Asylum Seekers in Scotland
ASYLUM SEEKERS IN SCOTLAND

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Scottish Executive Social Research
2003
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION
This research was commissioned by the Scottish Executive to explore the effects of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 on asylum seekers and devolved services in Scotland. It was conducted in parallel with research in England carried out for the Home Office by a team of researchers from Oxford Brookes University.

BACKGROUND
The 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act (the Act) provided the legal basis for the dispersal of asylum seekers. It is now amended by the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002. Immigration and asylum are matters reserved for the Westminster Parliament.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
The overall aim of the study was to assess the effect of the implementation of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 on asylum seekers and devolved services in Scotland. The specific objectives of the study included:

1. To consider the effects for devolved services such as housing, education, health, social work, the police and the voluntary sector of a) the dispersal policy and b) the new asylum seekers support system;
2. To identify issues relevant to multi-agency working and identify characteristics of good practice;
3. To assess the experiences of various categories of asylum seekers since arriving in Scotland with a view to lesson learning;
4. To assess the provision of interpreting services and English language classes;
5. To consider media and community relations issues;
6. To consider existing service provision to pinpoint gaps and suggest necessary improvements;
7. To investigate any unanticipated consequences of asylum seekers being concentrated in certain areas, particularly where this happens to be deprived areas;
8. To identify examples of good practice in all areas of operation under the 1999 Act;
9. To explore the policies and practices pursued by other local authorities in Scotland as they entered into contracts with NASS.

RESEARCH METHODS
The following qualitative research methods were employed:

- Thirty two interviews with a cross section of agencies providing services to asylum seekers, from statutory and voluntary sectors, including both managerial and front-line staff. The interviews explored policy, practice and experience in implementing the Act;
- Sixty three interviews with asylum seekers of varying ethnicity, gender, age, household composition and residence in Glasgow. These interviews concentrated on people’s own experiences of services and community life in Glasgow;
- Nine interviews with local community organisations not directly involved in providing services to asylum seekers, to explore wider aspects of community relations;
- Interviews with three local councils, in the process of negotiating contracts with NASS;
- Monitoring of the content of newspaper coverage during the fieldwork period;
- A stakeholders’ seminar to discuss some key research findings to inform the final report.
MAIN FINDINGS

1. Perspectives On Services

(a) Service Providers
Service providers emphasised the ‘steep learning curve’ experienced in their work with dispersed asylum seekers. For some, expertise and resources were initially stretched to the limit, though over time service provision was believed to have improved. Pressure on resources however remained. Areas of strength identified included multi-agency working which, though challenging, was felt to operate smoothly and effectively. Cultural sensitivity and a holistic approach were considered essential for responsive services. Community development work was seen as key to good local relations, especially to combat racism and harassment. Problems for service providers came from the centralisation of NASS, pressure on resources, unhelpful media coverage and community relations difficulties, especially earlier on in the dispersal process.

(b) Asylum Seekers
Asylum seekers had experienced both good and bad in all the services covered, though education services generally came across as particularly good. Asylum seekers emphasised the vital importance of the initial advice and introductions to the various relevant agencies. A key problem was interpreting: lack of interpreters or poor interpreters made access to services, gaining correct information and getting help particularly difficult. There were indications that for many, advocacy support would also be beneficial. There are continuing problems with racism and harassment directed at asylum seekers, whilst there are also areas in which effective community development work has helped to build up good relations among asylum seekers and between asylum seekers and local communities.

2. Community Relations
The community groups interviewed reiterated concerns about asylum seekers being placed in deprived communities, and the need to work with wider communities in all areas to promote good community relations. They felt there was a reservoir of goodwill in many communities, however deprived, and that this could be nurtured and supported. Integration and good relations required work and investment. This group was particularly critical of media activity in promoting hostility towards asylum seekers.

3. Other Local Authorities
Although negotiations for the new contracts were not proceeding smoothly at the time of interview, there was evidence that these councils were learning from the experiences of others, and that they had identified good practice which they planned to replicate, taking account of local circumstances. Learning had involved the Scottish experience, as well as work from other parts of the UK. The councils highlighted particularly the community relations work which others had argued was essential, and they were also planning from the start for ‘move-on’.

4. Media Coverage
Asylum seekers attracted extensive and continuing media interest, and it was often difficult to see why asylum seekers had been seen as relevant to some stories. Much of the specific coverage of asylum seekers was negative, confirming the feeling of respondents. Agencies were working to promote positive images of asylum seekers and adopting media strategies to counter the continuing negative coverage.
5. **Good Practice**

Good practice in the implementation of dispersal, the provision of services to asylum seekers, community relations, and media strategy undoubtedly exists, both in Scotland and in other parts of the UK. Where it is implemented, dispersal works, good, effective services are provided, and people live in welcoming communities, in the ‘safe haven’ they need.

6. **Key Issues and Implications for Policy and Practice**

(a) **Good Practice**

- There is evidence from this and other studies that good practice is being disseminated. For example other Scottish local authorities considering new contracts are developing individual approaches based on this good practice learned from Glasgow and other councils in England and Wales. **More effective mechanisms need to be developed to share and learn from this good practice. The work of SRIF and the forthcoming Action Plan will play an important role in informing this process.**
- This research demonstrates the benefits of multi-agency working for service providers and users alike, as it promotes better services, ‘ownership’ of issues and solutions and sharing of good practice between organisations. The promotion of joint working requires good communication, commitment from all agencies, time and resources. **Effective multi-agency working should be facilitated where possible.**
- Interviews with asylum seekers and service agencies demonstrate that cultural sensitivity is essential to the delivery of services. All agencies need to recognise diversity, individual needs and cultural preferences when planning and delivering services. **All agencies should aim to promote a holistic approach to service provision where appropriate.**

(b) **Community Relations**

- Community relations work is repeatedly identified as an integral element of good practice in this and other studies reviewed by the researchers. **There is a clear need to incorporate community relations work into preparations for asylum seekers’ arrival, into ongoing work with communities following arrival and into work to promote integration of refugees once they have been granted a decision.**
- Community organisations, and in particular, asylum seekers themselves, identified those groups formed by and/or drawing upon the skills and experience of asylum seekers as being especially effective in building good community relations as well as providing a valuable source of mutual self-help and support. **Resources to enable development of asylum seeker-led activities are required, particularly for smaller nationality or language groups who are dispersed widely across an area.**
- The study demonstrates that the provision of local community-based services, where asylum seekers are assumed to be part of the service client group, allow different groups to meet and engage with each other and help aid integration. **Local community activities such as crèches, drop-in centres, meeting facilities etc. need to be adequately promoted and resourced to ensure access to these services is as wide as possible.**
- This and other research highlights the way in which anti-racist community development work can help promote good community relations. **There is a clear need for the expansion of anti-racist training and awareness activity amongst community organisations and more widely.**
**Information Needs & Interpreting**

- The study highlights the need for service providers, and in particular advice agencies, to ensure the information provided to asylum seekers is as accurate and accessible as possible. **The remit of key services should be made clear so that asylum seekers know what they can/cannot expect from these services.**

- Good communication between services and between service providers and users is shown to be the essential foundation for effective services, especially at the initial stage of dispersal. **Communication can be facilitated by effective multi-agency working. Greater partnership working with NASS should be pursued in order to improve information flows in this crucial area.**

- The information provided to asylum seekers at the initial stage of dispersal is seen as critical by both service providers and users. **Examples of good practice such as Glasgow City Council’s Welcome Pack need to be disseminated and developed within a local context by other local authorities.**

- This report and others show the role of interpreting services to be crucial in achieving excellent communication. The study highlights a central difficulty for service providers and users alike in relation to interpreting for asylum seekers. **Continuing service improvement in relation to interpreting is essential.**

- Research interviews demonstrated a clear need to tackle issues of interpreter availability and quality. **Interpreter availability should be addressed through improved planning and resourcing of interpreting services, and issues of interpreter quality through improved training and monitoring of interpreters.**

- Examples of good practice identified in this report include the development of training for refugees and asylum seekers in order to gain accreditation in language skills. **This may be an approach that could be considered within the Scottish context.**

- Advocacy services were considered helpful by some study respondents. **There is a need to explore the added contribution that advocacy services can provide to asylum seekers and to promote the development of these services where appropriate.**

**Devolved Services**

- Service providers were critical of the centralised operation of NASS. **Decentralisation of NASS is to be welcomed, but agencies need to work in partnership and to develop shared approaches with NASS in the future.**

- Key statutory and voluntary agencies have faced significantly increased demands on their services as a result of dispersal and have received no, or limited, additional resources to fund this provision. **These resourcing issues need to be addressed in order to enable effective development and delivery of devolved services.**

- The report demonstrates both the foreseen and unforeseen impacts of dispersal on devolved services. **Devolved services in Scottish local authorities considering new contracts need to learn the lessons from Glasgow and recognise the need to plan, and resource, service provision at the earliest stage in the process.**

- Continuity of support from service providers once asylum seekers have received a decision is seen as key to effective integration. **The development and provision of devolved services in relation to refugee integration and asylum seeker dispersal should be considered in tandem wherever possible.**

- This study revealed limited staffing resources in key service areas and the presence of qualified professionals in the asylum seeker population. **There is a need to consider the existing skills of asylum seekers and refugees and the ways in which this resource could contribute to the work of devolved services in areas such as health.**
### Voluntary Sector
- The important role of the voluntary sector is clearly demonstrated in the report, and is likely to continue to be a key element in the implementation of dispersal. The special qualities of the sector such as its greater flexibility and responsiveness, need to be recognised and resourced if the sector is to work effectively.
- The report provides evidence of the extra pressures placed on the voluntary sector as a result of dispersal but highlights the lack of extra resources to meet increased demands. **There is a need to consider resourcing issues in relation to mainstream and minority ethnic voluntary agencies, as well as those focusing specifically on asylum seekers.**
- The report reviews a range of examples of good practice, particularly in relation to voluntary and statutory agencies working together. **There is a need for Glasgow and those Scottish authorities considering new contracts to share information on, and learn from, available good practice in this area.**

### The Media
- Nearly all study respondents felt that the media played a particularly negative role in coverage of asylum seekers issues. Many service providers had therefore developed media strategies to counter this persistent negative media coverage. **There is a need to assess the effectiveness of these media strategies and develop strategies which can counter negative coverage and promote positive coverage.**
- Media images of asylum seekers were thought to have an impact on asylum seekers themselves as well as on community relations. **There is a need for the promotion of positive images through the provision of factual information, community development and awareness raising work and anti-racism strategies.**

### Moving-On
- There was a widespread feeling amongst study respondents that issues related to ‘move-on’ of refugees needed to be more widely discussed. **Work on refugee settlement and integration needs to be considered alongside plans for services for asylum seekers.**
- Many of the aspects of good practice identified in relation to service provision for asylum seekers will also apply to refugees. **There is a need for good practice dissemination and learning to continue, with those authorities considering new contracts taking into account these issues at as early a stage as possible in the process.**
- Some differences in the support and service needs of refugees have been identified. **The specific service needs of refugees, as distinct from other sectors of the population, need to be addressed and equality of access to services promoted.**
- The voluntary sector has a continuing role in relation to refugees and the process of integration. **Resourcing of the voluntary sector, and in particularly the minority ethnic voluntary sector needs to be considered within this context.**
CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH METHODS

1.1 BACKGROUND

This research was commissioned by the Scottish Executive to explore the effects of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 on asylum seekers and devolved services in Scotland. It was conducted in parallel with research in England carried out for the Home Office by a team of researchers from Oxford Brookes University.

The Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 is now amended by the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, but this study focuses on the workings of the 1999 Act. Immigration and asylum are matters reserved for the Westminster Parliament. The Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 provides for quick processing of asylum seekers, for their support via the National Asylum Support Services and via housing provision negotiated with local authorities. The sole Scottish local authority involved in these arrangements to date is Glasgow City Council, though three other councils (Edinburgh, Fife and West Dunbartonshire) were negotiating contracts at the time of writing. The YMCA in Glasgow also has a contract with NASS. More than 5,000 asylum seekers are currently (summer 2002) accommodated in Glasgow.

Research in this field cannot ignore the sensitivity of issues attached to asylum seekers in Scotland today. Press coverage has been extensive and often controversial; welcome committees were established to counter perceived negative reactions to asylum seekers; and there is evidence of racial attacks on asylum seekers and refugees. These sensitivities have necessitated careful negotiation with research contacts, and a long process of negotiating access and consent, both with service providers and with asylum seekers themselves. The research has been conducted in a collaborative fashion with service providers and users commenting at various stages in the design and progress of the work, in an effort to ensure a focus on the real experiences of both service providers and asylum seekers themselves.

1.2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The central aim of the research was to assess the effect of the implementation of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 on asylum seekers and devolved services in Scotland. The specific objectives were as follows:

1. To consider the effects for devolved services such as housing, education, health, social work, the police and the voluntary sector of a) the dispersal policy and b) the new asylum seekers support system;
2. To identify issues relevant to multi-agency working and identify characteristics of good practice;
3. To assess the experiences of various categories of asylum seekers since arriving in Scotland with a view to lesson learning;
4. To assess the provision of interpreting services and English language classes;
5. To consider media and community relations issues;
6. To consider existing service provision to pinpoint gaps and suggest necessary improvements;
7. To investigate any unanticipated consequences of asylum seekers being concentrated in certain areas, particularly where this happens to be deprived areas;
8. To identify examples of good practice in all areas of operation under the 1999 Act;
9. To explore the policies and practices pursued by other local authorities in Scotland as they entered into contracts with NASS.
1.3 THE REPORT

The report begins by outlining previous research on asylum seekers in the UK. We then describe the methods used in the study. Chapter Two describes the arrangements for dispersal in Scotland and the roles of the various agencies involved. We then review, in turn, each of the sets of perspectives that were collected during the course of the research. We begin with the service provider perspectives (Chapter Three), then move on in turn to the asylum seekers (Chapter Four), the groups which were interviewed about community relations (Chapter Five), and the other local authorities which were in the process of negotiating contracts with NASS (Chapter Six). Chapter Seven discusses the outcome of the media monitoring exercise. Chapter Eight, on good practice, brings together the material collected in the Scottish study and examines it in relation to good practice lessons from elsewhere, including those arising from the study conducted by the Oxford Brookes team. The final chapter of the report (Chapter Nine) summarises the main findings and discusses key cross-cutting issues in relation to all the datasets and the contributions to the stakeholders seminar, which focussed on their implications for policy and practice.

1.4 PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The existing research record on asylum seekers is unsurprisingly limited, though growing quickly, with the most detailed work having been carried out in London, where 85% of asylum seekers in the UK are located (Audit Commission 2001), and also across England and Wales (e.g. Audit Commission 2000, Delahunty 2000, Kings Fund 2000, Oxford Brookes 2003, Parker 2000, Zetter and Pearl 1999). The work has tended to concentrate on the migration process, including international comparisons, implementing legislation and provision of services, and there have been limited attempts to focus on the experiences of asylum seekers themselves. Much of the work has been funded by government to inform the implementation of various pieces of legislation, or by local service providers seeking to inform local service provision. Also relevant to the present work is recent research on minority ethnic groups in Scotland and their experiences of racism and exclusion.

1.4.1 Migration

Migration is a complex and historic set of processes, and Glover et al (2001) argue that it necessitates a range of policy responses. They argue that the policy responses to migration in the UK require review, as processes of migration are changing. They note for example that in recent years, asylum seekers have become a much more significant population of migrants to the UK than formerly, and that there is insufficient knowledge of this group for effective policy responses. Whilst Glover et al (2001:viii) emphasise the regulation of migration ‘in the interests of social stability and economic growth’, others, such as Morris (2002:418) emphasise the contraction of rights for asylum seekers represented by the 1999 Act, and the lack of choice and ‘implicit surveillance’ it entails.

Recent work has started to research the process of migration of asylum seekers in more detail. Robinson and Segrott (2002) for example, explored with 65 asylum seekers in the UK their motivations for migrating to the UK. Overwhelmingly, they found that people had left their own countries to escape persecution and to reach a place of safety. Many had little choice about where they would find this, and were constrained by lack of money and dependence on agents. Most of those interviewed had little knowledge of UK legislation relating to asylum seekers, and were unaware of any entitlement to benefits. They did not know about
differences between one possible destination and another. Koser and Pinkerton’s (2002) study, which examines how asylum seekers get information about possible destinations, emphasises that many do not have information, or acquire it en route, sometimes from smugglers. Most people in Robinson and Segrott’s (2002) study wanted to work to support themselves though had little knowledge of the availability of work or the possibility of working. Where people did have some choice about destination, factors which attracted them to the UK included friends or relatives living in the UK, beliefs about the UK as safe and democratic, former links between their own country and the UK and either knowing English or wanting to learn. These studies serve to question some of the prevailing assumptions about asylum seekers, which we will consider later in the report.

This most recent UK research complements some wider international findings. For example, Havinga and Böcker (1999) also identify a large element of chance in the eventual destination of asylum seekers, and highlight the significance of agents and former colonial ties between countries of origin and destination. They emphasise that ‘no single or even restricted number of factors can explain the patterns of origin and destination for asylum seekers’ (Havinga and Böcker 1999:59). Like Morris (2002), Düvell and Jordan (2002) see developing European asylum and immigration policy as emphasising control of migration rather than the welfare of migrants.

1.4.2 Implementing legislation

Services for asylum seekers and refugees prior to the 1999 Act attracted some interest from researchers. Studies of particular settlement programmes, such as for Vietnamese (Robinson and Hale 1989) or Bosnian refugees (McFarland 1994) were completed, some of which identified examples of good practice and some of the issues involved in integrating minority ethnic refugee groups. Zetter and Pearl’s (1999) major study of access to housing for asylum seekers and refugees is strongly orientated towards the recommendation of good practice, and recommends national co-ordination of housing access. In their preliminary comments on the workings of the 1999 Act (Pearl and Zetter 2002), they note that the new system appeared set to repeat many of the problems of the former arrangements. Similarly, Carey-Wood (1997) identifies a number of effective initiatives for refugee integration, which offer lessons for future work.

More recently, researchers have focused on aspects of the 1999 Act and its implementation. Examples include Anon (2002), an evaluation of the voluntary assisted returns programme, an element of the Act which facilitates ‘dignified and orderly’ returns by asylum seekers to the countries of origin. A study of the workings of the voucher scheme (NASS 2001) concluded that, contrary to widely held opinion, vouchers were causing few problems, and only practical improvements to the existing scheme were needed. That the voucher system was nevertheless phased out soon after the publication of this report perhaps serves to emphasise the political imperatives, which may influence the reception of research findings in this area.

A study by Oxford Brookes University (2003) is parallel to the present study, examining the impact of the current dispersal policy on asylum seekers and local communities in other parts of the UK.

1.4.3 Delivering services

Much of the research covering issues of service delivery has been locally based, though national studies have included reviews of local initiatives and local practice (e.g. Carey-
Wood, Zetter and Pearl 1999). Later in the report (Chapter Eight), we will examine some of the good practice recommendations which have emerged from such studies. It is worth noting at this stage that the principles of good practice in delivering services to asylum seekers are not dissimilar to those involved in delivering services to socially excluded groups in general and minority ethnic groups in particular. Elements such as anti-racist working, cultural sensitivity, the proper use of interpreters, the provision of accessible information, the promotion of mutual support, inter-agency co-operation and communication are all relevant.

1.4.4 Asylum seeker perspectives
Recent work has included consideration of the views and experiences of asylum seekers themselves, using qualitative interviewing techniques. Ferguson and Barclay (2002), Oxford Brookes (2003), Robinson and Segrott (2002), and Zetter and Pearl (1999) have all included asylum seeker perspectives, to develop better understanding of migration processes, or to explore service use from a consumer perspective, as well as to identify the kinds of difficulties asylum seekers may experience and the support they might need. The findings of such work suggest mixed experiences. For example, Zetter and Pearl (1999) found that about half the 46 people they interviewed were satisfied with their housing. Others identified problems with the condition of the house, overcrowding, bureaucratic procedures, and personal finances. Ferguson and Barclay (2002) identified a range of difficulties faced by asylum seekers, such as poverty and bad housing, which, for many, threatened mental well-being. The present study includes the systematic collection of the views and experiences of a representative sample of asylum seekers in Glasgow.

1.4.5 Racism in Scotland
Research on minority ethnic groups in Scotland has recently been comprehensively reviewed by Netto et al (2001). One of the key cross-cutting themes which emerged from this review was that of racial disadvantage, discrimination and harassment. The review identified much evidence of racial disadvantage in housing, social care, health and health care and employment. The reviewers felt that the incidence of racial harassment was increasing, and later work by Clark and Moody (2002) identified that there was much unreported harassment. In Netto’s (2001) review, there was already evidence that refugees and asylum seekers were experiencing racial harassment. Throughout the present report, we note evidence of continuing harassment experienced by asylum seekers, whilst also drawing attention to anti-racist and community development initiatives which have aimed to address this issue. Towards the end of the process of the research, the Scottish Executive launched its ‘One Scotland. Many Cultures’ advertising campaign to raise awareness of racist attitudes and behaviour and highlight the negative impact this has on individuals and communities. The campaign aims to highlight the positive features of diversity as well as tackling negative behaviour.

1.5 METHODS

1.5.1 Data collection
The main method of data collection was in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a range of stakeholders. The identification of good practice involved a comparative element, completed in collaboration with Oxford Brookes University, who were conducting a study of the system in England. Media issues were explored partly through media monitoring and content analysis. Community relations issues were explored in all the datasets, and there was also a specific set of interviews which focused on this issue.
In the outline of research methods which follows, numbers in brackets refer to the objectives listed in paragraph 1.2 which were covered using particular techniques. The interview schedules used are available on request.

i) Interviews with service providers:

In addition to NASS and the Scottish Asylum Seekers Consortium, this group of interviews covered a wide range of agencies, including social work, housing, education (including community education), health, police, voluntary sector groups, and legal services, which were providing services to asylum seekers. For these agencies, interviews at managerial level, as well as front line worker level were conducted, in order to explore policy, practice and experience in the implementation of the Act. Thirty two interviews were completed in total.

These interviews explored
- the impact of the Act on these services, with reference to policy, practice and experience (1).
- links and co-ordination between the various services (2), including access to interpreting services (4) and effectiveness or otherwise of multi-agency working (2).
- examples of good practice under the Act (8) (good practice will also be examined from other points of view - see below).
- the impact of media (5), and
- issues of community relations (5).

ii) Interviews with asylum seekers:

Sixty three adult asylum seekers were interviewed, forming a representative sample of the population in terms of ethnicity, gender, age and household composition (3). These interviews concentrated on the asylum seekers’ own perceptions and experiences. They were conducted in the respondent’s own preferred language, using professional interpreters in 12 cases.

The topics covered in these interviews included
- what services had been used, and specific exploration of the services received and their effectiveness (3), (6),
- experiences of community life, including community relations (5),
- experiences of using interpreters (4),
- respondents’ qualitative assessments of the services they had used, to contribute to the identification of good practice (8), (2).

iii) Comparative work on good practice (8), (2):

1 Children were excluded from the study because of difficulties of consent, and the long timescale required to involve children in research.
2 A sampling frame was developed, based on the known structure of the asylum seeker population in Glasgow, and quotas were set to ensure coverage of the various categories identified. Variation in terms of nationality, gender, household composition and age were covered. Additionally, respondents were contacted across the city, to ensure a reasonable residential spread.
To assist in the identification and assessment of good practice, a small comparative exercise was undertaken, involving the collection of information from service providers in other UK towns and cities which host asylum seekers. The Oxford Brookes team provided relevant material for this part of the work. We explored the relevance of examples of good practice identified in this way for the Scottish context.

iv) Media monitoring and content analysis (5):

In order to provide context for the study, and to explore potential media impacts while the study was in progress, media coverage was monitored through the period of research by systematic review (using the Lexis-Nexus database) and content analysis of a sample of media coverage. All interviewees were asked about their views on the role of the media.

v) Community relations interviews (5)

Community relations issues were covered in all the interviews with stakeholders, as noted above. In addition, nine interviews were carried out with local community organisations based in areas in which asylum seekers are living. They were asked for their assessments and experiences of community relations, drawing on their knowledge of community networks and activities.

vi) Work with other authorities (9)

During the course of the research, three other Scottish local authorities were in the process of negotiating contracts with NASS, as the dispersal policy continued. These authorities were proceeding in ways which attempt to learn lessons from the experiences of other authorities, including Glasgow, and authorities elsewhere in the UK. Key personnel in each of these three authorities were interviewed about their preparations for the arrival of asylum seekers and particularly how these drew on experiences elsewhere, learning from existing good practice.

vii) Stakeholder seminar

Following identification of the key issues in the initial draft of the report, a stakeholders seminar was held to review the main issues emerging from the draft findings and provide an opportunity for stakeholders provide feedback for the final report. Representatives of service providers from the statutory and voluntary sectors were invited, as were asylum seeker representatives.

1.5.2 Data analysis

Data were managed using SPSS for quantitative data and NUD.IST for qualitative data. Both types of data were combined using NUD.IST, to produce complementary analyses.

Analysis of quantitative data concentrated on producing descriptive statistics on the topics covered by the interviews. Relevant cross tabulations were carried out as noted in the report, but complex statistical analysis was not appropriate because of the size of the sample.
The qualitative data allowed interview topics to be explored in depth, and for the operation of services under the Act and their effectiveness or otherwise to be comprehensively analysed. Questions explored in the analysis of interview data included:

- The impact on services of the dispersal policy and the support system (1);
- Multi-agency working (2);
- The experiences and expectations of asylum seekers (3);
- The effectiveness of a range of services, as listed, including particularly interpreting, legal aid, legal representation (4);
- English language teaching and FE issues (4);
- Perceptions of the role of the media (5);
- Community relations issues, including harassment, but also positive community relations (5);
- Gaps and potential improvements in provision, in the changing policy context (6);
- More detailed questions such as the effect of local concentration, or the potentiality for homelessness (7).

Analysis and identification of good practice (2, 8) involved triangulation of data from the service provider and asylum seeker interviews, examining their various perspectives on good practice. These were also considered in relation to the comparative work on good practice from other parts of the UK, with a view to identifying best practice in Scotland, as well as any lessons from elsewhere.

The media monitoring (5) provided a systematic record of the media context in which the research had been conducted. Analysed with reference to the comments of interviewees, it also permitted a basic assessment of the impact of media coverage during the period of the research.

**1.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The research covered a high profile issue, and a most vulnerable population. It was conducted in accordance with the British Sociological Association’s Statement of Ethical Practice, maintaining confidentiality of information, anonymity and protection from harm for respondents. The asylum seekers interviewed were in a particularly vulnerable position, and careful negotiation was essential to ensure genuine informed consent.

All our respondents were assured that none of their comments would be attributed to them as individuals. To protect confidentiality as far as possible, we do not include a list of service provider respondents.
CHAPTER TWO: DISPERSAL IN SCOTLAND – ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

2.1 NATIONALITY, ASYLUM AND IMMIGRATION LEGISLATION

The 1999 Asylum and Immigration Act dealt specifically with asylum procedures and support for asylum seekers. It was amended by the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, which received Royal Assent on 7 November 2002. Many of the measures contained within the NIA Act were initially introduced in the Government’s White Paper ‘Secure Borders, Safe Haven’ (published in February 2002). Some changes have already come into force and others will be implemented during 2003.

In this section, we outline the main provisions of the 1999 Act, and the amendments introduced by the NIA Act of 2002 to provide the legislative background against which Scottish service agencies are working.

The key elements of the 1999 Act were:

- The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) was set up within the Home Office. NASS is a UK agency which co-ordinates support for asylum seekers, until a decision is made about their asylum claim. This new agency took over tasks which had previously been the responsibility of local authorities, and set up a new UK framework of support to replace them.

- The Act provided for asylum seekers to receive support in the form of vouchers, which could be used to buy goods in designated shops. These proved extremely unpopular, and have since been discontinued.

- ‘No-choice’ dispersal was introduced, to reduce pressure on the South East and London. NASS entered into contracts with local authorities and other housing providers across the UK to provide accommodation for asylum seekers.

- The powers of Immigration Officers were increased, to include entry, search and arrest.

The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act (2002) reflects the twin aims of UK asylum policy, namely, to ensure that migration to the UK is controlled, and to provide refuge for those deemed to be fleeing persecution and in danger of their lives. Provisions in the new Act aim to:

- set up an effective end-to-end system of induction, accommodation and removal centres to speed up the asylum process, improve contact management and tackle widespread abuse;
- maintain the integrity of the UK’s borders by ensuring that our immigration controls are robust enough to exclude those who are an immigration or security risk, but are efficient, flexible and responsive enough to allow the high number of legitimate passengers to the UK to pass through quickly;
- tackle fraud, people trafficking, illegal working; and
- update nationality laws and modernise the acquisition of citizenship.
The NIA Act forms part of the most ambitious overhaul of asylum, immigration and nationality policy for a generation, being taken forward in parallel with other Government immigration reform, including:

- radical expansion of legal migration routes into this country, including doubling the number of work permits and opening up new routes for low skilled and seasonal labour;
- accepting refugees through the UNHCR, by-passing the claims system in this country and sidelining the people traffickers; and
- a ground-breaking deal with the French government which is resulting in UK immigration controls on French soil, increased security around the Channel Tunnel and the closure of the Sangatte camp.

2.2 DISPERSAL IN SCOTLAND: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF NASS AND SASC

2.2.1 NASS
NASS is a UK-wide organisation with its headquarters in Croydon. As noted above, its primary role under the Act is to co-ordinate support for asylum seekers, until a decision is made about their asylum claim. Asylum and immigration are reserved matters for the Westminster Parliament and in practice, decision-making within NASS has remained highly centralised. Although there has been some decentralisation during 2002 (with staff numbers in Scotland growing from one in the early part of this year to eleven by June 2002), the Scottish manager continues to be accountable to a line manager in Croydon. Glasgow City Council and the other organisations that have a contractual relationship with NASS negotiate directly with Croydon, with the role of the Scottish NASS manager being to monitor the ‘wraparound’ aspects of the contract. The Scottish manager also monitors the enabling role of SASC (see below), provides its funding, and monitors the SASC business plan.

