FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING:

Preventing homelessness in Greater Manchester among people recently granted refugee status

JULY 2025

boaztrust

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WITH THANKS TO

We are immensely grateful to the eight individuals who gave of their time to be interviewed for this research and who candidly shared their experiences. We are also grateful to the local authorities who worked with us during this pilot project period and to GMCA for providing the project funding.

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

We have chosen to publish the words of the individuals interviewed for this report without correction. The experience of going through the asylum process too often disempowers individuals, taking away their agency and voice. For this reason we have left language unchanged and unedited.

RHPP RESOURCES

As part of this project, we also developed resources to equip people recently granted status (and those supporting them) to find accommodation.

Our **Positive Decision Guidance** was translated into 15 languages, shared with the Regional Strategic Migration Partnership and distributed to people in Home Office accommodation when they received their asylum decision.

Our **Housing Guide** was created in consultation with people who have lived experience of the asylum system, while also incorporating our own learning from the past year delivering RHPP. It provides advice on finding somewhere to live following a positive asylum decision and includes information people we supported wish they'd known at the time.

You can find both of these resources at boaztrust.org.uk/our-resources

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ESOL: English for Speakers of Other Languages

FGD: Focus Group Discussion

GMCA: Greater Manchester Combined Authority

LAASLOs: Local Authority Asylum Support Liaison Officers

LA: Local Authority

LHA: Local Housing Allowance

LTR: Leave to Remain

RHPP: Refugee Homelessness Prevention Project


When you receive a positive decision on your asylum claim

After you receive a positive decision on your asylum claim we know you will probably have lots of things to think about. These might include your plans to study, to work or to travel to see people you care about. **After you have received your decision, you only have a short time before your asylum support ends so it is important to focus on these three things first.**

1. Proof of status and identification - your eVisa

- The UK is moving to a digital immigration system. From 31st October 2024, the Home Office started issuing **eVisas** instead of Biometric Residence Permits (BRP).
- Your eVisa is very important. You will need it to get a job or to claim benefits, and to rent somewhere to live.
- The Home Office will create your UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) account and your eVisa within 14 days of


Housing Guide

Finding a place to live after you've been granted refugee status

Who is this guide for?

This Guide has been written to help people with new refugee status and those that support them to find somewhere safe to live. It has been created by Boaz Trust, with input from people who have been through the process of trying to find somewhere to live after they were granted refugee status.

Introduction

Once you get a decision on your asylum claim, your asylum accommodation will end and you

SUMMARY

MEANINGFUL HOUSING SOLUTIONS ARE POSSIBLE THROUGH REGIONAL PLACE-BASED APPROACHES

Following the refugee homelessness crisis that emerged in the summer of 2023 (caused by a combination of the Home Office's new streamlined asylum processing and an administrative change around the ending of asylum support), the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) developed their Refugee Welcome Programme. As part of this, Boaz Trust was funded by GMCA to provide tailored outreach support, designed to help individuals across Greater Manchester with refugee status to access private rented accommodation. This year-long pilot project was the Refugee Homelessness Prevention Project (RHPP). During 2024-25, Refugee Action and the Migrant Destitution Fund were also funded as part of the Refugee Welcome Programme.

This report contains the findings of qualitative research undertaken by the Empowerment and Inclusion Coordinator at Boaz Trust, and a research assistant, with individuals who experienced homelessness after being granted refugee status, and who subsequently accessed the RHPP. It includes accounts of their experiences and challenges (related to housing and homelessness) upon being granted refugee status. It also includes the learnings and reflections of the RHPP team.

Those interviewed for this report had endured a difficult and depriving asylum process before finally being granted refugee status, and went on to experience a complex and unclear move-on period, often marked by poor communication and overwhelming complexity. As a result, participants became homeless due to vulnerabilities that were compounded by the asylum and move-on processes; specifically a lack of financial and housing access, as well as the knowledge and tools needed to begin an independent life in the UK.

After leaving their asylum accommodation (either dispersed accommodation or hotels) and becoming homeless, participants most commonly approached their local authority for support where they had varied experiences, particularly during their homelessness assessments. Most participants passed through some form of emergency or transitional housing provided by local authorities (LAs), and some individuals were still experiencing street homelessness at the initial point of contact with the RHPP team.

Participants went on to engage with the RHPP, predominantly via LA referrals. They were not aware of any alternative support services offered by other organisations, and many (wrongly) believed RHPP to be a LA-operated programme.

None of the participants interviewed expressed a preference for social housing or privately rented housing at any point when asked, challenging the assumption that individuals with refugee status are solely seeking council homes. Additionally, across RHPP, most people wanted to stay in the borough they were granted refugee status in. However, participants also indicated a willingness to relocate if housing opportunities were available. Ultimately, all participants in the research were able to move into housing with the support of the RHPP.

The trauma-informed approach of the project was widely appreciated, especially when compared to previous experiences related to housing. Recommendations were made by participants to further improve and expand the service, including the need to reach people earlier, before exiting asylum support (accommodation and financial support provided by the Home Office).

A key learning that emerged from the study was the lack of effective social integration activities for individuals while in the asylum system. Participants identified this as a major barrier to engaging and integrating in their new communities, and beginning a productive life that could enable them to contribute to the economy and wider

society. Being denied the right to work while in the asylum system, as well as the decimation of ESOL provision for people seeking asylum, meant that individuals had further and compounding challenges to overcome, which intersected with their ability to secure and afford housing options.

In the midst of a national housing crisis, there are clearly no easy answers. However, what this research shows is that regional place-based responses can help to meet very specific challenges that councils are facing. With the right kind of investment (in the broadest sense of the word) homelessness among people newly granted refugee status can be addressed and meaningful housing solutions can be found.

