

Organisations providing support to Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Birmingham

There are already organisations in Birmingham providing support to asylum seekers and refugees. They include funded charities, faith groups and a number of organisations solely supported by voluntary effort. This is not an exhaustive list.

ASIRT – Asylum Support and Immigration Resource Team

www.asirt.org.uk

ASIRT is a charitable organisation based in Birmingham registered with OISC (Office of Immigration Services Commissioner) to provide advocacy, advice and legal representation to asylum seekers and other undocumented migrants in the West Midlands who would otherwise be unable to access such representation due to their limited financial resources.

They assist with the submission of fresh asylum claims and with applications for leave to remain in the UK under Article 3 or Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights. They also provide advocacy support to help ensure that individuals and families who would otherwise be destitute are able to obtain the subsistence support to which they are entitled under the Asylum and Immigration Act, the Children Act and the Care Act.

Finally, they work with partner agencies such as Birmingham Community Law Centre to mount strategic litigation challenges on some aspects of immigration legislation.

Birch Community Hosting Network

www.birchnetwork.org

BIRCH is a small, volunteer led charity working across Birmingham to support vulnerable refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants. They run three projects:

- A weekly ~~s~~Meet and Greet Lunch for families at risk of destitution runs at St Martin's Youth Centre in Highgate, and offers refugee and migrant families a hot meal and play opportunities. Befrienders help with the running of the sessions forming positive relationships with the families by listening, offering empathy and a non-judgemental approach.
- The Family Befriending Project matches vulnerable young refugees aged 16-25 who have come to the UK without their families with volunteer families. Family befrienders offer a regular (weekly or fortnightly) meal within the family home to a young refugee wanting a taste of family life.
- The Hosting Network recruits and supports community hosts who share their homes with an individual experiencing destitution, normally due to difficulties within the asylum process. Offering a spare room to people who would, often, be street homeless otherwise, is a life enriching experience and can be beneficial to everyone involved. Stays are usually from two weeks to a year, depending on the time set by the host. Each placement is carefully supported by an experienced staff member to ensure the happiness of both the guest and host, and works with the guest to ensure that they are able to move onto more stable accommodation by the end of their placement.

British Red Cross

www.redcross.org.uk

The Red Cross Mission is to support people in crisis, whoever and wherever they are, including asylum seekers and refugees. The West Midlands Office provides services for asylum seekers and refugees in Birmingham, Coventry and Stoke on Trent.

The refugee support service gives advice and help to asylum seekers, refused and destitute asylum seekers, vulnerable migrants, and stateless people. This includes family tracing, travel assistance for family reunion, short term cash assistance to destitute asylum seekers as well as help to access asylum support or statutory benefits.

Hand, arm and shoulder massage is provided at a Solihull clinic, targeting asylum seekers who attend the reporting centre. They are looking at developing this service in other areas.

Brushstrokes

www.brushstrokessandwell.org.uk

Brushstrokes mission is to support vulnerable groups including newcomers to the UK and support their integration. We work with asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants in Smethwick and West Birmingham. The services they provide include:

- ESOL teaching from pre-entry to Level One taught by volunteers and college tutors. This includes ESOL for Health to help newcomers understand how to access health services.
- Practical resources to those in need including food, clothes, household items and baby packs and equipment.
- A befriending service to newcomers including home visits to people who are isolated.
- A peer mentoring scheme supporting tenants in the private rented sector. They offer a holistic package of support to people on the asylum pathway.
- They provide advice surgeries: debt and energy advice, a work club to support people seeking employment, health activities.
- A place of welcome café, trips and social activities and volunteering opportunities for service users and others.

Current developments include: monitoring the impact of Right to Rent legislation on migrants, developing neighbourliness and community cohesion in Smethwick, working with creative black country to increase access to arts activities by newcomer groups

Freedom from Torture

www.freedomfromtorture.org/about/15/5252

Freedom from Torture is a national charity providing direct clinical services to survivors of torture who arrive in the UK, as well as striving to protect and promote their rights.

At their West Midlands Centre in Birmingham, they provide psychological therapies as well as medical, legal and welfare support to survivors of torture. The types of therapy on offer are diverse and the charity works with adult survivors as well as operating a specialist Children, Young People and Families (CYPF) service.

Freshwinds

www.freshwinds.org.uk

Freshwinds is a Birmingham charity whose ' mission is:

"To provide a person centred, fully integrated model of care and support, to individuals with life threatening and life limiting illnesses and those experiencing social exclusion, within a caring, safe and secure environment, exploring their circumstances and emotions to find a true resolution to their situation.+

They provide some free immigration and nationality support. They provide training and employability support as well as volunteering opportunities in health and social care and other fields.

They have a support programme for destitute migrants who are HIV positive which includes support with housing issues, health and crisis interventions.

Hope Projects

www.hope-projects.org.uk

The Hope projects work to help destitute asylum-seekers and other new migrants barred from public funds in the West Midlands. Activities include:

- Hope Destitution Fund, makes fortnightly cash grants to destitute asylum seekers,
- Hope Housing, provides emergency accommodation for homeless asylum seekers,
- Ujamaa, provides counselling and casework support for asylum-seeker and refugee women,
- Hope Special Fund, makes one-off grants for purposes not covered by other Hope Funds
- Women s Group and Hope Gardeners, are therapeutic/recreational projects,,
- Migrant Families Support Project (in partnership with ASIRT & Birmingham Community Law Centre).

