



SUPPORTING NEW SCOTS CONFERENCE REPORT

2023

Foreword

As North Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire are becoming dispersal areas, it has become evident that an increased level of support will be needed for New Scots. In light of this development, a steering group consisting of representatives from Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire and Voluntary Action South Lanarkshire – the two Third Sector Interfaces for Lanarkshire – as well as NHS Lanarkshire, North Lanarkshire Council and South Lanarkshire Council organised the Supporting New Scots in Lanarkshire Conference 2023.

The steering group planned this event with the intention of providing New Scots who have lived experience and organisations supporting New Scots with a platform to share their experiences and insights. In addition to this, organisations and partners interested in supporting New Scots had the opportunity to access information, discuss new ideas, and form connections with attending partners.

We consciously held this conference during Refugee Week and the Scottish Refugee Festival. Inspired by these two events, the guiding themes for our conference were Hope, which was the theme of the Scottish Refugee Festival 2023, and Compassion, the theme of Refugee Week 2023. The New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2018-2022 also played an essential role in the planning of the conference.

The three themes Legal Rights, Health and Wellbeing, and Communities, Culture, and Social Connection, were at the core of the afternoon discussion groups.

In this report, we are sharing our key learnings from the day of the conference, and recommendations informed by contributions from our presenters and attendees. We are also providing insight into what's next in Lanarkshire regarding a partnership approach to supporting New Scots.

On the day of the conference, we asked all attendees to submit one word to sum up their experience of the day. The results are insightful and very positive. We would like to invite you to read this report with our vision of close partnership-working across sectors in mind.



01. Presentations

As a key part of the conference, three New Scots told the audience about their lived experience of arriving in Scotland, and what support they did and did not receive. Additionally, the presentations included advice for organisations attending the conference who are either already supporting New Scots or interested in extending their services to New Scots.

Our presenters with lived experience drew attention to two inter-connected themes: mental health and language.

These presentations highlighted the isolating nature of not speaking the language of the community New Scots are trying to integrate into. This social isolation similarly impacts New Scots' mental health, as they are struggling to form connections with their local community. Additionally, not being able to speak the language makes it more difficult to understand the asylum process and legal documents relating to this, which can evoke feelings of anxiety and uncertainty. Our presenters emphasised that the uncertain nature of the asylum process had a very negative impact on New Scots' mental health.

Connecting to these two core points, our New Scots presenters provided crucial advice to the attending organisations. All presenters asked the audience to be patient with New Scots who are accessing services or looking to volunteer. A lack of language skills, cultural differences, and mental health struggles can complicate communication. However, the vast majority of New Scots are looking to form connections with their local community. This was the core aspect our presenters asked the audience to keep in mind.





For our second set of presentations, we asked five Lanarkshire-based organisations from the charity and voluntary sector to elaborate on how they are supporting New Scots and what advice they would give to organisations looking to start supporting New Scots.

Our presenting organisations were Waverley Care, The International Conversation Café, East Kilbride Old Parish Church, Diamonds in the Community, and Heart of Africa.

All five organisations provided very valuable insight into their work with New Scots. The point that our presenting organisations placed the most emphasis on was how enriching it is for both communities, locals as well as New Scots, to embrace New Scots with open arms. Integration was described as a two-way process, with both communities sharing the responsibility to put in effort but also benefit from the connection.

The organisations advised attending organisations to embrace New Scots in their community with the mindset that they can learn from each other. Organisations should not shy away from supporting and working with New Scots, but rather see it as an opportunity to expand their own community.



02. Group feedback

We asked the facilitators to cover three subject areas: Legal Rights; Health and Wellbeing; and Communities, Culture, and Social Connection.

Legal Rights

Regarding our first topic, Legal Rights, the groups raised two concerns. On the one hand, it was highlighted that New Scots might not be aware of differences in laws and legal responsibilities between their country of origin and Scotland. On the other hand, New Scots might not be aware of their legal rights or how to access legal support. Info material should be made available in different formats and languages in order to make information on Scottish laws more accessible, as well as explanations of concepts that are vital to people's safety, e.g., sexual consent*.

Regular info sessions on rights, responsibilities, and legal support for new arrivals could facilitate the distribution of this kind of information. One group suggested that this could be part of ESOL classes in the form of an 'Info Welcome Pack'.

