

# SUPPORTING SANCTUARY- SEEKERS NEEDING HOUSING IN WALES

MID-TERM EVALUATION OF TAI PAWB REFUGEE &  
ASYLUM-SEEKER HOUSING PROJECT

Part of the Housing a Nation of Sanctuary Consortium  
supported by Comic Relief

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The need for housing among sanctuary-seekers is fundamentally driven by situations of conflict and insecurity abroad, but the UK government's major asylum processing backlog significantly inflates accommodation needs. People granted refugee status and people refused status have a short time frame to leave statutory asylum accommodation, and frequently experience homelessness.

Refugees struggle to find a place to live in the context of a wider housing crisis, lacking required deposits and guarantor contacts, and experiencing delays in accessing Universal Credit. Many have to seek help from Local Authorities with long waiting lists even for temporary accommodation.

Refused asylum-seekers have much more limited options. Although the Everyone-In policy temporarily mitigated against street homelessness among this group during the pandemic, this has ended. While some are housed under section 4, with personal contacts, or by charitable initiatives, generally their housing situations are highly precarious.

The current scale of the problem is hard to gauge, but the policy environment looks set to increase homelessness among sanctuary-seekers in Wales going forwards. Key factors include massive pressure on local housing authorities as well as the Illegal Migration Act's designation of asylum claims from people arriving irregularly as inadmissible.

In this context, Tai Pawb has been working alongside partners in the Housing of Nation of Sanctuary Consortium, with support from Comic Relief, to expand the availability of housing for refugees in the move-on period and refused asylum-seekers, and also to build the capacity of refugee organisations to provide housing advice and support. This mid-term evaluation focuses on the capacity-building dimension of the project, considering the challenges and successes of the initiative so far, to inform plans for the final year of the project. The evaluation draws on analysis of project documents, wider reports and statistics, 6 interviews with project stakeholders, and visits to partner organisations.

Substantial effort has been invested in core capacity-building in refugee partner organisations, Oasis Cardiff Community Centre and Home4U: with Tai Pawb providing valuable guidance on strategy, policies and good practice. There have also been important impacts in terms of staff training and development and some impacts in terms of staff capacity.

In terms of operational processes, there has been a major improvement in Oasis's casework data collection, and the effectiveness of internal triage and external signposting and referral systems. As one staff member put it, '*Oasis is transformed really in the way that it delivers frontline work*'. Closer analysis of housing advice work also gave rise to new pre-tenancy workshops with asylum-seekers. However, the organisations are still very limited in the ways that they can respond to urgent housing needs (Oasis still has to refer people to other organisations and H4U has property but typically this is at capacity) and monitor concrete housing outcomes of people they support.

While advocacy and networking was not the focus of this short evaluation, partners emphasised the important work done with / by Tai Pawb in this area. It has worked with partners to engage with refugees and asylum-seekers' experience and ideas about the interventions that are aiming to support them, supporting various successful consultations and a new podcast to give voice to sanctuary-seekers housing problems. It has also made various efforts to raise awareness and engage housing providers in meeting these challenges.

While there have been important capacity-building outcomes, the original primary goal of this element of the Comic Relief project, i.e. establishing additional housing for sanctuary-seekers, supported by refugee organisations, has not yet been achieved. The recommendations for the final phase of the project are:

- To focus on securing additional accommodation spaces. The most immediately promising line of enquiry, for Tai Pawb, given its network, appears to be with Housing Associations. It is important to remain flexible to HAs' priorities and both practical

and imaginative about the scope of refugee organisations' involvement in housing provision, as well as the different nature of demand among refugees and refused asylum-seekers.

- To recognise distinct organisational capacities and strengths and build more effective collaboration. Trying to implement Tai Pawb's Ready for Housing Framework revealed how over-stretched refugee organisations are and the importance of adequate funding for supported housing initiatives. The evaluation also revealed the need for better collaboration within the refugee and housing sectors and Local Authorities around data collection, to better monitor sanctuary-seeker homelessness and guide responses.

## INTRODUCTION

Refugees and asylum-seekers in Wales struggle to find housing when Home Office statutory accommodation is withdrawn. Tai Pawb has been working alongside partners, with support from Comic Relief, to expand the availability of housing for refugees in the move-on period and refused asylum-seekers, and also to build the capacity of refugee organisations to provide housing advice and support. This mid-term evaluation focuses on the capacity-building dimension of the project, considering the challenges and successes of the initiative so far, to inform plans for the final year of the project.

In 2021, Tai Pawb partnered with Housing Justice Cymru, the Wallich and Welsh Refugee Council to obtain support from Comic Relief's Change-makers Fund, under the 'Safe Place To Be' theme, for a **multi-stranded project aiming to support refugees and asylum-seekers into stable supported accommodation in Wales.**

The project had various overlapping objectives:

- Raise awareness among housing providers and develop relevant networks and partnerships between refugee and housing sectors
- Build capacity of refugee and asylum-focused organisations to engage in housing support
- Increase availability of housing for refugees and asylum-seekers asked to leave Home Office accommodation

Tai Pawb's initial objectives within the Comic Relief project concentrated on the design and piloting of a supported accommodation model managed by refugee organisations. This depended on the capacity of refugee organisations to undertake this work as well as on securing additional accommodation spaces, which has been a challenge. Therefore work so far has focused on (1) capacity-building for housing advice and support in refugee organisations (primarily working with Oasis Cardiff Community Centre, but also somewhat with Home4U, and very recently Hoops and Loops), and (2) raising awareness of the issue with housing organisations.

The **resources** for this element of the project included:

- Housing manager 24 h per week and Strategic Partnerships Manager 1 day per week at Tai Pawb, plus some senior management time
- Triage Officer 1 day per week at Oasis plus overheads
- Budget for events, marketing, communications, training, coaching and evaluation

The mid-term evaluation focused on three **questions**:

- What is the nature and scope of the need for housing among refugees and asylum-seekers?
- What impact has the project had on the capacity of target organisations to help people they support with housing issues?
- How sustainable are any changes and what has been learned overall from the project so far?

These questions were investigated using the following **methods**:

- Document analysis, including project documents, internal monitoring reports, and wider reports and statistics to assess destitution issue and demand for the service;
- Interviews with people working for Tai Pawb (2) and refugee organisation partners (4);
- Visits to Oasis Cardiff community centre and Home4U accommodation;
- Consultation with the Allocations and Re-Housing Unit at Cardiff City Council.

Thanks are due to all those involved for generously sharing their time and insights.

The evaluation took around 10 days, with three quarters of the research time given pro bono. The research ethics plan was approved by SOAS, University of London, and informed consent for audio-recorded interviews was sought from all participants. Project documentation was provided by Tai Pawb. The evaluation was informed by the 'most significant change' technique which considers stories of change brought about to organisational capacity by the project, including unforeseen outcomes.<sup>1</sup> It thus drew heavily on the reports of staff over the course of the project and interviews/visits at the time of the evaluation. This is combined

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<sup>1</sup> R. Davies and J. Dart (2005) [The 'Most Significant Change' Technique: A Guide to its Use.](#)

with quantitative indicators of project outputs where that information was available.

