AGM report Jan 27th 2014

Workshop 5: Welcome to my City

**Welcome To My City**- **how can local groups make sure that new arrivals meet the right people and access the right services as soon as possible? What has worked in other places? Mapping welcome from IA centres to dispersal cities and beyond.**

Brief introductions and brief outline:

 **‘How can local groups make sure that new arrivals meet the right people and access the right services as soon as possible?’**

First: how do you get to know about new arrivals in your area?

* Is there a Welcome to project set up?
* Are there local places where new Asylum Seekers and new refugees go?
* Is there a Meet and Travel Together scheme?
* Is there a School of Sanctuary?
* Is there any other stream of in the area?
* Are faith groups involved?

There were examples of housing providers being willing to pass information to CofS groups. There were also instances where the ‘Welcome Project’ worked well but relied on the Initial Accommodation Centre to pass on consent forms.

Ken from Dublin explained that the Initial Accommodation in Ireland was different, and in general asylum seekers and the population was not encouraged to mix or integrate in the local area.

Second: how do you let Asylum Seekers know where you are?

* Is there a social point of contact – Doctors, clinic, place of worship, Drop-in, conversation club
* Can you display information at places where new arrivals go – see above plus libraries, public offices, Post Offices, Community Centres, charity shops
* Is the information accessible?

Can the information be understood – are the directions clear – is language an issue?

‘**What has worked in other places?’**

In some areas, the vast majority of the asylum population used a particular Doctors’ surgery. In at least one area asylum seekers are taken to a Clinic or Surgery to register. This was something arranged by the health service providers.

The group generally shared ideas of methods of contacting new arrivals and explored avenues of getting the information out to newcomers.

A concern was expressed regarding how to reach people who had received refusals, or received status and only had 28days to leave their property. People were noticing more new refugees getting into difficulties with the change from NASS to normal benefits.

Should there be better signposting or awareness of this situation? Are there Rent Deposit Schemes or housing providers or organizations that could help?

For destitute asylum seekers is there support or emergency accommodation in the area?

**Mapping welcome from IA centres to dispersal cities and beyond.**

Welcome to my city

The First Welcome is at the Initial Accommodation Centres:

**Angel Lodge as an Example**: Staff at the Initial Accommodation are the first people to offer a welcome to Asylum Seekers. The staff at Angel Lodge do their best to make the process as humane as possible. The CofS can offer many small welcoming gestures. Some gestures are ongoing and transfer to dispersal areas.

* A Welcome map – a list of Cities and Towns of Sanctuary
* With the Refugee Council – sheets of what is available in dispersal areas are available: also the option to sign up for the Welcome Project
* With Urban Housing, local people have introduced various activity sessions – some volunteers visit and take people to local sites, faith based establishments, or general visits
* A Clothing Store has been set up – has emergency packets and operates a delivery system (it is also for local Asylum Seekers and Destitute Asylum Seekers)
* Local people collect items – different list are circulated – everything from craft materials to baby buggies (see mini flyers)
* Knitters of Sanctuary – people knit hats, mittens, baby layettes, teddies etc.
* The welcome in Angel Lodge also extends outwards – different faith groups advertise their times of worship, the WDCofS Drop-in is open to all and there are other Drop-ins run by churches in the area.
* During Refugee Week and Black History Month people at Angel Lodge are included
* Befrienders can invite new people to Mosques and Churches in the area
* Raising awareness and dispelling myths are essential

Not much of the above was discussed: the North East and Midlands Initial Accommodation Centre had different arrangements. Ireland has its own form of accommodation centre. It was suggested that notes from the workshop were circulated via an e-mail.

What are other local groups doing?

Drop-ins – Conversation Cafés – after worship coffee – Women’s groups, play groups, Men’s groups – gardening groups – chess clubs

Most groups were running one or more of the above. The logo, regardless of different colours, was an important symbol of continuity of a welcome.

What has worked in other places?

Generally, people were aware of other CofS schemes, such as Meet and Travel Together, the Welcome Project, and Schools of Sanctuary, as ways of identifying and reaching out to new asylum seekers and new refugees in their areas. Getting information into IAC or receiving information from IAC is something of a challenge at times – good lines of communication help with transferring forms of welcome.

General view of workshop: Difficult to share information. Discussion curtailed through lack of time. Discussion would have been easier in a quite and less cramped area.