

## Supporting refugee families

Schools and early years settings play a crucial role in helping refugee families establish themselves in local communities. Apart from their educational role, schools provide opportunities for families to access parent and neighbourhood networks and family learning courses.

Refugee families and children have very complex needs, often related to their asylum status. Problems with housing, health, employment, benefits and immigration can all impact adversely on children's well-being and learning. Although teachers may have limited resources and cannot be expected to respond to every type of problem, they are well placed to identify potential difficulties and help families find the support they need.

The government's Green Paper on children's services, Every Child Matters, set out for consultation a framework improving outcomes for all children and their families, to protect them, to promote their well-being and to support all children to develop their full potential. Every Child Matters envisages the setting up of multi-disciplinary teams providing co-ordinated support for children which will be based in universal services such as clusters of schools and early years settings. Providing parents and carers with information advice and support will play a key role. The new Children Bill will also place a duty on different agencies to work together to ensure positive outcomes for vulnerable children.

### Good practice

#### **Liaise with and build on existing resources**

Many schools where student teachers are placed already have outreach and home-school liaison workers who provide advice and support to families. They may have developed considerable knowledge and expertise, and be aware of local agencies and organisations that help refugees.

Some schools are already developing as extended schools which provide a range of activities and services, often beyond the school day, to help meet the needs of its pupils, their families and the wider community. Extended services include adult education, community use of ICT facilities and support for health and well-being.

#### **'Signpost' to local advice and support**

By finding out about local services and keeping up to date information on them, teachers can be well placed to direct or 'signpost' families to places where they can get help and advice. In most towns and cities there are a range of agencies that provide support to all sections of the community, including refugees. There may also be organisations and projects that have a specific role to help and advise refugees.

#### **Create partnerships**

Some schools have established partnerships with local advice agencies, such as Citizens Advice Bureaux. An outreach or advice worker may visit the school each week to provide information and support to families. Many families feel comfortable to meet advice workers in the school environment.

#### **Listen to parents**

Teachers are increasingly aware that refugee parents from different national and cultural backgrounds may have quite different needs. When planning support and interventions a one-size-fits-all approach may not address the specific needs of some families. Many schools have a flexible approach to family learning provision, and have adapted family learning programmes, for example, to focus on particular needs.

#### **Ensure families get specialised legal advice**

Asylum procedures are complex and have been affected by frequent changes of legislation. In the past eleven years there have been five major pieces of immigration and asylum legislation. It is vital that asylum seekers find a legal representative to help with their asylum claim. A legal representative can be a solicitor, barrister, caseworker from a specialist agency such as the Refugee Legal Centre or Asylum Aid, or someone from a refugee organisation. Apart from that provided by solicitors, all asylum legal advisers are regulated by the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC). Persons not exempted or registered with the OISC are not permitted to give legal advice and may be prosecuted if they do so.

### Frequently asked questions

**Is it a job for teachers to support families? Shouldn't social workers and others be doing that?**

School staff have always been a source of support and advice for parents, not just about issues relating to their children's education. Providing support can help improve the well-being of the family, which in turn will have a positive effect on children's educational progress. For many refugee families, their children's school may be the only neighbourhood resource that they are confident to approach. Parents may be more comfortable about talking to school staff they know and trust than they do approaching other agencies. Although social services do provide financial support to some asylum seekers, their ability to address other immediate needs and support integration is limited.

### **Aren't family issues a big thing to take on, on top of my teaching workload?**

The school as a whole has a collective role in responding to the wider needs of families and children. Many schools now have home-school workers and learning mentors that work with families. Schools are also building close links with Sure Start, Children's Fund projects and Connexions personal advisers. These agencies and projects run a variety of activities including after-school provision and parental and community learning initiatives. A multi-agency approach means that teachers can work in partnership with others to address needs.

### **What kinds of advice are available to families?**

Teachers and student teachers should not give advice in those areas where they lack knowledge and expertise – this may do more harm than good. Schools can find out about local services and agencies that work with families and maintain up to date information on them. Some schools display leaflets and posters of agencies such as the Citizens Advice Bureaux.

## **Key readings**

Bastiani, J (1989) *Working with Parents: a whole school approach*. London : Routledge

DfES (2003) *Involving Parents, Raising Achievement*. London, DfES. Retrieved on 24th September, 2005 from: <http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/PICE-IPRA.pdf>

- This booklet summarises some key research findings about involving parents. Areas covered include: working with all families, listening to and consulting parents, communicating with parents, meeting with parents, parents as volunteers, learning in and out of school, parents as learners, supplementary and mother tongue schools.

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## **Online Resources**

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/everychildmatters>

DfES - Every Child Matters

<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/extendedschools/detailedguidance/>

DfES Extended School guidance.

<http://www.multikulti.org.uk>

The Multikulti website aims to support citizenship through the delivery of culturally appropriate and accurately translated information in the following areas - debt, employment, health, housing, immigration and welfare benefits. Information is available in ten community languages.

<http://www.continyou.org.uk>

ContinYou (formerly the CEDC) offers a programme called Parentaid that has proved to be successful in bringing together schools, parents and local organisations to produce a directory that school staff can use to signpost parents to sources of advice and help. ContinYou publishes a guide to setting up Parentaid Partnerships, *Parentaid: A 'how to' guide*.

<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/publications/pub002.htm>

Comprehensive information in a range of languages downloadable free from the internet.

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