

# **Good Practice of Promoting Multi-Disciplinary Working with Asylum Seekers and Refugees – The Social Work Perspective**

***Mersey Care NHS Trust in Collaboration with Asylum  
Link Merseyside***

***5<sup>th</sup> Edition  
July 2015***

*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 his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.."*

## **1950 European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)**

United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (CRSR) 1951

European Union Asylum Qualification Directive 2004.

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## **Acknowledgement**

This valuable document required a considerable amount of work, research and dedication. Still, its development would not have been possible without the support, hard-work and commitment of my students, staff and volunteers at Asylum Link Merseyside (ALM), also partner agencies too numerous to individually thank and acknowledge

A particular thank you to asylum seekers at ALM who have agreed to share their experiences to be used as case studies that inform practice and theory throughout this document.

This is the 5th edition of the document which has been developed by my students at ALM over the past 10 years.

I am very grateful to Peter Trigilgas, currently a volunteer and retired mental health manager. I am extremely thankful and indebted to him for sharing his expertise, his sincere and valuable guidance and encouragement to my students and myself. Peter's passion for human rights and civil liberties has been inspirational. Likewise to both Ewan Roberts, Centre Manager and Durani Rapozo, Complex Needs Case Worker at Asylum Link Merseyside.

Finally special thanks to my employer Mersey Care NHS Trust for giving me the facility and time to support the invaluable work at ALM.

**Emad Lilo, Trustee Asylum Link Merseyside  
Vice Chair, Liverpool Arabic Centre  
Practice Improvement & Development Lead Mersey care NHS Trust**

## **Foreword**

Refugees and asylum seekers' experiences of war, organized violence, repression and exile (i.e. traumatisation and uprooting) will have different meanings for different individuals and will create the development of an impressive coping mechanism for the majority, but for some it could result in mental and physical health problems. The problems faced by them are complex. Presenting needs arising from isolation, loss, language, housing and poverty are as important as issues about past trauma and must be addressed simultaneously. Promoting social support, access to education, employment and better living conditions have a great impact on healthy psychological well-being.

Working with refugees/asylum seekers is very rewarding, but it can also be very challenging and frustrating due to negative media and political slogans compounded by complex immigration legislation and policies. It is imperative for those working in this area to have training and on-going support and supervision.

To provide refugees/asylum seekers with adequate health and social care, statutory agencies must make sure access to services is facilitated. This can be achieved by having health and care staff working collaboratively who:

- appreciate the vulnerability and multiple disadvantages faced by refugees and asylum seekers;
- understand relevant legislation;
- have knowledge of entitlements;
- are interested in learning and appreciating different cultures;
- promote tolerance and act as advocates when necessary;
- Have adequate access to interpreters and translators.

Asylum Link Merseyside (ALM) offer students as well as health and social care professionals a unique and enriching experience of reaching out and often making a difference to service users with diverse and complex needs arising from mental health, homelessness and destitution, physical disability, safeguarding including unaccompanied minors.

**Emad Lilo, Trustee Asylum Link Merseyside**

## **What is an asylum seeker?**

An asylum seeker is described by the UNHCR as a foreign national or stateless person who fears persecution in their country of origin as defined by the UN convention, and is entitled to claim asylum in the UK. An asylum seeker is an individual who has applied for asylum and is awaiting a decision determining whether or not they qualify for refugee status.

An individual is defined as a refugee by the UN convention relating to the status of refugees if;

- They are outside of their own country
- Have a well founded fear that they will face persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a social group or political opinion:
- And wont, or will not rely on protection by their country of origin.

## **Asylum in the UK**

Historically the UK is identified as a nation which provides sanctuary to foreign nationals who fear or have faced persecution in their country of origin. In recent years there has been an increase in public concern surrounding 'bogus' asylum seekers whose reasons for seeking asylum in the UK is to take advantage and exploit the benefits and economic opportunities that are available. Media representations exacerbate this by portraying Britain as a 'soft touch', and it is a terrifying thought that individuals who have fled torture and inhumane treatment could be demonised by the plenty throughout the UK, as a result of the scapegoating and demonisation of our media.

Initial judgements concerning the honesty of asylum seekers have become highly potent, reflecting that of the 80% of whom asylum claims are ultimately refused. The notion of the 'bogus' asylum seeker is exemplified just by looking at such statistics, and the sheer amount of refusals the Home Office disperses. This illustrates the extent of how the Home Office has ultimately made asylum seekers' **credibility** the key question when deciding their claims, giving rise to the culture of disbelief we are currently over-whelmed with. It can be argued that the media and the Home Office work in hand in hand with one another, as both demonstrate a similar ethos and goal. Their assumptions both convey that to be dishonest in an asylum claim is to be undeserving of protection. Both effectively assume that if asylum seekers are insincere, they face no risk of return. Such degrading and inhumane exposure is a hint of how conflicting and contentious grounds our contemporary UK Asylum Process functions on.

