



Listening to community perspectives: Engaging refugees and asylum seekers in service design

A Collaborative Research Project between
York St John University and Give a Gift

May 2024

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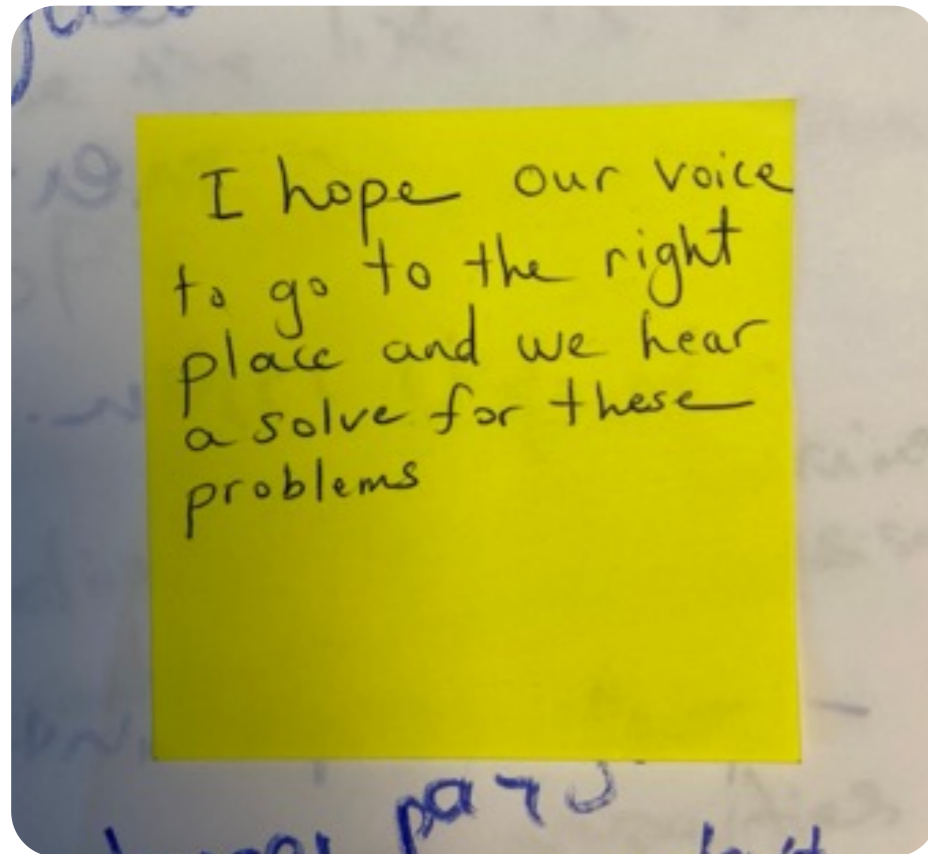


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Executive Summary

Overview and aims

With funding from a Community Research Grant from the Institute for Social Justice at York St John University (YSJU), we conducted a collaborative research project to find out how inequalities in health and wellbeing for refugees and asylum seekers can be addressed from the perspective of these communities themselves. In doing so, we wanted to determine gaps in GaG service provision and improve the quality of GaG service delivery and impact on beneficiaries. Taking a participatory approach where we consulted with members of the community, this project aimed to promote the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in the design of services.

Approach and Methods

We took a collaborative and participatory approach, recognising the expertise of each individual involved in this research. In addition to the core project team (YSJU researcher and GaG staff), we worked with three community researchers who helped shape the research design and were co-investigators during the World cafes and carrying out of the survey. In total, more than 200 asylum seekers and refugees participated in the research, completed a survey and/or participated in a World café. We believe that the findings presented in this report reflect the perspectives of the community.

Findings and recommendations

In World cafes, participants spoke widely about their experiences with different services they interact with in Leeds, including health, statutory and non-statutory. Some of these were positive (e.g. feeling helped; finding support needed) but most participants highlighted negative experiences. These related to the UK immigration system (e.g. long waiting times; restrictions on working and studying; dehumanisation), the health system (e.g. no availability for dentists; bad GP services; lack of mental health support); and housing (e.g. insufficient homelessness support; poor quality of housing; cost of renting privately). Participants also spoke generally about everyday life experiences (e.g. high cost of living, encounters with others). Opportunities for education, employment and skills development were also discussed by many; as was low mental health and the lack of support in this area. The survey gave insight into GaG service users, current provision of GaG services, as well as recommendations for additional services which users might find helpful.

Based on the findings, we developed several recommendations relating to employment, skills development and education; provision of mental health services; and support for individuals when they get a positive decision. We also think that funders and decision makers need to create more opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers to use their skills in volunteering and to include them in the decisions that impact on their lives. Participants stressed that they do not want to be passive people relying on state aid but rather contribute positively to society and make a better life for themselves and others.

Plain English Summary

Purpose of the Project

This research project was a collaboration between York St John University and the charity Give a Gift. We wanted to find out about the challenges that refugees and asylum seekers living in Leeds face, how they feel every day, and what suggestions or recommendations they have to improve their quality of life. We also wanted to find out what refugees and asylum seekers think about the services that the charity Give a Gift delivers.

Method

We developed a survey to ask refugees and asylum seekers who come to Give a Gift what they think about the charity. We also asked some demographic information, such as age, gender and legal status to find out who the service users are. 100 people completed the survey.

We also conducted World cafes. These were small discussion groups where participants discussed three questions about their everyday experiences; how they feel every day; and what they would say to policymakers and service providers how to best help them. Around 100 people participated in the World cafes.

Findings

We have found out that many people feel very low and depressed and that there is not much support available to help them. Participants spoke a lot about bad experiences with the immigration system, for example how long they have to wait for a decision; that they cannot work; and that it is difficult to go to University. Many also spoke about how difficult it was for families and children. Participants said they wished they were treated with more humanity, compassion and fairness by case workers and other people. They suggested to make services more accessible to include those individuals who do not speak English well. Participants also suggested to make it easier for degrees and qualifications to be recognised in the UK, and to support individuals to develop their skills. It was also said that it would be good to help individuals find accommodation after they get refugee status so they do not end up homeless.

Recommendations

Based on what participants have told us, we think that the situation for asylum seekers and refugees could be improved. For example, we think that asylum seekers should be allowed and supported to work. We also suggest that universities offer more opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers to go to university, for example through offering more scholarships. We also think that there needs to be more mental health support and that it needs to be culturally appropriate. We think it would be helpful to set up courses for asylum seekers which prepare them for what happens after they get refugee status and where they get information about paying bills, working and other everyday life aspects. We also think it would be good to set up a service to help individuals after they get a positive decision.

Finally, to funders and decision makers, we would say that asylum seekers and refugees need more opportunities to use their experience and skills in volunteering and to include them in the decisions that impact on their lives. Participants told us that they do not want to be passive people relying on state aid but rather contribute positively to society and make a better life for themselves and others.

Introduction and Background

Refugees and asylum seekers are often seen as objects, or passive recipients of support, rather than active and equal members in our communities. In everyday life, they often experience various forms of hostilities, discrimination and are silenced. To address inequalities in health and wellbeing, for example, individuals are inserted into traditional health and social care models, instead of being asked about their own perspectives on how to address their needs, or how to improve certain systems they are inserted into.

