

volunteering and asylum project

Managing volunteers in refugee community organisations



**Achievements and challenges:
a report on a training and support
programme for refugee community
organisations in Yorkshire
September – November 2005**

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Contents

1. **Introduction**
 - 1.1 Background to the project
 - 1.2 Acknowledgements
 - 1.3 Further copies of this report
 - 1.4 Abbreviations
2. **Summary of findings**
 - 2.1 Findings from consultation sessions
 - 2.2 Findings from project evaluation
 - 2.3 **Showcase: a summary of what organisations have achieved since attending the course**
 - 2.4 Recommendations
3. **About the training**
 - 3.1 Aims
 - 3.2 Activities
 - 3.3 Training the trainers
 - 3.4 Application process
 - 3.5 The participating organisations
 - 3.6 Contents of the course
 - 3.7 Visits and consultancy
 - 3.8 Additional workshops and final showcase
4. **Volunteering and refugee community organisations: a profile**
 - 4.1 Background information
 - 4.2 Volunteers in RCOs
 - 4.3 Funding and resources
 - 4.4 Volunteer management
 - 4.5 Governance
 - 4.6 General questions
5. **The evaluation process**
 - 5.1 Verbal evaluation of the first two days of training
 - 5.2 Telephone evaluation with participants
 - 5.3 Summary of focus group discussion with Community Development Network
 - 5.4 Trainers' comments
 - 5.5 Conclusions and recommendations

Appendix: Volunteering and Asylum Project Advisory Group

1. Introduction

This is a summary report about a training and support project for refugee community organisations (RCOs) in Yorkshire, run by the Volunteering and Asylum Project in 2005-6.

The Volunteering and Asylum Project is run by tandem communications and research, with an advisory group made up of a range of Yorkshire-based and national organisations. The project was funded by Refugee Integration Section of the Home Office Immigration and Nationality Directorate. For more information about the Volunteering and Asylum Project, visit www.tandem-uk.com. The project is managed by Ruth Wilson, Director of tandem.

1.1 Background to the project

Refugee community organisations rely on volunteers – community members who give their time and skills for free.

Through the work of the Volunteering and Asylum Project, the advice of the Yorkshire and Humberside Community Development Network, and through the initiatives of other organisations such as the Evelyn Oldfield Unit in London, we became increasingly aware that volunteering in RCOs raises a number of issues. We realised that active members of RCOs may not think of themselves as volunteers – and they may also not realise the extent to which they manage other volunteers.

We believed that the opportunity to reflect on issues around volunteering and to build awareness of volunteer management skills would benefit RCOs and the activists within them. It might also help them access resources or develop funding proposals. We also hoped the experience of mixing with experienced trainers and other RCOs would help with organisational and individual development.

1.2 Acknowledgements

We appreciate the support of the Refugee Integration Section of the Home Office, which funded the project. A number of individuals and organisations helped us to develop and run this training, including members of the Volunteering and Asylum Advisory Group (see page 27). Throughout the project, we received valuable advice and support from the Yorkshire and Humberside Community Development Network (see Section 5.3). We also became part of EASI – Empowering Asylum Seekers to Integrate. The EASI programme is funded through EQUAL, a European Social Fund initiative. Our thanks go to everyone who helped us and, in particular, to the individuals and RCOs that took part. Their energy, experience and commitment made the course a success:

- Al-Diwan al Iraqi, Leeds
- Arabic Initiative and Motivated Sisters (AIMS), Leeds
- Calderdale Asylum Seekers' Support (CASS)
- Leeds Somali Community Association
- Link Action, Sheffield

- South Yorkshire Eritrean Community
- St Augustine's Centre, Halifax
- West Yorkshire Eritrean Community, Bradford and Huddersfield

The three trainers – Liz Walker, Eli Mujo and Dieudonne Manirakiza – brought skill and commitment to the project.

1.3 Further copies of this report

More copies of this report can be downloaded from www.tandem-uk.com

1.4 Abbreviations

There is one key abbreviation we use throughout this report:

RCO refugee community organisation

Other abbreviations:

AIMS Arabic Initiative and Motivated Sisters (AIMS), Leeds

CAB Citizens Advice Bureau

CASS Calderdale Asylum Seekers' Support

CD Community Development

CRB Criminal Records Bureau

CVS Council for Voluntary Service

ESOL English for Speakers of Other Languages

NASS National Asylum Support Service

NGO Non governmental organisation

OCN Open College Network

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2. Summary of findings

2.1 Findings from consultation sessions

In addition to the training days, trainers visited each participating organisation for a consultation and advice session. Though not planned as research, and though the number of people involved was small (five RCOs and two voluntary sector organisations), the findings from these visits give a snapshot of volunteering-related issues in RCOs (for more information, see Section 4).

Background

- The participating RCOs provide a range of services and activities.
- Their work and composition is influenced by many factors, including the composition and location of the community they serve.
- Communities usually include people who are very isolated and vulnerable, including newly-arrived asylum seekers.
- Asylum seekers – as well as refugees – play a key role in RCOs.

Volunteering and RCOs

- Refugee community organisations work with few resources: volunteered time is their major asset.
- Key individuals in RCOs take on many voluntary roles and responsibilities, from befriending to bookkeeping, with significant management responsibility.
- Refugee community organisations vary in the number of volunteers they have, how much time they give, and how regularly they take part: for most, volunteer time is of huge value, even when only a few individuals are involved. Some people give many hours a week of their time.
- Reliance on key individual volunteers makes RCOs vulnerable if the individual leaves or reduces their time.
- Key individuals can feel overwhelmed by the demands on their time and the complexity of the problems the community faces.
- Volunteers in RCOs are involved in a running a wide range of activities and services, and in management committees.
- People volunteer with RCOs for a number of reasons, such as to be helpful, to have community or keep busy. These motives are likely to be far more important than seeking to improve employment prospects or build skills.
- Personal commitment is seen as key to running or volunteering in a RCO.
- Word of mouth, friends and family are the most common source of new volunteers.
- There is considerable openness to the possibility of involving host community volunteers.
- Volunteer management (planning, recruitment, support, supervision etc) is often informal and varies between RCOs.
- Some RCOs have contact with external agencies, such as volunteer development centres, but not all.

