

Dorset Welcome Fund
Impact report for Round 1 (grants made Sept 2022)

Summary of funded projects and impact on beneficiaries

Grant recipient	Project	Amount Awarded	Allocations	Number of beneficiaries	Number of volunteers involved	Outcomes
Citizens Advice Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole	Contribution to Immigration Advice Clinic, offered to people across Dorset	£4000	£4000 Dorset Council	176 (Mixed nationality)	7	Vulnerable people supported to achieve independent living or have improved quality of life at home.
Shaftesbury Refugee Group	Contribution towards a range of refugee and host support including homestarter kits & translation services, and training for volunteers	£4000	£3374 Dorset Council £625 DCF Fundholder	250 (Ukrainian)	23	Residents accessed various activities, leading to improved mental health & wellbeing, reduced loneliness & isolation, increased access to support
The Magdalen Environmental Trust	Residential visits to the Farm for young refugees and their families, to support mental health & social connections, and to learn new skills	£4000	£4000 Dorset Council	24 (Ukrainian)	0	People supported to reduce debts, receive additional benefits, and gain an increased understanding of money management
TOTAL		£12,000		450 beneficiaries	20 volunteers	

Reports and case studies submitted by the groups

1) Advice Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole

Funded activities

Our Immigration Advice Clinic has provided advice and advocacy for clients from an immigration adviser at OISC level 3, via a monthly drop-in session for clients requiring immigration advice across the spectrum - from refugees, to visa nationals, and with any immigration need. It has been supported by this grant and other income sources. Those that have benefitted include victims of Domestic Violence, victims of Human Trafficking, Refugees, Asylum Seekers, children of parents from refugee families, transient and vulnerable people, homeless people, those seeking family reunification, those seeking to settle in the UK, those seeking to become British Citizens, those without an immigration status.

The clinic is a confidential drop in service and does not limit the number of times a client may return for further advice. Beneficiaries include people of all nationalities who have been unable to rectify their immigration problems due to contributory factors, such as a lack of funds, lack of free advice provision, lack of ability to understand the relevant law and process, and lack of clarity from the UK Home Office or other bodies such as workplaces, universities or local government. The demand for the clinic was high and we do continue to see many more people with immigration issues than we had initially anticipated. We knew that demand was rising, but we were often surprised by the level of need. We often worked late, ensuring that all clients were seen and heard.

Impact

We offered 15 minute initial advice sessions for each client, offering signposting at the end of the session where appropriate. We assisted 176 clients directly, and nearly double this amount indirectly (including family members who benefitted from the advice given). 56 Refugees were given advice. All direct beneficiaries were helped to understand their immigration status and begin to think about their next steps with confidence. All reported an increase in knowledge of their rights and the law, and the majority (154) reported that they feel more able to enforce their rights. (Those not feeling able to enforce their rights were those with additional vulnerabilities, and were signposted for further casework to a relevant trusted third party.) 78 clients were signposted for further support from a range of other services; Citizens Advice wider advice team, other charities or Immigration Advisers.

“You have saved my life.” This type of feedback is typical of clients we have worked with in the clinic over the last year. Immigration issues are such a large part of our client's daily lives and their mental load, causing anxiety, stress and trauma. We can sometimes offer advice on a route out of this constant worry, and that is invaluable to members of our community. It means that they can focus on building their lives away from this feeling of re-traumatisation.

Client leave our clinic with the following:

- A feeling of a shared problem, where clients can feel safe to tell us the full scope of the problem facing them
- A better idea of their current immigration status and any restrictions it causes within their life
- A clear understanding of the next steps on their immigration journey
- How they can use their immigration status to improve their access to local services and to improve their living, working or family situation
- Where to go for further casework assistance
- Where to go for further advice, should they require it, either within Citizens Advice or within the local community

We have seen these outcomes result in residents being able to lead more fulfilled lives and feel more accepted and settled within our community.

