

# Sheffield Faiths Forum



CITY OF SANCTUARY



## Sanctuary, Hospitality and Refuge – Monday 10 Dec 2007 *Sharing our stories*

### Contents:

- Summary of event
- Notes from table discussions
- Feedback

### Summary of event

- 50 attendees (36 bookings)
- Attendance from the following traditions and groups: Buddhist – Amida Trust; Muslim; Christian – Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, Seventh Day Adventist; Quaker; Jewish – Reform; Humanist; Unitarian; Liberian community; Karen community; City of Sanctuary; ASSIST; Northern Refugee Centre; Student Action for Refugees; Sheffield Faiths Forum; Sheffield Interfaith; Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum.

### Programme

17:30	<b>Registration, drinks and networking</b>
18:00	<b>Welcome and introduction</b> Tim Wright – Development worker Sheffield Faiths Forum Craig Barnett – Development worker City of Sanctuary
18:05	<b>Stories from asylum seekers / refugees</b> Levan – a Chechen Christian Ibtisam – a Yemeni Muslim
18:25	<b>Readings from faith communities</b> Jewish readings – Cath Platt Islamic readings – Abdool Gooljar Buddhist Readings – Gina Clayton
18:35	<b>Zeela Liberian Gospel Choir</b>
18:55	<b>Food and conversation</b> Discussion at tables
19:55	<b>Plenary – feedback from tables</b> Mike Fitter, Chair of Sheffield Faiths Forum
20:20	<b>Close</b> Inderjit Bhogal, Chair of City of Sanctuary

## **Aims**

- Hear the story of people seeking sanctuary in our city
- Share your own experiences of sanctuary and welcome
- Explore what sanctuary, hospitality and refuge mean to people of different faiths
- Learn how, as faith communities, we can make our city a more welcoming place for refugees and asylum seekers?

Following a brief introduction by representatives of Sheffield Faiths Forum and City of Sanctuary, Christian and Muslim asylum seekers shared their experiences of arriving in Sheffield and South Yorkshire. They stressed the importance of the welcome and support they had received from local faith groups and how this had affected their own faith, particularly meeting and working with people of different faiths.

Members of Sheffield faith communities then gave short readings and commentary about the concepts of sanctuary, hospitality and welcome from the Jewish, Islamic and Buddhist traditions (copies of the readings can be found at [www.sheffieldfaithsforum.org.uk](http://www.sheffieldfaithsforum.org.uk)). This was followed by a performance from the Zeela Gospel Choir – part of the Liberian community in Sheffield. A large part of the evening was given to conversation and sharing of experiences by the delegates. At tables during the buffet, the following questions were posed:

- What do sanctuary / hospitality / refuge mean to me / my faith?
- When have I felt welcome / unwelcome in community?
- What relationships do I and my faith community have with Asylum Seekers / Refugees / Migrants?

Feedback from the tables was collected (see notes below) and there were contributions from a wide variety of delegates including the Karen community from Burma. The event was concluded by Inderjit Bhogal, Chair of City of Sanctuary, who explained how the City of Sanctuary campaign was being adopted as a national programme by the Refugee Council – a conference will be held in Sheffield on 6 March 2008.

NB as a direct result of the event members of a faith community were able to offer a homeless asylum seeker a place to stay.

## Notes from table discussions

### What do sanctuary / hospitality / refuge mean to me / my faith?

- Christian – Christ suffered as a refugee in Egypt, the Good Samaritan, strangers as angels
- Buddhist – taking refuge is a key understanding of the Buddhist faith – putting our trust and faith in something greater than our self, refugee = renunciant
- Islam – you come as a stranger you leave as a stranger, God said we are to look after the poor and the destitute – this is an act of worship, Care for others and do unto others as you would be treated yourself, generosity and care for people are key elements of faith
- Being a refugee provides opportunities – for communication, exposure to different cultures and experiences and to share. Look beyond the labels – instead of seeing an ‘asylum seeker’ see gifts, talents, skills and abilities.
- Sanctuary is feeling safe, protected and free from fear – feeling that no one is going to kill me, back home there is no hiding place.
- Sanctuary is like a tree under which people and animals can rest and take shade, like a fountain that does not dry up, where we are not worried about hunger. It is a blessing from God and from people.
- For 48 years my life has been under threat – running away, tears, fears, in a cage. I only experienced human rights when I arrived in Sheffield – we can speak our language without fear. I see hope and rights and freedom for my children.
- I spent 24 years in Thai refugee camps on the border where all the bombs and shells fall. I couldn't speak my language or look at people in the face for fear of the military.
- We are all family. Love God, Love your neighbour as you love yourself.
- Need to challenge churches to be as welcoming as they think they are already.
- Need to know each other in order to recognise and welcome the stranger. Community is being neglected – need to move outside our comfort zone to meet people throughout our city, not just in our safe neighbourhood eg walking, pilgrimage.
- How can we be good neighbours? – by taking the initiative to build relationships and break down barriers (between faiths for example). Organisations like Sheffield Interfaith provide an opportunity to meet with people of different faiths.

