

## Refugees & Mentors CIC Impact Report

April 2020 - March 2021

### Vision

An inclusive society where refugees, people seeking asylum and vulnerable migrants have equal access to job opportunities, in order to build a sustainable life in the UK.

### Mission

To support refugees, people seeking asylum and vulnerable migrants to improve their employment prospects and to collaborate with other organisations to offer inclusive opportunities.

*“The professional support that Refugees & Mentors provides is very valuable for any refugee seeking to restart their career in the UK”*

*“The community is made up of individuals, and the more active the individuals, the stronger the community. Refugees and Mentors plays a vital role to upskill individuals and close gaps in the employment market”* service users

*“It was great to see just how skilled these people were - a talent pool ready and waiting to be tapped into”* rail infrastructure employer

*“It was delightful to volunteer with R&M. Helping someone to find a job, course or scholarship, which could markedly influence their life, is very rewarding”* volunteer



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## Report summary

This is the Refugees & Mentors CIC Impact Report covering 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. Established in 2016 this is now our 5<sup>th</sup> year.

Refugees & Mentors support:

- Refugees, people seeking asylum and vulnerable migrants in Greater Manchester to improve their employment prospects and get jobs.
- Employers to develop inclusive recruitment practices, to diversify their workforces, fill skill gaps and to offer support to refugees.

We offer high quality employment-focused holistic services, which are confidential and impartial. This year we have:

- Provided individual support for 108 service users.
- 58 people have participated in workshops or events.
- At least 125 service users and volunteers have received our regular R&M Opportunities Bulletin.
- Engaged with over 30 employers and stakeholders.

Unemployment in Greater Manchester for people with refugee status has been estimated at 44% by the Manchester Refugee Employment Partnership in 2013. In our experience this estimate has not changed in the last 7 years. In 2019, the 'Tapping Potential' report by UNHCR, BITC and Prince's Trust, estimated the unemployment rate for refugees nationally at 18%, three times higher than the UK-born population. This year 20% of service users provided with individual support have gained jobs.

The main countries service users have sought sanctuary in the UK from are Sudan, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Iran, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Palestine.

## New for Refugees & Mentors this year

- We responded to the impact of COVID-19 by continuing services remotely and doing our best to meet the changing needs of service users, volunteers and stakeholders.
- At the end of the Returner Project pilot, we decided to continue a Returner Project for the foreseeable future.
- We became an employer and recruited 3 staff members (2FTE).
- 3 Volunteer directors were recruited and inducted.
- We held a Returner Project event for employers, candidates and stakeholders on the 28<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

## Reflections on the year

The full impact of the Covid 19 pandemic is covered in a separate section but it is worth noting here that the resulting prolonged periods of lock-down are a key issue underpinning the type and quantity of activities, outcomes and impacts this year. The most significant impacts were the constraints on in-person contact, the physical and mental ill health and personal traumas endured by individual service users and volunteers and the economic and business conditions affecting all stakeholders.

## What we said we would do & what we have achieved

“Use evaluation feedback to shape our services and support for volunteers.”

- We developed a planning strategy.
- Refugees & Mentors’ vision and mission statements were created.
- Some volunteer suggestions from 2019 started to be developed, but due to the pandemic we will continue to address these in 2021.

“Develop a good online presence to raise awareness of refugee talent and inclusive recruitment.”

- Our website was fully launched.
- The Returner Project increased its online presence.

“Dedicate resources to employer engagement, so we can continue to build relationships with employers.”

- We recruited a Returner Project Employment Worker and Administration Worker.
- Established an Employer Engagement Group, to share ideas and increase capacity.
- Held an employer, candidate and stakeholder event on January 28<sup>th</sup> 2021.

“Create at least one Refugees & Mentors work experience opportunity, targeted at services users.”

- The recruitment of the Administration Worker was targeted at people with lived experience of the UK asylum system.
- We recruited a new HR director who is also a service user.
- One person seeking asylum was recruited as an Information Worker Volunteer.

“Continue to increase the capacity and expertise of our directors board.”

- We recruited a volunteer finance director, volunteer HR director and a director with experience in the corporate sector and mentoring.
- One new director has experience of the UK asylum system.

## How we evaluated our services and support

This evaluation is underpinned by an *Evaluation Survey*, carried out by members of our board of directors and a volunteer mentor.

