



Wales: Nation of Sanctuary

Conference Summary –
Continuing the journey

27th April 2017



DISPLACED PEOPLE *in* ACTION
Pobl Di-le yn Gweithredu

From the Chair

Rebecca Scott – Wales Cities of Sanctuary Co-ordinator

It was inspiring to see so many enthusiastic people from all over Wales sharing and learning together at the Wales: Nation of Sanctuary conference in Cardiff, discussing ideas that we can all take forward. Thank you to those who attended for making the time to be with us - the event was a success because of you!



In the next few pages you can find a summary of the discussions at the conference. It is clear that to truly become a Nation of Sanctuary, action will need to be taken by all sectors. Welsh Government response to the Equalities, Local Government and Communities Committee report '[I used to be someone](#)' will be critical, but we recognise that the Nation of Sanctuary concept is much broader than what Welsh Government can do. We all have our part to play. The conference also called for action from the third and private sectors, local government, local communities and public sector institutions such as the NHS, schools and universities.

It was clear throughout the event that a great deal of the work to make Wales a Nation of Sanctuary will need to start *locally* on specific issues and then be scaled up and shared nationally. We hope you find this summary helpful to work with in your local area as you work to extend your welcome to people seeking sanctuary.

This report is not only a resource for local groups, but also a call to action for the newly-formed Nation of Sanctuary Steering Group. A range of organisations and groups have come together from across Wales to make our vision of Wales as the world's first Nation of Sanctuary a reality. Working closely with the Welsh Refugee Coalition, this group will ensure that tangible progress is made on the issues outlined here.

To register your interest in supporting the vision of Wales as a Nation of Sanctuary, if you have not already done so, please contact me at rebecca@dpia.org.uk. The Nation of Sanctuary Steering Group will keep you up-to-date on progress so far and will be able to share local achievements across the country.

Diolch yn fawr – I look forward to meeting you further along the journey.

Introduction

The summary is organised around four thematic headings, reflecting the broad range of issues that emerged and recurred throughout the day:

- **Community** (includes local issues, neighbourhood and the Welsh nation)
- **Personal development** (includes education, skills and employment)
- **Voice** (includes media, narratives, images and speakers)
- **Access** (includes transport, mobility, housing and the NHS)

Under each of these thematic headings, we consider the three core questions that were asked at the conference, and during the workshops:

- *What are the five most important things to be done in this area to further our aim of Wales becoming a Nation of Sanctuary?*
- *What could you/your organisation do to support these actions?*
- *How will we know when we have reached our goal?*

Community

- Recognising the constraints of devolved competence in Wales, Welsh Government should lobby for further devolution of powers, particularly around community sponsorship, asylum housing, and family reunion.
- Recognition of the valuable contribution of community-led initiatives, volunteers and grassroots workers in building community cohesion and swift integration. Communities that come together and raise their voice to demonstrate the potential of involving community groups in preparation for refugee arrival and welcome activities.
- Local government and third sector to work together to create communities where people are treated as individuals, with their aspirations at the centre of how they access services and activities in the community, and where realistic expectations are met.
- Refugees and asylum seekers involved in facilitating and designing events and services.
- While Welsh Government should lobby Home Office to end the two-tier system, the third sector and local community should work to reduce the gap, by supporting integration for all sanctuary seekers equally, including by making sure collections and donations can be channelled locally within Wales.
- Initiatives that support a 'common cause', recognising that many issues that affect people seeking sanctuary also affect several other vulnerable groups.
- Use of open venues for community activities that facilitate contact between people seeking sanctuary and the wider community eg. places of worship, museums, parks.
- Community-led services recognise and fill gaps in other provision eg. at weekends.
- Opportunities for individuals to engage with training and resources on sharing the 'Refugees Welcome' message to empower more people to challenge negative stereotypes. For example, HOPE not hate's [training on having difficult conversations](#), "focuses on the techniques needed to bring people around to a different way of thinking, and how to effectively and respectfully navigate challenging conversations about immigration and multiculturalism".
- Strong online communities and resources to share orientation and event information, as well as best practice and reflections on experiences that could support other groups.

