

The Refugee Job Placement Project

Breaking Down the Barriers to Employment for Refugees in West Yorkshire

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June 2006

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Project Background

In 2003, The Back to Work Company was commissioned through the West Yorkshire Refugee Network to conduct a skills audit of refugees in the West Yorkshire area. The research project was made up of a number of strands, including: five hundred interviews with refugees across the sub-region; a mapping exercise of the existing forms of job search support, and identifying and contacting employers who had employed refugees. The work formed part of a wider project supported by Yorkshire Forward, the Regional Development Agency, and the West Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council to provide an accurate picture of the skills and employment position of refugees in the sub-region. From these interviews it was found that, of the respondents:

- 71% were male.
- 75% were between the ages of 18 and 34
- 11% had a recognised disability that may restrict their working capacity
- 50 nationalities were represented of which - Iraq (30%), Iran (15%), Afghanistan (12%) & Zimbabwe (10%)
- The most commonly spoken first languages were Kurdish (26%), Farsi (16.6%) Arabic (9.4%) and Dari (7.4%)
- 40% of interviewees felt that their spoken and/or written English was sufficient for a working situation
- 33% had been educated to University level
- 7% had no vocational skills or qualifications gained in their home countries.
- Over 25% said they would be willing to do any job in the UK

A consistent message from employers was that refugee employees were motivated and had a good work ethic. Language difficulties were highlighted as the main problem – very often the only problem – in recruitment. The research identified that a range of support services were available for employers, however, they did not have well defined employer links, and employers experienced difficulty identifying who to contact for support.

Feedback from all participants in the research, including refugees, employers, and support organisations, indicated that:

- English skills can be rapidly gained in a work setting, and workplace based language tuition can be provided to support groups of refugee employees with language difficulties
- It is not easy for employers to find out about services that are available to support their refugee recruits.
- Mentor support can ease absorption into the work place

The research project provided the evidence for the development of the refugee specific job brokerage, the Refugee Job Placement Project (RJPP), on which this paper is based. The project's key aims were to caseload job-seeking refugees within West Yorkshire who had skills that could be used in the local labour market; to develop relationships with relevant employers; and to link suitable paid employment, work placements and voluntary work opportunities with refugees who had the appropriate skills.

However, the project also had softer outcomes to achieve including: increasing awareness amongst employers of the skills of refugees, whilst at the same time increasing their knowledge of the service providers offering support; to develop and disseminate case studies of good practice through local partnerships and networks in

relation to refugee recruitment; and attempt to increase positive media coverage about the contribution of refugees to the local economy, later on in the project mentor support also became an important part of the service provided.

Context

It was important for the project to not only be based on ‘what works’ and good practice from elsewhere, but also that it had a strategic fit within the region.

Defining Good Practice

A number of New Deal for Communities areas across England set up job brokerage projects as part of a programme to tackle worklessness. The early findings from the national evaluation suggested that effective projects need to involve a number of key elements. It is important that they integrate themselves into – and gain the support of – the local community, and develop a good understanding of the local context and good links to community networks. They need to be holistic, with a tailored service for each client that focuses on their individual needs and circumstances. They should add value and avoid duplication by working with key agencies such as Jobcentre Plus; and they should encourage an employer-focussed approach, building strong links with local firms. It is also important for projects to ensure sustainability and progression through the provision of appropriate aftercare for clients and employers.

Strategic Context

Yorkshire and Humber contains one of the largest number of asylum seekers in NASS accommodation in the UK. Leeds contains far more asylum seekers than any other city or town in the region and is amongst the UK’s top ten local authorities for the number of asylum seekers. With such a high level of dispersal, and with a success rate of people gaining refugee status at approximately 50%, a large settled refugee population now exists in Leeds and the Yorkshire and Humber region. The Yorkshire & Humberside Regional Refugee Integration Strategy was launched in December 2003. The strategy was prepared by the Yorkshire and Humber Regional Consortium involving extensive input from relevant agencies, voluntary groups, refugee organisations and statutory bodies from across the Region – including information from The Back to Work Company’s Skills Audit. The Regional Strategy identifies gaps in services for refugees across the region and highlights proposals for activities to address those gaps, either at local or regional level. The strategy also sets a regional policy framework within which local action is likely to succeed. The key issues highlighted in the Strategy relating to the employability of refugees in the Yorkshire and Humber region are that:

