

Case study



Resettling Syrian refugees

Leeds City Council (LCC),
communities, housing
and environment

Jenny Haslock
Sally Chawner-Baxter

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About Jenny and Sally

Jenny Haslock and Sally Chawner-Baxter work in Leeds Occupational Therapy Housing team. This unique team specialise in matching people with disabilities to homes that meet their physical, psychological, sensory and cultural needs.

Jenny was employed as one of the first OTs in the team. Her job was originally to ensure that properties were adapted appropriately for individuals. Sally joined after this and the team is now up to ten members.

The expansion of members has been because the team saves LCC £4 million annually by reusing already adapted properties.

About the innovation

As the team have grown, they have developed new ways to support disabled people in good quality homes. When LCC committed to support 33 Syrian refugee families to resettle in Leeds, they turned to the team for help.

The OTs needed to understand the refugee's complex health needs and then find homes that met their needs. Many of the people came with physical disabilities and complex mental health problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder.

The team had to ensure the physical environment of the homes were accessible and consider:

- the location
- external noise

- risk factors such as high rise building for those at risk of suicide
- proximity to support networks
- access to travel route.

They considered both psychological and physical safety, as some of the refugees had experienced abuse and torture. Consideration was given to avoiding facilities that might trigger distress. For example, using a bath could trigger memories of trauma.

They also worked with the Home Office and refugee resettlement team to develop a more efficient assessment process. This provided more relevant information earlier, which made it easier to match people to suitable homes. In turn, this made further cost savings.

Impact

In two years, all 33 Syrian families were safely housed. Previously when disabled people left a property, adaptations would be removed at a cost to the Council. By matching the Syrian families to already adapted homes, the team achieved savings of £227,660. This is what it would have cost to adapt standard accommodation to meet the families' needs.

The team's expenditure of £24,790, was significantly less when matching people to properties, rather than adapting other homes. They were able to apply to the Home Office for these resettlement costs, creating further cost savings for the city Council.

Because these refugees have been housed appropriately from the start, few have had to move on to alternative properties. This saves money in rehousing and minimises stress and trauma for individual service users.

Customer satisfaction results from the refugees show improvements in the following areas:

- feeling safe in their home
- positive mental wellbeing
- independent use of their bathroom
- access to the community
- access to their own home.

For example, Saleh (one of the refugees) said 'This property has given me my independence back, I no longer need to depend on my brother for anything. We feel safer.'

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