



Access to Healthcare for Asylum Seekers and Refugees

March 2019

Introduction

Local Healthwatches have been set up across England to create a strong, independent consumer champion with the aim to:

- Strengthen the collective voice of citizens and communities in influencing local health and social care services to better meet their needs.
- Support people to find the right health and social care services for them by providing appropriate information, advice and signposting.

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees works with local people, patients, service users, carers, community groups, organisations, service providers and commissioners to get the best out of local health and social care services. This doesn't just mean improving services today but influencing and shaping services to meet the needs of the local communities tomorrow.

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees is steered by a Board of volunteers, commissioned by the Local Authority and accountable to the public. Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees are the only non-statutory body whose sole purpose is to understand the needs, experiences and concerns of people who use health and social care services and to speak-out on their behalf.

Healthwatch has:

- The statutory right to be listened to; Providers and Commissioners must respond to Healthwatch within 20 days of submission of requests for information or reports.
- The statutory power to Enter & View publicly funded health and social care services.
- A statutory seat on the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Rationale

The asylum seeker and refugee population in Stockton-on-Tees is diverse with a wide range of social, cultural and health needs. Asylum seekers and refugees have different health and wellbeing issues depending on lifestyle risk factors, cultural practices, country of origin, genetic and hereditary factors and wider determinants (poor housing, lower economic opportunities, unemployment and living in deprived areas). The most recent national UK figures for asylum seekers is in 2017 with 40,736 asylum seekers in receipt of support (under section 95) from the Local Authorities, 833 of which were being supported in Stockton-on-Tees¹. Healthwatch felt it was important to engage with the asylum seeker and refugee community to gain a greater understanding of their views and experience of healthcare services in Stockton-on-Tees.

Definition of terms:

Asylum Seeker

A person who has left their country of origin and formally applied for asylum in another country but whose application has not yet been concluded².

Refused asylum seeker

A person whose asylum application has been unsuccessful and who has no other claim for protection awaiting a decision. Some refused asylum seekers voluntarily return home, others are forcibly returned and for some it is not safe or practical for them to return until conditions in their country change².

Refugee

In the UK, a person is officially a refugee when they have their claim for asylum accepted by the government².

Methodology

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees designed a questionnaire to gather feedback (Appendix 1). The staff team made contact with community drop-in leaders to agree dates and time to attend the asylum seeker and refugee drop-ins.

