

Increasing Syrian refugees' wellbeing, employability and English language through immersive creative activities

Part One – Research: Syrian Refugee Women and Employment in the UK
Part Two – Programme Development and Evaluation: 'Creative Skills for Employment'

Abigail Tweed, Director - [mt|milestone tweed](#)
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CONTENTS

PART ONE - Research: Syrian Refugee Women and Employment in the UK

1	Executive summary	4
2	Introduction	7
3	Research methodology	10
4	Desk research	12
5	Research - insights from qualitative data analysis	15
6	Research recommendations	21
	Appendix One – “Shifting sands: changing gender roles among refugees in Lebanon” Oxfam	24
	Appendix two – Sources	26

PART TWO – Programme Development and Evaluation: ‘Creative Skills for Employment’

1	Executive summary	28
2	Introduction and programme development	32
3	Evaluation methodology	37
4	Emerging themes	39
	Theme One – Wellbeing	39
	Theme Two – Employment	41
	Theme Three – English Language	43
5	The learning environment	45
6	Cultural change – integration and orientation	48
7	Recommendations and project improvements	51
	Appendix One – The STEP programme	55

Part One – Research and Programme Development: Syrian Refugee Women and Employment in the UK



“We want to improve our lives, we don’t want benefits. We want to build up our children’s future - not by sitting at home.”

Syrian refugee woman in Dewsbury

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report, commissioned by World Jewish Relief (WJR) in 2017, aims to increase understanding of the employment issues for Syrian refugee women in the UK. WJR work with Syrian refugees in Yorkshire through their Specialist Training and Employment (STEP) project, an employability programme for Syrian refugees in the UK. The STEP programme has, since its inception, worked mainly with male Syrian refugees and WJR are keen to increase the number of Syrian refugee women getting support to gain employment.

The primary aims of the research project were to:

- Understand the barriers to employment in the UK by Syrian refugee women
- Understand how STEP Employment managers are currently working with their female Syrian refugee clients
- Understand the support needed to encourage more Syrian refugee women to engage with the STEP programme and, thereby, move forward on their employment journey to gain appropriate and sustainable employment.

Interviews and focus groups were held with Syrian refugee women and men, STEP Employment Managers, interpreters and the STEP programme evaluator. The data generated through the interviews and focus groups identified common themes and insights arising from participants' perceptions of their experiences as Syrian refugees in the UK.

This report sets out the insights gained from the research and the subsequent programme development. Following an outcomes-based development process the 'Creative Skills for Employment'

project was developed, which aims to encourage more Syrian refugee women to engage with STEP Employment Managers and eventually increase the number of Syrian refugee women working in the UK.

RESEARCH - INSIGHTS FROM QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

As a result of the data analysis, four main themes emerged from the data, highlighting the challenges for Syrian women refugees gaining employment or moving forward on their employment journey. They are:

1. English language abilities preventing Syrian refugee women from working

The most common theme spoken about by Syrian refugee women was the fundamental necessity for them to have good spoken English to be able to access the job market.

2. Childcare and caring responsibilities preventing Syrian refugee women from working

Conversations within the interviews and focus groups about childcare needs and provision highlighted the predominant view that Syrian refugee women feel it is their role to look after children and provide caring responsibilities for the family. Women felt they needed more childcare provision to be able to engage with ESOL classes, employment and employment related activities.

3. Cultural challenges and gender roles preventing Syrian refugee women from working

Syrian refugee women talked about the ways in which gender roles and traditional Syrian cultural norms could prevent them

from looking for and taking up work and other opportunities. Becoming a refugee had influenced gender roles within their communities. There were discussions about the impact for them of moving from a mainly patriarchal society to a more liberal equal society.

4. Not enough voluntary work or work experience opportunities preventing Syrian refugee women from working

Syrian refugee women in the UK are experiencing frustration about their inability to participate in voluntary work. Those refugees, who previously lived in other countries before coming to the UK, were more easily able to do voluntary work and gain experience in those countries than in the UK. They find it difficult to understand that, in the UK, employers often want to see adequate English language skills before they will give someone a volunteer or work experience opportunity.

RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

THEME	RECOMMENDATION
English language abilities preventing Syrian refugee women from working	<p>Tailor ESOL / fast track ESOL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ provide additional conversational English activities with local people ○ provide intensive ESOL opportunities ○ provide ESOL for everyday living, drawing in women who would not attend other ESOL classes ○ provide employment focused ESOL opportunities i.e. ESOL in technology, ESOL for specific sectors of work
Childcare and caring responsibilities preventing Syrian refugee women from working	<p>Provide free childcare wherever possible to enable women to participate in employment, training, skills and ESOL activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Continue to encourage men in the UK to care for children, thus encouraging Syrian refugee men to do likewise, thereby enabling both Syrian men and women to participate in activities.
Cultural challenges and gender roles preventing Syrian refugee women from working	<p>Empower women and men – recognise that women’s empowerment can feel threatening to men. Look at this issue using a ‘whole family’ approach.</p> <p>It was clearly identified by the women that changing gender roles create challenges for the whole family and that this process can create specific challenges and risks for women. There is a responsibility to ensure all women have all the facts and information to ensure equality of opportunity. Whether women choose to act on this information is their choice but making sure that they are informed is critical to them embarking on their employment journey.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Working with the whole family, men, women and children to embed UK gender norms is useful to ensure equality of opportunity for all, ensuring all family members have access to information. ○ Provide additional cultural orientation and integration activities giving information about cultural norms in

	<p>the UK, employment opportunities, education, rights and responsibilities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Add in traditional (cultural) background to the initial STEP assessments (score 1 – 4) for women to enable STEP Employment Managers to have an indicator of whether a woman comes from a dominant patriarchal family background and may need extra support and information around equal opportunities in employment in the UK, together with information and support about domestic violence and abuse.
Not enough voluntary work or work experience opportunities preventing Syrian refugee women from working	<p>Provide mentoring opportunities and role models – Syrian refugee women talked about wanting to see other successful refugee women and understand their journeys to appropriate and sustainable employment. They felt mentoring opportunities would be helpful.</p> <p>Be ambitious – don't limit work experience and opportunities for women to traditional female occupations. Give information about non traditional female roles. Similarly, ensure men are given information about non traditional male roles.</p>

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Continue to recognise the diverse range of Syrian refugee women and tailor each programme in each location to the needs of the participants – one size does not fit all.

Continue to use an asset based approach – build on the skills, knowledge and strengths of the women and their families.

Carry out gender-disaggregated monitoring and evaluation of all programmes and track the impact of programmes on women and men to enhance learning about increasing women's economic empowerment and equal access to economic resources.

When designing future programmes, use information and experience from the client base and STEP Employment Managers in Leeds, Dewsbury and Kirklees and Calderdale to design core parts of the programmes, to ensure that they are more representative of the majority of Syrian refugees in the UK.

Understand clients using 'whole person' and 'whole family' approaches, for example, taking into consideration the emotional as well as the practical needs of the individual and their family group.

2 INTRODUCTION

In October 2017 World Jewish Relief (WJR) commissioned research to increase understanding of the employment issues for Syrian refugee women in the UK as a result of WJR's employment work with Syrian refugees in Yorkshire through their Specialist Training and Employment (STEP) project, an employability programme for Syrian refugees in the UK. The STEP programme has, since its inception, worked mainly with male Syrian refugees and WJR are keen to increase the number of Syrian refugee women getting support to gain employment.

The primary aims of the research project were to:

- Understand the barriers to employment in the UK by Syrian refugee women
- Understand how STEP Employment managers are currently working with their female Syrian refugee clients
- Understand the support needed to encourage more Syrian refugee women to engage with the STEP programme and, thereby, move forward on their employment journey to gain appropriate and sustainable employment.

It was anticipated the research project would give insights which would enable the creation of a programme of work to support more Syrian refugee women to engage with STEP Employment managers and eventually increase the number of Syrian refugee women working in the UK.

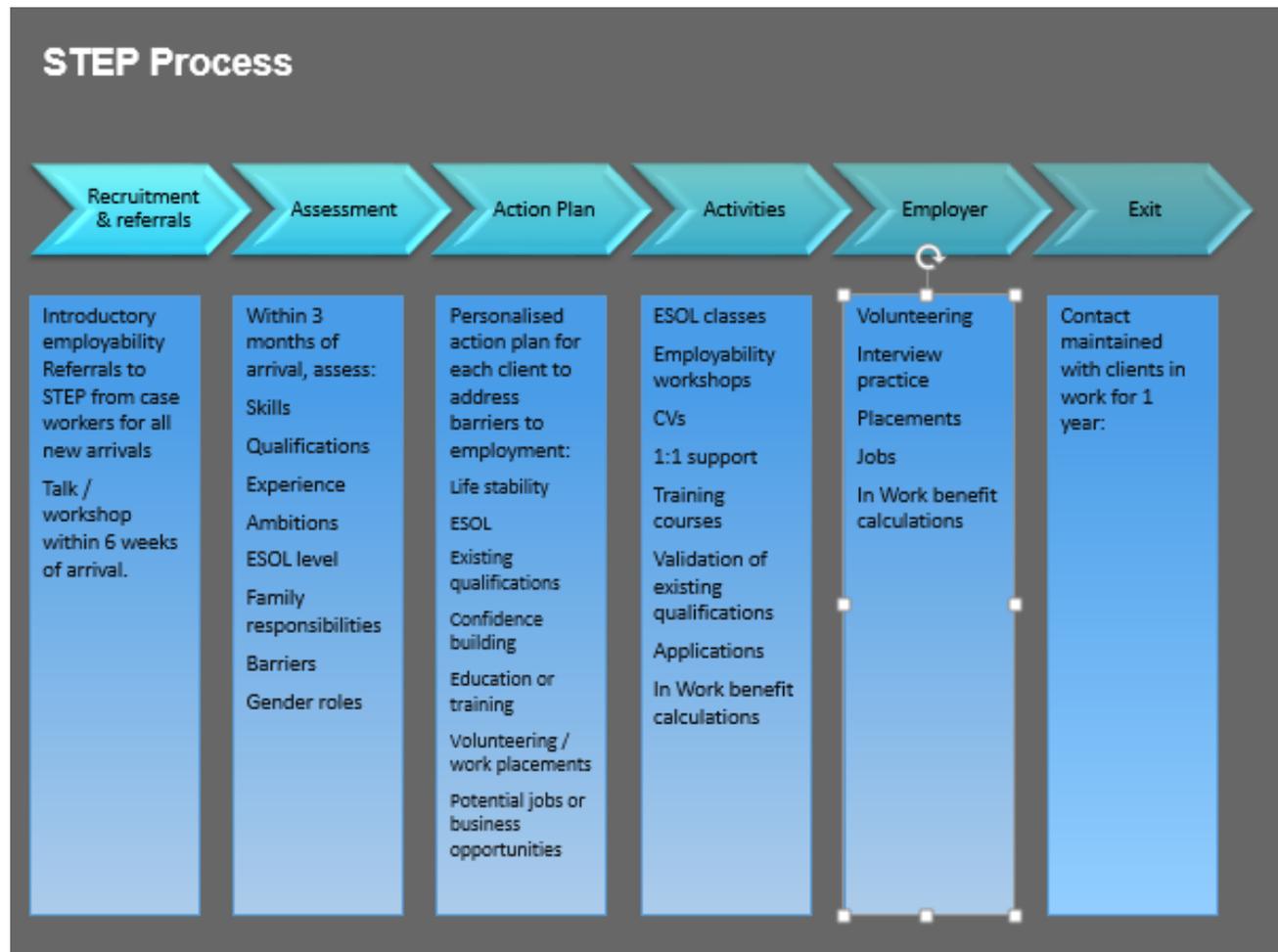
This report sets out the insights gained from the research and the subsequent programme development. Following the pilot programme there will be an evaluation of the pilot to understand the impact of this work and how the programme could be further developed and replicated in other geographical locations. One of the outcomes of this work is to share and disseminate the learnings.

