



City of Sanctuary

Housing

The workshop was very well attended and lively, though there was a very small number of local authority officers and I believe no councillors. The majority were from volunteer charities from a range of cities.

1) Aims

To look at how Local Authorities can prevent or alleviate destitution through examples such as

- Allowing empty council property to be used by social enterprises, including for housing destitute asylum seekers
- Including destitution amongst asylum seekers and refugees in the authority's homelessness strategy and Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
- Providing local licences for night shelters which will allow destitute asylum seekers to stay in the same place for as long as needed
- Providing Council Tax Relief for individuals who provide housing for destitute asylum seekers

2) Good Practice

- Dave Smith from NACCOM network (No Accommodation Network) opened the discussion and handed out a very useful information sheet. He started the BOAZ Trust in **Manchester** and looked around for organisations concerned with destitute housing. Ten years on he and NACCOM now have links with 31 organisations nationally that provide some form of accommodation for asylum seekers, refugees, and occasionally other migrants, through private hosts, mixed housing schemes, night shelters and so on. NACCOM applies for funding and is going for charitable status.

Dave Smith, co-ordinator davesmith@boaztrust.org.uk Find your nearest project at www.naccom.org.uk



City of Sanctuary

- **Bristol** Rachael Bee, Bristol Housing Network (BHN). There's a men's community house, a network of host families (for from 1-6 people), 3 or 4 live in with her and a couple more with her immediate neighbours. Funded by individuals. The Lush company gives funds to allow £10 per week to residents, but there's no council tax relief.
- **Birmingham** Hope Housing and destitution fund. Their model is working with housing associations. One church house, 7 housing association places offered at nominal rent. Partnership of voluntary agencies. They do get a reduction in council tax. They have limited funding, some of which comes from Comic Relief and other large charitable trusts.
- **Bradford** have something comparable to BHN above, 60 beds for people with leave to remain. Destitution project - 5 houses, 20 beds - loaned, empty vicarages.
- The charity **Emmaus** houses homeless people generally, gives recycling furniture which can be sold. This money helps to pay for the project. Have been able to employ refugees, and offer 'voluntary work allowance'. Present in Glasgow and many other places. It takes about 10 years to be sustainable. They do take on refused asylum seekers.
- **Nottingham** Housing destitute asylum seekers with exempt housing now. Two houses, pay no rent and do repairs. A privately rented house, with accommodation shared by asylum seekers (who don't) and new refugees (who do get housing benefit).
- **Glasgow** are setting up mixed model for those refused and those granted status, a night shelter for 10. Other organisations provide 2 houses. Working towards hospitality model.
- **Southampton and Winchester** Visitors' Group (SWVG) pay rent and give subsistence. This possible because not very many, even in Southampton. Seriously affected by Immigration Act rules for landlords, who will be bound to check immigration status of their tenants and reject those without - pilot is in Birmingham (where people can move outside the pilot area) but going to be rolled out nationally. Home Office have said that (only) the chief tenant has to have status/right to remain. (This is not easy for landlords to be confident of as there are 8 different status documents, with 31 pages of guidance! A chance this may bite the dust.) SWVG model challenged by this. It was suggested they use the funds they receive from charitable trusts and their tireless fund-raising to buy a house.



City of Sanctuary

- Discussion of how various groups got their houses. Often came out of the blue, 'a miracle', or out of relationships of trust in networks established over the years. An unused Chinese students' house was lent for one year, repaired, and 5 Eritrean women housed there. Now 14 houses in all, all at nominal rents or given when the owner dies, none owned yet. Vicarages? Ok for up to four people - fire inspection, safety plan, free ten-year smoke alarms. Not tenants. Local councils' rules vary. Single rooms worked better than sharing even if it meant fewer could be housed.
- NACCOM find that people stay very varying times. In **Manchester** a 12-month target, starting with a 'catchphrase' when getting sorted and settled. Feeling settled is necessary to the struggle of getting evidence, getting a good solicitor - they have one that works with them. Varied support given, male and female care-worker employed.
- ASSIST in **Sheffield** have masses of volunteers. Rachael, BHN, said you can have volunteers who want to give their whole life to this - really committed people who can do without much funding.
- **Newcastle** New refugees are helped through the transition. They bid for a specialist provider for new refugees so this released funds for other projects with refused asylum seekers. 'Exempt housing benefit' for people with status used to support refused people. Extra support where people have particular needs and you can provide for these.
- **Bradford** Providing one week's night shelter is circulated round a set of churches, which shares the responsibility - and acquaints a lot of people directly with the situation of asylum seekers - and filters really acute need. Provide education for the volunteers. Cold weather provision on frosty nights (ground temperature now) through use of B and B, hotels.

