

CASE STUDY —

Peartree, April - June 2023

Refugee Gym Scheme – Active Local Process

Herts Young Homeless (HYH) is an independent charity, established in 1998, providing various free services which support and assist 16-24-year-olds who are homeless or threatened with homelessness across Hertfordshire. Last year they supported over 2,098 people. Across the UK, young adults aged under 25 years accounted for around a quarter of households applying for help with homelessness. Trends suggest an increase in the complexity of homeless household needs in recent years, particularly concerning physical and mental health conditions.

The services include mediation, education, and specialist prevention services to avoid family breakdowns. The education service includes HYH going into schools, helping young people navigate issues such as family arguments, advice about moving out, being kicked out, staying with friends, struggling to pay bills, and feeling unsafe at home.

If homeless prevention is not possible, HYH supports young people with advice, support and signposting services. The charity also has a supported living accommodation in Peartree, Welwyn Garden City. The accommodation has a live-in support worker who helps the young people with all aspects of living independently, such as budgeting, cleaning, cooking and looking after their health and wellbeing.

This case study highlights the process following a 30 minute conversation, in which a place-based approach to tackling inequalities supports the needs and benefits of community relationships, community bridging and the role of Active Local Officers.



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Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council (WHBC) has funded individual refugees with a three-month gym membership at local leisure facilities. The scheme is open to refugees who have sought asylum in the United Kingdom (UK) in the last 12 months. Eligibility includes Ukrainian residents living in Ukraine before January 2022 and other international refugees granted refugee or asylum status by the UK government.

This project aims to enable refugees to gain the physical and mental wellbeing benefits of physical activity and help refugees' experience of life in the UK be positive. Refugees are exposed to severe mental and physical strain and traumatic experiences during their migration. The risk of psychiatric disorders is prevalent among international refugees. Physical activity has been utilised to treat various psychiatric disorders and is essential to our wellbeing. Physical activity positively impacts health-related quality of life, depressive symptoms, anxiety symptoms, and cardiorespiratory fitness.

Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL), also known as Better, is the leisure provider located in Welwyn Hatfield where these individuals can access these funded gym memberships. Applications can be made to GLL for the scheme by individual refugees or someone on their behalf. Host families, refugee charities, and GLL centre staff can make a proxy application.

Herts Welcomes Refugees (HWR) have been supporting the refugees in completing their application forms to use the leisure facilities. Herts Welcomes Refugees was formed in 2015 under the name of Herts Welcomes Syrian Families (registered charity 2017) and changed their name to HWH in 2019.



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Herts Welcomes Refugees supports refugees across Hertfordshire by meeting the immediate needs of new arrivals, providing language support, supporting their wellbeing, a befriending service and many other services.

Herts Welcomes Refugees aims to work with local councils and organisations to ensure refugees and asylum seekers can have access to appropriate services, integrate into their local communities by connecting them with befrienders and community groups and advocate on behalf of refugees and asylum seekers, engage with decision-makers and raise public awareness. Herts Young Homeless approached Herts Sport & Physical Activity Partnership (HSP) Active Local (AL) team to enquire about the current physical activity provisions in the AL area of Peartree. The charity supported three young Sudanese males who arrived in the UK as unaccompanied minors and had had a traumatic experience travelling to the UK. The young men, who were being supported in the supported living accommodation, had expressed concerns for their mental health by not being active and feeling isolated.

Through a place-based approach, the Active Local Officer had already built strong relationships with local stakeholders, including WHBC, GLL and HWR and was aware of the Refugees Gym Scheme and supporting agencies.

Our Active Local Officer then contacted the Sports Development Officer at WHBC, who works closely with GLL, and extended the invitation to this scheme to these three young males so they could benefit from the positive effects of physical activity on their mental health and overall wellbeing.



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Herts Welcomes Refugees (HWR) has been supporting WHBC and GLL, by completing these applications with the refugees enabling this cohort to access physical activity. The Active Local Officer reached out to a member of HWR and asked if she could assist HYH and their residents in completing the application forms. The Active Local Officer was then able to link all the services together to help facilitate the use of this scheme. Through this asset-based community development model, local services can use their communities' resources and empower groups and organisations to work together in a joined-up approach.

Physical activity programs facilitated by local authorities, public health and not-for-profit groups are fundamental for improving the rates of physical activity in communities. Previous reports have highlighted the importance of multi-agency collaborations in bridging the gap in refugees' health and social care needs and existing physical activity programs. Many authorities and not-for-profit organisations deliver physical activity programs at the community level with minimal or no cost for participation in community-based physical activity.

Herts Young Homeless said, "Working together with HSP has meant that we could arrange for access to exercise facilities for some of our vulnerable young people and signpost others to affordable exercise sessions in the area. This would be unattainable otherwise and is really important to their mental health and wellbeing whilst giving a sense of belonging within the community."

