An Evaluation

The (Pilot) Volunteering Placement Programme
for Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Vulnerable migrants
in Oxford City

(April 2018 – March 2019)

Run by Refugee Resource
Commissioned by Oxford City Council
Funded by the
Controlling Migration Fund

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Kama (2019) Available at: https://www.kamaoxford.org.uk/ (Accessed on 6th April 2019)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction and Overview
This paper begins with a brief overview of the Volunteering Placement Programme (VPP). This is a pilot project being run by Refugee Resource (RR) where I work, and funded by the Controlling Migration Fund (CMF) via Oxford City Council (OCC). A short literature review follows which analyses key concepts such as volunteering versus community service, the psychosocial approach and the hostile environment. It reveals how the parameters of the evaluation have been defined and explains the rationale for what has been assessed, whilst speaking to the wider debate around migrant volunteering, evaluation processes and the discourse around the CMF itself.

Next, it outlines the methodology, study participants, research tools used and the rationale for these. Given the vulnerability of the majority of participants it also considers important ethical concerns including the researcher's accountability as the gatekeeper and the importance of doing no harm.

Project Outputs
The evaluation considers the VPP outputs including: the efficacy of its outreach and engagement; the number and type of placements; the importance of partnership working; and processes around retention and follow up; as well as a brief discussion of the benefits of the volunteering pathways programme.

The Views of Service Users
In-depth analysis of semi structured interviews with 9/49 participants, plus programme surveys and feedback has been considered through an auto-ethnographic lens, so that an inspiring picture of engagement, agency and integration is revealed. Existing quantitative data and secondary evidence has also analysed to produce an assessment of the project's successes and recommendations around future developments, improvements and areas for future research.

The Views of the Key Stakeholders
Views of four key stakeholders have been considered and these paint a picture of effective partnership working, commitment and a shared commitment to promoting empowerment, engagement and agency.

Key Achievements
49 refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants have participated in this programme in over 2000 hours of volunteering. A range of different placements have been accessed with the support of local community (including refugee) and statutory agencies. A huge variety of informal and formal placements have been identified. Strong partnership working has been identified as key to the success of the programme together with the activities of a dedicated and experienced project coordinator.

Challenges/Lessons Learnt/Recommendations
Project challenges have included familiarising participants with the western concept of volunteering, difficulties in accessing/maintaining placements in more traditional volunteering contexts and overall retention because of the often chaotic lives of participants and the barriers they face in terms of health, language and integration. In the light of lessons learnt, it is recommended the strong partnership working be built on through the establishment of a bespoke network of agencies so that good practice can be shared and more placements made available to this client group in the wider Oxfordshire context.

ACRONYMS

CMF   Controlling Migration Fund

RR   Refugee Resource

VPP   Volunteer Placement Project

VPPC   Volunteer Placement Project Coordinator

SVPRS   Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme (see Appendix 3)

RAG   Refugee Advisory Group

OCC   Oxford City Council

OCVA   Oxfordshire Community Voluntary Action (see Appendix 3)

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1.1 Background

The **Controlling Migration Fund (CMF)** was established in 2016 'to help local authorities mitigate the impacts of recent migration on communities in their area.' (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2018 p4)   It was criticised both as another knee jerk reaction to social problems wrongly laid at the door of migration (Griffith and Morris, 2017) and as an ineffectual programme for allaying the fears of the 'anxious middle' by involving them in token integration programmes (Katwala and Somerville (2016). The government's aim was to improve UK residents' *perceptions* of migrants by making *explicit* vulnerable migrants contribution to UK society. (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2018 p4).

I sit on the Oxfordshire Refugee and Asylum Seeker Strategy Group, throughout 2016; meetings were dedicated to discussions over whether to apply for the CMF. Finally, in-spite of its explicitly anti-migration tone, because it would bring considerable much needed funds into the county, a positive decision was reached.

The CMF is highly prescriptive and demands acknowledgement of the issues caused by migration (Gov.uk, 2019).   This sat badly with the agencies preparing the joint bid, and yet, they all felt a moral responsibility to pursue the sizeable funds on offer (Morris, 2008).

1.2 The aim of the Volunteering Placement Project (VPP)

The first outcome of the VPP was for refugees and migrants to have increased opportunity to be involved with volunteering in their local community. In order to achieve this, RR was tasked with working with 5-10 partner organisations/businesses to secure volunteer placements for their clients and at least 30 refugees and migrants were to be involved in volunteering opportunities.

The second outcome was for learning from the programme to be used to increase understanding in the wider community and voluntary sector about how to improve migrant volunteer pathways and support local volunteers. This learning has been based on participants' reports of how their understanding of how to access volunteering has been improved and what part the support they had received from the RR VPP and other support agencies had played. To facilitate this, a Volunteer Pathways introductory course for refugees and migrants for 10 participants was developed and piloted, and feedback gathered (See Appendix 1). As part of the evaluation stakeholders' viewpoints have been analysed. Lessons learnt around issues affecting refugees and migrants, and how best to support them into volunteering have also be highlighted.

2. THE WIDER DEBATE

2.1   Volunteering or Community Service?

Much research and commentary has been given over to volunteering in the international context, probably because of the well-publicised activities of agencies like the UK based Voluntary Services Overseas and the US Peace Corps. In comparison, the literature examining volunteering and especially refugees experience of volunteering in the UK is limited (Yap et al, 2011; Wilson and Lewis, 2006). This is surprising given there are so many opportunities to volunteer under a government whose agenda it is to expand volunteering (Gov.uk, 2015). Furthermore, volunteering is one of the few activities accessible to asylum seekers in the UK as they undergo often lengthy asylum cases during which time they are prohibited from working (Vickers, 2016). Lack of research is all the more surprising, given 'volunteering' is generally considered to be a key pathway for individuals from vulnerable groups to gain experience, obtain relevant references, keep their skills up to date and make them 'work-ready',(Holds worth and Brewis, 2014), as well as a pathway to integration and improving English skills.

