

Migrant Destitution Toolkit

Good practice case studies from the housing association sector

Let's end homelessness together

Homeless Link, Gateway House, Milverton Street, London SE11 4AP | 020 7840 4430

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Produced by

The Innovation and Good Practice Team

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Feedback, corrections and suggestions: We welcome your feedback on our publications. Please email patrick.duce@homelesslink.org.uk

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Introduction

This toolkit is produced by the Strategic Alliance on Migrant Destitution (SAMD) with funding from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF). The Strategic Alliance is a unique cross sector partnership between national organisations from the homelessness, refugee and migrant sectors who have come together to ensure that they work more effectively to tackle homelessness and destitution amongst migrant communities.

The Strategic Alliance was set up in 2014 and operates across England. It aims to increase the number of bed spaces available to destitute migrants with no recourse to public funds, as well as providing routes out of destitution, including immigration advice and representation.

This briefing is for anyone looking to set up and develop a service to support destitute migrants. It was developed following requests for examples of how housing associations and large housing providers have worked in partnership with frontline services to support destitute migrants across England. The purpose of this document is to demonstrate the range of different forms that this support can take, from bed spaces in houses, to funding and wider social support within the community.

If you have additional good practice case studies that can be added to this document, or you would like to find out more information, then please contact Patrick Duce at patrick.duce@homelesslink.org.uk.

The role of housing associations

Housing associations (HAs) have long been responsive to the needs of the communities that they were set up to support. While some were explicitly set up to provide housing and support to refugees and migrants, many small and large housing providers are finding themselves in a unique position to be the providers of accommodation necessary to aid social integration of individuals from outside Europe.

Housing providers are however, facing increased pressure following the announcement by the UK Government that social housing rents must be cut by 1% per year for four years from April 2016. The Government also announced that the UK would take in 20,000 Syrian refugees by the year 2020, with local authorities looking to the social housing sector to provide accommodation and support through the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (VPRS).

Despite these challenges, housing associations can – and indeed some are - responding to the needs of destitute migrants in a range of ways: utilising existing provision of under occupied buildings, community projects, small grant funding, social enterprise and making the most of their existing community relationships. The role of housing associations in helping to facilitate small and innovative responses to migrant destitution cannot be understated. Their continued independence, and expertise in asset management and maintenance, remains of vital support to a number of frontline services working to protect some of the most vulnerable migrants in England.

Working in partnership

Destitute migrants have a diverse range of needs, including humanitarian support to meet daily living needs, good quality immigration advice, isolation among communities which are not culturally diverse and accommodation away from rough sleeping and destitution. It is extremely rare for one organisation to adequately deliver all of this, and therefore partnerships between services who have existing skills, expertise

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and delivery in these areas is vital. To find out more about building partnerships between services in your local area, please look at the *Migrant Destitution Toolkit – How to facilitate local partnership working and develop pathways out of destitution*, for which there is a link below.

Housing associations have invaluable and long standing expertise in delivering good quality and well managed accommodation to individuals in the UK that are in need. Social landlords care about community integration, and many housing associations in particular have strong roots as providers of shelter and support to people of all nationalities. They are also well placed to understand the local context of the communities that they were set up to support, with long histories of working closely with local business, faith, education and statutory partners.

Social landlords have portfolios of housing stock that can be used to house destitute migrants and refugees, and are able to make autonomous decisions around offering properties to migrant projects for little or no rent (known as “peppercorn rent”). These can come from a range of sources including hard to let properties, buildings due for sale, out of use properties, old community buildings and non-residential properties.

Some housing organisations will have the necessary skills and experience to take a lead on delivering projects to support destitute migrants. Equally though, it may be the case that there are other local services such as migrant organisations, homelessness services or locally commissioned services that are better placed to lead. The good practice case studies below demonstrate how this leadership can be delivered in different ways.

For a more in-depth look into the practicalities of setting up an accommodation project, including considerations around Right to Rent, income models, financial risks and much more please see the Resources page at the end of this document.

Call to action

Housing associations and large housing providers in communities across England can provide the vital accommodation that frontline projects need in order to give destitute migrants the safety and stability to move away from destitution. This document has brought together a range of case studies to help demonstrate this, and hopefully inspire you to do the same. None of these good practice examples would have happened without the passion and leadership from within the housing movement.

