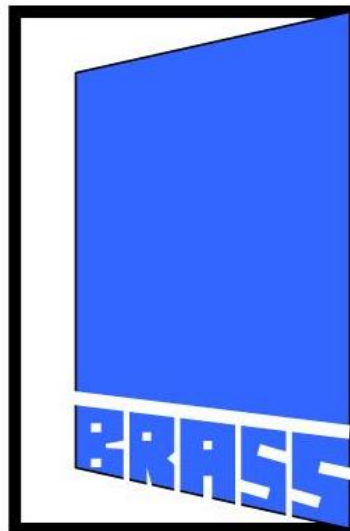


# Bedfordshire Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support

## “Facing new challenges”

TRUSTEES ANNUAL REPORT  
2008 - 2009



BEDFORDSHIRE  
REFUGEE & ASYLUM  
SEEKER  
SUPPORT

27b Tavistock Street, Bedford MK40 2RB      Tel 01234 211381  
Email [info@brass27b.org](mailto:info@brass27b.org)      [www.brassbedford.org.uk](http://www.brassbedford.org.uk)  
Registered charity number 1096874      Approved by the OISC N200100432

## FOREWORD

It is always a pleasure and an honour to be asked to write a foreword. BRASS is one of the few remaining sources of assistance and advice in Bedford for those seeking refuge in the UK. Actual numbers of asylum seekers may be decreasing but the problems experienced by those still unable to confirm their status seem to be growing and, without BRASS, life would be harder still.

I congratulate everyone associated with BRASS on the expansion into No. 27b and wish you all well with your future plans; Bedford would be a poorer place without you.



Patrick Hall MP

## CHAIRS REPORT

BRASS has successfully faced up to some major new challenges in this our tenth year, with help from many friends and supporters.

A year after settling into our new home with Bedford Community Rights Centre, our hosts sadly announced their imminent closure. As well as a blow for Bedford, this hit us hard too; BCRC had been incredibly supportive and we were looking forward to some joint ventures in the future. We had to go for it and take on the lease of the building ourselves. This is entirely new territory for us, but does open up some exciting opportunities.

Luckily, by this time, our new paid coordinator, Brian

Cunningham, had already been in post four months and has helped to manage this transition phase. The post, seconded from Bedford Race Equality Council, allows BRASS to network more widely and gradually to reduce our dependence on Bryden, our stalwart drop in supervisor of the past 10 years.

Meanwhile the twice-weekly BRASS drop in run by volunteers continues to support local refugees and asylum seekers with advice and help in just about everything.

Together with an ever expanding steering group of local agencies, BRASS this year again spearheaded

Refugee Week. The Week featured events and new promotional materials include its own website and local brand. BRASS itself has also produced a new leaflet and launched its own website [www.brassbedford.org.uk](http://www.brassbedford.org.uk)

On behalf of the BRASS committee, I would like to thank everyone at BRASS for your continued hard work, and all those that support us. It is no mean achievement to have survived as a organisation for a whole decade especially in these difficult times and your efforts are appreciated by the refugees and asylum seekers who put their trust and hope in us.

**Carol Solaiman**

**If you are interested in supporting the work of BRASS in any way, as a trustee, volunteer or Friend of BRASS, we would love to hear from you**

## ACHIEVEMENTS 2008 09

- Recruitment and appointment of Brian Cunningham as Coordinator
- Settled into new home at 27b and now taking on the whole building
- Strong crew of volunteers, some undertaking OISC training
- New leaflet and new website
- More resources for volunteers
- Continue to see a steady number of clients, with increasingly complex enquiries
- Introduced better IT and phone system
- Outing to Hunstanton
- Volunteers social to Brighton

## COORDINATORS REPORT

My first six months have been very interesting, rewarding and busy! Our busiest point of contact with our clients is at the drop in sessions. It is great to be there talking to the clients about their experiences and how we can help; and to chat to our volunteers and get feedback from them.

We intend to run a pilot evening drop in session from the end of September.

I had great fun helping with our social outing to Hunstanton beach during which the expression "we are going to need a bigger coach!" came up! (72 people in a double-decker coach in the end).

