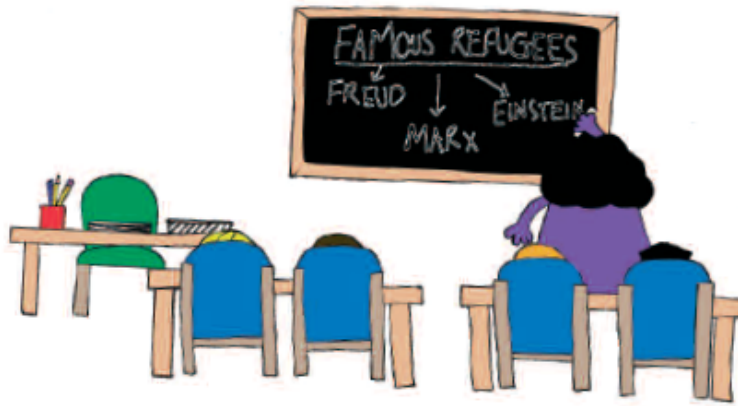


THE ISSUE

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WHAT CAN I DO?

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Write to your local schools and ask them to ensure children leave with an understanding of the importance of the UK's past and present role as a sanctuary for those fleeing persecution.

THE SOLUTION

Show leadership and challenge negative stereotypes of those seeking sanctuary.

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Meet with the people who are asking for your vote before the next general election, and ask them to support the recommendations of the Independent Asylum Commission.

"EDITORS, JOURNALISTS AND BROADCASTERS... SHOULD BE AWARE OF THE IMPACT OF THE CONTINUALLY NEGATIVE STORIES ON PUBLIC ATTITUDES TO THOSE SEEKING SANCTUARY, AND ENSURE THAT POSITIVE STORIES ARE ALSO HIGHLIGHTED ON OCCASION." INDEPENDENT ASYLUM COMMISSION'S SAVING SANCTUARY REPORT, MAY 2008

For more information and advice on how to perform these actions visit: www.citizensforsanctuary.org.uk

CITIZEN ACTION TOOLKIT 9: Local Leadership

Not everyone believes what they read in the papers.

But more do than you might think. When local rumours are reinforced by media stories, the truth can become distorted.

What can we do about it?

Showing a leadership at a local level is what.

What will I find in this toolkit?

The issue	1
The solution	2
What can I do as an individual?	3
What can I do in my own community?	4
What can I do to change the world?	5
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10 WAYS FOR CITIZENS TO SAVE SANCTUARY



CITIZENS
for sanctuary

Independent Asylum Commission
citizens

This toolkit is a supplement to the '10 Ways for Citizens to Save Sanctuary' booklet. You can download an electronic version or order copies of the full booklet at www.citizensforsanctuary.org.uk.

THE ISSUE

People's primary source of information about people seeking sanctuary is the national media, followed by local media, and word of mouth.

The Facts

Here is a selection of national newspaper headlines:

"...woman given asylum because she's 7ft 2in tall"

"Asylum-seekers spreading Aids across Britain"

"Asylum seekers ... cooking and eating swans"

"Widows Ordered Out, Then Asylum-Seekers Move In"

Links

For a selection of Daily Mail headlines see:

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/search.html?searchPhrase=asylum>

The Fear Factor

Bad news sells more newspapers and gets more viewers than good news. But fear of worse news sells more than both combined. In order to encourage fear, the papers need an enemy. A threat that is large, and unknown, and often imaginary.

People seeking sanctuary are an easy enemy to create because we can only guess how many there are, and how many more there will be. We do not know how much it will cost to feed and house them. We do not hear their stories or their humanity because they are without a voice. And because they look different, imagination and fear of the other runs riot. One thing is for sure, we think, they are not one of us.

Sadly the tone of most of these articles is negative. The editor of the Daily Express was once asked by a parliamentary committee whether he had ever met a person seeking sanctuary. He never had. When asked why the Express published so many negative stories he said: "Well, there aren't any positive ones, are there?" We did offer to send some to meet him, but he declined our offer to meet!

The Independent Asylum Commission did the most comprehensive survey of public attitudes to people seeking sanctuary in the UK. In 16 focus groups across the UK and in a nationwide opinion poll we asked a wide range of people where they got their information on the issue. Not surprisingly they said national media, local media and word of mouth – in that order.

Very few of the research participants had ever actually met a person seeking sanctuary. The research told us that personal encounters are important for promoting understanding between people in different communities. So it would be quite natural to look to the media for information, or judge how you feel about people seeking sanctuary by the stories your family and friends tell you.