The aims of the *Evaluation Survey* are to:

- Identify potential for improving or changing a service.
- Ensure services are relevant and effective to meet the stakeholder needs.
- Highlight the most important aspects of services from the stakeholder's perspective.
- Seek new ideas.
- Continue to learn and improve as individuals and as an organisation.

We used the following methods to ask service users, volunteers, stakeholders and employers for feedback:

- Mentoring and Returner Projects – a questionnaire and a service user group session.
- Work Club - service users were invited to answer questions by phone.
- Events and workshops - feedback after the event/workshop.

The level of involvement in the Evaluation Survey of those contacted was as follows:

- Mentoring Project - 10 service users (52%) and 10 volunteers (77%).
- Returner Project – 7 service users (70%).
- Returner Project – 4 stakeholders (10%).
- Rainbow Haven Work Club – 6 service users (27%).

## COVID-19

The pandemic has had a significant impact on the lives of everyone. For service users it has exacerbated isolation. Away from friendship and family support networks and often living in poverty, lockdowns, restrictions and digital exclusion have cut people off from everyday connections. The impact has been a loss of access to sources of good information and support. Some service users were not clear what to do if they had COVID-19 symptoms, or where to get help with food or medication.

From September – March more service users told us that either they or family members were feeling low. Two people were admitted to hospital because their mental health deteriorated so much because they couldn't see consultants for a year. We provided information and guidance in English and Arabic and signposted people to health practitioners and community services, such as Mind. We encouraged service users to join Rainbow Haven activities and those of other organisations, to connect, learn or have fun, and to talk to the NHS.

It was important for us to continue relationships and to support people to keep taking steps to improve their employability, when appropriate. We continued to deliver services and the switch to remote provision was overall very successful. Mentoring Project volunteers kept in touch with service users more frequently to check on their welfare, reduce isolation and provide information and guidance. We used our weekly R&M Opportunities Bulletin to share up-to-date information about the virus and government guidance, as well as sources of wellbeing, mental and physical health support.

### Evaluation feedback

*"... they supported me exactly the same when covid was at its peak and that shows how good the organisation is at what it does. They managed to have me obtain permanent employment in the middle of the pandemic"* Mentoring Project service user

*"... being able to meet online and communicate with professional people helped me a lot mentally and supported my wellbeing."* Returner Project service user

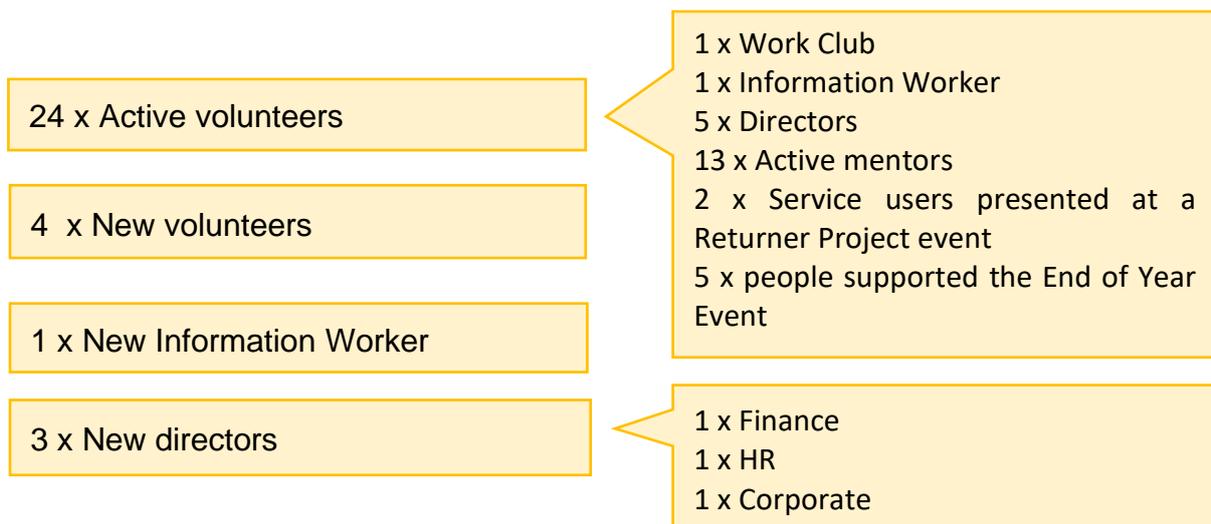
## Volunteering

Volunteering is central to our organisation in its governance, delivery of services and is a key step towards employment. The experience of volunteering is often significant in the lives of volunteers and can bring many benefits; friendship, the opportunity to learn new skills and gain experiences, to learn about other’s lives and a sense of purpose.

