**Addressing Destitution amongst sanctuary seeking individuals in Wales:**

**A proposal for grant investment by Welsh Government (August 2018)**

***Development by Welsh Refugee Council, Sharedydd, the British Red Cross and Asylum Matters on behalf of the Welsh Refugee Coalition.***

**1. Introduction and summary**

Destitution amongst some asylum seekers and refugees in Wales poses critical welfare and human rights issues, creating many challenges across homelessness, poverty, mental and physical health, community cohesion and access to public services.

As outlined in the Senedd’s ‘*I Used to be Someone’* report, specific action is needed both to reduce destitution and ameliorate its harmful impacts. There is, in addition, evidence of increasing delays[[1]](#footnote-1) in Home Office decision taking on asylum support and other claims. This has led to women in late-stage pregnancy or with new-borns lacking shelter, food and adequate provisions to wash and clothe themselves. Many cases often leave the third sector in Wales as the only realistic option for providing basic support to the most vulnerable.

After extensive consultation with a broad range of third and public-sector providers, as well as those with lived experience of destitution, this paper outlines three key areas where Welsh Government funding would reduce or alleviate this problem, through seed funding to build capacity and contribute sustainably to Wales-wide strategic goals[[2]](#footnote-2) of improving well-being through better focus on individual needs, partnership working and long-term prevention.

The three key areas identified are:

1. Enhanced training for key public and third sector staff
2. Expanded temporary accommodation and hosting provision
3. Targeted legal support

This paper also sets out the ‘added value’ actions that the sector is taking or planning that will increase the impact and cohesion of their current work. Welsh Government support would therefore form a key part of this integrated approach.

Alongside investment, the Welsh Government should use its influence with the four dispersal local authorities to undertake more transparent and informed assessments and support under the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014 to protect asylum seeking adults and others at risk, to ensure effective safeguarding and to provide advocacy for the vulnerable. It could also use evidence on the impact of destitution in Wales and its burden on local services to call for and influence improved Home Office decision-taking. It may be helpful to learn from experience with the Local Authority Asylum Support Liaison Officer network being established in England.

The most important factor in reducing this destitution in Wales is prompt and well-informed decision-taking on claims for asylum and asylum support. Some measures in this paper will make more efficient use of advocacy support in this area – e.g. by better training of paid staff and volunteers and targeted use of Asylum Rights Programme advocacy and legal support. Legal provision remains however limited, with Asylum Justice having reduced its service and there is very limited welfare legal advice available. We have proposed some further action in respect of Asylum Justice, whilst acknowledging that more needs to be done to improve welfare related decision making.

**2. Proposed investment sought from Welsh Government**

**2.1 Enhanced training for key public and third sector staff**

Providing support and a route out of destitution for sanctuary seekers is complex, requiring many agencies to work together, risks managed and various aspects of support to be combined and targeted appropriately. This requires a range of skills and knowledge of legislation and procedures that is often lacking in Wales. Our fieldwork identified significant gaps in public agencies (local authorities and the NHS) in how to apply ‘safety net’ legislation designed to protect the most vulnerable and in the operation of UK legislation on areas such as asylum support, welfare and access to public funds.

As part of our desire to ensure an effective approach we therefore propose a training and resources package to cut across sectors covering the following areas:

* One off training on No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) issues that is made available to equal numbers of local authorities (in dispersal areas) and third sector staff and volunteers.
* Produce and maintain a Welsh version of a toolkit containing information, advice and training materials, made available on the web. Ideally this would be produced by UK experts, however resource constraints in England mean we may need in Wales to modify existing material so as to apply it here.
* Training in risk assessment and safeguarding for Third Sector, co-produced and delivered with a local voluntary sector council (CVC) and offered across Wales. This would draw on existing safeguarding training whilst complementing it with specialist information on the specific vulnerabilities likely to be encountered with sanctuary seekers, the identification of risk factors and escalation routes (1 day a week person for 6 months).
* Asylum Support Appeals – the national Asylum Support Appeals Project (ASAP) provides free on-line learning materials, webinars and limited occasional training. Given that they have recently delivered one training session in Wales, local funding would be needed for any further sessions.
* Training for third sector staff and volunteers on the Social Services and Wellbeing (SSWB) Act: ‘Talking the same Language’, ideally in partnership with Social Care Wales and with training and information resources available via their information hub[[3]](#footnote-3).

