

PROFILE:

KARIBU MEANS 'WELCOME' IN SWAHILI



Karibu means 'welcome' in Swahili and that is exactly what was missing from the experience of many people arriving in Glasgow under the 'asylum seekers dispersal programme' from 2001 onwards. London and the south-east's infrastructure was deemed to be under too much pressure and so up to 25,000 households were allocated accommodation under this programme. Glasgow received 8,000 of these asylum seekers who were generally sent to poor housing estates to live within communities which had not been prepared for this influx and no forward planning in terms of support services for this clearly high risk group had been prepared.

Henriette Koubabkouenda, was one of the people who moved to Glasgow during this time. She was from Congo and in 2003 brought together women from French speaking West and Central Africa and then invited all African women to do something. They decided to start Karibu to help African women settle and integrate into new communities in Glasgow and Scotland.

The Karibu logo is a hut. The hut is where people meet, share, help themselves and each other. In the beginning Karibu was focused on helping only women with limited English skills to cope with their day to day problems such as isolation and lack of knowledge on issues relating to housing, education, welfare, and transport. This grew into voicing their concerns to service providers and policy makers, with a view to filling the gap between women and the mainstream services. In many instances service providers had no idea of the needs and sensitivities of this group and Karibu was influential in shaping and often formulating best practise in this field.

Karibu has always promoted cultural understanding and participated in integration activities with their members and the communities they live in. Promoting African heritage including food and fashion have been a natural activity for the organisation.

In 2007 Karibu carried out an audit of its members to see what their skills and aspirations were. From the audit of more than 50 women there were strong skills in catering, textiles and beauty and so the women decided to develop a social enterprise to better utilise some of these skills. A business plan has been developed and continues to evolve. In 2010 Karibu received a significant grant from Heritage Lotteries to develop 'African Tartan' a textile and sewing project to build the capacity of the women interested in sewing. Similar smaller projects have been done in catering, cookery and gardening.

Karibu is one of the few Refugee Community Organisations in Scotland to manage to have fundraised for paid staff, office and a range of activities. While this is a constant struggle for a small organisation we continue!

At present, Karibu runs several projects across the city advancing our key aims of promoting the confidence, skills and integration of African women in Scotland. Having a Development Officer and a city centre office has helped Karibu members to have a person to sign-post and support them as well as a place to meet. Monthly drop-ins are held to alleviate isolation, but also to host a venue where members can meet with service providers directly and get accurate and up-to-date information. Previous speakers have spoken on topics such as, changes to the welfare system, immigration law, how to save energy in the home, sexual health, domestic abuse, children's rights etc. Members are involved in various policy fora to advocate for African women.

On Saturdays the office is a busy place as women and their children come together to learn about sewing, business and develop their skills as they integrate further into Scottish society. Next year look for the African Tartan in a shop near you!