Our volunteer team includes people seeking asylum, refugees looking for work and people working in the corporate, voluntary and public sectors. Some volunteers are also service users. Volunteer roles are varied and many volunteers also work full-time.

The impacts of COVID-19 have been that several volunteers took a break from mentoring; we had to reduce our Work Club Drop-In volunteer team from 5 to 1 person; and volunteer opportunities in many external organisations were put on hold.

We continued to hold volunteer meetings, offer learning opportunities - such as a LinkedIn workshop and ESOL training - to invite volunteers to events and to participate in our yearly evaluation. Volunteers also received the R&M Opportunities Bulletin. At least one person gained a qualification after attending a course advertised in this.



## Evaluation feedback

*“I’ve worked closely with Mandy since I started volunteering with R&M. Mandy has been very supportive and helpful throughout my time in R&M. Apart from volunteering, she is always available to give support and guidance to any life related issues in the UK, which I found very helpful as a newly arriving immigrant in the country”* **Volunteer waiting for a decision on their asylum claim**

## Digital Inclusion

Before the pandemic, many people accessed devices, data access and the internet at libraries, colleges and community organisations - to connect, find information, complete courses and apply for jobs. However, the lockdowns and restrictions created digital exclusion.

During this year we tried hard to help service users with devices and access to the internet. We established relationships with Manchester City Council, Community Calling, the Prince's Trust and referred service users to our partner, Rainbow Haven.

We changed our application for services to include a digital inclusion assessment, asking questions about service users' access to the internet, data and the cost of contracts, so we could provide information and guidance.

### Digital Inclusion in numbers

From September until March, of the 46 people accessing the Work Club;

- 3 people did not have a phone.
- At least 20 people did not have a laptop/PC.
- 22 people had WIFI, but of these 8 people would stop having access when they were rehoused.

5	People were helped with smartphones and 12 months of data
2	People were lent devices through the Mentoring Project Lending Scheme
2	Were helped to obtain a device from the Prince's Trust
2	People were provided with a device by Manchester City Council

## Services: Rainbow Haven Work Club

Based in Rainbow Haven's community advice centre in Gorton, the Work Club is for refugees, people seeking asylum and vulnerable migrants and is provided in partnership with Rainbow Haven. The Work Club is a partnership between Refugees & Mentors and Rainbow Haven. Prior to the pandemic it was a busy drop-in 2 days a week, providing computer access, employment and digital skills appointments, and run by a team of 6 volunteers and 1 staff member. However, in the first 6 months, it was delivered by 1 staff member, as we navigated the impact of the pandemic. We supported 1 volunteer to offer the service remotely, reviewing how we processed and shared data and maintained confidentiality.

One drop in was provided in December, before restrictions were tightened again. The service has predominantly been offered by phone, video calls and email.

Work Club one-to-one employability appointments offer service users the opportunity to explore their situation and identify goals and small steps they can take in the short and long term. Information and guidance is provided in a wide range of employability areas: volunteering, courses/training, ESOL, job search, job applications, interview skills, work experience, business start-up, career planning and comparison of overseas qualifications to the UK education system.

Service users have valuable overseas work experience and transferable skills but many people are struggling through incredibly difficult periods in their lives, managing complex and often multi-layered interrelated issues. The partnership, which includes Rainbow Haven's advice team and wellbeing activities, offers a unique, specialist and user-led service where service users can access welfare, wellbeing and employability support. This year service users also took up Refugees & Mentors Returner Project (7 people) and Mentoring Project (8 people).

## Benefits of offering a remote service

The service has reached more people than previous years and been more accessible for people with a good level of English - we have been able to offer appointments more flexibly throughout the week. Away from a busy drop-in, phone appointments have also provided a quieter space for information and guidance. For Arabic speakers with limited English, the role of the Arabic-speaking volunteer has been invaluable.

