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WORKING WITH ASYLUM SEEKERS AND VOLUNTEERS

Training and Employment Section, Refugee Council

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The EQUAL programme aims to overcome discrimination and inequalities faced by disadvantaged groups in the UK and European labour market. ASSET UK is a partnership under the EQUAL programme. It consists of eight agencies that work together to promote asylum seekers' skills, empowerment and training in the UK. Led both nationally and transnationally by the Refugee Council, ASSET UK works to develop and disseminate good practice on information, advice and guidance, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), skills audits, volunteering and working with employers. ASSET UK equips asylum seekers with skills that prepare them for the labour market, either in the UK or in their country of origin, should they have to return. The eight agencies are:

Refugee Council



The Basic Skills Agency



LLU+ (formerly the London Language and Literacy Unit), London South Bank University



National Institute of Adult Continuing Education



Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities



Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit, London Metropolitan University



The Sheffield College



Training and Employment Section, Refugee Council

Foreword

ASSET UK is a partnership designed, as its acronym suggests, to improve asylum seekers' support, empowerment and training in order to improve their integration into the UK and its labour market. As asylum seekers are now not allowed to undertake paid employment, except in exceptional circumstances, volunteering offers an important opportunity to develop and practise skills, gain experience of UK culture and contribute to the local community.

This guide draws on development work undertaken by Refugee Council's Training and Employment Section, engaging and supporting volunteers in English language classes as part of the ASSET UK programme. It is written for practitioners, rather than as a formal report. As well as describing the successes and challenges, the guide includes useful suggestions for anyone working with and supporting volunteers. The advice is set in the context of the Home Office's guidelines and the volunteers' own descriptions of the benefits of getting involved.

We are grateful to our ASSET UK partners for their development work on volunteering and teaching ESOL, which has informed this guide: the Basic Skills Agency, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities, LLU+ of London South Bank University, the Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit of London Metropolitan University and Sheffield College. The financial support of the ESF and Learning and Skills Council has been essential in ensuring we could disseminate the lessons learned.

Finally, we would like to thank Katie Evans for preparing this guide and above all, the volunteers for their hard work and their readiness to share their experience so others could learn from it.

Anna Reisenberger
Deputy Chief Executive, Refugee Council
Chair, ASSET UK

Glossary

ASSET UK – Asylum Seekers Skills Empowerment and Training Development Partnership

Asylum Seeker – Someone who is fleeing persecution in their homeland, has arrived in another country, made themselves known to the authorities and exercised the legal right to apply for asylum

Beneficiary – The person or organisation receiving support from a Development Partnership

BSA – The Basic Skills Agency

Dispersal – the process by which the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) moves asylum seekers to accommodation outside of London and the South East

DP – Development Partnership. The strategic partnership that implements EQUAL activities. Each Development Partnership addresses one thematic field of its choice

Emergency Accommodation – Accommodation given to destitute asylum seekers

EQUAL GB Programme - Equal is a European Social Fund programme aimed at testing and encouraging new ways of promoting employability, entrepreneurship, adaptability and equal opportunities

ESF – European Social Fund. Aims to improve the employment situation in the European Union, by investing in people

ESOL – English for Speakers of Other Languages

LLU+ - formerly the London Language and Literacy Unit based at London South Bank University

LSC – Learning and Skills Council

NASS – National Asylum Support Service. The body which provides support to asylum seekers who made their claim for asylum after 3 April 200.

NIACE – National Institute of Adult Continuing Education

NICEM – Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities

RCO – Refugee Community Organisation

Refugee – Someone whose asylum application has been successful and who is allowed to stay in another country having proved they would face persecution back home.

TES – Training and Employment Section, Refugee Council

TNG – Thematic Network Group

PART I

Misunderstandings and Myth-Busting

HOME OFFICE GUIDANCE

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

Care should be taken to ensure that the activity undertaken by the asylum seeker is genuinely voluntary and does not amount to employment. Reimbursement can be made for meal, travel or other costs actually incurred, but not as a flat rate allowance.

There is a difference between volunteering and employment which in general remains forbidden to asylum seekers even if the employment is unpaid. Where the work is unpaid and carried out on behalf of a charity, voluntary organisation or body that raises funds for either, or in the public sector then it will be accepted for immigration purposes as volunteering.

Any enquiries should be directed to:
Refugee Integration Section (Volunteering)
8th floor, Apollo House
36 Wellesley Road
Croydon CR9 3RR

(from :

http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/ind/en/home/laws_policy/refugee_integration0/volunteering_and_mentoring.html

What does “volunteer” mean?

The word exists as both a verb and a noun, and the official definition of “volunteer” is ‘a person who offers to do something’ (noun) and ‘to undertake or offer voluntarily, to be a volunteer’ (verb).¹

Throughout the ASSET UK project we have worked with volunteers from a variety of different countries and cultural backgrounds. Here is the word in some other languages. Can you identify these different languages? The answers are on page 25.

