



Asylum Crisis West Midlands Project Evaluation

Evaluation Brief – January 2020

Introduction

Refugee Action has 38 years' experience providing specialist advice and support to people seeking asylum. Our beneficiaries are some of the most vulnerable people in the country; having fled torture, persecution and war. Since 2001 we have supported over 78,000 asylum seekers to access justice and support in the UK. We collaborate with colleagues to deliver and scale innovative practice that addresses the causes of poverty and injustice experienced by our beneficiaries and empower them to rebuild their lives. Under our 2019-22 strategy we are helping people seeking asylum and refugees to live free from poverty, access justice and rebuild their lives and assisting refugee support organisations to strengthen their services and maximise our collective impact. We are committed to shifting power within the asylum system by developing innovative service, campaign and capacity building approaches that ensure people seeking asylum can access justice.

The Asylum Crisis West Midlands Project

The Asylum Crisis Project West Midlands Project launched on 4th November 2018, to enable vulnerable adults who are homeless or face imminent homelessness to access housing and financial support, and people seeking asylum who have had their claims refused to understand their legal route to regularise their status and thereby access housing and financial support. It provides advice, complex casework and advocacy to homeless people seeking asylum to access the UKVI or Local Authority housing and financial support that they are entitled to. It is a three-year project funded by The National Lottery Community Fund (TNLCF) and a private donor.

It supports adults seeking asylum and their families living in Birmingham, Coventry and Stoke-on-Trent five days per week. Refugee Action is delivering the project in partnership with six organisations: British Red Cross-Birmingham, North Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent CAB (SNSCAB), ASHA North Staffordshire (Stoke-on-Trent), Coventry Refugee Migrant Centre, Central England Law Centre and the St Peter's Centre -Coventry. The Asylum Crisis West Midlands project is delivered by a Project Manager, Project Coordinator, student placements and volunteers. People access the service through weekly destitution drop-in services in Birmingham, Coventry and Stoke-on-Trent, referrals from partner organisations, and self-referrals.



The project plays a crucial role in providing people with accessible information about the asylum decision-making process and welfare support system processes by:

- Enabling people to understand, often for the first time, why they are destitute and what they can do to return to support; (increased legal literacy).
- Strengthening the Birmingham destitution service system by providing a unique, vital expertise to help homeless people to gather the detail evidence needed to prove their eligibility to support, enabling other organisations to meet their wellbeing needs; (ending homelessness and destitution and increased access to justice).
- Increasing partner organisations' skills in identifying and referring homeless people eligible for statutory support (strengthened partnership working).

Achievements:

- **Legal literacy-** Asylum Crisis West Midlands Project has worked with vulnerable people seeking asylum to ensure that they understand their legal routes out of destitution and how to make informed decisions about their future. Project has successfully supported 1497 clients while still offering a proactive, quality and expert service, three times our forecast client engagement target.
- **Experts-by-Experience-centred service model-** we facilitated a meeting with nine people who have a lived experience of the asylum process to understand their perspectives on the project and how it could be strengthened to improve access to support and justice for people seeking asylum.
- **Increased access to housing and financial support-** we have supported 590 vulnerable people who are needlessly destitute and homeless to understand their eligibility for financial and housing support from statutory sources, and the help available to them to access it, and of these supported 365 people to plan to gather the necessary evidence to access the housing and financial support they are entitled to. In total this year we have enabled 176 vulnerable people to access housing and support who were previously destitute.
- **Increased access to justice-**we have supported vulnerable, destitute people in Stoke-on-Trent and Coventry to understand their legal situation and their ability to lodge fresh asylum claim. This year we supported 225 people to gather the evidence needed to lodge fresh asylum claims.
- **Strengthened collaboration-**We have established strong referral pathways with our partners: Stoke-on-Trent CAB, ASHA, British Red Cross, Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre, St Peter's Centre, and Central England Law Centre having received over 60 referrals this year.

Evaluation purpose and outcomes

The Asylum Crisis West Midlands Project is critical to our achievement of 2019-22 strategic objective to create “a fair and effective asylum system, in which people access justice and avoid destitution”. It was designed with people with lived experience of the asylum system, and its ongoing development is informed by an Expert by Experience forum and steering group to ensure that it reflects the experience of asylum system of people seeking asylum and the organisations that support them.

Our service model aims to provide an accessible, targeted service that gives people seeking asylum who are destitute, or who will imminently be so,

- The information, advice and advocacy support that they need to understand their situation and what action they can take to access this support.
- Specialist casework and advocacy to overcome government policy or practice issues that impede peoples access to housing and financial support.
- Immigration advice and casework to enable people to overcome legal barriers to access housing and financial support and improve their access to justice.
- Strengthen refugee support organisations to collaborate and share this evidence to influence government policy and practice.