One reason for this could be the belief the western concept of 'individualised volunteering' is not applicable to migrants coming from societies where volunteering is 'intimately linked to the cultural identity and community' (Anheier and Salamon 1999, p48). Some have argued it is not appropriate to

shoehorn migrants into 'individualised volunteering', that the western concept does not translate and that it would not appeal to those coming from countries with a background of colonial repression and forced labour (Lough and Carter-Black, 2015).

On the other hand, the emergence of successful volunteer initiatives in recent years, which specifically target forced and vulnerable migrants, illustrate there is a need and that it is relatively straightforward to recruit and retain this group if the right type of support is implemented. A growing number of oversubscribed, award winning programmes like the Oxfam 'Future Skills for Women', the Oxford Kama learning programme, and the University Museums Multaka-Oxford Project, all testify to this (see below).   In contrast, I cannot find any evidence which indicates generic volunteering providing agencies make adjustments to allow for the barriers experienced and implement strategies to make volunteering more accessible to refugees and asylum seekers.

2.2 An offshoot of the psychosocial approach?

On its website RR talks about how it uses a psychosocial approach to facilitate recovery and integration (2019). RR is a therapeutic organisation originally set up to provide counselling to forced and vulnerable migrants. Over the years, in response to client need, it has developed a range of wraparound 'social' services (advice and advocacy, employment service, mentoring and women's group) which complement and enhance the psychological interventions which are the mainstay of the service. (Ruston, 2003; Ager and Strang, 2004; Sagger and Somerville, 2012). The VPP is the most recent addition to the portfolio. The psychosocial approach has been praised for facilitating long term recovery from and aiding the development of resilience in survivors of war, trauma and complex bereavement (Dona, 2010).   At the same time, it has been criticised for pathologising natural responses to war and trauma (Silove and Steele, 2000; Ager, 1997; Dona, 2010).

2.3 The Hostile Environment

Arguably, the VPP has come about as both a result of and a response to the hostile environment. The hostile environment was first announced in 2012 in the UK and was intended to make life for those without leave to remain extremely unpleasant and encourage 'voluntary return' (Liberty, 2018). It has been criticised for being complex, discriminatory and even damaging to people health (in the case of the NHS). It produced the controversial Controlling Migration Fund which is being used to fund the RR VPP (Webber F, 2019; Liberty, 2018) and, which is arguably a wolf in sheep's clothing.

RR is by no means the first NGO to have sought (often successfully) to make use of 'tainted' funds to the benefit of their service users, either in the UK or further afield.   Indeed, the CMF website lists a many community initiatives which have apparently navigated the minefield created by hostile political legislation (Gov.uk, 2019; Morris, 2008) and are running programmes which benefit their users.

2.4 Why an Evaluation?

It is agreed a good evaluation should provide crucial opportunities for learning and improving programming (ALNAP, 2016; Gosling, 2003).   Robust evaluations should also provide considered and evidence-based judgement on the degree to which a programme has been successful, and the nature of the success. Providing comprehensive answers to 'so what?' (Morra Imas and Rist, 2009), a good evaluation should analyse whether and/or why an activity was valuable and for whom (Buffardi et al, 2015).

Given my reservations around the CMF, the first challenge was to minimise my own partiality and to preserve some objectivity (Walliman, 2010) and to identify the right methodology to aid this. The VPP is a small, innovative pilot project coming to the end of its first year in Oxford and as such it lends itself to a dispassionate evaluation format (Gosling and Edwards, 2003).

Project quarterly reporting already ensured a degree of accountability and so it made sense for the evaluation to have a learning orientation and take the form of an after action review i.e. a 'facilitated process for those involved in the programme to reflect on what happened, successes, challenges and learning' (Alnap, 2016 p37). Initial investigations revealed the importance of partnership and so it was deemed appropriate to interview the partners and analyse their contributions as well as gather first-hand accounts from a sample of the participants. Given my professional involvement and the learning focus, it is likely it will be less objective than normal, however, it is hoped this can be offset by the provision of auto- ethnographic insight (Ellis and Flaherty, 1992)

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Evaluation Aim

To evaluate the Volunteering Placement Project (VPP) in Oxford city funded by the Controlling Migration Fund

It will evaluate:

1. Why and how participants were recruited to the project?
   1. *Numbers recruited*
   2. *Recruitment methods*

2. How and why they were retained?
   1. *Volunteer destinations*
   2. *Level of commitment/involvement*
   3. *Initial experiences*
   4. *Ongoing support methods and pastoral care*
   5. *Stakeholders attitudes and motivations*

3. The experience of the participants at each stage of the programme?
   1. *Were there obvious stages? Transition points?*
   2. *How did their experience develop?*
   3. *How was their trust and confidence developed?*

4. How and why they benefited from the programme (or not)?
   1. *What went well/did not go well?*
   2. *What impact (if any) did it have on their well-being (wider/softer outcomes)?*
   3. *What positive outcomes were achieved in terms of employment, social networks, and level of English etc.?*

5. The impact of the local (national) context and how it helped/hindered the programme?
   1. *Were there any subgroups who it was more difficult to recruit/retain?*
   2. *Did the 'oxford bubble' phenomenon have an impact?*
   3. *What about the hostile environment?*

3.2 Methodology

RR is a client centred organisation (Refugee Resource, 2019). Therefore, the experience of the participants and their supporters/stakeholders has formed the basis of the evaluation which has taken a positivist approach (Carver and Handley, 2019). An evaluation format requires a purposively selected sample, the use of observation and interviews as well as the examination of existing secondary data (Alnap, 2018)   In this case, semi-structured interviews (Walliman, 2010) have been conducted with 9/49 pilot project participants and 4 representatives from the key voluntary and statutory agencies involved. Analysis of participant feedback and surveys as well as programme observations have been carried out.

As the programme manager (aka the gatekeeper) I have also made my own autoethnographic observations based on my participation (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011). Because of close personal involvement, interpretivist elements have undoubtedly emerged and this may have limited the objectivity of the evaluation in the traditional sense. However, it could be argued, my auto-ethnographic contribution has helped provide closer insights into participants' motivations and experiences.

