training module 10: Gateway

What this module includes:

- what the Gateway Protection Programme aims to do
- how it works
- examples so far
- potential for Opening Doors partners to be involved

What the Gateway Protection Programme aims to do

The Gateway Protection Programme is aimed at resettling refugees in a ‘third’ country (Britain) directly from a ‘second’ country where they have taken refugee from war or other major problems in their own, ‘first’ country. The third country agrees to give them refugee status in advance, thus avoiding the asylum seeker stage.

Who benefits from Gateway?

Gateway is aimed at groups of refugees who have little prospect of returning peacefully to their first country, and who potentially could benefit from the opportunity to create a new life here.

The UNHCR (the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) assesses refugees for the Gateway programme in the second country where they are living, and its criteria are aimed at identifying the most vulnerable cases (eg people whose safety is at risk, those needing specialist care not available locally, vulnerable people such as lone parents with children, etc).

After the UNHCR has made its assessment, the Home Office makes its own assessment, prior to the people coming to Britain. Those that come are therefore assured of refugee status in advance.

How does Gateway work?

The success of Gateway depends on work in preparing the accommodation and support arrangements in this country, working with the ‘host’ communities to which they will move, and preparing the refugees before they leave their second country.

accommodation and support arrangements

Extensive preparation is need to ensure that the right number of units of accommodation will be available immediately the refugees arrive, appropriate to their family circumstances (including accessibility requirements where appropriate).
Support systems are required both to meet the refugees and ‘settle them in', and then to roll out the longer-term support programme. The types of support needed are similar to those described in modules 7 and 8, with the added factor that newly-arrived refugees are of course completely new to the country and without even the limited experience of Britain which (say) asylum seekers have.

This is not the place to go into the details of preparing the support arrangements, but there is now considerable experience available among the authorities and associations who initiated the Gateway programme.

**preparing the host community**

Gateway is very high profile locally, and of course it is vital that there is local political support, not just from the council but from ward members in the areas where resettlement takes place and from local MPs. Getting the local media ‘on board’ is also crucial.

At neighbourhood level, considerable work is needed in discussing the Gateway principles at an early stage with tenants' or residents’ groups, then engaging in a wider and more detailed programme across an area, which will involve identifying and focussing particularly on groups or local facilities which most need to be consulted and involved. This will include – among others – schools, places of worship that might be relevant to the Gateway refugees, their planned neighbours, etc, etc.

Experience in the areas where Gateway has operated so far has been that, with proper preparation, this work can be successfully done and the refugees can receive a positive welcome.

Some ideas on how to tackle these issues were referred to in module 9 and are included in chapter 6 of the CIH/JRF guide.

**preparation in the second country**

Once UNHCR has selected the refugees and the Home Office has agreed, and arrangements are in place for resettlement, a certain amount of work is done with the refugees to prepare them for life in Britain and give them specific information about the places where they will be resettled. English language training may also begin.

**Funding for Gateway**

Funding for Gateway is provided by the government. It is aimed at covering the first 12 months of the support which the refugees will need. It includes:

- housing benefit and income support costs
- costs of casework support
- cost of English language training
- extra costs for other services such as health (through the PCT).

Housing associations which take a lead in Gateway will need to look carefully at the financial arrangements. Funding covers direct costs, but there will be significant inputs of staff time, including at senior level, needed to make it work.
What’s in it for us?

Associations which get involved in Gateway will, first and foremost, be meeting the very real and obvious needs of people likely to be in far worse circumstances than their usual customers.

In addition, there could be many secondary advantages such as making better use of stock, promoting staff satisfaction and developing expertise in working with new client groups, and in building relationships with refugee communities.

Handled well, Gateway can make a significant contribution to wider community cohesion by (for example) providing volunteer opportunities for existing residents or stimulating the involvement of tenants’ groups (see the Sunderland example on p82 of the guide).

Examples so far

Currently 13 countries have Gateway-style programmes and in 2004 this led to over 80,000 refugees being resettled worldwide. This is a small proportion of the many millions of refugees in the world at any one time, but it does represent direct help to some of the most intractable cases and traumatised people, often condemned to living in refugee camps for many years.

Britain’s Gateway programme started only in 2004/05, with the resettlement of 151 refugees in Sheffield and Bolton. The refugees came originally from Liberia and East Congo. Since then, Sheffield accepted a further 51 refugees from Burma, and Bolton (with Bury) accepted a further 84 Sudanese refugees.

In total in 2005/06 about 260 refugees will have been resettled under the programme in five local authority areas.

The government has set a modest annual target of 500 Gateway resettlements, but so far this has not been met.

Potential to get involved

Clearly, the range of support needed by Gateway refugees means that it is unlikely that a housing association, even if it takes a lead role, could operate without the full backing of a local authority and other local service providers. In Sheffield and Bolton, housing associations have been involved in Gateway, but there has also been strong commitment – including political commitment – from the two local authorities.

The best ways to approach this will vary from place to place. There is the potential though for a housing association to have both a landlord role and possibly (depending on its experience) a casework support role – although this is most likely to be delivered through a partnership arrangement.

Potential partners include those within the sector, such as Refugee HA and Safe Haven, who already have experience of such support work.

There is also a possible role for MRCOs (whether in providing part of the support service or in offering services such as mentoring or interpreting).
After the first year

Inevitably there are a proportion of the resettled refugees who need support beyond the first year when funding runs out. Providing such support is greatly helped if there is local infrastructure for supporting refugees generally (as was the case in Sheffield and Bolton).

Resources on Gateway

The Home Office website has a Gateway section at www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk:80/lawandpolicy/ (look for ‘refugee integration’ then ‘resettlement’). Its booklet on Gateway (currently under revision) can be downloaded.

The magazine Inside Housing has run articles on Gateway, for example in the issue of 5 November 2004 about the arrival of refugees in Sheffield.

Follow up to training module 10

√ is Gateway relevant to our area?
√ do we know about the attitudes of local authorities?
√ what might our role be?
√ what partnerships would we need to consider?

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