This was the starting point for a 10-month research project which was conducted as a collaboration between the Institute for Social Justice (ISJ) at York St John University (YSJU) and Give a Gift (GaG).

Give A Gift (GaG) is a registered charity and not for profit organisation. It aims to provide the support needed to relieve need among refugees, asylum seekers, the destitute BAME and disadvantaged communities. GaG works with grassroots communities, and has considerable reach and expertise in engaging with the harder to reach sections of society. GaG supports these communities through bridging the void between the assistance provided by the statutory agencies and the actual need of individuals and families. The aim is to reduce dependency considerably, and support individuals to develop the skills, knowledge and self-confidence to progress and better integrate into society.

GaG's mission is to involve communities at the outset in decision making, overcoming language and cultural barriers, work in partnership and take a bespoke flexible approach rather than working to patterns unfamiliar with the user group.

Established in 2020, the Institute for Social Justice (ISJ) works across York St John University (YSJU) to facilitate social justice research, projects and partnerships that help to pursue and promote a fairer society. One of the ways in which this is achieved is through Community Research Grants, where community organisations are invited to submit their proposal for a research project which addresses themes and issues which are important to them and which they would like help researching. This is based on the premise that it is important to ensure that research is relevant and impactful, as well as open and democratic.

Following the 2023/24 call for Community Research Grants, GaG submitted a proposal for a research project to explore how inequalities in health and wellbeing for refugees and asylum seekers can be addressed through involving them in service design and delivery. Working collaboratively with the ISJ and YSJU, the following research question was developed:

What role can refugees and asylum seekers play in improving service provision through a participatory approach and how can the co-design of services address health and wellbeing inequalities?

The purpose of the project was not only to evaluate and generate evidence on the services GaG currently provides but also to find out about the everyday experiences of refugees and asylum seekers, and their perspectives on how to address the current challenges they are facing.

The project had the following objectives:

1. to understand how health and wellbeing inequalities can be addressed effectively from the perspective of GaG service users compared to generic health and social care delivery models.
2. to determine gaps in GaG service provision and improve the quality of GaG service delivery and impact on beneficiaries.
3. to determine the impact of co-design and participatory methods on GaG service users, in particular regarding ownership, confidence and empowerment.
4. to promote the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in the design of services.

We approached this research understanding refugees and asylum seekers as agents. We took a bottom-up approach, involving refugees and asylum seekers early on in the research, including in its design. We wanted to put refugees' and asylum seekers' voices centre-stage and consult with a wide range of GaG service users. Overall, we consulted with more than 200 refugees and asylum seekers living in Leeds who use GaG and other services provided by various statutory and third sector organisations.

It necessary to listen to refugees and asylum seekers and their perspectives of how their needs can be best met

While there is increasing hostility towards forced migrants, there is also an imperative to address inequalities for minority populations which exist in many areas. We considered it necessary to listen to refugees and asylum seekers and their perspectives of how their needs can be best met. To our knowledge, no local support organisation in Leeds has taken this approach, and so this research is uniquely placed to provide valuable insight into the everyday experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in Leeds, and their perspectives on what can be done to improve quality of life during and after asylum.

In the next section, we will discuss the methods we used. This will be followed by a presentation of the findings and recommendations. We offer some concluding thoughts in the final section of this report.

There are many unique individual circumstances which are difficult to summarise in tables and categorise

While many experiences participants in this research spoke about are similar, there are also many unique individual circumstances which are difficult to summarise in tables and categorise. Throughout this report, we will therefore present several case studies of individuals who have shared their stories with us during this research.

Methodology

The methodology we used was informed by a participatory approach; that is, we involved refugees and asylum seekers from the beginning in different aspects of this research. We did this through working with three community researchers who were part of the project team in addition to the researcher from YSJU and staff from Give a Gift, Community researchers had lived experience of refuge and asylum, and were volunteers at Give a Gift. They contributed to shaping the methodology, as well as the survey design and the questions for the World cafes; facilitated data collection; and were consulted during analysis and the writing of this report.

To collect feedback about Give a Gift services and determine the gaps in their service provision, we administered a survey among Give a Gift service users (see Appendix). These were completed face-to-face or via telephone, facilitated by Give a Gift staff who phoned their service users. Surveys were translated into Arabic, Kurdish and Urdu. 100 surveys were completed and inputted into Qualtrics where Crosstabs IQ was used to analyse data.

To further explore the health and wellbeing challenges for refugees and asylum seekers, we also conducted World cafes. We adapted the method to ensure that it worked better for participants in this research. For example, instead of participants switching between tables and different questions, they stayed at the same table with the same facilitator, discussing three different questions in three discussion rounds. This helped minimise language difficulties and trust issues between participants who did not know each other, and the facilitator. Notes were taken in English by the facilitator, and the entire research team facilitated the World Cafes which were conducted in different languages (Arabic, Kurdish, English and Urdu). The three questions participants discussed were:

1. What has been your experience with services in the UK?
2. How has your experience as a refugee/asylum seeker in the UK affected how you feel every day? Can you tell us about any bad experiences?
3. What advice would you give to policymakers and service providers to better support refugees/asylum seekers in the UK?



Participants at the World cafés were both asylum seekers and refugees. In total, we conducted four World cafes, one of which was a women's only group. Around 100 participants in total participated in the World Cafes.

Notes from the World café were categorised and analysed thematically.

Findings

In this section, we present findings from the World cafes and survey we administered with GaG service users.

World cafes

1. Experiences with services

| Service | Refugee | Asylum Seeker | What |
|--|---------|---------------|---|
| Immigration Services | | | |
| Home Office | | x | Prolonged waiting periods for a decision on a claim asylum support rates not enough; some individuals are left without any support; too many rule changes; inconsistent system |
| | x | | Long wait for BRP cards; high cost for citizenship application |
| MEARS | | x | Lack of help with repairs in accommodation |
| Migrant Help | | x | Long waits for simple complaints; quick answer time on the phone (15 mins) |
| Health Services | | | |
| NHS/GP | x | x | Difficult getting appointments; insufficient treatment – often given painkillers rather than finding the source of the pain; lack of interpreters at appointments |
| Mental Health Service | x | x | Long waiting lists; complicated form for referrals |
| Dentist | x | x | Long waiting lists and no appointments available; some have not seen dentist in years; NHS patients treated unfavourably |
| Local services and charities in Leeds | | | |
| Manuel Bravo | | x | Difficult getting an appointment; they pass people on instead of helping |
| CAB | x | x | Appointment time not long enough; make referrals to different organisations; do not solve problem |
| PAFRAS | x | x | give a lot of help and make life easier; provide emotional and practical support |
| Solace | x | x | provide help and support; good counselling service |
| Red Cross | x | x | differential treatment of different nationalities |
| Give a Gift | x | x | never refuse to help |
| Leeds City Council (note: comments related mostly to housing; these are captured below) | x | | Do not provide enough support with bidding process |
| Housing and Living | | | |
| Utility companies | x | | Cost of living |
| Housing and Homelessness support services | x | | Long waiting lists for council housing; council and private rented both poor quality; private landlords do not care about unsafe living conditions; private rent very expensive; complicated guarantor process is barrier to renting privately; homelessness after refugee status common; disappointment about lack of help in situations of homelessness |
| Transport services | x | x | High prices; drivers and passengers racist; drivers don't always stop; passengers block seats with bags |
| College/education | x | x | College oversubscribed; university courses expensive |
| Other | x | x | Differential treatment compared to other migrants from different nationalities; third sector most helpful |

Table 1: Experiences with services

Table 1 provides a summary of participants' experiences with different services. These related to the immigration system, notably Home Office rules and regulations, as well as organisations operating within this, such as Migrant help and Mears.