The participants were selected from a cross section of volunteering experiences in terms of roles/agencies/length of placement/time commitment and represent the breadth and variety of experience the project has supported. Initial analysis indicated that the majority of successful participants were placed internally (RR), with partner organisations like Oxfam (Tosal-Supron, 2017) and the Multaka project (Multaka-Oxford, 2019), whilst some have found placements independently. 4/6 of the identified key stakeholders were also interviewed.

3.3 Data Analysis

Once the interviews had been conducted they were reviewed and coded to identify significant themes (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011)).   This primary evidence was then reviewed in conjunction with relevant secondary data (RR annual review, CMF updates, the project's quarterly reports, case studies and so on) in order to answer the evaluation questions. The findings were then shared with the participants and their insights were considered in the interpretation of the data before the production of the final evaluation.

3.4 Time scale

The chart (below) was used to plan the evaluation process and ensure it was completed to schedule. Enough time was identified to plan the programme (ALNAP, 2019), consider and organise the ethics permission (Brookes, 2019), do the necessary reading and carry out field work before collating the data and analysing it in order to present the findings, and develop suitable recommendations.   The aim of this plan was to make the process as systematic, concise, targeted and focused as possible. In the event, it mostly went to plan, although the ethics permission and fieldwork took a couple of weeks longer than forecast due to the difficulty in scheduling appointments with very busy stakeholders and (former) participants who were busy volunteering or, having progressed from volunteering, working.

Tasks	January				February				March				April		
	7-13	14-20	21 – 27	28 – 3	4 – 10	11- 17	18 – 24	25- 3	4 – 10	11-17	18-24	25-31	1st - 7th	8-15	15-22
Initiate background reading and deciding on subject	X	X													
Write research proposal		X	X	X											
paperwork (GDPR privacy notice, Consent form and information sheet)		X	X	X											
Organise note taking system		X													
Continue background reading and note taking			X	X	X	X									
Draft literature review				X	X	X									
Submit research proposal							X								
Draft structure of evaluation					X	X									
Draft introduction							X								
Ongoing review and revising								X	X		X	X	X		
Decide on research method, data collection and analysis	X	X													
Arrangements for fieldwork and questionnaire appointments			X	X											
Carry out fieldwork					X										
Collate data for analysis and do analysis							X	X							
Draft findings and begin to develop recommendations									X	X					
Drawings and formatting. Introduction, contents, list of references, list of acronyms etc										X					
Write Executive summary										X					
Finalise evaluation and submit											X				

4. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Evaluations involve obtaining primary data from people involved in programmes by asking them questions and conducting interviews (Kivale, 2007). As part of this process, ethical issues (Dowling, 2010) around the interviewing of vulnerable participants have been considered, following Brookes protocols including its ethical code of conduct and completion of the TDE E1 form (Brookes, 2019) with my supervisor. This form covers informed consent; the role of the gatekeeper; the right to anonymity; response to sensitive issues; the use of financial inducements and so on.

The TDE E1 form required particular considerations being given to questions regarding gatekeepers, sensitive issues and inducement of stress and anxiety before concluding the 'no' response (see Appendix 5 for considerations)

5. EXPERIENCES OF SERVICE USERS

5.1 Introduction

49 participants have taken part in the VPP in over 2000 hours of volunteering since April 2018. Participants have had contact with communities they would never otherwise have crossed paths with e.g. the homeless, children with reading difficulties, the visually impaired and others with disabilities. This has resulted in a greater understanding of the situation of other marginalised groups here in Oxford and resulted in a renewed drive in some of the participants to make a difference to people's lives. Many of the volunteering events, like the Refugee Resource women's service community activities, have *'given everyone the opportunity to share, exchange views and, above all, to have some valuable time to focus on the greatness of coming from different backgrounds and the importance of getting involved with community-focused events'* Stakeholder. Further investigation has also brought to light the extraordinary range of volunteering and community activities (formal, informal and ad hoc) many of the more established clients have been involved in. This cohort of

clients have reiterated how rewarding and helpful their volunteering experience has been in increasing their confidence, improving their English and reducing their isolation.

5.2 About the Service Users

Apart from the nine in-depth semi-structured interviews, RR's bespoke self-evaluation tools have also been analysed.   These indicate 90% participants report making new friends, 80% gaining confidence and 85% gaining new skills as well as 75% reporting a greater engagement with their local community.

Of the nine who were interviewed in depth, all were women. They came from seven different countries (Syria, Iraq, Morocco, Pakistan, Sudan, Bangladesh and Turkey) and had been engaged with a range of RR Services and those of partner organisations from 18 years - 6 months. Five of them had a large amount of volunteering experience already, the other four had accessed volunteering in this country for the first time via the VPP. Eight had refugee status, and one was classed as a vulnerable migrant. All could be said to be well 'held' as - they are well integrated into the local community because they had lived here a long time: had the support of the SVPRS: or had come to join spouses already well settled. Education levels of all but two, one of whom is dyslexic, were University level and of these six had all been professional working women back in their own country. Six of them were mothers, 1 had been a single teenage mum. One was a survivor of a forced marriage. All reported they had engaged with RR's services because they had been suffering from low mood, felt isolated and wanted to improve their English. These motivations are consistent with those reported by other clients.

6.3 Views of the Service Users

Multaka-Oxford (2019) Available at: https://www.hsm.ox.ac.uk/multaka-oxford (Accessed on 6th April 2019)

General feedback as well as the interviews with the nine women revealed what a positive experience volunteering had been and mentioned a long list of benefits, new knowledge and motivations:

1.   All felt volunteering helped with getting a job/improving job skills/learning about the work environment/getting references/getting experience/good for your CV. Three of the nine interviewed women have gone onto secure paid employment as a result of the confidence and the experience they have gained and a number of others surveyed also said they had got (better) work.

And it gave me a taste of what it was like to be at work. And if you don't work in your life and you suddenly go into a paid job, things can be very scary. But if you have experience, because volunteering is like a job. It is the best way to find out about where you want to work, and meeting new people and you get life skills too. Participant

2. Many spoke about a growing sense of agency and empowerment

Participants have also been invited to sit on the Multaka Community Advisory Group.