This would complement the work we recommend that the Welsh Government undertakes with key local authorities on individual SSWB Act assessments. In parallel those third sector agencies directly involved plan to draw on independent social work expertise to identify how effectively social services are intervening in relevant cases and where action could be taken. We will also seek to identify and work with relevant welfare lawyers who may be able to take on individual cases or pursue test cases that highlight the application of relevant law in Wales

Initial estimates of this training for the first year were in the region of £10k, assuming that support would be available from the UK-wide NRPF network, who developed the toolkit for England. Given their capacity limits they may however be unable to provide this, so we will need to find options from within Wales, such as Swansea’s Centre for Migration Policy Research and Social Care Wales. We could draw on some previous Welsh Refugee Council briefings for single adults, children and families[[4]](#footnote-4), though we would need to cost Wales-based options to take account of what further development, fact-finding and user feedback may be required in order to replicate the NRPF network’s resources for use in Wales.

**2.2 Expanded temporary accommodation and hosting provision**

Temporary accommodation is sometimes needed for asylum seekers who have no access to NASS support but who have a realistic prospect of submitting a relevant claim that would progress their case. This is especially needed for the most vulnerable. Such shelter not only provides some basic security, it also enables guests to focus on progressing their asylum and support claims.

Three current projects in Cardiff and Swansea are limited in capacity, though effective and excellent value for money ranging from less than £1 per night to £8, depending on the approach adopted. There are potential hosts who could be used if there was capacity to link them with guests. There is also scope to utilise otherwise unoccupied housing – at present there is only one house in Wales that is used for this purpose, despite the potential that has been realised elsewhere in the UK.

Our 2017 field work led to a proposal for building capacity and effectiveness in terms of volunteer recruitment, procedures and training. A time-limited, smaller-scale pilot of this work, funded through the charitable No Accommodation Network (NACCOM) is due to begin shortly led by two groups in Cardiff. Negotiations with a Registered Social Landlord to provide a house to be shared between new refugees and destitute asylum seekers are in progress in Swansea but this was achieved through voluntary efforts over three years and there is no capacity to develop this work systematically.

Building on this we now therefore propose integrated action across South Wales, working under the supervision of a South Wales temporary accommodation partnership board, which will promote coherence, fit between existing destitution schemes and their expertise and support efforts to secure investment. The Board will oversee the work below, with each partner scheme retaining its existing decision-making, especially bearing in mind different models for using staff or volunteers. The Board will support national and local destitution forums by providing relevant evidence and input.

There are three strands to this as set out in detail below. The total cost to staff and deliver this work is estimated as a modest £67k per year for 2-3 years, with a one-off consultancy and scoping project. We envisage half of the staff effort (one post) being devoted to new accommodation provision (2.2.2 below) with the remainder focusing on capacity building and cross-sector action across the locations involved (2.2.1 and 2.2.3). The costs comprise mainly salary and on-costs, with small amounts for travel and room hire/ training. The resource would be managed collectively by the accommodation partnership board and priorities take account of progress made and opportunities created, including from the consultancy work, reviewed on a six-monthly basis.

We have reconsidered the management assumptions behind this strand of work. The original estimates were made at short notice and assumed management by volunteers with minimal use of office facilities. After more detailed discussion, we concluded that more robust arrangements were needed for successful delivery of a complex project of this nature. To keep within the original budget estimate, it would be necessary to reduce the staff time by about 20% (i.e. use more part-time effort). To fund at the original staff resource level might cost about £81k pa, though this could be tested. The yearly breakdown would depend on the timing of the consultancy, which would ideally take place in f/yr 2018/19. Our original breakdown assumed that the consultancy occupied the first half of year 1, with the housing post supporting section 2.2.2 beginning directly thereafter and lasting 2 ½ years.

***2.2.1. Greater capacity and effectiveness amongst providers of temporary shelter***

Support and build capacity in Welsh voluntary organisations assisting destitute asylum seekers and refugees into temporary accommodation and reducing length of destitution:

* Build capacity by recruiting, training, and mentoring link workers and hosts.
* Develop and help implement shared procedures based on NACCOM best practice toolkit.
* Equip organisations dealing with migrant destitute clients to respond more fully, through development of a practitioners tool-kit that builds on the resources developed under 2.1 (bullet 2) above whilst also giving guidance and resources for referrals and follow up.
* Develop a group of people who can support timely and convincing claims for asylum support so as to minimise the time for which guests are without NASS support.
* Improve information to placement co-ordinators about guests’ asylum and support claims.
* Support the development of hosting in other centres (eg possibly Newport).
* Support co-ordination between voluntary organisations in each city, e.g. through considering replication of Cardiff destitution clinic and better referral and allocation system of guests between relevant groups.