Project development

Our own knowledge and presence within the community has grown. We have worked closely with local charity ICN and local reputable Immigration Advisers to form a cluster group. Meeting for training together once a month, we also discuss difficult client cases, referring clients between ourselves to best meet their needs. ICN have also participated in the Immigration Advice Clinic; this has helped us to forge even deeper mutual trust and a great relationship, and has benefitted clients who receive advice from trusted sources.

Case study

Anna* is 27 and has been living in the UK since 2021. She has been in a relationship with a British man since 2015 and they have a son together. They married in 2019 in Thailand, her home country, and in 2021 they applied for a Spouse visa for Anna to come to the UK and live with her husband. Her child is already British, and so did not need a visa to enter the UK.

Anna quickly found work as a Healthcare assistant after her arrival in the UK; her son settled into school locally. Anna was very happy for the family to be reunited after a long separation. However, 3 months after her arrival, Anna's husband began to control her income from her job. He asked her to pay the majority of her salary into a bank account in his name only. When she refused, he lashed out and became violent. The relationship progressively deteriorated and become more violent. Anna was scared for her life and for her son. Her husband regularly threatened to 'have her deported' and 'cancel her visa'..

Anna's manager at work began to notice her injuries. Anna eventually opened up to her manager, and her GP, and allowed the police to be called. Anna and her son were given a place in a refuge, and the police found evidence of the violence and coercive control by Anna's husband, who was charged with offences against her and was unable to contact her due to bail conditions.

Anna visited us at the clinic, very worried that her husband would call the Home Office and try to separate her from her son. We were able to advise Anna that there is a specific visa for people in her situation; firstly a Destitution Domestic Violence Concession (DDVC) application would need to be made. This would remove her from her spouse visa, and give her 3 months access to public funds to help support her. During this period, she would then need to make a further application for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) as a victim of Domestic Violence. This would allow her to be settled in the UK in her own right, and she would no longer need any visas. She could then later apply to become British if she wished. Our team booked an appointment after the clinic to help her with the DDVC. This was granted immediately by the Home Office. Anna was then offered a free appointment at ICN to complete her ILR application.

Anna is now on track to be free of her abuser, and is able to stay in the UK with her son indefinitely.

2) Shaftesbury Refugee Group

Funded activities

We based our grant application to support Ukrainian refugees, on our experience of working with Syrian refugees and surveys at two meet and greet events with hosts and Ukrainian guests. We then had an opportunity to form a focus group with Ukrainian guests and established a WhatsApp group where we became aware of other needs for Ukrainians, which informed the support we delivered using the grant. In particular: IT equipment; transport support; community events; and a focus on children.

We underestimated the quality of Google Translate and its prevalence as a tool in the Ukrainian community and therefore overestimated the need for a translated website. We also had not anticipated the quality of volunteers coming forward for befriending and English Conversation. Homemaking however was an accurately identified need. Therefore the focus of our support shifted to these more carefully identified needs.

- **IT grants: 80 beneficiaries.** We formed a partnership with Donatelt to provide recycled laptops, phones and tablets. Printers cannot be recycled and a cheaper approach was to purchase new printers (with ink).
- **Transport: 25 beneficiaries.** We had a number of approaches to solve transport issues in a rural context. In the end we provided support for driving lessons and provided personal transport as well as emergency taxi fares for hospital visits. Transport grants have contributed to 10 Ukrainians gaining employment.
- **Homemaking grants: 10 families.** We provided homemaking support to 9 families and a one off purchase of carpeting. Items include sofas, dining tables, beds, mattresses, bed linen and kitchen equipment.
- **Website and publicity: 17,000 visitors** We have provided an active website. We translate key pages and documents ourselves. We also supported a Ukrainian guest by commissioning a Xmas card from him – 250 cards were sold.
- **Community events: 400 attendees** These have been vital to establish connections between Ukrainians and with the local community. Based around Ukrainian culture, such as Maslenitsa, Ivan Kupala, Independence Day etc, they have been a huge success.
- **Translation: 18 beneficiaries.** We have not needed to translate documents but in specific problematic situations we funded a face to face translator
- **English Conversation: 30 families.** We have 16 trained and checked volunteers who provide very good befriending support at no cost. They visit families about once a week, take them on trips, help with forms and provide assistance and a link with another community outside the host family.
- **Children's additional classes: 18 children.** We have supported attendance at Musical Theatre and English summer schools.
- **Advocacy:** We advocate for refugees in a range of ways, whether it is providing access to free tickets for events or enabling contact with statutory services . This happens through our website and by email, WhatsApp and personal contact.

