

Supporting Asylum Seekers In Contingency Hotels

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The Health Equity Ambition

In 2021 the Home Office set up two contingency hotels in Newham to accommodate people seeking asylum. A further three have opened since then. People placed in these hotels face a number of challenges including:

- Lack of information and support about services and how to access them locally
- Lack of money to support everyday essentials (no right to work and £9 per week in catered accommodation for all expenses – travel etc.)
- Lack of social connection with the community and limited or no English language
- Deterioration in mental health as a result of frequent and short-notice moves between hotels, uncertainty and stress of asylum process which can take 2-4 years for an outcome

At the same time the NHS and Local Authority identified gaps in their capacity to respond:

- No arrangements in place for GPs to be reimbursed for GP registration and Health Checks
- No health checks being completed
- Poor safeguarding practices in the hotels
- Children missing from education
- Limited in-reach into hotels to provide welcome and support orientation to local services and community groups
- Lack of data sharing between Home Office and NHS/LAs to support planning and access to services

The Approach

Local GPs, Primary Care Networks, NHS and LA Designated Safeguarding Leads, Public Health, Welcome Newham and local community organisations formed the **Refugee and Asylum Seeker Newham Health Partnership Group** to deliver targeted support where gaps have been identified, apply system change to complex challenges and work to increase knowledge and capacity of frontline staff. The group has implemented multiple responses including:

- Agreeing a **data sharing arrangement** with the accommodation provider so that local authority can see who is arriving and direct outreach to support people with their immediate needs (Feb 2022)
- Delivering outreach via multi lingual **Welcome Newham Family Navigators** to support immediate needs of arrivals (e.g. GP registration, school applications, Aspen cards, referrals for 0-5s to health services) (Aug 2022 – ongoing)
- Delivering **Welcome to Newham Small Grants** to support capacity among community groups to support and welcome sanctuary seekers, e.g. grants for community kitchens, English classes, social connection activities, shoes and travel cards (Dec 2022 – ongoing)
- Developing **referral pathways for 0-5 year olds** via a Task and Finish Group. The group generates and delivers actions that meet the acute needs of pregnant women, new mothers, and children under 5 years of age living in contingency hotels. (Dec 2022 – present)
- NHS and LA statutory safeguarding leads collaborating with hotel providers to **improve safeguarding process and practice** (Feb 2023-ongoing)
- Developing a **framework to improve Food Standards and Safety in catered contingency hotels** via a Task and Finish Group using a 3 step approach: (1) identify and respond to acute needs, (2) make meals better giving ownership to residents about what they eat, (3) embedding food as a life enhancing activity and vital aspect of community connection and social integration
- Identifying opportunities for partner agencies to work with hotel providers and address challenges via a **Newham Hotels meeting** which meets monthly.

Impact And Outcomes To Date

- **Welcome Newham hotel outreach:** over 202 children supported to apply for school places, 207 households supported to register with local GPs, 25 people who recently got their Leave to Remain have been referred to the Refugee Employability Programme and over 100 have registered for homeless support.
- **Referral pathways for 0-5 yr olds:** the group developed pathways into the Acorn Maternity Team, Health Visitors, Children's Centres, Newham's Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub, Newham Nurture, The Magpie Project, and Sister Circle. The pathways include anonymous case studies, assisting staff by bringing 'to life' examples of how services can support pregnant women, new mothers and children under 5.
- **Small grants:** since Dec 2022, 24 small grants have been awarded. Highlights: 350 families supported to get TFL Oyster Cards and/or school shoes; 16 people attended individual culturally sensitive counselling/psychotherapy and the fund supported the running of a refugee youth club attended by 40-80 young people a week.
- **Food Standards and Safety:** All hotel sites have been inspected and are statutorily up to date. Identified food hygiene rating score for one hotel cater as 1* - "major improvement needed". Local GP audit also found patients health impacted by poor food. Subsequent engagement with hotel has resulted in change in catering contract and hotel is trialling a new approach to making meals better.
- **Health checks:** North East London ICB are currently completing a procurement exercise to commission health checks for people staying in contingency hotels across hotels in NEL

Other related projects include: All Newham GP practices have signed up as **SAFE Surgeries**; a **Health Needs Assessment** is underway of people seeking asylum staying in contingency hotels, **Welcome Newham** and **HPAS** have developed a **Move On** service for people who have received a decision about their asylum claim to prevent homelessness and destitution; **Doctors of The World** are providing training in NHS Entitlements to frontline staff via the **Social Welfare Alliance**; **Newham Health Collaborative** are delivering MMR vaccine outreach clinics to hotels.

Residents visiting the Welcome Newham One-Stop Shop



Residents response to small grants projects

"thank you so much, my girl loves her shoes and can go to school happy"

"It is good. I am happy, I learn, I talk, I forget worries, I know to come with my family"