Yet, what the media chooses to ignore, demonstrates the real extent the supposedly 'bogus' asylum seeker is practically non-existent, and statistics represent the small minority such a 'soft touch' Britain actually allows in, as opposed to other European countries. In the year ending June 2013 the UK received only 23,499 new applications for asylum in comparison to;

- USA – 70,400
- Germany – 64,500
- South Africa – 61,500
- France – 55,100
- Sweden – 43,900

(UNHCR Global Trends Report)

However, more recently, according to the UNCHR Asylum Trends 2014, the United Kingdom is only the eighth largest recipient of new asylum seekers in 2014, with 31,300 claims, a trivial increase of 5% compared to 2013.

Evidently, there is one dangerous overestimation of the amount of asylum seekers the media and policy suggests to us. There is a huge misunderstanding of how people overestimate the number of asylum seekers granted refugee status.

In 2012, the number of refugees, asylum cases and stateless person contributed to just 0.27% of the UK population. The most common nationalities applying for asylum, year ending March 2014 are as follows:

- Pakistan
- Iran
- Sri Lanka
- Syria
- Eritrea
- Albania
- Bangladesh
- Afghanistan
- Nigeria
- India

(Home Office Immigration Statistics January – March 2014)

Asylum seekers in the UK are currently entitled to receive subsistence and/or accommodation support from the national asylum support service whilst their claim for asylum is being considered.

The national asylum support service is a part of the UKBA, which is a section of the home office. NASS was put in place in April 2000 under the Immigration and Nationality Act. Prior to NASS it was the responsibility of local authorities (in country applicants) and the Department for work and pensions (port of entry applicants) to provide support and accommodation to asylum seekers.

## **A Student's Perspective**

Prior to student's starting their placement at Asylum Link Merseyside, they may be unaware of the oppression, difficulties and marginalisation that asylum seekers face in the UK. The perception portrayed of asylum seekers in the media is based on a negative representation; 'What's the Story? Media representative of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK (2003)' analysed various media sources of reports of asylum seekers in the UK. The research revealed inaccurate and provocative language to describe asylum seekers in Britain by using terms such as 'illegal refugee' and 'asylum cheat'. The report also stated figures used to show how many asylum seekers enter the UK are un-sourced, exaggerated or unexplained. The report also states that individual asylum seekers and refugees are only quoted when they are involved in the report and never in regards to a policy debate. In IPPR's publications 'Seeking Scapegoats, 'The coverage of asylum in the UK press' (2005), highlights public attitude and xenophobic ideologies in Britain.

Whilst practising at ALM, student's see the reality of life as an asylum seeker by fighting for their rights and survival in the UK. It also highlights how the media portrayal of asylum seekers is flawed and that the challenges they face in the UK are harder than most people face in the UK. It is not reported that asylum seekers have no recourse to public funds, nor any other type of support if they are refused. The only accessible 'funds' they are entitled to is NASS support, which under section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 equates to roughly £36.62, or under section 4 the same amount in food vouchers only, with restrictions placed on purchasing goods.

Having an opportunity to work with such vulnerable service users, students have a vivid insight of the struggles that asylum seekers have gone through in their lives such as torture, persecution, oppression, witnessing family members being executed. It is unimaginable that the UK would not be empathetic to the plight of asylum seekers in the UK, instead of supporting asylum seekers by providing the help they need such as health, shelter, food and clothing. Student's have the opportunity to map their nine professional capabilities framework, for example domain eight – 'Contexts & Organisations' whereby regular communications with the Home Office and other government agencies are made daily. Students experience oppression by the Home Office towards the service users by trying not to provide aid for asylum seekers. This is evident as asylum seekers in the UK are refused any autonomy and any support from any government agencies. Chantler (2012) argues that the creation of NASS has reinforced the view that asylum seekers are being supported via NASS and therefore do not require social work intervention. This is a clear separation of them and us. Humphries (2004) argues that social workers are the gatekeepers to services and function as an arm of Immigration services, reporting failed asylum seekers to authorities rather than providing them with support.



Asylum seekers have strength and courage seeking asylum, as the process of their applications are routinely delayed having an overall effect on their emotional health and physical well-being. The majority of asylum seekers have no stability in their lives due to the constant dispersals of accommodation, thus resulting in them having to make new friends and new support networks. Maternity Action and Refugee Council (2012) reported cases of pregnant women being moved several times during their pregnancy, away from the father of the child, without sufficient orientation such as a map of getting to the nearest hospital. For example, previous students at Asylum Link have worked on cases where the Home Office have left families with young children stranded in Liverpool and being told to go to Asylum Link Merseyside for support, when in actual fact it should be the Home Office who should be providing this support who have a duty of care to the family.