***2.2.2. Increasing provision of accommodation for people experiencing destitution***

Review potential for increasing level of accommodation and sustainability and then deliver the change.

**Scoping** / investigation / consultancy of approximately 3 months (See Annex 1), to be undertaken by a person with experience and understanding of housing sector and financing options (e.g. statutory sources, grants, charity fundraising), alongside understanding of the needs of destitute asylum seekers and provision currently available:

* Learn from UK models of providing housing and apply this to the Welsh context
* Examine and consult with existing hosting/housing schemes to identify what works well and the potential and recommendations for change, taking account of previous fieldwork
* Drawing on early stage development of housing models, and Home4U, assess what is needed, what is possible and viable (e.g. influencing statutory provision, work with housing associations to see what they could offer), develop sustainable options and prioritise the most viable.

**Deliver** new projects and support existing schemes to become more sustainable based on recommendations from scoping phase.  2-3 years, working with local organisations and building on existing expertise to develop sustainable, viable destitution projects to ensure there are routes out of destitution / street homelessness for people experiencing it.

Some examples of what this might include are:

* Projects that partner with Housing Associations on an integrated programme and where possible drawing on appropriate tenancy support.
* Identification and utilisation of unused properties that could be made available.
* Mixed housing for destitute asylum seekers and refugees with status that would be financially self-sustaining.
* Expansion or reform of existing schemes in South Wales.

In all cases it will be necessary to negotiate with partner organisations and resolve issues around property, housing standards, finance, tenancy support and selection and management of guests.

***2.2.3. Sustainable cross-sector action***

Create a more effective, integrated and sustainable response across informal and public sectors, with greater resources and evidence that will drive change:

* Promote existing voluntary schemes, identify new finance and other resources.
* Organise structures through which the voluntary sector schemes can operate with public sector homelessness work in this difficult area.
* Encourage and facilitate a response to homelessness as a critical part of other refugee, migrant and homelessness organisations and their project workers’ activity.
* Evidence and change: Collect and analyse evidence on demand, need and accommodation support to be used by the Destitution Forum and others for improvement and in lobbying for change. Find creative means of easing the period of destitution e.g. access to travel.

***2.3 Targeted legal support***

One of the clearest findings from our fieldwork was the need for targeted support to help destitute asylum seekers develop and submit relevant asylum, immigration or support claims effectively and in good time. Such support can minimise the period of destitution, along with all the consequential issues associated with prolonged destitution. This is not to say that the strength of all claims is likely to be equal; it is also important to identify and target those individuals for whom temporary support of some kind will be most effective in helping them progress their claim and to protect them at a particularly vulnerable time.

Several key areas of claim-related support are often lacking – e.g. access to legal advice where prospects of a successful case could be substantial or funding for critical expert reports. Legal aid may be lacking, or lawyers may not be in a position to pursue a claim at a speed commensurate with a destitute individual’s level of vulnerability or assess prospects of success realistically.

Asylum Justice focuses on cases not supported by solicitors or covered by legal aid. Given current capacity their cases comprise almost entirely appeals where a solicitor has not sought legal aid and leave to remain applications that are nearly out of time. Whilst they might provide very basic initial advice, screening or referrals for other cases, waiting lists of 6-7 months operate for substantive work on them – often leaving individuals destitute and /or extremely vulnerable. What little support they can offer for these cases is diminishing with time and it is sometimes impossible even to regain contact with applicants after such long waiting periods.

The lack of effective assistance to progress critical types of case puts a substantial load on those groups, public or voluntary seeking to support the affected individuals. In other parts of the UK, local authorities may pay directly for legal support to some individuals to progress their cases, since this may be a cheaper option than providing continuing support[[5]](#footnote-5). One of the biggest challenges for those providing temporary shelter is ensuring that guests can progress their claims. There have been many cases in Wales where guests have needed support for prolonged periods, preventing others from being supported. Many of the most effective hosting schemes in the UK[[6]](#footnote-6) however provide this sort of targeted support as an integrated part of their service and make their offer of shelter conditional on guests engaging effectively with it.

We have consulted with Asylum Justice on where the biggest gaps are, taking account of their existing charitable and ARP-funded work and any destitution-related risks. They have identified three priorities as: fresh asylum claims (often followed by Judicial Reviews), new ‘family life’ based applications and claims for family reunion. The cases selected would have good prospects for success but lack legal aid support, whilst involving a high incidence of destitution until a claim is lodged. Addressing these cases, alongside the wider action we have identified, would make a significant difference to destitution – though it must also be recognised that many complex cases can, even with reduced waiting times, take time to pursue to a successful conclusion.

