

A part of society

Refugees and asylum seekers volunteering in the UK

A report based on case studies of ten organisations

by Ruth Wilson and Hannah Lewis



“I don’t want to be apart from society – I want to be part of it.”

Zhila, volunteer, Maryhill Citizens Advice Bureau

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Tandem communications and research ltd
21 Kingswood Avenue, Leeds LS8 2DB
0113 266 9123

volunteering@tandem-uk.com

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Ruth Wilson

Volunteering and Asylum Project/tandem

About the authors

Ruth Wilson is Director of tandem communications and research. She is involved in a range of projects, including research, marketing and project management initiatives. She has been running the Volunteering and Asylum Project since 2003.

Hannah Lewis is a researcher who has worked with Save the Children and Leeds Asylum Seekers Support Network. She is in the final stages of a PhD at the University of Hull on community-building among refugees and asylum seekers.

For more information or to get in touch, visit the tandem website: www.tandem-uk.com

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The ten case study organisations

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BTCV (formerly British Trust for Conservation Volunteers), Scotland	47
Irish Community Centre, Manchester	53
Maryhill CAB, Glasgow	57
Nomad, South Yorkshire	61
Oxfam shops , London and Leeds	64
Rosemount Lifelong Learning, Glasgow	68
School governors, Bristol, London and South Tyneside	72
Volunteer Centre Westminster, London	78
Whitchurch hospital, Cardiff and Vale NHS Trust, Wales	82

The intermediary organisations

Organisations that have helped the case study organisations to involve refugees and asylum seekers as volunteers.

Back to Work Company, Leeds	66
Camden Language and Support Service, London	75
Displaced People in Action, Cardiff	84
Refugee Action, Manchester	55
The Parade ESOL Service, Cardiff	85
Volunteer Centre Sheffield	63
West Thames College, Hounslow	44
Volunteer Centre Westminster Refugee Project, London	80

See also: [Building networks in Glasgow, Section 3.3, page 37.](#)

Summary and recommendations

“I came here to save my life.
So now I want to help people of this country.”

Annie, volunteer, Whitchurch hospital

Background

Many refugees and people seeking asylum volunteer. Most do so within their community, or as part of a refugee organisation they know and trust. This volunteering has great value.

Far fewer go on to volunteer in other, non-refugee organisations, and yet such volunteering is likely to have many benefits – for the volunteers, for the organisations that take them on, and for the communities or clients they serve.

The Volunteering and Asylum Project therefore set out to explore case studies where three or more refugees or people seeking asylum were volunteering in a ‘non-refugee’ organisation, to learn from their experience about challenges and benefits. We visited ten organisations, each with a different focus and based in different parts of the UK, to talk to volunteers, staff and managers.

In all cases, at least one outside organisation had played an important role in helping refugees and people seeking asylum get involved, and wherever possible we interviewed these intermediaries as well.

This report is an account of the ten case studies and our main findings. We hope it will inspire and help policy makers, volunteer managers and a wide range of organisations to do more to enable refugees and people seeking asylum to take part in high quality volunteering opportunities across the UK.

“Because of having more clients and volunteers who are refugees and asylum seekers we were able to challenge the way they are represented in the community and in the media.”

Jean Cheyne, Manager, Maryhill CAB

Main findings and recommendations

Interviewees – whether staff, managers or volunteers – saw volunteering by refugees and asylum seekers into non-refugee organisations as an overwhelmingly positive experience, bringing many benefits.

There were also challenges, at different levels – individual, organisational, social and political. Although people seeking asylum are allowed to volunteer, the asylum system in itself can make life

precarious and difficult for asylum seekers, and therefore can put people off taking the extra step of volunteering outside the refugee sector. However, it was felt widely that ‘mainstream’ volunteering promoted integration, whether or not the volunteer had received a decision on their asylum claim.

The following ways forward, therefore, support the further development of this area of volunteering.

Raising awareness among refugees and people seeking asylum

It is apparent that many refugees and people seeking asylum are not aware of the diversity of volunteering opportunities in the UK, or that volunteering is open to them and has value. Organisations recruiting volunteers need to reach this audience, and be clear and realistic about what is on offer – roles, training, support, possible benefits.

1. **More work needs to be done to promote awareness of volunteering as a worthwhile and legal option for refugees and people seeking asylum, through a range of organisations and media. Government needs to reinforce this message, in part through emphasising the difference between volunteering and unpaid work/unpaid employment.**

Raising awareness among organisations

Our experience of searching for case studies suggests that many volunteer managers and intermediary agencies are not aware of refugees and people seeking asylum as potential volunteers or of how to reach them. Others may be put off by a range of barriers, some of which have more to do with perception than reality.

2. **More must be done to enable a wide range of volunteering and intermediary organisations to include refugees and people seeking asylum as volunteers. This should include funding to increase capacity and build diversity, and the dissemination of information about refugee issues.**

Overall, a strong organisational commitment to equal opportunities and diversity, and clear leadership from senior management on this and volunteering, helped organisations be successful in involving refugees and people seeking asylum.

Criminal Records Bureau checks

Asylum seekers and refugees can go through a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check at any stage, but issues relating to identification papers or changes of address can sometimes put organisations and individuals off.

3. **Difficulties around Criminal Records Bureau checks need to be resolved through a further review of CRB-accepted identification documents. At the same time, other forms of risk management should be promoted.**

The volunteers were keen to learn about life in the UK and wanted to feel part of society. For many, volunteering was their only opportunity to mix with and work alongside British people.

5. **Integration is a two way process, requiring flexibility and change on the part of organisations and individuals. This needs to be acknowledged by funders, policy makers and volunteering organisations.**

“The idea of preparing someone for volunteering is great. It would help if there were more introductory courses for vulnerable people.”

Paul Harvey, Asylum Seeker and Refugee Worker, Volunteer Centre Sheffield

Supporting the pioneering volunteer

Many of the volunteers we interviewed had deliberately sought out volunteering experiences where they would be surrounded by people speaking English, and where often they were unlikely to meet other refugees. They did so for a number of reasons: to rebuild their careers, to improve their English, to understand and be of service to the host community and to be active.

This takes courage, persistence and adaptability. At this stage, these volunteers are pioneers. Many do not want to be made a special case, but others see themselves as ambassadors, wanting to show that people who seek asylum are not scroungers, and wanting to encourage other refugees and asylum seekers into volunteering.

Such volunteers offer a huge amount to British society. Their support and development is key to enabling organisations to become more diverse and to encouraging other excluded groups to consider volunteering.

4. **Organisations need to develop strategies to ensure that pioneering volunteers are welcomed and supported, and that their outreach role is acknowledged.**

Tools for integration

Organisations and volunteers often saw the involvement of refugees and people seeking asylum in non-refugee organisations as a tool for integration. The organisations were interested in adapting their policies and practices to ensure that they welcomed and supported volunteers from different backgrounds. They often invested time in building external networks, gathering information, and providing support to individual volunteers.

Adequate resourcing

Our case studies show that though additional funding is not essential to building diversity, when available it is a significant benefit. However, sometimes funding excludes particular groups, such as asylum seekers, and this was found to be detrimental to organisations' overall commitment to equality.

6. **Volunteer management requires resources: funding needs to be available to enable targeted initiatives and the building of diversity. Such support should not exclude particular groups, such as asylum seekers. At the same time, organisations must work to ensure diversity and inclusion are central to how they work so they involve a variety of volunteers whether or not additional funding is available.**

The volunteer co-ordinator as agent for diversity and inclusion

It was clear from the case studies that volunteer managers play a key role, either in implementing a whole-organisation approach to equality and diversity, or in introducing new levels of diversity through volunteering.

Volunteer co-ordinators were often fulfilling a variety of roles: volunteer management, awareness-raising within their organisation, devising new volunteering opportunities and overcoming barriers. Many said they benefited from having the time to include outreach work and to participate in networks and external events. However, sometimes volunteering was perceived within organisations as an ‘add-on’, and its core role in promoting diversity and inclusion was not

always understood. Leadership from senior managers was often key to overcoming this.

- 7. The importance of the role of the volunteer manager or co-ordinator in building diversity, and the range of responsibilities it carries, need to be acknowledged by senior management within organisations, and by funders. Leadership from the top is key.**

“Daniel [the shop manager] is helping me look for work. It is difficult. I would rather work than volunteer.”

Embet, volunteer, Oxfam shop

The role of intermediary organisations

All our case study organisations had benefited from the involvement of at least one external agency that put them in touch with refugees and asylum seekers wanting to volunteer. Some of these intermediary organisations were in the refugee sector, others might be adult education colleges, volunteer development centres or work placement agencies. They provided a range of support and advice to individual volunteers and the volunteering organisations, and often they maintained contact during a volunteer placement and after.

- 8. More organisations should take steps to facilitate the volunteering of refugees and people seeking asylum into non-refugee organisations. Existing good practice should be shared widely, through networks, seminars, publications and websites, and resourcing issues resolved.**

“You don’t get immediate quick wins – people are trapped in complex problems that many of us can’t begin to understand. This has to be recognised by funders. People have chaotic lives.”

Tom Flood, Chief Executive, BTCV

Ultimately, all volunteering and support organisations are potential intermediaries, sharing volunteers and building a pool of people willing to be active participants in British society whether they stay here for a limited period or the rest of their lives.

Volunteering and the world of work

For most of the volunteers we interviewed, building a career in this country was a key motivation for volunteering. This included asylum seekers who are not allowed to work, but who hope for a positive decision on their case.

- 9. Steps need to be taken to ensure that volunteering provides the best experience for refugees and people seeking asylum wanting to return to work or to improve their employment opportunities. This includes strengthening links between volunteering organisations, colleges and potential employers. It also involves helping volunteers to have realistic expectations.**

Several interviewees expressed their concern that people who got jobs were often still employed below their skill level.

- 10. Senior managers must be made aware of the skills and work aspirations of volunteers, and the ways in which their volunteering experience adds to their potential as employees. This is particularly the case in the NHS and other large public sector bodies, where volunteers often aspire to find work.**

Offering worthwhile experience to all

The fact that most people seeking asylum are not allowed to work means that volunteering can be of particular value to them. There are, however, risks that people may feel an obligation to volunteer – even that not volunteering may prejudice their asylum claim. There is also a risk that volunteer managers may pay less attention to the quality of experience they offer asylum seekers because they may be short-term volunteers or because they do not have permission to work.

- 11. Volunteering organisations must offer quality placements, whether or not someone’s long term motivation is to secure work, and regardless of whether they have permission to work.**



Volunteer,
Oxfam shop, London.

“Volunteering could be given more emphasis among asylum seekers so they can have a kind of life they can enjoy.”

Vitty, volunteer, Maryhill CAB

Volunteering by young refugees and asylum seekers

Young people are often keen to volunteer. However, young refugees and young people seeking asylum can face additional barriers, especially those who are here without adult relatives.

Some young refugees and asylum seekers have insufficient help in accessing volunteering due to gaps and deficiencies in existing support for young people. In the case studies, sometimes small sums of money could make a major difference to a young person's ability to participate.

Young people often want to volunteer to help other young people and children: CRB requirements can then be a serious obstacle.

12. Extra steps should be taken to encourage and enable volunteering by young refugees and asylum seekers. Social workers, teachers and other advocates must take a more active role in enabling young refugees to volunteer. CRB procedures should be reviewed to ensure that young separated refugees are able to provide adequate documentation.



Volunteer, Activeventure.

1.

Introduction

- 1.1 What is this report about?**
- 1.2 Who is it for?**
- 1.3 Who wrote the report and how?**
- 1.4 The volunteers**
- 1.5 How this report is organised**
- 1.6 Five key categories**
- 1.7 Social capital: bridging bonding and linking**

“I think an immense amount of social cohesion can happen with environmental work. I defy anyone to stand out in the rain all day and come to the end of the day judging people for being white, Muslim, whatever. You remove huge barriers by just getting on and doing.”

Tom Flood, Chief Executive, BTCV



Staff and volunteers,
Volunteer Centre
Westminster

“People go to refugee organisation because they are welcoming, understanding. They’re tolerant, not ignorant of who you are and they understand the refugee background.”

Zhila, volunteer, Maryhill CAB

1.1 What is this report about?

This report presents case studies of ten organisations outside the refugee sector that are involving refugees and people seeking asylum as volunteers. The organisations are very varied. They include, for instance, a hospital in Cardiff, a CAB in Glasgow and Oxfam shops in London and Leeds. What they have in common is that they have all had at least three refugees and asylum seekers volunteer with them, often for a period of several months.

Refugees and people seeking asylum often volunteer within their own communities, or with refugee organisations they know and trust. Their involvement brings many benefits – to the organisations they join, to the volunteers, and to the communities and clients they help.

But fewer refugees and people seeking asylum take part in more ‘mainstream’ volunteering initiatives.

For this reason, we decided to visit organisations outside the refugee sector where people seeking asylum and refugees are volunteering. We talked to staff, managers and volunteers.

We found that nearly always an outside organisation helped to bring the volunteering about, so as far as possible we also visited these ‘intermediary’ agencies.

You will find a list of the ten organisations and the intermediary agencies that were visited on [page 4](#).

We set out to learn about what was going on: why were refugees and people seeking asylum getting involved? What were they doing? What were the benefits? What were the barriers, challenges and solutions? What were the lessons that would help other organisations become more inclusive of refugees and people seeking asylum?

This book is a report of the ten case studies, with an account of the main findings and the ways forward that emerged from these.

1.2 Who is it for?

We hope this report will be useful to any one wanting to encourage the involvement of refugees and people seeking asylum as volunteers.

This could include:

- any volunteering organisation outside the refugee sector, wanting to involve refugees and people seeking asylum
- volunteer support agencies that help place volunteers with volunteering organisations
- refugee agencies that help place volunteers with non-refugee volunteering organisations
- adult education colleges, work placement organisations and others

We hope it will inspire and encourage a wide range of organisations to build diversity in volunteering.

“The media is particularly bad – we listen to it telling us they come here for the benefits. But I’ve learnt the opposite, and I’ve learnt that through contact. They have suffered terribly and they want to contribute. They don’t want to live on benefits. Their main aim is to improve their English and work in the NHS.”

Jill Griffiths, Head of Voluntary Services, Mental Health, Cardiff and Vale NHS Trust

1.3 Who wrote the report and how?

This report has been produced by the Volunteering and Asylum Project (see [the box below](#)), with funding from the Home Office. The project was led by Ruth Wilson, with co-researcher Hannah Lewis.

The research was carried out in 2005, starting with background reading and three focus groups (in London, Birmingham and Glasgow) to discuss the project and to identify possible case studies.

Visits to the case study organisations took place between July and November 2005.

Our aim has been to create a resource that is based on careful research, but that is accessible and useful to practitioners and policy makers, and that therefore is part handbook, part report.

For a more detailed account of our methodology, see [Appendix 5, page 91](#).

The Volunteering and Asylum Project

The Volunteering and Asylum Project works to promote good practice in volunteering, and to encourage volunteering initiatives that involve refugees, asylum seekers and others.

In 2003 we produced a handbook, ‘the a–z of volunteering and asylum’, published by Volunteering England (see [Appendix 6, page 93](#)). Since then, we have organised a series of training days and seminars across the UK. In Yorkshire, we have run a short training and support programme for refugee community organisations, looking at volunteer management.

The Volunteering and Asylum Project is run by tandem communications and research with an advisory group bringing together a number of organisations (see [Appendix 4](#) for advisory group members).



A member of staff and volunteers, Volunteer Centre Sheffield.

1.4 The volunteers

The following refugee and asylum seeking volunteers were interviewed:

	No.	%
Women	21	64
Men	12	36
Total	33	100

Immigration status	No.
Asylum seeker	13
Exceptional Leave to Remain	3
Indefinite Leave to Remain	15
Refused	2
Total	33

Age	No.
18	2
20-29	7
30-39	11
40-49	13
Total	33

“Firstly it makes everyone aware these people are not scroungers. They are young people with plans – they have futures. It is good for the other volunteers and the guests as they might live in a protected world away from this kind of contact. It is also good for the young refugees as it makes them realise that although their problems are enormous, other young people have problems too.”

Catherine Herriott, Welfare Officer, West Thames College

Countries of origin	No.
Afghanistan	1
Angola	1
Burundi	1
Colombia	1
Dem. Rep. of Congo	2
Eritrea	2
Ethiopia	3
Iran	4
Kosova	4
Kurdistan (Iraq)	1
Pakistan	1
Russia	1
Somalia	6
Sri Lanka	1
Ukraine	1
Zimbabwe	3
16 countries	33

Experience in country of origin	No.
Accountant	1
Business advisor	1
Car sprayer	1
Chef	1
Civil engineer	1
Dental nurse	1
Engineer	2
Farmer and community worker	1
Police Head of Finance	1
Hotel receptionist	1
Housewife	1
Emergencies medical assistant	1
Journalist	1
Lawyer	1
Manager, private sector	1
Nurse and hospital administrator	1
Retail and sales	3
Secretary	1
Secretary and musician	1
Student	3
Teacher	3

Year of arrival in UK	No.
1991 – 1999	8
2000	3
2001	8
2002	7
2003	4
2004	2
Not known	1
Total	33

1.5 How this report is organised

This report is set out so that readers can dip in and out of the sections that interest them or they find useful. You are also welcome, of course, to read it from cover to cover.

Summary

sets out our main findings and 12 recommendations.

Section 1

provides background to the report: our aims and methods (the methodology is also summarised in [Appendix 5, page 91](#), and a fuller account is available at www.tandem-uk.com).

Section 2

is a summary of some relevant policies and legislation.

Section 3

brings together the main findings based on an assessment of all the case studies. It groups common themes and concerns, and highlights examples of good or interesting practice.

Section 4

contains the ten case studies. Most include short profiles of intermediary organisations which have helped facilitate volunteering by refugees and people seeking asylum, and nearly all have one testimony from a volunteer. Key contacts or useful resources are listed at the end of each case study.

Appendices

include acknowledgements, useful resources and a summary of the methodology.

Throughout, we have made extensive use of quotes to illustrate the experience and insights of volunteers, staff and management. Occasionally, mostly in the case of people who did not have English as a first language, these have been abridged to ensure clarity of meaning. The research is an account of what was going on in Autumn 2005: we have not been able to track developments for individuals and organisations between then and the time of publication.

1.6 Five key categories

The following categories are used throughout the report, to group the main findings, and to structure each of the case studies:

Getting started explores how and why organisations begin to engage refugees and people seeking asylum as volunteers, and why individuals begin to consider volunteering.

Recruitment covers the process of getting on board: applications, interviews, induction.

Volunteering looks at what helps refugees and people seeking asylum continue to volunteer somewhere – what issues arise, and what solutions are found.

Leaving volunteering explores why people leave a volunteering placement and what happens at this stage.

Follow on includes the longer-term commitment of organisations to include refugees and people seeking asylum as volunteers, and other developments that result from the experience of involving them.

This structure is based on a model developed by Katherine Gaskin and set out in 'A choice blend: what volunteers want from organisation and management' (Gaskin, 2003).

Gaskin's model starts with the non-volunteer and progresses to the long-term volunteer. Four stages are identified: the doubter (who is outside volunteering); the starter (who has made an enquiry or application); the doer (who has begun volunteering) and the stayer (who persists as a long-term volunteer).

As Gaskin explains, the aim of the volunteering world and the volunteering infrastructure is to aid each transition in the most positive way possible, to transform the doubter into a starter into a doer into a stayer.

We adapted this framework to enable us to look at organisations as well as volunteers. We added the term 'leaver' because we wanted to understand what happened when refugees and people seeking asylum finished volunteering somewhere, and we also added a 'follow on' category, to include longer-term organisational issues arising from the initial experience of involving refugees and people seeking asylum as volunteers.

“It's been productive for the organisation and beneficial to the volunteers. A lot of work has got done. We think it broadens everyone's horizons, having volunteers here from outside the Irish community, from other countries. And for people trying to get some insight into cultural issues in England, volunteering with us has lots to offer.”

John Bailey, Manager, Irish Community Care

1.7 Social capital: bridging, bonding and linking

The Office for National Statistics defines social capital as ‘the pattern and intensity of networks among people and the shared values which arise from those networks’ (www.statistics.gov.uk). While definitions of social capital vary, the main aspects are citizenship, neighbourliness, trust and shared values, community involvement, volunteering, social networks and civic participation.

Three forms of social capital have been identified (Ruston, 2003):

- **Bonding social capital:** this describes the links within communities or groups, such as those within refugee communities.
- **Bridging social capital:** the links between different communities or groups – for instance, when networks are extended through a refugee volunteering in a non-refugee organisation, or a refugee community group forms a partnership with another organisation.
- **Linking social capital:** the links between people with different levels of power (this might also take place when a refugee or someone seeking asylum volunteers outside their community).

Bonding social capital is said to be important for helping people to cope and ‘get by’. Bridging

and linking are seen as particularly useful for ‘getting ahead’.

The government has endorsed all these forms of social capital in its refugee integration strategy (Home Office, 2005), where it sees both the existence of strong refugee community organisations and involvement in the host society as indicators of integration.

We believe that all are potentially of value to refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK. There are criticisms of the social capital model – particularly in relation to the risk that the notion of social capital may oversimplify complex relations, and that it may encourage viewing relationships in terms of economic value. For more on these critiques, see Griffiths et al (2005).

This report focuses on ‘bridging’ social capital: the involvement of refugees and people seeking asylum as volunteers outside the refugee sector.

Useful publications

A number of publications have helped us with this report – they are listed in [Appendix 7](#). As this is an emerging area of work, the number focussing on volunteering by refugees and asylum seekers is limited but have been particularly useful. They include: Amara et al (undated); Dooner (2005); Stopforth (2001); Wilson (2003) and Working Lives Research Institute (2005). The Institute for Volunteering Research report, ‘Volunteering for All’ (undated) was also helpful.



Volunteer, Maryhill Citizens Advice Bureau, Glasgow.

2.

The policy context

- 2.1 Refugees and asylum seekers: permission to volunteer**
- 2.2 Community cohesion**
- 2.3 Employment**
- 2.4 Diversity**
- 2.5 Integration**
- 2.6 National volunteering compacts and strategies**
- 2.7 Race relations legislation**

“I know my culture but I don’t know this country’s culture, laws. Some people want to judge people without contact with them. They say, for instance, ‘the British are racist’. No. Approach them and you can see.”

Annie, volunteer, Whitchurch hospital

The government's interest in and recognition of volunteering has increased markedly in recent years. A number of government departments and policies now emphasise the role and potential of volunteering, especially in relation to social inclusion and integration, and as a route to employment.

In the refugee sector, there is growing awareness that volunteering has much to offer to refugees and people seeking asylum and that they, in turn, have much to contribute. Volunteering has gained further prominence since asylum seekers lost the right to work in 2003.

This section therefore summarises some of the key policies and areas of legislation which affect the involvement of refugees and people seeking asylum as volunteers in the UK.



Volunteer,
Whitchurch hospital,
Cardiff.

2.1 Refugees and asylum seekers: permission to volunteer

The Home Office permits and encourages volunteering by refugees and people seeking asylum. The following is from the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) website (www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk):

“We are keen to see asylum seekers and recognised refugees take an active interest in the welfare of their own communities and the local community by undertaking voluntary activity while they are in the UK. But it must be borne in mind that, in the case of asylum seekers, they may not be given the right to remain here. They should therefore not be led to believe that voluntary activity is regarded as a step towards refugee status being granted.

“The following guidance may be of help when organisations consider offers of voluntary activity from asylum seekers. Care should be taken to ensure that the activity being undertaken by an asylum seeker is genuinely voluntary and does not

amount to employment (see [the Note below](#)). Reimbursement can however be made for meal, travel or other costs actually incurred, but not as a flat-rate allowance.”

Note on Employment: “There is a difference between volunteering and employment, which in general remains forbidden to asylum seekers even where the employment is unpaid. An example of unpaid employment would be an arrangement in which a person makes an arrangement to help out in a business, perhaps on behalf of a relative, in return for some non-monetary benefit. But where the work is unpaid and is carried out on behalf of a charity, voluntary organisation or body that raises funds for either, or in the public sector then it will be accepted for immigration law purposes as volunteering.”

For more information, visit:
Immigration and Nationality Directorate:
www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk

2.2 Community cohesion

The government and other agencies have identified community cohesion as crucial to promoting greater knowledge, respect and contact between various cultures and to establish a greater sense of citizenship. The development of community cohesion is defined as the attempt to build communities with four key characteristics:

- a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities
 - the valuing of diversity
 - similar life opportunities for all
 - strong and positive relationships being developed between people from different backgrounds and circumstances in the workplace, in the school and within neighbourhoods
- (Home Office and ODPM, 2005)

Volunteering is seen as one of the routes through which community cohesion can be built. This is emphasised in a number of publications, including 'Community Cohesion: seven steps' (Home Office and ODPM, 2005) and 'Guidance on Community Cohesion' (LGA, 2002). This latter publication specifically states that volunteering by refugees and people seeking asylum is to be encouraged.

For more information, visit:

Commission for Racial Equality: www.cre.gov.uk
 Race, Equality, Faith and Cohesion Unit (Home Office): <http://communities.homeoffice.gov.uk>

Case study example: See [School governors, Section 4.8, page 72](#).

2.3 Employment

In 2005, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) published a refugee employment strategy, 'Working to Rebuild Lives' (DWP, 2005a). This emphasises the importance of a wide range of approaches and partnerships to help refugees into work, including the involvement of volunteering organisations.

DWP's five year strategy for 2005 – 2010, 'Opportunity and Security Throughout Life', also refers to partnership working on refugee issues (DWP, 2005b). DWP supports volunteering among the wider population overall, as well as refugees:

"The aim is to increase the number of people who can participate in voluntary community based activity."