This has provided volunteers with the opportunity not only to own the narrative of objects coming from their own countries or countries nearby (during their research work and tours in the museums) but also to actively participate in discussions around what role museums can play for people who are forced migrants at this moment and in the future; give feedback, question and guide the project from its earlier days to its final evaluation. Partner

All reported it helped them to improve/learn English/integrate and/or other skills

Volunteering is very important for me, it's helped me to improve my English. And it's very important to me to improve my English. Because I am British now, and for my children, it's really important I understand the rules of this country. And I think that now, I understand a bit more about the rules. I don't want to make some mistakes, I want to teach my children. Participant

4. There was a general agreement volunteering is good for their mental health and reducing isolation, getting out there and meeting people:

I think volunteering is a good way to get outside, to get outside to work. You know, you meet people. And you gain new skills and you learn things when you work with somebody. You know everybody is different, everybody works in different ways and so if you do volunteering then you get to learn more. It's good for improving your English and it's good for mental health. It's something you can give back to the community. You can be making a difference to somebody's life. Participant

5. Many expressed not only a reciprocal sense of giving something back but also of enjoyment and personal satisfaction. Whilst some have spoken about how volunteering had renewed their wish:

'To make a difference to people's lives.... and give something back... I have been in their shoes... the UK opened its door to me, and now I want to give back' Participant

Volunteering has helped me in a lot of ways it is help me with meeting new people, with my mental health, and with my references. I think it has played a big part of my well-being. I'm doing something, I'm not just receiving. Participant

'There was very much a strong feeling of wanting to help your community, of helping other refugees and asylum seekers, and Syrians. There is a sense that we've all been through

something really difficult... of wanting to give something back' Partner

6.   A clear understanding of the nature of volunteering that it is done 'voluntarily; of their own volition, was also expressed:

> *Even when I'm tired in a job, I can't leave that. But when I work in the museum, I can leave it and so this flexibility encourages me to go there again and again. It's my own choice. It gives me some more confidence, more stamina and more hope. Participant*

7.   The great amount of enjoyment and improved well-being was referred to:

> *(Volunteering has been) 100% positive. I improved my confidence and met people and improved my speaking and listening. I am even learning Manners, and I understand how polite people are. Volunteering has been a wonderful experience for me. Participant Volunteering is very nice to build up confidence, to improve English, even for travelling, to meet different people, and find out about yourself and what you want. Participant*

8. Impact on the wider community via community service ethos was also identified:

> *I feel really good when we cook for the homeless people, for the Refugee people...it is a good feeling when you help people. I feel really good when I do that. Especially after we have come from a country at War, where there is fighting. Participant*

Whilst other spoke about first:

> *'Contact with communities I would not have crossed paths with e.g. the homeless, children with reading difficulties, the visually impaired and others with disabilities'.   Volunteer*

9. 'Informal volunteering' was also referred to:

> *I realised I didn't need to give a lot of time, to help. And also it gave me more experience, to help myself, to know some different things, because I wasn't born in this country. This has helped me to practice more, to speak more to meet different people. Participant*

10.   There was also evidence participants encouraged others to volunteer because of their own positive experience. This seems to be the most common form of engagement and certainly requires further research.

> *I'm always telling friends about volunteering. I got two or three of my friends interested in the Oxfam Project. They had told me they wanted to work. And so, I said to them if you come and do some volunteering it will be really good for you and it will be good for your future and help you find a job. Participant*

6. EXPERIENCES OF THE KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Oxford Mail (2018), Available at: https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/17241188.refugee-resource-oxford-changing-lives-one-pop-up-cafe-at-a-time/ (Accessed on 6th April 2019)

6.1 Introduction

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with four stakeholders. Their views were sought over a range of matters including: the success/failure of the VPP: areas for development; the Oxford context; meeting the need; participant involvement; barriers to engagement; partnership working; appropriacy of referrals; future recommendations.

6.1 About the stakeholders

Interviews were carried out with the following:

1. The Refugee Resource Volunteer Placement Project Coordinator (VPPC), who had been responsible for setting up and piloting it since April 2018.
2. The Volunteer Centre Coordinator from Oxfordshire Community Voluntary Action (OCVA)
3. The newly in place CMF Manager (formerly OCC VPRS Officer)
4. The Multaka Project Coordinator

(For further background to these organisations see Appendix 3)

All have been closely involved with the programme during its lifetime.

6.3 Views of the Stakeholders

● **Project success - A developing 'agency' and a motivational shift**

All the stakeholders said the VPP had been a success and agreed this was largely down to partnership work between the agencies and the support and encouragement the participants received from support agencies and their local communities. Reported outcomes have also been very positive:

> *Some people have applied for jobs including jobs at the Museum, in schools and in shops, and some people have gone on to find studies or have been encouraged to look at roots into*

study. I am definitely seeing people's English improve, and people sign up for more English classes, and people who have said that when I arrived I don't know what I want to do, and so they have dipped their toe in a few things. And I have one lady who has moved through a few different ideas and now has finally settled on what she wants to put some energy into doing.... I think the motivations are extraordinary. Partner

Confidence to experiment and a growing sense of freedom/clarity is strongly in evidence in both the stakeholders' and participants' interviews (see above). At the beginning, confidence was perceived as low and a barrier to feeling independently motivated. One key stakeholder remarked there:

'probably wasn't much agency, as often some have somebody pushing them from behind, they speak little English and have even believed they had been sent to do the cleaning!'

Stakeholders observations echoed participants' words (see above), perceiving first engagement to be motivated by a desire to improve their English and/or integrate. Continuing on, motivations shifted as confidence/experience grew and resulted in more satisfactory/suitable placements. The VPP aim was to help the participants either bypass or move swiftly through this first tricky stage. The co-ordinator put a lot of energy into ensuring volunteers were well matched with their placements and to this end, carried out (a series) of in-depth interviews in which he got to know the participants and discover their strengths and interests.