1.1 STEP Programme

The STEP programme aims to fast track refugees into employment in the shortest possible time through providing extensive and intensive individual support with the ultimate aim for refugees to secure jobs appropriate to their skills and experience. It operates in Yorkshire working across a number of geographical areas including Leeds, Bradford, Sheffield, Halifax, Kirklees and Calderdale and Coventry in the West Midlands. The interviews and focus groups conducted for this research project were held in Leeds, Bradford, Sheffield and Kirklees and Calderdale.

The type of support given to refugees on the STEP programme includes personalised employment support, *English for Speakers of Other Languages* (ESOL) provision, employability workshops, CV support, validation of existing qualifications, in work benefits calculations, job applications, training and childcare. The STEP programme also works with employers encouraging and supporting them to provide work opportunities to refugees.

STEP is run in partnership with multiple delivery partners. Although the STEP process has evolved slightly differently in each area its delivery model can be summarised as:



1

¹ World Jewish Relief “STEP Programme Learning the Lessons – Understanding the Impact” Report by Mark Richardson, Social Impact Consulting

1.2 Context – gender roles for Syrian refugee women

Syrian refugee women in the UK come from a myriad of backgrounds and the individual Syrian refugee men and women consulted as a part of this research were highly diverse in background and circumstances, please see page 11 for a summary of characteristics represented within the surveyed group.

Though gender roles for Syrian women are changing and women's rights to education and equal pay are recognised in the law, Syrian women still do not have as much power as men and are more likely to experience social and structural inequalities in countries of origin and migration. They carry greater expectations of social compliance and are sometimes seen as particularly vulnerable targets that need to be protected. A mistake or an instance of loss of control by a woman is still sometimes interpreted as a failure of the patriarch of the family to protect her. There is substantial social pressure on men to excel in their education so they can work in respected, well paid positions and provide for their family. Women are also encouraged to receive a good education, but it is widely anticipated that they will marry someone wealthy enough to support them and will, therefore, not have to work.

Attitudes against female participation in the workforce have changed as the harshness of living conditions in Syria demands their involvement. It can still be considered shameful for a man to earn less than his wife, but female employment is now very valuable to families. Furthermore, the ratio of men to women in Syria has shifted dramatically as more men have been recruited into the army, killed

in battle or driven out of the country by hostile forces. Many women have found themselves in a position of self-dependence.²

Because of Syrian women's recently changing gender roles some development organisations and researchers have recognised the importance of gender analysis in developing an understanding of refugee experience and of refugee integration, thus highlighting the importance of women's roles in supporting family integration. There is, however, still an almost complete absence of work looking at the role of gender in integration processes.³

Many of the Syrian refugee women within the cohort interviewed for this research experienced men and women's changing gender roles as both negative and positive. A number of women had experienced negativity from male family members as male identities were challenged through lack of work and increasing female equality. Many women felt the more equal society in the UK benefitted them. They were experiencing previously lacking freedoms and opportunities.

² <https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/syrian-culture/syrian-culture-family-syrian-culture-family>

³ Refugees and integration in the UK: the need for a gender sensitive approach to supporting resettlement Jenny Phillimore (IRiS, University of Birmingham) & Sin Yi Cheung (School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University)

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted using the methodologies below:

3.1 Desk research

Please see Section 4, page 12 for more information about the desk research.

3.2 Face to face interviews

These comprised:

- 3 interviews with STEP Employment Managers
- 11 individual interviews with Syrian refugee women
- 2 interviews with Syrian refugee men
- 1 interview with a Syrian couple
- 1 interview with an ESOL teacher (Syrian woman)
- 2 interviews with interpreters (1 was a Syrian woman)
- 1 interview with the STEP programme evaluator
- 1 interview with a Syrian integration support worker

3.3 Problem tree / solution tree⁴ analysis in focus groups

- 2 focus groups with Syrian refugee women (9 women participated)

⁴ A problem tree provides an overview of all the known causes and effect to an identified problem. It involves writing causes in a negative form (eg. lack of knowledge, not enough money etc). Reversing the problem tree, by replacing negative statements with positive ones, creates a solution tree. A solution tree identifies means-end relationships as opposed to cause-effects. This provides an overview of the range of projects or interventions that need to occur to solve the core problem.

The interviews and focus groups took place in three geographical areas in Yorkshire: Leeds, Sheffield and Kirklees and Calderdale. The Syrian refugees were identified and invited to the meetings and focus groups by the STEP Employment Managers working in these areas.

The data generated through the interviews and focus groups identified common themes and insights arising from participants' perceptions of their experiences as Syrian refugees in the UK. Interviews were conducted face to face with participants using the ORID method⁵. The data (or text) from notes, interviews and focus groups was analysed using a combination of content analysis and approaches in grounded theory⁶. Thematic results emerged from the data and these results have been used to inform the basis of this report. Results are not intended to be fully scientific.

⁵ The ORID method is a focus group process that facilitates a semi-structured discussion that can be used for one to one conversations and with small groups (up to 12 people). ORID stands for: Observation, Reflection, Insight & Decision

⁶ This basically counts the number of times a particular theme was discussed thus indicating the relative importance of that particular theme (content analysis) and being non-directive so that the themes genuinely emerge from the text with minimal bias (grounded theory).

The discussions focused on a number of issues for Syrian refugee women in the UK including:

- General practical dimensions and challenges of living in the UK: i.e. ESOL, childcare and caring responsibilities
- Specific employment challenges: i.e. gaining work experience
- Cultural dimensions and challenges to their lives in the UK: i.e. traditional gender roles changing
- Intra-household dynamics
- Public dimensions of life in the UK
- How women access employment
- Syrian refugee women’s perceptions of the UK labour market for women
- Previous life and work experiences and aspirations

It was felt important that the research examined the experiences of Syrian refugees from diverse backgrounds. The backgrounds of the men and women interviewed included those with characteristics that could be described as:

Urban	Rural
Religious	Secular
Traditional (culture)	Liberal
Well educated	Poorly educated
Professional	Skilled
Non-skilled	Working in business
Worked in Syria	Didn’t work in Syria
Disabled	Single women
Widows	

4 DESK RESEARCH

Desk research included a Google search alongside contacting a number of academic networks, research centres and organisations working in the field and examining publications, as outlined below. No specific academic research on Syrian refugee women and employment in the UK was found. Academics were clear that it is too soon yet to find academic studies on Syrian refugee women and employment in the UK as the arrival and resettlement of Syrian refugees has been relatively recent.

Some papers were found about refugee employment in other areas of the world, some of which related specifically to female refugees and / or Syrian refugees. Where research was found which highlighted gender difference between refugees experiences, the research showed refugee womens' experiences and needs are qualitatively different from those of men.⁷

Two papers with small amounts of information about Syrian refugee women and employment were examined. One paper looked at Syrian refugee women and employment in Lebanon⁸ and found that there tends to be higher unemployment for women than men (68% to 30%), lower pay for women than men (\$165 to \$287) and that these patterns are the same in Turkey and Jordan for Syrian refugee women and men. One of the consequences of poverty within Syrian refugee communities in these countries is child labour and child marriage. Therefore women often suffer further inequalities. There was a small section in another research paper about Syrian refugee women in Sweden⁹. Among other findings the paper showed that Syrian refugee women were more likely to gain employment if they moved to be near family or fellow Syrians.

⁷ [Responding to the Complex and Gendered Needs of Refugee Women](#) Zermarie Deacon, Cris Sullivan First Published June 10, 2009 Research Article

⁸ [Benedetta Berti | The Syrian Refugee Crisis: Regional And Human Security Implications Strategic Assessment](#) | Volume 17 | No. 4 | January 2015

⁹ [Employment Integration of Refugees: The Influence of Local Factors on Refugee Job Opportunities in Sweden](#) Pieter Bevelander Malmö University - School of International Migration and Ethnic Relations (IMER); IZA Institute of Labor Economics [Christer Lundh](#) Göteborg University Date Written: January 2007

In academic work on refugees and employment in the UK non-gender specific barriers to employment were identified:

- Refugee's lack of proficiency in English;
- their lack of UK work experience;
- the employers' failure to recognise their qualifications and skills obtained outside the UK;
- employers' concerns about their legal status;
- largely hostile, xenophobic and racist representation of refugees in the media and politics.

4.1 Changing Gender Roles

An Oxfam document [“Shifting Sands: Changing gender roles among refugees in Lebanon”](#) from 2013 made some interesting observations and recommendations about Syrian refugee women particularly in relation to changing gender roles and employment. Here are short excerpts from this paper:

“One of the main research findings among Syrian refugees and Palestinian refugees from Syria was that womens’ sense of self-worth is closely linked to their traditional gender role. As refugees in Lebanon, most [Syrian] women in focus groups reported feeling under pressure to fulfil their principal role as mothers and carers, doing the housework and bringing up children, but they also now need to provide financially for their families.

The changes in family dynamics have led to increased stress for women and men alike. Despite some women reporting a sense of increased empowerment with their new responsibilities, some men resent the changes, which have damaged their self-esteem. Some women described how they have had to deal with their husbands’ hostile attitudes.

Although many women feel that they have lost their female identity, others felt that taking on a different role also created a sense of empowerment. However, the potential for longer-term changes to women’s lives resulting from the increased self-confidence that some women experienced is limited, as men still wield more power in the household and, as already noted, some men have reacted to the threat to their traditional gender role in negative and damaging ways, in order to reassert their power.”

Within this document there is also a specific section on employment and income and recommendations about programme design for humanitarian agencies of employment programmes for refugee women. While this work focused on the changing roles of refugees in Lebanon, most of the recommendations proposed by the report also seem relevant for Syrian refugees in the UK. This piece of work has highlighted the potential increased risks for women refugees and the potential for high quality programme design to mitigate these risks. One of the risks identified was domestic violence and abuse.