(DWP, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Circular, HB/CTB A36/2001)

To support the DWP strategy, Jobcentre Plus has produced a framework for partnership working to help refugees fulfil their potential (Jobcentre Plus, undated). Titled 'Working together to help rebuild lives', the framework emphasises that DWP 'embraces diversity and, under the Race Equality Scheme, is committed to equal opportunities'. Partnership working is again seen as key to enabling refugees to take advantage of the advice, employment support and opportunities that are available:

"Government, the voluntary sector, employers and professional bodies all have a key role in working together to find solutions to improve access to appropriate employment for refugees."

Like other claimants, refugees who are in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance can do as much volunteering as they like, as long as they remain available for and are actively seeking work. Volunteers in receipt of benefits should declare their voluntary activity.

For more information and copies of strategies, visit:

Department for Work and Pensions:
www.dwp.gov.uk
 Jobcentre Plus: www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk

Case study example: Volunteer Centre Westminster Refugee Project ([Box, Section 4.9, page 80](#)) is working with local Jobcentre Plus offices.

2.4 Diversity

'Diversity' has become a term used by organisations working to ensure they welcome people from different backgrounds. It may be built in to volunteering and other organisational strategies.

Volunteering England defines diversity as follows:

"A diverse organisation is one which values difference. It is one which recognises that people with different backgrounds, skills, attitudes and experiences bring fresh ideas and perceptions. Diverse organisations encourage and harness these differences to make their services relevant and approachable. A diverse organisation draws upon the widest possible range of views and experiences, so it can listen to, and meet, the changing needs of its users, staff, volunteers, partners and supporters."
(www.volunteeringengland.org)

For more information: visit the diversity pages of the Volunteering England website: www.volunteering.org.uk/managingvolunteers/diversity/

Two reports published by Wales Council for Voluntary Action are also useful: *Thinking about Diversity and Equality* (May, 2005) and *Valuing Volunteers: the value of volunteering for refugees and asylum seekers* (Dooner, 2005).

Case study examples: See [BTCV, Section 4.2 page 47](#), and [Oxfam, Section 4.6, page 64](#). The [Volunteer Centre Westminster](#) has a Diversity Group ([Section 4.9, page 78](#)). The following have responded to growing diversity among their client groups: [Maryhill CAB \(Section 4.4, page 57\)](#), [Nomad \(Section 4.5, page 61\)](#), [Rosemount \(Section 4.7, page 68\)](#), [School governors \(Section 4.8, page 72\)](#).

Building diversity at BTCV

In 2001, BTCV secured funding from the Community Fund for 'Environments for All', an initiative that aimed to involve a wider range of people in environmental volunteering, including people seeking asylum and refugees. Funding ended in 2004, and the organisation is now focussing on 'mainstreaming' diversity – embedding it across the organisation.

"There is a danger that organisations use a single project to show their organisation has changed," said BTCV's Chief Executive Tom Flood. "And if you allow outputs to be the pattern, the learning doesn't deepen to the institutional process. This is the second part of the challenge – mainstreaming – not just having a few dedicated projects."

This change has been enabled by a number of factors, including:

- top-level dedication to diversity: organisational direction
- openness to change embraced by staff at all levels
- an ethos of learning from experience, acceptance that things don't always go right first time
- resourcing through Environments for All funding
- losing fear of embracing diversity: being a confident and experienced organisation
- successes in social cohesion: 'getting on and doing' environmental work

There have also been major challenges:

- staff have had to adapt quickly to working with unfamiliar groups in new ways
- new systems and a database have been put in place to monitor volunteer characteristics to satisfy funding demands
- the three-year funding was only enough to begin to implement change in such a large organisation
- awareness of the risk of 'tokenism' and the suspicions this can arouse
- change takes time, especially to have an impact further up the organisational hierarchy
- the exposure and risk of failure attached to trailblazing

"One of my biggest concerns is that our overall impact could be negative, by going in and only just beginning to be able to do work," said Tom Flood. "We're not running projects for the sake of it – it's about embedding the approach."

2.5 Integration

There is a growing literature seeking to define integration. Refugee agencies tend to advocate the approach outlined by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE): that integration is a dynamic two-way process which begins from the day an asylum seeker arrives within the new host society:

“We consider it a continuous long-term process enabling refugees and their communities to live in harmony with the host population of which they form a part. Refugee integration therefore places demands on both receiving societies and on the individuals and communities concerned.”
(ECRE, 2005)

Home Office integration strategy for refugees

In the UK, the government has determined that integration begins only once a person has been granted permission to remain in the UK. It therefore excludes people seeking asylum.

In 2005, the Home Office published ‘Integration Matters: A National Strategy for Refugee Integration’ (Home Office, 2005a). This aims to enable refugees to achieve their full potential, to contribute to the community and gain access to public services.

The strategy acknowledges the role volunteering can play, and calls on regional consortia to include volunteering in their integration strategies. The Home Office will evaluate integration – one of the indicators is ‘the number of refugees involved in voluntary work’.

‘Integration Matters’ also states that the Home Office will help develop the capacity of organisations to provide volunteering opportunities for refugees through the development of a volunteering strategy.

As part of the strategy, the Home Office has set up ‘Sunrise’, a pilot programme offering support to people newly-granted refugee status, which includes advice on volunteering.

Scottish Refugee Integration Forum

The Scottish Refugee Integration Forum published a Draft Action Plan in 2003 (SRIF, 2003). This takes a broader approach, allowing for the integration of asylum seekers as well as refugees. The Action Plan makes only one direct reference to volunteering. However, the following two actions

from the Community Preparation Section are relevant:

Key actions: Community preparation

14. Public and voluntary sector organisations and local networks should undertake proactive work to stimulate and support a range of types of activities to promote integration in the local community.
15. Partnerships... should take a strategic approach to supporting front line staff and volunteers from the start of the process of preparation for integration.
(SRIF, 2003)

A progress report was published in 2005, which listed a number of ways in which volunteering had been developed as part of the integration action plan (SRIF, 2005).

Wales and Northern Ireland

The Welsh Assembly and Northern Ireland Government plan to publish draft or final integration strategies in 2007.

“The ethos of integration is central to our work, with local people, with asylum seekers and with foreign students.”

Fiona Forsyth, Project Manager, Rosemount Lifelong Learning

For more information and copies of publications, visit:

European Council on Refugees and Exiles:
www.ecre.org
National Refugee Integration Forum:
www.nrif.org.uk
Scottish Refugee Integration Forum:
www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Equality/Refugees-asylum/integration

Case study examples: a number of the case study organisations had the promotion of integration as their aim. These include Westminster Volunteer Centre (Section 4.9, page 78), and two intermediary organisations: Displaced People in Action and The Parade ESOL Service (Section 4.10, pages 84 and 85). Maryhill CAB is funded by the Scottish Refugee Integration Forum (Section 4.4, page 58).

2.6 National volunteering compacts and strategies

England

The Volunteering Compact sets out principles and undertakings for both government and the voluntary and community sector in England on how to work together to support and promote volunteering (Home Office, 2005b).

In the Compact, government and the voluntary and community sector agree to tackle discrimination, to ensure that volunteering is open to all and that arrangements made for volunteers do not unfairly exclude particular groups from volunteering.

The Compact lists a number of commitments that have particular relevance to the involvement of refugees and people seeking asylum. These include the following for government:

- to work to actively reduce barriers to volunteering resulting from existing legislation, regulation and policies;
- to recognise that it is legitimate for voluntary and community organisations to include the costs of enabling greater access to volunteering in relevant applications for funding.

Voluntary and community sector commitments include:

- to promote volunteering opportunities including looking at how volunteers are recruited to ensure equal opportunities to volunteer;
- to include reasonable costs for reducing barriers to volunteering in relevant funding bids.

For more information and copies of the Compact, visit:

Compact: www.thecompact.org.uk
Volunteering England:
www.volunteeringengland.org.uk

Northern Ireland

The importance of volunteering is stated in 'Building real partnership', the compact between government and the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland, published by the Department of Health and Social Security, 1998. The compact 'recognises and values highly volunteering as an important expression of citizenship'.

Shared values include:

- Active citizenship: participation of people in society through volunteering, community involvement, and self help initiatives.

- Equality: equality of opportunity in relation to employment and services, and equality of access to resources and decision-making processes for all the people of Northern Ireland.
- Pluralism: upholding the rich diversity of cultures, identities and interests within Northern Ireland.
- Social justice: cherishing all citizens equally, through the pursuit of fairness, tolerance and social cohesion, opposing all forms of discrimination and ensuring the participation of those who are most marginalised.

A Volunteering Strategy is due to be published in 2007.

For a copy of the compact, visit:

Department for Social Development:
www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/publications/voluntary_and_community_development.htm

Scotland

The Scottish Executive published its Volunteering Strategy in 2004. This sets out a number of aims, and emphasises the importance of overcoming barriers to volunteering that certain sectors of society face. The strategy lists a number of values, including:

- Inclusiveness – everyone should be free to volunteer and have the opportunity to do so.
- Diversity – everyone in society has some passion, skill or talent that can be used to enrich someone else's life as well as their own.
- Free will and choice – volunteering is an act of free choice: there must be no form of compulsion or coercion.
- Empowerment – volunteering can empower people to fulfil their potential and acquire new skills and knowledge.

For more information and a copy of the Volunteering Strategy, visit:

Scottish Executive:
www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications

Wales

The National Assembly for Wales published the 'Voluntary Sector Scheme' in 2000. This sets out the broad principles and shared values which govern the relationship between the Assembly and the voluntary sector in Wales, and includes the Assembly's policy on volunteering.



Volunteer, Rosemount
Lifelong Learning,
Glasgow.

The policy includes commitments to improving access to volunteering for people from all sectors of society and encouraging the more effective involvement of volunteers. It states that:

- Everyone has a right to participate in the life of their community and society in general through volunteering.
- Volunteering should be available to all people in society and special measures should be taken to include those who are vulnerable to social exclusion.

- Assembly funding and grants schemes should require organisations to demonstrate an effective policy for involving volunteers from a cross section of society which is appropriate to the nature of the organisation.
- organisations should make proper provision to recruit volunteers from groups vulnerable to social exclusion.

For more information and a copy of the Voluntary Sector Scheme, visit:

National Assembly for Wales: www.wales.gov.uk

Welsh Council for Voluntary Action:

www.wcva.org.uk



Volunteers,
Conservation Volunteers
Northern Ireland.

2.7 Race relations legislation

Under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, public authorities have a duty to tackle racial discrimination, promote equality of opportunity, and promote good relations between people from different racial groups. The promotion of good relations is central to the work that local authorities do on community cohesion, and therefore has a particularly strong connection with volunteering.

Because of their connections to the local community, and their ability to stimulate and support community participation, voluntary and community organisations have a crucial role to play in helping public authorities to promote good race relations.

For more information, visit:

Commission for Racial Equality: www.cre.gov.uk

Case study example: See [School governors, Section 4.8, page 76](#), including the volunteer's story. One school successfully encouraged involvement to overcome racial tensions.

3.

The findings

- 3.1 Getting started**
- 3.2 Recruitment**
- 3.3 Volunteering outside the refugee sector**
- 3.4 Leaving volunteering**
- 3.5 Follow on**

“I would say it is an overwhelmingly positive experience. Sometimes you need a higher level of management for a short time, but its great for Oxfam in the long term because the volunteers give back so much.”

Daniel O'Connor, Shop Manager, Oxfam

3.1 Getting started

In this section we look at the factors that led organisations to engage with refugees and people seeking asylum as volunteers. We summarise how they got their first volunteers, and the perspective of refugees and people seeking asylum on their first experience of 'mainstream' volunteering.

The volunteer perspective

Why volunteer?

Reasons commonly given by refugees and people seeking asylum:

Work/study reasons

- To get experience that will help get a job
- To practice/develop skills
- To improve language/communication skills
- To get experience that will help get into college
- To get references

Personal

- To be busy, interested
- To meet new people
- To be with friends

Altruistic

- To help host community
- To show asylum seekers are not scroungers
- Sense of religious duty
- To help the environment
- To share knowledge
- Because come from culture of communal activity

Integration

- To mix with British people
- To learn about British society

Legal

- Because not allowed to work

"I'm giving advice and also learning as well. It helps me – each day learning new knowledge. If you don't have status you can still get experience, get references, and build your CV."

Nismah, volunteer, Maryhill CAB

The volunteer perspective

What puts people off?

Reasons commonly given by refugees and people seeking asylum:

Emotional/attitudinal reasons

- Low confidence
- Anxieties around immigration status
- Thinking your English isn't good enough
- Depression
- Previous negative experience of volunteering

Lack of knowledge

- Not knowing you can volunteer
- Not knowing what's on offer, how to get it
- Not understanding what volunteering is
- Fear that benefits will be affected
- Not seeing previous experience as 'volunteering'

Practical

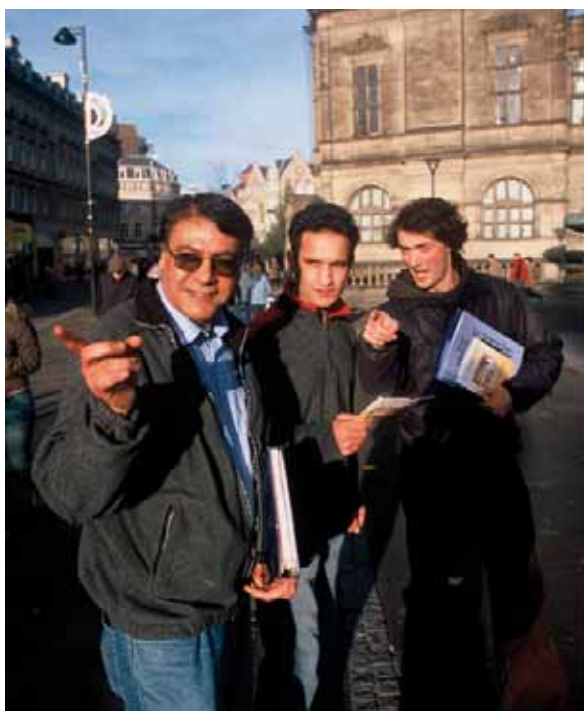
- Living in a hostel
- Destitution
- Lack of childcare
- Distance from home
- Amount of paperwork
- Expenses not paid promptly

"I tell Zimbabweans about being a school governor, but most of my friends are still asylum seekers. They don't know what tomorrow will bring, they can't commit. They want to live in their cocoon."

Elizabeth, parent governor, Greenfields School

"Volunteering in this country is something new for people coming here. It is very suspicious – employer is getting something but you're not getting paid."

Zhila, volunteer, Maryhill CAB



Volunteers and member of staff, Volunteer Centre Sheffield.

The volunteer perspective

Why choose a particular organisation?

Reasons commonly given by refugees and people seeking asylum:

Role/experience offered

Able to practise/make use of particular skill (new or previous)
Able to speak English
Opportunity to learn about local area/British society
Liked role/cause/people

Advised by third party

Recommended by another agency
Friends going
Heard the organisation give a talk

Level of diversity/welcome

Clear they accepted refugees and asylum seekers
Made you feel welcome and wanted
Other refugees or asylum seekers present
Some people who spoke own language

Practical

Fits with other commitments (study, childcare)
Childcare provided
Near to home
Already been a client/student

Why involve refugees and asylum seekers as volunteers?

The ten case study organisations began making deliberate efforts to involve refugees and people seeking asylum for a variety of reasons:

- strong whole agency commitment to equality and diversity
See: [BTCV](#), [Oxfam](#), [Volunteer Centre Westminster](#)
- specific organisational objectives, such as the promotion of skills, confidence and capacity in excluded sectors of society
See: [BTCV](#), [Rosemount](#), [Volunteer Centre Westminster](#)
- growing diversity among client group
See: [Maryhill CAB](#), [Nomad](#), [Rosemount](#), [school governors](#)
- research or internal review indicated a gap or need to involve refugees
See: [Volunteer Centre Westminster](#)
- funding enabled the organisation to target refugees and asylum seekers as volunteers
See: [BTCV](#), [Maryhill CAB](#), [Volunteer Centre Westminster](#)
- a need for volunteers (because of expansion or the loss of traditional sources of volunteers)
See: [Activeventure](#), [Irish Community Care](#)
- encouraged and helped by intermediary organisation
See: [Irish Community Care](#), [Whitchurch hospital](#)
- to reach refugee and asylum seeker clients more effectively
See: [Maryhill CAB](#)

Some organisations (such as Oxfam and Whitchurch hospital) felt they were already very accustomed to working with minority groups, and this made broadening their intake easy. For others, taking on refugees and people seeking asylum required going through some rapid learning about the asylum system and documentation (see [Activeventure](#), [Section 4.1](#), [page 42](#)).

“Nomad has all the policies and practices like any organisation – but it takes more than policy and practice to make something happen – it’s about attitude, having staff who want to make things happen.”

Trudie White, Volunteer Co-ordinator, Nomad

Methods of recruiting refugees and asylum seekers

Organisations used the following approaches:

- referral from another organisation
See: [Nomad](#)
- word of mouth (between volunteers in particular)
See: [BTCV](#), [Westminster Volunteer Centre](#)
- from own client/student base
See: [Rosemount Lifelong Learning](#)
- visits to wide range of organisations (refugee groups, ESOL classes, churches, mosques, organisations working with refugees and asylum seekers)
See: [Westminster Volunteer Centre](#), [BTCV](#)
- joining networks, building partnerships
See: [Activenture](#), [Maryhill CAB](#), [Rosemount Lifelong Learning](#)
- running a training course, then recruiting volunteers
See: [Maryhill CAB](#)
- distribution of leaflets, posters
- direct approaches to individuals

“We now have a pool of people with links in churches, organisations, refugee communities, colleges – people who are on the ground, in direct contact with refugees. Word of mouth referral has been the most significant. It takes a bit of time to build that profile.”

Tim Cowen, Refugee and Asylum Seeker Project
Co-ordinator, Maryhill CAB

Challenges

At the stage of getting started, organisations could face a number of obstacles. These included:

- lack of confidence within the organisation
- lack of knowledge of where/how to contact refugees and asylum seekers
- lack of resources for additional marketing or expansion of volunteering
- concerns about language skills of new volunteers
- concerns about racism in client group or older, current volunteers
- ring-fenced funding (eg excluding asylum seekers)
- lack of monitoring systems
- concerns about negative media coverage of asylum issues

- lack of awareness among refugees and asylum seekers of the recruiting organisation, and of volunteering in general
- concerns about recruitment procedures (references and CRB checks in particular)
- lack of internal capacity (for instance, not having a volunteer manager)
- nervousness about getting things wrong, including misunderstanding asylum legislation

Overcoming barriers

Some organisations put considerable effort into overcoming barriers and ensuring that refugees and people seeking asylum got involved as volunteers. They were creative in the roles they devised for volunteers, trying to shape these to the needs, interests and abilities of refugees and people seeking asylum. Organisations often worked very hard at marketing – BTCV in particular went out to talk to a wide range of groups.

Some secured funding to run targeted initiatives, but for most, the inclusion of refugees and people seeking asylum was part of on-going work to recruit volunteers from different backgrounds. While the organisations sought to involve refugees, at the same time they considered immigration status to be only a minor consideration, of consequence only if a CRB check was required or if a funder wanted related monitoring information.

Case study examples:

The following provide examples of how organisations tackled particular issues:

Securing funding:

[BTCV](#), [Maryhill CAB](#), [Volunteer Centre Westminster](#)

Creative marketing:

[BTCV](#)

Diversity of roles:

[BTCV](#), [Rosemount Lifelong Learning](#)

Overcoming language limitations:

[Maryhill CAB](#), [Oxfam](#)

Developing diversity awareness:

[Volunteer Centre Westminster](#)

Forging new partnerships:

[Nomad](#)

“We don’t ask people their immigration status. We try not to make distinctions.”

Daniel O’Connor, Shop Manager, Oxfam

Intermediary organisations

We interviewed eight outside agencies that had encouraged the case study organisations to take on a refugee or asylum seeker as a volunteer (see [page 4](#) for a list of the organisations). They had all developed this role as an on-going area of work, and usually had funding to carry it out.

They were very clear about the value of volunteering to refugees and people seeking asylum. They emphasised the importance of gaining experience that can increase skills and help people into work. They also mentioned other benefits, such as alleviating boredom, improving English, giving people something purposeful to do and helping integration. They emphasised the needs of asylum seekers, who are not allowed to work.

Criteria for identifying suitable volunteer placements

Interviewees in the intermediary organisations said they looked for some or all of the following when looking for placements for refugees and people seeking asylum:

- offers experience of particular skills
- offers a range of roles
- good environment for developing language/communication skills

- strong track record on diversity/inclusion and equal opportunities
- puts people in direct contact with local community/British society
- provides good support
- provides development opportunities
- you can volunteer with only basic skills
- you can volunteer with limited English
- has purpose people may like
- needs people at times/places that suit volunteer

Case study examples: see [page 4](#) for a list of the intermediary organisations visited, and where to find them in this report.

"I need to feel comfortable that people will be welcomed. Refugees and asylum seekers are vulnerable, plucking up the courage to be a volunteer. If something goes wrong they may be put off."

Magi Jackson, Horizons Project Officer, Refugee Action



Volunteer,
Whitchurch hospital,
Cardiff.

The volunteer as pioneer

We found that some refugees and people seeking asylum find their way into 'mainstream' volunteering almost by accident. However, at the other end of the spectrum there are people who are deliberately seeking out volunteering experiences where they know they are unlikely to meet other people from their community.

These people often have a long-term goal they are working towards, usually related to establishing a career in this country. They may have a strong wish to be of service to the host society. They may want to counteract the tabloid image of refugees and asylum seekers as scroungers.

They are aware of the benefits that come from volunteering outside the refugee sector: having to speak in English, meeting local people, learning about work and life in the UK, gaining references and guidance. They may use the term 'integration' and be seeking to integrate. They may encourage others to do the same: the presence of one enthusiastic volunteer can, in a welcoming environment, lead to other refugees and asylum seekers joining in.

To achieve their goals, several of the people we interviewed were volunteering in more than one place. A few had moved from one volunteering agency to another, to build up a particular track record, to continue to develop, or as they search for the right experience. Often they had sought out and welcomed help from intermediaries in finding the right volunteering opportunity. For some, their first volunteering experience had been in a refugee organisation they knew and understood, and this led on to volunteering in other sectors.

Most of the people we interviewed had at least some 'pioneer' qualities.

"The government is giving me food, house – so I want to do something for the people who help me. I want to work with them together."

Vitty, volunteer, Maryhill CAB

"I lost control of my life. You feel useless... The best way to get out of that is volunteering – but you have to be pushy even to volunteer. You have to find out. And there are a lot of obstacles. If you just accept you become passive and eternally grateful for inadequate services."

Asha-Kin, vice chair of board of governors, South Camden Community School



Volunteer and client, Volunteer Centre Westminster.

3.2 Recruitment

In this section we summarise some of the common experiences and insights of interviewees around the recruitment process. (for information on marketing techniques, see [Section 3.1, page 28](#)).

The application process

The following good practice points emerged from the case studies:

- support with filling in application forms is important
- forms can be filled in as part of a relaxed interview
- avoid sending documents by post if possible
- interviews need to be paced so that information is understood and both sides can ask questions
- intermediary organisations may help with forms and getting to the interview
- interviews and form filling are an opportunity to assess language skills
- there is no need to request immigration status, unless for a CRB check or to meet funding requirements
- get back to people as soon as possible

“We have an informal chat for about an hour, filling in the form as we go along. This is very useful as the volunteer is more able to express what they want.”

Daniel O'Connor, Shop Manager, Oxfam

“It was very easy. We didn't have to fill in forms. When you first visit an organisation and the first thing is to fill in lots of forms – it can put people off.”

Vladislav, volunteer, BTCV

References

Most of the case study organisations requested references. Several said they were flexible about this, especially with new arrivals. One said they normally asked for references from people who had known the volunteer two years, but would shorten this for people seeking asylum.

If an intermediary organisation was involved, it nearly always provided a reference and helped the volunteer identify possible other referees.

Induction and information

Several of the case study organisations handed out information packs in English to all new volunteers, summarising key information, health and safety requirements and other relevant policies.

Some provided short, introductory training and then helped people to learn their role ‘on the job’. Maryhill CAB provided six days of specialised induction training for refugee and asylum seeker volunteers, to help them get the most out of the mainstream CAB training, which they also attended. Nomad has a formal induction and mentoring scheme for new volunteers. Actventure requires all volunteers to attend a training day before starting.

The school governors interviewed had access to a range of training, and had been mentored to some extent, either by the head teacher of their school, or by another governor.

Volunteer roles

Most case studies had pre-defined roles for volunteers, and worked to find the most appropriate role for the new volunteer. Rosemount Lifelong Learning is an example of an organisation able to set up a particularly wide range of volunteer roles. Some organisations develop roles in new ways, to fit volunteers' skill levels – this enabled people to get involved and to develop. BTCV in Glasgow went a step further, in some cases finding out what the new volunteer wanted to do, then devising opportunities for them to do it.

“It's important to use your own judgement. Are you going to lose someone who's a very good volunteer because they can't give a reference? The nature of the training we provide means that people are under supervision and have support for some time.”

Tim Cowen, Refugee and Asylum Seeker Project Co-ordinator, Maryhill CAB

Expenses

All the case study organisations paid expenses incurred in course of volunteering, notably travel and lunch expenses. Prompt payment was seen as vital.

“I do make a point of making sure asylum seekers get their expenses as I know they don’t have any money.”

Sue Harper, Volunteer Development Worker,
Rosemount Lifelong Learning

Criminal Records Bureau checks

At the time of doing the research, four of the case study organisations routinely carried out CRB checks on volunteers because the nature of volunteer roles meant this was a legal requirement (Activenture, Nomad, Rosemount Lifelong Learning, Whitchurch hospital). Intermediary organisations sometimes helped with this process.