INTRODUCTION TO BOAZ AND BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION TO BOAZ

Since 2004, Boaz Trust has provided housing and specialist one to one support for people who have become homeless and destitute after seeking asylum. In recent years our outreach work has expanded to meet complex and emerging challenges facing people in the asylum and immigration system, including those with restricted eligibility,[1] as well as those newly granted refugee status. Alongside the practical work that we do, we also engage in local, regional and national advocacy, using the learning from our support work to campaign for positive reform of the asylum and immigration system.

BACKGROUND

During the late summer of 2023 it became clear that a refugee homelessness crisis was emerging. This was caused by a combination of the Home Office's new streamlined asylum processing (which saw a high volume of positive asylum decisions made very quickly) and an administrative change around the ending of asylum support.

The change meant that people were being given as little as seven days' notice that their asylum support and accommodation would cease. This was instead of the standard move-on period of 28 days (subsequently extended to 56 days as a pilot, initially until June 2025). While this administrative change is no longer in operation, we continue to see high numbers of people presenting as homeless after being granted refugee status as the Home Office attempts to clear the asylum backlog.

At what should have been a moment of relief and joy upon being granted refugee status, these evictions into homelessness caused unnecessary distress and severe hardship to many. There were also far-reaching implications for frontline statutory and voluntary services. Huge additional pressure was placed on local authorities and voluntary sector accommodation providers saw – and continue to see – higher than average referral rates for their services.

At Boaz in 2025 to date (Jan-June 2025), we have seen a 344% increase in the number of referrals for housing for people with refugee status, compared to the same period in 2023.

1 The term restricted eligibility includes people who have conditions attached to their immigration status that restrict their entitlements to claim benefits and access housing assistance. This can include those referred to as having No Recourse to Public Funds.

THE REFUGEE HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION PROJECT (RHPP)

As a result of these challenges, and in response, Boaz Trust was commissioned by Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) to deliver a new form of outreach support (as a pilot project from June 2024 – May 2025) across four boroughs in Greater Manchester (Bolton, Bury, Manchester and Oldham) for people with newly granted refugee status. This was named the Refugee Homelessness Prevention Project (RHPP).

RHPP worked with single adults who were facing or experiencing homelessness after recently being granted refugee status or humanitarian protection. It is worth noting that the project primarily worked with individuals leaving dispersal accommodation (asylum support provided through shared houses), although a small number of individuals had been accommodated in hotels.

Following a homelessness assessment,[2] the people supported through the project had been identified as having no priority need for housing under housing legislation. This meant that the local authority had no legal duty to provide them with temporary or long-term housing.

RHPP offered focused support for individuals to find, secure and move into accommodation, primarily through the private rented sector (mostly into shared housing). Through one-to-one appointments and ongoing follow up work the project supported people to understand the UK housing system, and identify and access appropriate housing opportunities. RHPP support workers helped with property searches, landlord liaison and tenancy readiness support.

Alongside the direct support work, a critical component of the RHPP was to build positive relationships with partners (including local authorities and voluntary sector organisations) to enable individuals to access other forms of crucial support including deposit schemes, furniture offers and more. As people moved into their new accommodation, the project offered ongoing support where this was required, to ensure that individuals had the best possible chance of sustaining successful tenancies.

From the outset, the success of this project was not guaranteed. Having not worked in this way before with local authorities and landlords, it was difficult to assess whether the project would be able to build relationships with landlords and, as such, secure private rented accommodation for individuals in need of it.

In Oldham and Bury, the RHPP support workers were invited to attend weekly British Red Cross drop-ins and referrals were accepted from council housing officers, migration officers, Local Authority Asylum Support Liaison Officers (LAASLOs) and staff from the British Red Cross. In Bolton, the project's support workers were invited to work with individuals with refugee status who were accommodated in an emergency hostel that had been set up in response to the growing numbers of people sleeping outside after being granted leave to remain. After supporting everybody staying in the hostel to access accommodation, the team were then given space to meet with people at Bolton Town Hall.

During the second quarter of the project, the team began supporting individuals in Manchester and were based at the Mustard Tree to contribute to the existing offer for people recently granted refugee status.

2 A homelessness assessment is a statutory requirement for local authorities in England. It is undertaken to determine if a person is homeless, or at risk of homelessness, and whether they are eligible for housing assistance.

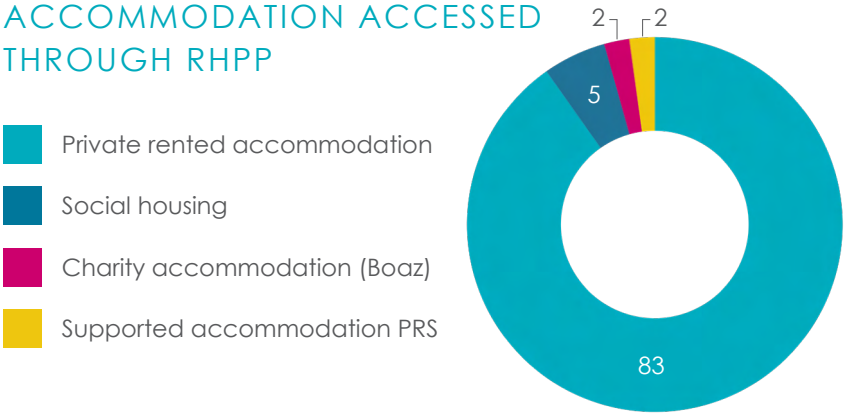
IMPACT AT A GLANCE

Through the project we saw significant numbers of people accessing accommodation. Between June 2024 and May 2025 we worked with a total of **242** people and supported **92** people to access accommodation. Of those who moved into accommodation, we have seen **100% tenancy sustainment.**

Other support outcomes have included:

