

Royal Borough of Greenwich Borough of Sanctuary Strategy 2026-2028



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2. Foreword

The Royal Borough of Greenwich is proud to be a fully awarded Borough of Sanctuary with a strong history of supporting people seeking sanctuary. Anyone who seeks to make our borough their home is welcome here, no matter where you are from in the world.

Here in Greenwich, we are proud to celebrate the wonderful achievements and contributions that sanctuary seekers continue to make, and we welcome those fleeing violence, persecution and injustice.

Sanctuary seekers increase the richness of community. Across the borough, you'll see their influence everywhere you go. You can taste it in the restaurants and hear it in the languages spoken on our streets. You can watch it in the amazing music and dance performances at events and venues and feel it in our community spirit. We are a diverse borough, and that makes us great.

You'll come across sanctuary seekers in every walk of life. You might be treated by nurses and doctors in our hospitals or taught by teachers in our schools. You could be supported by carers in care homes,

driven in buses and trains, served in shops, or cared for in hospices. Refugees, asylum seekers and migrants have helped shape our borough in so many profound ways, and they continue to do so.

Being a Borough of Sanctuary strengthens our borough by fostering a welcoming culture that supports integration and reduces isolation. Through coordinated services and collaboration between the council, the Borough of Sanctuary Partnership, schools, community groups, faith organisations and volunteers, there are more opportunities for residents to connect, built trust, and challenge misconceptions. This shared commitment to inclusion enhances community cohesion, celebrates diversity and helps build a more resilient and confident borough, where everyone feels like they belong.

That's why we are committed to enacting the principles of the City of Sanctuary movement. We want to continue working across the whole council, with partner organisations, and people with lived experience of seeking sanctuary to create a culture of ongoing service improvement. We want to make sure that we listen to and amplify the voices of sanctuary seekers in everything we do.

There have been many achievements to be proud of since we were awarded Borough of Sanctuary status. We are proud to have opened our doors to families displaced from Syria and Afghanistan, and to have offered safety and stability to nearly 1,400 people fleeing the war in Ukraine. Together, we have also built a dedicated team supporting those with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), ensuring that everyone who arrives in Greenwich is treated with dignity, compassion and the chance to rebuild their lives. We have also supported those in contingency hotels to find more suitable accommodation and hosted a display of local children's artwork to celebrate our recognition as a Borough of Sanctuary.

In this next phase, we will be implementing our co-produced workplan which sits alongside our first ever Borough of Sanctuary Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, and this document. We will also be working to promote a culture of readiness in anticipation of global crises which may lead to new patterns of migration.

Sanctuary seekers enrich our communities and support our local and national economy across a broad range of sectors. We are always happy to welcome them and help them to settle into their new lives in Greenwich.

Thus, I am very pleased to recommend this strategy to further this Council as a champion for all those seeking sanctuary in Greenwich. I can't thank the Borough of Sanctuary Partnership enough for all the incredible work that happens across the borough to ensure that Greenwich is a welcoming place for all. We are, and always will be, a borough proud to stand with anyone fleeing violence, persecution and injustice.



Councillor Mariam Lolavar,
Cabinet Member for Health, Adult Social
Care and Borough of Sanctuary

3. Our Vision

A Borough of Sanctuary is one which ensures a welcoming place of safety for people who are sanctuary seekers, including all asylum seekers, refugees and migrants.

The Royal Borough of Greenwich is committed to ensuring that we not only provide a welcoming environment for sanctuary seekers on arrival, but also support people to settle and integrate into our borough for the benefit of the wider community.

We will work with a wide range of stakeholders including our valued partners in the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) to promote the rights and meet the needs of everyone who lives in Greenwich.

Our Vision is aligned with that of the City of Sanctuary movement. We are very proud of our status as a fully awarded Borough of Sanctuary and this Strategy is a progression from our statement of intent.



4. Our Values and Principles

The Royal Borough of Greenwich is committed to the values and principles defined in the City of Sanctuary Charter.

Our strategic framework is based on the five core values of the City of Sanctuary Charter:

Inclusive: We welcome and respect people from all backgrounds, placing the highest value on diversity and are committed to equality.

Open: We are committed to a culture of working collaboratively across the City of Sanctuary networks and in partnership with others.

Participation: We work with people seeking sanctuary and value and recognise the contribution of all. We aspire to ensure people seeking sanctuary are involved in all decision making and are supported to become leaders in the organisation, networks, and the wider movement.

Inspire: We work with enthusiasm and positivity and are determined to surpass what has already been achieved. We act as a catalyst for change by being open to new and innovative ideas, sharing knowledge and working in partnership.

Integrity: We aspire to high standards of honesty and behaviour, and always to act in the interests of people seeking sanctuary.

Our aim is to encourage individuals, organisations, and institutions across the borough to join us in enacting the Seven Sanctuary Principles. These are to:

1. Offer a positive vision of a culture of welcome and hospitality to all.
2. Create opportunities for relationships of friendship and solidarity between local people and those seeking sanctuary.
3. Recognise and encourage partnership working and network development across localities.
4. Identify opportunities for practical action and work on common cause issues to effect change within and across communities (turning empathy into action).
5. Celebrate and promote the welcome contribution of people seeking sanctuary.
6. Engage people seeking sanctuary in decision making processes at all levels and in all activities.
7. Promote understanding of asylum and refugee issues, especially by enabling refugee voices to be heard directly.

These values and principles are in alignment with the priorities defined in the council's corporate strategy, Our Greenwich. Our priorities are:

Our Communities

Our People

Our Place

Our Economy

Our Organisation

Our work contributes to the delivery of following Our Greenwich Missions:

Mission 1: People's health supports them in living their best life

Mission 2: People will not experience discrimination

Mission 3: Those in financial need can access the right support, advice and opportunities to improve their situation

Mission 4: Children and young people can reach their full potential

Mission 5: Everyone in Greenwich is safer, and feels safer

Mission 6: People in Greenwich have access to a safe and secure home that meets their needs

Mission 9: Neighbourhoods are vibrant, safe and attractive with community services that meet the needs of local residents

Mission 11: Everyone has the opportunity to secure a good job

Mission 14: The voluntary, community and socially motivated sectors in Greenwich are strengthened and able to provide more support to the most in need

Mission 15: Our Council is better at listening to communities, and communities feel they are heard

Mission 16: We develop networks with communities, key partners and businesses to meet need and address challenges together

Mission 17: We design our services around the needs of our residents



5. Introduction

Every year, thousands of people seeking sanctuary arrive in the UK hoping to rebuild their lives after fleeing war, persecution, and terror.