2.2.2 The Scottish Asylum Seekers Consortium
The Scottish Asylum Seekers Consortium (SASC) was set up in 1999 to manage and monitor the commissioning and provision of services for asylum seekers, including accommodation and other services.

The Consortium facilitates partnership working amongst all organisations which support asylum seekers. It aims to help plan, co-ordinate, monitor and evaluate the commissioning and provision of short and long term accommodation for asylum seekers in Scotland and to establish a forum for local authorities to agree contractual terms with accommodation providers.

SASC is not legally constituted, and therefore does not have status in law. It assists in the contractual negotiations between NASS and local authorities in Scotland but does not contract directly with NASS on behalf of these bodies

SASC also plays a key role in work to counter the myths asylum seekers spread by some sections of the media, using its media strategy and its News Monitor provides a monthly review of the media coverage of asylum issues.
The Consortium structure has four elements. These are:

- **Stakeholders Group**, including housing and health agencies, voluntary organisations including refugee groups, national and local government. This provides a forum to hold the Consortium accountable for its work, set up support and service delivery strategies across Scotland and monitor decisions of the Executive Group and the Project Team;

- **Executive Group**, consisting of nominees from housing, social work, education, health and the police and representatives of the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations and the Scottish Refugee Council. This provides a policy link with NASS, the Scottish Executive, COSLA and other agencies. It identifies needs for policy development, shared operational guidance and inter-authority protocols, as well as managing the Project Team;

- **Scottish Project Team** is developing the overall Scottish policy for resettlement of asylum seekers and clarifying the legal and constitutional issues. It has systems for contracting, monitoring and evaluating providers and commissioning accommodation and support services. It gathers and publishes statistics and operates a media strategy;

- **Multi-Agency Groups** are local forums, involving voluntary organisations, refugee groups and refugee communities. They advise the Project team on issues relating to the housing and support needs of asylum seekers and refugees, and maintain links with local communities. They prepare the multi-agency plans for receiving and supporting asylum seekers and refugees under the leadership of the relevant local authority or consortium.

### 2.3 ROLE OF THE SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE IN RELATION TO DISPERSAL

Asylum and immigration are reserved matters, responsibility for which resides at Westminster. However, the recognition that asylum seekers also interact with devolved services such as education, health and social work, alongside the Scottish Executive’s responsibility to address the needs of those asylum seekers who have been granted refugee status, has led the Executive to begin to develop policies and strategies in relation to both asylum seekers and refugees.

To assist in this process, the Scottish Refugee Integration Forum was established in January 2002 with the following remit:

- In partnership with the Scottish Executive, and in consultation with the wider public and voluntary sector interests, to develop action plans to enable the successful integration of refugees in Scotland and the provision of more accessible, co-ordinated and good quality services.

The Forum is also expected to:
- Consider all matters necessary to assist refugees to integrate into life in Scotland
- Collect and disseminate examples of good practice from around the country
- Play a key role in promoting positive images of refugees as members of society.

(SRIF 2003)

The Forum is chaired by the Minister for Social Justice, and was set up by Scottish Executive to allow Scotland’s statutory and voluntary agencies to work in partnership to support refugees more effectively. The Forum set up six Satellite Groups which took evidence from a wide range of sources and developed draft action plans. A combined Draft Action Plan went
out to consultation in autumn 2002. The final Action Plan (reflecting feedback from the consultation exercise) is expected to be published in February 2003.

2.4 KEY AGENCIES INVOLVED IN DISPERSAL

2.4.1 Glasgow City Council

The major provider of accommodation for asylum seekers in Scotland is Glasgow City Council which has contracted with NASS to provide 2,500 units per year over 5 years, from April 2000. The Council has set up the Glasgow Asylum Seeker Support Project (GASSP) in partnership with Police and Health providers. This project has dedicated Education, Police and Health staff at its base and has operational staff with both Housing and Social Work backgrounds. GASSP staff aim to ensure that asylum seekers access Health and Education services and provide information and advice on local resources. GASSP also has a dedicated resettlement team whose role is to assist asylum seekers when they receive a decision in relation to their refugee status. The Council has also issued a Code of Guidance and Good Practice for its staff in other Departments.

2.4.2 YMCA

YMCA Glasgow entered into a separate contract with NASS to provide accommodation to asylum seekers at its property in Balornock. This came into force in April 2000 and, like the GCC contract, is for five years. The initial contract was to offer full-board accommodation, but since July 2002 has been fully self-catering. A 24 hour support service is provided, to deal with any of the many issues that asylum seekers are faced with, along with a drop-in centre with Internet Café, children's play area, coffee bar and study area, volunteering opportunities, English classes with Glasgow North College, a music group with Northern Rock, English tutorials, a women's group and regular residents' consultations. A Settlement and Integration Project, funded through the European Refugee Fund, provides mentoring support and workshops for people with a positive decision; a skills audit is being carried out in order to explore opportunities for training, placements and voluntary work for residents. Those staying at the YMCA are single men and women, couples and families.

2.4.3 The Scottish Refugee Council

The Scottish Refugee Council is the national non-governmental organisation in Scotland for refugees. It has three main areas of activity:

- Providing advice, information and assistance to asylum seekers and refugees in Scotland.
- Promoting a strategic response to refugee needs.
- Campaigning to ensure that Scotland plays its role meeting the UK's legal and humanitarian obligations under the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees.

The SRC employs 2 operational teams to deliver services to refugees:

- Settlement and Integration Team. This is focused on development work with other agencies and community groups promoting refugee integration and settlement. It contributes to strategic planning at Scottish/UK level. It also provides specialist advice, training and support to other Scottish Refugee Council staff and external agencies.
• *One Stop Service* – This provides a generic advice and advocacy service to dispersed asylum seekers and refugees. It co-ordinates and develops voluntary sector support in collaboration with the Settlement and Integration Team. It also monitors the impact of the NASS dispersal system on the human rights and welfare of asylum seekers to facilitate advocacy and campaigning. The One Stop Service is funded by NASS and was set up in March 1999. The current grant agreement expired on September 31st 2002 but confirmation has been received of a further 3 years funding until September 2005. The SRC’s core funding comes not from NASS but from other public funding sources, including Glasgow City Council.

**2.5 ROLE OF OTHER AGENCIES**

A very diverse range of other organisations is also involved in providing services for asylum seekers but these organisations have no contractual relationship with NASS. They include legal agencies, interpreting services, welfare agencies, community-based organisations, advocacy services, and religious bodies (including Christian, Muslim and Sikh organisations). The sheer diversity of these organisations makes it impossible to make generalised comments about their role, remit or funding. As far as possible, however, an attempt has been made within the present study to represent as wide a range of their views and experience as possible.
CHAPTER THREE: THE IMPACT OF DISPERAL – SERVICE PROVIDER PERSPECTIVES

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will explore the ways in which the dispersal of asylum seekers to Scotland has impacted on a wide range of central and local government departments, non-governmental organisations, voluntary organisations, community and religious groups who are involved in the provision of services. This will involve discussion of the following areas:

- The impact on agency policy and provision of services.
- Meeting the needs of asylum seekers
- Problems faced by asylum seekers
- The role of interpreters
- Collaborative work
- Community reaction
- General views on service provision.

The chapter is based on interviews with 32 individuals from agencies and organisations which have been involved in providing services to asylum seekers in Glasgow. As noted in Chapter One, included within this sample, in addition to NASS and the Scottish Asylum Seekers Consortium, are social work, housing, education (including community education), health, police, voluntary sector groups, and legal services. In that sense, the sample is a balanced and broadly representative one. Given, however, that the main aim of this part of the research was to explore policy, practice and experience in the implementation of the Act, the primary consideration in compiling the sample was to ensure that the experience and perspectives of those who have been most centrally involved in working with asylum seekers were included. In addition, to ensure that the research was reflecting different experiences and perspectives within agencies as well as between agencies, interviews were normally conducted at both managerial level and frontline worker level. The sample is therefore best described as a purposive one, compiled on the basis of extensive discussions both with the Research Advisory Group and also an informal Stakeholders Group.

For these respondents to feel able to speak freely about asylum seeker policy and practice within their own agency, in other agencies and more generally, it was necessary to guarantee complete confidentiality in respect of their contributions. A drawback of this is that it has not possible within this chapter to attribute particular remarks to particular individuals, something that would have usefully highlighted issues for specific agencies. On the other hand, the guarantee of confidentiality undoubtedly meant that respondents were able to provide much fuller - and sometimes more critical - responses than would otherwise have been the case.

3.2 THE IMPACT ON POLICY AND PROVISION OF SERVICES

In considering the impact of dispersal policy on service providers in Scotland, two factors are of particular significance. First, and most important, is the fact that under the devolution, settlement, immigration and asylum policy is a reserved matter, responsibility for which remains with the Westminster Parliament. Dispersal policy has been implemented by NASS in Croydon through contracts with Glasgow City Council and the YMCA and through grant funding to the Scottish Refugee Council. In practice, the implications of this way of implementing policy appear to have been threefold:
i) There seems to have been a very high degree of centralisation, particularly in the early stages of dispersal, with responsibility not only for general interpretation of policy but also for detailed individual decision-making (for example, in relation to an asylum seeker’s vouchers not arriving) remaining at Croydon;

ii) There seems to have been a strong initial perception amongst key service providers who were not party to the contract with NASS that the impact of dispersal policy on their services would be minimal, since there would be provision within the NASS contract with Glasgow City Council for addressing the basic needs of asylum seekers. This perception was strengthened by the fact that no additional funding was provided for key services such as police and social work;

iii) For reasons noted in the previous chapter, the role of the Scottish Executive in shaping or responding to developments, particularly in the early stages of dispersal, was minimal, though this has changed over the past year. This context is important in understanding many of the issues discussed below, including the difficulties experienced in dealing with NASS, the lack of preparedness of services to deal with asylum seekers, and the huge demands made on existing resources by the arrival of large numbers of asylum seekers.

Second, dispersal policy has brought many mainstream service providers in Glasgow into contact with asylum seekers for the first time. Prior to the Act, the relatively small number of asylum seekers and refugees in Glasgow meant that, while there was a degree of expertise in some services as a result of them either having a specialist remit or having responded to the needs of earlier groups of refugees (such as people from Kosovo), other service providers had no such experience. Not surprisingly then, the expression ‘steep learning curve’ was one which frequently recurred in interviews with service providers. This section will attempt to evaluate the impact of the Act on service providers – mainstream, specialist and newly-created services, posts and projects. This will involve exploring the impact of the 1999 Act on these service providers in respect of both policy and service provision, in terms of scale, nature of services provided and the way in which these services are delivered.

3.2.1 The impact on policy
In considering the impact of the Act on policy towards asylum seekers, it is useful to distinguish between the impact of the key policy change introduced by the Act itself – dispersal – and the subsequent impact of that policy on the policies of service providers.

3.2.1.1 Impact of Dispersal policy
Both positive and negative aspects of dispersal policy were identified.

a) Positive aspects

Financial gains. Glasgow City Council has benefited financially from the arrival of asylum seekers, principally in terms of new capital becoming available for old void housing stock, which would otherwise have deteriorated.

Increased employment. Jobs have been created (and saved) within several Glasgow City Council Departments, within voluntary organisations and within black and ethnic minority communities. As an example, refurbishment of houses for asylum seekers has resulted in 50 new jobs being created by Blindcraft.
Educational benefits. Glasgow schools have been kept open which would otherwise have closed due to low numbers. In addition, the high level of educational motivation of asylum seeker children was identified as having had a motivating effect on other children. Changed funding structures now allow for the payment of childcare costs to enable asylum seekers to access English language classes. One respondent summed up the overall impact as follows:

*The children here now have a new enthusiasm for education. Local children offer support with language to the asylum seeker children which has helped them to develop their own language skills. Another positive effect has been in homework production, the local children see that the asylum seeker children have progressed because they do homework, and in turn, receive praise and encouragement. This has encouraged local to children to follow the asylum seeker example.*

Addressing skills shortages. The fact that asylum seekers were generally well educated and skilled was seen as potentially significant in terms of addressing Scotland’s present and future skill shortages.

Increased ethnic diversity. Overall, Glasgow was seen as now ‘a richer place in terms of its ethnic mix’. For example, Farsi is now a significant language in Glasgow. Describing the impact of dispersal in one area of the city, one respondent felt that

*The people of [this area] have long had low self-esteem about their social position. I believe that they have a sense of common struggle between themselves and asylum seekers.*

b) Negative aspects

The scale and speed of dispersal. The pace at which both dispersal and the decision-making process in relation to asylum requests took place appears to have been much more rapid than key NASS partners and other service providers had initially anticipated. As a result, preparations to receive and integrate asylum seekers were often not in place. That lack of preparedness was exacerbated by an initial perception, noted above, that services to asylum seekers would be ring fenced and that there would be no major impact on mainstream services. A consequence of the resultant lack of preparedness was that additional pressure was placed on specialist providers.

Centralisation of NASS. The lack of preparation referred to above was exacerbated by the highly centralised nature of the dispersal process, leaving local service providers to respond in a highly reactive way. One respondent’s contribution gave a flavour of what this involved (as well as an indication of how things have improved):

*Dispersal changed things dramatically - asylum seekers were arriving on National Express buses in the middle of the night and then taking them to their flat was the only option. Now dispersals arrive at 6am, the asylum seekers are tired but at least it is daylight and if there are problems we can deal with them there and then. It has been a real learning curve.*
Impact of dispersal process on asylum seekers. The (perceived) highly bureaucratic and impersonal nature of the dispersal process was seen as creating problems not only for service providers but also for asylum seekers:

*It is much more problematic now because of the ‘no choice’ dispersal policy. Many families are divided which has created further problems for health care and social life. So much time is wasted by the bureaucratic system of the Home Office. Sometimes people's cases are due to be heard and their papers have not arrived up in Scotland yet. There have been cases when people have arrived here in Glasgow one day and have to be back in Croydon the next day for hearings. This creates intense pressure for all concerned.*

Other respondents also referred to the psychological effects on some asylum seekers of no–choice dispersal as a result of being separated from family and friends (‘for perhaps a second or third time’). The poverty and loss of status resulting from ‘no choice’ dispersal and voucher system were also mentioned.

Lack of preparation of local communities. A number of respondents identified the growth in racist incidents as one of the major negative effects of dispersal while others referred more generally to the impact of large numbers of asylum seekers arriving in very deprived communities:

*We didn’t anticipate such strong hostility, there wasn’t enough preparation work. The local community felt overwhelmed and there is still a massive amount of integration work to be done.*

3.2.1.2 Impact of Act on agency policy

As noted above, prior to the implementation of the Act, many service providers had had little or no contact with asylum seekers of refugees. As a result, there was often no policy or strategy in place to respond to the needs of the new arrivals.

*We didn't have a policy before. We've had to look at everything. We started from scratch, from the situation of knowing nothing.*

*Many service providers had to react and respond to the demand at short notice. We are faced with new problems and have had to learn as we go along, as it were.*

That said, there was a widespread perception that, two years on, many agencies, both voluntary and statutory, are now routinely considering asylum seekers in their planning and development programmes. Within primary and secondary education, for example, a system of bilingual and integrated classes has been developed which allows for the initial language needs of asylum seeker students to be addressed but avoids segregation and enhances the opportunities for integration. Two other areas which were referred to as evidence of learning here were improved multi-agency working (which will be discussed in more detail below) and also a shift in the use of interpreters within bodies such as the health service to the extent that it has become standard practice.
In addition, the appointment by the Scottish Executive of a minister with responsibility for asylum and refugee matters, along with the establishment of the Scottish Refugee Integration Forum to drive forward policy to meet the needs of refugees were also identified as positive developments, albeit seen by some respondents as rather belated.

3.2.1.3 Impact of Act on services (scale of provision, type of services, form of delivery)
While the impact of dispersal policy on services will clearly vary, all services had experienced an increase in their level of contact with asylum seekers which, in the case of specialist services such as the Scottish Refugee Council, had been dramatic.

The development of services was seen to have been hampered by a lack of funding, a lack of co-ordination, difficulties in communication with the Home Office and a lack of experience. Where services had received additional funding, such as education, they were often identified as models of good practice. As one respondent noted, however, ‘everything is still coming out of the same pot’ and this means that service development continues to be at best patchy with voluntary organisations, some statutory organisations (such as the police) and other services (such as legal representation) receiving no or very little additional funding. That said, there was a widespread view that, after a slow start, there has now been a significant increase in the level of service provision for asylum seekers. The decision by the Scottish Executive to award £700,000 of additional funding to Glasgow-based Social Inclusion Partnerships (with £500,000 going to Glasgow North SIP, including Sighthill) was welcomed.

In terms of the nature of the services provided and the way in which they are provided, there were wide variations between organisations which had traditionally been involved with ethnic minorities (and perhaps asylum seekers) on the one hand and those which had previously had only had limited contact. While the former experienced an increase in the volume of work involving asylum seekers, in some cases the content of their work was largely unchanged.

*We have always offered services to asylum seekers. We have had to adapt to the increase in numbers of people that come through our doors but no real changes to the way that we deliver services.*

By contrast, service providers who previously had only limited contact with asylum seekers, felt that the nature of the service they provided had changed significantly. One example is the police. Respondents noted that, with dispersal, there had been been an increase throughout the force in race awareness training and a greater understanding of diversity. In addition, investigating incidents with non-English speaking asylum seekers took up to three times longer than normal, not simply because of language difficulties but also, crucially, because of the need to build trust, given asylum seekers’ often very negative experience of the police in their own countries.

3.3 MEETING THE NEEDS OF ASYLUM SEEKERS

As noted in the previous section, the numbers of asylum seekers approaching agencies has increased significantly since the implementation of dispersal policy. Thus, a worker at a voluntary organisation offering advice, advocacy and support to minority ethnic communities might now expect to see between five and ten asylum seekers each week; a church group running a drop-in centre between fifty and sixty; an Asylum Support Team worker might see
up to 20 people in an afternoon surgery; between them, NASS outreach workers might make up to one hundred visits a week; while an agency like the Scottish Refugee Council which is centrally involved in dispersal might expect to receive up to four hundred and fifty enquiries each week. This section will look at how service providers attempt to address the needs of asylum seekers and at the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the services they provide.

3.3.1 The needs of asylum seekers
The provision of accommodation is at the core of the NASS contract with both Glasgow City Council and the YMCA. However, most service providers recognised that the needs of asylum seekers extended far beyond their basic need for housing. On the one hand, there was a recognition that asylum seekers shared the same basic human needs as everyone else, such as the need for friendship, a safe place to live, security, basic information and a decent income. On the other, there was an awareness that asylum seekers often have additional or special needs as a result of their particular experiences:

I would say that housing is their biggest need in the first instance but as time progresses their needs become more complex. They obviously need access to basic services like education and healthcare and legal services, but they also need access to recreational activities and perhaps counselling services.

In the first instance their needs are housing, however they also need healthcare and other services. Many of the asylum seekers have been victims of torture and need very specialist care.

Friendship. Somebody to guide them through the system, be helpful, find out things and go with them if they need it. English lessons, a family taking them home for Christmas dinner. They have unmet physical, medical, psychological and spiritual needs. And we need to have enough discernment not to be taken for a ride, for some will do that.

Mercifully they got rid of the voucher system, which was only equivalent to 70% of income support, but they still do not have enough money for a healthy lifestyle.

Reference was also made here to the need for legal support and representation in relation to the asylum process.

That said, not everyone felt that asylum seekers did have particular needs:

The only things that’s different about asylum seekers is that they’re awaiting a decision – otherwise they have the same needs and wants as everyone else.

3.3.2 Perceived strengths of services
Respondents were then asked to identify what they saw as the strengths of their service in addressing these needs.

3.3.2.1 Holistic approach
Several respondents saw the main strength of their service as being adherence to a holistic approach which valued the asylum seekers as human beings and sought to empathise with their experience:
We have tried to develop an holistic approach to service provision which enables us to be very flexible and allows us to offer clients full support, in this sense we can often extend support to clients who have underlying issues, which can often be overlooked by interpreting services alone.

Individual Officers bring their own life skills and it is how that comes across to asylum seekers and their families. It is an awareness and understanding of the issues and dilemmas that face the asylum seekers and the communities in which they live.

We try to provide a holistic social and psychological model of care to try and achieve optimum functioning in all areas. We have to think broadly from providing clothes to drawing a route map. Awareness of social factors that impact on everyday life.

3.3.2.2 Expertise
For other more specialist agencies, it was their accumulated expertise in the area of asylum that was identified as the main strength of the organisation:

We have a multidisciplinary team of professionals with expertise in social work, education, etc. therefore we have multi-agency knowledge.

We have extensive knowledge of refugee issues and experience in providing a range of specialist service. As a national organisation providing advice, information and assistance to asylum seekers and refugees in Scotland we are able to promote a strategic response to refugee needs and campaign to ensure Scotland plays a role in meeting the UK’s legal and humanitarian obligations under the 1951 United Nations Convention on Refugees. We work extensively with other agencies and government departments to improve and develop services to refugees.

3.3.2.3 Other identified strengths:
- The fact that Glasgow is one authority means that services are well integrated
- Integration of children into mainstream schooling
- Social and educational integration through ESOL teaching and the development of vocational classes:

  It became apparent to all the ESOL teachers that English lessons alone were not enough to learn the language and that integration with other students was paramount to their development and progression, therefore we developed the vocational courses to offer places for asylum seekers.

- Free legal advice and representation.
- Willingness to accept criticism
- Recreational support offered
- Interpreting services
3.3.3 Perceived weaknesses of services

3.3.3.1 Lack of funding and resources.
The major weakness identified by service providers – statutory, voluntary and community-based - was a lack of funding and resources, mentioned by more than 50% of respondents. One service provider summed up the problems in this way:

There is no specific funding for asylum seeker issues. Translation/interpreting is horrifically expensive. Community issues are still a major issue. There are still weaknesses around the initial reception of asylum seekers.

3.3.3.2 Relationship with NASS
The centralisation of NASS was identified by several respondents as a major problem. NASS now employs 11 members of staff as outreach workers in Scotland, but until April of this year, only one member of staff was covering the whole of Scotland. This, plus the fact that any problems or queries still have to be dealt with centrally, caused major problems in relation to the resolution of voucher difficulties; the allocation of houses (initially done by NASS); lack of notice of arrival of asylum seekers; and difficulties in legal representation due to delays in getting papers from Croydon.

3.3.3.3 Other identified weaknesses
- Legal support services
- Need for accredited training and development for people who work with asylum seekers
- Need for greater access to bi-lingual staff
- Difficulties in recruiting interpreters
- Barriers to access to ESOL classes and higher education

It would be misleading, however, to perceive all contact between asylum seekers and agencies as being primarily concerned with meeting the needs of asylum seekers. While the majority of service providers saw their role in this way, contact between asylum seekers and service providers was sometimes less concerned with meeting need than with ensuring that asylum seekers adhered strictly to the law in respect of both financial and immigration matters. In particular, the function of NASS is to provide assistance only to those deemed to be destitute (with the interpretation of ‘destitute’ narrower than that which would apply in respect of Income Support). Consequently NASS Outreach Officers combine what is seen as a pastoral role with clear control functions in respect of suspected fraud, whether it take the form of illegal working, fraudulent documents, or the possession of household goods. Not surprisingly, from time to time, this can bring NASS into conflict with other agencies whose role is primarily one of advocacy or humanitarian support and this will be considered more fully below in the section on collaborative working.

3.4 PROBLEMS FACED BY ASYLUM SEEKERS
Respondents identified the following as the main problems experienced by asylum seekers:

3.4.1 Racism and racial harassment
Racism was identified by several respondents as one of the biggest problems which asylum seekers faced, with three respondents seeing this as their biggest problem.
3.4.2 Social isolation
Several respondents also identified social isolation as a major problem. Factors contributing to that isolation included ‘no choice’ dispersal policy; language barriers; limited opportunities for social interaction; and poverty:

> As a result of the dispersal policy, people face social isolation, both from the host community and in many cases their own family who could be dispersed elsewhere.

Other respondents similarly saw ‘no choice’ dispersal policy as contributing both to social isolation and psychological problems:

> Family separation and emotional traumas resulting from this.

Restrictions imposed by the Act were identified by another respondent as contributing to their isolation and lack of social integration:

> They are not allowed to work, can't enjoy a certain lifestyle, live in the inner city area but can't afford to do anything. In order to integrate in the local community, asylum seekers need social interaction.

3.4.3 Waiting for a decision
Several respondents identified waiting for a decision on their asylum application as the biggest problem for asylum seekers.

3.4.4 Language problems
Language problems have been referred to above as one contributory factor to social isolation. However, several respondents saw language problems as underpinning many of the other problems which asylum seekers experienced:

> I think that language barriers are perhaps one of the biggest problems they face.

> 95% of their problems are language based.

3.4.5 Poor communication
Other respondents saw the key issue as poor communication in the early stages of dispersal between Glasgow City Council and local residents in areas such as Sighthill, allowing false notions to flourish concerning the benefits which asylum seekers actually receive:

> The problems in Sighthill were as a result of a lack of communication between the Council and local residents. There was economic jealousy. The locals were also annoyed at being called racist. The BNP arrived in Sighthill but were sent away with a flea in their ear by local residents. The answer would be to plough the money back into Sighthill.
3.5 THE ROLE OF INTERPRETERS

A major effect of dispersal policy has been to hugely increase demand for interpreting services in the West of Scotland. The Glasgow Interpreting Service, for example, indicated they now deal with between 700 and 800 requests for interpreters each week. This section will explore the issues that this raised for service providers and how they attempted to address these.

3.5.1 No use of interpreting services

A small number of service providers (3) indicated that they made little or no use of interpreting services. This was usually either because their staff were bilingual, in-house interpreting services were available or perhaps because financial constraints precluded their use. 15 service providers indicated that they had bi-lingual staff to work with asylum seekers:

- All of our staff are bi-lingual and speak most of the languages of the asylum seekers, but in some cases we have had to use interpreting services.
- We use in-house interpreters where possible.
- We rely on other asylum seekers.

In respect of this last comment, while reliance on other asylum seekers may sometimes be appropriate and/or forced on organisations out of financial necessity, it is clearly not appropriate where the matters under discussion are of a sensitive or a confidential nature.

3.5.2 Use of interpreting services

For those service providers who did make use of interpreters (22), the most common response was that interpreters were used whenever needed, which tended to mean (in the words of one respondent) ‘where the client has insufficient command of English to either explain their problems/needs or where language limitation inhibits the ability of the caseworker to communicate with the client’.

In addition to these general reasons, a more specific reason for using interpreters (as opposed to relying on family members) was also given, relating to the need for gender-sensitive practice:

- Some asylum seeker women can be culturally inept and dependent on their husbands to speak English. Domestic abuse amongst certain groups of asylum seekers is more liberal. This is a hidden crime. Women will not report this as their husband is usually the main applicant, and what would become of them if he was deported?

3.5.3 Which interpreting services to use?

There was some variation in terms of where interpreters came from. The Glasgow Interpreting Service (GIS) is funded by Glasgow City Council and is the main source of interpreters for local authority departments. The GIS is part of the SASC Stakeholders Group (referred to earlier in paragraph 2.2.2) and members of the Stakeholders Group who need an interpreter will be given priority by the GIS. Those who were not members of the Stakeholders Group or who had in-house provision tended to rely either on their in-house interpreters, on a range of private interpreting services or on more informal interpreters:
Whatever source is available at short notice. Some interpreting services need a week’s notice. This is obviously not suitable for people in desperate situations.

Wherever we can at short notice.

When we can find them, people willing to help. We can’t afford to pay interpreters, we rely on goodwill. The most valuable are the children who are picking up English so quickly.

The last comment highlights the need for proper training in the use of interpreters, since both previous research and accepted notions of good practice would regard the use of children as interpreters as highly inappropriate and even unethical, given the often sensitive issues which may require discussion. To say that, however, is not to underestimate the dilemmas facing organisations which wish to support asylum seekers but do not have the resources to ensure that best practice always applies.

3.5.4 Experience of interpreting services

As noted above, dispersal policy has led to a huge increase in the demand for interpreting services. At least one service provider expressed the view that the very narrow initial perception of asylum seekers’ needs – primarily, for housing – had led to an underestimation of their language needs. A common theme emerging from respondents’ comments was that initially, interpreting services had been problematic in several respects but had improved considerably in the past year, particularly in the period since increased funding had been made available to the GIS:

There were problems in the past but the system has been restructured by the stakeholders’ funding project. The service may still need some polishing but the service and standard of interpreters is very good.

The service has improved dramatically over the past year since GIS was refunded.

Patchy in places but the standard is fine.

One health service provider commented that

It’s not without problems but there are more that 800 requests per week.

Others were more critical. The three most frequently voiced criticisms of interpreting services in general was that they were very expensive; that they were unreliable; and that the quality was variable, with interpreters sometimes imposing their own interpretation on what an asylum seeker was saying. One respondent (whose organisation has moved towards developing in-house interpreting services) summed up these issues in the following way:

The quality of external interpreting has varied greatly over the past two years. Availability…and reliability remain problematic. In general there seems to be some improvement but there is little in the way of a quality mark in Glasgow. The cost of interpreting from private companies has been prohibitive in many
cases and continues to be beyond the budget of many organisations. There are significant difficulties accessing affordable services for written translation of documents.

Other respondents made similar points. Also, the recognition that interpreting is not simply a technical process but involves issues of values, politics and trust was explicit in the comments of this respondent:

My views have become more complex as time goes on. Sometimes the quality of interpreting depends on the interpreter's political views. I don't like to work with those that have other agendas. The asylum seeker may not trust the interpreter or may know the interpreter lives locally and they don't want their business to be known by others. Other interpreters censor what is being said, which I think is unacceptable.

