



## **NACCOM Annual Conference 2024 – York, Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> March**

### **Conference speaker and contributor biographies**

***\*Please note that not all speaker and contributor biographies are featured.***

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#### **Conference Keynote Speaker:**

##### **Patrick Butler, [the Guardian](#)**



Patrick Butler is the Guardian's Social Policy Editor. He's worked as an editor and reporter at the Guardian for over two decades, and formerly edited its weekly Society Guardian supplement.

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#### **Afternoon Panel Discussion:**

***What does planning, mitigation and advocacy around the Illegal Migration Act look like for NACCOM members and partners?***

##### **Panel:**

- **Eiri Ohtani**, Director, [Right to Remain](#)
- **Renae Mann**, Executive Director of Services, [Refugee Council](#)



Renae joined the Refugee Council in 2021, from the No Accommodation Network where she was National Director. She brings over 20 years of experience working with people seeking asylum, refugees and migrants in casework, business development, and leadership roles. She began her career working with people seeking asylum to access housing and legal representation in her home city of Brisbane, Australia. A trained social worker, she came to London to work for an inner London Borough to support unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Renae is passionate about creating prosperous, inclusive and equitable communities where everyone is able to feel safe and thrive. She specialises in tailoring services to the

unique needs of clients in collaboration with them and partners. She leads on safeguarding for Refugee Council.

- **Sonia Lenegan**, Immigration, asylum and public law solicitor and Editor of [Free Movement](#)



Sonia Lenegan is an experienced immigration, asylum and public law solicitor. She has been practising for over ten years and was previously legal director at the Immigration Law Practitioners' Association and legal and policy director at Rainbow Migration. Sonia is the Editor of Free Movement.

- **Letícia Ishibashi**, Head of Migration Programme, [Paul Hamlyn Foundation](#)



Letícia joined Paul Hamlyn Foundation as the Head of Migration Programme in September 2022. Since migrating to the UK, Letícia has worked in a range of roles to progress migrant justice, including casework, research, policy, narrative change, and cross-sector coalition building. Before joining PHF, she led the Greater London Authority's strategy to increase advice for migrants in the capital, the development of the Mayor of London's Migrant Londoners Hub, and advised the Mayor on migration policy. Letícia grew up in Brazil in a multi-racial migrant household having later moved to Austria and the UK. Letícia is passionate about disrupting power imbalances to ensure relationships and collaborations are built on trust, transparency and anti-oppressive practice.

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## Workshops:

### **Workshop One: *Setting up and diversifying your housing models***

- **Paul Catterall** – Network Development Coordinator, [NACCOM](#)



Paul Catterall is a Network Development Coordinator for NACCOM, specialising in housing. He is the author of NACCOM's Housing Toolkit and Working with Housing Associations Toolkit. Paul is part of NACCOM's Network Development team, which supports new and existing members with capacity-building, partnership working and good practice. Prior to joining NACCOM in 2018, Paul was CEO of a frontline refugee charity in the North East, and played a key role in the formation of the NACCOM network in 2006, serving for several years on the original NACCOM steering committee and subsequent Board of Trustees.

- **Andy Colclough** – Business Development Manager, [Open Door North East \(ODNE\)](#)



Andy has considerable experience in both the private and social housing sectors, having worked for many years as an estate agent branch manager/valuer and as Housing Manager for ODNE, through which he helped develop ODNE's housing portfolio, providing shared accommodation and family houses for new refugees, and bed spaces for destitute asylum seekers across 38 properties. In Andy's current role as Business Development Manager at ODNE he is responsible for the strategic development of the housing project and has overseen a restructure of the model to increase both income and flexibility of use.

- **Lisa Norcross** - Project and Fundraising Manager, [Kairos Housing](#)



Lisa Norcross is a founding member of Kairos Housing, which was started in 2019 by a group of local churches in Blackburn and Darwin. Lisa became a paid member of staff in January 2023 as the Project and Fundraising Manager. Kairos Housing houses both people seeking asylum who are appeals rights exhausted and facing destitution, and newly granted refugees at risk of homelessness in the move-on period, across five two-bedroom properties.

- **Jared Hodgson** – CEO, [Hope at Home \(UK-wide\)](#)



Jared is Co-founder and CEO of Hope at Home, a charity providing accommodation, including hosting, and support for survivors of modern slavery and human trafficking. Hope at Home are currently working to set up a supported housing project.

