

Asylum Seekers in Halton
(not to be confused with
refugees or economic migrants)

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Forum

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- “Representatives from Halton Umbrella Group and ecumenical volunteers from several faith organisations in Halton give their time to those seeking asylum and those who find themselves living in safe houses eg through the Medaille Trust. Signposting to professional help eg legal advice is given. Organisations for instance SHAP, the British Red Cross, A Better Tomorrow and Refugee Women Connect, support attendees. Some practical help is provided such as access to clothing, household items and food, which have been donated to the project. A simple lunch is offered, and people are encouraged to interact with others and improve their English. Some refugees attend as volunteers.”

General issues

- Asylum seekers are placed into accommodation (mostly private rented) in Halton by Serco – no one is notified about where they are (data protection)
- They are now given a leaflet about TSS in their information pack
- They will be unfamiliar with their environment
- They are given £5.37 a day per person
- Many do not have much food, clothing, basic household goods etc
- They may be accommodated with people they do not know/who do not speak their language/who are culturally different, therefore they may be lonely or tensions may occur
- Lack of access to independent interpreters is a problem
- Some have pressing legal needs
- Migrant Help, who are supposed to support them, have not been able to respond quickly in many instances

General issues continued

- Some asylum seekers are not literate in their own language – if you are using “Google Translate” you need to be able to use the audio version – they may well not be able to read their name or any other important information in any language. Form filling is very difficult, yet a necessity
- You may need to use Language Line or an interpreter – cost implication?
- People often need British cultural awareness raising
- Some statutory organisations have not been particularly helpful
- Transport is expensive and does not always go from where the people are to where they need to be
- Once “leave to remain” is granted, new accommodation must be found very quickly – this is difficult in some cases especially for single people
- Data sharing can be problematic

School/College related issues

- Not many schools/colleges in Halton have admitted refugees or asylum seekers yet – it depends where new people are accommodated and if they have children
- Lack of English in many cases – spoken and written
- Many different first languages are spoken eg Arabic, Kurdish, Pashto, Spanish, Turkish, Persian, Chinese and people are from a variety of faiths eg Christian, Islam, Bahá’i
- Parents are supported in getting their children into schools/colleges via HBC but this can be a difficult task in terms of:
 - Form filling in English
 - Finding places/numbers of places in schools nearby
 - Length of time it takes

School/College related issues continued

- As many of the children will have experienced traumatic events (leaving your home and country is traumatic enough), learning mentors, or other pastoral staff may work with them to support them emotionally and start to integrate them into English life – keep brief case studies of what you are doing and how it helps – this will be helpful as evidence for inspectors
- In PHSE or assembly talking to other children about different cultures and circumstances in the world is important so other children are supportive and not discriminatory
- Ofsted/other inspectors might well ask about children with English as an Additional Language which would include children just starting to learn English. They are likely to ask about the support these children are getting from the school to learn English - usually at the beginning through 1:1 or small group support, probably using an EAL programme of which there are many eg Talking Tables

School/College related issues continued

- It is equally important for the families, for schools to try and engage with the parents but obviously this can be difficult
- Schools/colleges could provide refreshments after a family assembly or a 'stay and play' where parents can see what their child is doing in class for half an hour and talk to other parents - this could be helpful. Communication may be a barrier as countries of origin/first languages are many
- Try working with agencies such as the ones we do so, as far as possible, there is joined up support
- Communication with local places of worship is also important as this is often a place where families, new to a country go to meet

Financial considerations

- Asylum seekers only have the £5.37 per person per day. Their accommodation and related costs are paid by Serco
- School/college uniforms, PE kits, stationery etc – do you have spares to give out as asylum seekers are likely not be able to afford to buy?
- Free school meals – they are entitled (qualify under “low income”)
- Activities where contributions from parents are requested – do you have a process to support financially those who cannot afford to pay so as not to adversely affect the children’s opportunities?
- Possible transience of pupils – how will you manage? Retrospective funding?
- Funding of EAL – creative ideas?

Finally.... the human side

- The entry of asylum seekers and refugees into Britain is ongoing and is likely to increase, as conflicts and persecution continue
- The people we have met may have faced unimaginable horrors and may be suffering the after effects of this; they may never see loved ones again
- We, as a moral duty, should give them support, care and love, providing them with the best opportunities for growth that we are able, even if they only stay a few months with us – it may be the best time they have ever had
- Learn from each other and from areas which have had more experience in dealing with asylum seekers – share good practice
- “When you learn, teach. When you get, give.” Maya Angelou
- “There is nothing like a dream to create the future” Victor Hugo