- Employment rates are much lower for refugees than the rest of the region’s population
- There is a mismatch between refugee qualifications and the level of work they access (underemployment)
- Refugees are excluded from society through discriminatory practices and attitudes.
- There is a lack of information provision to employers about the needs of refugees, and about the legal framework within which they sit, excludes refugees even where discriminatory practices and attitudes do not exist.
- There is also a lack of integration support services
- There are gaps in the provision of labour market intelligence on refugees and asylum seekers particularly in North, South and the Humber sub regions.

Identifying the Barriers

Recent research on refugees' skills and the labour market carried out by a range of organisations including The Back to Work Company, The Refugee Council, Leeds Metropolitan University, London Metropolitan University, the Medical Practitioners' Union, and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), all draw very similar conclusions. They identify that despite the high levels of educational attainment and willingness to enter the labour market amongst the majority of refugees; employment rates still remain low – even when the skills possessed could help to overcome major skill shortages in some areas. Some of the key issues include the difficulties refugees face when re-qualifying and finding jobs – qualified professional refugees, particularly doctors and nurses, have great difficulty finding routes back into their profession. The DWP report stated that 36% of refugees of working age in the UK are unemployed – six times the national average. The report also found that where refugees are working, it is frequently at levels well below their capabilities. The situation is worse in the West Yorkshire sub-region where it is believed that 59% of refugees are unemployed.

Using all the research findings, The Back to Work Company identified some of the key barriers faced by refugees as:

- Lack of understanding of the UK job market and culture – which, in many cases varies considerably from what they are used to in their own countries, including limited or no access to or awareness of job opportunities or application processes
- Poor application form, CV and interview techniques
- Lack of supervision, support and mentoring
- National re-qualification and re-registration schemes for professionals (particularly medical) are not 'refugee friendly'
- Poor language skills
- Lack of evidence of qualifications and experience
- Dealing with people, including guidance and training advisers, with little experience of refugee or understanding of the issues they face
- Lack of family and friends with most refugees having to rely on themselves to find their way through the system
- Lack of accessible information about what is available and what they are entitled to, tailored to their needs. Friends and community organisations are the most common sources of advice, but these may not be well placed to provide accurate and up-to-date information.
- Negative attitudes of employers, the public, and the harmful images of refugees and asylum seekers portrayed in the national and local media, all contribute to the barriers for refugees trying to enter the labour market
- Being forced to leave their country may result in loss of confidence and motivation, and waiting for refugee status can be de-moralising in itself

Some personal stories, from refugees who registered with the project, support these identified barriers:

A legal executive applied for jobs with the police, Amnesty International and the Fire Brigade to name but a few. He was concerned that he was not even getting to interview stage, and found never hearing from the employers was very frustrating. He said he needed to understand more about what employers are looking for and expect from a candidate, and how to prepare his applications and CVs more appropriately, all of which were new approaches for him.

A refugee from Cameroon was employed by a local College as a co-ordinator to deliver a project placing refugees into volunteering positions to gain work experience. He is a qualified pharmacist and has been living in the UK for three and a half years. He wants to practice pharmacy in the UK, but to do so he needs to register with the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain and undertake the one-year Overseas Pharmacists Assessment Programme. In order to be able to register he must have achieved a minimum score of Academic level 7 in each of the test parameters of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) at one sitting of the test. Even if he could meet these criteria and all the other requirements for registration, he would still face the biggest problem, which is to pay the application fee of £445 (non-refundable) and £7,800 fee for the course. If he pays the full fee in advance he would receive a 6% discount as a refugee, a saving of £468. The Royal Pharmaceutical Society interview fee of £445 is also waived.

One client on the project came to the UK in 2004 and despite having an undergraduate degree in Mathematics and two Masters degrees in Statistics and Biostatistics, along with extensive experience as a data analyst and research consultant, he found it very difficult to find suitable employment. He started a teaching course and a work placement in a local school through a local programme in order to gain experience in a teaching environment in UK; he was very successful at this and feedback from the school was excellent, however his heart was in research and statistics.

