



Listening to migrant communities

A Healthwatch Dudley activity update
January 2023

healthwatch
Dudley

Healthwatch Dudley is the champion for people who use health and social care services

We exist to give everyone a voice, especially communities who are often unheard.

In 2021, Dudley CVS was awarded funding from the Black Country West Birmingham Clinical Commissioning Group to deliver a 12 month pilot to expand social prescribing support for migrants, refugees and people seeking asylum.

The programme had an intended outcome of building capacity in the voluntary and community sector and to increase uptake of targeted prevention support and services, including health checks and creative and physical activity.

As part of this programme, Healthwatch Dudley was commissioned to listen to migrant communities to better understand some of the health and care barriers they face.

We were invited to the Welcome Group, a Halesowen faith-based charity, who host weekly sessions for refugees and people who are seeking asylum.

Supported by volunteers, the Welcome Group share food, clothes, household goods, friendship and guidance, as they bring people who might otherwise feel isolated together to connect in a safe, social environment.

During regular visits, the Healthwatch Dudley team provided signposting to people who were struggling to get the support or information they needed about health and care services.

We asked what it's like to be a migrant living in Dudley borough and what is important to people. We also listened to Welcome Group volunteers about their experiences of supporting people.

This update highlights how we have connected and what people told us about things that are important to them.



We connected with over 200 people as a result of our Welcome Group visits. People told us about their experiences of accessing housing and being homeless, healthcare barriers, struggles with communication and future hopes for their children. Here is a snapshot of our conversations: [Some names have been changed in this report]

Struggles with learning English and access to health and care

“Knowing more English would help me as I struggle to get health appointments. I need to talk to someone about my weight but I am finding it difficult to get an appointment with an interpreter.

I had been waiting for five months for a Hospital referral and when I did get an appointment I missed it because I didn't understand what I had got to do.

I am not learning English and it is really holding me back. I came here before the pandemic and started to learn but since things have been getting back to normal, I have not been able to get any lessons.

I know people who came here at the same time are going to Dudley College to learn, they are enjoying it and are doing really well.

Because of my health issues I can't sit for six hours each day, I have problems with my legs and struggle with my mental health. I am also older than them so I think I find learning harder than they do. I would like to be able to learn in a less formal place, I think I would do much better with shorter classes somewhere in my community. This is really important to me.”

Abdul [Syrian refugee]

Medication errors through language barriers

“I used my translation app at the pharmacy and they gave me tablets that I thought I had to take twice a day for three weeks.

They only gave me ten pills so I stopped taking them after five days when they ran out.

It must have been me as health services don't make those mistakes.

Perhaps I didn't understand properly and should have taken half or a quarter of each tablet, this has really worried me.

I think there should be more help with translation, easier instructions on medicine labels and I also would like more help to improve my English” **Mohammed [Syrian refugee]**



My life and hopes as a person seeking asylum

“My family were all arrested in the Congo and a friend helped me to escape to the UK. I have been an asylum seeker for 15 years and have not been able to get leave to remain.

This means that my life is on hold as I am not allowed to work, so my life is really hard. I have been getting a £40 voucher each week for food but that has just been stopped because my leave to remain has been refused.

It's not safe for me to travel back and there is no-one in the Congo for me, my mom died, my friends are here now, my life is here. I was born in 1992 and was 16 when I arrived but the Home Office changed my date of birth to 1988, I told them I am 29 but they say I need more evidence.

Three years ago I was taken to a detention centre in Oxford and then another detention centre near Gatwick airport where they

released me after a few days with a train ticket back to Birmingham. I told them I didn't have anywhere to stay but they didn't care.

I haven't got a solicitor or anyone to defend me so the help I get here is really important, I get food and clothing and everyone is very friendly. I get rice, pasta, sauce and sometimes vegetables but it's still hard to eat healthily and sometimes it's hard mentally.

I have got a GP and they helped me to send evidence to the Home Office about my depression and mental health.

