



#rethinkingrefugee

Conference Outcome Report

TUESDAY 10TH OCTOBER 2017 Sandwell Council House, Oldbury





KEY OUTCOMES OF THE CONFERENCE:

Setting priorities for action for #rethinkingrefugee

INTRODUCTION

Following a successful event of over 50 people from a wide range of organisations at our #rethinkingrefugee Conference in Sandwell on Tuesday 10th October 2017, a way ahead was agreed on this urgent matter. We have already started to take the next steps, but need your help and support! *The following is a summary of the issues discussed on the day:*

SANDWELL

Since the industrial revolution, Sandwell has been host for a series of diverse and complex communities of which current refugee arrivals are just the latest members. However, Sandwell has faced major challenges of economic restructuring and pressure on resources, and integration must be seen in that context. Like many other parts of the UK, Sandwell has an Integration challenge. The 2016 report by Dame Casey on Integration highlighted this challenge by stating that many of our major cities are like "communities living among communities." Given the importance of this matter, the Conference called for more emphasis to be put on integration as a driver of prosperity and community cohesion.

The challenge in Sandwell is not to necessarily take more people, but to make sure that those who are here are integrated. Key to this is the fact that integration is not a moment in time, but a long-term process that takes investment.

ACH Birmingham was established in July 2012, and currently has 27 staff members and 225 tenants.

Our Training Centre in Smethwick opened in February 2017 and is located within the Icknield area which is

now the focus of a major EU funded project (USE IT!) which aims to engage the very diverse communities of the area, including refugees and migrants with the very considerable investments - such as the new hospital. The Training Centre will be working with over 400 local people in the next 2 years.

REFUGEES ARE A RESOURCE

We face the most serious refugee crisis in modern times, with more people displaced since the 2nd World War. It was agreed that too often the refugee issue was portrayed as a burden to society and at best, a humanitarian and charitable issue. A humanitarian response designed for the short-term too often ends up administering long-term misery and wasted opportunity for both refugees and society. Rather than transitioning from emergency relief to long-term reintegration, refugee populations too often sadly get trapped within the system. This benefits nobody. Sandwell needs new economic opportunities and new enterprise. We have skill shortages, the challenge of major infrastructure projects such as HS2 and the need to become more competitive in the face of Brexit. The existing paradigm fails to adequately recognise that refugees have talents, skills, and aspirations that will boost our economy and enrich our communities. A rethink is urgently needed.

"We're a wealthy country. We could do more, we should do more, to help refugees. [Though there are humanitarian sides to this], it's not a humanitarian issue entirely. We see refugee resettlement as 'Britain's proud tradition', an idea which has investment and political support, but we still fail to see refugees as an opportunity." Maurice Wren, CEO of Refugee Council

Addressing Unmet Training and Employment Needs

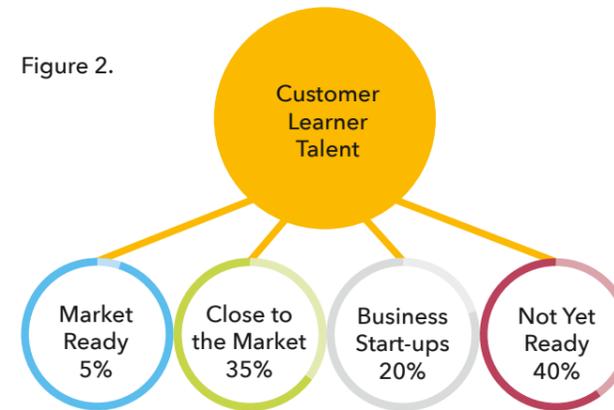


Figure 2.

ACH NEW PERSPECTIVE OF REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION

Our aim is to explore some new perspectives concerning the integration and resettlement of refugees from our grassroots and community based approach and experience. We must give greater priority to **employment and economic development opportunities** if we are to offer genuine integration and a better life to refugees and forced migrants coming to the UK. Conference participants agreed that early labour market integration for refugees is the best method for refugee integration, and this can be achieved through culturally sensitive support, training and sector focused employment skills, as described in figure 1.

This method facilitates not only training for employment, but support for self-employment and small business development. Recent research done by CREME (Centre for Research in Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship) and ACH showed that many migrants and refugees possess strong entrepreneurship skills, and have often run successful businesses in their home countries. Around 20% of our tenants want to start their own business: see figure 2.