Some individuals are left without any support. There are too many rule changes and the system is inconsistent.

The health system and its shortcomings were also addressed widely, such as the availability of dentist or GP appointments. Interpreters were often not present during appointments which made it difficult to communicate with health care professionals. In addition, participants felt as though GPs did not take enough time to find the source of symptoms, such as pain, and instead provided blanket recommendations to use painkillers. A serious lack of mental health support was also mentioned.

Participants also discussed other services and charities in Leeds. These were mostly talked about positively; however, some participants mentioned being passed around different services instead of being helped. Some participants discussed their experiences of being treated differently to other nationalities when seeking

support. Experiences made during interactions with Leeds City Council were discussed, notably housing and homelessness support where a lack of help to find housing, as well as the high cost of renting privately and the poor quality of the housing available was spoken about widely. Relating to that was the cost of living which many participants found difficult as they spoke about unaffordable utility and high food prices.

Other everyday experiences which were discussed related to public transport, which was unaffordable to many participants, or experiences of racism from drivers and passengers. Likewise, education opportunities were experienced negatively, as participants mentioned that colleges were oversubscribed, and university courses expensive. This left little opportunity for continuing education and developing skills.

Bus drivers and passengers can be racist and drivers don't always stop.

2. How has your experience as a refugee/asylum seeker in the UK affected how you feel every day? Can you tell us about any bad experiences?



Figure 1: Everyday feelings word cloud

Figure 1 shows a word cloud, visualising participants' answers to the question how they felt everyday and what bad experiences they have in their everyday lives. The bigger the word is written, the more often it was mentioned.

People feel very low and depressed and that there is not much support available to help them.

Users described their situation as difficult, one where they needed to fight every day (for survival).

Many participants spoke about how low, depressed and anxious they felt a lot of the time. During one World café, for example, a facilitator asked participants whether anyone in their group felt happy, and no one answered positively to this. Feelings akin to low mental health were due to the uncertainty of the asylum process generally, or certain restrictions individuals

face, such as limits to furthering education and skills, or in relation to work which was accompanied by feelings of uselessness and anger. Many participants spoke about how they felt stressed and overwhelmed due to their circumstances of being an asylum seeker in the UK and described their situation as difficult, one where they needed to fight every day. For refugees, everyday stressors related to the cost of living more generally; as well as poor housing conditions and experiences of homelessness after receiving a positive decision.

Individuals are being passed around different services instead of being helped.

Negative experiences were often exacerbated for families, single parents or individuals with health conditions who felt they were not addressed in the UK. Being an asylum seeker made individuals feel different as they did not have the same opportunities as others around them. For example, a father was not able to send his son on a school trip abroad because they were not allowed to leave the country while their case was processed.

Case Study: The M. Family's Asylum Journey in the UK

The M. family fled their home country in 2016 due to the ongoing civil war and threats to their lives. The family consists of K. the father, N., the mother, and their four children. They arrived in the UK in early 2016 and applied for asylum, seeking safety and a new beginning. However, their journey towards securing asylum has been fraught with delays and uncertainties. For over eight years, the M. family has been awaiting a decision on their asylum application. This prolonged waiting period has left them in a state of limbo, unable to make long-term plans for their future. The uncertainty surrounding their legal status has had a significant impact on various aspects of their lives, particularly their health and economic situation.

The stress and anxiety associated with the prolonged asylum process have taken a toll on the family's mental and physical health. As the primary breadwinner, K. has been particularly affected by the inability to work legally. The stress of being unable to provide for his family has led to depression and anxiety. He has also developed diabetes which has been exacerbated by the constant stress and uncertainty. K., who was a Professional Businessman, has been unable to utilise his skills and contribute to society. The inability to work has not only impacted their financial situation but also his sense of self-worth and identity.

N. has struggled with depression, compounded by the isolation and the trauma of fleeing their home country. The children have faced significant challenges as well. A., one of the eldest, has had difficulties in pursuing onto further education as he cannot afford the £17,000 fee, they are charging international students. He has shown signs of anxiety and behavioural issues, while the youngest, has struggled with nightmares and separation anxiety.

Despite these challenges, the support from a local charity, Give A Gift, has provided a lifeline for the M. family. Give A Gift has offered counselling services, which have been crucial in helping the family cope with the mental health challenges they face. The charity has facilitated social activities and community events, helping the family build a support network. These activities have been particularly beneficial for the children, who have made friends and feel more integrated into their community. Give A Gift has provided financial assistance for essential needs, such as food, clothing, and school supplies. This support has alleviated some of the financial pressure on the family, allowing them to live with a bit more dignity and stability.

The M. family's eight-year wait for an asylum decision in the UK highlights the detrimental impact of prolonged asylum processes on refugees' health and economic stability. The inability to work legally has compounded these challenges, leading to significant stress and hardship. The M. family's story underscores the importance of timely asylum decisions and the critical role of community support in the lives of refugees.

3. What advice would you give to policymakers and service providers to better support refugees/asylum seekers in the UK?

Humanise people: Treat people not as numbers and files.
Be more welcoming; listen to asylum seekers; be compassionate

| | |
|--|---|
| Treatment of people in the asylum system | Humanise people: Treat people not as numbers and files; young asylum seekers: show interest in them instead of disappointing them with no future; have more empathy when dealing with cases; be more welcoming; listen to asylum seekers; be compassionate and prioritise people with health conditions; local authorities don't treat people equally and discriminate; be fair and look properly at the evidence provided; talk in a nice way; be kind to people; |
| HO/Immigration processes and rules | Give permission to work; citizenship for newborn; decrease fees for citizenship application; cancel Life in the UK Test – British people don't even know the answers; let asylum seekers be independent: give permission to work for asylum seekers and let asylum seekers drive and take their children to school; stop wasting government money through the Ruanda scheme; speed up decision making; asylum seekers are being pushed into illegal activities due to the rules; rules are always changing – confusing; implement consistent decision making for cases; make it easier to people to bring their families from war zones; let people choose where they want to live during asylum process; |
| Cost of Living | Bills too high and benefits too low; financial support for asylum seekers is not enough to provide for daily living expenses; |
| Health and health system | Increase availability of dentists; provide interpreters in health services; |
| Services | Make services accessible for people with no English; |
| Benefits system | Make it worthwhile for people to work; system encourages lysing and manipulating; |
| Education, employment and skills development | Provide asylum seekers with opportunities for further education; make it easier to recognise previous qualifications and degrees; we want to work; support those in vulnerable situations with skills development – for example women who stay at home; |
| Transition period | Help people to find accommodation after they get refugee status |

Table 2: Advice to policymakers

Suggestions about how to improve the situation of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK were plenty. Many participants addressed the treatment of individuals in the asylum system, and wished that their humanity was more recognised by outsiders and those who handle their cases at the Home Office. Empathy, compassion and regard of individuals' stories and pasts should be at the heart of how cases are dealt with, as well as fairness and equal treatment of all individuals.