Following an explanation of the context, this reports analyses the outcomes of capacity-building work, and concludes with **key messages**:

- Urgency of accessing more bridging accommodation in a volatile policy context
- Importance of recognising distinct organisational capacities and strengths and building effective collaboration



# THE NEED FOR HOUSING

## Context

**The need for housing among sanctuary-seekers is fundamentally driven by situations of conflict and insecurity abroad**, which drive people to seek asylum in the UK, among other countries. Since 2002 the number of people applying for asylum in the UK remained relatively stable in the region of 30,000-40,000, but rose to nearly 60,000 in 2021 and nearly 90,000 in 2022, with around half arriving on small boats.<sup>2</sup>

**The UK government's response to these asylum claims has significant ramifications in terms of accommodation needs.** The Home Office's asylum backlog grew significantly since 2018 and by the start of 2023 tens of thousands of refugees were not receiving an initial decision within a year; this has only just started to ebb, with a surge of decision-making in autumn 2023.<sup>3</sup> Given the work prohibition, most asylum-seekers are dependent on government funding, increasingly sourced from the UK's international aid budget.<sup>4</sup> Yet initial acceptance rates rose to 75% by September 2023, with more succeeding on appeal.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, returns have trended downwards since 2015.<sup>6</sup>

**The Home Office has a statutory obligation to organize accommodation for the growing number of people who would otherwise be destitute while their asylum claim is considered** (this applies to the majority of people seeking asylum). People who have nowhere to stay are placed in Initial Accommodation (large-scale hostel style-accommodation, under Section 98 of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1999) while their application for accommodation is considered. Once deemed eligible for accommodation support during their asylum claim (under Section 95), they are moved more stable Dispersal Accommodation (typically shared housing/flats), if/where this can be found. This is done on a no-choice basis, and concerns have repeated been

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<sup>2</sup> UK Government [Asylum and resettlement datasets](#), accessed 14.08.23

<sup>3</sup> C. Yeo (2023) [The state of the UK asylum system](#); P.W. Walsh and M. Sumption [The UK's asylum backlog](#).

<sup>4</sup> ICAI (2023) [UK aid funding for refugees in the UK](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Briefing: the state of the UK asylum system - Free Movement](#)

<sup>6</sup> P.W. Walsh (2022) [Deportation and Voluntary Departure from the UK](#)

raised about the quality of accommodation, managed by subcontractors.<sup>7</sup> Since 2015, the numbers of people in Home Office asylum accommodation across the UK have nearly tripled, including a rapid rise in people housed in mass contingency accommodation (now around half current asylum-seekers, mainly hotels, but also barracks, with plans for a barge).<sup>8</sup> Asylum accommodation is geographically uneven: people housed in Home Office asylum accommodation only represent 0.16% of the UK-wide population, with the highest numbers per inhabitant in North East England and the lowest in the South East England.<sup>9</sup>

**The Welsh Government has adopted a Nation of Sanctuary Plan, pledging to support the integration of sanctuary-seekers in Wales, including mitigating destitution.** However, important policy areas are reserved for UK government, limiting the scope of Welsh government policy.<sup>10</sup> The numbers of people in receipt of Home Office asylum accommodation in Wales have remained broadly similar since 2015. In March 2023, there were 2,884 people (0.09% of the population), concentrated in dispersal accommodation in Cardiff, Swansea, Newport and Wrexham.<sup>11</sup>

**There are two main ways that Home Office accommodation may be withdrawn:**

- ***When a person has obtained refugee status or humanitarian protection ('positive move-on')***. Refugees are expected to vacate asylum accommodation and transition into the mainstream housing system. The 'move-on' period is often fraught, as finding work or claiming benefits and securing alternative housing typically takes longer than the 28 days given. Thus, the Welsh Refugee Coalition has been campaigning alongside others to align the refugee move-on

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<sup>7</sup> J. Darling (2022) [Systems of Suffering](#) London: Pluto Press.

<sup>8</sup> UK Government [Asylum and resettlement datasets](#), accessed 14.08.23

<sup>9</sup> Office for National Statistics [National population projections](#), accessed 14.08.23, UK Government [Asylum and resettlement datasets](#), accessed 14.08.2023G. Sturge (2023) [Asylum Statistics](#), House of Commons Library Research Briefing.

<sup>10</sup> H. Petch and T. Stirling (2020) [Providing accommodation for refused asylum-seekers in Wales](#)

<sup>11</sup> Office for National Statistics [National population projections](#), accessed 14.08.2023, UK Government [Asylum and resettlement datasets](#), accessed 14.08.23. The top 5 source countries of people in Home Office asylum accommodation in Wales in March 2023 were Iraq, Iran, El Salvador, Eritrea and Albania.<sup>11</sup> Note that many of the Afghans and Ukrainians displaced in 2021-2022 were channeled through resettlement or humanitarian visa programmes, rather than the asylum process, and benefiting from initial temporary accommodation in Welcome Centre / hotels / on civil society hosting schemes in Wales.

period with wider legislation that gives 56 days to access local authority housing and homelessness support services.<sup>12</sup> Despite this, since August 2023 the Home Office has accelerated the move-on timeframe, presumably in an effort to reduce the hotel bill: increasingly the cessation of asylum support is set 28 days from the status decision rather than (as in past practice) the issuing of the biometric residence permit (BRP), which is when people can start seeking employment, housing and universal credit.<sup>13</sup>

- **When someone has been refused asylum ('negative move-on').** This may happen because they have been refused asylum by the Home Office and have not lodged an appeal in time to maintain continuity in asylum support, or because they have been refused on appeal. They are given 21 days to leave their Home Office accommodation.<sup>14</sup> But their legal status may not be definitive: although many people struggle to get adequate legal aid support with their asylum case, there may be further legal avenues that can be explored if they manage to access proper support.<sup>15</sup>

## The struggle to find housing

**The wider housing crisis, and scarce availability and affordability of private rented and social housing, pose major challenges for newly-granted refugees.** Even citizens on a low income is facing a tough housing landscape. Local Housing Allowance has been frozen since 2020; there is very little accommodation that available at or below LHA rates; anecdotally, some landlords are leaving the sector in response to new Rent Smart Wales regulations; and agencies and landlords may discriminate against people on housing benefit.<sup>16</sup> In May 2023 there were 10,872

<sup>12</sup> Welsh Refugee Coalition (2020) [Nation of Sanctuary — making the vision a reality](#); WRC interview July 2023

<sup>13</sup> The minimum required notice for this is 7 days. S. Lenegan (2023) [Home Office change in practice increases risk of homelessness for recognised refugees](#) Free Movement Blog; H. Bancroft (2023) [Thousands more refugees facing homelessness after government eviction rule changes](#), *The Independent*

<sup>14</sup> Accommodation support may also be withdrawn as a result of a break in the asylum claim, for instance if someone was categorized as having withdrawn their claim, absconded from contact with the Home Office or committed an offence.

<sup>15</sup> A. Lindley (2022) [‘Hit and Miss’? Access to Legal Assistance in Immigration Detention](#)

<sup>16</sup> ITV news Wales (2022) [Why is the private rental market in Wales in crisis?](#); Bevan Foundation (2023) [Wales' Housing Crisis](#); Correspondence with Tai Pawb, 23.08.23

people in temporary accommodation in Wales, and only 660 moved into suitable long-term accommodation: it is clear that demand significantly exceeds the ability of local authorities to supply housing to those eligible for it.<sup>17</sup>

**Refugees are particularly disadvantaged in trying to find private sector rental property** because they have usually been prohibited from working while seeking asylum and lack social networks, so are ill-prepared to pay the deposits (often several months' rent in advance) and provide a UK-based guarantor, which are frequently required by landlords.<sup>18</sup> Delays in accessing Universal Credit also often contribute to periods of homelessness among refugees.<sup>19</sup>

**Thus often refugees need to register with the Local Authority to prevent homelessness, seeking emergency/temporary accommodation.** The Homelessness Gateway will not act, however, until the day that the person is made homeless, when emergency accommodation may be full.<sup>20</sup> There are long waiting lists for more stable local authority housing.<sup>21</sup> In recognition of these challenges, the government has contracted the Welsh Refugee Council (WRC) to provide housing advice to refugees in the 'move-on' period.

**Refused asylum-seekers are in a worse situation.** While Wales does not have the Right-to-Rent Regulations which prohibit renting in England,<sup>22</sup> refused asylum-seekers who are evicted from Home Office accommodation, generally have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) and are prohibited from working, leaving many destitute.

