

Submission from the NACCOM Network to the APPG on Refugees inquiry “Refugees Welcome?”

Contact details

Dave Smith- National Coordinator davesmith@naccom.org.uk

Lucy Smith- Communications, Media and Advocacy Worker comms@naccom.org.uk

We would be willing to talk to the Inquiry panel directly if needed.

Please note several of our members have submitted evidence this to Inquiry separately. We also conducted an interview with a refugee who was known through the network and this will be submitted separately. The individual involved wanted to remain anonymous.

Kester Young from Night Stop North East (nightstopne@depauluk.org) is also willing to be contacted if needed.

Organisational overview

NACCOM, the UK-wide No Accommodation Network, is a network of members providing accommodation and support to asylum seekers, refugees and other migrant groups with no recourse to public funds (NRPF). It is the only national network that supports organisations providing accommodation to asylum seekers that are destitute. It has been established for 10 years and grown to 37 members housing over 700 people collectively.

NACCOM was founded in July 2006 when the director of the Boaz Trust invited voluntary organisations providing accommodation for destitute asylum seekers to meet in Manchester to explore the possibility of working together. The first meeting was attended by three existing and two potential new groups who were providing or wanted to start innovative solutions to alleviating the destitution of asylum seekers. The aim from the start was to share information, creative ideas, best practice and resources, with a view to reducing, and ultimately ending, asylum destitution in the UK, through conferences, meetings, training and other resources and support.

Over the first seven years NACCOM operated as an informal network, holding regional meetings and an annual conference in various cities, hosted by member groups. The network grew until there were almost 30 groups involved, from London to Glasgow, collectively housing approximately 350 people every night.

In 2013 NACCOM became a key member of the Strategic Alliance on Migrant Destitution (SAMD) and at this point it became evident that NACCOM needed to change its infrastructure in order to meet the increasing demands of projects wanting our support, and to become more strategic in terms of engaging with the wider homeless sector, media and other policy influencers. We formed a steering group from the most active participating projects, developed a written constitution, began to apply for funding from small grant making trusts and applied for charitable status, becoming a CIO in June 2015.

The Board is made up of representatives from: London Hosting (Housing Justice), Open Door North East, Action Foundation, Arimathea Trust, Bristol Hospitality Network, Hope Projects, BEACON Bradford and ASSIST Sheffield.

NACCOM is made up of Member Projects which includes Full Members who are providing accommodation and support, as well as Associate Members who are providing support or are sympathetic to our work. We also support and resource other projects wherever possible. At the time

of writing (Sept 2016) we have 43 members organisations, including 37 Full Members and 6 Associate Members.

As NACCOM Member Projects (hereafter 'Members') accommodate those without recourse to public funds (NRPF), we have responded to the following questions with a focus on those who are newly recognised as refugees after going through the asylum process in the UK. Whilst some members are also working with local authorities in responding to Resettlement Programmes and may be delivering accommodation to meet this need, this is not our primary focus.

1. How far does current UK policy and legislation allow newly resettled and newly recognised refugees to integrate and rebuild their lives here?

We believe that current policy does not go far enough to enable integration and resettlement of newly recognised refugees, focusing our attention on two key areas:

1.1. The policy of destitution

The practical and personal impact of destitution on those who, having already suffered trauma before coming to the UK is both well documented and long-lasting (see Oxfam and Swansea University, 'Coping with Destitution' (2011) and British Red Cross, 'Poor Health, No Wealth No Home', (2016)).

Whilst there are no accurate statistics available on destitution across the UK, it is likely to be within the 2007 National Audit Office estimate of 155,000 to 283,500, rising as asylum refusals exceed removals by over 2,000 each year (see [Migration Observatory](#), August 2016). Destitution can occur at several points within the asylum process, for instance once individuals are deemed 'Appeal Rights Exhausted' or after the 28 day 'transition period', if they have been granted refugee status but have not yet found employment or alternative accommodation.

