

3.

The findings

- 3.1 Getting started**
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“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

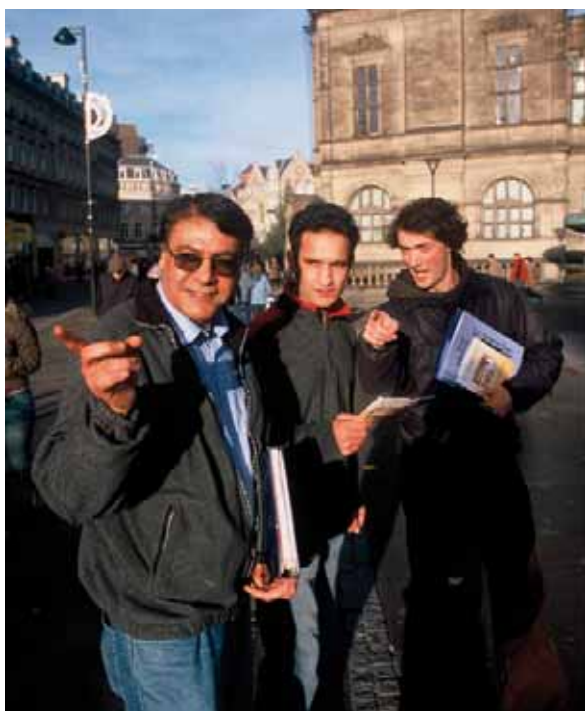
- Living in a hostel
- Destitution
- Lack of childcare
- Distance from home
- Amount of paperwork
- Expenses not paid promptly

"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

“Its 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:

Anniesland 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 Actventure, 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