



promoting equality in housing
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An innovative solution to Refugee homelessness in Newport

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Overview

Refugee support organisation The Gap Wales developed a supported accommodation initiative for Refugees made homeless as a result of being granted refugee status. With support from Tai Pawb and POBL group, who were able to release stock for use by the project and provide in kind support in setting up the initiative.

Phase 1 - Networking and Brokering

- Meetings were held with housing providers and local authority.
- Housing provider POBL agreed to release housing to The Gap.

Phase 2 - laying foundations for supported accommodation.

- Support plans developed.
- Tenancy agreement developed.
- Accommodation renovated.

Phase 3 - initial success and next steps

- Tenants moved in.
- The Gap exploring options to increase portfolio and scale up.
- Tai Pawb have taken learning from this success to develop a funding bid to replicate this model in other dispersal areas.

Historical context

Tai Pawb approached Welsh Government to help tackle the issue of Refugees experiencing homelessness in Wales. Welsh Government granted the money for Tai Pawb and Joy Kent to deliver a [feasibility study](#) for accommodation provision for Refugees. The aim of the study was to explore the issue further and engage lived experience voices, to map current services and gaps therein, to research innovative move on accommodation options being used in England and to explore feasibility of developing similar initiatives in Wales.

Tai Pawb held several engagement events attended by representatives from housing and the Refugee support sector in Wales. At these events speakers were invited from successful move on accommodation initiatives in England. These engagement events were attended by managers from POBL group - a social housing provider in South Wales.

Sector context

Tai Pawb's [feasibility study](#) found:

- Significant barriers for Refugees trying to access PRS in Wales.
- Significant shortage of social housing available
- Refugees being granted leave to remain immediately being given 28 days to vacate their Home Office provided accommodation.
- Move on support under-funded and at capacity.
- A lack of suitable move on accommodation
- **Limitations to support available from local authority homelessness services due to priority need (pre COVID) and system stretched due to lack of accommodation.**
- Innovative solutions being employed in England to tackle the challenges above.

August 2020 Welsh Government published a report called [Providing Accommodation for Refused Asylum Seekers in Wales](#). Within the recommendations Tai Pawb are named to explore partnership work solutions to establish shared housing to serve the needs of both refused Asylum Seekers (who have no recourse to public funds) and Refugees in housing need, mainly during move-on period, but who can pay rent.

Tai Pawb was introduced to Mark Seymour at The Gap in Newport during engagement events following Tai Pawb's feasibility study. The Gap provide holistic, community-based support for Refugees in Newport including day centre services, ESOL classes, activities and clubs, sports activities, volunteering opportunities, advocacy and advice services.

Newport City Council funds The Lighthouse project, managed by Taff Housing, with two designated staff who find newly granted Refugees appropriate accommodation. Welsh Government also funds a dedicated Move On worker at Welsh Refugee Council who supports newly granted Refugees to sign for Universal Credit, to search for employment and to open a bank account. Despite the great work achieved by these two organisations, The Gap have needed to step in to provide ongoing support for Refugees who are finding it difficult to settle or have found themselves sofa surfing or hidden homeless.

Issues for The Gap in Newport

In consultation, the Gap reported the following support needs of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Newport:

Asylum Seekers waiting for a decision as to whether they can stay in the UK are focussed on their survival needs of being safe. They are in limbo, in a liminal space, and often cannot process their trauma as they are living day to day (Maslow's hierarchy of needs). However, once being granted safety as a Refugee in the UK, many experience mental

health challenges as they process and work through the delayed trauma of the last few years - of the war or persecution that they have fled in their home country; of the dangers of the journey; and the challenges of proving their claim for asylum to the Home Office. Many experience a sense of loss, of mourning of what they have lost and need time to process what they have been through psychologically, emotionally and physically. This period of grieving and loss unfortunately coincides with seeking somewhere secure to live, finding employment or study, and planning what is next in life. This usually impacts on their mental wellbeing. Becoming homeless makes this a much harder process to get through.

The Gap take a trauma informed approach to tenancy support, to support newly granted Refugees in the challenging first 6 months of a tenancy. Some are young and lack the experience of maintaining a tenancy and the responsibilities that go with it; some struggle to budget and pay bills, having lived a very basic life in the asylum system with no responsibilities for a tenancy, others have unrealistic expectations of what their future live in the UK will look like. Over the years The Gap have built up trust with the Refugee and Asylum Seeker communities and have continually developed their services.

It had become clear that by becoming a landlord, The Gap could improve outcomes for Refugees with tenant support needs who were otherwise finding it difficult to maintain a tenancy and experiencing homelessness. By leaning on the trust, The Gap have built up over the years they can support this group with the best chance at developing the skills to be a good tenant and while processing their trauma, so they can fully participate in UK society.

Objectives

- To develop a new housing solution for single Refugees faced with homelessness in Newport.
- To explore the use of innovative business models to accommodate rent paying Refugees and to use any surplus income to subsidise accommodation for destitute Asylum Seekers with no recourse to public funds (NRPF)
- To engage local housing providers to release housing stock.
- **To engage local authority homelessness team to assist with housing refugees threatened with homelessness or homeless.**
- To ensure tenants have access to holistic support in the first 6 to 12 months after being granted Refugee status.
- To develop a sustainable income stream for the work undertaken by The Gap and growth of the housing programme
- To collate learning and evaluation to inform development of similar housing initiatives across Wales.