- a) Volontariato
- b) Iskaa wax u qabso
- c) Kazi ya kujitoleya
- d) Pune vullnetare
- e) Volantir
- f) Freiwillige
- g) Volontaire
- h) Volonter

ASSET UK

The ASSET UK project has been working on the social and vocational integration of asylum seekers, and part of this project has been to engage asylum seekers in meaningful volunteering opportunities.

Barriers to volunteering by asylum seekers

- Lack of awareness on the part of asylum seekers that they can volunteer.
- Cross-culturally the word “volunteer” (and “volunteering”) exists, but it can have different connotations in different countries and cultures.
- For example, in Congo it can mean to carry out military service, and in other countries the concept of volunteering that exists as a model in the UK can differ.
- Asylum seekers themselves may not be aware of what it means to volunteer in the UK, or may not be aware of the variety of opportunities available to them and how they can benefit from them.

¹ *The Oxford Study Dictionary*, (1991), Oxford University Press, Oxford

The aims of this report

Through the ASSET UK project, asylum seekers were engaged in volunteering activities, and dissemination events have successfully tackled the myths and misunderstandings surrounding volunteering for both asylum seekers and volunteers from the UK who have benefitted from their experience in a variety of ways. Through this report we aim to do the following:

- provide an example of how we have engaged, supported and supervised volunteers through the ASSET UK project, both for asylum seekers and volunteers from the UK.
- present our findings in the context of the Home Office guidance on volunteering.
- list recommendations and observations throughout the report, designed to be points for consideration for anyone working with, or thinking of working with volunteers.
- highlight the challenges that we have faced in our work over the past two years, and look at how we have addressed those issues.
- provide personal accounts of volunteering for ASSET UK and highlight the impacts this project has had for our volunteers.
- provide a useful list of resources for further reference.

PART II

Setting The Scene

The Facts

- Asylum seekers and refugees are one of the most disadvantaged groups in the UK labour market.
- They face enormous barriers towards social and vocational integration and employment.
- Skills and qualifications gained overseas are sometimes not recognised in the UK, and *underemployment* is as much a concern as *unemployment* for refugees.
- Asylum seekers and refugees have a lack of access to UK references.
- Asylum seekers face anxiety due to uncertainty of their application outcome and subsequent low self-esteem during the period in which they are waiting on their asylum application through lack of engagement in meaningful activities.
- Access to the labour market and employment was removed when the right to work for asylum seekers was withdrawn in July 2002.

The wider context

The ASSET UK Development Partnership's work with volunteers has been shaped by Home Office guidance on volunteering. As it says on the Home Office website:

'The Home Office, via the Active Communities Directorate, is constantly looking at ways of developing ways of:

- Increasing diversity in community participation
- co-ordinating citizenship training
- managing mentoring programmes
- policy on corporate community involvement
- raising awareness of community involvement through the media
- taking forward other initiatives to encourage and facilitate involvement by individuals in volunteering and less formal ways of achieving community engagement.'

(From

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/comrace/active/volunteering/index.html>)

The aims of the ASSET UK Development Partnership

ASSET UK Development Partnership was established in order to develop and implement quality infrastructures for asylum seekers dispersed into the regions awaiting a decision on their asylum application.

The work of the Development Partnership involved educational and voluntary agencies working on a national scale to develop and test new ways of working that will enable asylum seekers to live as independently and productively as possible in their given circumstances, thereby:

- Enabling asylum seekers to access employment in the UK once they receive a positive decision on their asylum application, or if they have to return to their country of origin.
- Working towards community integration and diversity
- Successfully helping individuals to engage in and work towards community cohesion through volunteering.

The Development Partnership

The ASSET UK Development Partnership consists of the following agencies:-

- The Refugee Council, as lead partner.
- The Basic Skills Agency (BSA)
- National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)
- Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)
- The Sheffield College.
- LLU+, London South Bank University.
- Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit (RAGU), London Metropolitan University.
- Training and Employment Section (TES), Refugee Council.

The main areas of work from the Development Partnership have been Basic Skills/ESOL including vocational ESOL programmes, skills audits, volunteering (including education, training and work placements), and information, advice and guidance. In particular, NIACE has been involved in skills audits with asylum seekers and working on volunteering placements in the East Midlands. These activities have enabled asylum seekers to gain relevant experience of the UK labour market through volunteering, thus contributing towards their future employability, should they obtain refugee status.

For further information please go to www.asset-uk.org.uk and www.niace.org.uk

The Training and Employment Section's Role

Within the ASSET UK Development Partnership, the Training and Employment Section has provided ESOL classes for asylum seekers in Birmingham.

These classes have been taught by qualified tutors on a voluntary basis.

We have also taken on volunteer language assistants to work with learners within the classes, as well as taking on volunteers for a small research project. Some of these volunteers were from the UK and some were asylum seekers awaiting a decision on their asylum application.

