**Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme**

**Refugee Council**

**Project Support to Local Authorities**

**Introduction**

The overall aims of the VPRS are to provide housing and integration support for Syrian refugees who have been identified as part of the Home Office VPRS.

The Refugee Council aims to meet the needs of resettled persons from arrival into the UK and for the 12 month period following. We will work to empower individuals to achieve their full potential and meet their responsibilities as members of British society; working in partnership with local service providers and local communities to best meet the needs of the resettled refugees, ensuring that they are at the heart of the service and that their relocation into the local area offers them a truly durable solution. We aim to build on our experience gained through delivering the VPRS over recent months in Leeds and the Gateway Resettlement Programme over the last 12 years in Sheffield and Hull and to optimise the contribution that resettled refugees make to British life.

In welcoming and supporting individuals, we aim to assist them in developing their skills, knowledge and integration potential. The VPRS addresses the need to relocate and settle vulnerable individuals into a safe and sustainable environment where they are afforded the opportunity to rebuild their lives and provided with suitable accommodation. In this environment issues can be addressed relating to long term health (both psychological and physiological); institutionalisation; separation and trauma; and education, allowing resettled persons to become a fully integrated, contributing and productive members of the community where they live.

From our experience of managing the VPRS and Gateway Resettlement Programme, the Refugee Council has been able to identify problems and needs that have arisen for individuals who have accessed the programmes. This knowledge base would allow us to hit the ground running in providing support to people with similar backgrounds if we were allocated further VPRS contracts.

Individuals who have been identified via the VPRS for resettlement in the UK often present signs of trauma and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder; anxiety following family separation; health needs; and ‘learned’ behaviours following time spent in refugee camps, which are difficult to abandon. Fundamentally, the VPRS will aide the transitional needs of the resettled persons and address the need for access to local services in order to fully and permanently integrate into UK society.

Our experience has illustrated that resettled persons are often institutionalised and that the transition from a refugee camp to an urban environment requires specialist support and advice. Through our therapeutic casework model and close working links with local agencies, the Refugee Council is able to provide specialist support for resettled persons presenting symptoms of trauma and emotional distress. We can offer specialist counselling and psychological support in both the short and longer term to assist with the impact of past experiences on their resettlement experience in the UK.

Through our dynamic partnership model, we are also able to offer support for resettled persons who have suffered rape, domestic violence including marital disputes, war and violence. We are well networked with local healthcare and education providers so that specialist health or education issues emerging or arising following arrival are dealt with sympathetically and expediently.

We have learned that for many individuals the anxiety of family separation and issues of isolation which occur prior to integration into the identified community are substantial and can significantly slow the resettlement period. For this reason, our support model and mechanisms include information relating to family tracing and reunification services, and our one-to-one visits, drop-in sessions and introduction to the appropriate Refugee Community Organisations considerably address the problem of isolation. Additionally, trained volunteers will be matched with resettled persons to support with language development and access to language resources such as conversation clubs, libraries and homework clubs. The Refugee Council has extensive experience of working with volunteers to support projects and holds the **Investing in Volunteering Standard**. We also encourage refugees to volunteer.Families and individuals are all assigned a named caseworker with whom they will work over the course of the year to address these issues and other problems which arise.

The Refugee Council has been providing support to refugees for 60 years and working with the Gateway Resettlement Programme for 12 years in Sheffield and 10 years in Hull. We have been instrumental in putting pressure on the government to develop a significant programme to help Syrian refugees, and are now delivering this service in Leeds and Sheffield. We have developed a cohesive, dynamic and inclusive programme of resettlement, which consists of direct support, partnership working and community development work. We have developed a highly skilled workforce, working across the spectrum of asylum and resettlement. This includes a skilled team of professional therapists who have developed a model of working with refugees, taking into account their cultural as well as psychological needs. We would bring this expertise to support any Syrian who may require therapeutic services.

The Refugee Council’s work includes running a programme of support for unaccompanied minors. As part of this we have developed a support model for victims of trafficking and unaccompanied young people who are in age disputes. We also run a youth and education programme for these young people.

The Integration and Employment team at the Refugee Council run a successful programme for qualified health professional refugees to support them to work in the NHS. This project is funded by the NHS and could add value to further VPRS work. The Refugee Healthcare Professionals project runs alongside our wider employment and training programme for refugees.

The Refugee Council has extensive skills and experience in resettlement financial management gained through the coordination of the projects detailed above. Our plans, budgets and financial monitoring ensure that the most cost effective means are used to support resettled persons on their integration journey.

**Partnerships**

We recognise the impact that migration can have on community cohesion and aim to develop thriving, sustainable and vibrant communities in local areas. Helping resettled refugees to become part of their communities and highlighting the role of migration in improving the economic performance of our region. Our aim is to help develop strong Refugee Community Organisations, which are sustainable in the long term.

