

ANNUAL REPORT

2009 - 2010

**REFUGEE INTEGRATION &
EMPLOYMENT SERVICE (RIES)**

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Introduction

The period covered is from 01/03/2009 - 31/03/2010.

Author Glyn Parry, Project/Office Manager Cardiff Refugee Services.

In March 2009 a new project started in SOVA Wales based in Cardiff - 'Refugee Integration & Employment Service' (RIES). This project is funded by the Home Office (UK Border Immigration Agency) for 2 years. The project requirement is to provide services to former asylum seekers who have been granted leave to remain through the 'New Asylum Model', who have new refugee status and have been dispersed in Wales.

The service is provided in the four designated dispersal areas for refugees in Wales - Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham. The RIES project is under the umbrella of the Welsh Refugee Council (WRC) and SOVA have a Service Level Agreement with the WRC, as do other partners in the project, which include the Local Authority/Red Cross and Displaced Persons in Action (DPIA) in the dispersal areas. The partners meet with the Welsh Refugee Council bi monthly.

The service the partners provide is:

- A general advice and support service related to accommodation and benefit system.
- An employment advice service.
- A mentoring service.

Each partner has a specific responsibility in the provision of the service. The Local Authority/Red Cross has responsibility for providing advice and support regarding accommodation and the benefit system; the DPIA have responsibility for providing an employment advice service. SOVA has responsibility for providing a mentoring service.

It is compulsory for a new refugee to access the services provided by the Local Authority/Red Cross and the DPIA. However there is no requirement for new refugees to access the mentoring service offered by SOVA. It is a voluntary relationship, which has implications for funding of the project, which is based on target outcomes.

The project is staffed by one Support Officer who has responsibility for matching the refugees with a volunteer and supporting the volunteers in the four dispersal areas.

Objectives and targets for RIES

The aims of the RIES project are:

- To build relationships between UK citizens and refugees so that they can share cultural understanding, helping refugees to develop their confidence, communication skills and employability.
- To increase public awareness of the contribution that refugees make to the community by promoting positive images in the media.

The objectives of the partners in the project are:

- To provide a consistent approach to advice and support by all agencies in the partnership delivering the service to refugees in the project.
- That all partners should make reasonable efforts to promote the positives and counter the negatives surrounding asylum and refugee issues.
- To help improve awareness and foster social cohesion in Wales.
- That every new refugee in Wales be matched with a mentor within a month of being referred by the Welsh Refugee Council.
- That 50% of income generated be linked to the refugee maintaining a relationship with the mentor for a period of six months.

Achievements for the period

Although refugees are diverse, they also share some common experiences – fleeing from their homeland, losing contact with family members or friends, adapting to a new way of life in a foreign country.

The aim of the mentoring relationship is to help this adaptation to a new way of life. Its aim is to facilitate the integration of refugees into British society, build bridges between communities and promote positive images of refugees in the media. The mentoring relationship is important to help new refugees to build new networks, friendships and self-confidence. It achieves this by focusing on a range of goals of the refugees. These may be around familiarization with the local community, trips to museums and libraries, opportunities to develop language skills etc. It contributes to refugees taking control of their lives and feeling able to use their skills, knowledge and culture in British society, thus paving the way to a more accepting, multi-cultural and diverse society.

The volunteers have mentored 126 refugees from 23 different countries.

See Appendices for breakdown of refugees and volunteers participating in the project.

It may seem obvious: a refugee is someone who is fleeing serious danger back home such as war, political persecution, famine, economic crises or natural disasters. Under international law, however, the word refugee has a very precise meaning. It describes someone who is forced to flee home and country because of founded fear of persecution, escapes to another country and claims asylum. This is legally recognized under international protection, the Vienna Accord 1951. After an asylum seeker presents their case for asylum the person has no say to which part of the UK they may be sent. Cousins and extended relatives may find themselves far apart from one another.

Once it has been determined positively that the case is genuine the asylum seeker has refugee status: they are then entitled to full British status and are free to move wherever they wish to go in the UK without restriction. This process has funding implications for the project as if they move immediately before being matched with a mentor SOVA will not receive any money.

The majority of refugees who are part of the RIES project have sought sanctuary in the UK as a result of war. For example a substantial number of refugees from Eritrea are male and former soldiers fleeing from the conflict in that country. Most refugees from the conflict in Sri Lanka are from the professional classes such as teachers, journalists and photographers and are from the Tamil community from the north of Sri Lanka.

It is crucial for refugees to quickly understand Basic English to survive in the UK. Unfortunately in Wales there is a waiting list for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes; and to respond to this shortage SOVA applied for European funding to provide 'Survival English' classes for refugees. However, just as the annual report was nearing completion we have been informed that we were unsuccessful in our European funding application. We are exploring other ways of providing these vital classes, as lack of Basic English can cause feelings of isolation, fear and a lack of confidence in local culture and official systems.

Sport is one way of helping towards integration and inclusion. In Cardiff there is a multi cultural five-a-side league and with the support of the Welsh Refugee Council we are hoping to recruit refugees to form a team to play in the league.

All RIES clients are refugees who have been granted leave to remain under the New Asylum Model which means that the majority of the clients have not been in the UK for a long Time.

This is one of the main challenges; that the mentor is dealing with a client who certainly still lives under the cultural shock and language barriers of recent arrival.

The main second challenge is that the client may not be in a position to determine their goals and objectives, since he or she still lives in limbo during this transitional period of their lives ; the journey from being an asylum seeker to a new settled person. There are issues regarding benefits - national insurance - housing - schools for the children - ESOL classes - knowing the town or city where they live.

