

PROTECTING SOCIETY

Resettling refugees with quality management

Every two seconds a person becomes displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, violence or human rights violations, according to the UN. That's 30 people who are newly displaced every minute.

Dina Patel speaks to Richard Thickpenny, CQP MCQI, Deputy Chief Executive Officer and Tom Dixon, Senior Projects Officer, at Ashley Community Housing, a refugee resettlement service in the UK, to find out how quality management is ensuring better integration for refugees.

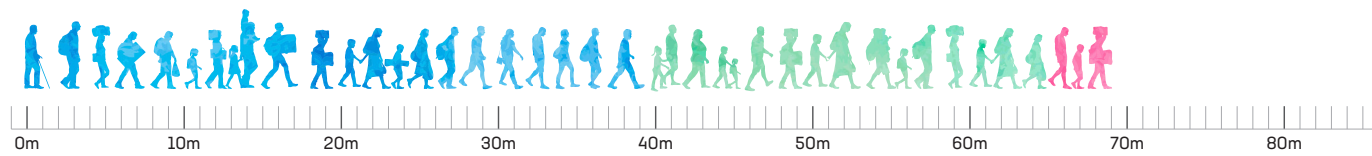
The UN argues that the world is witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record. In 2019, it is estimated that 1.4 million refugees who are currently residing in 65 refugee hosting countries worldwide will need resettlement. The UK has announced that it will continue to resettle thousands of refugees under a new scheme set to start in 2020 and that the government is committed to working with the UNHCR to identify the most vulnerable refugees.

During the past 10 years, Ashley Community Housing (ACH) has grown from a small-scale housing provider located in Bristol, England, to a provider of integration and employment services for refugees in the UK. With 70 employees working with 2,500 people per year, ACH is not only resettling refugees, but securing their future in the UK by helping them gain, or progress towards, median salary roles.

Richard Thickpenny, CQP MCQI, Deputy Chief Executive Officer at ACH, joined the organisation as a fundraiser – one of his first tasks was to source £5,000 to create a business plan. He is currently involved with the research and consulting side and developing the company's international activity using his background in quality management. Tom Dixon, Senior Projects Officer at ACH, is responsible for overseeing and managing the delivery of projects including working with the EU and with universities.

Quality World investigates how the organisation is using quality management to ensure a more effective resettlement programme for refugees.

68.5 million forcibly displaced people worldwide



Internally displaced people
40 million

Refugees
25.4 million Asylum seekers
3.1 million

Source: UNHCR/June 2018

The challenges

ACH initially set out to solve two main challenges facing refugees. The first was to change the way some refugees are being treated. Thickpenny says most refugees are seen to be disadvantaged and are all required to first learn English to get a job. He argues that by seeing refugees in this way, most refugees end up in entry level jobs for the rest of their working lives, and that's where about 75 per cent of them will stay.

There is a great emphasis on refugees learning English because of the view that they can't integrate without speaking the language, he suggests. However, ACH argues that what refugees really want is the ability to put down roots and build friendships, build social networks, and find the employability that meets their needs. "With the state pushing for refugees to learn English first, it actually delays people getting work by two or three years. We're looking to strengthen individuals so they can get into work quickly and pick up English

"WE DIDN'T WANT TO BE TRAPPED IN A QUALITY SYSTEM THAT WASN'T FIT FOR PURPOSE"

Images: Below: First West of England employability project to train people of refugee backgrounds to be bus drivers. Above right: Employability project with Starbucks in the West Midlands to train people of refugee backgrounds.

as they go along," he adds. Integration should also be led by the refugees themselves, Dixon adds, rather than by the state or funding bodies. "We're putting the emphasis on what people want and what they need, rather than what governmental agencies are issuing refugees with."

ACH specialises in two main services. One is an accommodation based integration service for newly arrived refugees, and this works with around 700 people a year. There is also a community-focused training arm that works with around 1,800 people a year, taking them from learning their first 600 words of English through to Level 2 qualifications.

"Integratedness"

ACH has been looking at quality management since it launched, which Thickpenny argues has helped the business grow from a £400,000 turnover to £5m in the past five years, and from four employees to 70.

"We didn't want to be trapped in a quality system that wasn't fit for purpose. Instead, we have a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system that tracks things like empty rooms in the property. It ensures that we provide the right amount of support to our tenants," Thickpenny says. "Now that our processes and systems are mature, we have plans to be certified to ISO 9001:2015 – Quality management systems later this year and are currently reviewing our state of readiness across all business operations. Until then, quality is maintained through good training and trust that is built up within the teams."

