

REFUGEES FROM VIETNAM IN BIRMINGHAM:
COMMUNITY, VOLUNTARY AGENCY AND
THE ROLE OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES

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Abstract

This paper discusses the resettlement of refugees from Vietnam in Birmingham. It also looks at the relationship between the voluntary agencies, the community from Vietnam and the local authority. The data is drawn from fieldwork including numerous interviews with Ockenden Venture staff, local authority officers, and Vietnamese people, and from the study of archives.

It investigates the history and work of Ockenden Venture, a charity which played a major role in the resettlement process. From an initial approach informed by a volunteer's philosophy and implemented through support groups, Ockenden is now more involved in stimulating the contribution of voluntary and statutory bodies.

This paper thereafter turns to the community from Vietnam analysing the demographic and ethnic composition of this population and its associations.

A third section deals with the response of the Birmingham Local Authority to issues raised by the resettlement of refugees from Vietnam. The main departments concerned are examined in the light of the refugees' needs.

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Introduction

Until 1979, only a relatively small number of refugees from Vietnam¹ had been admitted to Britain. In 1975, 99 children were airlifted from Saigon to Britain. By 1978 Britain had admitted 300 Vietnamese refugees mostly rescued by British ships, to which the 345 boat refugees rescued by the ship Well Park were added. In 1979 numbers changed dramatically since, following appeals by the High Commissioner for Refugees and a United Nations conference in Geneva (July 1979), Britain announced its intention to take 10,000 refugees from Hong Kong. More people were allowed in because of an extended definition of family reunion. Today there are altogether between 18,000 and 20,000 Vietnamese refugees in Britain.

The work of reception and resettlement was not carried out by the British government. Voluntary agencies have had this responsibility. Initially these agencies were Ockenden Venture, (OV)² and the British Council for Aid to Refugees (BCAR). The BCAR thereafter merged with the Standing Conference for Aid to Refugees to form the British Refugee Council (BCR) in 1981. Save the Children Fund (SCF) and Refugee Action (from the time of its creation in 1981) also undertook resettlement work.

As regards the first arrivals, reception and resettlement were in no way planned or co-ordinated but happened on an ad hoc basis according to the resources and initiatives of the voluntary agencies. However, in October 1979, at the initiative of the Home Office, the Joint Committee for Refugees from Vietnam (JCRV) was set up consisting of representatives of each agency with a secretariat of Home Office staff, which operated until 1981. Within this structure each voluntary agency retained its operational independence. The Joint Committee had the responsibility of co-ordinating the programme, and providing a forum for policy discussion. In practice it seems that co-ordination and exchange of experience were minimal. Nevertheless some rationalisation of the work took place on the basis of territorial division. There was still no division of labour between the agencies along the line of tasks to be accomplished: all the agencies were involved in selection, reception and settlement, but they agreed to divide the country geographically among themselves.

Today the BRC plays a central co-ordinating role replacing the JCRV. Refugee Action looks after resettlement in Scotland, Yorkshire, the South and East

Midlands; Ockenden Venture takes care of the West Midlands, Manchester, Merseyside, the North East of England and the North West, including North Wales. Each agency resettles the people that came to the reception centres under its responsibility. They all receive funding from the Home Office and the extension of the "Vietnamese programme" led to the awarding of £280,000 to cover 1984-87 - now prolonged until 1988. The current programme is due to be terminated in 1988 and an evaluation is at present taking place with a view to putting forward a new proposal.

The British government has not drawn up a well defined policy on the resettlement of refugees from Vietnam. The only aspect of resettlement which partly resulted from a clear government preference has been the dispersal policy of the early eighties. Altogether the British government has simply handed over the task of resettlement to refugee agencies.

There is a dearth of research on the refugees from Vietnam in Britain.³ The little there exists tends to concentrate on the background of people from Vietnam (Daglish, 80; Pearson, 82) on the reception centres which initially hosted them (Brand, 81; Mougne, 85) and on health questions (Lam, 80; Phillips, 81).

A few reports and articles look at aspects of resettlement (Edholm, 83) and the work of refugee agencies (Levin, 81). Most of the documents written on these two themes consist of unpublished reports from refugee agencies themselves. No publication is available as yet on the community from Vietnam in Britain and the response of local authorities to refugees from Vietnam has been little researched (Finlay, 85).

This study focuses on a particular area, Birmingham, which displays several interesting features. It is now the headquarters of Ockenden Venture (UK). It has a substantial population from Vietnam, the second largest after London, but the largest within a single local authority. Birmingham City Council has begun to show some interest in refugee issues, and a regional refugee council is being set up. The data have been gathered through interviews with voluntary agency workers, local authority officers, health workers and refugee organisation representatives; and the study of relevant archives.

Part One Ockenden Venture

I Ockenden in Birmingham : History

"The story of Birmingham is really the start of the story" said Barrie Denton about Ockenden's involvement in the resettlement of people from Vietnam.

Ockenden's work in the refugee field had begun as early as 1951, with the care, resettlement and education of refugee children coming from post-war displaced persons camps in Europe. Ockenden Venture was registered as a charity in 1955 and raised funds from private donations, continuing its work with refugees in Britain and abroad. In 1971 Ockenden opened an orphanage in Saigon, and when the "Daily Mail airlift" brought over the children from Saigon in 1975, Ockenden took care of them. Ockenden's ethic has promoted the notion of voluntary help and support and this is illustrated by its early resettlement operations in the Midlands.

When the first boat rescues took place in 1976, the BCAR agreed to help if the Home Office paid their cost; as a consequence, they opened a reception centre in Parsons Green in London. Joyce Pearce, chairperson of Ockenden Venture, committed herself to organise the resettlement from the BCAR reception centre. Barrie Denton, then assistant chief probation officer in Birmingham, took on the responsibility of resettling the families from Vietnam. Through contacts with housing associations, he obtained houses for those families, and other aspects of resettlement were catered for by personal contacts and community volunteers. Barrie Denton describes it as follows:

"I called our friends to a supper party and I said "we have got a problem"...One said, "I used to be a teacher, I will deal with education", another one said "my firm has a wagon, we can move furniture", another one said "I'll make some curtains". There was no planning in that activity but later, that became very much a pattern of how we operated and they began to be called support groups".

At that stage, all the resettlement work was done by volunteers. The first three families moved into housing association accommodation on 6 July 1977. The process continued, more families arriving, two or three at a time. Until 1978, the work was done in Birmingham by Ockenden alone and on the same basis of low key personal contacts. Ockenden opened its first reception centre in Barmouth, from then on doing both reception and resettlement work.

The media exploded the issue of the "boat people" with the arrival of the Well Park, a British registered ship, carrying 345 refugees from Vietnam. The scale and style of the operation were thus altered. Save the Children Fund were brought into resettlement work. The publicity and the lack of co-ordination between agencies led to competition as all the agencies operated throughout Britain, performing similar tasks. All over the country different people were contacting local authorities. Birmingham for a while was not exclusively served by Ockenden as SCF had opened a reception centre in Solihull and resettled some of the occupants in Birmingham, having obtained accommodation from the housing department. The actual territorial demarcation between agencies was finalised in 1982. Barrie Denton continued to do the work on his own but became a full-time Ockenden worker, with a secretary, based in Birmingham from May 1978; the Home Office funded his salary cost from October 1979.

The first Vietnamese programme awarding substantial Home Office funding to voluntary agencies began in 1979 because of the dramatic increase in the numbers of refugees from Vietnam. The Joint Committee for Refugees from Vietnam was also formed at this time. Ockenden appointed its first additional worker. It is worth noting that this post title was "support group liaison officer" not "social worker" for instance, furthering the community support outlook which had been previously established. In the following months and years Ockenden became a massive organisation with 26 reception centres and over 200 staff including housing and resettlement officers. Its operational headquarters were situated in Birmingham.

Four main features provided guidelines to the resettlement work.

1. Local community support. The concept of volunteer support group is characteristic of Ockenden more than any other agency and guided many decisions; for instance, in his first six months of paid employment with Ockenden, Barrie Denton had as one of his responsibilities to investigate whether there was a need to set up a housing association for Vietnamese refugees. The report on this issue concluded that a housing association was not desirable; Denton's opinion was that the refugees should not be separated from the community but be made part of it. It was therefore deemed better to appeal to housing associations and local authorities. This conclusion tied in well with the support group concept as relying on support groups also meant calling upon the help of a variety of voluntary agencies including churches and the Rotary Club, and gaining the interest

of individuals both in the community and in organisations such as housing associations or the housing departments of local authorities. The publicity given to the "boat people" stimulated the volunteer spirit as it prompted a lot of spontaneous offers for help. In 1983 there were 18 support groups in Birmingham initially recruited from organisations such as the Rotary Club, the Round Table and churches.