The recommendations from the sections on employment and income and gendered identity, which seemed especially relevant and useful for the STEP programme were:

- *Ensure that there are special provisions for widows, divorcees and other groups of women (such as women with disabilities and female heads of households) who may be especially vulnerable in predominantly patriarchal societies;*
- *Where possible, actively seek alternatives to the current coping strategies being used to address risks of sexual abuse or harassment of women and girls (such as limiting their movement outside the home and taking girls out of school), which reinforce conservatism;*
- *Promote awareness, prevention, and confidential and trusted mechanisms for reporting on safeguarding of vulnerable women, men and children, including specific measures to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse of beneficiaries. The presence of such mechanisms should be communicated widely;*
- *Organise recreational and art-related activities depicting the perceptions and challenges of gender roles;*
- *Conduct community awareness-raising sessions for men and women on gender and the kinds of new tools and techniques that they will need to adapt to their hugely changed and challenging environment;*
- *Ensure that women are not overlooked in targeting due to levels of literacy, assertiveness, or restrictions in social structures;*
- *Promote equal access to and benefits from income-generating programmes for women and men. Ensure that such programmes do not perpetuate gender-based labour discrimination but provide equal opportunities, including in non-traditional livelihood areas;*
- *Design programmes based on a mapping of local capacities among refugees, including assessment of women and men's knowledge, education, skills, and livelihood needs. Share the analysis among humanitarian actors across sectors;*
- *Carry out gender-disaggregated monitoring and evaluation of all programmes and track the impact of programmes on women and men to enhance learning on increasing women's economic empowerment and equal access to economic resources;*

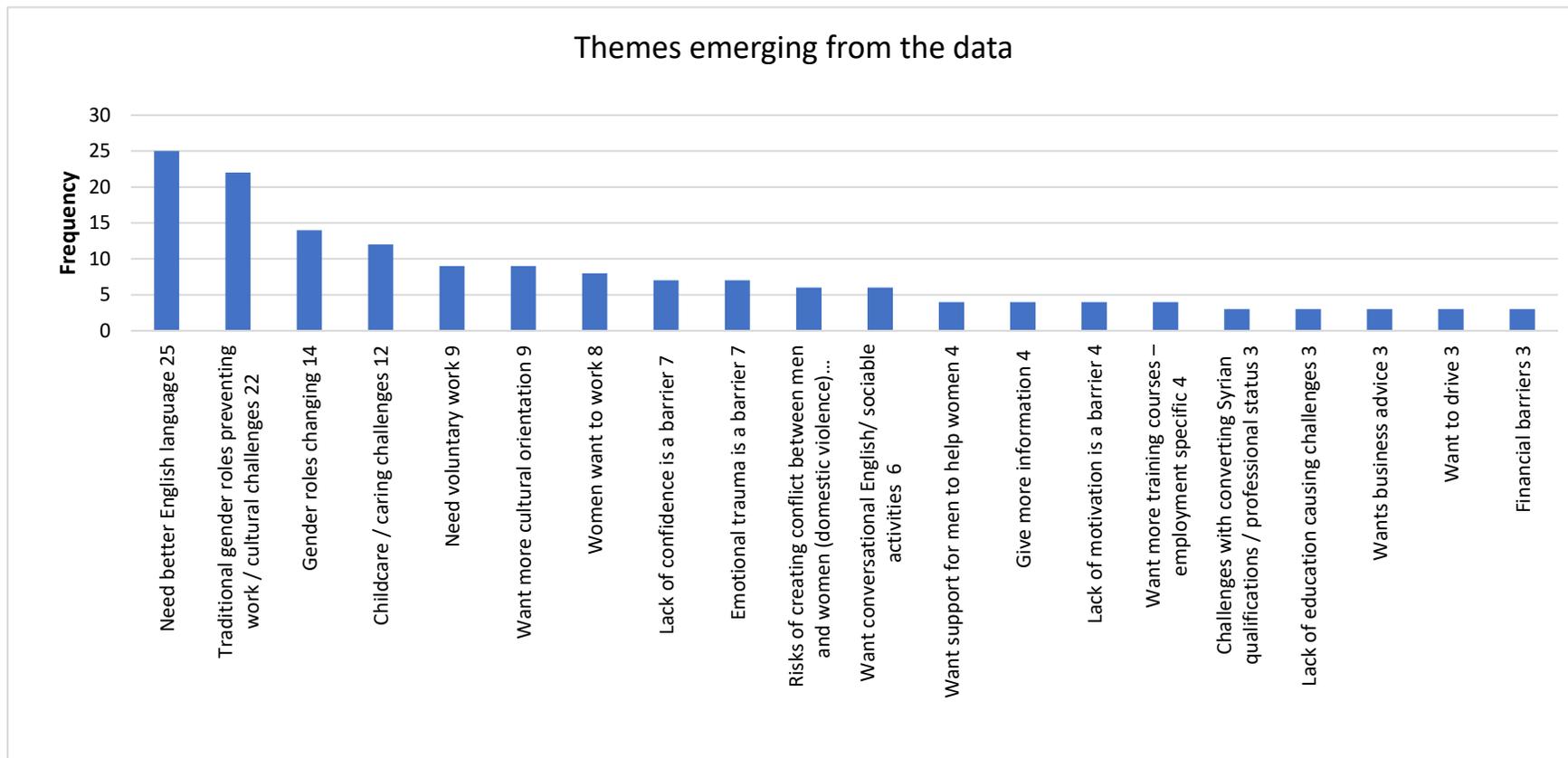
Please see Appendix One, page 28 for the Oxfam report's full recommendations for humanitarian agencies indicating how they can help with the issues of gendered identity and employment and income. Please see Appendix Two, page 30 for a list of the academic networks, centres, organisations and individuals contacted within the research; and the academic reports and papers used to prepare this report.

5 RESEARCH - INSIGHTS FROM QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

As a result of the data analysis, four main themes emerged from the data, highlighting the challenges for Syrian women refugees gaining employment or moving forward on their employment journey. They are:

1. English language abilities preventing Syrian refugee women from working
2. Childcare and caring responsibilities preventing Syrian refugee women from working
3. Cultural challenges and gender roles preventing Syrian refugee women from working
4. Not enough voluntary work or work experience opportunities preventing Syrian refugee women from working

The table below shows the issues that were raised in the interviews and focus groups and the amount of times those issues were raised.



5.2 Theme 1 – English language abilities preventing work

The most common theme spoken about by Syrian refugee women was the fundamental necessity for them to have good spoken English to be able to access the job market.

They talked about the quality of the provision of ESOL classes as variable and that their ability to access ESOL provision was sometimes limited by the cost of the classes, depending on the benefits being claimed by families, and additional costs such as transport. Lack of childcare provision and unsuitable timing of classes were also cited as reasons preventing them from accessing classes.

“Language is the main barrier. As soon as I learn the language I will work. We need to learn the language more than anything.”

Some women’s ability to learn was hindered by their previous lack of education, some women were illiterate in Arabic.

Women felt the formalised generic ESOL classes were not always suited to their needs. Women talked about wanting conversational English with native speakers, intensive classes and focused ESOL and employment classes to support their employment journey.

Many of these barriers to ESOL are also felt by Syrian refugee men and apart from the childcare issue, which predominantly affects Syrian refugee women, solutions to these challenges would also help Syrian refugee men.

5.2 Theme 2 - Childcare and caring responsibilities preventing work

Conversations within the interviews and focus groups about childcare needs and provision highlighted the predominant view that Syrian refugee women feel it is their role to look after children and provide caring responsibilities for the family. Women felt they needed more childcare provision to be able to engage with ESOL classes, employment and employment related activities.

“It is my job to take care of the baby more than it his [my husband’s] job.” Syrian refugee woman, who is aiming to continue her studies as a Pharmacist in the UK

Despite Syrian refugee men and women often both having the time to look after children, women said that it was normal for men not to take on childcare responsibilities. This was despite the fact that often it is a necessity for them to share childcare responsibilities to enable them both to participate in important activities such as ESOL classes and employment related meetings.

“We need childcare to enable both partners to participate fully.” Syrian refugee man

Syrian women felt comfortable with the types of childcare provision that was available in their areas, and were happy for their children to go to English language nurseries, crèches and childcare providers if they felt they needed childcare.

5.2.1 Childcare and teenagers

Some women commented that they were not happy to leave teenagers at home on their own and felt they needed to be at home when their teenagers came home from school or college. Further discussions revealed that there are likely to be Syrian teenagers who experienced trauma before they left Syria and may have increased vulnerabilities due to these traumatic experiences. This evidence was corroborated by anecdotal evidence of Syrian teenagers struggling at school and showing signs of post-traumatic stress.

5.2.2 Widows

There was a higher number of widows within the cohort interviewed and those participating in the focus groups, than would normally be found in native populations. The majority of widows within the cohort had young children and were widowed relatively recently when their husbands were killed in the war in Syria. These women had additional childcare needs as they are often more actively seeking work and attending other activities and were not 'stuck' at home. They often had no male relatives who were controlling their lives and restricting their activities.

“When I became a widow I ran away from the controlling men in my family with my two small children. As a refugee I took off my niqab and long clothes and now I feel free. I think women feel free-er in the UK.” Syrian refugee woman with two children aged 12 and 17.

5.2.3 Cost of childcare

It was felt that the cost of childcare was often prohibitive. Syrian refugee women felt they could only use childcare that was free due to their low incomes. All of the interviewees and participants in the focus group were receiving benefits at the time the research took place.



5.3 Theme 3 – Cultural challenges and gender roles

Syrian refugee women talked about the ways in which gender roles and traditional Syrian cultural norms could prevent them from looking for and taking up work and other opportunities. Becoming a refugee had influenced gender roles within their communities. There were discussions about the impact for them of moving from a mainly patriarchal society to a more liberal equal society.

Women talked about the unhappiness of Syrian refugee men due to not having work, that men were losing confidence and struggling with changing gender roles, and struggling to adapt to a more liberal and equal society.

They also talked about the positive effects of living with different societal gender norms.

“There is a big difference living here in the UK as a woman, to living in Syria. Women here are very advanced. They are driving buses, working in the fields, looking after their families. It is a big difference. I like the way women live here.” Syrian refugee woman

5.3.1 Increased risk of domestic violence and abuse

There were formal reports of domestic violence within Syrian refugee communities in one of the locations in Yorkshire and in Syrian refugee communities in Cheshire. People working with refugees suggested there may be further unreported incidents.

Women in the interviews and focus groups talked about men becoming ‘grumpy’ and feeling low:

“Generally men want to be responsible for the house. They think they are weak when they can’t do that. If she [his wife] gets work before him he will feel low. The men are really bored and fed up. They are sitting doing nothing at home. Men always like to do more [work] for the family than the women. It was a shame for a woman to work in Syria and some people still feel that living here.”

Men’s identity, which in Syria was closely linked with being responsible for their house and family, is now being challenged as women are increasingly needed to be economically active in the UK. There are significant concerns by those working with Syrian communities of mental health deteriorating in Syrian refugee men. A number of Syrian refugee women suggested that when men’s mental health is not good women could bear the brunt of the men’s discomfort. One woman talked about how her husband was reacting to her attending college:

“He is on edge and can fly off the handle. I am worried as he can get irritable.”

One of the translators, a Syrian woman suggested:

“The risk for domestic violence is there if the family have strong traditional cultures and traditional gender roles. These are the strongest indicators for violence and abuse. Lack of education, religious affinity, strength of religious belief or a rural upbringing, for example, would not indicate the potential for domestic violence or abuse as much as traditional gender roles.”

5.3.2 'Hidden women'

STEP Employment Managers and other people working with refugees discussed the likely possibility that there were Syrian refugee women who may be at home and are either not able or not wanting to engage with support services. It was felt that Syrian refugee women particularly could be limited in their employment opportunities by lack of information about education, employment and equality of opportunities. Depending on the information they received on arrival, they may have differing levels of awareness of the societal norms about gender equality in the UK. This could impact on Syrian refugee women's motivation and ability to look for and gain employment.

5.4 Theme 4 – Not enough voluntary work or work experience opportunities

Syrian refugee women in the UK are experiencing frustration about their inability to participate in voluntary work. Those refugees, who previously lived in other countries before coming to the UK, were more easily able to do voluntary work and gain experience. They find it difficult to understand that in the UK, employers often want to see adequate English language skills before they will give someone a work experience opportunity.