We have had the beginnings of a few social outings for volunteers also. Other future objectives are to grow the English language/befriending project for which we are now looking for volunteers. If you would like to meet up with one of our clients on a one to one and help with their everyday English, do get in touch. We are also in the process of reviving our "Friends of BRASS" where we ask members to fund raise in small ways via sponsored runs or coffee mornings or indeed any more inventive ways also welcome.

We have also been tangling with taking over the lease of the building on Tavistock

Street where we previously only rented rooms. This gives us the scope to let other rooms to like-minded small charities in the future which has great potential for us to be at the centre of good works in the future!

Did I mention it has been a busy six months! I am certainly looking forward to where we can be by the time of our next annual report. Meanwhile thank you so much to all volunteers and supporters who have made my welcome and time so far here so exciting and rewarding.

**Brian Cunningham**

## DROP-IN VOLUNTEERS

Mainly thanks to the Volunteer Centre, there is a steady flow of people interested in volunteering with us. Many are about to start college or have just finished. They are therefore not likely to stay long, even though they may be very enthusiastic. At the moment we are well staffed and the quality is high. This year we have set up 'endorsement interviews' for people who have settled in well here and are obviously right for the job. 4 volunteers have so far experienced this endorsement of their work. 3 volunteers have taken the OISC Level 1 test and we have applied for funding for Level 2 training.

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## DROP IN REPORT

The drop-in statistics for the year since the last AGM show some interesting and not altogether predictable trends.

At the settlement end of the refugee cycle, we see an increase in the number of people going through the stage of having permission to stay indefinitely (Indefinite Leave to Remain-ILR) and applying for British citizenship and a passport (at extremely high financial cost). This newly acquired status also enables them to apply for family reunion visas. When visas are unreasonably refused, we help with the follow-up appeals to an independent tribunal in this country and are proud of a high success rate. At the arrival end of the refugee cycle we note a recent increase in the number

of asylum seekers making desperate appeals for accommodation to the National Asylum Support Service (NASS). Almost all are from Zimbabwe and reflect the Government's refusal to recognise their case for asylum, even though our media make it clear that persecution in that country is as rife as in Somalia, the Congo and Sudan.

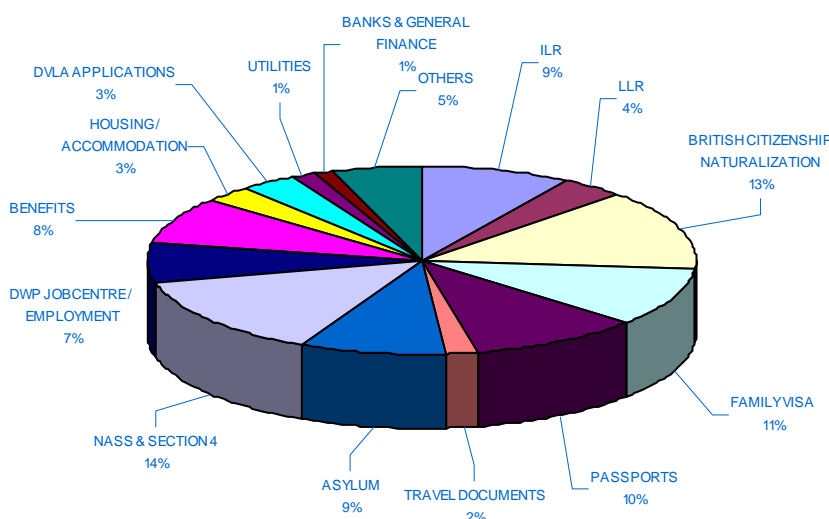
We are not solely an immigration advisory organisation, however. The second half of the category wise list shows all the other matters, which bring people to BRASS. They could just as easily go to the other local advice agencies but choose BRASS, probably because they know us and find a more comfortable solution to their language problems.

Overall, the number of visits is falling - now just over a thousand in a year. We do not know if this is a trend, which will eventually make BRASS unnecessary. What is certain, however, is that the average time that a drop-in call takes is rising significantly. Some problems cannot be dealt with in under an hour and some take much longer. Often we do not realise the scale of a problem or the likely timescale until we are well into a very long and wearing interview

Please ask if you would like a fuller analysis of our work.