Additional funding for Asylum Justice would enable employment of a full time Supervising Senior Caseworker who would also support training and supervision of volunteer caseworkers at Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) level 2. Costs are needed for an extra room to accommodate operations and trainees.

The current ARP support to Asylum Justice is having a real impact in its areas of focus. It allows a team of full-time, contracted and volunteer solicitors, barristers and advisers to work effectively together. Although this delivery model is different from what was originally bid for, Asylum Justice see this as now working efficiently in terms of case management. The new proposals would add to this by allowing training of others through a new, accredited, supervising role - which is critical to increasing capacity and ensuring long-term sustainability of this service. Asylum Justice are confident that extra funding would allow them to extend the current operating model and free up their staff to undertake this critical supervisory and capacity development role and address the other priority cases identified.

The support we recommend would sit alongside the other actions we describe. It would enable an integrated approach to be adopted that identified individuals for destitution- and claim-related support and ensuring they commit to full engagement and regular updates on progress. It would cost an estimated £42k per year, to cover salary, on-costs, room hire, and communications/ IT.

**3. Summary of Voluntary Sector ‘added value’**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Area/ cost to Welsh Government** | **Detail** | **Third Sector Added Value** |
| **2.1 Training**  **£10k**  **(year 1)**  *(possibly £5k subsequently)* | One off training on NRPF for local authority (dispersal) and third sector staff/ volunteers  Produce and maintain Welsh version of NRPF toolkits  Training in risk assessment and safeguarding for Third Sector with a local CVC  Asylum Support Appeals (for face-to-face sessions in Wales)  Training on Social Services and Well-being Act: ‘Talking the same Language’, welfare and housing  After 1 year – review how far training can be self-sustained or further training needed | Destitution communities of practice and/or clinic in relevant cities  Asylum Support and Appeals (ASAP) webinars and online materials (free)  Asylum welfare rights training sessions  Homelessness knowledge, strengthened links with Crisis |
| **2.2 Shelter**  **Consultancy, £67k pa** | Build capacity, effectiveness and sustainability across existing schemes. Seek to extend geographical coverage  Increase accommodation for destitute by identifying and negotiating new accommodation options in partnership  Promote sustainable cross section action, supported by joined up evidence  50% on item 2, remainder split between 1 and 3, with priorities reflecting progress and opportunities. (Mainly salary and on-costs, small amounts for travel, room hire/ training) | Build partnership with national charities especially Refugees@Home, to increase hosts and marketing  Improve operating models in response to consultancy review  Recruit volunteer link workers  Joint accommodation partnership board to implement procedures and partnership  No Accommodation Network (NACCOM) and Bristol Hospitality Network advice and support. |
| **2.3 Legal and advocacy**  **£42k pa** | Improve and target legal and advocacy support on specific destitute individuals, to promote more rapid progress, better use of destitution-support resources and hence reduced numbers and length of destitution.  (Salary, on-costs, room hire, phone/ IT) | Partnership working with Asylum Justice to assist with priority cases and support individuals to progress; procedures that support this |

The integrated approach outlined will need to be developed in the light of experience. We envisage a two-three year programme, with initial estimates of profiling over 3 years as £112k, 114k, £114k. After the first year we propose to review progress and priorities according to needs and opportunities identified, the progress made and the overall aim to make as much work as possible self-sustaining by the end of year 3.

The table lists some specific sector ‘added-value’ actions that would be catalysed by the three action areas proposed. The overall third sector contribution to asylum related destitution is however much wider – encompassing all the existing initiatives, support with money, food and shelter and including the Wales Destitution Forum and local forums or equivalents, the destitution clinic being set up in Cardiff and the support offered by numerous drop-in centres and City of Sanctuary groups across Wales.

**4. Envisaged impact of combined investment by Welsh Government and Third Sector**

In summary these proposals will:

* Address current issues of lack of coherence, capacity and prioritisation of cases
* Reduce numbers of destitute in two ways – by reducing length of destitution in key cases and increasing the overall numbers that can be supported at any one time. Hence a doubling of throughput is a realistic ambition.
* Have added benefits of having a clear pathway to support individuals, leading to more efficient use of resource and less ‘shopping around’ different agencies with the same issue.
* Achieve knock-on effects of reduced pressure on individuals’ mental and physical health, resilience, ability to integrate into society and contribute once their claim has progressed contributing to cost savings.
* Promote more effective partnership working with local authorities and others, with better training and awareness and the voluntary sector in a better position to influence decisions on provision for the most vulnerable.
* Build sustainability by putting in place a system of effective risk management, volunteer recruitment and training and raising the profile for this work, leading to increased support.

