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AFRICAN COMMUNITY COUNCIL FOR THE REGIONS

Registered Charity No: 1088205
Registered Company No: 4084309

HELPING REFUGEES, ASYLUM SEEKERS AND IMMIGRANTS TO INTEGRATE INTO THE COMMUNITY.

'Working together for social inclusion'

We provide free advice for African refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants who wish to integrate into British society.

Our services include:

- Immigration advice
- Welfare and health information
- Housing support
- Youth development
- Information on education / training
- Employment advice
- Facilitating women's inclusion
- Community development

To access any of these services please call 0121 456 8100 and ask for ACCR.

Monday - Friday
9:30-1:00 pm & 2:00-5:00 pm

Interpreters and translators are available by appointment.

The Challenge Which is Difficult to Face

ACCR Chair, Mr Mohammed Al-Rahim, talks candidly and compassionately about immigration and British society in the modern world



Over many years of working in the voluntary sector and with BME communities, and in my discussions with people at various levels within relevant organisations, from the frontline support services to the Management and Board, there has existed a number of issues that challenge the very nature of such organisations and the work they do. In particular, over the last three or four years, with a larger arrival of asylum seekers, refugees and economic migrants, **an inappropriate atmosphere of resentment and defensiveness**, along with changing legislation, has made the work of campaigners, managers, and development and support workers very difficult.

Dealing with a small minority of asylum seekers who it would appear are not genuine, is one of these challenges. Some people come to this, or indeed any, country, in order to inappropriately use the systems and programmes that are there for the genuine majority who need them. It is often a false perception that Britain is a haven for this kind of abuse of the system. However, the reality of today, of the privations which some asylum seekers face in Britain, challenges this claim. Sleeping on the streets without food, without care and attention and with no ability to work can never be considered a haven.

Furthermore, it is very important to recognise that stereotypical ideas of immigrants, especially of African people, that they are inept, slow or incompetent, are completely false and do not assist integration at all. Imagine a person who had been working for thirty years as a doctor or a senior engineer, who then has a total disintegration of his family, socio-economic and political environment, and moves to Britain to seek safety.

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ATTENTION OLDER PEOPLE! SAFETY AND SECURITY AT HOME

by Oluwole Akinole

As you get older you may feel more vulnerable to crime, but there are lots of simple ways to improve your security, boost your confidence and maintain your independence. Here are some easy tips on how to look after your safety.

Bogus Callers

Most people who call at your house will be legitimate and honest, but sometimes people will turn up unannounced with the intention of tricking their way into your home. These are called bogus callers and they may try to distract you whilst they steal your money or valuables.

BEWARE! Bogus callers are often smartly dressed or in uniform and may claim to be from the police, council, gas, water or electricity companies. They can be very persuasive and convincing. For example, they may have fake identity cards or name badges. Remember that genuine companies will very rarely send more than one person to your house at a time. Always check strangers are who they say they are.

- When someone calls at your house unexpectedly, always check who they are before you open your door. Use a door chain, or ideally a spy hole, to see who is outside. Ask them to identify themselves.
- Stay inside your house and do not open the door to them until you are completely satisfied that they are genuine. Ring the company they claim to be from to check, but use the number from the phone book or your utility bills rather than the one on the card they give you. Genuine callers will be happy to wait whilst you do this.
- If you are still not completely happy, do not let them in. Contact the relevant company and ask them to send you an appointment letter telling you when a visitor will be coming in future, or ask the caller to come back at a time when you know you will not be alone. Genuine callers will not mind this at all.

- If the person remains on your doorstep and refuses to move, call the police on 999. Do not feel embarrassed – your safety and security is the most important thing.
- Don't take risks and don't be bullied into doing something you are not sure about - this also goes for door-to-door salesmen.

Some bogus callers may pretend that they need your help. For example, they may say they have had an accident outside or that they need to use your phone. Remember, innocent-looking children can also tell lies to take advantage of you.

- Only go out to help or let someone into your home if you have someone you trust with you. It is not rude or unfriendly to say you are unable to help, if you are concerned about your safety.
- If you think the person *may* be genuine but you are not sure, you can always offer to telephone for help on their behalf – but do not let them in to your house to do it themselves. In a real emergency people will be grateful for this and should not be aggressive or insistent.

Remember: If in doubt, keep them out.

If you think you have been targeted by bogus callers, contacting Crimestoppers (see opposite) with the information could prevent other people becoming victims.

Alternatively, joining a Neighbourhood Watch scheme allows you to participate in your community so you can look after each other, and your homes and property.

Fire Safety

Fires can catch hold quickly, cause severe damage or trap you within your home. Prevention is simple and could save your life.