3.6 COLLABORATIVE WORK

Most organisations seemed to share the view of the respondent who felt that ‘partnership work is the key to meeting refugee needs in Scotland’. In response to the question ‘Which other organisations do you work with that provide services to asylum seekers?’ most service providers were able to come up with a very long list, which included statutory organisations, NGOs, voluntary organisations, campaigning/advocacy groups and churches. Reasons for such contact included offering and receiving training; exchanging information; joint decision-making; joint lobbying over refugee issues. The sections which follow will identify the perceived strengths of such collaborative working; any weaknesses; multi-agency training; and the experience of making referrals to other organisations.

3.6.1 Strengths of collaborative working

The following areas were identified as strengths:

There can only be strengths in multi-agency networks. We have the benefit of strategic joint decisions. We exchange examples of good practice therefore we all benefit from the successes and are warned about the problems in advance. It also provides us with an external gauge of our own service provision.

A strength is that the managerial positions of the representatives means that decisions can be made there and then.

The collaborative nature of work. Sharing of information. Joint 'ownership' of the issues and sorting out solutions.

It took a long time to build up relationships. Now there is a better degree of trust.

3.6.2 Weaknesses of collaborative working

The following weaknesses were identified:

Extremely time consuming and can be frustrating.
A weakness can be the commitment to the group - often there are key representatives missing.

One organisation felt that it was limited in its ability to respond to all the demands made on it due to lack of adequate resources.

In general, multi-agency working was viewed positively by respondents. There were also tensions and difficulties, however, and these tended to relate to the following two areas:

i. Additional demands and expectations being placed on service providers, particularly specialist service providers, for information, expertise and support which the providers did not feel they had the resources to meet;

ii. Expectations of what is meant by good collaborative working, and specifically, the extent to which it should include or preclude criticism or advocacy. An example was the issue of unannounced visits to asylum seekers by NASS Outreach workers, part of whose role involves ensuring that asylum seekers are not receiving any goods to which they are not entitled under the legislation. Some organisations clearly felt that the way in which this role was being carried out amounted to harassment and intrusion, and the issue became public. Following discussion between NASS and voluntary/church organisations involved in meeting the material needs of asylum seekers, agreement has been reached that groups involved in providing asylum seekers with second-hand goods such as televisions or radios will now provide the asylum seeker with a pro-forma which can be shown to the NASS Outreach Officer. This arrangement does not, however, cover gifts from friends or other family members, whether in the form of goods or money.

3.6.3 Multi-agency training

One respondent succinctly summed up the potential benefits of multi-agency training as follows:

Multi-agency training promotes healthy debate and strengthens good practice across a variety of disciplines. Participants' feedback highlights networking opportunities and exchange of information as two of the most positive aspects of multi-agency training.

Specialist organisations in both the statutory and voluntary sectors were heavily involved in giving (and receiving) training to a very wide range of statutory, voluntary and community-based groups, again often without additional funding for this task. That said, the high number of respondents from different organisations (including church groups) who either did not comment on this question or felt that the question was not applicable suggests that there may still be gaps.

3.6.4 Experience of referral to other organisations

The experience of referring asylum seekers to other agencies seemed generally positive but with some more critical responses:

Referrals work very well, again depending on the problem.

In general they work.
Usually they come back to us looking for more help.

Sometimes the asylum seekers come back saying they did not get any advice or support.

One reason why some agencies have a more positive experience than others was suggested by the respondent who said:

*In most cases the referrals are very positive because we offer a holistic service, and as such, we accompany the client to the referral in question.*

### 3.7 COMMUNITY REACTION

Community reaction to the arrival of asylum seekers in deprived areas of Glasgow such as Sighthill was a major issue of media concern during the early stages of dispersal. One respondent helpfully set the issue in context by noting that:

*It is worth reflecting that in general terms the dispersal pattern for refugees has been determined by the location of void housing stock. This stock is generally within communities of multiple deprivation. This in turn has a radical effect on the communities, and the quality of life within them. Since affluent areas are rarely included in dispersal programs there is even less evidence available to compare the impact of race relations issues in different kinds of socio-economic areas.*

Most respondents similarly linked the issues of poverty, community fragmentation (in Sighthill in particular), and lack of information/inaccurate information to the initial community response:

*Sighthill is definitely a problem. It’s an area which has been used over the years by the Council for Kosovan refugees, foreign students etc. so it was very mixed anyway and not really much of a ‘community’. There were 600 voids before asylum seekers started moving in. So there needed to be lots of community relations work done.*

*There was a lot of resentment due to the perception that asylum seekers were queue jumping, getting better flats and new white goods whilst outstanding repairs amongst the locals were mounting. So in the beginning the community was hostile to the asylum seekers fanned by negative press reporting. There is always underlying tension and there is a small group of hard-core offenders who had been committing racist crime before the asylum seekers came to Sighthill. But the vast majority believes in live and let live. Many people don’t know the real reasons why families are here, they don’t know the horrific stories.*

This raises the question of how dispersal to these areas was managed and what measures were taken both to address the issues of poverty and lack of information/misinformation. Some respondents felt that Glasgow had lacked an overall strategy for information provision. While meetings between council representatives and community groups seemed to have
taken place in most areas, it was felt that where this had been done systematically, with the local community being made aware in advance of the arrival of asylum seekers, this had considerably reduced friction. In one area of the Southside, for example,

Where the local people welcomed the asylum seekers this was because they had been well informed before the asylum seekers came here. We had conducted several public meetings to inform the locals of exactly what the asylum seekers would receive in terms of services. We also had meetings to discuss the conditions that the asylum seekers had fled in their own countries, therefore when the asylum seekers got here the locals formed a welcoming committee to present the asylum seekers with clothing, packages, etc.

There was appreciation of the fact that areas such as Edinburgh and West Dunbartonshire appeared to have learned from Glasgow’s experience and adopted intensive community development approaches (though, of course, these approaches have still to be tested in practice).

Most service providers nevertheless felt that as more accurate information had been provided and as the community began to organise itself against negative perceptions, the situation had begun to change:

At first it was watch this space. The local community were watching and waiting. There was a nosiness. This is a deprived area and there was new furniture and white goods going into these flats. It has all been about re-educating people, discussing the project and through this there has been more acceptance.

In the beginning there was a lot of economic jealousy. But in the long run the bad publicity by the media had a good ending with the march to George Square by the local community consisting of both Scottish people and asylum seekers.

On the basis of the experience of the first two years, one service provider felt that the issue of community integration needed to be more consciously addressed:

As dispersal enters its third year there is an identified need, which is beginning to be addressed, which involves developing integration initiatives to tackle racism and xenophobia. It is important to ensure that, in all dispersal areas, community development formulations are used to introduce and support communities toward a greater understanding of multi-cultural living and the development of tolerance and inclusive communities.

3.7.1 Relations with local community
Clearly relations between service providers and local communities will vary widely, depending on the purpose of the organisation and its previous role in the area. One respondent helpfully set the issue in context:

On the whole we have a fairly good relationship with the community but we have had problems in Sighthill. There were many reasons for this. The
housing in Sighthill was substandard and many of the local residents had been demanding repairs for a long time. When they saw trucks for Central Services and Blindcraft arriving to carry out refurbishment on the flats for asylum seekers they were rightly annoyed. This coupled with the fact that there was never a strong community, or neighbourhood tenant's association contributed to the problems in Sighthill.

This respondent also felt, however, that some of the key local authority agencies now had a good relationship with these communities. Another respondent saw the key as being to build up relationships with local youth:

We have been trying to build up relationships with the local youth because these are the ones that tend to cause problems for others. The critical factor is alcohol. We may speak to them during the day and they are in a positive frame of mind, displaying a good attitude but come the night-time, having consumed a few bottles, they are at their most intimidating especially in a group and pose the greatest threat to everyone.

Given the absence of significant minority ethnic communities in some of the areas to which asylum seekers were dispersed, not all of the minority ethnic organisations had had much previous contact with these areas and so had little relationship with them.

One organisation which was perceived to have strengthened its relationship with both the host community and the new community of asylum seekers was the church:

The church population has been in decline in this area – some members of the church live in the local community but most are not all that bothered – we seem to be moving into a post Christian era where the outside world couldn’t care less. But since the asylum seekers arrived in Sighthill and all the work that has taken place since has made people realise the church is here. For some asylum seekers the church has been the only place they have been made welcome and found help.

3.7.2 Impact of media coverage.
There was near unanimity on the part of respondents that the media had played a particularly negative role in their coverage of asylum seeker issues, especially in the early stages of dispersal, and considerable anger was expressed by a number of respondents at the way in which the media were perceived as having made the situation worse:

The safety of the community is so important yet the press has been a constant bugbear... They created a climate of fear. They fuel people's opinions and put suggestions into empty heads.

The media whip everyone up into a frenzy. They rarely publish good news or positive stories. You can get frustrated when they publish articles without checking the factual content. We do a lot of positive work and that can set you back 6 months. It can also cause difficulties for asylum seekers. They've got a lot to answer for.
At the same time, it was felt that one effect of the media’s negative and misleading reporting of asylum seeker issues had been to bring local people and asylum seekers together in a bid to set the record straight:

Coverage last year around Sighthill galvanised the community into stressing that they are not racist and contributed to them building proper bridges.

The end result has been a good one but that was because the community united together against the negative image of Sighthill put forward by the press.

I would say that the media had a negative impact in the beginning, although more of the good positive stories are now coming through now as a result of campaigning and media monitoring done by organisations like the Refugee Council and ourselves.

In addition, since the events in Sighthill during the spring and summer of 2001, almost half of the service providers involved in this study had developed a media strategy for responding to coverage of asylum seeker issues which touched on the role of their organisation. An example is the set of procedures put in place by Strathclyde Police for dealing with media enquiries which includes:

- Daily monitoring of incidents where asylum seekers and refugees are involved so that a response can be prepared
- Establishing close links with press officers from partner organisations so that joint responses to incidents can be considered
- Daily monitoring of media coverage so that trends can be identified
- Identification of police initiatives directly affecting areas where asylum seekers and refugees are located to take a pro-active approach towards publicising them

3.8 GENERAL VIEWS ON SERVICE PROVISION

There was a widely held view amongst service providers that services to asylum seekers had improved considerably over the past year in particular. Several respondents made the observation that Glasgow is now widely regarded as having the best practice within the UK, while others made the following positive comments:

The services have improved dramatically in the last year or so. The services have always been there but are much more available now. More information is available - this has expanded as dispersal has expanded.

I believe that the services have improved, however most asylum seekers are not aware that they are entitled to them.

3.8.1 Examples of Good Practice.

When asked to identify what they saw as examples of good practice with asylum seekers, respondents suggested the following (with comments reproduced in full):
General
Joint working ventures are the best examples of good practice.

The Welcome Pack.

Inter-agency work is the best example of good practice.

The Multi-Agency Project Team is good.

The interpreting services are now doing a really good job.

The work of Glasgow City Council in terms of how they have handled dispersal. They approached it very much from the asylum seeker viewpoint. They provided excellent documentation and have been used as a model elsewhere in the country. Glasgow will be a model for the new areas.

Another example of good practice is the YMCA. They have struggled because of bad publicity and have been the focus of a campaign but they have also responded and tried to resolve the problems... Also, the Consortium does really good work.

Education
I would say that there are examples of good practice in every service sector, as each service has had to adapt to the increase in numbers. However, I think that education has succeeded in offering a very good service to children of primary school age.

Education has been the most successful.

Bilingual units in Education.

The schools. In this area the local children are well integrated. The headmaster is proud to have 'bilingual students'.

Our education department, they are on the ball. Bridging the Gap is fabulous, a great resource.

The beginner’s language classes run here.

The education services are doing very good work with children.

Health
The Primary Health Care process regarding registration for GPs, and medical screening by questionnaire to build up a picture of asylum seekers' medical conditions.

The primary healthcare trust is doing fantastic work for asylum seekers without financial support from NASS.

The surgery at Fernbank Medical Centre.

Fernbank Medical Centre has done fabulous work with asylum seekers.
Springburn Health Centre.

[The mental health liaison] team and the group programme. The asylum support integration team because they have an education and a health liaison worker in the same premises. Individual examples of good practice are the mental health staff in Glasgow who are prepared to listen to trauma.

Crime/Police
The NE police division visited Sighthill recently having been impressed by the police in Glasgow. This was cited as an example of good practice in the Guardian and London Times, I think. Excellent integration.

Also, there's the use of interpreters on police patrols, going round with the officer. The fact that there's a specialist police officer with a degree of authority and nous. And also, 3rd party reporting (referrals to the police via other organisations).

Victim Support do very good work with asylum seekers.

Employment
The Bridges Project, run by the Institute for Contemporary Scotland.

Voluntary Sector
There are many voluntary groups who do very good work because they are not restricted by NASS contracts and rules.

There are many examples of good practice to be found in the voluntary sector and in local community groups.

There are many examples of good practice in the voluntary sector and in the community groups like the Mitchelhill project in Castlemilk.

The Scottish Refugee Council Housing Advice Service - providing advocacy for refugees with housing providers. Education Drop ins - offering specialist advice on accreditation of overseas qualifications, career guidance, employment assistance. SRC Status advisors offer a family reunion service, which is unique in Scotland - a service which reunites close family members following a positive decision on an asylum claim.

Community
Castlemilk community project has been very successful in encouraging integration.

The local residents prepared a welcome for the asylum seekers, which was very positive.

Glasgow Student Action for Refugees runs the weekly food co-op.

The Sighthill Festival.

Public meetings with interested parties involving housing, police, concierge etc. explaining their different roles and raising awareness of issues.

These views are discussed in Chapter 8 (below).
3.8.2 Problems in Service Provision.
When asked to identify problems in service provision, opinions varied widely. One respondent felt that

*Dispersal works. We are able to provide people with what they need - good accommodation, education, social work, health. Any research that we've carried out shows that people are happy with what they receive. As we start to decentralise, that will lead to continuous improvement.*

By contrast, another commented:

*The list is endless: lack of funds, lack of cultural awareness and sensitivity, shortage of trained staff, community relations projects and lack of co-ordination between service providers.*

Several respondents identified the issue of lack of funds as a problem:

*Resources are limited. Many services have had to respond to demands by redirecting funds form their original remit.*

*There needs to be money made available for healthcare and pre-school provision.*

*Lack of capacity and long-term stability of projects due to short term funding.*

*Volunteers are burned out. There is lots of goodwill but there needs to be more resources.*

Respondents also commented on problems arising from contact with NASS and the Immigration Service:

*NASS has to be decentralised. Regional offices are underused. Similarly, the Immigration Office needs to be decentralised. We need to develop local support networks. There needs to be funding specified for asylum seekers made available to healthcare provisions. These resources are already stretched.*

*Wrong papers being sent out from the Home Office with the wrong information for instance not including dependants which affects the amount of money the asylum seeker receives...Not allowing asylum seekers to work while waiting for their claim to be assessed is demoralising...The unlawful detention of asylum seekers in prisons...Unlawful detention is an abuse of human rights.*

*There are big problems of unaccompanied children amongst asylum seekers. NASS information on children and families is often very poor.*
Problems relating to the early stages of dispersal were identified by other respondents:

*Glasgow is often regarded as having the best practice in the UK - but there's a lot more that we could do. There's no room for complacency - the contract will run for another 3 years. Reception is the weakest link.*

*Form filling, asylum seekers need more help with filling in forms. Befriending - what they need is a good friend who speaks English and can provide both morale support and practical help.*

Another respondent emphasised the key role of the concierge in the process:

*When they are first dispersed to the area, familiarisation is not good enough. They are not taken around the area. There is a lot of burden on the concierge systems who have had no training in race relations. Yet they could play a pivotal role in raising awareness of cultural issues. Inconsistency of role - some concierges are better than others and will contact the police if asked, others refuse.*

### 3.8.3 Gaps in provision

As well as being asked to identify any problems in service provision, respondents were asked to identify any specific gaps in service provision. Once again, views differed widely:

*There are gaps with regards to the indigenous population. Asylum seekers get better services than the existing, settled black minority ethnic population. Asylum seekers also benefit from more 'joined up working' than is the norm with services to other black/minority ethnic groups. In terms of specific services, the Children and Families area is rather stretched. Perhaps also day care for the elderly. But then maybe it's the same for everyone. Glasgow is generally under-resourced.*

*There are no major gaps.*

By contrast:

**Housing**

*Again the list is endless, housing. predominantly white led service providers which leads to cultural issues.*

**Education**

*Lack of pre-school education.*

*Access to higher education.*

**Community**

*The lack of community programmes which has led to the creation of ghettos in already deprived areas.*

*Building community relationships*

**Employment**

*Assistance with integration and access to education and employment for those gaining status.*
Welfare rights and how to assist asylum seekers into employment What is important to asylum seekers is feeling safe in the community and gaining employment to be self-sufficient. They want to work, to be of use.

**Translating and Interpreting**

We also need more translated material in the criminal justice system - if we need to serve legal documents then these should be in the person’s own language.

**Interpreters**

Other important letters from NASS should also be in the person's first language.

**Advice**

Lack of agencies involved in delivering accurate advice to asylum seekers.

Lack of legal advisors with knowledge of immigration law.

**Social Work**

Lack of services to work with particularly vulnerable groups i.e. single parents, victims of torture, young unaccompanied minors.

Social work and a befriending team...The biggest gap is a lack of a befriending agency - which should be a priority. People need friends and to plug into Scottish culture. They need an introduction to the culture and support while they try to get involved.

There is a great need for befriending. I read something recently that suggested mentoring asylum seekers and it was looking for volunteers in London, Manchester and Glasgow to provide up to 5 hours per month to mentor an asylum seeker.

**Childcare provision and care for the housebound asylum seekers**

On a more general note, one respondent commented that:

The whole thing is too thin – usually the quality is OK - it is the quantity that is lacking.

**3.8.4 Improving services.**

Specific suggestions for improving services included NASS decentralisation, better communication among agencies and more people and resources. Respondents called for an end to the problem of ‘passing the buck’. It was also suggested that there was a need for more attention to people with special needs and the need for training and resources for statutory authorities and the voluntary sector so that they can develop their services to these groups was highlighted. Better pre-school provision and easier access to higher education, perhaps involving a fee waiver project for asylum seekers were also mentioned.
3.9 CONCLUDING POINTS

Impact On Policy

- The dispersal of asylum seekers to Glasgow has benefited the city in the following ways:
  financial (new capital for old void housing stock); increased employment (refurbishment of housing stock, new services)); educational (schools kept open that would otherwise have been closed, high level of motivation of asylum seeker children); addressing present and future skills shortages; and cultural (‘richer ethnic mix’).

- Negative aspects of dispersal policy which were identified tended to relate mainly to the process of dispersal, rather than dispersal per se. These included: the scale and speed of dispersal; the lack of preparation of services; the perceived over-centralisation of NASS; impact of the process on asylum seekers; and lack of preparation of local communities. Some respondents also criticised the ‘no choice’ nature of dispersal policy.

- Dispersal had had a major impact on the policy of service providers, particularly those which had had little previous contact with asylum seekers. The development of policy had initially been slow, due to a failure to appreciate the ways in which dispersal policy would impact on a wide range of providers beyond the contracting partners. However, service providers were perceived as now routinely including asylum seekers in their planning and development programmes.

- The appointment by the Scottish Executive of a minister with responsibility for asylum and refugee matters as well as the establishment of the Scottish Refugee Integration Forum were identified as positive developments.

Impact on Service Provision

- Factors identified as hindering the development of asylum seeker services, especially in the early stages of dispersal, were lack of funding; difficulties in communication with the Home Office; lack of co-ordination between agencies; and the lack of experience of some agencies. While there was some evidence of improvement in all of these areas, lack of funding and difficulties in communicating with NASS were identified as ongoing problems.

- The impact of the Act on the way in which organisations delivered services varied. For organisations with little prior contact with asylum seekers, the Act had had a significant impact on the way they delivered services. For organisations which had previously worked with asylum seekers, the way in which they delivered services had changed less but as specialists in the area, the demands on their expertise had increased considerably, creating a ‘knock-on’ effect on their other core services.

Meeting Asylum Seekers’ Needs

- Asylum seekers were identified as having a wide range of needs beyond their immediate need for accommodation. As well having the same range of human needs – material, emotional, social – as Scottish people, they were also seen as having additional needs due both to their experiences in their own countries and to their position as asylum seekers in this country (e.g. need for advocacy, language needs).
• Strengths of services were identified as the use of a holistic approach; cultural sensitivity; expertise in asylum seeker issues; integrated services; educational integration; free legal advice and representation; recreational services; interpreting services; and openness to criticism and change.

• The major weaknesses identified by respondents were a lack of funding to address the needs of asylum seekers; relations with NASS; legal support services; difficulties in recruiting interpreters; and lack of accredited training and development for those who work with asylum seekers.

Problems Faced by Asylum Seekers
• Service providers identified the main problems faced by asylum seekers as being racism and racial harassment; social isolation, in part due to ‘no choice’ dispersal policy and restrictions imposed on asylum seekers by the Act; waiting for a decision on their request for asylum; language problems; and the effects of poor communication between key service providers and local communities.

Interpreting
• There was considerable variation in the use of interpreters and in views of interpreting services. Some agencies did not use external interpreting services, either because their staff were bilingual or because they had in-house interpreting services. There was a widespread view that interpreting services had improved since the early days of dispersal, due to reorganisation and improved funding. However, views on interpreting services continued to be mixed, with some respondents expressing the view that they were very expensive, unreliable and of variable quality with interpreters sometimes imposing their own interpretation on what an asylum seeker was saying. Agencies which could not afford to buy in interpreting services sometimes used family members, including children and partners as interpreters, which raises a range of problematic issues of appropriateness and gender.

Collaborative Working
• Multi-agency working was identified by many respondents as being the basis of good practice in work with asylum seekers.

• The development of multi-agency working was seen as one of the key successes of work with asylum seekers in Glasgow over the past two years. At the same time, difficulties in multi-agency working were identified, including the considerable time commitment it involved; lack of commitment by some partners; and the demands which it made on specialist agencies in particular.

• Respondents were positive about the benefits of multi-agency training, although again the demands that this placed on specialist providers were acknowledged.

• A particular challenge in multi-agency working involves managing the perceived tension between agencies whose role is primarily one of advocacy and support and those whose role primarily involves ensuring that the statutory requirements of the Act (including the restrictions placed upon asylum seekers) are adhered to.
• While most respondents were positive about the way in which multi-agency working had developed locally, this did not always extend to relations with NASS in Croydon. Several service providers strongly expressed the view that over-centralisation and the lack of a partnership approach (including an unwillingness to share information) precluded a fully collaborative approach.

Community Relations
• Factors perceived as having contributed to an initially negative response to asylum seekers in Glasgow included the very deprived nature of the areas in which they were placed; the high degree of social dislocation already present in these areas; a perception that asylum seekers were receiving a range of goods and benefits denied to local people; and the lack of a strategy for dealing with local people’s concerns.

• The media were seen as having played a particularly negative role in reinforcing false ideas and stereotypes. However, examples of more positive stories which have appeared more recently in the media were cited, which suggests that there has been some shift in the media coverage of asylum seeker issues.

• There was a widespread view that relations between asylum seekers and local communities had improved considerably over the past year in particular. Community initiatives such as the Glasgow North International Festival and the activities of Sighthill United Against Racism and Poverty were perceived as having played an important role in helping to change the situation.

Improvements in Service Provision
• There was a widespread view that services for asylum seekers had improved in both quantity and quality over the past year in particular and all service providers were able to identify what they saw as examples of good practice.

• There was some variation in response in relation to the perceived adequacy of current service provision. A small number of respondents expressed the view that services are now adequate and in some respects superior to those provided to local residents. Others identified the following gaps in services: the need for NASS decentralisation; lack of pre-school education; lack of befriending services; the need for official correspondence to be in the asylum seeker’s own language; improved legal representation; more attention to people with special needs.
CHAPTER FOUR: ASYLUM SEEKERS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we explore the views and experiences of the 63 asylum seekers interviewed for the study. These are considered against the background of the services that were available to them. Following a description of the characteristics of those interviewed, we examine people’s current situation, their expectations and experiences of living in Glasgow, their experiences of and views about service they had received, local community relations from their points of view and any processes of integration they were experiencing.

4.2 GENDER, AGE, NATIONALITY, RELIGION, LANGUAGES SPOKEN, LENGTH OF RESIDENCE

The sample included 34 men and 29 women. Only one person was over 50 years of age, and the others were equally divided between the 18-30 and 31-50 age groups. They came from a wide range of countries, predominantly Middle Eastern, African and Asian, with a small group from Eastern Europe. Forty three in total were members of nationality groups which included at least 300 people in Glasgow, and the rest from smaller groups. Two thirds were Muslim, with smaller groups of Christians, Sikhs and people who said they did not have a religion. A wide range of languages was spoken, with the most common being English (38 people), Farsi (15) forms of Kurdish (14) and Dari (one of the languages of Afghanistan, spoken by ten respondents). Eleven respondents had been in Glasgow for two years or more, with the majority (39 people) having been there for one year or less.

4.3 CURRENT SITUATION

Fifteen people said that all their family was living in Glasgow. Everyone else listed close family members from whom they were separated. In some cases, relatives were living in other parts of the UK, but for many, family members were still living in the countries of origin or, for some, their whereabouts were unknown. A picture emerged of separated families and loss of significant social interactions, as well an anxiety for family members and histories of tragedy.

My mother and father live in Afghanistan. I don’t know where my brothers are. My husband’s family are in Pakistan.....I have no contact with my parents or my brothers. My husband has heard some news from Pakistan, but not recently. (1201)

I am all that is left of my family. They were killed in Afghanistan. (1225)

All my family [are elsewhere]. Some of them are in Iraq and some of them are in England. (1233)

My husband and my other daughter [are not in Glasgow]. (3203)

My husband and my eldest daughter are in Afghanistan. Five of my children are in London. (3213)

3 Children, siblings, or parents.
Although many of the separations were due to the circumstances in which people had sought asylum, some had clearly occurred during dispersal, when families had been separated.

Many respondents had no contact with separated family members. This was sometimes due to distance, or to circumstances (such as imprisonment) which made contact impossible. In several cases, maintaining contact was described as too expensive:

*My sister lives in London. I speak to her sometimes, maybe once a month because it is so expensive.* (1203)

*I cannot afford to keep regular contact with them.* (1205)

Means of contact were telephone, letter-writing and in one case, e-mail.

### 4.4 OCCUPATIONS

Respondents had a range of qualifications, with 12 in professions such as teaching, nursing or medicine. Several (8) described themselves as students, and many women (18) as full time mothers and housekeepers. At least some of those who described themselves as students were referring to their current activity in Glasgow, studying English.

### 4.5 ASYLUM STATUS

Most people were either awaiting decisions on their requests for refugee status (42), or awaiting an appeal (11) – one of these people had been waiting sixteen months. Six respondents had been granted exceptional leave to remain\(^4\). Three people had obtained refugee status recently.

### 4.6 LIVING IN GLASGOW

**Initial Expectations**

For nearly everyone, their expectations of Glasgow had been either positive or neutral. Many respondents said that prior to coming to the city, they had had no knowledge of it.

*I had never heard of Glasgow – I thought it was part of England.* (1214)

Of those who had explicit expectations (17 people), safety and the people of the city were mentioned frequently:

*I had no expectations of Glasgow prior to coming here, but I expected to be safe.* (1202)

*Shelter for myself and my family, security and safety. Work prospects.* (1209)

*Freedom, peace of mind and safety for my family and me.* (3201)

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\(^4\) This decision (ELR) may be applied for following the failure of an application for refugee status which confers indefinite leave to remain (ILR).
I had heard that Scottish people are not racist and they welcome asylum seekers. (1213)

I was really excited about going to Glasgow. I heard the education was excellent. (1228)

It is a free country, which offers people freedom of speech, and everyone has rights. (3217)

Two people reporting negative expectations referred to the death of Firsat Dag in August 2001:

I was very afraid about coming to Glasgow because I heard that an asylum seeker was killed here. (1201)

We were sent by the Home Office, despite our fears about coming to live in Glasgow because some time ago in Glasgow an asylum seeker was killed. (3207)

Initial Experiences
Following arrival in Glasgow, many of the positive expectations were fulfilled, with safety and security being the strongest themes (mentioned 19 times).

The services are better here than in England. The people are very friendly. (1205)

I had a secure roof over my head. The people were friendly and the services were good. (1217)

The best thing is safety and relief from persecution. I like the city and the people are nice. (1231)

It was generally very good. We felt safe, had a comfortable home, a doctor and a good education for my son. (3216)

Friendly Scottish people. (2201)

For others however, arrival had been less easy. Sixteen people had negative comments, such as

It was very alien to us. People looked at us all the time because we are very black and different. (1219)

I was shocked because there were no good things. (1223)

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5 It should be noted that despite some perceptions, Firsat Dag’s death was subsequently found to have been a robbery that ‘went wrong’, one of two attacks by the same people on the same night. The attack was not one specifically directed at an asylum seeker.
Unfortunately, there were no good things. I was shocked by seeing the high rise buildings and a dirty city. (3212)

Many people described themselves as being worried about the future, and spoke of the anxieties of being separated from their friends and family, and from familiar surroundings.

I was very lonely. I missed my family. My sister was pregnant and about to give birth, and I couldn’t be with her. I was isolated from my family and friends. (1213)

We were strangers to the ways and customs here. This made us very conspicuous. (1215)

We were very isolated from everyone. We were alone with no friends. (1219)

Everything was bad. I was put in here and I didn’t know anyone. I was very lonely and afraid. (1226)

There were many references to the social problems found in Glasgow, including poverty and drugs.

The biggest problems were alcohol and drugs issues. There is also a lot of unemployment here. (1217)

Racism was explicitly identified as a problem by 18 respondents, several of whom described particular incidents they had experienced directly:

We experienced racial harassment, and my children were assaulted quite badly, and this continued for some time. (3213)

Later Experiences
Respondents were asked about the good and bad things about living in Glasgow at the time of interview, as compared with their initial expectations and experiences. Safety continued to be a central theme, and respondents also referred to friendly people and sociability factors.