Greenwich Council has a proud history of welcoming everyone who comes to live in our borough with important and valued cohorts arriving from many countries including Nigeria, Jamaica, Nepal, Vietnam, India, Bangladesh, Syria, Afghanistan and Ukraine. Our work in recent years reflects our commitment to support those fleeing persecution, oppression and violence, and we are proud to recognise the enormous benefits which sanctuary seekers bring to our local economy, communities and culture, often through innovation and entrepreneurship.

Armed conflict continues in many countries in the Middle East and Africa including Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Sudan. In February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine causing many people to flee their homes. Human rights abuses are rife in many

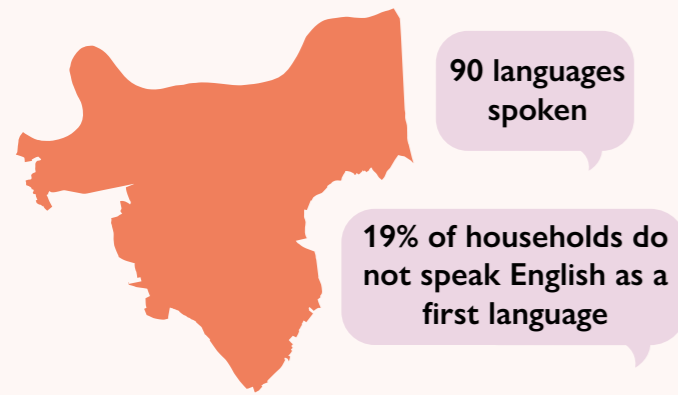
countries across the globe, where people are subject to torture, repression, and enslavement by their own governments. Meanwhile, the emerging climate crisis is increasingly making some parts of the world uninhabitable due to droughts, floods, and land fires. The Royal Borough of Greenwich is committed to ensuring that those arriving in our borough are welcomed and provided sanctuary.

We are keen to build on this legacy to ensure that we respond to global events and the developing needs of our communities. In Greenwich, we are clear that by ensuring a welcoming place for all, we can breakdown stereotypes, build trust across communities, identify shared values, create a sense of belonging for all, thereby promoting social cohesion and healthy communities.

As a Borough of Sanctuary, our goal is that refugees, asylum seekers and migrants are able to fulfil their potential and contribute to Greenwich's community, culture, and economy, while living in safety and security.



6. Our Population



38% of the population in Greenwich was not born in the UK

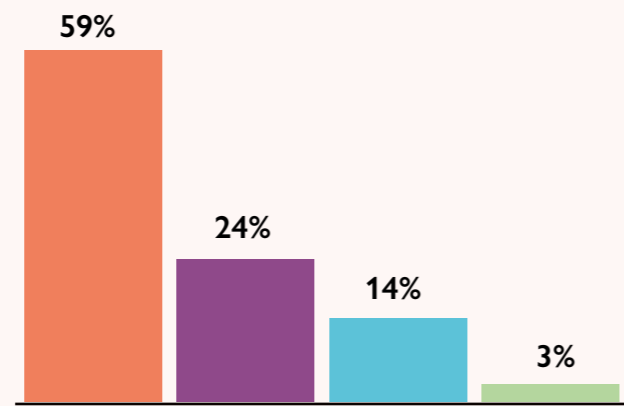
Greenwich is a diverse borough. People living in Greenwich are from a wide range of ethnicities and backgrounds, and there are over **90 languages** spoken. **19%** of households do not speak English as a first language. **38%** of the population in Greenwich was not born in the UK, at just under **108,500 people**.

Our Joint Strategic Needs Analysis provides data around the ethnicity of our sanctuary seekers and figures for our work with those who have no recourse to public funds.



Nearly **6,700 people** from overseas arrived in Greenwich in the year ending June 2025, falling from the recent peak of almost **10,400 arrivals** in 2022/23.

People from **87** different nationalities arrived in Greenwich in year ending June 2025, with Asian countries by far forming the largest regional group of origin.



In 2017 just over half (**59%**) of Greenwich's population was of white ethnicity, a quarter (**24%**) Black (African or Caribbean), a fifth Asian (**14%**) or other (**3%**) ethnicities.

38% of the population in Greenwich was not born in the UK, at just under **108,500 people**.

138 people seeking asylum were being supported by the Home Office in Greenwich at the end of June 2025, equivalent to **0.46 people per 1,000** of the population. People are supported in a range of housing types; there were **117 people** in community 'dispersal' housing and a further **21 people** were on 'subsistence-only' support. Greenwich doesn't have any asylum seekers being supported in temporary contingency accommodation, nor an initial accommodation site.



More than **20 children** are looked after as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Greenwich.

Sanctuary seekers form an important part of our population and new arrivals continue to contribute to the developing richness of our communities. The data below provides some insights into our population of recent sanctuary seekers:

- 1400 people** (Homes for Ukraine)
- 78 people** (Syrian resettlement)
- 119 people** (Afghan resettlement)



116 households supported by NRPF

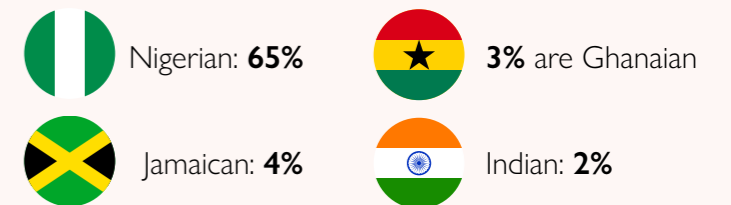
More than **20 children** are looked after as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Greenwich.



32% of pupils in Greenwich had a first language

32% of pupils in Greenwich had a first language other than English in the 2023/24 academic year.

In terms of nationality, the people supported by the Nil Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) team are as follows: Nigerian: **65%**, Jamaican: **4%**, Ghanaian: **3%**, Indian: **2%**



Remaining **26%** are other nationalities including arrivals from Bangladesh, Botswana, China, Holland, Nepal, Pakistan, Romania and Trinidad & Tobago.



(Data taken from RBG Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and Migration Yorkshire Report, 09.25 based on census and NI figures)



7. Meeting the Needs of Our Population

As a Borough of Sanctuary, we are committed to meeting the developing and emergent needs of a changing population as more people seek sanctuary in Greenwich. Migration has become a highly politicised issue, with the far-right seeking to instil division and hostility whilst local, national and international factors increase pressures on council and partner services.