In the current external climate of pressure on housing providers, it remains more important than ever to share existing good practice. We aim to both reassure and build confidence in order to help foster the leadership necessary to work in this difficult area of migrant destitution. If you work in the housing sector, and are interested in developing your own migrant destitution project, we would like to hear from you and can help you take your ideas forward.

Housing associations with a charitable mission and status have the ability to help all individuals in housing need, regardless of immigration status.¹ Housing associations can, and indeed are, playing an integral role in providing accommodation and other support services as part of partnerships with migrant support providers and homeless services. We know that this combination of legal advice, accommodation, advocacy and support can provide the pathway out destitution for vulnerable migrants in England.

¹ For specific guidance on how the ‘Right to Rent’ regulation laid out in the 2016 immigration Act, please see the Housing Rights Info website: <http://www.housing-rights.info/right-to-rent-checks.php>

Case study 1: Hope Housing and Hope Projects

Location: Birmingham

Learning points:

- **Strongly motivated volunteer base over long period of time**
- **Links with housing associations built out of personal contacts**
- **Referring agency keeps responsibility for the case**
- **Migrants' Union increases empowerment and peer support**

Hope Projects was set up by volunteers concerned about destitute asylum seekers and other migrants who are forced to sleep on the streets in and around Birmingham. Because this group is barred from traditional models of support due to their lack of recourse to public funds, they find it impossible to access mainstream provision for the homeless. Hope aimed to alleviate their destitution and later to offer them accommodation, but in both cases relied on charitable funding and 'in kind' assistance from the housing sector.

In March 2003, the Hope Destitution Fund began to assist destitute asylum seekers, raising and distributing just over £1 million since then. In 2007, Hope Projects established Hope Housing to provide emergency short-term accommodation for destitute and homeless asylum seekers. Referrals for Hope Projects come from a range of local migrant support agencies, who all continue to casework individuals as they move into the project's accommodation. This lowers support costs and retains the expertise of referring partners and provides consistency in casework for people receiving support. The eight properties which it now manages are leased at a peppercorn rent from housing associations and other supporters: Bournville Village Trust, Friendship Care and Housing, Mercian Housing Association, Midland Heart, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham, and Yardley Great Trust. Hope Projects recognises that asylum destitution is caused by flawed asylum decision making, and as such employs an Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) Level 3 legal representative to help people overturn such decisions. Achieving positive outcomes with their clients remains impossible without the security that the housing model offers.

In 2015/16 Hope Housing accommodated 67 new adult residents from 24 different nationalities – 39 women (six pregnant) and 28 men, including one family with children. Hope Projects has three part-time staff and, currently, 18 volunteers. Residents are encouraged to take on responsibility for housing management and are able to get involved in a range of other activities which Hope runs, including a local gardening project using land provided by Bournville Village Trust and involving local people, and a women's group.

Hope also works with its partners to support a wider group of migrants in various ways including in a Migrants' Union which aims to empower migrants and give practical, mutual support to members submitting asylum and human-rights claims.

Website: <http://www.hope-projects.org.uk/>

Case study 2: Street Legal and Notting Hill Housing

Location: London

Learning points:

- **Partnership between homelessness, refugee and community organisation**
- **Maximising commercial property usage in between major redevelopment**
- **Offering a portfolio of accommodation, not just NRPF**
- **Positive relationship with Local Authority**
- **Supporting frontline homelessness services**

Street Legal is a Pan-London partnership between St Mungo's, Refugee Action and Praxis Community Projects. The project provides homelessness outreach, accommodation, support and legal advice directly to vulnerable destitute migrants with complex immigration issues. It provides an initial safe space away from the streets to conduct assessments within their No Second Night Out Assessment Hubs (commissioned by the Greater London Authority). At this stage the Street Legal trained immigration advisors are able to provide ongoing immigration advice and referrals on to interim accommodation provided by St Mungo's.

St Mungo's have a long standing relationship with Notting Hill Housing (NHH), who have a variety of lease and management arrangements on accommodation schemes. These provide a range of frontline supported housing and hostel projects for the large homelessness organisation. This relationship led to NHH responding to St Mungo's request to source other large residential units to be used for a range of projects linked to homelessness.