2. The concept of dispersal. It was both Ockenden and government policy to encourage dispersal. Ockenden's approach was to avoid sudden saturation of an area, in order to avoid what has come to be called "compassion fatigue" (a phrase coined in the United States). As the provision of housing was in no way mandatory but depended on housing associations or local authorities' goodwill, and as welfare care relied on volunteer local support, Ockenden wanted to ensure that the local community could cope with the numbers settled in one single area. "Not less than four, not more than ten"; those were the magic numbers of families cited by Barrie Denton for any single town. The idea was to aim for dispersed clusters thus making sure also that a single family would not be resettled in complete isolation.
3. Family reunion. From early on family connections were taken into account in the geographical distribution of accommodation. This also entailed the attempt to arrange for relatives arriving later to be housed near their family.
4. A centralised and regional structure. Ockenden resettlement officers were based outside the reception centres and operated on a regional basis, a patch system; they were directly accountable to the Birmingham office, unlike SCF whose resettlement work was done from each reception centre. Ockenden's formula offered the advantage of providing support in the area of resettlement after people had left the reception camp. Ockenden's usual practice was to provide support for 15-18 months after the families were resettled, at which time a formal letter was sent to them informing them that this period was over. It was presumed that they should by then be able to seek advice from citizens advice bureaux or social services with the help of local contacts they should have made.

The government wanted all the reception centres vacated by the end of 1982. However, when the JCRV folded up in 1982 it was clear that the resettlement

of Vietnamese families was not over. The agencies succeeded in obtaining funding for a further two years to take care of the early stages of the actual resettlement. This leads us onto the present era.

II Current Situation

A) Staffing and Main Characteristics

Ockenden's office in Birmingham, employs West Midlands workers to look after resettlement in this region but also "national" workers since the Birmingham office is the headquarters of Ockenden (UK). The office occupies two terraced houses in Lozells within an area of substantial Vietnamese population. Its staff consists of the director of Ockenden UK, Ockenden's regional workers' team leader, two regional workers, one housing officer (part-time) who has held this post for seven years thus providing continuity and experience, one family reunion administrator, one supervisor of community programme workers, two resettlement officers for the West Midlands, eight clerical and administrative workers and one cleaner.

Most of Ockenden's main features have remained constant but it is worth noting modifications and changes in its style of work and staffing.

1. Since 1985 Ockenden has had eight Manpower Services Commission (MSC) community programme (CP) workers. Although it had initially refused the offer of MSC posts from the BRC, after consideration it was felt that the increased workforce would be useful and that it would provide an opportunity for Vietnamese people to gain experience and training. Unfortunately funding for the training side seems to have come only very late and after repeated complaints. MSC workers are employed for one year, at £3.50 an hour for 18 hours a week. Only one out of the six workers, the supervisor, is full time and she twice obtained a six months extension of her contract. One of the main drawbacks of these posts in terms of the work performed is that it does not allow for an accumulation of experience since the workers do not stay in post longer than one year.
2. Ockenden has increased its staff of Vietnamese workers - there are six of them, from a mixture of backgrounds, North and South Vietnam,

Chinese and Vietnamese, and men as well as women. This allows for translating and interpreting work to be done whenever necessary.

3. The end of the dispersal policy. The dispersal policy was abandoned because it did not work. The government and all the agencies acknowledge it today. Families settled in small towns or villages moved out of their own accord, to London or Birmingham, even if it meant living in overcrowded accommodation or paying an exorbitant rate to a private landlord. It became more and more obvious to Ockenden's housing officers that there was no point in dispersing the families as they would not stay in their first place of settlement but would need further help for rehousing in a place of their choice. Although the dispersal policy was already under discussion in the JCRV in 1982, it was definitely abandoned only in 1984. For the last two or three years, people from Vietnam in reception centres have been given much more choice regarding the place of settlement by the housing officer who interviews them. If they know anything about Britain, their first choice is generally London; Birmingham is their second choice. If they do not know Britain at all, they ask for a big town with a large Vietnamese community, which again points to London, Birmingham or Manchester. The trend is thus for the grouping of Vietnamese populations in a few large centres.
4. The emphasis on support groups is replaced by a new approach to "community development". The support group liaison officer post has been replaced by a post of regional worker whose responsibilities include addressing statutory agencies as a prime objective.
5. The trend developing nationally towards more professionalism, previously demonstrated in other agencies, is now extending to Ockenden whose appointees for the post of regional workers were qualified community workers; their team leader has the experience of fifteen years work with the Danish Refugee Council. In addition, the programme incorporates additional training for regional officers. Although there are still problems resulting from low salaries and underqualified, undertrained staff, (the negative aspect of the volunteer's philosophy), discussions between employees and executive committee are now being held over the issue of salary levels and pension schemes, which do not exist for Ockenden's workers.

6. The regional structure has become generalised; already firmly established in Ockenden previously, it now obtains in other agencies.

B) The "Post-Settlement Programme"

The last three features mentioned above have developed in the wake of the latest programme financed by the Home Office from 1984-1987. They developed from the outlook of the programme combining with the initiatives taken by new Ockenden workers.

The new programme was based on a proposal put forward by the three agencies (BRC, Refugee Action and Ockenden). As it became evident to all the agencies that the task of resettling satisfactorily the Vietnamese populations would be far from completed in 1984, they came together in September 1983 to discuss the issue and put forward a proposal. The proposal developed the notion of "community development" which included several variegated aspects.⁴ In their proposal the agencies set out as a general aim "to identify and mobilise the appropriate resources at a local and regional level which, with guidance and support from a national resource network in specialised subject areas, will be able to provide the services most needed by the Vietnamese to enable them to stand on their own feet".⁵ The £580,000 budget originally bidden for was almost reduced by half and a sum of £280,000 was granted, which funded the new posts created to implement the proposed plan. For Ockenden it has meant the appointment of eight regional workers: two in Birmingham, two in Manchester, two in Merseyside, two in the North East and one team leader. Refugee Action has its own regional workers. The BRC staff for this programme includes a host community development officer and an education and training officer.

According to this proposal the regional officers' responsibilities begin with the assessment of the needs of the Vietnamese population. They also comprise identifying a "community action network" which is only vaguely defined in the proposal as being able to "mobilise assistance within the local statutory and voluntary system". Other tasks include the setting up of a regional refugee council, an interpreting service, a "crisis intervention service", that should thereafter be phased out into the statutory services. Furthermore, regional officers are supposed to ensure the involvement of "influential" local people in the fields of housing, education health and employment; they must at the same

time encourage the formation of refugee community organisations. "Community development" therefore means on the one hand sensitising and mobilising the host community (including its statutory services) and on the other hand helping the refugee communities to organise themselves.

In the West Midlands, the regional organisers share the work primarily on a territorial basis but also according to themes of interest - Birmingham is on the whole the responsibility of one of the regional workers but the other one pays special attention to health and social security issues over the whole Midlands area. Regional workers are not supposed to do resettlement work as such; this plan can actually be implemented in Birmingham and the West Midlands as the Birmingham office has two settlement workers who check the conditions of the houses and their facilities for cooking, heating, etc. before the families move in; they introduce the family to the neighbours, register them with a GP, enrol the children in a school, help with DHSS and welfare benefits, give advice on language classes and help to solve a myriad of immediate problems. In Birmingham therefore, the regional officers can actually devote themselves to addressing the tasks set out in the programme.

"If Birmingham didn't have case workers, I would never do community development work, judging by the people who come through this door" said one of the regional workers.

C) Ockenden's relationship with the Vietnamese community, the voluntary and statutory agencies.

In the first place, a natural relationship with the Vietnamese population arises from Ockenden's work. In addition to its initial resettlement work Ockenden offers an advice service and regular clients come for help of a varied nature such as the filling in of forms they do not understand or counselling in cases of difficult relationships within the family such as marital problems or inter generational conflicts. As regards the links between Ockenden and voluntary and statutory agencies, some developed from Ockenden's resettlement tasks: the housing officer communicates with housing associations and Birmingham City Housing Department on a regular basis. The resettlement workers also establish frequent contacts with schools, doctors and DHSS.

In the early stages of the Vietnamese arrivals, Ockenden launched an appeal to several voluntary bodies, churches and charities for financial help and towards the setting up of support groups. Statutory bodies themselves call upon

Ockenden when they have to deal with Vietnamese people who often cannot speak English; such bodies include the Department of Health and Social Security, the Health and Education Authorities, Social Services, the Police Force and the Housing Department.

