



## CARITAS PLYMOUTH

# STEP BY STEP GUIDE FOR PARISHES CONSIDERING COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP

‘Make hospitality your special care’

Romans 12:13

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## Introduction

“You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God”  
(Leviticus 19:34).

In his [message on the 104<sup>th</sup> World Day of Refugees and Migrants](#) in 2018, Pope Francis expressed particular concern for the ‘*lamentable situation of many migrants and refugees fleeing from war, persecution, natural disasters and poverty*’. Pope Francis called on ‘every Parish, every religious community, every monastery, every sanctuary of Europe, take in one family’.

In response to Pope Francis’ call, the Diocese of Plymouth agreed that Caritas Plymouth would be the Lead Sponsor for Catholic-led groups interested in community sponsorship across the Diocese. Through its work with refugees and migrants, Caritas Plymouth aims to explore how the Gospel Imperative to ‘Welcome the Stranger’ can be translated into practical action. The Community Sponsorship Scheme offers a way for local groups - including Parish groups - to assist refugees fleeing war and violence to integrate safely into our local communities. It is a way to put local communities at the heart of a family’s journey to a new life in the UK.

The Lead Sponsor role provided by Caritas Plymouth, means that Caritas Plymouth takes on the legal responsibilities with the Home Office, freeing Parishes up to concentrate on resettling the family.

## Step by Step Guide to resettling a refugee family in your Parish.

Community Sponsorship is the programme for resettling a family from the UNHCR refugee camps. The community assumes responsibility for a refugee family, from first arrival through to settled independence as part of their local community. Families usually come from Syria but recently the programme has been extended to countries such as Iraq and Sudan. Uniquely, it relies on local volunteers. There are three key elements to the resettlement:

**Housing** – Find and prepare a suitable, affordable family home

**Funding** – Raise a support fund to cover additional needs

**Support** – Plan and deliver a programme of resettlement support

## Thinking about being a Community Sponsor?

Before embarking on this journey it is worth looking at a number of websites to get a good understanding of what is involved. Sean Ryan, the national Catholic Co-ordinator has also written a [detailed guide](#). Advice, training and guidance is available from [Reset](#), a national community and refugee charity:

The Home Office provides the family with a five-year visa which entitles them to the same welfare benefits, healthcare and schooling as British families. Additional language support is also provided in schools. Unlike asylum seekers, families are allowed to work and participate in training programmes. The formal [guidance from the Home Office](#) and the application form give more details.



### First steps

Once you decide you want to explore this further, the first step is to contact Deborah Fisher, the Caritas Manager on 07761 595567 or [caritas@prcdtr.org.uk](mailto:caritas@prcdtr.org.uk). She will explain all the support Caritas Plymouth provides and the different parts of the application form where Caritas Plymouth takes responsibility. This support is available to all Catholic-led Community Sponsors. Members of the wider community are welcome to participate but the Group must be Catholic-led and linked to a Catholic Church or School. The support of the local Parish priest is vital.

Prospective Community Sponsors will be welcome at [Charis](#), a regional network for Groups applying to the Home Office or waiting to welcome their families. Charis started as a Community Sponsorship Group in Taunton and recently welcomed their third family in Exeter. They receive a small amount of funding from the Home Office to offer training and run a regional network. They can put you in touch with a volunteer mentor to help you through the application process. Contact Lisa Westlake on 07493 410580.

### Starting to think about applying?

The most important step is to discuss this with others in the Parish – particularly the Parish priest. A key element of any community sponsorship scheme is having a strong group of volunteers, able to work well as a team and take on lead responsibilities. One or two people – no matter how dynamic – will not be able to support a family with all the complexities involved. You don't have to have a fully formed group at this stage but need to be sure that a good group could be formed.

Another important step is to check that you have local authority support from your local District Council and County Council or Unitary Authority. A call to the main Council number should get the details of your local Refugee Officer. The Home Office also runs a local authority led resettlement scheme so Refugee Officers deal with this as well as Community Sponsorship and are unusually very knowledgeable and helpful. Charis also has these contacts if you get stuck.