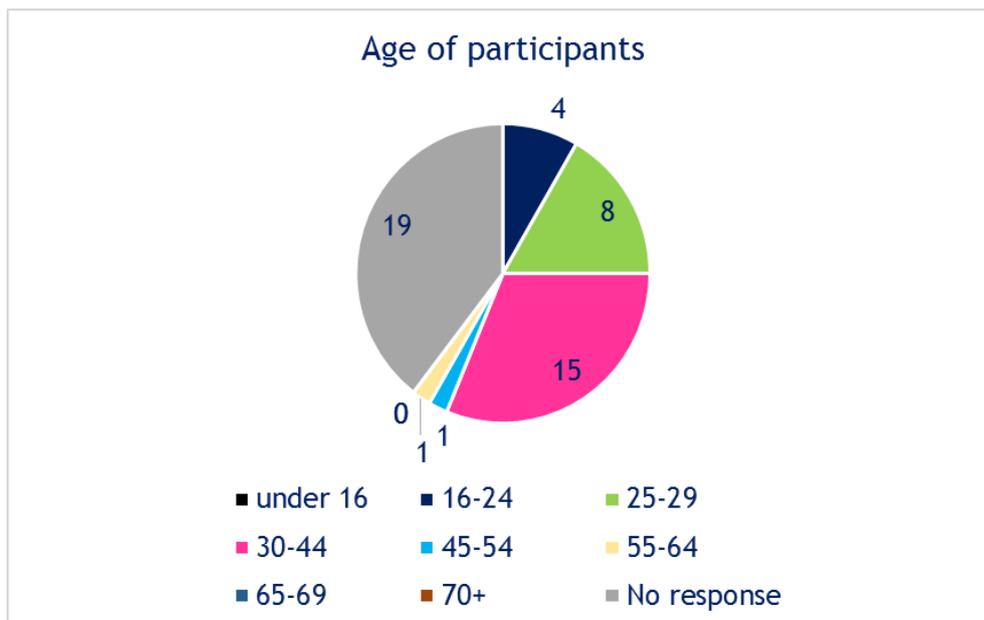
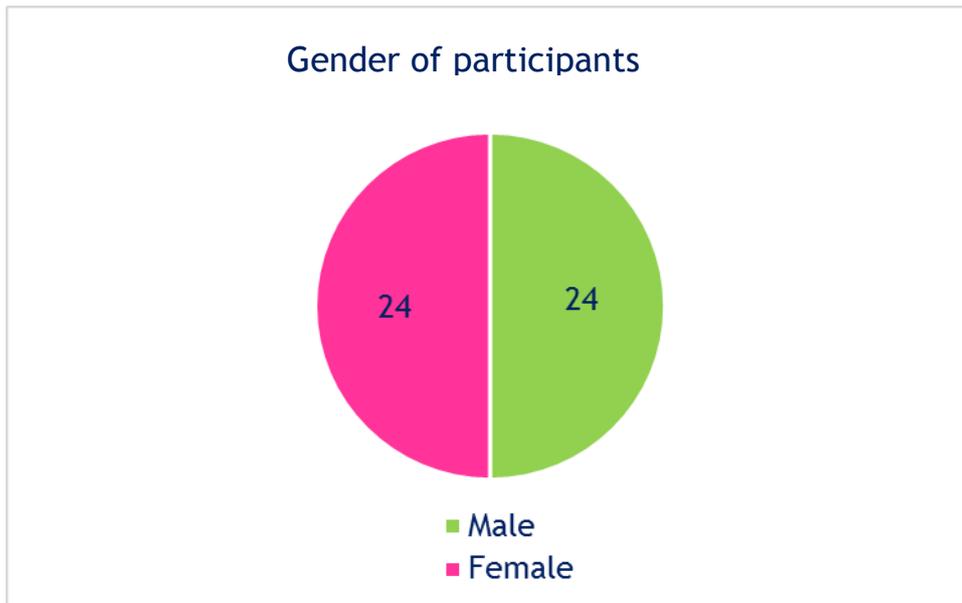
The following drop-ins were attended:

