West End Refugee Service: a Sense of Belonging
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The West End Refugee Service is a registered charity which provides support services for asylum seekers and refugees in a friendly, welcoming environment. The range of integrated services aims to address the disadvantage, exclusion and poverty which affect asylum seekers and refugees living in the West End of Newcastle upon Tyne. Refugees are among the most vulnerable members of the Newcastle community. Many are severely traumatised having experienced either the threat of or actual physical violence. Fear, exclusion, surveillance, separation from communities and families are all common experiences among refugees. Many have been tortured, imprisoned or raped in their home country and all have suffered bereavement and separation from family and friends. Adapting to life in a new and not necessarily receptive society and often on meagre incomes compounds these problems. The situation is then made worse by the many problems of life as an asylum seeker in Britain: sub-standard housing, low income, social isolation, racial harassment, unemployment, prolonged separation from family, difficulties with cultural adaptation and the fear of being returned to dangerous situations should their asylum applications be unsuccessful. Negative media reporting, political antipathy, a lack of educational and employment opportunities and hostility from local communities have created a climate which does little to aid the integration process of refugees. Much needs to be done to create an inclusive and welcoming society which recognises the enormous contribution to the UK that refugees can make.

Dr Simon Philpott has undertaken work with WERS and film maker David Campbell to make 5 short films which capture the stories of a number of asylum seekers/refugees and their experience of finding ‘a sense of belonging’ as they have made homes for themselves in the North East. The films have been screened at the Tyneside Cinema to a group of Newcastle and North East stakeholders working on refugee related issues and can be found on the WERS YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/user/WERSvideos.

“They give us time to talk.”
Refugee, WERS