Impact

- Many asylum seekers are subject to isolation and depression in the situation of dispersal and awaiting a decision.
- ESOL classes were therefore set up in the local community.
- These were delivered at two emergency accommodation centres.
- Each class was taught by two volunteer ESOL tutors, and we had the support of five volunteer language assistants, who registered and assessed new arrivals and assisted learners on a one-to-one basis within the class at one of the emergency accommodation centres.
- An ESOL class for a Sudanese refugee community organisation was taught by two volunteer ESOL tutors, and provided some one-to-one teaching in another emergency accommodation centre.
- A Somali community organisation delivering English, Maths and IT classes, through volunteers from within their own community, was supported by lesson plans, schemes of work and learner records of work and transport costs for learners to and from the class.

PART III

Introducing The Band

The Tutors and Language Assistants from the UK

All volunteer tutors and two volunteer language assistants were from the UK. The tutors were fully qualified TEFL teachers, but the language assistants were not. For all of them, their reasons for volunteering were varied and included:

- Wanting to be part of something in complete contrast to their full-time day job.
- Having just gained their TEFL qualification, tutors wanted to begin teaching as soon as possible, and used the ASSET UK project to gain experience while they searched for paid teaching posts.
- Unqualified individuals wanting to gain some experience of a teaching environment before applying for a teaching course.
- Those with years of teaching experience who wanted to give their time voluntarily.
- All were keen to gain references for future training and employment opportunities.

Asylum Seeker Volunteers Case Studies

- One asylum seeker in emergency accommodation where classes took place was a trained teacher from his own country. His main reason for volunteering was to alleviate his boredom and frustration and to become part of an activity that enabled him to contribute to the local community and to address his own social and vocational integration. His teaching experience was assessed and how he could use it in the UK by a brief skills audit and needs analysis. He was found to be best suited as a volunteer language assistant not only because he did not have the relevant UK teaching qualifications, but because he has interpersonal skills with individual learners.

The benefits of volunteering were explained and how volunteering could assist him with a professional reference, as well as a task description for his role.

- Three volunteers, all asylum seekers, who worked on an information pack for newly arrived individuals to the UK. They researched useful organisations, addresses and contact details, as well as information that they felt would be beneficial for asylum seekers to know as soon as they arrived in the UK, using the internet in libraries, which meant ensuring that they were library members. They were assisted in registering at Birmingham Central Library and told how to access the internet services there for their volunteering and how the library worked for borrowing books as well as showing them the language support centre so they could

access ESOL materials and support if they wished. Therefore, the initial volunteering opportunity that these individuals were involved in led onto them being able to access an important service in their local area which could support them outside of the initial volunteering placement. They all then felt their confidence, English language skills, IT skills and motivation were supported and increased. (A volunteer's personal account of this is on page 22.)

Observations and Recommendations

- *Individuals' motivations for volunteering varied.*
- *Taking the time to gain an insight into their needs, the reasons why they want to volunteer and what they hope to gain from volunteering so they can be placed them in a suitable volunteering opportunity. Specifically, what skills they have and how these can be developed and used.*
- *Explaining how volunteering can benefit them and ensure they understand the culture of your organisation or project so they can see how they are contributing to and fit in with the organisation or project as a whole.*
- *Being aware that an individual may not think they can volunteer, or realise that they can volunteer, and that it is the project's responsibility to raise awareness.*

PART IV

Recruitment, Support And Supervision

Recruitment

Consistency of recruitment was essential so all volunteers, whether British nationals or asylum seekers were treated in the same way, using the same processes was a key criteria in the project. There were, however, differences that are highlighted below.

The application form

Because the roles and tasks varied, two different types of application form were developed, one specifically for tutors and one for all other volunteering roles. See Appendix 1 for the volunteer tutor form and Appendix 2 for the general volunteering form.

Recruiting asylum seekers

- Asylum seeker volunteers were recruited through the emergency accommodation centres.
- Prospective students were assessed for their learning needs but also their current circumstances and aspirations which led onto specific volunteering opportunities to help meet these needs.
- Many asylum seekers could not provide references. This will be addressed in more detail later in the report.
- Many had not realised they could volunteer or were not aware of any volunteering opportunities, so it was our role to introduce the project, the concept of volunteering and the activities they could do and then match skills with suitable placements.
- As with the creation of the information pack, an opportunity was created to suit a volunteer's needs rather than trying to find a volunteer to meet an existing need. This made the whole experience more relevant for the volunteer, within the HO Guidance.
- For asylum seekers it was the only meaningful and motivational activity they were able to access and found it enabled them to forget their other concerns, issues and worries as they were fully engaged.