Accommodation and Housing

In Greenwich, significant housing issues include a shortage of affordable homes, high demand leading to long waiting lists, homelessness, poor conditions in parts of the private rental sector and challenges with temporary accommodation.

We know that the borough is affected by the wider London housing crisis, making homes unaffordable for many residents and key workers. In response, we have launched Greenwich Builds, an ambitious council home-building scheme to create 1,750 new homes at genuinely affordable rents for those in need of accommodation.

RBG has reduced hotel occupancy from over 280 people to less than 10 with no families accommodated in hotels. As a consequence all tenants now have access to cooking facilities.

The council and our partners are working together to support sanctuary seekers into mainstream accommodation and we commission services to support access to the private rented sector.

Training for housing staff is provided by a user-led VCS provider to promote awareness and understanding of issue affecting sanctuary seekers.

Presently (as of December 2025), there are no asylum hotels in Greenwich. This situation can change at any time according to decisions taken by the Home Office. In the period since we were awarded Borough of Sanctuary status, we have managed relations with the Home Office for periods where there has been such provision, with the aim of holding the Home Office and associated contractors (Clearsprings) accountable for the wellbeing of residents. The most recent Asylum Hotel in Greenwich was the Radisson Red, which accommodated approximately 100 people seeking asylum. When the Home Office announced the closure of the hotel in early 2024, the council commissioned a specialist assessment and advice service from local organisation Action For Refugees in Lewisham to ensure that support and guidance was offered to all residents and especially to any individuals deemed to be vulnerable.

In the event of further asylum hotels opening in Greenwich, our previous experience in this area means we are well-positioned to engage with the Home Office, Clearsprings Ready Homes and the Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) to support arrivals who are placed in asylum seeker accommodation.

Employment and jobs

Greenwich Local Labour and Business (GLLaB) provide support on an individualised case-by-case basis to help skilled workers access conversion courses. This enables sanctuary seekers to apply for jobs which are commensurate with their existing skills, experience and qualifications.

Further support has been commissioned from Beam, an organisation supporting asylum seekers and refugees to understand their entitlements in the UK and integrate into communities, to provide assistance with job applications resulting in support to 50 people in 2024/25. This service is continuing into 2025/26 and will aim to support a further 50 people.

The Business Team provide Access to Enterprise support programmes courses to assist business start-ups and businesses that have been trading for six months or more. Skills mentoring is also provided together with training on tax systems and HMRC, the UK's tax, payments and customs authority.

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Displaced Workers

Across England there is a significant cohort of adult social care workers who have been recruited internationally. A significant (but unknown) proportion of these workers have been affected by their employer's sponsor license being revoked. Work has therefore been undertaken across south-east London councils to ensure that support is provided to any workers affected through the provision of information, advice and signposting with assistance to join a staffing pool for the purpose of recruiting to vacancies in care agencies. Greenwich has taken a lead in managing the support for workers across south-east London by providing a first contact, pastoral support service for those affected, thus minimising the impact of displacement and enabling people to secure alternative employment.

We have achieved this through having a well-established NRPF and Resettlement Team with the specialist skills to support sanctuary seekers. To date, the team has supported 30 people, of which six have required full assessments resulting in subsistence provision to prevent destitution. The remainder of the cases have been supported through the provision of information and signposting, including referrals to the South East London jobs hub for displaced workers. This proactive approach to working with those affected is consistent with the Borough of Sanctuary principles of support and inclusion.



Health (Joint Strategic Needs Assessment)

Access to health services is a key issue for sanctuary seekers and health inequalities can arise due to language barriers, difficulties navigating the system and fear of immigration enforcement. Sanctuary seekers commonly experience and present with mental health problems associated with trauma. This may be pre-Migration trauma associated with witnessing or experiencing conflict, torture, sexual violence, trafficking, loss, and perilous journeys. Additionally new arrivals may experience post-migration stressors associated with the asylum process itself, including prolonged waits, disbelief in claims, destitution, lack of work, unstable housing, and difficulty resettling. Access to healthcare is impeded by a number of structural barriers including:

- Fear of data sharing with the Home Office and/or fear of being charged for using healthcare
- Late presentation at healthcare services
- Higher than average levels of deprivation
- Difficulty in travelling to healthcare centres & affording medication
- Frequent accommodation transfers, resulting in continuity of care being interrupted
- Negative experiences with healthcare providers leading to reluctance to seek care again
- Intersectional discrimination in healthcare system through unconscious bias & the effect of negative media & political messaging

Access to primary healthcare through GP surgeries is key to addressing many of these issues and we will be working to promote and develop the Safe Surgeries campaign across the borough.

In 2025, we expanded our **Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)** to include a chapter on the health and well-being of sanctuary seekers. Our JSNA details the demographics of our sanctuary seeking population and highlights health and wellbeing needs which have informed this strategic framework and our workplan. The key recommendations of the JSNA are linked to our strategic workplan and the themes identified during its co-production and relate to:

- Communication, Information and Engagement
- Education, Employment and Training
- Housing
- Health and Wellbeing

Funding

The government provides funding in the form of ring-fenced grants and the majority of these are associated with specific resettlement programs such as the Afghan Resettlement Program and Homes for Ukraine. The conditions attached to these grants create the risk of inequalities developing between different groups of sanctuary seekers but we continue to work with our statutory partners, the VCS and the private sector to maximise support for all and address inequalities.

The first year was the hardest. I struggled to find work and felt directionless, and my wife experienced emotional strain. However, with the support of local services, we overcame these challenges. We are now preparing for the Life in the UK Test and hope to apply for citizenship soon.

Mr M.R.

8. Greenwich: A Borough of Sanctuary

We are working with sanctuary seekers and the voluntary care sector on a range of activities and projects to improve lives. Our work is aligned with the City of Sanctuary principles and reflects a whole council commitment to be a welcoming place for all.

This work already relates to many areas of the council's core business and represents a strong foundation from which to develop our practice and become a Borough of Sanctuary.

Several key initiatives are highlighted within this part of the policy, with the understanding that the Royal Borough of Greenwich is committed to continual learning and improvement as our services evolve.

Greenwich City of Sanctuary Partnership

The Royal Borough of Greenwich is proud to be a fully awarded Borough of Sanctuary and is a member organisation of the Local Borough of Sanctuary Partnership Network. We work with local partners as well as the national local authorities' network, sharing our experiences and learning from those across the UK. The Greenwich group is a forum for learning and for identifying areas for development and improvement, whilst working to raise awareness across the community and local businesses.

