

Working with Refugee and Migrant Communities: a community engagement resource



“Things are so different here in the UK, meeting health workers helped me understand where to go to get help”

Feedback 2011 TS4SE Community Engagement Project

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Working with Refugee and Migrant Communities: a community engagement resource

Introduction

There are many reasons why health workers will need to engage with local refugee and migrant communities:

- ✓ improving service take up and reducing “Did Not Appear” appointments
- ✓ planning for future services
- ✓ consulting on changes to services
- ✓ promoting specific health messages

This toolkit provides important background knowledge on refugees and migrants and their community organisations and signposts to information and links resources from across a range of sources, initiatives and organisations, and introduces a framework that can help both the frontline worker and local planners engage with local refugee and migrant communities.

Many NHS services have community engagement strategies and resources to help and this resource is not intended to replace local guidelines - you should always refer to local policies and procedures.

“Community engagement encompasses a variety of approaches whereby public service bodies empower citizens to consider and express their views on how their particular needs are best met. These may range from encouraging people to have a say on setting the priorities for community safety, through involving them in shaping and supporting health improvement programmes for themselves, to sharing decision-making with them in relation to defined services.”

Dr Henry Tam, Communities Unit, Home Office





The Principles of Community Development

Community Development is a process through which communities are supported to:

- identify their own needs and aspirations
- take action to exert influence on the decisions which affect their lives
- improve the quality of their own lives, the communities in which they live, and societies of which they are a part.

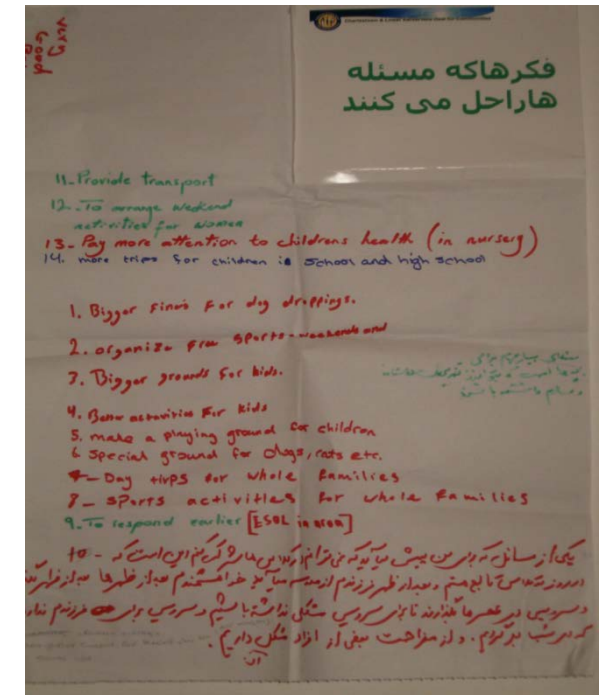
A community development approach requires a commitment to equality and anti-discriminatory practice, social justice and equality of access and outcomes, collective action, and community empowerment. Additionally community development is a learning and sharing process which recognises that both communities and health professionals are learning and working together for social improvement.

What is a “community”?

“Community” can mean many things – more often than not it can simply mean all the people living and working in an area, regardless of any other considerations. Often it can refer to a group of people with either an identity, social characteristic, nationality, gender, sexuality or ethnicity in common.

Communities are not homogeneous (ie all the same inside) – often the description of a group as a “community” is a label that is given to that group by others with little knowledge or understanding of the people they are talking about. For example the term “African community” hides more than it reveals; Africa is a vast continent with huge differences between nations, peoples, religions, politics, food and culture – after all you would you say a Norwegian has much culturally in common with somebody from Malta?

Communities can be self-defining or defined by others. They can refer to a group of people in a specific geographical location eg a city or town, or a group of people with something in common besides where they live or work. Don't assume because you speak of a “Somali” community there will be a single community group to work with!





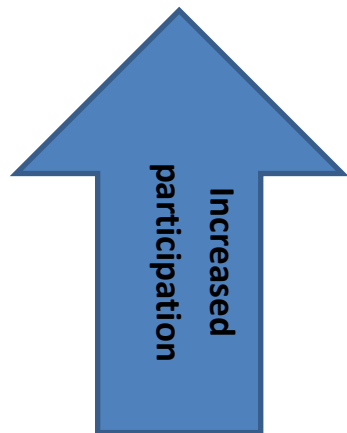
Why Community Development is important

For marginalised communities, excluded from the “mainstream” of society in which the community members experience profound “powerlessness” a community development approach is essential as part of the wider process of integration and community “healing”.