Interestingly, many of the research participants were openly sceptical about the information they read in newspapers. However, at the same time few really questioned the stories about people seeking sanctuary. When the prejudices encouraged in some newspapers are reinforced by rumours of deviance at a local level, then negative perceptions are reinforced.

Unless action is taken, parties like the BNP will continue to exploit the situation.

THE SOLUTION

Show leadership and challenge negative stereotypes of those seeking sanctuary.

The Facts

Local leadership has led to Sheffield becoming the first official City of Sanctuary – with a commitment from local political and civic leaders to promote a culture of hospitality towards people seeking sanctuary.

www.cityofsanctuary.org.uk

Links

Read about and be inspired by some of history's greatest leaders:

<http://www.time.com/time/time100/leaders/>

And for one great leader in particular, see:

<http://www.time.com/time/time100/leaders/profile/king.html>

The importance of leadership

The combination of media myths and Chinese whispers might appear insurmountable. But the Independent Asylum Commission's public attitudes research show that we – or perhaps I should say you - can do something to challenge negative stereotypes.

Edmund Burke once said that all that it requires for evil to triumph is for good people do nothing. He was right. To be a bystander is not neutral, it is to side with the oppressor against the oppressed. The one thing that can break the stranglehold of the media and local rumours is the intervention of trusted community leaders.

The Independent Asylum Commission found that where local leaders – political and civic – showed particular leadership then hearts and minds could be won. Conversely, where leaders collude or stay silent then local attitudes deteriorate.

Many leaders – especially political leaders - believe that they can reassure their communities that they have the 'problem' under control by talking tough. This has been the government strategy nationally for some years now – respond to the latest outraged headlines with another headline-grabbing policy measure or law to 'crack down' on people seeking sanctuary, in the hope that it will convince the punters that you are tough enough. Sadly, this strategy has failed, and for all of the government's laws and policy measures, the public still don't trust the system.

The losers, of course, have been people seeking sanctuary who have experienced a steady reduction in their rights and entitlements and greater stigmatisation.

Leadership does not mean dismissing the problems of the settled community or championing only the causes of people seeking sanctuary – it is bringing people together across communities to address local challenges that affect them both together.

Leadership not only requires an understanding of a particular situation, but also a desire to communicate this to others and to challenge instances where misunderstanding prevails. Leadership on this issue is also risky – which is why so many are silent when they ought to be vocal.

WHAT CAN I DO?

Challenge stereotypes held by friends and colleagues about people seeking sanctuary with positive stories about individuals who have sought sanctuary and made a contribution to the UK.

The Facts

Albert Einstein (Physicist),
Karl Marx (Political Philosopher),
Michael Marks (of Marks and Spencer),
Isambard Kingdom Brunel (Engineer),
Dalai Lama (Religious Leader),
Alec Issigonis (Inventor of the Mini).

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_famous_refugees

Links

Refugee Week:
www.refugeeweek.org.uk

Stand up. Stand out.

However besieged you feel by this issue and the popular perceptions you have a mind and an opinion and a voice. On a day-to-day basis you can use all three. And the more you do, the wider the impact.

But start with those closest to you – family, friends and colleagues.

One piece of advice though. Do not try to ‘myth bust’. This is a popular technique among campaigners, but recent evidence shows that it is counterproductive and often serves to reinforce the myth rather than bust it!

A better method is to present an alternative perspective – particularly focusing on the positive contribution that refugees have made and do make to UK society. There are loads of examples on the Refugee Week website (available all year round) – they even have a little booklet called ‘Credit to the Nation’ which shows everything that refugees have done in science, business, sport and the arts.

Sometimes an even better way to confront bigotry, ignorance or misconception is with a powerful personal example. If you have met a person seeking sanctuary who confounds the stereotypes then share their story. Emphasise why they came to seek sanctuary and the contribution they are making, rather than any problems with their case. We know that the public are more receptive if they understand the root causes of why people flee, and are surprised if they are already making a contribution to UK society.

Some other tips – be courteous, be rational and don’t be a bore! The facts are on your side so use them. Point out all of the things that the UK and the world would be without if it was not for refugees.

And remember, if you are in the pub or some other group situation, don’t just think about persuading your antagonist – the other three or four people listening in are just as important, so do not alienate them in your effort to win the argument.

Good luck!

WHAT CAN I DO?

Write to your local schools and ask them to ensure children leave with an understanding of the importance of the UK's past and present role as a sanctuary for those fleeing persecution.

