



Brushstrokes Strategy 2023- 2026



Introduction

Brushstrokes is a community project of Father Hudson's Care established in December 1999 for the past 23 years it has been working to ensure that the hidden poor have been provided with welcome, advice and support in Sandwell, West Birmingham and beyond. Our services are for individuals and families. The project is based at our large centre in Smethwick, in Sandwell, but provides outreach services in Birmingham, Dudley and other towns in Sandwell. Our core services include;

- English language provision,
- practical support through food, clothing and household goods,
- social and community activities,
- health information and advice,
- specialist advice including asylum support issues, benefits, , housing and immigration,
- specialist support services including employment, digital skills and refugee resettlement services.

Brushstrokes is registered with the Office of Immigration Services Commissioner to provide immigration advice to level 3. We are part of Sandwell Consortium CIC, a voluntary sector consortium that delivers a range of advice, health, English Language and employment projects for the benefit of Sandwell residents. Brushstrokes is the provider for advice and support services for asylum seekers, refugees and new migrants in Sandwell working in line with its core mission to

'Support the hidden poor, meet the needs of the most vulnerable and welcome the stranger'.

Brushstrokes strategic plan 2023/2026



Our vision: Refugees and migrants feel safe, avoid poverty and build a fulfilling life in the UK.

Our Mission: To reach out to and support the hidden poor, meet the needs of the most vulnerable and Welcome the Stranger.

Our Values

Compassionate	Inclusive	Respectful
Challenge injustice	Collaborative	Seek excellence
	Work with peoples strengths	

Brushstrokes are welcoming, innovative empowering , influential and work with integrity

Strategic Outcomes for 2023 - 2026

1. Greater Voice – Asylum seekers, refugees and migrants will play an increasing role in the community, actively engaging and raising their collective voice with policy makers, commissioners and service providers in ways that address their needs and aspirations and make a positive contribution to the sustainability and flourishing of the areas where they live.

2. Reduced crisis - Asylum seekers, refugees and migrants are able to take early action themselves , through the provision of information, advice and advocacy that prevents them falling into crisis or to seek early help when faced with homelessness, destitution, unemployment or poor health.

3. Better Health – The health and wellbeing of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants improves and health inequalities are reduced as a result of increased understanding of NHS services, self-care, improved accessibility and a responsive local health service.

4. Increased Belonging - Refugees and migrants develop strong connections and a sense of belonging to the local community as a result of an effective integration support that enables them to feel safe, secure accommodation, access education and training, gain employment and reach a place of financial stability.

5. Empowered resilience - Refugees and Migrants standard of living improves as a they access the language classes, advice , education, training and employment support that values and enhances their skills, helps them secure meaningful employment and provides the resources to deal with the impact of the cost of living crisis.

Context

Our work takes place within the context of ever tightening Immigration legislation and increased volumes of people seeking asylum in need of information, advice and support and the increased portrayal of those seeking asylum as illegal and economic migrants. The Illegal Migration Act 2023 removes the internationally recognised right to claim asylum under the UN Refugee Convention for most individuals who would come to the UK through the previous routes. The Act proposes an increased use of detention, removal to third countries for processing of claims and the increased use of reception centres for those asylum seekers. The numbers of individuals seeking asylum in hotel accommodation has continued to increase with new hotels being stood up and occupancy rates in existing stock also rising.

The introduction of the streamlined asylum process earlier this year is resulting in a more individuals being granted receiving refugee status and moving on from asylum accommodation and support. This alongside the arrivals of Afghans, Ukrainians and BNO's from Hong Kong has created additional pressures on local accommodation and increased length of stay in temporary accommodation. Having piloted the Refugee Transition Outcomes Framework (RTOF) in 2022, which combined integration support, housing and employment support, for new refugees, the government commissioned a separate refugee employment service this August without evaluating the learning from the RTOF programme and the benefits of a combined holistic delivery model. Local Authority restrictions on HMO accommodation in areas of high concentration and decisions to reduce the number of exempt providers of supported accommodation for new refugees has further restricted housing options for individuals with refugee status.

Access to English Language courses for new arrivals, especially those in the asylum system remains an ongoing issue, with college courses filling up as soon as enrolment starts and additional obstacles being put in the place of some migrants who may wish or need to attend. The provision of community based ESOL varies across the areas Brushstrokes operates in and has been able to secure only limited funding. English language support is vital for integration and progression into employment, yet much of the commissioned employment support provision at a local, regional and national level excludes those who most need support due to their lower levels of English. With commissioned services concentrating on those nearest to the labour market, refugees and other recent arrivals in our community are likely to experience higher levels of poverty and deprivation.