**The Everyone-In policy temporarily mitigated this during the pandemic,** by including people with NRPF, and the Welsh

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<sup>17</sup> Welsh Government [Homelessness accommodation provision and rough sleeping: May 2023](#) accessed 25.08.23; WRC interview, July 2023

<sup>18</sup> Refugee Council (2021) [Keys To The City](#)

<sup>19</sup> British Red Cross (2018) [Still an Ordeal](#), NACCOM (2019) [Homelessness among newly recognised refugees](#)

<sup>20</sup> Oasis interview July 2023

<sup>21</sup> If the person is recognized as having 'Priority Need', they may be prioritized and get housing quicker, but simply being a refugee does not suffice. See: Shelter Cymru [Homelessness - help from the council - priority-need](#) accessed 23.08.23

<sup>22</sup> JCWI (2015) ["No Passport Equals No Home"](#) UK Government [Code of practice on right to rent](#) accessed 23.08.23

Government extended this through 2022. But it ended in January 2023: *'Everyone-in was housing people that they wouldn't normally house. So the demand reduced quite drastically. And now we're seeing such a sharp uptick.'*<sup>23</sup>

### **Options for accessing statutory accommodation are very limited.**

Refused asylum-seekers may be able to appeal the decision, obtain permission for a Judicial Review or put in a fresh claim, which would allow them to stay in accommodation, if done within set time-limits; some may be able to apply for Section 4 support;<sup>24</sup> and if that is also refused, if they have children with them, they may be able to access accommodation through Local Authority Social Services. But these processes are challenging to navigate, typically requiring support from over-stretched legal aid solicitors and voluntary sector organisations, and take time.<sup>25</sup>

**Sometimes refugees and asylum-seekers find emergency accommodation in night shelters and homeless hostels**, staying the odd night at the Huggard in Cardiff, for instance.<sup>26</sup> The British Red Cross has occasionally paid for emergency bedspaces where no other alternatives were available. BAWSO has safe houses for people from black and ethnic minority backgrounds specifically at risk of domestic abuse and violence.<sup>27</sup>

**The wider community also saves some people from rough sleeping.** Some people have contacts that are quite settled in Cardiff (for example in the Kurdish community) which offer them informal support and accommodation. But many lack such networks, and moreover, even if staying with a friend, these arrangements are often temporary and precarious.<sup>28</sup> In 2022, 45%

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<sup>23</sup> H4U interview July 2023, also WRC interview July 2023

<sup>24</sup> On the grounds that they are trying to leave the UK but cannot; they are destitute or likely to become so within 14 days; and without accommodation human rights would be breached. See <https://sanctuary.gov.wales/refugeesandasylumseekers/housing> accessed 23.08.23. In March 2023 there were 215 people housed under Section 4 support in Wales. UK Government [Asylum and resettlement datasets](#) accessed 14.08.23.

<sup>25</sup> In 2018, it was reported that nearly half the people accommodated in hosting schemes over the previous year were able to move on with Section 4 support or having obtained Leave to Remain. H. Petch and T. Stirling (2020) [Providing accommodation for refused asylum-seekers in Wales](#)

<sup>26</sup> H. Petch and T. Stirling (2020) [Providing accommodation for refused asylum-seekers in Wales](#)

<sup>27</sup> H. Petch and T. Stirling (2020) [Providing accommodation for refused asylum-seekers in Wales](#) BASWO [BASWO Services](#) accessed 22.08.23

<sup>28</sup> Oasis and TP interviews July 2023

of people approaching NACCOM for accommodation arrived from informal or insecure accommodation arrangements.<sup>29</sup>

**Also at community level, there are local volunteers give space in their home to shelter an asylum-seeker or refugee.** The Comic Relief project has consolidated a Hosting Scheme run by Housing Justice Cymru, which has supported 28 people, mostly refused asylum-seekers, over a one year period.<sup>30</sup> In addition to accommodation, people also benefit, where they cannot access government support, from some financial support, as well as support accessing legal advice and community connections. However, the scheme is considerably over-subscribed.<sup>31</sup> Often people interested in volunteering to host refugees prefer to join the Government-supported 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme, which provides some remuneration, and involves people who already have more secure status.

**It is in this context that Tai Pawb and others are trying to forge collaboration with housing providers to bridge the gaps that leave sanctuary-seekers homeless.**

## Scoping the problem

**Homelessness under any circumstances can be traumatic** – for sanctuary-seekers, the abrupt cessation of asylum support comes on top of the rigors of the asylum process, and prior distress and trauma in countries of origin, taking a severe toll on people's well-being. For refugees, lack of settled accommodation also undermines their ability to start the new phase of life in the UK in a positive way. It makes it hard to establish and maintain connections, get a steady job, settle school children. Accommodation can also be a key barrier to applying for family reunion.<sup>32</sup> For refused asylum-seekers, homelessness crucially undermines their abilities to explore legal avenues available to them effectively. It can also mean people become more vulnerable to exploitative living arrangements, as well as pushing

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<sup>29</sup> NACCOM 2022 [Impact Report](#)

<sup>30</sup> See Housing Justice Cymru [Host a Refugee](#) accessed 23.08.23

<sup>31</sup> Oasis, H4U and WRC interviews July 2023

<sup>32</sup> British Red Cross (2018) [Still on Ordeal](#)

them into informal work in ways that can jeopardise their legal case.<sup>33</sup> Addressing these housing gaps not only saves people from destitution, it also provides a platform to move forwards constructively with their lives in the UK.

**Before the pandemic, newly granted refugees and refused asylum-seekers were already thought to be contributing to the homelessness and wider destitution problem in Wales.**<sup>34</sup>

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation estimated in 2018 that 5,300 asylum-seekers in Wales were destitute (i.e. without essentials to eat, stay warm and dry and keep clean).<sup>35</sup> Welsh Refugee Coalition estimated in early 2020 that several hundred refused asylum-seekers were becoming destitute annually in Wales.<sup>36</sup>

**The current scale of the problem is hard to gauge.** Alongside people *already* in housing limbo, as of September 2023 there were 3,182 people in asylum accommodation in Wales who would be expected to receive move-on notices in due course.<sup>37</sup>

- There appear to be growing numbers of refugees struggling to find housing. The Welsh Refugee Council's refugee move-on project supported 1,296 people in Apr-Dec 2022, housing was a common preoccupation.<sup>38</sup> With the surge in decision-making this autumn, the numbers of people seen at WRC offices in October were quadruple the April numbers.<sup>39</sup> Increasing numbers of newly granted refugees have been presenting to Cardiff City Council for homeless support each year since 2019, reaching 269 in 2022.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>33</sup> H. Lewis et al. (2015) [Precarious Lives: Forced Labour, Exploitation and Asylum](#). Bristol: Policy Press.

<sup>34</sup> J. Kent (2019) [Refugee Housing and Support Feasibility Study](#). Cardiff: Tai Pawb.

<sup>35</sup> See H. Petch and T. Stirling (2020) [Providing accommodation for refused asylum-seekers in Wales](#)

<sup>36</sup> See H. Petch and T. Stirling (2020) [Providing accommodation for refused asylum-seekers in Wales](#)

<sup>37</sup> Home Office (2023) [Asylum and Resettlement - Asylum-seekers in receipt of support, Asy\\_D09](#) accessed 30.11.2023

<sup>38</sup> Some kind of housing issue was logged in 1,152 appointments. Some people attended more than one appointment, some appointments covered more than one person. Often the housing issue was (risk of) homelessness, other queries included understanding tenancy agreements, council tax and bills. Available records on types of accommodation outcomes are limited but do not suggest significant change over time, with the vast majority needing support from WRC's Housing and Landlords caseworker to secure accommodation.