- 130 people supported to access welfare/housing benefits
- 46 people supported with their health
- 100 people supported to manage bills / their finances
- 27 people supported to access ESOL / employment support
- 95 people supported to access basic essentials
- 582 face to face support meetings
- Over 1500 other recorded contacts with individuals

ACCOMMODATION ACCESSED THROUGH RHPP



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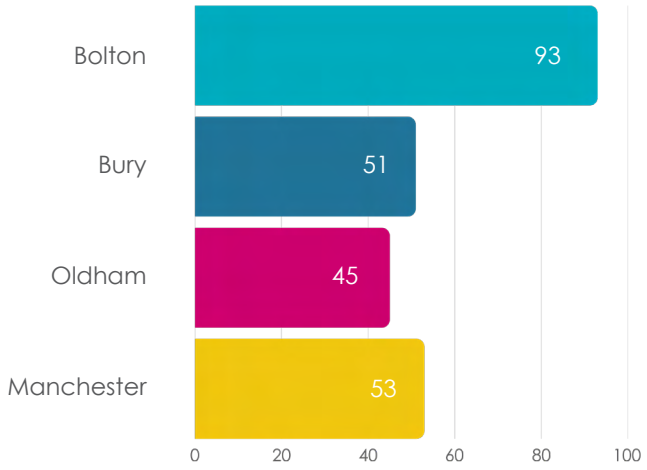
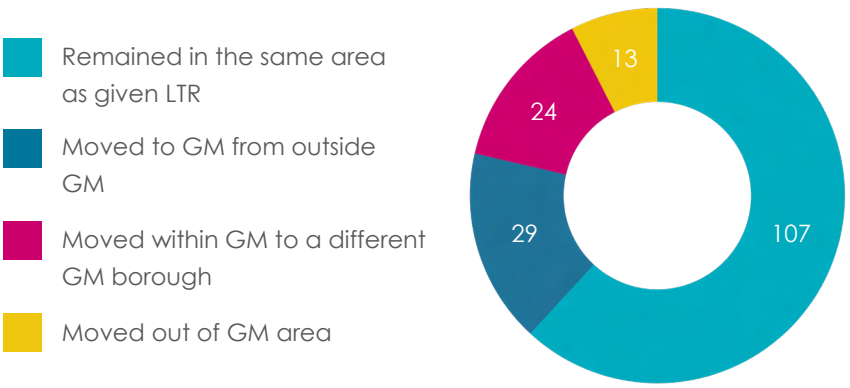


AREAS PEOPLE WANT TO LIVE



FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

What follows are the findings and learnings from the individuals who took part in the research, organised thematically. It also includes the barriers to accessing private rented accommodation identified by individuals and the RHPP support workers and, conversely, what was found to help enable individuals to access private rented accommodation.

The move-on period is too short and too complex

The move-on period of 28 days (at the time of writing temporarily extended from 28 to 56 days) is not nearly long enough for individuals to set up necessary administrative functions (such as opening a bank account and a Universal Credit account), understand and navigate the UK housing system and, subsequently, find and secure housing.

Interviewees described a rushed and unclear move-on period, characterised by poor communication and overwhelming complexity.

As none of the individuals interviewed had the right to work while their asylum claims were being processed, they were entirely dependent on financial support from the Home Office (£49.18 per week in dispersal accommodation, £8.86 for those in hotels where meals are provided). Consequently, individuals lacked the financial means to pay for housing deposits and rent advances, and spoke of being unable to provide references or guarantors for prospective landlords. In addition, most had limited or no knowledge of how to navigate the private rental market.

As a result of the complexities of the move-on period and the lack of support available to people during this transition period, many of the participants became homeless.

> *"After I have been granted the status I have been served with an eviction notice. I went to the council, they did not help as I do not have a priority. I did not know what to do. I just moved [in] with a friend in Oldham. At some point I had to leave the friend's house and stay at Oldham in the street."* **(Abi)**

> *"I was living in the Serco accommodation, I had had my eviction notice served to me, and I had left the property. I did not have any idea on how to get a house, I expected that I would call the council and they would give me a house. I didn't know that the council does not do that. The council only said find a private house and the job centre will pay, but I did not know how to do this. I do not even speak the language."* **(Abel)**

It is clear from the research that the move-on period would benefit from greater clarity and more consistent communication. The observations above reflect the experiences of the majority of individuals interviewed. The move-on process is too short, too unclear and - as such - too complex for individuals to navigate alone.

People's experiences of homelessness assessements varied greatly

All participants except one had undergone a homelessness assessment and were subsequently classified as no-priority need for housing due to them being single individuals without any significant health diagnoses, or additional vulnerabilities.

The duration and depth of homelessness assessments varied significantly. Some participants received a face-to-face assessment, while others underwent a remote assessment by phone. We know from our broader support work with individuals with refugee status that people can often experience lengthy wait times (upwards of 2 hours) when telephoning for a homelessness assessment and that, as experienced by at least one person interviewed, it is not uncommon for individuals to be disconnected whilst waiting for their call to be answered.

The homelessness assessment involved questions about people's current situation and their housing history, and where they would like to live, as well as about their health, support needs and any other vulnerabilities an individual

METHODOLOGY

Those interviewed for the research were single individuals who had recently been granted refugee status. The majority of participants interviewed reported experiencing homelessness (either sleeping outside, or in precarious situations like sofa surfing) after receiving their positive asylum decision letter and leaving their Home Office accommodation.

The study employed a qualitative mixed-methods approach, utilising StoryWalls[3] as a primary tool to capture participants' reflections on their engagement with the project. Each session began with participants contributing to a StoryWall, encouraging personal reflection and visual storytelling. This was followed by a facilitated focus group discussion (FGD), enabling participants to collectively reflect on their journeys, compare experiences, and identify key insights and learnings.