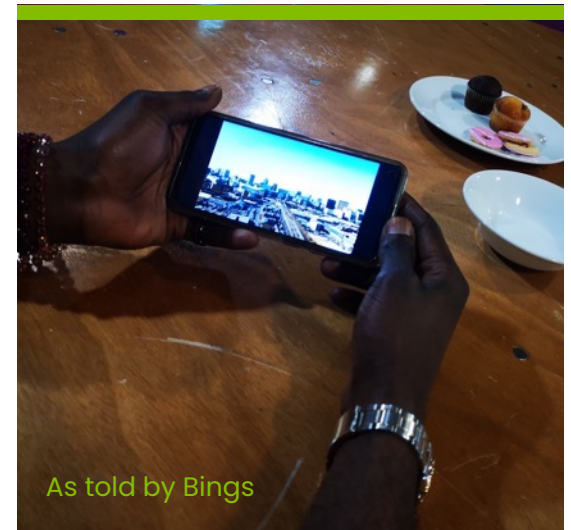
I don't have a dentist now, I had pain in my teeth 10 years ago, I just turned up at a dentist where they took all my teeth out and I haven't been back since.

I sometimes get pains in my chest and have been in hospital twice with TB, they treated me and I am clear now. I used to smoke and would take cigarettes from the floor which might be how I caught it.

I often live with friends, I move around a lot and might stay for three or six months, sometimes I live on the streets. I try to cook at friends' houses but with gas prices going up it's hard for them too, so I get money where I can to help them to pay the bills.

I have been studying painting and decorating and music at college. But when your support stops, everything stops, including being able to go to college.

I am an artist and I want to make it with music. Perhaps it will be my way out of this situation.”



As told by Bings

We listened to Welcome Group volunteers who told us why being able to help is important to them. We also heard about some of the barriers faced by the communities they support. Some of the Welcome Group volunteers are themselves refugees, which helps them to have a deeper understanding.

Worries about housing

“People tell us about being placed in poor housing and they struggle to know who to talk to about it.

Housing is provided by Serco and they don't give out a telephone number so people are told to call Migrant Help about problems, they tell us they don't get the help they need so we call on their behalf.

Serco is operating as a business at the end of the day and they seem to be immune to complaints.

People tell us about everything from insect infestations to antisocial behaviour. I am helping a woman at the moment who lives in a flat with her little girl who is terrified to go into their shared garden because she is frightened of their abusive neighbour.

The little girl sleeps with the light on because she is scared that the neighbour will get to them in their flat.” *Jenny [volunteer]*

“I have been helping an Albanian mom with two young children who came to Dudley from a neighbouring borough to escape an abusive relationship.

They are living in private housing and their landlord has given them notice to leave.

She receives Universal Credit and can't afford to find a new home, so she has been advised to stay put and wait to be made homeless.

The mom is terrified and doesn't want to put her children in this situation.” *Helena [volunteer]*

Affordable school activities

“An Iraqi mom who is seeking asylum came to me in tears because her daughter's school had asked for £25 for a school trip. She only gets a food card and £42 each week so didn't know what to do, other than tell her daughter she couldn't go.

I got in touch with the school and they said it was a voluntary contribution so we were able to sort things out.” *Patricia [volunteer]*

Making a difference

“I used to be a School teacher and help families who bring young children who often don't speak English, so we involve them in music and crafts.

It's good to feel needed though it can be challenging as you don't have the same authority as you have in a school setting.

Parents need space to unwind though as accommodation is often very cramped, so when people struggle with storage we help them to find furniture.

People live in such difficult conditions it's good to see everyone enjoying making the most of the space at the Welcome Group.”

Joanne [volunteer]

When things go wrong with dental treatment and care

My wife had her wisdom tooth removed, the tooth broke in her gum and she had to go to the dental hospital for an operation.

She was in constant pain and we have been going to the doctor and to the hospital but they kept telling her just to take paracetamol.

I have been so worried because it didn't seem right, she looked so ill and was sleeping all the time.