The cost-of-living crisis has a disproportionate effect on those with low income, unfortunately those in the asylum system and more recent migrants are more likely to have lower levels of income or be in receipt of welfare benefits, be living in private rented accommodation and on pre-payment meters for utilities. This section of the community are likely to experience greater inequalities in health due to problems with access and understanding of the health system and the impact of the wider social determinants of health on them and their family.

Birmingham is a City of Sanctuary and Sandwell has recently secured Sanctuary status as part of the 'City of Sanctuary' initiative. There is an increasing recognition and attempts to ensure those with lived experience of migration are able to play an active role in shaping the review and development of new services and policies that include the needs and aspirations of new communities. We are proud of our active service user panel members and other service users who are making a regular contribution to champion issues the community face and seek to engage with commissioners and providers of local services. It is in light of this changing landscape that we have set out our priorities for the next three years, developed through the active involvement of our staff, volunteers, service user panel and our management committee.

1. Greater Voice – Asylum seekers, refugees and migrants will play an increasing role in the community, actively engaging and raising their collective voice with policy makers, commissioners and service providers in ways that address their needs and aspirations and make a positive contribution to the sustainability and flourishing of the areas where they live.

We will do this by:

- Supporting our service user panel to increase its diversity, membership and capacity to identify and take action on issues of concern.
- Involving service users in reviewing Brushstrokes services .
- Ensuring service users are supported to engage with public sector consultations and strategy development.
- Supporting lived experience participation in Borough of Sanctuary.
- Providing leadership development opportunities for those with lived experience.
- Developing our pool of community researchers with lived experience
- Contributing to and participating in research projects on migration with Universities on migration matters.

We will know we have achieved this when:

- Service co-design in Sandwell evidences involvement of those with lived experience of migration.
- Local policies have identified and responded to the needs and aspirations of those with lived experience of migration.
- Asylum seekers, refugees and migrants increasingly report that they feel their voice has been heard.
- Service users understanding and participation in consultation and meetings with commissioners and providers of services has increased.
- Leaders with lived experience of migration are playing an active role in Brushstrokes, their own and the wider community by 2026.



2. Reduced crisis - Asylum seekers, refugees and migrants are able to take early action themselves, through the provision of information, advice and advocacy that prevents them falling into crisis or to seek early help when faced with homelessness, destitution, unemployment or poor health.

We will know we have achieved this when:

- Effective local pathways are in place for individuals who present as homeless with or without No Recourse to Public Funds.
- Brushstrokes sees a reduction in the number of homeless on the day presentations each year.
- New refugees are routinely presenting for support at least 3 weeks before their asylum support ends.
- We have a stable and growing pool of asylum guides and increase the number of individuals accessing a guide or group guiding sessions each year by 10%.

We will do this by:

- Using an early action approach to provide the right advice at the right time, in the right place that stabilises or prevents individuals falling into crisis.
- Ensuring individuals understand and can engage with greater confidence in the asylum decision making system.
- Providing more asylum guides for those in the asylum process.
- Expanding our advice provision through trained volunteers.
- Providing practical resources to individuals and families.
- Increasing our immigration advice service through training of additional staff and volunteers and securing additional funding.
- Providing specialist immigration advice to all who present as homeless and destitute where immigration status is unclear
- Clear pathways for those with NRPF, pre-settled status and new refugees to address homelessness and destitution.
- Working with Local Authorities, Children's Trusts and Adult Social Care to ensure a shared understanding of rights and entitlements for those with No Recourse to Public Funds and working assessment and referral pathways are in place.

3. Better Health – The health and wellbeing of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants improves and health inequalities are reduced as a result of increased understanding of NHS services, self-care, improved accessibility and a responsive local health service.

We will know we have achieved this when:

- Over 55% of our service users routinely report an increase in their self-rated health.
- The proportion of new arrivals accessing preventative health services increases each year.
- Over 75% of service users report an increased understanding and confidence to use NHS services
- Over 75% of service users report improved mental wellbeing as a result of the support we provide
- Awareness of the health needs of new communities is evidenced in local health strategy and examples of collaborative responses to these issues.
- A functioning dedicated assessment and support service for migrants experiencing trauma is in place and being accessed by those who need it.
- Reduced incidents of individuals falling into crisis due to delayed access to treatment and support.