<sup>39</sup> Correspondence with WRC, 22.11.2023

<sup>40</sup> Correspondence with Cardiff City Council 22.08.23. The number of presentations to Cardiff City Council by refugees citing Notice to Quit Home Office accommodation as primary cause of homelessness has increased significantly: 146 in 2019, 91 in 2020, 224 in 2021. These numbers most often refer to individuals, but can refer to a household. It would be unusual for someone to receive more than one Notice to Quit in a year. Currently data is not generally recorded on the immigration status / nationality of people finding placements.

- People with negative move-on notices may be detained or removed. Others will remain in limbo, or re-enter the asylum system. Refused asylum-seekers are often fearful of approaching Local Authorities for help, and refugee organisations do not always signpost them to Local Authorities, assuming that there will not be any help available.<sup>41</sup> In 2023 applications to Cardiff City Council for housing support were found to be ‘not eligible’ surged, likely as a result of the ending of the extended Everyone-In Policy in January.<sup>42</sup> At that point, in Cardiff alone, there were 62 refused asylum-seekers due to receive negative move-on notices.<sup>43</sup> The Home Office, the City Council and support organisations agreed that there would be only 10 evictions per month, to avoid overwhelming services.<sup>44</sup> Since then, there will have been additional people who have been refused asylum. There is no aggregated waiting list for charitable accommodation for refused asylum-seekers, but recently H4U and HJC – key providers of placements – compared waiting lists, identifying 26 people in this category.<sup>45</sup>

However the situation going forwards remains fluid. Aside from the current processing surge, two further factors are likely to contribute to greater housing needs among refugees and refused asylum-seekers in Wales:

- **The UK government’s Full Dispersal plan is set to increase the numbers of asylum-seekers housed in Wales.** Responding to the shortages and geographic concentrations of dispersal accommodation, this UK-wide government initiative seeks to ensure that all Local Authorities participate in asylum dispersal.<sup>46</sup> This means there will be more people in Wales when they gain

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<sup>41</sup> WRC, H4U and Oasis interviews July 2023, TP interview August 2023

<sup>42</sup> Correspondence with Cardiff City Council, 22.08.2023. 144 decisions in 2019, 97 in 2019, in 122 2020, 122 in 2021, 104 in 2022, and 96 in only the first six months of 2023. These numbers include refused asylum-seekers, but also other foreign nationals, including from the EEA and UK nationals returning from abroad who are not habitually resident. Nationality is not always recorded, but for the 283 cases where nationality was recorded between March 2020 – August 2023, 35% hailed from the 15 top asylum nationalities (see P.W. Walsh (2022) [Asylum and refugee resettlement in the UK](#) Migration Observatory Briefing).

<sup>43</sup> WRC interview July 2023

<sup>44</sup> WRC and H4U interviews July 2023. From Feb-Apr 2023 WRC advised 16 refused asylum-seekers with negative move-on notices.

<sup>45</sup> H4U interview July 2023

<sup>46</sup> Wales Strategic Migration Partnership [Asylum dispersal](#), accessed 22.08.2023; Asylum Matters and NACCOM (2023) [Principles for Asylum Dispersal](#)



refugee status, who need to stay local to access LA support.<sup>47</sup> Likewise there will be more people who are in Wales in 'negative move-on' situations.

- **The Illegal Migration Act 2023**, if brought fully into force, will deem inadmissible asylum claims of people arriving irregularly after July 2023. Unmodified, this approach it will lead to a 'perma-backlog' of people without leave to reside in the UK, but who are unlikely to leave.<sup>48</sup> This is likely to increase the numbers of people who are undocumented and homeless.

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<sup>47</sup> In a survey of asylum-seekers by Tai Pawb, 94% contacted said they would prefer to remain in Wales. Moreover, there are barriers to obtaining help from a new local authority (Correspondence with Tai Pawb, 22.08.23)

<sup>48</sup> The Act sets out a 'challenging and convoluted approach' to removals, preventing the Home Office from removing asylum-seekers to home country in most cases, requiring removals to transit/third countries, which are difficult: even if the Rwanda plan proceeds, it is likely to be on a modest scale. See IPPR (2023) [The Asylum In-Tray in 2025](#) page 3; NACCOM and Praxis (2023) [Risks of homelessness and destitution posed by the Illegal Migration Bill](#)

# BUILDING HOUSING SUPPORT CAPACITY IN REFUGEE ORGANISATIONS

## Framework and partners

There were three points of departure for Tai Pawb's capacity building work with refugee organisations:

- Prior research by the No Accommodation Network (NACCOM) and Tai Pawb on existing civil society interventions aiming to provide bridging accommodation for move-on refugees and people with NRPF points to possibilities of combining gift/loans, private rented sector leases, housing associations (HAs) and local council partnerships.<sup>49</sup>
- Prior research suggested that while there are many organisations working on housing provision and policy in Wales, they often lack understanding of the refugees and refused asylum seekers' specific issues and entitlements.<sup>50</sup> Integrating housing provision with holistic, specialist support (training and employment opportunities, financial help, and legal assistance where needed) can create a more effective springboard to a stable and flourishing life in the UK.<sup>51</sup>
- In the context of austerity, cost-of-living increases and the hostile immigration environment policies over the last decade, refugee and housing organisations are over-stretched.<sup>52</sup> More effective partnerships between public, private and third actor actors are needed.

The original aim was to pilot a housing capacity-building framework with refugee organisations, and build partnerships with housing providers, informing wider work in the Welsh context. Tai Pawb developed a 'Ready for Housing' Framework at the start of the project, drawing on NACCOM's toolkit, providing a checklist of requirements and good practice to build capacity to run

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<sup>49</sup> NACCOM (2019) [NACCOM Housing Toolkit](#); J. Kent (2019) [Refugee Housing and Support Feasibility Study](#).

<sup>50</sup> Exceptions include important work by TAFF Housing and CCHA

<sup>51</sup> J. Kent (2019) [Refugee Housing and Support Feasibility Study](#).

<sup>52</sup> D. James and I. Koch (2020) [Economies of Advice](#) in M. Aldenderfer (ed) *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Anthropology*. New York: Oxford University Press

supported accommodation.<sup>53</sup> Drawing on Tai Pawb's subsequent project experience, the final 'Ready for Housing' Framework is tailored towards organisations that are starting to work on housing issues, with guidance around three key pillars:

- **Governance:** strategic planning and policy review; effective staff structures, supervision and appraisal; accessible communication and data monitoring.
- **Support:** well-defined support approach; clarity on goals and monitoring these; co-design of support plans; psychologically informed environment; casework leadership; co-production; and safeguarding;
- **Partnership** – e.g. referral pathways; partnership agreements; sign-posting; service-level agreements.

**Tai Pawb has engaged extensively with Oasis Cardiff Community Centre over the last year and a half.** Oasis began as a social space in 2008 for refugees, and is still centred around providing an open space where people can socialise and have a free hot drink and lunch, five days a week. In addition to this, Oasis has increasingly over time supported asylum-seekers and refugees with accessing services and support, ESOL, various activities around well-being and mental health, and immigration legal casework.<sup>54</sup> Oasis also provides some training, volunteer and employment opportunities, in the main kitchen and a street kitchen which serves food to the wider community and caters external events. Apart from some of the ESOL work with Cardiff City Council, most of the work relies on charitable funding.<sup>55</sup> By December 2021 the charity had an annual income and expenditure of around £1m, 32 staff members and 349 volunteers.<sup>56</sup> The organisation has grown rapidly in the last five years in terms of staff, types of support, and the number of people that it serves.<sup>57</sup>

**Asylum-seekers and refugees frequently approach Oasis with housing issues.** This can include issues with property maintenance, bill payment and so on, but often relates to the more pressing

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<sup>53</sup> Tai Pawb (2022) 'Ready for Housing' Framework; NACCOM (2019) [NACCOM Housing Toolkit](#)