- There is scope to include volunteering in funding bids. However, external help with funding applications is valued highly and much needed.

2.2 Findings from project evaluation

- Several participants had never attended training in the UK before this course.
- Participants felt that the course was pitched appropriately, they learned a lot and it met their expectations.
- The course helped participants focus on the value of volunteering both for themselves and for their communities.
- Participants valued interacting with and learning from people from other communities.
- Groups found the information about sources of funding and how to apply particularly valuable.
- Participants found the session on policies very useful and almost all are writing new policies or developing existing ones as a result.
- Organisations face significant difficulties in recruiting and retaining volunteers, particularly since asylum seekers, playing key organisational roles, are often obliged to move at short notice.
- Dealing with the asylum process (making claims, finding solicitors, appeals, deportation) prevents many asylum seekers from volunteering.
- Asylum seekers and refugees do not always understand the benefits of volunteering, making it hard to recruit and retain them as volunteers.
- Most of the RCOs want and need more volunteers.
- The course has helped three groups either recruit new volunteers or plan recruitment strategies.
- Few participants wanted to make changes to the course. Those that did wanted more sessions, more work on funding and better advance publicity for future training.
- Organisations' main ongoing needs are for funding and additional training opportunities.

2.3 Showcase: a summary of what organisations have achieved since attending the course

Since attending the training course, the participants report various developments, both individual and organisational:

- One of the RCOs has written a child protection policy and applied for a grant from one of the funds they found out about on the course.
- Since learning more about funding, one of the newer RCOs is in the process of opening a bank account, has made contact with the local volunteer centre for the first time and is also writing a child protection policy.
- One of the more established RCOs has not only made it to the final stages of applying to a large funder, but has developed new activities and is now setting up a lunch club for older refugees.
- Two participants have commented that they found the course personally empowering and this has enabled them to make important decisions concerning the time commitment they make to volunteering.
- One of the non-RCOs has found ways, not only to keep their existing asylum seeker volunteers, but also to ensure they have a greater role and more autonomy in running activities.

- One of the groups has recruited three new volunteers using information obtained on the course to convince them of the personal benefits and benefits for the community.
- Two of the RCOs are in regular contact with each other since the course and have participated together in a national community development event.

2.4 Recommendations

Participants and others involved in the project have put forward various recommendations, which are included in different sections of this report. Our principle recommendations are:

1. That more training for RCOs with a focus on volunteering should be developed.

We list more detailed suggestions for how this might be structured in Section 5.5.

2. Infrastructure organisations and funders must recognise the contribution of volunteers in refugee community organisations and find appropriate ways to strengthen and support RCOs and their volunteers.

Refugee community organisations could not survive without the dedication of volunteers, who contribute the equivalent of thousands of pounds worth of time and skills to their communities and play an essential role in community development. They also support mainstream services through the provision of additional, dedicated advice and guidance projects, by interpreting and translating and by helping services to access marginalised individuals. This contribution needs to be recognised and supported by infrastructure organisations and funders.

3. About the training

3.1 Aims

The course aimed to help up to 15 RCOs in Yorkshire to develop capacity and good practice in regard to volunteer management. It was designed to support individuals who have responsibility for managing volunteers in RCOs with issues such as:

- getting the best out their volunteers
- becoming more confident as managers of volunteers
- developing appropriate policies and procedures
- making links and networking with other RCOs that rely on volunteers
- sourcing funding for activities involving volunteers
- showing potential funders the value of the work done by volunteers

Alongside this, the project aimed to develop the skills and experience of two refugee trainers.

3.2 Activities

May – July 2005	Planning; setting up; recruitment, induction, training of trainers; networking and liaison; design of training days; marketing; selection of participants
September 2005	2 day training
October/November 2005	Consultancy support, small workshops
November 2005	1 day training/seminar
February 2006	Follow up interviews/evaluation
March 2006	Showcase and final evaluation report

All the events and support were offered free of charge. Travel and childcare expenses were covered.

3.3 Training the trainers

All the trainers attended external training, to extend their knowledge of particular aspects of volunteering. The two refugee trainers had already completed 'train the trainers' training, through previous work with the Volunteering and Asylum Project. Lead trainer Liz Walker extended their skills by giving them an active role in designing and developing course content.

3.4 Application process

The course was marketed widely, through local networks, through the involvement of key community development workers and through visits by members of the project to the Leeds Refugee Forum and to RCOs linked to the Northern Refugee Centre in Sheffield.

23 applications were received. Several did not meet criteria set out for the course.

16 representatives of RCOs and two people from refugee-supporting organisations were offered places. Applicants not offered a place were sent a free copy of ‘the a-z of volunteering and asylum’.

The lead trainer telephoned participants before the course to introduce herself, confirm that joining arrangements were clear and establish whether any participants had concerns or particular issues they wanted to discuss before or during the training. Despite this level of contact, six participants did not attend the training and one had to drop out due to personal circumstances.

3.5 **The participating organisations**

Participating organisations were:

Al-Diwan al Iraqi, Leeds

Arabic Initiative and Motivated Sisters, Leeds

Calderdale Asylum Seekers’ Support (CASS)

Leeds Somali Community Association

Link Action, Sheffield

St Augustine’s Centre, Halifax

South Yorkshire Eritrean Community

West Yorkshire Eritrean Community, Bradford and Huddersfield

All are RCOs, with the exception of St Augustine’s and CASS, which are organisations assisting and involving refugees and asylum seekers. They were included because RCO development in Calderdale is at a much earlier stage and it was hoped their participation in the course would help strengthen this process.

