



# Newport & District Refugee Support Group

Refugee Week 2005 Review  
Aled Singleton



## 1. Introduction

Refugee Week in Newport 2005 was the biggest to date, taking in a music night, an evening of original digital film and photography as well as setting up art classes that led to a public exhibition of artwork for a week upstairs in Newport Market – a place visited by hundreds of people every day. A 4-page colour newsletter was designed and produced by an asylum seeker who lives in Newport and supported all events.

### *Highlights*

- At least 50 individuals, one local music venue, the Riverfront Theatre & Arts Centre, Welsh Refugee Council, University of Wales, Newport and Newport & Gwent Enterprise had a stake in organising and supporting the events this year.
- The Refugee Week message was seen by at least 400 people at the Safe music evening and up to two thousand of people will have passed by the exhibition - 4 pages of comments were left.
- The music night was supported and promoted by the Meze Lounge - a local venue popular with young people. They provided the venue free of charge, spent a significant amount of money on publicity and also stepped in to provide a headline act when the original artists pulled out.
- The art project gave one refugee and one asylum seeker the opportunity to sell their work under the 'Enterprising Art' test-trading scheme. As part of this scheme participants are given a platform to trade and learn the skills of being a professional artist over 3 months. This project also attracted additional expertise, £200 funding as well extra publicity from the University of Wales, Newport and Enterprising Art. In the first week £140 was generated in sales.
- The community involvement was stronger this year than last. One asylum seeker led the creation of the newsletter (supported by a small group) and he also was involved in the overall coordination of events and the making of a film. Up to ten people took part in the art sessions and fifty people attended events.

## 2. At-a-glance programme of activities in Newport

Name & Location of Event	Type	Participants	Public
(1) <b>Sat 18 June</b> 'Light in Shadow' Digital Film & Photo Evening, Riverfront Arts Centre	Conference/ seminar one-off	27	40
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Technical support from Riverfront staff and free venue from Council</li> <li>- 5 photography and 5 film projects</li> <li>- All contributors Newport students</li> <li>- Programme put together by Alex, Golkou, Juan, Maryam and Anastasia – finished by Aled</li> <li>- Even hosted by Alex and Golkou (students)</li> <li>- <a href="http://www.newport-refugees.org.uk/activities/index.html">www.newport-refugees.org.uk/activities/index.html</a></li> </ul>	Held at prestigious local arts venue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Work of 20 students</li> <li>- Professional support 5 staff from venue</li> <li>- Volunteers Aled &amp; Neil</li> </ul>	People impressed but not enough publicity
(2) <b>Week 20-24 June</b> Refugee Arts Exhibition, Enterprising Art, Newport Provisions Market	Arts and culture	10	Weeklong ~2,000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Subsidised via University of Wales, Newport</li> <li>- Overall direction from Enterprising Art</li> <li>- Lots of help from Sam at WRC</li> <li>- Sessions led by core group of 3</li> <li>- Invaluable final support from Enterprising Art to get work mounted, arrange press visit etc</li> <li>- <a href="http://www.newport.ac.uk/news/05/jun05/june0517.htm">www.newport.ac.uk/news/05/jun05/june0517.htm</a></li> </ul>	Support for refugee & asylum artists to work professionally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Up to 10 refugees &amp; asylum seekers</li> <li>- Professional support from WRC &amp; Enter. Art &amp; Aled to raise money</li> <li>- Volunteer help Aled</li> </ul>	4 paintings purchased during week
(3) <b>Thurs 23 June</b> 'Safe' – a Haven for World Music, Meze Lounge Bar	Awareness-raising music	20	400
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Supported and publicized by Meze Lounge Bar</li> <li>- Two performers asylum seekers</li> <li>- Venue brought in performers (from USA) who played Glastonbury the next day</li> <li>- Local performers: Batatan; The Shelleys &amp; Belly Dancers helped bring in people</li> <li>- DJ Andy Roberts from BBC documented night and put 14 images on website</li> <li>- <a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/southeast/tours/events/pages/safe.shtml">www.bbc.co.uk/wales/southeast/tours/events/pages/safe.shtml</a></li> <li>- £80 raised for hardship fund</li> <li>- Special t-shirts made</li> </ul>	Music & dance performances by local and international artists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Artists booked by Neil</li> <li>- Negotiations venue Neil</li> <li>- Publicity Aled &amp; Neil</li> <li>- One act supplied by Newport-based Association of Culture and Sport</li> <li>- Venue supplied door staff, technical assistance and publicity</li> <li>- Sarah ironed t-shirts</li> </ul>	Excellent reception by public
(4) <b>'Fafarafa' newsletter</b>	Newsletter	5	1,000 copies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Very colourful 4-page newsletter funded by N&amp;DRSG through via Refugee Week monies</li> <li>- Gives perspective from asylum seeker and refugee community</li> <li>- Able to acknowledge support from University of Wales, Newport, Riverfront, Enterprising Art</li> <li>- Explains themes of Refugee Week</li> <li>- Includes content from 'Understanding Asylum...'</li> </ul>	Backed up events and gave voice to community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Norbert, asylum seeker, edited and designed</li> <li>- Content from Aled</li> <li>- Features pictures by El Alzahari (art project)</li> </ul>	Good publicity for group also
(5) <b>Mon-Tues 20-21 June</b> – Film showings of Hotel Rwanda, Riverfront Arts Centre	Film	?	?
- Not done in cooperation with group			