**Consent means you have given permission, and that someone has given you permission to engage in any intimate activity or sex. Any sexual contact without consent is illegal regardless of the age of the people involved. In the UK, the age of consent for sexual activity is 16."*

Source: <https://www.letstalkaboutit.nhs.uk/directory-of-services/sexual-assault/consent/>

02. Group feedback

Health and Wellbeing

The discussions around our second topic, Health and Wellbeing, were characterised by a focus on challenges, rather than positives. Nevertheless, access to mental health support in multiple languages through colleges, as well as the efforts of conversation cafés, were praised.

The first significant challenge that arose in multiple discussions was the persistence of racism and misconceptions in society. This negatively impacts first and foremost New Scots who are trying to integrate and access support, but also impedes the efforts of organisations supporting New Scots.

Housing was another concern raised in discussions. Some groups drew attention to the fact that asylum seekers are assigned accommodation on a no-choice basis and are sometimes forced to relocate more than once during the asylum process. This means that some asylum seekers may be moved to a different local authority although they already feel settled in their previous area. A few attendees voiced that they felt like some New Scots were moved to areas that were not suitable for them due to, for example, a lack of public transport.

Furthermore, some organisations explained they had encountered the issue that New Scots are used to different healthcare systems, which means that they might not immediately understand how the NHS works and how to access medical support. Furthermore, some New Scots may arrive with expectations regarding the delivery of healthcare services which do not match the realities of healthcare provision through the NHS.

The final major concern that was raised in discussion rounds is that many New Scots do not have a CHI number yet. This is an issue because it delays access to important national health screening programmes.

In summary, the group discussions mainly highlighted challenges regarding the subject of Health and Wellbeing. Whilst some are procedural, as for example the lack of CHI numbers or the change in accommodation on a no-choice basis; other issues are based on a societal level, such as the effects of racism and misconceptions regarding the NHS. Regardless of the character of the challenges, they all have the potential to negatively impact New Scots.

02. Group feedback

Communities, Culture, and Social Connection

Our last topic, Communities, Culture, and Social Connection, sparked the longest discussions. The first challenge that emerged in discussions was a lack of third sector capacity. Our discussion rounds highlighted a need for training to respond to the needs of New Scots, and a need for additional funding. Attendees expressed an interest in increased provision of funding for pilots to test out new ideas, as well as funding streams that are specifically targeted at projects supporting New Scots.

The second challenge discussed at length in all groups is that of language barriers. While some groups praised access to translated materials, interpreting services such as Language Line, and translation services such as Google Translate, others criticised the lack of access to these resources. In particular, these organisations voiced concerns regarding the cross-sector dependence on informal translation and interpreting arrangements, e.g. bringing a relative or friend to a medical appointment. Additionally, some groups mentioned long waiting lists for ESOL classes in some areas due to a lack of ESOL teachers and a lack of funding to provide ESOL classes.

Within communities, the groups emphasised a need to aim for integration collectively. As was already mentioned in some presentations, some groups voiced the concern that one-sided integration efforts could lead to resentment on both sides. Therefore, integration should be viewed as a two-way process, with both communities and New Scots working together to succeed. The provision of increased opportunities for peer support spaces could prevent this by using new ideas to increase engagement and interest, encourage people to share their cultures and learn from each other.