Since receiving the award in July 2023, we have continued to meet our commitments to support sanctuary seekers to ensure we meet and where possible exceed our formal duties under relevant legislation and Home Office policies and guidelines.

Our progress and achievements in developing and improving services for sanctuary seekers have been brought about through effective cross-departmental

working but also, very importantly through co-operation, collaboration and support from the local Borough of Sanctuary Network. The local network comprises key stakeholders including people with lived experience who have informed our priorities for work since receiving the award.

Training

In line with the council's missions and to promote the training of more social workers in this emergent field, we have supported one member of the team to achieve the Practice Assessor's Award. This award enables the team to accept social work students for practice placements. The team has provided placements to two social work students in addition to supporting the successful completion of one Social Work apprentice placement. This approach helps to deliver training and direct work experience of working with sanctuary seekers which is an area of training in mainstream social work training programmes which is often neglected.

The service has engaged a local user-led charity, Creating Ground CIC, to develop a staff training programme for wider council staff with a view to making a training offer to colleagues in other statutory services. This has commenced in the Autumn of 2025. Planning is also underway for delivery of training to elected council members.

The Resettlement Team has supported learning across the department through participation and presentations at In-House Staff Networking Events, the Safeguarding Adults Board and at Health and Adult Services (HAS) Roadshows. The team itself hosts its own quarterly Team Reflective Practice sessions to share learning across the service to ensure best practice and learning from complex or unusual cases. The creation of the Borough of Sanctuary Service Lead post in 2023 has established a single point of contact within the council for matters relating to Borough of Sanctuary, NRPF, Resettlement and sanctuary seekers.



Housing and accommodation

A new training video has been produced by the council's Housing Department to provide information and advice to sanctuary seekers on how to secure private rented accommodation. The video will be available with subtitles in a range of languages.

Property inspections are undertaken by the council at the commencement of tenancy and instruction issued to landlords not to conduct unannounced subsequent inspections. Increased inspections of temporary accommodation have also commenced. In the context of the Renters Reform Act, contracts with private landlords are under review to ensure better housing, repairs and maintenance.

The Royal Borough of Greenwich has drastically reduced reliance on hotel accommodation since 2023, with hotel occupancy being reduced from over 280 people to less than 10. Consequently, tenants have access to cooking facilities which in turn brings health and economic benefits that they would not have in hotel accommodation.

All housing applicants now receive individual, personalised Housing Plans to help assist and manage the pathway into settled accommodation.

The Housing Allocation Policy is reviewed every three to four years and a review for 2026/27 is underway.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

The Royal Borough of Greenwich has established a central website, Greenwich Learns, to advertise our adult and community learning provision, alongside regular promotion of these services across the council's communication channels.

We have worked with partners to establish ESOL Information Fairs in the borough. The first fair took place in March 2025 in Woolwich Library. The event was attended by a wide range of ESOL providers and groups supporting sanctuary seekers as well as a stall staffed by the council's Resettlement Service. The aim is to host such events twice a year and the next scheduled event will take place in November 2025. The aim of the fairs is to raise awareness and

increase enrolment in ESOL training and utilise high footfall locations to improve visibility for groups with whom the council has less contact.

Refugee Week

The Royal Borough of Greenwich participates in Refugee Week on an annual basis. Refugee Week is an internationally observed awareness week, aiming to foster understanding, challenge negative stereotypes, and promote a more welcoming and inclusive society through direct interaction with local communities and through generating positive publicity around sanctuary seekers and the council's commitment to welcoming and inclusivity. In 2025 a food and music festival was held in General Gordon Square, and in 2024 a schools art project was convened resulting in an art exhibition at the Tramshed. The theme for Refugee Week 2026 will be courage.

Data

A data dashboard and key performance indicators has been developed with data shared across departments via the Borough of Sanctuary Council Officers Group.

Service Literature

Information and literature is published in a wide range of languages to promote awareness and access to local services, including housing, health provision and employment. Job clubs at the Old Library are available for sanctuary seekers. This remains subject to ongoing review based on emergent and changing needs of the community.

How the Council is supporting refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants

The three main government sponsored schemes for resettlement are Homes for Ukraine (the largest scheme), The Afghan Resettlement Programme and the Syrian Resettlement Program. In addition to these sponsored schemes is the work undertaken by the Nil Recourse to Public Funds Team.



Partnership Work with Community Groups, Voluntary Organisations and Statutory Services

In Greenwich, we recognise that working with partner organisations is vital to our work as a Borough of Sanctuary. Our partnership and collaborative approach has been crucial in securing our status as a fully awarded Borough of Sanctuary. The Borough of Sanctuary Network

The BoS Network in Greenwich is the main forum which brings together partner agencies, people with lived experience and the council together to discuss all matters relating to sanctuary seekers. The network includes a wide range of key stakeholders and providers:

New Arrivals Support CIC

Originally established as an emergency response initiative to support arrivals from Ukraine, NASCIC has become a key partner in providing support not only for Ukrainians but also in ensuring the continuation of support for Afghan arrivals. NASCIC provides holistic, wraparound support in relation to a wide range of challenges faced by new arrivals including accommodation, education, employment, visa applications, modern slavery, trafficking, domestic abuse, and safeguarding. NASCIC has supported over 180 people per year since its inception, with support and advice provided in relation to employment, health, education, finances, housing, transport, telecommunications and safety.

Creating Ground CIC

Creating Ground CIC is a not-for-profit organisation that works with women from migrant backgrounds to promote cross-cultural awareness, learning and sharing across different communities in South-East London (mainly in Greenwich) through collaborative arts and educational projects. This includes weekly dance, yoga and creativity for wellbeing

sessions and the establishment of the #NoticeUs campaign with a focus on Leaders' development and understanding Policy Making. Weekly theatre sessions are run to develop performances to accompany the #NoticeUs campaign and tackle health inequalities Community Action & Leadership training. Research Forums are run to map services used by migrant communities in Greenwich as part of MigRefHealth project. Creating Ground performances have reached a combined audience of over 4000 people in 2024/25. Creating Ground are now central to the delivery of training to council staff on matters relating to sanctuary seekers and are a key member of the Borough of Sanctuary Network.

Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network (LRMN)

LRMN is a local organisation which receives funding from the Royal Borough of Greenwich. LRMN provides free support and advice on immigration, housing and employment to migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. Additional services are funded by the council to provide mental health and wellbeing support to Homes for Ukraine sponsors through the delivery of specialist two-hour workshops. LRMN's migrant hub has provided advice and support to 746 people in 2024/25.

