MANCHESTER REFUGEE SUPPORT NETWORK

Annual Report 2023
Shared Routes Project

Reporting period: Project Year 5 (8/01/2023 - 31/12/2023)

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I. Summary of the year

2023 was our first year of the second funding by the NLC Fund and our fifth project year.
Our activities remained the same except for the new delivery of information sessions on where to find vocational training and where to get support for finding work. These sessions were delivered in partnership with Refugees & Mentors. 11 people attended and all were signposted to support agencies as appropriate. 3 peer navigators (PNs) were supported by Refugee & Mentors to find employment. It is worth noting that many of our PNs did not have a work permit or were not ready for work. All PNs reported that they benefitted from these sessions. Ahmed* who just got his work permit said “Happy to be part of this useful programme. Thankful for everything!”.
This was a highly successful year and we in fact met or exceeded our targets. 84 PNs completed our training (target: 72) and our feedback forms/focus group data showed that they learnt much useful things about the UK system and the daily life in the community which helped them to progress in different ways.
One of our huge successes this year was that we worked closer with our partner Hyde Primary Care Network (HPCN). We delivered training and volunteer support to a large number of their service users (31 PNs) who were so-called “hard to reach” facing language and cultural barriers as well as social isolation. A considerable number of them has been living here since 15, 20 and even 30 years but haven’t felt settled yet. A good number of them were aged 55+ and therefore this age group almost doubled compared with last year. (2022: 6%, 2023: 11%). Many PNs were from Bangladesh which is why this group increased from 2% in 2022 to 26% in 2023.
As this group was unable to attend online training due to lack of language and digital skills, we delivered in person workshops and worked with bi-lingual support. One of our PNs who volunteered with us assisted with the facilitation of the training and made trainees feel comfortable.
We were overjoyed how well this group engaged in the training as well as in volunteering, despite the lack of language skills and the fact that a huge number were not used to go out often. That we secured appropriate volunteering roles for them helped them build local connections and offered options for progress. We were also proud that some found their own volunteer roles. The final goal of our training is to make people independent. And they’ve reached this goal.
It was rewarding for us that we found volunteer placements for 3 PNs at the Grafton Community Centre Hyde and thereby we diversified their volunteer force.
The success of this group was also due to the fantastic efforts of our partner HPCN and we’re looking forward to continue this type of partnership in the future.
With more newly arrived asylum seekers accommodated in hotels we increased our outreach work to support this vulnerable group. The feedback we gathered showed that there was a huge need for what we offered: guidance and practical information on how to adjust to the ways of life here. PNs also reported that our project improved their mental health and wellbeing.
Challenges we faced this year were the project manager being off sick for several month and their phased return to work. This challenge as well as the special support needs of the large group in Hyde in terms of mobility and language skills made a network meeting unsuitable for the majority.
For the next year we plan to increase our work in asylum hotels and are looking for similar partnerships as with the HPCN in other GM boroughs.
All in all we are indeed proud that our hard work helped everyone to progress and it proved that the lack of language or digital skills does not have to be an obstacle to volunteering and personal development.

*All names in this report are changed according to our confidentiality policy.



II. Training Peer Navigators

Indicator	Target change	Actual change	Comment
Outcome 1 **Increase in volunteering in local organisations by PNs**			
Successful completion of PN training	72	84	
Outcome 2 **PN have increased confidence, skills and understanding of how UK agencies and communities function**			
Improved skills development	72	84	
Improved knowledge and understanding of UK agencies and communities	72	84	
Improved confidence	72	79	Those PNs who did not report an increase in confidence had reported being confident prior to the training, so this indicator was not relevant to them. 32 PNs experienced an increase in confidence of at least 2 levels (from 5 levels)

Note: 72 evaluation questionnaires were received from the total group of 84 peer navigators. We have estimated our 'actual change' figures by extrapolation of the evaluation responses received to cover 84 people.