The RJPP therefore attempted to arrange a work placement for him at the Regional Development Agency, through its partnership with Talent! Recruitment. He now has a placement in the organisation's research department and is extremely happy in his new post. He is finally using the skills he brought with him and despite the length of time it has taken for him to be successful, it has been worth the wait!

Project Activity – Overcoming the Barriers

Using the evidence, The Back to Work Company developed the RJPP in an attempt to overcome some of the barriers highlighted and ease the transition of local refugees into the labour market. The RJPP ran from November 2003 to March 2006, The team was made up of a part-time Manager, a Senior Job Placement Coordinator, and 2 Job Placement Coordinators who were refugees themselves. The project office was located close to where a large percentage of refugees reside in Leeds

Key facts on the clients

- 407 refugees were registered on the project, including 33 different nationalities
- 16% female, 84% male
- 5% had a disability
- 30% had no qualifications, 7% A level equivalent, 20% had completed secondary school, 18% first degree, 1% Masters,
- 8% working in the trades, 3% teachers, 1% accountants/book keepers, 1% medical
- 78% had work experience before entering the UK
- 55% had previous work experience in the UK
- 71% were registered with Jobcentre Plus
- 33% benefited from ESOL provision
- 11% accessed vocational training

- 3% accessed Higher Education programmes
- 1% re-qualified or were in the re-qualification process
- 26% spoke excellent English; 47% spoke average English and 27% were recorded as speaking poor English
- Age range

Age	%
19-25 yrs	26%
26-30 yrs	27%
31- 40 yrs	27%
41-49 yrs	8%
50 +	3%

- Length of time in UK

Length	%	Length	%
Not stated	18	3 yrs	20
< 6 mths	7	4 yrs	13
6-12 mths	6	5 yrs	8
1 yr	5	6 yrs	2
2 yrs	19	7-12 yrs	2

Key success Factors

It was a key priority and challenge for the RJPP to develop a service that could overcome as many of the barriers identified as possible. The project therefore developed a range of services to meet the needs of the local refugees and employers. The final external evaluation of the project, carried out in April 2006, identified a range of innovative methods of delivery, and highlighted the key success factors to support why the project was such a success at breaking down some of the barriers to employment and inclusion identified by refugees. The following provides further information on each of these key elements:

1. The Back to Work Company **employed two refugees to implement the project** as job placement co-ordinators – as far as the project knew this had not been done before and it had a positive impact on the case loading of refugees on to the project. Employing refugees to work on projects for refugees not only increases the credibility of the project within the refugee community and ensures the project is empathetic to the situation of many of its clients, but it also helps the refugees working on the project to gain some necessary skills to further their careers and make them more attractive to employers in the future. *One of the coordinators, for example, came to the UK in December 2004. He is a qualified General Practitioner Doctor with some excellent experience working in many countries around the world. After being granted Refugee status he started to rebuild his life in the UK. One of his long term goals was to resume his career as a General Practitioner Doctor with the NHS, however this involves a long process of registration with the General Medical Council and competition with many other applicants for few positions available, therefore it was important for him to think about short term employment goals in order for him to support himself. He applied to work with the RJPP because he thought it was a good employment opportunity that suited his short term goal and gave him a chance to use and further develop his transferable skills in management, and use his personal*

experiences of overcoming the barriers to employment, to help other Refugees in similar positions.

Whilst working with the project he has had a chance to further develop lots of skills such as effective communication, liaising with employers and clients, and presentation skills. He also learnt new skills in office administration and a good knowledge about the UK labour market. He learnt a lot from his experiences and stresses that the best advice he can pass to other Refugees seeking employment in the UK is firstly to understand that qualifications and experience do not guarantee employment, they have to be accompanied by an understanding of how the process of recruitment works in the UK.