Difficulties with CRB checks included:

- people lacking CRB-accepted identification papers
- people failing to receive information or documents in the post
- people moving house while a CRB check is in process (and so losing papers posted to the previous address)
- people finding it hard to remember five years of addresses when they have fled into exile and been housed in different places

- organisations being new to the asylum system, and not understanding the different documents and their meaning
- organisations having very little time in which to prepare CRB checks
- CRB checks sometimes taking many months, leading to volunteers losing interest or availability
- organisations lacking the capacity and experience to cope with CRB complications

For some organisations, learning to deal adequately with the CRB process had taken considerable time and effort. The organisations tried to find appropriate, supervised roles for volunteers who were waiting for a CRB check to be processed.

“I always encourage organisations not to use CRB and references to absolve themselves from good supervision and management. If you work with someone and get to know them, this self-reference is always stronger than one someone carries with them.

“And it is very important not to go through CRB unless it is a legal requirement – unnecessary CRB checking can be an infringement of human rights.”

Paul Harvey, Asylum Seeker and Refugee Worker,
Volunteer Centre Sheffield

3.3 Volunteering outside the refugee sector

This section looks at some areas of good practice that emerge once refugees or people seeking asylum have settled in to volunteering in an organisation outside the refugee sector. Differing styles of management worked well in different settings, but some common themes emerged from our visits that are highlighted here. This section also summarises a wider list of challenges and benefits identified by interviewees.

Understanding English?

Some refugees have English as a first language, or speak the language very well. For others, volunteering is an excellent opportunity to practise language skills. For many of the volunteers we spoke to, this was one of the main reasons they

opted to volunteer in an organisation where most people spoke English. Sometimes, volunteering was their only opportunity to regularly use conversational English.

Some of the volunteer managers said that they had been apprehensive that communication barriers could prevent volunteering, and only with experience had they found that language need not be a significant obstacle. Often, volunteers are attending English classes and make rapid progress. Some people struggle more with written than spoken English, and steps can be taken to help them fill in application forms or understand written information.

Some organisations said it was a great advantage having people speaking several languages.

How to involve volunteers with limited English

Case study organisations had found a number of strategies:

- help people to assess their language skills realistically
- match language capacity to role
- provide support with filling in application forms
- have practical tasks that make use of non-verbal skills
- use practical demonstrations when appropriate
- have more fluent volunteers act as interpreters or 'buddies'
- translate basic information
- train staff in use of plain English
- develop lists of useful vocabulary
- provide training in relevant technical or colloquial language
- provide volunteer English tutors
- encourage people to ask questions
- offer patience, attention, energy and inspiration so people feel enthused and able to try new things

Learning about language at Maryhill CAB

Maryhill CAB accepts that for some people it will take longer for them to train, and they may take longer working on each case, because of language issues. All refugee and asylum seeker volunteers complete an in-house English language self-assessment questionnaire before starting the CAB training.

To help all volunteer advisers (not just people whose first language is not English), the CAB has developed a dictionary explaining advice terminology and Glaswegian expressions. For those who want it, support is on offer through the Glasgow ESOL Forum.

If volunteers apply who do not have adequate levels of English, the project tries to find alternative opportunities within the CAB, or it refers people to the Volunteer Centre and other projects. One refugee took on an administrative role – after a year they felt ready to join the CAB advice training.

Support and supervision

Support and supervision arrangements varied between the case study organisations. Volunteer managers said the following helped them ensure volunteers thrived and were productive:

- being available and approachable
- making sure volunteers got regular support
- offering praise
- fostering independence
- being willing to look for solutions to problems
- being clear about what you can and cannot help with
- maintaining links with the intermediary agency
- being part of partnerships and networks involved in refugee issues
- learning basic information about the asylum process

"My English was really poor when I came the first time. You have to push yourself to learn new words and speak English all the time – that's what has taught me how to really speak."

Johan, volunteer, Activenture



Volunteer speaking at a Belfast volunteering seminar.

All volunteers are equal...

Many of the volunteer managers stressed that, in their organisation, all volunteers are treated equally. Immigration status was a private matter and, in many ways, irrelevant. If the volunteer manager knew someone's immigration status, this information was confidential. With this approach went a strong philosophy of not labelling people.

... but sometimes extra support is needed

However, volunteer managers also said that sometimes, some volunteers needed added support because of their situation or their experience of becoming a refugee. (One added that this applies not just to refugees and people seeking asylum, but also to other vulnerable volunteers.)

Case studies and intermediaries recommended the following:

- develop a basic understanding of the asylum system
- form links with refugee agencies you can refer people to
- understand the impact anxiety, destitution and reporting requirements can have
- be aware that sometimes painful memories are triggered
- have clear boundaries regarding the amount of support on offer
- do not pry
- observe confidentiality

Development of volunteers

Several case study organisations talked about ways in which volunteers could gradually take on more responsibility and receive further training. Sometimes, intermediary organisations also stayed in touch with volunteers and gave advice if they wanted to progress in particular directions.

A few organisations were exploring the possibility of offering accreditation to volunteers (see below).

Acknowledging and accrediting volunteers

There are many ways to acknowledge the contribution and achievements of volunteers.

Most of the case study organisations held social events to which they invited volunteers. At Volunteer Centre Westminster, for instance, there is a weekly staff and volunteer lunch. There are other special events, and volunteers are also invited to take part in some planning sessions and away days.

"The only selection criteria applied equally to all is the person's ability to carry out the volunteering role they apply for, within the law and Oxfam's policies and procedures."

Oxfam Volunteer Policy

"We don't want them to feel different, or for other volunteers and guests to feel that certain volunteers are 'special'."

Les Pond, Training and Recruitment Officer, Actventure

Volunteer development at Nomad

When a volunteer shows an interest in changing or developing their role, the Volunteer Co-ordinator at Nomad works with them on a development plan. Emphasis is placed on adapting to fit the person so they can still volunteer.

The first refugee volunteer began doing database inputting. He was extremely nervous when he started, but became more comfortable and later moved to answering phones. Over a period of six months, as his English improved, he went on to meeting and greeting clients and working on client files.

"I helped him with his development plan to move through the different roles," said Nomad's Volunteer Co-ordinator, Trudie White. "I think it helped his confidence a great deal. His English really improved by working in reception and just making cups of tea and chatting with people."

Volunteer advice workers at Nomad can go on an accredited advice work course.

Social events and work meetings were valued by staff and volunteers, who felt they strengthened relationships and helped people feel part of the organisation. Sometimes wider recognition is gained, through media coverage of volunteering, or in-house publications.

Some organisations were looking at more formal accreditation of volunteering, to help volunteers wanting to build their CV for the purposes of work or further education. Nomad, for instance, ran an accredited training that helps people of all backgrounds prepare for volunteering. This finished with an awards

ceremony. Oxfam is planning to offer optional in-house accreditation to its shop volunteers.

For a summary of the range of options around acknowledgement and accreditation:

see Volunteer Development Scotland's free publication, 'Getting recognised, giving credit' (Volunteer Development Scotland, 2002).

"No one helped me with my qualifications. It could be assessed – what's your qualification, what do you want to do here. I volunteered but I have no qualification to show for it."

Volunteer

Deepening involvement

In some cases, volunteers had become engaged in the management of the organisation and in making decisions about its future. Two of the case study organisations had refugees or people seeking asylum serving on their management committee (Maryhill CAB and Rosemount Lifelong Learning).

The case study that addressed issues of governance in particular was the one that focussed on refugees as school governors. The governors were aware that their role was to represent other parents – both from within their own community but also across the school. Three of the governors had served more than one period of office (each period is four years).

There was a clear progression for the people who took part, as they gradually became involved in more committees, or took on roles such as chair of governors.

"I was assigned to two sub-committees where I contributed my views. Later I joined all the sub-committees, in order to get experience. Then I joined the admissions panel for the entire local authority."

Abdul, former governor, Primrose Hill Primary School

Case study examples: see [Maryhill CAB \(Section 4.4, page 57\)](#), [Rosemount Lifelong Learning \(Section 4.7, page 68\)](#) and [School governors \(Section 4.8, page 72\)](#).

Volunteer training for refugees

Cross-border project, Northern Ireland

The Cross Border Centre for Community Development teamed up with the Volunteer Development Agency Northern Ireland and Volunteering Ireland to promote volunteering among refugees and people seeking asylum living in the border region.

The Cross Border Centre commissioned the Volunteer Development Agency and Volunteering Ireland to design and deliver two training programmes:

- Training for volunteers to prepare them for volunteering with an organisation
- Training for organisations on good practice for involving volunteers

The Volunteer Development Agency led on the training for volunteers. It developed a programme built around the Certificate in Community Volunteering. However, this was altered significantly because participants were not yet volunteers and because they required more information than indigenous volunteers about how things work in Ireland. The changes also reflected the interest of participants in community development.

Twelve refugees and people seeking asylum took part in the training, and went on to three-month volunteer placements in local agencies.

For more information: An evaluation of the project, with more information about the training offered, can be accessed at www.crossbordercentre.org

Who can be a trustee?

Asylum seekers are allowed to be trustees of charities, provided they do not constitute more than 50% of the board of trustees. At least 50% of a board of trustees must be officially resident in the UK – this can include UK citizens and refugees.

For more information: contact the Charity Commission (England and Wales), Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator, Department for Social Development Voluntary and Community Unit (Northern Ireland) or the National Council for Voluntary Organisations. See [Appendix 6, page 93](#), for contact details.

Sustaining partnerships

All the case study organisations had formed links with other organisations in the course of engaging refugees and people seeking asylum as volunteers. Personal contact with a named individual and visits to partner organisations were mentioned as crucial to building and sustaining relationships.

Some organisations had become active in networks and committees looking at refugee issues. Others were unable to spend much time on sustaining their links with other organisations because of a lack of capacity.

Partnerships were seen as having a number of potential benefits:

- they help volunteer managers understand refugee issues and provide appropriate support and development to volunteers
- they encourage the referral of new volunteers
- they provide opportunities for the organisation to profile its work
- volunteers who are ready to move on can be helped to find appropriate volunteering and work opportunities
- they increase capacity and lead to new volunteering initiatives

There were also limitations to partnership working:

- partnerships can break down when a contact person leaves
- sustaining partnerships takes time
- over-dependence on one or two organisations can limit outreach
- it can mean an organisation does not forge direct links with refugee communities

The level of partnership working is also dependent on wider factors in the local area, such as the history of immigration; levels of funding; strength of the voluntary sector; willingness of agencies to work together; policy framework and leadership styles.

“The best advice is to work with organisations who are doing it. It will work best if people create coalitions.”

Tom Flood, Chief Executive, BTCV

The volunteer perspective

What makes volunteers stay?

A few themes emerged from the many things that volunteers said made them stay:

- feeling welcomed
- feeling useful
- improving English
- getting better prepared for work
- practical support

“It’s better if you stick with it, then you know what you are doing and you get to know the people. You get to do more, different jobs, so it becomes more interesting.”

Anjeva, volunteer, Irish Community Care

Challenges

Once refugees and people seeking asylum settle into volunteering in one place, organisations can still face some of the challenges encountered when getting started or in the recruitment process.

They can also become aware of new areas of difficulty. These can include:

- the need to balance treating all volunteers equally and yet also identifying that refugees and asylum seekers may have particular needs
- racism among clients or older volunteers
- enabling support networks to exist among refugee volunteers, without them becoming separated off from other volunteers
- uncertainty around using volunteers in particular roles, such as interpreter, where paid professionals would be used if there was adequate funding
- a concern that the need to meet diversity targets can lead to tokenism and ‘tick box’ recruitment that do not lead to lasting engagement
- a risk of asylum seekers being exploited because they cannot work and are therefore easy to recruit
- concerns that people may feel an obligation to volunteer, rather than choose freely

For some of the solutions, see other parts of this section.

Building networks in Glasgow

Between 2002 and 2005, some 11,000 asylum seekers were dispersed to Glasgow, making it one of the main centres of dispersal in the UK (along with Yorkshire and Humberside, the North West and West Midlands).

The case study organisations and volunteers interviewed in Glasgow benefited from particularly strong formal and informal networks in the city. Staff are able to exchange information and ideas relating to volunteer management and opportunities, and volunteers are often helped to move between organisations or volunteer at more than one place.

Research participants named the following as among a range of organisations that are part of active networks in Glasgow:

Annesland College
The Bridges Project
British Red Cross
churches
Glasgow City Council
Glasgow Community Planning Partnership
Glasgow ESOL Forum
Maryhill CAB
Maryhill Community Centre
North Glasgow Food Growing Initiative
Positive Action in Housing
Rosemount Lifelong Learning
Scottish Refugee Council

Volunteer Centre Glasgow

The Wise Group

YMCA

Several of these organisations have been funded through European (EQUAL) funding, co-ordinated in Scotland by the ATLAS Development Partnership (Action for Training and Learning for Asylum Seekers), which is led by Glasgow City Council. Many are also part of the Community Responses Co-ordinating Group (facilitated by Glasgow Council for Voluntary Service and the Scottish Refugee Council).

Important elements enabling strong networks in Glasgow include:

- inclusion of asylum seekers as well as refugees in the Scottish Executive's Integration Plan
- emphasis on volunteering, work experience and work placement through European and Scottish Executive funding
- recognition of need to 'build capacity' in an area with little pre-existing infrastructure to support asylum seekers
- the wider socio-economic context: need for population growth/workers
- commitment to partnership working among local agencies, often facilitated by statutory bodies

For more information: information about the ATLAS Development Partnership and its members is available at www.atlas-scotland.co.uk



Volunteers,
Oxfam shop, Leeds.

What are the benefits of having refugees and asylum seekers as volunteers?

The case study organisations all named benefits that came from involving refugees and people seeking asylum as volunteers. These included:

- you gain motivated, skilled volunteers
- the organisation is more representative of its clients/the community
- staff, volunteers and clients enjoy greater mix of people
- it can lead to increased numbers of refugees and asylum seekers as clients
- better service provision to people in asylum system and others
- the organisation is meeting targets of involving excluded groups
- it is satisfying to help people develop through volunteering
- improved communication
- the organisation is modelling good practice
- involvement in wider range of networks
- increased knowledge of asylum system
- increased knowledge of international affairs
- you are encouraged to review and develop volunteering practice
- raised understanding and tolerance
- it contributes to integration, breaks down barriers
- the gains outweigh any extra effort needed to involve people

“Refugees have brought a different dimension of care to the hospital. It’s very interesting for the patients, having a variety of people to talk to. I haven’t had any negative feedback at all – all positive.”

Jill Griffiths, Head of Voluntary Services, Mental Health, Cardiff and Vale NHS Trust

3.4 Leaving volunteering

In this section we look at the reasons people finish volunteering with a particular organisation, and the role taken by volunteer managers.

Reasons for leaving an organisation

Volunteers and staff gave a number of reasons why volunteers leave:

- destitution, depression, distress
- disruption to volunteering through appointments, reporting requirements
- people being dispersed or leaving the area
- people being detained or deported
- other volunteers leave
- the organisation’s culture changes
- people get refugee status and then get a job
- moving on to other volunteering opportunities
- full time or increased study
- family responsibilities
- balancing multiple commitments
- language difficulties
- dissatisfaction with role
- short or fixed-term volunteering

In some cases, organisations are unable to find out why a person moves on. This can cause great concern and also frustration. Intermediary organisations may try to help if there are worries about a person’s wellbeing.

“Sometimes we do fail to engage people with the environment as not everyone enjoys it. We learn from our mistakes and have realised that many of the volunteers have very stressful life issues. It can sometimes be too much for individuals.”

Jenny Biggart, Environments for All Community Development Officer, BTCV Glasgow

“The two main challenges have been childcare provision and issues around immigration policy and destitution. Many women lack support networks for childcare. This is not just with refugees and asylum seekers, but it may be more difficult if you don’t have any family here.”

Tim Cowen, Refugee and Asylum Seeker Project Co-ordinator, Maryhill CAB

Moving on constructively

Other people leave for more positive reasons. Volunteer managers and intermediary organisations believed strongly that volunteering was of great value in enabling people to move into further education, new volunteering opportunities and work.

“Probably about six of our refugee volunteers have gone into paid work. Often in retail, commercial work and so on. Others have gone on to further education.”

Daniel O'Connor, Shop Manager, Oxfam

Both the case study organisations and the intermediary agencies frequently helped people wanting to move on. This included:

- talking to people about what they'd like to do
- building confidence, encouraging people
- letting people know about job vacancies, training opportunities
- tailoring volunteer roles to build useful experience
- letting people use the internet for job search
- signposting people to useful organisations
- referring people to an internal careers advice service
- giving advice on CV writing
- providing access to a computer for writing CVs and applications
- writing references
- helping people prepare for interviews
- providing access to training and accreditation
- giving volunteers more responsibility, including outreach roles
- helping people move on to other volunteering opportunities
- encouraging other organisations to involve refugees and asylum seekers

Getting the right job?

Some of the refugees interviewed had secured employment. However, a number of the case study organisations and intermediary agencies expressed concern that, although volunteering helped, it could not overcome inequities in the labour market. They said people often end up in jobs that do not reflect their real level of skill, experience or qualification.

In addition, refugees often feel compelled to stop volunteering and take the first job that comes along because they want to be independent and earn money.



Volunteer,
BCTV Scotland.

“When you come here as asylum seeker you want a safe country first of all. Then someone offers you work and you are happy because it is the first one you see and you think it's the best.”

Volunteer, Nomad

“Through the volunteering I improved my English and I got a reference. I was a nurse and hospital administrator in my country. I am working now as a Senior Carer in a nursing home. I am doing similar things to nurses, but I am not a nurse.”

Miguel, former volunteer, Whitchurch hospital

“I have a paid position. Volunteering played a part because of the experience of advice and guidance.”

Nismah, volunteer, Maryhill CAB

Long-term relationships

Some of the case study organisations saw volunteering as potentially the beginning of a long relationship. Some said that former volunteers sometimes dropped by. At Activenture, volunteers often return for short-term placements year after year. At Oxfam, the organisation hopes that people will support the organisation through return volunteering or in other ways, possibly over a lifetime.

3.5 Follow on

The case study organisations all wanted to continue to involve refugees and people seeking asylum as volunteers: this section gives a summary.

The case study organisations saw their work developing in various ways:

- accepting more asylum seekers and refugees
- extending a volunteering project to other areas
- looking at development of related projects (with external partners)
- applying for funding (for more specialist training/extra support/targeted recruitment/volunteer expenses)
- strengthening and extending relationships with intermediary and refugee agencies
- considering accreditation for volunteers
- spending more time on induction and support
- doing more to help volunteers develop their careers
- continuing to mainstream the organisation's commitment to diversity
- maintaining contact with former volunteers
- using the participation of refugee volunteers to build involvement with refugee communities
- getting refugees on the board of trustees

Only one organisation was uncertain about its continuing engagement with refugee volunteers, because of the significant difficulties attached to securing CRB checks for young people seeking asylum and the higher volunteer expenses its particular area of work entailed. Efforts were underway to overcome these obstacles.

At another organisation, staff spoke of the difficulties of the transition from having dedicated funding to ensure the inclusion of diverse groups to having no additional resources. The organisation remains committed to achieving high levels of inclusion of socially-excluded groups, but staff now struggle to sustain the partnerships and provide the outreach and support to make this happen.

Long-term goals

For most of the organisations, diversity and integration were seen as a long term objectives. This entailed working to change attitudes within the organisation, among volunteers, clients, partners and in the wider community.

Some of the school governors spoke of how they were inspired to work on education issues if and when they are able to return home.

“I have seen the value of involving parents in giving direction to a school. If I could go back to Somalia, I would rebuild Somali education according to my vision. I feel that education is power.”

Asha-Kin, deputy chair of governors, South Camden Community School

The wider picture

The difficulties that we encountered in identifying case study organisations indicate that volunteering by refugees and asylum seekers into non-refugee organisations is just getting underway, driven in part by regional and national integration policies and the need of agencies for new volunteers. Volunteering of this kind is likely to become more widespread in coming years.

Ideas for development

Volunteer managers had various ideas for development:

- general accreditation of volunteering
- sectoral/specialist accreditation – for instance NHS accreditation for its volunteers, charity shops accreditation
- strengthening links between ESOL courses and non-refugee sector volunteering
- English classes on site
- dictionaries explaining specialist or colloquial language use
- using post-it notes to help people when they fill in complex forms
- developing outreach volunteers
- volunteering by employees into the refugee sector: as induction or longer term
- strengthening alternatives to CRB checks: supervised roles; buddying and others
- allowing volunteer managers to network and be champions of diversity
- arranging ‘observation’ visits, so people can find out more about a volunteering organisation
- developing volunteering initiatives in areas where asylum seekers have been dispersed: addressing the difficulties for all communities that can arise
- building links with National Asylum Support Service housing providers
- joint volunteering initiatives with refugee community organisations

4.

The case studies

- 4.1 Activenture**
- 4.2 BTCV**
- 4.3 Irish Community Care**
- 4.4 Maryhill Citizens Advice Bureau**
- 4.5 Nomad Homeless Advice and Support Unit**
- 4.6 Oxfam shops**
- 4.7 Rosemount Lifelong Learning**
- 4.8 School governors**
- 4.9 Volunteer Centre Westminster**
- 4.10 Whitchurch hospital**

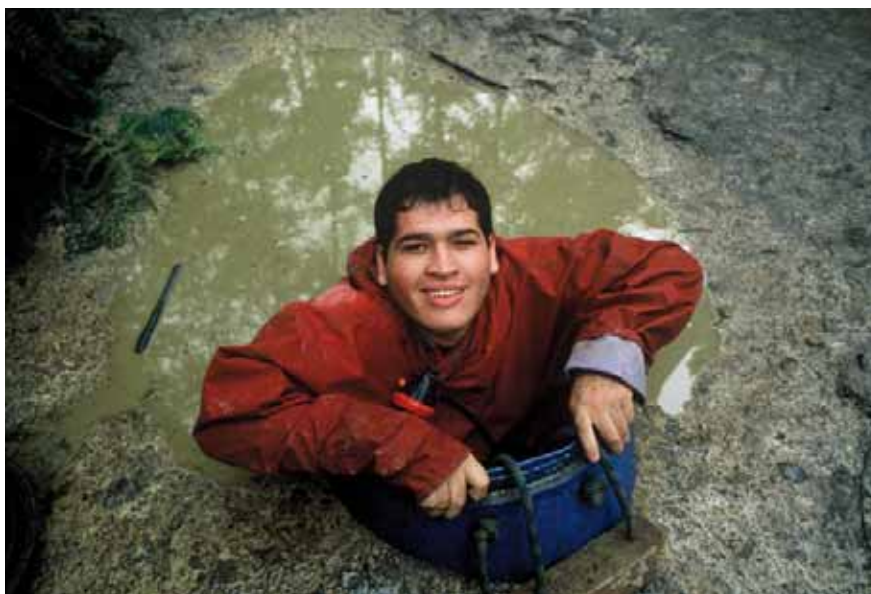
“I would say it is an overwhelmingly positive experience. Sometimes you need a higher level of management for a short time, but its great for Oxfam in the long term because the volunteers give back so much.”

Daniel O'Connor, Shop Manager, Oxfam

4.1

Activenture

East Sussex



“At first when I looked at the information I was so scared. How to wash people... I thought ‘I don’t go’. Without Catharine I wouldn’t go, she said, ‘go there, it will be good, you will meet people and make friends’.”

Volunteer, Activenture

Background

Activenture is a small voluntary organisation offering holidays to children and young people with disabilities and special needs. It is based at Hindleap Warren, a purpose-built outdoor pursuit centre in Ashdown Forest, East Sussex. Hindleap Warren is owned and run by London Youth (The Association of London Youth Clubs).

There are three staff: a full-time Manager, a part-time Administrator and a Training and Recruitment Officer (a new post, set up in 2005). The week-long residential holidays run throughout school holidays, at Hindleap and another London Youth residential centre. The holidays rely on volunteers: Activenture has around 2,000 volunteers on their books and each year provides 1,000 volunteer placements.

Activenture used to be part of the British Red Cross and got a constant stream of volunteers through its own youth groups, but since handover to London Youth this has changed. One task of the new Training and Recruitment Officer is to encourage youth volunteering, and volunteering by young men in particular. Millennium Volunteers and the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme are important sources of volunteers.

At each week there are up to 30 guests aged 8–18 who have disabilities or special needs, plus 30 young volunteer helpers (aged 14–18), 20 residential adult helpers and additional adult helpers who come in for one or two night shifts. There is also a volunteer residential nurse. Many volunteers come back year after year, and are very experienced.

The week is organised around teams, each one made up of two

adult group leaders, five young helpers and five guests. The groups are single sex. Activities through the week include abseiling, kayaking, archery and swimming.

Getting started

The first young refugee, Johan, came to Activenture in 2001 as part of Millennium Volunteers. Johan told his college – West Thames College – about Activenture, and the college Welfare Officer arranged for Activenture to talk to the ESOL students in 2004. The combination of the college and Activenture working together was key to enabling the young people to take part. As a result, 11 students from the ESOL Threshold Department volunteered as young helpers in the summer of 2005.

For Activenture, recruiting a number of young refugees was a new experience, as Manager Di Churchill explained. “I hadn’t

realised that all the young people there were asylum seekers and refugees,” she said. “In terms of the [asylum] process, that was all new to me. With everything in the papers you don’t really think about why people are here, or about the process and what happens when someone gets here.”

Many of the young people who volunteered with Activeventure want to go into the caring professions, and this was an important motivator. However, interviewees said the encouragement of the college Welfare Officer was very important in helping them decide to get involved.

Recruitment at Activeventure

Those who registered their interest in volunteering were invited to a training day held at one of the activity centres.

The training took place well in advance of the activity holidays. Some forms, policies and background information were dealt with on the training day, and some were sent later by post. This included information on child protection and caring for disabled young people.

The training day is an opportunity for people to decide whether or not they want to go ahead. “We do make the induction ‘hard end’,” said Manager Di Churchill. “We make it sound as bad as it gets as we’d prefer people to drop out at induction rather than on the residential week.”