Within the cohort interviewed and within the focus groups there was a significant proportion of women who had experience of and interest in employment in hair and beauty. They were disappointed that salon owners would not allow them to even observe the workplace without adequate levels of English language. One woman reported her experience through an interpreter:

“I tried to introduce myself to a few people in hair salons. They were all saying that we can’t employ you if you don’t speak English, even for voluntary work. I really want to do voluntary work, I worked for two years as a hairdresser in Syria and as time goes by I am forgetting how to do things. I really want to just watch and see how people work in this country.”

This theme clearly reinforces the message that for Syrian refugee women to access the job market it is a priority for them to learn English as highlighted in Theme 1.



6 RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

When barriers to gaining employment were mentioned, interviewees and focus group participants were asked for solutions or ideas to reduce the barriers. This section reflects ideas and solutions from Syrian refugees, people working with refugees and academic papers examined.

6.1 Tailor ESOL / fast track ESOL

- provide additional conversational English activities with local people
- provide intensive ESOL opportunities
- provide ESOL for everyday living, drawing in women who would not attend other ESOL classes
- provide employment focused ESOL opportunities i.e. ESOL in technology, ESOL for specific sectors of work

6.2 Provide free childcare wherever possible to enable women to participate in employment, training, skills and ESOL activities.

6.2.1 Continue to encourage men in the UK to care for children, thus encouraging Syrian refugee men to do likewise, thereby enabling both Syrian men and women to participate in activities.

6.3 Empower women and men – recognise that women’s empowerment can feel threatening to men. Look at this issue using a ‘whole family’ approach. It was clearly identified by the women that changing gender roles create challenges for the whole family and that this process can create specific challenges and risks for women. There is a responsibility to ensure all women have all the facts and information to ensure equality of opportunity. Whether women choose to act on this information is their choice but making sure that they are informed is critical to them embarking on their employment journey.

6.3.1. Working with the whole family, men, women and children to embed UK gender norms is useful to ensure equality of opportunity for all, ensuring all family members have access to information.

6.3.2. Provide additional cultural orientation and integration activities giving information about cultural norms in the UK, employment opportunities, education, rights and responsibilities.

6.3.2 Add in traditional (cultural) background to the initial STEP assessments (score 1 – 4) for women to enable STEP Employment Managers to have an indicator of whether a woman comes from a dominant patriarchal family background and may need extra

support and information around equal opportunities in employment in the UK, together with information and support about domestic violence and abuse.

- 6.4 Continue to recognise the diverse range of Syrian refugee women and tailor each programme in each location to the needs of the participants – one size does not fit all.
- 6.5 Continue to use an asset based approach – build on the skills, knowledge and strengths of the women and their families.
- 6.6 Carry out gender-disaggregated monitoring and evaluation of all programmes and track the impact of programmes on women and men to enhance learning about increasing women’s economic empowerment and equal access to economic resources.
- 6.7 Provide mentoring opportunities and role models – Syrian refugee women talked about wanting to see other successful refugee women and understand their journeys to appropriate and sustainable employment. They felt mentoring opportunities would be helpful.
- 6.8 Be ambitious – don’t limit work experience and opportunities for women to traditional female occupations. Give information about non traditional female roles. Similarly, ensure men are given information about non traditional male roles.
- 6.9 When designing future programmes, use information and experience from the client base and STEP Employment Managers in Leeds, Dewsbury and Kirklees and Calderdale to design core parts of the programmes, to ensure that they are more representative of the majority of Syrian refugees in the UK. Further information was gained about the increased vulnerability criteria for the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS). This information highlighted why Syrian refugee clients in Bradford seemed to be more highly educated, skilled and more liberal in their attitudes.
- 6.10 Understand clients using ‘whole person’ and ‘whole family’ approaches, for example, taking into consideration the emotional as well as the practical needs of the individual and their family group.

6.10.1 Extend the programme’s understanding of the Syrian refugee employment journey, lengthening it to include early stages which need to be addressed before refugees can progress on their employment journey. This could mean extending the employment journey to include stages which could help address an individual’s emotional trauma. For example, Syrian refugee women talked about being unable to concentrate on activities which would move them forward on their employment journey while they still had family members in danger and distressed in Syria.

STEP clients with their Employability ESOL tutor
volunteering in a local charity shop



APPENDIX ONE – Excerpt from “Shifting Sands: Changing gender roles among refugees in Lebanon” by Roula El-Masri from Abaad-Resource Center for Gender Equality, Claire Harvey And Rosa Garwood from Oxfam GB

How humanitarian agencies can help

Gendered identity

- Mobilize and engage community stakeholders on gender roles and associated inequalities (e.g. religious leaders, faith-based groups, focal points in municipalities);
- Provide gender-awareness raising and training for all organizations working with refugee communities, including integrating gender equality priorities into all programmes designed to respond to refugees’ needs;
- Learn from local best practice to develop programmes that engage men to address notions of positive masculinities (e.g. men’s forums, sports-related activities);
- Design interventions to address issues of stress, including facilitating access to appropriate counselling services;
- Conduct community awareness-raising sessions for men and women on gender and the kinds of new tools and techniques that they will need to adapt to their hugely changed and challenging environment;
- Organize recreational and art-related activities depicting the perceptions and challenges of gender roles;
- Promote creative use of the media and information and communications technology tools for discussion on positive forms of gendered identity;
- Increase the number of interventions that provide safe spaces for refugees – whether women or men, girls or boys – to reflect on changes in their social identities.

Employment and income

- Design programmes based on a mapping of local capacities among refugees, including assessment of women and men's knowledge, education, skills, and livelihood needs. Share the analysis among humanitarian actors across sectors;
- Promote equal access to and benefits from income-generating programmes for women and men. Ensure that such programmes do not perpetuate gender-based labour discrimination but provide equal opportunities, including in non-traditional livelihood areas;
- Carry out gender-disaggregated monitoring and evaluation of all programmes and track the impact of programmes on women and men to enhance learning on increasing women's economic empowerment and equal access to economic resources;
- When designing cash transfer programmes, incorporate learning from previous research on the impact of cash transfers on gender equality.¹⁰⁶ Cash-transfer programmes should target women as well as men;
- Ensure that women are not overlooked in targeting due to levels of literacy, assertiveness, or restrictions in social structures;
- Ensure that there are special provisions for widows, divorcees and other groups of women (such as women with disabilities and female heads of households) who may be especially vulnerable in predominantly patriarchal societies;
- Ensure that livelihoods programmes integrate protection concerns for women, men, and children, including targeting income-generating activities at families at risk of adopting harmful coping strategies such as early and/or forced marriage of daughters, or sexual exploitation;
- Where possible, actively seek alternatives to the current coping strategies being used to address risks of sexual abuse or harassment of women and girls (such as limiting their movement outside the home and taking girls out of school), which reinforce conservatism;
- Work with women's organizations and gender specialists to ensure community mobilization and participation in programme design. Work with communities to develop programmes and strategies for addressing the structural drivers of inequality and build on the positive drivers of change;
- Promote awareness, prevention, and confidential and trusted mechanisms for reporting on safeguarding of vulnerable women, men and children, including specific measures to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse of beneficiaries. The presence of such mechanisms should be communicated widely.

APPENDIX TWO – Sources

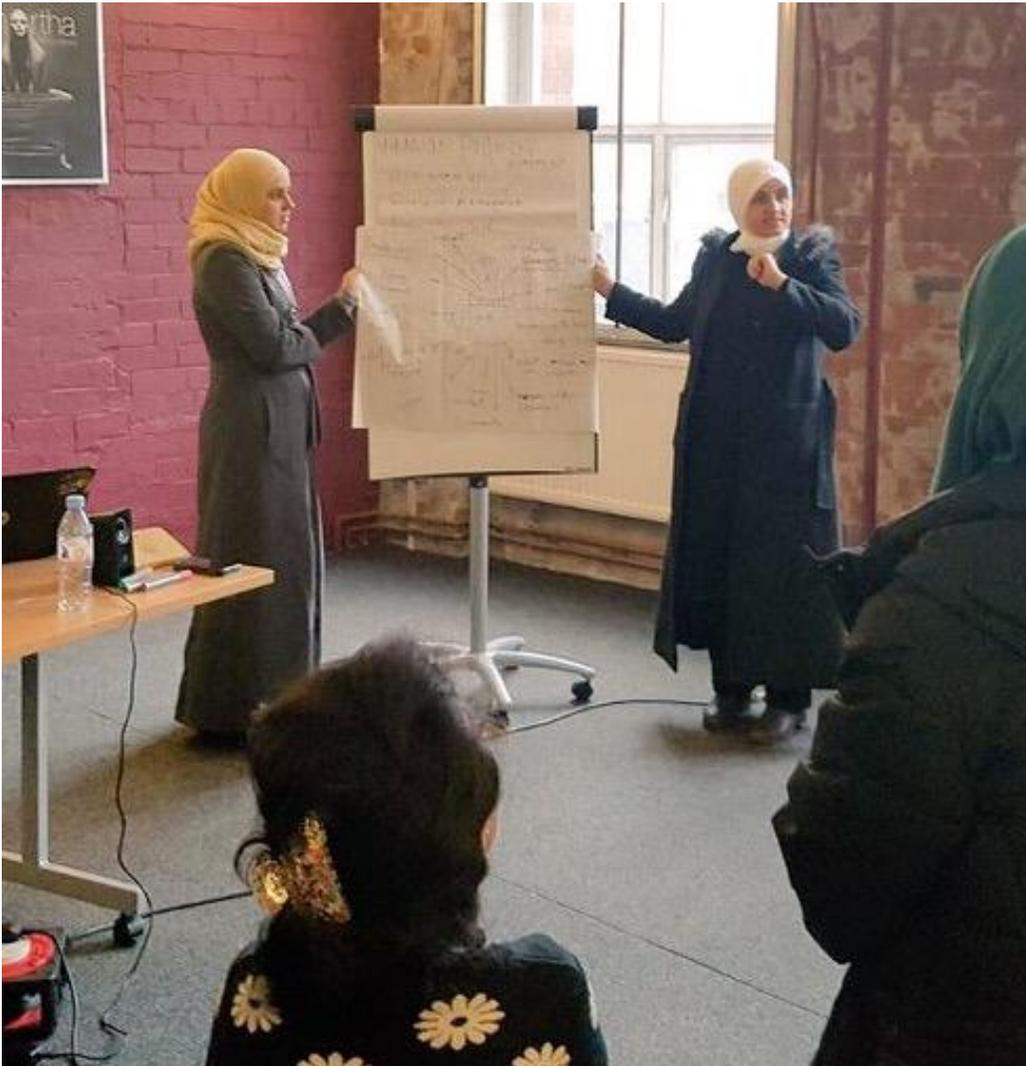
Academic networks, centres, organisations and individuals contacted within the research.

Displacement Studies Research Network, Plymouth University - Dr. Sana Murrani
Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford. - Alexander Betts, co-author 'Talent Displaced'
Centre for Social Justice and Community Action, Durham University - Caroline Lenette, Visiting Fellow
Social Impact Consulting - Mark Richardson, Director (STEP Programme Evaluator)
Scheherazade Initiatives - Caroline Watson, Founder and CEO
Growing Points - Jane Rennie, Director
Coleg Ceredigion, Aberystwyth - Anne Marggraf-Turley, ILT Manager
Cheshire West and Chester Council - Matthew Smith Senior Officer, Learner Data and Research Skills and Employment Team
St. Augustine's - Alice Garrod, Integration support worker for Halifax
UK HE Public Engagement Network
Journal of Refugee Studies

Academic reports and papers used to prepare this report.

