

Building Community

Supportive Networks around Asylum Accommodation

"In whatever place we decide to build our future, in the country of our birth or elsewhere, the important thing is that there always be a community ready to **welcome, protect, promote** and **integrate** everyone, without distinctions and without excluding anyone" - Pope Francis

In January a group of people with experience living or volunteering in asylum accommodation came together online. Participants discussed what community support currently looks like, what works well, and what could be built upon to create more supportive communities. This document holds some of what was shared in the session – you'll find ideas, questions to ask, and possibilities for connection.

Among the points shared below there are some consistent messages to takeaway: community support is vital for people to feel welcomed and supported, building strong relationships based on trust is key, provide space but pass over creative control, and continually build networks and share information. Participants stated that the greatest measurement for success would be 'Seeing people enjoying their lives, flourishing and moving on'.

If there are ideas in here that you would like to discuss further, or if you'd like to be included in future meetings, please contact caritaswestminster@rcdow.org.uk



WELCOME

Faith Support and Community Spaces

The role of faith groups in providing practical support and physical space for people to gather was underlined. The fact that natural encounters arise from offering space and facilities leading to more concrete support and strengthened ties to the community is a positive secondary outcome of this. As such, encouraging new communities to get involved – learning from existing groups - in this way is to be encouraged. Sensitivity is required around religious differences within communities.

- Offering up church spaces
 - for social activities
 - a place to be other than the hotel
 - kitchen spaces for cooking
 - a place to do homework
 - sorting donated items
- Provide pastoral support and outreach to hotels
- Foster and grow ecumenical and inter-faith links

Things communities can do together

Attendees shared some of the actions that have been productive and helpful; these had a focus on connection, being together, and being supported. It was mentioned that the impact of not having the support of organisations and charities was a deterioration in mental health.

- Communities coming together to improve living conditions:
 - Wi-Fi
 - £5 per person per week given from a church community to residents
 - opportunities to go out, daytrips
 - parties
 - celebration
 - a garden to grow fresh and seasonal food
- Meals where people have shared food that they have been missing
- Opportunities for mothers and toddlers to get together
- Opportunities for visiting or creating art exhibitions, theatre and concerts
- Hand over the creative lead with event organisation

Your Notes

PROTECT

Being a woman in asylum accommodation

During the meeting we discussed some of the experiences that women have in asylum accommodation. It was shared that in some cases there is a majority male staff who can be controlling and obstructive. This has led to women having to ask male staff for period products and underwear which can be an embarrassing experience, even more so when this hasn't been treated with sensitivity. Attendees of the meeting expressed that the residents, not staff, should have control over access to clothing and sanitary products, as well as more women on the staff.

- Ensure people have free, readily available, access to sanitary products
- Donate good new products, including make-up

Agency

- Find ways for people to have a say in the support they receive, both in hotels and in the support offered by faith groups
- Evaluate whether there is more you could be doing on this front
- Support each other to advocate for collective rights

Trust is the key

- Building up trust and relationship as the starting point
- Encourage people to share when they receive a letter
 - sometimes people are confused and unsure when they receive a letter, interpreting this early can help.
- Trusted buddy system

No one left Behind

- Seek to understand who aren't accessing services and why
 - How can the offer be made more accessible?
- Consider those family members who are still overseas

Mental Health Support

- Operate with a trauma informed approach
- Create more opportunities to be heard

Your Notes

PROMOTE

Strengthening Networks

Given the possible implications when people do not feel able to access, or do not have ready access, to support, the below considerations were detailed as ways to strengthen networks.

- Link up with local organisations doing the same thing
 - signpost more effectively
 - stronger networks of support
 - building capacity to respond in an emergency
- Cultivate links with people in power who can help to advocate
- Engage with local groups and sports clubs who can provide days out and fun activities

Changing the Narrative

- Take opportunities to counter negative narrative in the press
- Continual listening and dialogue
- Invite people intentionally to talk in a safe space

Your Notes



INTEGRATE

Preparation for Leave to Remain

- Prepare people for the moment they get leave to remain
 - Expectations around housing, possibility of moving to other parts of the country
 - Employment support
 - Support people to find volunteering opportunities
 - Help build up connections in the community
- Link in with ESOL courses at local colleges
- Cover current events and share practical vocab in ESOL classes
- Encourage peer interpreting and using people from within the group for interpreting and supporting conversations
- Access to a bank account (see links below)
- Link to other agencies e.g. CAB, Immigration Lawyers, translators, charities and organisations.

Moving On

- Use national networks to link them to a parish or organisation local to their new location.
- Explore how we can feed into a larger national network.

Your Notes



RESOURCES SHARED

Mental Health Support	Bernardo's Asylum Seeker Mental Health and Wellbeing Project	https://www.barnardos.org.uk/get-support/services/asylum-seeker-mental-health-and-wellbeing-project
Preparation for Leave to Remain	Citizens Advice	https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/immigration/asylum-and-refugees/
Housing	Housing Justice - Refugee Lodgings	https://housingjustice.org.uk/refugee-lodgings
Finance	HSBC - Basic Bank Account	https://www.hsbc.com/mt/accounts/products/basic-bank-account/
ESOL	LEAH (Learning English at Home)	https://www.learnenglishathome.org.uk
Finance	Proxy Address	https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/insight/the-unexpected-power-of-a-postal-address-81651
ESOL, integration, preparation for Leave to Remain	Refugee Employability Programme	https://repreedinpartnership.co.uk
Information	Right to Remain	https://righttoremain.org.uk
Housing	Room for Refugees	https://www.roomforrefugees.com

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