Shared Routes Training: Quotes from PNs

Ejder, volunteering and studying at Manchester College

"I learnt how to be confident to speak without any hesitation."

Samira, volunteering at Ladybarn Pharmacy

"I got useful information about job interview and English culture and my confidence increased."

Adam, volunteering with MRSN Asylum Guide

"It boosted my self esteem and confidence. It gave me the opportunity to improve my communication skills and we learned the basic British etiquettes and workplace culture. Furthermore it enhanced our knowledge how to volunteer and it's importance."

Nada, volunteering at MRSN advice and studying university

"The program opened my eyes and taught me new information. It enabled me to understand and find a volunteer role that suits me. I now understand the importance of volunteering. Also, I am prepared to take any role that I fit into and I am ready to learn and deal with many issues."

Baheela, volunteering at Pal Multicultural Centre

"I feel confident after attending these sessions. I'm ready to work with peoples."

Feng, found work as nursing assistant

"I gained knowledge in UK culture and skills in communicating with others. I think I can be more confidence in working and live easier in a new environment."

Mahmood, volunteering at Rochdale Council

"The training helped me a lot in understanding the UK culture and how to apply for volunteer role and how much volunteering is important. I'm now confident in the British work environment."

Hanna, has caring responsibilities

"As a result I am so happy for being with the team and for knowing that people deep in their heart help each other to adopt other humans to the new society."

Mariam, has housing issues

"Participating in MRSN courses made me get to know many useful organizations, how to work in charities, and getting to know you gave me more confidence to communicate with people in the community and be more useful."

III. Peer Navigator Volunteering

Indicator	Target change	Actual change	Comment
Outcome 1 **Increase in volunteering in local organisations by PNs**			
PNs and host organisations report min. 3 months successful volunteering in local organisations across sectors	60	56	3 PNs are in work, 9 PNs in education, 4 PNs have housing issues, 7 PNs are having caring responsibilities, and 5 PNs have health issues .

Signposting PNs for their urgent needs

We signposted in total 72 PNs to following services for their urgent needs:

College/University: 24
ESOL Classes: 19
Immigration Advice/Asylum Seeker Support: 12
Housing Advice: 4
Health Services: 5
Employment Support: 3

Volunteer Placements

56 volunteers (PNs), 30 host organisations

Name of organisation	No of PNs	Name of organisation	No of PNs
Age UK	3	Manchester College	1
Baptist Church Oldham	1	MRSN-Advice	3
Being there	1	MRSN-Asylum Guide	3
Bread & Butter	2	MRSN-Shared Routes	1
British Heart Foundation Hyde	2	Mustard Tree	2
British Heart Foundation Salford	3	Our Manchester Food Partnership (OMFP)	1
British Red Cross Hub Bury	1	Pakistani Community Centre	1
British Red Cross Hyde	1	Pal Multicultural Centre	1
Denton Methodist Church	1	Rochdale Council	1
Diversity Matters NW	6	St George Church	1
Fareshare	1	Tameside Hospital	2
Grafton Community Centre	3	Tameside Meal Project	1
Healthy Hyde Wellbeing Hub	6	Tameside South & Longdendale Foodbank	1
KHL Walking Group Manchester	1	The United Church Hyde	1
Ladybarn Pharmacy	1	Wub Hair Studio	1
Levenshulme Inspire Centre	1		