Each RCO sent one participant, except West Yorkshire Eritrean Community, which sent two management committee members. All were volunteers apart from one paid worker from St Augustine’s Centre.

3.6 **Contents of the course**

The training contained a mixture of discussion, facilitator input and practical exercises, with an emphasis on participants sharing information and learning from each other’s experience. Written resources were handed out, including policy templates.

Day 1: Focussing on the organisation – 3 September 2005

Topics covered included:

- welcome, introductions and housekeeping
- what is meant by the term volunteering in the UK context?
- what do volunteers in your RCOs actually do?
- how are activities organised?
- who volunteers in your organisation and who doesn’t?
- benefits of volunteering to the organisation and the individual
- how RCOs recruit and select volunteers
- role descriptions for volunteers

••• The trainers

The trainers were Dieudonne Manirakiza, Eli Mujo and Liz Walker.

- Dieudonne Manirakiza is from Burundi, where he used to volunteer with youth associations. In the UK, he has volunteered with a CAB as an advisor and he chairs the Refugee Forum in Huddersfield. He works with Kirklees Council and the NHS as a link worker/ interpreter and also works on a sessional basis for Refugee Council/Age Concern England as a researcher. As a trainer he is sometimes invited as a guest speaker at Barnsley Northern College.
- Eli Mujo works as Project Co-ordinator for Kirklees Refugees and Friends Together (KRAFT), based in Huddersfield. She has volunteered for this organisation or over four years.
- Liz Walker was lead trainer and co-ordinated the project. Liz worked as a manager for the Refugee Council in Leeds, before becoming a freelance trainer. She has been involved as a paid worker and as a volunteer with a wide variety of organisations connected with equality and refugee issues, including the Yorkshire and Humberside Consortium for Asylum Seekers and Refugees and the Red Cross Tracing and Message Service. Liz continues to work part-time as a trainer, including training volunteers for Leeds Asylum Seekers Support Network. She is also the Development Officer for the Joint Programme for Older Refugees, based with Age Concern England.

Day 2: Focussing on writing a volunteer policy and best practice in managing volunteers – 14 September 2005

Topics covered included:

- case study – using a volunteer policy as a support and supervision tool
- health and safety, confidentiality, equal opportunities and child protection policies
- developing yourself as a manager of volunteers
- skills practice- support and supervision
- identifying topics for further training workshops

Day 3: Meeting funders – 9 November 2005

This was an opportunity for the participants, joined by additional members of their RCOs and guests from the Yorkshire and Humberside Refugees and Asylum Seekers' Community Development Network, to meet a variety of funders interested in projects that involve volunteers and to ask questions about making applications.

The first speaker was Nahida Khan, funding advisor for the Yorkshire and Humberside Consortium for Asylum Seekers and Refugees. Nahida explained her role and gave a summary of what funders seek in a successful application. She listed funders that are particularly interested in refugee and volunteering-related matters.

The funders who attended were:

- Christine Ugborogho, Home Office, Refugee Integration Section
- Maureen Grant, Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust
- Noelle Gilbert, Opportunities for Volunteering, Volunteering England
- Vibeke Christensen and Lisa Lee, from the Charities Information Bureau, representing the Local Network Fund for Children and Young People

Participants were able to bring colleagues from their RCO with them to this event, and members of the Yorkshire and Humberside Community Development Network also took part.

3.7 **Visits and consultancy**

After completing the training and workshops, the facilitators visited nearly all the participants. During each visit they spoke with the person who had participated in the training course. In some cases other members of the management committee were also present. One participant was unavailable for personal reasons.

The visits were intended to help participants to consolidate and implement what was learned during the first two days of training. They also aimed to help participants to reflect on organisational needs and identify sources of support. In addition, the sessions were an opportunity for the facilitators to learn more about each RCO. With the consent of the participants, it was decided to summarise this information in a final report, which could be used by the RCOs and others (such as funders and support agencies) to further work in this area.

The visits lasted approximately two hours each. Notes were taken and typed up, with a copy going to the organisation for amendment and approval. Each visit led to a short action plan being produced, identifying key concerns and what the trainers or the organisation might do to address these. Often this highlighted that the RCOs needed help to identify and make contact with local providers of information, funding or support.

3.8 **Additional workshops and final showcase**

In response to requests from the participants, the trainers ran a series of three optional half-day workshops on issues they wanted to explore in more depth. These were: recruiting and supervising volunteers, health and safety, and the practicalities of preparing a funding application. On average, six or seven of the participants were at each workshop.

The final day of the course was a 'showcase' March 2006 to present the report and find out from participants how they have applied their learning from the course within their organisations.

4. Volunteering and refugee community organisations: a profile

The following is a summary of the information gathered through the consultancy visits to eight organisations (see section 3.8 for more information about how and why these were carried out). We focus on what was learnt about RCOs: two participants came from organisations that are not RCOs. Their experience is highlighted from time to time.

4.1 Background information

4.1.1 Main activities of RCOs

The participating RCOs offered a range of services, including:

- mother tongue language classes for children
- English classes
- cultural events and festivals
- a drop-in for homeless people
- interpreting and translating
- computing facilities
- orientation for new arrivals
- referral and signposting to appropriate support organisations

4.1.2 Communities served

The RCOs tended to serve communities of a single nationality, or from one region of a continent. These communities varied in size and composition. The Eritrean community in West Yorkshire, for instance, is small: there are approximately 120 Eritreans in Bradford and Huddersfield. The Somali community is much larger: Leeds Somali Community Association estimates there to be 1,500–2,000 Somalis in Leeds.