Project description

Phase 1 - Network and brokering

To meet objectives Tai Pawb invited staff in decision making roles from local housing associations to meet with Tai Pawb and The Gap to discuss the issue and gauge appetite for releasing housing stock to The Gap. Present at these meetings (and at previous engagement events) were representatives from POBL and Newport City Homes. Both housing associations expressed interest in getting involved.

Following this Tai Pawb arranged a meeting with The Gap and the **Homelessness leads at Newport City Council**. This led to discussions about referral routes, for Refugees, out of homelessness services and into support of The Gap. **Newport City Council homelessness team welcomed a move on alternative for Refugees from a specialist provider. Homelessness services are at capacity and do not typically match up with the support needs of Refugees.**

During this time POBL identified a 'hard to let' vacant 3 bed property in an area where; as a landlord they had struggled with antisocial behaviour. The Gap were currently supporting three Refugee tenants who had moved into this small estate, so staff and service users from The Gap were already a positive presence in the area, which was now subject to a local lettings policy. The 'hard to let' three bed family property was unattractive to families as all other units in the building are single occupancy. The property is located suitably close to The Gap and is walking distance from city centre and services for Refugees.

Phase 2 - laying foundations for supported accommodation

Tai Pawb were able to support The Gap in formalising their existing support plans through providing good practice from other organisations offering similar supported accommodation provision. Support is to include support to develop skills for independent living, advocacy support, wellbeing support, signposting to mental health services, signposting to employment and training services and support to move on into permanent accommodation. This was a key step in ensuring the project would meet the allowable activities for housing benefit exemption rate.

As the project meets the Gwent Allowable Activities for housing benefit exemption rate this has been awarded and The Gap will receive a higher level of housing benefit payments to cover the cost of the holistic support package.

POBL supported The Gap to develop a tenancy agreement.

Phase 3 - initial success and further work

In September of 2020 it was agreed between The Gap and POBL that The Gap would take on the property as Landlord. POBL would accept a discounted rent rate and would continue to offer maintenance services. The property required renovation, volunteer Refugees from The Gap provided the painting and decorating. POBL invested and provided contractors to convert the property into a HMO, upgrading the fire doors. The Gap received furniture through donations and purchased a cooker. The mattresses and carpet were funded by an online crowd funder. The Gap completed an inventory and co-designed with tenants a moving in essentials pack for new tenants.

In mid-December 2020 the first Refugee tenant moved into the property, being joined in mid-January by the second.

The Gap are now in discussions with POBL who have identified similar 'hard to let' 3 bed properties in the area. **The Gap have also been approached by a philanthropic faith organisation with property to release and also a private landlord.** The Gap have expressed from the beginning that they will look to grow the **portfolio sustainably to meet the need of their beneficiaries, including PRS properties.**

Tai Pawb feasibility study found that similar housing initiatives in England, often initially making use of empty or hard to let social or council owned properties. The initiatives are often led by a Refugee organisation and volunteers or charity workers from Refugee background are able to help refurbish properties. In this way, empty properties are refurbished and used to house people experiencing homelessness - this reduces homelessness, allows Refugees to focus on rebuilding their lives in the new community, access work and education and integrate without the threat of homelessness. At the same time it allows the property owner to receive income and maintain the property which would otherwise remain empty or be hard to let. They subsequently grow their portfolio with majority of the accommodation being leased from Private Rented Sector landlords or via properties donated by individuals, at times working closely with local churches.

As the initiative grows The Gap have plans to increase Refugee accommodation and to use surplus income to provide accommodation to destitute Asylum Seekers with NRPF.

In addition, the Gap and POBL are now working partnership to create a community garden, tackle fly tipping and other schemes create a more pleasant living environment. This creates volunteering opportunities for tenants and has a positive social impact on the area.



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Success Factors

Tai Pawb's feasibility study: the study and engagement sessions highlighted the issue of Refugee homelessness and highlighted what could be done to tackle it.

An appetite to meet the need: The Gap were very keen to develop Refugee move on housing and planned to increase portfolio to meet need and to develop the sustainable business model

The right people in the room: Tai Pawb were able to make necessary introductions and act as intermediary in initial stages of negotiations.

POBL's support of the project: POBL approached the project with compassion and a desire to contribute to the solution. They have guided The Gap through the process and offered a low rent rate and some services in kind.

Further work in this arena

Tai Pawb is part of a partnership of organisations seeking to bring resources and support to the refugee, asylum seekers and migrant support sector. This partnership involves Tai Pawb working with Refugee support organisations, housing associations and private rented sector stakeholders to increase move on accommodation for Refugees who have been granted Refugee status. Tai Pawb will work in partnership with Oasis a Refugee support service to increase the accommodation offer for Refugees in Cardiff. Tai Pawb will offer support to The Gap to increase the accommodation offer for Refugees in Newport. The partnership also involves Housing Justice Cymru who will use their base of supporters and volunteers to increase hosting of Asylum Seekers with volunteer families throughout Wales. This will provide options for Asylum Seekers who would otherwise find themselves in unsuitable temporary accommodation. The partnership also involves The Wallich who will be mapping services across Wales for people who are subject to the no recourse to public funds (NRPF) condition. The Wallich will be offering move on support, training and employment support for people with NRPF. And finally any advocacy needs of beneficiaries involved will be met by Welsh Refugee Council.

Partners involved:

- The Gap - www.thegap.wales/
- Oasis - www.oasiscardiff.org/
- Welsh Refugee Council - www.wrc.wales/
- Housing Justice Cymru - www.housingjustice.org.uk/cymru
- Tai Pawb - www.taipawb.org
- The Wallich - www.thewallich.com





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