In addition a number of students have come for information (such as psychiatric student nurses) or have shown an interest in doing their placement at Ockenden (social work students from Westhill College). However, on the whole, these contacts were often on an individual basis.

It is with the last programme and its regional workers that initiatives have been directed at statutory bodies and some voluntary organisations. The list of such bodies contacted by regional workers is impressive. Most of them were approached as a systematic exercise to raise awareness of the existence and needs of the Vietnamese population in Birmingham, and persuade them to take adequate measures to meet these needs. Regional workers reports repeatedly noted:

"The continuing ignorance about refugees by agencies and their corresponding lack of resources, eg no translation or interpreting facilities, no multi-lingual workers".⁶

They also stressed what the regional worker saw as an important goal: "We still need to push for positive employment practice by statutory departments in order that Vietnamese workers can be strategically placed within local authorities to provide an effective service to the community".⁷ All the main departments of Birmingham City were approached as well as several educational establishments and community and youth centres. Some of the departments were contacted for specific purposes with a view to solving an immediate problem: for instance, the Recreation & Community Services Department was approached for assistance towards an international Vietnamese scout encounter. In turn this event generated publicity and attracted more attention on the youths needs.

A great number of voluntary bodies were also contacted, the main ones being the Community Relations Council, (which until then had shown no interest in the refugee groups) the YMCA Chinese Association and Christian Aid.

The most notable achievements so far are the following:

1. Some communication has been established with the Midlands Vietnamese Community Association (MVCA); at first co-operation with the employment officer, and later, meetings with the chairman of the Association. Although these contacts are limited they are almost a breakthrough since the MVCA had until then refused to acknowledge the existence of Ockenden.

2. The support given to the scout group resulted in a very successful event when fifty Vietnamese scouts came over from Berlin to join a camp set up by the Birmingham Vietnamese scout group. The assistant director of the Youth and Community Development Section of the City Recreation and Community Services Department, representatives from the Birmingham Association of Youth Clubs, an area youth officer and an area community development officer were involved. The Race Relations Unit took an interest and councillors were called upon. The local scout groups also were more ready to help. This resulted in the granting of £300 from the Race Relations Unit, the lending of equipment, and the use of Sheldon's Country Park for the International Scout Camp in August 1986. Even the higher scouts authorities, Scout Secretary and Scouting District Commissioner, mellowed. This was a change from their initial response which had been rather unhelpful, as they did not look favourably upon a Vietnamese scout group carrying out its activities in the Vietnamese language.

3. An article on the work of Ockenden and its objectives under the latest programme was placed with the Birmingham Voluntary Service Council journal of January/February 1986, which proved fruitful. It contributed to a closer co-operation between Ockenden and the Midlands Area Housing Association which subsequently employed a Vietnamese housing officer and set up a special meeting with its Vietnamese tenants. It seems that this kind of publicity could be extended fruitfully to reach the maximum of organisations and individuals.

4. In addition to the initiatives mentioned above, a major breakthrough has taken place where the Birmingham Local Authority is concerned, in particular in terms of the Race Relations Unit and some departments such as Social Services and Housing. Moreover, a regional refugee council is in the process of being organised. These areas will be analysed in detail in the last section of this study. Collaboration between the BRC host community development officer, Ockenden regional workers and the Race Relations Unit played a determining role in this development.

Room for Improvement

The more problematic areas have been that of the Department of Health and Social Security, the Department of Education and the Manpower and Services Commission where results have been limited or nil, despite consistent efforts on the part of Ockenden workers. The difficulty, in relating to the MVCA is definitely a drawback as well as Ockenden's lack of involvement with existing groupings such as the Catholic Pastoral Centre and the Buddhist Association.

In the voluntary sector, Ockenden failed to have an impact on the law centres, action centres and citizens advice bureaux.⁸

Part Two

People from Vietnam in Birmingham

I Overview

The Vietnamese population in Birmingham is the second largest in Britain after London and the largest in any single local authority. Birmingham has seen a steady increase of its Vietnamese residents since 1980. There were 716 Vietnamese in 1982, 1157 in 1984, and the latest figures recorded by Ockenden Venture indicate 1620 but real numbers are between 1800 and 2000 according to a number of agencies. More than half this population is concentrated into two adjacent areas of Birmingham where are also based the few associations that exist. These areas are Handsworth and Lozells. Of the 390 families in Birmingham 200 live in the Handsworth, Lozells, Hockley, Newtown and Winson Green areas, which can be considered as one large area. These are inner city areas characterised by deprivation and disadvantage. Men are slightly more numerous than women, 100 women for 124.5 men, and young people below 19 constitute about a third of the population whereas there are around 82 persons above 60 (about 5%).⁹ The population from Vietnam is not a homogeneous one: a distinction has to be drawn between the Vietnamese group and the group of Chinese origin (respectively 40% and 60%). There are also differences between people from the North of Vietnam and people from the South. In addition, there are disparities due to religion, socio-economic background and levels of education.

This population is stable or possibly growing as Birmingham appears to be a relatively attractive city to people from Vietnam for a variety of reasons: Birmingham is said to have better housing and educational opportunities and to offer a certain amount of job outlets. Language classes are available in Birmingham because of its multicultural population and there is a substantial network of public transport. Last but not least Birmingham is seen to attract newcomers because it has a large population from Vietnam, and a "China-town" providing adequate shopping facilities especially where food is concerned. There are two Chinese supermarkets in the city centre which seem to have benefitted from Vietnamese custom. These have even expanded the choice of ingredients in response to specifically Vietnamese demands, such as fish sauce brought over from France.

The population from Vietnam is a discrete one, and adopted European dress in Britain, as the flimsy long tunic and trousers traditionally worn in Vietnam have been deemed ill adapted to the severity of the English weather.

People from Vietnam are confronted with a number of problems. Less than a quarter of the adults speak English and even less (20%) are in employment. Problems are generated within families where the man of the house is in receipt of welfare benefits and has lost the status and respect traditionally due to the breadwinner.¹⁰ Agency workers note the manifestations of serious intergenerational conflicts less than ten years after resettlement in Birmingham.

After this introduction to the Vietnamese population in Birmingham we turn to the community associations and consider in particular their role and character and their relationship with statutory and voluntary bodies.

II The Midland Vietnamese Community Association (MVCA)

The Vietnamese Community Association runs a well established advice centre in Birmingham. The Association was formed in 1982 and became an advice centre in 1983. It received some assistance from the Church of England Children Society which let them have the use of one room in a house in Handsworth. When it obtained some funding the association rented the premises, two rooms and one kitchen, for £1,500 per year. The Association/Advice Centre has been continuously funded from 1983 until today: in 1983 a £2,500 grant was received from the Cadbury Trust, in 1984 £3,500 from the West Midland County Council, and in 1985 an additional grant of £12,000 from the County Council, towards an employment development project. Funding was then taken over by Birmingham City Council. The Advice Centre was initially run by volunteers. Since June 1985 it received a number of posts from the MSC community programme.

Its current staffing includes one employment development officer and nine people on the community programme, six part-timers and three full-timers (one co-ordinator, two advice leaders, four advice assistants, one visiting leader and two visiting assistants). The Association is administered by a

steering committee of six members assisted by a board of advisers and area representatives comprising 20 members.

According to the chairman the main objectives of the Association are "to bring the Vietnamese together to preserve our national culture, and to help those who have difficulties in arriving here".

The Advice Centre reports that it services an average of ten clients per day who come with queries regarding welfare benefits and family reunion and for general advice. 429 people used the Centre from 17 November 1986 to March 1987. According to records £1,000 was obtained in benefit grants and £1,500 in insurance claims for the clients during this period.¹¹

The Centre is also a referral point whenever a translator or interpreter is needed in the Vietnamese language but none of the staff is fluent in Chinese. Young people are the major group to consult the employment development officer on training and employment.

In addition to its advice function the MVCA organises a number of other activities, including Vietnamese language classes on Saturdays for children, a Vietnamese pop group formed in 1984 which has performed for other Vietnamese communities in the UK, and for the Association annual general meeting and Tet festivals, a Vietnamese classical music band which plays Vietnamese traditional music, and a summer play scheme in August attended by about one hundred children (mostly from 5 to 10 years old), who are taught to read and write in Vietnamese, and are taken on a day trip. In 1985 and 1986 the play scheme was financed by a £500 grant from the Department of Recreation and Community Services.

The youth group of the Association has not really become effective and its scouts group is now operating independently from the Association.