The work of each RCO, and its capacity to recruit and involve volunteers, was affected by demographic factors:

- one community reported a relatively high incidence of isolated single mothers
- another is made up mostly of people aged 28-35
- one reported that there a few families
- one said the RCO was located in an area where there was a concentration of refugees from that country

The two organisations that are not RCOs (St Augustine's and CASS) serve a community of 15-20 different nationalities, including asylum seekers, refugees and EU nationals (former asylum seekers from accession states).

4.1.3 Size and resources of organisation

All the RCOs struggled with a lack of resources:

- none of the participating RCOs had paid staff.
- two wanted to find premises, instead of continuing to meet at members' homes
- three already had office space of their own or shared premises
- two organisations (one an RCO, the other voluntary sector) hired rooms on a weekly basis to run their activities.

One RCO, whose office was provided free of charge by the local authority, commented that whilst their premises were at the heart of their community, the office was not accessible, due to heavy entrance doors and a confusing buzzer entry system

4.1.4 Role of participants

Amongst the training participants:

- 7 were management committee members
- 6 also regularly volunteered for practical, non-management activities
- 5 were not in paid employment
- 2 participants from RCOs had paid posts in other organisations
- 1 was a paid worker in the participating voluntary sector organisation

One participant said that she volunteered for the participating organisation and for at least one other refugee/asylum seeker- assisting organisation.

One participant began visiting the organisation she represented as part of her paid job, but soon began volunteering additional hours. During the life of the training course, she switched from attending as part of her work to volunteering for the weekly drop-in and becoming a member of the management committee.

4.1.5 What do participants do in their organisation?

This revealed a wide range of activities, including:

- accompanying people to appointments to act as advocate and/or interpreter
- administration
- advocacy and provision of information to community members
- befriending new or isolated people
- delivery of special projects, such as support to children with additional needs and community consultation
- general development work in the organisation (planning, attending meetings, fundraising etc)
- helping to fill in forms and make appointments
- interpreting and translating
- opening and closing hired premises and being a key holder
- organising social activities and festivals
- providing lifts to group members
- recruiting and supervising volunteers
- shopping and managing petty cash
- signposting

4.2 Volunteers in RCOs

4.2.1 How many regular and how many occasional volunteers?

Answers varied considerably. Two organisations had at least 12 regular weekly volunteers. Those with fewest regular volunteers had between 3 and 5 regular volunteers. Often however volunteers attended on an ad hoc basis, especially for festivals such as Christmas or Eid, at which time numbers ranged from an additional two people to an extra 30.

Low numbers were attributed to community members having paid jobs or other commitments.

4.2.2 What tasks do volunteers undertake?

Again, the responses indicated the breadth of activities undertaken.

● book keeping and accounts	5
● interpreting/translating	4
● advice and advocacy – NASS	4
● advice and advocacy - other entitlements	4
● children and families support	4
● running drop ins	4
● attending external meetings	4
● applying for funding	4
● administration	4
● befriending	3
● accompanying to appointments	3
● running social and cultural events	3
● management committee work	3

Volunteers were also involved in activities such as providing computer classes, explaining official letters; practical sessions on cooking with ESOL; distributing donated clothes; running a project for men; community research; cooking; shopping; cleaning/washing up at drop in; giving lifts to people and making drinks at the weekly social gathering.

4.2.3 Number of volunteer hours per month on non-management tasks

The facilitators and participants sought to determine the number of hours volunteered a month. One group had an average of 1–4 non-management volunteer hours; one group has no non-management volunteers yet; in three groups volunteers worked in excess of 20 hours in total per month and in one group this rose dramatically to over 40 hours.

4.2.4 How many unpaid hours a month are spent on managing the organisation?

Managing RCOs is an extremely time-consuming voluntary activity that many undertake in addition to their paid jobs and domestic responsibilities.

One group spends 15-19 hours a month on management, and three groups spend 20+ hours. In one case, the participant spends about 28 hours personally each month and could not estimate how many hours other management committee members spent. One group averaged

40 hours per month and in one case, the response was, '40 hours each x 5 management committee members on a mixture of management and practical work = 200 hours a month for the organisation'.

4.2.5 Who volunteers?

The pattern varied according to the organisation. The following comments are from RCOs:

"Mainly mature men – two have children and are working. One has been here a long time, maybe nine years; the others not long."

"Mostly women, some of whom have children. Some of them are students; two are in paid jobs. The majority are over 30 years old. Some of them have been in the UK for five years."

"Mainly single women and men, most of whom have been in the UK since 2001. The ones who can volunteer during the daytime open up the office, take the messages off the phone and make calls and go on visits with community members, providing interpreting. The others do outreach during the evenings."

One group has no volunteers yet and one respondent said that she was the principal volunteer because she spoke the most fluent English and understood how to go about dealing with the bank etc.

4.2.6 Why do you think people volunteer to help your organisation?

A number of reasons were given:

- because of the level of need in the community
- because their faith encourages helping others
- due to a sense of responsibility towards the community
- wanting to help because of English language skills
- to feel more at ease
- to pass the time
- to meet people and mix with society
- to enjoy the atmosphere at a drop in

None of the reasons given related to developing skills or volunteering to help get employment.

4.2.7 Where do you get your volunteers?

Nearly all participants said that they were proactive in approaching friends and family members. This and direct approaches to other community members were the most successful methods of recruiting volunteers. Three organisations approached members of the community outside their immediate friendship and family circle. This method was used especially to recruit volunteers with specialist skills, such as teachers of English or computing. One organisation sometimes took on ex-service users as volunteers, if they asked and the group thought they were ready.

One group held a community meeting at which those attending identified core concerns and what they wanted an RCO to organise for the community. They elected interim committee members and asked them to get the project underway. Several community members indicated their willingness to get involved as soon as a project has been planned. The committee know the community well and who has particular skills. When the committee has finished planning and fundraising, they will call another meeting to recruit the volunteers needed to get it underway.