2. The project had a **strong and clear registration process** which identified the clients' needs and aspirations at the start, this enabled the project team to tailor the service to the individual's requirements and ensure it was demand led. The team introduced an English test for people when they registered, to determine their levels of English, and when an issue arose that was beyond the remit of the project, the client was referred to a partner organisation with the relevant expertise (such as further English Language support). The project aimed to enable the individual to undertake job searching themselves when possible and any follow up support was provided when necessary.
3. **Flexibility in provision** Such a flexible, individually tailored, approach to CV and application form support, interview techniques and general employability skills provision, enabled the beneficiaries to use the service within the times they had available: *One Client had three years secretarial experience from her own country and also had the Association of Accounting Technicians qualification from Peterborough Regional College. The project helped her prepare job applications, but she found the interview preparation the most rewarding. She said "The project got me an interview at Leeds University, and they told me to go on the web site to find out more about the university, but I did not. I did not get the job, and when I asked why I had not been successful they said I had not answered the question on what I knew about the university well enough. I was then offered an interview at Yorkshire Forward, and the first thing I did was go to their web site to find out about them. The first question at interview was what did I know about Yorkshire Forward, and I did not stop talking. They told me they were amazed at how much I knew! I was offered the job."*
4. **Providing support for beneficiaries and employers at all stages of the employment process** including once they were in work. The project ensured the beneficiaries and employers had follow up support when it was needed. This ensured the whole employment process was as effective as possible. It was very rare for the project to be required to solve any immediate issues, however when this was necessary the Team were able to provide support. The project acted as an "honest broker" when dealing with both success and conflict within the project. Employers were encouraged to remain in contact with the co-ordinators, to use them to help resolve any issues which may have arisen as a result of employing refugees. After care and follow up by the project co-ordinators as well as independently through the mentoring system was also used to obtain feedback from employers and clients so that improvements to the service could be made where necessary. The project tried to ascertain how sustainable the jobs were at 13 and 26 weeks. Approximately 50% were followed up, 94% were still in their jobs at 13 weeks, 86% at 26 weeks

One Client was found full time work with a local charity, which met her immediate needs to gain paid employment. She was however a trained prison officer, and really wanted to go back into the prison service. She said “the project continued to send me job applications, including one for the prison service. As a result I am now preparing for my second interview with them as I succeeded in my first interview to be short-listed to the next stage. I could not have done this without the support of the project.”

5. **Encouragement of Refugees to take on voluntary work** The project encouraged voluntary placements whenever possible, it recognised that voluntary work is an excellent way for refugees to gain useful experience in a UK working environment as well as a means of getting a much needed employer reference for future paid employment. It also helps to build confidence and communication skills. The RJPP aimed to find voluntary opportunities mainly for its clients who were struggling to find paid employment. The experience was very positive for both the employer and the refugee, and feedback was always good. *The manager of a local charity shop said: “Working with the project has been a very positive and pleasant experience; we now have 2 very motivated volunteers who have brought new skills to our organisation.*

A manager of another charity shop had a similar experience: “The project has a very professional approach and I have enjoyed working with them; the candidate they sent me was excellent, she is friendly and has taken to the job like a ‘duck to water’. Her customer service skills are brilliant and although she had trouble with the English coins at first, she has now improved significantly; she even turns the till off to practice when the shop is not busy!!

An Ethiopian refugee on the project was a qualified operational transport pilot who had worked in the Ethiopian Airforce for two years. She worked full time for a local college as a project coordinator and also volunteered with the Red Cross and the Citizen’s Advice Bureau. She could not stress strongly enough that work experience through volunteering and work placement is essential for refugees if they want to be successful in getting a good job. She felt her unpaid volunteering helped her to get the part time refugee project coordinator work. And her experience means she can act as a role model and provide the right message to other refugees.

