

Report on Year One of the Syrian Resettlement Vulnerable Persons Scheme

Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum

23rd January 2017

I would love if the Refugee forum can keep us under their protection forever



Executive Summary

This report was prepared for Nottingham and Mansfield City Council who have contracted with NNRF to provide the casework for the Syrians brought to the UK under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme. This report is prepared at the end of the first year of the work to assess the quality of the work, gaps or areas of improvement and moving forward.

Methodology

All the families who arrived in December 2015 had a one-to-one interview, with a worker from another part of the Refugee Forum, and an interpreter who had not previously worked with them. The interviews were scripted, but there was space for the participants to express their own opinions.

The methodology was limited by the fact that it was a member of the Refugee Forum who conducted the interview, and although the clients were told that they should feel free to express any opinions they wished to, they may have felt constrained by this. Additionally, the interviews were only conducted with one member of the family so may not reflect the view of the entire family.

A copy of the survey is attached as appendix i.

Data is also collected on our electronic casework management system, AdvicePro, where all visits and all work is recorded.

In addition the SVPRS work is being assessed externally by Roda Madziva and Juliet Thondlana from the University of Nottingham.

Background

In December 2015, eighteen families (a total of 81 individuals) were brought to Nottingham and Nottinghamshire as part of the Syrian Persons Vulnerable Relocation Scheme. This has been, to date, the largest number of individuals to be settled under this scheme. The families came with 5 years of humanitarian protection.

The casework support services requirements are as follows:¹

2.4 The Recipient will ensure that Beneficiaries are provided with a welcome pack of groceries on their arrival

2.5 The Recipient will provide a cash/ clothing allowances for each Beneficiary of £200 – this is to ensure they have sufficient funds to live on while their claim for benefits is being processed.

2.6 The Recipient will provide advice and assistance with registering for mainstream benefits and services and signposting to other advice and information giving agencies – this support includes:

2.6.1 Assisting with registration for and collection of Biometric Residence Permits following arrival

2.6.2 Registering with local schools, English language and literacy classes

2.6.3 Attending local Job Centre Plus appointments for benefit assessments

2.6.4 Registering with a local GP

2.6.5 Advice around and referral to appropriate mental health services and to specialist services for victims of torture as appropriate

1 As specified in the government's Statement of Requirements

2.6.6 Providing assistance with access to employment

2.7 The Recipient shall put in place a support plan for each family or individual for the 12 month period of their support to facilitate their orientation into their new home/area.

2.8 The Recipient shall put in place arrangements for the provision of English language classes which Beneficiaries should be able to access within one month of arrival. This should be provided following an assessment to determine the appropriate level of provision. This provision should be delivered by an accredited English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provider. This ESOL provision should be made available until such time as suitable mainstream provision becomes available or until 12 months after arrival (whichever is sooner). The purpose of the language tuition is to ensure that Beneficiaries are able to carry out basic transactions within the communities in which they have been placed.

2.9 Throughout the period of resettlement support the Recipient will ensure interpreting services are available.

2.10 The above services will be provided through a combination of office based appointments, drop in sessions, outreach surgeries and home visits.

NNRF had separate contracts with Nottingham City Council (including Gedling, Broxtowe, Rushcliffe, Newark and Sherwood councils), and Mansfield Council (including Ashfield Council).

It was agreed that an amount of £2,666 would be applied to each individual arriving. (The original amount agreed soon proved to have been severely underestimated and it was moved up to this amount in the Nottingham City Council, although not the Mansfield City Council).

Children

This is an area where we were quite surprised by the positivity of the feedback. All the respondents were very positive about how their children were settling in, picking up English and making friends.

my children get invited to lots of birthday parties.

Nothing Thank god. It was a little difficult for them in the beginning but wonderful now.

There three concerns that were highlighted are:

- FO BT Level of additional educational support for older children, particularly those who are having to sit examinations
- FO BT Loss of Arabic language skills
- FO BT Concerns about children after the 5 years humanitarian protection is up – will they be forced to go home?