Participants said they wished they were treated with more humanity, compassion and fairness by case workers and other people

We need more opportunities to use our experience and skills in volunteering and to include us in the decisions that impact on our lives

We do not want to be passive people relying on state aid but rather contribute positively to society and make a better life for ourselves and others.

Comments were also made on the availability of dentists, which was not enough, as well as the provision of interpreters at GP appointments. The latter also relates to the suggestion to make services more accessible to include those individuals who do not speak English well.

Participants also suggested to make it easier for degrees and qualifications to be recognised in the UK, as well as to support individuals to develop their skills, in particular those who are vulnerable and often remain invisible, such as women who look after children. In addition, helping individuals to find accommodation after they get refugee status was suggested to improve support for forced migrants.

Cancel Life in the UK Test – British people don't even know the answers.

Case Study: From Refugee to Resilience – The Journey of H.

H., a 54-year-old woman from Palestine, fled her war-torn homeland in 2015. Leaving behind a life of constant danger, she embarked on a perilous journey to the UK, seeking safety and a fresh start. With limited English and no professional qualifications recognised in the UK, H. faced significant challenges upon arrival.

Upon arriving in the UK, H. was granted Asylum status and allocated temporary NASS (National Asylum Support Service) accommodation in Leeds. She was introduced to a local charity, Give A Gift, which provided immediate support. The charity helped her navigate the complex asylum system, secure basic necessities such as clothing, travel expenses, volunteering and an opportunity to meet new people and offered her a sense of community and belonging in an unfamiliar environment.

Give A Gift provided H. with support to find stable and safe accommodation and enrolling her in English language courses to improve her communication skills. She achieved English GCSE & Maths GCSE grade 7. As H.'s English improved, she expressed a desire to give back to the community that supported her and began volunteering with Give A Gift. She offered help to other newly arrived seeking Asylum/refugees, drawing from her own experiences to provide empathy and guidance.

Through volunteering, H. gained new skills and developed her confidence and self-esteem by contributing positively to society. Her perseverance paid off when she secured a part time job in another partner organisation within the Voluntary community sector. Her new job provided financial Independence, and over the next few years, H.'s life underwent a significant transformation. She continued to work within the third sector, eventually being promoted to a Project Worker due to her dedication and hard work. H. also pursued further education, obtaining a level 3 Interpreting and an IT qualification in function and skills.

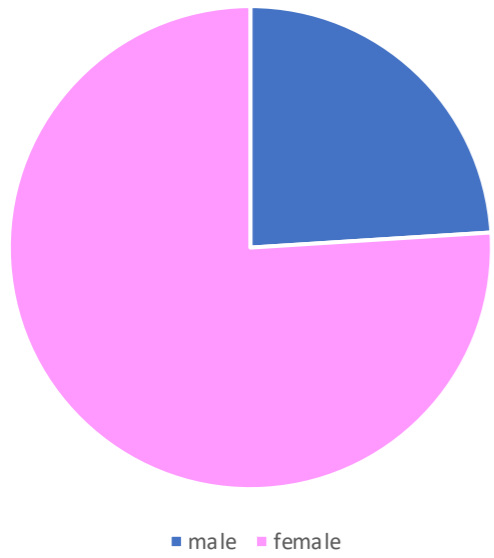
H. received the Leeds Compassionate City Award - Unsung Hero of the Year and Volunteer of the Year Award with the Hamara Community and Yorkshire Women's Volunteer award 2020.

Her journey from a refugee to a community leader positively impacted her husband and son, fostering emotional stability, economic independence, social integration, and future aspirations. Their collective success story highlights the importance of comprehensive support systems and the resilience of the human spirit in overcoming adversity.

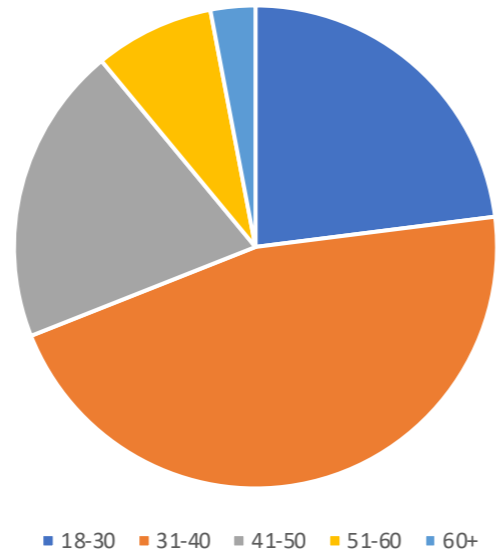
H.'s story is a testament to the transformative power of support, resilience, and the human spirit. With the help of Give A Gift, she not only rebuilt her life but also became a beacon of hope and inspiration for others in similar circumstances. H.'s journey from a vulnerable refugee to a community leader showcases the profound impact that targeted support and opportunities can have on the lives of displaced individuals.