Safety is the best thing. I feel better about my child's future. (1208)

We are safe now, and we have made some friends. (1219)

Things are better now we have met other Somali people. (1218)

I am more settled now, and I know my way about the place better. (1226)

Things are much better now. We have made friends and we are quite settled here. (1229)

At this stage of the interviews, 12 respondents commented on the services they were receiving, particularly education and health:

The education and health services are the best in the world. (1224)
The education system is excellent. Healthcare provision and other services are very good. (1227)

Good education for my children. The people are kind, and we feel safe here. (3210)

Thus on the positive side, respondents welcomed the security they experienced, in contrast with the circumstances they had left behind. As time went on, developing social relationships with local Glasgow people, and with other asylum seekers were increasingly important. The education and health services received much positive comment.

A significant proportion of respondents however were less content. Thirteen explained in detail that they continued to experience isolation and uncertainty

I am alien to this culture. I am isolated from my friends and family. (1203)

[I feel] isolation, alienation, and I cannot pursue my studies. (1204)

I am still uncertain about our future. I feel isolated from my family. I am very lonely living here without my sister. (1208)

I am isolated from all the people that I love. I don’t have news about my family in Iraq. (1226)

I still do not know what the future will hold for me. I feel I am being sheltered by a paper door here. (1213)

About one third continued to experience harassment and racism

I can’t go out at night because of drunk youths who taunt me with racist comments. (1213)

The racism is worse now. The house I live in is cold. This is a dangerous place for women and children to live. (1216)

There is a hatred against asylum seekers. There is also racism between ethnic groups. My biggest problem is social isolation and isolation from family and friends. (1217)

[We face] physical abuse of our children, racial harassment and vandalism. (3220)

There were continuing references to the problems of the city, compounding those of individuals.

Drugs, drink, vandalism, isolation and loneliness. (1202)

Racial harassment, drugs, drink, burglary. (3215)
These negative comments were partly to do with people’s own situation as asylum seekers, separated from family, friends and familiar culture and surroundings, and served to emphasise the levels of distress which many people continued to experience. Other problems, such as the inability to pursue studies or to work (mentioned by 2 people) were related to the formal status of asylum seekers under the 1999 Act. Other problems identified related to the local community, notably the presence of significant racism and a range of social problems linked with deprivation.

4.7 USING SERVICES

4.7.1 What services had been used

Asylum seekers were asked detailed questions about the services they had used in Glasgow, including their experiences of and views about service use. We also aimed to explore people’s understanding of the services they had received. It was clear that people did not necessarily understand who was providing the services, nor who was obliged to deal with which issues. Some of the initial feelings of asylum seekers using services were outlined by this respondent:

_We saw the asylum support team and the refugee council I think. I don’t remember too well. We saw so many strange faces. Everything was strange to us._ (1227)

Nearly all those interviewed stated that they had received services either from Glasgow City Council Asylum Support Team, or from the Scottish Refugee Council. Both these bodies were widely recognised as providing services themselves, and as routes to gain access to other services. Eight respondents specifically and spontaneously mentioned that they had received a welcome pack on arrival – whilst this may appear a small number, it is worth noting that many respondents had been in Glasgow for several months at the time of interview, and would not necessarily recall details of their initial service. Other services specifically mentioned at this stage included doctors (mentioned 12 times), legal services (16 times, with social work services, childcare, immigration, ‘council’ services, education and hospital mentioned only once or twice each. The initial highlighting of these particular services at this stage in the interview perhaps reflects their crucial importance for asylum seekers on first arrival. It is also worth noting that some respondents did not fully understand the concept of a service as an entitlement, but saw it as something to be purchased, reflecting custom in their home countries. Later in the interview, as we will note, it emerged that more people had used the services than mentioned them spontaneously at this stage, perhaps reflecting some of the uncertainty and lack of clarity which many people had about where services came from and who was providing them.

Four people said that they had received no services at all. It emerged that these respondents had arrived in Glasgow through the ‘spontaneous dispersal’ process (Oxford Brookes University 2003), i.e. they had not been dispersed by NASS, but had arrived in Glasgow independently. In contrast with those who were dispersed via NASS, these people had experienced great difficulty in gaining access to services, and had eventually received help via voluntary sector groups, which had served to refer them to mainstream services. There may be a key role for voluntary sector service providers here in humanitarian work with people who have slipped through the net of services in one way or another.
4.7.2 Advice services

On arrival in Glasgow, the first services encountered by most asylum seekers were advice services, which were set up to facilitate access to others (arrangements are outlined in Chapter Two). This initial advice and referral had come from the Asylum Support Team or the Scottish Refugee Council. Nearly everyone had been referred to an advice service during the dispersal process, though five had arrived there through other routes, such as via friends. One person thought that the services had contacted them – in the light of the comments of service providers, this pro-activity would appear unusual.

Responses to the services were mixed, with about half the respondents describing themselves as satisfied with the services, and the other half, relating dissatisfaction. Satisfaction referred to understanding, sympathy and helpfulness, as well as referrals for further help. One respondent who had used both services described the importance of this initial contact:

We had very good service there. The person that we spoke to was very sympathetic and understanding of our problems. (1209)

They told us what we had to do about getting a lawyer and doctor. This was very useful because we had no ideas what to expect, and it was good to see a reassuring face. (1227)

Dissatisfaction arose from a range of factors. For a few respondents, services had clearly fallen short in terms of quality:

This made us more confused. I was passed about like a rubber ball. This service left me frustrated, confused and angry. (1201)

I saw a young mother with children there – she was very upset. I don’t know why. I wanted to comfort her, but the young girl on the desk did nothing to comfort her. This was very upsetting for me. (1202)

This was very traumatic for me. I felt that they were taking over my life. They took away all my independence and told me how my future should be. They never gave me the impression that I had any choice in my future plans. (1203)

I mentioned my problem with harassment to someone…..and they were not helpful at all. They told us not to complain as we were kicked out of our own country and we should just accept the racism. (3218)

More frequently, respondents reported shortfalls in service which they explicitly related to resources. Long queues, long waits for appointments and lack of interpreters were described by most of those who had had problems with the services:

There is not much to say. They were very busy. I was kept waiting for three hours, and then I was sent away and given another appointment because they were short-staffed. (1204)

I was given help when I arrived here at first. But I had to wait for a long time for appointments. (1217)
The interpreters never arrived. We felt very confused. My wife was so upset, she cried for six months. We had to take her to a special doctor who knew about depression. He said that she needs special treatment. (1219)

We could not speak to them, as there was no interpreter present. (3207)

Many asylum seekers are disappointed by this service provider, as it is supposed to help us, but there have been many occasions when I have been told to wait for hours on end. I have also been turned away when they have been closed before my turn, and my wife has had to act as an interpreter for many clients who have attended. (3206)

These difficulties reflect some of the comments of the service providers, who described the pressure on the services in the early stages of the implementation of the 1999 Act. Many of the difficulties experienced by this group of respondents may have been a result of these early pressures.

Respondents who perceived the pressure that service providers experienced were generally very sympathetic towards them.

The service was appropriate, but it left me feeling very frustrated and annoyed. It was easier for me because I was on my own, but there were other people there with children, and their situation was much worse. Also, I speak good English, and I still found it very frustrating. This must have been much exaggerated for non-English speakers. The service was obviously understaffed and over-worked. (1204)

However, there remain questions about the ability of highly stressed providers to provide high quality, effective services. In the light of the personal situations in which many asylum seekers found themselves (see section 4.3), stretched services which rely on the sympathy of clients are a cause for concern. It was clear that many respondents continued to need support for several months, and that they were returning to the initial providers. In some cases, they were seeking support which the advice services did not have the power to provide, having failed to understand the nature of the services. For example, this respondent felt that the advice service should have helped them with police matters:

It is appalling – they don’t do anything for you. If your house is burgled, or you are harassed, they are asylum seekers’ only help, and they don’t do anything. (3218)

Such difficulties can only increase pressure on these services, and may indeed have arisen from the initial difficult period in which large numbers of clients were being seen rapidly, perhaps not receiving a full explanation of where to go for other services:

When I first came here I got good service, but I have contacted them since and received poor service. (1217)

One respondent made a strong suggestion about how services could be improved:
The people were very helpful, but they explained that they are over-worked and under-staffed to fully meet the needs of people in our position. I think it is outrageous that a service like this is under such pressure. There should be more money available to relieve some of the pressure from services that are under strain. I know that there are a lot of asylum seekers or refugees who would be willing to offer some of their free time to such a project. This would give the asylum seeker or refugee the opportunity to repay some of the debt they feel they owe to such a service. Therefore, it would be a two-way process between the services and the people who need assistance. (1209)

This comment is of particular significance for the reminders it offers that asylum seekers are not merely the passive recipients of services, or people who make demands on service providers. There is scope for greater appreciation of the potential resource within asylum seeker communities for significant community development and support – further comment on this issue appears in the section on community relations (4.9, below).

4.7.3 Housing services
Upon dispersal, allocation to a house is one of the first services received by asylum seekers. The majority of respondents (number) represented nuclear families. There were also four extended families\(^6\), six people living alone, six single parents, one childless couple, and the remainder were sharing accommodation with other asylum seekers, not necessarily of the same origin. For many households, members were missing. Either they were living in other parts of the UK or in other parts of the world, including countries of origin, or their whereabouts and safety were unknown. Nearly everyone was living in housing allocated under the dispersal process, either local authority accommodation or in the YMCA premises, and access to this accommodation had been straightforward. Seven households were living in privately rented accommodation, which they had acquired through personal contact with friends or family members. The search for privately rented houses had not necessarily been easy, and several people referred to the high price of such housing. One household had recently moved from a privately rented house into NASS accommodation. Respondents were located in various areas of the city. Twenty seven were located in the North and Eastern parts of Glasgow, including Sighthill and Springburn; 22 were on the Southside, including Castlemilk and the remaining 14 were in the West, mainly in Scotstoun.

Most people (46) agreed that their house was adequate for their family. However, there were some problems with the houses, with size being mentioned as the most common difficulty. Generally, this involved simply too many people for a small house. But for some respondents, there was a gender issue, in that the small house meant mixed-sex children having to share bedrooms:

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\text{I have a girl and a boy, so a two bedroom house is not big enough. (3218)}
\]

\[
\text{I have children aged between five months and 20 years old and they have a mixed gender, so the house is too small. (3220)}
\]

High rise flats were not well liked

\[
\text{I hate this house. I feel like a prisoner. (1221)}
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\(^6\) Defined as nuclear family plus other relatives.
There were several references to cold houses, to broken lifts which presented particular difficulties for families with young children and people with disabilities, and to what were seen as less than attractive neighbourhoods, echoing the comments on the Glasgow environment included in section 4.6. We explored whether any areas of the city were considered worse than others, and found that there were no significant differences. All areas had problems for some people.

A small number of people (12) were very unhappy with their housing, describing both the house and the service they had received as ‘not good’ or for some, ‘appalling’. Again, there was no clear relationship between area and these experiences.

Overall however, people were positive about the housing that they had received, whilst not necessarily seeing it as especially desirable or problem free. Expectations about housing were not apparently high. One woman living in a high rise flat with a frequently broken lift and several children, including one with a physical disability, expressed a widespread feeling:

    I am happy that I have a home now and that my children are safe, but I would like to move to a house without stairs. (1201)

Others expressed similar views:

    I am just happy to have a home. (1206)

### 4.7.4 Social work services

Only five respondents had received services which they identified as coming from the Social Work Department, increasing the numbers who had mentioned this service spontaneously at the start of the interview. Overall, respondents had little or no knowledge of social work services, and had not attempted specific contact with them. They did not appear conscious of the involvement of the Social Work Department in the Asylum Support Team and did not perceive themselves as using Social Work services.

Those who said that they had used the services were reluctant to give details. It is likely that this was a particularly sensitive area involving such matters as child protection, and it was not appropriate to press for information.

### 4.7.5 Legal services

All but one respondent said they had indeed used legal services. Access to good legal services was described as vitally important for asylum seekers:

    It is really important to understand what you are signing because this is my life. They are playing with my life. (2201)

In general, respondents were happy with the service they had received, whilst experiencing difficulty with delays in the system, and waiting for decisions on asylum applications. Two respondents had experienced difficulties with lawyers whom they did not perceive as having the necessary expertise.
My lawyer did not have any experience in immigration law, and he did not inform me of this until it was too late to change my representation. I felt that he could not defend me properly as a result. (3204)

In this connection, it is worth noting that in Scotland, solicitors can advise on any matters, and that therefore, all are free to take on work with asylum seekers. In England, this is not so, as a franchising system limits which solicitors can take on this work. The asylum seekers who had not received the advice they needed were few, but the potential seriousness of this issue should not be underestimated. These respondents appear to have ended up with inexperienced lawyers because of the pressures on the lawyers who did have the requisite expertise.

4.7.6 Police services
Fourteen people had had dealings with the local police, nearly all when they had reported incidents of racial harassment or burglaries. Responses to the service varied. Several respondents praised the police for the service they had received:

This was a very good service. The people here know you can trust the police. (1217)

[The matter] was dealt with appropriately. The police were very supportive of me. (1220)

There was some evidence that the local police had built a positive reputation:

I have had no contact with this service, but I know of others who have praised the work of the community police. (1209).

For others however, experiences had been less positive. In some cases, there was a perceived lack of help from the police:

My children were harassed a few times in the area we live in, and the police did not do anything, but told them to fight back. They did not do anything to help at all apart from take details of the incident. (3220)

One day I came home to find the window beside my door smashed. This occurred on more than one occasion. I told reception and we called the police, but they said they couldn’t do anything. I was very frightened, I didn’t want to stay. I didn’t feel protected. (2201)

Both these accounts suggested that in fact there had been little that the police could do, since the perpetrators had proved elusive, but also illustrated higher expectations of police activity. These were also demonstrated in some more general negative perceptions of the police:

We are scared, and the police don’t do anything to stop them attacking us. (3218)

A few people who have been insulted and reported the matter to the police were not happy with the help they got. They felt the police did not do anything to help their situation. (3219)
Only one person described what they felt was discrimination on the part of the police:

People from Somalia get accused of things that happen. Recently, a black man attacked a white woman. The police came to my door during the night to ask me questions. They said that the man was from Somalia and that they had to question all of us about the incident. It transpired that the attacker was from Kenya and not from Somalia, but the police assumed we are all the same. I believe that is discrimination. (1219)

Overall however, there was little evidence of negativity towards the police and none of fear of the police, which had been raised as a possibility in the course of the service provider interviews. Where people said that they did not want to involve the police, they generally explained this as due to a fear of recrimination from their attackers:

I was very upset when my bike was stolen by some young men. When I confronted them to get my bike back, they broke my wrist and I had to be admitted to hospital for an operation. I did not report this to the police, as I was scared of the consequences. (3206)

I was scared of what would happen if I told the police and whether the people who were harassing my family would insult us more. (3211)

These comments again refer to community relations issues, echoing earlier comments on life in Glasgow, and on experiences in some neighbourhoods.

4.7.7 Health services

Most respondents (51) had used health services, usually GPs. Most who commented were happy with the services they had received, and with the provision available. Health services had already been highlighted as one of the best things about living in Glasgow, and such comments were reiterated when people gave accounts of the treatment they had received:

The service is excellent, and I don’t experience any problems at all. (3220)

Six people had experienced a problem with lack of interpreters when visiting their doctors’ surgeries. Two raised gender issues – both these were women, who preferred a female doctor, especially for certain areas of care:

I have a male doctor, and I needed to know some details about birth control which I could not ask him. (1201)

I have a male doctor. I am not comfortable about this……I have no bond with this doctor, therefore I will hide things from him. I get very depressed and I cannot go out alone, but I cannot tell this to the doctor. (1208)

Neither the availability of interpreters, nor of female doctors appears to be intractable problems. They are matters of organisation and of sensitivity of service, neither of which is new to multi-cultural Glasgow, and it should be possible to address these problems. These issues are further discussed in the conclusions to the report.
4.7.8 Voluntary sector services
We noted earlier that voluntary sector services have the particular potential to attract and provide services for asylum seekers who have slipped through the gaps in mainstream service provision in some way. Of our respondents, eighteen had used voluntary sector services provided by smaller, community-based groups. A small number of respondents (five) valued the services they had received from these groups especially highly. Sometimes, they had come to the services having failed to contact statutory services, and in other cases, they had found the mainstream services (both statutory services and those provided by the larger voluntary sector organisations) unsatisfactory in some way. The smaller voluntary sector services that had been used were universally praised:

This was the best service I have received since coming here to Glasgow. (1214)

This is the only service I can trust since I came here. (1225)

The services that had been used included health advocacy, services for women and housing advice. Other areas of the data indicate that advocacy and specific sensitivity to women’s issues are gaps in mainstream service provision.

4.7.9 English lessons
Thirty six respondents reported that they or members of their families were receiving English lessons. Children were receiving these at school, and adults via various forms of provision, mainly through local colleges, or through the YMCA. In this section, we concentrate on the adult provision.

English lessons were popular, and several respondents were waiting for places. A minority of respondents (6) did not have access to the English lessons they needed – these were women with children, who were unable to arrange childcare and therefore unable to leave the house for lessons. Ten people in all raised the issue of lack of childcare facilities to allow attendance. One woman had commenced classes, but left, because they were mixed gender.

Apart from the access issues, classes were universally praised, and respondents reported that they were generally making good progress. Respondents commented that they enjoyed the classes, and several that they had made friends there. The lessons emerged as an important point of contact, highly valued by participants, and seen as crucial to integration.

I think the English language lessons are vital for asylum seekers, as it will help them to become a part of the community. (1217)

It is a very positive experience. I have made new friends here. [The] college is a great place, where no-one feels left out. (1220)

The lessons are very useful. It is liberating to be able to speak English well now. (1224)

There was only one case of bad experiences at the classes, that of a man who had experienced some racial harassment at the college. He had raised the problem with his lawyer, who had

7 Anniesland, Cardonald, Central, Langside Colleges were all specifically mentioned.
been unresponsive – the problem had not been raised with the college, as the respondent feared the harassment might worsen.

4.7.10 Schools
Initially, many respondents were reluctant to speak about their children, but as trust built up, made it clear that they were very protective of them. For example, there was a general reluctance to name their children’s school. When people commented on their children’s schooling, they were generally positive, emphasising the importance of schooling, the high value attached to education and the experience of mixing with other young people, and their children’s enjoyment of school.

This is an essential service. It encourages the youngsters to interact with other people from different cultures. This will help the integration process. (1215)

This has been a great experience for my children. They are happy here….They love school – it has helped them to settle down. (1230)

These comments reflect those of the service providers described in the previous chapter.

4.8 INTERPRETERS
When speaking about the services they had used, as we have noted, many respondents had used interpreters, and some reported difficulties in gaining access to interpreters. A section of the interview focused specifically on interpreting, to allow full exploration of the services and their strengths and weaknesses.

Interpreters had been used by a majority of the respondents (41). More often, the interpreter was a professional, but fifteen respondents described experiences involving friends or relatives as interpreters. In two cases, children had been used in this role.

Informal interpreters could be problematic. Respondents related incidences of confusion due to the rather poor language skills of informal interpreters, and expressed some concerns about confidentiality when using their friends in this way.

My friend’s English is not very good…..and you can’t always tell your friends everything. (3216)

The use of children was, fortunately, unusual, and is widely recognised as bad practice (see discussion in Chapter 3).

There were also some benefits in informal interpreters. For example, one respondent stated:

There are not many Somali interpreters here. We just help each other. (1218)

Having a formal interpreter present was widely appreciated, though the difficulties of needing to have an interpreter were highlighted:

The hospital arranged for me to have an interpreter when I was in labour. This was very useful at the time, although it was a bit of an imposition to have someone in the room with me. (1201)
Finding out about and arranging for an interpreter to be present were not generally under the control of the asylum seekers themselves. Interpreters tended to be arranged by the service providers. Doctors and lawyers appeared to have been most active in arranging for interpreters to be present. Asylum seekers had no choice of interpreter.

About half the respondents who had used interpreters were happy with the service they had received. For those who had experienced difficulties, the most common was that the service was unreliable. Frequently, interpreters had not been available (13 people recalled this), or had not kept appointments.

They are very helpful people generally, but they sometimes let you down at important times. There have been a few occasions when I requested an interpreter and they never appear to the appointment as agreed. (1201)

They were not reliable. They failed to attend my hospital appointment, which meant I had to make another one. (1211)

It was helpful when we had an interpreter, but when we needed the health services, most of the time we were not provided with a professional interpreter as it was too expensive. Also, our interpreter was not allowed in a few consultations. (3204)

The last comment may be indicative of difficulties among professionals with using interpreters, since the exclusion of the interpreter seems to have come from the professional side of the consultation. It suggests a lack of sensitivity towards the client, and a failure to appreciate the importance of effective communication during a consultation. A similar issue arose in a few cases in which a male interpreter had been provided in situations where female service users would have preferred a woman, for reasons of modesty and/or culture. Several respondents commented that they found using the same interpreter was particularly helpful, as they felt reassured about reliability.

Such problems appeared commonly to be due to organisational issues, or pressure on the service. As in the section on health services (4.7.7), there were also indications of a lack of sensitivity in service provision, possibly exacerbated by the pressures on them of dealing with large numbers of people with complex problems within constrained resources.

There were also some problems with the quality of the service. Particularly disturbing were issues concerning the professionalism of some interpreters

I was given an interpreter at the hospital who did not speak my language very well. This person was very rude when I tried to correct her on something that I had said. (1208)

Sometimes I knew that the interpreter did not say what I wanted them to say. They just agreed with the doctor. They didn’t realise that I could speak some English. I heard the interpreter say that I was over-reacting to my child’s health situation. They were suggesting that I was ungrateful for the service. (1222)
I think that some interpreters take the side of the service providers. (1229)

In all, eleven respondents were unhappy with the impartiality of the interpreters, feeling that they put the service provider’s points of view. Whilst such problems were, fortunately, experienced by a minority, they do serve to emphasise the importance of proper training for interpreters and monitoring of their work (cf McPake et al 2002:46).

Six respondents who needed interpreters had not used them. Two of these had preferred to make their own arrangements, but the others had experienced considerable difficulties. One woman had found herself trapped:

> The service providers have never provided an interpreter. This is partly because I cannot call in advance for an appointment as I do not speak the language. They say if I give them notice, they will provide an interpreter. (1232)

Another explained that her need for an interpreter was not always recognised:

> My English is quite good and I have been asked to be an informal interpreter for other asylum seekers. But when I am with the lawyer, I would prefer an interpreter to be there so I know exactly what is happening with my appeal. (2201)

These examples, whilst few, again illustrate areas in which the provision of services needs to be sensitive.

During the discussions about interpreters, some respondents raised a related, but different set of issues relating to communication. They noted the difference between interpreters, who would simply translate their words, and advocates, who offered additional support in the process of using services, and promoting effective communication. Some of them had had experience of an advocacy service, which was universally praised. This respondent expressed the typical response particularly eloquently:

> I didn’t really need an interpreter, as I speak very good English, but sometimes I feel I am not being listened to and in that situation it would be helpful to have an advocate with me. An advocate would be able to explain the professional terms to me and this would allow me to speak for myself. (1209)

In a related comment, another respondent compared the interpreting and advocacy they had experienced:

> I was uncomfortable with this service [i.e. interpreter]. There are many things in our lives that we cannot discuss properly with an interpreter. When we heard of [the] advocacy service, we were very keen to contact them because they speak my words precisely. This way I understand the situation better and I feel that I have a better say in matters that affect my life. (1229)

From these points of view, the development of advocacy services for asylum seekers appears welcome.
4.9 COMMUNITY RELATIONS

4.9.1 Safety and security
Asylum seekers were asked detailed questions about their neighbourhoods, and about factors which might indicate integration or alienation. They were equally divided about whether they were happy in their neighbourhood or not, and some areas were perceived as better than others. Other people described themselves as unhappy because of their personal situations, being away from their families and familiar surroundings:

I will not be happy until my family are with me again. (1204)

I am very lonely here – I miss my family and friends. (1207)

I like it here, but I am a bit homesick. (1221)

Safety was an important issue for many respondents, including some who were otherwise relatively satisfied with their homes. Many people expressed fear of going out at night, and explained that they did not let their children out of the house except to go to school. There were stories of people being attacked in the street, gangs of youths and harassment. These came from people who had been housed in more deprived areas of the city, especially in high flats, corroborating previous reports of difficulties in these areas. 29 respondents said that they felt threatened in their neighbourhood, and 11 of these described direct experiences of attack, mainly in the form of verbal abuse but also including four cases of physical attack, two of which involved children. One woman described particularly severe experiences of problems:

I constantly feel threatened here. I have my doors locked at all times. My house has been burgled three times when I was at home. I complained to the concierge and he did nothing about it. I would rather have died in Afghanistan. I don’t understand English, but I am aware by people’s expressions that they mean me harm. (1201)

Six people explained that they had reported problems in their local area to the police, and that they had been treated helpfully and with understanding. One person had reported an incident to a school, but had not found the staff helpful. Twenty-two people had not reported incidents, generally because of the fear of recrimination, which had been mentioned in previous discussions of using the police service.

I didn’t see the point in reporting the incident, as this could have exacerbated the problem. (1215)

I have been insulted before, but I did not report it. I was afraid of the consequences, in case the matter got worse. (3215)

For some people, the police inspired little confidence:

We are scared, and the police don’t do anything to stop them attacking us. (3218)
I felt it was useless [to report to the police] because a few people who have been insulted and reported the matter to the police were not happy with the help they got. They felt the police didn’t do anything to help their situation. (3219)

It is worth noting that the last comment did not derive from direct experience, but from a wider view of the police. It may serve to emphasise the importance of community relations work by the police force, and the continuing need to work to build the confidence of asylum seeker communities. It was clear in the previous chapter that the local police force recognises this at a strategic level, and that important work is being done.

Some respondents saw little point in reporting verbal abuse, accepting it as a minor matter:

Who would I tell? No-one will listen to this complaint. It is only names and that can’t hurt me. I would be wasting people’s time by complaining. (1206)

This stoicism has to be seen in the context of research evidence of the debilitating effects of constant verbal abuse, and the implications of such hostility for community relations. Virdee (1997:284-289) for example emphasises both the emotional impact of harassment and abuse for the individual, and the social impact of fear of leaving the house, self segregation and restricted interaction outside the home.

The theme of isolation was re-emphasised at this point in the interviews for many. There was a particular problem for some women, who commented that they did not go out alone for fear of attack, or could not speak English and therefore were unable to interact with others outside their families. For others, isolation was a means of self-protection. One respondent asked if they felt safe responded:

Yes, but that is because we keep to ourselves and mind our own business. (1212)

Twenty five people were living in areas where they had encountered no-one else who spoke their language. This was a little more likely to occur for people belonging to smaller nationality groups, but had also occurred for thirteen people belonging to large nationality groups.

These data overall indicate that there were significant problems of safety and security for many people. The data were explored in detail to ascertain whether there were patterns in the experiences – did they, for example occur more frequently in different areas of the city? Were women more likely than men to feel threatened? Were more visibly different people likely to experience more harassment? Did people with young children feel more vulnerable? Were there any ethnic groups who were more vulnerable? These investigations demonstrated that there were no significant differences between different parts of the city, between women and men, between visible and invisible groups, between those with or without children. There was a small association between Iranian and Afghan origins, and greater feelings of insecurity. This is difficult to explain, but may be linked in the case of Iranians to the more middle class origins of people who found themselves located in unfamiliar surroundings, and in the case of the Afghans, to the political situation in Afghanistan and world-wide at the time of interview.
4.9.2 Integration
Despite the problems of their surroundings and the widespread experience of abuse, a majority (42) of the respondents said that they had made friends in Glasgow. Friendships had been formed with compatriots, with other asylum seekers and also with local people. Many related that they had made Scottish friends, and spoke of their good neighbours. All these friendships were clearly important for mutual support, and were highly valued by respondents.

*I have made friends with Glasgow people and other asylum seekers. We help and encourage one another.* (2201)

For some groups, communities of asylum seekers sharing similar origins were emerging, and were described as providing important mutual support. These included Albanian, Somali, Turkish and Iranian communities, some of which were beginning to establish more formal support groups, offering interpreting, social meetings and so on. The capacity of these groups to provide much needed support was clear, though their recognition by formal service providers was not. At least one group had asked for facilities to meet, a request which had been turned down by the service approached. One respondent explained that the Somali group was important for developing more general good relations:

*I am a member of the Somali group here in Glasgow, and we meet regularly to discuss any problems and to chat about everyday things. This has helped me to become part of the larger community.* (1216)

Whilst friendships were emerging, feeling part of the wider community was much less likely. Fifteen people felt that they had indeed become part of local communities, and expressed positive and optimistic views:

*We are developing a new community here. I feel like part of the Sighthill community, but not really part of the Glasgow community. I am sure that through time we will develop and bond with the wider community of Glasgow. All it takes is patience and understanding and co-operation with all parties and we are getting closer to that goal every day.* (1210)

*I have been made very welcome here.* (1219)

Others felt that acceptance would be more difficult:

*It will take a long time to be accepted as part of the community.* (1211)

*The local people have accepted us now, but it will take a long time before we are welcomed as part of the community.* (1229)

They explained that their identity as asylum seekers was seen by others as paramount:

*I am an asylum seeker first.* (1202)

*Although the people here are quite friendly, I still feel like I am an intruder here.* (1204)
People who emphasised difficulties in local communities expressed further caution about integration:

_There are too many foreigners living here. The community here in Sighthill is very fragile, and I’m sure it could become volatile. There are too many different political and cultural differences to overcome in this area._ (1228)

The role of local churches in promoting integration and good community relations was explained by some respondents at this stage:

_I am not a member of the church as such, but the service myself and others have received from the church has made us feel very welcome in this part of Glasgow._ (1210)

_I am not a member of the church, but I go there to pray when no-one is about. The Mosque is too far for me._ (1221)

The Mosques also had this role:

_The Mosque is a private place where all men are treated equally. I am very glad that there is a mosque here._ (1220)

For children, schools were an important source of friendships. Most parents, as noted above, explained that their children were progressing well, and many felt that going to school had helped their children settle in Glasgow. It emerged that many children were kept at home outside of school, due to the safety considerations in the neighbourhoods in which they lived. Schools were thus key places in which children interacted with others. There appeared to be no potential activities for children outside school, except for some limited opportunities for extra-curricular sport. Family recreation was also limited, involving reading, shopping and going for walks. Swimming was a popular pastime, but proved expensive for some families.

