agent of positive change in order to improve the everyday life conditions of asylum seekers and refugees, and to promote social inclusion through integration and equal participation within British society.”

The objectives of the North of England Refugee Service are:

- (1) To provide support and advice for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, including refugee communities, emerging migrant communities, people with exceptional leave to remain, ex-detainees and their dependants in the Counties of Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Durham and Tees Valley.
- (2) Without distinction of age, sex, race, political, religious or other opinions, by associating the national and local statutory authorities, voluntary organisations and inhabitants in a common effort to:
  - (a) Advance education and relieve hardship amongst those listed above (1) by the provision of legal and other advice.
  - (b) Relieve the financial hardship of those above (1) whether living temporary or permanently in the areas listed (1).
  - (c) Preserve and protect the physical and mental health of those above (1).
  - (d) Educate and train those above (1) so as to advance them in life and assist them to adapt and integrate within a new community.
  - (e) Advance the education of the public in general about the issues relating to refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.
  - (f) Improve the conditions of life of those above (1) by facilitating leisure and sporting activities.
  - (g) Facilitate those above (1) to employment and full integration into the community.

## THE HISTORIC BACKGROUND OF THE NORTH OF ENGLAND REFUGEE SERVICE

The North of England Refugee Service (NERS) was founded in 1989 as an independent, charitable organization which works to support all asylum seekers and refugees. In 1999 the organization gained the Home Office One Stop Service contract for the North East to provide advice and support to growing numbers of asylum seekers dispersed to the region.

Since 2004, NERS has responded to the changing needs of refugee communities through activities to tackle social isolation and unlock refugee skills and potential.

In 2006 our integration projects offered joined-up support for individuals in many areas – employment, training, volunteering, youth activities, and mentoring and community participation. We created opportunities for meaningful interaction between local and refugee residents, strengthening the whole community. NERS also carried out capacity building work with refugee community organisations in partnership with the Refugee Forum.

Currently NERS has three regional offices in Newcastle, Sunderland and Tees Valley and the employment team is supported by approximately sixty volunteers. The cultural diversity within NERS Board, staff and volunteers stems from our core commitment: diversity is an asset, difference is an opportunity. It is a company limited by guarantee managed by a voluntary Board of Directors and governed by a Memorandum and Articles of Association.

## ONE STOP SERVICE

The One Stop Service (OSS) is NERS' project funded by the UK Border Agency (UKBA) via a subcontract with the Refugee Council. The project aims to provide free, independent and impartial information and advice related to the asylum process as well as to post-asylum decisions. Advice during the period of time while asylum applications are being considered could be regarding accessing further specialized advice from registered solicitors, advice and practical assistance in accessing accommodation and financial support from the UKBA, information / advice on eligibility for accessing health services and education and information on local statutory and voluntary services. There is also working with other relevant agencies in tackling racially motivated or hate related crime, information and advice on accessing Local Authorities support where appropriate, working with people who are already in receipt of UKBA support by providing impartial advice and assistance in resolving issues around poor accommodation standards and weekly financial support interruptions etc.

OSS works with people who are destitute and ineligible for any statutory support within current legislation by working closely with other relevant charity organizations and groups.

There is limited provision of advice to individuals granted some form of Leave to Remain (LTR) in the UK around further immigration entitlements and responsibilities as well as limited assistance in accessing mainstream benefits.

NERS' OSS project is delivering Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) advice as a subcontract with Refugee Action. Advice and information is provided on non-directive bases to ensure that clients are aware of the program and offered further practical assistance in completing actual application forms where necessary.

The One Stop Service is a regional project which is delivered from three NERS offices – Middlesbrough office, covering the Teesside area; Sunderland office covering the Wearside area and Newcastle office covering most of the Tyneside area. The delivery of the service, in addition to paid staff, is greatly supported by a large number of dedicated volunteers.