VOLUNTEERING: CASE STUDIES

Nasrin from Bangladesh, volunteering at Grafton Community Centre



"I'm from Bangladesh. I live now two years here in UK. I'm housewife now. I'm interested volunteer because my confidence and my English is not well. So communication is good for me that's why I want a volunteer job.
My neighbour told me Hyde Primary Network is very good. I went there and they told me about Shared Routes and that they help with volunteering. Then I did the training. It was excellent. My confidence is more. The Shared Routes team are very good persons. They taught me very well about volunteering. I liked to learn all together in the group. It was very good. I learnt so much. About what is polite here and to stay calm, discipline, self-independence. Now I'm confident. Now I understand many rules.
I have a BA from Bangladesh in Psychology but my language is Bangla and my English is problem. That's why I'm house wife.
Shared Routes found for me a volunteering in Grafton Community Centre, not far from my house. They are all very friendly there. They trained me everything: food serving washing and cleaning, food preparing, assisting.
I didn't know the centre before. Thank you so much for connection me Shared Routes.
Before I don't have any volunteer job, only house wife. That's why volunteering is very challenging for me. Like communication, how can I do it. I was afraid of how to do things. But here they are supporting me. And on my second day I'm confident here. I benefited so much from Shared Routes volunteer training. It helped me so much. To know the rules and how to stay calm and disciplined. I really benefited from communication, different things I know now how to do it here.
In the future anything I can do it. I can get a job. It helps. I need any job. My English is not well that's why I'm practicing my English. I learn and then I'm more confident in my English level. Then I'm trying any job. Volunteer job help me because I'm only housewife. With volunteering I'm outside communicating with all people. Then I understand.
The training changed some things in my life. Have cool mind. Before I was stressed. With the training and volunteering I'm more calm."

Sarah, volunteer coordinator at Grafton Community Centre

"Nasrin is a hands-on worker, polite and friendly. She helps in the kitchen and started helping with cooking. She works hands on and you can leave it to her. She fits very well with the team and customers. Everyone here loves her."

We benefited so much from Shared Routes as they sent 2 more volunteers and we always need volunteers to run our centre. Now our volunteer force is more diverse. We're so happy about that."

Taslima from Bangladesh, volunteering at The United Church Hyde



"I'm from Bangladesh. I came UK 18 years ago. My English not good. I go to Hyde Primary Network. They help me. They ask me go training. I go training. Their translation helped.
I go volunteering at The United Church in Hyde. I work in the kitchen, make drinks and food; and cleaning, tidying and make everything for meetings. I come two days in week. I like it. Everyone friendly. The Church is just next my house. Now I go out more. I speak more. I'm better."

Aras from Iran, volunteering at Mustard Tree



"I came to the UK in late April 2023. I'm an asylum seeker and stay in a hotel in Manchester. Just one month after my arrival I was looking to volunteer and I started volunteering with Friends of Platt Field Park in gardening.
My friends in the hotel told me then about the Shared Routes project as they knew I was so keen on volunteering. I took part in the Shared Routes training and it helped me so much. I learnt about British culture and communication at work, about customer service and personal skills development. This was so helpful and beneficial as in my home country we do a lot of things differently. The personal skills workshop was also very useful for me. I started looking for volunteering that helps me to mix up and improve my communication and how to talk to people. Because every culture might be different.
I found a volunteer role at Mustard Tree. There I help in retail, the warehouse and the art gallery. I've learnt in the training about customer service and I apply this to my volunteering. It makes it easier for me to talk to customers here. I enjoy talking to customers.
I also like to do volunteering to help others. Volunteering is a new experience for me and changed my mind. Every time in my life I try to be good, step by step. And I'm looking to learn new things. This is good for me. So maybe you see the elderly man. Maybe there are lonely and when you speak with them they are very happy. For kids for youngster for teenager as well.
And volunteering keeps me busy not to worry about my family in Iran.
I also started thinking about how to find work so that I can provide for my family when they can come here. I was a teacher in Iran and now I'm looking at what courses I can take to get a job in some related field. I'm very grateful that I took part in the Shared Routes project because it helped me to stay focus and work on my goals."

Desta from Ethiopia, volunteering at New Neighbours Together Charity (NNT)



"I'm from Ethiopia and I've been here for seven months. Since my arrival I have been in hotel accommodation very far from any activities and facilities. There you can't get any training, you can't get any volunteering activity because it's very far and a rural area. I started searching for online training like yours so that I got that chance and got that training.