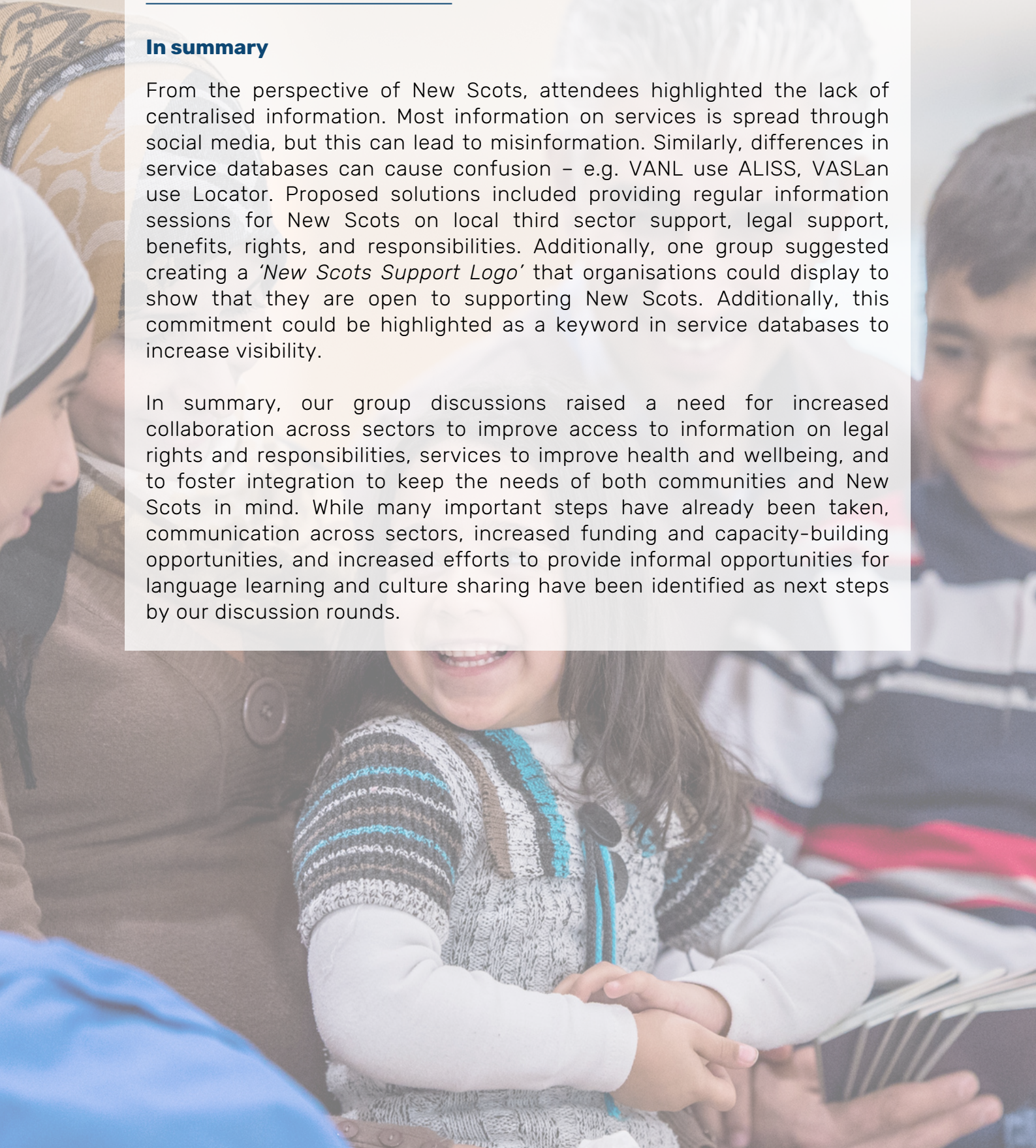
Finally, the groups drew attention to the difficulty of accessing accurate and up-to-date information – not only for New Scots, but also for organisations. From the perspective of organisations, the lack of information on where New Scots live makes reaching out to this population group more difficult. To improve this, groups suggested increased cross-sector information sharing and collaboration.

02. Group feedback

In summary

From the perspective of New Scots, attendees highlighted the lack of centralised information. Most information on services is spread through social media, but this can lead to misinformation. Similarly, differences in service databases can cause confusion – e.g. VANL use ALISS, VASLan use Locator. Proposed solutions included providing regular information sessions for New Scots on local third sector support, legal support, benefits, rights, and responsibilities. Additionally, one group suggested creating a *'New Scots Support Logo'* that organisations could display to show that they are open to supporting New Scots. Additionally, this commitment could be highlighted as a keyword in service databases to increase visibility.

In summary, our group discussions raised a need for increased collaboration across sectors to improve access to information on legal rights and responsibilities, services to improve health and wellbeing, and to foster integration to keep the needs of both communities and New Scots in mind. While many important steps have already been taken, communication across sectors, increased funding and capacity-building opportunities, and increased efforts to provide informal opportunities for language learning and culture sharing have been identified as next steps by our discussion rounds.



