



North of England
REFUGEE SERVICE



North of England Refugee Service

Impact Report: 2018 – 2019



An independent charity, supporting refugees to survive and thrive.

Supporting refugees to thrive

The North of England Refugee Service is the leading charity working for and supporting refugees in the North East of England.

Our aim is to assist refugees on their journey, from arrival to establishment in their new community. For many, arriving alone in a new country with no knowledge of how to get help, is traumatic. Under these circumstances, it's no surprise that our work focusses on preventing destitution, and on signposting and supporting refugees through what is a complex and often bewildering asylum system.

Our work is broadly divided into four main areas; providing:

1. Asylum Advice, from help applying to guidance on legal matters
2. Supported housing for those who are vulnerable and need safe, short-term accommodation
3. Integration support, helping refugees to settle in their new communities
4. Interpreting and translation services for those who don't speak English

We deliver these across the North East from our three offices in Newcastle, Sunderland and Middlesbrough and via an outreach centre in Stockton.

There is no doubt that the need for our work is growing. It is also clear that our work has positive results.

As you can see from the stories in this report, NERS is often the only place where people have been able to find the help they desperately need.

For some clients, the option of returning to their home country may be appropriate, in which case we assist people to return to their country of origin with dignity. But for those with leave to remain, we support them in every aspect of their new life. By providing access and advice on housing, training, education, employment and benefits entitlement, our integration service helps people to live well and adjust to their new surroundings.



Offering long-term support and guidance

Our supported housing service provides safe and secure homes for refugees who are vulnerable and in need of further assistance.

The service provides short-term housing and appropriate individualised support for up to two years and until clients can move on from supported housing to independent living.

We offer training and employ refugees and other migrants as sessional interpreters to provide interpreting and translation services. We provide these services for NERS clients and as well as other organisations such as local authorities, the NHS and local solicitors.

We provide ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes 3 days a week for those with low levels of English proficiency.

We use the evidence gathered from our clients to work regionally and nationally in order to influence and advocate on matters of policy. We usually do this in partnership with other organisations; nationally with our key partner, the Refugee

Council, but also with other agencies such as Refugee Action and the Welsh and Scottish Refugee Councils, Red Cross, Freedom from Torture and Migrant Help.

Locally we work with partner agencies such as the Regional Refugee Forum and we work through structures and processes such as the Regional Migration Partnership, hosted by Middlesbrough Council.

We work in partnership with local charities, such the Red Cross, West End Refugee Service, Newcastle Law Centre, Friends of the Drop-In, Open Doors, Justice First and Action Foundation, to address destitution and other issues.

We are also members of the National Asylum Stakeholders Forum and the Asylum Support Forum.

Providing practical help and emotional support: S's story

NERS provides crucial support and guidance through the asylum process and, once refugee status is granted, we help people to integrate into their new communities. This is the story of S, who arrived in the UK in 2016 after fleeing persecution in her country.

"I was still in my country when I first heard about the NERS and the work they do - I was searching on the computer about protection for asylum seekers in the North of England and I found NERS' address, so when I arrived in Newcastle, I knew where to go.

I was pleased when I realized that NERS' office was just a few minutes away from the place in which I was staying, and I went there straight away. At that moment I was incredibly stressed - I had a story to tell but I had absolutely no idea how to proceed... I desperately needed professional advice. The staff at NERS listened to my story very patiently and gave me the right advice - I needed to go to Croydon to claim asylum.

Then, a long a hard process to get refugee status started. The worst thing is the unclarity and uncertainty... it is very stressful not knowing what is going to happen and not being able to make any plans for your future. It takes time

to get rid of all that tension even long after you get refugee status. I faced difficulties regarding my case and NERS helped me in whatever challenges I had.

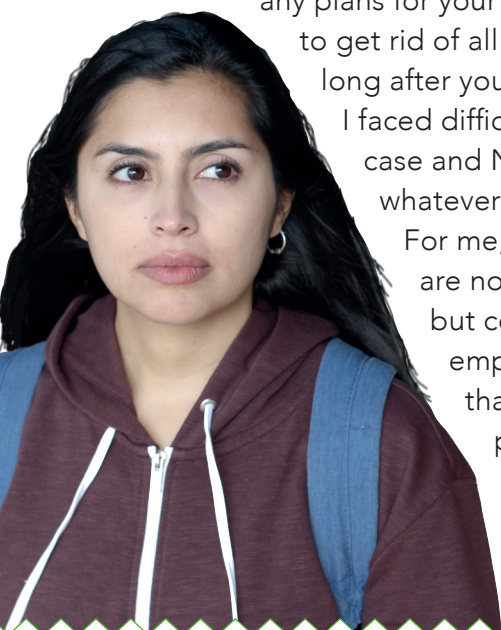
For me, the staff at NERS are not only professionals but compassionate and empathetic individuals that connect with people on a human level.

