

LEADING WITH THE HEART, DOING OUR BIT

Supporting refugees during crisis



INTRODUCTION

As one of the most culturally diverse boroughs, Hounslow Council is proud to support refugees in their resettlement journey, finding a new life in the borough and becoming part of a vibrant community.

Our resettlement of refugees plays a crucial role in the wider global response to the Syrian crisis, which has lasted for over a decade and is one of the biggest crises the world has seen to date. In January 2014, the government established the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and through the support of local councils it has since helped those in great need, including women and children at risk.

In 2015, Hounslow Council pledged to resettle ten Syrian families into its community to help them start a new life in Hounslow and leave behind their country that has been ravaged by war.

When the government announced additional plans to resettle refugees in 2019, Hounslow Council pledged to resettle a further 12 refugees. In August 2021, after working in the midst of a pandemic and national lockdowns, restrictions began to ease, and the council welcomed its first family.

10

Families

*Hounslow
Council
pledged to
take in 2015*

SUPPORTING THE MOST VULNERABLE IN CRISIS

For many refugees who flee their homeland and enter an unknown environment, they can face various challenges and it can be a daunting adjustment, particularly for those who had previously experienced thriving, professional lives as lawyers, doctors or teachers and suddenly find themselves under a system that puts them all in the same category.

Having continuously worked closely with the community, Hounslow Council were keen to be the catalyst for change – helping refugees break away from this confining category and starting afresh.



CASE STUDY 1

GHAITH'S STORY

“ Every year I become more confident as a resident within the borough. ”

188

languages spoken
in Hounslow

Ghaith, who arrived in Hounslow in his early twenties, was seeking refuge from Syria in 2012. From then, the Council assisted with his enrolment on an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Language) course and had conversations with him about his future goals. After expressing his interest in attending university to study media, RWH supported Ghaith with his university application process on UCAS, where he was later accepted on the course.

To help benefit his understanding of media, the council helped by putting him in contact with external media partners, including a freelance videographer, who had previously done work for the Council. With these connections, Ghaith was able to gain some experience and insight on media that helped his early understanding of the course.



Four years on and Ghaith is nearing his final steps to graduating to go on and pursue a career in Media and TV, to one day become a producer.

In addition to focusing on his education, Ghaith also managed to obtain a job at a high-end clothing store and has held this down whilst at university. While studying Ghaith also expressed interest in wanting to train to be a football referee, and by putting him in touch with a charity called Friends of Kathja, who funded his Level 1 coaching for football, he was able to become a qualified referee.

CASE STUDY 2



As a mother-of-two and wife and carer to her disabled husband, Rasha faced difficulty and uncertainty when resettling in an unknown environment. When Rasha and her family arrived in Hounslow, the Council helped her sign up to ESOL and a digital course to help her increase and improve her IT skills. The Council later assisted with Rasha's application for a provisional license, as well as providing information on the driving tests that she would take. The resources given to her catered to her needs and abilities, as they were bilingual, to help her fully understand all the information.

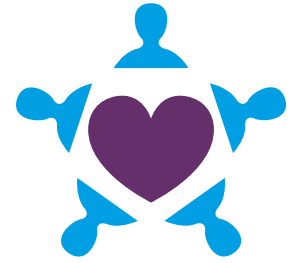
RASHA'S STORY

"I was initially anxious about moving to the UK, but with the support of our Resettlement Support Worker at Hounslow Council and Refugees Welcome Hounslow, I gradually built the confidence and skills to make Hounslow my home. My family and I feel lucky to be living in Hounslow. Hounslow is a multi-cultural place to live in, where everyone is respected."

Following this, the Council helped by putting Rasha in touch with a driving instructor whereby, after taking her lessons and studying hard, she successfully passed both the theory and practical tests. This milestone, though may seem small to some, is huge for Rasha and many refugees who have come to a country where English isn't their first language and they've had to adapt to a new way of life.

This achievement also signifies Rasha becoming more comfortable in Hounslow, can instil a sense of independence, and be another way she can help her take care of her family.