Only two organisations were not pro-active in seeking volunteers, relying on friends and family to approach them to ask about volunteering opportunities.

4.2.8 **Are you in touch with your local volunteer development centre?**

Four organisations were in contact with their local volunteer development centre. They used the contact to:

- make joint bids for funding from the Purposeful Activities fund
- refer community members who wished to get volunteering experience outside the RCO
- obtain funding advice

One RCO was considering involving volunteers from the host community and if the management committee agreed this, planned to use the volunteer centre to recruit these volunteers.

Three RCOs were not in contact with their local volunteer centre, in all cases because they did not know it existed or what it offered. Course facilitators introduced one of these RCOs to the manager of their local volunteer centre and they scheduled a meeting to discuss what kind of assistance could be provided.

4.2.9 **Would you like to change the number and mix of volunteers you have?**

Six respondents said they would like to change the mix and number of volunteers they had.

One organisation needed additional administration volunteers. This group were considering a suggestion from the trainers that they offer placements to students from the local college and high schools, emphasising that asylum seekers would be especially welcome to take up this opportunity.

Another organisation wanted a wider mixture of volunteers, to include volunteers from other black and ethnic minority communities; not only asylum seeking communities, thus enabling them to tackle common problems together.

Three organisations wanted more volunteers generally, especially to join the management committee. One commented that it was important to get the community more involved in deciding the future activities of the organisation, to try and create a shared vision. One of these organisations also wanted more host community volunteers.

One group wanted to keep their existing volunteers, a mixture of asylum seekers and members of the host community, whilst supporting more asylum seekers to get involved in running the group.

4.3 Funding and resources

4.3.1 Have you ever applied for funding for a project involving volunteers?

Five groups had not applied for funding for a project involving volunteers.

Of the three that had, two were in receipt of funding from Comic Relief and the Local Network Fund for Children and Young People and one had submitted an application to the Paul Hamlyn Foundation for a volunteer co-ordinator. Since the end of the training this group has proceeded to the final round of the funder's assessment process.

4.3.2 Do you currently receive any funding and if so, who is the funder and what work is being funded?

At the time of the course, three RCOs were not funded at all.

Comic Relief had funded two organisations. The grant covers running costs. One of these RCOs has additional project funding from the Community Chest and Community Learning Council. This organisation also has office premises provided rent-free by the local authority.

4.3.3 Funding information and advice

The RCO which appeared to have most success in securing funding put this down to attending as many meetings and networking events as possible, in order to get information about funding opportunities. They also used their local Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) for information and support and were keen to find out about the funding advice provided by the Yorkshire and Humberside Consortium for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (which they did at the 'Meet the Funders' event organised by this project in November 2005).

Three other groups also used a CVS or similar support agency and one noted that the FunderFinder computer package was particularly helpful.

Several organisations valued the information provided by other groups, networks and support organisations, such as the Northern Refugee Centre in Sheffield.

One group had not received any advice on applying for funding and at the time of the training, did not know how to access and use such information. The course facilitators explained the role that the local CVS could play and recommended a user-friendly website for information on local funding.

4.4 Volunteer management

These questions were designed to find out about systems for volunteer management in the participating organisations.

4.4.1 Who manages volunteers?

One organisation had no formal management structure, and two were not at the point of recruiting volunteers at the time of the course.

Only one organisation, not an RCO, had a paid co-ordinator to supervise volunteers. In the remaining three, the management of volunteers was a shared activity, although in one RCO, the main responsibility fell to one individual with help from two other committee members.

One of these groups commented:

“All the management committee supervise volunteers, giving them work to do, following it up and training them. Often the enquiries are the same, so there are key issues we train volunteers to deal with. We tell them about systems, policies, common problems for the community and where to signpost people.”

4.4.2 **Managing different stages of the volunteer process**

Only two of the five RCOs spent time planning the recruitment and selection of volunteers. Not all the RCOs interviewed prospective volunteers and levels of support and supervision varied. Some had begun to have a more structured approach as a result of their involvement in the training course. Only three organisations used role descriptions, but two others thought they would be useful and wanted to develop them.

One participant said:

“We plan volunteering, recruit, do induction and training and support/supervise volunteers. We have to make sure the person fits the task. [In our community] we speak different dialects and belong to different tribes, [so] we fit volunteers with families who speak the same dialect. The training we offer is not formal- I run it at home. We cover boundaries, health and safety. When volunteers go on outreach, we go with them the first time or more if necessary to guide them.”

One of the RCOs said:

“We look at who we have and the areas where we lack someone with the right skills. For instance right now we need someone with a knowledge of health”.

This group commented that the community doesn't really understand the value of volunteering; only of working to earn money. They discussed with the trainers using community events to advertise what the RCO does and to say they need more help. They are also considering using the volunteers that only attend from time-to-time in a new way - as ambassadors to approach other members of the community and explain what volunteering can do for individuals and the community as a whole.

One participating group asked for ideas from existing volunteers and community members and used these to plan volunteering opportunities. They often ask the local volunteer centre to identify potential volunteers and have an induction pack, which they go through only after the volunteer has attended twice, so that they can ensure that the volunteer has had time to decide whether this activity is really what they want to do. This organisation has informal support and supervision arrangements, but thinks they need more structure.

One RCO said the reason it could not plan endings is that people leave at very short notice, sometimes due to deportation or getting a positive decision and moving location.

4.4.3 **What do you think are your strengths in volunteer management (as an organisation or individual)?**

A word used by almost everyone was 'commitment'. Participants overcame significant difficulties posed by issues such as finding childcare, having to deal with their own asylum cases, domestic responsibilities and needing to travel to reach their organisation's premises, to turn up week after week to work on behalf of the community and to attend regular meetings.

All the participants knew their communities very well, were skilled networkers and were good at motivating community members to develop vision and provide practical help.

Having personal experience of being a volunteer, of dealing with confidentiality and boundaries issues and in some cases of paid managerial work were also important strengths identified by participants.