Soon, I decided to start volunteering with NERS and I got to know the team well. In fact, I continue to volunteer there still now after getting my status; and they continue to help me in my integration process - which, even though it is much easier than the asylum process, is still full of challenges.

After being granted refugee status, I was very unclear regarding my professional journey in the UK and I have been receiving great assistance from NERS's staff as part of the RISE (Refugees Into Sustainable Employment) project. They helped me to produce a good-quality CV and guided me in the job-seeking process.

"This has deepened my understanding of the UK job market, given me back the confidence in myself and made me not give up on my hopes to build a good career for myself here."

I now have a great full-time job, and not just any job, but one that matches with my expertise and interests. I couldn't be more grateful to NERS for their continuous support throughout every step of my journey!"



Our work in numbers

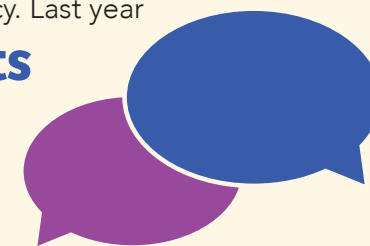
Throughout the year, we provided advice and support on asylum issues to **3,983 clients**, 1,763 from our Newcastle office, 1,386 from our Middlesbrough office, 614 from Sunderland and 220 Stockton.

40 volunteers worked with us to provide that support, which included writing letters to the Home Office on behalf of refugees, helping people to find emergency financial assistance, access to educational courses, housing and legal advice.



We have provided approximately **800 days** of placements for social work students from the universities of Durham, Teesside, Northumbria and Cumbria. This enables us to work and engage with future social workers, helping them to understanding the complex issues affecting our client group.

We run **ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes** 3 days a week for those with low levels of English proficiency. Last year **152 clients** benefited from the service.



Our **Integration and Employment Service**, which is run by one member of staff and four volunteers, has helped **1,380 clients**, supporting them to find housing, jobs, accommodation or financial assistance.

Through our **Supported Housing Service** we successfully supported **21 clients** to move into their own housing; **8** have gained employment and **two** are in full-time education. The service has offered housing advice and support to over **50 others**.



NERS 1989 – 2019: Three decades of support for refugees



NERS was started by an Iranian refugee Mohamed Rezai, who with his wife Margaret Identified the need for specialised support for refugees in the region. They are supported by local internationalists activists as they set up the Refugee Specialist Advice Project (RSAP) within Gateshead Citizen Advice Bureau. The project's aim is to provide a place of safety and support; influence services and developing a 'voice' for those refugees and asylum seekers who come to the North East.



NERS, leads a European Commission funded project in partnership with the University of Sunderland and a local housing association, Banks of the Wear, to research the 'voices' of refugees in policy and practice on integration. The research leads on to NERS establishing a range of community belonging and youth integration projects.

NERS also sets out a strategy to support refugee community organisations across the region. This includes setting up a regional refugee forum.



2003

To improve accessibility and to cater for the larger number of asylum seekers across the region, **NERS opened three new offices in Wallsend, Sunderland and Middlesbrough.**

The greater numbers of arrivals lead to a significant increase in hostilities and racist attacks. Tragically, an Iranian asylum seeker, Peyman Bahmani, is murdered in Sunderland. NERS is active in supporting refugees through the ensuing stress and concern.

With seed money from Comic Relief, the organisation establishes an interpreting and translation service; this continues to the present day on a self-sustaining and growing basis.

Nationally NERS works in partnership with agencies like the Refugee Council, Refugee Action and the Welsh and Scottish Refugee Councils to develop a quality service model and lobby government on issues of policy.



1985

The project becomes an organisation in its own right and is named the 'North of England Refugee Service'; it's mission:

'NERS acts as an agent of positive change in order to improve the everyday life conditions of asylum seekers and refugees, and to promote social inclusion through integration and equal participation within British society.'

The Reverend Tony Jamieson becomes the first chair of the Board, other trustees are Emily Porter, John Peak, Reza Sherrifi, Jim Cousins (MP), David Gray (solicitor) and Areti Sianni. Harriet Lamb is the only employee. (Ms Lamb later goes on to become an Executive Director of the Fair-Trade Foundation).

1989

1993

The organisation moves from Gateshead Citizen Advice Bureau to a new office at 19 Bigg Market in the centre of Newcastle. This year sees the arrival of the first group of Bosnian refugees to the Region.

1995

With the arrival of more Bosnians, supported by funding from the Home Office, NERS develops a Bosnian Project to cater for this new group.

Volunteer and refugee Daoud Zaaroura is employed as the NERS chief officer.

1999

To address the pressure on local services in the south, the Government develops a New Asylum Model (NAM). Under this 'dispersal system' large numbers of asylum seekers start to arrive in the Region.