### 3. How did the programme get organised?

The committee first discussed Refugee Week in the March meeting. Sam McAlister, Cultural & Social Support Worker at the Welsh Refugee Council, introduced herself to the group. Group members were invited to bring ideas back to the next meeting.

In April a number of ideas were brought to the meeting. These included a film festival at the City Centre Cinema involving the Medical Foundation and a music night at the Meze Lounge. The group agreed to form a sub committee; Aled Singleton, Neil O'Sullivan, Fabrice Likosso and Norbert Mbu-Mputu met later on in the week. The following arose:

- A music night at the Meze Lounge involving performers sourced by Fabrice and Norbert – as well as some local artists
- An exhibition of art work and possibly work shops
- Audio visual evening at Riverfront involving 'Light in Shadow' film as well as other student projects covering refugee issues

A proposal was put together and contact was made with the relevant people – including Sam, Meze Lounge, Anastasia Taylor-Lind at Enterprising Art, student filmmakers and the Riverfront.

- **Further meetings – setting roles and responsibilities**

On April 24<sup>th</sup> in the evening a larger group met, including Aled, Neil, Norbert, Sam, Anastasia and students Golkou, Juan and Maryam. The group agreed on a programme featuring the three activities above. Anastasia and Maryam took on programming the photography; Golkou the films; Neil would carry on negotiations with the Meze and Aled would look into funding the art classes. Aled also wrote up a plan and sent out.

- **Progress by meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> May – 7 weeks before Refugee Week**



By the next meeting a slot at the Riverfront had been arranged, the Meze Lounge booked for 23<sup>rd</sup> June and the Business School (University of Wales, Newport) had been approached to fund the art classes and mounting of exhibits. The sub group also had a very good idea about the programme for the Riverfront evening and a signature image and the word 'Safe' to publicise Refugee Week events was decided upon. Aled circulated a 3-page update afterwards.

- **Progress of subgroup**

Ideas were presented to the group at the AGM on 9<sup>th</sup> July – where film 'Light in Shadow' was also shown. Overall the committee were happy to support the activities. The sub group did not meet subsequently for various reasons e.g. meetings could only be carried out in the evenings and Sam had to prioritise her work in Cardiff.

The task of overall coordination was less apparent as the 3 activities had become quite distinct: Anastasia and Sam could work on art project during their work time; the student group could work on collecting materials for the film and photo evening and Neil's preparation of music night was well in hand. It was left to Aled to keep people up-to-date and make sure that preparations were running smoothly.

## 4. Developing the activities

The three activities became separate entities with different groups people wanting to promote and develop each for their own reasons e.g. the student group were very keen to showcase their work at the Riverfront, the Meze Lounge wanted to sell drinks at the event and for Enterprising Art to be supporting refugees and asylum seekers showed that they were breaking down social barriers.

- **Light in Shadow Digital Film & Photography Evening**

Two unexpected changes to the date and time of the show meant that we had to settle on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> June – just before Refugee Week. The working group for the evening met with Liz Driscoll from the Arts Development Team at the Riverfront and planned the technical requirements for the evening. The Council were very helpful with preparations for the show and registered tickets on to their system. The venue would have cost £230 had we paid for it.