Housing conditions are commonly reported to Asylum Link Merseyside as being insufficient, such as overcrowding, damp, bugs, delays in repairs, lack of heating or hot water and unacceptable risks in terms of fire. These conditions cause more problems for HIV positive asylum seekers who might be at risks of opportunistic infection. This is a national problem as Phillips (2006), APPG (2012), Garvie (2001; Wilson (2001) and Pettitt (2013) have all reported on these issues on a national level with little or no improvements have been made.

Ultimately, Asylum Link Merseyside is up against challenging one of the world's most restrictive and hostile asylum systems. Asylum seekers are structurally and institutionally oppressed, forced to accept the worst living conditions, and receive some of the most degrading attitudes and correspondence from Home Office. Asylum seekers are not seen as individuals or at most human beings, but as a burden to our government's time and funds. They are not allowed to have televisions and this contributes to mental deterioration as they are isolated and have no one else to talk to as they are often housed with others whose language is not similar to theirs.

Having considered the pitfalls of refugees and in particular asylum seekers lives, it is vital the struggles of refused asylum seekers are not ignored in the process. This is evidenced by the sheer destitution levels of refused asylum seekers, which remain to be increasing, by where the government take no responsibility for supporting individuals back to their home countries safely, and thus the number of refused asylum seekers have become higher than those of service use (British Red Cross and Boaz Trust 2013). Hence, in its report on destitution, Refugee Action (2006: 2) noted 'unprecedented levels' of destitute refused asylum seekers, concluding: "there exists in Britain a new and growing excluded class of people whose asylum applications have been refused, who are afraid or unable to return to their countries of origin, who have no contact with the authorities, no access to work or mainstream support services, and little prospect of their situation being resolved."

Chantler (2012) argues that the focus on past stresses, in particular clinical diagnoses such as post-traumatic stress disorder, may have led to a failure to recognise post-migratory stressors such as poverty, homelessness, boredom and social isolation and incarceration, although there is now a body of evidence that points to the role of the asylum system in generating or exacerbating stresses which increase the risk of psychological illness (Phillimore 2011a). Such evidence rectifies how our government needs to take responsibility over those asylum seekers who have been refused, as such victims of ignorance are becoming a common phenomenon and the situation is worsening as the numbers of refusals are increasing as opposed to those being accepted. The main issue here is that the longer the government refuses to take responsibility of those they have ultimately refused, the worse the problems for our services will be, as those problems of those refused are getting more serious such as mental health, physical health, and destitution, hence the numbers are increasing of those sleeping rough in our hostile communities. The Home Office policy of “we can’t return you home and we can’t support you has left hundreds stranded in our streets destitute.”

The NHSGGC suggest that the mental health problems facing asylum seekers and refugees may be divided into 4 overlapping groups;

### **1. Problems arising from displacement**

- Cultural Bereavement
- Isolation
- Boredom
- Unmet expectations about life in the UK
- Changing roles in the family / clash of values
- Racism in their new neighbourhood

### **2. Major Mental Health Problems or Developmental Problems**

- May have existed prior to their move to U.K or precipitated by the move
- Schizophrenia
- Depressive illness 35-42%
- Developmental disorders e.g. autism

### **3. Mental Health Problems stemming from trauma**

- Witnessing and / or being the victim of torture, rape or other serious atrocities in their home country
- Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Depression following traumatic bereavements

### **4. Mental Health Problems arising from asylum process**

- Range of mental health issues arising from the asylum-seeking process / destitution / early morning removals / forced removal & detention.

## **The current UK Asylum Process**

### **Arrival**

The Individual may claim asylum at their port of entry into the UK. They may claim asylum within a few days of arrival, although any delay in claiming asylum will severely impact on their claim. The individual is told that s/he needs to travel to Croydon in London to claim asylum; Refugee Action (on Mount Pleasant) may be able to help them with funds for the trip.

### **Screening Interview**

After arriving at the UKBA in Croydon s/he is able to claim asylum and their initial basic details are taken. The client will also have their fingerprints taken and receive an application registration card (ARC).

### **Substantive Interview and SEF**

The Interview is recorded on the Statement of Evidence Form (SEF) and this provides the main basis for the Asylum Claim. The Claimant can be accompanied by an advisor or can request that the interview is recorded. This is the single most important part of the asylum process, as all future decisions and correspondence with the Home Office will use the information acquired during this interview as the foundation of the client's asylum claim. In some cases the client may have been told what to say by a trafficker or may simply be uncomfortable disclosing sensitive information. They will have difficulty adding or changing incorrect information at a later date, as the Home Office will see them as deviating from their original story.

### **Dispersal**

The claimant is dispersed to a number of relocation centres of which Liverpool is one. S/He is provided with s.98 support at a Dispersal centre for 1-3 weeks. During this time s/he is given a health screening and onward dispersal. Serco has a contract to accommodate asylum seekers.

### **NASS Support**

NASS (National Asylum Support Service) provides certain types of support to people seeking asylum during the time that their applications are under way. The support can be support for accommodation, subsistence costs or both. S.95 support (Immigration and Asylum Act 1999) is instigated by the UKVI and then allocated by a number of

private housing providers. The claimant must remain at the accommodation assigned to them and this support can be withdrawn if the service user are seen to be absent from the property.