Through language training, networking, and support navigating bureaucratic systems, we aim to support refugees to start new businesses, and to upscale those which already exist. New financial instruments and support with marketing of products or services may well be needed to give refugee businesses the foot on the ladder they need

for growth. We are working with CREME on the barriers to entrepreneurship faced by refugees and this research can be found on our website.

ACH presented its unique model for integration. This holistic model has its heart focused on supporting refugees from arrival to integration through effective employment and enterprise skills. **In the future ACH wishes to play a more strategic role with a strong emphasis on economic and labour market integration through working directly with employers.** We also wish to work with the West Midlands Combined Authority in order to make sure that unmet training and employment needs are properly addressed. This process is illustrated below in figure 3.

INTEGRATION IS A PROCESS

As ACH CEO Fuad Mahamed pointed out, "settlement on its own does not integrate refugees"; integration is a long-term process that requires sustained support. Haile Michael, a tenant with ACH, spoke from his own experience as someone with a professional background and high level of English, who still struggled to navigate the UK system after being granted refugee status. He pointed out the difficulty that is faced by others in his situation, who do not have the same language abilities, and who are unfamiliar with the technology required in many areas of life. This highlighted the importance of effective professional support during resettlement, not only with regards to accommodation, but for adjusting to systems in the UK.

"It is very important that we expand this for others so that they have the same chance as me and others in my area"
Haile Michael

As the conference took place during European Local Democracy Week, an emphasis was placed not only on economic integration, but on civic participation. Surinder Singh stressed the importance of registering to vote and getting involved in local democracy, as part of refugees' integration process.

RECOGNISING POTENTIAL

Though businesses and communities stand to benefit from the economic integration of refugees, opportunities are still being missed. Conrad Parke, Regeneration & Partnerships Manager at Sandwell Council, presented his work on the USE-IT! programme, which provided training to people with overseas qualifications in order to fill NHS skills gaps. This revealed some impressive results; the scheme, which began

Figure 1. Sector Focused Training Model

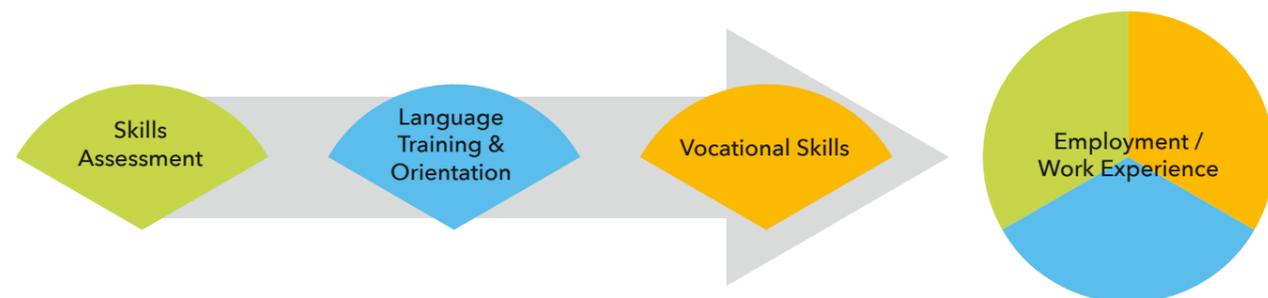
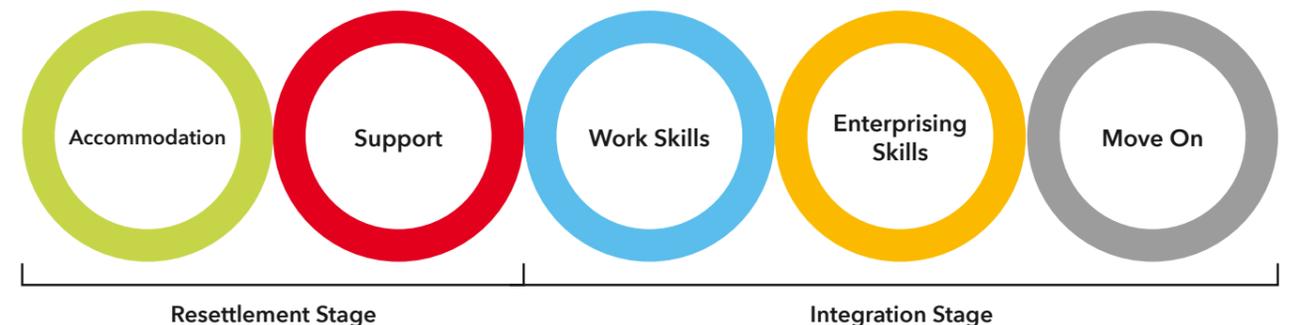


Figure 3. Five Stage Innovation Model



with the target of finding 60 qualified people over 3 years, had already found 94 within 6 months. The majority of these participants are refugees and asylum seekers, representing a wide range of health professions.