Recruiting other volunteers

- Advertisements asked specifically for volunteer ESOL tutors and volunteer language assistants.
- Advertisements were circulated to colleagues, colleges, libraries and community centres.
- The most productive place to advertise was libraries in and around Birmingham. All the volunteer tutors answered advertisements placed in libraries.

- Advertisements should be as local as possible. While transport costs were available it was too time consuming and difficult to fit in with other commitments and daytime jobs for prospective applicants.

Recruiting All Volunteers

- Every volunteer completed an official volunteer application form.
- All candidates invited for interview were asked to expand on their experience, the reasons why they wanted to volunteer and what they hoped to gain from volunteering.
- References proved more challenging with asylum seekers. They used ESOL tutors if they were attending an ESOL class in a college, as well as asking the accommodation management. In the majority of cases, however, it was not possible for them to supply two references and we did on these occasions waive this rule and provide increased support and supervision.

Observations and Recommendations

- *Utilise local service providers to advertise for volunteers. Libraries, in our experience, are the most productive.*
- *Visit accommodation centres or organisations working with asylum seekers to recruit them for volunteering activities.*
- *Be realistic in terms of the geographical area in which you advertise. Do not advertise too far away from where the volunteering will take place.*
- *Ensure you implement a formal recruitment process in terms of providing an application pack, inviting candidates for interview and conducting a proper interview.*
- *It is also beneficial for candidates to receive feedback from an interview whether they were successful or not. This is particularly relevant for asylum seekers who may not have experienced the culture of recruitment in the UK and it gives them valuable experience.*
- *Be aware that it may not always be possible for asylum seekers to provide two references.*

Training, Support and Supervision

Training

All volunteer tutors received a 1-day awareness-raising workshop regarding teaching ESOL specifically to asylum seekers, as part of their induction. While all were fully TEFL qualified, many had not taught asylum seekers before. This was to ensure they felt supported in their role. The workshop included:

- Introduction to the asylum process and the implications this could have upon their teaching and learning within the classroom.
- Considering learners' needs, and how the personal circumstances of asylum seekers impact upon their learning needs.
- Developing ESOL materials that meet asylum seekers' needs.

- Working with individual learning plans and how that can help meet and benefit asylum seekers' learning needs.
- Considering teaching and learning activities, such as pair and group work, and the layout of a classroom that is most conducive for learners, particularly a multicultural class where individual needs should be taken into account. *See Appendix 3 for an example activity from this training.*

Tutors visited the venue where they would be teaching before they began their class. This was because the teaching environment was very different to a formal classroom. In most cases classes were taught in the television lounge of the accommodation centres, where other residents who were not partaking in the class were watching television.

It could not be guaranteed each week how many learners there would be, due to the dispersal process. At times tutors could have a group of learners one week, and then a completely new group the following week.

There was a limited number of resources available, and the only whiteboards were small, portable A3 sized.

Taking the volunteer to the venue before they agreed to the volunteering role gave them an opportunity to see whether they were comfortable with things before they began their placement.

Support and supervision for tutors

- Lessons were observed regularly and feedback provided to tutors. The tutors had the opportunity to comment upon and discuss further any points from their lesson observations.
- Regular support and supervision sessions in conjunction with feedback from lesson observations were provided. *The Support and Supervision form we used with tutors can be found in Appendix 4.*
- Regular communication with volunteers ensured that they knew what was expected of them and that they felt supported.
- Classes were visited fortnightly so that an up-to-date record of the centres, students attending, numbers dispersed and how things were progressing was maintained. Any concerns were raised at support and supervision meetings.
- Student evaluations as part of tutors' support and supervision were a means of assessing the progress of the class, including addressing any issues.
- Tutors attended relevant external training events such as on-line ESOL curriculum training, ESOL resource training and awareness raising sessions on new ESOL qualifications to complement and support their placement.
- Support and supervision sessions followed any training, not only to see how beneficial it was for volunteers, but also to ensure that we were sending them on the most relevant kind of training.
- Updates of relevant external training opportunities were essential including all workshops, training days and conferences run for ASSET UK.

- All volunteers' travel expenses were reimbursed.

Training for asylum seeker volunteers

- All language assistants attended the awareness-raising workshop for tutors. This ensured they felt equally as prepared for their role within the class, and had a greater insight into the tutor's role. It also enabled the tutors and language assistants to meet prior to beginning their placements.
- Asylum seeker volunteers who worked on the research project to develop an information pack were helped to join the library so they could access the internet. They were given a tour of the library so they knew where to access the internet and the other services they could access within the library.