The Hope Projects work closely with other partner-organisations providing referral and support.

Current developments include: seeking funding to employ an immigration/asylum legal caseworker; working to develop mixed use+accommodation for both rent-paying refugees and destitute asylum seekers.

Karis Neighbour Scheme

www.karisneighbourscheme.org

Karis is a small community charity providing practical support, friendship and advocacy to people in need in the Ladywood area of Birmingham, particularly seeking to reach out to people who are isolated and marginalised.

They have developed a range of work supporting asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants, as over time these groups have become a significant proportion of their community. There is now a sizeable refugee community but new arrivals are Europeans. Services include informal ESOL classes, a Welcome group offering social activities particularly aimed at women and families, and home visits to offer further befriending along with practical support including linking to the local foodbank. A baby bank provides essentials such as pushchairs /cots /moses baskets for newborn babies in families who are in crisis.

The Community Advice service offers benefits advice and advocacy, helping to explain letters, fill in forms and make phone calls.

Lifeline Options

www.lifelineoptions.org.uk

Lifeline options is a Community Interest Company based in Birmingham registered with OISC (Office of Immigration Services Commissioner) to provide free legal advice/assistance to asylum seekers:

- Legal advice to people seeking to re-open their asylum application.
- Assistance to obtain welfare support from the UK Border Agency whilst waiting on or preparing applications.

They assist hundreds of people each year utilising the skills of their clients to run the office and raise funds. They provide placements to University students from the UK and Europe.

Oasis Church Welcome the Nations Project

Oasis Church in Edgbaston is close to the hostel in Stone Road used to house newly arrived asylum seekers before they are dispersed around the region. Members of the church realised how isolated and unwelcome people felt when they first arrived there.

Oasis started offering a meal and a welcome every Thursday evening. Soon 20 turned into 40 and now they have around 100 people from many different nations each week. Some are dispersed around the West Midlands & return to meet friends and introduce others to a place of welcome. The atmosphere is friendly, happy and inclusive.

After the meal there is a time of worship with prayers for justice. The team offer help and support in practical ways and some of those attending become part of the team bringing skills from translation to washing up!

Future developments include an allotment in Handsworth where anyone can join in and an extension to the building for more space!

Piers Road New Communities Centre Association

Piers Road serves refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable communities. Their mission is to relieve suffering, loneliness, distress, educational disadvantage and other life challenging issues.

The Association works with 23 different refugee community groups based in the building. They all have access to the building seven days a week with its office space and IT facilities. The present groups are from many African countries plus more established groups from Kurdistan, Iran and Afghanistan. The groups provide support to their own members both on and off site. Their activities include family support and community and other social events.

On site the association provides courses on ESOL, diet and other health issues, job search, literacy and benefits. Some of our partners put on their own courses for refugees in our catchment area, for example, African men's health issues.

The Association hopes to provide courses on Personal Money Management this autumn.

Red Sun Organisation

Red Sun is a Birmingham based organisation whose aim is to promote and improve the welfare of the Middle Eastern Communities and the Kurdish community in particular.

Red Sun is run by volunteers who provide information, advice and advocacy to relieve poverty and improve quality of life. They support the process of integration through the provision of services and activities including educational programmes.

Refugee Action

www.refugee-action.org.uk

Refugee Action is a national charity with offices in Birmingham serving the West Midlands. In Birmingham they work with refugees, asylum seekers and irregular migrants.

Their main service in the West Midlands is sChoices which offers advice to people without leave to remain who are considering voluntary return (including exploring alternatives to return). Where appropriate, they help people to make a dignified and sustainable return to their country of origin using the Home Office s Assisted Voluntary Return programme.

Restore

www.restore-uk.org

Restore is a project of Birmingham Churches Together which aims to welcome, include and assist the integration of refugees and those seeking sanctuary from persecution. It works to achieve its mission through befriending, social activities, equipping refugees for work, advocacy and awareness-raising.

The befriending scheme brings refugee and host communities together. It involves the matching of volunteers with asylum seekers to provide one-to-one support. Restore facilitates day trips for refugee families during school holidays and social activities for lone asylum seeker men and women.

They run a training course for those who have leave to remain and are struggling to find work called sEquipping refugees for work .

Restore seeks to change attitudes and foster inclusion by raising awareness in the host community about the need for people to seek sanctuary. This is achieved through speaking engagements, training courses, participation in church services and school classes, and circulation of information.

Solihull Churches Asylum Seeker Support Group

Solihull Welcome is a drop in Centre close to the Home Office Reporting Centre in Solihull which serves the West Midlands. They are open on Wednesdays and Fridays offering free refreshments to people who are signing at the Reporting Centre. Everyone is welcome regardless of religion or ethnicity.

They also provide toys for children, clothes and food parcels to people who are destitute. The Centre is run by volunteers who strive to provide a friendly and stress free atmosphere and an opportunity to talk for those who want to. They sign-post people to other organisations where further help and advice may be obtained.