Case Study: [Community sponsorship](#)

- A group of neighbours coming together to host refugees. Community sponsorship is already in motion in Narberth, Fishguard, Cardigan, Aberystwyth, Haverfordwest and Cardiff.
- Tasks include raising money (£4,500 per adult), finding homes, meeting new arrivals off the plane and integrating them into the community.
- Community sponsors need a Safeguarding Policy Officer and anyone with regular unaccompanied access to sponsored refugees needs a valid DBS check. The team should also invest in full psycho-social support training in managing trauma and culture shock.
- It will take time to build relationships with the local authority and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Having someone in the team who is familiar with DWP processes and makes arrangements at the Job Centre ahead of arrival will smooth the process.
- Advantages include bringing neighbours together around a positive, challenging mission. A whole society approach allows everyone in the area to help newcomers adapt and contribute to new community.
- For some, Community Sponsorship is seen as taking on UK Government responsibilities, but at our expense. Large amounts of effort and money are required.
- For more information, contact Vicky Moller, Croeso Teifi on info@croesoteifi.org

What You Can Do: Organise a Sanctuary Break

- You will need one key volunteer contact point and co-ordinator – share their phone number with local City of Sanctuary group to recruit volunteers to assist.
- Meeting with helpers prior to event to divvy up tasks. Let each person recruit others to help. Allocate kitchen duties in shifts so that everyone has chance to meet new people.
- Find a large venue (capacity for around 100 people) with catering facilities, crockery and cutlery, tables and chairs, heating and space around for parking and play. Local City of Sanctuary group may find it useful to keep a supply of mugs, a large urn, a large number of tea towels and tablecloths and some drinks flasks.
- Aim to provide vegetarian and halal meals, with hot drinks, water, juice and fruit available throughout the day. Local faith groups have proven good sources of cake! Salad, bread and hard boiled eggs are popular. Provide take-away containers so guests can take food home with them.
- Arrange transport from nearest dispersal area through coordination with local frontline services and ensure children are accompanied by a responsible adult.
- Try to provide a range of activities: arts, sports, walking, cooking all work well.
- Ensure you have a first aider on site and someone is nominated to deal with any safeguarding concerns that may arise.
- Invite people from the local community to join in the fun!

For more helpful hints, visit <http://hbtsr.org.uk/resources> or contact hbts4refugees@gmail.com



Case Study: [Interfaith Glasgow Weekend Club](#)

- Need identified for space to meet and talk with people who are different to you.
- Need identified for activities at the weekend, when most other provision is closed.
- Volunteers are the drivers and owners of the project. Interfaith Glasgow have been overwhelmed with support because it offers the opportunity to interact with and support people seeking sanctuary, and a forum for interfaith dialogue.
- All are welcome to share – there is no specific target community.

Events

- Monthly events, planned by volunteers on the first Saturday of the month and delivered on the last Saturday.
- Have to be educational, either around history or culture.
- Based on the opportunity for people to say what something means to them eg. what does a chocolate Easter egg mean to a Somali?
- Interfaith Glasgow provide free food and free transport.
- The venue changes every month and will be outside of some people's comfort zone eg. museums.
- Events advertised in English, Tigrinya, Arabic and Farsi at key organisations who have daily contact with people seeking sanctuary.

Personal development

- Welsh Government to provide more funding for certified ESOL classes locally, with childcare, with a range of start dates not restricted by academic terms.
- Schools to support after-school clubs as a tool for integration with opportunities for students to prepare peer skill-sharing eg. Arabic classes.
- Wider engagement with [Schools of Sanctuary](#) to engage people at a young age and enable them to build welcoming places of learning.
- Improved provision for 16-18 years old by making further education funding more flexible. Consider creative solutions, such as designating one college in Wales to provide flexible courses and ask Home Office to send 16-18-year-old asylum seekers there.
- Welsh government should give remit and funding for asylum seeker bursaries to HEFCW, following the example of English universities.
- Greater awareness of [volunteering for asylum seekers](#) amongst voluntary organisations and opportunities for asylum seekers to volunteer to use and develop their skills.
- Creative solutions to overcome funding barriers for education courses for asylum seekers, including sponsoring.
- Lobbying of the Home Office on restrictions for asylum seekers, with the ultimate goal of achieving the right to work while waiting for asylum claims to be processed.
- Revival of previous third sector work to recognise prior learning, and facilitate swift reaccreditation where necessary.
- Open and sustained dialogue with the private sector to encourage them to engage in supporting people seeking sanctuary as part of their corporate social responsibility, including: work experience placements (with crèche facilities), skill-sharing opportunities, buddying schemes for skilled refugees. This should be with a view to recognising more 'Businesses of Sanctuary'.
- Compulsory equalities monitoring for businesses.
- Work with a range of private sector representative organisations, such as the Chamber of Trade, CBI, trade unions and Business in the Community to determine how the private sector can both support people seeking sanctuary, and embed a culture of welcome and understanding for sanctuary seekers within the workforce.
- Support for [Business Improvement Districts](#) to develop plans that include the integration of people seeking sanctuary as part of wider economic regeneration.
- Business Wales and Business in the Community to support training for people seeking sanctuary eg. induction to UK office culture and starting your own business in the UK.
- Third sector organisations supporting sanctuary seekers and routes to employment more broadly should work together to identify key areas of the private sector that offer employment opportunities for refugees eg. retail or specific businesses locally