The recruitment process after the initial training day involved filling in postal forms, and this raised a number of issues for the college and Activeventure:

- The young people nearly always needed help filling in forms.
- Some young people had personal advisors or social workers who would help them, but not all.
- Several turned to the Welfare Officer at the college for help and with other queries: this was problematic as her availability was limited.
- Securing consent from an appropriate adult for those under 18 was difficult in some cases.
- The reliance on post was also problematic: in shared hostels letters often go missing, while some young people (especially those in or leaving care) may have to move as often as once every few months.

“We found out that for some of them their post was being opened by other people. Our information wasn’t getting to them. We’ve had to send things to some people again and again.”

Di Churchill, Manager, Activeventure



Intermediary Organisation: West Thames College ESOL Threshold Department

West Thames College is near Heathrow airport, Hounslow: an area with a very high number of young unaccompanied minors. Its Threshold Department has around 230 students aged 16–18. A full-time Welfare Officer helps students with issues affecting their learning and development.

The college promoted volunteering with Activenture because it could help with learning English, with integration and with learning about British culture. It would give the young people something to do and the opportunity to meet young English people.

“You know the summer is so long for these young people,” said Catherine Herriott, the Welfare Officer at West Thames College. “They’re so isolated and they have no money to do anything. When you work with them frequently you realise just how lonely they are. Many of the young people are highly motivated and career-oriented. A lot are interested in being nurses or doctors so this is excellent experience for them.”

Catherine Herriott encouraged the young people she thought most ready for the experience – those with a good level of English, who were motivated and reliable, and who understood the role was unpaid. The college is pleased with the outcomes, although the process was at times complicated.

“If you’re working with another organisation it is important to have lots of contact,” said Catherine Herriott. “Di’s visit to the college was crucial. She should take the credit as despite reservations and problems they kept on it and got the young people there.”

CRB checks

All Activenture volunteers undergo an Enhanced CRB check and agree to child protection and health and safety policies. They are asked to supply two personal references.

Completing the CRB checks became a particular problem. Many of the forms were returned by volunteers with insufficient information or documentation. There was then a last minute rush to get them completed, and some were rejected.

Activenture decided to hold a meeting at the college and asked the young people to come with all their documentation so that the Training and Recruitment Officer could verify details and photocopy documents.

The college Welfare Officer arranged references from the college for all of the young people – however, getting the second reference was difficult for some. Young people seeking asylum and young refugees are often very isolated. They may not be registered with a GP or have regular contact with other support services outside of the college who would be in a position to act as referees.

“With CRB we know now that understanding documentation and realising the time needed to sort it out is important,” said Activenture Manager Di Churchill.

Expenses and costs

Activenture volunteers are not usually paid any expenses, but their living costs are covered during the time they volunteer. Normally, they are asked to pay a contribution of £25 a week.

In view of the situation of the young asylum seekers and refugees, Activenture agreed to pay for their travel to the training day and the week itself. They also waived the £25 living costs contribution. This was again problematic as funds had to be found to cover the expenditure.

Activenture sent out a checklist of items each volunteer should bring. Many did not have necessary items such as swimming costumes, so the college Welfare Officer spent time helping them find cheap options. Eight of the young people got assistance and small grants from their social workers to buy a swimming costume and a spare pair of shoes.

Volunteering at Activenture

All volunteers are placed in teams, with more experienced volunteers leading each team and providing advice and co-ordination. New and younger volunteers are well supported by key adults.

The students from West Thames College said they felt very supported. “They have helped me very well,” said Batel, one of the volunteers. “They help with feeding, show me how to do it. They have helped with English, with everything.”

Managing a diverse volunteer team

The young people were not identified as refugees or people seeking asylum to the group. Only the adult volunteers in each group were informed so that they could anticipate communication problems, and so they understood any issues that might arise (one volunteer, for instance, had to go home early because of a solicitor’s appointment).

The equality ethos of Activenture means they are experienced at welcoming volunteers with varying language skills. “Language has been a slight hiccup,” said Di

Churchill, “but we’ve always had people coming here with various communication issues. We don’t see it as a problem.”

Benefits of taking part

The refugee volunteers were pleased to acquire skills related to caring and disability. All commented on how much their English language had improved through volunteering. They also spoke of their pride at making a contribution, the significance of relieving boredom, and their sense of personal success.

“You have to be strong, have a good heart,” said one of the volunteers. “Looking after children you have to take lots of care – put all your focus with them. It make me confident. It make me happy to help people.”

Despite some difficulties, both the young people and Activenture have gained greatly from the experience.

“There were a couple of small incidents,” said Di Churchill. “One girl got scared in the tunnels when it was dark, it brought back bad memories. Another fainted on a ride on Brighton pier. But by the end of the week they wouldn’t leave!”

Leaving Activenture

Activenture offers short-term volunteering during school holidays. People may go just once, though many volunteer a few times, and some return for many years. One of the young refugees from West Thames College has volunteered over several summers.

“What often happens is that we get young volunteers for a couple of years before they lose interest,” explained Di Churchill. “But often they then come back after a gap as adult volunteers. Once someone has been on Activenture they do tend to come back.”

One of the West Thames College volunteers had wanted to go back to do another week at Activenture over the summer.

However, with the college shut she didn’t know anyone who could advance her some money to cover transport. Activenture could pay her back, but she didn’t have enough money to buy the ticket. Young volunteers can therefore be lost because of their poverty and isolation, and because they lack the knowledge and experience to overcome barriers.

“I’m not working, I don’t have enough money to pay to go there. If you get wet, you need different clothes. I took everything I have. I didn’t have a swimming costume. Other people are all ready. Even a party dress – they have it. I don’t have anything, but it’s ok.”

Volunteer, Activenture



Follow on

The young people are very enthused by their experience with Activenture. One said she would tell everyone at her church about it.

“I will definitely come back at Christmas, Easter, summertime,” said another volunteer. “I’m lonely. I’ve got nothing to do. Why not I come back? These people need help. I just sit at home doing nothing.”

However, both the college and Activenture struggled with the complexities of getting CRB checks processed and with other administrative matters.

Both organisations were understaffed and inexperienced in this area. The main barrier for Activenture was the difficulty the

young people experienced in presenting sufficient documentation for their CRB check. Both organisations and the young people hope to repeat the exercise, but the CRB check is a major challenge needing additional resources.

“I feel pleased we stuck it out,” said Di Churchill. “It was difficult at times when we were organising it. But to see their faces at the end of the week... They have all been exceptionally mature young people. I’m so keen to take it further, and next time we can do it better and avoid these problems.”

Activenture is also looking at ways of accrediting adult volunteer time.

Volunteer testimony

My first Activenture was four years ago. It was the first time I had to speak English all the time. I was really scared. But it was great and I came back the following Easter. Then I was turning 18 so I kept coming as a leader.

I usually go most holidays – about nine weeks a year. By the end of the summer it is quite draining. You're up from 7am to 11pm, and sometimes I stay up later chatting.

Millennium Volunteers came to the college. They helped me fill in the forms – some were difficult and I needed help with the language. Activenture gives you a checklist of things you can bring and I didn't know what some of them were! My parents had to sign a release form.

I went to Millennium Volunteers because they gave you little things if you sign up – like a mug or something. They put me forward to get Millennium Volunteers of the year. I won the London area and then I met the Prime Minister.

I always had the idea to go into nursing. Through Activenture I realised that is definitely what I want to do. I lived in a small village in Colombia, so there wasn't really much going on.

But I did sign up to Red Cross when I was 14. At that time I wasn't thinking about employment, I just wanted the uniform!

My CRB took a year! You have to send ID and I didn't have a passport. The Home Office keeps it. I had my birth certificate sent from Colombia, then I had to have it officially translated. All this took a long time.

I have made friends – we get together sometimes. And I have done some fundraising for Activenture – we did a 20 kilometre canoe up the river Wye.

Some people think 'they're just disabled, they don't have feelings like real people'. But of course they do, and if you take the time, you get so much back. I've gained more from being here than I've given.

For me this volunteering is helping young people to achieve what they wouldn't normally achieve. It's not just the guests who have a good time! You get to do all the activities. It's nice to get away from my parents and be in a different world.

Johan, volunteer leader, Activenture



Useful resources

Activenture

www.londonyouth.org.uk/activenture
01342 822625

Millennium Volunteers

www.millenniumvolunteers.gov.uk
Encourages young people to take part in volunteer projects in their local area.

RefEd: Refugee Education discussion list

www.refed.org.uk
Mailing and discussion list for teachers and other professionals who work with refugee and asylum-seeking children, young people and families.

Refugee Council

www.refugeecouncil.org.uk
020 7346 1134
All young separated refugees are referred to the Refugee Council Children's Panel of Advisers. The Refugee Council website has useful information, publications and links relating to young people seeking asylum and refugees.

Russell Commission

www.russellcommission.org
020 7035 5328
Set up by the Government to develop a new national framework to engage young people in volunteering and community action.

Save the Children

www.savethechildren.org
020 7012 6400
Publishes a series of short guides on working with children and young people seeking asylum and young refugees.

4.2

BTCV

“We asked what people were interested in, we listened to what they want – but also fitting it into the environment by improving the place where people are. It’s not just about the countryside.”

Jenny Biggart, Environments for All
Community Development Officer,
BTCV Glasgow

Scotland



Background

BTCV (formerly British Trust for Conservation Volunteers) is the UK’s largest environmental voluntary organisation. It runs locally-based community environmental projects, and involves 140,000 volunteers.

From 2001 – 2004, BTCV ran an ‘Environments for All’ initiative in eight areas, in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. This set out to increase the involvement of marginalised people, especially those from black and minority ethnic communities. Nearly 3,000 refugees and people seeking asylum have been involved in BTCV volunteering through Environments for All.

The last stages of Environments for All and its follow-up have been concerned with ‘mainstreaming’ the volunteers, the staff and expertise into core BTCV projects. The allotment project run in partnership with North Glasgow Food Growing Initiative (NGFGI) is an example of a follow-on project which is achieving this (see [the box on page 49](#) for a profile of NGFGI).

Getting started

The Environments for All initiative in Glasgow was able to build on a partnership set up earlier between the local BTCV team, the Black Environment Network and the Scottish Refugee Council.

Through this partnership, one environmental project had already been delivered, and the Environments for All team in Glasgow therefore benefited from a combination of existing experience, contacts and networks, along with knowledge of environmental action.

Supported by senior management, the Glasgow team decided to draw on what had worked well, but also to adapt and develop the programme in new ways.

Rather than approach communities with pre-conceived volunteering programmes, they set out to listen to what people wanted to do and then work to provide this.

Promoting volunteering

To encourage refugees and people seeking asylum to take part, the team did presentations at many

organisations, distributed promotional material and sent letters to all ESOL classes in Glasgow. One Kurdish woman they met at a presentation took leaflets away and distributed them, helping raise BTCV’s profile at community level.

Volunteering
roles at BTCV
Glasgow

Through Environments for All, people have been active in a huge variety of roles.

“You don’t know what you will be doing,” said Vladislav, one of the volunteers. “Fighting with bushes. Sometimes barbecue. We have planted trees to create natural forest. Clean ponds. We cleaned paths. In one day you can do everything.”



The aim of meetings was to find out what people might want to do, and to help them be aware of the range of environmental volunteering, rural or urban.

One particular success was getting an ESOL teacher on board who took a whole class out each week to learn English through doing environmental activities. This ended when the teacher left, but good relationships had been built with the college, the students and their families and friends.

Ways of engaging refugees and people seeking asylum

The Glasgow Environments for All projects used a number of ways of engaging and retaining refugee and asylum seeker volunteers:

■ **meeting expectations**

Groups often had pre-conceived ideas of what BTCV would provide – such as a day outing. BTCV would try to provide this, and make it a lead in to other environmental activities.

■ **responding to local environments**

Volunteering in the countryside was on offer – but BTCV also helped people engage with the environment where they lived.

■ **working with pre-existing groups**

Staff visited established groups and ran activities with them (not mixing them with other volunteers).

■ **gradual introductions**

BTCV provided one-off taster

sessions. Once volunteers were involved in one project, they were told about other opportunities.

■ **bring your friends**

Volunteers were encouraged to bring people they knew to activities.

■ **developing volunteer officers**

Regular volunteers were encouraged to take on more responsibility.

“At first [at an introductory meeting] I’d be talking really fast – ‘this is who we are and we do this, this and this’,” said Jenny Biggart, BTCV Glasgow’s Environments for All Community Development Officer. “Now I go in and say ‘Hi, I’m Jenny’ and take it from there. You need an ice breaker – you can’t expect people to sign up for dates [to go volunteering] straight away.”

The team found the use of visual material highly effective for communicating across different languages. “We’ve made a film of some conservation volunteering activities to show groups,” said Jenny Biggart. “That’s been really helpful. So it’s very clear that you get wet, you get hailed on, you get muddy, but all you see is smiley faces!”

If a group showed interest the BTCV team could offer a taster session such as inviting people to the allotment for one day to talk about growing plants and eating vegetables.

“Taster sessions are not about telling people who BTCV are,” said Jenny Biggart, “but are about doing something practical for a day. People learn that way.”

Working in partnership

Partnership working was essential to getting refugees and people seeking asylum involved in Environments for All. BTCV built links with a wide range of organisations working with or representing minority ethnic or refugee and asylum seeker groups.

“It’s about creating bridges... When you drop the labels and get people involved it’s the same thing – it’s about citizenship, creating trust, it’s about community.”

Tom Flood, Chief Executive, BTCV

“A good partnership is understanding exactly what each organisation is about, and having a contact person who is committed,” said Jenny Biggart. “Don’t let staff leaving cause a breakdown. If someone leaves ask them to name someone to take it on. So many people move on and all the work is gone.”

For more information on partnership working, see [Section 3.3, page 36](#).

Volunteer motivation

The volunteers interviewed gave a number of reasons why they chose to get involved with BTCV, including wanting to be helpful and to be busy.

Remzije, a former journalist and Red Cross volunteer from Kosova, was helped by BTCV to use her art and craft skills to make greeting cards with recycled paper.

It built on her ideas and helped

her feel more confident. “If you want to kill someone slowly, leave them doing nothing,” she said.

Recruitment at BTCV Glasgow

Volunteering may start with a one-to-one conversation or through a group gradually becoming engaged.

Basic data was gathered for monitoring, accountability and health and safety purposes. BTCV staff found that filling in forms could be very off-putting for refugees and people seeking asylum, and that some people felt threatened by questions and officialdom. They therefore devised recruitment procedures that were as informal and unobtrusive as possible.

Sometimes, for instance, information could be given by a referral agency, and there was no need to go over it again. If people

were scared to leave their phone number they could use the number of the partnership organisation as a contact.

The minimisation of form-filling also reflects an organisational position against labelling.

Volunteering at BTCV Glasgow

Over the three-year funding period of Environments for All, the BTCV team in Glasgow was able to build up considerable experience of involving diverse groups and individuals in many different environmental initiatives.

Environments for All activities included taking large groups out for a day of conservation volunteering, and longer-term engaged work with small groups. Groups might be made up entirely of refugees and people seeking asylum, or people from a particular country.

The BTCV and North Glasgow Food Growing Initiative allotment project

The allotment project is an example of how BTCV's work involving diverse groups has continued after the completion of Environments for All.

The allotment project is a core BTCV project, run in partnership with North Glasgow Food Growing Initiative (NGFGI) since 2004. It brings people from different communities together to take part in activities that promote health, environmental awareness and biodiversity.

The project got support and advice from the Environments for All team before the team disbanded. It has been successful in getting some funding from the Home Office Purposeful Activities Fund to engage with people seeking asylum. At the moment there is under-representation from this community, even though the allotment is located in an area where many people seeking asylum are housed.

Good practice for the project includes:

- bringing together volunteers from different communities, including the host community

- welcoming the expertise of volunteers
- extra input for people with limited English
- outside trainers brought in for specialist skills
- encouraging volunteers to get involved in decision-making
- payment of travel expenses
- an end-of-year gathering for all volunteers
- clarity in roles and tasks
- links with organisations that can support and offer advice
- encouraging participants to take home the produce they grow

The lower resource level has led to some different ways of working:

- marketing of the project is to organisations rather individuals
- there is less time to support individual needs, and greater emphasis on group work
- BTCV still offers to pick volunteers up but is limiting this, to promote independence and the use of public transport

Alternatively, they might bring together Scottish volunteers and people of many different backgrounds: this proved very popular.

Over three years, a total of 2,230 people seeking asylum and refugees were involved in Environments for All in Glasgow.

Building relationships

BTCV staff emphasised the importance of constantly reinforcing relationships with volunteers. The proper resourcing of Environments for All allowed staff to maintain regular contact with volunteers, usually by phoning every so often to check people were OK, to inform them of opportunities, and see if they wanted to stay in touch with BTCV. Telephone contact through mobile phones has been crucial to retaining existing volunteers, especially as refugees and people seeking asylum may change address often.

Trust was viewed as an important quality: building a sense of safety and welcome was seen as important to ensuring people would

want to come back. Part of achieving this was providing refreshments and the practical equipment that people needed: tools, jumpers, hats, and back-up clothing in case people got muddy.

BTCV found that volunteering in the environment gave people something they could turn to away from the tensions of being in the asylum system, though the physical nature of the work, and being in the outdoors sometimes triggered painful memories. Staff learnt to handle this sensitively – two went on a counselling course, not in order to offer counselling but so they could improve their listening skills and develop their understanding of boundaries.

Going smaller scale

To begin with, the team ran large-scale outings and activities for up to 60 people at a time, but it emerged that this did not necessarily lead to longer term involvement, so smaller groups were set up.

This meant stronger relationships could build up between staff and volunteers, and

volunteering experiences could be tailored to individual and group interests.

Being flexible

Overall, success in getting people involved was also achieved through trying alternative ways of doing things without making people feel different or labelled.

“Don’t look at working with refugee or asylum seeker volunteers as a barrier or a daunting process,” said BTCV Scotland’s Diversity Manager, Romena Huq. “When I came into the job I had stereotypical views about refugees and asylum seekers. Yes, it might take more support and educating staff and volunteers, but it’s about being flexible.”

Staff and volunteers highlighted the importance of allowing people to opt in or out of volunteering. “They have plan, have a list of what want to do,” said Vladislav. “If weather is bad, anyway we work. But they don’t force us to do something – it is real voluntary. If want, do, if not, don’t – no pressure.”



Development for volunteers

Volunteers who show interest in developing skills have the opportunity to become a Volunteer Officer. They are offered training and protective clothing and greater responsibility in return for regular commitment. An agreement of roles and responsibilities is drawn up after a discussion about the volunteer's areas of interest and aspirations. One refugee volunteer, for instance, was able to develop an interest in video: he received technical training, and helped lead a project with young people, filming a local urban environment.

Leaving BTCV Glasgow

BTCV offered short term and taster volunteering experiences as well as open-ended volunteering. Some people, therefore, only came for one or two sessions, and some people said they'd take part but never showed up.

Diversity Manager Romena Huq explained that it was not possible to pin people down. "It's the nature of it," she said. "It's a volatile group. People have appointments with solicitors or the Home Office, or they move on. We lost a lot of people when they move on. It was quite frustrating."

Other people have stayed several months or longer before moving on.

BTCV staff have provided a lot of references, and this has helped them build up a picture of where people move to. Some get status and get a job locally, or move on to other volunteering opportunities.

Vladislav, for instance, left to establish a Russian-speaking community organisation. "BTCV have helped me," he said. "They give me character reference for setting up my charity."

Many leave the area. "People move down south because it's more multicultural," said Community Project Officer Anna Franklin. "Refugees and asylum seekers are housed in the worst areas of Glasgow. A lot of people



living there have their own issues of poverty and being let down. It can make it difficult for them to interact. There are racist attacks."

"My God is nature – our duty is to help. I never worked with voluntary organisation, but this is way of life – to help people, the environment."

Vladislav, volunteer, BTCV

Helping people to move on

The team felt it was important to find out about volunteers and help them progress to other things if they wanted.

"Don't assume all volunteers are coming for the same reasons," said Community Development Officer Jenny Biggart. "Ask them. This also helps you to move them on when they are ready – to know what they want to do. We can help other environmental charities to open their doors up to more diverse groups by referring people."

She emphasised that losing volunteers is often a sign of success for the project and the individuals. "Those who've stayed have been really proactive – but then they gain confidence to do something else and you lose them. But that's the point!"

Often, however, BTCV does not know why volunteers leave.

Follow on

The end of Environments for All funding has led to a shift of focus for BTCV:

- Diversity is increasingly built in to all activities and into all new funding bids – see the box, [Section 2.3, page 20](#), for information about this.
- There has been a shift from targeted promotion to people from black and minority ethnic communities to a tendency to simply state 'open to all' on leaflets and resources.
- There are no longer resources to get tools and hire buses for particular activities.
- BTCV's strong track record is used to explain to funders and other partners the importance and potential of diversity in the environment sector.

There is awareness, based on experience, of the importance of having the resources to make diversity work and concern that BTCV no longer has targetted funding for diversity.

An indicator of long-term success is the fact that some former volunteers maintain a link with BTCV, coming back for occasional volunteering.

"In the last two years all our groups have become mixed. We don't just have a refugees and asylum seekers group. We have tried to integrate volunteers and staff from these projects into mainstream BTCV activities. This was the whole aim of Environments for All."

Romena Huq, Diversity Manager, BTCV Scotland

Volunteer testimony

At home I was a businessman and a farmer. We worked in the village teaching others to grow things, to encourage people to grow things.

Here we do the different work – some can plant, others weeding. Others shifting plants to new area. It depends how you feel – what you find you want to do. Anyone can decide – we are the volunteer!

I found BTCV by this notice inside St Rollock's Church. I phoned the one who was in charge, she gave me appointment the next day.

I found volunteering very nice. I can learn from other people and they can learn from me. I can learn more English. And to encourage people to have their own allotment. To grow own food, to teach people how to cook good food. To encourage anyone, friends, Scottish.

It was only language that was hard, because I didn't understand it. You only manage to understand by force, because it is a thing I wanted to do. Till now I'm still at college. BTCV has helped me too much. My English is very different from friends who only go to college. I tell them I'm going to the allotment and they don't know what it is.

I learnt manual handling and first aid. I saw it on the BTCV programme and told them I want to do this. Another training I did for planting and to know how to grow in a greenhouse. Anyone who got any new idea... we can discuss all of it together. We don't disagree. If someone want to grow potatoes, ok, we put potatoes here.

I used to give some friends vegetables every time, I give them for free to encourage them to come. Some come here. Others have something to do.

If I can have a stay I still volunteering, and do the same thing. If I got five days for working I can have one day to come here. I haven't decided yet because I don't know what work I will get. I'm still learning English to allow me to have good work.

It is good to encourage people to do different things. This place is a place that we have to live. We don't have a mind to go back – we have to integrate. Yes, this helps. It's hard, some of people they don't like volunteering – they can say 'how much money they gonna pay me?' They don't know how to integrate.

Mussa, volunteer, BTCV

"I'm not involved with BTCV any more. It opened me doors for other places. It made me be more confident to use skills and qualities. BTCV never lose contact with people working with them – we was on phone, how things are?"

I work on garden club last year, helping with kids. I never finish with them."

Remzije, volunteer, BTCV

Useful resources

Black Environment Network

www.ben-network.org.uk
01286 870715

BEN works to promote equality of opportunity for ethnic communities in the preservation and development of the environment.

BTCV

www.btcv.org
01302 572 244

A full evaluation of Environments for All, further case studies, and 'lessons learned' can be found on the website. BTCV has also published a 'Guide for Community Action', based on Environments for All experience.

BTCV Scotland

www.btcv.org
0141 955 1504

The Glasgow team have made a DVD profiling their work, which can be purchased.

Scottish Refugee Council

www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk
0141 248 9799

Publications

Environments for All: the BTCV guide for community action

Chris Church with Emily Cluer and Rhiannon Guy, Think Publishing, 2005
Available from: <http://shop.btcv.org.uk/shop/level2/104/stock/4253>

4.3

Irish Community Care

Manchester



“ICC wanted someone straight away. I realised that we knew someone who could get a lot out of the administrative role they were wanting to fill – I knew the match would work. It was the fastest appointment we’ve ever placed!”

Magi Jackson, Horizons
Project Officer, Refugee Action

Background

Irish Community Care (ICC) is the largest Irish community project offering advice, information and outreach services in Manchester. In October 2005 it had nine members of staff (seven full-time) and was planning to take on five more. It is based in two offices in areas of Manchester with a high Irish population.

ICC’s main areas of work are community liaison, support and advice. The organisation offers a variety of social activities for the over 50s, and it runs a number of

specialist projects, including work with Irish traveller families.

ICC was set up by volunteers, and has always relied on their involvement. There is a bank of approximately 70 volunteers, though some give just occasional help. Most of the volunteers are from the Irish community, most are female and most have been volunteering since the organisation was set up. They are therefore an ageing group, and ICC is losing volunteers through illness and old age. Most volunteers are involved in offering support to elderly

members of the community, either through home and hospital visits, or through helping run social groups.

Getting started

The first asylum seeker volunteer was taken on in response to ICC’s need for administrative support. It was felt that the role required someone with computer and administration skills, able to write minutes and take on related tasks. They would have to work closely with the manager. They would be – at least to begin with – the only



Volunteer roles at ICC

Refugee and asylum seeking volunteers at ICC have been based in the main office, in administrative roles: filing, answering the phone, setting up data systems, taking minutes, typing reports and helping with a number of other tasks.

volunteer in the office, but would be able to be part of meetings and could benefit from the sociable environment.

There were a number of reasons why this role was filled by a volunteer from outside the Irish community. Funding was not available to create a paid role, but existing volunteers were either not skilled or not available. ICC has so far not succeeded in attracting young Irish people to volunteer. In addition, the organisation is committed to equal opportunities.