A total of eight participants took part in three focus group discussions, each conducted on separate dates and at different locations. Each FGD session was built around its own unique StoryWall, allowing for contextualised and focused dialogue.

The FGDs followed a non-linear, participant-led structure. While facilitators prompted discussion when necessary, the conversation was primarily shaped by the participants' own contributions, allowing for organic dialogue and deeper reflection.

Thematic analysis and open coding were applied to the transcripts to identify patterns and extract key learnings. These preliminary findings were then shared with the project team for triangulation and further reflection.

We acknowledge that the research described in this report was developed using a relatively limited and homogeneous sample. While the findings reflect some of the key issues that may be experienced more broadly across the refugee population, this in no way means that all perspectives or experiences have been fully captured. To mitigate this limitation and to strengthen the credibility of the report, we employed triangulation and reflective practices, drawing on insights and feedback from the RHPP, and wider support, team. These additional inputs have been essential in enhancing the overall quality, depth and reliability of the analysis presented.

3 The StoryWall is a qualitative research method where a group collectively visualises and understands a shared past process or experience. It achieves this through individual storytelling, mapping these narratives onto a common display and fostering shared reflection among participants. (Wülser G 2020).

may have. Interviewees' experiences of the assessment varied; some described brief interviews while others spoke of lengthy, interrogative two-hour sessions. Some participants suggested that the process they went through was less trauma-informed than it ought to have been and one person even compared it to their substantive asylum interview with the Home Office, expressing a strong negative emotional response.

> *"I had this experience, by the council. They were very positive and told me they will give me a house, very good attitude, but, once they take your data they say we do not have a house for you. Why do they take my data? What should I do now? They do not let you go to any other local area, as I do not have priority. It made me frustrated. They don't have a house for me."*
> **(Ahmed)**

> *"My homelessness assessment took place over the phone and lasted about an hour and a half. They asked many questions about my home country, my journey to the UK, whether I had any dependents, my background, and where I wished to live. Then they explained the council's challenges, including financial pressures and a shortage of available housing. This left me feeling confused, though I remained hopeful that I had answered everything correctly. At the very end of the call, they told me they had no resources and advised me to approach another council. Honestly, the Home Office interview felt easier than this phone call."*
> **(Pezhad)**

Furthermore, better communication with individuals following a homelessness assessment would be welcomed. Ensuring that even those assessed as non-priority need for housing are informed about their options and possible next steps is essential in helping individuals to secure accommodation and avoid homelessness.

Given that the individuals who took part in this research had all been identified as having no priority need for housing, it became clear that referrals from local authorities to the RHPP played a critical role for those individuals in terms of next steps. Coordinated working with local authorities can and does have a positive impact, and this ought to be built upon.

Overstretched council resources result in overstretched services

Following homelessness assessments where participants were informed they had no priority for housing, there was little time for follow up, support or guidance. The repeated message that local authorities could not help added to participants' feelings of being alone. Many felt that their personal data had been collected without leading to any meaningful outcomes.

When interviewees spoke about their interactions with council staff, a recurring theme was the lack of clarity as to what they should do after being identified as non-priority need for housing. Participants - wrongly or rightly - expected council staff to advise them of how they could find somewhere to live. There was also frustration expressed that some people experienced a more compassionate response, or that they knew of others who they believed to be in the same situation as them who had been housed.

> *"With the council you feel it depends on your luck and your case worker, some people got houses, some people ended up being homeless and others never experienced homelessness; their case workers helped them. It didn't feel fair or equal or even understandable to what could make the same group of people have very different experiences."* **(Abel)**

In contrast to the challenging experiences, three participants reported being promptly redirected to the RHPP by their local authority, where they received effective and timely support that enabled them to exit homelessness.

After triangulating these findings with the RHPP team, it was understood that the negative encounters individuals reported with local authorities is often a reflection of the demand placed upon them. It isn't that councils do not want to help, but rather that the need for housing (and their services) far outstrips the current supply. What was clear from the research is that individuals would benefit from receiving communication in a more informative, timely and supportive manner – even when other (practical) help cannot be given. Doing so would arguably enable individuals to better understand the situation for local authorities, as well as overall housing systems and market challenges.

> *"In the council they do not provide translation and they say " sorry, sorry" and hang the phone line inside the council calling booths whenever I call after the assessment. They kept asking me to just wait, with no additional information, which made me feel frustrated. I didn't know what to do."* **(Rakan)**

Adopting a more consistent and informed approach could improve how people with no priority need for housing receive and process information given to them by local authorities. This would arguably help individuals to perhaps have greater faith in the system, as well as enabling them to make more informed decisions, and explore other viable options to secure stable housing, without necessarily reaching the point of homelessness.

Dedicated support workers can and do make a positive difference

Having a named support worker played a critical role in improving the experience of individuals interacting with local authorities, particularly for those with lived experience of the immigration and asylum system (or with other vulnerabilities). Notably, one participant highlighted that their homelessness assessment was significantly easier because the local authority they approached had a dedicated migration support officer. The officer provided guidance and sat with them throughout the process, helping to navigate the complex administrative and legal requirements.

With the right training, migration officers in local authorities can bridge gaps in understanding and reduce confusion - ultimately making service

delivery more efficient and accessible. However, this support does not need to be provided exclusively by local authorities. The RHPP demonstrates the value of voluntary sector organisations working alongside local authorities to deliver effective, person-centred support.

For example, many participants spoke about meeting the support workers from the project and described that moment as one where a sense of hope emerged. Individuals also commented on the practical scope of support from accessing benefits and searching for houses to dealing with landlords and managing financial responsibilities.

Whatever form this dedicated support role would take, staff should ideally be trained in trauma-informed support and equipped to guide people through the process of securing a tenancy (much like the RHPP). This includes, but is not limited to, signposting and assisting with access to eVisas and share codes once they have been issued by the Home Office, supporting applications for claims of Universal Credit, giving information about housing in the UK, helping with home searches and tenancy applications, and liaising with landlords.