Support and Supervision for Asylum Seeker Volunteers

- Support and supervision sessions for asylum seeker volunteers were similar to that for tutors.
- Subsistence of up to £3.00 was provided for any volunteer whose placement took place over a lunch break. (This did not occur very often.)
- A day-trip for volunteers, both asylum seekers and others was arranged, towards the end of the project. This enabled everyone working on the project to come together socially, to meet with each other outside their volunteering role and to build friendships.
- Asylum seeker volunteers were sent on training to complement their qualifications and experience from overseas, and to work towards their employability in the UK. For example, one language assistant, a trained teacher from his own country, was able to attend an Adult Learning Support training session **when he obtained refugee status**, gaining a qualification at Level 2 Adult Learning Support.
- Asylum seeker volunteers' placements supported them in their English language progression. Those working on the information pack found it very useful to be able to research information in English and to write up their findings in English, as this supported their ESOL classes.

Observations and Recommendations

- *Provide volunteers with induction training relevant to and that supports their volunteering position. Ensure that part of this induction is to view the venue, where they will be carrying out their placement before they commit themselves to the role.*
- *Provide travel and subsistence expenses not only for the actual volunteering placement but also for attending any external training or events.*
- *Provide regular support and supervision sessions that enable you and the volunteer to air any concerns, issues or problems and also for them to be able to say what is going well and how they are benefiting from their experience.*

- *Observe volunteers in their post on regular occasions (e.g. what is the venue like? Are they having problems travelling to and from the venue? Are they working well with other members of the team?). Therefore any issues can be noted and commented upon during a support and supervision sessions.*
- *Maintain links with relevant external organisations and ensure you are aware of relevant training opportunities that your volunteers can partake in and that will compliment and support them in their volunteering role.*
- *Ensure that the volunteering opportunity can support the volunteer as much as possible, e.g. with their language learning needs.*

PART V

The Benefits and Impact of Volunteering

The ASSET UK project has highlighted some key benefits of volunteering, both for asylum seekers and for others.

Benefits and Impact for Asylum Seeker Volunteers

These points should be considered in relation to the Home Office Guidance on volunteering referred to at the beginning of this document.

- Asylum Seekers can make an active contribution to service provision. It provides them with a sense of ownership and encourages social integration and future employability.
- Enables access to local facilities and opportunity to gain a UK reference.
- Volunteering gives structure to a day, particularly for asylum seekers who may not be able to access many other opportunities while they are waiting for a decision on their status. This subsequently helps with mental well being and self-esteem.
- Taking an active part in an activity so they feel they are contributing to something practical, positive and worthwhile.
- Using skills that would not necessarily be addressed otherwise while they are waiting on their asylum application.
- Engaging in teamwork with peers – building team/interpersonal skills.
- Becoming more familiar and integrated with the local community, rather than just residing in it until a decision comes through.
- Being able to improve English language skills outside of the classroom. Volunteering can act as a support mechanism for learning English and can complement what is learnt within the classroom.

Benefits and Impact for Other Volunteers

- Tutors and language assistants gained experience of a very challenging teaching environment and unpredictable teaching environment. This enabled them to put their teaching skills to full use, and of an innovative and challenging teaching experience to use in future job applications.
- Tutors gained experience of working with asylum seekers and knowledge and understanding of the asylum system and the impact it has on individuals.
- They have been able to experience working in a diverse and multicultural environment, necessary for many jobs and it is therefore a valuable experience for them.
- They gained references, and could include the experience on their CVs.

Case studies

The key benefits of volunteering for ASSET UK are best illustrated by the volunteers' accounts.

Volunteer Tutors

John*

John has been able to empathise with learners' needs and his awareness of their needs has been increased since volunteering at the accommodation centre. He also feels he has been able to use the enthusiasm he has for teaching in order to get the best from his class and this volunteering experience. He also noted how enthusiastic the learners are and how much energy they have to give to the class, as well as recognising the diverse backgrounds that his learners have. This tutor's full-time day job is as a solicitor, and, due to his experience with ASSET UK, he now has a greater interest in and does more work with communities through his profession.

Laura

Since volunteering for ASSET UK, Laura has successfully completed her PGCE secondary teaching qualification. She has found that her experience of volunteering as a tutor for the project has had a very significant impact on her consequent training and teaching. She will begin working in a secondary school in the new academic year 2005/06 where the majority of pupils are from an ethnic minority background. She has a greater understanding of different cultural backgrounds through her teaching for ASSET UK, and feels her cultural knowledge and awareness has expanded significantly enabling her to work more effectively with her students, particularly on a personal and social level. She feels more confident in her teaching and is also significantly more aware of the predicament of asylum seekers. She is able to "set the record straight" now with others during conversations and is able to tackle misrepresentations of asylum seekers as portrayed by the media. She also noted how this experience has assisted her in applying for jobs, and has taken high priority on her CV. She has been able to use her experience of ASSET UK in interviews, particularly around questions relating to cultural awareness. She has also been able to use example anecdotes from lessons she has taught at the accommodation centre. She feels she has increased her planning ability, particularly as she never knew which or how many students she was going to be teaching each week at the centre. She also feels it has helped with her experience of initial assessments and registration procedures.

