Housing first for people with no recourse to public funds

Executive summary

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This is an executive summary version of the evaluation of Oxfordshire Homeless Movement's NRPF housing first project. The full evaluation is available at http://oxfordshirehomelessmovement.org/

Introduction

No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) is part of the United Kingdom's immigration control. It restricts access to public funds including social security benefits alongside access to some forms of healthcare for migrants in the United Kingdom. Estimates vary, but NRPF affects up to 3.5 million people in the UK (McKinney *et al.*, 2024, pp.9-10).

Most migrants in the UK support themselves. The 2016 migrant cohort were estimated to make a total lifetime contribution of £35.4 billion to the UK's public finances (Centre for Social Policy, 2024, p. 10). However, losing your job, a home, or a relationship breakdown causes people subject to NRPF to quickly fall into extreme poverty (Jolly *et al.*, 2022).

Support that is available is restricted to young families and extremely vulnerable adults, costing England up to £81.8million each year (NRPF Network, 2024). For everyone else, there is no statutory support available.

Oxfordshire Homeless Movement's NRPF Project fills this void. The NRPF project delivers a housing first approach for single, homeless adults subject to NRPF. It provides a safe home, a support worker and tailored support plan, alongside immigration advice and support.

It is delivered through a partnership of Connection Support, Edge Housing, SOHA Housing, and Asylum Welcome. It costs between £200,000-£250,000 per year to run and has supported 50 individuals since 2021.

What difference does the NRPF Project make?

The NRPF project offers a solution that creates lasting change for those it supports. Ultimately, most people leave the project with regularised immigration status and the right to work. This means that they can be self-sufficient and support themselves.

The project achieves these outcomes in a way that is person-centred, improves health and wellbeing, supports community integration, and is cost-effective.

Immigration status, NRPF and right to work

The aim of this service is to provide people with a safe home and the support to regularise their immigration status. 50% of the cohort had been through the asylum-seeking process, the majority having had their asylum application refused.

Asylum Welcome provide expert advice and support to individuals to regularise their status. The results are profound. 84% of the cohort have either regularised their status (42%), maintained a worker visa (3%), or have a pending immigration application (36%). In one instance, a deportation order was overturned and indefinite leave to remain granted.

The impact of the approach is strongest for those who have now regularised their status (21 individuals) with 95% of these individuals now with access to public funds, and 100% having the right to work.

These individuals should have no future need to access this project, creating lasting change for the person and for society.

Improved health and wellbeing

Throughout an individual's journey in the project, there is an increase in feelings that life is worthwhile, alongside happiness levels. Physical health improvements are also noted as people can access healthcare by having a registered address, and the support workers take an active role in ensuring people get registered with GPs and see to any illnesses promptly.

For people still in the project, their uncertain immigration status, and the restrictions this brings, negatively affects wellbeing and in particular – the ability to feel hopeful. Frequently, individuals expressed a desire to work but were frustrated that right to work rules prevent them from doing this.

The housing first approach, providing a support worker alongside housing is vital for supporting individuals to integrate with their community. People join social groups, spend time volunteering (56% of people), attend English classes (30% of people), take part in training (47% of people), observe their faith, and participate in society.

Cost effective solution

The project is a cost-effective solution to reduce homelessness and mitigate the effects of NRPF. It presents good value for money compared with doing nothing and the known costs of homelessness of up to £30,000 per person, per year and asylum accommodation costing up to £41,000 per person, per year (Institute for Public Policy, 2024, p.6).

With 50% of people supported having been through the asylum-seeking process, it is likely that the UK Government has already spent a considerable amount of money on each of these individuals.

None of this includes the human and social cost of homelessness.

The NRPF project costs £6200 per person, per year, receiving support.

For those accommodated, the average cost is £6870 per person, per year. For those who don't receive accommodation, the average cost is £4640 per person, per year.

These figures should be treated with caution as we were unable to account for differences in support worker time between those in accommodation and those not.

At a maximum cost of £6,870 per year, per person – this project supports 6 people every year for the same cost that the UK Government pays for 1 person, per year in temporary asylum accommodation.

Recommendations

For decision makers in government and councils

Whilst it is unlikely that the NRPF condition will be removed from the UK's immigration policy, there are opportunities to pilot alternative models of existing provision delivered by government and local authorities.

The UK Government could:

- **Pilot funding for housing first services that support people with NRPF when they fall into destitution or as an alternative to asylum accommodation.** For every 1 person accommodated in asylum accommodation, this NRPF project can accommodate 6 people for the same cost.
- **Pilot funding for housing first services for councils already supporting specific groups of people subject to NRPF.** Councils spent £81.8m providing support to families, and vulnerable adults subject to NRPF. Pilot funding to deliver housing first services could be more cost effective than temporary accommodation.
- **Provide people seeking asylum with the right to work at an earlier stage.** People want to work, to support themselves and contribute.
- **Consider NRPF exclusions for individuals reaching a threshold tax contribution through work.**

There are opportunities for devolved governments, combined authorities in England, and the voluntary sector to mitigate the effects of NRPF taking learning from this project:

- **Targeted action to mitigate some effects of NRPF** e.g. providing free bus passes to asylum seekers such as this scheme in Oxford funded by Oxfordshire City Council.
- **Develop existing support schemes for people with NRPF** – could additional support be offered such as immigration advice, or developing housing first approaches? For example, within Manchester's A Bed Every Night schemes – wraparound support and immigration advice could be provided for a longer term solution.
- **For devolved administrations, action can be taken to mitigate the effects of NRPF as explored by the Fair Way Scotland scheme**. This includes opportunities for change with NHS charging policy, which is a devolved matter, work to reform access to education, and right to work pilot schemes (Ang, 2025)

For funders and those with resources

Without philanthropic giving, this NRPF project would not exist. Independent funders therefore offer a powerful and impactful source of funding for innovation in service design and new models of support. Similarly, the project could not run at the cost it does without the significant 'in kind' investment from SOHA Housing and local charities. There are opportunities to invest in projects with limited funding sources. Funders could:

- **Prioritise funding projects such as this which are ineligible for any public funding.** The funding of the NRPF project has enabled a different approach to be demonstrated in how to support migrants.
- **Leverage funding to support wider partnerships bringing in other funders.** For example, by committing to a multi-year grant that will strengthen applications to other funders, or by connecting organisations with funders who have shared ambitions.
- **Leverage their power to support policy and influencing work.** Funders and philanthropists have power to engage and influence, helping to amplify the work of organisations funded.

Organisations with resources, such as housing associations, charities, or landlords, could:

- **Consider opportunities to provide homes or in-kind support to innovative projects such as this**.

Conclusion

Whilst the NRPF condition applies to most migrants within the UK – there will always be significant need for this project. This approach protects against people falling into destitution through the provision of a safe home, support, and immigration advocacy. This approach creates lasting change enabling people to regularise their immigration status in the UK and live independently, work, and contribute. This NRPF Project shows a way to do things differently. A way to provide support that is cost-effective and leads to lasting change and economic benefit for the UK.

Most importantly, it offers a way to treat people with dignity.

References

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