

## Case study

This case study illustrates the approaches Ashley Community Housing (ACH) take to supporting adults with an ESOL need to move into work and progress in work. It has been produced by Learning and Work (L&W) as part of a review of progression pathways for adults in low paid work, undertaken through the 2017-19 Work Programme of the European Agenda for Adult Learning. It draws on data gathered from qualitative research activities with ACH staff and service users. This involved:

- **Depth interviews** with four key members of staff to understand their delivery approach and support model, what works well, some of the challenges that might be faced for supporting those with English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) needs who are in work and supporting their in-work progression.
- **A focus group** with ACH service users to gain insight into their experiences and perspective of moving into work and achieving in-work progression.

### Summary of activity (100 words)

[ACH](#), Bristol<sup>1</sup> is a social enterprise working to resettle refugees through labour market and social integration. This includes developing refugees' autonomy and supporting them to gain the skills they need to move into sustainable employment and successfully integrate into society.

ACH house single vulnerable adults with support needs. The majority of their tenants are in supported accommodation, and each tenant has a dedicated support worker who provides housing support and support to meet their wider needs.

### Building blocks for success (500 words)

#### Employer Engagement

ACH works in partnership with local employers, including a coffee shop, a technology company and a bus company to support their service users to secure well-paid (median salary), secure employment with good progression opportunities. This offer is part of their #rethinkingrefugee campaign that aims to build a narrative based on refugees as assets to the workplace and local community. The campaign was created in response to traditional approaches which often result in refugees

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<sup>1</sup> ACH also operates in Birmingham, Sandwell and Wolverhampton. This case study draws on research activities with ACH Bristol.

getting stuck in low-paid, insecure work. ACH only partner with employers who are committed to diversifying their workforce, offer progression opportunities, pay the living wage and offer secure contracts (i.e. not zero hour contracts)

Working with the employer, ACH provides pre-employment sector specific training courses, with an English language component which includes employer-specific interview questions, and one-to-one support for candidates. The employer guarantees job interviews for all candidates who complete the course. One employer also offers candidates work experience and on-the-job training.

Successful partnerships are those with employers who are keen to diversify their workforce and improve their corporate social responsibility and/or are looking to hire new staff.

### Multilingual support

ACH's support team comprises Somali and Arabic speakers who can engage and communicate with participants in their first language rather than only English when they first arrive. This engagement approach is often taken in the initial stages of a participant's support journey. ACH's support team reported that this approach is particularly effective for engaging those with high level or complex needs such as those with low level English and mental health needs. Based on the success of this approach so far, it is an area ACH are keen to build on in the future.

ACH also have volunteers who are members of the refugee community in Bristol themselves. They are well placed to reach out to people in their community in their first language to raise awareness of and improve engagement with ACH's support offer.

### Initial needs assessments and learning plans

Prior to engaging in support, participants complete a thorough one-to-one needs assessment with their support worker. This involves discussing and recording individual's circumstances, needs, barriers and aspirations so that they can be matched with relevant support. This is kept as a 'live' document that is reviewed regularly in ongoing one-to-one sessions and updated to reflect changes in participant's circumstances.

Before accessing language provision, participants also create an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) with their tutor. Participants set goals which they intend to achieve through the course. During the course, the ILP is reviewed to monitor progress against goals set. This document also helps tutors to deliver language learning provision that is relevant to the aspirations of their learners.



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## Delivering relevant support

### Individual support

ACH service users identified the support from their ACH key worker as both a means to accessing wider support (such as further education courses and counselling) but also as an important source of support itself. Service users found that support with personal admin tasks such as acquiring necessary documents for potential employers and form filling was particularly useful. In many cases, their key worker provided them with references which meant individuals had the required paperwork to access employment - a key barrier previously for many who had no documentation.

### ESOL

ACH deliver a wide range of ESOL courses including conversational English, community-based English, employability English and integration English. English language support was seen as invaluable by service users in enabling them to engage in everyday activities and participate fully in their local communities. As well as provision for lower level (pre-entry to level 2) learners, they run an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) course which helps service users to access higher education.

### Accredited courses

In partnership with Bristol City College they provide a range of accredited training courses including Food Hygiene, Health and Social Care, and IT. Some of the service users who were engaged in the IT course saw gaining a qualification in this area as beneficial to securing employment. They also provide employability skills sessions, ESOL courses (including employment-focused English, community-based English and conversational English) and information, advice and guidance (IAG) sessions.

### Employment support

ACH run a bi-weekly 'jobs club' – a drop-in session providing holistic employment-related support including CV guidance, job search support and interview practice, and welfare support advice. The National Careers Service are co-located at ACH to provide weekly one-to-one careers advice sessions. This support tends to be accessed by individuals looking to move into work.

### Job matching



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ACH support service users with specific skills and experience to tailor their CV to secure higher paying roles in sectors relevant to their educational and employment background.

### Impact (400 words)

#### Impact on individuals

At the time of conducting fieldwork, ACH were developing a data collection system to measure client pathways and outcomes, and the impact of support. Ideally, Management Information (MI) would be collected from point of entry and capture the following:

- Referral route
- Benefit claimed at referral
- Housing status
- Highest qualification level at referral
- Health (physical and mental health issues)
- Refugee status
- Ethnic group
- First language (and additional languages if relevant)
- If an ex-offender
- Family status by number of children

During their support journey, types of provision accessed, and engagement rate (i.e. duration or frequency of engagement with different support types) should be captured.

Success measures should include:

- Job outcomes by earning levels
- Job outcomes by sustainment (13 weeks, 6 and 12 months)
- Education outcomes by qualification type and level

In the absence of MI data, ACH staff reported a range of positive outcomes for service user:

**Employment:** Some refugees who took part in pre-employment training with the local bus company successfully went on to secure employment. The company offers starting salaries from £18,000 to £24,000.

However, many service users who are refugees with an ESOL need are in low-paid work with few progression opportunities. ACH staff members explained that these

service users are attracted to these opportunities as it enables them to move into work quickly and easily. Securing these roles often occurs via word of mouth.

ACH staff members and service users noted a range of other outcomes attributable to the support, including:

**Higher confidence and improved wellbeing:** For many service users, gaining confidence, feeling proud of their achievements and having a greater sense of belonging and agency were key outcomes. For some, having higher confidence made them feel more motivated to conduct job searches. Service users attributed this change to having access to one-to-one support sessions.

**Improved literacy and language skills:** Improving their ability to communicate in English was unanimously regarded by service users as absolutely crucial in enabling them to carry out daily tasks such as shopping, and participate and engage in society, through education, work and social activities.

**Improved practical skills:** Some service users were progressing towards completing or had completed their driving test through support from ACH. Having been cited as a key barrier to securing work, this was seen as a beneficial outcome.