

Spreading the word

Welcome to the third edition of the ASSET UK newsletter. We report on Action 3, the Basic Skills Agency's brand new ESOL for Construction Course, the NIACE Skills Audit Project in Leicester and a recent European Conference on Asylum Seekers that took place in Dublin. The newsletter also includes updates from other partners, and you can find out more from the links on our website www.asset-uk.org.uk

ASSET UK partners are now disseminating what they are learning about new ways of supporting the integration of asylum seekers. The partnership is grateful to the National Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for providing the matched funding for this stage of the project. ASSET UK contributes to many of the LSC's strategies, such as Widening Adult Participation, Skills for Life and the Equality and Diversity Strategy.

One of the interesting design features of the ESF EQUAL programme is that the dissemination phase overlaps with continuing development work, rather than just issuing reports at the end. Over the next year, partners will be networking with mainstream organisations and providers. We kicked off by discussing with local LSC Equality and Diversity officers at their February conference how we can improve access to education, training and employment for asylum seekers. Our plans include setting up networks, running conferences, preparing toolkits and guides, and setting up websites for sharing good practice and on-line materials. We will use it to keep you up to date on developments. We want to make it useful to you. Just contact Diana Bowers whose details are on the back page, or the person named at the end of each article.

Anna Reisenberger Director of Development, Refugee Council
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Build up: ESOL for construction

Build Up, one of the Basic Skills Agency's Demonstration Projects concerned with teaching ESOL in the context of construction, is being developed and delivered by Peterborough College. The Project had its official launch at a breakfast meeting at the end of January. In addition to project and Basic Skills Agency Staff, participants included: the College's Principal, Construction Centre of Vocational Excellence [CoVE] co-ordinator, Director of Business and Employer Liaison, Programme Leaders for Construction, Engineering and for ESOL, Welfare Officer and Community/Student Liaison Officer; staff from Jobcentre Plus, IAG partnership/Connexions, the Refugee Council, the curriculum manager from Women's Education in Building and the officer with responsibility for basic skills from the Construction Industry Training Board.

Celine Castelino, from the Basic Skills Agency, opened the event with a brief presentation on the work of the Asset UK Development Partnership and the Agency's role within it. Sue Moseley, the College's Director of Basic Skills, Barrie Wicklen, CoVE Co-ordinator, and Louise

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Supported by the Learning Skills Council



Cottom, Project Manager, talked about the project in more detail.

The College has been teaching ESOL to a growing number of asylum seekers and welcomed the opportunity to extend their offer to include language skills for a particular vocational area. The course is intended for asylum seekers who are skilled in a construction related trade, or who wish to work in this area but need the vocational and English language skills appropriate to that setting. In addition it includes a general job seeking skills package adapted to 2 or 3 specific trades.

There is a skills shortage in construction right across Cambridgeshire, and the College wishes to promote good practices and train skilled workers from different areas. It offers a flexible syllabus and varied learning methodologies, which recognise results based on learning and understanding, not just on examinations only. The Project brings together a team of people to co-ordinate and support this innovative project, comprising internal and external parties, e.g. CITB, other Cambridge Regional and Isle Colleges.

As the certification is not examination based, there is a 'sensitive assessment' to determine competence levels, which includes discussion, working in teams and portfolio building.

Project staff hope to include 'Work Shadowing', with employers keen on working with non-traditional learners.

In her presentation, Louise Cottom reported that there were a number of asylum seekers with construction experience enrolling onto September 2003 ESOL courses and highlighted some of the differences in countries of origin. For example in Iraq if you are a plasterer, you also train to be a painter for internal & external work. People from Afghanistan mostly seem to be carpenters, while people from the Congo tend to be builders.

Health and safety and laws relating to construction differ considerably, and are virtually non-existent in some countries. Needless to say this is an important feature of the course. The students attend the course for 6 hours a week, in addition to general ESOL classes. The students' very different prior experiences has led to the development of a tailored ESOL programme.

At the time of the launch the course was in its 5th week during which the students undertook an assessment to determine knowledge gained. A visit to a DIY store is planned for the latter half of the course where the students will learn more about tools, materials, prices and so on.

