Council hosts asylum seekers employment visit

Thursday 20 December, 2018

The UK currently has one of the most restrictive policies in Europe in relation to the opportunity for those seeking political asylum to gain work. Not only is this debilitating for the individuals concerned, but it also increases the burden on hard pressed public services.

Thanks to a small grant from the Quartet Community Foundation, ACH / Himilo is working with Bristol Refugee Rights to give asylum seekers experience of businesses in the UK through short visits to employers across the city. Even though asylum seekers aren't currently able to work, the idea behind the project is that experience of UK workplaces will positively impact their integration.

The first employer visit took place this week with a visit to Bristol City Council.

Cllr. Ruth Pickersgill, Easton Ward, said: "So many asylum seekers in my ward and in other parts of Bristol have qualifications, skills and experience that we desperately need in our City, and yet they are unable to put them to use. I really welcome this scheme which will help them to be 'work ready' as soon as their refugee status is agreed, and enable them to support themselves and their families, contribute to the local economy and enrich our local workforce."

Marvin Rees, Mayor of Bristol, said: "Bristol is proud to be a City of Sanctuary, recognising the contribution that asylum seekers and refugees make to the city and seeking to include them as fully as possible in all aspects of social and economic life.

"We are missing out on a huge asset because asylum seekers are unable to work whilst their applications for refugee status are processed and we want to do all we can to support people in this situation. By working with ACH to offer employment taster sessions we will hope to ensure asylum seekers in the city feel confident and ready to find work if the restrictions are lifted soon."

One of the attendees for the visit was Souvik, from India, who has been here on a protection claim for the past four and a half years, but not permitted to work. He said: "Please think about the many skilled workers being wasted. There are plenty of educated people who could be possible future leaders."

David Jepson, ACH / Himilo Director and Policy Advisor, said: "We do need a change in the law to reform this absurd system, but rather than just wait for this we have introduced this pilot scheme so that those concerned can have a better understanding of the range of work available and the pathways to it. We are also hopeful that the recent campaign by the #LiftTheBan coalition, of which ACH / Himilo are a member, will result in some of the restrictions on asylum seekers working being lifted in the near future."

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