The local authority will talk to you about whether the location of your town or village is suitable for the resettlement of a refugee family. They take into account issues such as access to healthcare, schools, a mosque and halal food. Families have been successfully resettled in rural locations but you will have to show that you have a plan to provide the family with the necessary facilities.

Once you know the location of your accommodation the local authority will also liaise with the police to ensure it is a safe location for a refugee family. Sadly, hate crimes still happen.

A further important step is to set up a secure email and data storage area for communication with volunteers, Caritas Plymouth and external partners. Caritas Plymouth will provide one secure email linked to the secure prcdtr account and advise about data protection and confidentiality requirements.

Sidmouth is the first Parish in the diocese to resettle a family. Their application form was praised by the Home Office and they have offered to share it with Catholic Groups. Every Parish is different and will choose different management models and accommodation arrangements but it may be helpful to see a completed application form from another Catholic Community Sponsor. Caritas Plymouth also has a sample application form from Caritas Salford, who have 14 Community Sponsorship Groups.

## Preparing your Plan

You will need around 10 people actively involved in preparing different parts of the application form and around 20 volunteers.

The Home Office will want to see evidence that your local leads (for example on property, benefits, language, schooling and healthcare) all have relevant experience.

You will also need a couple of volunteers with experience of working with refugees or Arabic language skills.

Caritas Plymouth can come to an event organised to launch the process in the Parish and help explain it to the wider community. It is unlikely that you will be able to find all the skills needed amongst Parishioners and Community Sponsors find it very rewarding working with new people and bringing them into the Church family.

## Housing

One of the biggest problems for most Community Sponsors is finding appropriate accommodation. It has to be guaranteed for two years, affordable (with the rent linked to local housing allowances as the family will be reliant on welfare benefits), have its own front door and be in a police approved location.

Some faith organisations have seen properties donated by Parishioners. Where possible, the diocese of Plymouth will support the use of vacant presbyteries or religious buildings as accommodation for refugee families.



The local authority will visit the property to approve its use as well as the police check. They will be considering issues such as decent sized rooms and fire safety. They will also note any issues such as steps which may restrict the use of the property for a family with mobility issues. During the pre-approval process, you will be asked if you are willing to adapt the property to accommodate additional needs and if so, if the Parish can accommodate these needs.

There are dedicated agencies helping relocate families with additional needs so if you feel that the Parish could not provide the necessary support or healthcare just say so.

It is strongly encouraged that you use a letting agency to manage the property. They can provide the inventory and tenancy agreement and take responsibility for the safety of the property. It helps you focus on the resettlement of the family and avoids any risk to the church's reputation if there is a problem with the property.

There is a model tenancy agreement that you will be asked to use. Caritas Plymouth can help advise you how to translate any changes to the tenancy agreement into Arabic through [Multi-lingua](#), a not for profit organisation in Exeter.

Caritas Plymouth will provide public liability insurance and buildings insurance if you are using a diocesan owned property. You will only need to insure the contents (such as the furniture) and help the family insure their belongings.

## Funding

Another important issue is fundraising and budgeting. You will need to raise £9,000 for the immediate needs of the family when they land in the UK and prove this to the Home Office as part of your application. You will need a fundraising team as part of your structure and a way of recording income and expenditure that fits with the Parish finance system as the diocese will need to provide financial reports to the Home Office and reclaim gift aid on your behalf.

The costs of ESOL (English teaching), interpreters and translators will be significant and a big part of your budget. Sidmouth have estimated that they need to raise over £20,000.

Grants are available and the Home Office provides a small amount of money for English teaching which can be used flexibly. Most faith organisations find that Parishioners are very generous with their time and donations. Sidmouth had an Advent giving calendar where people bought a household item suggested in the Advent calendar and they were blessed as part of the advent preparations. In this way their house was stocked with duvets, glasses and kitchen goods.



## Resettlement Planning and Training

Once you have the basics such as a management structure and secure communications in place, you can start to put personalise our template Volunteer Handbook (available from Deborah at Caritas) and formally recruit volunteers. The Volunteer handbook contains all the policies and procedures agreed by the Diocese for community resettlement. It is important that these procedures are followed and that the recruitment process complies with the Catholic safer recruitment policies - taking up references and carrying out DBS checks where necessary. The safeguarding team and Caritas Plymouth can help.

