

# Resource Pack



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## Gardens of Sanctuary

# Welcome

Welcome to Gardens of Sanctuary, an initiative to inspire, support and promote the use of community growing spaces as places of welcome for people seeking sanctuary in the UK. This pack contains information and resources about seeking sanctuary in the UK and guidance on how your community growing space can become a Garden of Sanctuary, and be part of a network of gardens with principles of welcome and sanctuary at their core.

**A** Garden of Sanctuary could be anywhere and be any size. It might be an urban allotment, a rural smallholding, a city farm or a permaculture food forest. What binds them together is a commitment to learning about sanctuary, embedding that learning in policy and practice, and sharing this commitment with others. This resource pack sets out some of the key ideas for each of these areas using information from case studies, a national survey and academic literature to help us understand what makes a garden a place of sanctuary. There are also activities to help your group think through some of the key issues.

There are community growing groups all over the UK doing vital work that brings people together around things we all share in common like food, the land and our environment. Through this activity, communities are stronger and people are happier, healthier and less isolated. Because of this, community growing spaces offer enormous therapeutic value to the many thousands of people who regularly visit them.

Ensuring that people who have sought sanctuary in the UK – including refugees and asylum seekers – can be contributors and collaborators in these spaces means that we are making therapeutic places and spaces available to some of the people who may need them most, and also benefiting from the wealth of knowledge and experience sanctuary seekers bring. Taking steps to make sure that your community growing space is truly a space of sanctuary and welcome can take some work up front, but is ultimately a hugely rewarding and enriching experience for all involved.

Gardens of Sanctuary is a partnership between **Social Farms & Gardens**, **City of Sanctuary** and the **Permaculture Association**. We have a shared vision of a network of green spaces with a culture of welcome, in which asylum seekers and refugees feel safe and appreciated as valued contributors and co-creators of community gardens and environmental projects across the UK. In 2017 and 2018 we conducted a UK wide study of community growing groups to find out how they worked with refugees and asylum seekers. More information including an online version of this resource pack, the case studies, our report and other useful resources can be found at [gardens.cityofsanctuary.org](https://gardens.cityofsanctuary.org).





## Section 1

# Gardens of Sanctuary

### WHAT IS A GARDEN OF SANCTUARY?

A Garden of Sanctuary is a garden that is committed to being a safe and welcoming place for those seeking sanctuary, including refugees and asylum seekers [see Section Three for definitions]. It is a community growing space that helps volunteers, growers, any staff or committee and the wider community to understand what it means to be seeking sanctuary. A Garden of Sanctuary embeds policies and practices that ensure that everyone is treated as equal, valued members of the community, and actively welcomes sanctuary seekers to be part of their space.

### WHY BECOME A GARDEN OF SANCTUARY?

Gardens are naturally therapeutic environments which provide varied opportunities for people of all ages, and can bring communities together. By becoming a Garden of Sanctuary you can:

- Create a culture of welcome and belonging which is beneficial to everyone involved
- Provide learning opportunities about what it means to be seeking sanctuary and dispel some of the negative myths that exist
- Increase the diversity of people involved with your growing space and reach out to parts of the community you might not have reached before
- Benefit from funding available for promoting social inclusion and working with marginalised communities



*It is a community growing space that helps volunteers, growers, any staff or committee and the wider community to understand what it means to be seeking sanctuary*

### HOW TO BECOME A GARDEN OF SANCTUARY

There are three principles that underpin the commitment needed to become a Garden of Sanctuary

- 1. Learn** about what it means to be seeking sanctuary
- 2. Take positive action to embed** concepts of welcome, safety and inclusion in your growing space and the wider community
- 3. Share** your vision and achievements

If you are committed to these principles, and can provide evidence that you are meeting these and a small number of specific criteria, you can apply to be recognised with a Garden of Sanctuary Award. See the section Becoming an Accredited Garden of Sanctuary at the end of Section 2.



Where you see this symbol, there is an invitation to take part in a short exercise designed to help you think more deeply about some of the issues and subjects raised in this pack. These exercises can be completed either individually or in a group.



**Learn, Embed, Share**

## Section 2

# Becoming a Garden of Sanctuary

## LEARN

It is crucial to provide opportunities for everyone involved in your growing space to learn about the asylum system, why people seek sanctuary and what some of the major challenges they face are.

In Section Three there is more information and some activities to help you think about these questions. The following are some ideas for ways you can promote learning amongst your group, your project and the wider community.

### Partner with a refugee organisation

All over the UK there are fantastic organisations, often small charities, providing vital support to people seeking sanctuary. This might include drop-ins, housing advice, legal advice, integration projects, food banks and many others. Partnering with a refugee organisation can be crucial to making connections with people seeking sanctuary and for ongoing advice and support for your project. Some growing spaces offer dedicated sessions for sanctuary seekers, usually in partnership with a refugee organisation, whilst others invite people seeking sanctuary to attend regular sessions or just to drop in.

A good starting point is your local City of Sanctuary group which can be found at [www.cityofsanctuary.org/groups](http://www.cityofsanctuary.org/groups).

### Training

See if there is a local organisation that offers training on the asylum process and on working with people seeking sanctuary. This can be a great learning opportunity, but can also help you to connect with groups who work with people seeking sanctuary that could become involved in your growing space.

There are a growing number of sanctuary seekers who have trained to speak about either their own, or the general, experience of seeking asylum in the UK. Find someone who can come and talk to your group, or go along to an event in your local area where someone is giving a talk to find out more.

### Resources

There are some excellent resources available to support your group to learn more about the asylum process and the challenges faced by people seeking sanctuary. See Section 4 for a list of useful resources.





## EMBED

There are many ways in which you can take positive action to embed a culture and a practice of sanctuary in your group and growing space. The following are some key ideas and ways to overcome some of the many barriers to inclusion that a lot of people seeking sanctuary will face.

