MANCHESTER REFUGEE SUPPORT NETWORK

mrsn
Manchester Refugee Support Network

Annual Report 2020
Shared Routes Project

Reporting period: Project Year 2
(8/01/2020 - 07/01/2021)

National Lottery Community Fund

COMMUNITY FUND

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I. Summary of the year

2020 - The Start

We had a tremendous start in our second project year. As planned, we designed a training schedule with fixed modules and involved our volunteers (former peer navigators - PNs) to tailor them to the needs of participants to become fit and more independent to find a volunteer role. Through our partnerships with organisations in Tameside, we had recruited a good number of refugees and asylum seekers for our first training. This training managed to fill a gap for male asylum seekers for local engagement and ESOL learning opportunities in Tameside. The majority of these participants has been fairly new to the country and many have just started learning English. With our multilingual team, much patience and encouragement we delivered the training at their pace and had arranged with the volunteer centre in Tameside for volunteer placement support into roles requiring low language skills. Parallel we delivered a course in Manchester.

Covid-19 and our response

The Covid-19 lockdown hit us when the Manchester course was to three quarters completed. Consequently, we needed to put this course on hold and had to cancel our arrangements for the volunteer support in Tameside. During the lockdown we adapted our training to be delivered online, completed the Manchester course and delivered two further training cycles; the last course which was completed at the middle of November had a particularly high number of 25 participants.

Support into volunteering was highly impacted by Covid-19. The closure of many services lead to few volunteer roles being available which suited the language and digital skill levels of the majority of peer navigators. Additionally, a number of peer navigators were highly impacted by Covid-19 having been sick either themselves or their close family members or having underlying health conditions. The situation around Covid-19 created a feeling of reluctance of a number of PNs to volunteer at these times out of concerns for their health & safety or being bound to childcare. This uneasiness on their side was met by uncertainty of rules, new restrictions and lockdowns for organisations which impacted on our support into volunteering. Thus we developed with our peer navigators alternative services we can offer them during these challenging times (see below).

In addition we built new successful partnerships with organisations as for example the British Heart Foundation in Salford or Emerge in Manchester as they were open and welcoming to work with volunteers with lower English skills. At Emerge we helped with translations and guidance for the inductions. We're particularly delighted that at Emerge volunteers have the opportunity to study free of charge for certificates as food hygiene level 2 or customer service.

Involvement of Peer Navigators

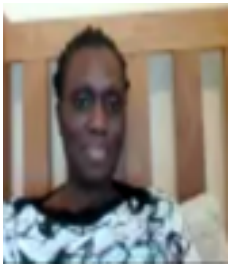
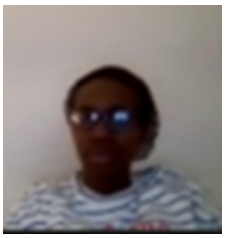
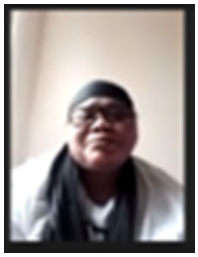
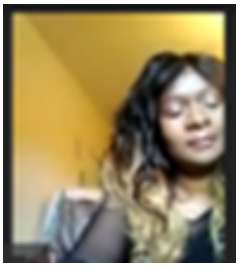
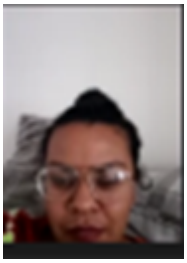
It proved highly effective that we involved peer navigators at every stage of the project. After every workshop we collected feedback and after the completion of a training course we hold focus groups and include their suggestions as appropiate. When it became apparent that there will be new lockdowns which will continue to be a challenge for our support into volunteering we hold a review workshop with our peer navigators to discuss which alternative services would help them. (see point IV.)

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	69	34 completed face-to-face 35 completed training on zoom
Outcome 2 **PN have increased confidence, skills and understanding of how UK agencies and communities function**			
Improved skills development	72	69	
Improved knowledge and understanding of UK agencies and communities	72	69	
Improved confidence	72	60	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. 31 PNs experienced an increase in confidence of at least 2 levels (from 5 levels).

Note: 56 evaluation questionnaires were received from the total group of 69 peer navigators. We have estimated our 'actual change' figures by extrapolation of the evaluation responses received to cover 69 people.