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## **Workshop Two: Working with people with complex needs**

Contributors:

- **Becky Hellewell**, Head of Immigration & Support, [St Augustine's Centre \(Halifax\)](#)



Becky has worked at St Augustine's since 2011, initially starting as a volunteer at the weekly support drop-ins. Through her work and many roles, Becky progressed on to managing various activities and advice sessions and supporting the management team with strategic and operational oversight. As an accredited OISC caseworker, Becky went on to deliver regulated immigration advice and is now Head of

Immigration & Support at St. Augustine's. Through her work, Becky has vast experience dealing with in-depth cases often involving a multitude of complexities. The outcomes of her work have produced robust partnerships and relations with external organisations and authorities. Becky is also on the board of Calderdale Valley of Sanctuary and recently joined The Homeless Pastors board of directors.

- **Ioana Brezeanu**, Policy and Research Officer, [St John of God \(SJOG\) Hospitaller Services](#)



After graduating from a MScR in Anthropology and obtaining a diploma in Cultural Management, Ioana became interested in working with community groups and co-producing evidence-based pathways for social integration and cultural participation. Ioana joined the SJOG three years ago, and has been working as a project worker at Olallo House, London. She has been contributing to various research projects and policy reports, including a 9-month study *'Establishing an Evidence-based Trauma-informed Care Pathway for Survivors of Modern Slavery'*, presented at various national and international conferences.

- **Mohamed Chahabi** is a Deputy Manager at Olallo House, [St John of God \(SJOG\) Hospitaller Services](#)



Mohamed leads with compassion and determination in serving people subject to modern-day slavery, human trafficking, and homelessness, in particular with no recourse to public funds. With a profound commitment to social justice and healthcare equity, he tirelessly advocates for the rights and well-being of marginalised populations. Through his leadership, he fosters a supportive environment that empowers both staff and clients alike, driving positive change within the community. Mohamed's expertise and empathy make him an invaluable asset in the ongoing fight against exploitation and homelessness, embodying the mission of Olallo House to provide comprehensive care and support to those in need.

- **Bethan Lant**, Training, Development and Advocacy Manager, [Praxis \(London\)](#)



Bethan has worked at Praxis since 2001, starting as an advice worker working with migrants in the criminal justice system and is now the Training, Development and Advocacy Manager. Bethan's role involves working with other voluntary sector and statutory sector organisations to increase understanding of migrant issues and capacity to work with migrants. She is project lead for the Pan-London Frontline Network on Migrant Homelessness, working to migrant

homelessness issues, delivers training on a range of subjects and advises organisations on policy and practice on migrant issues. Bethan is also an OISC accredited caseworker and Chair of the London Churches Refugee Network.

- **Alyssa Swiney**, Manager – Combatting Destitution Project, [Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre \(CRMC\)](#)



Alyssa is the Manager of the Combatting Destitution Project at Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre. CRMC supports a range of migrants, including failed asylum seekers, survivors of domestic abuse, entrenched rough sleepers, and others who find themselves experiencing or at risk of destitution. Support is holistic, including access to free therapy, housing support, OISC-accredited immigration support, food and cash subsistence and care packages, travel funding, a variety of enrichment activities and learning opportunities, and more. Before moving to the UK from the USA, Alyssa spent seven years as Director of a residential drug and alcohol treatment facility for women and their children.

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### **Workshop Three:** *Setting up and running a lodgings scheme for newly granted refugees at risk of homelessness*

Contributors:

- **Neşe Davidson-Birch**, Lodging Scheme Director, [Refugee Welcome Homes \(Bristol\)](#)



Neşe grew up in North Eastern Turkey, and moved to the UK when she was 17. She volunteered using her Turkish at a refugee centre and this experience inspired her to go on and study languages. She studied Arabic and Persian at SOAS as her undergraduate and she has an MA in Gender Studies also from SOAS. She volunteered as a community interpreter throughout her studies and was offered a job with a refugee centre in central London after she graduated. Neşe has worked with refugees and people seeking asylum since 2011 in Nottingham, London and Bristol. She joined Refugee Welcome Homes in Bristol in 2018 and founded the Lodging Scheme in 2021.

- **Jenna Roberts**, Head of Migrant Homelessness Projects, [Housing Justice \(London\)](#)



Jenna has managed the Housing Justice Hosting Project in London for the past 3.5 years, overseeing its growth and development. Learning from this has influenced the launch of the new Refugee Lodgings project, working in partnership with the GLA and Local Authority teams. Before joining Housing Justice, Jenna worked for three years as a Shelter Coordinator at a night shelter in North London. Originally from Wales, Jenna has lived in London for over 20 years.

