



Working together to help refugees flourish



Strategic Plan 2022 - 2025

"I have been in Stockton for 14 years – this is something that is very much needed".

One refugee's feedback during consultation



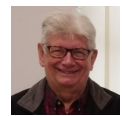
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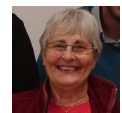
Refugee Futures (Registered charity number: 1159508)

Since 2017 a series of consultation events, one to one and group meetings have brought together over 50 local stakeholders to explore the needs and gaps to support refugees and people seeking asylum within Stockton-on-Tees. This led to the establishment of the charity Refugee Futures in June 2021. This document sets out our vision, mission, values and strategic priorities for the next three years building on our initial work so far.

Our board of trustees currently comprise of the following people, however, we are in the process of recruiting additional trustees to strengthen our diversity and experience:



Peter Chapman - Chair. A retired Certified Accountant, formerly Company Secretary at Auckland Castle Trust in Bishop Auckland; previously a Trustee of A Way Out, and The Leprosy Mission (England & Wales)



Ruth Hicks - Vice Chair. St Peter's Church; Coordinator of their ESOL Cafe; formerly Director of Adult Social Services at Middlesbrough Council; currently Chair of MIND Teesside, and Trustee of Recovery Connections



Malik Quraishi. An asylum seeker from Afghanistan. Formerly a senior Afghan diplomat with over 25 years experience and expertise in international relations, diplomacy and national security, often in difficult volatile situations.



Bill Williams - Founder of Arrival GP Practice dedicated to the RAS community - Bill has wide experience engaging with individuals, voluntary organisations, and Charities in supporting the RAS community



Yeama Susan Mansaray - Former journalist from Sierra Leone who has lived in Stockton for 15 years. Susan is Founder of Purple Rose Stockton and was until recently Chair of the local Refugee and Asylum Seekers' Forum



Catriona Macdonald - 36 years leadership experience as an operations manager in the care and disabilities sector with North Tyneside Council and Positive Support For You

We currently employ the following staff;



Heather Petch started as Executive Director in January 2023 and has over 30 years leadership experience in the public and voluntary sectors including roles in housing, homelessness, community and advice projects as well as charitable foundations.

Heather leads a team of staff and volunteers with lived experience including:

- **Jess Wratten** - Development Manager
- **Phil Bramhall** - Welcome Project Lead
- **John Kumpalume** - Finance Lead
- **Rachael Smith** - Volunteer Project Coordinator
- **Claire Paxton** - Executive and Administrative Assistant
- **Constanza Lealemelo and Leon Fernandes** - Action Asylum sessional staff
- **Kawa Wali** - Volunteer
- **Dalia Yagoub** - Volunteer

Vision

Our vision is that Stockton and the surrounding area is welcoming and inclusive to refugees and people seeking asylum so that they belong and are able to maximise their skills and abilities and flourish within the community

Mission

To promote inclusion and participation of refugees and people seeking asylum throughout the community by ensuring opportunities are accessible and that individuals, groups and organisations work together to maximise resources, address gaps in provision and stimulate positive change.

Values

Welcoming - in our view the first step towards integration, inclusion and belonging, is through the provision of a strong and warm welcome



Integration - This is a two-way process that isn't about refugees and people seeking asylum having to change in order to have a seat at the decision-making table. We encourage the type of change that ensures inclusion, celebrates difference, and enables people to be their authentic self within the community

Belonging - When people feel they can be themselves and are valued and respected by their community, we believe a sense of belonging is nurtured which promotes a safer community

Flourishing - Within a safer community people not only survive but thrive and flourish, both as individuals and as members of their community

Challenging - We believe refugees and people seeking asylum are an asset to our community and we want to change the often-negative connotations

Strategic plan 2022 - 2025

Refugee Futures will deliver projects and work with other partners to *ensure opportunities are accessible to asylum seekers and refugees, that they are able to maximise their abilities, connect with and integrate into the local community so that their lives may flourish in Stockton-On-Tees.*

We will do this by;

- 1. Providing opportunities for asylum seekers and refugees to be welcomed & included in partnership with other organisations by;**
 - a) starting a welcome, orientation and 'buddy' project so that trusted relationships are made, people find their way around and know their rights and responsibilities
 - b) explore managing a central space so that people can come together more effectively to use a shared resource
- 2. Enabling and enhancing access to services to develop confidence, skills & abilities by;**
 - a) developing a range of volunteering opportunities so that health and wellbeing, confidence, skills and experience are all enhanced
 - b) working with partners to increase ESOL capacity so that everyone can improve their ability to communicate in English
 - c) delivering training programmes and referring people to other support so that services can be accessed to equip people with life and employment skills
- 3. Working with others to promote narratives that positively encourage a sense of belonging by;**
 - a) commissioning research into the experience of refugees in Stockton so that greater understanding is gained as to what helps or hinders integration so that improvements can be delivered in services and support
 - b) facilitating mutually beneficial interactions between the local community and asylum seekers and refugees so that understanding and learning is increased that will positively impact public policy and debate
 - c) Empowering people with lived experience to inform and engage with those taking actions for change so that negative messages and false information about asylum seekers are challenged and gaps in policy, process and procedures are identified
- 4. Becoming a trusted and sustainable organisation working to high standards by;**
 - a) recruiting a diverse team of staff and volunteers, including many with lived experience of claiming asylum so that we have the capacity, experience, and skills to deliver our strategy
 - b) strengthening our leadership and governance drawing on the experience of and input from asylum seekers and refugees so that Refugee Futures is a diverse and well led organisation delivering quality services meeting needs identified by beneficiaries in a way that is empowering
 - c) securing funds from a range of sources so that the organisation is well resourced and not overly dependent on any particular fund