ESOL

The ESOL provision which we provide has been approved by the Home Office. It is not accredited, and how many hours people receive is highly dependent on the numbers requiring ESOL, due to the way the funding is distributed. ESOL is provided to individuals only until they are able to access statutory ESOL classes.

Although most of the comments about ESOL were largely positive, it was one of the main areas where there were clear issues, both in the level and the amount of ESOL provided.

There is simply not enough provision, and not enough choice of classes.

Health

Many of the surveys reported problems accessing healthcare. This is probably the result of unrealistic expectations of the NHS.

All the clients were registered with GPs, opticians and dentists, and certainly initially were accompanied to all appointments with interpreters if at all possible.

There are many comments about the length of time it takes to get medical appointments in the UK – this is not uncommon from people who come from areas where medical services are paid for.

Some^{ES} times I can't get an appointment but Julie always manages to help.

My children have been wait^{ES}ing for eye tests for seven weeks

My den^{ES}tist has been trea^{ES}ting me for 8 months. A medical student in Syria would be be^{ES}ter. He took my top teeth and I can't eat because of it.

GP appointments take a week! By the ^{ES} time the appointment comes around I am be^{ES}ter. It is much be^{ES}ter in Jordan.

There is also a general feeling that medics in the UK do not hand out enough medication – again, this is probably a reflection of the fact that unnecessary prescribing seems to be a feature of point of service payment medical services. Despite this slight dissatisfaction with the NHS, the comments around NNRF casework are positive.

Benefits

There have been a few issues around benefits, in particular some incorrect applications for child tax credits which were done by the job centre when people first arrived, these are currently being appealed by our welfare benefits adviser. Another major problem around benefits is the new benefits cap which has applied to several of the families, given the fact that some of them have several children. There is a general acceptance that this happens to everyone and is part of the system, though a few negative comments about benefits being too low.

Setting up bills and payments for people is an area which has been fraught with difficulty, partly because it is an area where neighbours, befrienders and others have been most likely to get involved, leading to confusion on a couple of occasions.

Work

Quality of Casework

Generally the families were overwhelmingly positive about the level of casework provided by NNRF. Only two out of eighteen families complained that they found it difficult to access their caseworker, or that they were not supported enough.

Whenever I need help they are there beside me

I don't go anywhere else. I don't need to as the NNRF sorts out everything for me.

There were very few occasions when the respondents were able to point to specific examples of work that had not been done. Even the two who complained that they had not been able to access

their caseworker often enough were not able to point to specific problems, with their children, ESOL, benefits or health.

There is now a dedicated team of five caseworkers, one of whom is a Syrian refugee himself, and all non-Arabic speaking caseworkers are accompanied by interpreters whenever is necessary. The quality of interpreting is one thing that was regularly addressed by respondents although not specifically asked about in the survey.

Fourteen out of eighteen families reported the level of their casework as excellent, with two reporting it as good and two as average.

The two families who reported particular problems have been asked to come back for further discussions about what we can do to address their concerns.

The work also threw up challenges for caseworkers – it's a very different kind of work than the usual resolving crisis work. It involved new challenges around relationships – when you are working with someone on an ongoing basis for several years, there are very different boundaries than when you only see someone once.

Other concerns

Of continual concern to the families was the fact that they came to the UK with five year's Humanitarian Protection. This protection does not confer the (almost) automatic route to citizenship that refugee status does. Additionally it does not allow the holder to make applications for family reunion or to apply for a convention travel document. This latter point particularly has caused a lot of distress with the families whose relatives are scattered all over the world. Those who do not have a valid Syrian passport can apply for a certificate of travel, which is considerably more expensive and is only valid for certain nationalities for certain countries.

Changes already made

One of the major changes that has been made to the work, is in its distribution. With very little time to prepare for the arrival of the first cohort of 81, NNRF extended the contracts of all its part time staff in the One Stop Shop, so that all staff were carrying a caseload of Syrian work. Unfortunately the initial part of this work coincided with a time when there were also an unusually high number of asylum seekers receiving positive decisions, and the organisation doing this work at this time, was unable to service, and passing large numbers of new refugees to us for resettlement services. In addition the fact that the families arrived the week before Christmas, with all the associated closures, lead to a very stressful month over the Christmas period.