Zermarie Deacon, Cris Sullivan [Responding to the Complex and Gendered Needs of Refugee Women](#) First Published June 10, 2009 Research Article
[Benedetta Berti | The Syrian Refugee Crisis: Regional And Human Security Implications Strategic Assessment](#) | Volume 17 | No. 4 | January 2015
Pieter Bevelander [Employment Integration of Refugees: The Influence of Local Factors on Refugee Job Opportunities in Sweden](#) Malmö University - School of International Migration and Ethnic Relations (IMER); IZA Institute of Labor Economics Christer Lundh Göteborg University
Date Written: January 2007
Roula El-Masri from Abaad-Resource Center for Gender Equality, Claire Harvey And Rosa Garwood from Oxfam GB ["Shifting Sands: Changing gender roles among refugees in Lebanon"](#)
Deloitte and Alexander Betts, Olivier Sterck, Remco Geervliet, Claire MacPherson, [Talent displaced - The economic lives of Syrian refugees in Europe](#)
Frances Tomlinson [Marking Difference and Negotiating Belonging: Refugee Women, Volunteering and Employment](#) 2010
UNHCR [TOWARDS INTEGRATION - The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme in the United Kingdom](#) 2017

Part Two – Programme Evaluation: ‘Creative Skills for Employment’



Some of the participants summarised their thoughts about the programme:

“It will help you to improve your language and feel more confident to meet new people and organise your decisions in your life. This course will help you to get a job or work and [help you] to decide what you like to do. After this course, it will help you to meet a lot of people who have big experience in working with lots of people working with refugees. I advise you to join this course.”

“Every day [this course] has different programmes. We can learn sentences to help you speak English. We have difference places to come to. It is a new course for people and you can have lunch. It helps you find volunteering opportunities and then you can find work.”

“I went to this course for two weeks in Leeds. The target is to build confidence and to help you introduce yourself and talk about my skills and experience. Also, this was the first time I got a train! It helps you to orientate yourself in the city. It has made me very positive in my life.”

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In October 2017 World Jewish Relief (WJR) commissioned research to increase understanding of the employment issues for Syrian refugee women in the UK recognising this group as particularly vulnerable, with significantly lower engagement with employment support resulting in fewer successful employment outcomes.

Following the research and insights about Syrian refugee women and employment, World Jewish Relief designed a project to address the barriers and challenges raised by the women and other contributors to the research. The overall aim of the resulting 'Creative Skills for Employment Project' is to: increase the number of female clients progressing on employment journeys on the STEP programme and thereby, in the long term, increase the number of Syrian refugee women getting sustainable and appropriate work.

Stand and Be Counted (SBC) Theatre Company were commissioned to lead the project and it was decided to run the project as an immersive 'whole family'

experience for participants with eleven, two and a half hour, sessions taking place over a two week period in March 2018 in both Leeds and Sheffield. 32 adult Syrian refugees and 8 children participated in the project. It was hosted by a number of creative organisations situated in Leeds and Sheffield.

The project provided a number of activities for the participants. Activities included: language based tasks, skill building, preparing presentations, performing (e.g. perform something badly, then do it well) and vocal and physical games. All sessions included singing, physical activity, word and counting games, and speaking in English to others within the group.

The evaluation used a mixed methods approach. Qualitative and quantitative data was collected from questionnaires, interviews and observation notes and was analysed using a combination of grounded theory and content analysis to understand the emerging themes and outcomes from the project.

Three primary themes emerged from the qualitative data collected from project participants, creative practitioners, STEP Managers, childcare providers and interpreters.

Theme One - Increased Wellbeing

Increased wellbeing for the individuals who participated in the project was the most significant theme. Participants had gained huge enjoyment from the activities which increased their general wellbeing and made them feel happier. The increased confidence reported as a result of this project was very specifically related to speaking English and feeling less shy in their communication with others.

"I started the course with confidence levels of 20-30%. Since the course, I now have 80% confidence. I went into an EE shop today and bought a SIM card myself without an interpreter. I wouldn't have done this before the course."

Another significantly important wellbeing outcome to emerge is that the

participants placed great value on their increased social networks as a result of the project. Enjoying the group, making new friends and sharing the experience with both Syrian and English people helped many to feel happier, more relaxed, increasingly supported and less alone.

Theme Two - Employment

Project participants felt more motivated to move forward on their employment journey as a result of their immersive experience. They talked about having been helped with their employment journey, getting more ideas about employment opportunities in the UK, and feeling an increased readiness for work. They felt confident to talk to others in English about their skills and experience, had increased their understanding of their skills and experience in the UK employment context and developed an increased understanding of how to behave in an interview.

As a result of the project there have been a number of employment related outcomes:

- Two women and one man have taken up new volunteering roles, two at creative organisations involved in the project and one at M&S. All three individuals have opportunities to progress to paid work following their volunteering roles.
- Two women and one man have had volunteering opportunities offered to them by the creative organisations involved in the project. At the time of writing these volunteering positions were not formally confirmed.
- One new female client has been taken onto the STEP programme in Leeds.
- Two women have started training courses, one to gain an industry recognised qualification, and one to gain further skills and work experience.

Theme Three - English Language

Participants' English language skills and confidence improved dramatically as a result of the two week immersion. The creative practitioners who led the course and the STEP Managers reported huge

leaps in English language skills for the majority of their clients. Participants reported feeling more confident to speak to native English speakers. They compared this experience with their ESOL classes and many Syrian refugees reported their ESOL classes were not as productive or impactful as this experience.

The learning environment

Comments were noted about changes in participants as a result of the learning environment. This included cultural orientation and integration adjustments. The learning environment was commented on by many of the participants and other people involved in the project.

All the project participants who took part in the evaluation said they enjoyed the course. There were specific comments about the supportive atmosphere and that the participants felt comfortable in the learning environment. Strong bonds were created between the participants and the creative practitioners. The participants highly valued and liked the creative practitioners. The singing, memorisation games and relaxation exercises were enjoyed by the group and were seen as a

highly effective way for the participants to learn. The group appreciated the food and transport costs being provided for them enabling them to attend the course.

Cultural change – integration and orientation

The project had impact on participants' integration into British life, their orientation in their locality and their cultural awareness of life in the UK.

Participants said that they had a better understanding of their city as a result of the course. They felt that they had learnt about new places. After the two groups trips, where the Sheffield group went to London and the Leeds group went to Saltaire, the Syrian refugees had seen more of the UK. Participants felt that the project gave them the opportunity to interact with English people and become more integrated.

There were some interesting comments from the interpreter and some participants about how participants' need to adjust culturally to British life.

Participants talked about needing to change the way they communicate to become more integrated and ready for work in the UK. It was felt that participants

needed to listen more and interrupt less in conversation. Women needed to become more vocal within mixed groups. Men needed to ensure they treated women and men in Britain equally, for example by shaking both men and women's hands in social and work situations.

A number of the participants, the interpreter and STEP managers identified timekeeping as a significant issue.

Participants needed to adjust to British norms about timekeeping, if they were to be successful in the job market.



A participant from the Leeds group presenting to his fellow group members

2 INTRODUCTION AND PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

Recent research by the University of Oxford¹⁰ has shown that refugees are significantly less likely – on average 20 percentage points less - than other migrants to be in employment. They also have a 60% lower hourly salary than UK natives. And refugee women are at a further substantial disadvantage relative to refugee men and non-refugee women in labour market outcomes.

This report was commissioned to evaluate the Creative Skills for Employment Project, a project designed to increase labour market outcomes for Syrian refugees and specifically Syrian refugee women. This pilot project ran for two intensive weeks in March 2018 in Leeds and Sheffield working with 32 Syrian refugees, aiming to support them on their employment journey into sustainable and appropriate work. Eight adults participated in the programme in Leeds and in Sheffield 24 adults participated. Two children in Leeds and six children in Sheffield regularly attended with their parents. Childcare was provided within the same room or in adjoining rooms.

Creative practitioners from Stand and be Counted (SBC) Theatre Company led the project using creative and drama based activities to deliver project outcomes.

2.1 Programme Development - The Creative Skills for Employment Project

Following the research and insights about Syrian refugee women and employment outlined in Part One, World Jewish Relief designed a project to address the barriers and challenges raised by the women and other contributors to the research. The overall aim of the project was to: increase the number of female clients progressing on employment journeys on the STEP programme and thereby in the long term increase the number of Syrian refugee women getting sustainable and appropriate work. Please see Appendix One, page 57 for more information about the STEP programme.

The pilot project was designed by World Jewish Relief, the STEP Employment Managers, the creatives from Stand and be Counted (SBC) Theatre Company and West Yorkshire Playhouse Creative Engagement Department, in response to the research insights. The design process used theory of change methodology to ensure an outcomes based project.

One of the key research findings and recommendations from the research outlined in Part One of this report was:

¹⁰ The Economic Integration of Refugees in the UK, Vargas-Silva, Kone & Ruiz University of Oxford, 2018

- Empower women and men – recognise that women’s empowerment can feel threatening to men. Look at this issue using a ‘whole family’ approach. (Please see page 21 for further information about this recommendation)

This led to the programme being designed for whole families rather than just specifically for Syrian women. Syrian women consulted within the research phase felt working with the whole family, men, women and children to embed UK gender norms is useful to make certain all women and family members have all the facts and information ensuring equality of opportunity.

The key elements of the project discussed during the design process were:

- Whole families, fitting the criteria (please see page 33) were to be invited to attend the project. Family groups were defined widely to include all those people who define themselves as a family group.
- The project would last for approx. 11 sessions, with an average session time of 2.5 hours.
- Thought was to be given to ways in which the project supports single parent families and teenagers participating in the project.
- There was to be a focus on giving opportunities for families to develop their conversational ESOL.
- There was to be a focus on increasing adult’s skills, and specifically employment skills. If the timing of the project allows, the project will also try to increase educational skills for the children / young people.
- There was to be a focus on providing information about volunteering opportunities with creative organisations.
- There was to be at least one day trip, which would happen at the end of the 10 sessions to celebrate the end of the activity.
- There would be a group visit to see a professional family theatre performance.
- The project was to be at no cost to the participants. Travel passes, childcare and food will be provided as a part of each session.
- Working with creative organisations to enable the outcomes.
- Including suitable role models within the project to inspire and engage participants

2.2 Project outcomes

The potential outcomes of the project were defined as:

- Increased women’s engagement with the STEP programme
- Increased women’s uptake of volunteering opportunities
- Increased men’s uptake of volunteering opportunities
- Increased conversational ESOL levels in men and women
- Increased men and women’s ability and confidence in interviews and public speaking

- Increased men and women’s awareness and demonstration of gender equality in the UK
- Increased men and women’s awareness of and engagement with cultural organisations in their area
- Increased men and women’s wellbeing
- Increased men and women’s feelings of integration
- Increased men and women’s understanding of British life, culture and customs particularly in relation to employment

2.3 Criteria for participants

The criteria for participants being invited to attend the project was loosely defined and depended on the STEP Employment Manager’s knowledge of their client group. However it was seen as useful for participants to have ESOL level 3 or above and both men and women were invited and encouraged to attend, so in two parent families, both parents were invited to attend.