Year on Year Work Club Numbers	2019-20	2020-21	Summary
Service users supported	89	75	Less people accessed the service but the number of appointments and signposts doubled.
Appointments	115	232	
Referrals / signposts	129	227	
Started volunteering	11	8	
Jobs gained	3	11	

Example referral organisations: GM ESOL Advice, colleges, volunteer centres.

## ESOL Strategy

This year we also worked with Rainbow Haven to draft an ESOL strategy. Rainbow Haven offer a wide range of ESOL services but wanted to take a more strategic approach to delivery. We gained feedback from staff and a volunteer and developed a strategy for supporting Rainbow Haven service users and volunteers learning English.

## Case Study: Sadiq service user and volunteer

Sadiq had been seeking asylum for 6 months, waiting for an asylum interview. As a doctor, he'd also requested that the Home Office use its discretionary power to grant permission to work in jobs on the Shortage Occupation List, so he could take up a doctor's job with the NHS and help during the pandemic. But months passed as he was waiting.

A Rainbow Haven social work student referred Sadiq to the Work Club to discuss volunteering. We discussed a role with Refugees & Mentors, helping to produce our weekly Bulletin. Sadiq applied and learnt more about the role and remote volunteering. We didn't request a reference because it wasn't necessary and is often a barrier to volunteering for the first time. Whilst volunteering the NHS were keen for Sadiq to start work. We discussed how to communicate with the NHS to keep them up-to-date and to reduce the risk of the job offer being withdrawn.

The Home Office granted permission to work and we discussed the DBS check required for his job and the challenges often faced by people seeking asylum, due to a lack of utility bills and/or ID.

Volunteering reduced Sadiq's isolation and provided a source of support. There were significant benefits for Refugees & Mentors. Sadiq was organised and reliable and his experience of seeking asylum and supporting others, alongside his language skills, meant he could offer new perspectives on how to improve the bulletin.

## Evaluation feedback

*“I was in the middle of the Flourish meeting of which you advised me to (join)... I like meeting other women who like myself have been through hardship in their lives but they didn't give up; they became stronger and found their ways to stand on their feet again... Thanks very much for the action plan sheet, it's good to learn how to organise myself and my actions. Thanks very much for your help. I really appreciate it very much”* Service user

*“(Work Club) always responded whereas Job Centre+ coach didn't. They had knowledge about types of jobs and links to opportunities. I also received personal support and once they even contacted the work coach on my behalf”* Service user

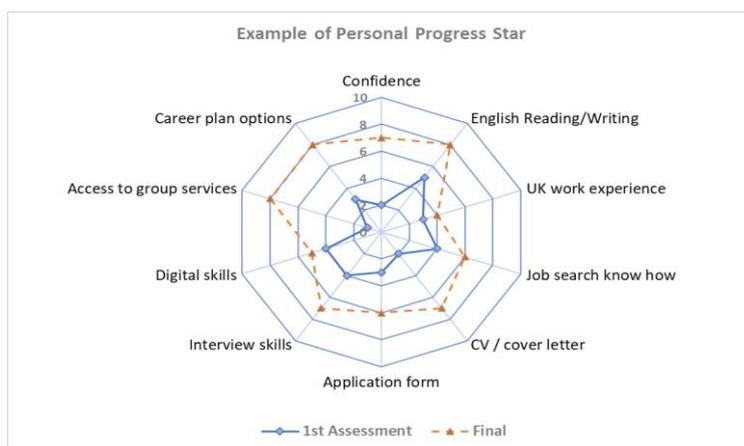
## Services: Mentoring Project

Our Mentoring Project full report can be found here [What we do – Refmentors](#)

The project is our core service and is for people who have been granted refugee status having fled war or persecution. Service users have a wealth of overseas work experience and soft and hard skills, but other issues impact on their ability to progress - poverty, physical and mental health, family issues or learning English. The service is provided by a manager and around 20 volunteers, each of whom have at least 15 years' UK work experience, have participated in training and undergone Disclosure and Barring Service checks. It offers employment focused mentoring which is bespoke and holistic, for one-five months, for around five hours each month. Accredited with the national quality mark for mentoring.

Taking a mentoring approach to service delivery reduces isolation and aims to bridge the gap between mainstream employability services and refugee support services. Mentoring can provide motivation and encouragement, it is a two-way commitment in which both people share knowledge, skills and experiences.

This year 19 service users were supported in mentoring relationships by 13 volunteers and the project manager. The service was delivered by phone, video call and emails. We also piloted mentoring by profession for two civil engineer Returner Project candidates.