## **Refusal**

The claimant has their case rejected by their Immigration Case owner. The Case Owner will remain the same throughout the client's asylum journey.

## **Appeal**

In order for support to be continued the client must appeal to the 1<sup>st</sup> tier tribunal. Section 95 support is continued during this period. The asylum Immigration Tribunal through an Independent Judge will reflect on the decision based on the 4 grounds for refusal. This will usually take 3-6 months or more to decide.

## **Full AIT hearing**

The client will have to visit court to state their case against their refusal and present the facts of their case.

## **Refusal**

AIT Immigration Judge Determination. The client receives a letter of determination and is informed that their NASS support will end in 28 days. The client therefore has 28 days to decide and implement their next move. The client is advised to contact Refugee Action on Mount Pleasant to sign up for an assisted voluntary return (AVR) programme. (Programme to cease in December 2015) In a number of cases this will be the first time the client comes to Asylum Link Merseyside, as they feel they have nowhere else to turn.

## **Request Permission to Appeal**

The client is able to request that this decision is appealed. His decision is made to the Upper Tribunal; if this is refused then their support is not reinstated. The case is sent to a Senior Immigration judge (SIJ) for permission to go to upper Tribunal. There are ultimately 3 possible outcomes:

- a) The decision is overturned and the client is given leave to remain
- b) The decision to refuse the appeal is overturned and the appeal is allowed to proceed to the Upper tribunal.
- c) The decision to refuse an appeal is upheld. In this case, the client is left with no access to public funds.

## **Appeal to Upper Tribunal**

If the client's appeal is accepted then support is provided during the duration of this period. A panel of immigration Judges in court will review the whole case for error.

## **Refusal**

After having their case refused by a panel of judges they will receive confirmation that all their right to appeal have been exhausted. The client will have to vacate their property and is advised to sign up for Voluntary return

## **Section 4**

If the individual is unable to return home for some reason, and is taking all reasonable steps to assist this process then they are entitled to s.4 support. The stated criteria for receiving s.4 support are:

1. you are taking all reasonable steps to leave the UK or you are placing yourself in a position where you can do so; or
2. you cannot leave the UK because of a physical impediment to travel or for some other medical reason; or
3. you cannot leave the UK because, in the Secretary of State's opinion, no viable route of return is currently available; or
4. you have applied for a judicial review of your asylum application and have been given permission to proceed with it; or

Accommodation is necessary to prevent a breach of your rights within the meaning of the Human Rights Act 1998.

## **Destitution**

If the client is unable to access section 4 support (or even whilst doing so) they are likely to be forced into destitution. The client no longer receives public support as they have "no recourse to public funding". Without financial support the client will have to rely on the charity of friends and family. S/he may apply for destitution support at Asylum Link Merseyside and receive a food parcel once a week. This parcel comprises of basic food essentials; the client may also get oil and bathroom products once a fortnight. Caseworkers will assist the destitute client in the progression of their case or in accessing other support such as the Sisters of Charity Hostel, hosts or occasionally ALM's own housing

## **New Claim based on fresh evidence**

The client can move out of destitution if they are able to find new evidence to support an asylum claim. If they are able to find sufficient evidence and a legal representative, then they can make a fresh claim based on new submissions. This is particularly hard to do though, as the criteria for acceptable evidence are high and often the individual is not entitled to legal aid. If the fresh claim is accepted then the client will be entitled to s.95 support once again. However, many individuals find it hard to get their cases taken on a second time; they thus remain destitute. Even if they are taken and apply for section 4 support. Recently 2015, has seen letters of refusal of section 4 being delivered at the same times as the letter of refusal of a fresh claim.

## **Support for asylum seekers (Asylum & Immigration Act 1999)**

### **Section 98 support**

- Provision of initial accommodation and essential living needs
  - Providing information on the asylum process and dispersal locations
- Supporting the applicants move to longer-term section 95 accommodations where they must stay while they remain eligible for asylum support.

### **Section 95 support**

- Cash – A single adult currently receives £36.62 per week for living expenses.
- Housing – Applicants cannot choose where to live, they will be sent wherever the UKBA deems housing to be available outside of London and the South East.
- Education – Children of asylum seekers have the same right to education between the ages of five and sixteen.
- Health – Asylum seekers and their dependents receive free primary (HC2) and secondary healthcare from the NHS. However it can be difficult to register with a GP due to confusion amongst healthcare staff over who is eligible. Refused asylum seekers who are not receiving any support from UKBA are not eligible for free secondary healthcare and will be charged.

### **Section 4 support**

- Failed asylum seekers who are on Section 4 support do not receive any cash. They are provided with accommodation and receive a Section 4 Azure payment card to use to buy food and essential toiletries to the value of £35.69 per person per week.