Any dedicated support worker role should also assist in meeting landlord requirements, such as providing reference letters, offering support around deposits and negotiating affordable rents (working with local authorities to do so), where possible. By providing this kind of holistic support, single individuals with refugee status would be far more likely to secure and maintain private tenancies, reducing their risk of homelessness and increasing their chances of independence and long-term stability.

> *"I was in Bury when I have been given my decision, the council migration officer supported me as soon as I got my eviction notice and did a homelessness assessment for me, the officer then quickly helped me to speak to Elaine and Tsegaye and I got a house before my eviction notice ended."* **(Fana)**

Emergency housing options vary depending on the local council

Participants who were facing a night on the streets reported varied outcomes from their interactions with local authorities. Some were accommodated in short-term shared sleeping halls or other emergency or temporary accommodation for up to three months. In some cases, however, local authorities were unable to provide accommodation and individuals were forced to sleep on the streets, or on the floors of shared bedrooms of friends.

> *"Then the council team member came to us daily for five days to check on us every morning to make sure that I am still there. On the fifth day she said 'we will get you a shared room', and that's how I got to a shared room."* **(Rakan)**

Of those interviewed who experienced rough sleeping and street homelessness after receiving their refugee status, this ranged from five to 15 days. However, many other people we worked with through the programme spent much longer periods of time homeless. Participants described this period as 'tough', 'isolating' and 'destabilising.' Several individuals noted that their contact with local authority support services occurred when outreach workers conducted daily checks to verify those sleeping rough. Those who were street homeless described this as going through repeated assessments, where they were asked to provide the same information daily, yet received no clear outcomes or guidance. This process intensified individuals' sense of frustration and confusion.

Homelessness is a traumatic experience with long term effects

People's attitudes towards their experience of homelessness were predominantly marked by fear, frustration and disappointment. Nobody interviewed had expected to become street homeless after being granted refugee status and spoke of the stress and harm it caused. Individuals described physical, as well as mental, health impacts of homelessness. Some of those interviewed still experience anxiety and other mental health challenges and conditions, the onset of which – for some - coincided with the period of homelessness.

> *"I was sleeping on my friend's floor, there was no solution for my issue, I ended up in the street."* **(Abi)**

> *"It was a very difficult experience being homeless. It was cold, very dark and very wet. This was not my expectation for the UK. It was not in my imagination that I would sleep on a street. However, I don't feel disappointed, it's just circumstances that can happen."* **(Rakan)**

> *"When I was living outdoors, there was an occasion where*

> *I was sleeping outside and I had a piece of plastic to cover me whilst I slept. Ice began to accumulate on top of me, inside and outside of the plastic that I was wrapped up in overnight. It was tough and I can never forget that time, I still remember it."* **(Abel)**

> *"Before I was able to get support I was homeless in the cold weather and I had a health issue on top of that, so I was really happy when I got accommodation to live in a house."* **(Abel)**

People would like housing, not neccessarily council housing, and misinformation is common

Regarding housing preferences, participants shared a common goal: to secure any form of accommodation that would allow them to move off the streets and feel safe. Furthermore, most participants did not understand the difference between council housing and private rented accommodation, challenging the misconception that people with refugee status only want or expect council housing.

> *"First of all, my goal was to find a home. After that, I planned to look for work and start building a life. Now, I'm finally able to relax, I can do what I want, and I feel settled. I'm happy with my current home and have no desire to change it."* **(Filmon)**

> *"My expectation was that I could get accommodation. At this moment the main issue was lack of accommodation and being homeless, so, I did not care [about the kind of accommodation received]. I just wanted shelter."* **(Rakan)**

There was also reported misinformation regarding access to housing. One participant described being told by another person who had faced homelessness that if they slept outside the local bus station, the local authority would be obliged to provide accommodation. This is a common form of misinformation that has frequently been reported to Boaz support workers and demonstrates the information voids that can be experienced by individuals facing homelessness, especially when official information is lacking.

> *"My friends told me if I had a good organisation - that does not work with the council - and if I stayed on the street they could have supported me better and given me a council house."* **(Ahmed)**

RHPP is a personalised comprehensive support package

The support provided by the RHPP was wide ranging and was generally well received. Participants reported being supported with additional tasks such as setting up bank accounts, communicating with the local authority and understanding documents written in English - indicative that the support offered by Boaz Trust was not limited to housing in and of itself. The RHPP support workers offered personalised support, catering for individual needs. Overall, the participants expressed appreciation and described the project as comprehensive with many staying in contact with Boaz Trust after finding housing.

> *"They have helped with so many things such as setting up my bank account. The support is not limited just to housing. They don't just help me, but others, too. I was feeling stressed about housing, so I reached out to them [and they] supported me a lot. They told me that I am always welcome to reach out as well as the other ladies in my house."* **(Fana)**

The project was viewed by those interviewed as more accessible and approachable, with more informative communication and less stressful engagement, than with local authorities. When asked to reflect on this, the RHPP support workers attributed it to their relatively manageable caseload and case flow they had in comparison to local authorities, which are under immense pressure to provide services.

> *"They had a kind and compassionate approach. They were genuinely nice people, very understanding and accommodating. When they were helping me, they offered several options for accommodation. I chose one close to a neighbourhood I was familiar with, and that's where I'm currently living."* **(Rakan)**

The project team used a trauma-informed approach when providing services. This was reflected in participants' descriptions of how they were respected, valued, listened to, allowed to share, validated and reassured, as well as given the time and space to utilise the service based on their needs. This created a positive attitude towards the project and made participants more likely to reach out again if they were at risk of homelessness again in the future.