Job seeking will be the focus of week 9, including CV writing, a visit to the local Job Centre and the CITB step programme to employment. Week 10 will culminate in a final assessment to measure the whole of the learning, and the award of certificates to students.

The presentations were followed by a lively discussion and offers of help from the other organisations present. A significant concern was the restriction of the course to asylum seekers which is the remit of the project. However, the College is keen to build on this course to enable other students to learn ESOL through construction and other vocational areas. The ESOL team is already in discussion with colleagues from Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy to extend the approach, and any materials developed through the project will be shared.

Comments from participants:

Mohammed Safraz - Community/Student Liaison Officer noted the reaction of colleagues from other organisations 'I have taken posters with me to network meetings and there have been positive responses. People are keen to support this project. We need to evaluate the effects of the course and progression.'

Adeela Bainbridge, Welfare Officer, raised a number of issues but also offered some solutions 'It may be possible to set up voluntary placements with 'Age Concern' and other agencies who need assistance?'

Because of the enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check we could not offer them to schools or play areas. Asylum seekers face enough bureaucracy without CRB checks.'

Celine Castelino, Basic Skills Agency

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Steps to Integration in Leicester

As part of the NIACE ASSET UK East Midlands project, the Leicester sub-division has provided a vocational orientation programme for over 135 asylum seekers in the city since it began in September 2002, helping participants learn more about working in the UK, helping them get to know the city and developing their skills. The project began after research undertaken by NIACE indicated that people seeking asylum had a very diverse range of qualifications and experience. It was thought that if people seeking asylum could be better prepared ahead of gaining refugee status then they would more successfully access the labour market and rapidly make a valuable contribution to the UK economy. The European Social Fund, the East Midland Development Agency and the Leicestershire Learning and Skills Council provide funding for the project in Leicester which has now helped people skilled in over 50 different occupations including doctors, civil engineers, teachers, nurses, accountants, scientists, electricians and secretaries.

The ASSET UK project in Leicester begins by undertaking a skills audit to identify the skills, qualifications and experience of participants. The skills audit process provides an opportunity for the participant to reflect upon their previous experience, to begin to use UK occupational language and to ensure that their previous experience and skills inform their future career choices. The information gathered is used to produce a professionally typed CV. We then help each participant research how their occupation functions in the UK and an action plan is created to provide a route by which they can return to this or to a new occupation of their choice. Participants are invited onto a short course describing UK working environments and legislation and with the help of the Leicester based Overseas Qualifications Development Programme, a comparison between their overseas qualifications and UK qualifications can be made. If needed contact can be made with professional organisations such as the General Medical Council or the Institute of Mechanical Engineers.

If the project identifies that vocational courses could further develop their skills, participants are helped to access courses at local colleges and training organisations. Since its conception, the project has guided and financially supported participants in joining 85 vocational courses such as the Diploma in Public Service Interpreting, AAT Foundation Accountancy, A+ computer maintenance, NVQ2 Beauty Therapy and City and Guilds Electrical Installation. ASSET UK participants are also helped to access volunteering opportunities with local organisations such as the Royal Infirmary, VAL, Environ and Babygear which gives them new skills, an insight into how UK organisations function and further develops understanding between people within the host organisation and their asylum seeker volunteers. Many of the organisations, which have hosted the 24 volunteering placements arranged by the project, have reported that their ASSET UK participant has provided considerable skills and expertise, one participant enabling the output of his placement provider to increase by 33% by introducing them to a new technical development.

Another aim of the project is to help participants become more familiar with Leicester. At the first interview, each client is given a copy of the Leicester A to Z map and by visiting many organisations and events as part of the project, participants rapidly develop their knowledge of the city. These experiences all contribute to the participant's integration into the city and UK society generally. The project was recently able to provide television sets for several participants. Access to a television is very helpful as it not only provides some comfort for people who may feel very isolated but also helps people learn more about the UK, its arts and culture.

