

# Working with Refugees in Waltham Forest and Redbridge

[North East London Foundation Trust]

## Working with Refugees – A NELFT case study.

### 1. Introduction

The Refugee Support service was established 15 years ago to meet the needs of refugees in NELFT, particularly in Waltham Forest, who require specialised support and care. The service initially had one clinician, but this has now been split between two 0.4wte posts covering two of the four NELFT boroughs. The demand for the service has continued to increase in line with sharp increases in asylum applications nationally and particularly in London. Demand for the service currently greatly exceeds its capacity, and the team is working on a business case to request more funding to provide services to all four of the NELFT boroughs. Over the past five years, there has been a 470% increase in the number of section 95 supported asylum seekers. Aware of the hostile environment policies that this group faces in the UK, the team strives to be as responsive as possible to provide advocacy, social support, and psychology services. They also link clients with other support services, such as legal and housing assistance. As part of the business case, the team is looking to reduce health inequalities and provide parity of access across the four NELFT boroughs, and specifically introduce a specialist service in Barking & Dagenham, which has the second highest number of asylum seekers in all of Greater London. The service aspires to create a safe space for clients to build trust and relationships with staff and access the services they need.

### 2. Spotlighting work with Albanian women as an example

Before the pandemic, it was observed that many young women from Albania who had been trafficked required support, but had no support network, particularly those with young children, including babies and toddlers who were not eligible for nurseries. To address this issue, a local student centre was identified, which had a creche, and funding was obtained to bring the mothers and their children to the same place, enabling them to be close to their children. An interpreter who was well-established in the Albanian community ran the group, which enabled them to reach out to people who would have had difficulty accessing healthcare due to a lack of childcare.

#### **Outcome**

Feedback from participants suggested the majority agreed or strongly agreed the group was helpful and helped them understand their difficulties better. The majority agreed or strongly agreed they would recommend the group to a friend in need of similar help, and most participants strongly agreed they were satisfied with the amount of help received until that point in treatment.

Qualitative feedback suggested what participants found most helpful were both practical and skills-based elements such as breathing exercises, learning how to manage difficult situations, managing their sleep better, and learning how to manage stress, as well as the relational aspects of the group. For example, one participant commented “I found useful coming and listening that are many women’s in the same situation, I learned new things and how to manage stress”. “It was very good experience, they could help me, I can trust them.”



### 3. Other support within the refugee support service

The refugee support service provides additional support to refugees through various means. One such method is **reimbursing travel costs** for those attending the service. As many clients live on limited budgets, this helps them cover their expenses. The reimbursement is funded by a trust.

The team has a **self-referral policy** to encourage clients to return when needed. This policy has led to some clients referring their friends to the service. However, the team faces resource constraints and a massive waiting list, limiting their ability to go into the community. They have had some success working with HESTIA, an organization that works with trafficked people and now refers clients to the team.

The team has applied for a grant from Samaritans to **help clients with issues such as winter coats and gas**. They also provide goodie bags with grounding materials to clients experiencing dissociative symptoms. The team also gets involved in other social issues, such as providing housing support and writing housing support letters.

The team believes in trauma-informed care and **provides a menu of service offer options for clients to choose from**, such as drumming groups and poetry. As part of their transformation work, they are looking at offering CEN pathways for traumatized individuals. The team believes it is essential to give clients as much choice as possible to increase access and deliver services that feel safe for them.

#### Contact person(s):

[Waltham Forest Refugee Psychology Service.](#)

---

#### Further information

This case study has been shared as part of a quality improvement project led by Transformation Partners in Health and Care's (TPHC) Psychological Therapies for Severe Mental Health Problems Programme team.

This project aims to promote the delivery of psychological therapies that are accessible and responsive to the needs of diverse populations. Through an information mapping exercise, the team has gathered information on good practices and interventions that mental health providers have adopted, or are adopting, to make therapies and therapy services more accessible.

**To view more case studies and learn more about this programme, please visit the [TPHC website](#).**