<sup>54</sup> Oasis interview July 2023

<sup>55</sup> Oasis interview July 2023

<sup>56</sup> Charity Commission [Charity overview, OASIS CARDIFF - 1131306](#) accessed 1.07.23

<sup>57</sup> Oasis interview July 2023



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problem of trying to find somewhere to live after receiving notice to quit Home Office Accommodation. Often people spend time trying to understand the situation, and work out solutions themselves, coming to Oasis for help at a relatively late point in their notice period.<sup>58</sup> This motivated the Integration Team to engage with Tai Pawb around how they might better help address urgent needs:

*'99 times out of a 100 it's an emergency, it's Friday afternoon, we can't get hold of anyone else, we don't have accommodation. A lot of times we're in the unfortunate position of having to say go to ask for emergency accommodation at the council, but we have to be very honest with them and ourselves that we are probably not going to get in there. So to have that option to be able to put someone up through Oasis.'*<sup>59</sup>

**Initial collaboration, using the Ready for Housing Framework, identified some specific priority areas.** It is important to be clear that embedding advice work within an informal social space is a powerful and humanising approach when it comes to engaging with people in marginalised situations:

*'[O]ne of the unique things about Oasis is that the trust that we're able to establish with clients is really strong because... some come over here for the first time and say, no, I don't need anything, I just want to come and drink coffee. And that's fine, we're not going to ask them their life story. They can come and just feel safe in the space. Then they want to ask a staff member for assistance or something, you know? So breaking the barriers down... we are here to help when you need it, but kind of on their terms, and in their own time.'*<sup>60</sup>

However, **there was a feeling that the rapid growth in terms of staff and activities had somewhat outpaced the systems and practices required to underpin these effectively:** *'the structures needed for a bigger organization were not necessarily in place'*<sup>61</sup> It was also clear that providing housing advice more effectively, and even

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<sup>58</sup>Oasis interview July 2023, also noted in WRC and H4U interviews

<sup>59</sup> Oasis interview July 2023

<sup>60</sup> Oasis interview July 2023

<sup>61</sup> Oasis interview July 2023

more so, running supported housing properties, would require changes to systems and practices:

*'[Tai Pawb] really helped us build that structure... when we got involved with this project it was about supported accommodation. But very quick it became apparent that actually we were not ready as an organization to be in a position to adequately do it. So that work needed to be done.'*<sup>62</sup>

**Tai Pawb has also engaged with Home4U (H4U)** which was established in 2007, when the founder heard of a private property that was vacant for a period and was able house some refused asylum-seekers there.<sup>63</sup> The organisation subsequently obtained access to other private and church properties on a temporary basis for peppercorn rents funded by charitable donations. Initially run by trustees and volunteers, over time, a paid director was recruited and relationships were forged with HAs. In June 2022, the charity had an annual income of around £84,000.<sup>64</sup>

**All of H4U's properties are now leased, rent free, from HAs** (e.g. Cadwyn, CCHA, Wales and West), for various timeframes ranging from 1 year rolling to 3 years.<sup>65</sup> One of the ways the HAs fund this is through their community benefits scheme, whereby all contractors are charged a percentage that can be used for charitable causes. Currently the organisation manages 9 spaces in 5 properties (houses and flats) asylum-seekers whose claims have been refused but who still have legal options to pursue.<sup>66</sup> The various HAs ensure that the properties comply with housing regulations, health and safety and carry out repairs and maintenance. Meanwhile, H4U:<sup>67</sup>

- pays the bills and provides a small allowance of £40 a week (just under the asylum-seeker government support rate of £47.39)<sup>68</sup> supplemented where possible with in-kind assistance (with food parcels from the charity Neighbourly; some support

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<sup>62</sup> Oasis interview July 2023

<sup>63</sup> Home4U [Our History](#), accessed 1.7.2023

<sup>64</sup> The Charity Commission, [Charity overview, HOME4U CARDIFF - 1163936](#), accessed 1.7.23

<sup>65</sup> H4U interview July 2023. One of the properties is not rent-free, but the rent is covered by a different HA.

<sup>66</sup> H4U interview July 2023

<sup>67</sup> H4U interview July 2023

<sup>68</sup> UK Government [Asylum support: What you'll get](#) accessed 3.07.23

from a local Mosque; equipment such as SIM cards and tablets).

- helps tenants to liaise as needed with the HA and works to address other support needs while the person is being housed.

In light of long asylum backlogs and the scarcity of legal aid, it has been taking a long time for tenants to lodge a fresh claim that can allow them to re-apply for Home Office accommodation, and there may be further delays in getting that accommodation. This means that H4U placements are becoming longer, and the organisation does not want to simply turn people out into homelessness.

*'Things have stalled. In order so for us to be able to move people on in a positive way or to even get legal help... within six months they might not even have got solicitor in that time. Which is why we come back to we're just going to need more accommodation. And more money obviously... numbers are just increasing and they're only going to get far worse. So the difficulty for us is affording it - every time we take on a property, we have to make that long-term commitment to fund it as well. Because although we don't pay the rent or maintenance, we have to pay all the bills that go with it, and we give money to the people that live there, so they've got some funds to live on... And we're not really entitled to statutory funding because of the client group we working with..'*<sup>69</sup>

Thus, **H4U has a significant waiting list and have been keen to explore, through the Comic Relief project, additional housing models and access new properties. H4U also struggled in terms of capacity.** This was in large part because it is very a small organisation – when the Comic Relief project started, the only paid worker was the Director, now it has two paid workers:

*'it's hard... where there is only two of you doing everything... So having somebody... to say... can I just get you to help with a policy on this... and what do you know about this?'*<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> H4U interview July 2023

<sup>70</sup> H4U interview July 2023



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*'we've got all these [small] organizations working in asylum... One of the biggest things I've noticed coming from the housing sector into this, is there's a lot of duplication but there's not much ability or resource to take a backwards step and take an overview of what do we want to do? Where do we want to go? What is best practice and how are we going to start to implement some of that?'*<sup>71</sup>

Tai Pawb has also engaged with other refugee and asylum-related organisations, in a more limited way. For instance, liaising between **Hoops and Loops** (a Support/Social group for LGBT+ asylum seekers and refugees in Cardiff) and a HA. This has led to initial scoping of a possible supported housing project for LGBT+ sanctuary-seekers – who often have a particularly hard and lonely time, facing prejudice, including from co-ethnic and religious communities who otherwise might be a source of support. This is at early stages, however, so the next sections focus on project activities and impacts of work with Oasis and H4U.

## Core capacity-building

### **Initial analysis of organisations needs using the Ready for Housing Framework led to several specific activities:**<sup>72</sup>

- **Guidance on strategy, policies, systems and good practice.** The Tai Pawb Housing Development Manager spent the initial months of the project primarily based at the Oasis Centre in the Integration Team, providing general support e.g. on GDPR compliance (client consent and WhatsApp policy), risk assessments for trips, site health-and-safety, safeguarding practices and professional boundaries. While the engagement with H4U was less extensive, the Tai Pawb also supported the H4U Director with discussions of vision and strategy and guidance on policy documents.
- **Staff capacity was increased with help from the Comic Relief project.** This funded a Triage Officer at Oasis one day a week,

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<sup>71</sup> H4U interview July 2023

<sup>72</sup> TP interview July 2023, Tai Pawb project documents and monitoring reports

to do frontline work supporting clients with practical problems relating to housing as well as wider advocacy work on housing.