The Association, through its chairman, has also organised Vietnamese language classes at the Brasshouse Centre (see part three of this study) and lectures on Vietnam's history and culture which were attended by policemen, English service providers and interested individuals. Three of the leaders of the Association are examiners in Vietnamese for the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Relationship with Other Bodies

The MCVA's relationship with Ockenden is almost non-existent or at best very strained, and this state of affairs creates some discomfort among institutions or groups and organisations who wish to work with both. The MCVA has links with several Birmingham City departments which sometimes call upon it for interpreting services. It co-operated with Brass House for the course mentioned above. In its information sheet it states that it liaises with "the police force, schools, social services, health centres and doctors, dentists and other agencies". The MCVA co-operated in the first seminar organised by the Race Relations Unit on Vietnamese on 1 May 1986. But its relationship with the Race Relations Unit is now fairly distant, as this is partly complicated by the Race Relations Unit's collaboration with Ockenden. The MVCA is a member of the British Refugee Council and was elected to membership of its Executive Council on 9 October 1986. It is one of four refugee organisations on the Executive.

The MCVA claims to be the first Vietnamese advice centre in the UK. Its cultural functions are limited but it obviously fulfills a useful role in organising summer schemes and language classes as the demand and attendance testifies. It is also a referral point for service providers but it seems that this aspect has not been exploited to the full.

The MCVA has proved particularly effective and well organised in its relationship with funding bodies, the County Council, the City Council and the Manpower Services Commission presenting convincing proposals and annual reports. When additional support was needed to further a grant application, it successfully turned to Jeff Rooker MP.

Some constraints impair the improvement of the service provided and the breadth of the Association's clientele. One problem is that MSC workers lack training and experience. This drawback is made worse by the fact that new workers have to be employed every twelve months in accordance with MSC regulations. A second is that the Association's membership does not include a balanced mix of Vietnamese, Chinese, Southerners, Northerners. In effect, it is essentially composed of South Vietnamese. This reflects onto the clientele of the Advice Centre. Northern Vietnamese and Chinese Vietnamese coming for advice are in a minority. For the former it is said that the strong anti-communist orientation of the Association can be perceived as offensive. The

Association leaders are active in political organisations working towards the "liberation" of Vietnam. They have links with political organisations based mostly in the United States and in Canada. A commemoration of the fall of Saigon is held annually on 30 April 1975. For the Chinese Vietnamese the difficulty is compounded by the fact that none of the staff is of Chinese origin and/or speaks Cantonese.

Finally, the young people feel that they do not have a sufficient say in the running of the Association and that it does not serve their needs. The traditional respect due to elders in Vietnam creates an obstacle to a change of leadership and orientation.

III The Catholic Pastoral Centre

One of the main focuses of attention among the Vietnamese population is the Catholic Pastoral Centre. A Vietnamese priest, Father Peter Diem, played a central role in establishing this centre and is himself very influential among the Vietnamese Catholic community. Father Peter reached England in 1980 and found it difficult to establish himself in London where he stayed for eight months among the Catholic establishment. On the other hand he was given a very good reception and offers of help in Birmingham (namely, accommodation and financial assistance) from two priests, one of whom was based in St Francis church in Handsworth. Father Peter chose the latter place as the Vietnamese families already settled in Birmingham were living nearby. Father Peter has been very active and effective in bringing together the Catholic community. He visited at least 20 reception centres and the parish paid for some of the travelling expenses. In Birmingham he assisted the new settlers by taking them to doctors, the DHSS offices, and helping them to find houses.

Some differences appear to have arisen in the early years (1980/82) between Father Peter, who was trying to bring the Catholic Vietnamese to Birmingham, and Ockenden, which was in the process of implementing a dispersal policy. These differences have since been superseded. The Catholic community in Birmingham is now numerous and close knit comprising 650 persons. In addition to arrivals from reception camps, it has been increased by conversions from Buddhism. Father Peter baptised over 100 people between 1981 and 1987. The readiness shown by the priest to extend practical assistance also to non-Catholic Vietnamese has contributed to this process. A Pastoral Centre has been opened comprising two houses, one of which is used as a home for large

families. Two more Vietnamese priests have been ordained, one in 1985 and one in 1986. Between the three of them, they service other Catholic communities in the UK.

One characteristic feature of Father Diem and the Pastoral Centre is that they do not only seek to maintain and extend the religious identity and cohesion of this community but also its Vietnamese identity. Father Peter emphasises this very clearly "I encourage children to speak Vietnamese at home and English outside. They should become English by nationality but remain Vietnamese by culture". A mass is held in Vietnamese every Sunday in St Francis church, attended by 300 to 400 persons. The children study catechism in the Vietnamese language, together with elements of the Vietnamese culture and language on Thursdays and Saturdays (about 100 children from eight to fifteen years old). Moreover, a choir in Vietnamese of 40 children has practiced regularly since 1981. Other cultural activities are based at the Pastoral Centre, including two groups of Vietnamese dancers (over 10 and under 10 years old).

At the same time, the priest intervenes actively to preserve the Catholic faith among his parishioners, and one determining factor is the schools children attend. Father Peter has encouraged parents to send their children to Catholic schools: there are about 45 Vietnamese children in St Francis primary school in Handsworth, 20 in St Claire's primary school, 40 children in Saint John Wall's secondary school. The priest is in close contact with the schools and provides a reference point for possible queries and problems.

Another feature has to be noted regarding the Catholic community from Vietnam. It is very largely constituted of Vietnamese, as only very few Chinese Vietnamese are Catholic. "Chinese Buddhists are much more difficult to convert" said Father Peter.

The Pastoral Centre and in particular Father Peter, have regular contacts with some British institutions: the Catholic churches themselves naturally, and other churches, the schools, Handsworth Technical College, the Steward Centre and some contacts with hospitals (Dudley & All Saints hospital), the Social Services Departments and the Race Relations Unit of the City Council. The priests appear to have a good relationship with the Midlands Vietnamese Community Association to whom they refer people in need of practical advice.

The Pastoral Centre definitely constitutes an important focus for a large section of people from Vietnam and could be used more as a transmission belt between British statutory and voluntary bodies, and the Vietnamese population.

IV The Buddhist Association

The Buddhists also have a gathering place but their degree of organisation is not comparable to that of the Catholic.

There are between 200 and 300 Buddhists in Birmingham altogether. There is no Vietnamese Buddhist temple or resident monk in Birmingham. There is a Buddhist temple but it is rarely frequented by people from Vietnam. Buddhists from Vietnam get together in a family house in Handsworth for collective meditation and worship. This is known as a *pagoda*.¹² A monk invited from London for the celebrations of the main Buddhist festivals addresses 15-20 faithful. Part of the ceremonies take place in the Vietnamese language. More rarely, a monk is invited from France or the United States to teach the Buddhist doctrine and address other themes such as life overseas. All the families tend to know one another. One particular family has links with Buddhists in Europe and went to Bordeaux in France twice for an international annual children's celebration, the Full Moon festival. Once again this community is essentially Vietnamese. Buddhist Chinese from Vietnam generally do not take part in these gatherings but worship at home.

There does not appear to be any antagonism between Buddhists and Catholics. This was confirmed by both Father Peter, who found a home in the house of a Buddhist family when he arrived in London, and by devout Buddhists.

V The Lamson Guides and Scouts Troop

The group was formed in Birmingham in 1985 by experienced scout leaders who had been involved in the scouting movement in Vietnam since 1968. They identify the group as "the best way to bring Vietnamese children together to teach them Vietnamese customs and mother tongue". The group includes boys and girls, Christians and Buddhists, all of whom are Southern Vietnamese. It comprises a guide company of 15 girls (from 7 to 24 years old) and a scouts group of 25 boys. The Lamson group has been bringing out a magazine in Vietnamese, the *Huong-Dao Vietnam*, every three months since 1986, which is circulated to other Vietnamese scouts in Germany, France, etc. Activities take

place in the Vietnamese language and traditional Vietnamese folk and camping songs are sung around the camp fire.

Initially the group had practical problems because of lack of sponsors to help with finance and premises. Moreover, its members found themselves disoriented by the British system as they did not know how to apply for the use of public facilities and parks. In Vietnam such applications were not necessary. They first used the MVCA yard and a meeting room in Saint Francis church. But they like to keep independent from the MCVA and the Pastoral Centre and are trying to find other meeting places.

The Lamson group is registered with the scouts movement in Britain and takes part in common activities. It also participates in international events together with other Vietnamese scouts and guides groups in Europe, Canada, the USA and Australia.

From this brief study of the community from Vietnam the sections of the population which, more than others, seem to need some assistance are the old people, some of the women and the young people. The MVCA said that it tried to launch a women's association but has not succeeded as yet. Ockenden, in conjunction with social services, has started an elderly luncheon club and a women's group; but these groups are only in their infancy and cannot stand on their own feet. A few young people have approached Ockenden for assistance in obtaining premises for a youth group. These are discussed in detail below.