Liaising is crucial to try to ensure an effective service is provided, For example; Asylum Reception Team, Welsh Refugee Council, Women Connect First, Displaced People in Action, Swansea Bay Race Equality Council, Voluntary Action Cardiff, Red Cross Newport, Asylum Seeker and Refugee Team, Regeneration and Housing Department City & County of Swansea,

Despite all these challenges SOVA mentors have always been very successful in befriending the new comers, guiding and empowering the clients, gaining their confidence and able to provide the needed support to achieve the objectives and goals of the clients in fields of education, employment and integration.

Volunteers

Thirty six active volunteers have been involved in the RIES project in the four areas - 28 in Cardiff, 3 in Newport, 2 in Swansea and 3 in Wrexham, in total 36 active volunteers. Their training has followed OCN Level 2 Core mentoring skills and has included the RIES induction for volunteer mentors.

Volunteer Case Example

“When we first met J lacked confidence and she could not talk to me, not only because of the language barrier but because of her fear of communicating with others. This issue I felt we could work on together and she was very cooperative. I started helping her to communicate with others by encouraging her by accompanying her to shops but enabling her to communicate with the sale assistants. This approach has proved to be successful and J now speaks well and is much more confident. I helped

her to write job applications and she has now applied for several jobs although without success.

Through my friends and connections J successfully applied to a restaurant as a waitress. The Manager of the restaurant says J works very hard and they are very pleased with her.

At our last meeting J asked me if we can remain friends. I was very happy to hear that from her because it gave me a feeling that I had had an input in her life”.

Refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo

“Before I met Z I was scared to speak to people because of my language problems and after I met her I have more confidence and every where I go I can speak and express myself. One day I went to hospital and they offered me an interpreter and I refused because I was confident enough. Z helped me to give my C.V., meet the people and explain what I feel to the people. Today I find a new job and I work like a waitress in a restaurant. I get good experience with Z”.



Refugee from Sri Lanka Case Example

“SOVA gave me the chance to practise my profession and now I am photographing and starting to know people from my professional background”.

Conclusions

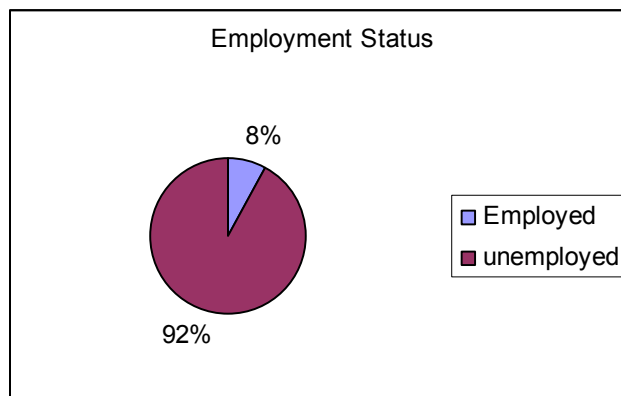
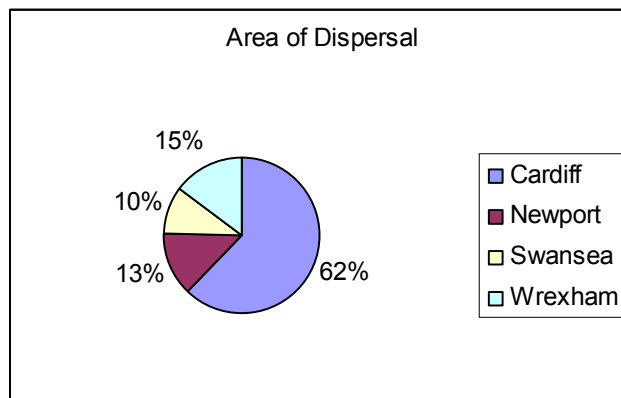
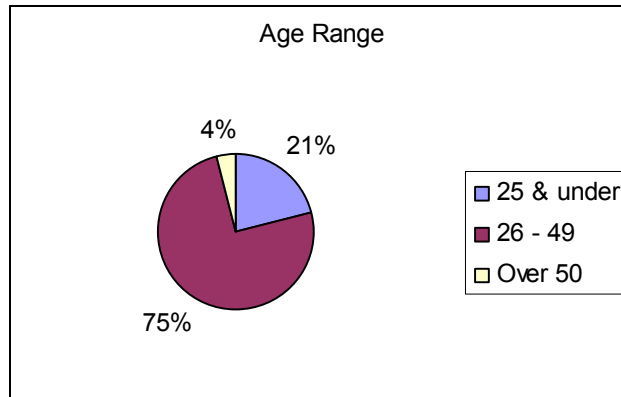
The project is successful and has achieved its goals and objectives. Most of the refugees have realized the benefits of the mentoring services and how it could lead them to positively realizing their potentials.

The project needs a large pool of volunteers since a substantial number of volunteers disappear after the training courses either because of change in circumstances or perhaps loose interest because of the long delay in processing the CRB.

The Project could be more beneficiary for both volunteers and refugees to gather at least twice a year in social events which will have a great impact; in both developing understanding as well as raising the awareness of the cultural differences and diversity. A social event would help both the new comers and host community to live more at ease in a multicultural society; but the restraint in budget was an obstacle to achieving this. However, it is our intention, despite limited resources to hold a social event in the coming year

Appendix 1

Refugees



Country of Origin

Country of Origin	Numbers
Afghanistan	5
Bangladesh	1
Burma	1
China	3
Cote D'Ivoire	1
Democratic Republic of Congo	1
Egypt	1
Eritrea	32
Ethiopia	3
Guinea	3
Iran	15
Iraq	7
Ivory Coast	1
Kuwait	3
Myanmar	2
Pakistan	5
Palestine	2
Somalia	2
Sri Lanka	6
Sudan	18
Syria	2
Turkey	1
Zimbabwe	11
Total	126

Appendix 2

Volunteers