2.4 Project outline

The summary project outline is shown below. Most sessions lasted on average 2.5 hours and took place in creative organisation’s buildings in the locality. Each area had these sessions. However they were not necessarily in the same order in each location.

DATE	SESSION PLAN
Monday 12th March	1. Getting to know you / sharing stories
Tuesday 13th March	2. Finding Your Voice – this session will be delivered by West Yorkshire Playhouse
Wednesday 14th March	3. Identity and confidence building
Thursday 15th March	4. Building a network
Friday 16th March	5. Project management and preparing a trip
Monday 19th March	6. Booking the trip
Tuesday 20th March	7. Prep day for presentations
Wednesday 21st March	8. Presentations
Thursday 22nd March	9. Volunteers opportunities session and theatre performance
Friday 23rd March	10. Coach trip organised by group
Saturday 24th March	11. Evaluation

2.5 Creative organisations hosting the project

SBC Theatre Company contacted a number of creative organisations to ask them if they would be interested in hosting the project.

Those who hosted the sessions were:

- West Yorkshire Playhouse (Leeds)
- Yorkshire Dance (Leeds)
- Carriageworks (Leeds)
- Montgomery Theatre (Sheffield)

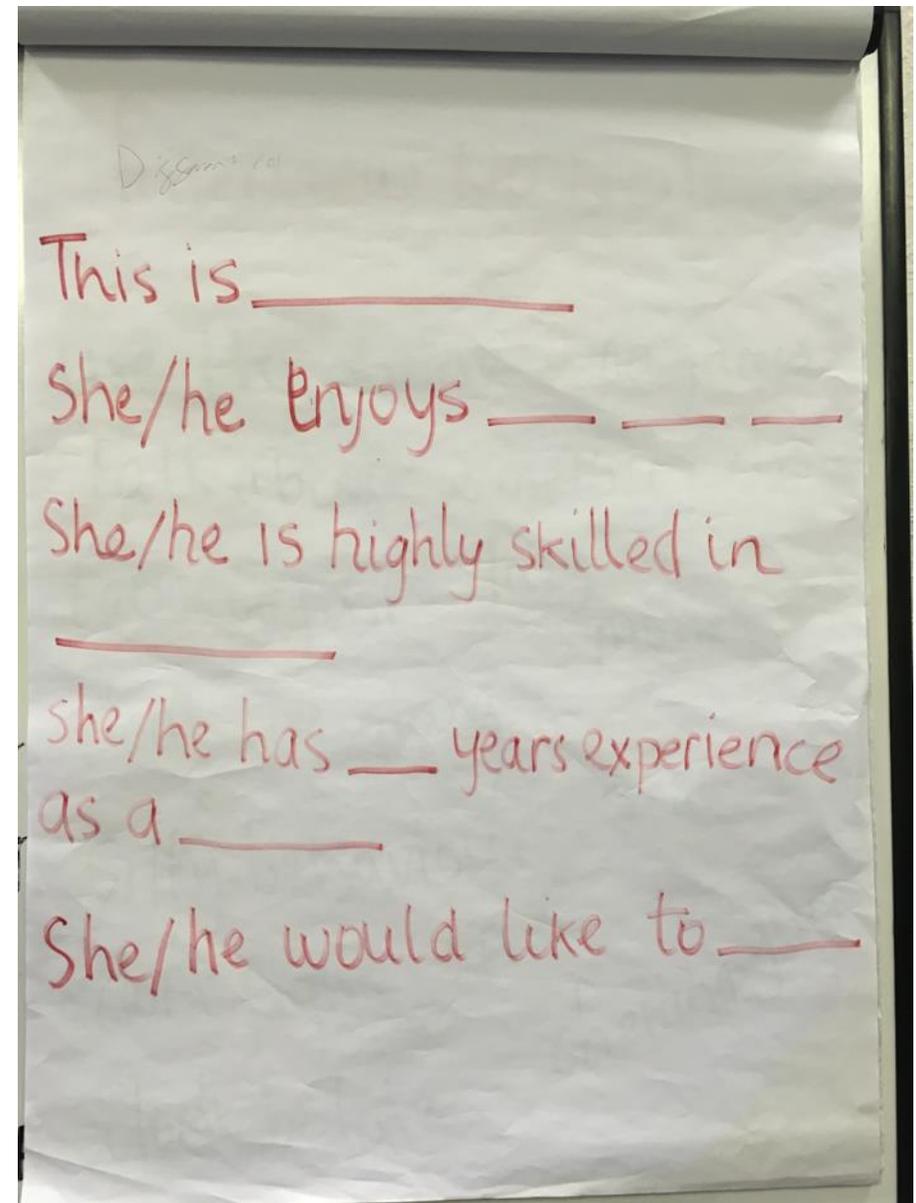
Some of the organisations provided back stage tours and offered volunteering opportunities to the participants.

2.6 Project activities

The project provided a number of activities for the participants. Activities included: language based tasks, skill

building, preparing presentations, performing (e.g. perform something badly, then do it well) and vocal and physical games. All sessions included singing, physical activity, word and counting games, and speaking in English to others within the group.

English language was always used in the Leeds group where there was no interpreter. In Sheffield, there was an interpreter present at every session and while English was used predominantly, some participants used the interpreter from time to time to communicate.





3 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

This evaluation report employed qualitative and quantitative methods to demonstrate the impact of the Creative Skills for Employment (CSfE) project. The evaluation period ran for the duration of the intensive two week programme. Planning meetings with programme leaders and WJR staff took place to understand and agree the prioritised outcomes for evaluation. The evaluation measures for this project included:

1. One to one interviews with:

- a. Eleven individual Syrian refugees participating in the project
- b. Three STEP employment managers
- c. Four creative practitioners leading the project
- d. Two childcare providers working on the project
- e. One interpreter working on the project

The data generated through the interviews identified common themes and insights arising from individuals' perceptions of the CSfE project. Interviews were conducted face to face or via telephone using the ORID method¹¹. The data (or text) from notes and interviews was analysed using a combination of content analysis and approaches in grounded theory¹². Thematic results emerged from the data and these results have been used to inform the basis of this report. Results are not intended to be fully scientific.

2. The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS)

This was measured at the start of the project and at the end of the two week project. The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being scale (WEMWBS) was developed to enable the monitoring of mental wellbeing and the evaluation of projects, programmes and policies which aim to improve mental wellbeing. The WEMWBS has been translated into Arabic and has been validated both psychometrically and

¹¹

The ORID method is a focus group process that facilitates a structured discussion that can be used for one to one conversations and with small groups (up to 12 people). ORID stands for: Observation, Reflection, Insight & Decision

¹² This basically counts the number of times a particular theme was discussed thus indicating the relative importance of that particular theme (content analysis) and being non-directive so that the themes genuinely emerge from the text with minimal bias (grounded theory).

qualitatively. Depending on participants' preference, it was used in this survey in both Arabic and English to benchmark changes in participants' mental wellbeing.

3. A benchmarking survey

Benchmarking questionnaires were given to participants at the start and end of the project. The questionnaire was short and simple in English only, and designed to measure changes in some of the potential project.

4. Observations of the activities

5. Two focus groups

The focus groups consisted of the Syrian refugees who participated in the project and some of their children, STEP employment managers and the SBC creatives. One focus group was held in Sheffield and one in Leeds, using the ORID¹³ method. The data (or text) from notes and interviews was analysed using a combination of content analysis and approaches in grounded theory¹⁴.

¹³ The ORID method is a four stage process that facilitates a semi-structured discussion that can be used in one-to-one conversations and for small groups (up to 12 people). ORID stands for: Observation, Reflection, Insight & Decision.

The ORID method is a focus group process that facilitates a structured discussion that can be used for one to one conversations and with small groups (up to 12 people). ORID stands for: Observation, Reflection, Insight & Decision

¹⁴ This basically counts the number of times a particular theme was discussed thus indicating the relative importance of that particular theme (content analysis) and being non-directive so that the themes genuinely emerge from the text with minimal bias (grounded theory).

4 EMERGING THEMES

4.1 THEME ONE – Wellbeing

Increased wellbeing for the individuals who participated in the project was the most significant theme emerging from the data. The project aimed to be fun and the feedback from participants showed that they had gained huge enjoyment from the activities, which increased their general wellbeing and made them feel happier.

Of those participants who completed the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being scale (WEMWBS) questionnaire at the start and end of the project, those scoring in the upper quartile doubled. Scoring in the upper quartile shows that the individuals wellbeing score is above average.

Wellbeing is important for refugees and their chances of employment. Recent research by the University of Oxford¹⁵ has shown that:

“38% of refugees report having health limiting conditions compared to 28% of migrants. Among those with health conditions, 70% report that the health problem limits the kind or amount of work they can engage in (compared to 50% of immigrants) and about 20% declare having mental health problems related to depression, anxiety or other [mental health conditions] (6% more than in the case of migrants). Having health conditions which lasted 12 months or more leads to a 16% reduction in the likelihood of employment.”

The most common change participants talked about was their increased confidence. A number of individuals saw themselves as more confident individuals, both in life generally and as compared with in their previous employment. The majority of men and women participating in the project displayed good levels of confidence once they felt comfortable in the learning environment. The increased confidence reported as a result of this project was very specifically in relation to speaking English and feeling less shy in their communication with others.

¹⁵ The Economic Integration of Refugees in the UK, Vargas-Silva, Kone & Ruiz
University of Oxford, 2018



Confidence building – sticking compliments on each other

Another significantly important theme to emerge is that the participants placed great value on their increased social networks as a result of the project. Enjoying the group, making new friends and sharing the experience with both Syrian and English people helped many to feel happier, more relaxed, feel increasingly supported and less alone.

This was backed up by the quantitative data. In the benchmarking survey both of the groups reported an increase in their networks to help them find work following the project.

This change is particularly relevant to individuals' employment journeys. Research suggests that individuals with strong social networks are more likely to gain employment and that refugees are especially likely to be isolated. It is highly likely that increasing networks for refugees is one of the most impactful interventions to support individuals progressing on their employment journey. As shown in a report for the Nuffield Foundation

by Cardiff University and Birmingham University¹⁶, *“Refugees with no social networks were the least likely to be employed”*. Possession of social networks by refugees has also been shown to be important for emotional and physical health, which in turn is important in getting a job.

¹⁶ [Social networks, social capital and refugee integration](#) Dr Sin Yi Cheung, School of Social Sciences Cardiff University & Dr Jenny Phillimore, Institute for Research into Superdiversity University of Birmingham

4.2 THEME TWO – Employment

Project participants felt more motivated to move forward on their employment journey as a result of their immersive experience. They talked about having been helped progress, getting more ideas about employment opportunities in the UK, and feeling an increased readiness for work.

The benchmarking survey showed that, following the project, participants in both groups felt an increased readiness to talk about themselves with a potential employer in an interview and were generally more prepared for an interview.