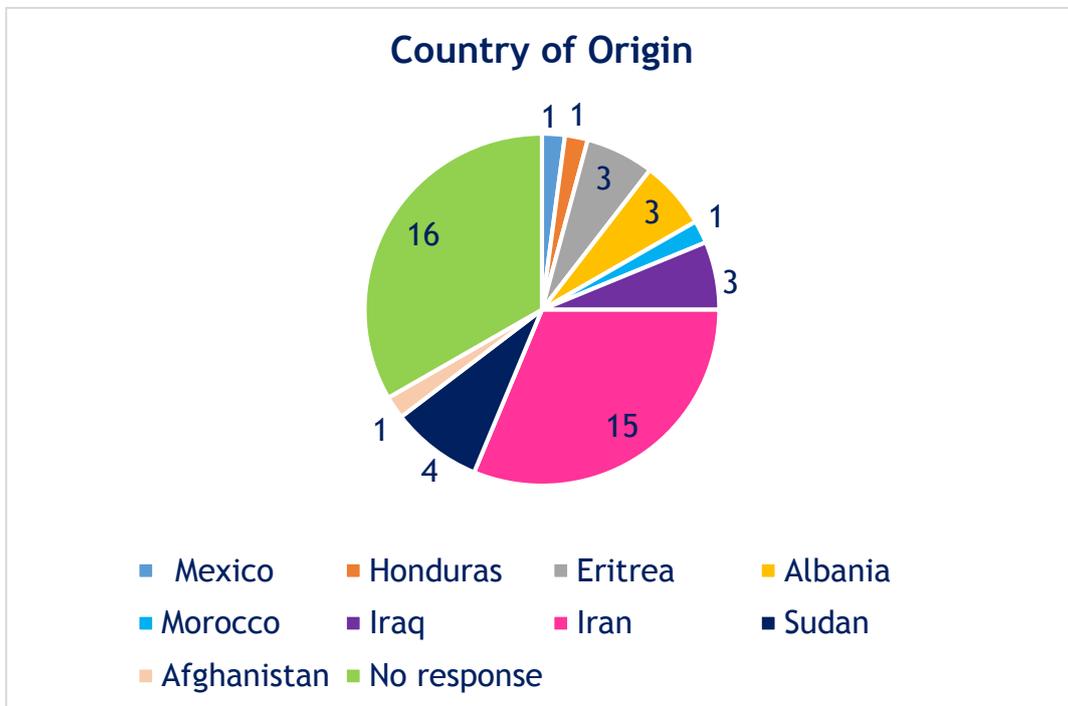
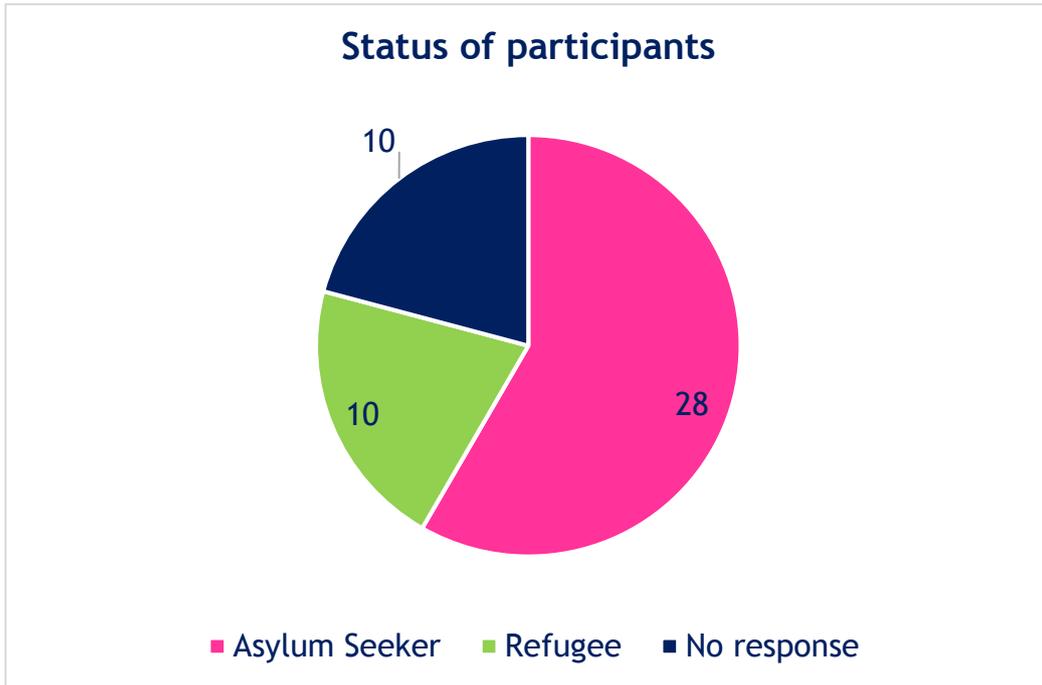
- Yarm Road Methodist Church on Thursday 28th February
- Stockton Baptist Church on Friday 1st March
- Stockton Baptist Church on Monday 4th March

Results

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees engaged with a total of 48 asylum seekers and refugees.

