



## Refugees & Mentors CIC Impact Report

1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020

***Refugees & Mentors (R&M) supports refugees and vulnerable migrants to improve their employment prospects and get jobs.***

*“An early presentation (by R&M) with a candidate showed me how there is an untapped and ignored pool of talent in the UK that we could and should be utilising. I was amazed how skilled the individual was, yet was still struggling to find employment.”*

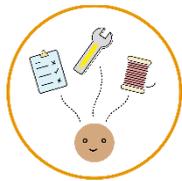
Engineering group partner on the Network Rail Transpennine Upgrade Project



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# Introduction



## Refugees & Mentors aims:

**Refugees, people seeking asylum and vulnerable migrants** – To offer high quality employment focused, holistic services, which are impartial, confidential and enable people to develop their employability, professional profile and get jobs.

**Employers** – To raise employer's awareness of refugee talent and to collaborate, so employers can take an inclusive approach to recruitment, diversify their workforce, fill skills gaps and offer professional support.

**Services and networks** – To have excellent knowledge of opportunities and share our knowledge with service users and wider networks, so everyone can benefit from services and networks.

## Evaluation

This year's evaluation was carried out by members of our volunteer board of directors and a volunteer mentor. We asked all clients, volunteers and employers involved in the mentoring and returners projects this year to participate in the evaluation. We have also included feedback from course learners. This year, due to capacity and the impact of COVID-19, we have been unable to gain feedback from work club service users.

### Percentage providing feedback:

#### Mentoring project

80% of service users

68% of volunteers

#### Returner project

92% of service users

66% of employers

# COVID-19

In March we switched to providing services by phone or video call. We contacted service users each week to reduce isolation, encourage people to exercise outside and to offer holistic information. We used our newsletter to share information about social distancing, self-isolation help, school meals and useful online websites. It became clear some people struggled to use online services due to a lack of access to digital devices, wifi and mobile data. In these cases, we reached out to other organisations to provide resources.

## Partnerships and collaborations

- Members of the Manchester Refugee Employment Partnership, a group of not-for-profit organisations working to reduce refugee unemployment locally.
- The Rainbow Haven Work Club was offered in partnership with Rainbow Haven.
- The Mentoring Project was offered as part of Refugee Action's Working English North programme.
- Our pilot Returner Project was made possible by collaborating with Transitions.
- One placement, resulting in a direct hire, was offered by M247.
- We offered a Universal Credit workshop, in partnership with Refugee Action.
- We were pleased to work with RSK, to develop a Refugees & Mentors website.

## Referral agencies and individuals

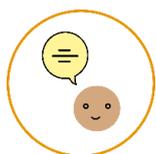
- Boaz Trust
- Friends of colleagues and clients
- Refugee Action
- Rainbow Haven
- Rethink Rebuild Society
- REVIVE
- Transitions
- Visible Outcomes

# Information sharing

It's difficult to navigate education and employability opportunities in Greater Manchester and this is exacerbated for people new to the UK and for whom English is a second language.

We share information about courses, training, local jobs, work experience, volunteering and events in our regular email newsletter, the 'R&M Update'. The newsletter enables us to regularly communicate with service users, to offer support and share opportunities.

## 21 newsletters shared with more than 100 people



### Service user feedback:

*"This is very good for the links it provides and it widens the types of opportunities that I look at."*

*"It provides me with regular opportunities and information to develop my career and socialise with my community."*

# Mentoring Project



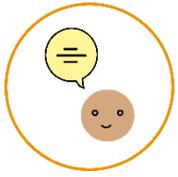
Our core service, the Mentoring Project, is for people with refugee status living in Manchester or Salford. The service is provided by a manager and around 20 volunteers, each of whom have at least 15 years' work experience in the UK, have participated in induction/training and undergone checks with the Disclosure and Barring Service.

Service users' overseas work and education experience is diverse, from health and business professionals, to those who had no opportunity to work before fleeing. Some service users are learning English and gaining volunteer experience and some are competing at interview.

This year, people had fled from the following countries and sought safety in the UK: Libya, Syria, Sudan, Ethiopia, Iran, Senegal, Kuwait, Eritrea, Congo and Palestine.

Mentoring usually lasts for one to five months and offers a safe and friendly relationship with a volunteer who, alongside the manager, can offer relevant information, guidance and ongoing encouragement. We offer holistic, bespoke support to each individual.

The service is accredited with the NCVO Mentoring and Befriending Approved Provider Standard, the national quality standard for mentoring.



## Service user feedback:

Service users were asked to rate their employment prospects before and after mentoring. Overwhelmingly, the feedback was that employment prospects had improved:

94% rated their employment prospects as 1 to 5 (very poor to poor) **before** mentoring

80% rated their employment prospects as 6 to 10 (good to very good) **after** mentoring

The common theme in feedback from clients was the importance of providing a structured approach, by identifying goals and actions. Often this had come after a deeply stressful and chaotic period of their lives. A key impact was the provision of a mentor to listen and provide morale as well as practical support.