Empowering people to take control of their lives again – to make decisions that CAN improve or change their life allows growth and healing, and improves general well-being and an individual sense of worth.

It is important therefore to understand what you are planning or delivering – and how this fits with a wider understanding of community engagement and empowerment. The ladder of participation developed by Arnstein is a good basis from which to think about your practice and reflect on your professional objectives during engagement.

A modified ladder of participation



Community control of service design, delivery and the resources required to this
Delegated powers – communities have responsibilities given to them in service design, service delivery, evaluation etc.
Participant in decision making – shared responsibilities
Placation – “invited nominees on committees”
Consultation about services through “meetings” and limited dialogue
Information provided about services to communities – no feedback or dialogue
Bad access to or not receiving existing services – no support or outreach



How refugee and migrant communities are disempowered in the U.K.



Refugees and migrant communities face multiple causes of disempowerment – understanding these is key to addressing the barriers they face – and to meaningful action and activity to improve general health and well-being. Some of these issues you can address directly – others will need a wider partnership approach, others are a matter of policy and government with little you can do in your professional role.

The social isolation experienced by refugees and migrants, as well as constant worries about immigration status experienced by people seeking asylum and migrant workers can compound disempowerment and lead to further social withdrawal making engagement difficult, but not impossible. Set clear goals and objectives and ensure you have adequate resources, and work through community groups or existing services and be patient and persistent.



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The individuals you may work with

It is vital that anyone wanting to engage with refugee or migrant communities spends time understanding the issues which affect the communities they want to work with.

Health workers need to understand that the lives of refugees and migrants can be markedly different from the lives of the local population around them. The demands of their everyday life can affect their ability to engage with service providers, and more importantly sustain that engagement over a long period.

The lives of asylum seekers are by the very nature of the asylum process “chaotic”: multiple enforced moves; demands placed on them by the asylum process case manager; potential detention and deportation; worry for relatives and family left behind; and an overwhelming need to secure sanctuary and a safe haven to live. A positive or a negative asylum decision can throw a person’s life into free fall – loss of accommodation, homelessness and destitution, transition to residency or preparation for deportation.

Any plans that a person may have made, and any voluntary work they were doing, all become less important as a person struggles to respond to the new life changing events that are happening to them every day.

This may be frustrating for the health professional or community health worker trying to engage and work with individuals and communities. It is important that your priorities may not be shared with the communities you are working with. The key however, is persistence and patience, and progress can be made and useful work to improve health and health outcomes can be undertaken.





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The Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs)

Refugee Community Organisations have been described as **“knowledge rich – resource poor”** – they are likely to be led by volunteers, receive little funding and have a primary role in supporting the immediate and everyday needs of the communities they grow out of.



Their function is not to provide service providers with a link into communities – any work you are likely to undertake with them is likely to have an impact on the rest of the work they do for the community.

Where community groups are funded often this funding will be for a specific purpose for a specific period of time – any resources they may have will therefore be restricted to that purpose.

Your priorities may not be the RCOs! Where they have been funded to deliver project work or specific outcomes they will need to focus on delivering these; think creatively and find ways to work with the community to deliver both their objectives and yours. For example, you could “piggy back” existing work using a stall at a community event delivered by an existing project. Don’t expect the community to share your priorities or necessarily share the importance you attach to your own work!

The volunteer base of RCO’s is drawn mainly from the communities they support, and these volunteers face the same issues and complications as anyone else from the communities. The RCO may fluctuate in activity – volunteers may be faced with choices about homes, housing, work and benefits that means the people you are working with can frequently change; don’t assume that everyone else in the community knows about the work – it is your job to spread the message within the community group – not theirs!

If you are working through RCOs remember – they will need resourcing too: paying the community organisation to assist planning, delivery, engagement, travelling and for the time they spend with you, shows you value their work and expertise, compensate the RCO for not doing other things (opportunity costs) and help sustain the RCO through longer pieces of work which could be a drain on the limited human and financial resources that they have.

Migrant Community Organisations

There is no set model for migrant community organisations each organisation will be different and communities may have more than one community group – this can be a sign of a vibrant and dynamic community engaged in different forms of social action, or a community under pressure.

Don’t assume that as you have identified one group you will have a route into the whole community, be patient as you find out more you can adjust your plans and ensure you have an “inclusive” approach.



Planning your refugee and migrant community engagement – “A.C.R.E.”