She was prescribed stronger pain killers but this made my wife vomit and she couldn't breathe. It was really frightening so we went back to the hospital emergency department where they gave her an ECG and told us to go back to the dentist for more x-rays.

We went back to the dentist who took one look in her mouth and said she had a really nasty infection and prescribed very strong antibiotics which worked very quickly.

I'm glad we were eventually able to make ourselves understood, we still had a difficult time but it could

have been so much worse had we not have been able to explain what was happening." *Jehad and Fatima [Volunteers / refugees]*

"I have been helping an Iraqi woman who is seeking asylum, who was referred to a Dudley dentist to have her wisdom tooth removed.

She has been here for 14 years so knows some English but there were still language barriers. Her own dentist didn't explain things, used lots of technical language and when they said they would numb her mouth she didn't understand.

They decided she should be treated at a different surgery and sedated but after we talked things through properly, without needing a translator, we realised she only needed to have her mouth frozen.

If this had of been communicated with more patience, it would have saved everyone a lot of trouble and she could have received her treatment at her local dentist after all." *Sharon [volunteer]*

Helping people is important

"My friend asked me to help at the Welcome Group 13 years ago and I

have been coming ever since. I help to prepare food and I love volunteering here, it's my favourite part of the week. Helping people is important to me and I have also made lots of friends.

It was really difficult when we had to close our doors during lockdown. Work still carried on and we helped with food deliveries. People don't realise how much goes on in the background." *Brenda [volunteer]*

I know there is always help for me here if I need it

"I first came to the Welcome Group in 2015 as someone seeking asylum from Nigeria. I have my status now but still come to meet friends and I know I can always get help and information when I need it. There is always a warm welcome here." *Abeke [former asylum seeker]*





Helping refugee communities to integrate

“The Centre for Equality and Diversity was commissioned to support Dudley’s first 20 Syrian refugee families for the first two years of a five year programme.

We helped the families to settle, supported with housing, benefit entitlement, access to health and to English lessons.

Access to healthcare was a real barrier and even a simple act of helping people understand how to make a call to a GP made a huge difference.

It was great to be able to connect the families so they could also help each other. And when people faced problems we staffed a 24 hour helpline so there has been lots of support. It’s been a journey and we’ve been through a lot together.

The remaining three years of the resettlement programme were picked up by Dudley Council Housing Services as the families needed less intensive support but the families still drop in for help with letters and health appointments.

Pretty much it’s the same as it was before but less intense than the early days, the families know we’re just a phone call away. People trust us and they know they can pop in for a confidential chat so it’s always busy here.

We learned so much from the Syrian scheme and it is helping us to tailor the right support to other new arrivals.

We are busy with a new refugee support scheme and have also been helping Ukrainian arrivals, it’s a blessing to be able to learn about different cultures.”

Jameela Hizam
Centre for Equality and Diversity

Learning from Syrian Refugees

During our engagement sessions at the Welcome Group, Syrian refugees told us how the pandemic had left them feeling disconnected from their community.

Dudley CVS, holds the contract for Healthwatch Dudley and the funding received through the Black Country and West Birmingham Clinical Commissioning Group, to deliver social prescribing support, enabled us to work with a group of people to plan and host two summer community celebration events.

The events were coproduced with Welcome group members. We shared our ideas and were open about what we were hoping to learn through our involvement.

In return, group members told us what a good event would feel like for them and they worked hard to bring local families together.

The resulting activity enabled over 100 people including 19 refugee families, to get together and build their support networks, at the same time as giving us a real insight into what it feels like to be a migrant living in Dudley borough.



The Welcome Group supports people who are marginalised, vulnerable because of language barriers, confidence, sometimes disability, insecurity and generally being overwhelmed by life.

Having support from Healthwatch Dudley has been extremely valuable, as often our people don't know how to access services they are entitled to.

The team has linked us with a wider range of health and care related services and visits from the team have helped our volunteers as sometimes we struggle to signpost people to the most appropriate support.

It is important for Healthwatch Dudley to have a connection with Dudley CVS as they are also a key community hub for our organisation."