### **Immigration Act 2014**

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of October 2013 the government announced the introduction of the new immigration bill, which is to be put in place by summer 2014. Although the bill intends to make many changes to the current asylum system in the UK for the purpose of this document I will note only a few;

- Make it easier and quicker to remove individuals who are said to have no right to be in the UK.
- End the abuse of article 8 of the ECHR.
- Reform the removals and appeals system
- Cut the number of decisions that can be appealed from 17 to 4 in order to preserve appeals for those asserting fundamental rights.

- Landlords to check immigration status of tenants.
- NHS health charges

The government proposes that these changes are being put in place to make the UK asylum process more effective. Depending on the way the changes are looked at, it could be said that these changes are to make it more difficult for individuals to claim asylum in the UK and in effect deter others from seeking asylum in the UK by making the process as difficult as possible.

In summary Rowenna Moffatt of the Oxford human rights hub describes the appeal rights in the 2013 bill as “disenfranchising the disenfranchised”.

## **Legislation**

**Immigration and Asylum Act 1999**

**Children Act 1989**

**European convention on human rights**

**UN Convention on rights of the child**

**UN Convention against torture**

**UN Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women**

**UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities**

**Mental Health Act 1983**

**S.117 Aftercare**

**Mental Capacity Act 2005**

**Children and Families Act 2014**

**Care Act 2014**

**Immigration Act 2014**



## **Theory in practice**

As does our professional values and code of ethics, theory underpins social work practice with any service user group and a social workers knowledge base informs that practice. There are many theories that are actively used in present social work such as;

- Task centred
- Anti-discriminatory
- Anti-Oppressive
- Crisis intervention
- Empowerment and advocacy
- Systems theory
- Maslow's hierarchy of needs
- Solution focussed

These theories can be used when working with individuals and dependant on what issue is presented that needs resolving or managing. These theories will be described in more detail below and examples of theory to practice will be given where possible from my time on placement at ALM.

### **TASK CENTRED THEORY**

The Task centred approach 'belongs' to the problem solving approaches and these stem from psychology. Specifically, task centred draws from cognitive and behavioural psychotherapies. This means theories about how people perceive, learn, remember and think about information. Task centred is highly structured, time-limited and problem focused and is particularly popular in many social service interventions today. It has been argued that clients make comparable and sometimes better progress in short term interventions than clients in longer term sessions. The task centred approach can be used with other theories but its main purpose is to be structured, focused and time-limited in its intervention.

The shortfalls of using this approach however, is that it focus's on the present and does not take into account a person's past and how that manifests in the present. This could also be viewed as a strength however as it is a process that moves an individual on by focusing on the future.

### **Example of Practice**

Student A was approached by a colleague from the section 95 team that had concerns regarding one of their service users (M) in which they had completed a section 95 application with him. Service User M had been destitute for roughly a year and had

been staying in various friends' accommodation. M had been initially refused, however he had fresh evidence to support his claim and was able to make further submissions, which were initially the student's reasons for completing a section 95 application with him. However, the colleague from section 95 requested the student to get an address from M, because his application couldn't be considered until he had a static address. M's address was formally in the care of Asylum Link, however section 95 rejected this, and requested the details of his current friend's accommodation. M expressed his concerns with the student, explaining this wouldn't be possible as his friend had previously told M he didn't want Home Office knowing about M staying with him. Henceforth, the student had to act quick and had to consider what the best and most effective intervention would be in order for M's application to be considered. The student was advised if they were to help M apply for initial accommodation through Migrant Help, given his circumstances if successful, M could be housed within the next 24 hours, however the student had to act quick before the Home Office were closed. They therefore decided that via the task-centred approach, the first and most prevalent task would be to compose a letter themselves with assistance from M, evidencing the support that ALM had been giving M since February 2014. The student then assisted M with writing a letter stating the places he had been living and who he had been staying with since his arrival in the UK in 2006. The reasons the student had decided to intervene in this way was because their initial aim was to advance their service users human rights by challenging such oppressive living conditions by applying for section 95, and to also empower the service user by getting them involved in the process and handing back control. In addition to this, the student then attached his ASF1 form (Section 95 application) just so they have it there for reference, and also his court appeal papers as proof of his entitlement to support. The student felt happy with their intervention as they felt pleased about giving the service user control through the tasks M was given to complete, and also the fact that M had left the building feeling listened to and understood. The student was certain that they had covered all aspects of what was needed to achieve in this task.

The next morning the student received a phone call from M delighted that he had been given initial accommodation. The student felt as though they had advocated efficiently and that they had empowered M to compose a letter himself stating his sheer destitution and the struggles he has consequently been faced with, yet now having his plight recognised and empowering him to receive a sense of achievement by the group work they both were involved in to achieve this. Even though M had phoned the student, they then also came in to see the student in person to thank them. This was one of the students highlights during their time at placement as it shown just how much of their time and efforts appreciated.