6. **Encouragement of clients to attend training – particularly vocational training.** Education and training is fundamental to helping refugees re-build their future and enable them to contribute their skills and experience to the UK society. Vocational training is a good way to meet refugees' need to update or transfer their skills to the particular circumstances of the host country and gain nationally recognised qualifications. It is also a useful tool for familiarisation with a new work environment and plays a major role in refugee empowerment - it helps them develop new skills, and be active in their own integration. The Project encouraged vocational training whenever appropriate

7. **Mentor Programme** – The project developed a tailored mentor programme in close partnership with the Refugee Council and Leeds Metropolitan University. The mentoring scheme proved to be real added value for the project and was very successful – it not only helped a small number of refugees with their integration issues, it also helped to increase awareness of refugees amongst local employers and organisations. Mentors offered guidance and assisted their mentees to develop and set realistic goals. The training and support programme was jointly developed and delivered by all three partners. *One mentor helped a refugee from*

Nigeria, who came to the UK six years ago. The mentee had experience in banking and a Degree in Geography and Education. Whilst studying for a Masters in Sustainability and Environmental Management, he needed to improve his understanding of the British employment culture in order to better integrate into society. The mentor knew the market better than the refugee, and felt he could help him understand how local businesses work and what they expect, with the hope of helping him achieve his goals and cope more effectively with whatever setbacks he may have to deal with.

Twenty eight mentors were recruited and trained, 12 of which were refugees and 16 local employers. Out of those trained, 13 relationships were successfully established

One mentor's comments: "What's uncanny are the similarities in some of our experiences and perceptions, despite the differences in culture, nationality etc. It just goes to show that there are common and universal experiences that defy such boundaries." The mentees also found it very useful "getting advice on my CVs and application forms has been really useful. As my relationship with my mentor develops we understand each other better and I have been able to gain an improved understanding of UK business" The partnerships exchanged views about culture and career experiences in the UK and internationally, and many built good friendships.

8. The project ensured that where possible the services provided were **Employer led**. As well as ensuring feedback was gained from employers when possible; the project also developed links with local employers and employer organisations and networks. The team felt that by building relationships with local employers the recruitment process was made easier both for the employer and the refugees. A number of local employers ran recruitment sessions from the Project's offices – these proved to be very effective and successful for all involved. And it was often found that once an employer had had a positive experience with the project, they returned to the project for further candidates.

The West Yorkshire Employer Coalition, who provided the funding for the project, willingly used their networks and employer groups to help publicise the project and its clients – and provided a channel for feedback from employers. When a highly skilled client joined, the project staff sent their CV on to the contact at the Coalition who then circulated it to the relevant employer contacts that they have on their networks. They have over 100 employers on their network. The project worked with a couple of organisations that develop positive action training programmes for ethnic minorities, including Talent! Recruitment, a national recruitment agency based in Leeds, who provided the project team with information on work/training placements as and when they arose. The project also developed a good relationship with PATH Yorkshire, and the project alerted clients to the positive action training opportunities they offered, and supported them through the application process.

Towards the end of the project the team developed a relationship with Leeds Ahead, a City wide regeneration initiative that encourages local businesses to play a role in the regeneration of the local community – the initiative is targeted at a range of employers from micro-businesses to large national organisations. It was agreed that when a highly skilled client joined the project an interview was arranged with a relevant employer involved in the initiative, this gave the client the opportunity to have experience with an employer and gain valuable feedback as to how they could improve their interview performance. Leeds Cares also

became a close partner of the project; it is a leading programme for engaging business support in Leeds communities, and it was decided that the project would work with a group of Leeds Cares volunteers to provide Action Days for refugees to learn more about British culture and traditions.

9. The project recognised the importance of **developing links and partnerships with statutory organisations**, both for the refugee and the organisation itself, as a way of raising awareness. The project had a Service Level Agreement with Leeds Jobcentre Plus, where two assigned advisors worked closely with the coordinators on a weekly basis. A referral process was developed and if the jobcentre was unable to help the refugee they were sign posted to the project. Likewise if the project came across an individual who would gain from some benefit advice from a Jobcentre Plus advisor, a meeting was brokered by the project.

After 12 months, a decision was made to put an additional Jobcentre Plus outreach support worker onto the project. Her support was to be in the form of giving in-work benefits advice to customers, and assisting with searching Jobcentre Plus vacancies and advising on training opportunities. The project received the daily mailing list of vacancies, and everyday would print out the full employer details of applicable positions and bring them into the office. This was especially useful, as without this help clients would not have been able to apply directly for these positions. Advice on training opportunities and Jobcentre Plus systems was also passed on to clients. This was helpful in promoting the benefits of Jobcentre Plus to customers and was greatly appreciated by those who were assisted. The secondee also had meetings with customers to establish their employment goals. She had agreed to meet clients regularly and conduct in-depth job searches and give advice to those who were not claiming benefits. This was to be done from the project (familiar and trusted surroundings), as many clients were reluctant to visit Jobcentre Plus offices. Unfortunately, this was not always possible due to technical difficulties experienced by the advisor.