### Policies and Practices

Many larger or long-established community growing spaces will have policies and procedures that act as a guide for how staff and volunteers handle a range of situations. These ensure that the values of the organisation are clearly expressed and that people know how to deal with matters as they arise. Smaller, informal or newly formed groups may not have produced these kinds of documents, and many groups exist happily for many years without “rules”. Wherever you fall on this scale, it is a good idea to think about how you would like to handle difficult situations and how you keep people on your site safe.

Many groups use a simple code of conduct to clearly communicate what is expected of people involved. Common points on this kind of document will be statements around drug or alcohol consumption and the prohibition of any kind of prejudiced language or behaviour.

Being aware of personal and professional boundaries is also very important. There is an exercise to help you think through this in Section 3.

These resources are designed to help you develop policies and procedures relevant to your group:

- City of Sanctuary resource pages - <https://cityofsanctuary.org/resources-for-groups/policies/>
- Social Farms & Gardens resource page - <https://www.farmgarden.org.uk/resources>
- Resource Centre - <https://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information-category/making-your-group-work-well/policies-and-procedures/>

### Dedicated sessions

Some people seeking sanctuary might feel safer in a new space if there are dedicated sessions for people in a similar situation. Some community growing spaces offer specific times or even whole days where they run structured, or unstructured sessions for people seeking sanctuary. You might also find that women in particular value women or women and children-only sessions.

For some people dedicated sessions will be a great way for them to be introduced to your space and help them to feel comfortable before joining in with more open sessions and opportunities.

## Case Study 1

### TRANSITION TOWN TOOTING

Transition Town Tooting work with CARAS (Community Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers) in South London to provide opportunities in their community garden and elsewhere. People involved with the project say they have become much more aware of what is available in their local community. It has helped a lot of people connect with their own personal histories of food growing and to gain confidence through being able to share skills they have brought with them from home. Most profoundly it has enabled people who have relied on charity, sometimes for years, to become proud of their own knowledge and to begin to pass this on to others who are themselves in difficult situations.

### Celebrate important events

Organise events to celebrate important dates. All Gardens of Sanctuary should endeavour to do something to mark **Refugee Week** which takes place during the third week of June every year.

Other dates you could mark include:

- 27 January – Holocaust Memorial Day ([www.hmd.org.uk](http://www.hmd.org.uk))
- October – Black History Month ([www.blackhistorymonth.org.uk](http://www.blackhistorymonth.org.uk))
- 10 December – Human Rights Day (<http://www.un.org/en/events/humanrightsday/>)

Make a calendar of key religious festivals for all the major faiths and see if there are ways you could mark some of them.

### Working in partnership

Local organisations, including refugee charities and others, can support you to embed a practice and culture of welcome. They can provide referral routes both in and out of your group, and offer additional expertise and support if you come across an unfamiliar situation or problem that you need advice on. You may also wish to discuss potential partnership work with national organisations such as Social Farms & Gardens, City of Sanctuary

and the Permaculture Association. Building relationships with other organisations can also be beneficial if you decide to apply for funding to support your work with people seeking sanctuary. The organisations listed in the Signposting and Support section are a good place to start, and there may well be other grassroots groups working in your area who would like to establish a link with your group.

### Creating opportunities

Consider how you could create opportunities for sanctuary seekers to learn more through volunteering, internships or work opportunities, or ways for people to share the skills that they have through teaching and mentoring.

Many people who seek sanctuary in the UK have a huge amount of knowledge and skills to share, so identify ways they could be actively involved in the project, perhaps by joining your committee, running courses or leading on particular aspects of the project.

**IMPORTANT:** See the section on Volunteering and the Asylum System in Section Three.

### Signposting and Support

Having the knowledge of where to signpost people if they are in crisis means that you will be able to assist them in finding the help they need even when providing that help is beyond the scope of you or your group.

In every area there will be local groups and organisations operating, and the following are some national organisations that may be able to offer support and advice:

- Asylum Aid – provides free legal advice and representation
- The British Red Cross – in many places they offer legal advice and other essential support
- City of Sanctuary – a grassroots movement present in over 100 UK towns and cities
- Detention Action – supports people in UK detention centres and campaigns on their behalf
- Freedom From Torture – a medical foundation for survivors of torture
- Refugee Action – offers practical support and campaigns
- The Refugee Council – offers practical support and advice

### Funding

Funding is invariably a challenge for many groups, and especially when working with sanctuary seekers who typically have extremely little access to money. Think about how your group could secure funding to enable you to embed provision for sanctuary seekers into your activities. Some specific costs you might need to consider include participant travel costs, food, additional staff time or to pay for a specialist support worker. There are a number of funders who support work with refugees and asylum seekers. For up to date information on what is



available it is worth signing up to relevant newsletters from supporting organisations.

Some examples of how groups have secured funding to work with sanctuary seekers are:

- The Grange (Norfolk) use funding from trusts and grants to subsidise residential stays for sanctuary seekers as well as to cover travel costs for sanctuary seekers from Norwich to visit on a regular basis
- Audacious Veg (London) crowdfunded in order to be able to cover travel costs
- Growing Together Levenshulme (Manchester) use funding from small grants to pay for sessional worker costs and to develop their allotment site
- Sydenham Gardens (London) has developed a partnership with the local NHS trust who fund them to deliver a dedicated programme for Sri Lankan male asylum seekers

### Overcoming barriers

There are many practical and psychological barriers that might prevent some people seeking sanctuary from getting involved in community gardens and other growing spaces. Some of these are detailed in Section Three. It is important for your groups to be aware of these barriers so that you can identify ways to overcome them as much as possible. Being aware of some of the barriers might influence the way you design activities and your policies and procedures.



### Case Study 2

#### GROWING TOGETHER LEVENSHULME

Growing Together Levenshulme provide a weekly gardening group on their allotment plot which is run on vegan organic principles and supported by volunteers. They access small grants to pay for gardening tools, travel expenses for participants and other costs. The group does not have an established referral system but their very strong links with local refugee organisations mean that people are regularly signposted to them. Participants report significant improvements to their mental health through being outdoors on the allotment, but also through being treated as a human being and not an asylum seeker whilst they are there.

