

Asylum Accommodation Support Transformation

NGO and Voluntary Sector written exercise

Introduction

NACCOM is the UK-wide No Accommodation Network, a registered charity and membership network currently comprised of 41 Full Members providing accommodation and support to migrants with no recourse to public funds (NRPF), and 10 Associate Members (individuals or organisations) who are sympathetic to the aims of the network and/or provide other forms of support to migrants with NRPF.

As a network, we resource, encourage and support Members to provide practical support and accommodation to those facing destitution. We:

- help establish new projects and support projects to expand capacity to meet need
- share ideas and resources, for instance via our conferences and networking/training events
- gather and disseminate information and data on the scale of destitution through our annual survey
- raise awareness and promote understanding, through media and public speaking opportunities;
- engage in collaborative working and shared learning, for instance, serving on the Steering Group of the Strategic Alliance on Migrant Destitution.

Our 2016 Accommodation Survey highlights that the number of Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Migrants accommodated by NACCOM Members in the last year was an estimated 1,707 (an increase of 28.5% since 2015). Of the projects involved in the survey, there were 24 housing schemes, 21 hosting schemes and 6 night shelters, providing 209,250 nights of accommodation over the last year. Housing schemes include partnerships with Housing Associations, agreements with Landlord/Private owned properties, Managed Properties, Church-owned properties and properties bought with money donated by supporters. For the full report please visit [here](#).

Our Board of Trustees includes representatives from a wide range of projects across the UK: Action Foundation, Open Door North East, Nottingham Arimathea Trust, ASSIST Sheffield, BEACON Bradford, Hope Projects West Midlands, Housing Justice and Bristol Hospitality Network. Our founder and network coordinator, Dave Smith, also set up the Boaz Trust. Each of these projects provides accommodation to those facing destitution although by the nature of their work will have experience in supporting asylum seekers who are either still in, or coming to the end of, asylum accommodation provided through the COMPASS model.

However, as we are not a direct service provider and operate across the UK (with members in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales), we have not commented on the existing provision of asylum accommodation and support (questions 1 and 2) because we recognise this varies considerably across the country. We know that several of our members have contributed responses either directly or through Strategic Migration Partnerships and trust these will provide a direct reflection on local experiences.

We would like to cite the key findings from 'Home Sweet Home', a report on asylum accommodation published in December 2016 by one of our members, the Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS). Four important areas were addressed in interviews with 76 asylum seekers: 1) The conditions of initial accommodation for asylum seekers on arrival into Northern Ireland; 2) Housing conditions in general and the provisions which were provided; 3) The responsiveness of the landlord and the Housing Executive when issues arise; and 4) The provision of 'no-choice accommodation'.

Some of the most striking figures revealed in the 76 interviews included:

- 54% of individuals found both the initial accommodation and more permanent accommodation to be below adequate standards remarking that conditions were 'bad' or 'very bad'.
- 38% of respondents had been in the asylum system for more than two years.
- Over half of the respondents noted that their homes did not have a heating system which would protect them from the cold.
- 29% of respondents received no food while in initial accommodation. Other issues respondents cited included:
 - Mice and rats in their property.
 - Children falling ill because of damp accommodation.
 - A majority of asylum seekers were afraid to complain in case it hampered their asylum application.
 - Comments made by officials included 'it's better than where you came from'.

For the full report visit [here](#).

Good practice and innovation

3) Please describe any good practice lessons, or examples of innovation, from your sector which could be relevant to a future asylum support model?

Although as an informal network we do not enforce operational standards, we share ideas and models which means many projects do, in practice, operate in a similar way. One example would be wraparound support, which many members consider to be a crucial way of providing continuity and reassurance at a time of significant uncertainty. Examples of in-house support across the network include support workers, legal advice, food parcels, transport costs and subsistence support. Other members cannot provide such services in-house but signpost/refer on locally. Such support can make a huge difference, for instance, enabling residents to register with their local GP or meet with their solicitor to pursue their case. Many of our members are also connected to City of Sanctuary groups, a very useful source of local knowledge and community connections.

Many member groups are also keen to help residents feel a sense of belonging in the local community. Examples of activities to enable this are widespread across the network, for instance, befriending and accompanying schemes. An innovative service that has since been disseminated nationwide is the 'Welcome Boxes' initiative. Set up by Derby-based NACCOM member Upbeat Communities, this has now been replicated across 40+ local churches through the Cinnamon Network (which replicates good practice projects across churches in the UK). The initiative enables communities to be part of a coordinated response to welcome and help integrate refugees, by teams of volunteers delivering boxes of small gifts and local information to newly dispersed asylum seekers. Here are a few quotes from people who have benefitted from the initiative: "*I feel so much happy. You are first person I meet*". "*Before you, no one knock my door. Now I feel I have family and support*". For more information visit <http://www.welcomeboxes.org/>.