Before that I was just like in minor depression because I was not engaging myself into different activities. So, I was not good at all. After I got your training it was nice. The training helped me a lot to move forward.

I was just searching a lot of online training activities and I saw your website and saw your training. I even saw another training but yours was very compatible with me.

The first issue when you come to another country is the cultural shock.

When I started the training I had arrived freshly. I didn't have any experience how is the culture, how is the daily life and everything in the UK. And when you just moved it's a struggle. You don't know and you feel you make mistakes.

So after the training I understand how the system is. So you can just do things with confidence. Otherwise you may feel am I right or not? You hesitate yourself by doing this. The training solved this problem for me. And the training also gives us guidance how to help people in social work for example. In this work you need to be very calm and patient to support people. It was also useful to learn about confidentiality and how to observe it. The training added a lot of value to me.

It helped to understand the community. It's about community development which helps you understand your new environment and to know the process for asylum seekers and refugees how to integrate in their new environment. It helps a lot and it's helping personal development as well as you can engage your time and yourself in fruitful activities.

After I got the training I was transferred to Burnley. Shared Routes signposted me to the local volunteer centre. I was searching for their vacancies and I saw the role of advisor/advocate for refugees and asylum seekers with the New Neighbours Together Charity (NNT).

Before I applied I looked at the centre and if their activities are compatible with me. I visited their services and observed their activities and their ways how to do things and they were compatible with me. So I applied. They asked what skills do I have and I told them that I completed a training from MRSN. They asked about the content and I told them. I explained that I was a university lecturer in my country and that I was also engaged in activities for children and around human rights.

I'm volunteering now as an advisor and advocate for refugees and asylum seekers in and around Burnley. I volunteer 2 days a week as it is quite busy because there are around 500 refugees and asylum seekers getting services from this charity. I work as advisor, interpreter and advocate to contribute to the betterment of refugees and asylum seekers. They are here because they have been persecuted in their country. They need to be treated very well, you know. That I can help asylum seekers and refugees makes me very happy. I feel I have accomplished something good because they need special help. It gives me satisfaction.

I'm also getting good experience. I'm understanding the system more – how the government – how things work and how things are done in this country. So both for myself and the people I serve it helps a lot."

Isla Advice&Advocay Advisor at NNT

"Desta is a real asset. He is fluent in 3 languages which we all need urgently because many service users need interpreters. Desta hit the ground running and works to very high standards. He helps in so many ways that we asked him to come 2 days a week. He is much organised and quickly learnt our processes. He is very dedicated to support our service users and is an invaluable part of our team. We're so lucky to have him."

Yasna from Kurdistan Iran, volunteering at Levenshulme Inspire Centre



“I came to the UK six months ago. Now I live in a hotel and my ESOL teacher told me about the Shared Routes project and volunteering. I liked that. In my home country Kurdistan Iran I had worked 5 years with the Red Cross. I like volunteering and helping people. It makes me feel better.

Shared Routes helped me so much. In the workshops every people talking for story, for everything. That was great and you the Shared Routes team you were helping us - no rush, no shame, nothing like this. You were helping us to help ourselves.
Before, I was very very ashamed for talking, for everything. But now no. I found friend in the course. She is a very very good girl. We see each other often.

The Shared Routes team got me a volunteer role in the Café of Levenshulme Inspire. I like it very much. Sometimes I work as waitress, sometimes I'm helping the chef. I’m learning food England. I learn names of food. For me it’s very very good. My cooking is very very good. I like learning for everything.

Now after Shared Routes training I speak more, I feel better, I learn local food, I speak every week to many people. I miss people. I’m working. I’m really happy.

Thank you Shared Routes for helping me feel confident and well. I’m waiting now for my status and my work permit so that I can work and bring my 10 year old son here. I miss him.”