## SHARE

As a community growing space committed to sanctuary, you can also play an important role in sharing your learning and experience with others in order to develop a wider culture of welcome in the sector and in your local area.

### Communicate and Celebrate

You might already have communication channels that you use including social media, a website, local press or others. Think about how you could use these platforms, or those of other people you work with, to celebrate the work you are doing to provide a culture of sanctuary and welcome. Think about getting the message out beyond your usual sector, and promoting material and content produced from within the local refugee sector itself to help amplify their voice.

Whilst photos can be a fantastic way to share your work, it is essential to ensure you have full consent before sharing images. It is possible that sharing a photo on the internet without consent could, for example, identify a sanctuary seeker who has escaped a dangerous situation but who still has family living in their country of origin. This could be dangerous for either the individual or their family.

If you become accredited as a Garden of Sanctuary, or even if you don't, think about how you can celebrate the fantastic work you are doing. Perhaps by having a themed open day, displaying your certificate (if you are accredited), handing out leaflets or holding information days. If you are a member of Social Farms & Gardens, the Permaculture Association or City of Sanctuary,



share your experiences with them so that they can include it in newsletters, through social media channels and on the Gardens of Sanctuary website.

### Grow the Movement

All movements grow through people and organisations working together towards common goals. To be an effective Garden of Sanctuary and to be part of growing the movement it is important to think about who you might partner with on a local level or more widely.

In your work with local sanctuary seekers, some of your most important partners are likely to be a local City of Sanctuary group or other charities and organisations working with people seeking sanctuary. As described in the previous section, these groups are where your referrals and participants are most likely to be found and they will be able to offer

ongoing advice and support. Find out if there is already a local City of Sanctuary group near you and, if there is, see how you can work with them. Details of all local groups and how to set up a group can be found at <https://cityofsanctuary.org/groups/>

Find out which other groups or organisations in your local area are recognised as places of sanctuary and explore how you can all work together to develop a culture of welcome. The same applies for any local cultural venues or organisations who might be able to support the creative development of your sanctuary movement.

Finally, it can be useful to build partnerships with your local authority and parliamentary representative who have a statutory responsibility to support people in the asylum system and who may be able to offer useful practical advice.

### Promote Sanctuary amongst other gardens

Think about how you could support and encourage other community growing spaces to become places of welcome for people seeking sanctuary. There are many ways you might do this including:

- Holding a gathering for community growing spaces to explore the concept of being a Garden of Sanctuary
- Writing articles for relevant magazines, web sites and blogs
- Sharing your story at local, regional and national gatherings and meetings
- Becoming an active member of the movement and part of the national network of community growing spaces working to create more Gardens of Sanctuary
- Becoming a Gardens of Sanctuary case study (please contact us if you would like to do this)
- Hold an open day as part of Refugee Week to celebrate the involvement of sanctuary seekers in your group

### Campaign

As a Garden of Sanctuary, you can lend your voice to some of the many campaigns that aim to promote a culture and a practice of sanctuary in the UK. These campaigns are always changing but might include appeals to support specific individuals, or wider calls for national policy change on the rights of asylum seekers. There are several national organisations whose campaigns you could support including:

- Asylum Matters (<https://asylummatters.org>): Part of the City of Sanctuary Movement
- Amnesty International UK (<https://www.amnesty.org.uk>)

- Detention Action (<http://detentionaction.org.uk/campaigns>)
- Migrants Organise (<https://www.migrantsorganise.org>)
- Refugee Action (<https://www.refugee-action.org.uk>)

### Case Study 3

#### THE GRANGE

The Grange in West Norfolk is a 10 acre smallholding which welcomes people seeking sanctuary for residential breaks and volunteering opportunities. The Grange has partnered with several refugee organisations who are responsible for safeguarding and ensuring that the right people are referred for appropriate trips. All staff and interns at The Grange receive regular supervision from a trained psychotherapist to support them with any challenging situations they may have faced and to limit the potential for vicarious trauma.





GARDEN OF  
**SANCTUARY AWARD**  
WELCOMING ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

## BECOMING AN ACCREDITED GARDEN OF SANCTUARY

If you would like to, you can apply for a Garden of Sanctuary award from the City of Sanctuary awards scheme. This is designed as a way to celebrate and showcase the huge variety of groups and organisations offering a welcome in the UK, and to let sanctuary seekers know that they are welcome in your space. To apply for a sanctuary award, you will need to send in an application form (available from the [Gardens of Sanctuary web page](#)) with information and evidence from each of the following three areas:

### LEARN

finding out what it means to be seeking sanctuary, and to be actively involved in awareness-raising with all your participants and in the wider community.

### EMBED

taking positive action to make welcome and inclusion part of the values of your organisation and group, to offer an active welcome and opportunities for sanctuary seekers, and to include them at all levels of decision-making in relevant areas.

### SHARE

sharing your vision and achievements within your organisation and in the wider community; letting others know about the positive contribution that sanctuary seekers make to our society and the benefits to all of a welcoming culture for everyone.

There are ideas and examples throughout this pack for each of these three areas. Your local City of Sanctuary group, regional coordinator and Social Farms & Gardens staff can also offer support and ideas.

If you receive the award you will be welcome (and encouraged!) to use the Gardens of Sanctuary logo at your community growing space and in any leaflets and publicity. The award lasts for three years and then needs to be re-applied for.

## CRITERIA

There are three essential criteria required for accreditation:

### 1. Active involvement of people seeking sanctuary

Every community growing space is different and not all are in areas where there are people seeking sanctuary. However, in order to be a Garden of Sanctuary it is vital that sanctuary seekers are involved in the space in some way. Examples of this might include:

- Regular participation in activities such as open days, volunteering and meetings
- Acting as advisors to the group for sanctuary work
- Offering dedicated sessions for sanctuary seekers
- Taking on roles in the group as growers / trustees / committee members etc. (Refer to Section Three 'Volunteering and the Asylum System' for important information on this area)

### 2. Marking Refugee Week

Refugee Week takes place during the third week of June every year and is an annual celebration of the contribution of refugees. Ways you could make Refugee Week include:

- Hosting an event at your growing space
- Supporting other Refugee Week events taking place in your area
- Using the opportunity to communicate about being a place of sanctuary through the media or social media

### 3. Have safeguarding systems in place

Safeguarding everyone involved in the City of Sanctuary movement is essential, most especially volunteers and asylum seekers and refugees who may be particularly vulnerable or at risk of exploitation.