Asylum Seekers and Refugee's are far from the portrayal we are bombarded with throughout the media. These are people's whose welfare and well-being are being

exploited and whose rights have always been blurred amongst an oppressive and inhumane system of the asylum process.

## **ANTI – DISCRIMINATORY THEORY**

Anti-discriminatory practice has a relatively limited aim of seeking to diminish and combat unfair and unequal treatment and remove barriers that prevent people from accessing services. Anti-oppressive practice goes beyond this to challenge the structure of society and the use of power to maintain some groups in inferior positions.

### **Example of Practice**

Asylum seekers and refugees have long been disadvantaged as a result of a series of laws and regulations introduced by successive governments that have largely been against their best interests. There is a belief that the continual fall in the number of asylum applicants is largely due to imposing visa regimes, rather than because of a drop in the number of asylum seekers.

Refugees and asylum seekers are often discriminated against for more complex cultural, historical and institutional reasons. Opportunities, housing, employment and health etc. may be compromised as a result, many suffer destitution, women and unaccompanied minors are particularly vulnerable. As well as working to combat discrimination, integration of refugees and asylum seekers into local communities, provided rights and cultures are protected, is actively encouraged to bring about a positive experience of living in Britain and greater community cohesion.

## **CRISIS INTERVENTION**

Crises are turning points in people's lives when precipitating events lead to rising distress, upsetting the steady state in which previous coping mechanisms dealt with problems. The whole asylum process is one of crisis, but there are barriers such as discontinuation of NASS support in conjunction with the threat of eviction and the realisation that you may become destitute. A significant flaw in using crisis intervention as a means to work with asylum seekers is that it is unable to help people whose life is characterised by continual crises because of poverty and social exclusion.

### **Example of Practice**

If a service user comes into Asylum Link and states that their NASS payments have been stopped, we can phone up the UKBA and find out why this has happened. There are various reasons why this might have happened such as their ARC card needs updating or the UKBA database has not been updated to reflect the asylum

seekers position. These issues can normally be rectified in one simple phone call to the UKBA therefore preventing further crisis in the person's life.

## **EMPOWERMENT AND ADVOCACY**

Advocacy is an essential tool which is used by social workers in the UK to ensure focus is placed on the needs of the individual that they are working with, particularly individuals who exist on the margins of society. Advocacy is predominantly influenced by the ideas of social and individual justice, and humanism.

Empowerment is influenced by both radical and Marxist theories about social change, with particular respect to class, and latterly to feminism and anti-racism. Although empowerment is seen to be based to some extent on 'revolutionary' ideas, empowerment believes that it is possible to change society for the better in order to help individuals, in contrast to seeking to bring about a change of society in order to transform current, oppressive social relations.

Often asylum seekers are living on the fringes of society and suffer from lacking a clear voice. Their sense of empowerment is dramatically reduced by the asylum process and they can benefit from having someone to advocate on their behalf to curb oppression that they may be experiencing.

### **Example of Practice**

The role of a practitioner/student in ALM is to empower the asylum seekers by acting as an advocate for asylum seekers; this can range from making appointments to see healthcare professionals, calling their legal representative, housing agencies and the Home Office. The practitioner/student calls the Home Office on a regular basis for the service users to ensure that their rights have been met. If they have not been met, then the practitioner/student will try and do everything in their power to ensure that they are met by acting as an advocate to ensure that asylum seekers are housed and they are receiving support to ensure that their basic needs are met. Student K worked on a case when the Home Office hadn't been supporting an asylum seeker for 3 months; as a consequence he was suffering with mental health problems and kept getting threatening letters stating that he was going to be evicted. This was not in the wellbeing of the asylum seeker who was suffering from mental health problems and his mental state was rapidly declining as he was stressed of becoming homeless. Also, without any financial support or food vouchers, he wasn't able to purchase food and relied on donations from friends and ALM. I reminded the Home Office that they have a duty of care to the asylum seeker to ensure that his health needs are met. The

service user felt happy and empowered knowing that I was there to act as an advocate for the service user.

## **SYSTEMS APPROACH**

Systems approach sees social work situations as being a series of interlocking social systems. Therefore, the practitioner must understand how these systems fit together and the strengths and problems that arise in this process. It is important to ensure that the support networks available to the service user are protected and strengthened. These might not be apparent at first glance and might come from a variety of different sources, i.e. family and faith groups. People interact differently in various systems and so it is worth exploring how some service users accessing Asylum Link services interact with the wider society. This can also address how the service user sees them within society and whether they reinforce the perceived “helplessness” of being in the asylum process. On a number of occasions service users at Asylum Link Merseyside referred to society as a separate entity, seemingly a structure that they did not feel part of. Whilst it may be a natural response to the sense of alienation experienced by the service user, this view needs to be challenged if the service user wants to feel like a valued member of society. There may be systems in which the service user feels empowered, such as within their family or within a set community group. It is therefore apparent that it is the environment that is disempowering to the service user. The practitioner is able to identify the situations in which the service user possesses a degree of power and helps the service user to replicate this positive behaviour in challenging their environments. In addition, life may apply stresses at different times to different parts of a system and it is important to help the service user whether these stresses.