3) Issues

- **Oxford** There is a local problem of homelessness. Asylum seekers not allowed in night shelters there. In **Brighton** 'a local connection' is needed for access to night shelter. The problem is that users have to give their housing benefit (and refused asylum seekers do not have this). The Council in **Anglesey** brought a case against the night shelter on the grounds that it is 'not a home' and therefore no housing benefit provided. (Please note - I'm not familiar with this and think I have not reported the remarks right here and elsewhere.)



City of Sanctuary

- Discussion of ongoing needs for first six months, including accommodation and support with councils. New refugees have no means for deposit and rent in advance, which are needed if not able to use social housing.

4) Proposals

The solutions in the room would save the government a great deal of money.
Emmaus support squats, teepee villages - part of protest - doing the moral, even if not yet the legal thing



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Training & Planning with Local Authorities

1) Aims

Local Authority staff may not (knowingly) have direct contact with asylum seekers, may be unsure about how they can help or advise, may not know what services asylum seekers can access (or how to make them accessible), or know how they can help people who are destitute.

- Ensure that Local Authority staff understand the difficult life experiences and position of asylum seekers and refugees and how these impact their position and outlook in accessing services locally;
- So Local Authorities can assist in meeting asylum seekers and refugees needs;
- And understand what they can do to help destitute or homeless people.

2) Good Practice

- Red Cross try to work with Job Centres and have run workshops in the past but not recently.
- Charities have developed 'template' letters for asylum seekers and refugees to take with them to the Job Centre or other service providers to explain the position of asylum seekers/refugees.
- A 'thematic workshop' in **Swansea** invited anyone who supports asylum seekers or refugees to attend e.g. NGO's, school, mental health services, housing etc. ran twice and had over 90 people attend each time – very successful. Open invitation to health professionals.
- Community Education (in **Cardiff**) asylum seekers and refugees can access ESOL classes but need opportunities to practice and integrate with local culture. FAN (Friends and Neighbours) is a local project run in Adult Education centres to help this process and offer a listening & talking opportunity. Led by ordinary local people not teachers.
- **Bristol** City Council has a Hardship Fund introduced in 2014 for local people in desperate need of short term financial help. One-off application only per person.



City of Sanctuary

3) Issues

- Even with good ESOL skills refugees cannot access many types of jobs except say cleaning roles. They often and easily fall foul of JSA regulations around applying for a minimum of 5 jobs per week as there aren't enough appropriate jobs available that they can access.
- The importance of training provision by Local Authorities for their staff has declined due to cut-backs. And less staff means that fewer people are working harder to deliver services which means they say they 'lack time' for training.
- Local Authorities rely on online training sessions that employees have to find the time to do themselves. There is no Equal Opportunities or Safeguarding training run for all employees any more.
- In Swansea Local Authority the aim for City of Sanctuary status was accompanied by an insistence on 'top level' support for a unanimous decision before a motion was put to the Council; became part of local political party's activities. A success story at the time but harder to maintain long term.
- City of Sanctuary locally and nationally is not good at sharing what it knows with other groups and more could be achieved if this was done.

4) Proposals

- Increase ESOL training capacity locally; voluntary and community agencies need help from Local Authorities in raising funds for this provision e.g. local sources of funding lists etc. Is this possible?
- Ensure that Local Authorities know all the local support groups available to help asylum seekers and refugees as they are area based, not needs based.
- Information sheets and quick guides that are easy to read are very helpful for Local Authority staff. Refugee Action's 'myth-busting' little pocket guides were very useful and should be updated, reprinted and issued to Local Authority departments.
- Service providers/charities to go to Local Authorities and run a quick 'awareness and information' session before the working day starts. These are becoming increasingly popular and are often well attended as most Local Authority workers do care and want to do a good job. But they don't know about asylum seekers and refugees and what they have gone through to get to the UK or what they are experiencing since arriving. They are as ill-informed as the general public and may think that they are economic migrants.
- BASRIG is a group for local NGO's – need an interagency group that includes Local Authorities so joined – up working and services can be offered. Get George Ferguson (Mayor of Bristol) to champion this!
- Bristol City Council – a lot of local expertise and knowledge has been lost through cut-backs and redundancies. It is important that knowledge is not dependent on one



City of Sanctuary

person. Every Local Authority department should have an 'asylum lead' person so that these people can work together as a team locally and advise the NGO's in the region.