As a minimum we recommend the following:

- All groups to have a safeguarding policy in place which suits the type of activities/services you deliver (and takes into consideration anyone involved or who may come into contact with the group)
- Ensure the policy explains why some volunteers might be particularly vulnerable
- Make sure that all volunteers are aware of, and have access to, the safeguarding policy, and ensure they know that any concerns will be dealt with in accordance with the policy
- All volunteers and service users should know who the safeguarding leads are and have their contact details. (A business card with a safeguarding lead contact is a useful idea)
- If you have a management committee/steering group/board etc., they should all be aware of the policy and their responsibilities

## AWARD ASSESSMENT

We want to emphasise and celebrate the variety of ways that places can be Gardens of Sanctuary, and we recognise that not all gardens can, or will, have the same approach. The structure of the award assessment is flexible to allow for gardens to approach becoming a place of sanctuary in a way most suitable to their context. We will award Garden of Sanctuary accreditation where we see evidence that each of the Learn, Embed, Share principles is running through the group that is applying. This can be challenging, and additional support is available from the Gardens of Sanctuary partners and your local City of Sanctuary groups.

Applications for awards are assessed by your local City of Sanctuary group with support from the national Garden of Sanctuary peer review panel, Social Farms & Gardens, Permaculture Association and other experts if necessary. The panel will always include at least one sanctuary seeker, and will ideally involve a visit to your site as well as assessment of the application.

## Section 3

# Seeking Sanctuary

### THE GLOBAL PICTURE

Over the last few years, images of men, women and children fleeing war zones and making dangerous and often fatal sea and land crossings have become tragically familiar. Whilst the headlines have largely moved on, the crisis of forced migration has not. According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) nearly 70 million people, roughly the same as the entire population of the UK, are currently living forcibly displaced from their homes. The vast majority are internally displaced within their own countries, or living in neighbouring countries.

In the year to March 2018, just over 1 million people sought refuge in Europe with more than a third making the perilous crossing of the Mediterranean Sea. Just 25,500 people (including children), less than 3% of those who reached Europe, claimed asylum in the UK in that same period. The UK asylum system is intentionally hostile with thousands of people waiting months, or often years, for a decision and just 32% of initial applications being granted in the last year. Most people whose initial asylum claim is refused appeal against the decision and a high number of appeals are successful. In 2016 the courts overturned Home Office decisions in more than 40% of appeal cases, raising huge questions over the initial application process.

### SOME DEFINITIONS

A **refugee** is a person who, 'owing to a well-founded fear of being



persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of their nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country' (Article 1, 1951 Refugee Convention).

An **asylum seeker** is someone who has applied to the Government for refugee status and is waiting to hear the outcome of their application. Asylum seekers do not have the right to work in the UK except under very limited circumstances, and must rely on minimal state support (in 2018 this is £37.75/week). Housing is provided to asylum seekers but they cannot choose where they live and are often housed in 'hard to let' properties

which others do not want to live in.

In this document we tend to use the general term "**Sanctuary Seeker**" most often, which applies to all people who are going to apply, have applied or have received asylum. Under international human rights law, every individual has the right to claim asylum and governments are obliged to provide protection for people who meet the criteria for asylum. Anyone seeking protection is also entitled to stay in the UK whilst they wait for a decision on their asylum claim.

To claim asylum in the UK a person is required to make themselves known to the authorities as soon as they enter the country (often at a port/airport). Many do, but in reality, a lot of people are either not aware of this, are too scared to do so, or



arrive hidden in a vehicle and have no idea where they are when they are dropped off. Others arrive on legal visas (such as a student or tourist visa) but then claim asylum if it is too dangerous for them to return home.

There are also a small number of government programmes that enable people to arrive in the UK as refugees through an international refugee resettlement scheme. The most well-known of these is the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme under which the government has agreed to allow 20,000 people who have fled the war in Syria to come to the UK between 2015 and 2020. At present it seems likely that this scheme will be extended post 2020 to include other countries.

For more information see:

<http://www.unhcr.org/uk/asylum-in-the-uk.html>

<https://www.asylumaid.org.uk/the-asylum-process-made-simple/>

### ACTIVITY 1: WHY DO PEOPLE FLEE?

On your own or in a group, take some time to think about what it would take for you to flee from your home, country or family, taking only what you can carry with you. What possessions would you take? Would you know where to go if you were no longer safe in the place you call home, or how to seek asylum in an unfamiliar country?

#### Common Reasons to Flee Your Home and Country

- Fear of persecution or repression because of your ethnic/social group,

religion, sexuality, political belief

- Fear of death due to war (ethnic, civil, military) and/or organised violence
- Abuses by the security forces or armed opposition groups (rape, beating)
- Massacres or the threat of massacres
- Death penalty for political opposition
- Conscription into the army
- Unjust systems, including detention without trial or unfair trials, such as persecution because of other family members
- Torture and inhumane treatment
- Gender-based human rights abuses, such as honour killings, forced marriages, FGM, sexual slavery and trafficking



#### Case Study 4

### THE COMFREY PROJECT 1

The Comfrey Project in Newcastle offers specialist drop-in sessions for local refugees and asylum seekers from across the regions as well as for a Syrian group. Their sessions focus on growing, cooking and eating food together. Participants are referred from partner organisations, often as a continuation at the end of a course of therapy that they are receiving. Sessions are run on a drop-in basis and don't need to be booked in advance although attendance is monitored so that anyone who is absent can be contacted to ensure they are OK. Sessions are supported by volunteers who go through a process of recruitment and training to ensure they have the appropriate skills and support mechanisms for the role.

