



Staffordshire Co-production Case Study

Organisation/Team: Staffordshire County Council, Families & Communities Commissioning Team

Co-production Example: Afghan Find Your Own Home Scheme

Level(s): Individual & Collective

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Background

There are two main official routes of resettlement for Afghan families to come into the UK following the collapse of the Afghan government in 2021. These are:

- Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) - for Afghan citizens who worked for or with the UK Government in Afghanistan in exposed or meaningful roles.
- Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) - prioritises those who have assisted the UK efforts in Afghanistan and stood up for values such as democracy, women's rights, freedom of speech, and rule of law.

The Find Your Own Home (FYOH) scheme is run by the Home Office and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). It allows people who have been residing in bridging accommodation (via the ARAP/ACRS routes above) the option of looking for their own private rented accommodation whilst still being entitled to the same level of resettlement support from a local authority.

Nationally, take up of the FYOH scheme has been low, mainly due to its complexity and exacerbated further for those who don't speak English and come from a different culture.

In 2023, Staffordshire had its first family who wanted to take the FYOH route, and this is their experience of coproduction with Staffordshire County Council's resettlement team.

The Family

Mr X (husband/father) was in the armed forces and first came to the UK in 2021 as part of the ARAP scheme, whilst his family remained in Afghanistan. He had been living alone in hotel accommodation in Bristol for a period of two years, whilst his wife, mother and three children were making the treacherous journey from Afghanistan to Pakistan to eventually join him in the UK.

In March 2023, the UK government announced that all people housed in bridging accommodation would have to vacate by the end of August 2023.

Mr X was a very sensible, capable and educated man with a reasonable level of English and some awareness of how the UK system worked i.e. children had to be in education. He already had a friend based in Staffordshire who had a private rental property available, so he proceeded to move out of the hotel and travelled to Staffordshire to make arrangements for his family to come over.

At this point the Home Office contacted Andrea, the County Council's Resettlement Lead to inform her of his move to the area under the FYOH scheme and to get agreement to offer wraparound support (which isn't mandatory). The team were keen to support him and his family's integration into the Staffordshire community and preparations began.

This was considered a really important pilot for the team, to learn through practice and develop the approach that would become the blueprint for supporting future refugees and asylum seekers coming to Staffordshire.

Co-production in Practice

Under the FYOH scheme a family has to have a named person from the respective local authority attached to them. Donata, a member of staff from Poland put herself forward and went with her line manager to meet Mr X about what he needed and how he wanted the home setting up.

The house had some basic decoration and furniture already. Mr X stated he wouldn't dare make any decisions about soft furnishings without his wife being there. The team were able to sort bedding for the family's arrival, toys for the smaller children, Halal food stocked in the cupboards in addition to some budgeting support for Mr X. **["work with" not "do to"]**

The Home Office are very prescriptive about what can be purchased in terms of setting up the home i.e. white goods can be provided but not a television. However, the resettlement team took it upon themselves to provide a laptop for the family, as it was considered an important tool for learning English and accessing online classes. **[working in a supportive way]**

The team then liaised with Mr X and the Home Office to plan how they were going to get his family from Pakistan. The visas were in place, but the flights kept changing which meant it was proving difficult to get staff to meet them at the airport. On speaking to other local authorities, the team learnt they could instead arrange a taxi for the family and a taxi for their belongings. After discussion with Mr X, he said he would go and meet his family at the airport and two resettlement team members would wait at the home to settle them in when they arrived.

[making decisions together]

"Co-production was learning together with the family through talking and listening to what they needed rather than impose or assume what we thought they needed."

The family arrived and Donata showed them how the house worked, how to use e-mail, how to apply for benefits, in addition to walking them down to the GP surgery to get everybody registered. In the background, the team had worked with education colleagues to ensure the children had a school place secured for the new term.

Contact with the family was purposely intensive and frequent during the first week and staff went every day, all day, if necessary, as the family were very anxious and needed that support. In terms of conversation, the team used Google translate and had access to a translator if required to ensure there was no breakdown in communication. **[Communicate well]**

The team also produced a guide to the local area that included a map and pictures of things the family might need or want to know e.g. GP surgery, bus/bus stops. At the same time, they were conscious not to infantilize anybody, so the family were used to test the guide and provide feedback on how they had used it or if anything else should be included or changed. As a result, it could be further refined and developed as a resource for new families, ensuring they have the right information. **[People's experience and contribution are really listened to]**

In quite a short space of time, it became evident that the property was too small for the size of the family, and it was actually overcrowded. At that time, large vacant properties were difficult to find, however, the team enquired on potential Home Office Housing Fund properties secured by local authorities in East/South Staffordshire for housing refugees.

This resulted in an empty four bed property being found in East Staffordshire and the family were delighted with the opportunity to move to a bigger home. Again, they were fully supported to move in by the team using the same approach with continued wraparound support.

[Help provided is as good as it can be and makes life better]

There is an active Afghan community WhatsApp group in existence for new families arriving in Staffordshire. Mr X has been posting on this group to reassure others in terms of what support to expect and telling them not to worry. This would not have happened if the team hadn't built that trust and relationship with Mr X and his family from the outset.

How has life been made better for those receiving support?

- The family are happy, safe and together, living in a home that is big enough and equipped to meet their needs.
- Their English has improved significantly giving them more confidence to communicate.
- The children were quickly integrated into school and have settled well.
- Mr X and his wife were given a voice. They were listened to and are now happy to use their experience to inform how support is best provided to other families coming to Staffordshire.

Mr X expressed how much he and his family valued the support they had received to the point that when the team started to welcome new Afghan families, he emailed the team to say, "you won't forget about us will you when you've got new people arriving?"

Workforce & Practitioner Development

This example of co-production has given practitioners a greater understanding of what it's like to be a refugee arriving in Staffordshire and how difficult it is, not just in terms of language but also the cultural barriers e.g. Afghan women can feel quite isolated as they are expected to be in the home looking after the children, which perpetuates even if they have been in the UK a while. If there is an issue at school, it may not be easy for mum to go and sort this out as she could be worried about misunderstanding things.

From having Ukrainian and Polish people working on the resettlement team it has helped with the planning and strategy behind the approach. They provide useful feedback on documentation, use of terminology, directness and clarity of instruction or processes for refugees to follow i.e. if there is a child protection issue certain action has to be taken.

The team has and will continue to evolve their learning and practice as more refugees and asylum seekers come to Staffordshire. Further practical interventions have included:

"When you've met one Afghan family, you've met one Afghan family. People have different backgrounds, abilities etc."

- Development of an accessible county guide that explains things such as what to do if you need a doctor, dentist or foodbank. The guide can be used by anyone whether they are part of a formal resettlement scheme or not.
- Starting to deliver a 'Life in the UK' course for new Afghan arrivals.
- The '[New Communities Resettlement](#)' grant scheme was set up to fund innovative and creative projects which support Ukrainian and Afghan communities. The scheme also provides further intelligence on what works and what doesn't work for refugees e.g. driving theory courses have been a real success, art classes not so.

[We will get better at the way we work and what we do]

Co-production Tip

"Listen and be prepared to learn. Don't assume you know everything because you don't. Don't worry that you're going to get it wrong because most things you can put right."

(Andrea Meaden, Staffordshire County Council)