Emily

For Emily, the impact of ASSET UK has been regarding her confidence with teaching groups. Her teaching background was predominately teaching on a one-to-one basis and she now feels more confident and relaxed teaching groups. She found it a very beneficial experience working with language assistants in the class and has been able to successfully put experience on her CV. She also benefited from attending courses with ASSET UK partners, particularly those staged by LLU+ around the new ESOL qualifications and the on-line curriculum training. She feels her awareness has been raised

enormously due to attending these events and now hopes to be able to use the ESOL curriculum when teaching abroad in the future.

Language assistants

Diane

Diane has been in England for 1 year and is learning English. She is currently at Level 2. She is a trained teacher from her own country and has been volunteering as a language assistant for ASSET UK. She attended some citizenship material training, run by NIACE, as part of her support in her role. We looked at how we could take these materials back to our learners at the centre and what would be suitable to use with them., she was conversing with ESOL tutors from a variety of college and she highlighted this event as her outstanding moment as, for the first time in the UK adult learning provision and said she felt "on the same level" as these other professionals as she found out about what they were doing in their roles and she was able to discuss her own volunteering placement, as well as talking with them about her own professional teaching background. She felt uncomfortable at first with many native English speakers, but engaged in discussions and worked with other tutors in workshop groups. This is an example not only of how we have supported our volunteers in terms of accessing professional development opportunities, but also how we have acknowledged their own needs, in this case language needs.

ASSET UK has placed her in a volunteering role at a local primary school, as she has a background of primary teaching from her own country, but has yet to gain the necessary qualifications to practice in the UK. This is an example of being aware of knowing what other opportunities are available to them outside of their initial placement.

Diane observed the ease of accessing volunteering opportunities in the UK and the support provided in a placement. She also noted how this particular volunteering placement with ASSET UK has since made access to other opportunities that much easier.

Richard

Richard was an asylum seeker who has been a language assistant in our classes for nearly a year. Richard progressed, as a direct result of his experiences with ASSET UK, to attend external ASSET UK conferences and workshops with the Training and Employment Section, where he gave concise, professional, informative presentations on his volunteering experience. The feedback from delegates regarding his presentations was always positive and it was noted how effective and beneficial it was for delegates to be able to listen and converse directly with an asylum seeker at a conference, rather than hearing information only from those who work with them. He found his confidence and motivation increased and he proceeded to join an IT course, a teacher training course, a management course and gain a Level 2 ESOL qualification all at a local FE college. He also gained invaluable experience of the culture of teaching and volunteering in the UK, and is now

very aware of how much more employable he is, and is equipped with a portfolio of his experiences with ASSET UK.

Personal Account

Here is a personal account of volunteering from an asylum seeker involved in research for the information pack for asylum seekers. This account illustrates the positive effects of volunteering and how ASSET UK has had an impact. "My name is..... I have been in the UK since May 2004. I'm an asylum seeker. I come from Congo Brazzaville. My qualification is Industrial Planning , I was teaching and working in the Humanitarian Association called Observatoire Congolais des Droits de l'Homme (OCDH). In English, the Human Rights Congolese Observatory in my free time.

When I arrived in this country I didn't speak or write in English, I couldn't understand English speakers.

Swiftly, I made an application to learn English at college and I joined an English class in the Hostel (Emergency Accommodation) with the ASSET UK project, where I acquired some knowledge. At this time I can understand, speak and write more than before.

This experience gave me the opportunity to translate for some people's meetings in the Hostel, also in my new apartment when we received a visit from the authorities and the case workers, I can now explain everything that we need, I can make appointments anywhere especially for myself.

In this learning I'm involved in voluntary work with ASSET UK, I was an assistant teacher and I received transport every week. Now I am collecting information to help asylum seekers to integrate in to British society. I hope ASSET UK will continue to assist asylum seekers to integrate in to UK society."

Observations and Recommendations

- *Ensure awareness of other opportunities for volunteers to ensure their needs are being met, particularly if volunteering placements do not fulfil all the needs.*
- *Ensure evaluation of the experience with volunteers to find out how it benefited them and was effective.*
- *Engage volunteers in conferences and workshops. Their experience and presentations they give are the most beneficial ways of dissemination.*

PART VI

What Were The Challenges and How Did We Deal With Them?

The many positive examples and success stories highlighted the main issues and dilemmas we faced, and here we offer some recommendations on how to deal most effectively with the challenges. These are processes that worked for us within our project context, and it may be that they will need amending or adaptation to different contexts.