Through the evaluation we want to understand the impact of the Asylum Crisis West Midlands service model for beneficiaries, and its potential as a model of best practice. Specifically, we want to learn:

- Which elements of the project model are highly valued by service users, partners and wider stakeholders
- Which elements of the methodology are having the greatest impact in addressing barriers to justice
- What the future operational model could look like.
- What opportunities exist to sustain this model.

The evaluation will assess the progress of the project towards its agreed outcomes and determine the impact that has had for people seeking asylum, project partners and the West Midlands network of refugee organisations. It will provide Refugee Action with critical analysis of the project model, how it can be strengthened, and emerging opportunities for sustaining this provision in the region.

The Evaluator will report to the Internal Management Group. The evaluator will engage with project beneficiaries (both primary and secondary) and regional stakeholders to

understand their experience of the project and its impact on people's ability to access housing and financial support, justice, strengthen the capacity of the sector collaborate to achieve this and to use the evidence to influence Home Office policy and practice. The evaluator will identify the future viability and opportunities for sustaining the model, based on an analysis of projected demand for the model, options for resourcing it, and stakeholder support. The evaluator will conduct mid-point and final evaluations.

Our approach to the project and evaluation is collaborative. While Refugee Action will manage the evaluator, the evaluation scope and findings will be owned by the Steering Group and wider stakeholders. The monitoring and evaluation framework will be shaped and informed by the Steering Group, as will the mid-point and final evaluations. The mid-point evaluation findings will be validated by presenting these for discussion and refinement with stakeholders at a seminar, including Steering Group members. Similarly, the final evaluation findings will be shared and explored with key stakeholders. We believe that this collaborative, developmental approach will strengthen both the project learning and its sustainability. Project stakeholders will own the project findings as they will reflect their expert perspectives, increasing the likelihood that the project findings will be embedded in future frontline immigration advice practice.

The evaluation will deliver the following outcomes

Increased understanding of how the project model operates, its strengths, challenges, and opportunities for development;

1. Review of the project's monitoring and evaluation framework;
2. Progress towards outcomes specified in our original funding application for the project, including the intended and unintended outcomes to date;
3. How the project supports our achievement of Refugee Action's theory of change;
4. Recommendations for embedding the learning within the service model and sharing the model with partners;
5. The connections between the Asylum Crisis West Midlands project and other Refugee Action projects and the achievement of the project outcomes.

Key deliverables

The evaluation will be delivered from March 2020-November 2021. It will deliver:

1. A mid-point evaluation by 30 May 2020. This will provide the critical analysis of the project model and its achievements, impact and sustainability options. It will draw on

monitoring data, and primary data collection with Experts by Experience forum, project partners, staff, volunteers, and referral partners. Work will begin in March 2020.

2. A final evaluation to be provided by 30 November 2021. It will also rely on monitoring and evaluative data from primary and secondary beneficiaries.

1. A written mid-point evaluation report service model analysis covering the outcomes described above. No more than 20 double-sided A4 pages;
2. A verbal presentation of the mid-point review;
3. A written final evaluation report, no more than 40 double sided A4 pages, including appendices;
4. A verbal presentation of the evaluation findings.

The evaluator will report to the Project Manager (Berna Djinaj and Project Coordinator Tamsyn Willis). They will enable evaluator to engage with the project and access all necessary documents, beneficiaries and external partners as necessary.

Evaluator criteria

The successful candidate/s will have:

- A proven track record of producing independent evaluations of services for vulnerable people;
- A detailed understanding of the UK asylum system, and barriers to justice;
- Awareness of approaches to service user empowerment;
- Experience of designed and delivering participatory research methods;
- Experience in working with beneficiaries, many of whom are adults living with specific vulnerabilities and/or with limited English language capability;
- Able to meet all timeframe requirements listed above in the 'Key deliverables' section;
- Able to work remotely and travel to Birmingham, Coventry and Stoke on Trent to engage the service beneficiaries and the project team.

Budget

The budget for the evaluation is £10,000 inclusive of travel and expenses. Please include a detailed budget with your proposal. Refugee Action will provide interpreting and travel costs for beneficiaries engaged as part of the evaluation process.



Application process

Applications will be assessed by an internal commissioning panel. The key dates are below. Please submit a written proposal in a word or pdf format no longer than three sides of A4 to Berna Djinaj BernaD@refugee-action.org.uk detailing:

- Your experience
- Approach to the evaluation, differentiating between stages one and two;
- Detailed delivering plan; including confirmation that key deliverable dates can be met;
- Key risks;
- Budget;
- Two referees.

The deadline for submission of proposals is 10th February 2020.

Interviews will be held in Birmingham -end of February 2020

The Evaluation Kick Off meeting will be in March 2020- TBC

If you have any questions or wish to seek clarification on any of the above, please contact by Berna Djinaj on T: 07500226649