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Many clients have received refugee status since joining the project and have succeeded in finding employment. NIACE hopes to analyse the skills audit data to provide a valuable resource to inform policy makers and support service providers. Robert Gray, the Leicester ASSET UK Project Worker said 'It is a privilege to be able to meet people from all over the world, to assist them during a time of crisis and to see them integrate with and make a valuable contribution to our richly diverse community of Leicester'. If you have any questions about the work of the ASSET UK project within Leicester, please contact:

Robert Gray, Leicester ASSET UK Project Worker, NIACE

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Asylum seekers in the EU: The Challenges of Integration

The first round of Equal has funded 38 Development Partnerships (DP) across all Member States to develop innovative approaches that enable the social and vocational integration of asylum seekers. The European Thematic Group on Asylum Seekers organised a European conference in Dublin in April to draw together the most promising practices achieved under Equal. The conference examined the potential contribution these practices have made to asylum processes across the EU.

In short, the Conference:

- Discussed the main challenges of integration and the approaches taken in different national contexts within the EU.
- Illustrated the benefits of activities encouraging the social and vocational integration of asylum seekers and the merits of EQUAL practices.
- Provided an opportunity for the New Member States to learn from the experiences of existing Member States.

A Showcasing Exhibition presented promising practices within the Equal Asylum Seekers Theme from across the Member States, and through transnational partnerships.

There are several EU developments that made the timing of this event extremely relevant. Firstly, the Second Round of Equal is starting and it will be important to pass on to the new projects some of the experiences and lessons learnt. Each of the New Member States have been requested to implement a DP under the Asylum Seeker theme and they might need some advice and guidance from those who already have some experience in terms of partnership building, transnationality etc. Secondly, DG Justice and Home Affairs is also preparing for the new European Refugee Fund, the "sister" programme of Equal Asylum Seekers, and it will be interesting to discuss the complementarities and synergies between these two programmes. Finally, the Common European Asylum System is reaching a critical phase with the completion of the first phase of Tampere approaching, the conference made it possible to look at future policy developments.

The British Refugee Council continues to represent ECRE on the steering group of ETG5. Please contact david.hudson@refugeecouncil.org.uk if you would like to know more about this.

To give or receive more information about ETG5 email: empl-equal-etg5@cec.eu.int or look at the ETG5 website.

Promising Practices in Capacity Building.

Approximately, 50 participants, largely made up of selected EQUAL Development Partnership representatives attended this workshop in Dublin on Capacity Building. It focused on:

- Training trainers, advisers and others working with asylum seekers.
- Partnership building and networking (including the development of tools for networking) to “match” asylum seekers to services and/or training and employment opportunities.
- Community awareness building and improving the interface with the local community.

The aim of the workshop was:

- To identify emerging good practices, benefits and lessons from DPs for the different types of capacity building in their own national contexts.
- To identify lessons transferable from one DP to others, from one national context to others, including the findings of relevant transnational work
- To inform the priorities of the work programme and communications of the ETG5 (i.e. how good practices and benefits/impacts should be communicated beyond EQUAL, for example at the European Conference of 1 April and a wider EQUAL “visibility” event in November 2004, provisionally in Warsaw)
- To produce guidance for the New Member States that are relevant to the second round of EQUAL

For information on the promising practice contact:

David Hudson, European Integration Project Manager, Refugee Council

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RAGU's University network - an example of Promising Practice:

As part of the Workshop on Capacity Building, RAGU were selected to do a presentation on a University Network Group that they have established. Below are some extracts from the EQUAL questionnaire which provides a useful framework for identifying and reflecting on emerging good practice:

How would you describe the practice proposed?

Aim: Establishment of a UK-wide network of universities who are working with asylum seekers (and refugees) under their widening participation remit.

Objectives: to exchange and disseminate information and good practice and through this process to develop a co-ordinated and national approach to asylum seekers' education and training; to create a representative UK-wide group that can influence and inform policy development.

The network consists of representatives from universities around the UK. There are meetings in London every 6 months but not all members are able to attend so we also communicate by e-mail and post. All members have contact details of others in the group so they can contact them directly. Information and good practice examples are collected before meetings and one or two members do a short presentation on a project or piece of action research they have done. The main topic for the meeting is agreed at the previous meeting but there are repeated agenda items such as updates on legislation. We agreed to produce a guide for staff (and students) who are working with asylum seekers and refugees (at the university or in the community) to clarify issues and entitlements. We have a draft of this and once completed, it can be adapted by each university to include local provision. We would then send regular updates and, in turn, receive updates of the local information. We will use this to publicise the network and attract more members. We will also establish a network website to allow us to communicate with a wider audience.