- a) With asylum seeker volunteers commitment can be irregular, short-term and unexplained absences.
- *Try and recruit more than one volunteer for a position, or create a position that two or more volunteers can work on together.*
 - *Try and create opportunities that enable flexible attendance. If this is not possible, ensure that the placements are aware of volunteers' circumstances regarding their status.*
 - *Try and access training and/or keep yourself up to date on current asylum legislation.*
 - *Newsletters and training from national refugee organisations are available.*
- b) Many volunteers had full-time day jobs and other evening commitments, and at times were unable to attend, or unable to continue volunteering for us.
- *Be prepared for regular recruitment drives. Ensure the time and resources to do this on a regular basis.*
 - *Be aware of the other commitments volunteers have. This is particularly useful not only to manage attendance but also for support and supervision sessions so the volunteer is able to manage volunteering and their other commitments and able to carry out their role efficiently.*
- c) Volunteering is sometimes not seen as the most important commitment. Attending a volunteering placement was the first thing to go if someone was very busy or other commitments arose. Volunteering cannot and should not be seen as "I just volunteer" or "I am *only* a volunteer."
- *It is important, through the recruitment process and induction training, to emphasise the role that the volunteer has, not just in relation to their volunteering position, but how that position fits in with the bigger picture. Ensure volunteers are aware of how crucial their role is to the work and how it enables the aims and objectives of the organisation or project to be realised and to actually happen. Ensure they are aware of how reliant others, the service receivers, are on them carrying out their placement each time and how important their role is to the organisation or project as a whole.*

- *Do not, when individuals make enquiries as to any vacancies that may be available within your organisation, say “we **only** have volunteer vacancies at the moment.”*
 - *Volunteering should always be promoted as a crucial element to an organisation in its own right. It is not to be sold as a lesser element within your organisation, or promoted as something that is being offered because of lack of funds for full time posts.*
 - *Volunteers should never be used as a replacement for paid members of staff.*
 - *Volunteering roles should be created specifically for volunteers and to fulfil aims and objectives relating to volunteering itself.*
 - *Volunteering is not a substitute, it is a role within its own right and with its own aims and objectives and its own benefits and rewards.*
- d) There are cultural differences and varied interpretations of what it means to volunteer in the UK.
- *This can be addressed through structured and formal recruitment and induction processes. Part of this process should be an introduction to volunteering in the UK, the benefits it offers and what is expected of the volunteer, as well as ensuring they are aware of how and where they fit into the organisation or project as a whole.*
 - *Ensure volunteers’ roles, responsibilities and boundaries are clear and have been understood before they begin their placement.*
 - *Continue to keep in touch with this through regular support and supervision sessions.*
- e) Asylum seekers with lower levels of English could volunteer but may not have sufficient English language skills in order to do so.
- *A volunteer with lower level language skills can be placed with a volunteer who can support them linguistically. This would not only help overcome the language barrier but would encourage team work and the development of interpersonal skills, both transferable skills for future employment. Ensure that other opportunities can be initiated or are available to support the language development of volunteers, for example, by helping them to join a library and creating a volunteering opportunity that utilises that particular service. There are also organisations that run peer-mentoring schemes that may be of use in this situation.*

Answers to volunteering questions on page 7

- a) Italian
- b) Somali
- c) Swahili
- d) Albanian
- e) Croatian
- f) German
- g) French
- h) Bosnian

* all names used in this document have been changed for privacy and confidentiality reasons.

Resource List

- www.asset-uk.org.uk: up-to-date information about the ASSET UK Development Partnership and the partners involved. Also see this website for products and publications from the partnership, including a report on "The Forbidden Workforce," equal opportunities and an evaluation of ESOL classes in the community.
- www.refugeecouncil.org.uk: current asylum legislation, news and the opportunity to sign up to the twice-monthly newsletter.
- www.basic-skills.co.uk: information about the Basic Skills Agency.
- www.lsbu.ac.uk/lluplus: information about LLU+, London South Bank University.
- www.niace.org.uk: for information about the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
- www.nicem.org.uk: information about the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities.
- www.londonmet.ac.uk/ragu: information about the Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit.
- <http://my.sheffcol.ac.uk>: information about The Sheffield College.
- www.lsc.gov.uk: information on all Learning and Skills Council programmes.
- www.timebank.org.uk: information on recruiting volunteers.
- www.do-it.org.uk: further information on recruiting volunteers.
- www.birmingham.gov.uk/centrallibrary.bcc: information about Birmingham Central Library.
- www.info-for-asylumseekers.org.uk: a website for asylum seekers covering information on education, qualifications and re-qualifying, getting into further and higher education and volunteering.
- www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/ind/en/home: information on the Immigration and Nationality Directorate at the Home Office including guidance on volunteering for asylum seekers.
- *The a-z of volunteering and asylum*, published by Tandem.
An information book for people managing asylum seeker volunteers.

Appendix 1
Volunteer Tutor Application Form

Office use only:

Received Interview Refs Police Check: Receipt Form

Induction

**REFUGEE COUNCIL VOLUNTEER TUTOR
APPLICATION FORM**

**Please answer all questions as fully as possible.
All answers will be treated in strict confidence.**

Personal Details

First name:

Surname:

Address:

Postcode:

Telephone numbers

Home: **Work/Mobile:**

Email:

Occupation:

How did you hear about volunteering at the Refugee Council?