*“They support me in all possible means by listening to my problems... giving me advice, guidance and recommendations, and by lifting my spirits when I feel depressed.”*

The greatest challenge for most people was the initial impetus - how to start searching and acquiring the credentials for employment opportunities in a new country with unfamiliar culture, language, practices and procedures.

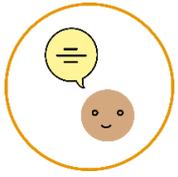
*“I felt lost at the beginning and didn't know how to start finding work and studying. R&M helped me see a careers adviser and helped me find out how to start the right course.”*

*“It helped introduce me to life in UK, we met every week, she helped me to set goals with time limits which helped me to move forward, and also to reflect on what I had done.”*

*“They (R&M) have helped me to look for a job, they helped me to make a short, medium and long term plan which gave me more motivation to complete next steps myself. They gave me focus. They do a great job and gave me skills to help me get the job I now have.”*

*“It (R&M mentoring) has helped me a lot in every single thing that I am doing now. I have had help with my CV and cover letter, and also with how to search for a job.”*

*“They have given me advice and instructions to build my CV and my life. Most helpful was teaching me how to search for a job online and how to search for different types of jobs.”*



## Volunteer Feedback:

Volunteers were asked to name two things they thought had most helped the service user they supported.

Activities most commonly highlighted in responses were:

- Coaching on CV writing and continuing to update and align CVs with specific opportunities.
- How to use online resources for job searches.
- Identifying education and skills training options.

*“I genuinely felt that the mentees I supported have benefited from our one-to-ones, whether that's improving their career prospects through interview practise and application support or building their confidence in practising and speaking English...”*

*“... It helped give more confidence and structure to the job-seeking process. You can visibly see the shift in confidence.”*

### Volunteers views on the impact of mentoring:

*“It provided a social contact in English and support in dealing with bureaucracy, for example, at the library and dealing with housing agencies”*

*“It matched the client with a volunteer from the same industry and encouraged them to take the correct training to improve their chances of getting a job.”*

*“I certainly learnt more about the struggles of refugees getting into the job market.”*

*“It has given them an opportunity to focus on identifying an appropriate course to apply for and to practice speaking English.”*

*“We reviewed and adapted their CV and conducted a mock interview with a variety of example questions then discussed the answers.”*

**92 % of volunteer mentors would recommend becoming a mentor to a friend**



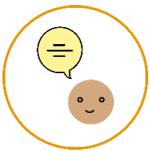
## Digital devices

We loaned devices to three people so they could study and apply for jobs from home.

*"I am writing this email to let you know how much I appreciate the laptop. It helps me to study communication skills and online courses. Thank you for all your kind support and encouragement!"*

## Events

In June, we invited volunteers to join us for a meal to celebrate national volunteers week. For the second year, in December, we held an end of year event, to bring together volunteers and clients and their families, to enjoy food and have fun. We held a family quiz for the first time.



## End of Year event service user feedback

*"It was a good time to socialise with the rest of people involved and to spread a nice environment around. It was a pleasant gathering."*

*"It is a very nice event and good to get to know people, it is a good way to feel less lonely."*

*"It was very good to be able to go out with my family and socialise and have fun, and be with the volunteers too. It changed our experience of living here."*

### **Mentoring project by numbers:**

35 people provided with information and guidance

31 mentoring relationships

**22% of service users supported by a volunteer mentor gained employment**

## Service users

Length of time living in the UK

Six months or less - 7 people

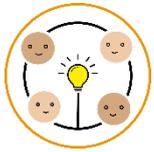
Six months to three years - 13 people

At least three years - 11 people

Single parent households: 6%

Separated from immediate family: 19%

Gender: 35% women and 65% men



## Information and guidance

- 16 people - learning English
- 10 people - volunteering
- 19 people - CVs
- 18 people - job applications/search
- 7 people - education/ qualifications
- 2 people - Disclosure and Barring Service
- 15 people - welfare/rights and responsibilities
- 6 - people work experience
- 3 - people start up business
- 9 - people interviews
- 9 - people networks, including LinkedIn

### Permanent jobs 57 %

Finance administrator

Hospital health care assistant

Network engineer Retail assistant

### Temporary jobs 43 %

Festival worker

Hospital health care assistant (bank)

Pastry chef

### Jobs gained after mentoring: 7

## **Suaad, networking student**

Suaad was learning computer networking at college and wanted to gain unpaid work experience in networking. A volunteer mentor supported Suaad to write a CV and we approached two employers.

After a few months, we brokered a relationship with one employer and discussed a work experience role. Suaad and the volunteer practiced interview skills and waited patiently.