**5. Summary of Key evidence**

Key evidence and further detail of the proposals are given in Annex 1 and 2 respectively and in the previous options paper. Key points are:

* There is no clear figure for the numbers of destitute people who have moved or are moving through the asylum process, though we infer from the limited data that there could be 500-1000 new cases in Wales each year.
* Delays in securing legal and other advice for fresh claims, section 4 NASS support applications and on welfare issues are major factors in the occurrence and length of destitution, hence addressing this is a critical remedy for individuals, not least as pressures increase on public funding.
* There are multiple routes into destitution and those people affected require a range of interventions across several agencies and sectors (whether trafficking or domestic abuse charities, local authorities, Home Office, police, hosting services etc) – without investment to bring these services together, they are hard for people to navigate.
* There is a lack of awareness and training in key areas of social welfare & immigration policy and legislation and hence scope for improving the effectiveness of current support. Testimony from Prudence Ngcobo can be found in Annex 2.
* There are larger scale operations elsewhere in the UK for supporting those without shelter that we could learn from if we had the capacity to exploit temporary housing and hosting options more effectively. The most effective do not provide shelter in isolation – they ensure that individual needs are regularly prioritised and that they have access to appropriate legal or non-legal support to progress fresh asylum claims, section 4 applications and other cases.

Annex 1 gives some typical case studies of the type of impact that short-term shelter with accompanied support can achieve.

**6. Anticipated cost savings**

This section gives some very rough initial estimates of potential benefits from destitution proposals, although the figures are intended to be illustrative and to start discussion.

**Target group**

We estimate the total number of new destitution cases to be 500-1000 per year and that at least 15% of these are those where there are good or realistic prospects of progressing their cases. Of these 120 cases it is realistic to consider that there is good potential to assist 60 additionally per year than at present.

**Impacts**

***Savings to local authorities.*** NRPF data via the NRPF network[[7]](#footnote-7) show an average LA support for NRPF clients of £10,700. Given the average length stay under LA care, the typical cost per individual case is £26.1k, which would be the amount an individual authority would save if it no longer needed to support one NRPF client.

***Welfare costs.*** Any prolonged period in the asylum system involves an increased burden on non-earned funds in the UK, since this group is not allowed to work. We assert that a period of destitution significantly increases the time taken for an individual to become economically productive and cease to rely on benefits, partly because they are unable to progress many aspects of their life, not least their asylum claim, when they have to prioritise the very basic needs of life and have no access to resources that would equip them to progress in the longer term. The damage to mental health and social networks are also significant contributors to slowing the pace of their eventual integration and these burdens can mean an individual never becomes fully economically productive. It is possible to conjecture that each period of destitution could represent an extra time relying on this support, perhaps three times longer than the actual destitution itself. On this assumption a period of 3-4 months’ destitution might lead to a dependence on benefits of an extra year. If this situation can be avoided, the possible benefits gain per person per year could be in the range £8,500 (average UK payments for unemployment and housing benefits, ignoring all other benefits) to £13,300 (benefits cap)[[8]](#footnote-8) , i.e. the savings per individual could be around £10k.

***Economic costs and benefits.*** The average wage in Wales is £30,100 (median: £25,900)[[9]](#footnote-9). The contribution to the economy from someone in work will clearly be substantially greater than for someone on benefits, in terms of their spending in the Welsh economy, payment of VAT, Income Tax, National Insurance and other fiscal contributions, perhaps an additional £8,000 on top of any benefit payments saved.

***Public service costs.*** Evidence from Crisis shows that people who experience homelessness for three months or longer cost on average £4,298 per person to NHS services, £2,099 per person for mental health services and £11,991 per person in contact with the criminal justice system[[10]](#footnote-10). The same report estimates that preventing homelessness for one year would lead to an average reduction in public expenditure of £9,266. The cost to the NHS per patient, simply of depression is £6,000 per patient (2007 prices)[[11]](#footnote-11). Many other health conditions are likely to be exacerbated or brought on by lack of shelter.

**Impact of Individual Elements in Coalition Proposal**

It is not sensible to attempt to assess the impact of individual elements of the proposal, since they form part of an integrated approach to improve a system. Training, for instance, will unlock considerable potential, not least from voluntary effort, but this will only be realised if those who are trained are appropriately deployed. Part of the impact of the project will derive directly from the investments, but much will depend on better use and targeting of the infrastructure that is already there or the potential to grow voluntary or other effort. Training will have a broad but less direct impact. Shelter provision will affect a more limited number of those who are guests but have a larger individual effect and legal assistance will also help a small number, but of those whose cases have the most potential to progress, despite the difficulties.