- NGO's should invite Local Authority Strategic Directors or Corporate Directors to visit a Drop-in so they can see for themselves the situation of asylum seeker and refugees and understand the issues by talking with them.
- Training in local schools in 'British values' of democracy, equality, inclusion and fairness may help to create positive attitudes in children and young people as many people are worried about fundamentalist attitudes becoming entrenched in Britain and this hardens attitudes against immigration. Ofsted could help in this by getting it into the national curriculum and inspecting schools on it.
- Look at the HARPS website for lots of information and resources for health and social care professionals. <http://www.health-policy-systems.com/>



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Local authorities and voluntary sector working together

It was noted that there was no-one present from any local authority and that very few had registered for the event. Organisations attending the workshop included those from Bristol, Sheffield, Glasgow, Reading, Tees-side, Malvern, Swindon and elsewhere.

1) Aims

Many Local Authorities understand and value the work which the voluntary sector – both Refugee Community Organisations and other voluntary sector groups working with asylum seekers – do in preventing and alleviating destitution. Others still need educating or persuading!

The workshop will look at how Local Authorities can support the voluntary sector to work against destitution, including by:

- Encouraging close working relationships with the voluntary sector through a designated officer to provide help, support and advice to and enable a coordinated response to relevant issues
- Undertaking research with local statutory and voluntary organisations to understand the scale of destitution amongst asylum seekers and how this can be best addressed
- Funding or providing relief to organisations who help prevent destitution

2) Good Practice

- **Bristol.** Refugee Women of Bristol: local group for women, drop-in meetings since 2003. Funded by Bristol City Council (BCC). Organises English classes, advocacy, health domestic violence, FGM. There is also childcare and lunch each Tuesday. Diverse membership eg 27 languages spoken by RWB members.

Bristol Refugee Rights: Welcome Centre 3 days each week, English classes, volunteering, food bank and destitution support, advocacy, bike project, hot meal each Thursday. Wellbeing group and 'stop smoking' work. BRR 'home to many; a safe place'.



City of Sanctuary

BCC grants support RWB, BRR and Refugee Action and also Law Centre (legal advice.) Total of 90K from global grants of £7M. Outcomes and compliance are monitored flexibly, grant life of two years (2015).

Borderlands, Bristol. Open each Tuesday, ESOL, advocacy. Has both a legal fund and destitution fund. Faith based organisation able to appeal to other parishes to raise funds and awareness elsewhere. Foodbank not limited to ASR but open to other local people too. City of Sanctuary helped co-ordination with agencies.

- **Glasgow** – large numbers of ASR since 2000 as city identified as a dispersal centre. Since 2001 seven integration networks operate across the city. Variety of modes of working – some have support staff, others concentrate on casework. An Asylum Destitution Network umbrella organisation operates across Glasgow.
- **Sheffield** – City of Sanctuary manages a weekly drop-in to give destitute asylum seekers access to services. Links to Red Cross, Migrant Health. Limited DWP presence. Hosting accommodation, food bank and signposting to other food banks. Weekly Conversation Club attracts 60 – 70 people.
- **Swindon** – Harbour Project (25 hours week) 2 p/t posts. Support from Big Lottery and Lloyds TSB also do own fundraising
- **Teesside** – North of England Refugee Service drastically in decline now 7 staff only. In Middlesbrough 2 p/t workers, Migrant Health link but now no advocacy or casework. Hardship Fund exists and newsletter to supporters and donors. Local Authority pay £600 for costs and overheads.
- **Malvern**– news of local initiative to settle a small numbers of Syrian families locally
- **Blackburn, Leeds and Liverpool** local authorities all have a designated officer for ASR support.
- **Leicester** has funded well regarded research into asylum seekers in the city, 3 or 4 years ago. Now thought to be discontinued.

3) Proposals

Due to time constraints there was limited discussion on ways forward.