Partnership Work
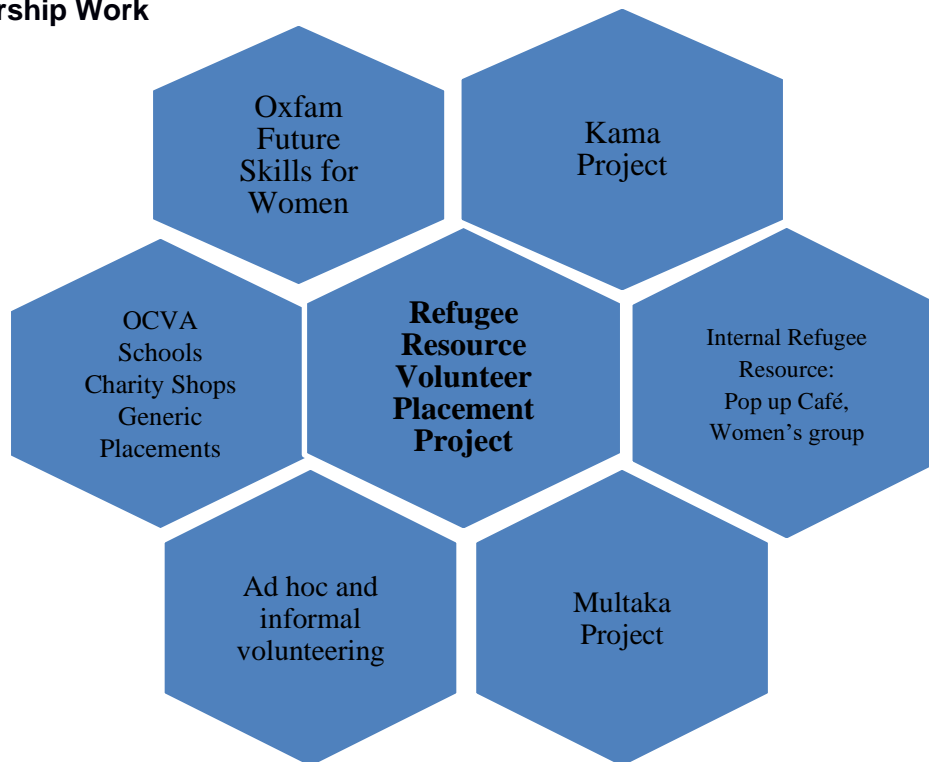
At the VPP's start, the coordinator had meetings with various refugee volunteering programmes like the Kama Project, The Multaka project, Refugee Resource Women's group, Pegasus Theatre Remix and Oxfam's Future skills for women as well as OCVA, with a view to discussing how they would work together and cross refer.

These meetings were followed up with regular liaison over client cases. OCVA, said the only forced migrants, to their knowledge, they had recently engaged with were those referred by Refugee Resource.

> *So it's working with other people and agencies like Refugee Resource, that we really reach people who would benefit from doing volunteering, that wouldn't otherwise put themselves forward for it.* OCVA

One stakeholder commented how her job was made much easier as the VPPC looked after the complex needs of joint clients, providing wrap around support, in order that she could focus on their volunteering needs and sustain their placement. In general, it was felt the engagement with the client at induction and in the first few months was strong but more work needed to go into following up in a joined up way in order to sustain the placements long term. The establishment of a stakeholder meeting/forum was mooted as a way of dealing with this and further detail is included in the recommendations below.

- **'The Oxford bubble'**

One stakeholder commented that because Oxford is quite a small city it was easier to get effective networks and all the organisations in one place to promote really effective partnerships. She went on to say 'it's a very diverse City, and it has a long history of migration'. The CMF officer and the Multaka project coordinator both said OCC and the University showed a lot of leadership by creating a compelling narrative around the positives of migration. Furthermore, Oxford is a city with very low unemployment and the strong narrative around the need to fill these vacancies, created a positive atmosphere. Conversely,

> *negativity around migration is often caused by the Oxford housing crisis both in terms of migrants experience of housing and of hostility towards migrants who are accused of taking much sought after local housing. A huge rise in rough sleeping and sky-high rent makes things very difficult - real fault line, a real tension. Partner*

- **Barriers to engagement**

1. Chaotic lives
Oxford is not a dispersal city and therefore little support exists for those asylum seekers, who decide to live in Oxford, often because of family and friendship ties. Additionally, other vulnerable migrants who do not have settled status and are not able to exercise their treaty rights also fall through the net.

Few asylum seekers have engaged with the VPP and related programmes (see Appendix 4), and of those who have engaged, often their placement has not been sustained, probably because of the complex and chaotic nature of their current situations.

> *Strictly speaking asylum seekers are permitted to volunteer, but with confusing distinctions between volunteering and voluntary and the opaque legislation created by the hostile environment, volunteer providing organisations, often stretched to capacity, are understandably reluctant to engage this group who will struggle to commit and engage anyway. Partner*

One stakeholder commented, once participants wish to take up more formal volunteering:

> *They will need to be showing right to work and a whole host of other and bits of documentation will be asked for. That's a massive barrier and so people don't continue.*

Another stakeholder commented:

> *Volunteering was often just what people wanted and it wasn't always about getting into work. And that has got to be respected as well. And often it is more about communication and involvement and well-being. And actually they may not even be permitted to work by the government or their families and so employment is not an option, and so it provides a less exclusive path to integration. Some people really don't know their future, and so why would you be thinking of steps into work. It's about filling your time with something interesting and meaningful, and that is just as important you know. Partner*

Interestingly, the same stakeholder felt they had had more success with individuals who were not so near to employability, and observed some placements had not lasted because participants had progressed into a job very quickly.

2. Working for free?

One stakeholder mentioned how amongst the refugee and migrants she had seen, the men in particular, sometimes felt very insulted when asked about volunteering as they perceived they were being asked to work for free.