Survey

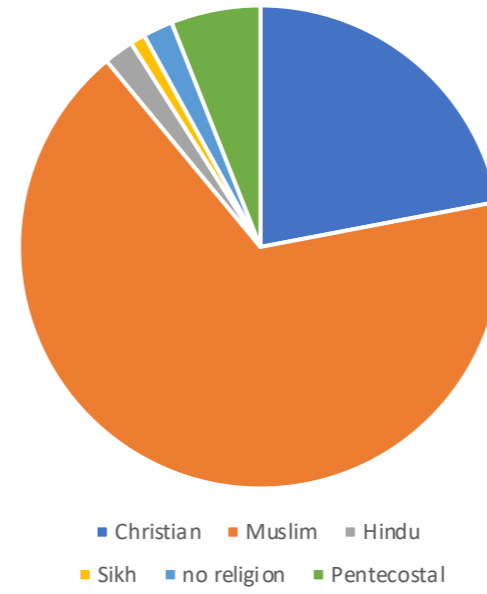
Gender



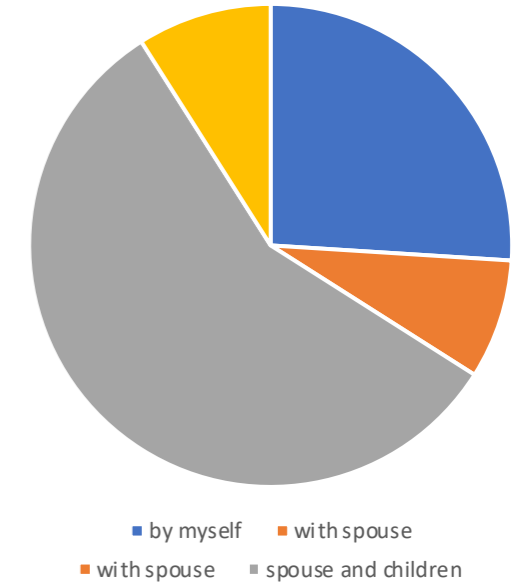
Age group



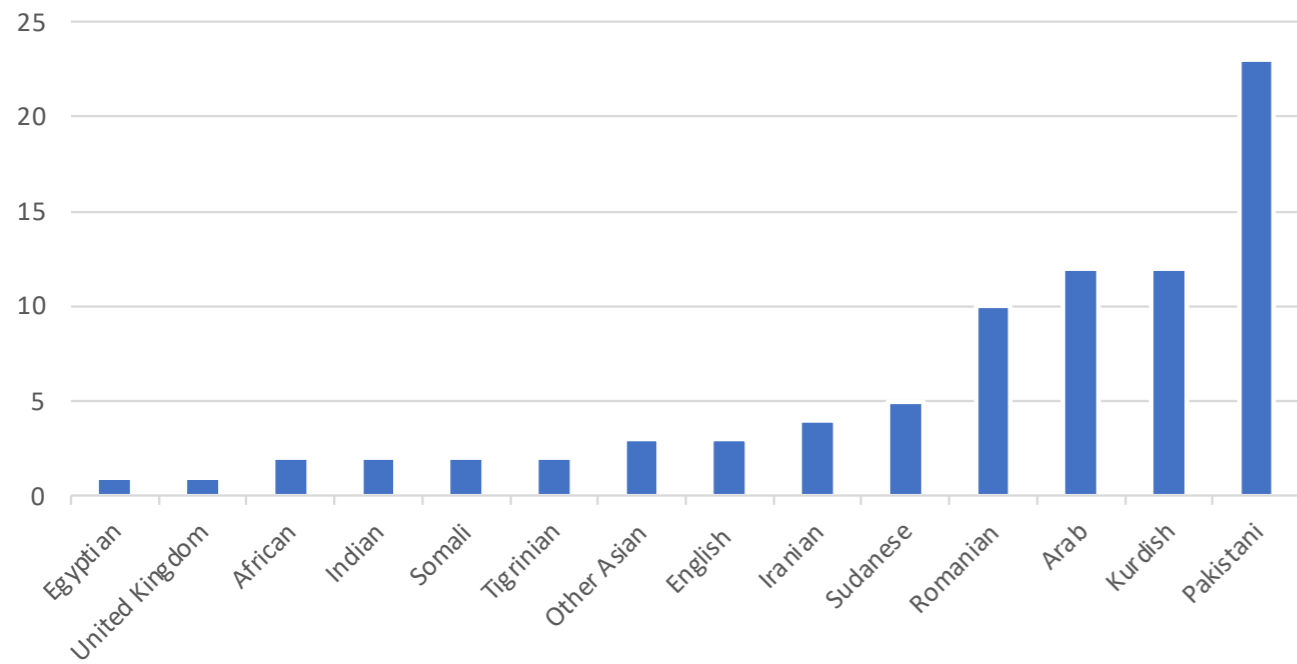
Faith



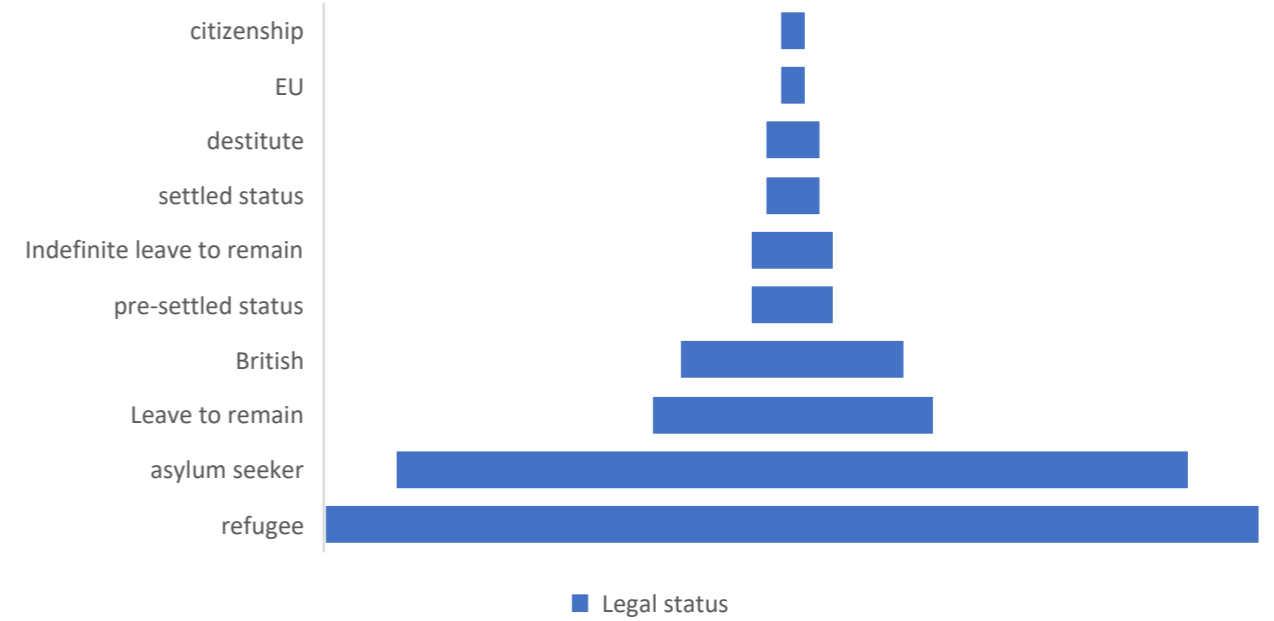
Who are you in the UK with?



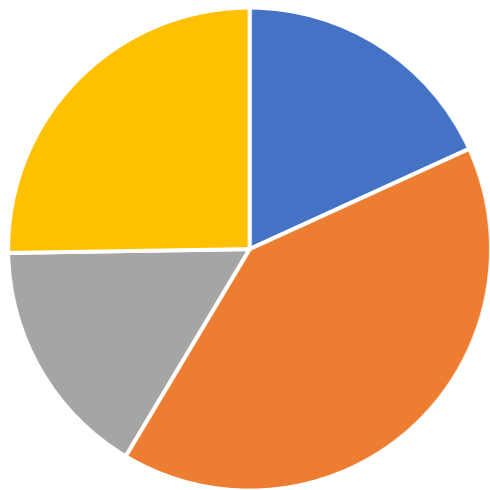
Ethnicity



Legal status

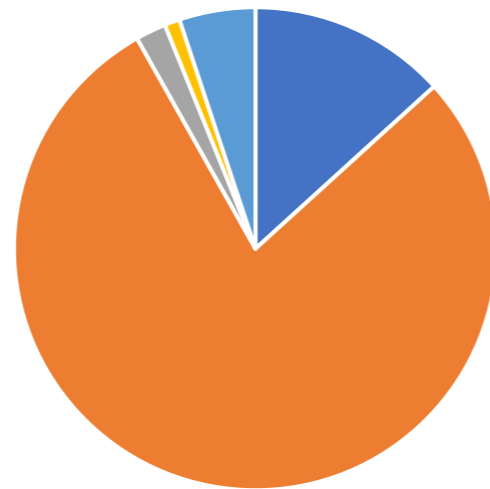


How long have you been coming to GaG



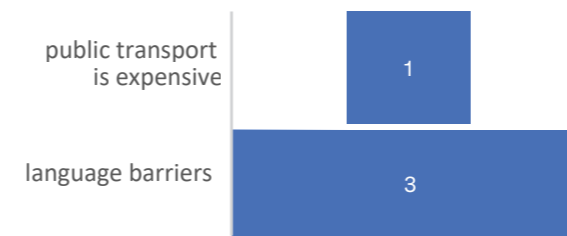
■ less than 6 months ■ less than 1 year
■ less than 2 years ■ more than 2 years

How often do you come to GaG?