In one case Notting Hill Housing acquired a large former hotel in the London Borough of Harrow, with a range of room sizes and adaptable smaller buildings surrounding the central reception. With a total of 77 bed spaces, and with the housing provider putting in place an 18 month planning application for redevelopment, an interim plan to secure or use for the building was needed. Notting Hill Housing offered the building to St Mungo's on a peppercorn rent basis. The responsibility for maintenance and general running costs were the responsibility of St Mungo's, who have a long history of building compliance, health and safety and property management.

The large building represented a unique opportunity for St Mungo's to offer a portfolio of bed spaces across a range of projects. These included local authority temporary accommodation, low support needs move-on accommodation for rough sleepers, Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP), and crucially ten units of accommodation for destitute migrants with NRPF (referred through the Street Legal project). The ability to claim housing benefit related income on the majority of the bed spaces has enabled the project to cross subsidise the cost of these "no recourse" bed spaces and deliver a model that seeks to minimise housing costs.

In another example, St Mungo's formed a close working partnership with large contractors and property redevelopers such as Orion and U+I. This enabled them to provide bed spaces for rough sleeping migrants with NRPF through utilising empty buildings undergoing lengthy local planning applications.

The key success of this approach to providing bed spaces has been ability of the homelessness organisation to have a flexible portfolio of units, which can provide much needed move on bed spaces. Large homelessness organisations have the skills, staff and expertise to manage large residential buildings. This model ensures there is no need to pay for security costs on an empty building, and finds a way of putting

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buildings that are in "limbo" to good use in the interim between planning applications. The fact that the buildings are not left empty and put to good use fits in with the ethos of housing associations and developers who are looking to contribute positively to local communities. Managing relationships with a local authority can often be a challenge when providing accommodation services for rough sleepers or destitute migrants. In this case however, the relationship with the host local authority was greatly improved by enabling units to be used for temporary accommodation for local rough sleepers being referred by the housing options department.

Providing short term accommodation (usually around 18 months), during which buildings and land is prepared for redevelopment can however lead to several complications. From a project perspective, long term planning is a challenge as the building can be given very short notice at any point to vacate. This is especially problematic for NRPF clients, who cannot be easily moved to any other project, where commitments to income revenue are stricter. It is also more difficult to justify capital investment towards improving the quality of accommodation, due to the temporary nature of the stay within these buildings. For the destitute migrants themselves, many of these bed spaces are single rooms without en-suite, so cooking and cleaning facilities are limited. Many destitute migrants remain in this accommodation for longer than 9-12 months due to the complexities of immigration and asylum decision making. Therefore relying on food banks, cooking with microwaves and maintaining general health and wellbeing is an ongoing challenge.

Website: <http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/project/street-legal/>

Case study 3: Cornerstone and St Vincent's Housing Association

Location: Manchester

Learning points:

- **Combination of innovative short term emergency accommodation and HA property**
- **Relieving pressure on frontline homelessness service**
- **Focus on supporting young adult destitute migrants**

St Vincent's Housing Association (SVHA) is a small housing association, with approximately 3,500 properties located across Greater Manchester. Through effective partnership work across a range of small scale, yet innovative projects, SVHA are able to demonstrate diversity in their provision for destitute migrants and refugees.

As part of the Syrian Family Resettlement Scheme, SVHA have provided a property in Trafford, following the newly adopted Canadian model of community sponsorship for recently arrived refugees. Involving a range of partnerships with the Home Office, Citizens UK, local churches and the wider community, SVHA are able to offer their invaluable expertise in housing management and provision.

Through a close working relationship with Cornerstone Day Centre in Manchester, SVHA are providing housing that is being used by single, non-priority destitute asylum seekers. Many young asylum seekers struggle to access support from statutory services and end up destitute. Support options via local authority housing options departments are limited and many seek support from day centres such as Cornerstone, which is run by Caritas – a large multi-national Catholic charity. In response to increasing numbers of young, homeless asylum seekers accessing their services, Cornerstone set up a "pod" scheme in their courtyard,

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using donated temporary construction units to house low support need individuals awaiting access to the private rental market. These temporary accommodation units provide emergency bed spaces for those accessing Cornerstone services, and enable housing support staff to assess suitability for moving on to shared accommodation in SVHA properties.

