

WERS

2021-2026

strategic plan

Welcome to West End Refugee Service's Strategic Plan

In this document we set out our renewed vision, mission, values and strategic priorities and what we will do to achieve these. This strategy is shaped and will continue to be shaped by the external context in which we work and the views and voices of those we work with.

People seeking sanctuary in the North East, continue to face increasingly intense challenges and uncertainties. We are entering into a period of significant change as this government proposes to introduce its new plan for immigration that threatens the rights of people seeking safety in the UK.

We have a fantastic team at WERS - of staff, volunteers, trustees, partners and supporters - and we have a strong track record. We will continue to provide essential support and opportunities to people seeking sanctuary here. We will continue to raise awareness and understanding of refugee issues. However, we will have renewed focus in certain areas.

We will also be responsive to the changing environment and the people we work with. We will review our plan as we progress. We will be bold, brave and compassionate in the way we approach this work.

OUR VISION AND MISSION

Our **VISION** is that the North East is a welcoming place for people seeking asylum and refugees where they find safety, support, have their human rights respected and can access opportunities to rebuild their lives, fulfil their potential, free of prejudice.

Our **MISSION** at WERS is to work to achieve positive change for asylum seekers and refugees through our direct support services, by creating opportunities for people to engage and thrive in their local communities and through our work raising awareness, promoting good practice and challenging injustices in the system.

We will become a platform for the voice of the people we support and will ensure their lived experience shapes the work we do.

OUR VALUES



EQUITY

Fairness is central to what we do. We challenge injustice.



COMPASSION

We maintain an ethos of care, kindness and give a big welcome to all we work with.



CHANGEMAKING

We take action to enable positive change by advocating, empowering, leading through good practice and influencing.



INCLUSION

We value and respect all experiences, perspectives and contributions. We celebrate diversity. Lived experience shapes what we do.

Feedback from the people we support

That the current direct support we provide is good. This includes advice and support on housing, linking with solicitors/legal support, GP/health liaison, issues with education, volunteering and befriending.

That the building as a welcoming, social space is important – a place to talk to people and meet new people, meet people with the same language.

That we help people make local connections, orientate themselves, discover nearby places through trips.

That the material support is important: hardship fund, food, toiletries, digital inclusion/tablets.



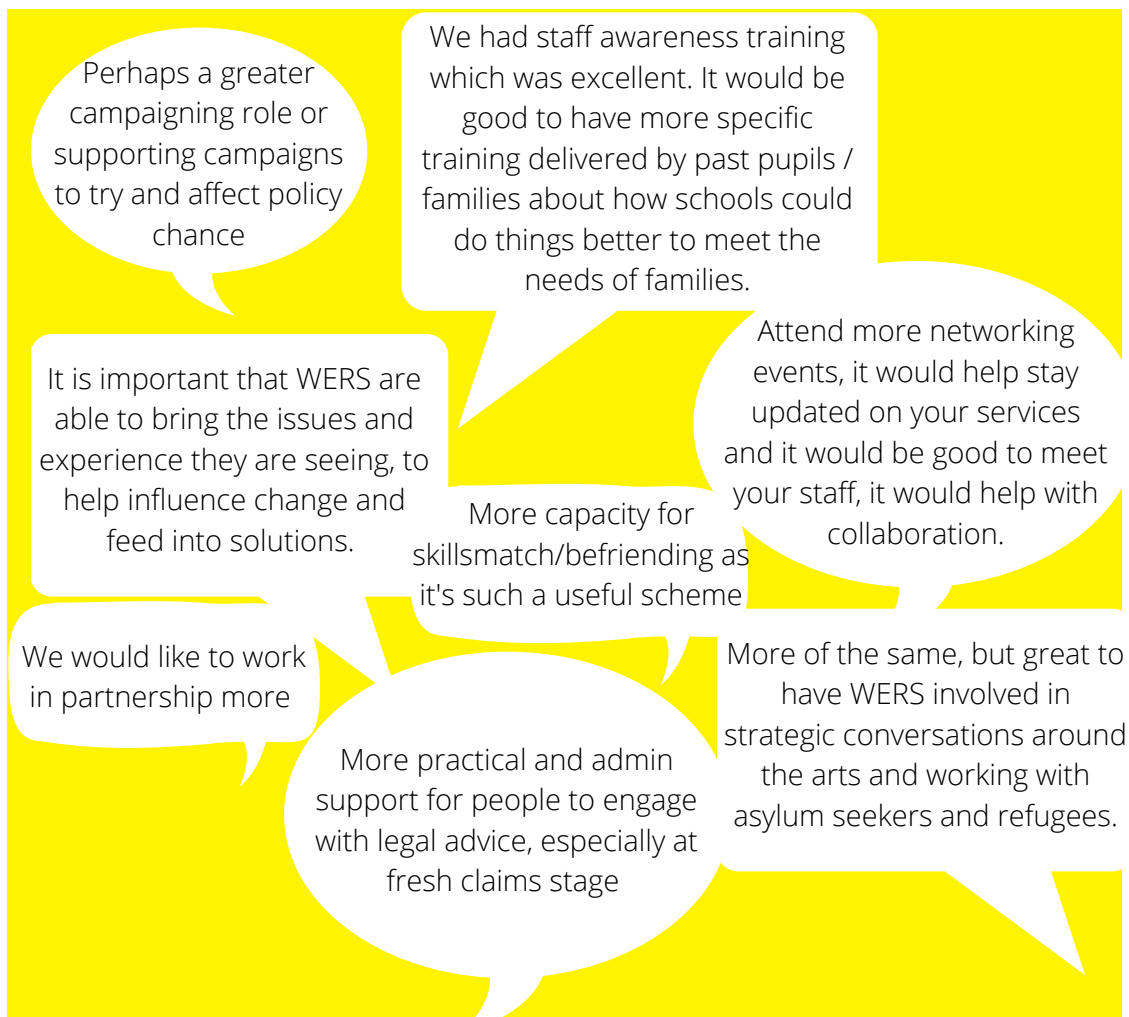
Feedback from our partners and the people we work with