Finally, a take away business, the Saigon Garden, has been launched by people from Vietnam in Lozells. A young Vietnamese also tried to set up a Vietnamese disco but with short-lived success.

The number of magazines published in Vietnamese is impressive. They are based mostly in London: these include *Noi San* published by the Vietnamese cultural society, *Bantin newsletter* from the Vietnam Refugee National Council based in London, *Viet-Bao*, from the London Vietnamese Association, a ladies magazine, a Buddhist magazine and a young people's magazine.

In Birmingham, the Lamson Scouts and Guides Troop publish a magazine and the Pastoral Centre publishes a monthly entitled *Song*.

Altogether the associations which exist among the refugees from Vietnam

service some sections of the Vietnamese population. However, the existing associations do not include either people from North Vietnam or people of Chinese origin.

Part Three

The Local Authority

I Social Services

The first documented references made about refugees from Vietnam in the Department of Social Services in Birmingham appear in an exchange of correspondence between directors of social services departments and the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS).

The discussion was prompted by a Home Office announcement that it was going to terminate its funding of the voluntary agencies' work with Vietnamese refugees. In a meeting with Peggy Lee and Jim Nicholson of the Home Office Voluntary Organisations Unit, it was stated that the Home Office "wished to reach the position by April 1984 whereby Vietnamese refugees will be seen as permanent residents with a right to services within their own local authority area".¹³ Social services departments directors were alarmed by this announcement and the ADSS stated that this would not be accepted as a "realistic view of the situation",¹⁴ noting that the needs of the then 16,000 Vietnamese refugees could not be met within ordinary social services provision for a variety of reasons. The dispersal policy made it difficult for social services departments in each local authority to divert special resources for a relatively small number of people. The refugees from Vietnam had special needs as their uprooting, their feeling of cultural alienation in Britain, their language difficulties (85% of the parents being unable to speak English) and their isolation were compounded by the wide range of social problems they had to cope with. The ADSS also protested against the exclusion of Vietnamese refugees from Home Office funding through Section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966 which is reserved for New Commonwealth immigrants.

Copies of this correspondence reached the Birmingham Department of Social Services together with Association of Metropolitan Authorities (AMA) circulars and news summaries, emphasising that "finance must be made available to either enable the Refugee Agencies to continue or for the local authorities to work closely with specialist staff".¹⁵ The documents quoted above did not seem to have much impact in Birmingham. The only other mention made of Vietnamese

refugees is the resolution of the social services committee supporting an Inner City Partnership application to continue funding the Ockenden social workers. Moreover, this discussion abated for a while as the Home Office renewed its funding of voluntary agencies.

The question of refugees from Vietnam came back on the agenda after 1985 in the Department of Social Services in Birmingham. The situation had begun to change in several ways: The Birmingham City Council had adopted an equal opportunities policy concomitant with the creation of a Race Relations and Equal Opportunities Unit. A number of individuals in the Social Services Department were committed to making this policy effective and this began to happen little by little. At the same time the voluntary agencies had undertaken to address local authorities as one of their principal tasks through regional workers. In addition, both in the Race Relations Unit and in the Social Services Department, particular individuals came to take a specific interest in Vietnamese issues.

Social Services is probably the department which has responded the most positively to the question of refugees from Vietnam. This is demonstrated first of all by the attendance of social services staff at the first seminar organised by the BRC and Ockenden jointly with the Race Relations Unit. The Midlands Vietnamese Community Association also took part in it (1 May 1986). They also attended subsequent meetings of a similar kind: the conference on the setting up of a Regional Refugee Council (27 February 1987) and the 20 May 1987 meeting. The readiness of the officers concerned, both to report back to the Race Relations Unit and to take a number of initiatives in response to the issues raised, positively testifies commitment on their part. As Vietnamese cases came to the attention of the Social Service Department in the area where most families are concentrated, it naturally fell on workers from a particular district to become more involved as they cover these areas. An officer based in the central office was also involved. The first recommendations made as a result of the 1 May 1986 seminar included the need to advertise services in Vietnamese and to employ more Vietnamese staff such as social workers and interpreters. It also mentioned investigating Vietnamese needs and liaising more with Ockenden and giving support to the Vietnamese Association.

Within one year (19 May 1987), G Ward reported the following initiatives taken

by social services: Information leaflets about the department had been translated into Chinese (Cantonese) but not Vietnamese. Three Vietnamese home helps had been recruited. This was achieved through the very sensitive approach of the officer concerned who visited the candidates at home with their families in order to explain what the work involved and allay their worries. For the first three weeks the three home helps from Vietnam were attached to an experienced worker and thereafter worked on their own. Although these home helps are attached to Centre Five¹⁶ in the West District, they may be sent to other areas if need occurs. A Vietnamese trainee social worker has been recruited in the framework of the black and ethnic minority trainee programme. An elderly people's luncheon club was launched in early 1984 in co-operation with Ockenden. About 12 old people come together every fortnight at the Annie Wood House Centre, including men and women, Cantonese and Vietnamese speakers. A Vietnamese Chinese meal is prepared for them by an Ockenden community programme worker and some activities are planned (for example videos are shown and books are provided). Their transport is provided free by social services. A women's group has also just been started by social services and Ockenden in Annie Wood House. As they expressed the wish to learn English, social services are investigating the possibility of finding a teacher from Handsworth Technical College who would teach them in situ. Two grants were awarded by the Social Services Committee in 1986; £9,380. to Ockenden Venture and £5,000 to the Midlands Vietnamese Community Association.

Social services also made an attempt to establish regular links with the MVCA but this has not yet produced results. Social services has offered training sessions to the MVCA community programme workers who have not come forward to take up the offer. A number of people in the Vietnamese community argue that the Association's chairman is not co-operating as fully as could be. Social services are holding regular liaison meetings with Ockenden. Those meetings prepared the organisation of a training day (5 February 1987) in the West District bringing together about a hundred people including people from education, health, police and probation services. Both Ockenden and the Vietnamese Association contributed to it as well as one GP, an accupuncturist, a social worker and a health visitor.

The liaison meetings and the training day identified the language barrier as one of the most crucial problems. Moreover, it is pointed out that service

providers lack the knowledge of Vietnamese and Chinese culture essential for the delivery of a sensitive service. This is particularly so in areas where issues are sensitive per se, such as private, marital or family problems. Mistakes can be emotionally very disturbing: For example in some instances child abuse was suspected when bruises were noticed on children from Vietnam; had they not been identified as traces of traditional medicine practices in good time, a place of safety order could have been made out causing great distress to both children and parents. In the field of medicine, there is a risk of wrong diagnosis, especially where mental health is involved.¹⁷ To compound matters, people from Vietnam themselves frequently do not know and do not understand how the British system works. The role of social workers and social services as it exists in Britain is unknown to them, and so is the need to register with a general practitioner. These communication problems even caused people to take drugs incorrectly. The whole area of health is problematic; ante natal care, vaccination and family planning have to be explained in a tactful manner. As a conclusion, despite the efforts made by the Social Services Department, the task to be accomplished is vast before refugees from Vietnam can benefit from ordinary services without difficulty.

II Health

Although some health care is the responsibility of the local authority through the Social Services Department, the majority of health issues are dealt with by the Area Health Authority.

Within Birmingham Area Health Authority, very little has been done in the way of meeting the needs of Vietnamese people or those of other refugees. Ockenden Venture in its efforts to organise a health conference on refugees has met delays from the Area Health Authority.¹⁸ Information on health has not been translated in Vietnamese and/or Chinese. Even the one interpreter appointed to help one particular GP is paid by the Birmingham Local Authority. Ockenden Venture and the Vietnamese Association are constantly being called upon to provide interpreters for health cases. One single sector of the Area Health Authority seems to have taken an interest in the issue of people from Vietnam in a new department started in October 1984, the Health Promotion Unit. One of its officers attended a meeting to prepare for the Regional Refugee Council conference and also attended the conference itself.¹⁹ The Health Promotion Unit has turned its attention to the needs of ethnic

minorities, and within this context has linked up with Ockenden Venture and the Midlands Vietnamese Community Association. A workshop planned for February 1984 had to be postponed until September 1987 and it is not clear whether it has taken place as yet.

The question of health for all refugees is a crucial one; they have gone through taxing, physical and psychological trauma which need to be attended long after their arrival in the country of resettlement, even though refugees might not be aware of it themselves.²⁰ The informed, attentive and sensitive service they require appears to be totally lacking.

