



EURO
CITIES



Leeds supports migrants' strengths

Integrating new arrivals into city life

Leeds has harnessed the strengths of migrant communities to help growing numbers of new arrivals fleeing war or looking for a better life settle into the city. By enabling migrant volunteers to come up with their own support solutions, the city is benefiting from better-informed, happier and more employable new citizens and more cost-efficient services and harmonious communities.

Leeds is proud to be the most diverse UK city outside London and home to over 140 ethnic groups. It looks to address migration issues with a focus on being both a compassionate city and a strong economy. Maintaining this focus was, however, proving difficult in the face of public sector budget cuts, a reduction in services for migrants and the arrival of a broader range of migrant communities. In fact, it was becoming clear that growing numbers of new migrants were failing to access public services because of language, information and cultural issues. The system simply wasn't working for them - and presumably not for others either.

Recognising that many migrants were disengaged from the world of work and from city life yet desperate to work and to contribute to their community, Leeds decided to take a novel, asset-based approach to the problem. Instead of focusing on what is wrong in migrant communities, it chose to look at what is strong - what skills, knowledge and cultural and life experiences exist within them - and how it could capitalise on these assets. The belief was that a citizen-led approach would not only enable communities to identify their unique needs and develop and implement their own solutions. It would also mean the city benefited from more appropriate use of existing services, the creation of more relevant services and more cohesive and productive communities.

New conversations

This conviction led to the development of the Migrant Access Project (MAP) by Leeds City Council and two local not-for-profit community service providers, Touchstone and Feel Good Factor. Its aims were to reduce pressure on services impacted the most by migration by raising awareness of how the system works and help new arrivals put down roots by strengthening relations between migrants and settled communities. A pilot project received financial support from the city's Migration Impact Fund. Once success stories emerged, funding of €86,000 a year was forthcoming from Leeds City Council's Adult Social Care, Public Health Directorates and partners.



Leeds has a rich multicultural heritage with many new arrivals contributing to the economic, social and cultural life of the city. The Migrant Access Project is a great way for those who have already made links in Leeds to help others.

Ghulam Hussain, lead councillor for communities, Leeds City Council



cities in action

November 2016

where: Leeds, UK
what: Participation
when: 2010 - ongoing

At its core, MAP is about building relationships so that citizens and service providers can have a new kind of conversation, learn from each other and embrace a community-based approach to developing solutions. The people facilitating this new dialogue on the ground are the project's volunteer Migrant Community Networkers (MCNs), natural community leaders who are equipped by MAP with the skills and knowledge needed to provide support, guidance and information to their communities. It is MCNs who help new arrivals navigate their way round housing, benefits, employment, health, education and social services and come together to share their concerns, needs and solutions.

Inspired initiatives

To date, the project has trained 87 MCNs from diverse backgrounds who collectively speak 30 different languages. Through one-to-one and group sessions in their communities and at the MAP drop-in centre, these volunteers have enabled a wide range of initiatives. These include work clubs to help people prepare and apply for jobs, confidence building and parenting skills sessions for women in Swahili, a Roma community café offering cooking classes to advocacy support and an Afghan Women's Association which meets weekly to hear from service providers, take classes, make jewellery and help children stay in touch with their culture.



One of MAP's highest profile successes is a community group called The Syrian Kitchen, set up by a Syrian dentist to train new arrivals who volunteer in the kitchen and attend its activities and in doing so learn about life in Leeds. Now it also contributes to wider social cohesion by providing a lunch club for older local customers while others teach conversational English to the Syrian community. A number of new social enterprises have also emerged from MAP, including one that teaches volunteers additional skills such as how to set up and manage an organisation, helping migrants with translation, form-filling, signposting and advocacy.

Sustainable success

Six years in, MAP's work has succeeded in reaching into seldom-heard communities and providing culturally-sensitive and bespoke community solutions with limited resources. It has, as a result, been recognised as an example of good practice in rising to the challenge of the UK government's equalities agenda. The team has identified five factors they believe are key to the success and sustainability of asset-based projects like MAP; don't be tempted to over-fund or over-regulate; encourage and enable neighbourliness and new ideas rather than being prescriptive about focus areas and activities; take whatever time is needed to find, inspire and liberate community builders; and finally, gather stories and statistics to evidence the project's impact.

“Once you meet migrants it is life affirming—you hear about their incredible journeys to get here and you see so much desire to give and support their communities. Amazing things are going on, from advocacy to football clubs, and it makes you really proud of Leeds.”

Mick Ward, Chair, Migrant Access Project and chief officer, Commissioning, Adult Social Care, Leeds City Council