The following demographic data was gathered from the participants:

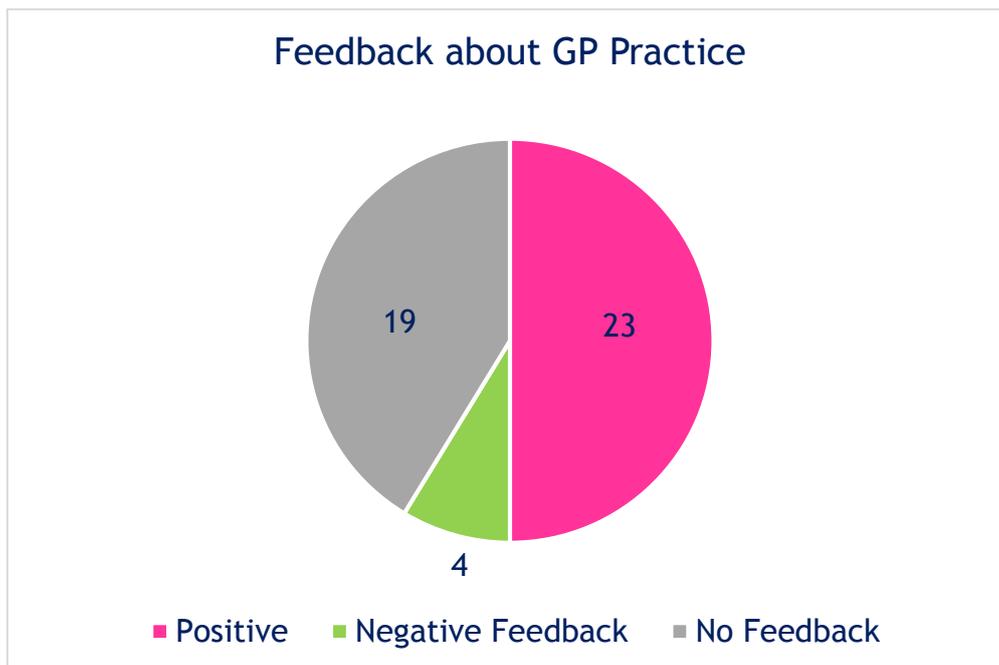




The feedback and results were as follows:

