



Co-operative Councils

Innovation Network

COMMUNITY



North Herts Council

Community Support for Asylum Seekers in Hotels

In October 2022 the Home Office took over a hotel within North Herts to temporarily house approximately 70 Asylum Seekers. The residents were a mix of families, single men and single females and had recently made their way across the Channel to flee war and or persecution in their own countries. The original hotel location chosen was particularly unsuitable for families.

Following representations from local authorities, the MP, police, social services, and NHS the families were subsequently relocated to a more suitable location. When the families first arrived, we were approached by Herts Welcomes Refugees, a local charity who have been working in this field since 2015, when they formed to assist Syrian Refugees displaced by the civil war.

Herts Welcomes Refugees had been contacted by residents of the hotel asking for clothes. They then emailed the Community team to ask if we could assist.

We were aware that Gemma Maret at Stevenage Borough Council had formed a group of VCFSE organisations to support in a similar situation in her area. We attended some of these meetings and replicated the model to benefit the Asylum Seekers in North Herts.

The Community team contacted local churches, charities, community groups, the local centre for voluntary services and citizens advice and set up a meeting with the Manager at the hotel to find out exactly what needs the residents had. The staff at the hotel kindly assessed the residents room by room to get information on gender, age, and sizes so that we could find clothes that were suitable and seasonal. By this time, it was December, and the southeast was experiencing snow and icy conditions.

Once representatives from the groups visited the residents we found out that they would benefit from activities which would give them a break from the hotel, which was in a remote location. Residents highlighted various items and services which would help them. For example, bicycles would help them access local towns and villages, English and IT classes would help them to navigate life in the UK, and a new baby car seat would help a pregnant lady to bring her new-born home from the maternity hospital.

Linking up with a bicycle recycling scheme we managed to find some bikes for the residents to share and help them access local activities.

North Herts Minority Ethnic Forum set up English classes both in the Hotel and in a local village hall that is within walking distance.

The local Churches Together sourced and sorted clothing that was delivered to the hotel and we also linked up with a Muslim Women's group who provided culturally appropriate clothing for the small group of ladies based there.

The Voluntary Community Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) groups we have been working with include:

- Herts Welcomes Refugees
- Citizens Advice
- Asylum Friends
- NHCVS
- Create Community
- Citizen's Advice
- Churches Together
- Hitchin Pantry
- North Herts Minority Ethnic Forum (NHMEF)

Initially weekly feedback meetings were set up, moving to fortnightly as more actions were identified and allocated to the groups. As the network groups become embedded and develop good relationships with each other and the hotel management the District Council will withdraw and allow the network to continue with arm's length support.

The statutory authorities are working hard to support these groups locally with health care, education, and transport where necessary but don't have the resource to provide the additional extras that can make life that bit more bearable.

The process of bringing together the community to support asylum seekers has been very rewarding and has demonstrated some of the CCIN's values and principles. Social partnership has been the key principle of this work as we have supported co-operation and collaboration between residents, community groups, asylum seekers, and the council, to benefit the wellbeing of some of our new and vulnerable communities. Through this process we have found numerous groups and individuals who have been willing to assist and share responsibility for the welfare of asylum seekers, indicating a strong sense of solidarity from within the broader community.

This model of bringing together a range of groups and individuals to provide support within the community has proved very successful and with the Home Office having commissioned another hotel in the district in a town centre location, we are again taking the approach of creating a local VCFSE network to provide additional support. So far, we have been able to provide toys, activities, clothes, assistance with making applications for the right to remain in the UK, and translation services from within the local community.

For further information contact:

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