Charlotte, volunteer coordinator Levenshulme Inspire Centre

“Yasna is very reliable, hardworking and friendly. She is working on the front line in our café. We always need volunteers because they come and go. We’re very happy to have her because she is brilliant and fits in well with the team. That is fantastic.”

Amira from Kurdistan Iraq, volunteering at KHL Walking Group

""My ESOL teacher in Salford College told me about the Shared Routes training. Before I started the Shared Routes training I didn't know about so many things, about volunteering, how you work volunteer, what do I need to do. About smiling. When you want to volunteer you need to be smiley person. I learnt a lot in the training.
We need to work volunteer to have experience. To learn more and get a job. For me it's the most important thing to get work experience.
I'm new in this country. I came 5 years ago with my husband and 3 children from Iraqi Kurdistan. We are still asylum seekers.
I want to know about volunteering because I didn't have any information about it.





After the training I was looking for volunteering and asked in the mosque. Then I started volunteering with the Kurdish community group that clean landscapes and do walks in nature. My husband joined to volunteer with me and he enjoys it so much.
Sometime I go to a park and take litter bags and engage my children. My six year old son now always picks litter if he sees some.
The best thing of the training you learn about volunteering and helping the community. I didn't know and didn't think about to do something what is for everyone in this country. And I get experience from volunteering.
Now I want to do more volunteering. My teacher asked who wants to volunteer in nails and I will do it. Then I will get more experience and later I can get job when I have my work permit."

IV. Supporting PNs

Indicator	Target change	Actual change	Comment
Outcome 4 **Increased engagement of PN in local community**			
Cultural awareness of UK and other RAS cultures	60	84	
Choices and opportunities for engaging in society	60	84	

V. Key learning for the year

1. We worked closer with our partner Hyde Primary Care Network and delivered an in-person training for a large group of their service users. This enabled us to support so-called “hard to reach” people and help them progress personally and/or professionally.

2. Through this partnership we reached this year more people aged 55+. The percentage almost doubled from 6% in 2022 to 11% in 2023. The percentage of people from Bangladesh increased from 2% in 2022 to 26% in 2023.

3. We supported a large number of people who spoke little English. As they reported and we observed they gained confidence in the training. Despite their lack of English skills, they did an amazing job volunteering and became more independent.

4. With more newly arrived asylum seekers accommodated in hotels we increased our outreach work to this group and offered valuable support to ease ‘culture shocks’ and offer options helping them to start settling in the UK. This way we also improved their well-being and confidence.

VI. Equality Monitoring Data

Gender	%
Female	55%
Male	42%
Prefer not to say	3%

Age	%
18-24	14%
25-34	31%
35-44	31%
44-54	13%
55-64	11%
65+	0%
Prefer not to say	0%

Ethnicity

Black/African/Caribbean/Black UK	%
African	20%
Caribbean	1%
Any other Black/African/Caribbean background	1%

Asian	%
Indian	0%
Pakistani	2%
Bangladeshi	26%
Chinese	10%
Any other Asian background	9%

Other ethnic group	%
Arab	12%
Any other ethnic group	10%
Prefer not to say	3%

Mixed/Multiple ethnic background	%
White and Asian	0%
White and Black African	0%
White and Black Caribbean	0%
Any other mixed background	1%

White	%
English/Scottish/Welsh/Northern Irish/UK	0%
Irish	0%
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0%
Any other White background	5%

Disability	%
Disabled	0%
Not disabled	89%
Prefer not to say	11%

Sexual orientation	%
Heterosexual/Straight	73%
Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual	7%
Prefer not to say	20%

Caring responsibilities	%
Caring responsibility	38%
No caring responsibility	58%
Prefer not to say	4%

Religion or belief	%
Christian	23%
Muslim	52%
Hindu	1%
Jewish	0%
Sikh	1%
Other religion	0%
No religion	8%
Prefer not to say	14%

*Note: Numbers are rounded and therefore might add up to more than 100%