Caritas Plymouth will come and help if you hold a training event for your volunteers explaining the complaints policy and outline their role. They will also demonstrate the App which is used to record interactions with the family. We can also offer online sessions through zoom or Teams if you would like a 'virtual' group meeting.

Safeguarding training is provided for free through Educare and the Safeguarding Team can also attend a local training event explaining this and their role as well as data protection and GDPR. The Safeguarding Team will also check the safeguarding arrangements with the local Safeguarding Board as required by the Home Office, before the application is submitted.

As you get nearer to submitting your application and welcoming a family, you can also book Reset training and cultural training. It is best to do this when preparing to meet your family so the information is fresh and your volunteers are in place.

## Submitting your application

When the application is ready it can go to Reset for their free 'application check' service. They offer useful advice on any points you may have missed which would be picked up by the Home Office. You may also be asked to send the County and District Council a draft, so might want to do that at the same time as RESET and then you can collate all the comments, with the final version going back to the County Council.

Once finalised, the application will need to be signed off by Canon John Deeny, the Vicar General and Chair of the Caritas Committee. He has legal responsibility for the resettlement of the family as the Lead Sponsor.

The final application should be sent to the local authorities or unitary authority to provide a formal consent letter. This satisfies the Home Office that they have been consulted and that issues such as availability of healthcare and schooling and security have been considered.

Only the final application form can be used and it can take a while. Applicants should consider getting draft approval in place so it is ready to go when the final application is sent to the local authority or allowing enough time in their project plan. Three applications in East Devon were delayed by two months as the Home Office didn't accept their district council's consent by email and the district council had to decide whether the full Council had to sign off the consent letter.

Caritas Plymouth will then submit the required documentation to the Home Office.

## Pre-Approval

The Home Office will check that all the relevant Agencies such as the local authorities, police and Safeguarding Board have all been formally consulted. They will also check that the volunteers have the necessary experience and that the property is suitable (by a report from the local authority).

The local authority will double check the final details with the Parish and start to discuss specific needs. By this stage the Home Office often has a specific family in mind.

During the pre-approval process (on the property form) you will be asked if you are willing to adapt the property to accommodate additional needs and if so, if the Parish can accommodate these needs. Your local County Council also have a say on whether they are prepared to accept a family with significant additional needs. There are dedicated agencies helping relocate families with additional needs so if you feel that the Parish could not provide the necessary support or healthcare just say so.

The Home Office will make a pre-approval visit to the Parish to discuss any amendments which they require. This meeting usually consists of two representatives from the Home Office, two from the Parish and two from Caritas Plymouth – Canon John Deeny and the Caritas Manager.

Once the Parish and Caritas Plymouth make any amendments, the application is resubmitted to the Home Office.

## Approval

Congratulations!

You will be pleased to hear that once the application is successful most of the negotiations with the Home Office over the legal agreement are Caritas Plymouth's responsibility.

Caritas Plymouth will sign the Agreement and provide documents such as the Public Liability Certificate.

The Parish has to finalise the Key Facts document. This is a two-page document for the refugee family giving basic information about the Group, the property and the local area. Caritas Plymouth will advise you how to arrange for the document to be translated into Arabic.

Once the Agreement and these documents have been submitted, the Home Office will start the matching process.

Caritas Plymouth and the Parish lead will be shown a video with confidential information about the family and their journey. This will be sent securely and then deleted. Only the basic facts in this video are shared. The Parish can discuss whether they will be able to meet the needs of the family and if they feel they would be a good fit for the Parish and the local area.



At this stage the family do not know that they are under consideration so they will not be disappointed if the Parish feels it cannot meet their needs. This process continues until a family is agreed by the Home Office, Parish and local authority.

It takes about 6-8 weeks for the family to land in the UK once the agreement is signed. During this time the group will need to finalise the pre-arrival action plan with Caritas Plymouth as well as the 3-month post-arrival plan and regular monitoring and evaluation meetings.

**It is absolutely critical that the families' arrival is not publicised in any way and that the location of their accommodation is not shared.** The Home Office enforce Media and Communications restrictions to keep the family secure and protect their privacy. Failure to comply could result in the Diocese failing to comply with its legal obligations.

**Caritas Plymouth**

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