One group defined their strengths as follows:

“We have found out how to get funding, we have an office and have vision and commitment. We are in the process of writing a development plan...”

4.4.4 **What areas of volunteer management do you think your RCO needs to strengthen/develop?**

Four organisations identified the need to work on policies and for their management committees to get more training on issues such as fundraising, managing money and project development. One commented:

“It is very difficult if the people in our group who are trained then leave.”

Several struggled with getting to know how the voluntary sector in the UK is structured and the procedures for managing money and people, which small organisations need to have in place. This means they are not necessarily using skills they already have, such as bookkeeping, in the most effective way.

Some volunteers also need training in interpersonal skills, understanding policies and giving advice. One RCO explained that they need training:

“not just in the basic ‘common sense’ issues but specialised things like mental health, interpreting, education and benefits.”

Several organisations commented on how difficult it is to meet community needs and attract volunteers when they do not have accessible premises near to the community.

4.4.5 **Have you ever had any training on volunteer management?**

Only one RCO had received training on volunteer management before this course.

4.5 **Governance**

4.5.1 **Does the management committee discuss volunteering at all?**

In most cases, the management committee discussed the tasks volunteers should undertake. In one RCO and in the two participating non-RCOs more strategic discussion was also held regarding, for example, whether/how to involve host community volunteers and future training needs.

4.5.2 **Which policies do you have in your organisation?**

Nearly all participants said that their organisations had health and safety and equal opportunities policies. The majority also had confidentiality and child protection policies, but two wanted assistance to plan and write child protection policies.

Only one organisation – not an RCO - had a volunteering policy. Three of the RCOs were planning to develop volunteering policies after the course.

4.6 General questions

4.6.1 Overall, what do you think your RCO does well?

Participants named the following:

- skilled provision of a much-needed community service
- holding regular management committee meetings
- running events
- building trust between community members of different ethnic groups
- bringing people together to run shared activities

The two non-RCO participants commented that they judged their success by their ability to offer what the community wanted and needed. One manages to get members of the host community [mainly south Asian people] and refugee communities mixing together and has a mixture of volunteers shopping for and preparing meal each week.

4.6.2 Community consultation and evaluation

Most participating groups used community meetings, sometimes run alongside cultural celebrations or the organisation's annual general meeting, to find out community needs. One commented:

"We have general meetings and make home visits to find out from people what their issues are and then have monthly management committee meetings to decide on the priorities."

Participants assess the success of their organisations informally, taking feedback from the people who use their services. They change and develop activities based on the views of these community members. Two RCOs noted that the community is joining in and attending the different events they organise and this indicates that they are providing what the community wants.

4.6.3 Looking ahead two years

We asked participants what they would like their organisation to be doing in two years' time and what role volunteers might play. Whilst some struggled to answer this question and needed time to think about it, some knew very clearly the strategic direction they wanted their organisations to take. Below is a range of the comments that appeared on the wish list:

"Self- managed volunteer roles."

"More formal training."

"More activities, not gone stale, users being involved in the running of i.t"

"More information sharing needed, for instance from the CD workers network."

"A more integrated community with more English speakers. We would have more volunteers and a community development co-ordinator and youth co-ordinator. Our priorities are 1. English language; 2. women's projects and 3. children and young people. We want management committee members from social services and local schools. We will still be running advice sessions."

"More organised- knowing the needs of the community and meeting them, such as a strong women's group, activities for men and for children. I want the management committee and volunteers to be more knowledgeable, especially when giving support. We would like a paid volunteer co-ordinator. People know we are volunteers and value the help they get."

5. The evaluation process

The evaluation process consisted of two phases. Phase 1 involved taking verbal feedback from course participants after the second day of training and this appears below. Participants were also invited to write anonymous comments on post-it notes to say anything about the course that they did not wish to say aloud or in front of the group.

Phase 2 of evaluation took place after the training sessions and workshops, but before the showcase event. This involved taking verbal feedback from the trainers, a focus group discussion with members of the Community Development Network and contacting participants by phone to ask a short series of questions about the course and what impact it has had.

5.1 Verbal evaluation of the first two days of training

Participants liked:

- sharing knowledge
- the way it was presented
- simplified but not patronising
- meeting other people and organisations
- food!
- keeping to the topic
- useful contacts
- everything!
- venue in central Leeds
- the co-ordination
- the way we are doing evaluation [no forms]

They wanted more:

- information in order to get started
- case studies
- contact list of each other's details
- trips to each others' organisations

They said there was nothing they would change.

5.2 Telephone evaluation with participants

Seven of the nine participants took part in telephone evaluation interviews. Their comments about the course follow. It was not possible to conduct the evaluation with Link Action or AIMS.

5.2.1 Can you remember what you expected when you started the training?

Three people said it was the first time they had been on training so they did not really know what to expect, except that they hoped for improved skills by the end of the course. Others from

RCOs wanted a mixture of new skills, contacts, information about polices and support to get funding. One of the refugee-assisting organisations wanted this to be a mentoring experience, to support a refugee to take a role on the committee. One person, who had attended training before was worried they would not learn anything new.

5.2.2 **Has it turned out as you expected?**

Three people commented that they got more than expected in terms of new skills and new opportunities. One commented, 'I loved it!' and another noted, "The level of training and support was excellent". Participants generally felt that the course was pitched at an appropriate level, they learned a lot and it completely met their expectations.

Unfortunately the group mentioned above did not manage to mentor a refugee through the course, due to people not turning up and in one case being deported. Another participant noted that since the course, their organisation has had problems opening a bank account and has not written funding applications yet as they were dealing with the bank and with asylum application problems.

