



Background issues - The Need for multiple equalities work relating to refugees

Refugees often face bewildering and unjustifiable discrimination simply on the grounds of being refugees. It may be ignorance; it may be hostility; but the impact is real: exclusion, rejection, inability to access, voicelessness.

REAP has become increasingly concerned about the isolation and direct, indirect and institutional discrimination refugees with other or multiple equalities issues face. People see refugees as refugees first, assuming that refugees will turn to 'their community' for help (eg. comments at WLN-LGBT conference Dec 07) , boxing them in and making it harder for people who are already struggling to learn British systems or cope with social stigma to gain their rights and entitlements.

REAP staff have experienced seeking support for individuals who have equalities issues, eg. disabled child, person living with HiV, lesbian single mother, from 'single-equalities' groups to be told 'we don't do refugees', or 'we can't handle the language issue' as the perception of people as refugees blinds potential providers to other issues despite there often being no objective grounds for such distinction. We need a clearer picture of how widespread these attitudes are and thus propose a survey of vol/stat professionals in West London. Vol/stat sector professionals need to become aware of the complexity and multiple equalities issues facing refugees and realise they must respond equality and equitably to all people regardless of refugee background or not, and with only limited exceptions relating to asylum-seeking status. Further to the survey, events, activities and information with locally relevant material will support a necessary change in attitudes.

In addition, significant stigma and discrimination amongst refugees – particularly around race, sexuality, disability and mental health - are rarely acknowledged openly either by refugee groups or those who work with refugee communities. We have heard comments such as 'we don't want anything to do with those BME types' on more than one occasion. As with domestic violence in LGBT relationships (see Broken Rainbow), racism amongst refugees and amongst ethnic minorities is an uncomfortable part of reality for those who aim to promote equality. However, discrimination amongst refugees is an issue that must be addressed and we must find a way to address it if we are to tackle it.

For further information please see our leaflet or contact Olesya on 01895 441530 or olesya@reap.org.uk.



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