We will do this by:

- Using an 'inclusion health' approach, providing monthly health information and awareness sessions and helping people understand NHS services.
- Ensuring all new arrivals are registered with a GP and dentist and those with additional health needs can access relevant health services.
- Promoting mental health and wellbeing through training, arts, social and cultural activities developed with our adult service users, health professionals and specialist providers.
- Working with the NHS to ensure migrants can access the services they require and play an active role in consultation and service redesign.
- Coordinating with local health providers to provide access on site or at outreach venues for preventative health care. E.g. Blood pressure checks, smoking cessation, BBV screening, Sexual health services and Immunisations.
- Providing advice on benefits, budgeting, immigration and housing and volunteering opportunities that make a positive contribution to reduce health inequalities.
- Delivering health outreach in Birmingham and Dudley.
- Conducting research with our communities to understand and evidence specific health needs to inform service delivery and future provision of local health care.
- Supporting our service user panel and community members to share their experience of Health services with commissioners and providers of services.
- Working with providers of counselling and mental health services to improve access, initial assessment and support for those who have experienced trauma, violence and torture .

4. Increased Belonging - Refugees and migrants develop strong connections and a sense of belonging to the local community as a result of an effective integration support that enables them to feel safe, secure accommodation, access education and training, gain employment and reach a place of financial stability.

We will know we have achieved this when:

- Over 75% of our service users report an increased feeling of connection and belonging to their neighbourhood.
- Refugee and migrant participation in volunteering and community events/ activities increases by 15% each year.
- We see a 10% increase in our service users year on year, accessing education, training and securing employment.
- Refugees are routinely able to secure and sustain their tenancies for over 12 months

We will do this by :

- Providing a consistent approach to refugee integration in our service irrespective of the route individuals are resettled that enables access to refugee resettlement and move on support.
- Developing a personalised integration plan jointly with refugees that identify clear goals linked to health, housing, education, employment and settling in community.
- Through provision of Employment, digital skills , English language services and volunteering opportunities that assist with integration.
- Social and community activities that proactively encourage participation of new arrivals in the community.
- Creating a community housing offer for new refugees.
- Providing a community garden for service users and local volunteers to work promoting inclusion, wellbeing and integration.
- Orientation sessions and welcome packs for new arrivals that raise awareness of local services and activities and encourage participation.
- Partnership work linked to Borough of Sanctuary, community, faith and voluntary sector groups that provide a welcome for new arrivals and opportunities for connections within the wider community

5. Empowered resilience - Refugees and Migrants standard of living improves as a they access the language classes, advice , education, training and employment support that values and enhances their skills, helps them secure meaningful employment and provides the resources to deal with the impact of the cost-of-living crisis.

We will know when we have achieved this when:

- Refugees are routinely completing training courses and /or securing employment.
- Reduced numbers of people access our resources provision as a result of our advice and employment support year on year.
- Over 60% of our new volunteers have lived experience of migration.
- We see a 10% increase in volunteers moving into employment each year
- 15% more ESOL learners are progressing into college or adult education within 12 months.
- We see a 10% increase each year in the number of learners passing IELTS or OET. or other accredited courses at Brushstrokes or local providers
- Over 50% of service users report that income maximisation, budgeting advice and resources support has improved their quality of life.

We will do this by:

- Providing access to information, advice and support through outreach, home visiting, advice sessions with other organisations and accessible translated information and digital tools across Sandwell, Dudley and West Birmingham.
- Using an early action approach to our advice that helps individuals understand their rights and responsibilities, empowers them to take action themselves to address specific need.
- Providing free English language classes and digital skills support to individuals who will improve their confidence and capacity to engage with support to help with the cost of living and improve opportunities to access employment ,education and training.
- Developing accredited courses that link to employment and skills provides individuals with qualifications that can be taken in a trusted and supportive environment.
- Developing clear progression pathways into Further and Adult Education for our language learners.
- Working with other providers in delivering employment support helping individuals identify their skills, training needs and match their previous qualifications.
- Developing personalised employment support plans that help individuals move towards employment.
- Delivering budgeting advice and support, practical resources and income maximisation will give individuals greater choice and control over their income and spending.
- Working with partner agencies to ensure energy efficiency and debt advice is accessed by those who need it.
- Increasing volunteering opportunities at Brushstrokes and with other organisations to enabling people to develop new skills and experience to increase future employability.



“They may cut all the flowers but they will not be able to stop the spring” Pablo Neruda

For further information on this strategy please contact info@brushstrokessandwell.org.uk

Father Hudson's Care is a working name of Father Hudson's Society
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