III Housing

The Birmingham Housing Department was involved with refugees from Vietnam earlier than any other department, as is testified by documents and correspondence dating back to 1979. The Home Office launched two appeals to the local authority associations asking for assistance in providing long-term accommodation for Vietnamese refugees. The AMA in turn wrote to relevant Birmingham officials (letter dated 12 July 1979). Save the Children Fund and, from 1980, Ockenden Venture, approached the Birmingham officials.²¹ This resulted in a resolution by the Housing Committee (6 September 1979 - 7606) to award 25 dwellings.

There is more than meets the eye in such a decision. It means making a special case for the Vietnamese; in spite of not even being resident in Birmingham, a condition for eligibility to council accommodation in Birmingham, they will in effect be allowed to "jump the queue" coming forward on a long waiting list. This can arouse protest from the local residents and voters, as has been demonstrated by a complaint made to Terry Davis by one of his constituents.²² It also puts more strain on an already limited housing stock. Local authorities soon became alerted to this problem and through the AMA presented to the Home Office several possible alternatives available regarding additional resources which "would be conditional upon an undertaking to accept Vietnamese refugees", arguing that:

"the practical limits of voluntary response have now been reached. If the refugees are to be located in areas where they are likely to obtain work, then additional resources will have to be provided so that

accommodation can either be acquired or built. Local authorities with long waiting lists or existing homelessness problems are not in a position to make further units of accommodation available in the current climate of pressure upon the Local Authority housing stock and considerably reduced housing resources. In this respect, should particular authorities be asked to take a substantial residual number of refugees, local difficulties could well occur if they are to be seen to be "jumping the queue" ahead of local residents or homeless families currently in temporary accommodation".²³

This request remained unmet and central government did not grant any financial assistance to local authorities for this purpose. Apart from London boroughs, Birmingham is the most concerned by the debate over resourcing. Birmingham's attention was drawn again to this issue when it became apparent that the "dispersal policy" had failed. The evidence of this was the conververgence on London and Birmingham of Vietnamese families which had abandoned council accommodation allocated to them elsewhere in the country. A concentration of Vietnamese people therefore occurred of its own accord in particular areas under particular local authorities.

Resources are necessary for this group of residents. This entails not only extra housing but also appropriate social services and education and health provisions. Because of the extra resources required, local authorities are not always in a position to readily accommodate new populations. This is so for any new groups of refugees and highlights the need for better planning.²⁴

Nonetheless, Birmingham granted a first quota of houses in 1979 (quoted above) and continued to grant more in the following years; five additional units of housing in July 1980; 18 properties in September 1982; 25 dwellings in September 1984. These units of accommodation were not concentrated in any single area of Birmingham but spread over several areas including the inner city (Ladywood, Stetchford, Newtown, Harborne, Quinton, Nechells, Aston, Winson Green, Sheldon). Not all these houses/flats have been offered or granted as yet. In the last few years, after the dispersal policy was abandoned, the requests of Vietnamese applicants were taken into account by the voluntary organisations and the Housing Department has accepted as a valid criterion for first applications or transfers the requirement "to be near the established community from Vietnam".

The actual location of the established community was not determined by local

authority housing allocations but by housing associations which provided the bulk of the accommodations for refugees from Vietnam. In 1984, the local authority had offered 49 houses (44 of which had been taken up) whilst housing associations had granted 190 dwellings.²⁵ In 1987, 70% of accommodation to Vietnamese families comes from housing associations, the most important ones being the Midlands Area Housing Association (60 dwellings out of 2500), COPEC (35 dwellings), the Family Housing Association (20 dwellings out of 1500), and the new Hestia Housing Association. These associations happened to have a lot of houses available in the Handsworth/Lozells areas. This created a "community" from Vietnam in these areas thus establishing this community in the inner city. One of the housing associations, the Midlands Area Housing Association appointed a Vietnamese housing officer in 1987. This considerably improved communications with Vietnamese tenants, who now use this office more frequently. An average of four a week see the housing officer who translates letters and helps them to apply for housing benefits and removal expenses. He plans to translate tenancy agreements and leaflets into Vietnamese and contributed to organising meetings between Vietnamese tenants and the Association.

Birmingham, although one of the better local authorities according to Ockenden's housing officer, has not been as prompt and flexible as housing associations. The main difficulty appears to be caused by bureaucracy, so that a long period can elapse between the committee's decision to set aside a quota of houses and the actual obtaining of houses; it took eighteen months to occupy the first twenty houses. The committee's decision has to filter down to the local offices which take the concrete measures of awarding a dwelling. In some local authorities, like Manchester, this process has meant that none of the twenty dwellings promised over the last few years has yet been taken up. In Birmingham there is an average delay of three months. The intrinsic problems involved in welcoming Vietnamese tenants and the red tape necessary for local authority allocations create complications for both sides. The Vietnamese refugees are in urgent need of accommodation as soon as they arrive, but the date of their arrival is often known very late in the day. As it is best for their arrival not to be delayed, if a house is offered by a housing association to a particular family which has been awarded a local authority dwelling not available as yet, it is likely that the housing association offer will be taken up. For the local authority it entails a new phase of paper work to change the names of the applicants, and may also mean that a

house stays vacant until the new applicants arrive. Another difficulty is the lack of large houses, which results in the splitting of families. Single people's accommodation is also difficult to obtain. Moreover family reunion and secondary migration often resulted in overcrowding, or left people at the mercy of unscrupulous landlords since at that stage they often moved on their own and received no assistance from voluntary organisations. After houses have been concretely offered, other problems often occur, such as houses being in a bad state of repair, or lacking gas, electricity or water facilities, which cannot always be solved promptly. In one house occupied by a pregnant woman and two children under five, there was no gas and they had no cooking or heating facilities for a month in winter. It appears that the responsibility for these issues keeps being passed from one desk to the next. On other occasions, the occupants do not know how to use facilities.

More generally, there is a serious problem of communications, the Housing Department is rather bureaucratic and Vietnamese families often do not know English. It has been stated plainly by a housing area manager that without the intervention of voluntary organisation staff, the allocation of houses would not have worked out. Communication breakdown is noticeable after the tenants have settled and the Housing Department frequently needs to call on Ockenden and the Vietnamese Association for interpreting services; a large proportion of the MVCA and Ockenden casework concerns housing issues.

The Housing Department responded positively to invitations to attend the 1 May seminar, the Regional Refugee Council conference, and a follow-up seminar in May 1987. It seems that changes have occurred;²⁶ leaflets have been translated into Chinese and in June 1987 the housing committee approved the proposal for a post of Vietnamese housing caseworker; a proposal strongly supported by Ockenden Venture. The caseworker will be based at Area Four²⁷ where many Vietnamese families live. The postholder will have the primary responsibility of providing all types of housing advice and assistance to Vietnamese people; he will also have to identify the housing needs of people from Vietnam and liaise with the policy advisor, ethnic minority representatives, the neighbourhood office, and statutory and voluntary organisations.

IV Education

One of the reasons often put forward by refugees from Vietnam for wanting to come to Birmingham is that it possesses good educational facilities. It is true that Birmingham compares very favourably with some smaller towns which have no educational facilities for non English speakers. As a "multicultural" town and because 25% of its residents are of foreign origin, Birmingham has acquired an educational infrastructure for the teaching of English as a second language and language support services: a 300 strong ethnic minority support unit, multicultural advisors, two educational centres for secondary school children from overseas, adult education centres, and further education colleges which offer ESL or EFL courses.

People from Vietnam have benefited from existing services but this did not result from an effort on the part of the LEA; on the contrary, it was almost despite the LEA's total lack of interest in the Vietnamese that they were able to use the facilities available. The saga of one particular adult education centre which has had a regular yearly intake of 60 Vietnamese students since 1980, demonstrates a persistent refusal to allocate funding to take those students into account. As is evidenced by the correspondence between the head of the Brasshouse Centre, the director of adult education, the LEA and Ockenden Venture, a saturation point was reached as early as March 1981, with classes bursting at the seams and students having to be turned away. It was not possible to secure funding from either central or local government. Vietnamese students were not allocated any special funding for language teaching after they had left reception centres; and yet they were not entitled to resources and teachers financed by Section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966 whose sole beneficiaries were people from the New Commonwealth and Pakistan. Adding insult to injury, the LEA even refused financial assistance to enable the head of the Brasshouse Centre to attend a day conference on "The Funding and Provision of English as a Second Language Tuition in the Post-School Sector" organised by the Joint Committee for Refugees from Vietnam at London University (27 January 1987²⁸).