Plumstead Community Law Centre

The Plumstead Community Law Centre is part-funded by the Council and provides free support and legal advice on immigration, housing and employment to all Greenwich residents including migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. Legally qualified support is available to support sanctuary seekers, including those with no recourse to public funds to seek discrete advice concerning a wide range of immigration issues including visa applications, immigration status and asylum applications.



University of Greenwich

The University of Greenwich provides support and research-led, academic insights to the Borough of Sanctuary Partnership, to inform best practice and strategic governance arrangements.

Blackheath Conservatoire

Blackheath Conservatoire is a local organisation which receives funding from the Council to deliver art, ESOL, conversation and social evenings for Ukrainian adults. Funding from RBG has led to the establishment of a Ukrainian choir and art classes, led by Ukrainian nationals and Ukrainian speakers and have provided a weekly opportunity for displaced community members to meet and maintain their culture. The Conservatoire's refugee programme enables people of all ages who have fled war and persecution to be offered access to free music tuition, drama and art classes and has welcomed arrivals from a wide range of nations including Ethiopia, Turkey, Honduras, Iran and Afghanistan.

Citizens of the World Choir CIC

Council funding supports this organisation to produce social media videos about hosting, art, and wellness projects for Ukrainian adults, and supported places in the choir. The choir consists of singers from 28 different nationalities delivering performances in nine languages. 93% of members report improved mental health, and 85% of displaced members agree the choir helps reduce social isolation.

B Young Stars

B Young Stars is a youth-focused initiative based in Greenwich that provides education focussing on maths and English as well as sport and mentoring programs for young people. The group operates from three locations across the borough to provide easy access and reach into the communities they support.

Trinity Vineyard Welcome Churches Project

Trinity Vineyard Church supports asylum seekers and refugees in Woolwich. The project produces welcome boxes including toiletries, stationary, books and leaflets about the area. Project volunteers regularly meet with beneficiaries and help them navigate the local area or provide informal social opportunities. Informal ESOL groups are also run to provide a conversational setting to discuss particular themes whilst reducing social isolation and improving functional English skills.

The Royal Greenwich Community Hub

The Royal Greenwich Community Hub has been supporting people with advice and help on a range of topics from food, money issues and housing to employment, training, and social activities.

Live Well Greenwich

Live Well Greenwich is an organisation which offers health and wellbeing support for residents including those seeking sanctuary in the borough.

Commissioning

Service commissioning and grant funding is a key area of support for sanctuary seekers and of partnership working with the voluntary sector.

The Royal Borough of Greenwich has commissioned specialist support for arrivals under government schemes. This has been to provide wrap-around support to enable arrivals to settle into Greenwich and access assistance in relation to a wide range of areas including accommodation, employment, education, training, health, ESOL, visa renewals and other local services. The three main providers for these schemes have been Ukraine Support Greenwich (Homes for Ukraine), GriP (Afghan Resettlement) and Greenwich Islamic Centre (Syrian Resettlement). Evaluations of these services have been completed giving strong assurance that Greenwich's commissioning arrangements have been effective in supporting the resettlement of those we welcome.



In addition, the council has commissioned a service from Beam to enable access to private rented accommodation and employment. This contract has supported 50 people in its first year and has been extended to continue into 2025/2026. Whilst the focus of the Beam service is to assist people from Ukraine, the contract ensures that people from all groups can be referred, as part of the council's efforts to provide greater consistency in the support given to all groups.

The council continues to fund legal support and advice through the provision of grants to Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network and Plumstead Law Centre. These services provide drop-in support to people requiring specialist advice in relation to local services, visas and the law and have served as vital components in the offer made to sanctuary seekers.

People with Lived Experience

Over the past two and a half years the council has dramatically increased direct engagement with people with lived experience to develop co-production to ensure it becomes part of our routine business approach. This has been done over the past two years in preparation for Refugee Week, resulting in a Greenwich schools art project and exhibition in 2024 and a music and food festival in 2025.

Each year we have run four workshops engaging six to eight people at each session with input from our Communications team. The council has also run a series of workshops for people with lived experience to support the design and content of our forthcoming Borough of Sanctuary Strategic Workplan. These workshops engaged around 50 people from 14 different nations as part of this process, and all participants in consultation workshops are remunerated with vouchers in recognition of their knowledge and expertise.

Looking forward, a forum for people with lived experience will be established as part of our new governance framework.

The council has participated in a program of workshops run by Lewisham refugee and Migrant Network to provide training to sanctuary seekers on

how to organise campaigns and consultation groups and how to become speakers for their communities.

Participation in and hosting of targeted workshops has resulted in wider discussions around user needs and service provision with the positive outcome of which have informed the actions and service development defined in the 'Embed' section below.

Cross-council working

The council routinely participates in London and National Borough of Sanctuary Council Network meetings and events to share learning and good practice. The Royal Borough of Greenwich has received praise from the chair of the national network for the establishment of the Council Officers Group which is regarded as a beacon model for ensuring effective cross-departmental working in councils.

Partnership and governance

The governance structure relating to all Borough of Sanctuary work is under review to support the delivery of the forthcoming Borough of Sanctuary Strategic Workplan. We have convened a workshop with key partner organisations which will inform the design of the new Borough of Sanctuary Strategic Partnership Board and local network group. In the meantime, the council continues to oversee all work relating to sanctuary seekers through the monthly Council Officer Group (COG) meetings. This is a cross departmental management meeting to bring together managers from all relevant council departments, led and chaired by Health and Adult Services. The COG has captured work undertaken and improvements in service delivery in a workplan which demonstrates our progress over the last three years.' The establishment of this cross-departmental approach will be strengthened further through the establishment of the new forthcoming governance structure and partnership arrangements. In the meantime, the council ensures representation at the local Borough of Sanctuary Network which comprises key stakeholder organisations from the voluntary sector as well as people with lived experience.



Syrian Resettlement

Greenwich has successfully achieved its Home Office allocation under this scheme.

The Royal Borough of Greenwich initially received 20 families (a total of 78 people) under the Greenwich Syrian Project (GSP), however one family moved to another borough, and therefore exited the scheme. As of March 2025, there are 19 families with a total of 40 children that were re-settled under the GSP including:

- 12 children aged under 5
- 16 primary school aged children aged 5-11 years old
- 12 children aged 12-17 years old

All children of school age were enrolled in schools within a month of their arrival in the UK. The children have generally made excellent educational attainments with two progressing to university.