Photos: www.leeshawilliamsphoto.com

Voice

- Ideas and projects to meet the needs of people seeking sanctuary should be based on the road map of the asylum journey, rather than the framework of existing providers. This could be achieved by encouraging and responding to self-advocacy by asylum seekers and refugees (see below).
- Welsh Government should implement a national awareness-raising campaign, ensuring it is appropriately funded and people seeking sanctuary are involved in designing and delivering the campaign. This should be evaluated by baseline polls and follow-up polls on public perception and understanding of issues concerning sanctuary seekers.
- Local and Welsh Governments should regularly debate asylum and refugee issues, and publish regular progress reports.
- More 'experts by experience' involved in a range of third sector organisations should be trained and supported to deliver awareness raising in public settings.
- Private sector should undertake regular awareness training as part of Equality and Diversity training for all staff, particularly those in 'gatekeeper' roles eg. receptionists.
- Schools to highlight role of global learning in the new curriculum, embedding citizenship, providing effective teacher training, and supporting activities for students to be ambassadors for sanctuary seeking peers.
- Local media should be encouraged to challenge negative perceptions by supply of positive local stories.
- Online platforms for refugee stories and experiences to be shared from a range of backgrounds, including from those who now work in the private sector.
- Wales as a Nation of Sanctuary should be celebrated, with promotion of the concept in the context of best practice, shared by politicians and the media.
- Local communities should use national social media platforms to advertise activities that work well in their area to share and inspire more widely.

What You Can Do: Join an Advocacy Forum

- Providing sanctuary seekers with the opportunity to take control of decisions about themselves and telling others what they want, speaking up for their rights
- Support building confidence and facilitation skills. Co-ordinators chosen by the group to manage the forum and take actions forward.
- Members decide agenda and decide who to invite eg. Home Office, Clearsprings
- Opportunity to explore rights and entitlements eg. Human and children's rights, law, policies and procedures. Members of the forum need information before being able to effect change.

A new Asylum Seeker and Refugee Advocacy Forum is starting in Swansea! If you are an asylum seeker or refugee and wish to be involved, contact eleri@dpia.org.uk for more information.

Case Study: [Sanctuary in Politics](#)

- Curriculum for sanctuary seekers to help them understand and engage with the Irish democratic process.
- Six interactive sessions, including input from Irish broadcaster and voice coach on how to be understood, journalists, politicians, and organisers of successful campaigns.
- Participant assignments include videos, essays, letters and press releases.
- Local people act as companions to course participants as extra support.
- Former participants are now registered to vote and prepared to speak in public settings.

Access

- Local government to commit to continue taking in refugees and asylum seekers.
- Welsh Government to support concessionary transport schemes and local community transport.
- Partnerships between private and third sector to implement matched funding scheme for transport for destitute asylum seekers, using a model pioneered in Bristol.
- Work with local health boards to ensure accessibility and cultural sensitivity in Health and Social Care services.
- Strong Welsh Government message celebrating equal access to NHS care for everyone, without fear of deportation as can be the case in England.
- Campaign for effective mental health pathways for all vulnerable groups, but recognising the specific mental health needs of people seeking sanctuary eg. trauma support.
- All services providers to ensure services are placed where they are needed and, more importantly, can be accessed either through public transport or shared car schemes.
- Local government to introduce public Wi-Fi to enable asylum seekers to access information and resources online.



Photos: www.leeshawilliamsphoto.com

- City of Sanctuary groups to consider a range of organisations to approach for pledges of support, including housing associations, police, fire services, and other service providers.
- Support for respite breaks, local links and exchange that the whole community can get involved in.
- Asylum seekers and refugees know where to go, who can help and what support is available, and thus it is possible to imagine a future in Wales.

What You Can Do: Lobbying your Representatives

- Target the right people – With a specific problem start locally and work up. Talk to the agency delivering the service. Write to the responsible Minister or Department. Use your Assembly Member to influence policy in Wales such as on health or education. Your MP can influence UK-wide asylum policy.
- Think and do your research – before you lobby. Search, for example, for Welsh Refugee Coalition papers, Welsh Refugee Council and City of Sanctuary evidence.
- Form alliances – for issues that affect many people. Use existing policy positions.
- Limit your request – to what that person is responsible for and build relationships. Be ready to influence several bodies to change their approach before you achieve a solution.
- Tell a positive story.
- Offer them the “hero” opportunity – consider how backing your issue will play out for your MP in terms of impact on voters and local press.
- Bring in the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers – MP often do not hear from people who have been through the asylum system. Hearing from them directly can have the most direct impact, attending a meeting directly or sharing first hand experiences, anecdotes, stories.