Our referral partners, funders and other voluntary sector partners were very supportive of our work 'reliable', 'useful', 'high quality', 'empathic' and 'inspiring' being the chosen words to describe our work.

Our stakeholders most valued:

- our specialist knowledge in the support of refugees and people seeking asylum
- our work as a trusted partner
- our work to increase the wider sector's understanding of issues facing people seeking sanctuary here.

Our work was rated excellent by 78% of all respondees, with the rest rated good and our net promoter score was 87.



THE CONTEXT WE ARE WORKING IN

The strategic aims outlined below have been developed responding to the needs of the people we support and the following key features of the context we find ourselves in.

An increasingly hostile environment:

- This government is introducing policy that threatens the rights of the people seeking safety in the UK more than ever
- There are significant issues around asylum accommodation and support which have worsened over past year
- The New Plan for Immigration will create more hardship and uncertainty for the people we support
- Under this new plan we are expecting to see levels of destitution rise.

Covid & Inequality:

- Increased inequality in society, exacerbated by Covid 19 – poverty, digital exclusion, lack of access to services, poor and unsafe housing conditions
- Covid has disproportionately affected the wellbeing of the people we support, increasing feelings of isolation and anxiety.
- People are waiting longer for decisions on their asylum claims which is causing increasing stress and this does not look set to change

Racism:

- Racism and hate crime are on the rise and are experienced frequently by people seeking sanctuary in the North East
- Institutional racism is an integral part of the asylum system
- Local Communities:
- Whilst tension has risen in some areas, some communities have come together during Covid, they have shown solidarity and resistance in challenging times

Funding:

Funding is insecure and there is increased competition across the sector for grant funding and individual giving. We are seeing an increased need for our resources, services and experience/expertise.

OUR AIMS

Following consultation and review, we have developed new strategic aims for 2021-2026 under the following key themes:

Essential Support /Meeting basic needs

Continue and develop our direct support offer to ensure, where possible, that people's basic needs are met

- Continue to support people with their basic needs (financial, food, toiletries)
- Link people with access to material support available

Championing rights

Develop our direct support offer into a model that champions the rights of people seeking asylum and refugees

- The people we work with get access to the support they are entitled to
- Ensure the people we support understand their rights and the support they are entitled to
- Ensure we keep our focus on support for destitute/NRPF
- Ensure support model is co-designed by people with lived experience

Creating & Facilitating Opportunities

Develop partnerships with local communities and organisations that embody good practice to create ways for people to rebuild lives and make connections

- Support refugees and people seeking asylum into volunteering roles and placements
- Support asylum seekers and refugees to build on existing and develop new soft and technical skills to rebuild their lives here
- Ensure the people we support have access to opportunities for sports, leisure and cultural experiences
- Ensure local communities and organisations are well-informed and equipped to welcome and support refugees

Tackling prejudice, racism and injustice

Develop our awareness raising programme, community development initiatives, collaborative working and influencing to tackle prejudice, racism and injustice

- Increase understanding of injustices facing refugees and share and promote positive stories to dispel prejudice
- Develop and embrace a positively anti-racist approach to all our work, partnerships, communications and awareness raising
- Develop our profile and our approach to become a platform for the people we support to express their experiences, their needs and have their voice heard
- Ensure the voices of lived experience are at the heart of our communications

Become ***shaped and governed by people with lived experience*** of the asylum system

The way we deliver these aims above will be informed and shaped by the involvement of people with lived experience.

Healthy, strong and agile organisation

To ensure that WERS has the right resources, structures and processes in place to support all the above aims, we have identified the following key organisational priorities:

- Supporting the wellbeing of staff and volunteers
- Developing a learning and development culture for all staff and volunteers
- Build our data management systems and evaluation framework to become more evidence based, to enable us to reflect and learn more from our practice
- Diversify and increase stability of income
- Strengthen governance, looking at both diversity and skillsets
- Develop our building and its spaces to welcome people
- Attract people with lived experience to all areas of the organisation