- Make sure you have fire/smoke alarms fitted and check the batteries every week to ensure they work.
- Make sure candles are not left unattended and are fully extinguished when you go to bed. Never let them burn right down to their end.
- Make sure electrical sockets are not overloaded with extra plugs and that electrical appliances are safe – get a qualified electrician to check if you are not sure.
- Do not leave cooking pans unattended.
- Make sure you use fire guards in front of open fires or heaters.
- If a fire does start, do not try to tackle it yourself unless you are trained to do so. Get out and dial 999. Do not stop to pick up personal items - your life is more important than your possessions.

Crimestoppers: 0800 555 111

(an independent, nationwide charity which allows you to report crimes or criminals in total anonymity)

Age Concern Information Line: 0800 00 99 66

(free welfare advice 365 days a year, 7am - 7pm)

Help the Aged Senior Line: 0808 800 6565 or minicom 0800 269 626

(free welfare advice, although not medical or legal or counselling, Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm)

Neighbourhood Watch Association: 020 7772 3348

(advice on existing schemes in your area and how to set up a new scheme to protect your neighbourhood from crime)

You can also contact your local **Council, Social Services or Health Visitor**

DEAR DAISY...

In the first of a new column, Daisy advises about help available for those returning to their home country if an asylum application fails.

Dear Daisy,

I have had my asylum seeker request refused and have no alternative but to return home to Zimbabwe. I am 26 years, a mother of two girls aged 3 and 11. Both of them, I thank God, are negative while I am HIV positive.

I do not have any recourse to assistance in this country. Is there any way that I can obtain assistance for returning to Zimbabwe with dignity and with resources to start me off in Zimbabwe's rural villages where I am going to now? Please help. Any information will be useful. I want to be able to help my children whilst I am still alive.

I want you to publish my letter so others in my position can find this useful too.

From Chido

Dear Chido,

I have contacted an organisation called the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and it appears that they are able to assist your voluntary return and provide reintegration support in your country of origin. You may be able to receive education or job training. The IOM does not provide cash grants, however, with a business plan you may be able to receive the materials to start your own business.

There appears to be an IOM office in Zimbabwe. So Chido, it appears all is not lost in your cause. I presume you are healthy at the moment and in time Zimbabwe will participate in the healthy management of HIV /AIDS. Good luck.

For further advice contact Daisy at the ACCR Office, or the IOM London Office directly on 020 7233 0001 for information, neutral advice and support before, during and after repatriation to your home country. See also www.iomlondon.org

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Not only does this person have issues of language and cultural barriers to overcome, perhaps resulting in them taking a menial job to survive, they also often have to deal with multiple bereavements, economic dislocation and loss of family support they had in Africa. Then add in the problem of being a different race.

Immigration is a very sensitive issue, not least for voluntary organisations involved in this particular work, because any in-depth attempt by those organisations to discuss this minority or deal with it creates an environment where one can be branded a racist or an anti-immigrationist, or your words can be used or misconstrued to support the racist and xenophobic agenda. The anti-foreigner lobby often parade themselves as patriotic people trying to preserve a way of life, although that way of life no longer exists. Indeed, originally it may have been built on false perceptions because although life for some classes was one of affluence and recreation, for other classes it was one of abject poverty and deprivation. Or otherwise their views are a perception based on an idyll - a concoction of racial inaccuracies and false premises

The idea that Britain, a nation of 60 million people, can be swamped by asylum seekers would appear quite ridiculous. Home Office figures released in February 2004 suggest that asylum applications are dropping drastically: in 2003 the figures dropped by 41%. Only approximately 60,000 people claimed asylum in Britain last year.

that do not represent the true nature of the history of the peoples of their country. This is not a phenomena of any one country, but a syndrome that exists all across all the world, regardless of race, in one form or another.

Most countries of the world have histories of migrations, invasions and resettlements, whereby the indigenous population assimilated or absorbed other cultures. In my observations Britain is not in danger of losing its culture but is certainly transforming it into a varied, exciting, vibrant and healthy multiculturalism, with many interesting facets, that in its potential will be ahead of the rest of the world and something for Britain to be extremely proud of. If we truly

grasp this multi-cultural opportunity and empower its socio-economic potential, we can create the ability for modern Britain to be a greater world leader. I believe this is, and will continue to be, a testament to the integrity, compassion and sense of justice of the British people. This makes Britain a wonderful country to live in, of enormous freedoms and intrinsic fairness. No wonder people want to live here.

The reality of a multicultural Britain is that the "new British society" has, and will have, a globally diverse cultural reality, that is and will

continue to be more powerful and realistically pragmatic in dealing with the modern technological and economic world. Diversity is globally empowering; it does not have to be fearful, limiting and threatening. This global relevance makes Britain ideally placed to work with countries across the world, for the good of the economy as well as the social, cultural and political development of the world.