**Conclusion**

Illustrative potential benefits can be estimated in the context of 60 additional individuals being directly helped annually through these proposals and drawing on the above cost estimates (each category is not necessarily exclusive):

* Moving 20 individuals from welfare benefits into work a year earlier than would otherwise be the case might yield £360,000 in benefits no longer needed and additional economic and fiscal impact.
* Preventing 50 individuals from being homeless for a year might save the public purse £465,000, based on average figures for the cost of homelessness.
* Preventing 10 people from relying on Local Authority NRPF support could save £260,000.

In addition, though possibly not affecting net costs to the UK, moving 30 individuals onto Home Office funded NASS support instead of relying on Welsh resources might save the Welsh purse £300,000, if they moved on average a year earlier than would otherwise be the case.

Proving the above figures in practice would be extremely difficult, not least due to the lack of a counter factual, as would be required in a properly designed assessment. It is also the case that we would expect Local Authorities to take due regard to their statutory obligations under Welsh legislation and not rely on voluntary initiatives to pick up and provide for the most vulnerable individuals who should properly be publicly supported. This means that Local Authority spending is a critical contribution. However, the figures do demonstrate a benefit substantially exceeding the cost, in purely financial terms, whilst not accounting for any social benefit, or moral and legal obligations in respect of human rights.

**[Annex 1 suggested scoping brief for consultancy]**

**Annex 2 – Short case studies (Sharedydd)**

Between April 2017 and March 2018 Sharedydd hosted 19 individuals, offering nearly 3,000 nights of accommodation. Below are 5 brief pen portraits of typical clients supported during this period.

***A -*** *A became homeless in May 2016, despite having a case for Refugee Status. Sharedydd hosted A between May 2016 and September 2017 to prevent homelessness. This support meant that A was able to continue to work with solicitors and was able to make a 'Fresh Claim' in September 2017. Without this key intervention it is unlikely AS would have been able to work through to continue the legal process.*

*Subsequently A was able to apply for NASS accommodation was given Leave to Remain under Humanitarian protection in March 2018.*

***B -*** *B has lived in the UK for a number of years and had suffered long periods of homelessness and destitution. Sharedydd were able to offer short term hosting to B during 2017. This provided respite from staying with friends and continued to provide a back-stop in case informal arrangements failed.*

*B made a Fresh Claim and was able to apply for NASS accommodation in Autumn 2017. B was granted Refugee Status in February 2018*

***C -*** *Sharedydd were introduced to C via Oasis – a Refugee support centre in Splott, Cardiff. C has a strong claim for Refugee Status in the UK, but developing sufficiently robust information to support a realistic Fresh Claim is a long process. C has no recourse to public funds and without support from Sharedydd and others he would be destitute.*

*Sharedydd support C by providing significant periods of hosting and by providing a back-stop in case his informal connections fail.*

*C is an active and involved volunteer in our community. C continues to work towards making a Fresh Claim for Asylum.*

***D -*** *D became homeless in November 2016. At that point he was continuing to gather key information to make a Fresh Claim.*

*D is a keen and committed volunteer in our community and volunteers in the 3rd sector to support older people, in addition to studying at college.*

*Without Sharedydd 's hosting scheme, preventing destitution, it would have been very difficult for D to continue to focus on making a legal case and put energy into the community.*

*Whilst in detention in November 2017, it was verbally confirmed to D that he had been granted Refugee Status, based on information submitted by D himself. At that point D was released from detention and has continued to be hosted by the Sharedydd scheme. He continues to pursue the Home Office's formal decision with the support of his MP.*

***E -*** *Sharedydd were introduced to E in August 2015. At that time he was destitute, despite having lived and worked in the UK for 12 years. He had an excellent working record and supportive ex-employers.*

*E has a daughter in the UK and was working with a solicitor towards making an application regularise his status.*

*Sharedydd supported an informal hosting arrangement, helping to fund costs of his host. PA was removed from the UK by the Home Office in September 2017.*

**Annex 3 - Prudence Ngcobo speech for Sanctuary in the Senedd**

I’m South African and I came to the UK in April 2015 to claim asylum. In October I moved in with my then boyfriend in Manchester due to pregnancy. My asylum claim was later unsuccessful.

In 2016 March my son was born. That relationship was difficult and due to domestic abuse, social services were involved. They would call me regularly, but they couldn't offer me accommodation because my stay was not confirmed then.