### JOURNEY TO THE UK

Every individual's experience is different but all involve uncertainty and risk, and for many people their journeys to the UK leave them with significant physical and mental trauma. Many refugees are forced to use forged documents and are at the mercy of agents and people traffickers who are able to arrange land and sea transport, often in dangerous and overcrowded conditions. In just the first half of 2018, more than 1000 people died crossing the Mediterranean Sea.

Find out more about people's experience of fleeing to the UK through some of the following resources:

- Amnesty International's 'Play Against All Odds' shows the reality of being forced to flee - [http://www.playagainstallodds.ca/game\\_us.html](http://www.playagainstallodds.ca/game_us.html)

- UNICEF Forced to Flee teaching pack - <https://www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/resources/teaching-resources/forced-to-flee/>
- British Red Cross have produced a range of teaching materials - <https://www.redcross.org.uk/get-involved/teaching-resources/refugees-and-migration>

### CLAIMING ASYLUM IN THE UK

The UK asylum system is complex and hostile, and navigating it can take many months and often years. There are even cases of people being in the asylum system for two decades either due to Home Office bureaucracy, or because they struggle to gather evidence to support their case, which can be impossible to get hold of.

**NOTE:** This section offers a very brief overview of the UK asylum system and it is a good idea to familiarise yourself with the basic process if you are going to be working with sanctuary seekers. However, you should under no circumstances try to give legal advice to people seeking sanctuary as it can severely jeopardise their asylum claims. Instead it is important to be aware of organisations that are qualified to give legal advice in your local area (often the British Red Cross) and to refer people to them.

#### The asylum system

After applying for asylum, people seeking sanctuary will be interviewed by a government official looking for evidence of whether they are entitled to asylum. These interviews are often highly traumatic as people are forced

to recount their experiences, reasons for fleeing and their journeys to the UK.

Under the UK Government's hostile environment for immigration, many applications are refused and people are told to leave the country. At this point they have the right to appeal, and if they don't they may be transferred to detention centres managed by private security firms, from where just over half of those detained will be deported back to the country they fled from. Being held in detention is often described as feeling like being in prison for a crime you haven't committed, and the UK is currently the only EU country which has no limit to the amount of time a person can be detained. Many people suffer physical and mental health problems after being in detention. For more information on detention see [www.detentionaction.org.uk](http://www.detentionaction.org.uk).

Those whose cases are not refused, or who are refused but then put in an appeal, will have to wait for their case to be heard by a Home Office official (or by a jury in the case of appeals). People are usually sent to an Initial Accommodation Centre and then 'dispersed' somewhere in the United Kingdom – often to a place where they don't know anyone and have no support network.

Whilst waiting for the result of their application or appeal, people are provided with basic accommodation. This is often of very poor quality, and they might be sharing with people from many different countries who often will not speak the same language. During this time asylum seekers are barred from working, except under very limited circumstances, and have to survive on a tiny weekly allowance (currently £37.75/week or just over £5 per day).

If a person's claim for asylum is

accepted they will usually be granted 'refugee status' and discretionary leave to remain for up to five years. At the end of this initial period they must apply again for further leave to remain, leaving people in constant fear about their future safety even after they are given status. If a person is granted refugee status or humanitarian protection they have the right to work, claim benefits and to be reunited with their spouse and children (who are under 18).

The point at which an application is accepted can also be incredibly difficult and stressful. Once an individual is granted refugee status, they have just 28 days to move out of their Home Office provided accommodation and either apply for benefits or find work. After this, all support and housing is withdrawn and it is not uncommon for people to become destitute and/or homeless.

### **UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM-SEEKING CHILDREN (UASC)**

Anyone under the age of 17½ who has applied for asylum and been refused is granted a form of limited leave if there are no adequate return arrangements with their home country. UASC leave is granted for a period of 30 months or until the child turns 17½ - whichever is shorter. Once they have reached this age, unless they can successfully apply for asylum, they will be returned to their home country.

UASC have the right to education and are put under the support of a Local Authority social services team and often housed by foster carers.

More information on UASC can be found here - [https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/what\\_we\\_do/childrens\\_services](https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/what_we_do/childrens_services)



## OVERCOMING BARRIERS

### Mental Health

Many sanctuary seekers share a history of multiple traumas which may display in many different ways and whilst in some people it might not be immediately obvious, it is important to be aware of some of the signs of stress and to have a clear process if you need to support someone. The examples in the table below are taken from the City of Sanctuary Mental Health Resource Pack.

Physical impact of stress	Psychological impact of stress	Behavioural impact of Stress
Shallow breathing or hyperventilating	Irritable, aggressive, impatient	Finding it hard to make decisions
Panic attacks	Overburdened, overwhelmed	Biting your nails
Heart racing	Anxious, nervous or afraid	Tired all the time
Headaches	Negative and/or black and white thinking	Shouting at people
Chest pains	Sleeping too much or too little	Avoiding situations that might trouble you
Aches and pains	Depressed or uninterested in life	Unable to concentrate, poor memory
Feeling sick, dizzy or fainting	Poor judgement	Eating too much or too little
Grinding your teeth or clenching your jaw	Sense of dread	Smoking or drinking too much alcohol
Blurred eyesight or sore eyes	Worried about health	Very tearful
Frequent colds	Loss of sense of humour	Restless

Unless you have specific training, it is usually not advisable to try to support someone who is in crisis or displaying clear signs of trauma. If you do find yourself in this situation it is important to:

- Be sensitive to cultural factors, such as the fear of shame or humiliation of revealing suicidal thoughts
- Take the person seriously but do not feel like it is your responsibility to support them directly unless you are trained and confident in doing so
- Explain that you have a responsibility to help. Ask if they have a mental health professional who you can contact. If they don't

then you can contact a crisis team through the NHS 111 service, their GP, the Police or A&E. Remember that everyone has the right to primary healthcare regardless of their immigration status

- Have contact details for help lines such as the Samaritans available. The Samaritans can be contacted at any time, for free, from any phone on 116 123

Being clear about your personal and professional boundaries is vital. There is an activity later in the book designed to help you think about the right personal and professional boundaries for your group.