Suaad had her first interview in the UK, with a member of HR and a service manager. After the interview, the manager fed back “if we had a job we would give it to her”. They were impressed by Suaad’s level of interest in networking and offered a part-time placement of up to 8 weeks.

We reviewed progress with Suaad and her manager on a regular basis, checking Suaad felt supported, was learning and took time off when needed.

Towards the end of the placement, Suaad identified a job vacancy at the company. We supported Suaad to find out essential information, such as shift patterns and how the job could impact on her housing.

Suaad sat a technical test, was interviewed and offered the job. We continued to offer guidance through recruitment and provided a reference, based on our experience of Suaad using the mentoring service.

# Returner Project

The Returner Project is a six-month pilot from January until June. The service aims to:

- Enable recently arrived, 'work ready' skilled refugee engineers, architects, business service, IT and telecom professionals to rebuild their careers by providing specialist information and guidance and brokering and supporting paid placements.
- Support employers to take an inclusive approach to recruitment, by offering three to six month paid placements, enabling employers to fill skills gaps and diversify their workforce.

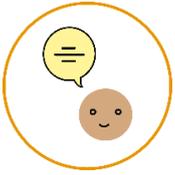
This pilot is based on good practice by Transitions <https://transitions-london.co.uk/> who have provided expert information and guidance to Refugees & Mentors' staff working on the service.

It's essential for the service to collaborate with employers to broker, develop and support placements for this group of highly skilled refugees.

## Placement process



The returner project is a recruitment service for employers. As such, it charges a placement fee to employers, for identifying suitable candidates and supporting placements, including monthly reviews. There is a direct hire recruitment fee of 15% of a candidates starting salary, this is paid by the hiring company with no impact on the candidate. These fees are essential to the sustainability of the service.



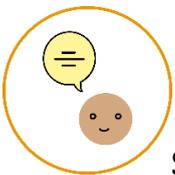
## Service user feedback:

We asked how important it was for Refugees & Mentors to broker and support three to six-month refugee professional returner placements with employers?

*“...a refugee struggles with the lack of the UK experience so without this support return to work is so difficult.”*

*“There are many talented refugees out there who can get more confidence and fill up the gaps and differences by mentorship and placements. So it's crucial.”*

Service users considered the support they received had a significant impact in terms of securing placements and long-term employment. However, the greatest impact was in regard to knowledge and motivation. Knowledge in terms of their understanding of the employment market and employer requirements and motivation in terms of the clarity of setting goals for personal development.



## Service user feedback on the impact of the project on:

**Knowledge** *“The information I received helped me to understand the way of thinking rather than doing the task for me.”*

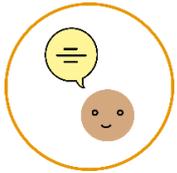
**Skills** *“The employment workers take time to analyse and discover your key skills and support you towards redirecting your energies to your strengths.”*

**Confidence** *“They don't leave any room for you to feel less of a human or undeserving, they are professional and always give you assurance on how best you can get your confidence back.”*

**Motivation:** *“They have been able to navigate the job market and this has acted as a motivation to me along my returner journey to employment.”*

## Transitions, London CIC

Transitions are a social enterprise and supported the pilot on a consultancy basis, by providing expert guidance and good practice resources to the Employment Worker and Project Manager.



### **Feedback from the team on this collaboration:**

Employment Worker:

*"It's really, really, important for the project, essential to have the support there."*

*"Partnerships have been developed so strongly through Transitions and we have been able to learn from that."*

Project Manager:

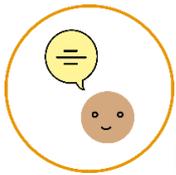
*"It's so specialist, and for me, we were determined to get on and try and push this in Manchester, because it is such a good way of helping people to get jobs. In terms of casework support, working with mentors or coaches and work with employers, there's so much important detail to it, we really needed the support and expertise Transitions brought"*

Sheila Heard, Transitions London CIC:

*"It's (the Returner Project) been delivered efficiently by R&M, given the limited staff time available to it, with clear documentation and processes developed and friendly and accessible services to candidates... Employer engagement is the number one priority for this kind of project."*

## Employers

During this period we focused on working with national employers, that had previously provided refugee returner placements in London, with Transitions. We started to build a local relationship with Network Rail, who like many engineering employers, faced skilled gaps.