Within the NACCOM network, according to our recent mapping exercise (conducted over the summer of 2016), approx. 1,600 individuals were accommodated by our 37 Members in the last year. This figure includes 28.5% refugees, 51.4% Refused Asylum Seekers, and 20.1% other individuals in need (mainly EU or non-EU migrants, overstayers or asylum seekers with NRPF). For a list of members supporting refugees, please see Appendix.

1.2 Accommodation

Home Office Dispersal data shows that the top 10 locations for asylum dispersal in 2015 were: Birmingham, Liverpool, Cardiff, Bolton, Rochdale, Manchester, Middlesbrough, Leicester, Swansea and Nottingham. When individuals are refused (as in 60% of cases last year), many remain in these communities (for instance, NACCOM has Members in 8/10 locations). This could be because of positive connections within such communities, but may also be for the simple reason that those with NRPF cannot afford to travel or would have no reason to relocate for housing or job purposes.

These communities can become areas of welcome (for instance by connecting with the City of Sanctuary movement, which a large number of our projects are involved with) but can also be places of tension and hostility. Night Stop North East, a Member in Tyne and Wear, stated that placing refugees in *'the poorest accommodation in the most deprived areas of the country only serves to make those people feel isolated and generates resentment amongst communities that are already struggling. Some people within such communities are looking for scapegoats for their own challenging lives and refugees are an easy target for their anger and frustration. This raises tensions and leads to hate crime, which is not positive for anyone involved.'*

2. Are there any particular barriers that newly resettled and newly recognised refugees face?

Barriers experienced by NACCOM Member beneficiaries are often around knowledge and understanding, that is, knowing what they are entitled to and knowing what they need to do to access further support or opportunities. Night Stop North East cited a major barrier was *'Not being told of where to go for help and support. They appear to be put into communities without consultation with those communities and without any help given to the refugees who are desperately lonely and frightened and vulnerable'*.

Abigail Housing (based in Leeds and Bradford) cited examples of people being turned away from Leeds Housing Options because of previously living in another area apparently due to lack of local connections, stating: *'A homeless assessment does include a question about local connections, but it is the 5th question in a sequence of 5 which should be asked in order - (1) eligibility, (2) homelessness, (3) priority need, (4) intentionality and (5) local connection. In other words, local connection is no business of LHO staff unless (a) they are conducting a formal homeless assessment and (b) the answers to the other 4 questions indicate that someone might qualify for statutory homeless status. LHO then have a duty to provide advice and assistance to these people from out of area, including helping them to register with Leeds Homes.'*

3. Are there any areas of good practice where refugees are being supported successfully? Are there any differences in support in the different regions of the UK?

A tremendous amount of dedication, often from volunteers, goes into providing high quality support and delivering lasting change with refugees across the NACCOM Network, and several members have submitted evidence separately for this Inquiry which we trust will highlight much of the good work that is going on across the sector.

As a network, our geographical reach is substantial for the level of resource and capacity within it, and Members work in the following areas: Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and within England, the North East, North West, Yorkshire and the Humber, Midlands, London, the South East and South West. In addition, two of our Members, Refugees at Home and Green Pastures, have a national remit but one is based in the South East and the other in Southport.

Our small staff team (0.6 FTE) work to identify areas of need to enable effective, joined up responses wherever possible. For instance, we recently ran two hosting conferences, one in the North (Bradford) and another in the South (London), which were attended by representatives from 10+ Members including several accommodating destitute refugees. These conferences provided opportunities to share ideas and resources and have led to further discussions across the network since (for instance through our Members Area, a password-protected online forum within our website) about how to best support hosts and guests with risk assessments and other best practice guidelines.

3. What support is available to local communities who are accommodating refugees? What more could be done to support local communities who may be impacted by refugees?

Local communities developing schemes to accommodate refugees can apply for membership to the NACCOM network, through which they can access resources, training and networking opportunities, as well as practical support with setting up and developing projects.

Members of the network have also been grateful for information-sharing and networking opportunities available through the SAMD, for instance through attendance at events and meetings.