### Destitution

Being destitute means that someone has no money and nowhere to live. As noted elsewhere, asylum seekers are not allowed to work and most commonly become destitute when financial support from the government is stopped. Destitution can happen at any stage of the asylum process but more often when people have had their case refused.

Many refused asylum seekers find it hard to access mainstream homeless shelters and can suffer prejudice particularly if they are street homeless. There are



## Case Study 5

### THE COMFREY PROJECT 2

Sahani\* came to the UK as a refugee in 2010, and has been at the Comfrey Project for seven years. She comes from a family of restaurateurs and chefs in Sri Lanka, and immediately took to organising the daily lunches of the gardeners, working from the small sheds at the allotments or the kitchen at Windmill Hills. Cooking with donated foods or produce grown in the garden, often with no prior knowledge of what is available until she arrives on site, Sahani organises a kitchen and a number of volunteer cooks to produce fresh, home cooked, vegetarian food for up to forty participants. Over the past seven years, Sahani has prepared over fourteen thousand lunches, always with a smile, and with utmost professionalism. Having received her right to remain in 2014 she has now set up her own Sri Lankan catering business, supplying snacks and catering for community events.

a small number of charities and a growing number of hosting organisations providing for destitute sanctuary seekers but they are often over-stretched. For more on hosting schemes visit <https://cityofsanctuary.org/group-activities/hosting/>

Destitution can also aggravate mental and physical health problems and people with no fixed abode can find it extremely difficult to get the support they need.

#### Language

Make sure that language is not a barrier to people attending who speak limited, or no, English.

There are plenty of ways to work together without using any words at all.

Some things to think about are:

- When giving instructions, try to incorporate as many nonverbal descriptions as possible. Things like miming actions, pointing to specific tools or giving clear positive or negative hand signals can really help someone with little English
- Ask what the plant or tool you're talking about is called in their language, and if possible make a note of it. You could label key items with a number of different translations, and use photos of common items like tools, or to

illustrate processes like the lifecycle of a plant. This can be more inclusive than the use of written language and makes those with little English feel welcome and considered

- Think about having key pieces of information, signs or words of welcome translated into a few different languages. This helps to send a clear message that speakers of other languages are welcome and valued
- Find out whether there are people within your community who could help with interpreting, either in person or by helping translate key bits of information like labels, signs and notices

\*Not their real name



### Cultural Differences

One of the fantastic things about welcoming people from different countries is the cultural diversity it brings. Everyone will come with different ways of interacting and growing food and with their own songs and stories. This diversity should be celebrated but it is also important to be mindful of it to ensure that differences are understood and don't create barriers to participation. You might consider:

- Including a short introduction to volunteering in the UK as part of any induction session
- Using clear signage to direct people and to explain how to use facilities, especially if you have things like composting toilets
- Consider how cultural differences might lead to people feeling excluded, e.g. a Muslim person might not feel able to join a committee if it always meets in a place where alcohol is being served
- Seek feedback on your activities from people from as broad a range of backgrounds as possible
- Don't be afraid to discuss different attitudes. This can help people understand local values and beliefs such as gender and sexual equality, religious freedom and freedom of expression

### Gender

There are huge disparities between the treatment of genders around the world, and gender-based persecution is recognised as a serious global issue. Different cultures also have different expectations of genders than the ones we are used to in the UK. For example some people would consider it improper to shake the hand of a member of the opposite sex, and

some women may feel they are only able to attend female-only sessions.

- Find out whether there is a demand locally for single-gender sessions, and consider whether you have the capacity to deliver these
- Be clear that you do not tolerate discrimination of any kind
- Consider whether your group still subconsciously upholds certain gender stereotypes. Who makes the tea, who does the washing up and who makes decisions?

### Finances

People seeking sanctuary rely on very limited benefits and might be destitute. When working with people with such severe budget constraints you could consider:

- Fundraising to cover transport costs for refugees and asylum seekers to get to your site. This could be done through grant applications or crowdfunding
- Eating together at the end of a session. This is a great thing to do for many reasons, but will also help provide a healthy meal for people who may be in food poverty. You could also offer them a food box to take away with them
- Having equipment such as overalls,

wellies/boots and gloves available for people to borrow

- If you run any social activities away from your site, such as a celebratory meal or fundraising event, consider whether they are accessible for people on very limited budgets. Take steps to ensure no one is excluded by paying travel costs or making arrangements for people to bring their children so that the cost of childcare is not an issue
- If you are reimbursing volunteers for out of pocket expenses, see the section on Volunteering and the Asylum System in Section Three to ensure that this does not inadvertently jeopardise someone's asylum claim

### Isolation

The experience of being an asylum seeker can be incredibly isolating. People may find themselves in an unfamiliar part of the country, far from any friends or family and perhaps also feeling unsafe through recent or past experiences. Reaching out to isolated people and helping someone overcome initial fear or hesitation can take time, but is ultimately very worthwhile and rewarding.

- Working with refugee organisations is vital. You could arrange to visit a drop-in or other space used by sanctuary seekers to talk about the activities you offer. People coming for the first time will often benefit from being accompanied by someone they know from the partner organisation to help them feel confident
- Provide training to your volunteers so that they can act as buddies for people coming to the group for the first time to help them find their feet
- If you are rural, see if there is a refugee organisation in a nearby town or city who would like to come and visit and consider a joint funding bid to help cover travel costs to enable people to come regularly
- Be clear what you do and don't expect from people when they come to you. The more information you can give the less there will be for someone to worry about! If you

expect people to arrive at a certain time, wearing certain clothing, or even if they can just turn up whenever they like – say so!