An evening programme written by Maryam and Alex complemented the work of Anastasia and Golkou to source photography and film material. Aled completed the programmes and published on to the [newport-refugees.org.uk](http://newport-refugees.org.uk) website ahead of the event.

- **'Safe' – A Haven for World Music at Meze Lounge**

The original line-up for the evening was Yva and Melia (via Fabrice) and the Kongo One Band (a Refugee group via Norbert) as well as Batatan (Maindee-based Samba band), BBC Wales' Jazz Connections DJ Andy Roberts and local folk band 'The Shelleys'.

Negotiations with Kongo One broke down. They were due to come from London to play and wanted more money than we had to pay them. Only being able to pay people by cheque after the event complicated issues also. Fortunately the Meze suggested Kokolo. Kokolo were due to play at the Glastonbury festival the next day and the venue saw this as an opportunity to promote the event even more than before. The wording of the posters changed from

*'a haven for world music' (followed by the line-up) to*

*'KOKOLO – afro-beat orchestra funk - latin music and beyond... glastonbury warm up gig – soon supporting legendary Isaac Hayes' Also featuring....*

This undoubtedly made the event more attractive to the paying public and prompted the venue to pay for 3 colour adverts on the back of the South Wales Argus.

- **Enterprising Art project**

After a meeting between Aled, Anastasia, Neil (Enterprising Art Manager) and Sally Brooks from the Newport Business School we were able to set the parameters for financial support. The University would be able to use some of its European Social Fund monies from the City of Enterprise project to pay for art materials and tutors providing that people signed beneficiary forms. Enterprising Art (part of Newport & Gwent Enterprise) also agreed to support the project by supporting art classes and teaching participants the skills necessary to mount and market their work.

After an initial meeting on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> May the first art session was organised for 27<sup>th</sup> May with a group of 3 artists located by Sam. It was held at the Welsh Refugee Council and Enterprising Art provided materials. Mo from Pakistan and his friend Anthony from Newport (**right**) with El Alzahari from Sudan were given charge of promoting and running the sessions from then on. After a couple of weeks it was clear that not enough material was being generated to support an exhibition. Anastasia stepped in and organised a tutor to do an all day session. The intervention proved successful.



- **Fafarafa Newsletter**



A small project as part of Refugee Week was to commission a special community newsletter as one of the asylum seekers – Norbert – had previously shown a great interest. Aled floated the idea to the committee, proposing to use up to £300 of the £1,000 from the Refugee Week funding. The committee accepted the idea and Aled started to work with Norbert on a 4-page colour newsletter at the end of May. After some evenings of work we compromised on a design and layout that gave prominence to the N&DRSG and the Refugee Week events as well as giving a voice to members of the asylum seeker and refugee community.

The newsletter features an editorial 'Refugee Week: An Opportunity' by Norbert, pictures by El Alzahari, news of a recycled bike scheme from Swansea and a story about a man from the Ivory Coast who has difficulty understanding why our alphabet has u, v and then w (double 'u') in it rather than double 'v'. These stories complement the information about the events and background of Refugee Week in a manner that wouldn't come to somebody who wasn't a refugee.

## 5. Publicising the events

1,000 A6 double-sided post cards printed as below. A few hundred A4 posters that combine image and text together were made also.



Front of postcard

**Three FREE events in Newport this June to mark Refugee Week 2005**

Sat 18th	Digital Film & Photography Show Studio Theatre, Riverfront Arts Centre	7:30pm
Mon 20 <sup>th</sup> to Fri 26th	Art Exhibition & Workshops Enterprising Art, Upstairs Newport Market	9am to 5pm
Thurs 23rd	'Safe: A Haven for World Music' Meze Lounge, 6 Market St	8pm to 2am

For more information ☎ 02920 432 985  
[www.refugeeweekwales.org](http://www.refugeeweekwales.org)  
[www.newport-refugees.org.uk](http://www.newport-refugees.org.uk)




Back of postcard


Posters were delivered and given out at the meeting on June 6<sup>th</sup>. They were displayed around Newport, put in libraries and circulated via other networks such as the Maindee Festival Association.