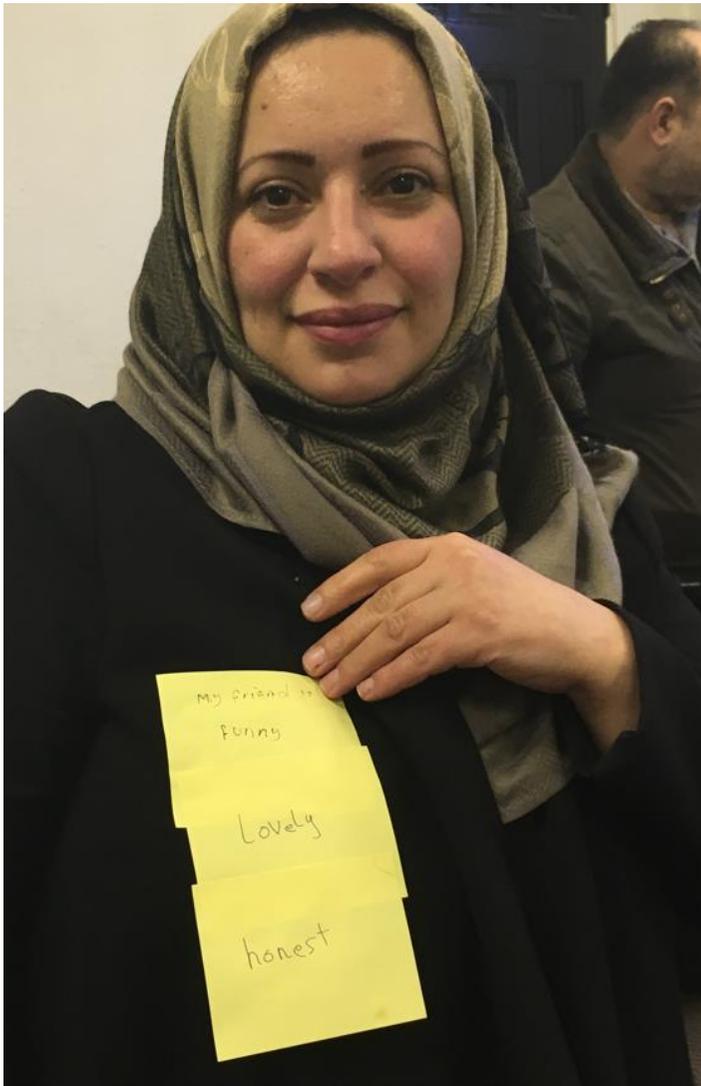
Improvisation - Practicing what to do, and not do in an interview

There were a number of activities within the two week project which focused on participants being able to talk about their skills and experience; and participants mentioned this as important.

Participants worked together in small groups to increase their understanding of how to share their skills and experience in the UK employment context. They were all required to do presentations to the group in English. As a result of this work they felt confident to talk to others in English about their experience and the things they are good at.

They developed increased understanding of how to behave in an interview, the formalities required and the questioning, which is likely to be significantly different from the more informal mechanisms which take place when looking for work in Syria.

A number of volunteering opportunities were showcased to the participants over the two weeks by the creative organisations who hosted the project and by the creative practitioners who were leading the project.



As a result of the project there have been a number of employment related outcomes:

- Two women and one man have taken up new volunteering roles, two at creative organisations involved in the project and one at M&S. All three individuals have opportunities to progress to paid work following their volunteering roles.
- Two women and one man have had volunteering opportunities offered to them by the creative organisations involved in the project. At the time of writing these volunteering positions were not formally confirmed.
- One new female client has been taken onto the STEP programme in Leeds.
- Two women have started training courses, one to gain an industry recognised qualification, and one to gain further skills and work experience.

4.3 THEME THREE – English Language

Participants' English language skills and confidence improved dramatically as a result of the two week immersion. The creative practitioners who led the course and the STEP Managers reported huge leaps in English language skills for the majority of their clients. The benchmarking survey showed participants in both groups reporting that they felt their conversational English had improved.

"I came at the beginning and at the end and I can't believe how well everyone is speaking. Everyone has improved so much I am so stunned! I could cry, I am so proud." STEP Manager

Participants reported feeling more confident to speak to native English speakers. When asked what could be done to help them further with their language skills or how the project could be improved, Syrian refugees said they wanted to speak more often, daily, in conversation with native English speakers.

"We want to speak more English every day like this."

"Here [on this course] we are happy because there are English and Arabic people all together. If you can arrange another course, invite more English people including equal proportions of English people and Arabic people - that would be helpful for us."

They compared this experience with their ESOL classes and many Syrian refugees reported their ESOL classes were not as productive or impactful as this experience.

"The ESOL classes don't help you as much as this. We've had a quick improvement here."

"In the ESOL classes people talk in Arabic. It's no good. There are no exercises in the classes. No speaking. Just listening. It is two hours a day for three days a week. This needs to be fed back to the classes."

"We don't need college we just need this course."

Unfortunately, the Syrian refugees experience is not uncommon. As shown in a report for the Nuffield Foundation by Cardiff University and Birmingham University, *"Between 36% and 48% refugees report no progress in ESOL classes"*.



5 THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

All the project participants who took part in the evaluation said they enjoyed the course. There were specific comments about the supportive environment and that the participants felt comfortable in the learning environment.

Strong bonds were created between the participants and the creative practitioners. The participants highly valued and liked the creative practitioners.

“The teachers are really friendly and they like to help.”

The STEP employment managers also commented about the creative practitioners:

“The leaders of the course treated everyone so equally and normally.”

“What worked was the creative practitioners themselves – SBC Theatre Company. Clients adored all the SBC staff. They were really good at engaging with the clients. They are very charismatic and also sensitive to the client group. All activities were appropriate, relevant to employability and fun – this is not easy!”

The singing, memorization games and relaxation exercises were enjoyed by the group.

“The way that they teach made us learn quicker. It is an easy way to learn. The practical bits and the way we did it with the exercises and songs. Theatre made us feel good. And singing made us feel like this!”

Doing power poses – getting ready to speak in public



The creative practitioners commented:

“People learn in different ways. Having fun helps people to learn.”

“There may have been a moment of resistance or concern at the beginning [from the participants]. This has disappeared. They have now built trust. This can’t be written in a book and this has to be done naturally.”

The group appreciated the food and transport costs being provided for them enabling them to attend the course. They were aware of the costs involved. Some participants were getting to the course late every day as they didn’t want to get the more expensive tickets first thing in the morning. The creative practitioners intervened in this situation and explained it was more important that they turned up on time. The evaluation sessions took place before the coach trips to London and Saltiara. Following the coach trips the STEP managers reported that both trips went really well, and the groups thoroughly enjoyed seeing new places in the UK.



The Sheffield group outside Buckingham Palace

6 CULTURAL CHANGE – INTEGRATION AND ORIENTATION

The project had impact on the participant's integration into British life, their orientation in their locality and their cultural awareness of life in the UK.

Participants said that they had a better understanding of their city as a result of the course. They felt that they had learnt about new places and following the two groups trips, the Sheffield group went to London and the Leeds group went to Saltaire, the Syrian refugees had seen more of the UK.

There were some interesting comments from the interpreter and some participants about how participants need to change the way they communicate to become more integrated and ready for work in the UK.

"In our [Arabic] culture listening is a bit of problem. A lot of people talk quickly. Here [in the UK] we listen and finish our conversations. In Syria, you can have a discussion and people will talk over each other. Listening skills aren't as good for Arabic people in general. They can be a bit loud in comparison to people in the UK. British people are a bit more reserved. People need to listen more and this is a barrier."

There were also some comments about gender roles in relation to communication:

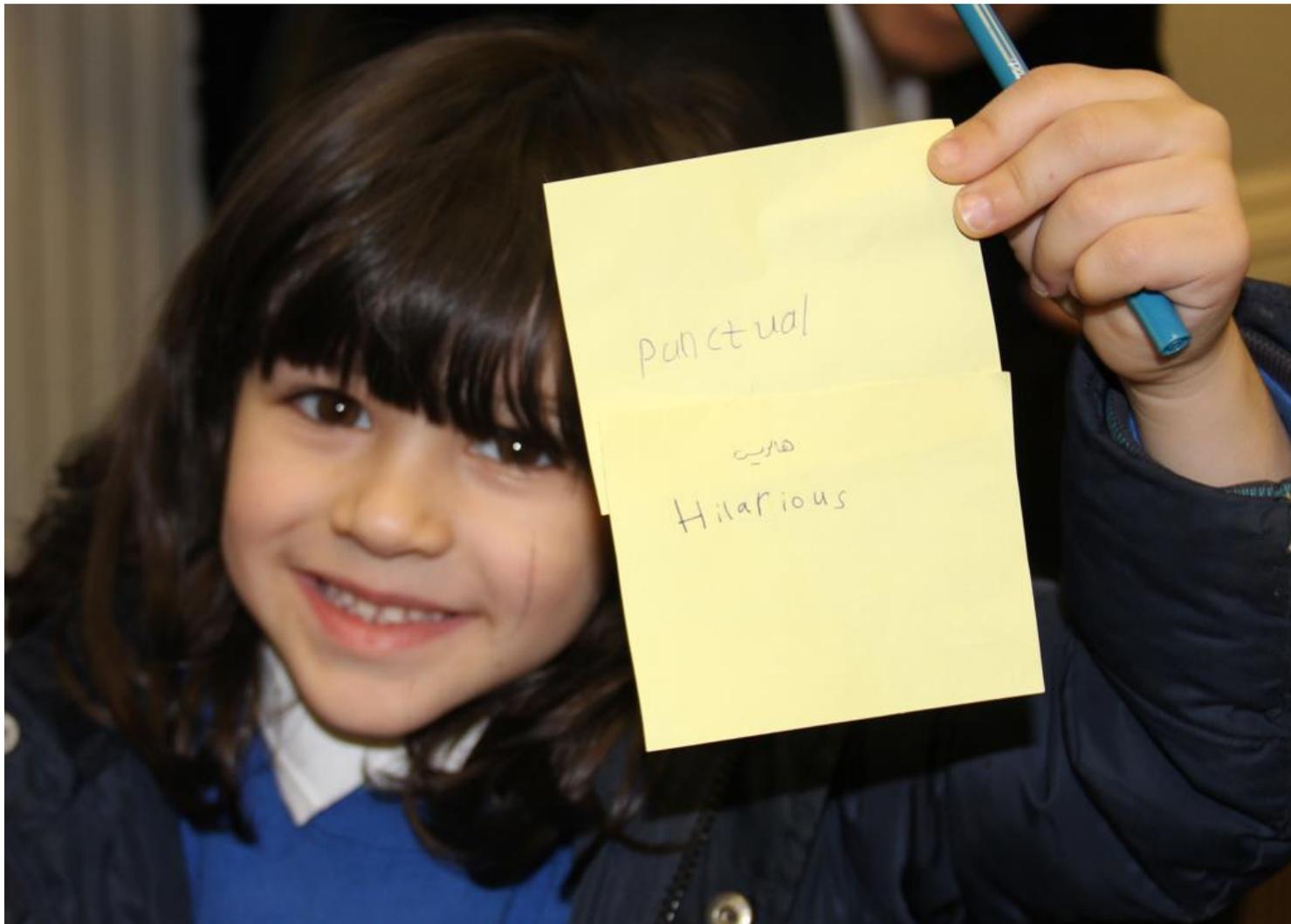
"Women are calmer and quieter than men [when they are in a mixed group]. This is because of the way the Syrian culture is - the men have the power. Things will have to change here. Some women will have to change."

There was an incident with one of the male participants expressing difficulty in shaking the female leader's hand on arrival. He felt uncomfortable about this and shared his concerns with the translator and with the female leader. She explained through the translator that, in British culture, men and women are treated equally. She emphasised that it is important in British society to shake both men and women's hands equally, and particularly important in the workplace, for example in an interview situation, it would be important to shake a woman's hand as well as her male colleagues. The participant, despite expressing discomfort about this, recognised the importance of this and subsequently did shake her hand every day.