> *"Boaz gave me clear information on how to find housing. In contrast, the council didn't offer me a home or even pro-*

> *vide basic information. It felt like they didn't care. I don't know of any other places I could turn to for help, but Boaz was there when I needed them."* **(Filmon)**

None of the participants had received similar support previously, or encountered the same kind of tenancy support. The team attributed this to a lack of comparable services being available.

> *"If I ever found myself homeless again, I would want to stay in contact with Boaz Trust and would always go back to them. The experience of being homeless is incredibly tough, but Boaz was very helpful. I now have a private tenancy and I'm happy with it."* **(Filmon)**

Empowerment and social integration are key for safety and independence

At the time of writing, all of the participants were in long-term accommodation, secured through the RHPP, and had tenancy agreements, most in privately rented shared houses. They noted that their preliminary housing goals had been met after working with the project team.

However, in addition to housing challenges, another issue raised consistently by participants was empowerment and integration into society. Most of those interviewed for this research had received their status in the last quarter of 2024. Once they had settled and begun to establish their lives, they faced a new challenge in accessing ESOL classes (due to the timing of when they received their decision, it meant they could not formally start learning English until the following academic year). Furthermore, the decimation of ESOL provision more broadly impeded their opportunities to access ESOL in an informal setting.

> *"I also want to learn the English language and I want to get full language so I can speak. I am a professional by the way, I am a marketer and I am skilled at driving heavy vehicles. I love to run my own projects. All [of that] is hindered by the English language, I do not want to be a burden. I want to go and work and contribute."* **(Rakan)**

Consequently, participants who want to work but struggle to access opportunities due to language barriers or other challenges are arguably more likely to remain dependent on Universal Credit for longer. Some may need to requalify or retrain to meet market standards.

> *"I am a teacher back home. I used to teach in school. I wish I can learn English quickly so I can go back to work as a teacher. It will bring me back the joy of working and feeling independent."* **(Pezhad)**

Investing in ESOL provision, as well as allowing people the right to work while they are awaiting a decision on their asylum claim, would enable better integration into society for individuals granted refugee status.

Social activities are also a challenge for many participants who want to volunteer, find work, meet others, use and develop their skills and become independent contributors within their community. While it was not a question that the facilitators asked during the focus group discussions, almost all participants raised the issue about volunteering and social clubs as a way of gaining experience and being able to integrate into society.

LOOKING AHEAD

As mentioned, RHPP supported single adults. However, some of the individuals who accessed the project have partners and children who remained in their countries of origin. Once granted refugee status, they understandably chose to apply for Family Reunion.

Three of the participants who took part in the research accessed the RHPP as single adults and then applied for Family Reunion. Two of the three participants at the time of the research had been reunited with family members and a third was engaged in the process. These individuals expressed a clear need to secure more suitable accommodation in the near future to better accommodate their families.

Local authorities ask that, before applying for Family Reunion, individuals have a plan to secure appropriate housing for their families, rather than relying on local authority temporary accommodation when they arrive. However, it is worth noting that the timescales around the process of Family Reunion often vary greatly. Individuals can wait months or even years for a visa to be granted and it is therefore understandable why, after years of separation, people would want to start the process as soon as possible. If a visa is issued quickly (reuniting family members must arrive within a month of a visa being issued; otherwise the visa expires), suitable housing is unlikely to yet be in place.

Single participants were generally more comfortable with their current living situations, though many still expressed a desire to move out of shared houses in the future. A common theme across all participants when discussing their future was the aspiration to one day have their own home. Additionally, participants consistently voiced their ambitions to improve their English language skills and to secure employment, reflecting strong personal goals for integration and self-sufficiency.

STORYWALL VISUALISATION AND EXPLANATION

In this research, the StoryWall was used to help participants map their responses before the focus group discussions. Participants were invited to express their thoughts and feelings in their own language by responding to three separate prompts on three different walls. Each wall represented a specific stage of their journey with the project: before receiving support from the RHPP, during the support period and after the support had ended.

The data collected from the StoryWalls informed the research analysis. Direct quotes were captured and the responses used to create word clouds for each stage. These word clouds were analysed alongside the key findings, offering insight into participants' attitudes and experiences throughout their engagement with the project.

STORYWALL 1 | BEFORE ENGAGING WITH THE RHPP

Participants' input from this stage reflected a challenging period marked by low morale. This was closely associated with experiences of homelessness and the stress it had brought, including the complexity of searching for housing, engaging with local authorities and trying to find a sense of direction amidst uncertainty. However, this stage also represented a turning point. Many participants spoke about meeting the support workers from the project, Tsegaye and Elaine, and described that moment as one where a sense of hope emerged.

Looking at the words displayed on the cloud, glimpses of individuals' lived experiences (words such as 'tired', 'unwell', 'exhausted') conveyed the emotional and physical toll of homelessness. At the same time, recurring mentions of 'information', 'contact' and above all a 'house' arguably reflect that people were yearning for their basic needs to be met, along with clarity, connection and stability. These insights illustrate both the hardship and the human desire for dignity, support and a safe place to call home.

STORYWALL 2 | THE PROJECT SUPPORT PERIOD

At this stage, individuals were transitioning from temporary or precarious accommodation into more stable, long-term tenancies, dealing with new responsibilities such as paying rent and maintaining housing. Words like 'good', 'positive', 'supported' and 'help' reflect how participants perceived the project's role in their journey, highlighting not only the emotional impact, but also the practical scope of support from accessing benefits and searching for houses to dealing with landlords and managing financial responsibilities.

A key theme that emerged here was the growing desire for social integration. Participants expressed a clear interest in beginning their new lives in the UK. Aspirations were reflected in phrases like 'I want a job' or 'I want to learn [the] language,' or 'I want to meet my kids' and 'become a citizen', showing a forward-looking attitude, despite the challenges and systemic barriers they continued to face.