## **Example of practice**

A service user that student K dealt with had a variety of agencies involved in his case; mainly health agencies such as mental health and charity organisations that involved in assisting in the wellbeing of the service user. The service user has suffered with mental health problems from his initial claim of seeking asylum from what had happened to him in his home country to what has happened to him since arriving in the UK. The service user had not received any care during his first 5 years being in the UK. When he arrived in Asylum Link Merseyside, his life had improved as the practitioners at Asylum Link Merseyside had seen how much help and assistance he needed, he started to receive the help that he needed. This was by getting him accommodation, referring him to mental health agencies and allowing him to travel for free by providing a travel pass for people who have health problems. This has provided freedom for the service user, though he continues to suffer with mental health, he has the freedom to travel around Liverpool, somewhere to live and access to charities/workshops that provide activities that interests the service user.

## **SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY and SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION**

Social psychology is concerned with the way relationships within & between groups and help to create & maintain social identities. The main approach is to practice and identifying how people perceive their social world; helping them to reconstruct their world by using language differently to identify possibilities for change. A key theme when working with asylum seekers is overcoming the sense of helplessness and equally the dependency on charity support.

Similarly, social construction theories have generated a practice model that responds particularly to the clients' own assessment of their problems; the practitioner can therefore empower and help them to create a new discourse. Many service users have come from environments in which they possessed a degree of status and the processes of losing this leads to a sense of disempowerment. This period mirrors the bereavement process and often leaves the service user feeling that they are victim of injustice. It is important to empower the service user to see themselves as the agent for change in their life, rather than a disempowered victim. Impossibility thinking can be a useful resource, with questions such as what the service user would like to do if granted refugee status helping the service user to temporary view their life from a different perspective. Constructive social work is a positive, forward-looking approach to clients' problems rather than a backward-looking, blaming one. This is essential when working with asylum seekers as the process of reflecting on past events can be an emotionally painful experience.

### **Example of Practice**

Service users regularly attend Asylum Link Merseyside to interact with one another and to feel like they are part of a community and feel respected like an individual. A lot of people who attend Asylum Link Merseyside are trained professionals have qualifications in professions such as medicine, education, science etc. The asylum seekers that come into the centre are not able to use their skills as they are forbidden to work due to the regulations of claiming asylum. A lot of people in Asylum Link Merseyside have been in the asylum process for a number of years and often express and show signs of depression, stress, uncertainty, frustration, hopelessness and fear. A lot of asylum seekers show signs of disempowerment as they have no rights, their freedom of liberty is limited and the final say of whether they are given permission to remain in the UK is out of their hands with the permanent risk of being relocated to another city. Although the practitioners/students at Asylum Link Merseyside have no influence of their immigration status, it is important that everyone values each other by asking questions such as; 'how are you today?' It is important that the service users are made to feel special, that is why Asylum Link Merseyside provides days out for the service users so they are allowed to forget about their problems for at least a few

hours whilst they have positive experiences that they may have not had before in the UK.