There are currently no proposals for any further arrivals.

Specialist wraparound support was commissioned from Greenwich Islamic Centre (GIC). As such this was the first major service of its type commissioned in the borough with excellent results around arrival arrangements, education, access to English classes (ESOL), health, income/finances and accommodation. With input from GIC, all of the families were enrolled in ESOL classes soon after arrival. Attendance of classes was strong enabling signposting to employment programs.

All families were registered with GP's and dentists upon arrival. 100% of the families resettled confirmed that their health had significantly improved since arrival in the UK and in one highly notable case, a child from one of the families recovered from leukaemia.

Social integration as well managed through strong partnership working between council social workers and GIC. The families enjoyed social activities which included seaside trips, picnics, walking and dance sessions for women and children as well as informal social gatherings.



Afghan Resettlement

Greenwich has successfully achieved its Home Office allocation under the two resettlement schemes.

In order to provide wrap-around support for our Afghan arrivals, the council commissioned the Greenwich Afghan Resettlement Service (GARS).

To date Greenwich has successfully received 20 families under GARS with a total of 119 individuals, comprising 57 adults and 62 children, including:

- 14 children aged under 5
- 26 primary school aged children aged 5-11 years old
- 22 children aged 12-17 years old

All children of school age were offered school places within 3 months of their arrival in the borough. Additionally, most of the adults were enrolled into ESOL classes soon after arrival.

All families were accommodated on arrival through a mix of furnished temporary accommodation, Ministry of Defence (MOD) properties, Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) properties or utilising the Find Your Own Accommodation route into the private rented sector.

To augment services to these families, the council commissioned a specialist wraparound support service from Greenwich Inclusion Project to enable the resettlement of the families. This support has been vital in managing income related enquiries and all families now have at least one family member in employment resulting in financial stability.

Most families were registered with GP's and dentists whilst at reception centres or bridging hotels and were smoothly assisted with transfers to local GPs. 100% of the families resettled confirmed that their health had significantly improve since arrival in the UK.

The formal period for supporting these arrivals ends in March 2026 but it should be noted that the Home Office has implemented a new Afghan Resettlement Programme under which councils will receive further allocations. These allocations have not yet been made. However, as a Borough of Sanctuary, the council has agreed to commence support for two early arrivals. These two arrivals will count as part of Greenwich's eventual quota for the new scheme.

Our current team structure and knowledge of commissioning wrap-around support means that we are very well prepared for the next cohort of Afghan arrivals.



Homes for Ukraine

This is the largest of the government sponsored resettlement schemes and to date the Royal Borough of Greenwich has welcomed 1,400 arrivals who have been resettled, with Greenwich residents acting as sponsors. Of these, 261 arrivals are children which includes:

- 31 children aged under 5
- 119 primary school aged children aged 5-11 years old
- 111 children aged 12-17 years old

Guests continue to arrive under the scheme and no timescale has been given for the end of the program, although recent changes to the scheme mean that new arrivals are granted an 18-month visa rather than a three-year visa (with the option to extend visas by 18 months per renewal application). The scheme has been very successful and managed within budget resulting in no cost pressures to the council. This is primarily due to the design of the scheme in Greenwich through the creation of a dedicated social work Resettlement Team and the commissioning of the Ukraine Support Greenwich Service which has prevented placement breakdowns and avoided a reliance on temporary accommodation which has occurred in other local authorities. This design represents a real investment of available funds to provide high quality support and is a unique model for the UK. Consequently, Greenwich is in a strong position to manage the end of the scheme should such an announcement be made.

Nil Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)

The NRPF Team works with people who have no recourse to public funds. This refers to a condition placed on visas which limits a person's ability to access benefits and other types of financial support, including housing. Many migrants in the UK have an NRPF condition on their visa. Presently, the NRPF Team supports 116 households (31.07.25). 67 of these are families and 49 are single adults. Greenwich has the 6th highest NRPF expenditure in London on supporting persons with NRPF demonstrating the council's commitment to Sanctuary Seekers. Nevertheless, since the creation of a dedicated NRPF Team and the allocation of a budget, the team is forecast for it's first end of year underspend since the team's inception in 2015. High expenditure has made us the subject of a significant number of Freedom of Information requests, with a total of six in 2024 increasing to 10 to date in 2025.

In terms of nationality, the people supported by the NRPF team are as follows: Nigerian: 65%, Jamaican: 4%, Ghanaian: 3%, Indian: 2%, Remaining 26% are other nationalities.

Over the past three years a major focus for the team has been in supporting people whose applications for leave to remain have become delayed and in resolving queries that have slowed decision-making. The resolution of applications has been of benefit in enabling people in temporary accommodation to be transferred into settled accommodation.

The NRPF Team supports vulnerable households who are assessed as being destitute through the provision of subsistence, to enable households to function as valued members of the community.

With USG's help, Nadia was referred to the charity Beam. Through their support, she secured private-rented accommodation, enabling her to leave her restrictive host environment and begin living independently.

Nadia



9. The Future: Borough of Sanctuary Workplan 2026-28

Our workplan has been co-produced with people with lived experience and a wide range of partners and stakeholders through a series of workshops and a major stakeholder event in February 2025. The content of the workplan is also informed by the findings of a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment completed by Public Health in partnership with Health and Adult Services, in 2025. Through the process of co-production, four key thematic areas have been identified for the focus of our future work:

1. Information, communication and engagement
2. Employment, education and training
3. Accommodation
4. Health and wellbeing

Our workplan is structured around these themes with actions assigned to each theme. Each action is aligned to at least one of the Borough of Sanctuary principles of learn, embed and share:

Learn: Learning about what it means to be seeking sanctuary, both in general, and specifically.

Embed: Taking positive action to embed concepts of welcome, safety and inclusion. To take steps to ensure this progress remains sustainable.

Share: Sharing our vision, achievements, what we have learned, and good practice with other local authorities, the local community and beyond.

This workplan succeeds the previous workplan which has already been delivered by the Council Officers Group.

Mohamad was 17 at the time, and didn't speak English. He enrolled in ESOL and completed around two years of study before leaving to pursue work. He is now employed with Amazon delivery.