Importantly, participants generally reported feeling more positive and hopeful compared to earlier stages, which may be attributed to having secure and safe housing, access to better information, consistent support from the project support workers and the trauma-informed approach adopted by the project. This approach recognised individuals' needs and preferences, promoting a sense of autonomy and dignity.

One particularly striking phrase, the 'Welcoming Kingdom', illustrates participants' gratitude and positive outlook towards the UK, seeing it as a place of safety and new beginnings. This emotional shift signals the importance of support systems that not only address housing needs but also foster belonging and long-term integration.

STORYWALL 3 | POST-SUPPORT PHASE

The final word cloud reflects the post-support phase, capturing participants' reflections after engaging with the RHPP. While positive feelings remain strong, evident in the frequent emergence of words such as 'good', 'happy' and 'covered', ongoing challenges are still clearly present. Terms such as 'finding a new house' and 'Universal Credit' highlight persistent barriers, particularly as people adapt to changing personal circumstances or navigate the complexities of the benefits system.

At the same time, participants expressed a strong desire for growth and integration. Words like 'education', 'community' and 'adapt' illustrate individuals' aspirations to gain new skills, become active members of society and put down roots in their new environment. This shows a proactive shift in mindset from immediate survival to long-term empowerment.

Despite challenges such as paying rent or utilising deposit schemes if they wish to relocate, participants generally conveyed a sense of progress and agency. They were actively exploring opportunities that aligned with their evolving lives and ambitions, demonstrating the transformative power of stable housing.

What does homelessness prevention really mean? Arguably it means enabling people to thrive. With the right guidance and support, people are not only able to rebuild their personal lives, but also contribute positively to their communities.

The reflections shared in the StoryWalls highlight not only the emotional toll of the asylum process and homelessness experiences, but also the ways in which meaningful support can help individuals to regain a sense of agency and control. Through the RHPP, many participants described reclaiming parts of their identity, confidence and power that had been diminished or lost during the uncertainty of their previous experiences. This shift from vulnerability to empowerment is central to understanding the true value of effective, person-centred support.

BARRIERS AND SOLUTIONS

In addition to the challenges and difficulties that individuals encountered, as detailed and discussed in the research findings, the RHPP support workers also identified a further set of barriers to accessing private rented accommodation. These are listed below, along with a set of implementable actions that could enable some of those same barriers to be overcome.

BARRIERS TO ACCESSING PRIVATE RENTED ACCOMMODATION

- **'No DSS.'**[4] Some landlords and letting agents continue to prejudice individuals who claim benefits even though this discriminatory practice has been illegal since the Equality Act 2010.
- **Practice of insisting on guarantors, specific income levels, references and credit history reports** in order to be able to rent a property (by letting agencies, in particular).
- **Local Housing Allowance** not covering private rental levels, meaning housing costs, above LHA rates, lead to arrears.
- **Prejudice and racism** against individuals with refugee status, which has most certainly been exacerbated by the increase in anti-migrant public, political and media discourse.
- **Lack of parity** for those under 35 years of age leaving Home Office accommodation who obtain the lower rate of Local Housing Allowance – unlike those leaving other institutions e.g. prison leavers, care leavers and individuals leaving homeless hostels, who receive the higher rate of Local Housing Allowance.
- **eVisa roll out** and poor communication about these changes, outside of the migration sector. In particular, banks have been unwilling to accept eVisas as proof of ID until the official change over date in January 2025 (and more generally problems opening bank accounts). This has meant some individuals have not been able to secure or access private rented accommodation. Likewise, some landlords have knowledge gaps around the use of eVisas as a form of official ID.

ACTIONS THAT HELP INDIVIDUALS TO ACCESS PRIVATE RENTED ACCOMMODATION

- **Early engagement** with individuals receiving refugee status and making sure that the 'basics' are in place: working eVisa, bank account, access to Universal Credit claim, an accurate understanding of the local housing market, access to Local Housing Allowance, support searching for rooms. Also, having the time and capacity to repeat information multiple times, when needed.
- **Instant access to emergency accommodation for a minimum 12-week period,** when needed (locally this could be through A Bed Every Night provision) to stop individuals from becoming street homeless. Allowing individuals to stay for a minimum of 12 weeks, for those under 35 years of age, enables access to the higher rate of Housing Allowance when claiming Universal Credit housing costs.

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4 Department of Social Security (now largely replaced by the Department for Work and Pensions).

- **Local authority private rental teams** who have a working relationship with local landlords and can enable access to private rented HMO properties (houses of multiple occupancy). Using these relationships to negotiate affordable rents. We have found that no more than 25% shortfall from the standard/personal allowance of Universal Credit, ideally 20% maximum, works best.

- **Listening to people.** Understanding where individuals want to live and why, and acknowledging their circumstances. Individuals know that there are restrictions, but would like some choice and agency. Giving support to access housing out of area if requested: either financially, or on-going support. Providing information using a person's first language, or via telephone or in person interpretation.

- **Providing advance payments as grants rather than loans.** This usually consists of one month's rent in advance and a one-month deposit/or incentive payment.

- **Provide support after tenancy sign up.** In general, continuing support for three months works well to ensure people have their benefits in place, understand their finances and can manage their tenancy agreement. A willingness to extend support on a case by case basis for some individuals can be very beneficial. Similarly, working with landlords and individuals for a period of six months can help to build more trusted relationships, which can result in landlords being more open to renting rooms or properties to individuals who they know have support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

What follows is a series of recommendations based upon the research undertaken, as well as observations made by the RHPP support workers during the project period. These recommendations are intended for both local statutory services and national government, as well as for future iterations of refugee homelessness prevention projects (locally and beyond).

