

RAS 40

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Pobl i Bobl

Response from: Pobl i Bobl

## **WAG Consultation – Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales**

**Response submitted by Pobl i Bobl, grassroots organisation in NW Wales**

### **Organisational Background**

1. Pobl i Bobl is a grassroots organisation founded in response to the refugee crisis of 2015. We have grown in membership primarily through social media, and currently have around 1000-1500 supporters. Our main task is to collect and distribute physical donations to refugees worldwide, whilst also raising awareness of refugee issues. Over the past 6 months Pobl i Bobl has been engaged with refugees arriving in North West Wales under the SVPRS. We are pleased to submit the following points with regard to our experiences relating to resettlement.

### **Pace & effectiveness of WAG approach**

2. We believe that the majority of our supporters would like to see more refugees settled in Wales and at a quicker pace than is currently occurring. We do appreciate that the decision on numbers lies in the hands of Parliament rather than the Welsh Assembly. However, we would like to take this opportunity to state that we feel WAG should make a firmer commitment to take a greater number of refugees, and take appropriate action to lobby the British Government to allow Wales to do so.
3. We are aware that there are no Home Office designated dispersal areas in North West Wales (the closest being Wrexham), and that the settlement of Syrian refugees in the area so far has been a steep learning curve for councils and partner organisations, and therefore inevitably has had to be slow. We hope that, moving forwards, the process of resettlement will progress more swiftly.
4. Pobl i Bobl would like to be able to welcome refugees under the community sponsorship scheme, whereby named refugees are resettled in the UK, hosted and paid for by the local community. However, if communities are

to raise funds and host these refugees, this should be in addition to SVPRS numbers and not, as currently being considered, within the UK 20,000 over 5 years. We would urge the Welsh Assembly to lobby parliament on this matter.

## Effectiveness of Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan

5. We agree with the principals of the above plan, but would like to make the following points:
  - a. We are concerned that refugees are not provided with a sufficient introduction to living in Wales prior to their arrival in the UK, which leaves them somewhat unprepared for the cultural differences. For example, a lack of awareness that Wales is a bilingual country, and the significance of the Welsh language in education, culture and identity.
  - b. We believe that it would be beneficial to offer training to both council employees and third sector relevant parties on resettlement, integration and the specific needs of refugees, to enable us all to work together more closely and effectively.
  - c. As noted, North West Wales has not had a significant intake of refugees as yet but we question whether there are sufficient advice services available to the refugees in the area, particularly in relation to welfare benefits, debt, housing, employment and discrimination. We feel that it would be beneficial to provide a specific advocacy service which is sensitive to the language and cultural needs of Syrian refugees.
  - d. We feel that the provision of mental health services for refugees, needs to be strengthened and be more sensitive to the trauma and PTSD suffered by refugees escaping war.
  - e. We consider that educational support (including ESOL) is being well provided for by local authorities and local colleges.
  - f. We find that some of the points raised in the community cohesion plan are South Wales centric and feel that greater utilisation could be made of grassroots groups across Wales in facilitating stronger links between refugees (and asylum seekers) and members of the community who wish to support them. For example, as a third sector grassroots group, we are unaware of who holds the position of Community Cohesion Co-ordinator locally.
  - g. We feel there could be better dissemination of information on how refugees can engage with the provision of arts, culture and sport.

## **Unaccompanied children**

6. To date, Pobl i Bobl has not been involved in working with unaccompanied children, but we are keen to offer our support to local councils in preparation for the arrival of unaccompanied children in North West Wales.

## **Integration of Refugees & Asylum seekers**

7. We feel that North West Wales is lacking in formal integration services, with many organisations mentioned in the delivery plan being South Wales based. However, there is strong community support for refugees in the North West area, which has led to successful integration, albeit on a relatively informal and ad hoc basis.
8. As stated earlier, better use could be made of local grassroots groups by the local councils in facilitating integration in a more structured way.
9. The far right rally that took place locally in November 2015, generated a counter rally on the day of 400 attendees (compared to no more than 10 “infidels”) and resulted in a celebration of diversity and welcome to refugees and asylum seekers.
10. Pobl i Bobl has developed a growing relationship with the families who have arrived in the area under the SVPRS, and helped them engage with the local community of both Arabic, and Welsh/English speaking residents. For example, we have organised integration events for the refugees, and some members of the families choose to regularly volunteer with Pobl i Bobl, working alongside local residents. This has helped the families settle in the area quickly and feel welcomed.
11. The existence of an Islamic Centre in Bangor has been an important factor in successful integration, where refugees have been warmly welcomed by other Muslims and Arabic speaking residents.

## **Conclusion**

12. In conclusion, we would like to reiterate that support for refugees in the area is strong and that we have experienced no adverse responses to our continuing work in supporting refugees to date. The community of North West Wales has been exceedingly generous with both financial and physical donations, since the inception of Pobl i Bobl and has always turned out to show their support for refugees.