> *The idea of having to go back and do or learn about what you had been doing for many years, not paid, or do what they thought of as quite low status work like gardening when they had been a trained Carpenter. I think they found that really tough. Partner*

This echoes the words of the stakeholder from OCVA who had commented:

> *There were definitely explanations to be made about the difference between volunteering and working for free*

Another stakeholder noted the gender divide, as women often, even the educated ones who had worked before *'were open to the idea of volunteering, as this seems like a less scary stepping stone.'*

3. Language Barriers

English aptitude was another barrier faced by both the volunteers and the organisations they wished to engage with. The OCVA coordinator observed, rather than racism or hostility from volunteer providing organisations, she had encountered more concerns over potential volunteers' English levels. Another partner recommended a placement to allow a volunteer to:

..go somewhere when they can practice their English as much or as little as they wish, and either make the most of the skills they have, in order to grow in confidence or be given the opportunity to learn new skills with the necessary adjustments and allowances made for low language skills or difference in culture. Partner

4. KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND FACTORS IN SUCCESS

What the project achieved	What the Project did well	Factors in success
Engaged 49 Participants in 2060 hours of volunteering' Worked effectively with a wide range of support and volunteer providing agencies 100% participants reported reduced isolation, improved English skills and greater confidence Positive outcomes such as new employment, uptake of training and education were also reported Participants accessed placements they would not otherwise have done Ran a successful, well attended Pilot Volunteer Pathways course (10 participants) all of whom reported increased knowledge around volunteering. Project participants came into contact with a more diverse range of people than would have done e.g. the pop up café for the homeless, the cake bake at Helen and Douglas House	Engaged a cross section of nationalities and ethnicities including: Sensitive recruitment and placement and 'holding' of often very vulnerable participants Supported 49 participants to engage in volunteering in their own and wider communities via a programme of induction, hand-holding, ongoing pastoral care and follow up Made valuable use of limited 'tainted funds' Supported participants to 'buy into' volunteering ethos and validated their experiences Provided a client centred approach which enhanced agency and empowered participants to help steer the programmes	Unique access to cohort of vulnerable clients Reputation of RR and the trust this instilled in participants and stakeholders alike Close partnership working and valuable networks provided by the Oxford context RR is well known and trusted in target communities Dedicated and experienced project co-ordinator who was very familiar with needs of the participants. Knowledge and insight he gathered and shared with partners in order to ensure successful placements Approachable and supportive contract managers Reflection and willingness to learn demonstrated by RR and partners Willingness to adapt and flex the programme to the needs of the participants

8. PROJECT CHALLENGES

C1 More traditional volunteering placements e.g. roles offered via OCVA appeared less popular with this client group and led to less engagement/retention. In general, these placements were often more demanding in terms of time/attendance and may not have been so sustainable because of the chaotic lives of many of the participants. Bespoke projects, targeting migrants and refugees and aimed at engaging this group in ways they could or felt comfortable to do, appear more successful and led to the most placements. The challenge remains how to redress this balance and encourage more 'mainstream' volunteering.

C2 The formal western concept of volunteering as a civic duty was often not familiar to participants at the beginning of their volunteering journey. Many came from countries where informal community service as part of community life was the norm. At the beginning, some participants spoke about how angry they felt at having to work for free, especially in 'work' which they have been paid highly for in a professional capacity in former lives. However, all spoke about how as their experience grew, they began to understand the ethos behind volunteering and talked about how much they enjoyed the sense of volition and freedom/agency it gave them. Several, who have gone onto paid employment, spoke about how they had continued to volunteer even though they no longer 'needed to' because they enjoyed it so much.

C3 It has also been observed that potential participants (especially men) who were capable of gaining employment would prioritise their time to seek gainful employment over gaining volunteering experience. It has been observed this could be motivated by the fact families would much rather bring in their own income, than depend on benefits for support. Hence, the lack of men involved in volunteering, probably because they are generally the principle income earners in this target group.

C4 It was observed some potential participants who were about to start their involvement failed to sustain their engagement due to the increasing complexity and urgency of their needs (housing, benefits, family issues) which shifted their focus to other pressing priorities.

C5 Because of the informal nature of much of the volunteering, it has been difficult to accurately record quantitative data such as the total number hours. It is suspected the real number is much higher.

C6 Whilst the number of agencies involved has enabled many positive outcomes, it has also meant it can be more challenging to track and follow up clients appropriately and sometimes participants, in the words of one partner, can '*fall between the cracks'.*

9. LESSONS LEARNED

L1 Volunteering placement programme participants' first experience of volunteering in traditional settings like charity shops, were not always entirely positive. However, as they gained confidence and their experience developed, their confidence also grew and they became more discerning in their engagement with placements.

L2 Participants in the volunteering placement project have reported a wide ranging list of motivations and benefits from volunteering (see above)

L3 Unsurprisingly, bespoke 'voluntary placements' for refugees, which sought to meet their needs, use their skills and remove barriers to engagement e.g. the Multaka Project, Future Skills for Women; Pop up café appeared to lead to longer term engagement and enjoyment (see above).

L4 Of traditional routes, it appears schools and charity shops can provide good pathways into volunteering. Charity shops were cited as good entry points, as they did not always require references, which could be an obstacle for the newly arrived. Having said this, these were not always a positive experience, as some referred to the 'smelly clothes', the boredom and the lack of opportunity to meet people/speak English when stuck for hours at a time in a dusty storeroom.

L5 A lot more ad hoc 'informal' volunteering than previously known has come to light e.g. cooking for a care home's annual fête; teaching embroidery at a one off workshop, helping fundraise for a local school.

L6 Many of the refugees and migrants who engaged in volunteering were already quite well established, longer term residents and/or had a significant number of support networks around them, as in the case of the VPRS clients. There could be a correlation between this and engagement/retention. All of the key stakeholders, were keen to emphasise the partnerships around the clients, led to more successful placements.

L7 Some of the volunteer placement participants identified with the people they were volunteering to support, talking about how when they first started to volunteer how lonely, depressed and under confident they felt. For one or two, volunteering provided some very affirming experiences e.g. winning a prize for volunteer of the year, whilst others commenting it was a great way to be 'recognised'. One talked about the importance of being a role model for those in whose shoes she had walked and for the younger generation.

L11 Discussion with OCVA has revealed that generic volunteering providing organisations require and have asked for capacity building training on how to work more effectively with migrants and refugees with ESOL needs and who may be survivors of trauma

10. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

R1 In the light of the concern raised by generic volunteering providing organisation and the lack of access to these organisations for migrants and refugees, it is recommended RR deliver training to them via their partnership with OCVA as part of Oxfordshire Volunteering Forum.