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Perhaps one of the challenges for many organisations is the minority of people who come to abuse Britain's

This, I repeat, is a small minority, though a visible one. It is this visibility which gives the impression that there are more of these false people than there really are and **we should never let this visibility distort our view of the whole complex issue of immigration.** They are of all nationalities and races. Of course in Britain we have people who are members

Some Famous Historical Settlers and Influences on British Society
79 AD: First large scale Roman arrival in Northern Britain
500 AD: Scots Dal Riata tribe arrive from Ireland and settle in Argyll
793 AD: Vikings arrive and build their society
1066 AD: The Normans arrive in Anglo-Saxon England

of the indigenous population who do similar things. It is therefore our responsibility as organisations to weed out and firmly challenge all such individuals,

fairness and compassion. There are enormous numbers of people who suffer the most horrendous personal tragedies, deprivations and emotionally scarring events, who come to Britain to receive compassion, understanding and a period of healing and assistance, who end up being t o t a l l y misrepresented by a small minority of opportunists and people who take advantage of the v o l u n t a r y organisations and the systems which

equally and without prejudice.

How do we go about this? We need to be very honest and forthright with people that such behaviour is unacceptable. We need to examine clearly each individual case. This is an assessment process, not a judgemental process, and it is vital that the people who really need help get it and resources are not dissolved by the advantage-takers. But let us be clear and willing to talk about this, not defensively but proactively, whilst not giving any ammunition to the xenophobes, isolationists and those with leanings towards extreme views.

We also need to show a greater understanding and compassion for people who are trying to do better for themselves and their families when they arrive here. People sometimes have a tendency to look at an asylum seeker one-dimensionally. Often an asylum seeker has left large numbers of their family in the area of abuse or deprivation which they have escaped from. This puts pressure on them to seek as much support and money as they can from the host community. This is quite normal and is very different from the

are in place to protect the vulnerable. They take up a great deal of time with inappropriate claims.

advantage-takers and opportunists. It is important therefore that people really try to understand asylum seekers' situations. It is not easy to understand the level of need evidenced by individuals who have arrived in this country and still have problems in their home country. Often there is the idea that just arriving to a place of physical safety like the UK solves all their problems. Unfortunately this is not so.

And then these issues all impinge on the international issues of democracy, fair trade and a need to have concern for the devastating effect in the world of diseases such as HIV / AIDS, especially the severity of the situation in certain parts of Africa, which has reached truly horrendous proportions.

So where do we go from here? Organisations and the people within them need to come together proactively, as they indeed do to some degree at present, to try and address these issues in a compassionate and effective manner without feeling threatened by those with xenophobic or racist views. We need to create new systems and awareness of the real plight of people. This is an ongoing subject. The difficulties in some countries of the world are constantly changing – many definitely for the worse, though some, fortunately, for the better. Information, knowledge, bridge-building – all of these activities are very important.

We are very fortunate in Birmingham to have a great city in which, over the last few years, communities have reached out to work together, to understand each other and to face the challenges of modern life.

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Our humanity is always going to be the thing which unites us. We need to be prepared to tackle the things which divide us.

I really do not think many people wish to live in a homogenised, one-dimensional world, without an interesting and rich,

AFRICAN COMMUNITY LEADERS' WORKSHOP

In the last edition, we featured the African Community Leaders' Workshop which was held in November to discuss the importance of networking within the African Community.

Community Specialist Mr J. Omunson examined how Africans can challenge stereotypes and false assumptions about immigrants and about diseases being brought into the UK.

Mr Omunson emphasised that health is both physical and mental and that the trauma of persecution in the home country of many African immigrants, along with the separation from loved-ones and the journey to the host country, is made much worse by the threat of imprisonment or deportation on arrival.

Once settled in the host community, isolation can be a major problem for immigrants, particularly due to the language barrier faced by many, but also due to the loss of traditional support networks such as extended families and also, unfortunately, often due to the ignorance and prejudice of local people.

A combination of these factors leads to suspicion, lack of confidence and frustration which consequently prevents the take up of health care provision such as the National Health Service (NHS) and local GPs. Alongside unemployment and poverty, this often leads to ill-health arising more often and being treated less often than amongst other communities. The seriousness of this situation for personal and community health is clear.

African immigrants are diverse – arriving from various nations, faiths and backgrounds - so it is even more important that community leaders act as mediators and network on behalf of the African people, being resources for information and advice. This is indeed a responsibility but a very valuable one and one with crucial benefits for all.