The images were also attached to emails and sent out to the group's email list of over 100 people. Newport Council also sent out via information via its weekly e-newsletter. The information was also provided in good time to be featured in the Welsh Refugee Council's publicity for Refugee Week and website [www.refugeeweekwales.org](http://www.refugeeweekwales.org).




The t-shirt was the other tool used to develop a brand for the events. We took 23 t-shirts with the Refugee Week logo and put the 'Safe' image on via iron-on transfers. As well as being a good souvenir for event organisers the t-shirts gave a feel of professionalism to the events. Unfortunately the transfers started to peel off after one wash so screen-printing may be an option next time. They were very labour intensive for Aled and Sarah!



LIGHT IN SHADOW  
 A Digital Film & Photography Show Celebrating Refugee Week.



Studio Theatre  
 Riverfront Arts Centre, Newport  
 Be Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> of June - 7.30 pm

The 'Safe' image was also used to publicise the music night – and a cover image for the film & photo evening at the Riverfront (left)

Good coverage came from South Wales Argus' Venue magazine - <http://www.thisisgwent.co.uk/gwent/mono/music/MUSIC13.html> on Friday 17th June. They put it at the top of their music coverage and also included the following:

*'The aim of Safe is to play music from around the world and, hopefully, make people more aware of the issues surrounding refugees and asylum-seekers.'*

## 6. Outcomes

Overall the programme in Newport has:

1. Extended the range of activities - particularly in terms of involving and reaching students and young people through music and the use of popular local venues
2. Been successful in getting more agencies and volunteers involved in organisation
3. Engaged with refugee and asylum seeker community with attendance and participation
4. Been good value for money

- **Extending range of activities**

Previous year's events have been focused on venues familiar to the group e.g. the Salvation Army and have been promoted via the group's own channels. Limited numbers have attended due to the group being wary of unwanted tension. Consequently turn out has been low and the message has not been so effectively spread. Using a popular venue this year (the Meze Lounge) meant their management had an incentive to attract people. In supporting Refugee Week they also promoted a pro-Refugee message to their clientele.

- **Getting more volunteers and agencies involved**

The student group was pivotal in providing the content and support for the 'Light in Shadow' film and photo evening. They were encouraged by the opportunity to show their work at the Riverfront – a prestigious local venue.

Enterprising Art established a good relationship with the Welsh Refugee Council and became familiar with the WRC offices. The WRC will actively encourage their clients to visit the market and Enterprising Art in the future.

- **Engage with refugee and asylum seeker community**

Two artists were signed up the Enterprising Art scheme. Many more displayed their work in the Market and their friends and family visited the exhibition. Discovering the market helped them to find a source of cheap food and provisions and also allowed Ethnic Business Support to meet more people. The newsletter raised confidence and was circulated far more widely for being produced by a member of the community. Members of the community will have come to events and also attended the after-event party for the film and photography show.

- **Good value for money**

The overall budget from the Welsh Refugee Council was £2,000 and over £1,000 more investment was attracted from other sources: University (£200 cash); in kind time from Enterprising Art; Riverfront (over £200 saved); Meze Lounge (£500+ saved on rental and publicity). With this investment 2 well-attended events were staged; a newsletter was established and long links to other organisations and venues were made.

## 7. Media Coverage

Media coverage was limited but supportive.

- University of Wales, Newport <http://www.newport.ac.uk/news/05/jun05/june0517.htm>
- BBC <http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/southeast/tours/events/pages/safe.shtml>



South Wales Argus Coverage of the Art Exhibition Saturday July 2<sup>nd</sup> 2005



Refugee Week special newsletter produced by Norbert Mbu-Mputu



The **Meze Lounge** placed an advert for the Safe evening on the back page of the South Wales Argus for 3 successive days



The **Meze Lounge** produced large posters and put them around Newport



The Voice magazine, a Newport-based free magazine of entertainment, put 2 pages of editorial in the June edition – pages 12 and 13. The content explained nothing of the life for asylum seekers and refugees in Newport nor any understanding of what was being done by any local agencies or even what were the messages of Refugee Week. The content seems dictated more by Gartside Solicitors who have a prominent advert and deal with immigration and asylum law.

- Effectiveness of using ‘Safe’ brand

The word ‘Safe’ and an image were used to publicise the events. This image appealed the Meze Lunge and was successful in getting people to the event on the Thursday night.