This work is no longer distributed in this way, and we now have a dedicated Syrian team who only do this work. This also means that the One Stop Shop team are able to focus on their own work. The fact that the Syrian work is very front-loaded (much more work, particularly outreach work, is required within the first three months of arrival) is managed by the fact that after the first cohort, numbers have been much smaller and much more manageable.

The casework team is continually learning and with three more cohorts having arrived since then, the welcome process is becoming better every time. The most recent arrivals were two families in Newark who arrived in November 2016.

An element of the casework which has been difficult to resolve organisationally is the contrast between the levels of support which are being given to people on the SVPRS and that given to other

refugees. This is another reason it has been much easier to have a separate team doing each kind of work. We have however used the work we have done with the SVPR scheme to inform the way we work with other new refugees. This includes appointing a named caseworker for each new refugee to ensure that they have a constant point of contact.

Proposals for the Future

Rather than putting new Syrian arrivals into specialist classes, we will distribute them over the spectrum of classes that we offer. This will have the following benefits:

- They will be able to access more classes, no matter how large the cohort they arrive with
- They will get to meet people outside the Syrian group as soon as possible
- They will be able to access different levels of ESOL
- As an additional benefit, this will spread the benefits of child care to other mothers
- As a part of the childcare, toddlers ESOL classes will be included

Our year two project will focus on employability – but it will be possible for all members of the SVPRS to access this services, not just those in their second year. There will be a caseworker whose sole responsibility will to set up a network of contacts for volunteering and work experience, enabling those who wish to get into work. This position will also be responsible for networking with other organisations in the City, and providing services like CV writing, interview practice etc.

In addition we will be employing a part time youth/children's worker who will work between our youth team and the Syrian team to ensure that children and young people are able to access local services as much as possible. AS part of the COI thematic development in the coming year we will be looking at homework clubs and helping children integrate, and this position will sit well with this project.

Other organisations providing services

Respondents said that they had help from the following:

- The Syrian Society in Nottingham (3)
- Maun Refuge in Mansfield (3)
- Neighbours (4)
- Karimia – ESOL classes (2)

It was surprising how low these numbers were as we are aware that many of the respondents regularly attend both Karimia and the Syrian Society events.

Nottingham City Council Contract

We are just going into the second year of the contract with Nottingham City Council, and continuing the casework for any new cohorts coming into the area.

Mansfield District Council

This contract was terminated one month before the end of the first year. NNRF conducted surveys with the three families remaining in Mansfield who were very satisfied with their casework. In fact some of the most positive comments about NNRF came from the families in Mansfield.

Appendix i

Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation – End of Year One

Please introduce yourself and your interpreter and thank the family very much indeed for participating in the survey.

We are doing a feedback survey on behalf of Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum. The answers you give to this will help us to shape the work we do in the coming year with yourselves and with new families arriving in the UK. Please answer as fully as you can, and don't worry if you want to raise concerns, your name won't be on this and it won't affect any future service.

Please feel free to say you don't want to answer if you find any of the questions intrusive or ask for clarification if you don't understand something.

A report from the results of the survey will be produced to inform our future work. Please be assured that all your answers will be anonymous.

- How many are there in your family?
- Overall, how have you found the casework you received from NNRF?
- How often do you see your caseworker?
- Do you find them responsive to your calls?
- Have you had any problems with school for your children?
- Was the NNRF caseworker able to help?
- How do you feel your children are settling into life in Nottingham?
- Are the children having any problems that you are worried about?
- Have you had any problems accessing medical care?
- Was the NNRF caseworker able to help?
- Have you had any problems accessing benefits?
- Was the NNRF caseworker able to help?
- What help have you had from outside agencies?
- Did you find that helpful?
- Have you been accessing NNRF ESOL classes?
- Are you now accessing statutory English classes?
- What are the best things that the NNRF have done for you around your resettlement?
- What are the things that NNRF could have done better for you?
- What other things would you like NNRF to do as you move into the second year of support?
- For people coming in the future, what sort of support do you think would make things easier for them to settle in?
- Have you got anything else you want to say, that we haven't asked you?