Segmentation

5) Under such a segmented approach, are there specific services which you, as a voluntary sector organisation, would have an appetite to provide or support? What barriers to delivery or constraints would need to be overcome to facilitate your participation?

We cannot speak for our individual members on this point except to say that over 90% of our members surveyed last summer did not receive any statutory funding for their work, and are doing the best they can (with over-stretched resources) to deliver existing work.

6) Are there potential supplier groups / types (e.g. social housing providers) for different services, which are not currently involved in service delivery under COMPASS, which we should consider in a future arrangement?

There is a wealth of knowledge and expertise within local community groups as well as housing associations across the country that could be engaged in this area of need. In the last two years there has been a considerable rise in community interest towards supporting asylum seekers and refugees, highlighted most clearly within our network by the rising interest that our members have reported in, for instance, volunteering opportunities and hosting schemes (since our last survey (June 2016), we know of at least three new hosting schemes that are now getting underway).

Vulnerability

7) With reference to specific vulnerable groups, or aspects of vulnerability, please discuss the needs of these individuals, and how the accommodation and support offer might need to be configured to adequately meet these needs?

Whilst we welcome the proposal to improve standards of care and recognise that needs vary considerably from person to person, it is clear (for instance, from the recent Home Affairs Select Committee report on Asylum Accommodation, as well as the previously referenced NICRAS 'Home Sweet Home' report) that there is a need to improve standards of care across the board, and we would see this as a reason not to differentiate too much between different types of vulnerability.

Move-on

9) What arrangements or structures do you think ought to be in place to allow supported asylum seekers who are granted asylum access to employment or mainstream benefits?

As a network we subscribe to the objectives of the [Still Human Still Here coalition](#) and believe that the right to work would make a profound difference to the 'move on' experience of asylum seekers/refugees.

Of the 36 Member Projects that participated in our 2016 survey, 12 operated housing schemes for refugees. These are listed below:

Yorkshire and Humber (2)

- Abigail Housing
- Open Doors Hull

Midlands (5)

- Sanctus
- Nottingham Arimathea Trust
- One Roof
- Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre
- Upbeat Communities

North West (2)

- Boaz Trust
- Asylum Link Merseyside

North East (2)

- Open Door North East
- Action Foundation

South East (1)

- Brighton Voices in Exile

One example of effective support with 'move on' has been demonstrated by Open Door North East, who run both a Move On project and Employment Support Project. New refugees are given a leaflet with their 28 notice letter by their Housing provider (this leaflet, produced by Open Door, is in 8 key languages and directs clients to a single point of contact). They are then given a one to one appointment and assisted in applying for relevant benefits as well as being given advice on housing options. Having benefits in place before the end of the 28 day notice period is essential in avoiding homelessness by giving immediate access to both Housing association and private rented options. Once benefits have been applied for, the Open Doors Employment Support project provides service users with ongoing support via a dedicated refugee work club staffed by a team of trained volunteers who amongst other things help refugee clients fulfil the requirements of Job Centre Plus so as to avoid being sanctioned. As refugees come from nations where there is typically no benefits system, their comprehension of the process is often very limited and compounded by language barriers and barriers in accessing digital and telephone services. In this instance, having a dedicated service that allows refugees to find help with any benefit, housing or debt situation has been very positive.

In addition to having a positive impact amongst local refugees, the Open Doors Move On project has proved excellent value for money, with 110 new clients being supported in 2016 (they believe this to be 100% of all positive decisions granted in Middlesbrough). We believe that locally provided face-to-face 'Move on' support within the 28 notice period is essential to ensure that benefits are in place and homelessness is avoided.

Collaboration

10) Please provide examples of where you have effectively collaborated with local or national public sector bodies (e.g. Local Authorities) to deliver complex services, including a description of the lessons or insights have you identified which may be relevant to asylum support?

This is not something we have examples of. However we are keen to work with Strategic Migration Partnerships where this would be helpful in preventing destitution, and we already work well with other national and regional non-statutory organisations. For instance we sit on the panel for the Strategic Alliance on Migrant Destitution, which is hosted by Homeless Link. Examples of the benefits such collaboration has brought are engagement between the refugee and homelessness sectors, regional meetings resulting in closer working with Housing providers and Local Authorities, and new partnerships with local housing associations within our membership network (Boaz, Hope Projects, Open Door North East).