Overall therefore, the data illustrated plenty of potential for integration, and examples of how this might be built. There were also missed opportunities, such as a lack of work with children outside school, the possibility of promoting the development of friendships through befriending services, support for the developing mutual support associations which appeared to aid integration by increasing people’s feelings of security and belonging.

### 4.10 CONCLUDING POINTS

#### Asylum Seekers

- The essential backgrounds to all the comments of the asylum seekers interviewed are their traumatic experiences and continuing difficulties. It was clear that for many, whatever their experiences in Glasgow, separation from family, concern about family members and for their home countries were dominant. It is however inappropriate to consider asylum seekers as victims of circumstance, and passive recipients of services. They are active users of services, who make constructive suggestions for service improvements, and active participants in the processes of dispersal, community building and integration.
Using Services:

Advice Services
- The vital importance of the initial contact with services in Glasgow was clear from the experiences related in this chapter. The advice and referral services, where effective, built upon the initial provision of housing to facilitate use of other services such as health and education. Where the initial service had been under intense pressure, and unable to provide the necessary advice, problems had ensued for asylum seekers who did not have correct information and had not received the support they needed. It was clear that properly resourced services, with effective information and efficient, professional interpreting services could pay dividends in the longer term.

Satisfaction with Services
- There was widespread satisfaction with the services received, with particular appreciation expressed for schools and college language classes, as well as health services. Legal services were also considered helpful, and their essential role underlined. Some police work was commended. Voluntary sector groups without a specific asylum seeker remit or resources to work with asylum seekers received particular praise.

Problems with Services
- However, there was some evidence of low expectations, and expressions of gratitude and resignation in reference especially to housing, which other comments, notably those on neighbourhoods and community relations, suggested was less than satisfactory.
- For some asylum seekers, services had clearly failed to provide the necessary support. There were examples of this in all areas of services, advice, housing, health, education, police and legal services, and our respondents graphically illustrated their impact on asylum seekers.
- Apart from general areas of bad practice, such as poor advice, over-crowded and dilapidated housing, difficulties of access to health care, and so on, some issues recurred. These included difficulties over interpreting, gender issues, which served to exclude women, poor information about services and insensitivity to service users.

Community Relations
- There were many examples of good community relations, including descriptions of friendships forged, and communities developing. Missed opportunities in community relations included building on the good work of schools to promote out of school activities, to integrate children with others. This would seem a particular benefit, as many of the problems of racial abuse were described as coming from children. The resources for mutual support which were building up in some asylum seeker communities and the friendships which existed with local communities might have benefited from more effective nurture and support.
- The importance of these integrative relationships was highlighted by the widespread experience of racism and harassment, which remained a serious problem in all areas of the city. Many respondents did not feel safe or secure in their neighbourhoods, were afraid to go out, or to allow their children to play outside.
CHAPTER FIVE: COMMUNITY RELATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Interviews with local community organisations were held, as part of the analysis of community relations. The organisations selected for interview were all based in areas in which asylum seekers were living. Such organisations were to include tenants associations, churches (who have had a high profile in public debate about asylum seekers), youth clubs, voluntary groups etc. Organisations were asked for their assessments and experiences of community relations, drawing on their knowledge of community networks and activities. Included in the interviews were ones with local Social Inclusion Partnerships (SIPs), who were considered to have an overview of local communities.

5.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF COMMUNITY GROUPS INTERVIEWED

The groups ranged from being very locally based to those, like the Social Inclusion Partnerships, which covered a wider area. Some, like the Glasgow Campaign to Welcome Refugees, had been founded specifically to work with refugees and asylum seekers. Most groups had been established within the previous four years, although two had existed for ten years. All had a board or committee of management, which made the strategic decisions. Day to day decisions were more likely to be made by staff although where there were no permanent paid employees, volunteers and committee members took decisions together.

Interviews were generally held with senior people within the organisations, usually a co-ordinator or development officer, who would be most likely to have an overview of the issues surrounding their services to asylum seekers.

5.3 FUNDING

Funding for the projects came from a variety of sources. Most received some form of public funding, often ultimately from the Scottish Executive, but also from Glasgow City Council and the European Social Fund. There was also substantial funding from charitable trusts and foundations, and from individuals.

All organisations received time-limited funding, usually for a three year period. Thereafter, funding appeared to be quite uncertain, although monitoring of the success of certain projects might lead to grant extensions. This has implications for the long term survival of some of these important projects.

5.4 GROUP REMIT

The remits of the groups varied widely, but all claimed to have a remit to tackle some area of social exclusion through their work, whether this be through direct service provision or wider campaigning. Among specific groups being assisted were women (particularly those suffering from domestic abuse), and young people, as well as asylum seekers.

Groups provided general advice and information, practical help and support (such as a crèche), and befriending services and were often involved in campaigning and publicity work. In relation to asylum seekers, several organisations referred to the need for detailed
practical help and advice, but also arranged social events, facilitated language provision, lobbied relevant authorities and sought to confront negative media images. There was thus a strong campaigning theme running through the remit of many of the groups.

The services therefore complemented those provided by the statutory sector and were sometimes thought to be more flexible and sensitive. Some community leaders felt that the attitudes of some staff in the statutory sector were not always very sympathetic to the needs of asylum seekers.

**5.5 SERVICES PROVIDED FOR THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES**

Services provided for the local communities included crèches, drop-in and advice centres, and a range of classes including languages, sewing, creative writing, dance and relaxation, as well as children’s and youth groups. Access to these services was completely open and asylum seekers were automatically assumed to be part of the client group:

*Are asylum seekers not the local community? We provide English classes and support which has been running since August 2000. It is run by volunteers and never closed. There are two classes – one during the day and one in the evening. Children are allowed to come; we have toys but no crèche. At its busiest there have been 30 adults and children. BBC Children in Need have funded a pilot project – Sighthill Unity Youth Project. It was set up to support both asylum seekers and local youths aged 12-16. Its aim is to aid integration and concentrates on holiday periods up till next Easter. It has some paid workers but it is organised by volunteers, linking with other organisations (2302).*

*Prior to the asylum seekers coming, [this organisation] did a lot of community work in schools, highlighting integration, addictions and youth work. Since the asylum seekers have come to the area, we have provided a weekly drop-in offering fresh fruit, tea, coffee, humanitarian aid and a crèche facility. Someone has taken on the responsibility for the crèche, although it is in the same room as the parents but they have provided toys etc. We provide arts and crafts and the involvement of local organisations providing alternative medicine and massage……… We provide English classes in conjunction with the Nautical College……… Social Services provides us with interpreters for the drop-in, which is a very positive thing. People call into the office to see us between drop-ins – it may be something simple, like help with reading a letter they have received or something more complex like vouchers not arriving. We are trying to develop a befriending scheme to help asylum seekers feel part of the community. Most of the volunteers who work at the drop-in have expressed an interest in befriending (2305).*

That said, some services, such as youth clubs, were not thought to be widely used by asylum seekers, and this may be due to lack of awareness of the service or uncertainty about the extent of their welcome. There were also some problems in accessing halls which could be used for the various activities. Although most organisations claimed to monitor the ethnicity of their service users, it was not clear that this was being done consistently or effectively.
The organisations themselves had a very local focus, serving particular areas of Glasgow, such as Castlemilk, the greater Springburn area, or Gorbals. Some of them therefore dealt with only relatively small numbers of asylum seekers, although reference was made to asylum seekers ‘bringing their friends from all over Glasgow’.

### 5.6 RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES

The groups interviewed all claimed to have good relationships with the local communities, and often local people served on management committees or boards. Sometimes, however, activists were disproportionately drawn from older people or from women. Groups which were involved in recycling activities relied on good local support for materials and goods. In the case of Social Inclusion Partnerships, local councillors were also involved in the Partnership Boards.

The ways in which asylum seekers engaged with the local communities varied. On the one hand, language barriers were still evident, which prevented asylum seekers becoming fully involved:

> Because asylum seekers and refugees are a relatively new addition to the local community, ways of engaging them through existing mechanisms are largely ad hoc and still being developed, with language the biggest barrier. The Partnership is working with SRC and GCC on the Framework for Dialogue initiative which will identify representatives from the asylum seeker and refugee communities through which improved contact can be made (2303).

On the other hand, some respondents felt that local people believed that some projects were for asylum seekers when, in fact, they had been set up with a more general remit:

> The organisation has a very good relationship with the local community, although some think it is only for asylum seekers. Black people are more noticeable. Locals are self-excluding (2306).

### 5.7 COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND THE REACTION TO ASYLUM SEEKERS

Community groups reported that, in the main, local reaction to asylum seekers had been broadly positive, although there was also some hostility. Organisations operating in areas such as Castlemilk and the south side of Glasgow suggested that problems were most severe in Sighthill. This may be over-emphasising the problems of Sighthill, although organisations there did acknowledge the difficulties in absorbing such a large influx of new people:

> I think the majority of the community has reacted as well as they could be expected to, with the lack of information and the constantly negative media and political representations of asylum seekers. The sheer scale of dispersal to areas dominated by high rise flats has meant it is difficult for any single community organisation to take a lead in positive or negative relationships with the asylum seekers. These areas have seen very low levels of investment in community development over recent years which, along with the focus on Stock Transfer taking up activist time, has meant that unlike in other areas of the city, tenants organisations etc have not had a big role in responding to
dispersal. So community relations have been more difficult to gauge. Generally there has been wariness between the communities (2303).

The point about the historical lack of investment in the area – in both community relations and in the housing itself – was cited by several organisations as a problem. This had allowed some negative aspects of community relations to surface:

*We need more investment in Sighthill, more money for community development. We’ve allowed a few racists to frighten thousands of folk. The police have difficulties in dealing with troublemakers under 16 (2302).*

It was also suggested that other services such as health and social work were now being spread too thinly, as a result of asylum seekers arriving in the areas.

There was a strong view that the Housing Department had neglected Sighthill, so that when asylum seekers were given properties which had been newly decorated and furnished, there was considerable resentment on the part of existing tenants:

*[There’s] a mixed attitude – from ‘What a terrible time they are having’ to ‘Look at them getting brand new cookers and we get nothing’ (2307).*

This place has been beset with every social problem in the book. The reason there are empty houses is because nobody else wishes to live there. Housing was very badly run down and......over the years the area had been used as a dumping ground for problem families. Five years ago, the drug dealing was blatant......Suddenly, asylum seekers were getting new doors and brand new furniture. Locals started grumbling away at the bus stop (2308).

A lack of information from GCC meant that initially the local community were very scared and hostile. Dispersal was to two main areas, Red Road and Sighthill............. Both areas were already suffering very high levels of deprivation and low levels of investment in housing and other services. When large numbers of GCC vans started arriving to redecorate and refurbish flats, even if only to basic standards, local people felt cheated as they had waited months for even basic repairs to their homes to be done. When large numbers of asylum seekers started arriving, often in the middle of the night, with no warning or information about who they would be or where they were from tensions began to rise (2303).

This resentment had, in some cases, developed into racism and several interviewees referred to hostility and racially motivated incidents. In some cases, however, it was pointed out that incidents, such as youths fighting, might not necessarily be racist and it was suggested that there was a small minority of people who already had a history of getting into trouble and had simply found new victims. It was also pointed out that some communities might react badly to an influx of new people, regardless of their ethnicity:

*There is a racist element which has set out to target asylum seekers, but mostly antagonism is towards this new group because of ignorance and fear. They could be from Paisley and would be treated much the same way (2303).*
It was suggested that the lack of a specifically racist element was demonstrated by the fact that the British National Party had tried to establish itself in Sighthill but found itself unwelcome.

A key problem, which was identified by several people, was the lack of information which had been provided to local communities prior to the arrival of asylum seekers. As a result, hostility towards the newcomers had been based on ignorance.

Another problem was thought to be a large number of single (often young and male) asylum seekers, which local people had found rather intimidating, particularly as they ‘used to hang around the shops and flats with little to do’. Tension had, however, lessened as many had received decisions about their status and moved out of the area. There now appeared to be more families and their presence was seen as better for community relations, particularly as activities in local community centres and churches were geared more towards families.

Community groups were keen to highlight the many positive things that were happening in relation to asylum seekers. For example, in Castlemilk, the organisation ‘Castlemilk Churches Together’ had been established in Autumn 2000 and had become an important local resource, staffed with volunteers from the local community.

In the Sighthill area, the North Glasgow International Festival took place in June 2001, originating as an idea from Strathclyde Police. It was apparently well attended locally, with numerous examples of asylum seekers and local people interacting positively, often for the first time. It was suggested that, after the Festival, the number of racist incidents in the north of Glasgow went down and it appeared that community relations were improving.

Previous experience of dealing with refugees was thought to be significant in encouraging positive community relations and there were references to the previous influx of Kosovans:

In Royston the asylum seekers feel the locals are friendly. The Kosovans were placed here a few years ago and that has helped. In the Community Centre, asylum seekers can meet local people in a friendly atmosphere and if they need any information, they only need to ask (2306).

Some sections of the community reacted very fast to the need to welcome and provide services to asylum seekers, in particular the churches and community groups that were already involved with the Kosovan programme, or who had a history of working with international students (2303).

The murder of Firsat Dag in August 2001 seems to have acted as a catalyst for improved community relations. Some people in Sighthill appeared to have reacted angrily to their portrayal as racists and ‘many local people began to talk to asylum seekers, often their neighbours for months, for the first time’ (2303). A particular issue was the lack of community facilities in the Sighthill area as the community centre is relatively small and has no café or meeting space. As a result of pressure from local groups the idea of converting a disused supermarket into a café and resource centre has emerged and funding for this is now being sought. This facility will help greatly in encouraging more interaction between local people and asylum seekers.
5.8 THE IMPACT OF MEDIA COVERAGE

The media coverage of asylum seekers has been an important part of this research and is reported fully in Chapter Seven. As part of our investigations into media coverage, we explored with community groups their own experiences of the issue.

The general view was one of extreme frustration with the media, and in particular the press. Journalists were accused of ‘sloppy reporting’ and of failing to check basic facts within stories and, more seriously, of seeking deliberately to sensationalise stories:

*Before anything else, I feel I should say that the behaviour of some of the media after the murder of Firsat Dag was appalling. I know of many examples, where journalists stopped people in the street and asked them how they felt about the ‘invasion of asylum seekers’. If they did not hear anything suitably negative and inflammatory, they walked off to find someone who would give the negative image of the estate they wanted. There were also cases of journalists forcing their way into community or asylum seeker meetings (2303).*

*One week before the murder of Firsat Dag, a local was stabbed. The BBC were not interested and were more interested in what was happening to the asylum seekers, which caused a lot of resentment (2308).*

Where press releases had been issued regarding new projects or new resources being introduced, it was felt that they had been inadequately reported in the newspapers. This reinforced the view of many organisations that journalists were only interested in ‘sensationalist’ stories. A number of interviewees complained that stories about asylum seekers constantly referred to Sighthill, regardless of whether the asylum seekers concerned lived there or not.

That said, there was also a view that stories about asylum seekers had become slightly more positive within the last year or so.

The generally negative approach of the press was seen as being extremely prejudicial to the development of good community relations:

*It’s very negative. The media creates problems in communities but who takes responsibility for that? It’s not fair (2306).*

*Bad coverage from the press about asylum seekers using all the services can breed discontent amongst the local community, who feel that they are being deprived of services as a result of the asylum seeker’s presence (1301).*

*They whipped up bad feeling and tended to highlight negative aspects, which was destructive to community relationships and created barriers which led to fear and mistrust of asylum seekers (2302).*

*Locals’ misunderstandings are bolted to the media term ‘bogus’ and some think that all asylum seekers are bogus and are here to better themselves. In reality, most are worse off than in their previous life…..[Locals] can’t*
understand what they have been through. Newspaper stories confirmed racist attitudes (2308).

Publicity may lead to fear, prejudice and the attention of right wing groups. Some people believe false statements in the media. We have been concerned about this and have not sought media publicity (2304).

The constant negative attention given to asylum seekers has only reinforced, for local people, that asylum seekers are a problem that they are being forced to deal with, that they are ‘spongers’, and that there is no such thing as a good asylum seeker, no matter what the evidence of their everyday contact is. It creates tension because almost every night local people are seeing stories that virtually encourage them to treat asylum seekers badly. At the same time, asylum seekers are scared of this negative attention. The tension created is one that it is very difficult for any local activities to tackle (2303).

There was almost complete unanimity amongst community groups that the media had a responsibility to report issues accurately and to take responsibility for the effects which their stories might have.

This antagonism towards the press did not, however, extend towards the smaller local papers, which were praised for their community focus and their willingness to interact with local agencies which were working with asylum seekers:

The only consistently good reporting has been from the local newspaper, the Springburn Herald, which reports every story as a local interest one and will put in positive news stories (2303).

The local papers have reported events (2305).

There have been several positive articles, quite large with photos, in the local paper, the Rutherglen Reformer, and in the local free sheets. This seems to have been OK (2304).

There had also been positive coverage of particular events, such as Refugee Week, which were seen as being helpful in the longer term:

The local community got good coverage and ‘good press’ during Refugee Week, which has created a sense of pride within the community and has encouraged interaction and integration with the asylum seekers (1301).

The generally negative press coverage was, however, seen as having a positive outcome in that it had forced local people to defend their community and led to improved interaction with asylum seekers themselves. The press coverage had allowed local people to emphasise that the problems on their estates, of deprivation and poor housing, affected everyone who lived there, and that the arrival of asylum seekers only made the need for more resources more pressing.
5.9 RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

The various community groups appeared to have strong links both to each other and to other statutory and voluntary bodies. All referred to the Glasgow City Council statutory service departments, such as Housing, Social Work and Education, as well as the Glasgow Asylum Support Team, the Health Board and the Police. The Police in particular were mentioned as having become very skilled in dealing with some of the sensitive situations which had arisen. There were sometimes very specific links, for example with local health visitors or with local colleges, in relation to language classes.

All groups also referred to the Scottish Refugee Council and to local Social Inclusion Partnerships. The churches were significant and there was a huge range of voluntary agencies mentioned, including local drop-in centres, food co-operatives, childcare groups, women’s groups, and residents and tenants associations. There were strong indications that there was substantial co-operation between the various groups operating with asylum seekers.

5.10 GAPS IN PROVISION

Finally, several groups identified gaps in provision, which needed to be filled in the short or longer term.

Firstly, it was suggested that more money needed to be injected into the development of community relations. There is undoubtedly a reservoir of goodwill within Glasgow, which remains relatively untapped. Many asylum seekers experience isolation and a better provision of befriending services might start to address this. Some groups have started such services but their provision seems to be very piecemeal and underfunded. There also appears to be a shortage in some areas of adequate halls, cafes and community centres where asylum seekers can meet, read papers, and talk, as well as engage more with the established community. Such centres could provide fairly basic facilities such as telephones, as asylum seekers are often forced to queue to use public call boxes.

Secondly, there appeared to be insufficient advice on legal issues and on welfare benefits, particularly because of language difficulties. In terms of legal advice, groups felt that asylum seekers rarely knew their entitlements in terms of work, benefits, access to services and so on. It was suggested that legal advisers, based in drop-in centres on a one day per week basis would be an extremely valuable service. The model would be the CAB approach, whereby people can attend for legal advice on a range of issues.

Third, it was reported that some asylum seekers were experiencing difficulties in relation to language classes. One difficulty was a lack of childcare in some areas to allow adults to attend classes. Another was the difficulty of teaching adult asylum seekers English when they might not necessarily be literate in their own language. It was thought that the effort which was required by language teaching staff was not always appreciated and further resources were required.

Fourth, there appeared to be some concern that Glasgow Housing Department was rather slow in resolving neighbour disputes between asylum seekers and locals. The situation had been improving but misunderstandings sometimes still occurred.
Groups also raised the issue of asylum seekers being allowed to work – although this is a matter reserved to the Home Office. Some Glasgow asylum seekers have apparently talked of developing a Local Exchange and Trading Scheme (LETS), whereby they exchange their skills and services, rather than having the money to purchase them. The scheme is of importance, because on 23 July 2002, the Government announced that asylum seekers would no longer be able to work or apply for vocational training if their case remained unresolved after six months. A LETS scheme would allow asylum seekers to make use of their skills to assist local people and other asylum seekers, without getting payment and thereby breaking Government rules.

Finally, some organisations stated that it was of increasing importance that strategies were developed for asylum seekers who receive permission to remain in the UK, many of whom will then choose to remain in Glasgow. It was thought that a strategy for providing services in the long term for refugees had not yet been developed.

5.11 CONCLUDING POINTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relations with Local Communities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Clearly, there is important grassroots activity by a range of groups, which is helping to foster good community relations. There is a reservoir of goodwill towards asylum seekers in many areas which is an important resource, which is being tapped by many groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There are, however, several issues which are raised by the community groups. First, there have undoubtedly been problems in particular areas, usually because local people were not sufficiently informed prior to the asylum seekers’ arrival. Antagonism which has been expressed in regard to asylum seekers receiving refurbished and furnished houses appears to have its roots in a historical neglect of many of these areas by the local authority and is not necessarily directed at the asylum seekers themselves.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• There is a growing provision of services for asylum seekers by community groups, although the groups themselves do not consistently monitor the usage of these services. There appear to be important language barriers to participation and one – perhaps unforeseen – difficulty has been the belief by some local people that certain services exist only for asylum seekers and this has led to some self-exclusion. This issue clearly needs to be addressed so that services can be delivered across all the communities, thereby assisting the integration process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• There was complete unanimity amongst the community groups that the media coverage of asylum seekers had been at best unhelpful and at worst deeply damaging. There was a general feeling that reporting standards were poor and that the press had a responsibility to address this and to take responsibility for any effects that their stories might have. Local newspapers were, however, explicitly excluded from this criticism.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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8 In fact, this issue had been considered as early as June 2001 by Glasgow City Council’s Policy and Resources Committee.
Gaps in Provision

The groups were able to identify a number of gaps in provision for asylum seekers. These included the need for extra resources for community relations, better support for asylum seekers in the areas of law and welfare benefits, the need to address some of the difficulties experienced in language learning, and the issue of a LETS scheme, as an alternative to paid work. Finally, there is the important long term issue of how best to provide services to asylum seekers, after they receive a positive decision to remain in the UK.
CHAPTER SIX: OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITIES

6.1 INTRODUCTION

During the course of our work, three other local authorities have been in the process of negotiating contracts with NASS to take asylum seekers. These authorities have been proceeding in ways which attempt to learn lessons from the experiences of other authorities, including Glasgow and authorities elsewhere in the UK.

The three authorities concerned are Edinburgh City Council, Fife Council and West Dunbartonshire Council and in each case, we interviewed key personnel. Interviews focused on preparation for the arrival of the asylum seekers and how they had drawn on experiences elsewhere, learning from good practice. The interviews also explored the support which councils have received from SASC and other relevant agencies. Any relevant lessons for the future were also to be identified.

6.2 THE STAGE NEGOTIATIONS HAD REACHED

There appeared to be something of a standstill in negotiations, while details, including legal points were finalised. Strategies had been agreed by the authorities but there was a feeling that NASS had been slow to respond to issues which had been raised. Negotiations had often been conducted through SASC, rather than with NASS directly and this had slowed things down.

Negotiations stalled in Edinburgh because of the Home Office’s decision to consider Airwest, formally RAF Turnhouse (at Edinburgh Airport) as an accommodation centre for 750 asylum seekers. The City Council has taken the view that, while these asylum seeker families would not be based directly in the city, there would inevitably be an impact on local services. Teachers, health workers and interpreters would be required to work there, while asylum seekers at Turnhouse who received a positive decision to remain in the UK might then be looking for long term accommodation in the Edinburgh area. The Council was therefore of the view that the situation regarding Turnhouse required to be resolved, before it finalised contracts with NASS. In other cases, subsequent events illustrated the stop-start nature of negotiations.

Fife City Council finally withdrew from negotiations with NASS after being unable to reach agreement over levels of funding. The Council claimed that with the funding proposed it would be unable to provide quality care for asylum seekers without making cuts in other services.

6.3 THE LOCAL PROVIDERS GROUP

The local authorities concerned had assembled a core team (or ‘Corporate Steering Group’) which covered all the main areas of service provision, both within the authority and from outside (including the Health Board and the police). The aim was to be as wide-ranging as possible. In Fife, the Education Department had not initially been involved in the core team as it had been expected that most of the asylum seekers to be located there would be single people. Fife had now established that almost all would be families and, now it was clear that children were involved, the Education Department had been included.
The voluntary sector was not always included at the early stages, although it was assumed that voluntary agencies, local minority ethnic groups and the Scottish Refugee Council would eventually become part of the core team

6.4 ISSUES REGARDING COLLABORATION AND CO-ORDINATION

Authorities were involved in what was described as a ‘gearing-up’ process, designed to ensure that all the services were in place. West Dunbartonshire had specifically identified a lead-in period of six months, from which they were determined not to deviate. In Edinburgh, the city had already dealt with around 100 asylum seekers who had arrived there independently, so some support packages were already in place, and the Council believed that they had worked hard over a long period to ensure good co-ordination between agencies. A particular example is a ‘roadshow’, developed by the Education Department, in conjunction with the Scottish Refugee Council and the Edinburgh and Lothians Refugee Forum, which has toured primary and secondary schools in the city. It has been used to inform school pupils about the plight of refugees and asylum seekers, and the possible implications of asylum seekers moving into their area. Subsequent presentations were then made at some of the city’s F.E. colleges.

Some areas of service delivery appeared to be more advanced than others in terms of their preparation. Health was identified as being less prepared than some other areas, although this could vary. West Dunbartonshire dealt with two Health Boards, one of which, Greater Glasgow, already had the experience of providing services to asylum seekers. The other, Argyll and Clyde, was less informed about the issues.

There was seen to be a need to involve the voluntary sector at a reasonably early stage, to help support the work of the statutory services.

6.5 ADVICE IN PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

It was thought to be extremely important to obtain advice from authorities currently involved in housing asylum seekers. SASC had been a prime source of information, as well as Glasgow City Council, and the three ‘new’ authorities had attended a number of meetings with SASC. The experience of Glasgow City Council in relation to their NASS contract had also helped to inform the other authorities.

English authorities had also been contacted, however. West Dunbartonshire had looked at the work of authorities like Kent, while Fife had identified Leeds as a model of good practice and saw their approach as being a ‘Scottish Leeds’ model.

This model is based on the practice of not taking asylum seekers directly to their long-term housing accommodation from the reception centre. Instead, Fife Council had identified ten properties in central Kirkcaldy which would act as a ‘Welcome Centre’. Asylum seekers would spend time becoming familiar with the local area, meeting and being fed in a local resource centre based in a church. Only after two to three weeks would families be moved on to their long-term accommodation elsewhere in Fife. The Council felt that this approach would allow them to maximise the level of support needed in the initial period of stay.

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In contrast, Edinburgh had decided to adopt the Glasgow model of placing asylum seekers in housing immediately as they believed that this would help them to become more settled more quickly.

### 6.6 EXPERIENCE OF NASS AND SASC

Local authorities had undertaken the bulk of negotiations with SASC, rather than NASS and had found the experience to be helpful and supportive, with SASC making available a range of material, as required. NASS staff in Scotland were also thought to be helpful but the experience of NASS’s central administration in London was completely negative. They were perceived as being unhelpful, aloof, intransigent and unwilling to be flexible about contracts. It was thought that they did not appreciate the value of working in partnership with local authorities, and appeared unwilling to recognise any distinctly Scottish perspective. For example, the colder Scottish climate might result in asylum seekers requiring more expensive heating of their houses, while living costs in Edinburgh were generally higher than many English cities. This inflexibility echoes the experiences of some staff in Glasgow City Council, who have liaised with NASS over a much longer period.

A particular difficulty concerned the nature of the asylum seeker households which authorities could expect to receive. Both Fife and Edinburgh had expected that most asylum seekers would be single males but at the time of interview, they were expecting to receive a much higher proportion of families. The nature of the households would determine where they were located, the size of housing they required and the nature of services which they received, but it was suggested that NASS was unwilling or unable to provide local authorities with the information they needed to make these decisions.

Another difficulty which was highlighted was the need for SASC to refer back to NASS in the context of negotiations and this, it was felt, slowed things down considerably. It also led to some meetings with SASC being described as inconclusive and more like ‘talking shops’.

It was thought that the nature of SASC would inevitably change as more local authorities accepted asylum seekers and became participants.

### 6.7 PREPARING FOR LOCAL PROVISION

In housing terms, the approaches of organisations varied. West Dunbartonshire had identified two localities, in Dumbarton and in Clydebank, where there would be two groupings each of 25 properties to be used for asylum seekers. Some of these, as in Glasgow, would be multi-storey flats. Fife has decided to select a larger number of smaller groupings. The Council had committed itself to making available 110 properties, of which 10 would be provided by Fife Special Housing Association. The houses were being selected on the basis of 11 clusters, each of 10 properties, mostly in the urban parts of the council area. Thus most asylum seekers would be located in Kirkcaldy, Dunfermline, Glenrothes and Levenmouth (the Methil and Leven area). Edinburgh was likely to take around 100 asylum seekers but had not finally determined which houses would be made available to them.

None of the authorities envisaged using the private housing sector at the stage when the interviews took place, although private landlords have been used in the past in Edinburgh, in
relation to previous arrivals of asylum seekers in the city. In Edinburgh, referrals to housing
associations were only anticipated, after asylum seekers received positive decisions to stay.

The state of readiness of Health Boards varied, with West Dunbartonshire having to work
with two Boards within its area. The Greater Glasgow Board was the best prepared, building
on its experience within Glasgow city.

Education Departments were beginning to prepare schools for the arrival of children of
asylum seekers, while reference has already been made to Edinburgh’s Education Department
‘roadshow’. Social Work Departments were also preparing – particularly in the area of
childcare, as one of the major problems experienced in Glasgow was that of the arrival of
unaccompanied children. In West Dunbartonshire, the Arts and Leisure Department staff had
been working to plan activities for newly arriving children – particularly during school
holidays.