*Andrew Harwood
Project Manger, The Welcome Group*

Syrian Celebrations

You are warmly invited to two community events with local Syrian families.

Come and share what it feels like to be Syrian living in Dudley Borough. What is good? What would make life easier? What makes you happy and healthy?

Enjoy meeting friends, singing and dancing, Syrian food and sweets, a bouncy castle for the children and fun craft activities.

12pm - 4pm
Saturday 6 and 20 August
Wellington Road Community Centre
27 Wellington Road
Dudley
DY1 1UB

"I have enjoyed working with local families to plan these events with Healthwatch Dudley. We have loved celebrating with friends and family and talking about our experiences of living in Dudley borough. The health checks were important to us so it's great that local services supported us to make them happen."

Jehad Khattab

Coproducing successful community events

Working with and listening to the community from the outset ensured that everyone got the best experience out of making the events happen.

We explained that Healthwatch Dudley is a small team and everyone agreed to pull together to make the events work. Group members responded by choosing a venue, sharing catering ideas and contacts, shopping for refreshments, decorating and setting out the hall and clearing away afterwards.

The group wanted traditional Syrian music, which we would have struggled to organise, so we hired a sound system that would easily connect to a laptop and mobile phones and group members played their own recorded and live music.

Crafts were organised for the children and we hired a bouncy castle to be supervised by parents. A group member who had previously owned a bakery made Syrian sweets, for which we were able to refund the cost of ingredients, so no one was out of pocket.

Keeping connected with Whatsapp

Group members told us how they keep in contact through a Whatsapp group.

They share special supermarket deals, school uniform offers, community information and during the pandemic, where to buy food items in short supply.

Syrian refugee families also use their network to share party and wedding invitations, so it was a great way to spread the word about our events. It was also important that our invitation came through a trusted network.

An extra invitation...

The events took place in August to keep families connected as the Welcome Group took a summer break.

Welcome Group volunteers joined the families who came together to eat, sing and dance. Young people shared their experiences of living in Dudley borough and the group were invited to take part in embroidery workshops facilitated by CreHeart, a local community organisation who we were able to fund to continue community embroidery workshops that would continue to connect people.

Healthwatch Dudley were also able to team up with the Dudley CVS Children's team, to involve families in the Government funded Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF) to enable children to access holiday fun and to be equipped with back to school packs.

Providing community health checks

People who came to the first event asked for health checks. We listened and worked with Dudley Integrated Health and Care NHS Trust (DIHC) and Solutions4Health, to deliver blood pressure, cholesterol and diabetes checks during the follow up session.

Information from the checks was shared with primary care, enabling people at high risk to receive follow up support from their own GPs.



- Of the 30 health checks made, five men and two women were advised of high blood pressure with one being very high.
- Two people were advised about high cholesterol and a further two received advice about being overweight.
- A pregnant woman received additional support and guidance.
- All of the men receiving health checks smoked, except one who was an ex-smoker.
- Everyone was registered to a GP but some people had not received health checks before and were unsure about where their GP practices were, so found the checks valuable.



8. WELCOMEING NEW FAMILIES AS THEY ARRIVE...

Syrian CELEBRATIONS Welcome...

THANK YOU for helping us
I spent my free time learning English
"Involvement is a easy welcoming place..."

We came to get a better life...
"I did lessons at home"
"I did lessons at home"
"I did lessons at home"

NEVER GIVE UP...
"Language is a key to happiness"
"I've never given up on my dream"

I'm happy to be here
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

2 years to learn English
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

Hard at first but gets easier...
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

Children are the future
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

GETTING WORK
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

What makes it hard
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

What makes it easy
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

NOT SPEAKING ENGLISH MAKES THINGS HARD
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

EDUCATION & LEARNING
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

keeping healthy in Dudley Borough
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

What's it like to live in Dudley
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

MENTAL HEALTH
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

DOCTORS & GP'S HARD TO ACCESS
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