Gardening at Cultivate Tees Valley

Delivery Plan

Set out below is the way we propose to deliver our strategy. However, this is shaped by the external context in which we work and so whilst we have made a clear plan that will direct our activities and resources it is sufficiently flexible to respond to new and emerging challenges as appropriate.

Developing a range of volunteering opportunities

We currently deliver a project called Action Asylum that provides much needed group volunteer activities that connect people with their local community through one-off volunteer events alongside local people. However participants have asked us to develop a more tailored approach to match volunteers with local providers to complete long term placements in line with their future aspirations. Wrap around support will be established, such as one-to-one mentoring. We will also offer training to placement providers to enable them to better understand cross-cultural working and how to ensure inclusion. Our skills match volunteer opportunities and work to train organisations will be targeted to placement providers where there is potential progression into paid work opportunities with the placement provider. Evidence of success will form part of induction into welcome and volunteering so that people can see a clear pathway to work in Stockton or the surrounding area from as early as possible.

Starting a welcome, orientation and ‘buddy’ project

This project will empower asylum seekers from the point of arrival in the town by providing practical knowledge of where to seek support and access integration opportunities. A core team of volunteer befrienders or buddies including volunteer interpreters will be recruited, trained and managed to conduct ‘welcome meetings’ and signpost and/or refer to appropriate services. Anyone who may benefit from a personal introduction to partners will be accompanied to their first appointment. Orientation events will be designed and delivered e.g. to provide opportunities to meet contacts from key partners at an event, or set up a walk around town to key services, shops and amenities.

Explore managing a central space

The idea of a cultural / international centre has been discussed by a number of organisations and individuals in Stockton over the last four years. There is some support for this idea to provide low cost or free office space to support the development of refugee-led organisations as well as a communal space for social and training activities and events. Further work will be carried out to scope the need for and cost benefit of Refugee Futures managing a central space or whether there is a better placed organisation to do so.



Working with partners to increase ESOL capacity

Access to volunteering and employment is reliant on English language ability therefore Refugee Futures will prioritise ensuring adequate ESOL capacity. Many organisations provide ESOL support however a more coordinated approach is needed. Refugee Futures will engage with key partners across the town to assess the needs / gap with ESOL provision and address the lack of support where this is possible.

Delivering training programmes

We believe that integration is a two-way process and that there is much work to be done in terms of organisations adapting to ensure refugees are included and able to access opportunities. We wish to explore the development of a training arm to the organisation that offers modules around: Understanding Culture, Inclusion & Belonging, Creating an inclusive working environment, Working with refugees and people seeking asylum. This programme would train trainers with lived experience and offer freelance work opportunities whilst also generating income for Refugee Futures.

Commissioning research into the experience of refugees in Stockton

We will work with a partner organisation to conduct research and provide evidence which can be used not only to inform our own project aims but to provide information to influence local and national decision makers. There is no substantial local data on refugees that settle in Stockton. Highlighting the cultural and economic contribution of refugees may encourage further investment into services that support their needs and change the way they are considered from a vulnerable approach to an asset based approach.

Facilitating mutually beneficial interactions

Many people in Stockton have never met someone who has had to flee their home country for their own safety. By creating opportunities for people to meet, understanding and awareness can be gained that will dispel pre-conceived ideas or myths. Refugee Futures will explore common interests or connecting points such as food or sport to help people who would not normally interact together to be able to meet and share common interests.

Empowering people with lived experience to engage with those taking actions for change

Refugee Futures will support people who have experienced the UK asylum process to add their voices to others trying to influence the system for the better. Many people have valuable evidence and stories to tell of the difficulties they have faced since arriving in the UK. However, speaking out can be difficult and so we will work with those who would like to do so to ensure that they are not re-traumatised or feel exploited in the process.

Action Asylum launch - Houses of Parliament



Consultation

Refugee Futures have consulted with a range of stakeholders to get their feedback on the future direction proposed for the charity. A total of 40 people provided feedback in small focus groups online or in person to a draft strategy in January 2022. Over half (26) are people who have claimed asylum themselves. Their input was very helpful and influenced the final strategy outlined on page 3.

The draft strategy (and consultation) was welcomed by everyone and in several cases, there was great enthusiasm and optimism expressed.

“The strategy that RF aims to deliver within a period of 3 years is very bold and ambitious. Being a member and involved with the asylum seeking community for a while now, I am very excited to see this project take off the ground and more importantly succeed.” Someone seeking asylum

“When I read your strategy, I thought yes yes yes. This is exactly what Stockton needs – a first point of call for people and organisations – can only be a good thing so long as there is partnership and good referral mechanisms” Professional



Beach Clean with RSPB at South Gare



Gardening at Cultivate Tees Valley