NERS as a part of a national voluntary sector consortium, wins the Home Office contract to deliver a 'one stop' advice and support service for newly dispersed asylum seeker across the North East.

2000

NERS 1989 – 2019: Three decades of support for refugees



2004

Activities grow and spread. NERS establishes partnerships with local authorities and with new smaller projects such as the West End Refugee Service, East End Refugee Service and Comfrey Project and a motor mechanics project in partnership with Northumbria Youth Action.

NERS wins a Newcastle city contract to deliver Supported Housing for vulnerable and homeless refugees. The contract is continuing to this day.

The Regional Refugee Forum becomes an independent charity - and continues to work closely with NERS to this day.



Community Belonging 2010

2006

A grant from the Learning and Skills Council for 'Widening Adult Participation Fund (WAPAF)' lays the foundations for what becomes the Refugee Employment Project (REP). **Involvement in an EU funded transnational EASI (Empowering Asylum seekers to integrate) programme enables NERS to pilot innovative approaches to support employers** in overcoming skill shortages by helping refugees and migrants to develop and adapt their skills for the UK labour market.

2009

The still growing organisation sets up a community interest company, 'Northern Revive', as a trading arm. Beside interpreting and translation, the company provides catering and cleaning services and employment opportunities for dozens of refugees and migrants.

NERS also wins an NHS contract designed to assist refugee health professionals to gain employment in UK.



National Convention, Hilton Newcastle Gateshead, 24th April 2008

2010

Around this point NERS has reached its peak size, with 65 employee and over £2 million annual income.

Then come the effects of the worldwide financial crash and the change of UK Government. Austerity and the public sector cuts bite. In the next few years the Home Office first cuts and then, by 2014, terminates both the One Stop Service (OSS) and the Refugee Integration and Employment Service (REIS) contracts. It also abandons its positive Integration Strategy.

Ben Hopkinson takeover from Rick Bowler as Chairperson.

2012

The effects on NERS are critical. Widespread redundancies are required, many highly skilled and dedicated staff have to leave. The end of the year sees the retirement of NERS longest serving CEO, Daoud Zaaroura, after 20 years association with the organisation, but not before he wins an outstanding citizen award from the Lord Mayor of Newcastle.

Northern Revive is making losses and reluctantly it is closed, with the remaining profitmaking interpreting and translation service brought in house within NERS.

At this stage NERS has lost about 80% of the annual income and has had to lay off over half of its staff. The organisation has to rely on reserves to continue to provide services and it turns to charities to support the continued provision of advice and support to asylum seekers.

Longstanding staff member Dr Mohamed Nasreldin becomes director, remaining staff take a voluntary pay cut and volunteers and trustees pitch in to see that services can be maintained.

2014

Critically charity funders continue to support NERS. Northern Rock Foundation provides vital funding to help the organisation to recover from the loss of public sector support. Others follow suit, for example, the Henry Smith Charity begins to fund a newly organised integration support service.

A governance review is completed and a new chair, Simon Underwood, takes over from Ben Hopkinson. New trustees begin to be recruited, including several from among refugees. The Newcastle office moves from the Bigg Market to better premises at Friars Street.

2015

Termination of Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) contract – the Home Office decides to run the AVR programme in-house. NERS continues to find new sources of funding – for example Comic Relief and the Tudor Trust. **Newcastle City Council steps back into the ring and becomes the first North East local authority for several years to fund local agencies to support refugees.**

2017

Stabilisation continues, although turnover is now down to just over £500k and the organisation only employs 12 paid staff. **NERS makes a surplus for the first time in seven years.** Our client numbers continue to rise –to almost 5000 - in fact they hardly dipped throughout all the turbulence the organisation has faced. Despite a continuing 'hostile environment' created by Government policy; and despite many internal organisational challenges caused by the need for change, the dedication, commitment and skills of trustees, staff and volunteers all help to redevelop the organisation.

M's story

Many people risk becoming destitute when they are granted refugee status and they are forced to leave their asylum support accommodation in a very short time-frame.

NERS manages 20 properties in Newcastle in which vulnerable refugees are accommodated, helping them to live independently and escape destitution. This is the case of M, a young person who was made homeless as he was unable to independently find accommodation.

M was referred to our supported housing scheme, where we accommodated him in one of our flats. At that time, he was very distressed and worried about his future and his first concern was to secure a safe place to live.

The housing team supported M to apply for his benefits, secure his tenancy, set up his utilities and access health services.

Once M's situation was stabilised, NERS' started working with him on an action plan to help him achieve his personal goals.

M had been working hard towards gaining a place at university: he was studying for his A-levels since he arrived in the UK and was waiting for the clearing process to know if he had been successful. His stay in NERS' supported accommodation removed the threat of homelessness from his life, and enabled him to focus on completing his A-level studies and making university applications for a degree in science.

