



www.gweini.org.uk

GWEINI News

Autumn / Winter 2010

ASYLUM JUSTICE WINS NATIONAL AWARD

ASYLUM JUSTICE is a voluntary project that gives legal advice to failed asylum seekers. Begun in Swansea, it also operates in Cardiff and Newport. Last July the URC General Assembly awarded it first prize in its Community Project Awards. Asylum Justice was set up by retired barrister Roger Warren Evans, who now leads a large number of volunteers. The project has made him a very busy man – too busy even to travel to collect the award in Loughborough!

However, he did find time to give an interview on YouTube – see:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BYLejVO2y_g to find out more about the centre, and the motivation of those who work there.

Roger, a retired barrister, explains that they began by offering failed asylum seekers "tea and sympathy". Then he realised that they needed something more – they needed advice to help them

with forms they could not read, and procedures they could not understand. So he requalified as an immigration advisor and began to build up his team of volunteers. He describes it now as, effectively, "a large solicitor's practice" that is entirely free to the users. It now has 25 volunteers (40 if you include interpreters) and has helped 2,500 people in the past five years.

What motivates people to help in this way? Roger has given this a lot of thought. Some of the volunteers are law students, wanting to use their developing skills to help others. Others are "political" in the broadest sense – wanting to see change in a global system leading to great



hardship and distress. And many are church goers who have realised that what matters is what we do to help and to change things. He offers us all a powerful challenge – What are we doing to put our compassion into action? Asylum Justice is still looking for volunteers, especially in Cardiff.

Roger is surely right when he says that Asylum Justice shows that, "action by ordinary people is enough to achieve great things."

GWEINI PEOPLE

Mark Seymour

Gweini Councillor for Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Mark Seymour has an important role within the Gweini structure, serving on the National Gweini Council as our Specialist for Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

In his day-job Mark works as a primary school teacher in Cardiff. He is a husband, father and foster-carer. Mark says he stumbled into working with asylum seekers when Eritreans began to arrive in his church – Bethel Community Church in Newport. He and his wife Claire felt God's calling to offer them friendship and kindness, to complement the expert advice they need. People who have suffered a major dislocation need support to find their identity again – even to re-establish their identity in Christ – and then learn to laugh once more. Among other things, Mark and Claire have both started up drop-ins – one for male and one for female asylum seekers and refugees.

Funding so far has come partly from Oxfam, but things change so fast it is hard to plan very far ahead. The key thing is to be flexible and adaptable.



And Gweini? Well Mark believes it is a powerful network and has been a huge encouragement to the work in his congregation. He hopes to use his influence within Gweini to encourage more churches to build up a ministry to asylum seekers.

MEET THE NEIGHBOURS



This book is about one of the best kept secrets in Wales! It re-counts some of the amazing ways in which local churches have reached out into the Welsh community

Preface by Rev Lyndon Bowring Chairman of Care Executive

ONLY £6.95

This inspiring book will inform you of hundreds of local Christian Staff and volunteers getting involved in all kinds of projects - exercising their 'gospel responsibility' and being effective light and salt in their towns and villages

Name:

Address:

Post Code: Tel:

Please send mebook(s) at £6.95. Please make cheques payable to Gweini and allow 14 days for delivery. Unfortunately, we are not presently in a position to accept credit or debit cards or provide books on credit terms.

Post to Gweini, P.O.Box 601, Cardiff CF10 1YR



www.gweini.org.uk

GWEINI News

Autumn / Winter 2010

SUCCESS STORY

POSITIVE PARENTING FOR ERITREAN REFUGEES

Semere, now just turned 40, has lived as a refugee from Eritrea in Wales for some time. He works for the Welsh Refugee Council, an independent charity empowering refugees to rebuild their lives, and is a member of Bethel Community Church in Newport.

Semere's church supports the refugees that have been joining its congregation in a number of ways. They support and befriend them as part of a Christian community. They try to help asylum seekers who are Christians and need to explain that to officialdom. They educate refugees about Wales – including trips to St. Fagans – and offer them food and clothing. They write letters in support of individual cases.

In addition, Semere has set up an initiative to provide parenting classes. The aim is help refugee families understand the way British families work, and support them as they cope with the stress of relocation – sometimes into difficult accommodation.

The first event was held in Bethel Community Church, with support from Gwent Police to cover training and travel costs [arranged with help from Gweini's Jim Stewart]. Semere was able to find a qualified person, born and raised in Britain, who is fluent in the two languages, Tigrinya and Amharic, most commonly spoken in Eritrea. The feedback was very positive. A similar event is being planned for Cardiff, as soon as resources are available to cover the costs. The plan is to extend these courses as widely as possible, opening them to the whole Eritrean refugee community, including those who do not go to church.



JIM'LL FIX IT

Do you remember?

March
Obama's controversial helathcare bill is passed by US Congress.

May
May 6th General Election produces Britain's first hung parliament for 36 years.

May
Greek workers strike against government austerity measures as the Eurozone is plunged into crisis.

June
England football team loses 4-1 to Germany, crashing out of an eventful World Cup in South Africa.

Sept
US pastor Terry Jones threatens to burn copies of the Koran on the anniversary of 9/11 in a move widely condemned by Wales' evangelicals and other faith groups.

Sept
Pope Benedict XVI makes his first state visit to the UK, speaking passionately about the role of faith in the public square.

October
Europe's golf team pip America to the post in a dramatic finish to the Ryder Cup, held at Newport's Celtic Manor.

Were you aware?
Wales has four 'dispersal areas' where asylum seekers are sent to while their claims are being processed: Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham.

Did you know?

The Welsh Assembly Government has a Refugee Inclusion Strategy. More details can be found on www.wales.gov.uk



Above: Jim Stewart