The Facts

We had a genuine asylum seeker coming to talk to the children at school. It was just really interesting – my daughter is all for asylum seekers now and she is only 11 years old!

Glasgow focus group participant

“No child should leave school without being aware of the UK's past and present role as a safe haven for those seeking sanctuary.”

Independent Asylum Commission's *Saving Sanctuary* report.

Further information

If you would like access to the teachers' resource pack on migration and sanctuary then email sanctuary@cof.org.uk. It will be available for September 2009.

Start 'em young.

The Independent Asylum Commission's public attitudes research showed the importance of teaching young children the importance of sanctuary, so that they could grow up into adults with a strong understanding of the issue.

Whilst many adults have made up their mind and are often not inclined to change their mind, children and young people are much more open-minded.

This is why we are urging you to contact your local schools, and ask whether they teach their children about sanctuary. If they don't, encourage them to ensure that no child leaves school without an understanding of the UK's past and present role as a place of sanctuary for people fleeing persecution.

You could either suggest a day of study dedicated to the topic during Refugee Week, or a more comprehensive scheme, taught alongside subjects such as history, geography and PSHE. The school may well be aware that some of its students are seeking sanctuary, or are the children of parents who are. Either way, be sure to be sensitive of their wishes – they may not want others to know their position.

CITIZENS for Sanctuary is developing a comprehensive resource pack on migration and sanctuary for use in schools that will be available from September 2009. If you would like a copy please contact sanctuary@cof.org.uk. If your local school lacks resources to teach the subject then ask them to get in touch and we can make sure they get what they need!

We have often found that the best way to convince children of the power of these arguments is by letting them hear the testimony of someone who has sought sanctuary in the UK and lives in their local area.

It is not always easy to find someone who is willing, but *CITIZENS for Sanctuary* can put you in touch with people and organisations who may be able to help.

TOP TIP: IF THE PROJECT IS A SUCCESS, CONSIDER SPREADING THE IDEA TO OTHER LOCAL SCHOOLS. WHY NOT BECOME A SCHOOL FOR SANCTUARY?

WHAT CAN I DO?

Meet with the people who are asking for your vote before the next general election, and ask them to support the recommendations of the Independent Asylum Commission.

The Facts

“Politicians, government, media and civil society must work together to develop and promote a ‘centre ground’ for sanctuary in line with mainstream British values.”

Independent Asylum Commission, *Saving Sanctuary* report.

Further information

To find out who your local MP is, see: <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/mp/>

We are looking for citizens around the country to commit to tackling their political candidates. Let us know if you are interested: sanctuary@cof.org.uk.

Get politicians to sign the Sanctuary Pledge

Politicians are most vulnerable when they are seeking election. With a major general election due before June 2010, now is the time to think about how you can lock your future MP into exercising responsible leadership in relation to sanctuary.

CITIZENS for Sanctuary is developing a ‘Sanctuary Pledge’ which we hope Prospective Parliamentary Candidates (PPCs) will sign in the run-up to the next General Election. The Sanctuary Pledge will ask candidates to express their support for sanctuary, campaign responsibly without pandering to prejudice, and support the values and recommendations of the Independent Asylum Commission.

However, PPCs respond best to local people (whose votes they want to attract) making the approach – particularly if the request comes from a delegation representing a much wider group of people. So we are encouraging our Regional Campaign Action Teams to work together with faith groups and others to ensure their PPCs sign up to the Sanctuary Pledge.

You could do this by sending a delegation to meet each PPC in advance of the election campaign and ask for them to sign the pledge. You could then arrange a photo opportunity during the campaign in which PPCs sign the pledge. And to make sure that they are all held to account and publicly state their commitment to the Pledge, go along to public hustings events and make sure that they are all asked about their commitment to the Pledge.

But don’t rush in unprepared! Always plan these approaches very carefully, because if the meeting goes badly you may damage any future meetings by losing their respect. The important thing is to build a relationship with the PPC, so that they know who you are and will more readily engage with you next time round.

Think about *who* you are. Are you just going as Mr Jones from 63 Brent Road? Or are you going as a representative of a group, like a church, mosque, school or social group? If you really do have the support of a group, then that holds greater power when it comes to the negotiation, as the PPC knows you represent 40 votes, rather than just 1!

And please let us know if you plan to do this – we can provide advice, resources and support.

Resources

Title

Text

Please let us know how you get on with these actions. We will collate all of the results from across the country and add them to our website so we can see all the change we have accomplished.

If you need advice or support, please contact carina.crawford-rolt@cof.org.uk.

Good luck!