

**THIFF Forum Meeting Summary: Supporting Refugees & Arrivals from Ukraine**

**Monday 13 June 2022, 6-8pm at THCVS offices, Bethnal Green**

**Update on THIFF**

THIFF took part in the recent Festival of Communities, organised by Queen Mary University, where we repeated a past exercise to capture the proprieties of residents. Many responses were captured, and the event itself represented a wide range of local groups. The responses from people will be the focus of our forum meetings throughout the next year.

**Bethan Lant,** [**Praxis**](https://www.praxis.org.uk/) **–** [**see here for slides**](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cjennyhadgraft.LIFELINENETWORK%5CDesktop%5CUkrainian%20work%20TH%20interfaith%20Jun22.pptx)

Praxis:

* Provided advice to 2,254 people in 2021
* Community groups & support
* Campaigning & advocacy
* Second-tier advice & training
* Influencing key stakeholders – local & regional authorities, funders, partners

Emerging situation:

* Fast moving
* A lot of uncertainty
* A lot of confusion and problems with the practicalities of the system

Three routes for immigration:

* Ukraine Family Scheme
* Homes for Ukraine Scheme
* Ukraine Extension Scheme

Key points:

* Difference from previous large scale refugee crises – proximity of Ukraine, relative ease of travel to UK
* No government sponsored evacuation like in Afghanistan
* Ukrainians NOT applying for asylum – kept separate from the existing asylum system
* People began arriving very quickly

Praxis works – advising regional authorities:

* Advice to GLA & London Councils on the schemes
* Confirming understanding of the scheme
* Identified possible problems
* Highlighted key issues to raise with the Home Office

Biggest issues to date:

* Differences between schemes
* Unclear documentation & obtaining BRPs
* Accessing schools, bank accounts, GPs – proof of address, id, language issues & “What do I do first?”
* Delays, poor or contradictory information, gaps between stated processes & events on the ground
* Homelessness

Future/ongoing issues:

* Homelessness - pressure on housing stock + new rules around housing outside of local area
* Trauma & mental health impact
* Unaccompanied children & private fostering arrangements – extended family or friends
* Exploitation & abuse
* Uncertainty re what happens after 36 months

**Q&A**

*Q – Is there any evidence of GP surgeries refusing the right to register? If so, the CCG can assist.*

A – Some people try to access GP without proof of address – Newham has been working with all surgeries around Safer Surgeries – all are well aware that people need to be registered.

*Q – How many refugees is Tower Hamlets taking?*

A – The local authority has official figures Ukraine, but the true figure is expected to be higher. For example, 93 children in Newham have arrived via the family route.

*Q – Have any non-Ukrainian people in hostels noticed difference between treatment?*

A – People in hotels seeking sanctuary do wonder why they are being reacted to differently.

**Praxis NRPF Group – Pascale Robinson & group members Charity, Shakira and Asqa**

The NRPF (No Recourse to Public Funds) group are campaigning for a better system across the wider immigration system. NRPF is when a person cannot access mainstream benefits.

The campaign is against decisions made by the government and system. New campaign will work towards shorter more affordable routes to settlement to avoid to people getting into debts over visas and living in poverty.

The campaign launches in September – for more info contact pascale.robinson@praxis.org.uk

**Reverend Georgina Stride –** [**Shoreditch Tabernacle Church**](https://www.tabcentre.com/)

The church created two English classes for local Iranian Christians and linked up with a Pastor in Liverpool who helped with translation. Although they are a small church, they try to provide practical support, including clothing.

48 Iranians attend the church, so they now have an Iranian pastor once a week. They take part in fellowship together, eat together and the church will finance food if they want to cook for themselves. Not all attendees are believers, however all are welcomed.

The church also provides advocacy and often communicate with the Home Office on behalf of the Iranians and help with housing and employment needs.

There are challenges – the church is unaware of any grants that could help finance the work with the refugees, so it is self-financed. Some of the refugees that live in local hostels have had negative experiences, particularly women. Many people are suffering the effects of trauma, some have PTSD and others are on medication. People have traumatic stories to tell, so this is also distressing for church members.