SVHA converted several buildings from a previous piloted housing scheme called “SnugBug”, which utilised two- and three-bed properties for social housing purposes. By negotiating volunteer support from Cornerstone’s existing staff base, and with SVHA supplying the buildings, the project is now providing over ten bed spaces and relieving pressure on a vital frontline homeless service.

Website: <https://www.svha.co.uk/>

Case study 4: Open Door (North East) and North Star Housing Group Ltd

Location: Tees Valley

Learning points:

- **Clear messaging about not replacing role of Home Office**
- **Portfolio of different accommodation**
- **Innovative partnership with legal advice service**
- **Charity acting as social landlord**
- **Clear service level agreement (SLA) between HA and refugee service**

North Star Housing Group bring together Endeavour, Teesdale and Darlington Housing Associations to provide a range of housing and other services to tenants across the Tees Valley, North Yorkshire and County Durham. Open Door North East are a Christian charity supporting destitute asylum seekers and refugees in the Tees Valley region since 2001. They provide a range of services ensuring that migrants with no recourse to public funds have access to critical immigration advice to achieve regularisation of their immigration status. They also provide holistic support in the form of food parcels, subsidised English lessons, women’s groups and clothing from partnership organisations in Teesside.

A relationship with North Star developed as part of Open Door’s portfolio of accommodation, making use of large four (or more) bedroom properties near Middlesbrough town centre, that were proving difficult to let in the private sector. North Star also agreed to offer a six bedroom building on a peppercorn rent basis that was at risk of incurring under-occupancy charges due to the “Bedroom Tax”. North Star offered to utilise their maintenance contracts to install fire doors, wire smoke alarms and redecorate the properties ready for tenants to move in. The six-bed house is let using a service level agreement (SLA), in which Open Door North East are responsible for internal repairs and maintenance, with the housing association covering external repairs.

Providing short term, emergency accommodation for asylum seekers who have lost their support, offers stability and enables them to meet practical needs of daily food and shelter. It also allows them to properly explore their immigration options, which includes making a fresh claim, with the help of local OISC accredited immigration advice. The fact that approximately 40% of fresh asylum claim cases are successful, suggests that the Home Office’s original decisions are often wrong.

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Providing accommodation, support and good quality immigration advice to help destitute migrants back into mainstream asylum services is a critical framework to assist move-ons through the project. This housing model also enables services to better protect the human rights of destitute migrants, while providing safety and security at the same time. North Star's support has also been integral in saving the Teesside charity up to £5000 a year.

Open Door and North Star's partnership shows that in areas with difficult to let properties, charities can act as agents for social landlords. The large house provides accommodation for five asylum seekers and refugees who would otherwise be destitute. Converting houses into Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) and delivering accommodation to both refugees and destitute migrants can be an effective model of support for individuals struggling to access even the most basic of services.

Website: <http://www.opendoornortheast.com/>

Case study 5: Boaz Trust and Arawak Walton

Location: Manchester

Learning points:

- **Maintenance and housing management support from HA**
- **Suitability for living in long term accommodation is assessed in night shelter**
- **Increased reactivity to housing related issues**

The Boaz Trust has been providing accommodation and support for destitute asylum seekers and refugees in Greater Manchester for over 12 years. As well as a hosting scheme and winter night shelter, they currently have 14 shared houses, accommodating single adults. Arawak Walton is a housing association working in Greater Manchester, specialising in providing quality accommodation for black and minority ethnic communities.

Arawak Walton and Boaz formed a partnership in 2016, which has seen the housing association provide housing management to Boaz for a fixed fee per property. In practice, this includes handling new refugee tenant sign up with tenancy agreements, housing benefit forms and direct debits for service charges. It also includes collecting rent from refugee tenants, following up bad debts and overdue payments and providing advice on notices. A further crucial aspect of support has been through reactive property maintenance, including handling reports, assessing severity of issues, referring issues to contractors, paying contractors and ensuring necessary safety certificates are in place.

Boaz's partnership with Arawak Walton has led to an improvement in the standard of the accommodation that it provides to both refugees and asylum seekers. The use of existing trusted contractors through the housing association has also led to increased savings in both cost and time spent responding to call outs. This has enabled Boaz staff to concentrate their time more efficiently upon vital holistic support for their clients, including extra help for those that are less skilled in reporting housing related issues. Finally, the feedback from tenants themselves has been that they felt improved confidence in their independent living skills and dealing with a "real" housing association while still engaging with Boaz.