What are the problems/needs it is trying to address?

Since dispersal started in 1999 the Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit (RAGU) at London Metropolitan University received many enquiries from colleges and universities throughout the UK about issues affecting asylum seekers (and refugees) who wanted to access higher education. Typically, enquiries were about: eligibility, access and funding for asylum seekers; ways of obtaining recognition and accreditation of overseas qualifications and experience; school leavers who are accepted to universities but then find that, as asylum seekers, they are considered to be overseas students; lack of consistency or contradictions in policies or practices in different institutions; examples of models of good practice in providing courses and services for refugees and asylum seekers with higher level education or professional qualifications; RAGU's Certificate in Professional Development (including portfolio-building for APEL) programme for refugees and asylum seekers.

We had several interesting meetings with staff from other universities to discuss issues and share ideas and current practices. We found there was very little information about entitlements and legislation and little sharing of good practice where it existed. In response to this demand for information and discussion, we decided that we needed to form a network of universities and colleges as a discussion forum and to develop a co-ordinated and national approach to asylum seekers' education and training and related issues.

What works?

Network members have shown interest and commitment. We have established a good way of working with a core group of members and then disseminating to the rest of the network. We have realistic ideas (focused, specific and practical) about what we can do in terms of influencing policy for asylum seekers in the current climate. We have exchanged information and practical advice about projects that have worked for refugees and asylum seekers and members have offered support to others trying to set up something similar at their university. We have produced clear information for staff that can be adapted to suit the needs of individual universities and will avoid the incorrect or misleading information that is circulated about asylum seekers and refugees' entitlements and to help staff and students who want to support asylum seekers and refugees (in university and in the community). We feel that the network is still in the relatively early stages but we are now clear on how it can develop. Our next step is to establish a website.

What doesn't work?

The main external obstacles are a) the difficulty asylum seekers have in accessing university because of the way they are assessed and the costs - in the current climate, this is unlikely to change. This means that the focus has to be on specialist programmes preparation, support and guidance for asylum seekers while they wait for a decision from the Home Office. b) the time universities are willing to give their staff to attend network meetings focusing on asylum seekers. This is not a priority and it is difficult for our members to justify the time spent, especially as this includes the time for and the cost of travel to London. Time restrictions have also meant that it has been more difficult than we anticipated to collect information from members. The main internal obstacle is time needed to develop a network like this (and associated activities) once it is established and to ensure that it is truly representative.

Is what works transferable?

It is already in a national context, although we would like the 'active' membership to represent all parts of the UK which it does not at present. We have agreed that once the network is fully established with a website and various products such as the guidance for staff leaflet (see above), we would like to link up with other national networks and websites used by asylum seekers and those supporting them and generally raise our profile.

Why is it innovative?

There is no network like this in the UK, although there are networks for widening participation. This means that if a university wants to develop a project for asylum seekers (and refugees), or if they want to know what the policy of other universities is for assessing overseas qualifications or deciding whether an asylum seeker should be considered a 'home' or 'overseas' student for fees purposes, or if they simply want to check current legislation, they don't know how to get reliable information and support. If this network develops as we anticipate it will, it could encourage universities to work with and for asylum seeker and refugee students (and potential students) and make it easier for them to do this. This, in turn, will lead to a more co-ordinated national approach and as the network increases its membership and scope, we will have greater leverage to influence policy.

Susan Davenport, European Programmes Co-ordinator, RAGU

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Information on EU Funding. Equal II for Asylum Seekers:

The integration of refugees into the society of the country in which they are established, is one of the objectives of the Geneva Convention. The EU supports actions intended to promote refugee social and economic integration, in so far as it contributes to economic and social cohesion. Therefore, the Asylum Seekers' theme of Equal continues.