5.2.3 **What has been the most useful part of the project?**

This varied for the different participants. One valued the way that material was simplified without it being patronising and said, "It made things seem possible". This person especially found it useful to consider risk assessments when CRB checks are not possible. Two appreciated learning about funding, since this is key to developing activities. Others valued focussing on the benefits of volunteering. For one participant, "It encouraged me to volunteer more". Several people said that learning about policies and role descriptions was useful and they enjoyed hearing from other participants about their organisations.

One participant found the course personally empowering and commented, "It made me realise I cannot do it all alone- I can help but cannot be responsible for everything."

For one participant, the course highlighted areas that were not being looked at and also helped them to see what they were already doing well.

5.2.4 **After attending the training what do/will you do differently?**

Comments included:

"I have recruited three new volunteers by telling them the benefits of volunteering."

"I want our local Voluntary Action to challenge organisations insisting on CRB checks and references."

"We are having more regular committee meetings and have decided we don't have enough volunteers, so will use the local Voluntary Action and create new leaflets about our project to advertise for more."

"I understand much better volunteers' rights, management committee's role and responsibilities- I'm a totally different person!"

"I would recommend all the committee attend this training- to know their roles and carry them out."

Two organisations want to recruit more volunteers but are finding this difficult because community members are preoccupied with their asylum claims.

5.2.5 **Have you done anything in your RCO/organisation as a result of receiving training on role descriptions for volunteers?**

Four have not, but one has targeted specific community members with appropriate skills to teach mother-tongue classes and invited someone from the Yemeni community [a different community from the one responding] to teach Arabic to children.

One respondent noted:

“We have raise our standard of volunteer management and told people more about their roles and responsibilities.”

5.2.6 **Have you used the policy information in any way in your RCO/organisation?**

One group has written a child protection policy and three others are preparing to do so. In one case, however, the organisation has had to prioritise reorganising the committee and getting committee members to attend regular meetings first. Two are planning health and safety policies and one has written a confidentiality policy.

5.2.7 **Has the training on fundraising been useful to you/your RCO?**

One RCO is in the process of completing an application to a funder who attended the ‘Meet the Funder’ event. One organisation is considering rewording their constitution to enable them to apply to a wider range of funders. One participant is planning to set up an NGO if funding can be secured.

5.2.8 **Overall, what do you think are the greatest barriers to developing volunteering in your RCO?**

Two respondents reported that refugees and asylum seekers do not regard volunteering in the same way as having a ‘proper job’ and understandably prioritise getting paid work, unaware of what they have to gain from volunteering in the meantime. A third respondent noted: *“It is hard to keep good volunteers once you have trained them, because they get jobs.”* This indicates that volunteering can be a useful stepping-stone on the way to paid employment, but asylum seekers do not always realise this.

Having a bank account and funding was seen as a challenge, as was recruiting committee members, keeping them and persuading them to attend regularly.

All participants struggle with the instability experienced by asylum seeking communities, as community members are frequently preoccupied with their asylum claims and appeals, get decisions and move away or are refused and deported. This lack of stability has serious consequences for community organisations and one person commented:

“A lot of people are refused- they don’t have confidence to get involved or even go out sometimes.”

Another agreed:

“If like us, a group wants to encourage its service users to volunteer, the main barrier I find is the state of their mental well being due to their circumstances. Some lack confidence and suffer from low self-esteem and together stops them from being able to commit themselves fully. Barriers for attracting volunteers from outside the organisation depends on the person, some find it really difficult to communicate with people whose English is not very good, others simply could not take on board the emotions and pressure that come about when working with this group of people.”

5.2.9 **What would help you overcome these barriers?**

Two participants noted that only a change in the way asylum seekers are treated would help:

“A change in government policy would stop asylum seekers having the rug pulled from underneath them at short notice.”

Two people mentioned having more time to meet community members and share information with them about the benefits of volunteering. One noted this was difficult without premises.

Thorough preparation when drawing up budgets was mentioned by one respondent, since it is vital to ensure that volunteer expenses can be paid. Another said that better organisation was needed in order to fundraise more effectively.

5.2.10 **Before you attended the training, were you in touch with organisations that can help RCOS with management and development?**

Only one was not. The others were in touch with a variety of organisations such as Northern Refugee Centre, Voluntary Action Calderdale, Refugee Action, Refugee Council, Resourcing the Community and Bradford Action for Refugees.

5.2.11 **Do you have more contact with outside organisations as a result of the training?**

Two said that they did. One person has begun volunteering with CAB. Another has attended a national conference for members of their community, invited by someone they met on the course. A third participant is seeking support from the local volunteer centre.

For the RCOs which had not had more external contact, time was the main constraint – especially when people were busy with their asylum cases.

5.2.12 **On the course, you mixed with other RCOs. What were the advantages and disadvantages?**

All felt that it was valuable to mix and hear about other groups' experiences. One noted that some organisations already had funding and had different needs to the new groups.

5.2.13 **What would you have changed about the training?**

Several people said they would have liked more sessions. Other comments were:

“Not changed but added- being able to complete a funding application from beginning to end, including looking at reporting.”

“I liked having daytime sessions, as this fitted round collecting children from school and we had enough time to ask questions.”

“I was expecting many more RCOS from Leeds. To get more participation, we needed more explanation about the course, e.g. at Refugee Forum and more emphasis on how important it is to attend.”

“Nothing... I was impressed by the way Liz made sure everyone kept to the topic but in a very civilised way.”

“Nothing ... it gave me many resources.”

5.2.14 **What would you like to see happen next regarding volunteering in your RCO/organisation?**

Whilst all groups wanted to secure more or more sustainable funding, more training was the other main request, for both management committees and volunteers who advise community members.

One group noted with joy that they are seeing more volunteers coming into the organisation who are willing to commit. They will continue to work hard to build up trust and confidence and hope by the end of 2006 they will have a strong core team of volunteers who will be helping to develop the centre.