- **Tai Pawb has particularly supported staff training and development** in the two partner organisations, via 22 coaching sessions with 6 people, on aspects of the Ready for Housing framework, including meeting good practice standards on recruitment, induction and governance. To extend and consolidate this work, the Tai Pawb Housing Development Manager organised an Integration Team Away Day focusing on roles and teamworking (see Section 3.3). Subsequently the Integration Team created a formal induction process and began doing reflective one-to-ones identifying issues and training and development needs within the team. Meanwhile informal training and guidance was given to H4U's tenant support worker, to develop support plans and risk assessments.<sup>73</sup>

**This core capacity-building resulted in long-term improvements in systems and practices in the integration team at Oasis** and was identified as the most significant change resulting from the project by staff:

*'All of what we've been doing has a long-term benefit. That will stay when the project ends. It's changed the organisation.'*<sup>74</sup>

*'To me, the most significant change has been actually the impact on Oasis as an organisation. I think before the project... the work we did and it was quite casual at times you know... I think we've become a lot more professional as an organization.'*<sup>75</sup>

The H4U Director noted:

*'It's not yet, here's a house. It's been more somebody that believes in... a shared vision really of where I would like to steer us as a charity.. And that offer of support... a sounding board on ideas... sharing ideas on funding... Everything in the background that is sort of invaluable to me...'*<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> TP interview July 2023

<sup>74</sup> Oasis interview July 2023

<sup>75</sup> Oasis interview July 2023

<sup>76</sup> H4U interview July 2023



## Operational processes

**A key focus of work with Oasis was improving casework data collection**, to identify people with housing needs in a more systematic way and allow reliable reporting of needs:

*'We had the database but some people wouldn't use it. Some people would. So the actual information you're getting out of that is always going to be flawed if not everything's going into...'*<sup>77</sup>

Tai Pawb *'massively improved how we used [the database], filling in more fields and putting in data on protected characteristics... it's all work in progress but... The reporting capacity of the database has improved in a big way, it's a lot more comprehensive.'*<sup>78</sup>

*We certainly see the value a lot more of why we're collecting the data we are, making sure it's being collected in the first place.*<sup>79</sup>

As a result, Oasis is now able to provide quarterly statistics on housing needs of people attending casework appointments. In Jan-June 2023, 130 new people sought housing-related support, of which around a third were women; the main ethnic groups Black African and Arab. In terms of status, 58% were asylum-seekers, 22% refugees, the rest fell into other insecure status categories. In terms of housing situation, 53% reported living in Home Office asylum accommodation, equally split between initial and dispersal accommodation; 8% in social housing (HA or Council property); 3% in Council temporary accommodation; 4% living with friends; 4% private rented sector. The rest (29%) reported being homeless. This helped to improve understanding of needs, for example: clarifying that it was not only asylum-seekers presenting with housing needs, but also refugees in the move-on period; and importantly, highlighting the seriousness of the housing issues (the proportion recorded as homeless) among people seeking help.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Oasis interview July 2023

<sup>78</sup> Oasis interview July 2023

<sup>79</sup> Oasis interview July 2023

<sup>80</sup> TP interview July 2023



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### **Internal triage and external signposting and referral at Oasis has also improved substantially.**

Roles and teamwork was the focus of an Away Day organised for the Integration Team by Tai Pawb in 2022. Subsequently, clearer role descriptions and more regular organised team meetings under a new Integration Team Lead enabled more effective teamwork within Oasis, including on housing-related issues.<sup>81</sup> A later training session led by Tai Pawb focused on professional boundaries, reinforcing these practices (12/19 strongly agreed and 7 agreed that this session was useful and helpful).<sup>82</sup> In an example of flexible working between Comic Relief partners, a Wallich support worker spent time at Oasis, helping to improve the internal triage system.<sup>83</sup>

**Tai Pawb also encouraged shadowing as a means of learning about other organisations and practices.** The Triage Officer has spent time shadowing workers at relevant organisations, including: WRC (which holds the government-funded move-on advice project for refugees, and also provides advice to people with NRPF); and the Huggard (homeless charity in Cardiff managing emergency bed spaces and temporary accommodation) and the YMCA (which also runs 'The Walk In' homeless accommodation in Cardiff). The H4U support worker has made visits to Oasis to learn more about asylum support work, improving contact between these organisations also.

### **These processes, facilitated by Tai Pawb, have has some important effects:**

- Helped define what issues Oasis staff and volunteers could help people with effectively and how to triage internally.
- Helped identify when external signposting and referral is more effective, with an improved understanding of advice, referral, allocation, and provision at other organisations. For instance, often new refugees approaching Oasis have already entered the Housing Options and Homelessness Gateway via the WRC's move-on project, but want reassurance that they are in the system; other times they need signposting to WRC, or explanation, encouragement and language support to make

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<sup>81</sup> TP interview July 2023

<sup>82</sup> Participant feedback forms shared by Tai Pawb

<sup>83</sup> TP interview July 2023

their application.<sup>84</sup> This has reduced duplication, allowing Oasis to focus better *‘on the unique offering that they had. And then they now are quite specific about what they will do, what they won't do, they signpost really well.’*<sup>85</sup>

- Led over time, according to Oasis staff, to an increase in incoming referrals from housing organisations accommodating people who would benefit from support via Oasis: *‘Refugees, because they've got different rights, a lot of things come up when [HAs] don't know how to help those individuals. So I think that's why we get a lot of referrals this way because we're a bit more aware of the specific issues that refugees would face.’*<sup>86</sup>

**A relatively new initiative is pre-tenancy workshops with asylum-seekers at Oasis.** This is intended to anticipate (a) the challenge of finding move-on accommodation and (b) issues encountered after that:

*‘Many clients when they did move into a tenancy were getting bills, not knowing what it was about... [coming] to us with big red letters... And we thought that would be easier if you'd brought that in 3 months ago... We saw there's a lot more that could be done to empower individuals... to be able to manage these things themselves... [and] know what their responsibilities... [and] rights are... If you can help 10 people in a one hour session, that would be better than 10 one-hour appointments.’*<sup>87</sup>

The workshop raises awareness of the importance of move-on refugees registering with Housing Options and refused asylum-seekers seeking assistance early in their move-on period, and explains what moving into new housing will involve.<sup>88</sup> After three sessions, some well and some poorly attended, the Integration Team is planning to work with Oasis ESOL teachers to build this knowledge into English language classes. This builds on positive experiences of working with resettled Afghan refugees in hotels, where employment and life in the UK training was integrated into ESOL provision.

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<sup>84</sup> Oasis interview July 2023

<sup>85</sup> TP interview July 2023

<sup>86</sup> Oasis interview July 2023

<sup>87</sup> Oasis interview July 2023

<sup>88</sup> TP interview July 2023



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**Through these changes to operational processes have delivered major changes at Oasis,**

according to staff members involved: *'Oasis is transformed really in the way that it delivers frontline work'*<sup>89</sup>

**While work to support operational processes at H4u was less extensive, some similar elements were pursued.** In particular, Tai Pawb was able to help coach the new support worker in developing detailed support plans and arrangements for each tenant (see Section 3.2).<sup>90</sup> The work of H4U demonstrates the benefit of direct and tailored support from specialist provider. In addition to the material support provided, H4U helps people navigate the myriad of everyday tasks that people may find mysterious in a new context and language, making everyday life more liveable during a difficult period of limbo and building competencies that will support the person if in due course they get status.<sup>91</sup>

**However, monitoring of concrete outcomes gets lost via referral to other organisations.** TP's partners are limited in the ways that they can respond to urgent housing needs (H4U having property but typically this is at capacity) and refer people to other organisations, particularly the WRC, itself is a referral organisation, and directly to the HJC hosting scheme. Clearly, many end up seeking emergency and temporary accommodation, or long waiting lists for hosting schemes and the few charities with accommodation.<sup>92</sup>

## Co-production and advocacy

**Tai Pawb has also worked with partners to engage with refugees and asylum-seekers' experience and ideas about interventions that are aiming to support them:**

- After initial debate in the Comic Relief team around the common terms 'client' or 'service user', **Tai Pawb led a**

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<sup>89</sup> Oasis interview July 2023