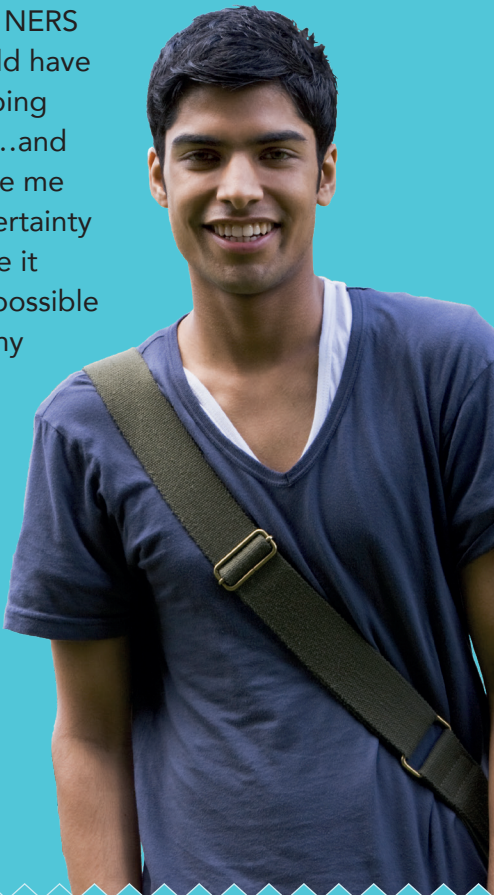
With this in mind, M was assisted in setting up everything that living independently and managing a household entails; and when the

time came for getting his A level results, M was successful and he was accepted on the science degree of his choice.

As a supported service, NERS then helped him to apply for his student finance, accommodation and hardship funds to ensure that he did not miss out on his university place due to having a low income and having no family support.

M has now moved on into student accommodation and is excited about his future. On moving on from our service, M told us:

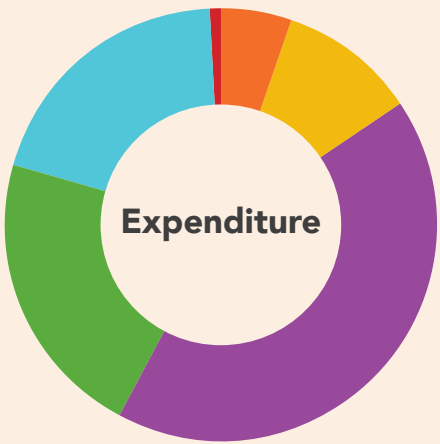
"When I was granted my refugee status, I didn't have anywhere to go. I was waiting for my A-level results to start my university studies. If not for the NERS Housing Team, I would have been homeless, sleeping rough on the streets...and that would have made me live in stress and uncertainty and would have made it difficult or almost impossible for me to complete my UCAS application. NERS supported me to apply for my course and for a student finance loan and helped me to make the transition to live as a university student."



Financials



| | £ |
|--------------|----------------|
| Grant | 184,556 |
| Contracts | 221,759 |
| Trading | 122,695 |
| Donations | 8,182 |
| Other | 20,332 |
| Total | 557,524 |



| | £ |
|-------------------------|----------------|
| Asylum Support Services | 30,000 |
| Integration Service | 58,891 |
| Supported Housing | 239,938 |
| Interpreting Service | 122,695 |
| Core/General Costs | 113,026 |
| Governance | 3,500 |
| Total | 568,050 |

Thank you for supporting refugees through NERS

Our work would not be possible without the dedicated and ongoing support of our volunteers. On behalf of the staff, we would like to extend sincere thanks to the 40 volunteers who served with us throughout the year.

In addition to our service volunteers, we would also like to thank our Board of Trustees for their ongoing commitment and dedication in serving the lives of people seeking refuge.

NERS is proud to have the support of AB Charitable Trust, Evans Cornish Foundation,

Garfield Weston, The Henry Smith Charity, Lloyds Bank Foundation, The 1969 Charitable Trust, Newcastle City Council, The Tudor Trust, The Willian Charitable Trust, and all of whom have provided financial support throughout the year.



Donations

The North of England Refugee Service is an independent charity working to support people seeking refuge in the UK. Many are fleeing violence and persecution and have suffered trauma.

We support people on every step of their journey, as well as speaking on their behalf, defending their rights and making sure they are treated fairly. A gift from you today will help to save people seeking refuge from destitution, equipping them to survive and thrive.

To donate to our work, log on to www.refugee.org.uk and click on Donate.

Interpreting and Translation Services

NERS provides sessional interpreters and translational services to clients across the North East, including the NHS, social services, schools, solicitors, local authorities, housing associations and care homes. If you would like to find out how we could help your organisation, call our service on **0191 245 7303**.

Follow us on:

Twitter: @NERSRefugee

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