My relationship became more and more difficult, dangerous even, and so, in November 19 2016 I left - for my safety and the safety of my child. We went to stay with a friend of mine in Bristol. I told Social Services and the Police in Manchester where we were going and then Social Services in Bristol got in touch whilst I was there to check if we were OK. We were not OK, my friend’s place was not suitable for a child. We were faced with homelessness.

Social Services in Bristol provided us with a Bed and Breakfast whilst they talked to the Home Office about who had ‘responsibility for us. Hearing myself talked about in this way was soul destroying: in my thirties with a child to look after and strangers were talking about who is responsible for me. I wanted to be responsible for myself and for my child.

After three days in the Bed and Breakfast in Bristol, I was told we were moving to Cardiff as we ‘were the responsibility of the Home Office’. It was December 8. We were being moved to ‘temporary accommodation’, designed for people with asylum claims to stay for 16 days before they are moved elsewhere. This place is a place of desperation, with people from all over the world from war zones with sadness. I was there as a failed asylum seeker, and that got me to be used to people not knowing what to do with me. In that office one guy at Migrant Help was able to help me, after making few calls.

I thought I’d be there too for 16 days. But it became 90 days. Mostly due to not knowing what to do of staff, the guy had to be off and it was December. During that time, I learnt to focus on each day. I hoped that every day would be the day I was moved, but I couldn’t look too far ahead and couldn’t have too much hope. That disappointment of life, not knowing what tomorrow holds can shatter you, it messes with your mental health.

On 4 April, I was sent to Swansea. I had thought that Cardiff was nice, I had plans in my head to stay here. But when I got to Swansea, I thought “this is the place”. In Cardiff, it was about the place and in Swansea, it was about the people. It was a loving community.

It was after a week in Swansea, on 11 April, that I got my status, positive news! But I also had a new problem, one that I hadn’t prepared for. It had No Recourse to Public Funds. This meant that I couldn’t get help from the state. Believe me, I wanted to work, but I had a one-year old baby to take care of and I knew no-one in Swansea to help me look after him.

With this newly granted status, I had two weeks to leave the property I was in. But then what? I didn’t know what to do. I had a health visitor and she was a big help. She told me about Roxy, the specialist Women’s Paralegal at Welsh Refugee Council and she helped me making an application to remove the NRPF. Meanwhile social services was refusing to help. Eventually called me in so they can see my documents I went to Social Services covered in shame – it isn’t easy as a 36 year old to say you are destitute and need help. Especially if you have a child – they are depending on you and you can’t provide for them.

After lots of going backwards and forth about No Recourse to Public Funds, Social Services said they would help my son once we were evicted. I was so worried this would mean them taking my son away from me, but thankfully, this wasn’t their plan.

On the day I was evicted, it seemed like no one knew what was happening. My bags were packed and I was waiting, ready to leave. The person came and it seemed like she was just there to chat. I’d been talking to people in their office for 10 days and they knew the day I was being evicted but she came and didn't know that was our last day there. She was confused and not told anything except the address and our names. But by the end of the day, Social Services gave me accommodation in Swansea. The accommodation was for my child – they made that clear. Though the people running the house were also kind and provided an additional bed for me. They also gave me £5 a day for my son.

By now it was July. 3 months after getting my status! I was still in touch with Roxy at the Welsh Refugee Council and she was trying to get the No Recourse to Public Funds condition removed from my status. I thought this would take around 10-15 days. This was important for me to move on with my life, but also for Social Services - you can’t live indefinitely off Social Services.

Removing the NRPF condition, like everything, took longer than I expected and all the time I thought I was going mad, in a small room, in a shared house provided by Social Services for my son. I was given a food voucher for a month’s worth of food from a food bank. Luckily, the Health Visitor gave me another. You are only supposed to have two vouchers in six months. I missed fresh vegetables and meat - my son’s brain needed proper food, not just tinned food. I missed choice too: with the food bank you can only choose between ‘Tea or coffee? Rice or pasta?’ The rest is chosen for you! Beggars can’t be choosers and you have to be grateful. And I WAS. With the £5 a day for my son, I bought the cheapest range of nappies and that’s how I gave him the meat and vegetables he needed for him to be healthy, strong and grow well.

On 25 September, nearly 5 months after getting my status, I received my documents with the NRPF condition removed. Apparently, the Home Office had sent them to the wrong solicitor in July, but neither myself nor Social Services knew about this.