The ICC Manager contacted Refugee Action's Horizons Project, which at that time was just beginning to place refugees and people seeking asylum as volunteers in local organisations – see the [box on page 55](#) for information about the project.

When the Horizons Project got back to ICC, a new manager was in post, who was not aware of the link with Refugee Action. "If Magi hadn't got in touch with me I'd never have thought of recruiting a refugee," said John Bailey, Manager of Irish Community Care.

A meeting was set up, so that the Horizons Project Officer could learn more about ICC and its needs, and so she could explain

the work of Refugee Action. Once the first administrative volunteer had been recruited and proved a success, ICC decided to recruit more refugees to help in the office.

"We want to expand and diversify our volunteer team," said ICC's Volunteer Project Co-ordinator Janet Martin. "We want to offer more training, and more services to the elderly."

She explained that ICC does not discriminate: "We can have volunteers from any community, and there are benefits in being diverse, though some of the elderly Irish people prefer to be visited by someone else who is Irish and elderly. At the same time the profile of ICC needs raising, because we don't just work with the elderly and we want greater awareness of the whole range of services we offer."

Recruitment at Irish Community Care

The first person referred by the Horizons Project to ICC had an interview with the Manager, and was taken on straight away.

Like many community organisations, ICC has needed volunteers to get on with things quickly: the volunteer therefore had few bureaucratic procedures to go

through. The referral from the Horizons Project acted as a reference, and there was no application form to fill in.

The role involved working closely with the Manager, so training and induction took place 'on the job'. The other refugee volunteers who joined ICC went through a similar recruitment process. The appointment of a Volunteer Co-ordinator in 2005 means that ICC now spends more time on recruitment and induction.

Volunteering at Irish Community Care

Volunteers taken on into office roles have been supervised by the ICC Manager, though the new Volunteer Co-ordinator now also offers support.

The administrator role in particular has involved close one to one working with the Manager. ICC, Refugee Action and the volunteer herself say that this placement has proved a great success, with the volunteer growing in skills and confidence, and the organisation getting invaluable administrative support and help.

"I like to volunteer with the Irish community because I learn new things."

Alan, volunteer, Irish Community Care.

Intermediary organisation: Horizons Project, Refugee Action, Manchester

Refugee Action set up the Horizons Project in 2003, to help refugees and people seeking asylum to volunteer with other organisations in the Manchester area. The project was a response to the removal of the right to work for asylum seekers and to research which indicated high levels of unemployment among refugees and the benefits of volunteering in helping people find work. In addition, Manchester has no volunteer centre.

A worker from the Horizons Project visits local agencies to find out about their work and the volunteering opportunities they offer. The worker explains the asylum system, and offers awareness training to staff and volunteers. Organisations are encouraged to register with the project.

At the same time, the project works to raise the profile of volunteering among refugees and people seeking asylum. Staff and volunteers visit colleges, adult education centres and other venues to give talks and invite people to the Refugee Action office to find out more. Refugees who have volunteered talk about their experiences: this 'peer-to-peer' approach has been very successful in encouraging people to try volunteering.

The Horizons Project interviews people wanting to volunteer, to find out about their skills, availability and interests. They are then told about organisations where they might like to volunteer.

"People may come with a very specific idea of what they want to do – but they are not aware of the wider options," explained Magi Jackson. "Often, thinking about the kind of volunteering they'd like helps them think about their life and what they want to do."

Refugee Action helps prospective volunteers apply to the organisations they're interested in. However, applicants are encouraged to fill in application forms themselves, and efforts are made to promote independence. They are given directions on how to get to an interview, but only in exceptional circumstances are they accompanied there. A member of staff phones volunteers every six weeks to monitor progress. In 2005, between five and ten volunteers helped the Horizons Project with interviews and phone calls – all were refugees or people seeking asylum.

At the end of 2005, 84 organisations were registered with the Horizons Project, mostly from the voluntary sector and NHS. Over a 2.5 year period, around 200 refugees and people seeking asylum were placed with approximately 30 volunteering organisations. Two funding sources end in 2006 and the organisation is looking at what to do next.

"Now I'm getting more networked, finding out more, I'm telling other organisations about Refugee Action."

John Bailey, Manager,
Irish Community Care



Horizons Project has kept strong links with all three volunteers. One also volunteers with the Horizons Project at Refugee Action. As an advice agency, ICC has been able to help one of the volunteers with problems around housing repairs.

There are some barriers to integrating non-Irish volunteers in some areas of ICC's work. The large elderly Irish groups are seen as being very set in their ways, unlikely to welcome a younger person from outside the community. The oldest members speak two languages, and their accents can be hard to understand.

However, ICC is committed to keeping its current refugee volunteers and recruiting more. ICC is also promoting the Horizons Project to other organisations.

Two more people seeking asylum were taken on as volunteers, though with more mixed results. One has been undermined by a negative decision on his asylum case. In the autumn of 2005 he was still volunteering with ICC, but intermittently.

"I volunteer in reception, I answer the phone, writing down enquiries, transferring calls," said

Alan. "I was going two or three days a week, but now just one day a week because they want to send me back to Mosul, but it is not a safe place. It is difficult to think about being a volunteer. Magi encourages me, she says it's better because I don't think about my problems there."

ICC has kept in monthly contact with Refugee Action, and the

Leaving Irish Community Care

Of the three volunteers ICC took on, one left in the summer of 2005: a Kurdish volunteer with fluent English stayed only a few weeks. He reportedly said there was not enough for him to do. In addition, ICC feels his role was too isolated. He helped with filing, which may not have given him the experience he was hoping for.

“He came one day a week and was very keen,” said Manager John Bailey. “I couldn’t keep up with him. We have the work, but it is so non-stop here that I don’t have time to delegate.”

The Horizons Project then found him a placement within Refugee Action which better suited his needs. By the end of 2005, the other Kurdish volunteer had also given up, because of anxieties about his asylum case and pressures in his personal life.

Follow on

The appointment of a full-time volunteer co-ordinator means that ICC is now able to put more time into induction, training and support. ICC and Refugee Action are hoping to match more refugees with volunteer placements at ICC.

Refugee Action is looking into providing an accreditation course for volunteers. It is also undertaking the Investing in Volunteers Quality Award (www.investinginvolunteers.org.uk).

Useful resources

Irish Community Care

www.iccmanchester.org.uk
0161 205 9105

Horizons Project, Refugee Action

www.refugee-action.org.uk
0161 233 1429

Volunteer testimony

I didn’t work in Albania: I got married young and brought up children. I had a very difficult time when I arrived here. I spoke hardly any English. I went to college and studied English and information technology.

I’ve volunteered here for one year. It’s the first time I’ve been a volunteer. I didn’t know about volunteering before – I learnt about it through Magi [at the Horizons Project, Refugee Action]. I wanted office and admin experience, I didn’t mind what kind of organisation, large or small.

I came for an interview and after about 15 minutes John said, ‘I’ve loads to do, can you stay and help me now?’ so I started there and I’ve never looked back.

He helped me learn the job as I went along. I felt uncomfortable but he encouraged me. I’ve got skills, confidence, job references. When you are in another country you know no one, so I wanted to meet new people. Many people seeking asylum are not confident, they feel they are not accepted so they don’t go to organisations like ICC to volunteer.

I feel more comfortable volunteering here because the Irish are from another country as well. But also I see everyone as human beings so I don’t always think about it. I’ve learnt about the problems of the Irish, especially Travellers. We have Travellers in my country, but I never knew they’d be here. It’s sad they need help, and they are not accepted, like asylum seekers.

I’ve been here since 1999 but I am still an asylum seeker, so I’m not allowed to work. If I get a decision to stay, I want to work. If I get a decision and I didn’t volunteer, I wouldn’t get a job – I’d have no experience, no references.

Mostly, I am the only volunteer in the office. When I come, I do my job, it’s a commitment. I think sometimes you have to be patient or make the first move, like make your own tea. It’s a busy office, sometimes you have to cope on your own.

ICC is near to where I live, a short bus ride. I used to come to ICC three days a week, and now it’s one or two – it depends, because I am studying more and I volunteer once a week with Refugee Action’s Horizons Project. It all has to fit round the children and school.

But I definitely will continue volunteering. You don’t have anything to do so why not go and do something that is positive for you and someone else?

Anjeva, volunteer, Irish Community Care



4.4

Maryhill Citizens Advice Bureau

Glasgow



“They have to learn a whole different legal system, and understand what a CAB does – there’s nothing like a CAB in Afghanistan, Iran and so on.”

Jean Cheyne, Manager,
Maryhill CAB

Background

Maryhill Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) is one of eight CABx in Glasgow. Each CAB is an independent, charitable, local organisation and a member of Citizens Advice Scotland. CABx help people resolve their legal, money and other problems by providing free information and advice, and by influencing policymakers.

Maryhill CAB is situated in an area of National Asylum Support Service (NASS) housing in Glasgow. It has an Asylum Seeker and Refugee Project which recruits and trains people to become CAB volunteer advisors, and it was the first CAB in the UK to run such a initiative.

Between December 2003 and December 2005, the project had around 180 enquiries and over 50 asylum seekers and refugees have

been through the training programme.

Volunteer advice workers give information and advice to members of the public. Ten asylum seekers and refugees have stayed on to become advisors, working with all CAB clients.

Getting started

From the start of dispersal, Glasgow received significant numbers of asylum seekers, and Maryhill CAB got a large number of enquiries from new asylum seekers moved into its area.

“We weren’t up to speed with languages and knowledge of the issues,” said Jean Cheyne, Manager of Maryhill CAB. “So the germ of the idea started to have a project to recruit refugees and asylum seekers as volunteers.”

After two years of planning, the CAB was successful in getting

EQUAL funding from the Atlas Development Partnership and support from Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS). “CAS were 100% behind it,” said Jean Cheyne. “Support from the top was important. CAS agreed to take on legal issues to do with the partnership.” (See [page 37](#) for more information about Atlas.)

An 18 month pilot project was started in October 2003 with two main aims: to increase the capacity of Bureau advisors to respond to refugees and people seeking asylum through training and support, and to recruit and train refugees and people seeking asylum as volunteer advisors.

Finding volunteers

The new Project Worker spent the first three months getting publicity out and networking (with colleges in particular).

One of the main sources of referral at the beginning was the Scottish Refugee Council. Anniesland College – a leading ESOL provider in the city – has also played an important role.

Those interviewed in the research came to the CAB through other organisations, indicating the existence of strong networks and widespread advertising. “I saw [the poster] on the Scottish Refugee Council notice board,” said Vitty, one of the volunteers. “Because it said refugees and asylum seekers and I know I’m not allowed to work, that was the key.”

Increasingly, word of mouth has become the main source of referrals, with volunteers recruiting their friends. See the [box on page 37](#) for information about networks in Glasgow.

Volunteer motivation

The CAB volunteers interviewed all expressed a desire to integrate, to learn about UK culture and systems, to improve their English, and to contribute to the country where they had found refuge.

One older interviewee talked about the need to find work. “I did an HNC in childcare,” she said. “You can see the difficulties – me as a mature woman. When I first arrived I was ready to do something. My confidence grew. But then I lost it – two and a half years waiting for decision. I thought, when I have certificate I can start work. But that is just the beginning.”

Vitty was volunteering because he couldn’t work: “God-willing I will get Indefinite Leave to Remain and find a good job as an engineer, or in the advisory field. That would make me more integrated with free hands. We came here for freedom, but don’t have the freedom we were looking for.”

Recruitment: See [Section 3.2, page 31](#), for a summary of recruitment processes at all case study organisations.

The Scottish Executive: volunteering and integration

Maryhill CAB is one of around 30 projects funded through the Scottish Executive’s £500,000 Scottish Refugee Integration Fund (SRIF). The Executive set out by funding projects specifically for refugees and asylum seekers, but is now looking at ways of making these part of mainstream provision, as part of its integration agenda.

SRIF offers support to many projects offering volunteering and work placements because they have proved particularly successful. This goes hand in hand with the Fresh Talent initiative, through which the Executive is looking at ways of developing the workforce in Scotland.

In February 2003 the Scottish Refugee Integration Forum published an action plan. In 2005 a report on the action plan highlighted areas of good practice such as the Maryhill CAB project. It reflected the role volunteering has played in the two years since the plan had been published and recognised the benefits of volunteering for many asylum seekers and refugees and their communities. See [Appendix 7 on page 96](#) for details



Training for volunteers at Maryhill CAB

All CAB volunteers go through a basic training that prepares them for the role of volunteer adviser. In addition, the Asylum Seeker and Refugee Project provides a six-day specialised induction programme to prepare people for the mainstream CAB training.

The specialised induction covers topics that may be unfamiliar to new arrivals, such as local governance, UK and Scottish parliamentary systems, UK legal systems, credit and debt language, the role of CABx, confidentiality and impartiality, and an introduction to Glaswegian.

The induction has evolved in response to feedback from participants:

- All six days used to take place before the mainstream CAB training. Now four days are held before, and two days in the middle: this gives participants a chance to review any issues they haven’t fully understood.
- The content has been altered in line with knowledge gaps identified by people as they offer advice to CAB clients.

Once volunteers complete the initial induction they join the training provided for all CAB advisors. The training is one day a

week for three months. During this time volunteers start shadowing existing advisors.

The basic training has also been altered:

- A CAB dictionary is handed out to all volunteers, with language relevant to advice-giving and Glaswegian phrases.
- The lunch provided includes vegetarian and halal dishes.
- A staff member sits in on training to ensure the language used is simple, and to provide additional support if necessary.

Once they have completed the training, undertaken some cases with supervision and feel ready to be more independent, the volunteers begin advising clients on their own. After undertaking 30 cases they can qualify for a certificate in advice work.

For information about the language support on offer to Maryhill volunteers, see [Section 3.3, page 33](#).

Volunteering at Maryhill CAB

The CAB volunteers interviewed spoke of the friendly and helpful attitude of staff and other volunteers as being key to their enjoyment of volunteering. Support and supervision is available from CAB staff and the Asylum Seeker and Refugee Project Co-ordinator.

Developing involvement and skills

Longer-serving volunteers are likely to be given more responsibility, and this can include going to the CAS annual conference (six refugees have been to this) and going to occasional inter-agency meetings on refugee policy.

There are three volunteer representatives on the Board of Maryhill CAB and one of them is a refugee.

There is a Scottish Vocational Qualification in customer service available to all volunteers, including people seeking asylum. For those in administrative roles there are opportunities to do computer training.

Overcoming barriers

The CAB has found that it can be hard for some people to continue volunteering due to high levels of anxiety and sudden changes in their immigration status. Interruptions can also be caused by the requirement to report frequently to the Immigration Service, and appointments with the Home Office or solicitors. The CAB has occasionally negotiated with the Home Office to change signing on times to allow people to volunteer.

The abolition of the voucher system, the reduction (for some) in immigration reporting requirements, and improvements in the understanding of issues faced by refugees and asylum seekers city-wide and in the CAB, have had a positive impact.

Identifying the benefits

Since its inception the project has been oversubscribed. Refugee and asylum seeker volunteers have increased the capacity of Maryhill CAB by around 25% a year. On average there are 23 languages spoken among the volunteers. At the same time, staff report that the client base has become more diverse and the quantity and complexity of problems dealt with at Maryhill CAB has steadily

increased, including a greater number of immigration and asylum queries.

As a result, Maryhill has developed an in-house training on asylum legislation and rights.

Volunteers who stay said they value learning about their rights and being able to pass this information on. They were also pleased to be improving their English.

Leaving Maryhill CAB

At least two thirds of prospective volunteers complete the CAB training. Staff report that they are more likely to lose people once they come into the Bureau than during training, and that retention rates for asylum seeker and refugee volunteers are similar to other volunteers.

CAB staff help volunteers draw up a CV, give advice on interview skills, and provide references to volunteers who have been there at least six months. There have been some successes, with more than 12 volunteers going into paid work.

“Around a dozen of our volunteers have been successful in getting work,” said Tim Cowen, Asylum Seeker and Refugee Project Co-ordinator at Maryhill CAB. “Some with other services, one to do admin at the Department of Work and Pensions, and another to be a travel agent. Many have said that completing the training course has given them the confidence to apply for jobs.”

Staff send an exit questionnaire to all leavers. These are often not returned, and efforts are made to talk to people to find out why they leave. The main reasons are similar to the barriers that prevent people from volunteering in the first place: difficulties with language or the Glaswegian accent; destitution; anxiety; changes in immigration status; moving on to work or other volunteering, and family responsibilities.

Through partnership working the CAB has secured some funding to cover childcare during the training

“In terms of supervision we’ve had to draw quite careful boundaries. If issues of harassment, housing problems and so on come up, volunteers go through the normal CAB system as clients. We’ve learnt to be firm about not getting involved.”

Tim Cowen, Refugee and Asylum Seeker Project Co-ordinator, Maryhill CAB

period. However, it is not available once people are volunteering, and this leads to losses.

This is recognised as a problem and the CAB is actively fundraising to cover childcare costs.

Follow on

The project at Maryhill is available as a source of advice and training to all CABx in Glasgow on asylum and refugee issues.

Because of the level of demand and the positive outcomes so far, Maryhill CAB has taken steps to expand the Asylum Seeker and Refugee Project. In 2005, it gained further funding from the Scottish Executive to extend the project to two other Glasgow CABx in Parkhead and Pollock. A mobile support worker has been employed to oversee training and volunteering at the two other CABx.

In the longer term, Maryhill CAB is hoping to roll the project out more widely, and to share its experience with CABx across the UK. It also aims to secure funding to develop more specialist training on Immigration Tribunals and on debt.

Useful resources

Maryhill CAB Asylum Seeker and Refugee Project

0141 5765104

Copies available of Maryhill CAB report 'Integrated Advice – our first two years', November 2005 and the Maryhill CAB 'Training Dictionary', 2005.

Citizens Advice Scotland

www.cas.org.uk

The umbrella organisation for Citizen's Advice Bureaux in Scotland.

Citizens Advice

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

The umbrella organisation for Citizen's Advice Bureaux in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Glasgow ESOL Forum

www.glasgowesol.co.uk

Scottish Refugee Integration Forum

www.scotland.gov.uk

Multi-agency forum set up by the Scottish Executive to enable agencies to work in partnership to support refugees more effectively.

www.asylumsupport.info

An email group on asylum rights, entitlements, and policy.

"I feel useful, not useless. You should know about the society where you live. I don't have contact except coming here."

Volunteer, Maryhill CAB

Volunteer testimony

When you're coming to a country there is no information on being an asylum seeker. You don't come with opinion – you just want somewhere safe. Everything is provided for you, but you feel like a prisoner. Like a beggar.

So I try to make an identity for myself by going to college. I start to work with different groups as interpreter. I don't want to be apart from society – I want to be part of it. To help asylum seekers, and also I wanted to work with them [Scottish people] to know the country, how things work.

I saw this poster for CAB. I thought, 'how can asylum seeker do this?' The manager of my local community centre said – 'give them a call'. Tim interviewed me, and I asked questions too. 'Do you really think I can advise Scottish people?' He said 'yes!'.

I've been at CAB since March 2004 – that's when I started the training. By September I started advising on my own. You have to pass 30 cases, housing, employment and so on. Everyone helps you and encourages you!

In this country they are always asking for experience, for a reference. In my country it's different. You go to university and you get a job. There is no volunteering organisation in Iran. I

know a lot of people from Middle East, they don't trust volunteering – they think there must be something wrong. I wasn't suspicious because I heard about it before from my friends, others that are already here.

At the moment I'm working here and on SVQ [Scottish Vocational Qualification] at same time. When I get a stay I want to get any job to work. I'd love to work in advice. Someone I know from Iran she said this is the best organisation to get experience – it's a very, very good skill.

We're always trying to go out in the evenings. We have Christmas party. We have meeting every month – talking about the organisation, difficulties, how to improve. At the moment I'm a representative on the Board.

The system provides everything you need, but you're losing your confidence. You have to make yourself busy. It's very, very interesting – learning, working, feeling useful. I have got time. If I can use to help others, why not? And I'm giving something to the organisation and getting something – first this training, and now I'm getting skills.

Zhila, volunteer, Maryhill CAB

4.5

Nomad Homeless Advice and Support Unit

South Yorkshire



“I would stay volunteering because that will lead me where I want, prepare me. I need more confidence and knowledge.”

Volunteer, Nomad

Background

Nomad offers support, advice and practical help to people who are homeless or inadequately housed. It has 50 staff, and around 15–20 volunteers. It runs projects in Rotherham and Sheffield.

Volunteering is central to the ethos of Nomad, and Nomad has a well-developed programme of volunteer recruitment, training and development. Nomad has had a Volunteer Co-ordinator for around six years, and in 2005 ran a Volunteer Training and Development course for vulnerable

people in hard-to-reach groups. See the [box on page 62](#) for more information about the course.

Getting started

Nomad didn't set out to involve refugees and people seeking asylum. The first refugee volunteer came in 2004, referred by Volunteer Centre Sheffield.

“I saw the benefit for him,” said Nomad's Volunteer Co-ordinator Trudie White, “so I thought ‘let's do this a bit more’.”

The decision to seek out and encourage refugee and asylum

seeker volunteers fits with the overall approach to diversity adopted by the organisation

Due to dispersal, Nomad has seen a rising number of refugees coming as clients to one of their housing advice drop-ins. This also drew the organisation's attention to the issues faced by refugees.

Referral has been the main route through which Nomad has linked up with refugees. Tracy, for instance, found Nomad through a volunteer placement organisation.

“There was a lot of choice,” she said. “I looked at [another

Volunteer Training and Development Course

In 2005, Nomad was successful in gaining funding from the Sheffield Vulnerable People's Task Group to open up volunteering to hard-to-reach groups, through running a one-off volunteer development training course.

A questionnaire was sent out to target groups and organisations to find out what people would be interested in. Fifty people applied for the training, of whom 14 were selected. Of these, one was a refugee.

The course ran over 11 weeks covering topics such as confidentiality, equal opportunities, communication, job-hunting, and specialised topics on advice work and housing. Participants were presented with a certificate at the end.

The course ended with a four week volunteer placement at an organisation matched, as far as possible, with the volunteer's needs and interests. Seven people, including the refugee, completed their course and their placements. Several – again including the refugee – have continued to volunteer with the organisation in which they were placed, and one has been successful in gaining a job in their placement organisation.

Nomad hopes to raise funds to run the course again, and to share its experience with other organisations.

“Diversity is about recognising and valuing difference, and making sure people know why it is important to us. For example, if a volunteer has particular language skills it gives a framework to ensure they are appreciated, but not exploited.”

Hilda Francis, Director, Nomad

organisation], but being black I didn't know if I wanted to be on a panel making decisions. I was doing a counselling course and thought that working with battered women or young people would be good. Nomad was the first one to get back to me.”

Nomad has been granted a small amount of funding to encourage diversity, and this has helped cover some volunteer expenses.

Recruitment: See [Section 3.2, page 31](#), for a summary of recruitment processes at all case study organisations.

CRB checks: All volunteers are CRB checked. See [Section 3.2, page 32](#), for more information.

Volunteering at Nomad

Volunteers are supervised by staff in the project where they're placed. There are bi-annual volunteer socials that incorporate a volunteer meeting. These provide an opportunity for volunteers to find out more about volunteering in Nomad, and to take part in decision-making. There are other regular social events for staff and volunteers.

Offering support

Nomad has found that managing people with diverse needs can require some extra time and support: this applies to a range of volunteers, and not just refugees and people seeking asylum.

The main challenge identified by the Volunteer Co-ordinator when involving people seeking asylum

has been around language. Allowances are made that some things will take a bit longer if the person does not have fluent English.

Development through volunteering

Nomad has internal training that is compulsory for staff and offered free to volunteers, covering equal opportunities, communication and confidentiality. It is accredited by the Open College Network (OCN). The second unit is an introduction to housing.

Each volunteer can also have a development plan: see [Section 3.3, page 34](#) for more information about development of volunteers at Nomad.

Identifying benefits

Nomad's Director reports that the involvement of refugees and asylum seekers has helped raise the knowledge base of advice staff. The volunteers we spoke to talked of how their own experience of displacement and homelessness made them sympathetic to Nomad clients.

Leaving Nomad

Nomad reports that most of its volunteers leave to go into employment.

The first refugee volunteer, for instance, left to work in a nursing home. Staff feel, however, there is a risk that refugees in particular may leave to take the first job that they can get, rather than wait to get something they find more satisfying and possibly better-paid.

The acquisition of confidence was seen as an important factor in determining whether a volunteer would feel ready to enter the employment market.

Follow on

Because Nomad was started by volunteers, their position is seen as central to the organisation. This ethos will influence future developments.



The volunteer project is funded year on year and presently has no direct funding. The management committee have agreed to cover the costs from reserves, demonstrating the organisation's commitment to volunteering.

"It's not a one way thing – we gain a lot from our volunteers," said Volunteer Co-ordinator Trudie White. "We link with a lot of other organisations and we're well known for being a volunteer organisation. Several organisations have been in touch wanting to buy our volunteer development training course, or parts of it."

Nomad is also part of a group of organisations in Sheffield looking into language support and the development of a Volunteer Interpreting Language Project.

Useful resources

Volunteer Centre Sheffield

www.vas.org.uk/refugee_asylum_project.htm

0114 249 3360 ext 129

Volunteering leaflets and letters are available on the website in the following languages: English; Amharic; Arabic; Farsi; French; Kurdish (Sorani); Somali; Tigrinya and Urdu.

Nomad

www.nomadsheffield.co.uk

0114 263 6624

Roles and induction at Nomad

Nomad offers a wide range of volunteering roles including administration, reception work, befriending, mentoring, advice work, tenancy support, and serving on the management committee. The roles are offered at different levels according to the skills and interests of the volunteer.

Tracy volunteers with Nomad's young people's Residential Project in Rotherham as a befriender, and in the office providing administrative support. "I wanted to do admin because I thought that's the only thing I can do," she said. "I thought if they get used to me and I know how to approach young people I will move."