LIVING WITH HIV: A PERSONAL STORY

I am a woman aged twenty eight years. I come from Kenya and am a mother of two daughters. My husband died eight years ago. I came into this country four years ago to study, during which time I fell in love with a guy from my country. We lived together and soon after I became pregnant. During pregnancy I was tested for HIV and found to be positive. My partner was tested and found to be negative. He was so unhappy and he left me.

I was supervised quite well during pregnancy by the doctors. When my child was born she was checked and found to be HIV negative. She does not carry the virus. Now that I knew about testing and had information about the HIV virus, I asked my daughter to be checked at home. I received good news that she is not positive.

When I discovered that I was HIV positive my world was shattered.

I did not expect it even though my husband had died, I was never sure of the cause of his illness. Nobody talked about it. I don't remember much except that it was a long illness. The family thought that it was TB. It is only now that I suspect it could have been AIDS. I am grateful that I am getting treatment and advice on how to look after myself well.

I feel healthy and strong and am able to do my day to day work and bring up my daughters. I am glad that I am able to look after my daughters and continue to do productive work and help others to cope with the condition, especially newly diagnosed young persons. I am now a member of Africans for Positive Living. Meeting others in similar situations helps me to keep going because we share experiences and support each other.

Rosa Hamisi

AFRICANS FOR POSITIVE LIVING

Africans for Positive Living (APL) is for all Africans who are infected or affected by HIV / AIDS. ACCR supports the group which meets at Freshwinds House every last Friday of the month.

Members find it very valuable to meet fellow Africans in a similar situation to them. The African meal is always the special focus of the day. The discussions are often funny, and the mood is jovial. But it can also be the ideal place to discuss worries and concerns and share advice. Don't be left behind.

In the next meeting, we have someone assisting us to discuss and learn about **Weapons of Mass Protection** (condoms) so it will be very informative.

We need testimonies from people living with HIV / AIDS in Birmingham and the West Midlands to act as messages of support to others. Write to us about your experiences of the illness and we can use

them to move, reassure, encourage or inspire others.

We are also looking for volunteers to help with the HIV / AIDS support offered by ACCR and would like to hear from you if you might be interested in helping out.

For more information contact Dr Deng, Paul or Daisy at ACCR.

IN BRIEF

** Did you know about the Department of Health's free and confidential Sexual Health Line? Use it! Call 0800 567 123 or visit www.staying-alive.org.

** A group of ACCR volunteers are trying to start a support group for single parents and an outside organisation is keen to help with training and some resources. If you are interested please contact ACCR and leave a message for Christine or Nomasa.

UPCOMING EVENT

Last year ACCR launched the idea of an African Communication Day which would unite local African Communities and raise the profile of African people living in the West Midlands. The event was a great success, promoting multi-cultural harmony and bringing many people together for a fun but informative day.



The Malawian craft stall at African Communication Day 2003

This year the African Communication Day will be held on Saturday 17th July in Victoria Square in Birmingham City Centre. ACCR invites all Africans and other people interested in African culture to attend this all day event. You do not need to book – just turn up and enjoy the day. It will be a brilliant opportunity to meet and share culture, and work towards integration amongst African people and the local community.

There will be space for stalls to display traditional products and skills, and opportunities to present dance, song, poetry and other arts.

Professional and voluntary sector organisations, women's forums, faith-based groups, businesses and groups which represent specific countries will all be able to hold stalls and demonstrate their valuable contribution to a multicultural British society.

If you are interested in holding a stall at the event, presenting art, helping out in the planning or running of the day, or just want further information, please contact Daisy: 0121 456 8123 or email daisy.s-marere@accr.org.uk

SKILLS DIRECTORY & VOLUNTEERING

Last year we requested that skilled African specialists make themselves known to ACCR if they were willing to help the African Community and get involved in local events. We would be very happy to hear from mechanics, painter-decorators, plumbers, dressmakers etc, as well as experienced counsellors to work with ACCR for the benefit of the African Community.

If you think you could help, please contact Mayom Malek or Kate Stokes at ACCR, so that your name and expertise can be printed in the Bulletin or maintained in our Directory of Services.

We are also still looking for dedicated volunteers to help with the content of the Bulletin - articles, interviews and ideas are all welcome. Other enthusiastic people can contact us to do general volunteer work, in administration, web-site maintenance and marketing – all help is gratefully received.

African Community Council for the Regions

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Web-site: <http://www.accr.org.uk>
Phone: 0121 456 8100
Fax: 0121 456 8119
E-mail: office@accr.org.uk

Freshwinds House is conveniently situated within walking distance of many bus stops near Five Ways.

It is five minutes walk from Five Ways Train Station, which is on the Redditch to Lichfield line.

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Neighbourhood Renewal
Community Chest