Impact

We are regularly thanked for the support we offer to build community.

“The feast of Ivan Kupala was very good. This is very important for us, Ukrainians. Because we have very few opportunities to meet. But there are very few positive emotions. Our children desperately need such meetings where there is a mention of the culture of Ukraine and many Ukrainians. England is a beautiful country with very positive and kind people. But we still miss home, and we have a war. Everyone at the front or in the occupation has friends, acquaintances, and relatives, so we are very worried all the time. Such meetings help us relieve emotional tension. At the last meeting, we were really happy. Thank you very much for your help. I am very impressed by your sincere good attitude towards us.”

We know that refugees have used our support as a wider signifier for how the community has accepted them and will keep them safe. The community activity in particular has had a powerful effect on the identity of Ukrainians who have been displaced. Maslenitsa in the Town Hall shared culture and food. Carol of the Bells was a powerful and moving film that reflected current circumstances and Eurovision demonstrated levels of support that Ukrainians were surprised by.

Project development

Prior to the grant our income was about £1200 per year for the three families we supported. Now we support about 250 Ukrainian people across North Dorset and link into valued partners that we could not work with without this grant such as Open House, TLW Dance and Guggleton Farm Arts.

Our understanding of needs has evolved with greater contact with beneficiaries. Our website has been much more successful as a tool for managing our support. It does however require maintenance and translation. (automatic translation services are not as good and required too much editing by a fluent bi lingual). We now use Google Translate.

The increase in grant income and donations took us above the threshold for a small charity and we have registered as a charity.

We wish to continue to provide very similar support for IT, Transport - especially personal transport and emergency taxi requests, Homemaking grants, Face to face translation, and community events. We will maintain a programme of events which are based around Ukrainian culture such as Independence Day and Orthodox Christmas. We also have a significant project in October 2023, working with Kyiv City Ballet who will provide a week-long arts and dance programme involving schools, dance classes and the community of Ukrainians and North Dorset residents.

Case studies

'I' came to our area from Ukraine in May 2022 with her daughter and son. The daughter was helped by our partners TLW dance to prepare for an audition as a professional dancer. The son was helped to establish himself in school. 'I' had medical training but could not be employed on Ukrainian credentials. Whilst employed at a local supermarket she was helped by a Trustee to visit medical centers and eventually became a phlebotomist at a local GP. She was able to become a householder in a small flat and used our homemaking grant to settle in. Her son has developed his confidence and contributes to events, e.g. barbecuing for Ivan Kupala. 'I' knows she has friends as well as support.

'M' was a single young Ukrainian whose host lived in a rural location. Keen to get a job she applied to a hotel in Shaftesbury but there was no transport. We advised her host of a scooter option and provided grants for training, safety wear and help with a purchase. She is now a valued employee, is becoming very fluent in English and appreciates the support she received before she could become independent.

'N' had been helped to move to our area with her young son and disabled older daughter. The hosts provided excellent support but relationships began to deteriorate due to unrealistic needs of and language barriers. We provided support for 'N' to approach estate agents and found a property which we helped furnish with the hosts, volunteers and gifts from our friends of the charity'. 'N' has regular visits from an English Conversation volunteer. Her anxiety has dropped and her confidence grown in her new home. Her English is and improving and she is now joining in Ukrainian community events.

'O' was always a confident guest with her own transport and a host who could provide separate accommodation. However she could not afford the school transport costs. We advocated for her with Wiltshire Council and secured funding for her children's transport.

