

So what do we do now? Getting involved in supporting asylum seekers where you live.

WORKING WITH REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Introduction

This is an activity to help you reflect on the needs of refugees and asylum seekers. You can do the activity in a small group of 3-5 people or in a larger group. The aims of the activity are:

- To understand the needs of asylum seekers and refugees
- To think about ways in which you can engage with asylum seekers and refugees

Activity equipment

Three case studies, photocopied for each group

Pens

Large sheets of paper

Activity plan

1. Introduction (5 minutes)

Ask people what knowledge/experience they have of asylum seekers/refugees?

2. Buzz groups (15 minutes)

Organise your big group into smaller groups of 3-5.

Read out a case study of an asylum seeker or refugee to each group. Ask them to draw the person on a big sheet of paper. Then ask them to identify and note:

- Needs the person will have in relation to their health, self identity and self esteem and practical needs.
- Ways in which the church, or they as individuals, could tackle some of those needs.
- Resources might they need to help out.
- Issues or challenges they might encounter.
- Resources they have themselves, or within their communities.

Encourage the groups to think about a whole variety of needs, from emotional needs such as friendship, to practical needs such as food and clothing. Ask people to consider small ways in which they can fulfil needs, such as giving someone a lift to the supermarket, to big ways such as setting up ESOL classes.

3. Feedback (15 minutes)

Talk about the needs you identified. Discuss:

- Which needs appear to be the most pressing?
- In which ways do people feel they would like to get involved with asylum seekers and refugees?
- What kind of research and/or training would you need to do before you got involved?
- Which other organisations or individuals might you work with?

Working with asylum seekers and refugees is not necessarily as difficult as you might think. Anyone can offer a welcoming smile! However, as with working alongside any vulnerable group of people, it is important to be thoughtful about how to get involved. In particular, we recommend that you:

- Never give legal advice to help with someone's asylum claim, unless you are qualified to do so.
- Be sensitive when asking asylum seekers or refugees personal questions, as many will have faced traumatic situations in their past that they will not feel comfortable sharing. Until you know someone well, avoid asking why they have come here. Also remember that people may have lost family members in horrific circumstances.
- Be careful about getting into counselling situations that you can't handle. Remember that it takes specialist training to counsel someone who has been traumatised.
- Seek expert advice as often as you can by getting in touch with organisations such as the Refugee Council and Refugee Action.
- Be confidential. Talking about an asylum seeker's personal history or situation could have an adverse affect on their asylum claim.
- Look after yourself and make sure you are well supported.
- Remember that giving is not a one way transaction. Many asylum seekers and refugees will be delighted to offer *you* hospitality and friendship.

Case study 1

Suliman is from Iraq. He came to England with his wife and 3 children ten years ago and has been granted full refugee status. In Iraq, he was a physics teacher but he has been unable to get back into teaching here. He works in a bread factory and studies in the evenings. His wife is unwell and unhappy and seems unable to make friends here. She witnessed her sister and niece being killed in the family courtyard. She does not like the children playing outside.

Case study 2

Mary is a geography teacher from Zimbabwe. Her husband was very active politically and was killed. Mary was then raped. She fled to England and has been housed in emergency accommodation in a large towerblock in London for nine months. She recently gave birth to a baby. She feels very isolated.

Case study 3

Samuel is from Democratic Republic of the Congo. He has been in England for five months, has already been refused asylum and is in the process of appeal. He was tortured for two weeks and suffered leg, arm and head injuries. He does not know where his wife and 4 children are despite efforts by the Red Cross to trace them. He complains of constant headaches and cannot sleep at night. He feels like giving up.