The project also had a weekly slot at the Leeds Central Learning Centre's English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision where one of the coordinators visited to register clients. Good links were also developed with: local regeneration employment projects, local Family Learning Centres, Further Education Colleges, and Higher Education institutions.

10. It was also a key aim of the project to **develop links and partnerships with relevant Refugee Community Organisations** in order to strengthen the infrastructure of the local organisations. The project was a member of the multi agency cross sectoral West Yorkshire Refugee Network, which represents over 100 organisations across West Yorkshire led by and/or supporting refugees and asylum seekers. The network referred clients to the project for support, and the project used the network to refer clients to appropriate local provision. The network enabled the project to offer a much more holistic approach within its service provision as a result.

Other key organisations that the project worked with included RETAS, which offered a range of support services for refugees, particularly those with professional qualifications. The Refugee Council was also a key partner and a referral agency for sending clients to the project.

11. **Quality Assurance** was very important for the project and the project manager ensured continuous development and improvement of the services provided, ensuring they were client, partner and employer led – a clear in-house

performance management and evaluation framework was developed to facilitate this. The project also developed a dedicated database, which held all information on the clients and the employers that had had contact with the project. The database provided monthly and weekly reports documenting the number of submissions made and the number of clients and employers that had been contacted.

12. **Publicity and dissemination** was key to ensure the project was visible and maintained a positive external profile. Regular updates were provided in West Yorkshire Employer Coalition newsletters, and the team presented at numerous events, locally and nationally, including those for Jobcentre Plus; ACAS; Leeds Ahead; and the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion. The team also attended regional integration meetings with key regional agencies and developed good links with the Yorkshire Post, Yorkshire Evening Post, and the media officer at the Refugee Council

Project Results

Using all the methods mentioned above the project produced some excellent results, the main targets were to place 165 refugees into employment; to engage 280 employers; and to facilitate the development of 20 mentors recruited and trained

Achievements

- 407 refugees were registered on the project, with 33 nationalities, 44% Kurdish, 16% female, 84% male, 5% with a disability
- 641 employer contacts input onto employer database
- 245 successful job placements were made
- 183 (78%) refugees gained permanent jobs
- from a sample check of 50% of those placed with employers: 94% were still in their jobs at 13 weeks, 86% at 26 weeks
- 16 employer mentors recruited and trained
- 12 refugee mentors recruited and trained
- Numerous positive media articles published in local and regional sources

Issues and barriers for the success of the project

Although the project delivered against its targets, it identified a number of barriers which limited its success; these are highlighted here and are potential lessons that could be learnt for similar projects in the future. Barriers included: The **Capacity of the team**, which was relatively small for the numbers that it was dealing with and the complex needs that many of the clients had – this limited the amount of time that could be spent with individual clients or employers. Plus it was difficult to effectively spread the project to other areas in West Yorkshire – although this was attempted. It was often felt that **employers' stubbornness** to accept refugees into their workforce, despite the project's efforts, lead to a lack of communication or communication breakdown; the project tried various ways to engage employers however it was an uphill struggle. The **lack of reliability** from a number of the clients – not turning up for interviews/appointments, not keeping the project informed of any changes in their circumstances etc occasionally proved to be a problem. Although the project ensured clients signed a contract to encourage them to keep in touch, it often had little effect. The **lack of English language skills** of clients was a problem. In response the project developed links with local ESOL providers, as mentioned above, to whom refugees could be signposted. This turned out to be very successful. The **lack of future funding** eventually slowed the progress of the project in 2006 as co-ordinators were

struggling to find employment for themselves, at the same time as finding employment for the clients, all coordinators were successful however at gaining employment once the project had closed.