## VOLUNTEERING SERVICES

NERS aims to develop meaningful volunteering opportunities that can be easily accessed by all members of our diverse communities, including those who are isolated, marginalized and hard to reach as well as members of the community of refugees in the North East region of England. NERS facilitates on the job training for volunteers on placement to enable them to gain professional qualifications that will allow them to deliver specialized services.

NERS uses volunteering as a means for intercultural interaction to strengthen shared identities; and this requires effective interaction across ethnic lines. From over twenty years experience we know that changing peoples' perceptions of the culture divide can be a slow process which can be nurtured through diverse and meaningful interaction.

### WEDNESDAY DROP – IN (SUNDERLAND OFFICE)

The primary objective of the Wednesday Drop-In at the Sunderland office is to provide a meeting place for asylum seekers and refugees to engage with people from their own and other countries / cultures to promote awareness and prevent isolation. Whenever possible support staff from NERS attend to provide general advice and where appropriate, to signpost service users to access move on advice from the Housing Options Team who also attend.

The Drop-In provides activities such as table tennis, pool, chess, computer training and an informal English language session. It is also a place where the users can discuss problems with professionals from the statutory and voluntary sectors.

NERS has been able, with the assistance of Fareshare, to distribute a small number of food parcels to the homeless and destitute former asylum seekers in the community. It is proposed to forge greater ties with the local colleges to promote awareness and for students to use their skills for the benefit of our service users.

### ESOL CLASSES (MIDDLESBROUGH OFFICE)

There are two ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes that take place in the NERS Middlesbrough office every Monday from 10:30am – 12:30pm and 1:45pm – 3.45pm. The classes are delivered by volunteers and are open to individuals with pre-entry to stage one level of English. They were originally established as part of NERS' Home Office-funded Refugee Integration and Employment Service but since the funding ended the classes have broadened out their intake to include all asylum seekers and refugees.

## HOUSING SERVICES DEPARTMENT

The objectives of the Housing Services project is to provide move-on housing and support services to refugees with Leave to Remain (LTR) in the UK.

The support given is dependent upon needs and what helps a service user to live independently and the aim is to help the individual establish themselves in both the short and long term.

Support workers help service users with accessing Health and Social Care services, benefits, assisting with housing applications, advice on implications of their immigration status, accessing ESOL and other relevant education services, emotional difficulties, accessing employment and training services, managing personal safety, budgeting and financial advice, introducing service users to community activities and refugee community organisations, finding suitable leisure activities and basic counseling services and help with problem solving.

Individuals can apply if they have had a positive decision from the Home Office, have a current housing need, are having difficulty finding somewhere to live or have been experiencing difficulties with where they are living now.

Supported housing is different to ordinary housing because the person living there gets advice and support services as part of their tenancy. The service is not only about housing and there is an expectation that service users actively engage with support staff to plan and develop skills for future independent living. The accommodation is for a period of up to two years and the aim of the scheme is to give intensive support during this time to help people move on with their lives and achieve their potential.

## ALL POINTS NORTH (project now closed)

All Points North is part of NERS Youth Projects supported by the Big Lottery Fund. It delivers a structured twelve week programme of training for young people aged 16-25 around mental health & well being, culture and citizenship. The project has been successful in bringing together asylum seeker and refugee young people as well as those from the white and BAME communities in each locality to work around issues of citizenship and intercultural.

Young people take part in a range of activities including arts, media, discussions, fundraising and community activities; all of which aim to encourage leadership and active citizenship within local communities.

The programme also offers the opportunity for young people to gain a nationally recognized accreditation through the Youth Achievement Awards that recognizes their contributions in participation and / or leadership within the project or other local community activity.

## REFUGEE HEALTH PROFESSIONALS – NORTH EAST PROGRAMME

### IELTS PROVISION

The total number of clients on the programme in the North East region is thirty-two and this includes doctors, nurses, pharmacists and laboratory technicians.

As part of this programme an IELTS class is held on Tuesday and Thursday, in the Training Room at NERS Middlesbrough office.