The UK Asylum Seekers Development Partnership – ASSET UK is part funded by the European Social Fund under the Equal Community Initiative Programme.



We work with people who speak many different languages. Do you speak, read or write any languages other than English and how well?

1 – Fluent 2 – Intermediate Level 3 – Basic Level 4 – Some Knowledge

Language	Spoken	Written

Why do you want to volunteer with the Refugee Council?

Please give a brief description of your teaching experience to date, including levels taught, responsibilities, type of classes and the organisation you worked/volunteered for.

Do you have any special requirements that we would need to consider if you were to become a volunteer? Please give details.

For how long do you hope you will be volunteering with us? E.g. 3 months, 6 months.

For most volunteering we ask a minimum commitment of 3 months.

How many days a week would you usually be able to volunteer?

Monday **Tuesday** **Wednesday** **Thursday**
Friday

References*

Please give the contact details of two people who will be able to comment on your suitability to volunteer for the Refugee Council. They should have known you for at least a year, and cannot be a member of your family. One of these people should ideally be a former employer, tutor, or volunteer manager.

*If this is difficult for you because you have been in this country for a short time, please let us know and we can discuss it further.

Name:

Name:

Address:

Address:

Email:

Email:

How does this person know you?

How does this person know you?

Data Protection

Your details will be entered on to our database, which we use to record information about volunteers and monitor recruitment. The only people who can see this information are the volunteer development co-ordinator and the volunteer co-ordinators. If you do not want to have your details put onto the computer, please tick here.

I declare that the information given in this form is correct and true, to the best of my knowledge.

Signed:

Name:

Date:

Please print, sign and return your completed form to:

APPENDIX 2
GENERAL VOLUNTEER APPLICATION FORM

Office use only:

Received Interview Refs 1. 2. Police Check: Receipt Form I

Induction

**REFUGEE COUNCIL VOLUNTEER APPLICATION
FORM**

**Please answer all questions as fully as possible.
All answers will be treated in strict confidence.**

Personal Details

First name:

Surname:

Address:

Postcode:

Telephone numbers

Home: **Work/Mobile:**

Email:

Occupation:

How did you hear about volunteering for the ASSET UK project?

We work with people who speak many different languages. Do you speak, read or write any languages other than English and how well?

1 – Fluent 2 – Intermediate Level 3 – Basic Level 4 – Some Knowledge

Language	Spoken	Written

Why do you want to volunteer for the ASSET UK project?

Please give a brief description of your work and / or volunteering experience to date.

Do you have any special requirements that we would need to consider if you were to become a volunteer? Please give details.

For how long do you hope you will be volunteering with us? E.g. 3 months, 6 months.

For most volunteering we ask a minimum commitment of 3 months.

How many days a week would you usually be able to volunteer?

Monday **Tuesday** **Wednesday** **Thursday**
Friday

References*

Please give the contact details of two people who will be able to comment on your suitability to volunteer for the Refugee Council. They should have known you for at least a year, and cannot be a member of your family. One of these people should ideally be a former employer, tutor, or volunteer manager.

*If this is difficult for you because you have been in this country for a short time, please let us know and we can discuss it further.

Name:

Name:

Address:

Address:

Telephone:

Telephone:

Email:

Email:

How does this person know you?

How does this person know you?

Data Protection

Your details will be entered on to our database, which we use to record information about volunteers and monitor recruitment. The only people who can see this information are the volunteer development co-ordinator and the volunteer co-ordinators. If you do not want to have your details put onto the computer, please tick here.

I declare that the information given in this form is correct and true, to the best of my knowledge.

Signed:

Name:

Date:

Please print, sign and return your completed form to:

APPENDIX 4
EXAMPLE SUPPORT AND SUPERVISION FORM

Private & Confidential

VOLUNTEER SUPPORT RECORD

Name _____ **Date**

Name of support person _____

ACTION POINTS FROM LAST SUPPORT MEETING

REVIEW OF VOLUNTEER'S WORK

Work undertaken since last meeting & any special tasks carried out?
What areas are working well / need improvement?

WHAT HAVE YOU ENJOYED DOING WITHIN THIS ROLE?

What hasn't been going well? What if anything, have you found difficult?

PERFORMANCE LEVEL / SUPPORT OF VOLUNTEER

How do you feel you are performing as a volunteer? Feedback from support person

Are you being fully supported in your work?

Do you require any further support or training ?

VOLUNTEER'S PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Are you satisfied with your experience as a volunteer?

What do you think your volunteer role is achieving?

Are there any projects (old or new) you want to become involved in?

ACTION POINTS AGREED FOR VOLUNTEER / SUPPORT PERSON

ACTION BY WHOM

INFORMATION SHARING

Share any relevant information with volunteer (meetings, events, policy)

Date of next support meeting