The transnational dialogue within the development partnerships has enhanced learning at the practical and operational levels because of the similar challenges in differing contexts across the EU. Throughout the first round, the backdrop for the asylum seekers activity has been challenging, with media coverage of asylum seekers becoming increasingly hostile. EQUAL's benefits have become clear and include reductions in inactivity, reduced 'losses' of asylum seekers to the black economy and greater contributions to the local economy. Lessons from Equal I which will hopefully reach a much wider audience under Equal II, include:

- The importance of providing support that is relevant and of value to both integration in the Member states and reintegration in the country of origin or a third country. Several Development Partnerships stress this approach.
- Providing support as soon as practicable after an application for Asylum is made.

Working with employers: development partnerships have established various links with employers, such as a co-operation agreement with a business to get asylum seekers into employment once they have completed their training programme. The experiences have demonstrated that these partnerships require intensive liaison and awareness raising to engage the employer, but have good potential and results.

- Helping to develop the capacity of the NGO sector, and enable it to work effectively in partnership with the relevant authorities;
- Helping to develop networks to share information between the NGO sector;
- Improving the social integration of individual Asylum Seekers.

Equal II benefits from the adoption of the Directives related to the Common Asylum Seekers Policy which allows greater focussing of activities on asylum seekers as defined, rather than those benefiting from other forms of protection. It also clarifies the relationship and complementarity between EQUAL and the European Refugee Fund at a national level. As both funding sources are likely to work with the same type of organisations and fund quite similar activities for different groups of people, Member States will need to clarify whether they encourage joint funding of activities, making clear the practical steps which will be taken to ensure that this can be managed, monitored and audited at a national level.

There are two other potentially vulnerable groups that will be covered by Equal II. These include the Roma community and victims of trafficking.

Equal II for the Roma Community

Enlargement to 25 countries will make the Roma community the largest ethnic minority group in the European Union. The poverty, exclusion and discrimination faced by the Roma people is a challenge, and an issue of concern, for all Member States. Existing Member States have developed some policies and programmes to support and integrate the Roma people already living in the Union. But with enlargement, these challenges confront the Union on a much larger scale. The criteria of success seen by the Roma people themselves may change in this new dynamic. Thus both Roma communities and other sections of society will have to play an active role in efforts to build a more inclusive Europe. As a source of innovation, Equal plays an important role in finding ways to tackle discrimination and inequality, and is thus relevant for the Roma people. Consequently, during the second round of EQUAL, support for the Roma people will be particularly sought in all thematic fields.

EQUAL II for Victims of trafficking

Up to half a million women and children are being trafficked into Western Europe each year. The trade is international, well organised and growing. They are bought, sold and then forced into prostitution, domestic labour, or sham 'marriages' where they are held as prisoners. Even if they manage to escape from the trafficker, or make a report to the authorities, women can find themselves facing even more trauma. The stark reality is that trafficked persons may be treated as illegal migrants and criminals. They can face arrest, detention or expulsion.

The EU is now able to use the financial resources of the Community Initiative Equal to promote, in accordance with national law, the social and vocational integration of such beneficiaries, to make it possible for them to return safely to their countries of origin or to receive adequate protection in their host countries. Therefore in the second round of EQUAL, support for victims of trafficking will be particularly sought in all thematic fields.

DPs will operate from 2005-2007. For further information on the second round, including the timetable, please click here for the Equal website http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equal

Saba Khan, European Integration Project Information Officer, Refugee Council

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Raising the profile of the EQUAL Project in Sheffield

A change of management for the EQUAL project at the Sheffield College inspired putting together a re-launch of the project. Also many of the new, and indeed existing staff, were unaware of the project's aims and objectives

Held in one of the community centres right in the heart of where many of the asylum seekers live, the re-launch attracted around 30 members of staff from an extensive cross-section of key curriculum areas, different sites and various ethnic backgrounds.

The introduction was followed by a brainstorming session conducted by four small groups on:

1. What are the needs of asylum seekers? Are these needs being met / partially met / not met at all?

2. You have £5000 to spend. How would you use this resource, remembering that the project is working with asylum seekers?
3. Asylum seekers arrive, from many countries with diverse cultural backgrounds. How can you make them feel a part of the community and college?
4. How would you ensure that more asylum seekers, students and staff members are aware of the EQUAL project and its role?

The brainstorming session worked well and provided a good forum for discussion. All ideas were carefully recorded for a more thorough analysis thus ensuring that we are currently reviewing what we are doing, spending the money and also considering new and innovative ideas. .