Breaking Down the Barriers to Employment

Consultation with the clients from the RJPP identified how the project met many of their needs and helped to break down some of the identified barriers not just to employment but also to integration and inclusion. Comments from the consultation highlighted that the project was successful in:

- Providing much needed support with preparation of CVs and job application forms
- Supporting individuals in preparing for interviews which invariably led to improved performance and job success
- Making contacts with employers, particularly where the individual had previously been unsuccessful
- Providing a one stop shop for accessing work and further contacts
- Providing much needed ongoing support, as often the first job obtained was not the job preferred
- Providing opportunities for work placement, which provided a UK work reference
- Providing somewhere to go when things were not working well
- Increasing the success rates, for many clients, in being offered an interview and a subsequent job
- Helping build confidence in application and interview process
- Helping to increase awareness of what employers are looking for and how the UK work culture works
- Providing a greater understanding of voluntary work and how it can prepare clients for the real world of work
- Being empathetic and understanding the clients' needs and their situations because the coordinators had experienced this first-hand themselves. This made initial contact much easier
- Increasing awareness of other agencies which could help with other needs

A client with a degree in Business Computing from the University of Roehampton, was unable to find a job in computing. The project helped him reconstruct his CV and to write better job applications. Whilst improving his CV and application form technique the project found him work as a security guard and gave him more support with preparing for interviews. He had his first interview for a business computing job, which recognised his professional qualifications. He says: "I might not get this job, but I felt for the first time my CV and application was of a good standard and I was able to answer all the questions. I also felt I performed well at interview". He said "It is very hard for refugees to find work in the UK. We cannot make contacts and do not understand what employers want from us. The project has helped me to understand what is needed, and my mentor has given me more support too."

A Refugee found out about the project from a friend and met with one of the project co-ordinators. He had previously tried to get a job and, although he got some interviews, he was repeatedly unsuccessful. When he joined the project he found that with his new skills he always got an interview. He is now studying accountancy at

Leeds Metropolitan University at degree level, because although he has an accountancy diploma from his home country, his experience has shown him he needs to be able to compete with British accountancy graduates to be promoted. He also felt he needed a challenge. He would like to go back to his original employer in the short term, where he was working in the accounts department, but longer term he would like to become self-employed.

All those interviewed as part of the external evaluation expressed their wish for the project to continue, many felt it had given them hope and they wanted more people in their situation to benefit.

A 20 year old Refugee from Rwanda arrived in the UK and attended and completed training courses in administrative work in order to improve her skills and experience and help her find a better suited job. On completion of her courses, she started to look for a job as an administration assistant with several employers, however she was unsuccessful. To support herself she started doing factory work until, through a friend, she heard about the Refugee Job Placement Project. She contacted the project, registered her details, and started to build up her portfolio to make her more attractive to prospective employers - the project helped her write a good CV, encouraged her to do voluntary work and found her a work placement with a local Family Learning Centre in order to keep practising her skills and gain valuable references. During her work placement, the Project contacted a number of relevant employers, sent her CV to employers, and helped her to complete job application forms. Eventually she got a job as an administrative assistant with a Counselling and Psychotherapy Service in Leeds with good rates of pay and benefits. She was very pleased with the help she received from the project: "I am very proud of the project because it made my dreams come true by finding me a job that I enjoy!" "I had lost hope in my career and had started to believe that factory work was all I would do for the rest of my time in the UK, I am so grateful to the Project."

A Joiner, from Iran, attended joint Vocational Training Courses at Leeds College of Building as well as ESOL training at Park Lane College to improve his communication skills. He was introduced to the RJPP who made contact with a number of Construction employers and, after being with the project for less than a month, they managed to place him with a local construction company. He is enjoying working as a Carpenter/Joiner in Leeds and he is very grateful for the support he was given by the Project.

A qualified Electrician, from Zimbabwe, attended several training courses to develop his skills and update his qualifications from his home country so that he could get a better job in his chosen profession.

However, he found that even after completing his course he was still struggling to find a job in his chosen area of work, so instead he started to work as a warehouse operative, and later as a van driver in order to pay the bills. This did little for his confidence and he started to feel he was wasting his time and was quickly losing hope. Then, through his connections with local Refugee Community Organisations, he found out about the Refugee Job Placement Project: he contacted the project immediately, registered his details, and with the help of the team he managed to prepare a good CV which was then sent to various employers with electrician

vacancies. After only 2 weeks of being registered with the project he got a good job as an Industrial Electrician.