- **Sarah Wilson, Director, [PERN \(Penrith and Eden Refugee Network\)](#)**



When Sarah retired from a career in Human Resources and Organisation Development, she towed a few caravans to “Calais Jungle” and set up a Learning Centre in the refugee settlement in Dunkirk. PERN was originally established to support new families who joined the community through the Government’s Resettlement Programme. In 2022 SERCO procured 380 hotel places for asylum seekers locally. PERN’s values led it to look towards the most vulnerable and excluded and it is PERN’s ambition to be an organisation run by refugees for refugees.

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#### **Workshop Four:** *Media work when you’re new to it: Safeguarding, support and storytelling in the refugee sector*

Contributors:

- **Patrick Butler, Social Policy Editor, *the Guardian* (see biography above)**
- **Anna Lewis, CEO, [Open Door North East \(ODNE\)](#)**
- **Katie Bryson, Regional Communications Coordinator (North East), [IMIX](#)**



Katie supports organisations working in the migration sector in the region with their communications and media. An ex-BBC journalist with many years of experience in digital media, Katie clocked up over a decade at BBC News and CBBC Newsround before turning to charity communications in 2018, including leading the communications for Action Foundation in Newcastle, where she used her passion for storytelling to give a platform to people living on the margins.

- Elahe Ziai, Head of Voices, [IMIX](#)



Prior to IMIX, Elahe worked at the Scottish Refugee Council for six years as a caseworker, where the majority of her clients were newly granted refugees. These experiences taught her a lot and helped her to achieve a large portfolio of work. At IIX, her role allows for more collaboration. She has also completed a BA in Education and Social Services and volunteered with multiple charities in Glasgow.

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### **Workshop Five: *Influencing in a general election year***

Contributors:

- Sophie Boobis, Head of Policy and Research, [Homeless Link](#)

Sophie Boobis is Head of Policy and Research at Homeless Link where she leads a team to produce evidence-informed policy influencing across a range of policy areas impacting people experiencing homelessness. A North East native she has been working homelessness policy and systems change work for a decade. Her work continues to focus on how to ensure that research provides the knowledge and evidence needed to influence policy makers, with a priority of making sure the reality of the experiences of those working in services, and people with lived experience of homelessness are embedded throughout. Sophie's published work covers the experiences of non-UK nationals experiencing homelessness, multiple disadvantage, youth homelessness, the implementation of the HRA, and homelessness health inclusion.

- Sara Trehwitt, Director of Operations, [City of Sanctuary](#)

Sara Trehwitt is the Director of Operations at City of Sanctuary UK as well as leading on the Schools and FE College of Sanctuary initiatives. Prior to this role, Sara worked in different positions in the field of international development including at the UN World Food Programme, the US Agency for International Development, Crown Agents and the International Rescue Committee. Sara holds a Bachelor's degree from Macalester College, USA and a Masters Degree from the University of Stockholm.

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### **Workshop title: *Building lived experience representation: Learning from the Community Research Programme and the NACCOM network***

Contributors:

- Iman Alharithi, Advice Drop-in Manager, [St Augustine's Centre \(Halifax\)](#)

Iman Alharithi works as advice drop-in manager at St. Augustine's Centre in Halifax, where she also previously served as a trustee. Iman helped co-create Refugee Action's resources and guidance exploring how organisations can effectively and meaningfully bring expert-by-experience trustees onto their board. She has done lots of work in the UK related to asylum and refugees and has a background in Human Rights having worked as an advisor for a sustainable development organisation in Yemen. She received her master's degree in public management from Potsdam University, Germany in 2010 and another master's in international business management, UK in 2018.

- Patrick Masebo, Expert by Experience Coordinator, [Manchester Refugee Support Network \(MRSN\)](#)

Patrick Masebo is the Expert by Experience Coordinator for the Greater Manchester Step Change programme at Manchester Refugee Support Network. Patrick leads Great! (Greater Manchester Refugee and Asylum seekers Together) which is an advisory and advocacy group of refugees and people seeking asylum in Greater Manchester within a consortium of 11 local charities.

- Dr Ibtissam Al-Farah, Expert-By-Experience Coordinator, [Explore Adapt Renew, Refugee Action](#)

As well as working for Refugee Action, Ibtissam also works as EBE Coordinator, City of Sanctuary Sheffield and is a cofounder and director of DEWA project (Development and Empowerment for Women's Advancement project) working with asylum seekers and refugee women since 2008.

- Pascale Gayford, Good Practice and Partnerships Manager, [Refugee Action](#)

Pascale's role sits within the Experts by Experience and Partnerships Department at Refugee Action. She oversees three programmes ([Step Change Consortium](#), [Explore Adapt Renew](#) and the [Insight Hub](#)), which aim to centre lived experience/remove barriers to power and work alongside the Expert by Experience Manager.