### Employer feedback:

Sarah Rial, Social Value and Stakeholder Manager, Engineering group partner on the Network Rail Transpennine Upgrade Project:

*“This project has been extremely informative in showing us not only there is an issue for refugees but a potential solution for our recruitment issues/skills gaps.”*

*“R&M were great at communicating”*

*“A dedicated returner programme is needed rather than a referral of candidates in to regular recruitment processes.”*

Emily McCabe - Resourcing Business Partner - CEO Integrated Talent Solutions, Network Rail:

*“In future get more HR and Diversity & Inclusion buy-in to ensure consistency of message across the business.”*

A key message discussed with Emily was that if employers are to understand their customer needs, they need diversity reflected within their own business. This is Network Rail’s position on diversity and inclusion;

*“By 2024 we will be an even more open, diverse and inclusive organisation that is better at reflecting the communities that we serve”*

## Returner Project by numbers

10 people provided with information and guidance

3 mentoring relationships

49 information and guidance meetings sessions

3 people had postgraduate qualifications

3 people had a UK degree or higher

1 person contributed to a returner placement meeting with construction partners

## Service users

Length of time living in the UK

Six months or less - 4 people

Six months to three years - 5 people

More than three years - 1 person

Single parent households: 10%

Separated from immediate family: 20%

Gender: 20% women and 80% men



## Information and guidance

- 7 people – UK labour market
- 10 people - CV
- 5 people - professional bodies
- 5 people - professional portfolio
- 6 people - education/ qualifications
- 7 people - Networking, including LinkedIn
- 7 people - welfare/rights and responsibilities
- 3 people - interviews
- 2 people - individual grants

**Jobs gained during the pilot: 2**

# Rainbow Haven Work Club

Based in Rainbow Haven's community advice centre in Gorton, the work club runs two days a week and is for refugees, people seeking asylum and vulnerable migrants. Offering a computer drop-in and employability and digital skills appointments, the work club is provided in partnership with Rainbow Haven.

- Career planning
- ESOL
- Education and qualifications
- Digital skills (English and Arabic)
- volunteering
- Interview skills
- job search
- CV and job applications
- Grants
- Networks

## **Stacey, Fatima and Zeinab, craft start-up**

Three women attended our Learning English course in 2019 and attended one-to-one follow up appointments. The women did not know each other, were from different countries and had different work histories, but all spoke Arabic.

We discussed identifying goals, taking small steps and believing in yourself. Two women had experience of making crafts and one had business experience.

Following the course, the group developed a not-for-profit business idea, to make crafts in the drop-in and raise funds for Rainbow Haven. Two women tested out their craft ideas with the centre manager.

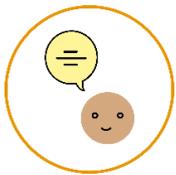
Rainbow Haven applied for a small grant to test out the business idea and are working with the women to pitch their case for funding at a local event.

## Workshops and courses

Workshops and courses were offered at Rainbow Haven and by video for Returner and Mentoring Project service users. Courses at Rainbow Haven were predominantly attended by people new to the UK and learning English. Courses offer employability information and guidance and aim to support learners to build their self-confidence and take small steps.

### **Number of learners attending courses and workshops:**

- Employability courses: 12
- Learning English courses: 46
- Job application & interview skills course: 8
- LinkedIn Workshop: 12



### **Employability course learner's feedback:**

*"Learnt many things about the UK system and to manage life after getting refugee status."*

*"We now know difference between knowledge, skills, experience and qualities"*

*"Learnt where to find better jobs."*

*"We learnt where to get genuine advice."*

# Our team

## Diversity

We are working to build a team which reflects our service users, meets their needs and reflects the employment market, in all roles within our organisation.

- Seven volunteers, including two directors, have experience of the UK asylum system.
- Two volunteers are retired, 29 work and seven were job seeking or in temporary work.
- Volunteer mentors have a wide range of work and education backgrounds; they work in the private, public and voluntary sectors or are business owners.

## Team by numbers

- 16 new volunteers inducted and started volunteering
- 3 Work club digital skills volunteers
- 2 Work club volunteer and job application volunteers
- 2 Transitions employment workers (consultancy support)
- 1 Project manager
- 1 Employment worker (p/t)
- 1 Information worker volunteer
- 23 volunteer mentors
- 5 volunteer directors

## 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.

# Supporters

Thank you to the funders and organisations who supported our work:

- Focusing First on People
- Forever Manchester
- Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce
- Leigh Day
- Manchester City Council
- M247
- One Manchester
- Refugee Action and AMIF
- Rethink Rebuild Society
- RSK
- Rainbow Haven
- The National Lottery Community Fund
- Transitions

# The year ahead

We will:

- Use evaluation feedback to shape our services and support for volunteers.
- Develop a better online presence to raise awareness of refugee talent and inclusive recruitment.
- Dedicate resources to employer engagement
- Create at least one Refugees & Mentors work experience opportunity, targeted at services users.
- Continue to increase the capacity and expertise of our board.

## Contact us

Tel: 07747080523

Email: [info@refmentors.org.uk](mailto:info@refmentors.org.uk)

Website: <https://refmentors.org.uk/>

Face book: <https://www.facebook.com/RefMentors>

**Thank you for taking the time to learn from refugees, vulnerable migrants and our team**