The organisation's CRM system covers the areas of quality that have to be documented. For example, ACH has a number of contracts that are funded by the Education Skills Funding Agency and they are monitored by Ofsted. Quality management allows us to track, for example, if tutors are delivering qualifications to standards, and whether learners are making measurable progress.

"We also have had to create the concept of 'integratedness,'" Thickpenny says. "This is because if we are looking to be the best integration business in the country, we have to be able to demonstrate that individuals are able to integrate. A lot of our research over the last three years has focused on how we ►

Where the world's displaced people are being hosted



85 per cent of the world's displaced people are in developing countries

57% of refugees worldwide came from three countries



South Sudan 2.4m



Afghanistan 2.6m



Syria 6.3m

LINA'S STORY:

ACH partners with employers including First Bus and Starbucks. For example, Starbucks has made a commitment to developing its staff and have already promoted refugees to management positions.

Originally from Syria, Lina had been a tenant and learner with ACH for four months before taking part in the organisation's course with Starbucks in Birmingham. Having successfully completed the course, Lina now has a job with Starbucks.

Lina said this was a positive experience. "The Starbucks team gave us a lot of advice and help for our interview. It was the first time I went to an interview in England, and I found it hard and made some silly mistakes. However, even if I wasn't accepted into the job, I'm glad I went for this experience".

Lina attended University in Syria and holds the equivalent of a bachelor's degree in her subject. She hopes to become a qualified teacher in England in the future.

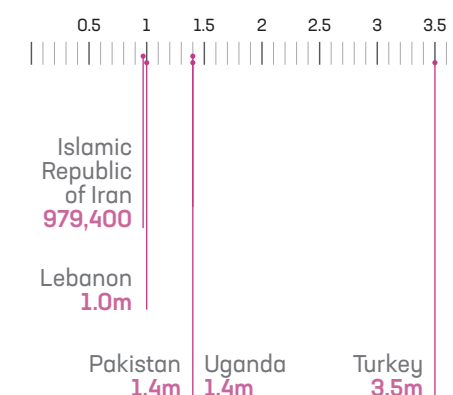


10 million stateless people worldwide

102,800 refugees resettled

44,400 people a day forced to flee their homes because of conflict and persecution

Top refugee hosting countries



Source: UNHCR/June 2018



can capture an individual's state of integration or "integratedness" and measure quality improvements to that state of integration. We're learning as we go along." The organisation is also continuously looking at risk management, as ACH works with 2,500 individuals each year: "If we provide a poor-quality service; poor quality advice, we can negatively affect people's earnings for the next 45 years of their working lives."

ACH uses a toolkit called Integrass, which tracks an individual against a timeline, and the organisation is working to build this into its CRM system to track an individual's progress across seven thematic areas. These are: cultural, civic, social, economic, health and wellbeing, resilience and agency. The measures of success are determined by an individual's progress in those seven areas.

For example, an individual might be working in low-skilled employment and living an isolated existence. Using Integrass ACH can combine volunteering (civic), accessing events and museums (cultural), with healthy walking groups (health and wellbeing) to increase social networks (social). "Building on this with support to acquire skills for new occupational areas (economic), we improve the chances of progressing towards better paid work. Addressing the mental health impacts of becoming a refugee (resilience) means we're able to strengthen the individual to be able to push forward with their lives and choose how they create their better future," Thickpenny says.

"OUR RESEARCH OVER THE LAST THREE YEARS HAS FOCUSED ON HOW WE CAN CAPTURE AN INDIVIDUAL'S STATE OF INTEGRATION AND MEASURE QUALITY IMPROVEMENTS"

Image: Above. An away day looking into men's experience of displacement with The University of Bristol

Rethinking Refugee campaign

The organisation created its #RethinkingRefugee campaign four years ago to counteract the media attention surrounding refugees entering Europe from Turkey, which differentiated between 'good' and 'bad' refugees, explains Dixon. This campaign has now transformed into a 10-year plan of action. Helping refugees to develop careers amid the stereotypes is one of the many challenges that Dixon and Thickpenny face at ACH.

"If you just sit on the periphery of the debate, you're telling lots of emotionally charged individuals that what they're doing is wrong. So, we needed a different approach," Dixon says. "Having a 10-year plan means we can commit an investment. We can create very specific services and look to grow them commercially. We are not a charity. We are a social business and having a 10-year plan lets us take the time to create quality products, services and buildings."