HARD TO GET THINGS TO & GP
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

Benefits vs. cost of living rises
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

HELP WITH THIS STRUGGLE
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

OUR ideas
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

IMMIGRATION ISSUES
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

WESS MAY WORK FROM MY
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

Guidance
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

BEING A REFUGEE
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

1st day at school - not good - better when we have FRIENDS
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

LOTS OF OPPORTUNITIES & THINGS THAT YOU CAN ACHIEVE...
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

did not know A SINGLE WORD of English
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

Reading books & learning English at school was good
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

did not know A SINGLE WORD of English
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

what others think about you...
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

It's never too late
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

is it strange at first?
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

we have a shared, lived experience of fear & war...
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

we all have mental health
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

it's not easy to talk about...
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

PROPER ORGANIZATION ARE NEEDED - BUT ARE MISSING, SURE TO ARRIVE, START WITH MUCH TIME TO SPEND, ALSO TO INCREASE NOT ASSISTANT, IT IS AN OK, YOU GET, YOU GET, NOT THE GP
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

THE SUPPORT OF SCHOOL WITH WORKSHOPS TO HELP THE UNDERSTAND
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

NEED LEVEL 4 ESOL QUALIFICATION - CASH IN HAND
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

TECHNOLOGIES LEAVE US TIME TO CHECK ENGLISH SPEAKERS WHO MAY GET BACKS...
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

REWARDS, COLLABORATION, BONDING, INVOLVING EXPERTS - MANY AVAILABLE IN SYRIA, BUT NOT NEARLY AVAILABLE IN THE UK
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

BOYS & GIRLS ARE STRUGGLING...
"I've never been so happy"
"I've never been so happy"

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What people told us:

At each event, we asked the simple questions, 'what makes it easy to live a happy healthy life in Dudley borough, and what makes it difficult.?' This is what people said:

"We love living in Dudley borough"

People told us about green spaces and blue skies and how they generally feel safe living here..

"Finding work is hard"

Men told us that they had trades in Syria, they were bricklayers, drivers, plumbers and machine operators.

We were told how people are finding it difficult to get work as their qualifications are not transferrable. Or to get qualifications for trades here, they first need to have English to a level that they are struggling to achieve. **"Everything is becoming more expensive"**

Some refugees told us how they relied on benefits, which were just enough when they first arrived but now they are finding their income doesn't cover their families most basic needs.

Some people are getting 'cash in hand' jobs to make ends meet but are being exploited and they cannot speak out about it. People were very worried about the increasing cost of living.

"We all struggle with our mental health"

People told us how they experienced things before they came here that they don't like to talk about. People don't ask for help and wouldn't know how to find it. We were told how lots of people are struggling, especially men.

“Connection is important”

We heard about the importance of their shared lived experience of the conflict of war and how it is vital for families to connect and support each other. People were worried about and missed their wider families who had been left behind.

“We want a better future for our children”

Some people felt it was too late for them to start again with a career but they didn't want their children to be held back.

The pandemic had already interrupted schooling for children who were trying to start again in a new language.

Parents wanted extra tuition to help them catch up so their children wouldn't be disadvantaged by their experiences of war.

“It can be expensive to take part in healthy activities”

We heard how people are keen to get fit but can't afford to use the gym or leisure centre so have to think of other ways to keep themselves healthy.

“Football football football”

We heard from parents who's children are football mad but they are struggling to get them playing as related club fees and kit are unaffordable for many.

“My child is constantly growing”

Local school uniform banks where parents can donate and swap items would really help parents on low incomes.

“Can I use the library?”

We heard how people worry about which public buildings they are allowed to use. People told us that it would be good to have somewhere warm to read books and use computers but they didn't know if refugees or people seeking asylum could use library services, or if they would be turned away.

Our sessions were graphically facilitated by Thinking Visually and interpreters were present to help us to communicate. Young people also helped us to translate.

Healthwatch Dudley would like to say a huge ‘thank you’ to everyone who helped or took part.








Healthwatch Dudley

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