Quotes from PNs

“After attending the Shared Routes training programme I feel more confident in British culture, because nobody did tell me about this culture before. I learnt a lot new things about this. I very liked the role plays games, especially speaking by the phone.
This knowledge is very helpful in everyday life. All trainers were very friendly.”
(Anna*)

*All names changed in line with our confidentiality policy.

"This training helped us in many different ways. How to adjust to society. It was good guidance, for example how to apply for voluntary work. The trainers give also information and let us practice for things we need in our life like filling a form. And that we can improve our skills through volunteering.
We learnt also how we can volunteer in mental health support. And we learnt about British culture and communication ... and how can we both learn British culture and communication and be just ourselves in this society."
(Naila volunteers at Growing together Levenshulme)

“You guys were very friendly and the training was very informative. The workshops were very fruitful for me. And at this situation with Coronavirus, you know, we are sitting in the house hopeless because of limitation but you guys gave us the inspiration to do something and those workshops for me it is like a good preparation. Thank you.”
(Manal, engaged in a women's group)

“Thank you very much to the Shared Routes team for this training where we gained a lot of skills and knowledge as well as more confidence. Thank you very much for being very patient when we have language problems. I have been in this country only for four months. It has been very helpful to make sure we understand everything by explaining things again until we understand. It was a friendly environment and we met many people from different countries, cultures and backgrounds. We made a lot of friends. Now I know more ways to talk, make friends and build relationships. This helps me very much in the future. Thank you very much.”

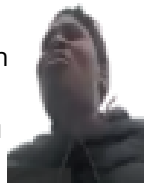
(Munir uses the MRSN chat service, did an English cooking course and participated in a mental health workshop we referred to)

Securing a Job

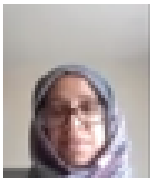
We’re very happy and proud that one PN was able to secure a job as what he has learnt in the workshop on Office Administration helped him to be successful at the interview.



"The training has been very good as it has covered a lot of things. Some are things that I have never tried to look at before and have not known that they’re important. For example things that have to do with British culture. And then much of the things I have benefitted from, were in the area of office administration, like the role of an office administrator and what he does. First of all the filing and confidentiality and all these kind if things. I think that very morning (of the office admin workshop) I was telling I was going for an interview and some of those things that I learnt in the workshop - almost all of them - came in the interview and I was successful in this interview. Some of the things they asked was about confidentiality and how to organise yourself and filing and all these kind of things."



“So many things I learnt, I know this workshop helped me a lot, even when it comes to day-to-day interacting or when you call on phone, the way you talk, you know. Sometimes, you just call, you just talk to them normal. But with this training we got to know the rules, and how to communicate, especially when you talk to people in the office. So it was really helpful, in various aspects, in lots.” (Gawat)



"Actually, the British culture & communication at work workshop is not useful only for volunteering. It’s about the way of life we have to live here and how to interact with everyone. So it’s very important for us being in this country and we didn’t know about it for so long. So it was very useful and it gives us ...like a life lesson. I have learned a lot about the British culture which made my life easier. And I have found that there are various field where I can find volunteering job which will lead to a permanent job."(Azra)

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	23	Due to Covid-19 closure of services: -> limited number of volunteer roles available; some PNs were apprehensive to volunteer due to health safety concerns. 7 PNs will complete 3 m. volunt. at the end of Feb., 2 PNs at the end of March.
Volunteering of PNs in MRSN and RCOs, 4 other agencies per year	8 volunteers 4 agencies	8 volunteers 3 agencies	Agencies: MRSN (various projects, see table below), Amanah Mosque, PRIDES

13 host organisations, 23 volunteers (3 volunteers volunteer in 2 roles)

Name of organisation	No of PNs
Emerge/fareshare	4
Emerge/touchwood	2
United in Hearts	2
Church of the Nazarene	1
MRSN - Advice	1
MRSN - Check in & Chat	3
MRSN - Asylum Guide	1
MRSN- Shared Routes	1
PRIDES	2
The ARC Project	1
Refugee Mentor	1
British Heart Foundation	2
British Red Cross	1
Amanah Mosque	1
Salvation Army	1
Growing together Levenshulme	1

Volunteering: Brief Case Studies

"I am so happy with my volunteer work as an asylum guide with MRSN. It gives me more confidence and I am really improving in interpreting by doing consecutive interpreting with the asylum seekers and sometimes online ones." (Sahar)



"The Asylum Guide has benefited massively from having Sahar as volunteer as she has lived experience of the asylum process and speaks Arabic so her help has been invaluable. She will go on to feed back into the project and Refugee Action's campaign work as an 'Expert by Experience' so it will help us to re-evaluate and grow as a project." (Bridget, AS coordinator)

Ibrahim was another rather active PN. He started volunteering as shop assistant at the British Heart foundation but was also chosen as trustee for the Manchester Sanctuary where he can advise on policies regarding refugees & asylum seekers. He himself is still an asylum seeker and to help others in his situation was something he was eager to do.