CONNECTIONS, IDENTITY AND SUPPORT



Hounslow Council has adopted a “One Hounslow” approach that involves leading by with a heart, doing what’s best for the community and work closely with others to solidify their close-knit culture. The One Hounslow holistic approach is a way of thinking and being for staff and is an integral part of Hounslow Council, as it acts as a foundation for the service, values, behaviour and communication. These values underpinned the Council’s resettlement approach: creating a ‘One Hounslow’ package of support that worked with charities and voluntary organisations in the borough.

The Council and its key partners acknowledge and prioritise the entirety of a person or family’s resettlement journey. They understand that the resettlement process is not only about providing a roof over their heads but also enabling the right support to help them rebuild their lives. By doing so, the Council puts in practice its One Hounslow approach by working in collaboration with other services in efforts to help refugees.

How does this work in practice?

This approach has been adopted by a dedicated community and resettlement link worker that acts as a vital contact and brings together key cross service agencies to help families set up the foundations for a new life. By working collaboratively, the Council can ensure refugees have a warm, welcoming home to restart their new lives again, as well as offer refugees support so they can learn English, access healthcare and education, and integrate with local communities.

Working with Refugees Welcome Hounslow

A key voluntary group that Hounslow Council supports and works with is Refugees Welcome Hounslow (RWH), a local action group that successfully organised and welcomed Syrian families into Hounslow. The group makes a significant contribution to the resettlement process by gaining trust and establishing rapport with refugees, which can often be difficult for public agencies to achieve.

From the very start of the resettlement journey, the Council works with RWH in collecting refugees from the airport, going with them to their new accommodation, helping them settle into the neighbourhood, assisting with school admissions or employment and apprenticeships, as well as traveling with them on public transport to help them familiarise with the different systems.



The refugee families enjoying their time out together as part of the ‘Bring and Share’ lunches with RWH.

The work that RWH delivers also focuses on bringing people together in communities by promoting social inclusion through regular events that bring together the refugees and their families with RWH volunteers. Having a support system with those who have similar experiences can help refugees feel connected and instil a sense of solidarity within their new community. Beyond the initial intensive support provided to the families in their first year of arrival, some other ways RWH has helped them integrate into the community and reach their potential include:

- Improving their English language skills.
- Applying for travel documents (allowing the families to visit loved ones resettled in other countries).
- Socialising with others by organising outings. For example, attending Watermans Theatre to watch the Pantomime.

By recognising all the work that Refugees Welcome Hounslow have done, including their integral role in the resettlement programme and in spite of the challenges risen from Covid-19, they were presented two awards in October 2021 at the One Hounslow Community Awards. RWH received the Community Heart award and the One Hounslow Spirit award, which were voted by Hounslow communities and residents and is testament to the vast amount of work they've done and continue to do.

The support given by the Council and the voluntary sector is crucial to refugees resettling in Hounslow, helping them socially integrate and become independent, yet knowing that the council's support is still in the background to be their main point of contact if needed. However, as everyone is different, some refugees will go on to live autonomously once they have the basic foundations set up with the help of the Council. For others, life can be difficult, unpredictable and find it hard to deal with difficult situations particularly when needs change due to circumstances that are out of their control.