### Racism

A number of our case study groups reported that sanctuary seekers they work with have experienced racism since arriving in the UK, occasionally directly from other group members or participants. Prejudice of any kind can make people feel unwelcome, uncomfortable and afraid for their safety, so ensuring that it is tackled and dealt with swiftly if it is experienced at your site is essential in creating a safe space for everyone. Things to consider are:

- Making it clear within your site rules and policies that discrimination of any kind will not be tolerated, and displaying these rules prominently
- Discuss as a group in advance how you would like to tackle incidences

of racism, how they should be reported to you, who will deal with it and what the consequences might be

- Consider how best to approach someone who you feel has made a racist comment, and remember that this person might be a child or person with additional needs
- Some incidents, experienced either on or off your site, could constitute a hate crime. Be aware of what this is and how someone who experiences a hate crime can go about reporting it. There is some guidance on this available from **Citizens Advice** - <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/law-and-courts/discrimination/hate-crime/racist-and-religious-hate-crime/>
- Be aware that some refugees and asylum seekers may be very mistrustful or fearful of the police and authority figures, so may be far less likely to report crimes that are committed against them



### Case Study 6

#### NEW ROOTS

New Roots is a project in Bristol that was set up in 2009 and welcomes people from all backgrounds to their site based on four allotments. For several years the project was very informal and a small number of sanctuary seekers visited through word of mouth. More recently New Roots have carried out a community consultation and begun to offer more structured opportunities particular for mothers and children. A unique outcome of the project is that an Iraqi couple who were beekeepers back home have taken over looking after the beehives and now produce honey that is enjoyed by many people in the local community!

## VOLUNTEERING AND THE ASYLUM SYSTEM

Asylum seekers are permitted to volunteer their time for charities or public sector organisations, so long as it does not interfere with any stage of the asylum process, such as interviews or appointments. Volunteering is a great way to socialise and gain new skills. Anyone claiming asylum is currently prohibited from working by the Home Office. There is provision for people to start applying for work 12 months after they submitted their asylum claim, but this is only for a very limited number of specialist roles and so effectively most people are still barred from employment and any suggestion that they have undertaken paid work of any kind could seriously jeopardise their claim.

The Home Office has guidance for asylum seekers wishing to work or volunteer, and this explains the key elements in establishing whether someone is a volunteer rather than an employee or a worker. Volunteers may be reimbursed for expenses incurred whilst volunteering, for example, for travel and food, but should not receive any other payment. If any other payment is received the role may be classed as an employee or worker.

In order to ensure that no part of their volunteering with you could constitute this you should:

- Ensure that no payment is made, other than reasonable travel and meal expenses actually incurred (using receipts as evidence, not giving an allowance for the same)
- Ensure there are no contractual obligations on the volunteer and they do not have any contractual entitlement to any work or benefits (either financial or of items in kind)
- Be aware that your group should be a registered voluntary or charitable organisation, an organisation that raises funds for either of these, or a public sector organisation
- Make sure that the volunteering being carried out is not a substitute for employment, i.e. fulfilling a role that a salaried worker would normally fulfil
- If you provide a letter of support for an asylum seeker who volunteers with you, be very clear in your description of the activities they have undertaken and only use the term “volunteering”, never “volunteer work”

[Full information can be found on the UK Government website at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/583192/Permission-to-work-v7.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/583192/Permission-to-work-v7.pdf).]

## ACTIVITY 2 – GROUP REFLECTION



Spend some time, ideally together as a group, reflecting on the following questions. Do they help you identify any gaps, or areas that you would like to learn more about? At the end of the resource pack there is a list of resources where you can find out more about some of the issues raised in this section.

### Location

Are you rural / suburban / urban? Are there likely to be many people seeking sanctuary living in your area or would they need to travel to get to you? What are the public transport links like to your growing space and how expensive and accessible are they?

### Accountability

Who is responsible for your organisation or growing space? Is there an obvious person to take responsibility for working with potentially vulnerable people? Who takes responsibility if there are any problems?

### Accessibility

Can anyone just drop in or do people need to book? Are there set opening and closing times? Do you have limited numbers that you can take for particular sessions? Do people need to volunteer or can they come and just enjoy the space too?

### Priorities

What are the key priorities for your project? Are you growing on any kind of commercial basis or are you purely a social/therapeutic/community space? How do you balance therapeutic and commercial activities, and do you make a clear distinction



between these for people who may not be familiar with volunteering? If you are growing for sale, how do you balance having a range of volunteers and visitors on site with the need to meet produce requirements?

### Knowledge

Does anyone in your group have prior experience of working with people seeking sanctuary, or detailed knowledge about the asylum system? Do you know where to go to find out more, or could you partner with someone locally who has this experience?

### People

How do people usually find out about your project and who is already involved? Do you take referrals from other organisations and who would you need to work with to reach out to people seeking sanctuary? Are there already people seeking sanctuary accessing your growing space, or contacts in wider social networks? What training and support do you currently offer for volunteers

and other participants and does it feel sufficient?

### Safeguarding

What systems do you have in place to keep people at your group safe? How do you safeguard people, and do you have safeguarding policies? How do you create a culture that ensures everyone is welcome?



## ACTIVITY 3 – PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES

For everyone running community growing spaces, being friendly and welcoming is a big part of what we do. When working alongside people who could be vulnerable, it is a good idea to consider where the boundaries to this friendliness lie, and in what instances it is necessary to maintain professional boundaries in order to keep everyone safe. Deciding where your boundaries lie really depends on the type of group you are and the way in which you work with people coming to your garden. For some groups working in a more therapeutic context it may be preferable to have quite clear professional boundaries in place.

Consider the following situations:

- **Someone tells you that their accommodation is unbearable and asks if you know of anywhere they could stay. You have a spare room at your house. What would you do in this situation? What help or suggestions could you offer them?**  
– Our suggestion would be to be very careful. Whilst the impulse

## NEW ROOTS 2

Ahmed\* came to Bristol from Iran back in 2007. His claim for asylum fell through and without support to put in an appeal, he became homeless and destitute. He was housed by Bristol Hospitality Network (BHN) and through this started to come to the garden. He is a talented carpenter and came every week for the workday for about a year and a half. He said he used to do this back in Iran, helping his Uncles on the farm. He put his skills to very good use, building the compost loo and a raised outdoor kitchen area, ringed with beautiful benches - that are still used now. Through the advocacy of BHN he went on to get leave to remain and immediately started work as a carpenter. Because of the relationships he had made through the garden he managed to find work, references and a place to live quickly. Now ten years later, he is still an active member of the extended social community - living with friends of friends of the garden, and working as a carpenter.