Tracy has moved on from filing to doing home visits alongside the tenancy support worker.

"One of our successes is to try and not put up any barriers. Shouldn't asylum seekers get a development plan like anyone else? Shouldn't they be given an opportunity to gain skills and improve themselves? I think it would be unfair to give them less of an opportunity than anyone else."

Trudie White, Volunteer Co-ordinator, Nomad

Intermediary organisation: Volunteer Centre Sheffield New Beginnings

New Beginnings is a project run by Volunteer Centre Sheffield with three-year funding from the Opportunities for Volunteering Fund. The project aims to increase the participation of refugees and people seeking asylum in volunteering. It started in May 2004.

By October 2005 the Asylum Seeker and Refugee Worker had placed 59 volunteers. Referrals and possible volunteering opportunities are generated through networking and visiting drop-ins and interested organisations.

The project has had a number of letters and information leaflets translated: these are available in nine languages on the Centre's website. They can be used for appointments, missed appointments, and to give information about volunteering and specific roles.

The project now has volunteer advisers, all of whom are refugees. They interview people interested in volunteering, and help match them with possible vacancies. The Asylum Seeker and Refugee Worker or one of the volunteers accompanies people to their interview or first visit, as people can find it quite daunting and often get lost. Although this is time consuming it improves their chances of starting. Attending appointments also allows the Asylum Seeker and Refugee Worker to get to know the organisations better.

Part of the work of New Beginnings is raising awareness among voluntary organisations about what people seeking asylum and refugees can offer, and responding to concerns. These include queries as to whether people seeking asylum can volunteer, concerns about language skills, and questions about references, documentation and CRB checks (see [Sections 2 and 3](#) for information on these topics).

The project has referred four people to Nomad, and will refer more because of people's interest in getting experience in advice and tenancy support.

4.6

Oxfam shops

“Oxfam has been going for so long. Our cause – to ease poverty and suffering – is one everyone can relate to across the board.”

Sally Stone, Shop Manager,
Leeds city centre

London and Leeds



Background

Oxfam GB is a development, relief and campaigning organisation that works with others to find lasting solutions to poverty and suffering around the world. There are many different ways of volunteering for Oxfam GB: in Oxfam shops and offices across the UK, or through fundraising or campaigning.

Oxfam shops raise money by selling second-hand books, clothes and household goods. Some also sell Fair Trade foods and crafts. In 2005, there were 750 shops UK-wide, run on a decentralised basis that gives each shop manager a degree of autonomy in how their shop is run. Volunteer recruitment, for instance, is managed locally rather than at national level.

The shops exist to maximise Oxfam's income. Every week, more than 20,000 volunteers give their time to Oxfam shops, and the shops raise millions of pounds to help Oxfam's work. Shop development is business focussed, and volunteers are taken on to enable the shops to meet their

targets. All new shop managers attend a three day training, one day of which focuses on volunteer management

Oxfam head office provides a range of information to shop managers, including legal guidance regarding the involvement of refugees and people seeking asylum as volunteers. Oxfam data indicates that the majority of

volunteers in shops are female and white, but that the number of volunteers from ethnic minority communities is increasing (5.8% in 2004).

Getting started

The two shops we visited took on refugees and asylum seekers as volunteers as a result of being approached by an outside agency.

Oxfam shops, Leeds and London

For this research, we visited two Oxfam shops:

Oxfam Books and Music, Victoria, London

This shop has around 28 volunteers and a full-time shop manager. It specialises in selling only books and music. There is a core of around seven volunteers who have volunteered with the shop for two or three years. The shop is unusual in taking on quite a lot of short-term volunteers who do just a few weeks volunteering, often through a placement as part of a course or training scheme.

Oxfam shop, central Leeds

The shop has between 25 and 30 volunteers, one of whom has been volunteering with Oxfam for 20 years. The shop sells a range of goods, but specialises in retro clothing. Volunteers come through word of mouth, through referral from other agencies, and some walk in off the street. Because of the shop's location, the customer base is young.

The Victoria shop was approached by the Refugee Project at Volunteer Centre Westminster (see the [box on page 80](#) for more information). In Yorkshire, the Back to Work Company (which also ran a special programme for refugees) contacted Oxfam's Area Manager for Yorkshire, who then linked the Company up with some of the shop managers (see the [box on page 66](#)).

Commitment to equality

Oxfam's commitment to equality and diversity was extremely important to both managers. As part of this, both had thought about ways of overcoming language as a barrier.

The Leeds shop manager emphasised that shop staff and volunteers could always find ways to communicate if volunteers had limited English. This was echoed by Daniel O'Connor, manager of the Victoria bookshop who said he had no qualms about taking on refugees and asylum seekers.

"If language is a very serious difficulty," he said, "then we have roles available that have a low language requirement."

Reasons for volunteering

The volunteers interviewed had not always heard of Oxfam when they started, but they all wanted the experience Oxfam could offer.

"In Ethiopia I had my own shop selling jewellery," said Embet, a volunteer at the Victoria bookshop. "That is one reason why I volunteer in an Oxfam shop."

Saba, another volunteer at the Victoria bookshop, had delayed volunteering because she was living in a hostel and didn't speak English. "But I don't like to sit and do nothing," she explained. "Oxfam helps poor people in Africa, so I don't mind if I help them for free."

Research carried out by Oxfam indicates that for the great majority of volunteers, the overseas work of Oxfam is a prime reason why people opt to volunteer with them, rather than the specific experience of being in a shop. With the

"Anyone can volunteer in an Oxfam shop. We embrace diversity."

Sally Stone, Shop Manager, Leeds city centre

refugees and asylum seekers interviewed for this research, the initial motivation had been different: to gain experience and references, to be busy and useful. However, as they learnt about Oxfam, this became an important factor in why they wanted to continue to volunteer.

Volunteering in the shops in Leeds and London

Through its links with the Volunteer Centre Westminster, Oxfam Books and Music in Victoria has a well-established tradition of receiving refugee and asylum seeker volunteers. Between September 2003 and March 2005, 35 refugees and people seeking asylum were placed with the shop. In October 2005 there were around seven refugees and asylum-seekers volunteering with the shop – over a quarter of the shop's volunteer workforce, and a number described by the manager as average.

What makes volunteers stay?

Managers and volunteers said that people stay on as volunteers because:

- there is training and help 'on the job'
- roles are adapted to meet the interests and skills of the individual
- volunteers are helped to develop and take on new roles
- there is good communication between volunteers and staff (through team work, social events, meetings)
- staff are sensitive to cultural and refugee issues
- racism is confronted (for instance if a customer is abusive to staff or volunteers)
- managers offer occasional support to people with additional needs
- volunteers are kept informed about the wider, international work of Oxfam

Recruitment: See [Section 3.2, page 31](#) for a summary of recruitment processes at all case study organisations.

Roles at Oxfam shops

There are a number of roles that volunteers can take on in Oxfam shops, including sorting, pricing, till work, shop display and other customer services. Both of the shop managers emphasised that roles can be adapted to meet the needs and skills of the volunteer:

"We can tailor roles according to people's interest and language ability," said Daniel O'Connor, shop manager at the Victoria Bookshop. "Many want to improve their English, so we ask if they would like to work on the till. There's no better way. You talk to a multitude of people, about all sorts of things."

Including volunteers

Both shop managers saw volunteers as key to the formation of a team and to running the shop. Volunteers are encouraged and helped to speak and understand English, and are involved in decisions about the running of the shop.

The volunteers themselves appreciated the companionship they enjoyed across nationalities. "I have made friends here – or I would be at home watching the TV," said Embet. "Here I talk in English. The customers are nice. Otherwise I have no friends – only here and at Church. I can't go to the Ethiopian community."

Leaving an Oxfam shop

The refugees interviewed at Oxfam shops were looking for work, and saw their volunteering as a stepping stone to employment.

A Part of Society

The manager of the Oxfam Bookshop in Victoria has helped many volunteers move on – at least six of the refugees volunteers have gone into paid work, and others have entered further education. Support on offer includes helping volunteers write their CV, and detailed references explaining the full range of skills people use in the shop. Volunteers can use the internet in the shop to check for jobs on line.

Long-term support and volunteering

Overall, Oxfam takes a positive view of short-term as well as long-term volunteering, because it hopes that volunteering will be part of a lifelong relationship. Former volunteers sometimes return to volunteer after they have got a job.

“We connect with people at a particular time of life, when they are able and want to volunteer with us,” said Volunteering Manager Carolyn Myers. “We realise that in

the long term, this can have huge benefits for us. It can influence their view of Oxfam, and the support they give us over a life time.”

Oxfam operates a National Length of Service Award scheme for volunteers.



Follow on

Oxfam remains committed to encouraging and welcoming diversity within all its shops. The Victoria bookshop and various Oxfam shops in Leeds will continue to link up with the intermediary agencies that have helped. (However, funding for the Back to Work Company's refugee project in Leeds ended in 2006.)

At national level, Oxfam is looking at accrediting volunteering in shops, and may develop its own optional accreditation programme for volunteers.

“I am very happy here, especially with Daniel, the manager. He explains what we are going to do clearly. He helps if anything is needed. He is a very different person.”

Saba, volunteer, Victoria bookshop

Intermediary organisation: Back to Work Company

The Back to Work Company is a private company based in Leeds. For three years up to March 2006, it ran the Refugee Job Placement Project, with funding from the West Yorkshire Employer Coalition.

The Project worked to help refugees develop their job-seeking skills and to find paid employment, work placement and volunteering opportunities. It did this through offering training, guidance and a mentoring service to individual refugees, and through providing advice to employers.

“It is very important that people get UK experience and references,” said Job Placement Co-ordinator Ahmed Eltayb. “This makes it much easier for us to find them a job. They are in a new country, a new culture, so you need to gain confidence, improve your language through direct experience with people who speak English only.”

The gaining of references was seen as key, because newcomers find it hard to acquire these, and because there is additional negative stigma attached to refugees which they have to counteract when seeking employment.

When looking for volunteering opportunities, the Back to Work Company decided to focus on charity shops. This was for various reasons: the shops provide an opportunity for refugees to interact with the local community; there are a range of roles, and till work in particular indicates a high level of trustworthiness, as well as skill and experience.

This led to refugees volunteering at three Oxfam shops in Leeds, and at the British Heart Foundation shop.

“We recommend volunteering now to all our clients: it means you don't sit at home doing nothing, and it shows you are keen, you want to be involved, want to develop skills,” said Ahmed Eltayb.

Volunteer testimony

First I went to the Back to Work Company. My sister was in New Deal, and the Job Centre sent her to the Back to Work Company, so she recommended it. They said 'are you a refugee?' and they could give me training and help me find work.

They call me about jobs, they help me with my CV and interviews. They suggested Oxfam.

I come here from 9.30 till 4, every Saturday. I'm on the till or the shop floor, I help people find things, do the display, put the bags in the lift. I did a bit of sorting, but now they want me on the till. I'm good at getting people to buy things!

I'm 20 years old, and I'm in college doing Business Studies. In Somalia I was a student, and when I got to Uganda. I'd like to be a shop assistant. This is my opportunity to get experience – if you say 'I have no experience', you are not going to get that job.

Oxfam is a big company, everyone knows it, I like that. When I talk to people and say I'm helping Oxfam, they say – 'are you being paid?' I say no, and they say that's great – everybody likes Oxfam!

I'm getting practical experience, and they help people in Africa, people in disasters. Even if I got a job, I'd want to carry on here. I brought my friend here, she's 17 and at college with me. She filled in application form to volunteer.

We have to help Oxfam become the biggest community in the world.

Amran, Oxfam volunteer, Leeds

Useful resources

Oxfam

www.oxfam.org.uk/volunteer
0870 333 2700

For information about Oxfam, contact details for shops, and information about volunteering with Oxfam.

Association of Charity Shops

www.charityshops.org.uk
020 7255 4470

For information about volunteering in charity shops, plus a search mechanism to find charity shops in any part of the UK.

Back to Work Company

www.thebacktoworkcompany.com
0113 262 2789

For information about the Refugee Job Placement Project.



4.7

Rosemount Lifelong Learning

Glasgow

“When I start to come here I have nothing, no friends. I start meeting people, making friends. So it gives me the energy for volunteering. It's better for my health. I always had high pressure, I was always in hospital. If I stay at home I'll be depressed thinking so many things.”

Nonhlanhla, volunteer,
Rosemount Lifelong Learning



Background

Rosemount Lifelong Learning is a community-managed charity offering pre-vocational and vocational courses and childcare for people wanting to return to work. Rosemount is based in Glasgow, in an area of high deprivation with a large population of dispersed asylum seekers.

The Rosemount Flexicentre is a short distance from the main building. It offers drop-in literacy, IT and various personal development and learning skills sessions, while at the main building there are courses in ESOL, computing, and

health and social care, along with pre- and after-school childcare, an integration group and other activities. At least 800 learners attend one or both centres each year.

Volunteering at Rosemount has developed considerably since the appointment of a volunteer development worker in 2003. In October 2005 there were around 45 volunteers, ten of whom were asylum seekers or refugees. At any one time, about 25% of volunteers are refugees or people seeking asylum.

Roles at Rosemount

Rosemount volunteers undertake a wide range of roles including running recycling and fruit stalls, reception, administration, website development, ESOL and literacy learning support, childcare assistance, marketing and outreach, involvement in RING (Royston Integrated Neighbours Group) and membership of the Board.

Refugees and people seeking asylum have got involved in most of these roles.

Getting started

The provision of English for speakers of other languages has always been one of Rosemount's core activities. When dispersal started in 2000, refugees and men and women seeking asylum started coming to Rosemount's ESOL classes, and the college began to explore ways of meeting the needs of the changing population in its area.

An evaluation in 2003 recommended the creation of a dedicated volunteer co-ordinator post: "We were thinking about how people move towards the labour market and realised there are very big barriers," explained Project Manager Fiona Forsyth. "It wasn't specifically about refugees."

The Centre has found, however, that volunteering can be especially important for people seeking asylum who are not allowed to work.

"It is very frustrating for asylum seekers," said Fiona Forsyth. "If you've done a course you've gained skills and built confidence. People want to volunteer to maintain skills and not get stuck back in the house, getting depressed with nothing to do."

Often participation in the labour market is put forward as the only way of alleviating poverty, but the Centre believes that volunteering can also have an impact on people's quality of life.

Developing Rosemount volunteering

The new Volunteer Development Worker went about developing and strengthening volunteering in a number of ways. These included:

- establishing policies and procedures
- building links with other voluntary organisation
- sitting on the North Glasgow Asylum Seeker Network
- talking to classes about volunteering
- distributing and displaying posters and leaflets



Volunteering at Rosemount

Since the establishment of the volunteer development worker post in 2003, 100 people have volunteered at Rosemount. The proportion of people seeking asylum and refugees volunteering has gradually increased, reflecting local demographic changes. Staff believe the increase has also come about as the reputation of the Centre has grown as a place where there is guidance, sensitivity and a diversity of courses and volunteer roles.

Most of the volunteers have a good command of English, often because they have attended ESOL classes at the Centre. Many are multi-lingual.

"If you stay inside you don't know anything, you don't know your rights, you just stay in darkness."

Nonhlanhla, volunteer, Rosemount Lifelong Learning

- encouraging word of mouth marketing
- accepting referrals from other organisations
- joining the Rosemount guidance team, which offers all students advice on returning to work
- creating varied, interesting and worthwhile volunteering opportunities across the Centre

Volunteers are current and former students, and people with no previous link to the Centre. Some move into volunteering after completing a work placement in the Centre.

Recruitment: See [Section 3.2, page 31](#), for a summary of recruitment processes at all case study organisations.

CRB checks: All volunteers are CRBS checked. See [Section 3.2, page 32](#), for more information.

Support and supervision

On a day-to-day basis, volunteers in the Flexicentre are managed by the member of staff they are placed with. The Volunteer Development Worker supports the volunteers in the main Centre building, and offers supervision every two months to all Rosemount volunteers.

"Personal contact means I can explain to people, make it as straightforward as possible," said Sue Harper, the Volunteer Development Worker. "It's better all round as you get more from volunteers because of personal contact."

Some people seeking asylum face multiple problems, and Sue Harper offers additional support to those who want it – though she stresses that it is also important to respect people's independence: "They don't want you standing over them all the time."

Through the growing involvement of people seeking asylum and refugees, staff at

Rosemount have learnt about asylum issues. At the same time, it is seen as important that refugees and people seeking asylum are not singled out as different.

"I think everybody here is the same," said Sue Harper. "Once you get an insight – knowing them as people – you don't label them. They're very skilled."

What makes volunteers stay?

Volunteers said that they stay at Rosemount for a number of reasons. There is a strong sense of community at the Centre, particularly for people who are or have been students. The provision of childcare is essential to some of the volunteers, and the structure of

support and guidance is very welcome, even though Rosemount cannot solve all problems.

Volunteers felt listened to. One said that staff would refer people to the right organisation if they couldn't give direct help. Another said that volunteering had helped her learn about life in the UK and her rights.

Involvement in decision-making

Rosemount has made particular efforts to include people from ethnic minorities on its board of directors. One member of the board is a refugee from Burundi (see [the box below](#)).

Rosemount Board of Directors

Rosemount's Board is made up of 13 directors who have overall responsibility for monitoring strategic planning. Directors often get involved in other activities, for example hosting outside visitors and taking part in interview panels. Rosemount is a membership organisation and directors are elected at the Annual General Meeting.

The changing profile of the student body, with growing numbers of people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds attending courses, has led the Centre to review the membership of its Board of Directors, and to encourage people from different backgrounds to stand for election.

Project Manager Fiona Forsyth explained that asylum seekers have not been approached to do this so far: "I've not asked an asylum seeker simply because they often have a lot of worries about their status and we don't want to add to their problems".

However, in 2005, two of the directors were former students from minority ethnic communities, one of whom – Therese Kankindi – has refugee status. She was encouraged to stand for election for a number of reasons, including her understanding of the Centre and being a student, her knowledge of different communities, her potential as a manager, and her financial expertise (Therese is a qualified accountant).

"Fiona asked me and I said yes because I know how Rosemount has helped me in many things," said Therese. "Now I follow all the activities – how they work, what they do, finance."

Training is on offer to all directors to help them in their role, and the Project Manager also offers one to one support. There is a considerable amount of paperwork to read. Therese tackles this in the evenings, using a dictionary when necessary. She has included her board membership on her CV, and believes that this and a reference from Rosemount helped her get her job as a cashier at a supermarket.

Therese says she would encourage other refugees to take on a governance role:

"People know that you are confident in yourself. It is making you to know many things and to know the Glaswegian people. The community can see that refugee people are involved in the community."

Leaving Rosemount

Many of the refugees and people seeking asylum are volunteering at Rosemount in order to build skills and gain experience that will help them into work, and to gain contacts and references. Centre staff provide careers guidance and help with job seeking and references.

Many volunteers also value and enjoy the support, companionship and community they find at the Centre. As a result, some volunteer for quite lengthy periods, especially if they are waiting for a decision on their asylum claim.

Why volunteers leave

Some volunteers give up because of what happens to them in the asylum system: reporting requirements, anxiety, possibly deportation.

In the summer of 2005, staff and some Rosemount volunteers ran an information stall at a local festival. They used it as an opportunity to talk to former students and volunteers, and a large number dropped by. The stall had a 'Rosemount Re-united' board, where instant photographs were pinned up. The event enabled people to re-establish contact with friends and colleagues, and also provided useful information on how people had progressed.

Staff found there had been a mixture of outcomes for volunteers. Some had gone on to further or higher education, some to other volunteering opportunities (often through contact with Glasgow Volunteer Centre).

Of the refugee and asylum seeker volunteers who have moved on, some have got jobs.

"I had an asylum seeker who volunteered working in IT and on the website," said Volunteer Development Worker Sue Harper. "She moved down south because she had a positive outcome. She was able to get a job in a similar area – IT – and I gave her a reference about everything she had done here."



“We had one man who really just wanted to do gardening – and then he got deported. They have to go regularly to the Home Office and have to drop everything. They panic. It does disrupt people.”

Sue Harper, Volunteer Development Worker, Rosemount Lifelong Learning

Follow on

Rosemount Lifelong Learning plans to continue to encourage all its students, including those who are refugees or seeking asylum, to take up volunteering within the Centre and beyond.

Rosemount is developing a pilot project to provide volunteer

mentors to support a group of lone parents wishing to progress into full time higher education. Working in partnership with Jobcentre Plus, those on the pilot will be able to pursue an HNC whilst still being eligible for benefits.

Useful resources

Rosemount Lifelong Learning

www.rosemount.ac.uk

0141 552 3090

Volunteer testimony

I have skills for web design, so it is easy for me. In 2001 I started computing HND and in 2004 I did three months at a hospital – IT volunteering. It was interesting, but it was too far to go. I chose here because it is 25 minutes walking.

I'm happy and they're happy too. I come in Friday 11am–2pm. I always come on time. I'm very pleased to do some little help to help something because Scottish people helped us.

I meet with Sue every two or three months. They wanted a simple website. Something helpful to get information for students. Timetables. Simple and clean. Many of the students are refugees or people seeking asylum and they do understand English, very well. I have put volunteer work on the website with downloadable forms so people can find it very easy. There are many people waiting for experience, for volunteering.

I'd like to start to work, definitely. I got an HND and I didn't do anything! I have to pay back. I have a place for IT networking at Paisley University. The volunteering helped a lot. The course I chose is the same as what I do here – web page, IT. I have this experience.

I'm just waiting for papers [to remain in the UK]. I think this volunteering will help me with references. I improved my skills working with staff, with people.

Most Kosovans I know they stay home and don't do anything. I tell people to come here. I try to bring people here. If you have skills, education – just do something, not to stay at home. You can forget things if you don't use your mind.

Some people say that asylum seekers wanting to get Income Support. No it's not true! Most of refugees and asylum seekers have bad reputation here. But no – they're waiting to work.

Volunteer, Rosemount Lifelong Learning

4.8

School governors

**Bristol, London,
South Tyneside**



“When Camden suggested it, I had no idea what being a parent governor meant because in the education system in Somalia, parents had no role.”

Abdul, former governor,
Primrose Hill Primary School

Background

All local authority schools in the UK have school governors. In 2005 there were around 345,000 school governors, making them one of the country's largest groups of volunteers.

School governors are members of their school's governing body. The governing body has a statutory duty to conduct the school with a view to promoting high standards of educational achievement, through effective management of its resources. At least one third of the membership of the governing body should be 'parent governors', elected by parents to represent their interests.

The School Governors' One Stop Shop website has a summary

of who can be a school governor: "... as long as you are over 18, you will be welcome regardless of race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, sex, disability, marital status, sexual orientation or religion. It is in fact critical that volunteers represent all age groups and the diversity of the communities in which the schools are situated".

Parent governors tend to serve for a four year period. They can be re-elected.

Getting started

For the schools we contacted, ensuring diversity and the representation of parents from minority groups were key reasons for including refugees as

governors. However, the immigration status of the governor was sometimes unknown to the school.

"We encouraged Elizabeth, not because she was a refugee but because she came from an ethnic minority," said Margaret Conway, Headteacher at Greenfields School. "She wasn't working during the days, so she could come to our meetings. We felt she had a lot to offer and would make a good governor."

One school took the step in response to an internal racial equality audit. Another hoped the refugee governor would help them with the piloting of a scheme to strengthen children's language skills. Another faced problems of

The schools: Bristol, London, South Tyneside

To learn about the experience of being a refugee and school governor, we spoke to two governors, one from Greenfields School (South Tyneside) and one from South Camden Community School (London). We also spoke to a former governor at May Park County Primary School (Bristol), and one from Primrose Hill Primary School (London).

Two are primary schools, one secondary, and one (Greenfields School) is for children and young people aged 2–19 with severe learning difficulties. All have pupils from a range of communities. The schools in London and Bristol in particular have a high percentage of children who do not speak English as a first language, including children of refugee families. Many of the families face great hardship. Some are transient, only staying at the school a few months.

“It must be very hard to hand your child over to school, when you don’t speak the language.”

Lesley Schwarz, Headteacher, May Park County Primary School

inter-ethnic conflict, and found ways to resolve this through engaging parents in a number of ways, including as school governors.

Raising standards and ensuring the well-being of the children were important objectives, and reaching out to parents of all backgrounds was seen as central to the work of each school.

Sometimes the decision to involve parents from minority ethnic backgrounds was reinforced by campaigns run by the local education authority.

Workneh Dechasa, Senior Refugee and Community Education Adviser with Camden Language and Support Service (ClaSS) reported that involving governors from minority communities could benefit a school overall, and not just one particular community. “When a refugee became head of governors we found it helped diversify the school and it helped improve standards for all children, not just refugees,” he said.

National strategy and legislation

The recruitment of school governors is a local issue, dealt with by schools and local authorities. However, national legislation and policy also play a role.

In ‘Governing the School of the Future’ (DfES, 2005), the Department for Education and Skills states that: “Governing bodies are better served when governors bring the perspective of the local community to their decision making and the community feels connected to the school through its governing body. The membership of the governing body should, wherever possible, represent the community.”

The diversity of school governors will also help a school in its duty to promote race equality. Under the Race Relations Amendment Act this duty has three strands – eliminating unlawful racial discrimination, promoting equal opportunities, and promoting good relations between people from different racial groups (CRE, 2002).

Barriers to involvement

The headteachers and others interviewed said that schools often struggle to get parents involved as governors. They said there were a number of barriers to getting involved. These included:

- the timing of meetings
- length of commitment (four years)
- the amount of time needed to read and attend meetings and events
- the level of responsibility
- the need for child care
- high level of self employment/small businesses in some communities
- number of other voluntary commitments of potential governors
- language issues, including the amount of paperwork in English
- cultural limitations on some women’s ability to take part
- perceptions that the existing governing body is a ‘clique’
- lack of understanding of the school system in UK
- lack of awareness of role of parents and governors
- lack of self esteem or confidence

“Where English is not the first language of a person, the greatest barrier to getting involved as a governor is probably language itself,” said Geoff Friston, Policy Manager with the School Governance Team, Department for Education and Skills.