One thought that it would be good to continue to have training with the people from the course as they know and feel comfortable with each other now. Another came up with an interesting variation:

“I would like some further training that we can pass on to the community on language barriers and cultural differences- what do British people expect and what offends them and what our culture is like too. Not knowing how to behave or how they will be treated puts asylum seekers and refugees off volunteering in other organisations.”

5.3 **Summary of focus group discussion with the Community Development Network**

In February 2006, a short focus group discussion was held at a meeting of the Community Development Network. The Network brings together a range of people working on community development issues with refugees and asylum seekers in Yorkshire and Humberside. Its members include representatives of a number of key agencies. The Network has offered guidance and support to the training from the outset.

The focus group included representatives of the Northern Refugee Centre (2); Refugee Action (1); Refugee Council (2); Yorkshire and Humberside Consortium for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (1).

General comments

- Feedback from participating RCOs has been positive.
- One has secured funding, and feels that involvement on the course helped achieve this.
- Very difficult to find people who volunteer over time, lack of continuity undermines RCO development: the training has been an opportunity for people to explore this and look for solutions.
- Lack of capacity is a major problem for RCOs.
- Activists play a key role – and without volunteer management skills they can decide it is easier for them to do everything themselves rather than delegate.
- Volunteer managers in RCOs are themselves volunteers – this is different to most organisations and has a major impact. They need opportunities for support and skills development.
- Management committees also need training and development – they are all volunteers.
- It is also important to have realistic expectations – RCOs and key individuals cannot do everything.
- The funding day was very useful – informal atmosphere and small scale so people could take part.

Next steps

- The focus on volunteering needs to be continued, because it is a key feature of RCOs, and because people come and go, and new people need training.
- Need to do more to share how different RCOs overcome or resolve the lack of funding.
- The transition from being entirely voluntary to having a paid worker (often a former volunteer) can be problematic, needs support.
- Active citizenship overlaps with volunteering: the CD network is looking at ways RCOs can be engaged in representative bodies.
- It is important to encourage volunteering by host community into RCOs. There can be some resistance to this, sometimes because host community volunteers do not speak the community's language. Also, it can require strong volunteer management skills. Need to profile examples of good practice.
- There could be a pool of host community volunteers willing to volunteer on short term basis in RCOs.
- Employee volunteering: is there scope for RCOs to have a relationship with a local organisation that could help them through providing employee volunteers?
- Accreditation (e.g. as planned by Consortium) could be useful to RCO volunteers.

5.4 Trainers' comments

The Volunteering and Asylum Project team held several evaluation discussions during the course of the project. The following focuses on feedback from the two refugee trainers. Both had done a 'training for trainers' course and delivered training on the Volunteering and Asylum Handbook seminars.

What did you gain from participating in the course?

- Attending external training on volunteer management: opportunity to extend knowledge and observe other trainers in action.
- Building skills and knowledge to develop training material.
- Both trainers found it beneficial to progress from delivering training that somebody else had written, to delivering a package of training that they had contributed to.
- Both trainers found it useful to build a wider range of contacts, for example with the Community Development Network and with workers in local Voluntary Action and volunteer centres.
- Greater confidence and more experience.
- Greater insight into issues and difficulties facing RCOs.
- Management skills, which can be used in the trainers' volunteering and paid work.
- Feeling able to share experience and encourage people.

What do you think was the most valuable aspect of the training for participants?

- Having trainers who are refugees – they have experience of the asylum system, volunteering and getting paid work.
- Enabling RCOs to meet people from mainstream organisations who are interested in them and provide support.
- Good, high quality information.
- The opportunity to reflect on the benefits of volunteering.

5.5 Conclusion and recommendations

1. The course was appealing because it was 'modular', covering a range of topics over a series of 3-6 sessions. This means that participants could enjoy a mixture of pre-arranged sessions on fixed dates and optional additional workshops on topics of particular interest on days that suit the majority of people. This flexible approach should be used for future courses, perhaps even splitting the days into two-hour sessions that could be held in the evening, if participants felt this would be useful.
2. Contacting each group before the course began was useful for participants and for facilitators, as it allowed introductions to be made and for facilitators to gain a fuller picture of the RCO and the issues it faced. It also offered participants an opportunity to talk about the course content and have questions answered. This 'pre-course counselling' should also be undertaken for future courses.
3. There was a high ratio of facilitators to participants, which allowed those attending to have plenty of individual input if they required this and for group activities to be supported by a facilitator in each group. If possible, future courses should keep this ratio, to allow greater personal involvement with participants.
4. The low number of participants meant that there were enough people to interact with one another and work in different combinations in groups, yet with plenty of time for individuals to ask questions and share experiences. Further courses could experiment with timings and frequency of sessions to suit the need of participants.
5. It is important for refugees to have qualifications from the UK. This course could be adapted to gain accreditation with a body such as the Open College Network. In this way, participants would have the option of gaining credits for coursework. Furthermore, by working within the framework of a regulating body, such as OCN, the quality of the course could be demonstrated and safeguarded.
6. A number of very useful links were established whilst developing this course, both with and between participants and with external organisations, such as funders and CVS around the region. We hope that these contacts can be retained and strengthened for future training courses and that new linkages can be developed.
7. The project is grateful for the support and guidance provided by the Yorkshire and Humberside Community Development Network. We hope that if this course is run again, facilitators will continue to involve the Network in the planning, marketing and delivery.

Appendix

Volunteering and Asylum Advisory Group

Nasim Aslam, Wakefield Metropolitan District Council

Pam Bye, Kirklees Refugees and Friends Together

Charlotte Cooke, Refugee Council

Gill Gibbons, Leeds Asylum Seekers Support Network

Maureen Grant, Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust

Sheila Hawkins, Volunteering England

Val Kay, Yorkshire and Humberside Consortium for Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Lynne Kent, Bradford Volunteer Centre

John Rodgers, Refugee Council (volunteer)

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