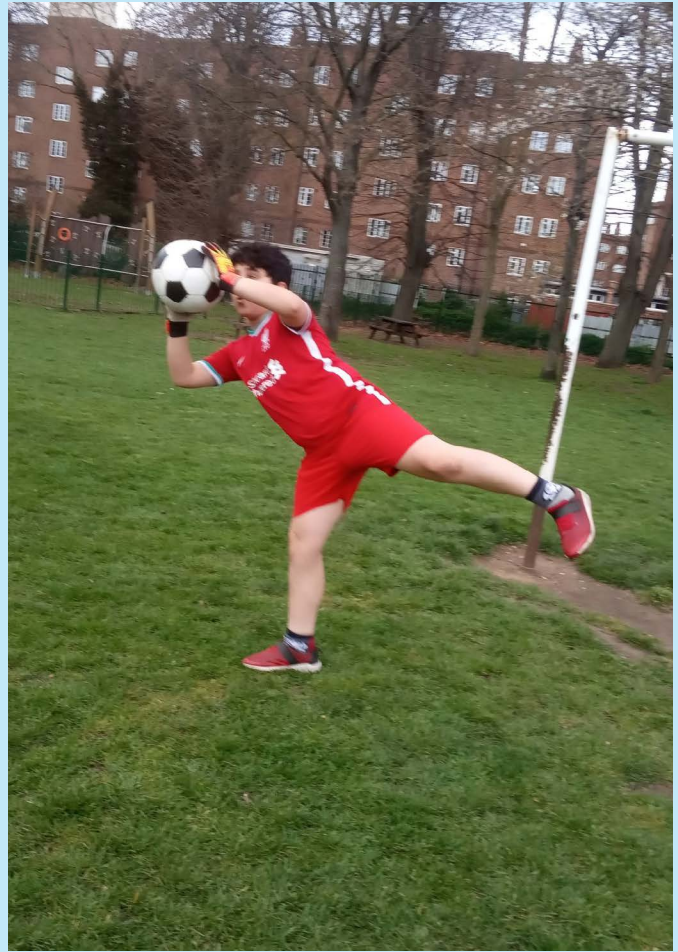


"Refugees Welcome Hounslow receiving the "Community Heart" award and "One Hounslow Spirit" award, which was voted for by Hounslow residents.

CASE STUDY 3

YASER'S STORY

The Council not only supports adults with their independence and education, but they also help children realise and work towards their potential.



“ Yaser was very happy to be told that he has a talent for the sport he loves, he dreams to become the next Ronaldo and we are very proud of him. ”

Yaser's mum, Nihad

Recently, the council helped a young boy, Yaser, excel in his passion for football after he expressed his love for the sport and interest in playing. After attending some sessions that the voluntary group helped him join, the football coach identified Yaser as a talented goalkeeper, before offering him a place at their development centre. Amid his love for football and playing with the trust, RWH organised a trip for the boys and their families to visit QPR's Stadium, where the children met the players and watched a game.

Such activities are important to the council as it's fundamental in a child's life to socialise with others in the community to build connections and promote healthy development, which will positively affect them later in life.

EXTENDING A HAND TO AFGHAN REFUGEES



With the escalating violence and conflict in Afghanistan, the Council welcomes the Government's pledge to resettle Afghan's fleeing violence under the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) and Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP). While many families and individuals have moved on from accommodation in Hounslow, the Council are working closely with the Home Office, accommodation providers and different communities to help alleviate the pressure by welcoming and supporting the needs of individuals and families who have resettled in the borough through the schemes.

Its a devastating situation in Afghanistan that weve all seen since August 2021, but it is uplifting to hear about and witness the compassion and endless hours local people have put into supporting Afghan evacuees in the borough, whether it be with accommodation, or supplying them with toiletries, clothes, et cetera. Im looking forward to seeing how we continue to work together to help those in need. Im aware that weve already welcomed one Afghan family in the beginning of January, which is a great start to this year and really sets the tone for more work that we will put in as a council.

The former Leader of Hounslow Council, Councillor Steve Curran who has previously shared his support for local organisations who quickly stepped up to support Afghan evacuees.



Afghan refugees attending a welcome lunch run by the Islamic Integration Community Centre in Hounslow.

Supporting Ukrainian Refugees

With the emergence of the government's "Homes for Ukraine" scheme last month, individuals, charities, community groups and businesses have offered volunteer accommodation to families fleeing the devastating war in Ukraine. Hounslow Council is already actively engaging with the sponsors and identifying local voluntary and community organisations who could offer assistance to refugees. As a borough rich in diversity, Hounslow will utilise its diverse and expansive community links to welcome Ukrainian refugees.



More Information?

For more about information about our resettlement programme please contact us on **020 8583 3942** or at myindependence@hounslow.gov.uk



London Borough
of Hounslow

ONE
HOUNSLOW