

Based at Victoria Place, Pearson Way, Stockton on Tees

ACTIVITY

The British Red Cross works with refugees and people seeking asylum across Teesside.

We offer practical and emotional support to individuals and families at all stages of the asylum process.

- ✓ Emotional support through home visits
- ✓ Escorting to medical appointments
- ✓ Practical support through donations of baby clothing, bedding, soft toys and books
- ✓ Signposting to solicitors/charities to assist with asylum claim
- ✓ Referrals to charities/organisations for destitution support, talking therapy and other specialist support
- ✓ Emergency provision of cash payments, clothing vouchers and food bank referrals if Home Office support is delayed or stopped
- ✓ Travel tickets to Liverpool for fresh claims
- ✓ Provide maternity pack/payment
- ✓ Support with move on when refugee status or leave to remain is granted
- ✓ Family Reunion Travel Assistance. Arranging flights for families of refugees who have been given permission from the HO to join family in the UK
- ✓ International Family Tracing service and providing proof of detention
- ✓ OISC level 1 immigration advice

During the 1st quarter of 2017 Red Cross supported 296 clients and 157 dependants in **Stockton on Tees**. 57 of clients seen were destitute.

Red Cross operate across the whole of Tees Valley (Hartlepool, Redcar, Middlesbrough, Darlington). In Stockton we have an office where we meet clients and we also attend the [Justice First](#) Thursday drop-in, alongside [Migrant Help](#). This has proved to be really successful and I believe beneficial to our mutual clients. Red Cross have recently started working from the [Arrival Practice](#) alongside the Care Co-ordinator, Elvis Katoto, and Hazel from [NERS \(North East Refugee Service\)](#).

Red Cross co-ordinators and volunteers also visit the Women's hostel twice a week at [St Johnston House](#). Along with the practical and emotional support we raise issues with the housing provider about the conditions and have called meetings in the past to discuss concerns about individuals. We have links with other smaller charities and individuals in the Stockton/Thornaby area.

TEES VALLEY ARIADNE PROJECT

Refugee and asylum seeker support project funded by the Big Lottery Fund.

An overview

Red Cross is leading a new partnership in 3 towns: Middlesbrough, Stockton & Hartlepool. It will deliver end-to-end holistic support for refugees & asylum seekers (RAS) with a range of partners. [Open Door North East](#), [Justice First](#) and [Methodist Asylum Project \(MAP\)](#) are the main partners.

The project has a needs-led design, delivered via one model in each town. RAS will be registered via drop-ins at 3 service hubs and at venues known to RAS. They will receive: on the day triage, assessment, signposting, information giving and referrals for casework to the appropriate partner. There will also be women-only drop-ins.

For destitute RAS, food, clothes and emergency shelter will be provided. They will be able to access: practical support (e.g. completing applications for welfare benefits and funding for travel to get to appointments), fresh claims and specialist support (e.g. legal advice from solicitors and navigation through the immigration system).

New arrivals will receive: orientation to and information about key local services (e.g. schools, hospitals), wellbeing courses to reduce anxiety, and social drop-ins to make new friends.

They will be able to access English language, employability classes and volunteering opportunities at the hubs. Via volunteering they will develop new skills and the references will enhance their CVs.

In Stockton, the Red Cross are working with the team at the [Baptist Tabernacle](#) to develop services. [Open Door NE](#) is now attending and a women's-only drop-in has started operating on a Friday morning. The Red Cross will welcome new people at the [Arrival Practice](#) on a Wednesday morning and link them to activities and volunteers at the Tabernacle Hub and other services.

ISSUES

We have focus groups with our clients to find out what are the issues they face.

Some of the feedback:

- Stress, anxiety, depression, isolation: RAS told us the asylum process leaves them "feeling lost" and "breaks even the strongest". They consistently described being "isolated" / "alone": feeling left with "too much in their heads".
- Poverty, hunger, homelessness and lack of access to justice: RAS highlighted daily struggles meeting basic needs (food / clothing / shelter). 40% in one group spoke about experiencing hunger throughout the asylum process. RAS reported having to share rooms with strangers, in accommodation without heating / electricity. They said state solicitors were doing "only the minimum" and unwilling to take on complex cases.
- Waste of skills and lack of anything "to do": Asylum Seekers (AS) consistently said they needed "something to do" whilst waiting for an asylum decision, which can take several years. One stated "I would like to start over a new life here but I haven't the possibilities", [we are left] "to nothingness". Refugees (who are able to access employment) told us not speaking English was a significant barrier.
- Stigma and abuse from the local community: RAS told us of harrowing experiences of harassment from local communities: a broken jaw; being spat at; having eggs thrown at them; stigmatisation at Job Centres and local food banks.

Shared rooms are a real issue for our clients who often complain about having to share with someone from a different culture/country. As a safeguarding officer, in the Red Cross, I have raised concerns about the safety of people in shared rooms and incidents of bullying, intimidation

and violence against room-mates. Some of those sharing rooms have been released from prisons and have a history of violence. Newcastle City Council's cabinet has agreed to ban bedroom-sharing. Darlington Council has already done so.

The Immigration Act 2016 is a concern as it will see a rise in destitution if fully implemented. A consultation on the changes is due in late summer. It will have a huge impact on local charities and the statutory services if families are left without support and accommodation.

Other issues include the transition from asylum seeker to refugee which can lead to destitution. There can be long delays in people getting their National Insurance numbers and benefits.

Universal Credit has been piloted in Newcastle upon Tyne and is being rolled out to Stockton. Claimants are required to fill out the application online so need access to computers and often need someone to sit with them, particularly if they have little English. We have 2 clients in Thornaby who are applying for Universal Credit and have struggled to access the application. They need someone to sit with them, at a computer, and help them through the lengthy process. We have seen a rise in refugees being made homeless since its implementation in Newcastle. Often they are the most vulnerable; those who are ill, either physically or mentally.

Families arriving under the Family Reunion programme are left without support for up to 3 months due to switching from JSA to universal credit.

Our team in Stockton have provided evidence for a number of reports commissioned by the Red Cross to lobby parliament. They include "The Azure payment Card – The humanitarian cost of a cashless system". One of our Stockton clients has been invited to meet MPs at the House of Commons when the latest report "Can't stay! Can't go" is launched.

CHALLENGES

The main challenges for our organisation:

- We have to be flexible due to the change in dispersal patterns. Investment has been made in Teesside but we have seen an increase in people being moved to Newcastle and Sunderland.
- We are seeing a rise in enquiries, often as a result of cuts to other charities.
- Funding to build capacity is an issue, particularly when you need to react quickly to an increase in caseload or for a new dispersal area. Lots of charities going after the same pot of money. We are lucky to have a big brand, this helps. Red Cross are very happy to apply for joint bids.
- Stresses on staff who are dealing with more complex cases (i.e. domestic violence, trafficking, mental health). We now employ a Psychosocial Support Practitioner (Alan Brice) to provide 1:1s to staff and volunteers once a month, but any extra support would be welcome.

*Hilary Hodgson
Red Cross
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