Each locality represented had configured support differently reflecting local circumstances, maturity of the organisations, funding, local support etc



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As Bristol had a large presence in the workshop attention focused on the local situation. There was consensus that there was a lot of activity and energy in the city but that co-ordination/integration could be better. Time was often spent signposting people etc. Concept of a local Asylum Passport to give access to a number of local support services was floated but no time to discuss how this might work.



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Travel, Language, Volunteering and Integration

1) Aims

- Provide asylum seekers including those who are destitute with free or concessionary local travel cards
- Provide and/or facilitate free English classes to asylum seekers and refugees, including refused asylum seekers.
- Provide and/or facilitate opportunities for asylum seekers to volunteer for projects, including those which benefit the local community
- Seek to improve the integration of refugees so they can fulfil their potential and contribute to local communities
- Create a fund that can be used to assist destitute individuals, including asylum seekers

2) Good Practice

During the initial discussion, participants at the workshops agreed on the importance of volunteering while destitute. Volunteering was considered as a way to integrate in the British society, to improve language skills that could be used in every-day life as well as in interpreting, and to develop other skills that could be applied in various professional environments.

Example of good practice:

- Language Café (**Glasgow**).
- Hope Project (**Birmingham**) – support for people in a destitute position, specifically from other refugees and asylum seekers who shared the same experience. By giving support to people in destitution, former destitute asylum seekers and refugees are actively involved in the community and put their knowledge and experience at service for others. The project is particularly successful among women.



City of Sanctuary

- In **Torquay**, asylum seekers receive practical and moral support when travelling to collect their asylum seeking allowance. Practical support includes money and/or Travel Cards; moral support usually consists of volunteering travel companions.
- Volunteering in organisations outside the local asylum seekers & refugees community helps spreading knowledge concerning asylum issues and challenge common perception and stereotypes. One of the participants at the workshop reported his experience with the local Scout group in Torquay.
- African Community Centre (**Swansea**). The centre hosts yoga classes, counselling, English and sewing classes. Furthermore, the centre helps and supports women with their personal issues and ambitions.
- Bristol Bike Project (**Bristol**).
- In **Cardiff**, the local council funds ESOL classes to encourage mums whose children attend the same schools, to meet up. Usually ESOL classes terminate at the same time as school, so mothers can go collect their children together. ESOL teachers are state-funded.
- Oasis Cardiff (**Cardiff**). An organisation that helps refugees and asylum seekers to integrate into their local community. The centre provides various activities (English classes, craft sessions and activities specifically for women).

3) Proposals

- A platform to support teenagers (peer support)
- Organising school events in which refugees and asylum seekers could volunteer to raise awareness regarding asylum issues.
- Opening opportunities towards the outside sector.
- Spreading knowledge concerning the importance of volunteering.
- Broadening training opportunities and bridging inter-cities activities between various centres.
- Exploring the idea of a language café.
- Reporting bad practice of language use and hate speech.



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Central Government

1) Aims

Destitution is not an accident, but is Government policy. We will look at how organisations, individuals and Local Authorities can challenge this through local and national democratic systems, including

- Working with Councillors
- Working with MPs to take Parliamentary action
- Passing motions against destitution and the policies which cause it
- Local Citizens' lobbying and campaigning

2) Proposals

- A Bristol City Councillor opened the discussion by saying that the entire immigration system needs to be changed, based on Human and Civil Rights. He suggested a Private Member's Bill, not an Early Day Motion due to the latter not being very effective. He called for a National Day of Action, demonstrating in Westminster. The Swindon representative suggested that the public should be re-educated, which would be more useful than a Private Member's bill. It was suggested that both routes could be taken.
- It was asked how best to make the public care? We have had "sleeping out" campaigns in Bristol to highlight destitution. The suggestion was made that Destitution and Detention campaigns should be linked.
- Several different approaches which can be taken were described by contributors. Amnesty (Weston-Super-Mare) said that they wanted to lobby their MP. One MP suggested concentrating on one issue and asking for a pledge card to be signed.
- The contradictions within public opinion were mentioned; often people can be more sympathetic than expected, as seen in campaigns around individual cases.



City of Sanctuary

The programmes on Channel 4 this week should help public opinion. “Long Walk to Cardiff” -Asylum Seekers walked from Bristol to Cardiff to publicise their plight.