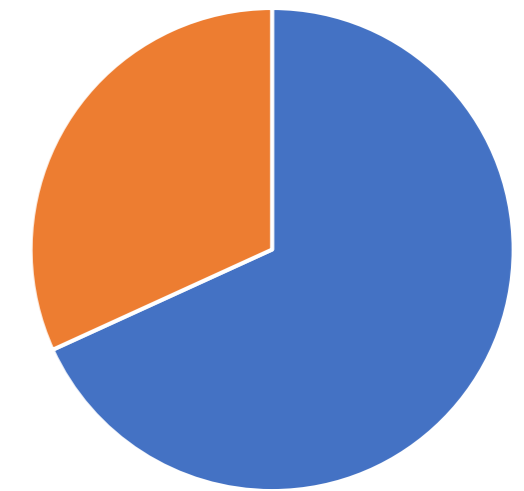
■ multiple times a week ■ once a week
■ once a month ■ only when I need help

Why do you NOT come to Give a Gift?



Other answers include: busy; childcare responsibilities, living in hotel far away

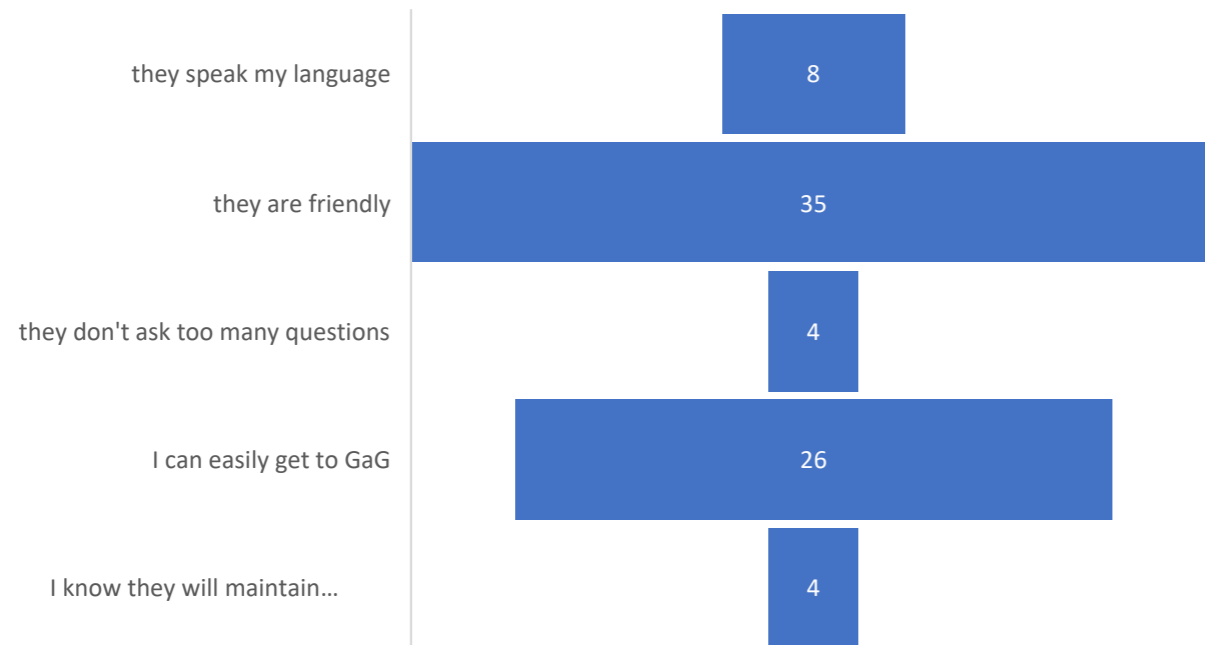
How did you find out about GaG?



■ friend ■ another service in Leeds ■ other sources

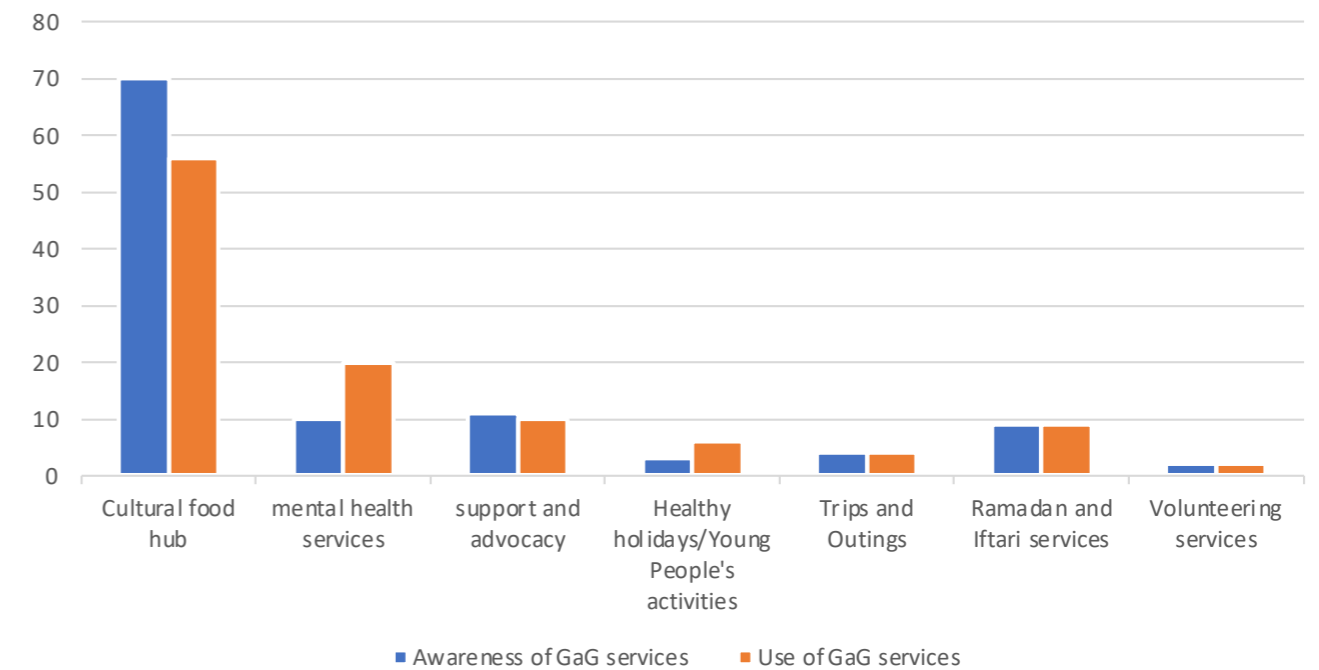
Other answers include: came to Hana's group, college, imam from mosque, in the news, children's school

Why do you come to Give a Gift and not another service?

