

Family Reunions - an essential part of the resettlement process

Last week we published on our **blog** and social media accounts the story of one of our Birmingham tenants being reunited with her daughter after 11 years. This heart-warming story served as a lovely reminder of the impact our work has on our tenants and our mission.

"To support the settlement and resettlement needs of refugees, vulnerable homeless and other displaced people, to develop their independence, promote their positive contribution to the community and ease their integration into UK life."

Sara was separated from her daughter, Hasene, in 2004 when she arrived in the UK to look for work in order to provide for her daughter back in Sudan. Sara was referred to Ashley Community Housing by **Midlands Heartservices**. Since then, Sara has worked closely with her support worker, Sam order to get permanent accommodation, enrol on college courses, register with her GP, and even be reunited with her daughter.

"I didn't know Birmingham and now I have settled well. I can always approach my support worker Sam about something I am unsure of and I know she has my best interest at heart."

Now they are reunited, Sara is keen to continue her studies at College and Hasene dreams of going to school in the UK, making British friends, and becoming a fashion designer!

"I feel so happy, and a lot of weight has been lifted off my shoulders. All that stress and worry has been building up, but now that I have my daughter by my side, I feel complete."

Sara

Their happy story is one of many that we have at ACH. Each year we deal with up to twenty-five family reunions. These reunions are an important part of the journey that ACH takes its tenants on.

In the past few years legal aid has been cut, causing poor disadvantaged people, such as our tenants, to face difficulties accessing legal advice in situations such as getting their family into the country. We work closely with [Refugee Action](#) and the [Red Cross](#) to offer support to tenants to assist their family reunion; for them to do so otherwise they would have to pay for a solicitor, costing them potentially thousands of pounds which they simply do not have. Our support staff provide the necessary support to the tenant as they prepare the evidence needed for the immigration process, with our partners delivering on the complex legal side of this work.

Many refugees arrive in the UK after being forced to flee conflict areas, with no choice but to leave their family behind. This is a deeply traumatising and stressful time for everyone. Not only have they arrived in a new country, often to a new culture and frequently with little English, they are also dealing with the strain of being separated from their family.

When tenants arrive at ACH, the resettlement process happens very rapidly. ***The first few hours are essential in changing a tenant's life and outcomes. This window of time is crucial in building up confidence within our tenants, which essentially starts the resettlement process. It is very important for improving new tenants' mental health, as tenants often have hard to identify low levels of depression and anxiety due to problems at home.***

The initial resettlement process is about making each tenant feel safe and secure in order to be able to restart their lives. At first they are supported to meet their basic needs through housing, benefit support, and GP and other health registration. They then work alongside their support worker who facilitates a tailored package of training and support. The support ACH provides has a degree of flexibility and can be delivered in a way that works best for each individual.

When tenants first arrive, they often face many barriers and it is up to our culturally responsive support workers to establish a support plan for each individual. Through this personalised approach, each tenant builds deep trust between themselves and their support worker resulting in the right level of support for their needs. This tailored approach has proven time and time again to succeed in empowering the tenants to take on personal responsibilities. The impact of this swift resettlement is invaluable to the tenants' wellbeing.

A huge part of resettlement for anybody anywhere in the world is dependent on mental wellbeing. Understandably, the strain of being separated from a family member is often a huge

weight and can significantly hinder the resettlement process. Reunions significantly improve a tenant's wellbeing and mental health, which in turn allows for progression onto our other services and ultimately helps them to 'move on' with their lives and become fully independent.

Our ex tenant Adib is a prime example of the benefits of our reunion service. He arrived in the UK in 2013 and came to ACH in 2014 having fled the conflict in Syria. He had no choice but to leave his wife and children in Syria.

"Before my family was reunited with me, I was very stressed. I had stress every day. Because I didn't know sometimes where my family was. There is lots of fighting in Syria. It's very bad."

After a year and a half without being able to see his family, and having settled in the UK, Adib decided to get help with ACH to be reunited with his family. Through the **refugee family reunion scheme**, ACH helped Adib to find an appropriate solicitor to handle his application. He was then supported to compile the necessary supporting evidence to maximise the chances of a positive outcome of his claim. Adib was also supported in acquiring a DNA test for his children, which was very challenging to arrange with the medical staff in Damascus. Adib submitted his application in November 2014 and his wife was interviewed at the embassy in December. On 9th February 2014, Adib's family were asked to come to the embassy to collect their passports. They had received their visas and they have now been reunited!

"ACH helped me a lot. They have helped me with my reunion application, getting a solicitor and for anything I needed. They helped me get my family over here. The first time my family came here I was very happy. I had butterflies."

"ACH were so good to me. I am very happy. I thank all the staff in the office especially Mr. Tom. In the office I found broad smiles, good treatment and assistance which has no limits. As I am unable to speak English I need a lot of help and am grateful for the support I have received."

Adib

Adib has now moved out of ACH accommodation and moved on with his life. He is now living happily with his family in Bristol and working as a painter/decorator. Having come to ACH with

no English and without his family, being in a very stressed and traumatised state of mind, he is now with the help of ACH looking to set up his own carpentry business.

To see more inspiring success stories, including Adib's, watch our [video here](#).

We aim to create transformative change within our tenants by making them feel safe and secure in order to allow them to restart their lives.

