

Overview of Cardiff Asylum Seeker and Refugee Advocacy Forum Meetings

Cardiff Asylum Seeker and Refugee Advocacy Forum is facilitated by DPIA staff member based in Cardiff, together with volunteer Forum Champions from the community, under the Asylum Rights Programme, funded by Welsh Government. It is run by sanctuary seekers, for sanctuary seekers, with the aim to create a safe space for communicating questions, concerns, comments and suggestions on topics that the members feel are important to them. It is run on a monthly basis (except school holidays). Professionals from relevant sectors are invited to respond to input from members. Previous to the Asylum Rights programme it had been run 4 years ago by DPIA.

This newsletter outlines quarterly what took place at the sessions. It is written by Leila Usmani on behalf of members of the forum and circulated publically as desired.

July 2018

Theme: Initial Meeting

Aim: To welcome and introduce the idea of an advocacy forum. Find out what shape members would like it to take and what topics they would like to address / professionals they would like to invite in.

At this meeting 8 people attended. It was communicated that members would like to use the space to communicate individual issues but also consolidate these so that when talking with service providers / professionals these issues could potentially be addressed. They agreed to the idea posed of writing a newsletter (such as this) to send out to the wider sector and public so that their voices could be heard further afield. A group agreement of how the forum would be run was compiled and brainstorming on issues to be addressed came up with the following themes: education, housing (asylum seeker and also general for refugee), issues around access to education for both children and adults, transport and integration.

September 2018

Theme: Housing

Aim: To meet with a Clearsprings representative to raise concerns, comments and suggestions around different elements of asylum housing in Cardiff.

Clearsprings Regional manager Susan Lane confirmed a representative's attendance at this forum and an agenda was produced prior by forum champions to outline some of the elements they wished to comment on, which included housing managers, access to housing, maintenance issues and resolution options, and overarching rights and responsibilities of different plays within the housing service. Unfortunately, a Clearsprings representative failed to attend, and attempted contact on the day by telephone and email was unsuccessful. Members in attendance decided to write a letter in response to failed attendance which was then sent to Susan Lane. Susan Lane apologised for not being able to attend / ensuring representation and confirmed she/ a representative would attend the next available meeting. She stated that direct response to the letter she felt would best be undertaken during the next forum meeting when they would attend rather than by letter.

The forum members were then presented with the review of housing issues as undertaken at the Swansea forum and asked to comment on any similar or other issues they wished to be noted for Kathryn Williams to also raise directly at the next COMPASS meeting. Within this discussion, members mainly commented on the feeling that housing managers were not properly trained to understand how to support and work with the welfare of tenants, especially on an intercultural basis. Members were appreciative of the new way in which Clearsprings notified those in initial accommodation of a proposed move to NASS accommodation. Members took full understanding of the need for Home Office to undertake spot checks on properties however they felt that Clearsprings were inadvertently taking on the role of policing households by also undertaking spot checks and would prefer if notice was given for Clearsprings visits. The conversation moved on to private rental options for refugee as refugee members felt they were not clear on what their rights and responsibilities were in the private rental sector as well as learning how to access private rental options. A session on this will therefore be planned for the future.