I have experienced that until you have access to public funds, you literally not treated as a person but a problem without a solution. I was a new mother. My hormones were already all over the place and needing balancing. I needed to balance them and make sure I take care of my baby. And then I was destitute. I had to stay strong and look after my mental health. I knew I had to save my mind. It would have been easy to lose it and I almost did many times.

One of the biggest problems, as well as the threat of having to live on the streets, is that almost everywhere I went no one knew what to do with me or how to help – even when they clearly wanted to. I understand that people all have different circumstances, but I often wondered: “am I the first single mother with a baby who has experienced destitution you’ve seen?”

Once I got recourse to public funds, all doors opened for me. And people’s attitudes changed. For example, When I was at the initial accommodation there was one employee who had some baby clothes to give away. We had just received a £20 voucher to use at the Red Cross for clothes. She said ‘I don’t know if I’m allowed to give them clothes’ My boy was cold! Had the system influenced her thinking so much that she couldn’t see a human being in desperate need?” I felt that way to me.

By contrast, now I have all sorts of offers of help. I’m grateful, but my question is, how can people be treated so differently either side of the No Recourse to Public Funds line?

Once you get recourse to public funds, it seems that the situation changes for YOU, YOU suddenly become a human being. Now you worthy of help! But for me, inside, I’m still the same human being, with the same needs as before. And I can’t so easily forget that I was treated like a non-human. When someone is destitute, you need to look beyond WHY and look at them as a fellow human - to look at what they need to survive and the effects the destitution is having, mentally and in their heart. Let's take back the power from the word DESTITUTION & empower HUMANS.

That’s a little of my story. It was a very unsettling and stressful time. I didn’t feel human. I had lots of “big girl, keep it together times. But I also cried. And wanted someone to talk to and didn’t have anyone. I look back now and this time changed me. The experience grew me. I appreciate life better than I ever did before. But still I don't wish it for nobody. This process has the ability to knock someone out of their senses. It can make one really crazy.

Before I finish, I also want to say that destitution is not just a problem for the individual. People in the community are scared when they see a homeless person on the streets.

And I want to say to the Home Office: please do your research. Particularly if there is a child involved, then look at what will happen to the child if you give NRPF. I understand the Home Office can’t support everyone. If I wasn’t a mother, it would have been great.

And finally, for organisations in Wales: please train the people who work for you, make sure they understand what NRPF means and section4. Most places I went, people were telling me, ‘I don’t know’ or ‘we don’t know what to do’. It’s not good enough to be confused or not know how to help when people come to your service. Two places I went where this didn’t happen & it gave me hope: Housing Options in Swansea and Welsh Refugee Council Cardiff They said to me ‘we see this all the time, it will be OK, we can help’. Hearing that meant I left smiling, with hope for my future. Somebody understood what to do when I didn’t.

1. ***Waiting in the Dark,*** *Refugee Action May 2018* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *As set out in the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014 and the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://socialcare.wales/hub/home> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See <https://welshrefugeecouncil.org.uk/migration-information/legal-briefings/single-adult-migrants-destitution-safeguarding-and-services> and <https://welshrefugeecouncil.org.uk/migration-information/legal-briefings/children-and-families-destitution-safeguarding-and-services-to> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. From the NRPF network: data consistently demonstrates that the primary reason for people being able to establish a sustainable pathway out of dependency on social services’ support is being granted a form of leave to remain allowing recourse to public funds. Data shows that two thirds of all households financially supported by a local authority will leave support on account of being awarded leave to remain with recourse to public funds. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. E.g. the Bristol Hospitality Network’s ‘help team’ or the Boaz Trust [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. NRPF Annual report for 2017/18 (<http://www.nrpfnetwork.org.uk/Documents/NRPF-connect-annual-report-2017-18.pdf> ) & notes of 21 March 2018 Wales Destitution Forum. NRPF Network reported £44m annual spend from 47 LAs on NRPF clients, to support 4,124 dependents, an average of £10,700 per person or £17,193 per household. Average stay on support is 887 days. We understand that 70% of these cases were non-asylum, but this average still gives an indication of the scale of spend. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Institute for Fiscal Studies, IFS Briefing Note BN13, 2016 *A Survey of the UK Benefits System* [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Stats Wales, 2017 data.<https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Business-Economy-and-Labour-Market/People-and-Work/Earnings/averageweeklyearnings-by-ukcountryenglishregion-year> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Crisis, *Better then Cure, 2016. i*[*https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/cost-of-homelessness/*](https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/cost-of-homelessness/) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The Kings Fund, 2088, *Paying the Price, The cost of mental health care in England to 2026.* This data is at 2007 prices, from Table 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)