01

Permanently extend the move-on period to 56 days

The move-on period, which at the time of writing was in a temporary extension from a 28 to 56-day period, ought to be permanently extended (to 56 days). It is clear from this research that reverting back to 28 days would not be nearly a long enough period for individuals to leave their Home Office accommodation, set up administrative requirements (such as opening a bank account, opening a Universal Credit account), and secure suitable housing.

02

Continue to fund, and further replicate, models such as the RHPP

It is clear that individuals interviewed for this report would have benefitted from a more accessible, user-friendly post-decision support system in place before they were at risk of homelessness. Therefore, projects such as the RHPP should continue to be funded, as well as replicated, as a service that is proven to contribute towards the prevention of homelessness for people newly granted refugee status. Information should be provided to people as early as possible, including pre-asylum decision, to ensure a consistent focus on homelessness prevention. Replications could be delivered by charities or by local authorities themselves.

Whether delivered by a local authority or a service-providing charity, a holistic and person-centred support package tailored to the needs of individuals is needed. This includes helping individuals navigate key administrative processes such as accessing the eVisa account, setting up a bank account and applying for Universal Credit. Assistance should also extend to sourcing suitable private rented housing and ongoing support (where needed) with tenancy agreements. Strong relationships with private landlords, housing associations, and letting agencies are crucial in being able to find and secure safe and stable accommodation.

03

Expand trauma-informed support models

Trauma-informed practice (which is non-retraumatising, and which prioritises safety, trust, collaboration, empowerment and cultural sensitivity) has a significant impact on people's ability to successfully find housing and live independently. Face-to-face appointments, giving adequate time and attention to people, and allowing flexibility is essential. It is recognised that there are limitations for local authorities, but it cannot be stressed enough how important a trauma-informed approach is to enable successful move on that can become sustainable.

Trauma-informed is a 'buzz term' at the moment, but it is essential that it is understood as a way of working. To be truly working in a trauma-informed way often means spending a considerable amount of time on support and interaction with each individual. This in turn often has positive impacts. People feel they have been given a better service, understand limitations/restrictions more easily and have more realistic expectations.

04

Standardise and improve homelessness assessments

A consistent, inclusive, and trauma-informed assessment process would ensure that people with refugee status, as well as anybody presenting as homeless, understand their rights and options. Clear, supportive assessments can reduce systemic barriers and improve outcomes. Furthermore, a follow-up pathway or adequate information for those with no priority need for housing still ought to exist, so that individuals can start to explore other suitable pathways out of homelessness.

05

Individuals with refugee status ought to be given the same level of financial support as others leaving institutional care

Affordability of rents is a significant issue. Nearly everybody when granted refugee status will start out on Universal Credit. Given people seeking asylum are not allowed to work, and even with the currently extended move-on period of 56 days, nobody the project worked with, at the point of leaving their asylum accommodation, had been able to secure employment. People concentrate on finding somewhere to live before taking the step of finding work. It is therefore essential that people can find affordable accommodation whilst claiming Universal Credit.

The majority of people do not have their rent covered by the Local Housing Allowance and have to pay the shortfall from their Universal Credit standard allowance (currently £400.14 per month for those aged 25 years and above and £316.98 per month for people under 25).

People with refugee status ought to be treated the same as those leaving institutional care e.g. care leavers, those leaving prison, those leaving temporary homelessness accommodation. Anyone leaving Home Office accommodation should equally be able to access the higher amount of Local Housing Allowance when renting in the private sector.

06

Deposits and advance payment policies and practices ought to be standardised across Greater Manchester local authorities

It would benefit people to know that regardless of which area they lived in when they gained their refugee status (within Greater Manchester), they would be given access to the same financial resources. It is very difficult to reconcile someone in one borough moving into a property debt-free (because advance payments are made as a grant), while someone in another borough would move into accommodation with substantial debt to repay (as advance payments are made as a loan). In current housing markets this is a significant amount, taking years to repay. Therefore, local authorities should consider standardising their financial practices across the region, giving grants rather than loans.

07

Reform aspects of the asylum system that impact on successful post-positive decision move-on

While it is clear that the broader asylum system in and of itself is in need of significant reform, there are key policy making decisions that, if implemented, would significantly improve the experiences of people newly granted refugee status. Allowing people the right to work if they have been waiting for a decision on their asylum claim for more than six months would doubtlessly facilitate a better post-decision move-on experience for many, owing to greater financial security (and already established associated administrative tasks) and savings for local authorities.

Likewise, more investment in accredited ESOL provision for individuals who do not speak English would act as a catalyst for their integration within society, opening up future employment, voluntary and educational opportunities.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, homelessness among single individuals newly granted refugee status is deeply complex and rooted in the dysfunction of the asylum process itself and the challenges of the move-on period. This one-year pilot project to reduce homelessness in Greater Manchester among people with refugee status has proven successful in providing private rented housing and practical related support to individuals who encountered and accessed the RHPP.

There is potential for greater impact by expanding a project such as this one to other boroughs within Greater Manchester and extending levels of funding so that more people can be supported to access private rented accommodation. Likewise, referral pathways could be expanded to include support for people before they experience homelessness or eviction from Home Office accommodation.

Furthermore, there are changes that could be implemented at a local authority level e.g. a standardised deposits and advance payments practice across Greater Manchester local authorities, standardised access to, and implementation of, homelessness assessments, and embedded trauma-informed practices that would have a significant positive impact on individuals.

Reform of the asylum system itself, including allowing people the right to work and increasing investment in ESOL provision, would undoubtedly improve the experiences and opportunities of individuals upon being granted refugee status.

In the midst of a national housing crisis, there are no easy answers. What this report has shown, however, is that regional place-based responses can help to meet very specific challenges that councils are facing. With the right kind of investment (in the broadest sense of the word) homelessness among people newly granted refugee status can be addressed and meaningful housing solutions can be found.

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