03. Recommendations

Thanks to insightful presentations by New Scots and CVS organisations in the morning, and in-depth discussion rounds in the afternoon, we reached four recommendations we would like to make going forward:

1

Our first recommendation, addressed to funders, is to create funding streams dedicated to supporting New Scots.

Our discussion groups concluded that more funding for projects or services specifically to support New Scots is needed. Attendees and presenters alike agreed that support for New Scots is underfunded and therefore neglected. While a lot of generic funding options can be used to provide this kind of support, many organisations, especially smaller ones, rely on this funding for ongoing projects and would therefore need new funding sources.

2

Our second recommendation, addressed to funders, statutory partners, and CVS organisations, is to provide more opportunities and funding for formal and informal language skills development, as well as funding for formal interpreting arrangements.

All our presenters, New Scots as well as CVS organisations, highlighted the need to invest in projects and services that help New Scots to improve their language skills. A particular emphasis was placed on the value of informal opportunities to improve language skills, like conversation cafés, in addition to ESOL classes. Our group discussions highlighted the issue of long waiting lists for ESOL classes, and a lack of funding to expand this service.

3

Our third recommendation, addressed to all partners, is to embrace partnership working as an opportunity to grow and improve a support network available to New Scots. Service maps and websites should be updated to make services supporting New Scots more visible and accessible.

In our group discussions it became evident that partners from all sectors would like to improve the level of partnership working across sectors. This requires more information sharing, best practice sharing, and support between partners. Additionally, our attendees suggested providing “Info Welcome Packs” to New Scots, which would explain rights and responsibilities and signpost to services in the area that New Scots can access.

4

Our fourth recommendation is two-fold: We would like to ask funders to provide more funding for training tackling racism and unconscious bias, and to ask CVS organisations and partners from other sectors to regularly attend these kinds of training sessions.

The last point that was referred to multiple times in presentations and group discussions is the need for more training regarding definitions and rights of New Scots, as well as racism and unconscious bias awareness training. This is essential to ensure that New Scots feel welcome in the communities they are forming connections with.

04. What's next?

The Supporting New Scots in Lanarkshire Conference 2023 was only the start of the journey towards establishing a system of partnership working. Now it is time to take next steps to improve support for New Scots in Lanarkshire.

At the conference, we asked our attendees whether a cross-sector, pan-Lanarkshire network would be beneficial to continue the conversation and improve support available to New Scots. The response was overwhelmingly positive.

We are taking this as a call to action. The Lanarkshire New Scots Integration Network will launch on 24th October 2023, with an online launch event from 3:30-4:00pm.

The network will be a forum for partners from all sectors to come together to:

- **Learn about how to support New Scots.**
- **Connect with other organisations and partners.**
- **Discuss issues, successes, and new projects where we can work in partnership to support the integration of New Scots into our local communities.**

If you are interested in attending, please contact Charlotte Elsner, Resettlement Officer for VASLan, or Tony Collins, Resettlement Officer for VANL:

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05. Messages of hope and compassion

"We welcome you to our country and wish you every health and happiness here!"

"Thank you for sharing your experiences."



"Stay as long as you need to, or as long as you want to."

"Always remember that you matter."

"The personal statements we heard from New Scots today helped me to understand the difficult journey of people's circumstances."

"I have taken lots of information from the groups today. Hope we have more events like this and more funding to support refugees."

"You are welcome here. Don't give up!"

"There is strength in working together and so many organisations who want to help."

"Partnership working is key."

"We look forward to making new friends and being part of a family."

"Welcome to Scotland! I hope you find a safe and loving home here. You are loved and you are welcome."

"To all Refugees and Asylum Seekers: You are not alone!"

"Cead mile Failte (a hundred thousand welcomes)."

"Stay as long as you need to, or as long as you want to."



"Belief: That those seeking refuge will be supported.
Hope: That events like this encourage others to become involved.
Inspiration: To learn more and to continue supporting those who need it. "

"I may not speak very good English, but I still have a lot to contribute to society. "

"Believe that you matter."

"Welcome to your new home. Please don't hesitate to get involved with your community and make the best of it!"

"Please join in wherever and whenever you can."

"We are all working together for a better tomorrow."