Community relations staff were working with local groups, partly to tackle what was
described as ‘the rumour machine’. A new organisation has been established in Fife, called
‘Dignity for Asylum Seekers’, which was to work with the Council to provide information,
while simultaneously confronting prejudices. In Edinburgh, similarly, there had been
extensive briefing meetings with local communities.

6.8 THE VOLUNTARY AND PRIVATE SECTORS

There was a widespread recognition that the voluntary sector has an important role to play
and West Dunbartonshire, for example, has established a voluntary sector forum, involving
existing minority ethnic groups and local churches. It was generally felt across all authorities,
that the voluntary sector would become much more important once asylum seekers had
actually arrived but, at the preparation stages, their role was inevitably limited.

The private sector was not seen as having a significant role at this stage, although if asylum
seekers received permission to stay and their status changed, the private sector might have a
role in providing accommodation as part of a ‘move on’ strategy.

6.9 STRATEGIC PLANNING

Strategic plans had been drawn up for each sector, with advice from SASC and from other
authorities with asylum seeker experience. But authorities found it difficult to finalise these
strategies, until negotiations with NASS were complete. It was also difficult to be precise
about strategy, until the precise composition of asylum seeker households was known. As a
result, authorities were not always able to provide agreed documents to the researchers.

6.10 EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

Authorities believed that they were in a position to learn from other authorities and adopt
certain examples of good practice. West Dunbartonshire, for example, had taken on the
SASC media strategy which was important in terms of dealing with local press and rebutting
negative stories about asylum seekers. They also felt that they had followed Glasgow’s
example in seeking to engage as much as possible with local community groups.
Both West Dunbartonshire and Fife felt that their approach to housing asylum seekers by using relatively small clusters of housing, rather than large blocks of void properties on large estates, was good practice. Fife felt that its adoption of the Leeds model allowed it to take on board good practice on helping asylum seekers to orientate themselves before being allocated to long term accommodation.

Edinburgh believed that the preparation work done in schools as part of its Education Department ‘roadshow’ (referred to earlier) was an example of good practice. They were also able to point to their in-house Asylum Seeker Response Unit, established in 2000, with a dedicated health worker and established referral processes between Housing and Health.

6.11 ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY

Authorities recognised that extra staff would be required but that, until their contracts with NASS were finalised, it was not possible to appoint them. In some cases, however, job specifications had been drawn up, with SASC assistance, so advertisements could be placed quickly. Once appointed, training would be required, although some equality training with existing staff had already taken place. It was generally acknowledged that local authorities themselves would not be able to develop the various language skills which would be required and so the use of external interpreters would be required, along the lines of the Glasgow model.

Groups outwith the local authorities were being seen as contributing to the capacity for dealing with asylum seekers, and to help with things like training. In Fife, for example, FRAE (Fairness, Race, Awareness and Equality) Fife is a local Social Inclusion Partnership which aims to tackle social exclusion for isolated and marginalised black and ethnic minority communities and this was seen as an important local resource.

6.12 RELATIONS WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

This was acknowledged as a particularly sensitive area, as many local people were thought to be ‘a bit twitchy’ about the prospect of asylum seekers coming into their areas:

*There has been a reaction, with the appearance of graffiti and so on. But we've had public meetings in most of the areas and most have gone off quite peacefully. We've had meetings with the local tenants' associations and they've been 100 per cent successful. We still need to target the wider community, though we’ve had radio question and answer sessions and stuff in the local newspaper.*

West Dunbartonshire was planning more public meetings and the setting up of community cafes, which would serve both local people and asylum seekers.

Fife Council have pointed out to any concerned tenants that asylum seekers would be treated in exactly the same way as a homeless family, in being placed initially in furnished temporary accommodation. They acknowledged that some people on the waiting list might object, however, as the granting of accommodation allocated to asylum seekers through NASS would reduce the available housing stock for general letting.

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That said, there was also a groundswell of support in many areas for helping asylum seekers, and Edinburgh, for example, referred to the fact that they had been approached by several community and ‘welcoming’ groups, offering support. Edinburgh had worked with people who might be perceived as community leaders, such as head teachers, the police and health professionals to spread information as widely as possible.

For local authorities, there is a particular concern about the long term, if asylum seekers are given the right to remain in the UK. For example, should they be allowed to remain in the houses they occupy, where they have probably made friends and where their children attend school, even though this will create difficulties for the local authority which must then find other housing to meet their NASS contract requirements? Should asylum seekers be allowed to keep their furniture, although there is a considerable cost to the authority (of perhaps £600 per house)? How quickly can benefit details be worked out? What are the roles of other sectors, including the private sector? It is therefore seen as important, once asylum seekers start arriving, to think ahead to a ‘move on’ strategy and this should be discussed with local communities.

6.13 MEDIA STRATEGY

Local authorities were very conscious of the need to have a robust media strategy, with a strong principle of rebutting misleading stories.

*We’ve taken on board all the work done by Glasgow. It’s basically about putting the information out and getting the press on board. At the moment, it’s mainly factual information. We’ve produced a leaflet that’s gone out to all agencies and that will go out to households nearer the time, which addresses some of the myths about asylum seekers.*

Authorities were often working with journalists on locally-based newspapers to inform them of the issues and this would seem to be a sensible strategy. Community groups have already indicated (Chapter Five) that they believe that local press are much more professional in dealing with stories and issues about asylum seekers than the national press which they accuse of ‘sloppy reporting’. Use was also being made by authorities of in-house newspapers and magazines, aimed at both staff and residents.

6.14 INFORMATION PROVIDED TO ASYLUM SEEKERS

The organisations which agreed in Summer 2002 to accept asylum seekers decided to provide a Welcome Pack, on the Glasgow model. The Pack would contain translated material, information on and telephone numbers for emergency contacts, and links to interpreting services. Edinburgh had also been debating whether or not to provide asylum seekers with a mobile telephone.

In addition to the Pack, authorities involved local organisations like Race Equality Councils, local interpreting services etc, and these bodies would also be able to provide information to asylum seekers. One problem which West Dunbartonshire stated that they faced was that NASS expected asylum seekers to obtain advice through the Glasgow One-Stop Shop, whereas the Council felt it would be more helpful if they travelled to Dumbarton, to receive more local information and a more local orientation.

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6.15 HOW ASPECTS OF THE PROCESS ARE WORKING

Authorities felt that, because the process was still in its early stages, it was too soon to make a judgement on how well or badly things were being handled, although the effectiveness of communication was seen by everyone as a possible cause for concern. Costs were frequently mentioned as influencing local judgements and there were comments about the need to liaise with all relevant agencies and not to be overly Council-dominated.

6.16 CONCLUDING POINTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Progress</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• There was some uncertainty regarding the reception of asylum seekers by the three authorities, as negotiations had not been finalised and, in the case of Edinburgh, appeared to depend on whether the Home Office decided to locate an accommodation centre at Turnhouse. Authorities seemed, however, to be broadly prepared for asylum seekers and had established core teams, systems of collaboration and co-ordination between departments and agencies, and had to an extent, identified the housing that they anticipated using. Information for asylum seekers, such as Welcome Packs, were also being prepared and future staffing needs identified.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good Practice</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Authorities had sought and received substantial advice in relation to their preparations, not only from Glasgow but also from English cities, with Leeds in particular becoming a model for Fife. Authorities had used this advice and learned lessons from other areas to identify good practice and develop their own examples of good practice in relation to media relations, housing and education services for example.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role of SASC and NASS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• All authorities had found SASC supportive but their experiences of NASS had been universally negative and unhelpful. Clearly authorities found NASS’s lack of flexibility and the lack of information being provided to be deeply frustrating, and this echoes the Glasgow experience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role of Voluntary Sector</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The voluntary sector had not yet been fully involved but all expected that the role of voluntary agencies would become important once asylum seekers arrived. The private sector’s role was seen as being more limited – perhaps becoming more important in the context of move-on accommodation, once refugee status had been achieved.</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Relations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Relations with the local community were seen as being sensitive but all authorities were working hard to inform local people and had adopted strategies for dealing with the media.</td>
</tr>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Move-On’</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Finally, authorities identified the need to think ahead to a ‘move-on’ strategy for asylum seekers who receive permission to remain in the UK, and who require long-term accommodation and support.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER SEVEN: MEDIA MONITORING

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In order to provide context for the study and to explore potential media impacts while the study was in progress, media coverage was monitored through the period of research by systematic review, using the Lexis-Nexis database, and content analysis of a sample of media coverage was carried out. In addition, all interviewees were asked about their views on the role of the media. In this chapter, we review the content of media coverage, and discuss it in relation to interviewees’ views about the content and impact of media.

Media monitoring was carried out over a seven month period - January to July 2002 – accessing the Lexis-Nexis database and the Scottish Asylum Seekers Consortium News Monitor which provided a month by month review of the main issues relating to asylum seekers. The Lexis-Nexis Executive News Plus is a collection of databases containing in total around 2,300 UK and overseas newspapers, newswires and magazines, going back in some cases for 20 years. It is divided into two sections: ‘News’ which covers the full content of UK and overseas newspapers and ‘News and Company’ which focuses on company information, financial data and news items relating to companies. The Scottish Asylum Seekers Consortium News Monitor is an archive of related news stories.

7.2 MEDIA CONTENT

Table 7.1 indicates the extent of media coverage during the research period. Using the keyword ‘asylum seeker’, the database pulled up every UK news story, which satisfied the research request. This is indicated by the right hand column in the table and would include every document that had 'asylum seeker' buried within the story. As the number of hits returned usually exceeded 700 per month, the search was refined by restricting to UK news - major news articles, indicated by the left hand column. This option ensured that the search terms appeared within the headline or lead portion of the article.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>UK News - Restricted to Major news stories</th>
<th>UK News</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>666</td>
<td>Search interrupted at 1,000+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>714</td>
<td>Search interrupted at 1,000+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>722</td>
<td>Search interrupted at 1,000+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>907</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Press coverage during the research period was extensive and often controversial. The intense media interest in asylum issues was evident in the number of articles printed per month. The
term ‘asylum seeker’ appeared in a variety of apparently non-related news stories, without having any immediately apparent links to the main story covered. It would appear that linking ‘asylum seekers’ to diverse news reporting serves to keep the issue firmly in the public domain. It was therefore our intention to monitor the extent of media coverage and also to identify and explore some of the main issues covered.

Table 7.2 highlights the issues with the greatest media coverage over the research period. Over the seven months monitored some issues dominated – the Sangatte camp; security concerns at Eurotunnel; the proposed locations of new accommodation centres; and government policies relating to immigration and asylum.

Other issues included incidents that resulted in widespread reporting – the fire at Yarl’s Wood detention centre; Mr Blunkett’s statement that children of asylum seekers were 'swamping' education and the police raid on a mosque to remove Afghans awaiting deportation.

On the international scene, media attention was given to other countries and their asylum policies – Woomera detention centre in Australia reached the headlines with reports of hunger strikes and asylum seekers escaping; the political right was on the rise in Europe; Pim Fortyn, right wing politician, was murdered in Holland; immigration was top of the agenda at the EU summit and protesting asylum seekers sewed their lips together at Sangatte.

Scottish issues included concern for the Euro link and its effects on Scotland; the proposed siting of an accommodation centre in Edinburgh; issues at Dungavel detention centre and new local authorities preparing to welcome asylum seekers.

Table 7.2: Most widely reported issues for each month of research period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>January 2002</th>
<th>International</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>Scottish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zimbabwe deportations halted</td>
<td>Yarl’s Wood Detention Centre unveiled</td>
<td>Euro Link affected by asylum seekers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asylum seekers protesting in Woomera Detention Centre, Australia</td>
<td>Proposals for accommodation centres in various parts of Britain</td>
<td>Glasgow at saturation point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sangatte refugee camp and effects on Euro tunnel</td>
<td>Government to persuade Afghan asylum seekers to return home</td>
<td>Proposal to use Turnhouse as an accommodation centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ID smart cards for asylum seekers</td>
<td>Supporters try to prevent deportation of Panxhi family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 7.2 contd: Most widely reported issues for each month of the research period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>International</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>Scottish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February 2002</td>
<td>Sangatte refugee camp and effects on Euro tunnel</td>
<td>Immigration and Asylum White Paper published – Secure Borders, Safe Haven</td>
<td>Edinburgh Council suspend talks with NASS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asylum seekers threaten to throw children overboard on cross channel ferry</td>
<td>Fire at Yarl’s Wood Detention Centre</td>
<td>Asylum seekers wishing to leave Scotland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Australia’s treatment of asylum seekers</td>
<td>Citizenship classes for asylum seekers</td>
<td>West Dunbartonshire Council agrees to take asylum seekers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Asylum seeker identity cards unveiled</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Court of Appeal rules against policy of imposing fines on lorry drivers for carrying asylum seekers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>March 2002</td>
<td>Asylum seekers escape from Woomera Detention Centre, Australia</td>
<td>Concerns regarding level of French security at Euro Tunnel</td>
<td>Fife to welcome asylum seekers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2002</td>
<td>Increase in support for political Right on the continent</td>
<td>Voucher system scrapped</td>
<td>Conditions at Dungavel detention centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sangatte refugee camp</td>
<td>BNP gaining support</td>
<td>MSP’s report calls for changes at Dungavel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Australia's asylum policy</td>
<td>Children of asylum seekers ‘swamping education’</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EU states agree common policy for treating asylum seekers</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 2002</td>
<td>Concerns re. Euro tunnel security</td>
<td>Plans confirmed for new centres</td>
<td>Dungavel Detention Centre opens door to media</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Murder of Pim Fortyn, right wing politician in Holland</td>
<td>Debate over exclusion of asylum children</td>
<td>BNP in Scotland</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Asylum seekers sew lips together in protest at Sangatte</td>
<td>Garza family win reprieve</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Demonstrations at proposed</td>
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</table>
Table 7.2 contd: Most widely reported issues for each month of the research period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>International</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>Scottish</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>June 2002</strong></td>
<td>UN condemns Australia’s treatment of refugees</td>
<td>NHS psychologists refuse to treat asylum seekers with mental health problems</td>
<td>Poll finds most Scots reject racist attitudes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Immigration tops EU summit agenda</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>July 2002</strong></td>
<td>Sangatte camp to close</td>
<td>Police raid mosque and remove Afghan couple</td>
<td>Asylum seeker questioned over ritual murder case</td>
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<td></td>
<td>British consulate in Australia rejects boys’ asylum plea</td>
<td>Row over private health care for asylum seekers</td>
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<td>Employment concession ended as faster asylum decisions being made</td>
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<td>Government abandons target of removing 30,000 failed asylum seekers every year as unrealistic</td>
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<td>Britain declares Afghanistan safe enough for asylum seekers to return to</td>
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<td>Protests at planned asylum centre sites</td>
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7.3 TONE OF REPORTING

The influence of terms and connotations of words used by the media is not to be underestimated. Throughout the monitoring phase the following terms appeared to be used interchangeably with asylum seeker, blurring the differences between those genuinely fleeing persecution and genuine economic migrants: ‘immigrant’, ‘illegal immigrant’, ‘refugee’, ‘economic migrant’. The negative language used by the media also called into question the reliability of asylum claimants, for example, ‘bogus refugees’, ‘asylum cheats’, ‘migrants scam’, ‘crook refugees’, ‘illegals’; ‘bogus asylum seeker’. The last term, ‘bogus’, highlights the seemingly judgmental nature of some news reporting.

During the period of the research, it appeared that it was often the headlines that caused the greatest impact. These headlines and subsequent stories seemed to be highly influential in creating impressions of asylum seekers. There was a belief amongst research respondents that during the research period the media coverage had been overly negative towards asylum seekers.

Focusing on headlines, Table 7.3 highlights some examples that appear to cast asylum seekers and asylum issues in a negative light. The criterion for including a headline in the table was the use of a negative word or phrase to describe asylum seekers and asylum issues.
### Table 7.3: Examples of headlines that appear negative in tone: January - July 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Headline</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 2002</td>
<td>Refugee sex rap, The Mirror, 15 January</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Immigration hit squads to target 5000,000 illegal workers, The Independent, 21 January</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Stowaways leave £20million hole in Eurotunnel revenue, The Times, 23 January</td>
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<td>Sangatte 'drives freight off tunnel', The Guardian, 23 January</td>
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<td>Eurotunnel refugee is electrocuted, Sunday Mirror, 20 January</td>
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<td>Cut benefits and stem the asylum tide, The Express, 21 January</td>
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<td>UK is soft touch for refugees, The Express, 21 January</td>
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<td>Refugees in under-age sex scandal, The Express, 25 January</td>
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<td>'More arrests soon' in migrants scam, BBC, 28 January</td>
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<td>Firms warn thousands of jobs will go; asylum invaders will 'destroy' channel tunnel, The Express, 31 January</td>
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<td>February 2002</td>
<td>The Hi-Tech ID card to beat asylum cheats, Daily Mail, 1 February</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Illegal immigrants are spongers, wasters and conmen who have chosen a life of crime and drugs: fury at TD 'racist speech', The Mirror, 1 February</td>
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<td>Britain is top asylum haven, Daily Mail, 2 February</td>
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<td>Blankett crackdown on immigration; hotline to shop illegal asylum seekers, The Express, 8 February</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Block the asylum tunnel, The Sun, 12 February</td>
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<td>Rioting asylum seekers torch centre, Daily Record, 15 February</td>
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<td>Refugees on the run after rioting leaves £35m trail of destruction at inferno 'jail', The Express, 16</td>
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<td>Bogus refugees treated better than UK citizens, The Sun, 18 February</td>
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<td>60 illegals sew up lips, The Sun, 19 January</td>
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<td>Immigrants riot, The Sun, 21 February</td>
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<td>£42M bill for asylum cops, The Sun, 22 February</td>
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<td>Police hunting escaped asylum seekers, The Sun, 22 February</td>
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<td></td>
<td>We reveal just how easy it is for a bogus refugee to enter UK, Sunday Mirror, 24 February</td>
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<td>Chuck 'em out, Furious Blankett sends home asylum thugs, The Sun, 26 February</td>
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<td>Refugee centre set to be forced on Scotland, Daily Record, 20 February</td>
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<td>March 2002</td>
<td>EU adopts fingerprint database to stamp out 'asylum shopping', Financial Times, 1 March</td>
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<td>UK no longer most popular target for asylum seekers, The Independent, 1 March</td>
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<td>Asylum nut goes to jail, The Sun, 21 March</td>
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<td>Refugees stabbed in brawl, The Herald, 21 March</td>
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<td>Our town's too nice for refugees, The Express, 23 March</td>
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<td>April 2002</td>
<td>Refugee cheats cost state EUR16M; welfare scams are rife, The Mirror, 1 April</td>
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<td>No legs asylum seeker does a runner, wheelchair escape, The Mirror, 4 April</td>
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<td>Asylum seekers with killer diseases exploit legal loophole to avoid deportation; Got AIDS? Welcome to Britain, The Express, 7 April</td>
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<td>Iraqi in rape quiz, The Sun, 12 April</td>
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<td>It takes that much from every man, woman and child to cover the fees of asylum lawyers; we all pay a tenner, Sunday Express, 14 April</td>
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<td>14 guards hurt as asylum seekers riot, Scotland on Sunday, 21 April</td>
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<td>Blunkett hardline on crook refugees, Daily Record 24 April</td>
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<td>Blunkett stands by use of 'swamping', The Guardian, 25 April</td>
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<td>Invasion of foreigners 'making UK non-British', The Sun, 26 April</td>
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<td>Le Pen: I will send trainloads of asylum seekers to Mr Blair, The Sun, 27 April</td>
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<td>Scabies rife in Channel asylum camp, The People, 28 April</td>
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<td>Damages claim over asylum rapist, London Evening Standard, 30 April</td>
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<td>May 2002</td>
<td>Asylum seekers 'driving EWS out of business', Edinburgh Evening News, 3 May</td>
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<td>Asylum seekers' legal aid soars, The Sun, 9 May</td>
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<td>End asylum soft touch, says Hain, The Guardian, 13 May 2002</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Most Immigrants are not genuine asylum seekers. They are young single men who have deserted their families for money.' Who said this yesterday? Immigration minister Lord Rooker, The Express, 15 May</td>
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<td>Villages' fury at refugee camps, The Sun, 16 May</td>
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<td>Migrants in benefits con, The Sun, 16 May</td>
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<td>Six men on bikes guard us against illegals (4 at weekends), The Sun, 16 May</td>
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<td>130 asylum seekers vanish daily, Scotland on Sunday, 19 May</td>
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<td>Sangatte Britons' grim warning to villagers threatened with refugee camps; our little Paradise has been lost to migrants, Sunday Express, 19 May</td>
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<td>Officials admit that more than enough bogus asylum seekers to fill the city of Derby have Escaped to set up home here, though the true number may be four times higher; 276,214 reasons to lock up asylum seekers, The Express, 20 May</td>
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<td>Refugee invasion as French close camp, The Sun, 23 May</td>
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<td>Military must fight to stop bogus refugees, The Express, 24 May</td>
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<td>Pounds 1.4M asylum scam, The Sun, 27 May</td>
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<td>We must not give in to France over refugees, The Sun, 28 May</td>
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<td>Blunkett purge on migrants, The Sun, 31 May</td>
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<td>June 2002</td>
<td>Anger at 5-star migrant centre; asylum luxury, The Express, 8 June</td>
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<td>Guns in the cab as drivers live in fear of asylum gangs, Sunday Express, 19 June</td>
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<td>Asylum violence fear for villages, The Express, 19 June</td>
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<td>Refugee's car hit 10 shoppers, The Sun, 25 June</td>
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<td>July 2002</td>
<td>ID cards will lead the war on asylum cheats, Daily Mail, 1 July</td>
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<td>Asylum law lets pervert stay in UK, Sunday Express, 7 July</td>
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<td>Neighbours' fear of asylum seeker held in ritual killing case; voodoo lady terrified us, The Express, 11 July</td>
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<td>Swoop on migrants, The Express, 17 July</td>
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<td>£1M for refugee daytrips, The Express, 24 July</td>
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<td>£1M 'Hols' for asylum families, The Sun, 24 July</td>
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<td>Most shocking of all - the victim is British; murder suspect is given asylum, The Express, 26 July</td>
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<td>Illegals jump NHS queue, The Sun, 29 July</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Officials admit: Bogus refugees will stay forever; 200,000 asylum seekers vanish, The Express, 29 July</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bogus refugees stay in Britain, The Express, 29 July</td>
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<td>We're lax on asylum, The Sun, 30 July</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Asylum gangs in gun battle, The Express, 31 July</td>
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</table>
Some negative headlines appeared to endorse racist views that asylum seekers brought diseases, were not legitimate asylum seekers and were only here to avail themselves of the better social provisions of the UK.

The language of the media and some politicians can be considered to reinforce these myths by asserting the need to toughen asylum policies. All images portrayed of asylum seekers are likely to affect the way people respond to them both in thought and behaviour. They way reinforce negative stereotypes already held, or misinformation currently circulating.

Table 7.4, in contrast, highlights some examples of headlines that appear to cast asylum seekers and asylum issues in a positive light. The criteria for including a headline in the table were positive descriptions or highlighting contributions of asylum seekers.

Table 7.4: Examples of headlines that appear positive in tone January - July 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>January 2002</th>
<th>Schools pledge of support to refugees, The Herald, 16 January</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AUT celebrates the contributions of academic refugees, Association of University Teachers, 29 January</td>
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<td>Composer celebrates refugees, Scotland on Sunday, 29 January</td>
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<td>Voices unite from around the world, Evening Times, 30 January</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 2002</td>
<td>Fife urges locals to welcome asylum seekers, The Herald, 21 March</td>
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<td>March 2002</td>
<td>Music scholarship raises hope for asylum seeker, The Herald, 29 March</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Asylum seeker, 11, wins place at top music academy, Daily Telegraph, 30 March</td>
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<td>April 2002</td>
<td>End of the voucher system scheme will give asylum seekers much needed dignity, The Herald, 8 April</td>
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<td></td>
<td>School of many nation; Welcome to Scotland’s multi-cultural swot shop, Daily Record, 30 April</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 2002</td>
<td>Scotland needs more, not fewer, economic migrants, The Herald, 3 May</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Leader: Britain needs immigrants now, Guardian, 26 May</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 2002</td>
<td>Can Britain afford to keep talented immigrants out?, The Herald, 27 June</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 2002</td>
<td>I’m proud of refugee children in my school, says Head, Independent, 2 July 2002</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Degree of Hope; Fatima grew up in horror of civil war. Now she has chance to go to university in Scotland, Daily Record, 3 June</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Children of the exodus; baby boom for asylum seekers is boost to Scotland’s economy, Daily Record, 7 June</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

As can be noted, the number of headlines with a negative tone far outnumbered those with a positive tone. Generally, more positive coverage appeared in the Scottish press. A number of headlines advanced the view that the skills of asylum seekers could benefit their host nation and that they had much to contribute. Other reports fell into the human interest category, detailing awards and experiences of individual asylum seekers currently living in Britain. There appeared to be a lack of news articles giving factual information about the conditions and treatment of asylum seekers in the countries from which they fled or which included the views of those seeking asylum in Britain. There is a need for the promotion of positive images of asylum seekers through factual information being available to the media, as well as awareness raising and anti-racism strategies. There is also a need for organisations working with asylum seekers to be able to provide consistent and accurate information to those in the media as well as highlighting examples of good practice.

Several organisations interviewed had, as we noted, adopted media strategies which tried to ensure accurate media coverage and to promote more positive stories. Research respondents
felt that that stories about asylum seekers had become slightly more positive within the last year or so, suggesting a potential impact of these strategies. Interestingly, few had forged links with national and local politicians whose comments could also have an important role in promoting positive images of asylum seekers and refugees.

7.4 SCOTTISH HEADLINES

The table of Scottish headlines in Appendix One highlights the headlines from a Scottish perspective. Criteria for including a headline in the table were keywords relating to asylum issues from a Scottish newspaper. These are the headlines that were in the news during the period of research.

Glasgow and Edinburgh have received considerable media coverage as have the local authorities in consultation with the National Asylum Support Service. Some of the smaller, local newspapers created positive images of asylum seekers by highlighting events, exhibitions and local community events, and in general, the coverage appears to have been less negative in Scotland as compared with the UK wide press. This may suggest the effectiveness of the media strategies adopted by Scottish organisations.

7.5 IMPACT OF MEDIA

The evidence suggests that media coverage of asylum issues creates a discourse made up of assumptions and beliefs about asylum seekers, many of which may be false. A number of the headlines create uncertainty about the numbers of asylum seekers seeking entry into Britain, with talk of ‘invasions of foreigners’; comments that Britain is a ‘soft touch’ for ‘bogus refugees’ casting doubt on the eligibility of those seeking asylum. Frequent reference is also made to the cost of supporting asylum seekers by British taxpayers.

Media images of asylum seekers are likely to have an impact on the asylum seekers themselves and on community relations. If asylum seekers are viewed with suspicion and hostility, it is likely to be more difficult to make friends thus intensifying a lack of social support. This may ultimately affect acceptance by the local community and future integration. Negative media images are likely to reinforce negative stereotypes.

Rather than a media which predominantly promotes and reflects negative views, local people need to know factual information about why asylum seekers from various countries are in Britain claiming asylum. The press could play an important role in presenting factual information that will allow people the opportunity to review the facts for themselves.

7.6 RESPONSES TO MEDIA COVERAGE

As part of the research study, all interviewees were asked about their views on the role of the media. The issues raised by different groups of respondents are highlighted below. All the groups saw the role of the media as negative.

7.6.1 Service providers

Media activity was seen as unhelpful by many service providers, who had developed media strategies to try and counter what they saw as misinformation, and the promotion of negativity towards asylum seekers.
Nearly all respondents felt that the media played a particularly negative role in coverage of asylum seeker issues, especially in the early stages of dispersal, and considerable anger was expressed by a number of respondents at the way in which the media were perceived as having made the situation worse.

The end result has been a good one but that was because the community united together against the negative image of Sighthill put forward by the press.

To counteract this, almost half of the service providers involved in the study had developed a media strategy for responding to coverage of asylum seeker issues which touched on the role of their organisation.

Local authorities negotiating contracts with NASS were very conscious of the need to have a robust media strategy, with a strong principle of rebutting misleading stories.

We’ve taken on board all the work done by Glasgow. It’s basically about putting the information out and getting the press on board. At the moment, it’s mainly factual information. We’ve produced a leaflet that’s gone out to all agencies and that will go out to households nearer the time, which addresses some of the myths about asylum seekers.

Local authorities were often working with journalists on locally-based newspapers to inform them of the issues, as well as utilising in-house newspapers and magazines, aimed at both staff and residents. As we have noted, some of these activities appeared to be having results in the more positive coverage.

7.6.2 Community organisations
Many community based groups saw part of their role to be lobbying relevant authorities and confronting negative media images of asylum seekers.

Some community groups were particularly critical of media activity in promoting hostility towards asylum seekers.

I think the majority of the community has reacted as well as they could be expected to, with the lack of information and the constantly negative media and political representations of asylum seekers.

Community organisations felt that journalists failed to check basic facts within stories and often sought to deliberately sensationalise stories, seeking out suitably negative and inflammatory views.

Where press releases had been issued regarding new projects or new resources being introduced, it was felt that they had been inadequately reported in the newspapers. This reinforced the view of many organisations that journalists were only interested in ‘sensationalist’ stories. A number of interviewees complained that stories about asylum seekers constantly referred to Sighthill, regardless of whether the asylum seekers concerned lived there or not.
The generally negative approach of the press was seen as being extremely prejudicial to the development of good community relations:

*The constant negative attention given to asylum seekers has only reinforced, for local people, that asylum seekers are a problem that they are being forced to deal with, that they are ‘spongers’, and that there is no such thing as a good asylum seeker, no matter what the evidence of their everyday contact is. It creates tension because almost every night local people are seeing stories that virtually encourage them to treat asylum seekers badly. At the same time, asylum seekers are scared of this negative attention. The tension created is one that it is very difficult for any local activities to tackle.*

This comment reflects the potential for media to tap into existing negative views and to reinforce and promote them. Among these respondents, there was almost complete unanimity amongst community groups that the media had a responsibility to report issues accurately and to take responsibility for the effects which their stories might have.