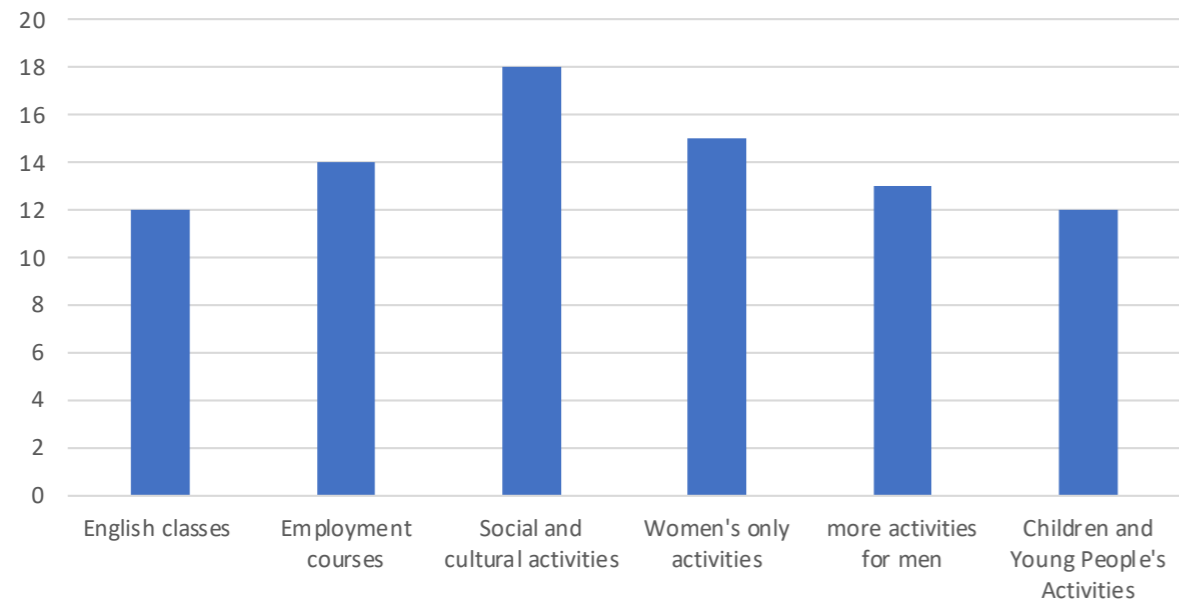


Other answers included: for the vouchers, regular sessions set out, they give me lots of good quality food, very helpful

Give a Gift services - Awareness and Use

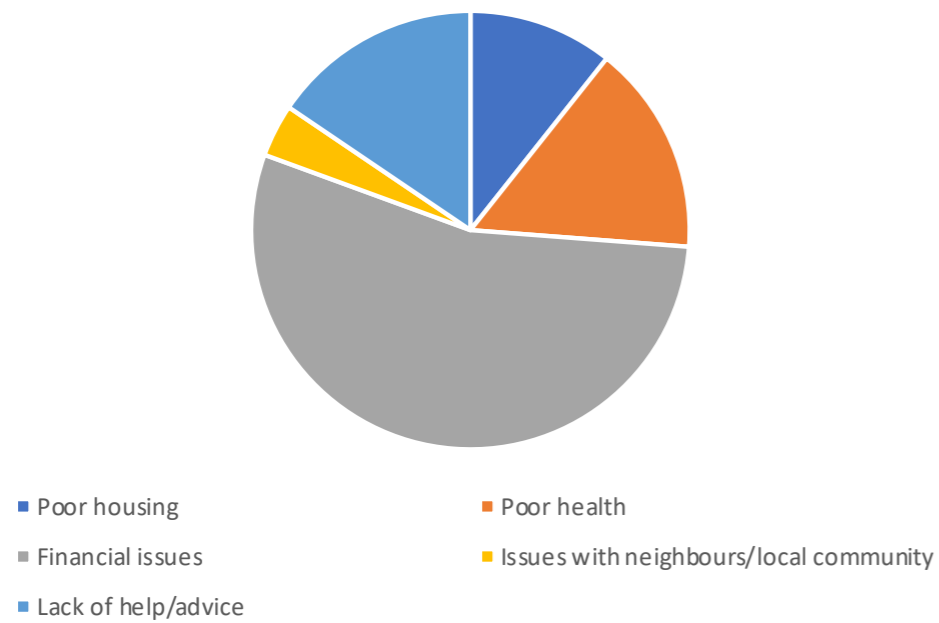


Suggestions for additional activities



Other answers include: sewing classes, arts and crafts, Ramadan activities, counselling sessions, more food, more trips

These things have a negative impact on my quality of life



Other answers included: stuck in hotel with no money; poor mental health

Give a Gift help my whole life, I have no family here and Give a Gift made me feel like I have them as my family.

The support has raised confidence, I have made friends and now have support, and learned from others on how to express yourself.

GaG have been there since day 1, they have truly changed my life, I have only ever volunteered for GaG because they support me so much

The vouchers and support help me feel like a person and help with my respect

I would like to work and become independent, maybe need empowerment courses in a mix of languages – I am happy to do any job.

Figure 2: Other comments left by participants

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this report, we have presented findings from a collaborative research project. Our approach was user-led and participatory, and in addition to the core research team, we involved three community researchers with lived experience of asylum and refuge in the UK to inform the research design and methods. They also worked as co-investigators in the research.

Using World cafes and a survey, we were able to capture the perspectives of refugees and asylum seekers living in Leeds, and get insight into their experiences and feelings, and elicit their suggestions on how to better provide support. This report has covered how the current environment restricts the ability of asylum

seekers and refugees to become actively involved in decision making structures. By more pro-actively involving users, we are aware this fosters a feeling of civic responsibility and helps mitigate feelings of isolation. Engaging with public decision-making can further improve refugees' sense of self-worth by giving them a voice. In addition to giving refugees the chance to form relationships with other members of their community, this can boost confidence and help to build relationships with other individuals in their community.

Based on the findings and analysis of data, we have developed the following recommendations:

- to funders and decision-making bodies:

- Investment should fund community projects and peer support activities for refugees and asylum seekers that create platforms for interaction with other communities. This should give the target group a say in the formulation of how these activities are developed and delivered.
- Enable refugee and asylum seeker voices to be better heard through developing community engagement and involving the development of peer ambassador programmes.
- Support activities that matter to the refugee and asylum seeker community and acknowledge that with the right support, they can play a key role in helping shape the future of their communities.
- Assist asylum seekers and refugees to overcome barriers in participating in decision making structures through community initiatives and volunteering schemes that are designed and delivered in a way that is accessible to asylum seekers and refugees.
- Use volunteering schemes to utilise the significant skillset and experience prevalent in the asylum seeker and refugee community and recognise that they are often best placed to deliver community-based interventions.
- Recognise that culturally sensitive service provision can help to tackle a range of inequalities, create resilient communities, reduce loneliness and encourage the formation of social connections.
- Invest in creating programmes that are accepting of a different cultural approach and use this diversity to enable refugees and asylum seekers to contribute to society, by initiating activities that support connections between disparate groups of people.

- on a national level, we suggest the following:

Employment and skills development.