**Bryden Keenan (Volunteer)  
Drop in Supervisor**

**CATEGORY WISE TOTAL VISITS FOR 2009**



ILR	95
LLR	40
British Citizenship Naturalization	147
Family Visa	113
Passports	105
Travel Documents	21
Asylum	93
NASS & Section 4	149
DWP Job Centre/ Employment	75
Benefits	88
Accommodation	28
DVLA Applications	35
Utilities	15
Banks & finance	13
Others	57
<b>Total</b>	<b>1074</b>

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## BRASS Friends Reunited

On our 10th anniversary, we bring you news from friends and supporters, starting with our founder, David Tatem, who set up BRASS in 1999 at St Lukes Church, in response to the large number of refugees arriving in Bedford

### David Tatem

After leaving my post as minister of St Luke's Church in Bedford in 2003 I became the Free Church Minister at the Church of Christ the Cornerstone in Milton Keynes.

This is a large ecumenical church of 5 traditions and with people from all over the world.

Just a few of these were asylum seekers but the main issue that affected the work there was with the homeless.

In June 2009, I became the National Secretary for Ecumenical

Relations for the United Reformed Church. This is based at our head office in London but, for the moment, we still live in Milton Keynes.

### Carol Thanki

I volunteered at BRASS from September 2005 until April 2006 whilst I was still a student studying Mathematics at *University College London*. Since I graduated, I have been working as a fundraiser for the charity *Computer Aid International* which provides affordable ICT solutions to charities, schools, hospitals

and other community organisations across the developing world. I am also in the penultimate year of my part-time, evening degree course in Development Studies at *Birkbeck College*. I am so pleased to be working for a charity now as I have always

wanted to; and I have *BRASS* to thank for allowing me to take my first, faltering steps along this path. I still regard my days at *BRASS* as one of the most rewarding times of my life and I hope *BRASS* continues to carry on its valuable work for many years to come!

### Patrick Gavigan

I started at BRASS in 2002 through a weekly placement by my then employer, *bbpositive*. I learned incredibly quickly under the supervision of Bryden, who has a lot of knowledge about the issues faced by refugees and asylum seekers and experience in helping to address those issues. I enjoyed my time at BRASS so much that

when I left my employment, I continued to attend in a voluntary capacity until I started in my current position in August 2004.

I've been working for Turning Point in Milton Keynes for 5 years on a project called *progress2work*. This is a

government initiative designed to help unemployed people who have a history of substance misuse, problematic alcohol use, homelessness and or ex offenders move towards work. It can be very rewarding work when people achieve their goals and equally frustrating when people fall at the last hurdle.

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## BRASS FRIENDS REUNITED

### Chris Lowe

I volunteered with BRASS during 2001-2002 while I was studying Social Science and Politics with the Open University. In very many respects I learnt more about the world through my activities with BRASS than I ever could through reading books or writing essays.

After completing my OU degree I undertook further studies, this time in International Relations, before beginning my career in the Civil Service in 2004. In 2008 my wife and I founded Bedford UNICEF Group which helps to raise funds for disadvantaged children around the

world. I've no doubt that the seed for this idea was sown some 8 years ago when BRASS opened my eyes to a world that exists beyond Bedford.

### Lila Begum

I first came in touch with BRASS in May 2000. I was working at Bedford Community Rights Centre as Welfare Rights Outreach Officer. BRASS was one of the places where I held outreach surgeries, for over a year or so. The clients I saw touched my heart: the difficulties that they had faced before coming to the UK and the continuous struggle here. This increased my awareness and understanding of

asylum seekers and how to deal with multiple problems. I still see some of the clients that I had seen 9 years ago. I stopped work in 2002 as I had my 2 younger boys. The minute the younger one started nursery I returned to BRASS in 2006. I could only do a few hours a week, but I knew that few hours I can do a lot. I returned because I knew BRASS was making a difference in peoples

lives and also I enjoined working there.

I left BRASS to become a Learning Support Officer with Bedford Race Equality Council in September 2008 and am now a surgery advisor. Many of the clients say that BRASS and BREC are the only organisation that has helped them and made a difference in their lives. Without us they would've been lost.

### Helen Ashman

Joining BRASS was one of those random things that turned out extremely well!