Ms A.A.A

Ref	Development Area	Lead	Learn/Embed/Share
1	Information, Communication and Engagement Improve and develop information for new arrivals to support resettlement and inclusion and develop partnership working across the Borough of Sanctuary Network.		
1.1	Welcome/Orientation		
1.1.1	Develop existing welcome packs through co-production (GPs, schools, employers, faith groups, tuition groups, colleges, childcare and local food shops, housing, private rentals, health provision, service directories, ESOL). More visual content and QR codes and explore audio/visual IT -based content.	BoS Network/ Resettlement Service	L, E, S
1.1.2	Welcome/orientation meetings and briefings and tours to be set up for new arrivals (face to face) – Quarterly meetings suggested initially.	Partnership Board (VCS)	E
1.2	Promoting the Borough of Sanctuary		
1.2.1	Spread awareness of movement through leaflets and press articles. Print in multiple languages and use QR codes and use social media to address mis and disinformation. Dedicated channel for sanctuary seekers on IT platforms (Whatsapp), with greater use of QR codes.	Comms and Partnership Board	S
1.2.2	Quarterly engagement events to promote local services to local residents in high-footfall locations to promote services and support relevant to sanctuary seekers.	BoS Network	S
1.2.3	Partnership Board to encourage more vol. sector organisations, schools, health providers and local businesses to take Borough of Sanctuary Pledge and seek awards. 1 - Launch a campaign to sign up all Greenwich GPs to the Safe Surgeries campaign, which aims to improve access to GP services 2 - Launch a campaign to sign up all Greenwich schools to the Borough of Sanctuary pledge, which aims to make all children feel welcomed in their schools 3 - Launch a campaign to sign up all up local business to the Borough of Sanctuary pledge, which aims to make residents feel welcomed in Greenwich.	Partnership Network Comms Children's Services Economy and Skills	E, S

Ref	Development Area	Lead	Learn/Embed/Share
1.2.4	Partnership Board to collaborate with community leaders, faith groups, and influencers to amplify key messages and develop a better understanding of the needs of different religious groups in sanctuary seeking communities and provide info/literature in places of worship.	Partnership Board	L, E, S
1.3	Partnership and Governance		
1.3.1	Establish new Partnership Board to develop working across the partnership and ensure compliance with city of sanctuary guidelines.	Health and Adult Services (HAS)	L, E, S
1.3.2	Create more forums for sanctuary seekers to share experiences and establish community representatives models.	BoS Network	L, S
1.3.3	Partnership Board to develop methods of engagement with other stat services e.g. health, police, fire service	Partnership Board	S
2	Employment, Education and Training Support the development and improvement of work, education and training for sanctuary seekers		
2.1	Further and Higher education		
2.1.1	Partnership Board to discuss university access, college resources for sanctuary seekers, college partnerships and information sharing protocols to enable improved access to further and higher education for sanctuary seekers.	Partnership Board	E
2.2	ESOL		
2.2.1	Undertake mapping of all ESOL services and consider areas for development including access.	BoS Network	L, E
2.3	Council Staff Training		
2.3.1	Council staff training to ensure officers understand their duties and roles in supporting sanctuary seekers, incl. sanctuary seekers experiences and their pathways to resettlement	HAS	L
2.3.2	Council member training to understand the needs of sanctuary seekers	HAS	L, S

Ref	Development Area	Lead	Learn/Embed/Share
2.4	Volunteering & Work Experience		
2.4.1	Increase volunteering and work experience opportunities for sanctuary seekers.	GLLAB	E
2.4.2	Exploration of remuneration for sanctuary seekers providing childcare that enables others to work (including work as volunteers)	GLLAB	E
2.5	Employment and Jobs		
2.5.1	Networking events including local business and community leaders, employers and sanctuary seekers in places of worship and community centres to improve access and opportunities around employment.	Economy and Skills	L, E, S
3	Accommodation Ensure access to appropriate, well maintained long-term accommodation for sanctuary seekers		
3.1	Private Rentals		
3.1.1	Newly implemented training on how to report concerns with repairs/maintenance to be made more accessible to sanctuary seekers – video with subtitles to be produced.	RBG Housing and Safer Communities	E, S
3.1.2	Explore options for support in securing a guarantor for tenancies.	Partnership Board	E
3.2	General Housing Issues		
3.2.1	Identify and address risk factors for eviction through engagement with people with lived experience in local network.	RBG Housing and Safer Communities	L, E
3.2.2	Monitor existing schemes to consider opportunities for housing options outside London.	RBG Housing and Safer Communities	L, E
3.2.3	Offer workshops on tenant rights and challenging unfair evictions.	Welfare Rights	E

Ref	Development Area	Lead	Learn/Embed/Share
4	Health and Wellbeing Promote health and well being for sanctuary seekers and develop understanding of the needs of specific groups		
4.1	GP Access		
4.1.1	Improve practice on safer surgeries with a view to all surgeries signing up to safer Surgeries.	NHS Primary Care	L, E, S
4.1.2	Explore options for support in securing a guarantor for tenancies.	Partnership Board	E
4.2	Advocacy		
4.2.1	Further develop advocacy and representation networks for sanctuary seekers to further increase consultation and co-production.	Partnership Board/BoS Network	E
4.3	Recreation		
4.3.1	Ensure physical activity services, procured under the new LiveWell contract and including community-based physical activity, consider equity of access and provide services that are accessible for all inclusion groups, including Sanctuary Seekers.	Partnership Board/BoS Network	E
4.4	Food/Nutrition		
4.4.1	Ensure a review of access to food and food security is included in the Greenwich Food Needs Assessment with the findings used to inform the development of a new Food Strategy for Greenwich which includes recommendations relating to access to free/subsidised food and guidance on evidence-based models of delivery such as Food Pantries.	Health and Adult Services and Public Health	L, E
4.4.2	Ensure that the new community cookery services, procured under the new LiveWell contract, are culturally appropriate and consider the needs of the populations they are aimed at, including Sanctuary Seekers and other inclusion health groups	Health and Adult Services and Public Health	E
4.4.3	Raise awareness of the health-risks related to foods high in sugar, salt and fat for sanctuary seekers arriving from countries where these messages aren't commonplace and also raise awareness of Healthy Start and Free School Meal eligibility for sanctuary seeking families.	Health and Adult Services and Public Health	E

Ref	Development Area	Lead	Learn/Embed/Share
4.5	Mental Health		
4.5.1	Review of how trauma is addressed/supported through mental health services and services that reflect cultural differences and stigma concerns.	Partnership Board	L, E
4.5.2	Support the establishment of peer-led, self-help groups in which storytelling is used to share experiences.	Partnership Board/BoS Network	L, E
4.6	Special Needs		
4.6.1	Improve diagnosis and service access for older children not previously known to health/social care	Partnership Board	L, E
4.7	Community Safety and Police		
4.7.1	Awareness raising about domestic violence and support services. Police need more awareness training.	Partnership Board/BoS Network	E
4.7.2	Raise awareness of Hate Crime Services and monitor data on referrals to specialist services due to concerns around under reporting and recent review of hate crime service.	HAS	L, E



10. Case studies

Case study 1:

Z.A.K. and S.A. arrived in the UK in December 2017 with their three children. One of their daughters, aged five at the time, was receiving treatment for leukaemia. None of the family spoke English on arrival. They were warmly welcomed by a council representative and introduced to their Arabic-speaking Family Support Worker, who provided consistent practical and emotional support. Volunteers (pre-GrIP commissioning) were also introduced and helped befriend and orientate the family.