This antagonism towards the press did not, however, extend towards the smaller local papers, which were praised for their community focus and their willingness to interact with local agencies which were working with asylum seekers. These newspapers were praised for reporting local events and positive stories.

*The only consistently good reporting has been from the local newspaper, the Springburn Herald, which reports every story as a local interest one and will put in positive news stories.*

There had also been positive coverage of particular events, such as Refugee Week, which were seen as being helpful in the longer term:

*The local community got good coverage and ‘good press’ during Refugee Week, which has created a sense of pride within the community and has encouraged interaction and integration with the asylum seekers.*

7.6.3 Asylum seekers
Asylum seekers, like other respondents, felt that the media had portrayed them negatively, and told misleading stories about them. They made links between the negative coverage and some of their experiences in Glasgow. About one third of asylum seekers interviewed continued to experience harassment and racism in all areas of the city. Many respondents did not feel safe or secure in their neighbourhood, were afraid to go out, or to allow their children to play outside. It would be a mistake to see these experiences as entirely the result of media activity, but there is a strong suggestion that negative coverage could support racism and harassment.

On the other hand, many respondents welcomed the security they now experienced in Scotland, in contrast with the circumstances they had left behind. As time went on, developing social relationships with local Glasgow people, and with other asylum seekers became increasingly important. These experiences serve to counter the overall media tone, revealing that whilst the coverage may have tapped into racism, it was failing to reflect the more positive approach of many people in Glasgow.
7.7 CONCLUDING POINTS

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Media Coverage</th>
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<tr>
<td>• There has been considerable media coverage relating to asylum issues during the research period. A number of British and international asylum issues are ongoing and receive widespread media coverage. Specific incidents relating to asylum policies and asylum seekers often receive a high intensity of media coverage.</td>
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<th>Tone and Language of Coverage</th>
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<tr>
<td>• The tone of news reporting relating to asylum policies and asylum seekers appears overly negative, calling into question the validity of asylum claims. Positive headlines appear to be considerably outweighed by negative headlines. In Scottish and local papers however, there are more positive stories.</td>
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| • The language of the media and politicians can reinforce the myths surrounding asylum seekers. National and local politicians could play an important role in promoting positive images of asylum seekers and refugees. |

<table>
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<th>Media Strategies</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Organisations working with asylum seekers in Scotland should continue to build up good relationships with the media which will bring more positive stories to the public attention. There is a need for organisations working with asylum seekers to provide consistent and accurate information to the media.</td>
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| • There is a need for the promotion of positive images through factual information being available, awareness raising and anti-racism strategies. |
CHAPTER EIGHT: GOOD PRACTICE

8.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we bring together the material on good practice which has emerged during the course of the report. We identify what aspects of service provision for asylum seekers and of community relations work are praised and copied within Scotland, and also examine some recognised good practice examples from elsewhere. Finally, we examine processes of policy and practice learning, and consider how the dissemination of good practice might be more effectively promoted.

The notion of ‘good practice’ can be both contentious and difficult. A number of service providers, for example, identified policies and procedures which they were pursuing, which they believed were examples of good practice, but this view was not necessarily shared by the asylum seekers themselves. In this chapter therefore, we have tried to identify as good practice, those areas of practice which were also identified by asylum seekers, and which also link to national trends.

This discussion is informed by the stakeholders’ seminar which was held in Glasgow in September 2002 and attended by a range of service provider and asylum seeker representatives.

8.2 GOOD PRACTICE IN SERVICE PROVISION

8.2.1 Support for asylum seekers

The most successful examples of good practice were those which were focused on the asylum seekers’ perspective. Many service providers felt that the services delivered by Glasgow City Council were in this category and there were certainly a number of service areas, such as housing, where asylum seekers were generally positive. The documentation which had been produced for asylum seekers on their arrival in the city was thought to be excellent and there was general praise for the Council’s Welcome Pack.

Some service providers felt that the YMCA, having initially struggled because of bad publicity, had responded to concerns and tried hard to resolve the issues raised. They were seen as giving increased support to asylum seekers, although asylum seekers themselves did not identify the YMCA as an example of good practice.

Many asylum seekers have difficulty accessing services, because of difficulties in communication. The work of the interpreting services was widely praised, particularly in view of the range of languages now spoken in Glasgow. There was also praise for the various examples across all services of translated material.

Approaches to service provision which were holistic were thought to be particularly successful, as this allows for flexibility and the ability to deal with all the various needs of asylum seekers, rather than trying to compartmentalise.

Asylum seekers themselves had developed a series of mutual support organisations and these were also seen as being extremely important. A Local Exchange and Trading Scheme (LETS) is being discussed, as this would allow asylum seekers to work through exchanging their skills and services, rather than being paid, which would not be allowed. There was a
widespread view that schemes such as these were worthy of a greater level of support than they were perhaps receiving.

Another way in which asylum seekers were being supported in the employment area was in ‘work shadowing’ and the Bridges Project, run by the Institute for Contemporary Scotland in conjunction with the Scottish Refugee Council, was seen as a model of good practice. The scheme is aimed at asylum seekers and refugees who are either waiting for their status to be decided or who have been given leave to remain and wish to access the work environment. Individuals undertake three month placements, observing the work of others and gaining the knowledge needed subsequently to apply for a job. It therefore prepares asylum seekers and refugees for the return to work.

8.2.2 The Education Service
The Education Service was widely praised by asylum seekers themselves, and by other service providers. As well as providing a safe learning environment for children of asylum seekers, schools had developed good bilingual support, and this was seen as being extremely important, particularly at primary level. It was thought that teachers were giving out very positive messages, being ‘proud to have bilingual students’.

The role of schools in community relations was also praised and the children of asylum seekers were thought to be relatively well integrated in the community.

Education for adult asylum seekers was also important and local projects such as Bridging the Gap were praised. This project, based in the Gorbals, provides English classes, in conjunction with Glasgow College of Nautical Studies. Other colleges were also providing excellent adult education in English.

The Scottish Refugee Council was also thought to be providing a valuable education service, through offering specialist advice on the accreditation of overseas qualifications, and guidance on careers and employment.

8.2.3 The Health Service
The Health Service was seen as providing a good service, particularly at a local level and there was widespread praise for local GP practices, who were seen as having done good work with asylum seekers, despite difficulties involved in language and communication.

There had also been excellent work carried out by the Primary Health Care Trust in organising medical screening by questionnaire, in order to build up a picture of asylum seekers’ medical conditions.

A major concern has been the mental health of asylum seekers and mental health workers were thought to have carried out their work sensitively, being prepared to ‘listen to trauma’. That said, there is research evidence elsewhere (Ferguson and Barclay 2002), which demonstrates that problems in the provision of mental health services to asylum seekers still exist. Their findings are similar to those of Lewis and Church (2001) in their Liverpool study, referred to below in paragraph 8.4.

8.2.4 The Police
The police were seen as being sensitive in terms of their use of interpreters, their appointment of specialist officers for working with asylum seekers, and their willingness to accept third party reporting, whereby referrals to the police are made through other organisations.
It was suggested that the work of the police in Glasgow was seen in England as a model of good practice.

8.2.5 Voluntary Organisations
The role of voluntary organisations was widely recognised. These ranged from organisations like the Churches and the Mosques to various community groups which were important for community development. Some individual community groups were singled out as having worked hard to integrate asylum seekers into the local community. Voluntary groups were seen as having the flexibility to work well with asylum seekers, as they were not as restricted as the local authority, not having any contractual ties to NASS.

As well as community groups, there were also groups such as Victim Support, who have worked with asylum seekers in relation to trauma and mental health issues.

There are voluntary groups who offer very practical support. Glasgow Student Action for Refugees, for example, runs a weekly food co-operative for asylum seekers. And for asylum seekers who receive permission to stay in the UK, the Scottish Refugee Council status advisors offer a family reunion service. This is a service which reunites close family members following a positive decision on an asylum claim.

8.2.6 Joint Working
Multi-agency working was identified by many respondents as being the basis of good practice in work with asylum seekers and its development was seen as being of great significance. At the same time, difficulties in multi-agency working were identified, including the considerable time commitment it involved; lack of commitment by some partners; and the demands which it made on specialist agencies in particular.

Nevertheless, joint working allows all agencies to have ‘ownership’ of the issues and solutions and examples of good practice can be exchanged between organisations.

A good example is provided by Edinburgh Council, which is one of the local authorities discussing taking asylum seekers in the near future and which has worked to ensure good co-ordination between agencies. Their Education Department has developed a ‘roadshow’, in conjunction with the Scottish Refugee Council and the Edinburgh and Lothians Refugee Forum, which has toured primary and secondary schools in the city. It has been used to inform school pupils about the plight of refugees and asylum seekers, and the possible implications of asylum seekers moving into their area. Subsequent presentations have been made at some of the city’s F.E. colleges.

8.3 GOOD PRACTICE IN COMMUNITY RELATIONS
There is a wide perception that the grassroots activity of community groups is helping to foster good community relations. There is a reservoir of goodwill towards asylum seekers in many areas which is an important resource, and which is being tapped by many groups.

Community groups are becoming significant providers of services for asylum seekers. Services include crèches, drop-in and advice centres and a range of classes, including languages, sewing, creative writing, dance and relaxation, as well as children’s and youth groups. The provision of such a wide range of services and the automatic assumption
that asylum seekers are part of their client group is an example of good practice. It is clearly helping to foster integration.

The Churches have played a major role. For example, in Castlemilk, the organisation ‘Castlemilk Churches Together’ was established in Autumn 2000 and has become an important local resource, staffed with volunteers from the local community.

The role of community organisations in helping to foster local festivals and street parties was also seen as significant. The West End Festival has existed for a number of years and there have been further developments, notably the North Glasgow International Festival, held in June 2001. Such events may take on much greater significance in the future, as asylum seekers decide to remain in Glasgow, following a positive decision. They may develop much as the Notting Hill Carnival has developed in London.

Local groups were also seen as having a major role to play in helping to organise public meetings. These can involve the statutory agencies – Housing, Social Work, Police etc – and help to explain the position of asylum seekers, and raise awareness of issues.

8.4 EXAMPLES FROM ELSEWHERE

Research which has been undertaken elsewhere, for example by Oxford Brookes University, has also highlighted examples of good practice and many of them parallel the Scottish experience. This section describes some of the good practice which may be found in England.

8.4.1 Support for asylum seekers

One of the main concerns of the English consortia has been to try and maintain coherent language clusters, as this offers the opportunity to devise efficient and responsive support packages, including most crucially, the provision of appropriate interpretation facilities. From the asylum seeker’s point of view, relatively homogeneous language groupings would provide solidarity, mutual support networks and, if the host communities shared the same languages, the possibility of developing wider social networks as well. As a result, those eventually given a positive decision to remain might feel more inclined to settle locally.

Some consortia have not always achieved their aims and have had to deal with a multiplicity of languages and lack of information on which to plan translation services and language support in schools. On the other hand, the Yorkshire and Humberside Consortium has been resolute about limiting asylum households to their designated languages. While this may be seen in some ways as being less flexible than some other consortia, there have also been positive outcomes: in particular, the greater scope to identify suitable accommodation for asylum seekers and provide appropriate support packages.

A key area of support relates to the initial reception of asylum seekers. Glasgow, for example, has received praise for its Welcome Pack. Another specific example of good practice is the Hillside Centre in Leeds, which is used to accommodate asylum households dispersed to the region for a period of two weeks, during which time they have health screening, language training, induction to the area and registration with local health and education facilities. This is believed to create a greater capacity for independence when asylum seekers are placed in accommodation and reduces ad hoc demands on local services due to ignorance of systems. Interestingly, Fife Council has decided to adopt this particular model (see paragraph 6.5).
As in Scotland, approaches to asylum seeker support which are holistic are seen as good practice. Zetter and Pearl (1999), for example, refer to the work of many housing associations in England who have adopted a holistic ‘Housing Plus’ approach, assisting asylum seekers to access training, work experience and education, so as to enhance their opportunity to achieve independence and a better quality of life.

Some associations have also worked to support tenant groups made up of refugees and asylum seekers, as part of their tenant participation strategies. This has helped to give asylum seekers a voice in relation to the housing service. Similarly, Carey-Wood (1997) identifies refugee-specific housing initiatives as being good practice, because they are easily identifiable to users.

The area of translation and interpreting is also one where asylum seekers themselves could have an input. The Audit Commission (2000), for example, describe the work of the London Borough of Lewisham, which has a project to provide asylum seekers with an accredited qualification in community translation that offers a route to the Institute of Linguists qualification. Training asylum seekers in this way can help bridge gaps in provision and ensure a speedy response to any new asylum seekers with new language needs, while recognising that in small language clusters, issues of confidentiality may arise.

8.4.2 The Education Service
Education services have been very closely involved in the development of good practice, because of the sheer number of children in asylum households. In the Manchester consortium, the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS), which is part of the city council, has a number of initiatives as regards the education of asylum seekers’ children and adult education. The £500 capitation per dispersed asylum seeker child, is used in Manchester to ‘buy back’ an interpretation service from EMAS. This provides 50 hours of interpretation for each child, with EMAS employing interpreters in 33 different languages. Manchester Education Authority has appointed extra teachers of English as an ‘additional’ language. Additional funding is available to support asylum seeker children, from The Children’s Fund which EMAS uses to fund five full-time Family and Support Workers and a trauma support team.

EMAS also produces a Welcome Document for asylum seekers, providing information on the English educational system for children of statutory school age. It covers how to access schools, what children can expect at school, English language and special educational needs, plus a contact list of useful local agencies.

In the West Midlands, some extra funding has come from the New Opportunities Fund for out-of-hours work with pupils. Birmingham Education services are currently investigating new funding avenues including the ‘pupil support allowance’ for all newly arrived children, as funding specifically for asylum seekers tends to be perceived as divisive and discriminatory in relation to the settled minority ethnic communities in Birmingham.

8.4.3 The Health Service
As in Scotland, there are examples of good practice elsewhere and the Oxford Brookes research specifically highlights the mental health area as one where a great deal of work has been done. For example, in Birmingham, the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, in an initiative which predates dispersal, provides some outreach through the Midlands Refugee Council (MRC) and a network of city and regional resources. The MRC
Health Initiative specialises in working with the victims of torture with a holistic approach to health. But the work performed by the MRC is insufficient to meet the level of demand now presented by the asylum seekers. After a successful bid to the Challenge Fund it secured funding to the end of March 2002, enabling it to employ two mental health workers.

Another, but different example of good practice relates to filling the information gap about asylum seeker mental health conditions and needs. In Liverpool, the Mental Health Needs Assessment Working Group of the local health authority has undertaken research in this field. This began following the influx of refugees from Kosovo, continuing with the arrival of asylum seekers through dispersal. The survey has highlighted the mental health problems faced by asylum seekers, including emotional problems (anxiety, fear, frustration, disappointment, anger, unhappiness), depression, past trauma, and uncertainty over the future, specifically their asylum claim.

Research by Carey-Wood (1997) has suggested that health initiatives which are refugee-specific have decided advantages, because of the need to combine language skills, medical knowledge and knowledge of the refugee experience. The use of interpreters without specialist training in medical situations is not adequate. She identifies projects in London, for example in Haringey Health Authority, which use outreach workers based in health authority premises, and such an approach could be useful also in assisting asylum seekers.

One of the main problems which occurs in areas where large numbers of asylum seekers are living is the strain on individual GP practices. The Audit Commission (2000) suggests that this can be reduced by establishing a dedicated resource for high mobility groups. South Camden Primary Care Group, for example, has employed an extra doctor specifically to work in a practice with a high intake of transient patients, while Parkside Health Trust in west London has set up a Health Support Team to improve access to health services for asylum seekers and refugees. The Commission suggests that these approaches would be appropriate for areas where there is a high density of refugees and asylum seekers.

8.4.4 Voluntary Organisations
The role of voluntary organisations is particularly significant and there are several examples of good practice, particularly with the voluntary and statutory sectors working together. For example, in Liverpool, the Refugee and Ethnic Minority Support Services (REMISUS) is a small but active group with a number of aims, one of which is to provide supported accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees in partnership with local housing associations. It also provides advice, information and support. REMISUS has recently received funding and has begun to develop and build upon some of these ideas. Comprised of refugees, the organisation has extensive experience of asylum seeker and refugee concerns including, importantly, mental health problems.

In Glasgow, there is evidence that the Churches and the Mosque have provided significant support to asylum seekers. The Oxford Brookes study also indicates that faith-based groups have played a major role in plugging gaps left by more formal organisations. Examples include areas such as Lincoln, where the level of dispersal is relatively low and the support networks characteristic of large urban areas do not exist. Lincoln Welcome is a church based organisation which remains the only refugee agency in the city. But even in the major dispersal regions there is a similar picture. In the North West the West Midlands and Yorkshire and Humberside, the Churches and faith groups have also provided support, often
in the form of much needed commodities such as **food parcels and welcome/arrival packs** for asylum seekers or for local authority asylum teams to distribute.

**8.5 POLICY AND PRACTICE LEARNING**

Although there are a number of examples of good practice both in Scotland and elsewhere, such practice has often evolved independently and there are only limited examples of the different consortia learning from each other. The very different approaches of the consortia can be seen, for example, in relation to language clusters. As noted above, Yorkshire and Humberside has adopted a far firmer line than elsewhere in relation to the asylum seekers they were prepared to accept, specifically so as to minimise the numbers of languages with which they would have to deal.

There are too very different approaches to reception. Leeds places asylum seekers in a reception centre for a couple of weeks, to allow for an induction process. Other consortia have placed asylum seekers more quickly into houses, in the belief that this would allow them to settle into the local communities. Both approaches are valid and both are adopted in Scotland, with Glasgow using the latter approach, while Fife has chosen to use the Leeds model. The Glasgow Welcome Pack is being copied in other Scottish authorities.

There seems to be a general acceptance across all consortia that the needs and problems of asylum seekers cannot easily be compartmentalised according to service provider or departmental responsibilities and a holistic approach is required.

There is also a general acceptance of the importance of the voluntary sector and of faith groups, including the Churches, Mosques etc.

There does not, however, appear to be any organised way in which the good practice of one consortium can be passed on to another. Local authorities in Scotland who are at the first stages of taking asylum seekers for example, have visited English authorities to learn from their experiences but this seems to have taken place on an individual basis. **It may therefore be more appropriate in future for information exchange and the dissemination of good practice to become more organised.**

There are undoubtedly a number of areas, where Scottish authorities can still learn from experiences elsewhere. **Firstly, there are a number of health initiatives described in section 8.4 above, which would have an important impact in Glasgow, notably in mental health provision and in additional support for hard pressed GP practices.**

Secondly, there are an increasing number of organisations being established in England which are led by refugees and asylum seekers themselves. This appears to be the case particularly in the housing and employment areas. By contrast, Scotland, unlike England, has no fully developed black and minority ethnic led housing association yet. In England, such associations have taken a lead in working with refugees and asylum seekers. **It will be important for such refugee-led organisations to be developed in Scotland,** as asylum seekers increasingly obtain positive decisions to remain in the UK and decide to stay in the Glasgow area.

Finally, this whole area of **developing ‘move-on’ strategies for refugees is one which will become increasingly important, as the numbers of refugees opting to remain in Scotland**
increases. Examples of good practice such as work shadowing (described above) are particularly important in this regard, so that refugees can start to move into the labour market. Many English organisations have developed expertise in planning ‘move-on’ strategies, as they have dealt with refugees for many years, so it is important that ways are found of enabling Scottish organisations to learn from these experiences.

8.6 CONCLUDING POINTS

There are a number of conclusions which may be drawn from this examination of good practice.

**Good Practice in General**
- There are a number of examples of good practice in relation to working with asylum seekers. Some of these may be derived from within Scottish practice; some have emerged from the experiences of the English consortia.
- Specifically, it is recognised that holistic approaches to practice, which deal with the range of issues and problems affecting asylum seekers are ultimately more effective. Multi-agency working was identified by many respondents as being the basis of good practice in work with asylum seekers.
- Good practice has emerged in the different consortia rather independently and there does not appear to be a readily accessible mechanism for the dissemination of good practice. As more local authorities negotiate contracts with NASS, it is important that they have the opportunity to learn from the experiences of other consortia.

**Good Practice in Reception**
- One of the most important areas of practice relates to the initial reception of asylum seekers. There are differences in approach across the consortia but each has its strengths. Within Glasgow, the Welcome Pack is generally praised as an example of good practice.

**Good Practice in Refugee/Asylum Seeker-Led Organisations**
- There are a number of examples of mutual support organisations, which are led by refugees and asylum seekers, in both the housing and employment fields. These are extremely important, as they place the asylum seekers in ‘control’.

**Good Practice in Education**
- Examples of good practice from Glasgow include the development of bi-lingual support in schools, the role of schools in community relations and the promotion of positive messages by schools. Education for adult asylum seekers was also praised, including the Bridging the Gap project and other English language classes. The advice on accreditation and guidance on careers offered by the Scottish Refugee Council was also highlighted as good practice.

**Good Practice in Health**
- Examples of good practice include the good work done by local GPs in Glasgow, the development of medical screening for asylum seekers by the Primary Health Care Trust and the sensitive and important work carried out by mental health workers in the area.
### Good Practice in the Police
- The police were seen as demonstrating good practice in the use of interpreters and in the appointment of specialist officers to work with asylum seekers. The willingness of police to accept third party reporting was also seen as good practice.

### Good Practice in Communities
- Examples of good practice in community relations include the automatic assumption that asylum seekers are part of the client group for community services. The work of the churches, such as *Castlemilk Churches Together* demonstrate good practice. Development of local festivals such as the *North Glasgow International Festival* were also quoted as good examples of ways to bring communities together.

### Good Practice in ‘Move-On’
- The *Bridges Project*, which is aimed at preparing asylum seekers and refugees for the return to work, is quoted as a model of good practice in the development of approaches to support ‘move-on’.
CHAPTER NINE: KEY FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

9.1 KEY FINDINGS

The aim of this research project was to assess the effect of the implementation of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 on asylum seekers and devolved services in Scotland, with an emphasis on identifying good practice which would be of lasting value in delivering services to asylum seekers. Overall, we have found the effects on services and asylum seekers to be mixed. There is much goodwill and good practice, and many asylum seekers have found safety, security and welcome in Glasgow. Others have met with inadequate, insensitive services, and antipathy from local communities. Services have made huge efforts to respond to the needs of this new client group, often in the face of difficult relationships with the central agency and inadequate resources.

We begin this concluding chapter by briefly summarising the conclusions of each chapter, focussing in turn on each of the different perspectives we have discussed. We then go on to consider key issues from the findings, and their implications for policy and practice. The key issues cross-cut the findings from the various sets of data.

9.1.1 Service providers

From the service provider point of view, dispersal brought benefits to Glasgow. These were financial (in terms of the housing stock); increased employment (in refurbishment work and service provision); educational (keeping schools open and bringing in highly motivated children); addressing present and future skills shortages; and cultural (in terms of the benefits of a multi-cultural city).

Negative aspects of dispersal policy identified included: the scale and speed of dispersal; the lack of preparation of services; the perceived over-centralisation of NASS; impact of the process on asylum seekers; and lack of preparation of local communities.

In terms of the development and delivery of services, significant policy development had been required over a short period. This had been especially marked for those services which had not previously worked with this group, and considerable investment had been made. Services which had some experience experienced considerable strain, as their expertise and resources were stretched to their limit. The ‘steep learning curve’ was experienced by providers in all areas – over the process, much has been learned.

Service providers identified areas in which they felt good practice had become established. These included the multi-agency working, which, though not necessarily operating smoothly, was recognised as the most effective way to approach service provision for asylum seekers. Cultural sensitivity and holism, involving an appreciation of complex needs, were seen to be ideal approaches in delivering services. Community development work was seen as an essential part of service provision and development, especially in terms of tackling issues of racism and harassment. Service providers also felt that learning from the experiences of others, and disseminating good practice were crucial to successful provision in the future.

Problems identified by service providers included some which had been especially acute at the start of the dispersal process, when there had been a lack of co-ordination, and though efforts had been made by agencies to prepare for the arrival of asylum seekers, they had found themselves insufficiently prepared for the range of support that asylum seekers would
need. Relations with NASS were widely described as problematic. Agencies had experienced some funding difficulties. In some cases, funding had simply been insufficient for the level of demand on services. In others, no resources had been allocated, and service providers had been considerably stretched. Media activity was seen as unhelpful by many service providers, who had developed media strategies to try and counter what they saw as misinformation, and the promotion of negativity towards asylum seekers. Finally, service providers were highly conscious of the need to address wider community relations issues which they linked with deprivation in some of the areas in which asylum seekers had been settled. They saw deprivation as being more likely to engender racism when incomers might be perceived as receiving resources which local people had not.

Several issues emerged as being of particular concern to service providers. Interpreting, which, despite a recent injection of funds, was still proving difficult to provide effectively. Advocacy emerged as a service which asylum seekers were considered to need, but which was not yet available. Information flows were inadequate, and many asylum seekers were not getting the information they needed, and were sometimes receiving incorrect information from informal sources. Move-on was an issue which many providers felt was in urgent need of further attention as asylum seekers became refugees, sought permanent housing and employment, and became the sole responsibility of Scottish service providers.

9.1.2 Asylum seekers

The interviews with asylum seekers served to re-emphasise the very traumatic experiences which many had had in leaving their own countries and eventually arriving in Glasgow, a place of which many had no previous knowledge and in which few expected ever to be living. They also emphasised that asylum seekers cannot be regarded merely as the passive recipients of services, but that they are active in the process of seeking out and negotiating help, and that they have a positive role in fostering effective service provision and good community relations.

Much of the experience of the asylum seekers mirrored the difficulties which the service providers had highlighted. Though many people were positive about the service they had received, a wide range of problems was highlighted. Asylum seekers had experienced both good and bad in all the services covered, though the education service generally came across as particularly good.

The experiences of the asylum seekers emphasised the vital importance of the early services, the initial advice and introductions to the various relevant agencies. Where these went well, there was smooth progress through the various services. Where they went wrong, there was significant potential for disaster, for the propagation of misinformation, for frequent, fruitless repeat visits to agencies which could not help and whose responsibilities were not well understood.

Key problems highlighted by the asylum seekers included interpreting. There were too many instances of lack of interpreter or poor interpreters, making access to services, gaining correct information and getting help particularly difficult. Effective interpreting and good communication came across as fundamental to a good experience of services and there were indications that for many, advocacy support would also be beneficial.

It was clear that there are continuing problems with racism and harassment directed at asylum seekers, whilst there are also areas in which effective community development work has
helped to build up good relations among asylum seekers and between asylum seekers and local communities.

9.1.3 Community groups
The community groups which were interviewed to ascertain wider perspectives in community relations generally confirmed the picture which had emerged from the service providers and the asylum seekers. They repeated the concerns about asylum seekers being placed in deprived communities, and the need to work with wider communities in all areas to promote good community relations. They felt that there was a reservoir of goodwill in many communities, however deprived, and that this could be nurtured and supported. Integration and good relations required work and investment in the view of these respondents. This group was particularly critical of media activity in promoting hostility towards asylum seekers.

9.1.4 Other councils
Three other local authorities were involved in negotiations with NASS to take asylum seekers whose dispersal continued. The negotiations were not proceeding very smoothly, and the problems with the central agency appeared persistent. In terms of receiving asylum seekers, there was evidence that these councils were learning from the experiences of others, and that they had identified good practice which they planned to replicate, taking account of local circumstances. Learning had involved the Scottish experience, as well as work from other parts of the UK. The councils highlighted particularly the community relations work which others had argued was essential, and they were also planning from the start for move-on.

9.1.5 Media
Monitoring of newspaper coverage of asylum seekers over the period of the research demonstrated extensive and continuing media interest. Material on many issues included mention of asylum seekers, and it was often difficult to see why asylum seekers had been seen as relevant to some stories. Specialist coverage about asylum seekers was also extensive, and a large quantity of this material was negative. It was not difficult to see why respondents to the interviews felt that the role of the media had been mainly negative. Of course, monitoring content does not indicate how the stories were received, but the experience of our interviewees has to be taken seriously. They were working in many cases to promote positive images of asylum seekers often against the odds, and feeling the need to have a media strategy which countered the continuing negative coverage.

9.1.6 Good practice
Good practice in the implementation of dispersal, the provision of services to asylum seekers, community relations, and media strategy undoubtedly exists, both in Scotland and in other parts of the UK. Where good practice is implemented, dispersal works; good, effective services are provided and people live in welcoming communities, in the ‘safe haven’ they need. There is evidence that good practice is being disseminated and followed, though more work remains to be done in this area, and more effective mechanisms to spread learning from good practice need to be developed.

9.2 KEY ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS
In this section, we explore the key cross-cutting issues which emerged from the various sets of data collected for the study, and consider their implications for policy and practice. These issues were discussed at the stakeholder seminar held in Glasgow in September 2002 and attended by representatives of statutory and voluntary sector services and of asylum seeker
groups, as well as the Scottish Executive and the research team. In this section, we draw on the research findings and also on the discussion at the seminar.

The key issues are good practice, community relations, information needs, devolved services, the voluntary sector, media and moving on.

### 9.2.1 Good practice

The following key questions were identified:

- How can good and bad practice be identified?
- How can good practice be disseminated?
- Is good practice learning occurring in Scotland?

The approach taken to identifying good practice involved exploring the perceptions of the various stakeholders in the delivery and receipt of services. It was considered important to identify good practice grounded in all these experiences, rather than accepting at face value the assertions of some service providers about the quality of their practice. Further support for the assessment of quality in practice was provided by the review of good practice from elsewhere included in Chapter Eight. In general, there was no one service, which was an exemplar as a whole of good practice. Rather, elements of good practice were widely distributed across services and service sectors.