Recommended training includes input on how to: recruit and manage forced migrants; work with survivors of trauma; and those with ESOL needs. It is hoped this will help increase local organisation's capacity to work with this client group, thus diversifying their volunteer base, and make generic volunteer placements more accessible.

R2 Work with OCVA to create a 'green list' of generic volunteering providing organisations who have been trained and supported to work with forced migrants and area able to model best practice

R3 In order to encourage and widen participation, it is recommended new volunteer participants be made aware of the success stories of previous clients by inserting case studies and positive feedback into the volunteering placement leaflet for clients, as well as articulating the purpose and benefits of volunteering identified by them. Leaflets need to be in relevant languages

R4 Following the success of the recent volunteering pathways course, and having identified the need for it, it is recommended RR run further courses in response to demand and continue to involve stakeholders in its delivery (partners and participants)

R5 Given the shortfall in male participants RR should liaise with relevant partners, e.g. Ethnic Minority Business Service which has a large proportion of male learners, to encourage more male participation in the programme at the same time as developing a specific programme of voluntary work with men, especially those with few qualifications

R6 In order to widen the range of participants, carry out 1-2 outreach sessions a month with partners and seek out new partners e.g. refugee support groups, so that greater coverage can be promoted across Oxfordshire and a wider range of opportunities for volunteering placements

R7 Given multi agency support was noted as a strong factor in ensuring client engagement and retention, it is important to continue to partner with local advice and advocacy agencies to support the needs of clients.

> *I don't see a way to get there without partnership working. Looking at it from a holistic perspective, one organisation is not going to be able to provide for every need of every individual. I don't see how we can do this without partnership work. Partner*

R8 Furthermore, it is recommended a volunteering network group for partners involved in placing refugees and migrants in volunteering should be established. This should be a forum for sharing good practice and facilitating better access for mutual clients into volunteering opportunities. It is hoped current partnership work can be formalised with a 'working together agreement' and this will enable better working with others to develop seamless referral systems and improved follow up. More robust tracking systems need to be in place to gauge reasons for disengagement so as to devise solutions for better retention

R9 Gather more feedback from participants and invite them to be part of the Refugee Resource Refugee Advisory Group focussing on volunteering

R10 Work with our partners to train a cohort of community ambassadors to support participants into volunteering and run outreach activities in their respective communities. This strong model has been piloted by the Multaka project and has its roots in similar successful programmes like Community Learning champions.

R11 Bring the learning and recommendations from this report to the June 2019 conference on refugee volunteering which Oxford University Museums is running

R12 Given the impact volunteering has on participants' well-being and the fact they may not have many other avenues open to them, it is important to emphasise the value of volunteering for volunteering's sake.

11. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This paper aimed to evaluate to what extent the VPP had enabled RR to meet the outcomes of the project whilst remaining true to its mission. (Appendix 2). It has revealed the positive impact volunteering has had on its participants' lives and demonstrated how much value the project has brought to the RR client experience whilst identifying examples of good practice for supporting migrants into volunteering. In this sense, it is hoped it has struck a good balance between learning and accountability (ALNAP, 2016). Finally, it is hoped the format of the evaluation itself will provide the basis for an evaluation toolkit for use within the RR context, based on the latest good practice guidelines and examples.

The study has been small and the methods largely qualitative, therefore it is not expected wider conclusions can be drawn or have any influence on policy made. Neither are the conclusions expected to be consistent or reliable in a broader sense. Rather, it is hoped the evaluation will start to promote further investigation into this under-researched area and provoke further questions around how volunteering can benefit migrants and refugees and be adapted to other contexts.

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Appendix 1

Outcome 1	Outcome 2
Refugees and migrants will have increased opportunity to be involved with volunteering in their local community.	**Learning from the programme will be used to increase understanding in the wider community and voluntary sector about how to improve migrant volunteer pathways and support local volunteers.**
Indicators ● RR will work with 5-10 partner organisations/businesses to secure volunteer placements for our clients ● At least 30 refugees and migrants involved in volunteering opportunities ● 80% of refugees and migrants engaged in volunteering opportunities will report increased understanding of the process of accessing volunteering, and will have opportunity to feedback about their experiences and progress to inform our learning	**Indicators** ● 75% of participants in our programme will report increased understanding about how to access volunteering and where to go for supported ● 80% stakeholders will demonstrate improved understanding of issues affecting refugees & migrants and how best to support them into volunteering ● The development and delivery of a Volunteer Pathways introductory course for refugees and migrants to 8 participants
Monitoring and evaluation: We will track the number of placements secured and voluntary activities (including volunteering hours), and obtain feedback from participants regarding the support they have received.	**Monitoring and Evaluation:** Obtain feedback from training sessions Production of a report with recommendations/findings

Appendix 2

Vision
We will establish ourselves as the the provider of choice for counselling and therapeutic services for refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants within Oxfordshire

Mission
Our mission is to relieve distress, improve well-being and facilitate the integration of refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants in Oxfordshire, by providing psychological, social and practical support

Key Principles
Healing: nurturing a sense of belonging, identity, self-worth and purpose for individuals to facilitate healing after experience of trauma and dislocation
Empowerment: increasing the capacity to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes with confidence
Integration: facilitating integration on psychological, social & community level

Appendix 3

Partner Organisations

Asylum Welcome gives support to Asylum Seekers and Refugees throughout Oxfordshire. They welcome asylum seekers, refugees and detainees who have fled persecution and danger in their own countries and seek refuge in Oxford and Oxfordshire. Every unaccompanied child arriving in Oxfordshire is referred to them - they look after over 100. They run a food bank. They provide advice and practical help on a wide range of topics. They teach people English so they can be more independent. They work closely with lawyers to support access to rights. They support refugee voices nationally, and advocate for better asylum policies.