A Ugandan, with a Business Administration Degree and a successful entrepreneurial background in his country, who was also the Vice President of the Ugandan Chamber of Commerce, used the project to help develop his new business in the UK. It took 7 months to be granted refugee status and during this time he did not have permission to work – he therefore took this opportunity to plan his business and undertake market research. He joined the Refugee Job Placement Project in July 2004 and, like many refugees in the UK, wanted some support and guidance to achieve his goals and ambitions; which was setting up his own businesses. The Project supported him in various ways throughout the development of his business offering advice on where to go and who to speak to for business start-up advice. He developed an interest in hairdressing and decided to do a course at a local College. He was awarded “best student in his class” and it was at this point that he decided, not only was he capable of being a good barber, but there was also a gap in the market which he could fill! Having made the decision to open a barbers shop, and after 4 months searching for premises, he found a suitable location and shortly afterwards opened up a business. Not content with just hairdressing, he quickly realised that his shop could offer other services to the community. He installed an internet connection so that waiting customers could use the facility, and extended the services offered to include money transfers, international calls, phone cards and fax services. He now owns a successful enterprise and is getting to the stage where he would like to recruit others to help him manage and grow the business

Feedback from employers

In general, in the first instance, employers gave reasons as to why they were interested in employing refugees as being mainly because they were having trouble recruiting locally for the jobs they had available, they had also heard from other employers that refugees were, in fact, good workers. *The Managing Director of a local factory, for example, said “I was very impressed with the quality of the candidate the Project put forward. We are delighted with our new recruit and if we could have five thousand like him we would be extremely happy!! He is coping well in a chaotic environment and is always smiling and keen to go the ‘extra mile’. His line manager has never met anyone so willing and quick to learn, and his excellent time keeping is refreshing! If he continues to work in this way he is very likely to be promoted” He would recommend that any company recruits refugees and was also willing to fund English Language training in-house.*

Increasingly employers recognised the skills some refugees possess and could see how these could benefit their organisation, *the regional development agency, for example, created a research placement for a client as part of their Diversity Scheme when they saw the value the refugee’s skills could bring to the organisation. Their belief was founded as he provided a unique skills set in research techniques which benefited the team immensely. As an organisation it was felt that they benefited from the broader skills he brought to the post and now have a better understanding of refugees, organisational diversity, and the benefits it brings*

It was also discovered that employing refugees helps educate the current workforce on refugee issues, including the barriers they face and the experiences they have had with the hope of dispelling some myths – some co-workers have even become very angry at the inaccurate stereotypes being portrayed by the media. One employer said *that by*

working with the project it has helped them to increase the diversity of their workforce, increase the understanding of refugees' situations, and helped to reduce the myths and pre-conceptions of refugees.

Not all employers had positive experiences however. Some complained of poor timekeeping, poor English language skills, or individuals not turning up for interview. These experiences were rare; however when they did occur the project ensured it did its best to work with the employer and the client to try to ensure the problems did not recur.

Impact

As well as having a positive impact on many refugees' lives in Leeds and surrounding areas, the project also had an impact on other levels. For instance, it created National interest from the National Employment Panel, DWP, and Jobcentre Plus. The South Yorkshire Employer Coalition was keen to replicate the project in South Yorkshire, and lessons learned fed into sub-regional and national policy consultations. Jobcentre Plus also used the employer support package, developed by the project, to inform the development of their employer module as part of their general refugee programme.

The External Evaluation highlighted the following key messages for policy and decision-makers at local, regional and national levels:

- ✓ More funding needs to be provided for awareness raising and capacity building initiatives for those working with refugees and asylum seekers in the statutory sector, this would help tackle the lack of understanding of refugee issues
- ✓ The gaps between policy and operational levels need to be addressed to reduce the lack of knowledge about how much support should be delivered through the statutory services
- ✓ Employers are key to the successful employment and integration of refugees and are notoriously difficult to engage – there needs to be more investment in awareness raising with employers