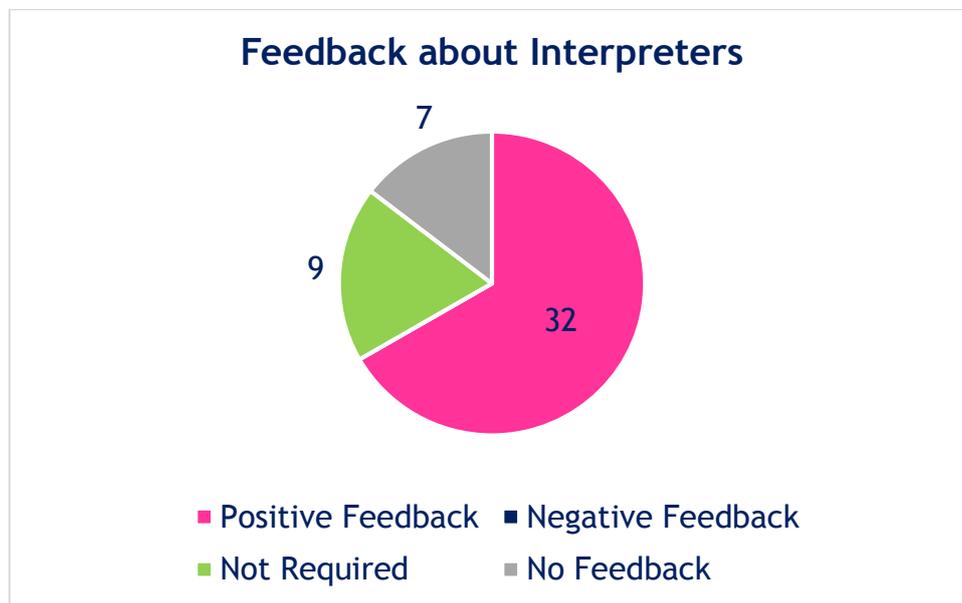


Only two participants were not registered with a GP Practice, the majority of participants were registered at the Arrival Practice. Arrival Practice provides a specialist service for newly arrived asylum seekers in Stockton-on-Tees. Arrival Practice has been found to be a huge benefit to asylum seekers and refugees in Stockton-on-Tees by improving access to healthcare services, interpreters and information.



Some of the participants gave feedback about their experiences at the GP practice:

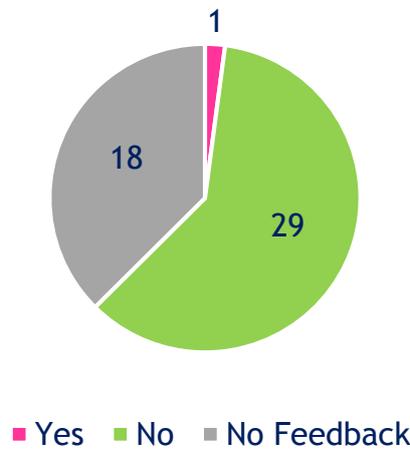
- 'No problems'
- 'I am happy with my GP'
- 'Very good'
- 'I receive good care'
- 'GP's are good and helpful'
- 'Happy with service'



The participants shared the following feedback about their experiences of interpreters:

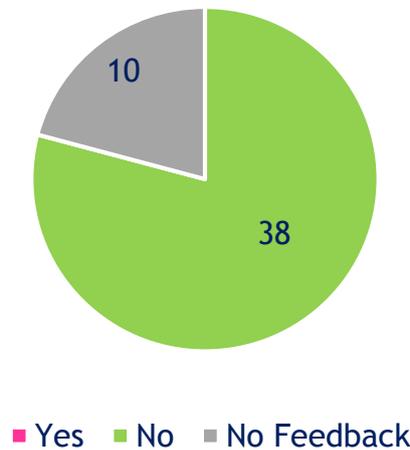
- 'No problems'
- 'The GP practice will ask if you want one'
- 'They are very good'
- 'I have an interpreter for all my appointments, they are very good and I have no issues'
- 'Very good service'

Is There Any Reason Why You Would Not Access Healthcare Services?