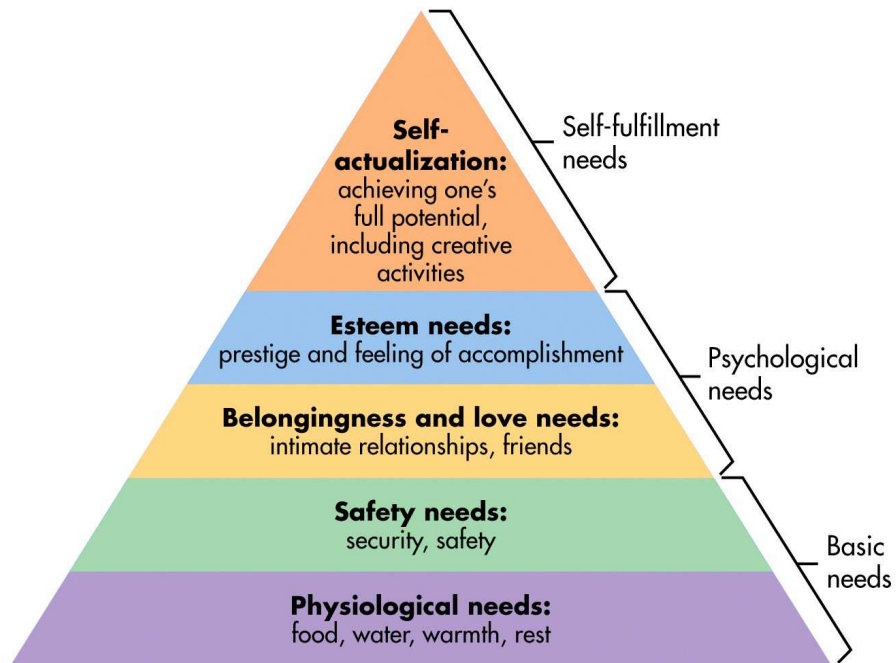
## **HUMANISM and SPIRITUALITY**

Understanding the spirituality of many minority ethnic groups in Western countries is important in addressing the needs of many individuals claiming asylum. Asylum seekers represent a diverse community with a number of varying religious and spiritual beliefs expressed. For a number of service users these beliefs are a source of resilience and help them to define the world around them. Response to crises and means of processing emotions will be directed by a service user's belief system, which may have a religious element to it. Social work largely exists in a secular society and work with asylum seekers should avoid following the discourse of any one belief system, for fear of oppressing those who do not share this worldview. Spirituality allows the practitioner and the service user to discuss issues in a neutral setting, with religious topics reduced to individual experiences and their value to the service user. In a similar fashion, humanism is an effective theory to practice as it seeks to unlock the potential of the service user. Humanistic psychology holds that humans are intrinsically good and that it is only due to environmental and structural pressures that they may struggle to adapt and function effectively. The practitioner will then work to address the psychological and social barriers that prohibit the service user from reaching this state.

### **Example of Practice**

Service users come to Asylum Link Merseyside seeking assistance, such as their NASS support has stopped or is about to be stopped due the rejection of their asylum claim. Also, service users come to Asylum Link Merseyside because they are homeless or threat of being homeless and need support in finding accommodation or contacting the Home Office/the accommodation provider and requesting an extension of the service user staying at the property. When entering Asylum Link Merseyside, service users may arrive noticeably distressed, and as well needing support for housing/financial support, sometimes service users just need someone to talk to. The practitioner/student will discuss the several of factors that may affect the emotional wellbeing and safeguarding of the service user. Faith can play a big part for service users as it gives a lot of service users' hope. Also, interaction with other people in Asylum Link Merseyside gives people a chance to interact with one another and share their problems. Asylum Link Merseyside provides English classes allow the service users to learn English and feel achievement and a sense of fulfilment. When interacting with the service users, it is important to install hope, support and positivity in service users and trying to help them to see the positives in life.

## Maslow's hierarchy of needs





## **Definition of a refugee**

A refugee is:

*“A person who owing to well 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 his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it”.*

(Definition from the 1951 Refugee Convention)

The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees in the UK, a person is officially a refugee when they have their claim for asylum accepted by the government.

In 2012, UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) estimated that there were 149,765 refugees in the UK, 67% of initial refusals in 2011 with a success rate of 22% in appeals.

### **Types of refugee status:**

Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) – is an immigration status granted to a person who does not hold the right of abode in the UK but who has been admitted to the UK without any time limit or her stay and who is free to take up employment or study, without restriction. When indefinite leave is granted to persons outside the UK is known as Indefinite Leave to Enter (ILE) and can refugee status for up to 5 years.

### **Charges for leave to remain:**

Number of applicants	Fee
1	£1,249.00
2	£2,498.00
3	£3,747.00
More than 3	Add £1249 to each person regardless of the persons age

A person who is given refugee status is normally granted leave to remain in the UK for up to 3 years. Refugees granted permission to stay in the UK can claim all the benefits a UK citizen can. Refugees are also entitled to work and are given a National Insurance Number. Like asylum seekers, refugees are still granted free health care in the UK.

## **Myth Busters of refugees**

### **Myth: Are refugees criminals?**

**Fact:** A report by the Association of Chief Police Officers found no evidence that refugees are more likely to commit criminal offences and refugees are more likely to be victims of crime.

### **Myth: 'Refugees are benefit scroungers'**

**Fact:** more than 2,000 refugees are health professionals, 1,500 refugees are teachers across the UK. Most refugees in the UK are skilled and eager to work. Department for Work and Pensions found that a higher proportion of qualifications and skills among refugees than among the UK population. Refugees don't always end up working in their chosen profession as their qualifications are not always transferable, therefore refugees will do any job they can find to earn money. Examples of British institutions created by refugees are fish and chips and Marks and Spencer's. Fish and chips was designed by Alec Issigonis who escaped the Turkish-Greek conflict in 1922, who brought with him the idea of frying fish in batter which was established in Jewish communities. Sir Michael Marks (co-founder of Marks and Spencer's) was born in Belarus and was of Lithuanian Jewish descent. Government figures show that the foreign-born population accounted for 10% of UK GDP. 5 times more than North Sea oil! Current statistics show that it is estimated it costs £25,000 to support refugee doctor to practise in the UK. Training a new doctor in the UK is estimated to cost over £250,000

### **Myth: 'You can't move in Britain for refugees'**

**Fact:** It is estimated that refugees make up 0.5% of the total UK population and an estimated 3% of the world's refugees which ranks the UK 8<sup>th</sup> in the world behind Pakistan, Iran and Germany.

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**“Equality is the soul of liberty; there is in fact no liberty without it” (Frances Wright)**