One of our peer navigators, Lida, was very keen to volunteer to mix with people and practice English but she needed a place where she didn't need much English skills to start with. Our new partnership with the British
Heart foundation shop in Salford was just such a place. Manager and colleagues were very welcoming and understanding. Lida was put in a shift with a colleague who speaks the same language and thus had a good start to be able learn everything she needs to know to help in the shop. By now she is volunteering for more than 3 months and is very happy about it.

"Thank you MRSN-Shared Routes for your services and training. My English was very weak but the training environment and trainers were very friendly and not strict and helped everyone to be active in the workshops.

Always I have wanted to play a role in the community in which I live. I like to help others, but I did not know how and with what it is possible to get in touch with people who are not my language and culture. I have been living in the UK for over 2 years and, in addition to not being fluent in English, I did not know the culture and rules of living in the UK. Through one of the college teachers, I became acquainted with MRSN services and participated in suggested courses, through which I was able to learn good information and be able to connect with the English community. And I feel I can be useful here. Currently, I volunteer in a store one day a week, and once a week I practice telephone communication with the help of the MRSN chat service. And I feel that my personality has become stronger and I have peace of mind. I recommended all my friends who are in the same situation as me to use MRSN services and join the Shared Routes project. Two of them joined the new Shared Routes training course and are very excited about it." (Lida)

We're very pleased that we could support one peer navigator into a volunteer role she benefits from in so many ways. As Shezan said in the training that she did learn not only admin and other useful skills but also about mental health and how to stay fit. We managed to support her into an admin and events volunteer role with PRIDES' Covid-19 cycling project where she can also engage herself and start cycling, doing something that lifts her so much up during these times of lockdowns.



PRIDES was also happy to recruit trained volunteers. "We are very thankful and appreciate Shared Routes Project as its offer great services to our Refugees community members. We can recruit volunteers through Shared Routes and it is good networking with each other. Before, we have spent lots of time and effort before our volunteers get to fulfil the tasks. Now when we work with trained volunteers we can see the difference, and it frees up time that we can invest in community development projects. Thank you Shared Routes from all members of PRIDES to give us all your help and support." (Bushra, general secretary of PRIDES (Pakistani Refugee Integration and Education Services)

"I'm so happy that I volunteer here, that you connected me. This year full of lockdown and restrictions was getting us suffocated. We don't see anybody and I'm old school, I'm not the best friend with online things. I'm so so happy that I have the opportunity to get out of the house and to meet people. At the same time I can finally improve my English and in real life and on top of that I learn so much here about things we have to do as asylum seekers or refugees. I'll come two to three days a week. This is really uplifting. "

During the lockdown Ronya started to take up a second volunteer role as MRSN chat buddy. "I'm so happy that I can do volunteer at the chat service, helping people to overcome loneliness is something I love to do and it's close to my field as I have a degree in Psychology. At the same time it helps me to keep busy during the lockdown. Thank you for this opportunity!"

Ronya was overexcited after she started volunteering at MRSN advice drop-in.



Ronya will be the third peer navigator volunteering with the MRSN chat service. Rebecca, our chat service coordinator, was happy to recruit a Sorani speaking volunteer from Shared Routes as she was of the other peer navigators.

"Being able to have Shared Routes volunteers has allowed recipients who may not have been able to use the service if it wasn't for Rayann who could speak the native language of her recipients. Goli has the ability to speak to her buddy in a clear and easy way which has allowed her buddy to learn more. These two volunteers have also been able to relate to their buddies and provide them with a feeling of understanding.

It is great to see how willing these volunteers are, they went about the application process extremely professionally and take their role very seriously. Both volunteers are great at feeding back to me and are always willing to have a phone call to discuss how they are getting on. I think that they have been prepared for volunteering experiences very well through the Shared Routes programme."

Goli attended the Shared Routes training in the summer and later started volunteering at MRSN chat service:

"The training was useful for me because I didn't have confidence and I was shy when I spoke but now I feel better."

