
Opening Doors ~ Five Years On

Kathryn Heaps

October 2007

The History

- Established in April 2002
 - Large numbers of young people aged 14+ arriving in Brent and not finding a school
 - Little to no English
 - Little to no support
 - No family or friends
 - Victims of conflict in their own country
-

The Facts

- An Asylum Seeker is someone who has fled their country of origin due to a well-founded fear of persecution and seeks safety in another country. He or she has applied for refugee status
 - A Refugee is someone who receives a positive decision on their asylum claim and is granted leave to stay in the country they have fled to. A refugee has full employment rights and may claim benefits
 - An Immigrant is someone who has left one country to live in another. He or she is under no threat in their country of origin, but is moving to another country through choice
-

The Facts ~ Dispelling some of the Myths

- The world's poorest countries take in the majority of refugees
- Between 1992 and 2001, 86% of the world's estimated 12 million refugees came from developing countries. 72% of refugees sought refuge in developing countries
- The top three refugee hosts are Iran, Burundi and Guinea
- The top developed country host is Germany
- Within the European Union Britain ranks 10th in terms of asylum applications
- In the world Britain ranks 32nd in terms of asylum applications
- Britain takes in less than 2% of the world's refugee population
- Asylum seekers are not allowed to claim mainstream welfare benefits in the UK. If they are destitute they may apply for support to the NASS. The maximum grant per adult is £37.77 – 30% below the poverty line.
- Asylum seekers are not entitled to be included on council housing lists. NASS provides accommodation – asylum seekers have no choice in the location of accommodation

Appeal from the LA

- Waiting lists
 - Admission criteria
 - No specialist staff
 - Exam results
 - No room at the Inn!
-

The Solution

- Set up a school within a school
 - Create a curriculum that not only teaches English but also teaches the young people how to survive in this culture
 - Help them to deal with their issues of anger, loss, fear, rejection
 - Make them feel special and valued
-

The Problems

- Finding the money
 - Dealing with issues of prejudice and racism
 - Finding space for the young people to continue in education
 - Managing groups of young people so traumatised that sometimes they couldn't sleep, eat or talk
-

What do we offer?

- Proficiency in English
 - Proficiency in Numeracy
 - ICT skills
 - Citizenship in its broadest sense
 - Access to the FE college
 - Sports Facilities
 - The chance to be children
-

What have we used to teach language?

- Very skilled and dedicated staff
 - Teacher and Support in every class
 - State of the art IT
 - On line programmes
 - English in a Flash from Renaissance Learning—
briefly!
 - Trips and Visits
 - Drama with the Tricycle Theatre
-

Does it work?

- You be the judge!
 - Over 95% of our students have progressed to mainstream education either at KS4 or the post 16 phase
 - Two of our original students are now at University
 - The two host schools have very high numbers of refugees and asylum seekers in the mainstream and benefit greatly from this wealth of cultural diversity
-

Who helped?

- Headteacher colleagues both Secondary and Primary
 - The Learning and Skills Council
 - The Local Authority and the Elected Members
 - The Press
 - Our local MP
-

What is the way forward?

- This could be replicated in any area that has waves of young people who arrive as refugees or asylum seekers
 - These very vulnerable young people need to feel safe
 - They also need to learn to integrate
 - Young people in mainstream schools benefit greatly from working inclusively
 - English in a Flash needs to be released in the UK!
-

Contacts

- Kathryn Heaps kheaps48@vodafone.net
 - Renaissance Learning www.renlearn.co.uk
 - The Refugee Council www.refugeecouncil.org.uk
 - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees www.unhcr.ch
 - Asylum Support Information www.asylumsupport.info
 - Institute of Race Relations www.irr.org.uk
 - US Committee for Refugees www.refugees.org
-