Mentoring starts with the Project Manager and service user identifying objectives and recording these on a star diagram. The service user rates their knowledge or ability for each category and reviews this at the end of the relationship.

## Evaluation feedback

*"You could call up any time and (they) would be available every time I needed help, she built trust....and taught me how to thrive and believe in myself"*

*"They supported me to prepare for interviews. (They offered) coaching, motivation and encouragement"* **Service users**



## Services: Returner Project

The Returner Project full report can be found here [What we do – Refmentors](#)

The project works with refugees and employers.

Refugees supported on this project are engineers, architects, business services, IT and telecoms professionals rebuilding their professional careers.

Employers using the service face skills gaps, want to take a more inclusive approach to recruitment and diversify their workforce. To do this, employers offer 3 to 6 month paid placements for refugee professionals.

## Highlights this year

- 1 stakeholder event, attended by 36 people at which 2 candidates jointly presented.
- 14 refugee candidates accessed the specialist casework service.
- Employer Engagement Group.
- 2 candidate group peer support sessions.
- 1 LinkedIn workshop.
- 1 Build your own brand & networking workshop
- 1 candidate chaired Refugees & Mentors End of Year Event.
- R&M Opportunities Bulletin and specialist information shared with candidates.



We are looking forward to our next virtual event!

**Harnessing the skills of Refugee Professionals**

**Date:** Thursday, 28th January 2021  
**Time:** 10:00 - 12:30  
**Cost:** Free to attend  
**Platform:** Zoom

For more details and registration please contact:  
[claire@refmentors.org.uk](mailto:claire@refmentors.org.uk) | [www.refmentors.org.uk](http://www.refmentors.org.uk)





## Evaluation feedback

*“Placement is the key for us to test our knowledge and work experience. This is helpful to understand what we need to do to improve our skills.”* Candidate on placement.

*“(They helped me) improve my CV to match my skills, qualifications, and work experience... support with employers and engineers from industry... It was helpful for me to understand the engineering industry in the UK and improve my networking”* Candidate.

## Services: Workshops and Courses

This year we provided six online workshops and courses.

### LinkedIn workshop

This explored how to set up a profile, develop your network and research. The workshop was attended by 6 service users and 6 volunteers.

### Employment options and the Prince's Trust

A session for young people, using WhatsApp and Zoom, offered with the Prince's Trust which was attended by 8 service users. We found WhatsApp a good tool for group work, but learners faced challenges moving from WhatsApp to Zoom. The session raised awareness of Prince's Trust services, ESOL service and resources and other learning opportunities such as Code Your Future, Edx and Future Learn. We also referred some people to Manchester City Council's device scheme.

### Rainbow Haven Mamas and Babies group

We participated in 3 sessions, attended by approximately 20 new and expectant mums who were refugees, people seeking asylum or vulnerable migrants. These regular sessions raised awareness of the Work Club service, of online learning opportunities and provided a safe space for people to ask questions and find out information.

### Inspire Community Centre

We began delivery of an employability course for Inspire, a community centre in Manchester.

### Evaluation feedback

*"I enjoyed meeting people who are seeking to develop their careers and also attending a formal workshop"*

## Services: R&M Opportunities Bulletin

Refugees & Mentors shares a bulletin with service users and our volunteers, most weeks. This includes relevant information we are sent by other organisations, such as information about courses, workshops, training, jobs, volunteering, apprenticeships or unpaid work experience.

The bulletin is produced by a member of staff and a volunteer. This year due to capacity, we were unable to produce the bulletin for 3 months. We sent 18 bulletins accompanied by information and guidance with regard to COVID-19, wellbeing and health services.

The bulletin is a good regular source of information and a way for us to communicate with service users on a weekly basis. It's also a reminder to contact us for employability support.

### Evaluation feedback

*"I have some good updates. I've been applying for some of the positions shared on your newsletter and this week I've been invited to two interviews"* **Work Club service user**

*"This has become really excellent in the last year. Great detail and lots of resources"*  
**Mentoring Project volunteer**

*"These were really helpful... It starts with the client, if the client is willing to pursue the opportunity you can get a good result"* **Service User**

*"It would be good if the volunteer could e-mail directly anything on the update they think might be good, also if there are things that are not obvious that I should look at"*  
**Mentoring Project service user**

## End of Year Event

Our End of Year Event is for service users and volunteers. In the past it has been held at the Mustard Tree. Due to COVID-19 restrictions we held the event remotely and invited people to share a talent, story or achievement for 5 minutes. 22 people came to the event which was chaired by a Returner Project candidate.

