

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 Activenture 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 Activenture

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 Activenture:

- 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, Activenture



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 Kosovo, 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 targeted 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 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

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.

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.

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

"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.

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.

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](#)).

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.”

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.”



“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

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

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).



“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

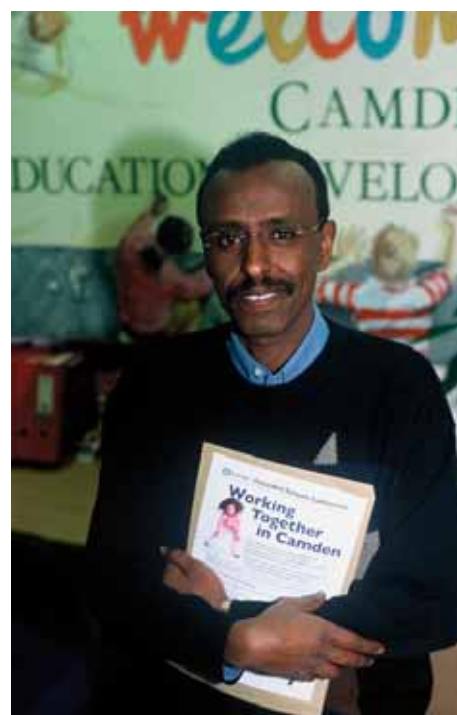
Department for Education and Skills, 2002

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.

Suhrab, 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