#### 9.2.1.1 Multi-agency working

From the service providers’ points of view, key elements of good practice included multi-agency working, which had clearly been extensive, though not always unproblematic. Nevertheless, service providers were in general committed to it. Asylum seekers who had received good information on arrival in Glasgow, which ensured access to all the services they needed, provided evidence that where multi-agency working was effective, it resulted in good services. Good services ensured, for example, that interpreting support was readily available, reliable and effective, specific family needs were understood and catered for, health issues were identified and addressed, accurate legal advice supported the efficient processing of claims and so on. Where there were difficulties in co-operation and communication between agencies, problems could result, such as were widely reported for NASS and the local service providers. These difficult relations had produced problems both for local service providers and for asylum seekers themselves.

#### 9.2.1.2 Cultural sensitivity and anti-racism

**Cultural sensitivity** was identified by service providers as an essential basis for the delivery of services, involving recognition of diversity, varying needs and particular cultural preferences. Whilst commitment to culturally sensitive practice was widespread however, it had not always been realised in practice, as indicated for example by difficulties with the gender of medical staff, and lack of childcare provision for women seeking to study outside the home. Agreement on the need for services to be culturally sensitive also came from the asylum seekers themselves, who stressed, for example, the need for interpreting and support services which took account of different cultural understandings, as well as offering straight translation. Asylum seekers’ responses dealt more widely with attitudes, and included accounts of experiences of racism. Many felt excluded from wider social relations, as well as, in some cases, from receipt of services, feeling that attitudes towards them were particularly negative. Where service providers spoke of the need to combat racism, they tended to locate
this in wider communities rather than potentially within agencies, though a few were more explicit about the **need to combat potential institutional racism**.

### 9.2.1.3 Community development

Service providers, community organisations and the other councils interviewed all emphasised the **importance of promoting good community relations**. The difficulties experienced in some areas of Glasgow, especially in the early stages of the NASS contract and despite best efforts locally, had clearly had a considerable effect in re-emphasising the importance of work with local communities. The experiences of asylum seekers of racism and harassment on the one hand and, on the other, of building good relationships with local communities, support the view that community relations work is an essential element of good practice. We discuss this issue further below (9.2.2).

### 9.2.1.4 Disseminating good practice

There was some evidence of good practice dissemination and learning in the Scottish context, which had also drawn on work elsewhere. The multi-agency working had allowed open lines of communication between agencies, and though these involved some tensions, there was a **clear commitment towards working together and sharing good practice lessons**. Good practice lessons from across the UK had also been taken into account to some extent, especially by the authorities in the process of negotiating new contracts. These authorities were also learning from the Glasgow experience. However, across the UK, consortia have tended to work rather separately from one another, communicating with NASS rather than with other consortia, and readily accessible good practice learning mechanisms do not appear to be in place. These relationships and practices may have impeded the dissemination of good practice to some extent.

**There is a continuing need for learning and dissemination.** Although current practices derive from and are relevant to recent and current dispersal policy, they also have wider implications for delivery of services to asylum seekers under other policy regimes, and will certainly be relevant for the foreseeable future as dispersal continues, and as refugee settlement proceeds. In this context, the **SRIF (2003) report and action plan are to be welcomed for drawing on lessons learned from the process of service provision to asylum seekers, as well as previous experience in supporting refugees, to develop detailed discussion of developing services for refugees and the processes of settlement and integration.**

**GOOD PRACTICE: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE**

- More effective mechanisms need to be developed to share and learn from this good practice. The work of SRIF and the forthcoming Action Plan will play an important role in informing this process.
- Effective multi-agency working should be facilitated where possible.
- All agencies need to recognise diversity, individual needs and cultural preferences when planning and delivering services.
- All agencies should aim to promote a holistic approach to service provision where appropriate.
9.2.2 Community relations
The key questions identified in the community relations area were:

- What is the value of community relations work?
- Who should do it?
- What is the role of asylum seeker groups?
- Does clustering help? Is it operating?

9.2.2.1 Need for community relations work
There is much evidence in the report of the value of and continuing need for community relations work, generally adopting a community development approach, especially to combat racism and harassment of asylum seekers. As noted above, service providers repeatedly identified community development as a key element of good practice, involving preparation of communities before asylum seekers’ arrival, working with communities to ensure good relations, and combating racism and harassment. From the point of view of asylum seekers, good community relations existed for some, whilst others had been troubled by racism and harassment. The groups interviewed specifically about community relations were involved in grassroots work at a local level and identified further investment in this area as necessary. Difficulties were believed to have arisen from the placement of asylum seekers in deprived areas, and though efforts had been made to prepare local communities for this, many respondents felt that more work was needed.

9.2.2.2 Community development activity
Community development work has to date involved a variety of groups and agencies, each of which has had a particular role to play. They have included statutory and voluntary service providers, as well as other voluntary sector groups, faith groups and organisations such as SIPs, as well as asylum seeker communities themselves. This range and depth of work appears to have positive results, and to be worth the investment of resources it undoubtedly entails. Some work, such as that conducted by Glasgow City Council in preparation for the arrival of dispersed asylum seekers, was clearly planned from the start of the process, and seen early on as an integral part of it. Other work however, such as some of that done by faith groups, seems to have appeared in response to issues on the ground, and in several cases to have severely stretched the resources of the groups involved.

Groups formed by asylum seekers themselves, and subsequently refugees, appear to be especially effective in promoting a sense of security and community which provides a safe basis for building good inter-community relationships. Asylum seekers themselves commented favourably on the benefits they derived from these groups, notably mutual support and self-help, and commented that resources to facilitate this activity would be especially welcome. It should be noted, however, that many asylum seekers did not have access to such groups for various reasons, including small numbers of people from one country being settled in Glasgow, the dispersal of nationality groups across the city and, potentially, their reluctance to raise their profile as a group due to experiences of racism and harassment.

9.2.2.3 Racism and harassment
The experiences of the asylum seeker respondents in particular also serve to emphasise that community relations work needs to include anti-racist activity. There were many experiences of racism and harassment, and service providers recognised these as issues in communities. They commented in particular on the link between social deprivation and the tendency to
blame incomers for local problems. Service providers were less likely to locate problems of racism within their own organisations, even though some asylum seekers had felt that some agency staff had behaved towards them in a racist manner. Thus, anti-racist community development work can help promote good community relations, and there remains a need for anti-racist training within agencies.

Calls therefore continue for further community development activity. Some have argued that measures such as befriending services will enhance community relations, especially as issues of refugee integration become increasingly significant. The SRIF documentation (2003) emphasises the need for promoting community development of refugee organisations, seeing these as promoting genuine representation and social inclusion of refugee communities, as well as facilitating inter-community activities.

**COMMUNITY RELATIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE**

- There is a clear need to incorporate community relations work into preparations for asylum seekers’ arrival, into ongoing work with communities following arrival and into work to promote integration of refugees once they have been granted a decision.
- Resources to enable development of asylum seeker-led activities are required, particularly for smaller nationality or language groups who are dispersed widely across an area.
- Local community activities such as crèches, drop-in centres, meeting facilities etc. need to be adequately promoted and resourced to ensure access to these services is as wide as possible.
- There is a clear need for the expansion of anti-racist training and awareness activity amongst community organisations and more widely.

**9.2.3 Information needs**

The complex issue of information needs raised the following key questions:

- How far are information needs and interpreting needs part of the same issue?
- What is the impact on agencies of asylum seekers’ unsatisfied information needs?
- Would measures such as advocacy and befriending improve information flows?

**9.2.3.1 Asylum seekers’ information needs**

The report identifies many areas in which improved circulation of information would counter some of the difficulties experienced both by providers and users of services. The asylum seekers’ interviews in particular demonstrated how poor information in many ways could increase calls on services. People’s needs had been misunderstood; often, they did not fully understand the remits of different agencies; and misinformation circulated, causing unnecessary difficulties. Such difficulties had transpired most often where the initial information received had for one reason or another not been fully effective.

Excellent information and communication provide the essential foundations for effective services, and nowhere are these more critical than at this initial stage of dispersal, a time which has in the past brought particular difficulties to both service providers and service users, as our respondents described. Much of this difficulty was laid by respondents at the door of NASS, which was felt not to liaise effectively either with local service providers or with asylum seekers themselves.
9.2.3.2 Interpreting
To achieve excellent communication and information, **language barriers necessitate a high standard of interpreting.** However, the report demonstrated that interpreting was a central difficulty for service providers and users alike. The service providers raised the lack of interpreters as a key weakness of services, and, though noting that matters had improved somewhat since the early days of dispersal, raised questions about quality and availability of interpreters. From the asylum seekers’ interviews, there was evidence of poor service, poor quality of interpreting, and the use of untrained, informal interpreters (sometimes family members). Many respondents thus identified **needs for improvement in this area,** which they recognised as fundamental to the effective circulation of information. In some cases, especially from the asylum seekers’ interviews, it was clear that interpreting alone was insufficient, and that **advocacy services, which had been found useful by some, might merit further development.** Befriending services also require further consideration, for their potential positive contribution to communication, integration and well-being.

9.2.3.3 Promoting good communication
In addition to better interpreting services, especially at initial settlement, **good communication and information can be facilitated by the good practice identified earlier in terms of good multi-agency working and good practice learning.** There was evidence that councils negotiating contracts were determined to promote these practices. Clearly, **moves to improve communication between service providers in the form of working together and disseminating good practice should have a positive impact on fulfilling asylum seekers’ needs for effective communication and information.**

**INFORMATION NEEDS: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE**

- The remit of key services should be made clear so that asylum seekers know what they can/cannot expect from these services.
- Communication can be facilitated by effective multi-agency working. Greater partnership working with NASS should be pursued in order to improve information flows in this crucial area.
- Examples of good practice such as Glasgow City Council’s Welcome Pack need to be disseminated and developed within a local context by other local authorities.

**INTERPRETING: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE**

- Continuing service improvement in relation to interpreting is essential.
- Interpreter availability should be addressed through improved planning and resourcing of interpreting services, and issues of interpreter quality through improved training and monitoring of interpreters.
- This may be an approach that could be considered within the Scottish context.
- There is a need to explore the added contribution that advocacy services can provide to asylum seekers and to promote the development of these services where appropriate.
9.2.4 Devolved services
In the report, there was discussion about the centralised nature of NASS and some of the difficulties this had presented. There was also a wider UK demand that NASS be devolved to operate more locally. The following issues arose in this context:

- Will decentralisation help, and how will it do so?
- How might the resource issues for statutory agencies be addressed?
- What are the unforeseen effects on devolved services, and how might these be addressed?

9.2.4.1 Devolving services
The service providers were widely critical of the centralised operation of NASS, and there were many comments from them as well as from asylum seekers about the difficulties that centralisation was believed to have caused. Many of these were linked with issues of information and communication. There was support for decentralisation, but this was seen to require more of a partnership with NASS, and the development of shared approaches to work with asylum seekers. The councils negotiating contracts, which found SASC helpful, but had experienced difficulties in the constant necessary reference back to NASS, reiterated the difficulties of centralisation. There was a lack of partnership in the negotiations, with NASS being perceived as directive.

Thus, the respondents demonstrated on the one hand some support for decentralisation of NASS, whilst on the other, scepticism about whether this would be effective, as it might not be accompanied by what were seen as other necessary changes in NASS’ way of operating.

9.2.4.2 Resourcing devolved services
There is, of course, an inherent difficulty in discussions about devolving NASS, in that whilst asylum is a reserved power, service support for asylum seekers in Scotland falls to devolved agencies in housing, health, education and social services. Devolution of NASS cannot therefore include the devolution to Scottish agencies of the full responsibility for asylum seeker matters – it is a question of having more locally based staff, who are more familiar with local conditions, and who can provide advice and support to service providers as well as asylum seekers themselves more locally, and, our respondents hoped, more quickly and efficiently. Some respondents saw devolution of NASS, accompanied by changes in its operation, as potentially assisting moves towards resolving the funding issues for some of the statutory agencies which had found themselves supplying services without extra resources. There was a view that Scottish Executive involvement in discussions might assist in this process, since it would imply better recognition and understanding of some of the difficulties arising from the particular balance of reserved and devolved powers.

Refugee integration and support is a devolved matter. The interviews with service providers and other councils negotiating contracts indicated recognition of the need to address these issues, as we have indicated. The SRIF (2003) documentation explicitly links consideration of asylum seeker and refugee issues, emphasising that for many agencies, little distinction is made between the two groups when services are provided, and acknowledging the importance of continuity of support when asylum seekers gain refugee status or exceptional leave to remain.
9.2.4.3 Impact on devolved services
The report has investigated the impact of dispersal on devolved services, and has demonstrated the extent of this. Whilst dispersal initially involves housing, and NASS contracts are made with bodies which can provide accommodation, demands are also made on other statutory agencies including health, education and social services. Services are also needed from voluntary sector organisations such as the Scottish Refugee Council, funded to provide information and support services, and on the wider voluntary sector. The report has shown that in many areas, organisations faced unforeseen calls on their services, which stretched their resources considerably. The ‘steep learning curve’ identified by many providers is indicative of the demands encountered. From the asylum seekers’ perspectives, there was sympathy for over-stretched services, whilst also evidence that some people’s needs were not being effectively met. Community groups felt that some of the community relations difficulties resulted from pressures on services, including those normally experienced in deprived areas, which were in many ways compounded by the settlement of asylum seekers in these areas. Other councils planned to learn from the problems experienced in Glasgow, and recognised the wider picture from the outset in a way which had clearly been difficult, despite best efforts, in Glasgow.

There was evidence in the report that some impacts on services had indeed been unforeseen. These included perhaps the positive impact on some schools, which had benefited from the arrival of asylum seeker children, whose presence served in some cases to revitalise schools otherwise at risk of decline. The asylum seekers themselves were in general very happy with the education their children were receiving. Less positively, deficiencies in services identified included problems with pre-school education, some communication problems including needs for better interpreting and translation services (see above, 9.2.3.2), lack of befriending services, insufficient legal representation and lack of provision for people with special needs. In health services, asylum seeker needs were calling upon a wider range of services than seem to have been provided with extra resources, such as maternity services, certain specialist services and so on, and these were a source of difficulty.

The composition of the asylum seeker population includes qualified health professionals, who may provide an untapped resource for meeting some of the health needs of asylum seekers. This point is also noted by the SRIF (2003). There are of course issues attached to licences to practice in Scotland, but these cannot be insurmountable.

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<tr>
<th>DEVOLVED SERVICES: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Decentralisation of NASS is to be welcomed, but agencies need to work in partnership and to develop shared approaches with NASS in the future.</td>
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<td>• These resourcing issues need to be addressed in order to enable effective development and delivery of devolved services.</td>
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<td>• Devolved services in Scottish local authorities considering new contracts need to learn the lessons from Glasgow and recognise the need to plan, and resource, service provision at the earliest stage in the process.</td>
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<td>• The development and provision of devolved services in relation to refugee integration and asylum seeker dispersal should be considered in tandem wherever possible.</td>
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<td>• There is a need to consider the existing skills of asylum seekers and refugees and the ways in which this resource could contribute to the work of devolved services in areas such as health.</td>
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9.2.5 Voluntary sector
Key questions identified in relation to the voluntary sector were:

- What demands does dispersal place on the voluntary sector?
- How important is the voluntary sector?
- What are the key resource issues for the voluntary sector?
- What can the voluntary sector do that statutory services cannot (and vice versa)?

9.2.5.1 Demands on the voluntary sector
The report includes evidence of the extra demands placed on the voluntary sector in general as dispersal occurred. These demands fell on agencies which were formally involved in service provision, such as the Scottish Refugee Council, and also on agencies with a more general remit, many of whom had no experience of working with asylum seekers, and others which were already under pressure providing specialist services for black and minority ethnic communities. Where services to asylum seekers provided by statutory agencies had encountered problems, there were some indications that asylum seekers would turn to the voluntary sector. Voluntary sector groups were not necessarily able to cope with the demand, or to provide the kinds of services that were needed – some of the reports from asylum seekers who said they had received inaccurate information related to contact with the voluntary sector. In contrast, there were many reports which indicated that the role of the voluntary sector had been essential.

9.2.5.2 The importance of the voluntary sector
There is also much evidence of the highly effective role that the voluntary sector could play. For many asylum seekers, voluntary sector services had been crucial, in providing basic advice and initial orientation, and in offering specialist support as time went on. In the community relations field, the voluntary sector was doing particularly significant work, bringing asylum seekers together with members of local communities, notably in faith-based groups which were an important source of support for many. The community relations activity of voluntary sector groups was also reported to SRIF (2003).

There is also evidence that in many cases, voluntary and statutory service providers can work and have worked together effectively. This was reflected in the service provider, asylum seeker and community relations interviews. The councils negotiating contracts had recognised the potential role of the voluntary sector in their areas, but had not yet fully involved them in the process. This reflected the nature of contract negotiation, rather than any unwillingness to involve the voluntary sector on the councils’ parts, and is a further example of some of the difficulties presented by working across reserved and devolved matters, and dealing with a highly centralised agency.

Where working collaboratively between statutory and voluntary sector services is proposed, it is clearly important that activity is informed by the good practice lessons about multi-agency working, communication and information identified earlier (9.2.1.1 and 9.2.3.3)

9.2.5.3 Resource issues for the voluntary sector
The pressure on some agencies, especially some of the smaller ones, had been considerable, and indicated the need for capacity building support, as well as more particular resource needs, such as support for interpreting. As previously noted, most agencies had not necessarily been prepared for their role in dispersal, and had received no extra resources to
support the additional demands. Agencies which had received resources also felt that these had been insufficient, and that difficulties such as those experienced with interpreting had been largely due to under-resourcing – it is worth noting that when additional resources were put into interpreting, matters began to improve tangibly, as noted by several respondents.

Some voluntary sector agencies, which had not expected to become involved in asylum seeker support, experienced particular difficulties in terms of knowing how to respond, and having the capacity to do so. Some groups were unable to quantify the extent of calls on their resources, whilst nevertheless identifying difficulties. These included access to interpreters, which was often more difficult and expensive for this sector than for others. From the asylum seekers’ perspectives, voluntary sector groups, whilst willing and for many a lifeline as noted above, had not necessarily been able to offer the support that was needed, or to direct asylum seekers towards more appropriate agencies.

9.2.5.4 Special qualities of the voluntary sector
The important role of the voluntary sector is clearly demonstrated in the report, and is likely to continue to be a key element in the implementation of dispersal, especially in terms of the community relations work. As asylum seekers gain refugee status or exceptional leave to remain, the voluntary sector will inevitably be involved in processes of integration (SRIF 2003).

Whilst statutory services can provide basic needs, voluntary sector groups, if properly resourced, can be more flexible and responsive. In many cases, they are also more firmly grounded in local areas, and thus sensitive to local requirements and events. They have the capability to work closely with local people. Some of the potential attaching to these qualities had been realised in the community relations work identified in the report. Support groups established by asylum seekers themselves have already been identified as important (9.2.2.2), and these too are able to respond to specific needs at a local level.

Nevertheless, it is important that the voluntary sector is not seen as substituting for the statutory services. Mainstream statutory agencies will continue to be the key providers of housing, health, education and social services for asylum seekers and refugees. The voluntary sector cannot necessarily plug gaps in statutory service provision which require large-scale organisation and commitment of resources.

VOLUNTARY SECTOR : IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

- The special qualities of the sector such as its greater flexibility and responsiveness, need to be recognised and resourced if the sector is to work effectively.
- There is a need to consider resourcing issues in relation to mainstream and minority ethnic voluntary agencies, as well as those focusing specifically on asylum seekers
- There is a need for Glasgow and those Scottish authorities considering new contracts to share information on, and learn from, available good practice in this area.

9.2.6 The media
Against a background of negative media coverage of asylum seeker issues, key questions about the media are:

- Has the impact of the media changed?
- Are the media strategies of various agencies working as desired?
9.2.6.1 Media impact
Views about the role of the media expressed by our respondents were overwhelmingly negative, in that the media were felt to have promoted a moral panic about asylum seekers and damaged community relations by promoting negative stereotypes. These perceptions were expressed by all the categories of respondents, including participants at the stakeholders’ seminar.

The content of the media reviewed during the period of the research seemed to bear out these comments, in that positive coverage of asylum seekers was the exception rather than the rule. The use of emotive language, gratuitous linking of asylum seekers with every conceivable social problem and so on were widespread.

Service providers felt that their efforts to promote good community relations had been particularly damaged by the media coverage. Community groups were most critical of the media coverage, and felt that journalists representing the national press in particular were interested only in ‘sensationalist’ stories. Their attempts to issue press releases with more positive stories had not, they felt been adequately covered. **Counselling preparing to receive asylum seekers had been conscious of the need for a media strategy from the start**, and were attempting to work with the local press in particular to ensure that misleading coverage was avoided.

9.2.6.2 Media strategies
Several of the service providers had adopted media strategies in an effort to influence the tone of media coverage in a more positive direction. These strategies had involved significant expenditure of resources, and were in operation over the period of the research. They had been adopted by members of SASC, by individual service providers, local community groups and the councils negotiating contracts.

Some service providers cited more positive stories which had appeared during the fieldwork period, and saw these as evidence that the media strategies were having some effect. They were able to give specific examples of positive stories which had recently appeared.

In the stakeholders’ seminar, there was some feeling that **the media strategies adopted by many organisations were beginning to have some effect**, in that more positive stories were finding their way into print, albeit alongside the negative ones. Respondents felt that there was a **continuing need however for organisations to use their media strategies to try and promote more positive coverage**, in the interests of better community relations in particular. In expressing this view, they concord with the SRIF (2003) recommendations. However, and this is a point also made in the SRIF report, there is a danger in ‘demonising’ the media, and blaming the negative coverage purely on journalists seeking sensational stories. There is clearly an audience for these stories, and its existence re-emphasises the importance of the anti-racist approach mentioned earlier (9.2.1.2).

THE MEDIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

- There is a need to assess the effectiveness of these media strategies and develop strategies which can counter negative coverage and promote positive coverage.
- There is a need for the promotion of positive images through the provision of factual information, community development and awareness raising work and anti-racism strategies.
9.2.7 Moving on
The report has covered the impact of dispersal of asylum seekers for devolved services and asylum seekers themselves. Finally, we explore some implications of our findings for the process of move-on, as the population of asylum seekers acquires refugee status or exceptional leave to remain. Some key questions are:

- Are agencies prepared for move-on, as people obtain refugee status?
- How will refugees fare in using services?
- What will be the continuing role of the voluntary sector?
- How well are issues of integration being addressed?

9.2.7.1 Preparing for move-on
There was a widespread feeling that issues relating to move-on needed to be more widely discussed. The authorities considering new contracts in particular identified one of the key lessons from experience to be that this needed to be considered alongside dispersal more fully than had been the case to date. The work of the Scottish Refugee Integration Forum was welcomed, and the report and action plan keenly awaited (SRIF 2003). Issues of integration are discussed fully in the supporting documentation from SRIF – here, we simply identify some links between the Forum’s work and the findings of this research.

9.2.7.2 Services for refugees
Many of the conclusions we have drawn about accessibility and appropriateness of services for asylum seekers will continue to apply for refugees. Thus, the need for effective multi-agency working, good information and communication, cultural sensitivity and anti-racism, community development and the identification and dissemination of good practice will continue to be relevant for refugees. Refugees will still face issues in building lives in unfamiliar surroundings, and a need to build and sustain networks of social support, as well as using services.

Changes will occur however, in that refugees will become part of the general population, no longer recorded by a central agency as are asylum seekers dispersed by NASS. They will be less accessible and identifiable to service providers, who will need to ensure nevertheless that their services are accessible to and used by refugees. There are lessons here in work on the development of services which are responsive to multi-cultural needs (Butt and Mirza 1996, Netto et al 2001), and which operate in an anti-racist way. Out-reach work may prove necessary, and refugee groups will need to be integrated into the processes of service development, to help ensure that needs are effectively met.

Attention will need to be given to specific service needs which refugees may have, distinct from other sectors of the population. These may include for example mental health services to cover PTSD, services for unaccompanied young people, services for children who have not experienced normal childhood activities, due to the circumstances of flight from their home countries. All these are identified in the SRIF documentation. At the same time as these specific needs are addressed, there will be a need to promote and ensure equality of access to services, and monitoring of this under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.

9.2.7.3 The role of the voluntary sector
We have already indicated (9.2.5.4) the continuing role for the voluntary sector in relation to refugees and the process of integration. This role is likely to increase as integration
proceeds, and as refugees themselves develop voluntary sector activities. The community relations role of the voluntary sector is likely to continue its significance.

It is important to note that the voluntary sector will need resources to realise its potential integration role effectively. The minority ethnic voluntary sector in particular is under-resourced (Reid-Howie Associates 2000), and much of the work to come is likely to involve this part of the sector, as it has already done.

9.2.7.4 Integration
Integration has implications for all service providers. The report shows that these are being widely considered across statutory and voluntary sector services, in groups working in the community and by other councils which may receive dispersed asylum seekers in the future. Integration of refugees in Scotland will be achieved under devolved powers. This offers an opportunity for Scottish service providers to promote joint working, and to implement good practice lessons already learned from work with asylum seekers, as well as building on good practice in promoting and mainstreaming equality.

MOVING-ON: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

- Work on refugee settlement and integration needs to be considered alongside plans for services for asylum seekers.
- There is a need for good practice dissemination and learning to continue, with those authorities considering new contracts taking into account these issues at as early a stage as possible in the process.
- The specific service needs of refugees, as distinct from other sectors of the population, need to be addressed and equality of access to services promoted.
- Resourcing of the voluntary sector, and in particular the minority ethnic voluntary sector needs to be considered in this context.
REFERENCES


McFarland E (1994) *Bosnian Refugees in Glasgow* SEMRU paper no. 1, series 2 Glasgow: Glasgow Caledonian University


APPENDIX ONE: SCOTTISH HEADLINES

This table lists headlines which appeared in Scottish newspapers over the monitoring period. These are discussed in Chapter Seven (7.4).

Scottish Headlines: January - July 2002

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<tr>
<th>January 2002</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Scottish firms lose Euro rail link</strong>, The Herald, 2 January</td>
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<td><strong>Immigrant problem ends Scots freight link</strong>, The Scotsman, 3 January</td>
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<td><strong>Video diaries for refugees a waste of cash</strong>, The Scotsman, 4 January</td>
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<td><strong>Refugees in the frame</strong>, Scotland on Sunday, 6 January</td>
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<td><strong>Asylum seeker has become a dirty term</strong>, The Scotsman, 8 January</td>
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<td><strong>Blanket freezes asylum returns</strong>, The Herald, 15 January</td>
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<td><strong>School’s pledge of support to refugees</strong>, The Herald, 16 January</td>
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<td><strong>Support system for asylum seeker children</strong>, The Scotsman, 16 January</td>
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<td><strong>Eurotunnel enjoys its busiest week ever</strong>, The Herald, 18 January</td>
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<td><strong>Refugee tells of Glasgow knife attack</strong>, The Scotsman, 19 January</td>
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<td><strong>Refugee help group meets</strong>, Evening Times, 22 January</td>
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<td><strong>Glasgow reaches limit on refugees</strong>, The Evening Times, 24 January</td>
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<td><strong>Glasgow council reaches capacity to accommodate asylum seekers</strong>, The Scotsman, 24 January</td>
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<td><strong>RAF base could become refugee centre</strong>, The Scotsman, 26 January</td>
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<td><strong>Composer celebrates refugees</strong>, Scotland on Sunday, 27 January</td>
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<td><strong>French arrest refugees who put lives in danger by tampering with the channel tunnel signals</strong>, The Scotsman, 28 January</td>
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<td><strong>Calls for compassion as asylum seekers’ hunger strikes escalate</strong>, The Scotsman, 28 January</td>
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<td><strong>Plan to convince refugees on ‘merit’ of going home</strong>, The Herald, 29 January</td>
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<td><strong>Refugee children in suicide threat at Australian camp</strong>, The Scotsman, 29 January</td>
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<tr>
<th>February 2002</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>New homes for asylum seekers</strong>, Daily Record, 1 February</td>
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<td><strong>New boost for asylum seekers</strong>, Evening Times, 1 February</td>
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<td><strong>Kirk boss talks on asylum</strong>, Evening Times, 4 February</td>
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<td><strong>Police fear for missing refugee</strong>, Evening Times, 6 February</td>
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<td><strong>Blanket sets refugee rules</strong>, Evening Times, 7 February</td>
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<td><strong>£20m refugee bill for Tunnel</strong>, Evening Times, 11 February</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>New health centre for asylum seekers</strong>, 14 February</td>
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<td><strong>Rioting asylum seekers torch centre</strong>, Daily Record, 15 February</td>
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<td><strong>Rioting asylum seekers set fire to centre</strong>, The Scotsman, 15 February</td>
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<td>French to raise tunnel security</td>
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<td>UN condemns Britain's paranoia over refugees</td>
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<td>Fears grow after new attacks on refugees</td>
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<td>Degree of Hope; Faima grew up in horror of civil war. Now she has chance to go to university in</td>
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<td>10,000 join Sighthill street fun</td>
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<td>Sighthill united still needs help to beat bigots</td>
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<td>Asylum seekers jump from train</td>
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<td>New bid to evict family in asylum seekers row; Exclusive; Council returns to court to have anti-</td>
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<td>refugee mother thrown out of home</td>
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<td>Welcome to a new Europe; Slashed benefits, fewer rights and the threat of deportation at any time</td>
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<td>Britons ignorant of facts on refugees</td>
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<td>Refugees offered way to work</td>
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<td>Blair facing defeat on asylum seeker</td>
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<td>Blair backs down on asylum plan; Sanctions dropped after French object at summit</td>
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<td>Fears for immigrants children unfounded</td>
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<td>Tyranny is their softest option; Iain Macwhirter says EU leaders are getting touch with</td>
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<td>Asylum seekers say city is wild</td>
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<td>Immigration policy rethink; The government's change of tack is long overdue</td>
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<td>France 'to shut Sangatte camp'; Timetable to be agreed</td>
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<td>Can Britain afford to keep talented immigrants out?</td>
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