### This is what people shared:

- Poem
- Christmas myths
- STAR method for job applications
- Sung a song/played guitar
- Fairy homes made in a woodland
- Patchwork
- An exhibition of art pieces created by the public.
- Glass artwork



## Evaluation feedback

*“Thanks for organising such a lovely event in this difficult time. I enjoyed it. I also enjoyed the Iranian song, that was lovely. Thanks again and hope we meet again in a better situation in the future”* **Service user**

*“I did enjoy the EYE and it was a great turn out”* **Volunteer**

*“I would like to thank you and all Refugees and Mentors colleagues for organizing such a wonderful event where we got to know each other as Refugees and Mentors project clients and volunteers. It was a very good opportunity for everyone to share his or her experiences, hobbies and the new skills they have learnt and the Persian song was awesome”*

**Service user**

## Partnerships and collaborations

This year we continued our fantastic partnership with Rainbow Haven, now in its 3<sup>rd</sup> year. Locally we continued to work closely with the Manchester Refugee Employment Partnership and nationally, to share good practice with Transitions.

We developed new referral systems with Manchester University and the Greater Manchester ESOL Advice Service, to support service users with English and to compare overseas qualifications to the UK education system.

We developed new working relationships with the TENT Partnership and with Greater Manchester Combined Authority teams working with people seeking asylum and refugees.

Referrals to Refugees & Mentors were through our website and word of mouth, as well as a wide range of organisations, such as: Rainbow Haven, Caritas, Visible Outcomes, Refugee Action and Transitions, London.

Our Work Club service continues to make the highest number of referrals/signposts to other organisations.

We have built on our work in the Returner Project pilot, by engaging with more employers to raise awareness of refugee professionals and of returner placements as an inclusive approach to recruitment. Our Returner Project event raised the profile of refugee professionals and of placements and we are continuing to develop relationships and placements with employers in the north.

In response to requests from candidates for mentoring by industry and interest from employers, we piloted professional mentoring with two companies. We look forward to continuing to progress professional mentoring with employers.

## Evaluation Feedback

R&M partners were asked to explain their involvement or interest in the Returner Project and what barriers they are now aware that refugees face:

*“Language, stigma, bias, knowledge of UK employment market, familiarity with recruitment and selection norms in the UK, translatability of skills, experience and qualifications to the UK, confidence.”* *Head of HR, Refugee Action*

*“I’m interested in co-operating with Refugees & Mentors to offer access to refugee candidates to our corporate members that want to hire refugees.”* *Associate Director for Global Partnerships; TENT*

## Our team

### Diversity

We continue to build a team which meets the needs of service users and reflects the employment market.

- 4 volunteers, including 2 directors, have experience of the UK asylum system.
- 2 volunteers are retired, 11 are in work, 1 person is working and 1 person is waiting for permission to work.
- Volunteer mentors work in the private, public and voluntary sectors or are business owners.

### Team by numbers

- 5 Volunteer directors
- 1 Information worker volunteer
- 13 active volunteer mentors
- 1 Work Club volunteer
- 1 Project manager
- 1 Employment worker (p/t)
- 1 Administrator (p/t)
- Transitions, London consultancy support (until December)

## Supporters



**Leigh Day**



 MANCHESTER  
CITY COUNCIL



## The year ahead

We will:

- Expand our Mentoring Project to increase the level of support offered by industry professionals and by people with lived experience of the asylum system.
- Continue to support employers to offer returner placements.
- Work towards the Matrix quality standard.
- Continue to recruit and train volunteers to help with our infrastructure.
- Complete our organisation governance and strategy plan.
- Return to a blended approach of in person and remote services.

### Location

We are based in the offices of Rethink Rebuild Society, Unit 7, Longsight Business Park, M13 0PD. We are a not-for-profit community interest company. Our financial accounts are at Companies House <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/companies-house>  
Registered company number: 10373232.

Contact us <https://refmentors.org.uk/>

*Thank you for taking the time to learn about people seeking asylum, refugees, vulnerable migrants and Refugees & Mentors CIC*