### Case Study 7

\*Not their real name

to offer someone shelter when they have none is very natural, you should also be aware that if this person refuses Home Office provided accommodation they will be deemed to have their own means and might not be entitled to accommodation support for the rest of their asylum claim, which could take years, potentially leaving you responsible for their accommodation for far longer than you intended. We would recommend getting them some support from a specialist organisation who can advocate on their behalf to try and improve their housing situation.

- **Someone asks if they can have your personal phone number. Would you give your number out and what might be the consequences if you do?**

– It's very common for people to become friends through volunteering, that's one of the wonderful things about it, and it's natural to give our friends our contact details. A volunteer who is also a sanctuary seeker is just the same as any other volunteer, and before giving your personal number to anyone it's worth considering what your relationship is to them. If they are someone who you have more of a professional or supportive role with, then it may be better to keep that role clearly defined by not giving out your number, just in the same way that a therapist would not also have a friendship with a client. If however, the relationship is based on friendship and mutual support then go ahead!

- **Whilst in the garden, someone starts to share a traumatic experience they have had. You are not a therapist and feel**

***uncomfortable but don't want to stop the person from talking. What would you do in this situation?***

– Hearing about traumatic experiences can lead to vicarious trauma which is a very real risk when working with people who have had to flee from persecution. The fact that someone opens up to you shows that they trust you and it can be OK to provide a listening ear. It is crucial to know your own boundaries and to be aware of where you can signpost people to for support – this might be someone involved in your project or a local organisation. As a group

think about how you support each other and whether it would be useful to have some form of support or supervision for staff or volunteers.

If you feel that these situations, or some of a similar nature, might cause your group difficulties, one suggestion would be to try and identify a specialist adviser who can help you navigate these issues. Someone locally with a therapeutic background, or who works in the asylum sector, may be willing to join your board or management group, or give advice on an ad-hoc basis.

**Case Study 8**

**ROOM TO HEAL**

Room to Heal is a therapeutic community in London that offers psychotherapy to survivors of torture. For several years the group have met for gardening and cooking sessions at a community garden and in the garden of the community centre where they are based. The model that Room to Heal work on is based on the idea that someone who has been severely traumatised sees themselves only as a victim. Psychologically the aim is to connect with 'pre-traumatised capacities.' This can happen very quickly such as when one very vulnerable participant went to the garden for the first time and found mint which triggered a positive memory of his Grandmother cooking it for him when he had a high fever. For others it takes longer. One participant said, 'For a long time it was difficult to come out here and then I realised I could allow some of the good of my past to feed how I am living now.'



## Section 4

# Resources

### STATISTICS, TOOLS AND USEFUL GUIDES

- The City of Sanctuary resources section has a wide range of information, tools and templates available at <https://cityofsanctuary.org/resources/>
- The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has detailed information and statistics on asylum in the UK at <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/asylum-in-the-uk.html>
- The Refugee Council publishes regular briefings on UK asylum statistics at <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/stats>
- Refugee Week happens every year in June and there are lots of resources and ideas at <http://refugeeweek.org.uk/resources/>
- Asylum Aid has published a guide to the asylum process at <https://www.asylumaid.org.uk/the-asylum-process-made-simple/>
- There is a thorough guide for communities and individuals hosting refugees from Host Nation at <https://www.hostnation.org.uk/guide.pdf>

### OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN MORE

- The Guardian produced a 360 degree virtual reality video about what the asylum process is like, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/jul/05/limbo-a-virtual-experience-of-waiting-for-asylum-360-video>
- The Survivors A to Z series from Freedom From Torture is a set of powerful audio clips and resources, available at <https://www.freedomfromtorture.org.uk/resources>

[freedomfromtorture.org/an\\_a\\_to\\_z\\_of\\_poverty](https://freedomfromtorture.org/an_a_to_z_of_poverty)

- Future Learn periodically offers a free course titled “Working Supportively with Refugees” at <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/cultural-mediation>, and another for volunteers working with refugees at <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/volunteering-with-refugees>
- The Asylum Support Appeals Project has a free e-learning course on asylum support at <http://www.asaproject.org/training/elearning>
- Amnesty International run a free online course called Human Rights: The Rights of Refugees at <https://www.edx.org/course/human-rights-the-rights-of-refugees-0>
- The City of Sanctuary Mental Health resource pack is a fantastic resource designed to offer a detailed understanding of the circumstances of refugees and asylum seekers’ lives and how these circumstances affect their wellbeing. <https://health.cityofsanctuary.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/47/2017/12/CoS-Mental-Health-Resource-Pack-digital.pdf>

### BOOKS

There are many fantastic books that offer insight into the asylum process and the lives of people seeking sanctuary. These may be available at your local library.

- **The Arrival by Shaun Tan** – a graphic novel depicting a man setting out to seek a better future for his family
- **Gervelie’s Journey by Anthony Robinson** – a true story of one

girl’s flight from her home in Africa to seek refuge in the UK

- **What is the What by Dave Eggers** – a true story of a boy separated from his family by war in Sudan who flees to Ethiopia and then to the United States on a painful journey towards safety

### KEY ORGANISATIONS

The following is a list of some of the key organisations working with asylum seekers and refugees in the UK. Do find out about your local groups as well, who may run their own training sessions.

- **Asylum Aid** - Legal advice and representation for asylum seekers and refugees
- **British Red Cross** - Legal advice and orientation support in their centres around the UK
- **British Refugee Council** - Support for resettlement and integration including therapeutic support
- **Freedom From Torture** - Therapeutic, advice and protection services for survivors of torture
- **Migrant Helpline** - Offer advice and guidance to asylum seekers and refugees
- **Refugee Action** - Support and advice for asylum seekers including legal advice and integration

### OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES

**Refugees Welcome in Parks** is an initiative of the University of Sheffield which has some great resources and case studies about how our public parks can also be places of welcome for people seeking sanctuary.

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