- A delegate stated that the HOIE was “hopeless”. The staff were not properly trained. The HOIE ruling that Fresh Claims evidence should be presented in person in Liverpool, by people with little or no money for travel, had been overturned by legal action from Liverpool City Council.
- A delegate with a legal background brought up that Asylum Seekers can sometimes be offered the right to work-but only in shortage occupations, for which they are very unlikely to be qualified. He felt there might be a legal challenge to this using the National Assistance Act of 1948.
- There was the consensus that disabled and other vulnerable groups have similar problems to Asylum Seekers.
- Suggestion that we need a “totemic” issue to put to the new government. The right to work was put forward. A Nigerian delegate said that he had worked as an engineer in Britain, but since his case has been refused, he has become destitute.
- We spoke about engaging local and national government. A delegate from Gloucester group GARAS said that she had lobbied local MP Mark Harper without success and wondered about a 38 Degrees petition. It was suggested that Parliamentary e-petitions could sometimes be effective.
- Almost unanimous cross-party vote in Bristol City Council in favour of bringing the venue for Asylum Seekers reporting to HOIE back to a police station in the city centre, instead of making them travel 7 miles out of town to a new Police Centre in S. Gloucestershire. (Unfortunately this was refused by HOIE, though some concessions were made.)
- Feeling that progress was being made, with Sarah Teather's Parliamentary Inquiry published. With the election coming we should lobby our MPs and engage the local media.



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Social Services, Health and Well-being

1) Aims

We will look at how Local Authorities can

- Ensure that Social Services work in partnership with the voluntary sector to identify asylum seekers who need support. Ensure existing powers, including under the National Assistance Act, the Chronically Sick and Disabled Act, 1970, the NHS Act 2006, Children's Act 1989, etc. are used progressively to assist asylum seekers who are vulnerable and also to avoid destitution
- Ensure that any child on asylum support or who is supported by local authorities is given free school meals
- Review whether the locally enhanced services contracted from GPs by clinical commissioners are providing adequate and effective services to asylum seekers and refugees and take action as appropriate
- Make the mental health needs of destitute asylum seekers a standing item on adult safeguarding boards' agendas

2) Good practice

- **Manchester** - Amazing GP practice, specialists to work with mental issues. Service was found costly as everyone from Manchester was using it so they decided to close it down. But different GPs decided to continue
- **Liverpool**
Public Health Team.
Making society understand the risk if people would not have access to these services
- Solicitor talking about his projects/legal challenges
- Project **London**-set up clinic for people facing difficulties in getting help (eg. Charges for treatment!)-first help individuals, then link up with the group, organise meetings with GPs, lobbying parliamentarians ; grouping helps



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Collect all of the cases- it's easier to work on issue because it is not just single case but group cases

- **Coventry** Refugee and Migrant Centre Project: work with local GPs about areas to develop: not everyone can benefit from talking therapy, especially when interpreters are needed

Introduction of art therapy- Iranian artist who leads that (so comes from community)

Problems: management cost is not covered by everyone and there is need for management, supervision, admin work= funding needed

- **Bristol** Medical School
Training students as interpreters

Training clinicians how to work with interpreters

Training with voluntary sector

Freedom from torture

Found dynamics between agencies that supposed to work collaboratively difficult

Monthly training sessions based on case studies

Strength of 'virtual' support by e-mail groups

Must be common respect for each other among organizations delivering services

Dialogue needed between GPs, psychologists, professionals

Offering holiday accommodation, rural areas

3) Proposals

- Mental health- importance of well-being of asylum seekers(trauma); support services are an issue, limited access to support;
- Bristol Public House project- people need more help than just medication
- GPs should talk to asylum seekers asking what kind of help they need
- Community counselling modules- bringing people together, non-medical concept, talking support, counselling, no questionnaires!; talk therapies, practical solutions(for instance how to deal with unemployment etc)
- 'Stop smoking' advisors within community
- Necessity of training for mental health workers- how to deal with trauma!
Well being



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- Organizations working in therapeutic way- map out what services are there to gap out what is missing= services are there but there is huge need to join them out
- Recognize services that are struggling to understand trauma
- GP- NHS clinic for asylum seekers. Providers of services (GPs etc.) must inform about other providers of similar services- to move through services easily!
- Training with clinicians how to deal with asylum seekers
- Community counselling- raise awareness among organizations; isolation has big impact on mental health; mentoring projects- 6 weeks project with mentor to discover ones skills
- Value of multiagency forms
- Improvement needed when using interpreters services