<sup>90</sup> TP interview July 2023

<sup>91</sup> H4U interview July 2023

<sup>92</sup> The hosting main scheme in Wales is now run by Comic Relief partner Housing Justice Cymru, but in spring / summer 2023 Oasis was often told the scheme was at full capacity with no information regarding joining a waiting list

**consultation with refugees and asylum-seekers around terminology**, which concluded that it was preferable to use the term 'people we support' and guidelines were developed to guide co-production work of Tai Pawb.<sup>93</sup>

- Conversations and questionnaires were used with people supported via Oasis to **understand better what 'home' means to them and their expectations in terms of housing and understanding of the housing system**. This revealed that expectations were high and that informed the pre-tenancy workshops.<sup>94</sup>
- Tai Pawb obtained a grant to **consult asylum seekers and refugees as part of the Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales**, which was done in collaboration with H4U.<sup>95</sup>
- Although not a direct outcome of the Comic Relief project, there has also been some debate among support workers and organisations working with refugees and asylum-seekers about **allocation of available housing**. This prompted H4U to do some informal consultation with residents on criteria to inform their own and wider guidelines regarding how to prioritise people in need of housing.<sup>96</sup>
- Supported via the Comic Relief project, the Oasis Triage Officer did training with CoProNet Wales to learn more about co-production, and subsequently a 8 week accredited course, supported by a tutor to **develop a podcast**. The first 3 episodes will focus on housing: *'to release the stories of people struggling in housing and make them human to the housing world... So people in the housing sector can hear individual voices of refugees, to build a bit more enthusiasm to get something done to help people.'*<sup>97</sup>

**While modest and not strongly co-ordinated, these processes have sensitised relevant partner organisation staff to the ethical and pragmatic value of involving refugees and asylum-seekers in provision of support:**

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<sup>93</sup> TP interview July 2023; Tai Pawb (2022) Our Commitment: Working with People with Lived Experience; C. Hollinshead (2022) [Research – listening to those with lived experience](#)

<sup>94</sup> TP interview July 2023

<sup>95</sup> H4U and Tai Pawb (2022) Response to Community Consultation from The Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales.

<sup>96</sup> H4U interview July 2023

<sup>97</sup> TP and Oasis interviews July 2023

*'There are still things we just said we're just going to do that because that will be good. But I think we'd be more vigilant... I think as we start a project... we're much more conscious of... actually what would people want. Partly because of experience or having those conversations.'*<sup>98</sup>

**The advocacy and networking strand of the Comic Relief project is not the focus of this evaluation, but was mentioned by staff interviewed at partner refugee organisations as highly relevant to building housing support capacity and linking this with property access.** Relevant activities by Tai Pawb have included:

- Hosting 2 annual conferences, including a focus on sanctuary-seeker housing issues
- Hosting a anti-racism and Cwmpas event
- Talks at housing sector conferences
- Joint event with NACCOM July 2023
- Publishing a good practice briefing and two blogs.<sup>99</sup>

**For both Oasis and H4U, this wider advocacy work was seen as a major benefit of the Comic Relief project:**

*'Tai Pawb have been really busy behind the scenes... they've got the voice to speak to organizations... [to] do that strategic overview. Have those conversations [with housing providers and the Welsh Government] and put the narrative out there... which we can then benefit from a later date.'*<sup>100</sup>

## The search for accommodation

**There have also been targeted collaborative efforts to secure new accommodation partners.** The original goal of Tai Pawb's work was to deliver 25 additional supported bed spaces for refugees and 5 for refused asylum-seekers, via partnership between housing

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<sup>98</sup> Oasis interview July 2023

<sup>99</sup> Tai Pawb (2023) [Refugee and Asylum Support and Housing](#) Good Practice Briefing, No. 70; R. Milligan (2023) [Refugee Accommodation: A Step Towards Inclusive Communities](#); C. Hollinshead (2022) [Research – listening to those with lived experience](#)

<sup>100</sup> H4U interview July 2023

providers and refugee support organisations.<sup>101</sup>  
Work towards that goal has included:

- **Mapping** of potential accommodation partners and landlords in Wales by Tai Pawb and Oasis; beginning discussions with Welsh Refugee Coalition regarding how to map coalition members interested in providing accommodation; providing input to HJC independent consultant on their planned stakeholder mapping.<sup>102</sup>
- **Targeted information sharing:** via workshops and smaller meetings with existing and potential housing providers to explore strategies and possibilities for supported accommodation for sanctuary-seekers, including the *Stronger Together Networking & Lunch Event* in July 2023, attended by 23 people from housing and refugee organisations.

**However, these efforts to secure new housing spaces have encountered various barriers, across the private rented sector, faith groups and HAs.**

**All organisations agreed that the private rented sector was the most challenging:** *'we came up with brick walls on the private, because obviously there's a huge affordability issue especially in Cardiff but the whole of Wales.'*<sup>103</sup> As noted in Section 2.1, the availability of private rented accommodation at LHA rates is small and anecdotally, there are landlords leaving the sector.<sup>104</sup> In-depth discussions were held with a private landlord in West Wales, but not pursued owing to concerns about the quality of the offer.<sup>105</sup>

**There has been some interest from faith groups with available properties, thanks to Oasis's good networks with faith communities, leading to one modest success and some dead-ends:**

- In Penarth, a 4 bed house was made available by a church landlord (Tabernacle Church), initially with the idea of housing a Ukrainian refugee family via the local authority. However, lack of school placements, complimentary support for local travel,

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<sup>101</sup> Tai Pawb internal project documents

<sup>102</sup> Tai Pawb & Oasis (2023) Project Update to end of March 2023

<sup>103</sup> H4U interview July 2023

<sup>104</sup> Bevan Foundation (2023) [Wales' Housing Crisis](#), Correspondence with Tai Pawb, 22.08.23.

<sup>105</sup> TP and Oasis interviews, July 2023; Tai Pawb & Oasis (2023) Project Update to end of March 2023

the accommodation format (lots of stairs for young children) and overloaded and complex council bureaucracy rendered this difficult.

After several months of negotiation, an agreement was put in place with the Welsh Centre for International Affairs (WCIA) which has used funding from the European Social Fund to pay for four of their Ukrainian refugee volunteers to be accommodated in the house for a year or so. This is a time-limited and nationality-specific opportunity.

- Tai Pawb assisted Tredegar Ville Baptist Church, Housing Justice Cymru and Cwmpas (a pan Wales co-operative development agency) to obtain a grant for a feasibility study to develop their church site to support a social housing/community development offer for refugees.<sup>106</sup>
- There were also detailed discussions with All Nations Church in Cardiff regarding a possible accommodation offer for refugees, which ultimately their trustees rejected, having concerns about full cost recovery and tenants with complex cases.<sup>107</sup>

Concerns also emerged in some discussions with faith groups about apparent preferences for Ukrainian asylum-seekers over more universal provision and varying approaches to LGBTQI+ issues.

**HAs are important accommodation providers, some with growing interest in refugee and asylum-seekers**, according to participants. Participants saw Welsh HAs as being somewhat more community-focused and less profit-focused than English HAs, and as promising partners. 33 HAs have signed Tai Pawb's 'Deeds Not Words pledge: *'In asylum dispersal areas, commit to donating or leasing housing to refugee housing initiatives (where these exist).'*'<sup>108</sup> This, along with new anti-racism legislation, provides a platform for advocacy and partnership development.

**There has been some prior success in organising bridging accommodation with HAs:**

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<sup>106</sup> Tai Pawb & Oasis (2023) Project Update to end of March 2023

<sup>107</sup> Tai Pawb & Oasis (2023) Project Update to end of March 2023, TP interview August 2023.