IELTS (International English Language Testing System) is owned and run by Cambridge University, the British Council and IDP Education Australia and can be sat in one hundred and sixty countries worldwide. This language qualification is required by all non – EU overseas trained health professionals who wish to register with the General Medical Council and work within the NHS. Due to changes brought in last year, a minimum score of seven in all four modules (listening, speaking, reading and writing) has to be obtained; previously an overall score of seven was sufficient.

Once an IELTS score of seven is attained the health professionals can start their individual pathways into the NHS, for doctors this involves sitting Plab 1 & 2 exams and undertaking a Clinical Attachment and Foundation years within a hospital.

Currently there are six participants on the IELTS course in Middlesbrough, all doctors ranging from a GP to a Pathologist.

In the Newcastle/Sunderland area there are twelve members who will be starting classes in January 2012.

## NORTHERN REVIVE

Northern Revive is a community interest company and an entrepreneurial platform for diverse regional communities based in the North East. It aims to combine the latest business technologies with an emphasis on helping disadvantaged groups find employment and for individuals to develop personal skills. It is hoped these skills will then enable them to become entrepreneurs in their own right.

The services offered by Northern Revive are interpreting and translation, catering, cleaning and IT Support.

The Interpreting and Translating Service is a specialised provider of professional language services with approximately seventy languages available. All the interpreters work on a sessional basis and are used when their services are needed. The client's participation in the translation process is encouraged particularly regarding transliteration and the meaning of the source text then all translated text is checked and submitted in any format specified by the client.

The catering service is provided to offices, meetings, events and conferences in Newcastle and Sunderland with regular services including special occasion catering, business lunches, boardroom lunches and marquee events.

The community cleaning business provides cleaning services to offices, businesses, schools, hostels, pubs and bars, cinemas, houses, gyms, hospitals and churches in the North East of England either for one-off or long term needs.

The IT Support, Maintenance and Upgrade Service helps organisations with computing solutions that can translate into a real competitive advantage. It provides help with assessment, design, installation, management and troubleshooting in all the areas of IT and Networks. Services available include IT support, maintenance and upgrades, installation of servers, network administration, IT consultancy services, design and installation of networks, web design, database design and IT training.

## ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN

Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) is a European Return Fund programme that supports the efforts of EU Member States to return nationals from developing countries back to their country of origin, particularly where the return is voluntary. The programme services are:

Advice and information service to clients – this is a specialised casework service to deliver impartial advice, counseling and information to individual clients who are considering voluntary return. The aim is to enable them to make informed decisions in their own best interests about Assisted Voluntary Return.

Outreach service to other stakeholders – this requires targeted awareness-raising activities to those agencies across the North East that are likely to come into contact with the client group eg RCOs, Social Services, voluntary groups and the wider advice sector. The outreach service promotes and raises awareness of the AVR service to these organisations and is also a vehicle for dialogue around voluntary return.

NERS are agents for, and contracted to work with 'Choices' which is the new programme for migrants of any kind who want to return to their own country. We have formal arrangements with Choices to enable individuals to apply to us and we can then help them apply directly from the NERS office. There is a substantial amount of advice and information that we give out to clients to aid them in making their own choice of if they wish to return.

## ENGLISH CLASSES – WALLSEND LIBRARY

The volunteering services runs an English class at Wallsend Library in partnership with North Tyneside Library for non-English speakers. This partnership has been running for over four years and has seen over two hundred and fifty students pass through its doors who have then gone on to further study at colleges or gone in to employment and Higher Education.

North Tyneside libraries provide the space used as classrooms every Tuesday between 10:00am and 12:00 midday. NERS volunteering provides the volunteer teachers for the sessions, recruits the students, provides light refreshments and also develops volunteering opportunities for those participants who are eligible, in order to get them to be more confident with their spoken English whilst volunteering in a working environment.

Social work students on placement are welcome to assist in delivering lessons or in working on a one to one situation with some of our class students as part of their course assessment while they are being observed by University course assessors. This has proven very popular and successful with students in the past.

The ESOL class at Wallsend is very popular because of our ability to attract qualified volunteers to teach, through the NERS volunteering programme.