In the following years the LEA adopted a more flexible attitude such as authorising finance towards a summer link course in July/August 1984.²⁹ However, up until now, indifference prevails regarding the educational needs of Vietnamese or other refugees. During my study it has been made clear that

nobody in the administrative section of the LEA has any data on Vietnamese school children or older Vietnamese students. Nobody from the Department of Education attended the 1 May 1986 seminar on Vietnamese refugees organised by the Race Relations Unit, the BRC and Ockenden. Ockenden regional organisers confirm that it has been incredibly difficult to find a door that would open to the words "Vietnamese" or "refugee". At the latest meeting held on 20 May 1987 by the Race Relations Unit, the representatives from the Unit and from Ockenden Venture expressed their concern about "the difficulties and delays in communication with and within the Department of Education".

As the settlement of Vietnamese has been treated as a non-issue by the LEA, it has meant that there was no information or resources available and no training facilities. Even now there are no Vietnamese teachers in schools nor any Vietnamese liaison officers. The practitioners who have had to grapple with the very concrete problem of teaching Vietnamese children or adults did not know where to turn to for information or advice on the particular language or cultural difficulties of this group. There was no previous knowledge to draw upon as Vietnamese settlement in Britain had not begun until 1979. This led to the Vietnamese being slotted into existing courses which were often unsuitable. Language tutors needed to be alerted to the specific linguistic difficulties encountered by Vietnamese/Chinese speakers: pronunciation, syntax, etc. It can also be argued that teachers of refugees and other immigrants are required to teach a whole lifestyle, not just a language. None of these problems were tackled by the relevant authorities.

As a consequence the educational establishments and the teachers directly concerned had to cope on their own. They organised their own training days and seminars or attended whatever was proposed by voluntary organisations. In Birmingham, it became possible to call upon Ockenden Venture and the Midlands Vietnamese Community Association (but only from 1983 onwards) for advice and co-operation. Some establishments have also been in touch with Father Peter Diem. In practice, the onus fell onto particular educational establishments attended by people from Vietnam. Primary school children were directly integrated into the local schools, and the strong contingent of catholic Vietnamese families has meant that catholic schools in Handsworth have received a substantial number of children. Secondary school children have naturally been directed towards the relevant language centres, Steward Centre for North Birmingham and Cherrywood Centre for South Birmingham.

The Steward Centre is the one that catered for Vietnamese children. The Steward Centre appears to have been very useful to those children. Its main advantage is perhaps the close attention given to each individual child as is testified by their preparation for an English as a second language profile certificate (a detailed progress report). The head of the Centre and the teachers know the children very well and the students work in small groups. This may have helped to compensate for the lack of background knowledge on the part of the teachers. The most important factor to be noted is the Centre's objective not to focus solely on language teaching but to see the children as whole persons with special needs.

"We are concerned with the emotional, cultural and social needs of the children at a time when they are exceedingly vulnerable. It is our job to create an environment in which the functional language of the school and playground can operate in an atmosphere which encourages the talents the children bring to their new country. When they leave us they must have a feeling of high self-esteem and be aware and tolerant of different cultures. It is a sad fact of life that they also need to learn how to cope with the prejudice and bias of others against them".
The Steward Centre.

Children from Vietnam constitute 25% of the Steward Centre's roll in 1987. It has received altogether 205 children, ie 119 boys and 86 girls, the peak year being 1982 with an intake of 45 Vietnamese children.³⁰ All but 35 of them (25 boys and 10 girls) thereafter attended schools or colleges. There is a strong probability that such centres will close down. For newly arrived refugees this will mean greater problems as the schools will have to cope on their own without having the resources to do so, since nothing has been made available for the educational needs of refugees.

The problems faced by adults and young people beyond 16 have been greater; The older one is the more difficult it is to acquire a language. A number of further education colleges and their outreach centres have offered courses which attracted Vietnamese students, some of these courses combined language and skill acquisition and proved very popular, like the pre-TOPS course, a training scheme, at Handsworth Technical College which was attended by up to 24 students a year from 1980 to 1984. The additional attraction was that an allowance of approximately £45. per week was paid to the students attending this course. The MSC has since then cut these facilities.

The Brasshouse Centre is the main adult education establishment which attracted Vietnamese students. Altogether it has catered for about 400 Vietnamese students. Lack of funding led the Centre to launch a recruiting drive for volunteers to assist in classes, and to give them a short training course (Jan 29, Feb 5/12 1982). There has been an average of 50 students per year and there is no sign of it diminishing in the near future. One reason for the large group of Vietnamese at Brasshouse is the fact that there is no adult education centre in Handsworth where most Vietnamese families live. The students have to pay £4.30 a term and also incur transport expenses which may put off some of them. They are allowed to be in receipt of social security benefits whilst attending classes. As early as 1980, a course specially designed for Vietnamese was proposed at Brasshouse, stressing pronunciation difficulties. In 1983 the chairperson of the MVCA was invited to teach Vietnamese to a group of 26 British people (police, nurses, social workers, volunteers) as well as Vietnamese literature, history and culture. Since May 1986 an English class has been offered by a Vietnamese/Cantonese speaker at Brasshouse, mostly for beginners, so that the students can communicate with the teacher in their own language to clarify difficulties. This post is financed by the Birmingham University Extra Mural Department; this was helped by the fact that a linguistic project on problems of English pronunciation for Vietnamese speakers is being carried out at Birmingham University in the English for Overseas Students Unit. Brasshouse is also publishing courses programmes in Vietnamese and Chinese.

The three establishments mentioned, the Steward Centre, Handsworth Technical College and Brasshouse, have good relations and co-operate with both Ockenden Venture and the Midlands Vietnamese Community Association. They have also sent representatives to the seminar and conferences organised with the assistance of the Race Relations Unit.

The issue of language acquisition and education can only be touched upon in this paper but it is of paramount importance for people from Vietnam and other refugees. It has been perhaps the most neglected area by central and local authorities in Britain and yet it is arguably the one single domain which will determine the success or failure of settlement together with employment.³¹ Language training and employment are intimately linked. Little employment is available for those who do not speak English, and training that may lead to employment is inaccessible to them. Little has been done in the way of

promoting Vietnamese people's employment. The rate of unemployment amongst the Vietnamese in Birmingham is high: more than 80%. One clerical course was set up by the MSC task force, which folded up as it was a last minute thought to use up the budget of the year (1986) and failed to give sufficient time for planning and recruitment. An Inner City Partnership post of employment development officer is based at the MVCA which has produced some limited results. In addition, there are also some MSC funded posts at the MVCA and at Ockenden Venture.

V The Race Relations and Equal Opportunities Unit³²

One of the local authority departments that has taken the greatest interest in people from Vietnam and refugees in general is the Race Relations and Equal Opportunities Unit. It played a central role in raising issues connected with refugees and obtaining responses from other departments. When the Association of Metropolitan Authorities wrote to the Chief Executive about hosting a West Midlands seminar on Vietnamese, this request was passed down to the Race Relations Unit. Refugee agency workers noticed that there was a tendency for refugee matters to be seen to fall within the remit of race relations and ethnic relations structures by local authorities. However, they added that the bodies or officers concerned did not necessarily pay a lot of attention to refugee issues as the more substantial Asian or Afro-Caribbean minorities could be seen as the main priorities of ethnic or race relations officers.

This was not the case in Birmingham; in response to approaches from the AMA, the BRC and Ockenden, the Race Relations Unit has taken refugee matters on board as one of its responsibilities. The main reason for this has been the discrimination which refugees are perceived to suffer as a disadvantaged group and frequently as black groups since most of them come from the third world. The Unit had already sponsored the writing of a report on the Chinese and Vietnamese in Birmingham. It obtained from the Race Relations Committee approval for a West Midlands seminar on Vietnamese which it organised for 1 May 1986 in co-operation with the BRC and Ockenden Venture. About 100 people attended this meeting including local authority representatives, invited from each department in Birmingham, and representatives from other authorities in the West Midlands, voluntary organisations representatives, refugee organisations and Vietnamese representatives. The chairman of the Midlands Vietnamese Association was one of the speakers. A report and recommendations

arising from this event were circulated by the Race Relations Unit to other departments. A meeting with department representatives was organised a year later (20 May 1987) by the Race Relations Unit in order to report on and evaluate the responses of departments.

