**WM Migration Network Rights Thematic Meeting**

**25th May 2023 (10:00 – 11:30)**

**Minutes**

**Chair: Danai Papachristopolou**

1. **Introductions**

DP welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained the new format that would be used, with each meeting based around a specific issue. The first part of would be led by a presentation from an organisation working on that issue followed by an open discussion on the issues raised. The second part of the meeting would allow groups to update on their current activity and any issues of note.

This meeting would be around refugee resettlement, with a presentation from Refugee Action.

1. **Previous Activity and Actions**

The previous minutes were agreed as correct. The last meeting centred around housing and was led by a presentation from Emily Goodyear at Shelter. DP summarised the key priorities that were raised as:

* + Working with individuals with multiple disadvantage
  + Supporting homeless families through campaigning and advocacy
  + Regulation of the Private Rental Sector

1. **Presentation on Refugee Resettlement**

IA spoke about the CARE Project at Refugee Action. This looks at Access to Justice, support organisations to involve Experts by Experience in their strategic planning and supporting partners to have greater involvement in the sector.

1. Access to Justice

Difficulties for organisations working with individuals due to the need for regulation of immigration advice. The project looks to support smaller organisations with capacity issues in order to meet these requirements. Refugee Action also offer several courses for organisations to raise awareness of issues in this area.

1. Experts by Experience

Supporting increased involvement at all levels of organisations for those with expertise by experience. They also host regular meet-ups for organisations looking to increase representation in these areas.

1. Supporting Partnerships

Sharing resources with sector partners and creating forums for those working in the sector to discuss and respond to legislative and policy changes.

Recent achievements include increasing OISC registered advisers in region with partners, and higher levels of referrals between organisations.

BD stated that the Project has been working in the region for a number of years, providing holistic support to asylum seekers . This includes increasing legal literacy for clients in order to better understand and navigate the asylum system. They work closely with VCS organisations and forums currently in the region.

A lot of work is conducted to support clients in both making initial asylum submissions, appeals and legal challenges, especially with relocation requests for clients in initial accommodation. They also have routes to escalate requests and decisions if needed.

One of the biggest current challenges is that many clients currently in hotels are unaware of their eligibility for certain support. Demand and resources mean that many referrals are being received for individuals who are waiting for decisions. The upskilling of community groups is vital to increase the level of basic advice available.

Close working with the Asylum Appeals Project in London to provide barristers to hearings which is incredibly useful for clients who do not have legal knowledge and has resulted in many successful appeals.

Over the last year around 650 clients have been supported, including finding legal representation. Capacity remains a massive issue, so developing partnership work is crucial. The Good Practice team also provides regular reports for the voluntary sector around eligibility requirements and other useful information.

1. **Discussion**

DP asked about clients with Sec. 4, Sec. 95 and Sec. 98 applications but if they become complex then they cannot represent clients themselves during appeals. Could these be referred? BD confirmed that these could be sent through but that if they did not meet eligibility criteria then this could not support appeals. DP stated that this was often an issue as a number of clients had absconded so were told that they would not be provided with accommodation. BD advised that clients could be referred to another team who deal with admissions of fresh claims so there are avenues for support.

DP also asked about the availability of training in asylum support. BD stated that there were training courses available, as well as online learning packages.

HD asked if all referrals had to be complex cases? BD confirmed this was not the case and was often governed by client choice. If there are difficulties in completing referral forms, then make contact with the team who can progress although there may be a delay in these cases.

1. **Current Priorities**

DP asked if Shelter could provide an input on the Renters Reform Bill that was recently being legislated in Parliament. EG stated that this is a huge milestone and the result of campaigning since 2020. The bill will shortly be debated and it has been proposed to offer amendments including the banning of Sec. 21 No Fault Evictions, the replacement of fixed term tenancies with open ended contracts and the establishment of a new Ombudsman for the Private Sector. There will also be a proposal to ban evictions for those with children or in receipt of benefits.

It was also recently reported that Birmingham City Council have recently failed an inspection of their properties against the decent home standard and now have a short timescale to resolve issues raised.

EG also announced that she would shortly be redeployed to a new role and therefore be unable to attend future meetings. A new representative from Shelter will hopefully be attending instead.

DP also updated that RMC had partnered with Brushstrokes to open a new service in Dudley offering immigration advice, ESOL and employability support. There is also a regional practitioners network to support increased provision of immigration advice in the region.

LR asked a question around the risk of retraumatisation for those with lived experience who provide immigration advice and the responsibility for funders to support this as part of capacity building. Feedback was welcome as part of developing a response to this.

1. **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be **Tuesday 4th July** at **10am** and will be led with a presentation from Ahlem Kadeed of Birmingham and Solihull Women’s Aid.

AH reminded members that inputs from members are still welcome as part of the new structure. A sign-up form, with future dates can be found [**HERE**](https://f5rycfssgmn.typeform.com/to/SCAw8uXo)**.**

Meeting Closed