Participants discussed widely that they felt useless and as if they were wasting their time due to regulations around working for asylum seekers. Participants want to contribute and not be reliant on state support. Especially those individuals who are stuck in the system for multiple years risk deskilling which puts individuals in an unfavourable condition once they get refugee status. The ban on working for asylum seekers should be lifted and anchor organisations should try and encourage individuals to work.

- Recognition of Qualifications and Skills. Establish a streamlined process for recognising foreign qualifications and credentials, allowing refugees and asylum seekers to leverage their existing skills and education.
- Provide vocational training programs that align with the needs of the job market, including apprenticeships and on-the-job training opportunities.
- Offer career counselling and mentorship programs to help refugees and asylum seekers understand the UK job market, prepare for job searches, and develop their careers.
- Provide cultural sensitivity training for all employees to foster understanding and respect for the diverse backgrounds of refugee colleagues.
- Develop community programmes that support the social and professional integration of refugees and asylum seekers, including networking events and business incubator
- Educate employers about the benefits of hiring refugees and asylum seekers, addressing potential misconceptions and highlighting success stories.

Education.

Participants appreciated the opportunity to go to College and study. However, beyond this, there are limited opportunities for individuals to further their education. Sanctuary scholarships exist; however, they are very limited. We suggest that universities do more to recognise the circumstances of asylum seekers and refugees and offer more opportunities for forced migrants to attend university, for example through increasing the number of scholarships.

- Ensure that refugee and asylum seeker children can enrol in schools immediately upon arrival, regardless of their legal status or documentation.
- Allocate additional funding to schools with high numbers of refugee and asylum seeker students to support their integration and educational needs.
- Offer training for teachers and school staff on cultural sensitivity and the specific experiences of refugee and asylum seeker students to create an inclusive and supportive school environment.
- Develop and implement a curriculum that is inclusive of diverse cultures and histories, fostering a sense of belonging and respect among all students.
- Provide access to mental health and psychosocial support services within schools to address the trauma and emotional needs of refugee and asylum seeker children.
- Create safe and supportive spaces within schools where students can express their feelings and experiences without fear of stigma or discrimination.
- Employ community liaisons who can facilitate communication between schools and refugee families, addressing any concerns and promoting parental involvement.
- Develop catch-up programmes for children who have missed significant schooling due to displacement, ensuring they can attain the educational level appropriate for their age.

Mental health.

Participants often spoke about serious mental health problems and the lack of support that is available. Mental health support should be increased, and it is important that any provision is culturally appropriate.

Trauma-informed practices recognise that many people bring traumatic past experiences to their interactions with public or other services. A trauma-informed approach means that staff respond to individuals' experiences by listening to and valuing people's stories by creating safe spaces to talk, by showing an understanding of the traumas people have experienced, and by responding to their needs without creating new traumas.

- Implement mandatory mental health screenings upon arrival and at regular intervals thereafter. This ensures timely identification of mental health issues and allows for early intervention.
- Train healthcare providers in trauma-informed care practices to appropriately address the complex needs of refugees and asylum seekers who have experienced significant trauma.
- Provide access to mental health services that specialise in trauma and culturally sensitive care, including counselling, therapy, and psychiatric services.
- Integrate mental health support within the broader framework of asylum processing, ensuring that mental health care is not seen as an isolated service but part of the holistic support system for asylum seekers.
- Ensure all staff working with refugees and asylum seekers receive training in cultural competency to understand and respect diverse backgrounds and experiences.
- Deliver training to staff across community public services which promotes anti-discriminatory attitudes towards asylum seekers and refugees.

-on a local level, we suggest the following:

• Transition 'service'.

We suggest establishing a transition service, where individuals who have been given a positive decision are referred to. This should be multidisciplinary and multiagency work (e.g. DWP, housing, utilities etc) to help individuals making the transition from asylum seeker to refugee.

• Leave to Remain course.

We also suggest running courses which prepare individuals for what happens after they get refugee status. We found that participants were ill-prepared for the fast changes in their circumstances brought about by getting refugee status. A course would make the transition easier and prepare individuals for the reality of life in the UK.

Appendix

Give a Gift - Service Feedback

This survey is conducted by Give a Gift and York St. John University. The purpose of the survey is to find out about your opinion of Give a Gift services. The survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

PARTICIPATION & RISKS

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may refuse to take part or exit the survey at any time without penalty. You may skip any question you do not wish to answer for any reason. Some of the survey questions ask about your experiences and engagement with Give a Gift and may be distressing to you.

ANONYMITY & CONFIDENTIALITY

Your responses will be anonymous, and no identifiable information will be collected. You will be asked about your age at the start of the survey. Your survey answers will be stored initially with Qualtrics in a password protected electronic format. Data will later be downloaded and stored on a password protected OneDrive file on the York St John University server. Results from this survey will be used to evaluate Give a Gift's services and may be used in reports or disseminated in academic publications.

CONTACT

If you have further questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, contact Raphaela Berding-Barwick (r.berding@yorks.j.ac.uk).

ELECTRONIC CONSENT

By continuing the survey you indicate that

- You have read the above information
- You voluntarily agree to participate
- You are 18 years of age or older

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary / third gender
- Prefer not to say

What is your age group?

- 18-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- 60+

What is your ethnicity?

- Arab
- African
- Bangladeshi
- Pakistani
- Other Asian
- Other:

What is your faith?

- Christian
- Muslim
- Hindu
- Sikh
- Other:

Who are you in the UK with?

- I am by myself
- I am with my wife
- I am with my wife/husband and children
- I am a single parent

What is your status?

- Refugee
- Asylum Seeker
- Destitute
- Other

How long have you been coming to Give a Gift?

- less than 6 months
- less than a year
- less than two years
- more than two years

How often do you come to Give a Gift?

- multiple times a week
- once a week
- once every two weeks
- once a month
- only when I need help

Why do you come to Give a Gift and not to other organisations in Leeds?

- They speak my language.
- They are friendly.
- They don't ask many questions.
- I can easily get to Give a Gift.
- I know they will maintain confidentiality.
- I can access multiple services.
- They are culturally and religiously sensitive.
- Other

If you are NOT coming to Give a Gift - what prevents you from going?

- It is difficult to get there.
- It is too expensive to take public transport.
- There are language barriers.
- n/a
- Other:

How did you find out about Give a Gift?

- friend
- another service in Leeds
- Other

Which of the following Give a Gift services are you aware of?

- Cultural food hub
- Mental health services
- Support and advocacy (help)
- Healthy holidays/Young People's Activities
- Trips and Outings
- Ramadan and Iftari Services
- Volunteering Services

Which of the following Give a Gift services do you use?

- Cultural food hub
- Mental health services
- Support and advocacy (help)
- Health holidays/Young People's Activities
- Trips and Outings
- Ramadan and Iftari Services
- Volunteering Services

In addition to the services Give a Gift are offering, what else would you find helpful?

- English classes
- Employment courses
- Social and Cultural Activities
- Women's only activities
- More activities for men
- Children and Young People's Activities
- Other

Which of the following have a negative impact on your quality of life?

- Poor housing
- Poor health
- Financial issues
- Issues with neighbours/local community
- Lack of help and advice
- Other

Can you describe any personal achievements or milestones Give a Gift have helped you reach since arriving in the UK?

Please share any additional comments, suggestions or feedback about Give a Gift.



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