About her volunteering experience Goli said:

"Actually this experience is so great for me as a first placement that I do here. I came to the UK in 2016 and it was difficult for me to communicate with people because my language was not so good and I did not have enough confidence. But now I speak with a person and teach her English and this is so great for me. From when I started this placement I feel more better because I think I am a useful person who can help other people and this make me more happier person. I really like to speak with other people to learn new things or if I can give some new things to other people so I think I put my feet in a path that I always like to do it.
This person who I speak with her is from China and she is so alone so I really effort to make a friend with her and asked her any time that she had a question or need some help she can contact with me. I hope I can do my job as the best and I will be happy if I can help more to other people."



"After I started the course I feel like the course makes things easier for me. I understand more what I can do and I can't do when I volunteer. I feel like now I'm more confident. I'm new here, I'm here just one year, now that I have the course I understand the culture, the people more. This is nice. I feel like my life is now easier." (Salah)

Salah was one of the very active PNs. He volunteered during Covid-19 at even two places: at his mosque as safety guard and for the British Red Cross he delivered safety kits making sure that this communities stay safe during these challenging times.

For our volunteer support we benefited much from new partnerships with the British Heart Foundation and Emerge.

Emerge provides recycling and reuse services to businesses, schools and homes, and promotes sustainable resource management advice through information and education services within the wider community. It might be best known to many as running fareshare to redistribute food to people in need where Marcus Rathford and his mother volunteered. We were overjoyed to secure volunteer places with emerge branches fareshare and touchwood (their wood recycling services) as these service operate during lockdown.

At fareshare we secured four volunteer roles as warehouse assistants for a father and his three sons who are still asylum seekers. One of the sons remarked after the training: “Through the Shared Routes training I became more motivated to start volunteer work and try to help the communities in Britain. After this course I understand how I can benefit from volunteering and I understand how I can behave with the people, with the other cultures and with the other nationalities. So these are the things I liked it and I learnt from this course.”
We helped at the induction with translation and guidance and they were all very excited to start. The father remarked: Oh, they really thought about everything! We will learn so much here, not only practising the language and mixing with people but how to handle food safely, how to carry things safely and so much more. This is learning for life. That’s what I’m, trying to teach my sons.”



Liz, the Volunteer Manager at Emerge remarked: “Volunteers are highly motivated. They have contributed to responding to the increase in picking and assembling food orders. The warehouse has extended its operational hours, volunteers have contributed by being able to be involved in a range of tasks. Our induction session was much improved due to the attendance of Shared Routes Project Manager, who was able to give support and guidance. Their Volunteer Manager will raise awareness of free training opportunities for volunteers, whilst volunteering."

The partnership with emerge/fareshare led to further volunteer roles in carpentry with emerge's branch touchwood. We were looking for these type of role for a long since one of our PNs Adam is a carpenter, had a carpentry shop in his home country for four years and really want to volunteer in his field to get a job later.



Adam was overjoyed when he heard that we secured the carpentry role for him:

“I’m so excited that I finally found this role. Now I can continue practicing my trade and learn how it’s done here in England. It was my biggest wish that I can improve my language and work in carpentry. Here I can do both and mix with people and help them. Thank you for this opportunity!”

Adam is on the picture in the middle and Issa is another PN who started volunteering at touchwood and who was very happy to start a volunteer role where he can get along with little English and start immediately. Both PNs had completed the training in March together and have been extremely resilient in looking for a volunteer placement during lockdowns.

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	60	
Choices and opportunities for engaging in society	60	60	

We discussed with our navigators what alternatives to volunteering we can offer which resulted in these new services:

1. Peer support groups (2 groups with a total of 16 PNs)
2. Mental health awareness sessions (one PN who is a certified mental health first aider assisted with the design and the delivery)
3. Engagement in local projects as for example the cycling project by PRIDE to promote mental and physical wellbeing and women groups (4 PNs)

V. Key learning for the year

1. Despite the challenging environment a good number of peer navigators showed remarkable resilience to adapt to the new circumstances and start volunteering.

2. Shared Routes was needed as a bridge between a number of peer navigators and organisations to facilitate the start of volunteering. A number of peer navigators need close individual support to apply and connect with organisations. We support with completing application forms, arranging for inductions, be present at inductions and help with translations where necessary. For the next year we plan to engage more volunteers to assist in this field.

3. It was important to understand changing situations and to adapt services based on the feedback of clients and to stay flexible.