<sup>108</sup> Tai Pawb (2020) [DEEDS NOT WORDS](#)



- As noted in Section 3.1, H4U has had several such partnerships. For example, Cadwyn provides a property in Cardiff rent-free to H4U to support refused asylum-seekers.<sup>109</sup>
- Prior to the start of the Comic Relief project, Tai Pawb helped facilitate a partnership between the PoBL HA and The Gap Wales, a Christian charity which runs a drop-in centre, The Sanctuary, in Newport. PoBL provided a hard-to-let 3 bedroom property and maintenance services close to The Gap for discounted rent and The Gap assisted with refurbishment, 'move-in' packs and assigned a staff member to carry through support plans with refugee tenants. All 10 refugee occupants over 2.5 years moved on to sustained tenancies.<sup>110</sup>
- Another important example is TAFF Housing. On the back of a supported housing project for single Syrian refugees in the move-on period, TAFF been working to move resettled Afghan refugees from initial Welcome Centres into housing. This has involved recruiting 14 support workers from relevant language communities, referring people as appropriate to Oasis for ESOL, social activities, and advice sessions.<sup>111</sup>

**There has been a lot of activity aiming to build interest among HAs** in partnering with refugee organisations including Oasis and H4U, as noted above. This has helped to identify advantages for HAs of engagement in this kind of work, including low housing management issues, alignment with organisational values and Welsh government Nation of Sanctuary policy, as well as positive wider effects in surrounding communities.<sup>112</sup> It has also revealed some concerns on the part of HAs regarding working with refugee/asylum support organisations which need addressing. For instance:<sup>113</sup>

- Given the grassroots nature and limited funding base of small refugee organisations, HAs have expressed concern around

<sup>109</sup> Tai Pawb (2023) [Refugee and Asylum Support and Housing](#) Good Practice Briefing, No. 70; H4U interview July 2023

<sup>110</sup> Tai Pawb (2021) [An innovative solution to refugee homelessness in Newport](#). The Gap Wales, accessed 14 Aug 2023

<sup>111</sup> Taff Housing (2022) [Annual Report 2021-2022](#), and (2023) [Annual Report 2022-23](#); H. White (2023) '[The end of bridging accommodation will be devastating for Afghan refugees](#) *Inside Housing*, 19.07.2023; Tai Pawb (2023) [Refugee and Asylum Support and Housing](#) Good Practice Briefing, No. 70. <https://thegap.wales/project/the-sanctuary/>

<sup>112</sup> Tai Pawb internal meeting notes; TP interview July 2023; Tai Pawb (2021) [An innovative solution to refugee homelessness in Newport](#)

<sup>113</sup> Tai Pawb 'Key Themes in Partnership Working – Reflection session notes (2022), TP interview, July 2023

governance, compliance and possible force majeure situations if an organisation runs out of funds. Experience shows that it takes time and cooperation to build trust and capacity.

- Direct allocations of housing to particular groups, rather than referral through Council housing registers, raise issues of fairness - highlighting benefits of liaising with local authorities on allocation processes.
- For refused asylum-seekers, Home Office backlogs and overstretched legal aid lawyer capacity, combined with delays in re-accessing Home Office accommodation where eligible, make bridging accommodation all the more vital, but also means that they need accommodation for unpredictable but often significant periods, slowing the provider's ability to respond to new referrals.
- Some concerns about possible local antipathy and prejudice exist, although no specific problems were reported in data reviewed for this project.

Thus, the search for accommodation providers for sanctuary-seekers remains on-going.

## MOVING FORWARDS

Tai Pawb's work with refugee organisations has facilitated core capacity-building, improvements to operational processes and steps forward in co-production and advocacy. However, the original primary goal of this element of the Comic Relief project, i.e. establishing additional housing for sanctuary-seekers, supported by refugee organisations, has not yet been achieved. There are implications for the final phase of the project.

### Urgency of accessing more bridging accommodation

**It is vital to focus Tai Pawb's efforts on developing concrete partnerships with housing providers.** While it is possible some private sector landlords may materialise willing to offer accommodation to refugees, this does not currently appear to be

a fruitful line of enquiry. Faith-based organisations with property have shown interest, including in supporting refused asylum-seekers, but the process of actually forming viable partnerships has proved challenging. The most immediately promising line of enquiry, for Tai Pawb, given its network, appears to be with HAs, converting some of the goodwill generated through recent information sharing events and meetings into real partnerships. In doing so, it is important to remain flexible to HAs' priorities.

While there are indeed benefits of having refugee organisations involved as partners in supporting accommodation, the outcome of making more accommodation available for target groups is the priority. **Refugee organisations' involvement in this may vary on a continuum.** At one end of the spectrum a full partnership is agreed between housing provider and refugee organisation, i.e. agreement to make housing available for a certain period, HA manages maintenance, refugee organisation deals with allocation and manages support needs, employing housing worker(s) with specialist skills. At the other end of the spectrum, the housing provider refers individuals in need to support to the refugee organisation. Between these two models, there are other possibilities that might also be explored, for example, for refugee organisations to support training of housing provider staff including support workers; run workshops and events with tenants; or provide on-site clinics for needs that housing providers find hard to meet (e.g. interpretation and translation; legal advice; welfare support).

**Geography is a major challenge as well as a potential opportunity:** with the Full Dispersal Plan increasing efforts to find dispersal accommodation across Wales, awareness will be raised in places with little previous experience of dealing with sanctuary-seekers. In the best case scenario, the Full Dispersal Plan would also encourage refugee support capacity, alongside accommodation, in these new areas. However, at the time of writing it was not clear what additional government funding would be available for this.

**There are also two distinct populations to consider.** Refugees are eligible for Local Authority support and require housing to bridge delays in eventually obtaining that. Refused asylum-seekers, by

contrast, have no access to statutory funding and are at risk of homelessness for an unpredictable period. Growing ‘legal aid deserts’ for immigration and asylum matters mean it is vital to consider routes to effective legal support, alongside housing provision.<sup>114</sup>

## Importance of recognising distinct organisational strengths and capacities and effective collaboration

The starting point for the project was to help refugee organisations bring their skills and knowledge to supported housing projects. While the challenges in securing accommodation have been a major barrier to realising this, the stretched capacity of refugee organisation partners has also been flagged. **This demonstrates the value of working with the Ready for Housing Framework**, which defined key parameters for specialist supported housing provision, and has been a valuable tool in guiding the necessary capacity-building.

**The importance of adequate funding for supported housing initiatives for sanctuary-seekers is also clear.** H4U is already doing the work effectively but with only two paid workers. Oasis is a larger organisation, but a lot of core capacity had to be built in the Integration Team to bring it to a place where this work would be feasible. While many refugee organisations are over-stretched, there is still value in exploring collaboration – in some cases, lighter touch models might work, in others fuller partnership is appropriate, as outlined in Section 4.1. But councils continue to be unwilling to offer enhanced rents for specialist refugee support, and even if property is provided rent free, the support work requires securing proper funding via bigger grants over longer periods.

While there has been considerable collaboration on advocacy, which is not the subject of this evaluation, **the analysis also highlighted the need for greater collaboration in other areas.** Aside from flexibility in terms of partnership models (addressed in

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<sup>114</sup> J. Wilding (2022) [No access to justice](#)

Section 4.1), an important area for potential collaboration is data. The WRC and other groups like Oasis play a vital role in providing housing advice and referrals. However, data from NGOs and Local Authorities remains patchy, which is problematic from the point of view of scoping and responding to the issue. This points to the potential value of (a) shared waiting lists and better outcomes reporting among charitable organisations, and (b) the integration of immigration status in Local Housing Authority application and placement reporting systems.<sup>115</sup> This would allow a more accurate picture of the contribution of charitable initiatives and local authorities in the provision of bridging accommodation, as well as unmet among refugees and refused asylum-seekers.

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<sup>115</sup> For instance, Cardiff Council records presentations to the Homeless Gateway of refugees with positive move-on notices, but does not record that status in placement system (Communication with Cardiff Council, 30.08.2023). It also does not record reasons for NRPF in not-eligible decision reporting.