“All governing body meetings are carried out in English and papers are written in English,” he said. “Governing bodies can make payments to support governors whose first language is not English, for example for the cost of translators, from the school’s budget. But many governors feel that to make such payments would be taking money away from the children in the school.”

Some interviewees expressed concern that new governors from minority groups are more likely to



“It is particularly hard to get parent governors from black and minority ethnic groups. We never have elections to the governing body as there are always spaces. Recently we needed three parent governors, and we got one.”

Lesley Schwarz, Headteacher, May Park County Primary School

drop out, because the additional support they need when getting started may not be available.

These views were echoed by Asha-Kin, vice chair of the board of governors at South Camden Community School: “... unless someone with a refugee background really persists you could get disillusioned. The jargon, reports... there’s a lot of reading, a lot of politics”.

Louise Bale, Co-ordinator of Bristol’s Governor Development Service, stressed that understanding the role is key: “It’s not the PTA, it’s not fundraising, you don’t need to be an expert on education”.

Recruitment of school governors

Three of the governors we interviewed had been approached directly by the headteacher and

encouraged to put their name forward.

“It’s no good sending a letter out” said Lesley Schwarz, Headteacher of May Park County Primary School. “You have to sit down and talk to people.”

Sometimes, parents had got involved in the school in other ways, and later were asked to become a governor. In one case, a local education authority had encouraged someone to stand. Once elected, all the refugees we spoke to had tried to encourage others to be governors, through personal or community channels. Sometimes they helped with organised campaigns to promote governorship among minority groups.

Induction and training

The National Strategy for Governor Support calls for new governors to

be assigned an experienced governor as a ‘mentor’ to help introduce them to their role and to identify where their training needs lie. In reality, given the pressures governing bodies are under, it may be the head teacher who carries out this function. They will also ensure that new governors receive the appropriate induction training available from their local education authority.

All the refugees interviewed had attended training for governors: this was contracted in by the school, but external courses were also available, where participants were able to meet governors from other schools.

“It was very difficult for me to settle down and understand how they ran things,” said Abdul, a former governor at Primrose Hill Primary School. “The Chair made

an extra effort to help me. The head teacher was always available to help. This is very important.”

The role of school governor

Governors have wide-ranging responsibilities relating to the overall management of the school. In addition, some refugee school governors acted as a link between their community and the school. They translated letters home and acted as interpreters. They spent time explaining the school system to parents. They encouraged initiatives in the school that brought children and parents in and promoted the children's education and culture. They offered own-language support to children during SATs. Some set up or got involved in supplementary schools, where children had extra opportunities to study English, and could also learn about their own language and culture.

“Some Somali parents think children will learn everything at school,” said Ahmed Duale, a former governor at May Park County Primary School. “They don't fully understand that they have a role to play. Some have a very limited educational background. Being a governor meant that I could explain more to the Somali parents.”

One head felt that this liaison role was best carried out when the governor also had some standing in the community. Louise Bale, Co-ordinator of Bristol's Governor Development Service, stressed that once recruited, a refugee does not have to act as a specialist.

“Once you're elected, it doesn't matter how you came to be on the governing body,” she said. “All the governors are equal. Someone from a black or minority ethnic group does not have to deal with all the race or refugee issues. These are shared responsibilities for the whole governing body.”

Intermediary organisation: Camden Language and Support Service

Camden Language and Support Service (CLaSS) Refugee and Community Team works to ensure that refugees and ethnic minorities are represented in Camden life and in its schools. It is made up of a team leader, two primary school advisers for refugees, a secondary school adviser, and a Congolese community link worker.

There are 41 primary and nine secondary schools in the borough, and in 2005 there were more than 3,600 refugee children aged 4–16 years old, from over 70 countries. For around 45% of the school-age population in Camden, English is a second language. This sector of the population is under-represented on governing bodies, and many of these children under-achieve at school.

In 2003 the Camden Education Development Plan had as one objective raising the number of ethnic minority governors. This has led to a number of initiatives.

Firstly, CLaSS set up a Refugee Education Forum and Ethnic Minorities Steering Group, made up of parents and community representatives. Meetings (held once a term) are well attended. The group is consulted on any policy relating to education in the borough. It has made a presentation to Camden's Governor's Support Team about the needs and experiences of children from minority backgrounds. It also links to the council-wide refugee forum, led by the Equalities and Social Inclusion Team.

In addition, CLaSS is working with the Governor's Support Team to run a local governor-recruitment campaign, with a video, leaflets and numerous meetings.

As a result of these initiatives, there are at least six refugees serving as school governors in Camden schools, and more from other minority backgrounds.

There is training on refugee issues for all governors, and all governors are given training on equal opportunities, diversity and issues where children from minority ethnic backgrounds may be at a disadvantage (such as exclusion). There is on-going support, to help people remain in the role.

CLaSS also offers funding and training for supplementary schools.



Volunteer testimony

I have five children to look after, and at first I just sent the kids to school and cried. Everything looked grey. In Somalia I was running a law firm with four juniors. I came here and I was just a number for the Home Office. I lost everything.

My children were at South Camden Community School. My daughter became a target for bullying. I went to the school in despair. I learnt that there were great tensions between the different ethnic communities and that the school wanted help.

The school system here is totally different to Somalia – there it is state run, no help from parents. I learnt that here there is a bigger role for parents. The Somali and Bangladeshi families came together and started talking to the head teacher.

He was very good. He said, ‘why not become a parent governor’, and I did. I learned the hard way how to do it. I went to every event. I became chair for four years, and now I am vice chair. I used to go to the meetings of chairs of governors. I helped appoint the new head teacher. I am very active on the exclusions panel.

My main concern is how many refugees are there in the school, and how to deal with this. It was a ghetto school. White families

had deserted it, except those of refugee background. Now it is a beacon school with a waiting list. By doing the best for the refugee child, the school is doing the best for the whole community.

I asked the school to convene a meeting of Somali parents. I explained that to bring change you must work from the inside. Now we have weekend supplementary classes providing GCSE support for children who don’t have English as a first language. There is greater diversity among the staff. We have cultural festivals.

To be good citizens the children need an identity, so we pay attention to language, culture and so on.

I have been co-opted to be a governor at a college and I am involved in other trusts. I always talk about my experience and why I became a school governor, and now I encourage others to stand. The school is what we make of it. We all have a stake in the school.

**Asha-Kin, vice chair of board of governors,
South Camden Community School**

Being a school governor

The headteachers interviewed saw refugee governors as an asset, bringing new perspectives and helping with parent involvement. The governors themselves also said that they had strengthened existing skills and built up new ones. They felt they had helped their school to develop and improve:

“It is a privilege to find this school and the staff,” said Ahmed Duale, a former governor at May Park Primary School. “Being a governor has educated me about the school system, how it works, legal issues, special needs.”

Stopping being a governor

Three of the governors we interviewed had served more than one four-year term – the other was newer to governorship, but hoped to carry on beyond the first four years.

Two had resigned from their governorship within the last year. Breadth of commitment was an issue for them: both were active in a number of community initiatives and this put great pressure on their time.

“One year ago I was doing too much,” said Ahmed Duale. “I had no time to be a governor. I kept missing meetings. So I offered to be on one working party instead. But it is still very close to my heart.”

Follow on

The governors interviewed were all juggling work, heavy family commitments and a range of voluntary roles. However, they had all taken on new commitments since becoming a governor as a result of their involvement in the education system. This included setting up and running a supplementary school; becoming a trustee or governor somewhere else; getting involved in youth activities and serving on committees.

For all the governors, their school experience was seen as beneficial to their career and helped shape their sense of direction.

“Being a governor encouraged me to apply to do a degree at university,” said Elizabeth, a parent governor at Greenfields School.

“I included the school on my CV and it made a difference.”

Abdul hoped to return to governorship at his children’s new school: “I’ve done two four-year terms, and I resigned because I have other commitments. Two of my children are now at secondary school, and I plan to become a school governor there”.

Head teachers did not tend to play a front line role in careers guidance to governors, but would give advice if asked. They were also willing to provide references.

Two of the governors said that if they could return to their country they would now commit themselves to improving education there.

“If I go back to Zimbabwe, it’s the first thing I’ll do, work with parents of autistic children,” said Elizabeth. “In my country they have not heard of autism. I just thought my son was a late developer, or you think ‘maybe he’s spoiled’.”

All the education professionals interviewed were keen to sustain and develop diversity within the governing bodies of schools.

Useful resources

governorline

www.governorline.info

08000 722 181

Free advice, information and support across all areas of school governance.

governornet

www.governornet.co.uk

Official UK government site offering up-to-date information on all aspects of school governance.

National Governors' Council

www.ngc.org.uk

Representative body for local associations of governing bodies across the UK.

National Refugee Integration Forum: education website

www.nrif.org.uk/Education/index.asp

This website provides information, guidance and examples of good practice to support the integration of refugee children. The following pages include information for schools wanting to include refugees or asylum seekers as school governors, with links to useful resources and organisations:

www.nrif.org.uk/Education/SecondaryEducation/contributingtothecommunity

RefEd: Refugee Education discussion list

www.refed.org.uk

Mailing and discussion list for teachers and other professionals who work with refugee and asylum-seeking children, young people and families.

Refugee Council

www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

020 7346 6777

Publishes a range of resources and policy guidance for schools.

School Governors' One-Stop Shop

www.sgoss.org.uk

Aims to recruit volunteers with transferable skills to become governors.

The Ethnic Minority Achievement Unit – DfES

www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ethnicminorities/

Funds and promotes ethnic minority achievement strategies, through links with schools, local education authorities and ethnic minority achievement teams.

Publications

Help Schools Help Children

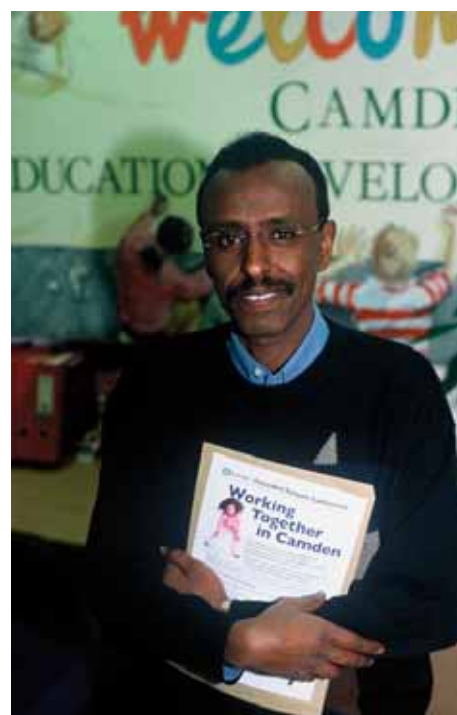
Department for Education and Skills, 2002

A leaflet about school governance which includes advice on how to become a governor. Available in 12 languages – Bengali, English, Hindi, Punjabi, Chinese, Turkish, Vietnamese, Gujarati, Arabic, Somali, Urdu and Greek. Copies of the booklet in any of the 12 languages may be obtained from PROLOG, the Department's publications centre.

Email: dfes@prolog.uk.com Tel: 0845 6022260.

The English text (ref LEA/0356/2002) can be downloaded from Governornet:

www.governornet.co.uk/cropArticle.cfm?topicAreald=2&contentId=254&mode=bg



“It’s not enough to get people to be school governors. You have to help them stay in that role.”

Workneh Dechasa, Senior Refugee and Community Education Adviser, Camden Language and Support Service

4.9

Volunteer Centre Westminster

London



“We need to be able to welcome all our clients by reflecting the diversity of the surrounding community. Our aim is to be a model so we can network with other organisations and help them be more diverse.”

Chris Reed, Manager,
Volunteer Centre Westminster

Background

Volunteer Centre Westminster (VCW) provides ‘the opportunity for all people to benefit their community through volunteering’. Like other volunteer centres across the UK, it helps people find suitable volunteering opportunities, and encourages organisations to recruit and work effectively with volunteers.

The Centre has 11 staff (eight are full-time). It also has about 17 volunteers. Since 2003, the Centre has run a specialist refugee project, and this has enabled it to place people seeking asylum and

refugees in volunteering organisations across Westminster (see the [box on page 30](#) for information about this). It has also included refugees as volunteers within the Centre: in October 2005, approximately seven of the Centre’s 17 volunteers were refugees or people seeking asylum. In total, 16 refugees and people seeking asylum had volunteered with Volunteer Centre Westminster since June 2003.

Getting started

The Centre became involved in working with refugees and people

seeking asylum as a result of research it carried out. This showed that there were a lot of refugees and asylum seekers in Westminster – many with qualifications gained overseas or in the UK – in need of something to do. Some were not allowed to work, others were studying, and some were finding it difficult to get a job.

Developing diversity awareness

Over the same period, the Centre set up an in-house Diversity Group. The make up of the Centre – both staff and volunteers – was entirely

Roles at Volunteer Centre Westminster

Most volunteers help the Centre by interviewing people who are considering volunteering, to find out about their interests and availability. Volunteers may also key in the data gained through interviews, and help identify possible volunteering opportunities for individuals using the Centre's database.

Most of the refugee volunteers have taken on these roles. Some also spend time helping the Centre with its outreach work to refugees and people seeking asylum.

white and middle class and predominantly female, and the Centre wanted to find ways of becoming more reflective of the communities it serves. This coincided with a move to larger premises, and the opportunity to take on more staff and more volunteers.

As a result, the organisation made a commitment to building diversity. All staff had diversity training. Monitoring has taken place to track changes, and the aim is to develop a diversity awareness training package that can be offered to organisations VCW works with.

Securing funding

In 2003, the Centre secured funding from Opportunities for Volunteering to run a three year project to encourage refugees and people seeking asylum to get involved in volunteering. A full time Development Officer was appointed, a refugee who had experience of volunteering in a number of different settings as well as relevant management qualifications and experience.

The existence of the refugee project has been central to enabling Volunteer Centre Westminster to build up greater diversity among its own, internal volunteers. Follow-on support from the National Lottery means the project is funded until 2009.

“There is a hunger among refugees and asylum seekers to volunteer, and in organisations there is an openness to having them.”

Chris Reed, Manager, Volunteer Centre Westminster

The first volunteer

The first refugee to volunteer within the Centre itself did so because he had had a placement with another agency through the Centre, and he wanted a change. Since 2004



Intermediary organisation: Volunteer Centre Westminster Refugee Project

The Volunteer Centre Westminster's Refugee Project has a number of aims, including:

- to promote and publicise the benefits and accessibility of volunteering to refugees and asylum seekers in Westminster
- to recruit and support refugees and asylum seekers in finding appropriate voluntary work and in making the most of their involvement in the community for their long term integration and employability
- to campaign or initiate new approaches to counteract any barriers to volunteering by refugees and asylum seekers
- to advise and support voluntary organisations in good practice in the involvement of refugees and asylum seekers as volunteers

From the beginning, an advisory group made up of volunteers and representatives of refugee and other relevant organisations has played a key role in ensuring the effectiveness of the project.

Word of mouth has been vital to encouraging refugees and people seeking asylum to visit the Centre. In particular, visiting adult education classes is an important way of reaching

prospective volunteers. The Centre also runs surgeries at the JobCentre that help draw people in.

"Word of mouth is the best way to recruit refugees," said Development Worker Johannes Hagos. "I can tell them about the benefits in a way they can understand. British people know about volunteering and its usefulness. Refugees can volunteer, they like to help each other, interpret, accompany members of their community, all unpaid. They need more support and information so they understand the benefits of more structured volunteering."

Refugee volunteers help with outreach. They also interview prospective volunteers, and help match them with suitable vacancies. Once refugees and people seeking asylum attend the Centre for an interview, the Centre tries to give them exactly what they want with regard to volunteering.

"If a placement works out well, the volunteers tell their friends and more refugees want to volunteer," said Johannes Hagos.

The target was to help 86 refugees between June 2003 and March 2006: by 2005, more than 160 had been helped to volunteer.

several other refugees also have helped with the general work of the Centre.

"I started volunteering three months ago," said Tina, one of the VCW volunteers. "I was passing the Centre, going to Connexions. I have a friend who knows Johannes [the VCW Refugee Project Development Worker]. I was asking her about volunteering and she gave me the contact. Its summer, I'm not working, so I thought I'd volunteer – and there was a meeting six months ago when Johannes talked to us at a one day course on job search skills."

Tina, like other volunteers, was now recommending volunteering to her friends.

Recruitment: See [Section 3.2, page 31](#), for a summary of recruitment processes at all case study organisations.



Volunteering at Volunteer Centre Westminster

Until 2005, volunteers within the centre were managed by the staff they worked with. More recently, the Centre has had funding to recruit someone to manage internal volunteers.

"People should have a contact person," said Johannes Hagos, VCW's Development Worker.

"If they get confused and don't know who to ask they can get fed up and leave. Language and communication are key."

Involving volunteers

The Centre provides a lunch for everyone once a week – the day of the week changes so that part-time staff and volunteers get to take part on different weeks. There are also occasional social events. These are provided to encourage a sense of belonging, to build communication and to acknowledge the contribution of both staff and volunteers.

In addition, there are occasional away days to look at strategy or specific issues, and staff and volunteers are invited to these.

What makes volunteers stay?

Some refugees who volunteer with the Centre stay around six months, some longer.

The volunteers named many reasons for staying involved, including the relationships they

have formed and feeling part of things. Enjoyment, feeling useful, and having expenses and lunch paid for were also mentioned.

One person who found it difficult to form relationships said he found volunteering helpful:

“I’m learning here,” he said. “It’s better than being isolated. I haven’t made friends but I like to be with the other volunteers. I only make friends with Somali refugees.”

Leaving Volunteer Centre Westminster

Common reasons for people stopping volunteering with the Centre are that they go to college or get a job. Sometimes they ask for more volunteering, but a change in placement. A few people seeking asylum have been dispersed.

The Centre helps volunteers who are looking for work in a number of ways: it helps people put together a CV, tells them about job vacancies that might interest them, gives them guidance on interview skills and provides references. The Centre is also able to help volunteers find other volunteering opportunities if they want a change.

Follow on

The Centre has secured follow-on funding, to ensure that the Refugee Project runs until 2009.

The long term inclusion of refugees and people seeking asylum as volunteers in the Centre is seen as key to ensuring the Centre continues to serve refugee communities.

Useful resources

Volunteer Centre Westminster

www.volunteer.co.uk

020 7402 8076

For information about involving refugees and people seeking asylum as volunteers in the city of Westminster.

See [Appendix 6, page 93](#) for listings of the national volunteering agencies.

Volunteer testimony

I started volunteering early in 2005, when I finished at college. I didn’t know about volunteering. I am allowed to work – I was looking for a job, but I don’t have the experience, so I asked my teacher can I do any job unpaid? She said yes and sent me here.

I did a certificate in computers and databases, so I wanted to work in an office. So here I am interviewing people who want to volunteer, wanting opportunities.

I enjoy speaking with people, taking the interview, putting information in the database, working with the computer and the people here in the office.

At the same time, you get very useful experience for the future. I am looking for a job. Now is a good time because I have done seven months as a volunteer. I have knowledge of working in British society – it is very different to working in Afghanistan. I was a student in Afghanistan, then I worked a bit and then the war started, so I had little experience.

I put my volunteering on my CV. The Centre will provide a reference if I go for a job or anything else.

There was no chance to volunteer in Afghanistan. But it didn’t seem strange here, I knew what is volunteering. But for some people, when I suggest it in college, the first thing they ask is ‘is it paid?’. I explain it is unpaid but you get experience. Some think it’s crazy. They say volunteering is only for elderly people, retired. I say no, it’s for everyone, young and old. They don’t know about volunteering.

So I’ve spoken about it a few times in the college, with the teacher to groups of students, and some came here to find opportunities.

I have made new friends here. My travel and some lunch expenses are paid. I also volunteer twice a week with Befriend a Family, helping an Afghan family, a single parent. I’ve had training, and we had a day trip for volunteers.

I’ve been seven years in the UK, all in London.

Volunteering is great. It helps you and at the same time you can help others.

Suhrah, volunteer, Volunteer Centre Westminster



4.10

Whitchurch hospital



Cardiff and Vale NHS Trust

“First of all I was looking for a job because I qualified as a nurse in my country. But I couldn’t work because I was an asylum seeker. So I decided to volunteer in a hospital, to improve my English and get more experience. Thirdly, I like working. I don’t like staying at home.”

Miguel, former volunteer,
Whitchurch hospital

Background

Cardiff and Vale NHS Trust is the largest NHS Trust in Wales and the third largest in the UK. Its mental health services occupy several sites, the biggest of which is the Whitchurch hospital, which has around 300 in-patients and many out-patients.

The mental health services have their own dedicated volunteer manager and there are usually between 20 and 50 volunteers helping on any given day. Volunteers are drawn from local communities in Cardiff (including people who have retired), local colleges (students), and also include former service users. There is a well-established practice of involving young people from the European Union through the European Commission Youth Programme.

The Trust’s mental health directorate has produced a volunteering policy, a volunteer information leaflet, and volunteer induction guidelines for staff and volunteers.

Getting started

The hospital gained its first refugee volunteer in 2004, after being contacted by Displaced People in Action (DPIA), a local advice organisation (see the box on page 84). DPIA were in touch with refugees and people seeking asylum wanting to be involved in health service projects, partly through involvement in the EQUAL course run by The Parade ESOL Service (see the box on page 85).

By July 2005, the hospital had had around 12 refugee or asylum seeker volunteers, several via DPIA

but also others who approached the hospital through other routes.

The hospital does not advertise for volunteers and had not targeted this sector as a source of potential volunteers. However, volunteering in the NHS has widespread appeal. Many refugees and people seeking asylum have worked in health or social care in their countries of origin and want to continue with this line of work, while others feel they would like to build new careers in this area.

Some volunteers found it hard to find a health setting where they could volunteer. It took former volunteer Miguel, for instance, eight months to find somewhere. “Refugees don’t know where to go,” he explained. “Refugee organisations don’t always think of telling people where they can go to

Roles and induction at Whitchurch Hospital

Once someone is accepted for volunteering, the volunteer manager talks to the appropriate staff and, if they agree to take the volunteer on, a start day is set.

Volunteers go on a one day induction course, and the staff they work with show them round and explain their role.

Volunteers are involved in a wide range of activities. The majority – including the people who are refugees or seeking asylum – take part in social activities, talk to patients, assist them and staff with routine tasks, and help run group sessions and events. Volunteers are welcomed as part of the team on a ward or unit. They take part, for instance, in the handover between shifts, when they can let the new nursing team know what has been happening on the ward.

“We are a multicultural organisation, so I just treat them as people. I don’t see them as any different to our other volunteers.”

Jill Griffiths, Head of Voluntary Services, Mental Health, Cardiff and Vale NHS Trust

volunteer. DPIA and my social worker put me in touch with the hospital.”

Commitment to diversity

Although the hospital did not seek out refugee volunteers, their inclusion reflects an overall commitment to diversity. This was emphasised by the Head of Voluntary Services, who sees volunteering as a way of breaking down barriers between people.

Higher up the organisation,

recruiting from some communities is seen as a challenge, and the involvement of refugees at Whitchurch is therefore particularly welcome.

“People often volunteer within their community and not elsewhere, and we find that from an employment angle as well,” said Judith Hardisty, Director of Human Resources at Cardiff and Vale NHS Trust. “Some groups are reluctant to think about involvement outside their community. Volunteering can

be a way to break down those barriers, and help people eventually move into a career with the NHS.”

Recruitment: See [Section 3.2, page 31](#), for a summary of recruitment processes at all case study organisations.

CRB checks: All volunteers are CRB checked. See [Section 3.2, page 31](#), for more information.



Volunteering at Whitchurch hospital

Volunteers are managed by the staff they work with on the ward or elsewhere in the hospital. Head of Voluntary Services (Mental Health) Jill Griffiths drops in on people around the hospital to see how they are, and encourages volunteers to visit her office.

Refugees and people seeking asylum are treated the same as any other volunteer. However, any volunteer may go through difficult times, and this can include people in the asylum system.

"You may have to be more sensitive at times," said Jill Griffiths. "The staff have become more aware, more understanding, but we are in a caring profession, we have very diverse staff and patients, and we deal with mental health issues, so it is a supportive environment."

Benefits of volunteering

None of the staff, including the Head of Voluntary Services, have had training on refugee issues, or knew much about the asylum system when DPIA first got in touch. However, the experience of meeting refugees and people seeking asylum has brought positive feedback from staff, who report that the volunteers have fitted in well to the hospital environment.

In interviews, the volunteers said they value feeling useful and being busy, and get satisfaction from caring for others. They all felt their English had improved considerably. Most were also using the experience to think about the work or training they might want to do in the future.

Zahra, a former teacher, said that volunteering at the hospital had helped her decide what she would like to do. "I am interested to be a physiotherapist or assistant physiotherapist because I saw the physio here and their work with elderly people," she said.

Intermediary organisation: Displaced People in Action

Displaced People in Action (DPIA) works 'to enable displaced people to better their lives, to encourage integration and to contribute to a thriving refugee community in Wales'.

In 2004, DPIA's Volunteer Co-ordinator began searching for volunteering opportunities for a client who qualified as a nurse in his country of origin, and who wanted to get relevant UK experience.

"Health workers often hope they can have some kind of placement that will enable them to work alongside medical staff," said Caron Jennings, who was DPIA's Volunteer Co-ordinator up to 2005. "I had to explain that this is not straightforward. It is easier to become a regular volunteer in a hospital, where you will be busy and you will be learning more about British health services."

After ringing various hospitals, Caron made contact with Jill Griffiths, Head of Voluntary Services at the Whitchurch hospital.

