

# CONNECTING LEGAL ADVICE AND MATERIAL SUPPORT: BRIEFING FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS AND CIVIL SOCIETY



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June 2024

## INTRODUCTION

This briefing paper addresses the urgent needs experienced by destitute asylum seekers and puts forward key lessons that can be drawn on by other service providers and civil society organisations. This briefing is informed by a four-year longitudinal evaluation of the Hope Projects (West Midlands) Ltd, conducted by Nottingham Trent University.

## IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- » This evaluation has identified the vital importance of connecting together different forms of material and legal provision – most prominently in this case housing, financial support, and immigration advice, but also extending to diverse wellbeing services and the identified need for further specialist mental health provision. The interdependence between having one’s basic material needs met and being able to effectively pursue one’s legal rights has broad relevance, particularly for organisations supporting people whose rights are in any way insecure or contested. This suggests that these different forms of provision need to operate in a coordinated way, whether this is through the same organisation providing diverse services or a network of organisations meeting these different needs as part of a coalition.
- » The further severe curtailment of asylum rights that has resulted from the Illegal Migration Act 2023, which was highlighted by many stakeholders interviewed in the later part of this evaluation, will require substantial changes to the services provided by Hope and other organisations that provide services to asylum applicants. A narrowing of the terms on which asylum claims can be made – and new measures to render many claims inadmissible – mean that increasing numbers of people with legitimate fears of persecution will need to resort to other means than the asylum system to regularise their status in Britain. This calls for organisations to broaden their provision of immigration advice if they are to continue to assist refugees to remain in Britain, even if formal refugee protection is now unavailable to them.
- » Support organisations undertake brilliant work to support clients across the UK but wider infrastructure support is needed to connect leading practice and lobby for change where it is required for at-risk groups.

## BACKGROUND

UK asylum laws operate on the principle of mistrust – assuming that anybody claiming asylum is lying unless they can prove otherwise. The expectations for evidence to prove one’s claim have been found by numerous studies to be wildly unrealistic, given that the desperate flight to safety often leaves no opportunity to gather extensive evidence. In the absence of recognition as a refugee, the British state denies those seeking protection many fundamental rights. These conditions, produced by the state, directly render people vulnerable to multiple forms of exploitation and represent a severe failing in safeguarding responsibilities. It is into this context that Hope Projects and other charities must intervene. Lessons from Hope Projects’ work are shared here to inform current and future provision and to aid the case for changes at both local and national levels. As organisations working in this space the onus is on us to lobby for change and to provide evidence-informed support to those most at risk of destitution and exploitation.

## THE HOLISTIC HOPE MODEL

Hope understands asylum seekers’ material circumstances and the progression of their claim as interdependent - people cannot pursue their legal case effectively unless their basic needs are met, and likewise cannot improve their housing situation in a sustainable way without progressing their legal case:

“when we meet clients, their first needs normally are not their [legal] case. The first needs are always food and shelter; those issues come first. And those needs to be met first before we can even continue... So, we do have to use other resources and services that Hope have. So, we have a Hope destitution fund for housing. That is an essential part of it. When someone’s needs are met, they’re in a place to talk about legal services.”  
– Hope staff

Hope responds to these material needs through a combination of direct provision of housing and financial support, liaison with charitable partners, and support with applications for clients to access statutory provision, alongside specialist legal advice to help clients progress their asylum claim, with a strong focus on helping clients to understand and take ownership over their case.



This produced important results:

- Progressing the legal case
- Promoting clients' understanding of their legal case
- Improving clients' material circumstances
- Enhancing Client experiences

Full details of these findings are available in the full evaluation report: [www.ntu.ac.uk/hope-project](http://www.ntu.ac.uk/hope-project)

## HOPES' EVOLVING APPROACH TO COMMUNICATION AND PROCESS OWNERSHIP WITH CLIENTS

A Hope staff member explained the importance of helping clients to understand their case more fully:

"People are in a system that they don't understand, that they're lost within it. And we're trying to help them navigate it, trying to help them find a way through it. We talk about people taking control of their cases, and they can only do that if they understand ... you need to have different approaches for different people and you need to just be clear that what as a guarantee that somebody understands at the end of it. And I think that's still an ongoing thing. You're dealing with people who are often very stressed and very traumatized. And what you think has been clear actually needs to be clarified. And so, when you go back to someone a month later and say, and talk to them, what they got out of that conversation is completely different to what you thought you'd got across. So, I think we're continually learning the importance of communication, and I think we're better at it now than we were when we started, but I think we've still got a way to go." – Hope staff

Another staff member described the practical steps the legal service has taken as a result of this learning:

"We have practically changed the language we use; we've simplified it, and we've changed the client care letter to make it a slightly better visual than before... We've made leaflets ... that explained what we would do and what the client would do. We brought in a plan of action in letters that were midpoint reviews [for clients in Hope housing], with practical things we've brought in to make things easier and to keep contact with the client and explain to the client over and over again. It's putting them on, keeping them on track." – Hope staff

Another Hope member described measures that are being taken to make efficient use of resources through the provision of group information sessions, where this was appropriate:

"I think there's a lot of people where ... they just need some guidance. And those are the people where we're more likely to do a group information session rather than to say, we'll go and get it for you. So, we might be inviting them, saying we're doing a session about supporting letters or we're doing a session about Facebook..." – Hope staff

In summary, strengthening clients' understanding and ownership over their case is clearly the most challenging and ambitious of Hope's goals, and also proved the most difficult to evaluate. Nevertheless, we can confidently say that Hope has helped many clients to improve their understanding of the UK asylum process and of their specific case, and this has translated into concrete outcomes for some of those clients in progressing their claims and accessing support, and in some cases securing leave to remain. This is also an area where Hope has demonstrated huge strengths in reflective practice and an approach of ongoing improvement whose results can be clearly evidenced.

## NEXT STEPS

Hope Projects welcomes contact from other organisations to discuss possibilities to share learning or collaborate. The NTU team can be contacted at [tom.vickers@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:tom.vickers@ntu.ac.uk) for any questions about the evaluation or its findings, or to discuss requests for further evaluation or consultancy.



## DOWNLOAD THE FULL EVALUATION AND OTHER OUTPUTS

[www.ntu.ac.uk/hope-project](http://www.ntu.ac.uk/hope-project)

Contact the evaluation team with any questions or for further discussion: [tom.vickers@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:tom.vickers@ntu.ac.uk)

Contact Hope Projects Director Phil Davis:  
[phil@hope-projects.org.uk](mailto:phil@hope-projects.org.uk)

## THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluation undertook a review of the academic literature, views of clients gathered through a satisfaction survey (92 responses), 90 in-depth qualitative interviews and a focus group, a documentary case review of 20 client care letters, 18 in-depth interviews with Hope staff, volunteers, trustees and partners, and Hope's own monitoring data on client outcomes. The evaluation was funded by the Oak Foundation as part of its support for Hope.