Website: <http://boaztrust.org.uk/>

Case study 6: Bolton at Home

Location: Bolton

Learning points:

- **Grant funding for local migrant services from the HA**
- **Sharing of language and interpretation classes**
- **HA playing a leading role among range of local partnerships**

Bolton at Home is a large housing association made up of over 18,000 properties across the city, many of which are former council houses. Bolton is a designated Asylum Dispersal Area and has received a large number of newly arrived asylum seekers. The housing association has long recognised the need to support and aid those people who are in need within its local community and take an active approach to building partnerships with third sector providers across the city. For many years, the CEO of Bolton at Home has taken a leading role on the settlement of refugees and asylum seekers within the Bolton area and has contributed to continued support for grass roots organisations working with destitute migrants. Many of these destitute migrants have been evicted from asylum accommodation after being refused asylum in the UK.

The housing association offers guidance, referrals, interpretation and English classes to local migrants, some of whom have no fixed address. Anyone can access these resources, regardless of immigration status, as the provision is funded exclusively by the housing association. It also provides grant funding for projects where evidence of need is demonstrated, and there is a clear benefit for the local community. Bolton at Home has funded several local migrant destitution charities to provide both practical and emotional support to refugees, asylum seekers, and destitute migrants without access to welfare support.

While this commitment from a housing association to community integration is commendable, it is not without its challenges. Due to restrictions on certain budget streams, the provision of direct accommodation for local migrants with no access to public funds is often not possible. The size and nature of the housing association, coupled with range of contracts already in place to support non-EEA migrants through more established resettlement programs, can lead to a delicate balance of managing local relationships. Therefore Bolton at Home is currently in a position to be most effective and supportive to destitute migrants through its indirect support and open access provision of training and development.

Website: <http://www.boltonathome.org.uk/>

Case study 7: Ashley Community Housing

Location: Bristol and Birmingham

Learning points:

- **Conversion from community organisation to HA**
- **Focus on employment and integration**
- **Collaborations with universities and international partners**

Ashley Community Housing is a refugee support organisation that provides accommodation and works with local landlords in Bristol and Birmingham. Since 2008, Ashley Community Housing have successfully resettled

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this put the business on a trajectory for change which will see them working with over 2500 people over the following 18 months. The HA have achieved this by expanding provision into Wolverhampton and Birmingham and developing a training subsidiary arm, delivering on an extensive range of training contracts. In five years, their turnover has increased from £300k to £3.5m and they have become known internationally for their work on resettlement and integration.

Website: <http://www.ashleyhousing.com/>

Further reading and resources:

Migrant Destitution Toolkit

To read more from the Migrant Destitution Toolkit, including briefings on immigration advice and tools on building partnerships between the homelessness and refugee/migrant sector, please visit:

www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/national-projects/strategic-alliance-on-migrant-destitution/migrant-destitution-toolkit

Resources from partners of the Strategic Alliance on Migrant Destitution:

For practical downloads to support you in helping destitute migrants in England, please go to the SAMD resources page. This includes introductions to working with destitute migrants, legal analysis, models of accommodation and more.

www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/national-projects/strategic-alliance-on-migrant-destitution/resources-for-supporting

Models of accommodation and support for migrants with no recourse to public (NRPF). A resource for practitioners and groups who want to get involved (2015)

www.housingjustice.org.uk/data/resources/648/Models-of-accommodation-and-support-for-migrants-with-NRPF.pdf

Supporting people with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) - Guidance for homelessness services (Homeless Link, 2016)

www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/supporting-people-with-no-recourse-to-public-funds

Housing and Migration – A UK Guide to Issues and Solutions (Housing and Migration Network, 2012)

www.metropolitan.org.uk/images/Housing-and-Migration-A-UK-Guide3.pdf

How to improve support and services for destitute migrants (JRF, 2015)

www.jrf.org.uk/report/how-improve-support-and-services-destitute-migrants



What we do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for organisations working directly with people who become homeless in England. We work to make services better and campaign for policy change that will help end homelessness.

Let's end homelessness together

Homeless Link
2-5 Minorities
London EC3N 1BJ

020 7840 4430

www.homeless.org.uk

Twitter: @Homelesslink

Facebook: www.facebook.com/homelesslink

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