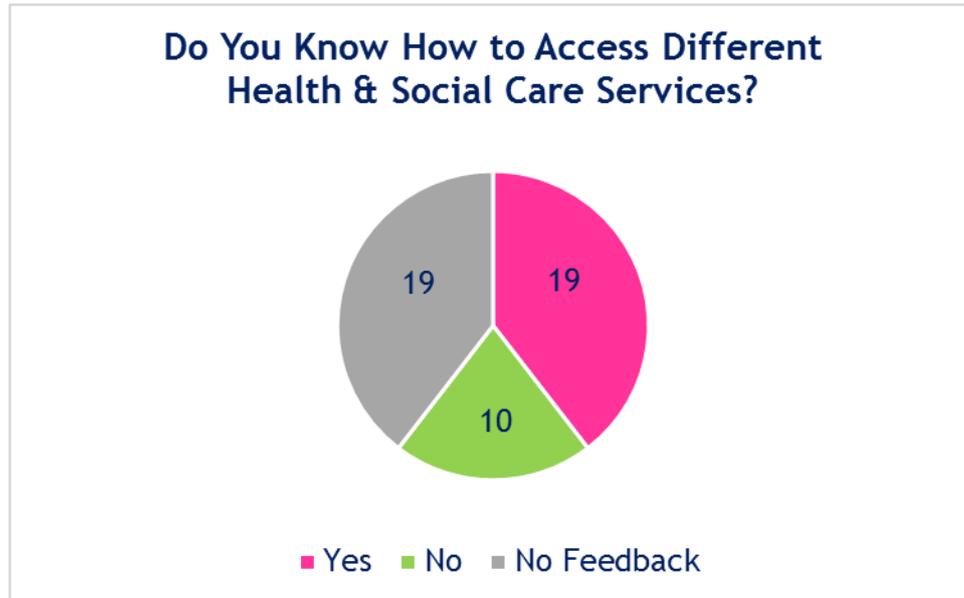


When participants were asked if there are any reasons why they would not access healthcare services, the majority of participants said they felt confident in accessing services should they require to use them. Only one participant said that they may not access a service due to cultural reasons.

Have You Ever Been Denied Medical Treatment?



When Healthwatch asked the participants if they had ever been denied medical treatment, all respondents said 'No'.



When participants were asked if they knew how to access different health and social care services, the majority said they would speak to their GP. Other feedback suggested that asylum seekers and refugees would find out how to access other services by speaking to other asylum seekers and refugees.

‘Would talk to GP’

‘Not needed to’

‘I am accessing therapies locally’

Feedback about University Hospital of North Tees

Of the 48 people Healthwatch spoke to, a large proportion of participants gave feedback about their experiences at the University Hospital of North Tees, the majority of which was positive. Only two participants had a negative experience.

Positive feedback:

‘North Tees are so good, the staff are lovely. I’ve had no problems at all’

‘Good treatment at North Tees hospital’

‘My overall experience of North Tees hospital has been good’

‘North Tees hospital has been so good, staff are so nice’

‘North Tees hospital provide good care’

‘Spent three days in North Tees hospital, quite happy with service’

‘North Tees were very good’

‘Staff and treatment at North Tees Hospital was very good’

‘I’ve had no problems at North Tees hospital’

Negative feedback:

‘I had to walk home, no patient transport provided’

‘Long wait in A&E’

Other Feedback:

Healthwatch gathered the following additional feedback about asylum seekers and refugees experiences of health and social care services in Stockton:

‘I struggle to register with a dentist’

‘I was previously living in Newcastle - not as good care as I get in Stockton’

‘There are very good services at the GP for myself and my children’

‘I receive a good service from my dentist’

‘Very good services, no problems’

‘There is good support here’

‘Everything is perfect’

Conclusion

Healthwatch were pleased to receive an overwhelming amount of positive feedback about asylum seeker and refugees experiences of healthcare services in Stockton-on-Tees.

It is clear that asylum seekers and refugees receive good support from their GP practice to enable them to access other services including mental health support. It was apparent that some participants found it difficult to register with a dentist therefore Healthwatch staff gave appropriate signposting advice. Healthwatch were happy to receive such positive feedback about the University Hospital of North Tees with regards to staff, treatment and overall service.

Due to the large amount of positive feedback received, Healthwatch feel that no recommendations for improvement are required following this investigation.

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees would like to thank the staff and volunteers at the Stockton Baptist Church drop-in and the Yarm Road Methodist Church drop-in who were extremely accommodating and cooperative during our visit. Healthwatch would also like to thank the asylum seekers and refugees who gave their time to provide information about their experiences of healthcare services in Stockton-on-Tees.

References

1. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-statistics-october-to-december-2017/list-of-tables#asylum> (Home Office National Statistics Asylum, 2018)
2. https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/policy_research/the_truth_about_asylum/the_facts_about_asylum

Appendix 1

Asylum Seeker and Refugee Questionnaire

Age:

Sex:

Country of origin:

What is your status? Asylum seeker / Refugee

Are you registered with a GP Practice?

How do you find the interpreters when accessing healthcare?

Is there any reason why you would not access healthcare services?

Have you ever been denied medical treatment?

Do you know how to access different health and social care services? E.g. Sexual Health / Mental Health Services

Any other feedback?