Thickpenny says quality plays a role in validating the research work undertaken by ACH, ensuring accuracy and helping to create models that can be adopted more widely by governmental bodies. Partnerships with Aston University, University of West of England, University of East Anglia, University of Bristol, and University of Oxford have been set up to share data. "This means we're able to influence the academic debate and we are able to influence those who are lobbying into Parliament for integration qualities," Thickpenny argues.

"Quality forces us to look at the evidence base for our argument," Dixon adds. "There has always been the case study of the 'Syrian doctor who has been working as a cleaner'. There is a lot of anecdotal data, but there's very little quality evidence." That is to say data, both qualitative and quantitative, identifying how many such individuals there are and why they are working in these roles.

"If a refugee, after five years and a day, then becomes a Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) individual, they go from one stereotype to another," Thickpenny argues. "By analysing the quality data, we create specific programmes for different characteristics. For example, we regularly have young men from Eritrea who will have been first- or second-year university students.

"Their requirements are different than a South Sudan rural individual who has fled drought and has had no primary education. We tailor programmes using the Integrass toolkit that are specific to their characteristics, and through our training programmes we build critical thinking, creativity, team working and leadership."

Highlights of the campaign include international recognition and improvements to existing services. Dixon says the organisation is not only helping to secure employment for refugees, but also find university placements for those who want further education.

Continuous improvement

Improvement initiatives at the company include giving team leaders the ability to manage their work streams and encouraging them to complete a Level 5 apprenticeship in Business Management and Leadership, holding regular focus groups with other stakeholders to gain feedback and improving the website and courses. "If you look at other housing associations and charities, a Support Worker is an entry level job. It's an £18,000 a year job and people only stay in the role for a couple of years. Within our support team, three employees have been here for five or more years and they have significantly developed their roles," Dixon adds.

Thickpenny argues a diverse staff – 51 per cent female and 49 per cent male with 70 per cent from refugee and ethnic minority background – has also contributed to the organisation's success. Dixon says there is a huge benefit of working with that level of diversity because of the way it challenges him. "I think more creatively and look at problems in a way which I would not have done before working here."

The future

The current objectives for Thickpenny and Dixon include moving refugees towards median salary employment. In Bristol, where ACH is based, a medium salary is roughly £26,000 a year. This means ACH is looking at businesses that are providing jobs with that salary or jobs with progression. Another objective is to encourage self-integration rather than policy

TOP TIPS FOR DEVELOPING A SUCCESSFUL QUALITY CULTURE:

RETENTION

Thickpenny says: "Your staff ultimately makes your organisation. If you have a high staff turnover, then quality is inevitably going to diminish, when you're constantly bringing in new people who need to be trained. It will also take time for that person to get to the level of the staff member they have replaced."

DIVERSITY

Having a diverse team, Thickpenny argues, allows an organisation to look at problems in different ways, giving you a range of outcomes.

LEARN FROM OTHERS

Go out and learn from others, Thickpenny advises. "We've gone to Europe and Canada, and we're now looking at Australia. We want to get new ideas and try to implement them."

"IF WE PROVIDE A POOR-QUALITY SERVICE; POOR QUALITY ADVICE, WE CAN NEGATIVELY AFFECT PEOPLE'S EARNINGS FOR THE NEXT 45 YEARS OF THEIR WORKING LIVES"

driven integration, and to do this by working with universities and academics that are creating policies for the government. "We're looking into how policies are entrenching poverty and comparing an individual on a national minimum wage for their working life compared to a career with a median salary," Thickpenny argues. "That results in a difference in earnings of about £400,000 per person over 40 years of working."

Another crucial objective for ACH is ensuring refugees in the UK have developed the skills necessary to help rebuild their home country once it enters the rebuild phase. Currently the organisation is rolling out training in Somalia with refugees in the UK to pass on best practice and knowledge. Thickpenny is using his background in quality to frame the scalability of the work ACH is currently doing and building processes that can be replicated internationally while retaining a high level of quality. "We use plan, do, check, act (PDCA) to improve service quality and ongoing evaluation to determine the learning to be taken forward into new products and services."

Dixon emphasises the value of this: "It's easier to maintain the quality of something that's happening in an office downstairs. It's much harder to maintain [the quality of] what is happening in Somalia." ■