Most departments have taken into account the recommendations made, in particular social services and housing (for detail see relevant section). Education is noticeably the most elusive and non-responsive department where management is concerned, despite the interest taken by some service deliverers. According to Rose Austen who has taken the responsibility for this area of work, the difficulty is to obtain the attendance and co-operation of officers who are both interested in this issue and high enough in the management structure to be able to act upon it. The letter of invitation to the 20 May 1987 meeting sought to achieve those goals. All the chief officers were asked to send a representative "to contribute to the meeting in two ways:

- to report on the measures the department is taking to address the needs of Vietnamese refugees in Birmingham.
- to participate in discussions with Vietnamese representatives at the meeting to identify strategies which could be pursued by the department in conjunction with voluntary agencies and with the Vietnamese themselves"

This initial interest in the question of Vietnamese residents has led the Race Relations Unit to broaden its scope of action. In conjunction with Ockenden Venture it has organised a conference titled "Towards the Setting up of a Regional Refugee Council" held on 25 February 1987 to bring together about 85 people including Local authority and voluntary organisation representatives. In all, ten refugee groups were represented. The issues discussed included the status of refugees, policy of return, resettlement policy, employment and training/education, social welfare/health and culture. A representative from the Scottish Refugee Council and from a Newcastle citizens advice bureau doing work for refugees were called upon, and the recommendations from the Standing Conference of local and regional authorities of Europe were consulted. A provisional steering group composed of 14 refugee representatives was responsible for drafting a proposal of constitution which was discussed and ratified by another conference at the end of 1987. The Midland Refugee Council was formally constituted at this conference which took place on 11 December 1987.

The question of refugees is not a contentious issue in the Birmingham City Council. It is rather a non-issue and there is no council policy on refugees. The strategy for action as explained by the officer in charge is the following:

- "1. to raise the profile of the issue.
2. to encourage and assist the setting up of a refugee pressure group as a single group bringing together refugees from all origins is seen as more powerful as it will be representative of a substantial number of people as opposed to separate national refugee groups.
3. to obtain responses from Local authority departments".

One member of the Race Relations Unit added that these initiatives

"might produce the climate where a policy on refugee issues can actually be developed, that's what one should work towards, but I don't think you can achieve that unless you have laid the ground for it. Nothing happens fast in local government".

A number of recommendations have been made by the Unit. Altogether these developments appear very promising. However, the abolition of the Race Relations and Equal Opportunities Unit (May 1987) throw these efforts into jeopardy.

Conclusion

Ten years after the first arrivals of people from Vietnam in Britain, the process of settlement can be assessed with sufficient hindsight for the benefit of the present groups and future groups of refugees.

The results of the Vietnamese programme have shown that the dispersal policy was a failure and that front end loading funding was unsatisfactory. Leaving all the onus of the resettlement work to voluntary agencies has also proved inadequate. The agencies are currently directing their efforts towards the involvement of statutory bodies with refugee issues.

A certain amount of progress has been made in Birmingham in the way of provisions for refugees. Some Local authority departments have responded favourably and have taken a few measures benefitting refugees. In this respect refugees from Vietnam have fared a great deal better than Chilean refugees a decade earlier; nobody was aware of the existence of Chilean refugees among service providers. However, the hindrance to faster and more substantial improvements is still that of resources, and to these, Central Government holds the key.

Appendix

Area	Number	Households	Men	Women	Dependents	
					under 19	over 60
Aston	109	32	63	46	42	6
Alum Rock	19	4	12	7	9	-
Balsall Heath	15	5	5	10	5	2
City Centre	16	5	11	5	4	1
Edgbaston	59	13	29	30	16	3
Erdington	45	8	23	22	13	4
Handsworth	766	192	420	346	356	40
Lozells	82	20	47	35	42	3
Lozells	31	7	18	13	14	1
Moseley	38	12	28	10	9	1
Ladywood	54	14	32	22	16	3
Northfield	36	7	18	18	16	-
Hockley	14	4	7	7	3	1
Harborne	23	5	12	11	7	2
Nechells	74	17	44	30	40	3
Newtown/ Perry Barr	30	7	16	14	10	3
Quinton/ Selly Oak	35	8	17	18	13	2
Sheldon/Sparkhill/ Sparkbrook	58	11	30	28	16	4
Stechford/Washwood Heath/ Tyseley	50	7	28	22	20	2
Winson Green/ Yardley	66	19	38	28	21	5
Total	1620	397	898	722	672	82

Notes

1. Refugees from Vietnam are frequently called Vietnamese refugees. In reality a substantial number of these refugees are of Chinese origin and do not refer to themselves as Vietnamese.
2. For a detailed presentation on Ockenden Venture see Part One of this article.
3. For details on the literature pertaining to refugees in Britain, see D Joly, Refugees in Britain: an annotated bibliography. Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations, Bibliography No.9, 1988.
4. According to the Ockenden representative "the proposal comprised very different things because it was the result of a compromise between the three agencies".
5. Joint Operation Committee, Vietnamese programme (1984-87), Proposal to the Home Office.
6. Vietnamese programme evaluation, Regional Officer's report forms, David Crisfield, 1 July - 30 September 1986, West Midlands.
7. Vietnamese programme evaluation, Regional Officer's report forms, David Crisfield, 1 April 1986 - 30 June 1986, West Midlands.
8. In other areas such as Newcastle, a citizens' advice bureau is collaborating with a refugee association to provide specialised advice to refugees.
9. Figures gathered by Ockenden Venture.
10. Emily Lam, "Health visiting Vietnamese refugees in Britain", Health Visitor, Vol.53, July 1980, pp.254-255.
11. Report from the employment development officer, 17 November, 31 March 1987.
12. A *pagoda* is a place of worship in a private family house, as distinct from a temple dedicated to worship only and occupied by a monk.
13. Letter dated 2 December 1982 from Mr Jillings, Director of Social Services.
14. Letter dated 1 Mach 1983 from John Chant, Honorary Secretary of the ADSS to T E Noder, Deputy Secretary of the DHSS.
15. AMA News summary, 10 March 1983.
16. Administrative unit which covers the areas of Birmingham inhabited by Vietnamese. These mostly congregate in the west of the city.
17. Janice Reid and Timothy Strong, Torture and Trauma, Sydney Cumberland College of Health Sciences, 1987.

18. Lack of interest is clearly demonstrated by notes from the regional worker report: "Have met Senior Health Promotions Officer for West Birmingham Health Authority to open discussions re possible West Midlands Refugee Health conference. Very fruitless meeting with no positive offers to help".
19. There are also some individuals who took an interest in those questions: a doctor from Birmingham who attended the Refugee Health in the UK conference held in Liverpool on 18 September 1987, and a research sister from Dudley Road hospital who attended a seminar on local government responsibility towards refugees held at the University of Bristol (20/21 October 1986), and also the practitioners who encounter Vietnamese people in their day-to-day work.
20. Jeanice Reid and Timothy Strong Torture and Trauma, Cumberland College of Health Sciences, 1987.
21. Letter from the AMA to the director of housing and chief executive dated 28 February 1980 informs that one voluntary organisation has been nominated to which all offers of housing have to be made within one area and includes the JCRV list of voluntary organisations' regions.
22. Letter dated 15 July 1980 to City Housing Officer.
23. Letter dated 11 June 1980 from AMA, ADC London Borough Association to Mr G I Deney, Home Office.
24. "to ensure that a lesson is learnt for the future handling of substantial numbers of refugees". Letter dated 3 July 1984 from Director of housing services, London Borough of Greenwich to the AMA.
25. Letter dated 30 August 1984 from Linda Barker (Ockenden Venture) to Mr Bevan, housing department.
26. A particular area manager, ready to help, contributed to ease the process.
27. Nechells, Lozells, Newtown, Aston, Witton, Winson Green, Small Heath, Bordesley Green, Handsworth, Handsworth Wood, Ladywood, Lee Bank, Balsall Heath, Highgate, part of Edgbaston.
28. Memorandum dated 22 January 1982 ref AEYC/SJW/SCD/IFE 20).
29. Ref OTB/DC 10 July 1984.
30. Vietnamese children intake per year

1980	22
1981	34
1982	45
1983	14
1984	20
1985	26
1986	20
1987	14
until June	

31. Joint Committee for Refugees from Vietnam, Report of the Joint Committee for Refugees from Vietnam, London: Home Office, 1982.
32. "Race Relations Unit" for short.

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GLOSSARY

- ADSS Association of Directors of Social Services
- AMA Association of Metropolitan Authorities
- BCAR British Council for Aid to Refugees
- BRC British Refugee Council
- CP Community Programme
- DHSS Department of Health and Social Security
- EFL English as a Foreign Language
- ESL English as a Second Language
- GP General Practitioner
- JCRV Joint Committee for Refugees from Vietnam
- LEA Local Education Authority
- MSC Manpower Services Commission
- MVCA Midlands Vietnamese Community Association
- OV Ockenden Venture
- SCF Save the Children Fund