

# ACH in the Community: A story of women, education and business

Ashley Community Housing (ACH) started when a few members of the refugee community in Bristol decided that more needed to be done to support people's resettlement needs. Since we were founded in 2008, we have been able to successfully meet the needs of a specific community primarily because our CEO and many of our staff have **first-hand experience** of what our tenants have been through and therefore what types of support our tenants need. Ashley Community Housing is therefore not simply a housing and training 'provider'. The clue's in the name: we are a housing association committed to supporting the **communities** we work with. Whilst we do things for the community, what is most important is that we do things from within the community.

Based on this principle, our ethos does not involve providing hand-outs. Rather, we are about supporting people to reach their potential, which they are often prevented from achieving by societal barriers that hold them back. Much of what we do involves facilitating the actions of people who are already leading change within their community from the grassroots level. By listening to local people's needs, we are able to build upon steps they have already taken in order to bring their ideas to fruition.

A perfect example of this is the way that our **Health & Social Care course** derived from a need within the female refugee group in Bristol. The course has its origins in a group of women from within the community who set up an informal childcare group to enable one another to work and carry out daily tasks without having to worry about their children. This also met a need in that it provided childcare for free, as many of our tenants and learners could not afford childcare costs.

Many of these women recognised the opportunity to develop this informal group into an employment opportunity and came to ACH with the idea for us to establish a course in connection with a local training provider. Since being approached by this group we have been able to offer various courses in this sector. Each course that ACH provides is accredited by an awarding body for educational qualifications including NOCN and NCFE. This enables learners to gain an official qualification and to progress into higher education and into subject related jobs. The courses in this sector have are in high demand, with us having to include new courses. This shows the high demand for such educational opportunities within this community and in a suitable location to our learners.

The establishment of this course shows our growing reputation within the communities we work in as a leading provider of specialist training. We did not set up a course and then seek out people to enrol; people came to us with their needs and we responded accordingly. We are happy to be

able to build a bridge between training providers and marginalised members of the city in a way that allows people to undertake educational opportunities of interest and relevance to them and to their futures.