With the combined support of the worker and volunteers, the family quickly became familiar with their local area. They were helped to register with schools, their GP, dentist, and other essential services. Both parents enrolled in ESOL classes at the local college to begin learning English.

Their daughter completed five years of successful treatment and remains in recovery. Now in Year 8, she is doing very well. The whole family has developed strong English language skills and integrated confidently into the community. Mrs S.A. enjoys volunteering with a range of charities and has created a warm home environment. She has also cultivated an abundant garden of vegetables and herbs, which she generously shares with friends and neighbours.

Mr S.A. passed his driving test and now works as a Security Officer. All family members have received their British passports, and they continue to live happily in Greenwich. They remain grateful for the support they received from the borough.



Case study 2:

This case study focuses on Ms A.A.A., who arrived in the UK with her son Mohamad in March 2019. Mohamad was 17 at the time, and neither of them spoke English. He enrolled in ESOL and completed around two years of study before leaving to pursue work. He is now employed with Amazon delivery.

Ms A.A.A. experiences both physical and psychological health challenges, due to her experiences of war in Syria and the pressures of adapting to a busy lifestyle in the UK. She remains highly dependent on her son and others for day-to-day support. Despite continuously attending ESOL classes since her arrival, she struggles with learning and is currently applying for a waiver for the Knowledge of Language

and Life in the UK requirement. Her GP has agreed to complete the application, though it is uncertain whether it will be accepted.

Although her official council support ended in March 2024, she continues to seek help for ongoing difficulties. Her son assists when he can, but he works full-time.

The key learning from this case is the importance of early monitoring and assessment so that educational and psychological needs can be identified and addressed from the outset. While counselling is available through mainstream services with interpreters, the absence of language-specific counsellors at Oxleas can limit the effectiveness or appeal of support.



Case study 3:

My name is Mr M.R. I arrived in the UK in August 2021 through the ARAP scheme, seeking safety and a new beginning for my family after leaving a conflict zone. Before coming to the UK, I worked at the British Embassy in Kabul as a translator while completing a master's degree in international relations, specialising in National Security.

From the moment we arrived in Greenwich, we felt supported. The Council helped us settle into temporary accommodation and guided us through registering with GPs, schools, and colleges. Their support helped us adapt to a completely new environment.

I enrolled in ESOL and completed Level 2 at LSEC. My wife also joined the college, and our children are happily attending school. Taking part in local events helped us build connections and discover opportunities. A turning point came in 2024, when I met professionals at a council-hosted event who helped me secure employment. I am now proud to support other Afghan families by sharing my experience and offering guidance.

Over time, I completed several short courses in IT, safeguarding, skills development, GDPR, mental health, and more. I began with part-time work before progressing into full-time employment. Both my wife and I also gained our UK driving licences, giving us greater independence.

The first year was the hardest. I struggled to find work and felt directionless, and my wife experienced emotional strain. However, with the support of local services, we overcame these challenges. We are now preparing for the Life in the UK Test and hope to apply for citizenship soon.

I am deeply grateful to Greenwich Council and all the organisations that supported us. Their dedication helped us not only settle but thrive. To new arrivals, I encourage you to stay determined, make use of the support available, and believe in yourselves. Hard work and patience make independence possible.

Today, I am proud to call Greenwich my home. I close with this Afghan proverb:

“تسرا ننتس ناوت، ننتس اوخ” Where there is a will, there is a way”



Case study 4:

Nadia arrived in the UK seeking sanctuary with her four children and was accommodated under the Homes for Ukraine scheme. However, instead of finding refuge, she encountered restrictive and controlling conditions from her host. Feeling isolated and frightened, she was initially hesitant to disclose her situation.

Nadia was referred to Ukraine Support Greenwich (USG), who helped her navigate the complex process of applying for Universal Credit and child benefits, providing vital financial stability for the family. USG also connected her with local food banks and supported her in registering with a GP and enrolling her children in school.

They assisted Nadia in creating a CV and helped her secure employment with a reputable company, significantly improving her

independence and security. She also enrolled in ESOL and private language classes, which played an important role in her personal and professional progress.

With USG's help, Nadia was referred to the charity Beam. Through their support, she secured private-rented accommodation, enabling her to leave her restrictive host environment and begin living independently.

USG also encouraged Nadia to attend community events, which connected her with other Ukrainians and helped rebuild her confidence. These activities provided her with a supportive network that recognised her resilience and celebrated her progress.



Case study 5:

Anna and her teenage son travelled to the UK under the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Their journey was marked by significant difficulty, particularly for Anna, who found herself in a coercive and abusive relationship shortly after arrival.

In distress, Anna contacted the police and was placed in temporary accommodation. She reached out to the local council, who referred her to Ukrainian Support Greenwich (USG) for further assistance.

USG supported Anna in applying for Universal Credit and housing benefits to cover her accommodation, as well as child benefits. They signposted both Anna and her son to mental health support, including Time to Talk, and helped them register with a GP—essential steps for their wellbeing.

USG also provided guidance on ESOL courses and supported Anna's son in accessing college, helping both improve their English skills.

They assisted Anna in updating her CV and connecting with an agency to identify work opportunities in her field of interest.

With the support of USG and the charity Beam, Anna and her son were able to secure private housing. USG also continued to assist with her son's college education.

A year later, Anna's son secured work in the hospitality sector and progressed to a junior manager role. His English improved significantly, and he felt proud of his achievements. He later encouraged his mother to join the same team, marking a positive turning point after an extremely challenging period.

This case highlights the transformative impact of community support and the strength and resilience of individuals like Anna and her son. Their story demonstrates the vital importance of the work carried out by organisations such as USG and Beam.