The ideas included: setting up a buddy system for asylum seekers, having posters in different languages stating what EQUAL is providing, social events for students and displaying students work and images/pictures from their own background.

Increasingly we are trying to raise awareness of the project across the whole college, representing over 28,000 students. With Refugee Week approaching we hope that this will also help raise the profile of asylum seekers and refugees who are studying here and who bring a wealth of experience and increase the cultural diversity of the college.

Andrew Oatridge, Project Manager, Sheffield College

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Photo: © Sheffield College, 2003

Students attending a recent 'Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners' course at The Sheffield College.

Introducing....

Emma Saunders has started as Project Development Officer at RAGU and will be working on the on-line material. Emma writes: "After completing a MA in Refugee Studies at the University of East London last September I was ready for a new challenge. That has turned out to be ASSET UK! I have worked with dispersed asylum seekers so I am really excited to be part of a project that will help inform and orientate this group. I am looking forward to developing the on-line resources and taking it into the regions".

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Francesca Mazzetto, a workplacement student with the Leonardo Da Vinci programme has started with the Central Co-ordination Team at ASSET UK. Francesca started in March and she will be working with the team until August. Here are a few words from Francesca:

"I have been studying movements of population matters since I began studying Arabic language and culture at the University of Venice in Italy and then I took an MA on migration and international co-operation. I consider this work experience as the best chance to give a European dimension to my interest in Asylum and Migration themes and to increase my expertise in the management of European Projects".

francesca.mazzetto@refugeecouncil.org.uk

Edin Hromadzic has been appointed to the post of Project Development Worker with the Central Co-ordination Team at ASSET UK and started in post on 4 May. Edin is originally from Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. He has been working for the Refugee Council for 8 years for various Projects including the Bosnia and the Kosovo Project in which part of his role was to help refugees on the programme to adapt and integrate to the new society.

For the past four years he has been working with the Asylum Support Team at the Refugee Council in Birmingham as a Project Worker and also for several months as a Volunteer Coordinator. Until recently he has been working as the Service Development Worker where he has been developing access to services for refugees in the West Midlands area. He is hoping that his past experience will help to increase the involvement of refugees and asylum seeker volunteers in the partnership.

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Forthcoming events

Teacher Training Workshop - 25 May 2004 - Birmingham

As part of the ASSET UK project, the Training and Employment Section of the Refugee Council is running a one-day teacher training workshop for ESOL tutors on 25th May, at the Refugee Council office, Digbeth, Birmingham. The training looks at teaching ESOL to refugees and asylum seekers, and covers issues such as the asylum process, government legislation, learners' needs, materials and individual learning plans. The workshop is designed to raise tutors' awareness of teaching ESOL specifically to refugees and asylum seekers, and also provides the opportunity to exchange ideas, good practice and to meet others working in the field.

For further details or to book a place please contact Katie Evans on 0121 622 0963 or katie.evans@refugeecouncil.org.uk.

Dissemination and Mainstreaming Seminar - Working with Volunteers and Asylum Seekers - 22 June 2004 - Birmingham

As part of the ASSET UK project, the Training and Employment Section of the Refugee Council is running a one-day seminar entitled Working with Volunteers and Asylum Seekers on 22nd June, at the Refugee Council, Digbeth, Birmingham. This event is open to anyone who has worked, is working or hopes to work with volunteers and/or asylum seekers, in any capacity. The seminar is designed to enable people to exchange ideas and good practice on working with volunteers and/or asylum seekers, and will include guest speakers. There will also be afternoon workshops in order to collate ideas and good practice on working with volunteers and asylum seekers which will influence the final report for this project.

For further details or to book a place please contact Katie Evans on 0121 622 0963 or katie.evans@refugeecouncil.org.uk.

Do not hesitate to contact us for more information on the work of the ASSET UK Project

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Forthcoming events

May 17 & 18, 2004 - RAGU Study
Visit to Sweden on On-line
Orientation Information

ESOL in the voluntary sector (May
19, 2004) 9.30am - 4.00pm

Teacher Training Workshop
25 May 2004, Birmingham

**Partnership Board
Meeting**

**22 July 2004
12.30pm
at LLU+, London**