

Equalities Participation Network – 28 March 2024

Present: Myshele Haywood (GREC), Shola Ajide (Fountain of Love Church), Susan Bains (No Recourse North East), Matt Carter (ACHSCP), Roslynn Fowler (Aberdeen Action on Disability), Carol Hannaford (ACC Sheltered Housing), Linzi Harrow (ACC), Ells Mchaffie (Guide Dogs), Mary Rasmussen (Guide Dogs). **Apologies:** John Whitfield, Grace Milne, Karen Finch.

Speaker: Susan Bains, No Recourse North East Partnership

Susan gave a brief presentation (see attached) about the Partnership and her role there. She also outlined No Recourse to Public Funds, or NRPF, a visa condition that's on most visa categories, including all student and spouse visas, work visas, and other categories (it's also imposed for people seeking asylum).

What is the No Recourse North East Partnership?

- Formed in 2014, when changes to visa rules meant more people began facing hardship because of NRPF. It now includes local councils, universities, religious groups, Shelter, Turning Point, GREC, and other organisations that work with people facing hardship because of NRPF.
- **Website:** nrnepartnership.org
- Susan does free trainings for organisations so they're aware of the issues around NRPF. Since 2022, she's trained 40 organisations.
- She also creates resources with information so people can understand their rights, runs several groups to focus on specific topics, and runs a 'lived experience' group for people with NRPF.

What is NRPF?

- NRPF means that a person can't access specific support from the UK/Scottish governments and local councils – for example, Universal Credit, housing benefit, child tax credit, Disability Living Allowance, etc – full list here: nrnepartnership.org/what-are-public-funds (does not include the NHS – as long as a person has paid the Health Surcharge)
- For most people, this is ok – but unexpected circumstances can cause a person to fall into destitution very quickly – like illness, losing a job, relationship breakdown, domestic abuse, or even 'just' the rising cost of living.
- Other examples:
 - Someone budgeted a certain amount to cover their time in the UK, but rent and utilities are more expensive than they expected, and they can't find enough work to cover the gap.
 - A student is sponsored by their home country's government to attend university in the UK, but political problems mean the funds aren't sent on time.
- NRPF has 'built in destitution.' People are put in an impossible situation.
- Accessing 'public funds' when you're not supposed to, even without realising it, can lead to deportation, visa not being renewed, or even prison (in rare cases) – so it's important to

make sure people know what they're allowed to access, and organisations know what they're allowed to offer.

- Not all services are 'public funds' – for example, people with NRPF can join waiting lists for social housing and access services from charities, children receive full time education to age 18 and can access student grants/loans for university. Full list here: migrationscotland.org.uk/migrants-rights-and-entitlements
- There are exceptions for people in certain situations, like fleeing domestic abuse or the death of a spouse – but it's a complex process.
- In 2022-23, RGU and Aberdeen University have had to put a lot more resources into helping international students – for example, the food bank nearest Aberdeen Uni went from 68 requests for food parcels one year, to over 1000 the next year – so the uni set up a food bank on campus.

Other info:

- Fountain of Love Church can support anyone looking for work through their job club – every Thursday from 12noon to 2pm. Contact info:
fountainoflove.org.uk
info@fountainoflove.org.uk
01224 574511
29-31 Palmerston Road, Aberdeen AB11 5QP
- Fair Way Scotland also provides support using a housing-first model.

Date of next meeting: Thursday 25 April, 4:00-5:00pm

Topic: TBC