However there are clearly many ways in which support for those accommodating refugees could be improved. When asked for input on this topic, the main area of need identified was that of financial support and reduced barriers to support. Night Stop North East cited *'incentives for communities to*

accept refugees; financially and availability of services’ and Abigail Housing cited ‘legislation to protect Exempt Accommodation status for refugee accommodation providers’. The latter is a significant issue within the network because many of our refugee accommodation providers offer housing to tenants on the basis of the Exempt Accommodation scheme and changes to this scheme could have a detrimental effect on these projects.

Other suggestions included *‘praise for being welcoming (i.e. more done in local and national press to highlight the positive stories surrounding refugees settling in various locations)’.* We know from the number of press requests we receive (62 to the NACCOM Head Office in the last year, with many more to individual members as well) that there is an interest in community-led work with refugees. Better publicity about the work of such communities can be tremendously effective in breaking down barriers and helping people to think differently about the issue.

Appendix:

Below is a list of members and associate members working with refugees (please note this may be subject to change):

Northern Ireland

NICRAS - a Refugee Community Organisation based in Northern Ireland. NICRAS aims to support the integration process of refugees and asylum seekers into local communities and raise awareness of the issues, problems and difficulties faced by refugees and asylum seekers.

Embrace- a group of Christians from different denominations working together to promote a positive response to people who are seeking asylum, refugees, migrant workers and people from minority ethnic backgrounds living in Northern Ireland.

North West

Warm Hut- a Salford-based refugee community organisation providing a hosting scheme for refugees, with a mission to help African people gain a better insight into their experiences of living abroad, have a positive attitude towards life in the UK, maximise their well-being and feel empowered and enabled to contribute to the host country.

The Boaz Trust - a Manchester based charity committed to ending destitution amongst refugees and asylum seekers who have become homeless through the asylum process, providing accommodation and support.

North East

Action Foundation- an accommodation provider in the North East (Newcastle and Sunderland) helping new refugees transition to independence living following their positive asylum decision.

Nightstop North East (Depaul UK)- emergency accommodation provider to homeless clients, including those who are destitute, in the homes of approved and trained volunteers.

Open Door (North East) - a Christian charity serving asylum seekers and refugees in the North East with a focus on the Tees Valley including Middlesbrough, Stockton & Hartlepool.

Yorkshire and Humber

Abigail Housing- a West-Yorkshire based charitable company dedicated to providing support and homes to refugees and asylum seekers who find themselves destitute.

St. Augustine's Centre is a Halifax-based community centre that welcomes the vulnerable and cares for all, including destitute asylum seekers, refugees and vulnerable migrants, enabling individuals to access support and advice to help with basic needs, and build confidence and prevent isolation through community participation.

Midlands

Upbeat Communities- a Derby-based charity which exists to help vulnerable refugees and migrants settle and begin to thrive in a new community.

One Roof- a Leicester-based consortium of independent faith, community and voluntary sector organisations providing support and accommodation to the homeless and the destitute.

Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre- Coventry-based service providing access to employment, education, training, basic life skills and volunteering, alongside an in-house supported housing scheme. The Coventry Destitution Fund offers practical help to people suffering extreme hardship, including food, clothes, night shelter and travel.

Arimatea Trust- a Nottingham-based provider of housing and support to vulnerable people in Nottingham, also providing advocacy support, volunteering opportunities, training, English classes and cultural celebrations.

South East

Host Oxford- a project which matches destitute sanctuary seekers to those people with spare rooms and open hearts in the community who are prepared to allow someone to stay with them rent free for a pre-defined period of time.

London

Just Homes- a London-based housing provider for homeless people seeking to rebuild their lives, including refugees and asylum seekers.

Praxis Community Projects- a London-based project working with vulnerable migrants including asylum seekers and refugees, providing support, advice, housing, English classes, interpreting and community events.

National

Refugees at Home- a small group working to set up a matching service for hosts around the UK willing to offer a room, without charge, to asylum-seekers and refugees.

Green Pastures- a Southport-based national initiative, providing housing and support to formerly homeless people including asylum seekers and refugees across the UK.

Please note a full list of our members including those working with destitute asylum seekers and other groups can be found on our website: www.naccomm.org.uk