3) The Magdalen Environmental Trust

Funded activities

With the generous support of the Dorset Welcome Fund and Dorset AONB FIPL, The Magdalen Environmental Trust was proud to provide a special residential event for 24 Ukrainian refugees living with sponsor families from the Dorset Council area. on 6th and 7th April 2023. We invited 11 families: 16 adults and 15 children, ranging in ages from 4 to 12. Unfortunately, 4 families cancelled at short notice – final numbers were 24.

The aims of the residential event for refugee families from Dorset were to:

1. Provide a brief respite from cohabitation, for the benefit of both refugee families and sponsor families.
2. Enable refugees to spend time together, get to know each other, and form informal supportive networks and friendships to help overcome trauma
3. Allow greater mental wellbeing to have a positive impact on placements within sponsor families, helping to sustain those placements
4. Give refugee families an experience of interacting with nature, and seeing their children thrive in the safe open spaces of Magdalen Farm.

The families stayed in our onsite accommodation. They were provided with fresh meals prepared by our kitchen team. We wanted to make our guests feel at home, so we created an authentic and traditional Ukrainian menu, based on the guidance of a Ukrainian refugee living in a sponsor's house locally. During their stay, the families took part in a range of nature-based activities within our 100 acres of developing nature reserve. On the first day, they were taken on a woodland adventure to build dens and investigate the wildlife in the woods and along the banks of the River Axe. The families were introduced to our farm animals and participated in caring for them. They also learnt about the process of organic food production on a smallholding scale. The next day the families took part in an art project using natural materials from the land to create their own unique mementos of the weekend. Later, they took part in an orienteering challenge, navigating their own way around the farm to discover information about the local wildlife.

Impact

Food and time in nature are both great 'levellers' and they enable the refugees to spend time together to create new networks and friendships. To begin with many of the families seemed quite reserved, and there were some who struggled due to not speaking much English. During our first woodland activity, many of the adults took a step back and didn't want to get involved, there was also a lot of concern over the children becoming muddy. With some encouragement from our staff the children started playing together and forming friendships. By the end of the activity, most of the parents had relaxed and were engaging in playing alongside building relationships with other adults.

Later that day, we took the families to meet and feed some of our pigs and goats. The families all loved seeing the animals and were asking questions alongside sharing their experiences with us. One parent, explained how in Ukraine they kept animals and grew vegetables as a hobby.

That evening the catering team put on an incredible traditional Ukrainian Easter dinner which made everyone smile. One parent said she wanted to cry as she hadn't seen meat in jelly in a year. She was so thankful to all the effort that the Magdalen team had gone to. The day ended with everyone sitting around a campfire, the children were playing and toasting apples and the adults sat together singing and listening to traditional Ukrainian music.

The next morning, we met two further animals; the chickens and cows. Some of the children helped to move a few of the chickens into a different pen and everyone loved collecting the eggs and visiting the Egganator 3000. Before lunch we split into two groups with some of the families taking part in the orienteering challenge and others sitting in the sunny courtyard getting crafty and creating mementos to take home.

The feedback from the weekend was excellent, with new and supportive friendships formed, hopefully becoming the long-lasting legacy of the event.

Project development

We will continue to offer these events to refugees families across Dorset, Somerset and Devon in 2023 and 2024.

Case studies

While the children were taking part in crafts, I noticed one parent adult having in depth discussions with others, which was a huge improvement on the day before when she had excluded herself from some of the activities due to not understanding and not speaking much English. As time went on more of the adults and children came out of the shell and would speak to members of Magdalen staff alongside other families.

Laura shared that whilst chatting to one of the mums in the woods she told her *“People are quite like trees; they need to put down roots and as they grow up tall and strong, they can keep growing towards their hopes and dreams.”* She said that’s what she always wanted for her children, and it did not matter which country they were in, they must put down roots to stay standing up tall like the trees.

“This has been an amazing chance for my children to play with other Ukraine children. As where we live there are no other Ukraine children nearby and they have been learning English well and playing at school with English children. Being able to speak their own language and play together is so important for them as they grow up.”

“We are so lucky to be invited to such a beautiful place, and to spend time with other Ukrainian people. You have done so much more than we expected and we just want to say thank you so much.”