We are committed to working with councils and other voluntary sector players who can support and enhance the work we provide. We aim to strengthen working relationships at all levels, local, regional, national and international , in order that all those who can contribute, work together to achieve the best possible outcome for resettled persons.

We will develop a robust partnership in Local Authorities across the public, voluntary and private sectors, and offer extensive experience, best practice, and value for money in our joint commitment to assisting the most vulnerable resettled persons to find durable solutions for themselves and their families. We will use our knowledge of Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs), gained through our role, funded by London Boroughs Scheme, to support RCOs, to identify any existing or emerging groups who may be interested to link up.

We will develop a local stakeholders group to include a police cohesion team, health and safeguarding team, housing, job centre, education/schools/colleges welfare, and voluntary sector groups to support the work and gain a better understanding.

**Activities**

The project will deliver a spectrum of activities to the resettled persons; both in a one-to-one and group setting.

We will recruit local volunteers, adding value for money and increasing the support to resettled persons. A named caseworker will work with the individuals and families to deliver a variety of support including but not limited to:

* Home visits by case workers
* Resettlement support plan reviews
* Drop in advice sessions
* Group briefings
* Geographical, social and financial orientation
* Volunteer support including accompanying clients to appointments
* Advocacy and advice
* Community Development Support – establishing a community forum that will help them to preserve their heritage whilst becoming established members of the community
* Employment and training advice
* Information and support relating to opening bank accounts
* Support with shopping for culturally appropriate foods
* Advise on required school uniforms
* English language support, including volunteers delivering conversation sessions either at home for isolated refugees or in a group setting at the drop-ins
* Links to faith groups

**The programme will have three stages:**

**Months 1-3** **- first stage of support**

**Integration encouraged from day 1**: each adult (aged 16 plus) will have a baseline assessment completed in the first few days of arrival and a support plan drawn up from a needs assessment within the first three weeks. Support provided will take the form of drop-ins once or twice a week. Drop-ins will include awareness briefings delivered in group work sessions, some done by Refugee Council staff and some done by external agencies in order to ensure refugees are very quickly linked to mainstream services. In particular, work is to be done around welfare benefits, jobcentre requirements, health, schools and employment. We will work closely with ESOL providers, interpreters and volunteers.

**Early weeks outreach work done during the orientation period:** some home visits will be arranged according to the need of each household in the initial stage but support will quickly be provided through appointments and drop-ins. Drop-ins may need to take place at external venues identified in advance.

Working closely with the housing support staff would be key, and they may arrange to visit each household once a week for the first 4 weeks after arrival as well as having a presence at the drop-in sessions provided by ourselves. Other partners may also attend these drop-ins impart information about their specialisms.

We anticipate housing staff will act, in the first 6 months, as a conduit between the refugee tenant and the landlord; and continue to have a presence at the drop-in sessions through the 12 months support, as well as carrying out monthly visits to each property to check on repairs and assist with any property related matters.

Mental health needs are difficult to address immediately, but support could take the form of group work, or individual referrals to therapeutic services such as those provided by the Refugee Council if resettled persons request this. It is most likely that their concerns will be around practicalities and that addressing mental health needs will come at a later stage.

**Months 3-9 - second stage of support**

The support is delivered through drop-in sessions and group briefings in order to encourage independence and transition into the local community. The main activities will include family support, sign posting, psychological support through therapeutic case working and referrals to appropriate mental health services, and community development support. Community development support helps the resettled persons to make links locally and gain support through existing community networks. Support during the second stage will also include group briefings by invited speakers, for example, police, healthcare providers, local community groups etc.

**After the first 6 months of the project:** Each group will be invited to a review day to gauge progression at this mid-point in the project. In turn, this will help to shape the project moving forward, offering a continuous review and evaluation tool. It will also directly benefit other service users, feeding into the existing plan/strategy for resettled persons. Housing staff will start passing over responsibility for liaison with landlords to the resettled persons, offering support and guidance to individuals until they feel confident in dealing with all landlord/tenant matters without the support of staff. At the same time, housing staff will handover responsibility for liaising with utility companies to refugees, whilst continuing to provide support as and when it is needed.

**Months 9-12 - final stage of support**

**Final stage to facilitate the transition into mainstream support:** the Refugee Council will work in partnership to deliver briefings through mainstream agencies and reduce the one-to-one support. This will include final assessment and review.

Each group will be invited to a review day towards the end of the year. This will be an opportunity to gauge progression of the group over the course of the project, get direct feedback and evaluate the project.

Although support ends after 12 months we often find some people come back from time to time for support or advice which we are always happy to give.

Una Barry MBE

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Refugee Council