KAMA (courses and events run by refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants) was established in Vienna 11 years ago, and has since blossomed across Austria – in Graz, Innsbruck, Linz and Salzburg, as well as in Dresden, Germany and across the pond in Washington, DC. They have a packed programme of weekly and monthly courses, workshops, and events on any topic imaginable – languages, dance, music, cooking, yoga, history, politics... *KAMA Oxford* aims to give current refugees and asylum seekers a voice, confidence, skills for their future, integration and just fun and humanity amidst all the bureaucracy, an adrenaline rush from taking control and sharing their passions.

The Multaka Project - It is based on a model successfully pioneered in Berlin and runs at the Museum of the History of Science and the Pitt Rivers Museum. The aim is to work collaboratively with new communities and volunteers, and to create new volunteer opportunities at the museum which tie in very closely with the ethos of the museum. So it is volunteer opportunities which are helpful for people and helpful for the museum. The majority are forced migrants and they have been sign posted through grass-roots partner organisations.

OCVA - Oxfordshire Community Voluntary Action, is the umbrella organisation for volunteering and third sector organisations in Oxfordshire. Their remit is to:

to help you help others by supporting and empowering volunteers, networks, partnerships and non-profit organisations big and small.

Oxfam Future Skills for Women The Future Skills project offers support and skills development to meet the particular needs of women who face many barriers to progress out of poverty. Working in partnership with Oxfam's extensive shop network, we provide a six-month supported volunteer placement in an Oxfam shop alongside professional mentoring, workshops and group work.

Pegasus Remix Remix is for young refugees, asylum seekers or migrants. Delivered in partnership with Pan Intercultural Arts the group comes together weekly to explore their creativity through games and scenes. They work to gain confidence in their self-expression and to enjoy sharing their voices with each other and wider audiences.

Sanctuary Hosting (formerly **Host Oxford**) is a project which matches destitute **sanctuary** seekers to those people with spare rooms and open hearts in the community who are prepared to allow someone to stay with them rent free for a pre-defined period of time.

SVPRS   Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme The **SVPRS** and VCRS are entirely funded by the Government and families are housed in private sector accommodation in **Oxford**, rented mostly at market rates. This involves the group providing all the resettlement support for a vulnerable refugee family. It is administered by the City Council.

Appendix 4
Result of Refugee Resource Monitoring and Evaluation

Gender	Year of birth	Ethnicity| Please select from drop down	Country of Origin | Please enter free text	Main language | Please enter free text	Please select from drop down	Month and year involved started in project
male - 18%	under 20 - 4%	Arab- 24%	Afghanistan - 3%	Albanian - 1%	Refugee - 22%	March-June 2018 57%
female - 82%	20-29 - 16%	Asian - Pakistani - 9%	Albania - 1%	Arabic - 38%	Asylum Seeker - 9%	July - Sept 2018 9%
	30-39 - 16%	Asian - Bangladeshi - 1%	Algerian - 3%	Bengali - 1%	Join Spouse - 6%	Oct-Dec 2018 - 18%
	40-49 - 18%	Asian - other 12%	Bangladesh - 3%	Burmese - 1%	Not disclosed - 63%	Jan-March 2019 - 9%
	50-65 - 12%	Black - African - 10%	Burma - 1%	Chinese - 1%		not known - 9%
	unknown - 34%	Black - Caribbean - 1%	China - 1%	Dari - 1%		
		Black - other - 1%	Congo - 1%	English - 9%		
		Chinese 1%	Eritrea - 3%	Farsi - 4%		
		Other - 8%	Iran - 4%	French - 1%		
		White other 1%	*Iraq - 6%*	Kurdish - 3%		
		Unknown - 13%	Kenya - 3%	Pashtu - 1%		
			Kurdish - 1%	Tamil - 1%		
			Mauritius - 1%	Tigrinya - 3%		
			Morocco - 1%	Urdu - 10%		
			Pakistan - 9%	Xhosa - 1%		
			Somalia - 1%	Not known - 19%		
			South Africa - 1%			
			Sri Lanka - 1%			
			Sudan - 4%			
			Syria - 22%			
			Trinidad and Tobago - - 1%			
			Turkey - - 1%			
			Not known -25%			

Appendix 5 – Further consideration of Ethical Questions

3. Will the study require the cooperation of a gatekeeper for initial access to groups or individuals to be recruited (e.g. students, members of a self-help group, employees of a company)?

In this case, as the Delivery Manager at Refugee Resource with overall responsibility for the programme, I am the gatekeeper, and so no permission 'per se' would need to be sought. However, in this capacity, I needed to consider I might need to address such ethical issues as conflict of interest as well ensuring the evaluation process did not undermine my own duty of care/accountability to Refugee Resources clients, staff and organisation.

6. Will the study involve discussion of or responses to questions the participants might find sensitive? (e.g. own traumatic experiences)

The participants are all clients of Refugee Resource which is a therapeutic (Mental Health) charity. All are very vulnerable, and many are survivors of trauma and complex bereavement. Having said this, the purpose of the evaluation is not to research their trauma but to look at the impact of volunteering on their lives. Therefore, most of the questions in the questionnaire relate to their experience of volunteering and the placement project itself. However, there are a couple of questions about (i) how the project has helped them and (ii) to what extent their involvement in the project has helped them feel less isolated and improve their self-confidence/self-esteem. Given the experience and training I have of working with this client group, I believe it is unlikely the interview will upset or re-trigger them because I will be able to ask the questions in such a fashion as to avoid this. Also, the participants who have engaged with the volunteering programme are more stable, integrated and further along the road to recovery than many of our other clients.

10. Could the study induce psychological stress or anxiety?

I do not think the study per se could induce stress or anxiety. However, I know the participants themselves all already suffer from stress and anxiety, hence their engagement with Refugee Resource.

To ensure the participants were able to give fully informed consent a bespoke project information sheet was created and shared with interview subjects together with a consent form and GDPR privacy notice in accordance with University guidelines prior to the interviews. Thus, ensuring participants gave informed consent and research procedures adhered to the latest data protection legislation and University policy. Compliance with all of this was particularly important given I am a gatekeeper and needed to be sure not to abuse my position of responsibility (Dowling, 2010; Townsend and Townsend, 2004).