With training costing £5k to get each person ready for work, the project has had a great response from Health Trusts, and is already being rolled out across the whole of the Black Country. The success of the project exemplified the impressive potential of a tailored system of support. At the same time, it highlighted the high numbers of refugees and asylum seekers who are not working in jobs equivalent to their level of education, and the potential that could be fulfilled with the right approach. As Conrad put it, "this was clearly there waiting to happen".

"I've never been involved in a project that's met all its targets and had such success so quickly." Conrad Parke, Sandwell Council, USE IT! project

People with strong qualifications that are much needed by UK employers are not being connected up with the right opportunities. Conference participants discussed the barriers causing this, including lack of access to training, the need for accreditation of qualifications, and negative stereotyping. It was agreed that we need to promote positive messages and to change the narrative surrounding refugees, in order to make the most of an as yet underutilised pool of talent.

"We're trying to help refugees follow their aspirations, whether that's getting a job or starting their own business" Fuad Mahamed, CEO ACH

JOINING THE DOTS

While individual organisations are doing excellent work across the region already, there is a need to unify these efforts and work collaboratively. For effective impact, we need to establish an interconnected system rather than independent programmes and schemes.

Maurice Wren, CEO of Refugee Council, spoke passionately about the opportunities refugees represent to this country, and how supporting them to thrive through labour market integration is in the best interest of communities, business, and government. He argued that by working together to build a strong evidence base for this, we can influence policy and initiate change.

Presenting the business case to employers, and making clear how their needs can be addressed at the same time as helping refugees, is more effective than simply arguing that action should be taken. We also need to be working alongside refugee communities to promote the personal and social benefits of progressing into employment, and to increase motivation. By working with both businesses and communities, we can create positive outcomes for everyone involved.

NEXT STEPS

We are determined to make sure that this wasn't just a great conference. Actions speak louder than words. The following actions came out of the event:

SPEAKERS

Surinder Singh (Electoral Participation Officer, Sandwell Council)

Fuad Mahamed (CEO, Ashley Community Housing)

Lucy Williamson (Himilo Training)

Conrad Parke (Regeneration & Partnerships Manager, Sandwell Council)

Abdulgadir Ali (Manager, Ileys Community Association)

Dave Newall (Project Manager, Brushstrokes Sandwell)

Richard Thickpenny (Business Development Manager, Ashley Community Housing)

David Jepson (Director, Himilo Training)

Haile Michael (Ashley Community Housing Tenant)

Cllr Syeda Khatun MBE (Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods & Communities, Sandwell Council)

All participants to work together on rethinking refugees and promoting integration. A focus on sharing and listening is needed, to learn from the work others are doing. We especially need to develop training and employment support which meets the specific needs of refugees and migrants whilst adding value to businesses and dealing with skills shortages.

"The next step isn't to do something new, but to look at what we're already doing and join the dots." Conrad Parke, Sandwell Council, USE IT! project

Sandwell Council representatives committed to working with refugee organisations across the area.

"Solutions are found when we talk to each other. Sandwell Council's ambition is for our communities to thrive, and refugees and asylum seekers are part of those communities." Cllr. Syeda Khatun

We run regular **Rethinking Refugee Conferences** across the West Midlands and the Black Country. We will also organise mini Rethinking Refugee events in localities and communities of interest as needed. All can join in the conversation on Twitter using the hashtag #rethinkingrefugee.

WHAT OTHERS SAID ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

"Interesting afternoon at Sandwell Council with Ashley Community Housing and Himilo Training regarding #rethinkingrefugee - assets not liabilities." Robert Bruce, CEO, Dorothy Parkes Centre

Ashley Community Housing has organised #rethinkingrefugee Conferences in Sandwell, Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Bristol and Bath, with over 350 people attending these events. If you are interested in working in partnership with us please get in touch.

What do you say? Please let us know your views and how you might engage with our work to ensure far better integration of refugees within our city and region.

Keep the conversation going and talk to us: info@ashleyhousing.com
• @ashleyhousing • @ACHBham • #rethinkingrefugee