"They ran an effective volunteer programme, and they wanted to be diverse," she said. "From then on I was in regular contact with Jill, linking her up with volunteers and making sure things were going OK."

DPIA helped people fill in volunteer application forms, and also helped them with paperwork for the CRB check. Once people started volunteering, DPIA gave continuing support. Health professionals could take part in DPIA's medical English course. Contact with the hospital was disrupted when the Volunteer Co-ordinator moved to another job in 2005, but a new Readiness for Work Officer planned to develop more volunteering in 2006.

"We are pleased to include refugees and asylum seekers because if we are becoming a multicultural country... volunteering is a step towards them understanding us and us understanding them. People are people. Its about integration."

Jill Griffiths, Head of Voluntary Services, Mental Health, Cardiff and Vale NHS Trust

Leaving Whitchurch hospital

Refugees and people seeking asylum have moved on from volunteering at the hospital for various reasons. Some have gone into full time study. Some have moved away from the area, or have suddenly disappeared.

One volunteer left because she was fearful that people would learn about her immigration status. "She was very nervous about people finding out she was an asylum seeker," said Jill Griffiths, Head of Voluntary Services, Mental Health.

"I assured her that information was confidential, but she remained very anxious. She only came a few times."

Most of the volunteers hope to secure work, possibly in the NHS. The Head of Voluntary Services gives volunteers guidance on job seeking, provides references, and refers them to the Trust's careers advice service.

At least one refugee volunteer had left to start work. He said the volunteering had been a key factor in helping him secure employment in a care home for the elderly.



However, he felt his skills were not recognised or made best use of in his job, and still hoped to re-qualify as a nurse in the UK.

Follow on

The volunteers interviewed were all keen to develop careers in health or social care, and the hospital is beginning to forge stronger links between the volunteers and the Trust's careers advice service in order to secure them more guidance and advice.

There has been little time for the Head of Voluntary Services to network with organisations outside the Trust, but steps are being taken to build up links with DPIA, the Welsh Refugee Council and the Parade ESOL Service so people seeking asylum and refugees wanting to volunteer in the health sector can easily apply.

Intermediary organisation: The Parade ESOL Service

The Parade ESOL Service is part of Cardiff Council's Essential Skills Service. It operates through 22 outreach centres and has up to 2,000 part time students, of whom approximately 22% are seeking asylum. A number of different programmes are in place to help students learn about life in the UK and develop work-related skills, as well as develop their English.

In 2004 The Parade ran three courses on 'childcare and employability in Wales' as part of the ASSET UK Initiative (funded through the European Union's EQUAL programme).

The courses aimed to aid the social and vocational integration of people seeking asylum. They included training sessions, mentoring and support, visits to nurseries and talks by outside agencies, several of which promoted volunteering.

Volunteering had not been identified as an important area in the course plans, but rapidly emerged as a key option for the asylum seeker trainees, who were not allowed to work. Of 32 participants, 12 are known to have gone on to volunteer. The visit by DPIA in particular resulted in three of the course participants volunteering at the Whitchurch hospital.

As a result, the college is doing more to promote volunteering to its students. A new mentoring scheme will help students consider volunteering among other options. Links with the Whitchurch hospital and other volunteering agencies are being built up so that students wanting to volunteer can be signposted on.

Useful resources

Asylum Seeking and Refugee Doctors (WARD) Project

www.cardiff.ac.uk/pgmde/hospital_practice/overseas_doctors/index.htm
029 2074 2555

Cardiff University project offering a broad range of support to refugee and asylum seeker health professionals and health care scientists.

Displaced People in Action (DPIA)

02920 388389

Glasgow Overseas Professionals into Practice Project (GOPIP)

www.gcal.ac.uk/gopip

GOPIP helps overseas-qualified nurses and midwives find work in the NHS in Scotland.

ROSE NHS

www.rose.nhs.uk

An NHS-led website to support refugee and overseas qualified health professionals who are settled in the UK return to work in the health sector.

Royal College of Nursing

www.rcn.org.uk

0845 772 6100

The RCN runs a national database of asylum seeking and refugee nurses to help them to continue in their career.

Scottish Refugee Healthcare Professionals Forum

www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/refugee

A partnership of organisations supporting the integration of refugee healthcare professionals.

Whitchurch Hospital, Cardiff and Vale NHS Trust

www.cardiffandvale.wales.nhs.uk

Head of Voluntary Services, Mental Health: 02920 336439

Publications

Diversity Works: research report on work placements for refugees in the NHS

Louise Salmon, RAGU, 2006. Available from: www.londonmet.ac.uk/ragu

Report on the ASSET UK Childcare and Employability Project

The Parade ESOL Service, 2005

Available from: www.asset-uk.org.uk/public/childcar.pdf

Safer recruitment – a guide for NHS employers

NHS Employers, 2005

Sets out procedures for the appointment of NHS staff, and includes volunteers. Available from: www.nhsemployers.org

Silver Lining – Integrating refugee skills into the workplace

Strategy for Refugee Nurses, Employability Forum, 2004

Available from: www.employabilityforum.co.uk

Strategy developed by the Refugee Nurses Task Force to maximise the skills and experience of refugee nurses and other health professionals.

Valuing volunteers – The value of volunteering for refugees and asylum seekers

Dooner, 2005

Findings and recommendations of a survey of volunteering by refugees and asylum seekers in Wales. Available from: www.wcva.org.uk

Volunteers across the NHS

Sheila Hawkins and Mark Restall, Volunteering England, 2006

Available from: www.volunteering.org.uk

Volunteer testimony

I help elderly people at the hospital. Some are losing their memory – you talk to them, listen, play together, you help them to walk or eat. If they are crying, you help them to stop. I come two days a week, and I've been volunteering for six months.

In my country I was a teacher. It can be hard to do that here. I decided it would be better to work in the NHS, and when I met Caron from DPIA she helped me get in touch with Jill [at Whitchurch hospital].

People don't usually volunteer in the Congo – everyone has to work to stay alive. But volunteering did not seem strange because sitting at home made me more depressed. I had an English course for two hours a week – it was nothing. I didn't have a way to integrate into society.

Volunteering is important to me – to help me improve my English, and to be with people. They are elderly people, sick people, but I understand them and they understand me. When I first started at the hospital, there was a refugee from Africa, and his presence made me feel comfortable. There are two women who were also on a course with me, and I've got to know the European volunteers as well.

Some asylum seekers don't know about opportunities like this. If you know something you must go knock on the door. If you don't knock on the door, no one can help you.

Volunteering is helping me get onto a course in Health and Social Care. I have had a police check through the hospital – the college requires that. I have to have a careers advisor – Jill is arranging that and she will give me references when I apply for work. She has also given a reference to my solicitor.

We didn't come here for money. We came to save our lives. And we can take care of ourselves. I am proud I'm an asylum seeker. I want people to see I can contribute to the society where I am living.

Annie, volunteer, Whitchurch hospital

Appendices

1. **Acronyms**
2. **Definition of terms**
3. **Acknowledgements**
4. **Volunteering and Asylum Project Advisory Group**
5. **Methodology**
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“Our centre is in a very multicultural part of London, and it is a great asset to have people who can speak different languages, or who understand what its like not to know your way round.”

Chris Reed, Manager, Volunteer Centre Westminster

Appendix 1. Acronyms

BTCV	formerly British Trust for Conservation Volunteers
CAB	Citizens Advice Bureau
CLaSS	Camden Language and Support Service
CRB	Criminal Records Bureau
CRBS	Criminal Records Bureau Scotland
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
DPIA	Displaced People in Action
ECRE	European Council on Refugees and Exiles
ELR	Exceptional Leave to Remain
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
GDS	Governor Development Service
HND	Higher National Diploma
ICC	Irish Community Care
ILR	Indefinite Leave to Remain
IND	Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Home Office
NASS	National Asylum Support Service
NGFGI	North Glasgow Food Growing Initiative
NHS	National Health Service
OCN	Open College Network
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
RIAF	Refugee Integration Action Fund
SATs	Standard Assessment Tasks
SVQ	Scottish Vocational Qualification
VCW	Volunteer Centre Westminster

“I recommend it to a lot of people – I tell them we can get new skills, I explain that its not just for the British, the staff and volunteers are all nationalities. One of my friends now volunteers here.”

Tina, volunteer, Volunteer Centre Westminster

Appendix 2. Definition of terms

Asylum seeker: someone who has lodged an asylum claim with the Immigration and Nationality Directorate at the Home Office and is waiting for a decision on their claim. Asylum seekers are not usually allowed to work, but they are allowed to volunteer. Most people seeking asylum apply to the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), which offers accommodation and support to asylum-seekers without means to support themselves. They receive the equivalent of 70% of Income Support.

Consortia: regional co-ordinating bodies which provide accommodation and support to NASS-dispersed asylum seekers through local authorities. Consortia also develop a range of services and strategies for asylum seekers and refugees through the activities of a wide range of agencies.

Discretionary Leave: if applicants do not meet the criteria of the Refugee Convention they may qualify either for 'Humanitarian Protection' or 'Discretionary Leave'. Discretionary Leave is normally granted for a period of three years but, as with Humanitarian Protection (see below), it can be granted for shorter periods. Those with Discretionary Leave have full access to mainstream welfare and employment during the period of protection. They are allowed to volunteer.

Dispersal: the government policy of moving newly-arrived asylum seekers who apply to the National Asylum Support Service for accommodation away from London and the South East of England.

Humanitarian Protection: since August 2005, those granted Humanitarian Protection are given leave to remain in the UK for up to five years. During this time, they have access to mainstream welfare benefits and can work and volunteer. After this period, their case is reviewed. (Prior to the introduction of Humanitarian Protection, people were given 'Exceptional Leave to Remain', usually for three years.)

Integration: see [Section 2.5, page 21](#).

Refugee: in the UK, a person is recognised as a refugee only when their application for asylum has been accepted by the Home Office. An asylum applicant is granted refugee status if they meet the criteria laid down in the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees. People who arrived before September 2005 and who met the criteria were granted Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR). However since August 2005 refugees are only being granted limited leave, initially for five years. All refugees have full entitlement to benefits, housing and health care, and they can work and volunteer.

Unaccompanied minors: see 'Young separated refugees'.

Unpaid work and unpaid employment: asylum seekers are not permitted to take on 'unpaid work'. They (and certain other entrants to the UK) are given an 'IS96' document that states they cannot take on 'unpaid employment'. This has led to some agencies and individuals believing they are not allowed to volunteer. The Home Office Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) has made it clear that asylum seekers and refugees are allowed to volunteer (see [Volunteering, below](#)).

The confusion has been compounded because the term 'unpaid work' is used in different ways by different government departments. For the Department of Work and Pensions, it usually excludes volunteering. For IND, it includes volunteering – unless the volunteer is an asylum seeker. The Commission for Racial Equality, Volunteering England and other agencies are calling for the distinction to be made clear so all entrants to the UK are free to volunteer.

Volunteering: 'an activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or individuals or groups other than (or in addition to) close relatives' (Volunteering Compact Code of Good Practice, 2005). The Immigration and Nationality Directorate of the Home Office states that, for asylum seekers, where work is 'unpaid and is carried out on behalf of a charity, voluntary organisation or body that raises funds for either, or in the public sector then it will be accepted for immigration law purposes as volunteering' (www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk).

The Department for Work and Pensions defines a volunteer as follows: 'a person who may or may not have a connection with a charitable or voluntary organisation. They perform, of their own free will, a service for another person (other than a member of their family) or non-profit making organisation.'

Young separated refugees and asylum seekers: children and young people aged under 18 who arrive in the UK without an adult relative or guardian, and request or secure asylum. They are supported by local authority social services, not the National Asylum Support Service (NASS). Also known as unaccompanied minors or unaccompanied children.

For more information about the asylum process in the UK, contact the Refugee Council, www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

Appendix 3. Acknowledgements

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Appendix 4. Volunteering and Asylum Project Advisory Group

Nasim Aslam	Senior Community Cohesion Officer, Wakefield Council
Pam Bye	Director, Kirklees Refugees and Friends Together
Charlotte Cooke	Yorkshire and Humberside Team Manager, Refugee Council
Gill Gibbons	Manager, Leeds Asylum Seekers Support Network
Maureen Grant	Development Officer, Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust
Sheila Hawkins	Head of Volunteering, Health and Social Care, Volunteering England
Val Kay	Training and Information Manager, Yorkshire and Humberside Consortium for Asylum Seekers and Refugees
Lynne Kent	Director, Volunteering Bradford
John Rodgers	Volunteer, Refugee Council
Omer Shurkian	Volunteer Befriending Co-ordinator, Bradford Action for Refugees
Christine Ugborogho	Policy Adviser, Refugee Integration Section, Home Office

“There is no discrimination, I am treated the same as any volunteer. Occasionally you find an old person says something. There was one woman in particular. If I thought in my mind ‘that lady is racist’ I could not work with her. But I feed her, I do it with all my heart, because now is her time, she is approaching her end. Maybe she was afraid of black people, but now I know she loves me.”

Annie, volunteer, Whitchurch hospital

Appendix 5. Methodology

This report is based on research carried out between March and November 2005 using qualitative methods. The aim of the research is to enable the successful involvement of refugees and asylum seekers as volunteers in organisations outside the refugee sector. As this is an emerging practice, a case study method was considered appropriate to capture organisational learning. By profiling good practice and exploring challenges and possible solutions, it is hoped the report will help promote diversity in volunteering. Steps were therefore taken to make the final report accessible and useful to a range of audiences, including the use of photography.

Preparatory research included:

A literature review: this found that little has been written about refugee volunteering in the UK. Publications on volunteering, policy, and case study research and methodologies helped to shape research design. Those we found most useful are listed in [Appendix 7, page 95](#).

Focus groups: three focus groups were held, in London, Birmingham and Glasgow, involving 22 people from the refugee sector and voluntary agencies. Participants were identified through snowballing from existing contact lists and through key agencies. The groups discussed the criteria for selection of case studies, the direction and content of the report, and identified possible case studies.

Identifying case studies

We then sought to identify up to 12 case study organisations.

Selection criteria for organisations were:

- mainstream – outside of the refugee sector
- having three or more refugee or asylum-seeking volunteers for a period of over three months
- a mixture of local and national, small and large voluntary organisations and at least one statutory body
- geographical spread across the UK
- a range of sectors and client groups
- overall, volunteers to include different age groups and nationalities, men and women, asylum seekers and refugees

In practice, selection was also guided by the limited number of organisations already involving refugee volunteers. A large number of contacts helped to find possible case studies. Many organisations fell short of the criteria, often due to having too few volunteers for too short a period, or where roles were work placements or work shadowing, not volunteering. As a result, the decision was made to reduce the number of case studies from twelve to ten.

Interviews

Interviews were carried out with 33 volunteers in ten case study organisations, their volunteer managers and other staff, and also with staff at intermediary organisations.

A summary of the research purpose and plan was sent in advance to managers and volunteers. Volunteer managers established initial consent with volunteers. The researchers recognise the importance of trusting and positive relationships between volunteers and their managers: these helped to establish informed consent, confidentiality, and permission to withdraw. Verbal consent was then confirmed by the researchers at the time of the interview. Written consent was secured for photographs, which were taken at a separate visit.

Questions for semi-structured interviews were based on the model developed by Katherine Gaskin in 'A Choice Blend: what organisations want from volunteers and management'. See [Section 1.6, page 15](#) for more on Gaskin's model.

Monitoring data on country of origin, length of time in the UK, age, gender, and past experience were collected to ensure representation. Breadth of these factors were sought, although inclusion was also guided by the agreement of organisations and volunteers to take part. Selection was not limited to English speakers – however, all the volunteers interviewed had good English so no interpreting was needed. Notes were taken by hand during the interview and afterwards. Thus quotes are sometimes approximations.

Checking text

Draft text was reviewed by the Volunteering and Asylum Project advisory group (see [Appendix 4, page 91](#)), other key contacts, and relevant sections were sent to all participants for checking prior to publication.

For more information

More information about the methodology and our ethical approach is available at: www.tandem-uk.com

Appendix 6. Useful organisations

There are many organisations that can help with the development of volunteering that involves refugees and asylum seekers. Some are listed at the end of different case studies, because they relate to a particular area of volunteering. On this page we list a few of the key agencies – their websites are often a starting point for finding other useful resources.

Active Community Unit, Home Office

www.homeoffice.gov.uk

020 7035 4413

Promotes the development of the voluntary and community sector, and encourages people to become actively involved in their communities.

Central Registered Body in Scotland (CRBS)

www.crbs.org.uk

Provides free disclosures for volunteers in the voluntary sector working with children, young people and vulnerable adults in Scotland.

CRBS is part of Volunteer Development Scotland.

Charity Commission

www.charity-commission.gov.uk

0845 300 0218

The regulator and registrar for charities in England and Wales.

Criminal Records Bureau

www.crb.gov.uk

0870 90 90 811

CRB's aim is to help organisations by identifying candidates who may be unsuitable to work with children or other vulnerable members of society.

Department for Social Development, Northern Ireland

Voluntary and Community Unit

www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/voluntary_and_community.htm

028 90829 414

Administers and develops policy on Northern Ireland charity law.

Department for Work and Pensions

www.dwp.gov.uk

Disclosure Scotland

www.disclosurescotland.co.uk

0870 609 6006

Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Home Office

www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk

0870 606 7766

For government information on the asylum process, immigration legislation, and related matters.

Jobcentre Plus

www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk

National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)

www.ncvo-vol.org.uk

020 7713 6161

Services include advice and publications on governance.

National Refugee Integration Forum (NRIF)

www.nrif.org.uk

A government-led forum with five sub-groups looking at particular themes, including community and employment and training.

NICEM (Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities)

www.nicem.org.uk

028 9023 8645

Provides services and support to ethnic minorities living and working in Northern Ireland.

Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator

www.oscr.org.uk

01382 220446

The regulator of Scottish charities.

Refugee Council

www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

020 7346 6700

The largest refugee agency in the UK working with asylum seekers and refugees.

Scottish Executive

www.scotland.gov.uk

08457 741741

Policies on asylum, social inclusion, equality and volunteering.

Scottish Refugee Council

www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk

0141 248 9799

Offers advice, information and assistance to asylum seekers and refugees in Scotland.

Scottish Refugee Integration Forum

www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Equality/Refugees-asylum/integration

Volunteer Centre Sheffield

www.vas.org.uk/refugee_asylum_project.htm

0114 249 3360 ext 129

Downloadable translated resources to help organisations involve refugees and asylum seekers as volunteers are available.

Volunteer Development Agency, Northern Ireland

www.volunteering-ni.org

028 90236100

The development agency for volunteering in Northern Ireland.

Volunteer Development Scotland

www.vds.org.uk

01786 479593

The development agency for volunteering in Scotland.

Volunteering England

www.volunteering.org.uk

0845 3056979

The development agency for volunteering in England.

Wales Council for Voluntary Action

www.wcva.org.uk

0870 607 1666

Supports volunteering and the voluntary sector in Wales.

Welsh Refugee Council

www.welshrefugeecouncil.org

029 2048 9800

Support, information and advice for individuals and organisations.

www.exile.org.uk

Central website for three email groups: asylumpolicy.info, asylumsupport.info and newcomers.org.uk.

“Often people think that because they are barred from doing ‘paid or unpaid work’ that they are not allowed to volunteer.”

Magi Jackson, Horizons Project Officer, Refugee Action

Appendix 7. Useful publications

Amara, M, et al (undated) 'The Roles of Sport and Education in the Social Inclusion of Asylum Seekers and Refugees: An evaluation of policy and practice in the UK', University of Stirling and the Institute of Sport and Leisure Policy, Loughborough University.

Available from: www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/sses/institutes/salp/comptransnat.html

Commission for Racial Equality (2002) 'Community Cohesion: Our Responsibility', CRE.

Available from: www.cre.gov.uk

Commission for Racial Equality (2002) 'The duty to promote race equality : a guide for schools', CRE.

Available from: www.cre.gov.uk

Cordon, A and Ellis, A (2004) 'Volunteering and employability: exploring the link for incapacity benefit recipients', Volume 12, Number 2, pp113–118.

Department for Education and Skills (2005) 'Governing the School of the Future', DfES.

Available from: www.dfes.gov.uk

Department for Work and Pensions (2005a) 'Working to Rebuild Lives: A refugee employment strategy'.

Available from: http://www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/dwp/2005/emp_guide.pdf

Department for Work and Pensions (2005b) 'Five year strategy – Opportunity and security through life', DWP. Available from: www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/dwp/2005/5_yr_strat/index.asp

Dooner, P (2005) 'Valuing Volunteers: the value of volunteering for refugees and asylum seekers', Wales Council for Voluntary Action. Available from: www.wcva.org.uk

ECRE (2005) 'The Way Forward: towards the integration of refugees in Europe', ECRE, 2005.

Available from: www.ecre.org

Esterhuizen, L (2004) 'Doing case studies for the refugee sector: a DIY handbook for agencies and practitioners', ICAR. Available from: www.icar.org.uk/

Gaskin, K (2003) 'A Choice Blend: What volunteers want from organisations and management', Institute of Volunteering Research and England Volunteering Forum.

Available from: www.volunteeringengland.org

Griffiths, D et al (2005) 'Refugee Community Organisations and Dispersal: Networks, resources and social capital' Bristol: Policy Press.

Home Office (2005a) 'Integration Matters: A National Strategy for Integration', IND Corporate Communications.

Home Office (2005b) 'Volunteering Compact Code of Good Practice', Home Office.

Available from: www.volunteeringengland.org

Home Office and ODPM (2005) 'Community Cohesion: Seven Steps A Practitioner's Toolkit', Home Office and ODPM. Available from: <http://communities.homeoffice.gov.uk/raceandfaith>

Hurstfield, J. et al (2004) 'Employing Refugees: Some organisations' experiences', Institute for Employment Studies. Available from: www.employment-studies.co.uk/pdflibrary/01550ef.pdf

Institute of Volunteering Research (undated) 'Volunteering for All? Exploring the link between volunteering and social exclusion', IVR. Available from: www.ivr.org.uk/socialexclusion/fullreport.pdf

Jobcentre Plus (undated) 'Working together to help rebuild lives, A framework for partnership working to help refugees fulfil their potential', Jobcentre Plus.

Available from: www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/static/Dev_009918.pdf

Kamat, A (2001) A 'Room for Growth: Patterns and Potential in Black and Minority Ethnic Volunteering', Community Development Foundation and Black Development Agency.

Local Government Association (2002) 'Guidance on Community Cohesion', LGA.
Available from: www.lga.gov.uk

May, A (2005) 'Thinking about diversity and equality, a guide for the voluntary sector', Wales Council for Voluntary Action. Available from: www.wcva.org.uk

Ruston, D (2003) 'Volunteers helpers and socialisers: social capital and time use', Office for National Statistics. Available from: www.statistics.gov.uk

Salmon, L (2006) 'Diversity Works: research report on work placements for refugees in the NHS', RAGU. Available from: www.londonmet.ac.uk/ragu

Scottish Refugee Integration Forum (2003) 'Draft Action Plan', SRIF.
Available from: www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/society/srif.pdf

Scottish Refugee Integration Forum (2005) 'Progress Report on the Implementation of the SRIF Action Plan', SRIF.
Available from: www.scotland.gov.uk/publications/2005/04/04142815/28180

Stopforth, S (2001) 'Volunteering Is It Worth It? The effect of volunteering on refugees' prospects for getting paid work', RETAS and Islington Volunteer Centre.

Stopforth, S (2001) 'The effect of volunteering on refugees' prospects of getting paid work', Voluntary Action, 4:1 Winter. Available from: www.volunteeringengland.org.uk

Volunteer Development Scotland (2002) 'Guidance on recognition and accreditation for volunteers in Scotland', VDS. Available from: www.vds.org.uk

Wilson, R (2003) 'the a-z of volunteering and asylum', Volunteering England. Available from: www.volunteeringengland.org.uk

Wilson, R and Walker, L (2006) 'Managing volunteers in refugee community organisations', tandem. Available from: www.tandem-uk.com

Working Lives Research Institute (2005) 'Women Refugees – from volunteers to employees: a research project on paid and unpaid work in the voluntary sector and volunteering as a pathway into employment', University of East London. Available from: www.workinglives.org/volunteers.html

Yin, R (2003) 'Case Study Research – design and methods', Sage Publications.

“By having the problems of the host community being sorted out by these volunteers we hope that in the long run we can change attitudes.”

Tim Cowen, Refugee and Asylum Seeker Co-ordinator, Maryhill CAB

"Oxfam is delighted to see this refreshing and inspiring report. This research not only provides practical advice and guidance, its clarity and simplicity will help support organisations who want to positively encourage volunteering by asylum seekers and refugees. Oxfam knows that embracing diversity can be an extremely beneficial and rewarding experience for the organisation, and for the refugee and asylum seeker."

Chris Coe, Trading Director, Oxfam

"Cardiff and Vale NHS Trust places a strong emphasis on equal opportunity and diversity, and we therefore welcome this clear and useful publication. Volunteers play an important role in the work of the Trust and we include and support volunteers from many different backgrounds. I would certainly encourage other NHS organisations to involve their local communities in the ways highlighted in this book."

Hugh Ross, Chief Executive, Cardiff and Vale NHS Trust

"I am delighted to see this publication. Volunteering in non-refugee organisations can play an important part in the integration of asylum seekers and refugees, and promotes a wider understanding of the difficulties that people fleeing persecution face in the UK. These case studies show what can be achieved by seeing beyond the headlines and taking a positive approach to involving and supporting this talented and dedicated source of volunteers. The Refugee Council welcomes this publication and its recommendations."

Maeve Sherlock, Chief Executive, Refugee Council

PRICE: £10 (including postage and packaging)

FROM: Tandem communications and research ltd, 21 Kingswood Avenue, Leeds LS8 2DB

FREE DOWNLOAD FROM: www.tandem-uk.com