Each local authority and health partnership will have specific standards and approaches to community engagement and involvement – please check your local NHS organisation and local

A.C. R.E. stands for **Awareness, Communication, Resources and Relationships, Engagement** each element concerns both you and your service and the local community you want to engage.

Remember

An important element in engaging refugee and migrant community groups is background knowledge and awareness – understanding the lives, limitations, restriction and daily problems faced by migrants will help you plan realistic engagement strategies and avoid disappointment and failure.

Equally important is the question of resources – the resources you need to sustain your engagement and the resources needed by the community group to work with you. Don't assume as they have an office, computer and telephone they are well resourced! *In your planning you will need to consider how to support the community in their engagement with you – are their local funds you can use to do this?*

council for local standards. This tool is designed to assist you in thinking about particular issues involved in working with migrant communities and individuals.

Relationships, both formal and informal are key to successful community engagement. Often these relationships break down as personnel and staff move on to new jobs, or volunteers are drawn away from community activity. Key to maintaining the work and engagement is ensuring that relationships are structured and between organisations, teams or projects rather than between individuals. Individual relationships help smooth the running of the work – but if engagement is limited to personal relationships they may be short lived and not have longevity.

The following table highlights the key issues under the A.C.R.E. heading, however, remember every community is different and you will need to assess and plan your work on the basis of this difference, one size does not fit all!

Use the A.C.R.E. tool to supplement your existing knowledge and skills and integrate the issues you highlight in your planning.



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	Awareness	Communication	Resources	Relationships	Engagement
Issues for you	What do you know about the community? Language History Location Celebrations – important dates? and the issues affecting them?	Is there a barrier to communication? Do you need written translations and/or interpreters? How will you contact the community?	How much time do you have to commit to this work – is this realistic to achieve your aims? How much will this work cost your service – where are funds?	Has the community consented to take part – or have they been “encouraged”? Will you sustain your contact with the community after the current work?	Have you developed a plan – have you involved the community in the planning? Are you following local procedures, structures or approaches?
	Who else is or has been working with them?	Who will you contact and will you need more than one contact?	Have you considered costs for the community group – can you cover these costs?	How do you ensure the relationship is with the whole team or service – not just you?	Are there any issues which may impact on the engagement?
	What are the lessons, issues arising from this work?	How will you explain your aims – how will you listen to the community’s needs?	What will you leave behind – how will you update or maintain it?	What are the limits to the engagement – have you made this clear to the community?	
	Are there any other issues which may impact the work – do I need signposting information or to work in partnership?				
Issues for the community	What does your service do?	How do they contact you or your team – when and where?	What impact will this work have on their existing work or commitments?	Are you just “ticking a box”?	Where does this fit with local plans or partnerships?
	What do you do?	Will you listen to them and help them?	Will you cover costs or pay for their time, knowledge and expertise?	Is the relationship meaningful – will it help the community?	Is this a priority or distraction?
	What demands will you place on them?	How often will you contact them?	What will you leave behind – how will you update or maintain it?	What happens when the person they know moves on?	What will the community gain from this?
					How long will it last – what are the aims/outcomes?



Community Engagement Resources and Links:

It is useful to seek good practice, information, tools and tips to help guide your work – the links below provide useful sources of information and help.

Facts and Figures

Contact your local authority for specific information regarding asylum, refugee and other migrant populations and community groups

- Statistical Information on Neighbourhoods and localities ONS link here: [Neighbourhood Statistics](#)
- Home Office figures and statistics:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/immigration-asylum-research/>

Health and Community Engagement

- NICE guidance on community engagement: <http://www.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/pdf/PH009Guidance.pdf>
- Practical community engagement help: <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=16639575#contents-5>
- Social Capital and Health – Scottish Model for Engagement:
http://www.edinburghcompact.org.uk/downloads/Social_capital_health_and_wellbeing.pdf
- Scottish Guidance on work with minority communities: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/regeneration/engage/HowToGuide/MinorityEthnicCommuniti>
- Kings Fund Reading List on Public Health in England: www.kingsfund.org.uk/document.rm?id=8375
- The Health Foundation: Engaging Communities for Health Improvement: www.apho.org.uk/resource/view.aspx?RID=101717
- The Benefits of Community Engagement <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/151525.pdf>

Community Development

- Federation of Community Development Learning – website full of useful information, links and tips: <http://www.fcdl.org/>
- Community Development Exchange – a membership based organisation with a wealth of resources: <http://www.cdx.org.uk/>
- Community Development Foundation – social enterprise promoting community development: <http://www.cdf.org.uk>
- TS4SE – not for profit cooperative offering community development support and training: <http://www.ts4se.org.uk>