I remember being asked to deal with a visitor's water bill on day one. Bryden's policy of giving early responsibility felt a little scary, but he was excellent at giving volunteers confidence in our abilities. My "heyday" at BRASS perhaps began when Kay Kaur joined as Coordinator. She was great at taking me and other volunteers to events - e.g. the Refugee Council conference in York - which helped me

appreciate the political side of the refugee scene.

Going on to my second year at BRASS, I was trusted enough to open the drop-in when Bryden took a holiday, and open the office outside normal times and wait with asylum seekers for Group4 to take them to Initial Accommodation in Birmingham. I found refugees and asylum seekers such a rewarding group to work with and it was great to see progress in many cases. I learned a lot about immigration law, and became confident enough

to challenge misconceptions Seekers about refugees and asylum.

I moved to Lancaster in Sept 2008 and trained with Morecambe and Heysham CAB; they were very impressed with my experience at BRASS. And just recently I've been offered a job at Lancaster University, handling admissions of PhD students in the Management School. Here the international aspect of BRASS will be relevant. My time at BRASS gave me valuable skills and experiences, many happy memories, and the visitors were my role models for moving on and starting a new life.

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## WANT TO SUPPORT BRASS?

BRASS has always relied on the good will and support of many people, whether as individuals or local groups and agencies. There are many ways that you can help us:

- Donate non-perishable goods to our welfare cupboard, distributed at our discretion to those suffering hardship
- Raise funds through sponsored events, collections, and donations
- Take part in Refugee week 2010 – could you organize an event or activity at your workplace, school or place of worship?
- Visit our website at [www.brassbedford.org.uk](http://www.brassbedford.org.uk)
- Help someone practice their English so they can integrate better into UK society
- Recruit more Friends of BRASS
- Become an adviser at the drop in – training and support given; evening session as well as daytime

## WITH THANKS

### STAFF

Brian Cunningham (*Appointed April 2009*)

### TRUSTEES 2008 - 09

Carol Solaiman (Chair)	Malcolm Lee	Mark Smith (Observer, Community & Voluntary Service)
Bryden Keenan (Secretary)	Parvin Lee	
Mariam Fayeq (Treasurer)	Sally Monkman	

### DROP IN VOLUNTEERS

Ali Akbar	Arlete da Conceicao	Veronica Leone
Robert Atkins	Simon Everitt	Glen Wratten
Soneni Baleni	Bryden Keenan	Victoria Halliard
Lila Begum,	Teresa Kirhner	Paddy Harris

### ENGLISH LANGUAGE BEFRIENDING PROJECT TUTORS

June Barnes	Morris John	Maggie Sloman
Angela Huddart	Rachel Kirkham	Helen Ward
Barbara Cripps	Stephanie Aerts	Nic Johnson
Kathleen O'Sullivan	Tom Treacy	
Mary Smith	Sharon Keaney	

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# About BRASS

## OUR PURPOSE

BRASS is an established charity working to empower, inform and support refugees and asylum seekers and to protect rights with an aim to develop independence and involvement in UK society

## OUR VISION

A world where refugees and asylum seekers are included, accepted and supported by society

## OUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES 2008 – 2011

Sustainable development of BRASS as an organisation to serve the interests and needs of refugees and asylum seekers

To enhance the ability of refugees and asylum seekers to understand UK procedures, processes and systems

Increasing independence and confidence through learning and social activities

To raise awareness of issues faced by refugees and asylum seekers

Encourage participation of refugees and asylum seekers in the development and management of BRASS

## OUR SERVICES

### Drop-In Advice

We offer two drop-in advice sessions, run by volunteers on Tuesdays and Wednesdays and are accredited by the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner to give immigration advice

### Social activities

We organize social activities for refugees and asylum seekers to reduce isolation and promote integration into the wider community

### English Language Befriending Project

We match volunteer tutors with individual refugees and asylum seekers who want to learn or improve their English language.

### Newsletter

We produce a newsletter for refugees and asylum seekers and another for supporters

## OUR ORGANISATION

We are a registered charity, managed by an Executive Committee. We have been operating since 1999 when David Tatem, the then Minister of St Luke's Church, set BRASS up in response to the large number of refugees arriving in Bedford.

We are funded by grants, donations and support in kind from a range of agencies and individuals

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