**Q&A**

*Comment – Care4Calais will be able to give you good advice – link provided.*

*Q – Have the people at hotels reported poor treatment to anyone else?*

A – Yes, this has been reported to immigration – but it is not clear where things like this need to be reported. People are worried about being moved from the area to an unknown place.

**Hate Crime Figures**

Hate crime across the borough has declined in last quarter, most crimes involve race hate; the number of faith hate crimes has dropped, but a spike about six months ago was one person making repeat offences and the case has now gone to trial. The sanction detection rate is low across whole of London, however Tower Hamlets has the highest rate in London

Nazrul Hannan, Met Police - Faith officers and hate crime officers were aiming to work more closely. There were three mosque attacks in the Central East are – one was swiftly dealt with within two days. Criminal damage took place at a mosque at Shoreditch, Ashaadibi Mosque was also targeted – but it transpired it was not a hate crime.

Chair Alan Green commented that it is a delicate balance to what is considered to be a hate crime, it has an impact even if it is not directed at faith as it affects attitude – people see it as an as attack on their faith and it impacts on relations in future.

**Information Sharing**

[**Fern Street Family Centre**](http://www.fernstreet.org.uk/) – Situated in Bow, works with Bangladeshi and Somali community and also people from Syria and Ukraine. They offer family support and full programme of activities, ESOL classes and also English classes that are suitable for people that have no reading or writing skills

[**Maternity Mates**](https://whfs.org.uk/index.php/what-we-do/maternity-mates) – The programme supports pregnant women and have lots of referrals from the hotels in the area for pregnant asylum seekers. They have started a support group for women from the hotels; they go walking, to the library, they had a trip to Tower of London etc. They also flag up services including foodbanks at Good Shepherd Mission and kids’ clubs at East End Church, London City Mission also run kids club for refugee families at Ibis hotel, Bethnal Green Library also has a drop in session for refugees.

[**St Georges German Lutheran** **Church**](https://www.stgeorgesgermanchurch.org.uk/) – They are holding a history talk featuring next Spitalfields Trust and saving Georgian houses – the talk takes place online (see website for details).

[**No Place for Hate**](https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgnl/community_and_living/community_safety__crime_preve/hate_crime/organisational_pledge.aspx) – The team have spaces on their Champions training programme – hate crime champions raise awareness of hate crime in local communities – and then progress to become hate crime ambassadors. The training covers what is hate crime, delivering presentations, and is a vital role for someone with some time to give. Please email hatecrime@towerhamlets.gov.uk for more information.

[**London College of Fashion**](https://www.arts.ac.uk/colleges/london-college-of-fashion) – Are working using fashion to tackle social issues – including knife crime and youth violence and working with young people in East London to provide educational opportunities for young people in fashion. Another project is focused on refugees to show how much we can learn cultural heritage and resilience building. The pilot phase involves collecting stories from refugees, who will then co design a manifesto for their sustainable future. The project will aim to embed cultural heritage, start a social enterprise and advocate for policy change. They welcome anyone willing to collaborate or link them with refugee communities.

[**Jesuit Refugee Services**](https://www.jrsuk.net/)  – They work with refugees and asylum seekers, providing advice and case work support. They receive referrals from all over London and offer monthly food parcels, English classes, drama and trips.

[**North East London CCG**](https://northeastlondonccg.nhs.uk/) – Are working to improve engagement and public involvement and want local people to influence and co-produce services – there are lots of change ahead in which this input can take place.

[**East London Foundation Trust**](https://www.elft.nhs.uk/) – Are a community psychology service based in Whitechapel and Mile End hospital, and recommend the services of Tower Hamlets Recovery College, who have a conversation club for refugees and asylum seekers.

[**East London Mosque**](https://www.eastlondonmosque.org.uk/) – ELM hold Muslim Women Support Groups around mental health, sessions take place on Tuesdays at 10:15 in the Maryam Centre and at 10:00 on Thursdays at Sama Academy.

**The next forum meeting will take place at 6pm on Monday 12 September, venue tbc – save the date!**