Timekeeping was a significant issue for some of the participants. Many arrived late to the sessions, and were very relaxed about the start time, as is the cultural norm in Arabic countries. A number of the participants were unhappy that the sessions were interrupted by a steady stream of people coming in late. The leaders of the group did tackle this issue on a number of occasions but there were still many people who felt it

was OK to arrive during the sessions rather than on time. It was felt by a number of the participants, the interpreter and STEP employment managers that the participants needed to adjust to British norms around timekeeping if they were to be successful in the job market. The interpreter, who had been working with the Sheffield group intensively commented at the end of the project:

“There has been a change in people [on the course] learning to listen. This group will manage this change. They just need time, education, listening skills and knowing more about British culture.”



Participants felt that the project gave them the opportunity to interact with English people and become more integrated:

“We live with English people but we haven’t spoken with any English people for one year. These sessions gave us a chance to start to make relationships with English people. We can learn some traditions and cultures, learn what English people prefer and like and give us a chance to do the best thing.”



“I was surprised how much I enjoyed the English people.”

“I was really surprised how nice the English people are. Great people.”

7 RECOMMENDATIONS / PROJECT IMPROVEMENTS

The project participants, the creatives leading the project, the STEP employment managers, the interpreter and childcare providers were asked for ideas to improve the pilot project. This section outlines their ideas and solutions.

The most important suggestion received from participants was the that participants would like other refugees to be able to take part in this project. It is recommended that the Creative Skills for Employment project is to be considered as a key element of the STEP programme for all clients.

7.1 Project Content

- a. Specific elements of the project were commented upon as particularly successful. Aside from the elements mentioned previously in the report, successful elements included: attending a theatre performance and going on a group visit. It was seen as particularly valuable to give the participants the power to make the choices about where to go as a group.
- b. Developing social networks was particularly important for the groups so it is recommended that activities and initiatives that encourage and enable network development should be included within any future projects.
- c. Bringing the two groups together was also recommended. This would further increase the participants' social networks.
- d. Some participants felt it would be beneficial to have workbooks to accompany the sessions so they could do further reading at home. They specifically mentioned having some written information about tips for getting a job.
- e. The outcomes and impact of this project are likely to have been related to the social agency and energy built within each group. Participants and creatives leading the project formed strong bonds and were keen to meet up again. A participant recommended that the group should meet up again after a period of time to continue the momentum they built up on the project, to see how people's lives have changed and to inspire each other.
- f. A participant suggested including contact with employers and workplaces during the project. Workplace visits or visits to schools and colleges, as an example, could give specific ideas and understanding about work and workplaces.
- g. The project could have a website to promote itself and aid participants' learning during the project.
- h. It is recommended that the project includes more action planning at the end of the project to support participants next employment steps, both by themselves and with their STEP employment manager.

7.2 Project Practicalities

- a. There were a variety of opinions about the optimum size of group. The majority of the comments favoured a group size of 12-15 participants. Once the group gets as large as 20, as it did in Sheffield, there is an impact on managing critical elements such as timekeeping, for example.
- b. The participants benefitted from the project providing free travel, childcare and food. However, in some cases participants were being reimbursed for travel expenses during the sessions which took away from the learning time available and, in some cases, may have resulted in participants feeling uncomfortable and embarrassed. It is recommended that travel arrangements and payments are done in advance of the sessions by the STEP employment managers.
- c. It is recommended that STEP employment managers further increase their engagement with, and ownership of, the project, during the project planning, delivery and evaluation stages. This will support the project in being more tailored and responsive to individual clients' needs, and will ensure clients actions and STEP employment managers actions following the project are acted on, thereby increasing employment outcomes.
- d. It is recommended that the timings for the project sessions is reconsidered for future projects. For the afternoon session in Sheffield, some participants were arriving late due to having to wait for children to come out of school; and some children were often tired as they had to travel some distance home after the session. It was suggested that the project could be more beneficial to participants if it were to be held in the school holidays.
- e. It is recommended that discussions about timings of the sessions are reconsidered for future projects. Some participants would have liked the daily sessions to be longer than 2.5 hours.
- f. Childcare provision in the same room or in an adjacent room to the sessions was very successful and participants were keen that this should continue for future projects.
- g. STEP employment managers expressed concern about the loose eligibility criteria for participants' attendance on the project. Therefore, it is recommended that there is a discussion between the STEP employment managers, creative leaders and WJR staff to decide on appropriate criteria for future projects. Discussions about criteria could include: levels of English language, clients' stage of employment journey, needs of clients.
- h. As mentioned previously, there were concerns that participants' relaxed attitude to punctuality was affecting their learning experience. It is recommended that more emphasis is placed on punctuality in initial discussions with participants, both before they attend the course and within the first few sessions.
- i. It is recommended that the location for the project is reconsidered for future projects. Having the project take place at multiple locations was seen as both a benefit and a problem. Participants enjoyed visiting a variety of locations and using new methods of transport and found this beneficial to their knowledge of their locality, despite the logistical challenges it presented to them. However, for the organisers of the project, multiple locations provided logistical challenges, for example, ensuring adequate child care providers

and facilities were available. Some participants had to travel some distance to attend the sessions and it was suggested that in an ideal world it would be best to have this project based in the locality where the participants live.

7.3 English Language

- a. It is recommended that WJR aim to improve the quality of ESOL provision for their clients through working with local partners, providers and funders, for example by feeding back comments from project participants about the quality of the ESOL provision and through discussion gaining a joint understanding of what quality ESOL provision looks like.
- b. A number of participants suggested it would be beneficial to have more native English speakers present within the sessions to enable more participants to speak and listen to English more of the time.
- c. It was suggested that participants should be encouraged to communicate themselves more often. It was felt that some participants relied on the interpreter or other participants to communicate and that this should be actively discouraged in future projects.

7.4 Gender issues

- a. It was suggested that women would not have seen this project as an initiative to promote Syrian women into employment. More could be done to ensure this outcome while still working using a 'whole family' approach. From experience gained in this pilot project it could be beneficial to be more explicit with participants about gender roles in the UK and participants' cultural barriers to employment. For example, being explicit about male and female equality in the workplace and British norms in the workplace i.e. shaking hands with both men and women in the workplace. However, creating a dominant focus on the project being specifically to support Syrian women may be counterproductive to outcomes.
- b. It is recommended that a further discussion about the focus of the project on vulnerable women takes place prior to any future project. If the idea is to engage with the most isolated vulnerable and less confident women it may be necessary to reduce the English language criteria as mentioned previously in 2g.

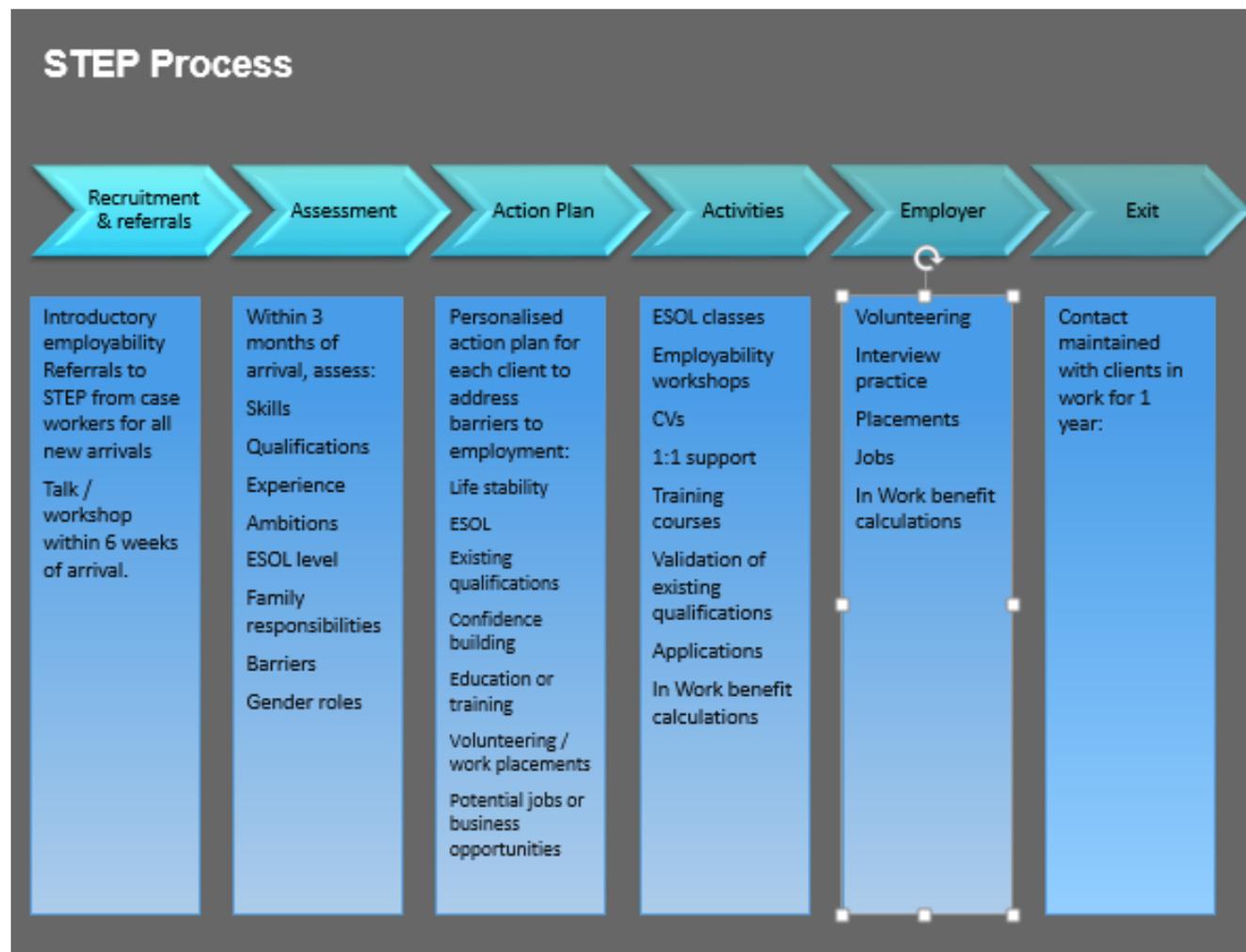


APPENDIX ONE – The STEP Programme

The STEP programme aims to fast track refugees into employment in the shortest possible time through providing extensive and intensive individual support with the ultimate aim for refugees to secure jobs appropriate to their skills and experience. It operates in Yorkshire working across a number of geographical areas including Leeds, Bradford, Sheffield, Halifax, Kirklees and Calderdale and Coventry in the West Midlands. The interviews and focus groups conducted for this research project were held in Leeds, Bradford, Sheffield and Kirklees and Calderdale.

The type of support given to refugees on the STEP programme includes personalised employment support, *English for Speakers of Other Languages* (ESOL) provision, employability workshops, CV support, validation of existing qualifications, in work benefits calculations, job applications, training and childcare. The STEP programme also works with employers encouraging and supporting them to provide work opportunities to refugees.

STEP is run in partnership with multiple delivery partners. Although the STEP process has evolved slightly differently in each area its delivery model can be summarised as:



Abigail Tweed – Director

mt | milestone tweed

abi@milestonetweed.com

07718 177 251

www.milestonetweed.com