### When have I felt welcome / unwelcome in community?

- Welcome – around this table, upon arriving in Sheffield being welcomed by the University Islamic Society, welcomed into someone's home for a meal.
- Unwelcome – when ignored, language barrier, current political climate eg “British jobs for British workers”, arriving in Britain the day after hearing Enoch Powell's speech, being asked for your passport by the hospital, when attending church being told you've come to the wrong one and being directed elsewhere
- Welcoming the stranger means loving your neighbour (including strangers) and being open to new ways eg new songs, new faces (Jesus was not white!). Practical examples eg befriending people through walking groups.
- Feeling unwelcome – people in Sheffield scare me, in other countries people help each other more, guns on Sheffield streets, feel safe when the neighbourhood feels familiar and feels like home.

## **What relationships do I and my faith community have with Asylum Seekers / Refugees / Migrants?**

- Muslim communities – 3 course meal for asylum seekers in June, developed links with ASSIST
- Christian communities – provide space eg rooms to meet at the Cathedral, support conversation clubs
- Buddhist communities – support conversation clubs, support City of Sanctuary movement, Maitri(?) project

# Feedback

## Summary

Did the event enable you to:

- **Hear the story of people seeking sanctuary in our city?** Yes / in part - 100%
- **Share your own experiences of sanctuary and welcome?** Yes / in part - 88%
- **Explore what sanctuary, hospitality and refuge mean to people of different faiths?** Yes / in part – 82%
- **Learn how, as faith communities, we can make our city a more welcoming place for refugees and asylum seekers?** Yes / in part - 100%

**Overall, how useful did you find the event?** Very useful / useful – 82%

## Detailed

51 participants attended. 17 evaluation forms were returned

<b>Comments on how well the event met its objectives.</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>In part</b>	<b>No</b>
Hear the story of people seeking sanctuary in our city	14	3	
Share your own experiences of sanctuary and welcome	6	9	1
Explore what sanctuary, hospitality and refuge mean to people of different faiths	13	1	1
Learn how, as faith communities, we can make our city a more welcoming place for refugees and asylum seekers?	5	11	

### **Comments:**

The event brought the reality home

We digressed in our discussion to an immediate question of finding an individual a bed for the night and whether or not we would welcome someone into our homes

My main experience of the evening was meeting someone who needed somewhere to stay and feeling able to offer it – thank you.

Free food also helped

Didn't talk about it in different faiths – except seemed similar – had Christians and Muslims at table

In the time available the evening was positive

I think we needed more information about the way that our city welcomes refugees and asylum seekers

Perhaps all centres of faith might agree to display outside a notice: "Refugees and asylum seekers welcome here"

Consider having some posters detailing 'good practice' in faith communities

	Very poor	Poor	Okay	Good	Very Good
<b>What did you think of the venue? Please include any comments on location and accessibility.</b>			2	11	4
<b>Comments:</b> Cold and not entirely veggie buffet Difficult to hear some of the speakers In town – good Centre of city – very accessible					

	Not at all	No	Okay	Yes	Definitely
<b>Did you have enough information in advance of the event? Please include details of any extra information you would have liked.</b>		1	4	11	1
<b>Comments:</b> Initially went to side door Fine for me – only need times and theme Only found out a few days before – obviously hard to get round all groups					

	Very poor	Poor	Okay	Good	Very Good
<b>How well do you feel the event was facilitated? E.g. were you encouraged to participate?</b>			3	11	3
<b>Comments:</b> Might have been good to have shorter time in more than one group, not just one But we didn't follow table instructions but heard moving stories Good to have a mixture of styles – listening and also contributing Everyone was ready to do their part and they did it very well Very useful to have an interpreter in our group					

	Not at all	a bit	Okay	useful	Very useful
<b>Overall how useful did you find the event?</b>			1	8	6
What did you find most useful about the event?	Talking to people Food was terrific and good conversation Hearing other faith perspectives on sanctuary Talking to people Hearing peoples' stories Positive experience I can feed back to my faith community Opportunity to network with people I hadn't met before Share with each other The time for discussion and thing on issues, conversation Meeting people from different faiths and communities Talking round the table Listening to the stories of the asylum seekers / refugees Hearing peoples' stories at first hand Hearing peoples' stories and lovely music Sharing with refugees and asylum seekers				
What did you find least useful about the event?	Not talking to enough people Didn't find it easy to approach strangers and have discussion Feeling guilty about not answering the questions! Food!				

