

Partnership for Employment

Evaluation of the Access First Employment and Training Project for Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Refugee Resource in partnership with
Oxfordshire County Council Adult Basic Skills Service
and Social and Health Care Asylum Seeker Service
Asylum Welcome
Jobcentre Plus

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We thank the employers who gave their time to participate in the evaluation process. The project constantly aims for a best match between an employer and a potential employee, and the work of employers in helping us to discover how that match can be made is deeply appreciated. Particular mention is due to Oxfordshire County Council's Fire and Rescue Service for their creativity and support for the project as well as for individual refugees and asylum seekers through work placements and employment.

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Very many thanks to the 24 refugees and asylum seekers who willingly gave their time to be interviewed for the evaluation. The project staff recognise how much they have learnt alongside refugees and asylum seekers in finding ways to overcome the huge barriers to employment that they face, and are grateful to all who improve the project by sharing their experiences with others. In addition to client involvement the refugee advisory group has made important contributions in shaping the project at every stage including the evaluation.

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OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL



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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

Access First is a partnership project managed by Refugee Resource in Oxford, which seeks to support refugees and asylum seekers in Oxfordshire into work and training that matches their skills and aspirations. This document reports on the evaluation of the project and aims to:

- Inform the development of the next stage of the project
- Provide partners with a record of achievements to date, identifying those factors that have contributed to the project's success
- Inform the development of a good practice guide on refugee employment partnerships.

In introducing this report, the consultants would wish to highlight the intense pride that many involved with the project expressed in its achievements and ways of working. This included staff and partner organisations, through the wider stake-holder groups, to many of the service users interviewed during the course of this evaluation.

1.2 PROJECT OUTPUTS

Access First has achieved some notable successes. It had contact with 224 people in the period of operation through an initial survey, basic advice and support was provided to 135 people, and 72 eligible people were enrolled on the core European Social Fund (ESF) programme. Outcomes for these 72 people were tracked with 81% securing a positive outcome:

- Two-thirds (46 people) got full time work (36%) or part time work (28%) as a result of their involvement with **Access First**
- A further 9 (13%) went into training, and three into voluntary work.

This compares favourably with the project's targets in its funding bid and similar projects operating in London:

- Double the numbers targeted achieved full-time employment
- Forty-one achieved the health and safety certificate (40 people targeted)
- More than the numbers targeted achieved a job interview (43 people, 35 targeted)

Meeting these targets is particularly impressive because 25% of those helped by the Project were asylum seekers rather than people with refugee status or some form of exceptional leave to remain. Many employers are often reluctant to employ asylum seekers due to uncertainties over status and confusing documentation.

However, one area of concern is the small number of refugee women contacting the service: 14%. There are no reliable statistics on the presence of refugees in Oxford, and so limited intelligence of the gender breakdown to provide a comparator. However, while it is true that many more men than women apply for asylum, it is also true that many women arrive as

dependants or follow as family reunions. The project staff observe that, although they have had some important successes with professional women, they have failed to attract women with fewer, lower-level or no qualifications.

We consider that the ESF project provided value for money, its unit cost for each person securing one or more positive outcomes was £3,958. The cost per beneficiary was £3,188. The project remained within its original budget and was successful in securing match funding. The sums from individual parties were broadly in line with the original funding application. These included:

East Oxford Action	£45,543
Refugee Resource	£35,554
Oxfordshire County Council	£32,903
Oxford, Swindon and Gloucester Cooperative Society	£5,869
Oxford PGMDE (Deanery)	£3,450
Oxford and Cherwell FE College	£1,943
Asylum Welcome	£1,545
Connexions	£457

1.3 THE VIEWS OF SERVICE USERS

This document reports on the views of 24 service users following detailed semi-structured interviews. These interviews were designed to reflect the range of different service users seen by the project including age ranges, ethnicity, gender and skills/educational attainment.

A significant proportion of those interviewed (42%) were made aware of the project by the Community English School, many of the others came to the project as a result of word of mouth recommendations from friends and family. The closeness of the relationship between the project partners (in particular, the Community English School and Refugee Resource) was also noted by stake-holders as a key factor in the success of the project.

The overall views of service users were very positive. The friendliness of staff and the way in which they were kept informed about developments and opportunities were cited as particularly important. Few of those interviewed had contact with other refugee services.

The development of self-confidence was as important for many of the participants as specific skills development. The holistic nature of the service provided was also cited as important, particularly for those who came to the project following contact with Refugee Resource's counselling service.

There were some disappointments with Access First. For some this related to very high expectations that the project would definitely secure them employment and for others it related to the length of courses – “two days a week is not enough”.

Alongside boosting individuals’ self-confidence, the project scored very highly on developing individuals’ skills in searching for jobs and in writing applications. The development of interviewing skills was also highly rated.

For many service users questions over their status was the main concern. For those where this was not an issue key concerns related to English language proficiency and lack of UK based work experience (four of the interviewees were on work placements, but the project reported some reluctance amongst service users to take up unpaid opportunities). A number of individual concerns were also reported including child care provision and recognition of overseas professional qualifications.

1.4 KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Alongside exceeding targets and the impacts identified by service users the evaluation identifies a number of key achievements in the development of the project. These included:

- The involvement of refugees at the start of the project and the way in which it sustained that involvement through supporting the Refugee Advisory Group.
- The model of guidance and the development of individual learning pathways.
- The development of good relationships with employers and the way in which the project addressed these needs.
- Developing the partnership (including shared values) before the funding was sought, and ensuring that the partnership was useful to all involved: action focused and informative.
- Taking responsibility for ensuring the partnership worked well, but insisting that leadership was shared.
- Working to ensure that there was a seamless referral network so refugees did not get “passed around” too much.
- The close nature of the relationship between the project partners (in particular, the Community English School and Refugee Resource).

A further key achievement is that the project developed a sustainable model that recognised that the time-limited nature of the project meant that as much as possible must be mainstreamed to be of long term use. Some of the project’s work is now in use elsewhere:

- The course developed for Access First has now been published nationally
- The course is now mainstreamed as part of the Community English School provision
- One employer has built on their experiences in Oxford to develop work accessing English language support in Southampton

- Kent Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) have asked Oxfordshire FRS for copies of the protocols on refugee employment developed with the project's help.

1.5 FACTORS IN SUCCESS

The location of the project within Oxford was seen as being a key factor in success. This includes:

- Excellent labour market conditions for the project to flourish (but would not have done without approach as detailed)
- Perceived as a relatively safe, diverse city where refugees feel settled (but is expensive and housing is a major problem)
- Has an established refugee sector with a solid human rights focus that has links into many other areas through campaigning and also assumes policy relevance because of relative importance of Oxford University in national life
- "We are a small city and we bump into each other" which increases real and effective accountability (but can magnify errors and confuse personal and professional boundaries)
- Is not an area of dispersal so asylum seekers and refugees may have chosen to come to the city (but some have been detained in Campsfield and others may be arriving to the Bicester accommodation centre).

The project's commitment to refugee involvement was also seen as a key factor in success:

- Refugee involvement backs up the call to altruism and gives the project authority (but involvement in the advisory group has not been easy to sustain more recently)
- Refugees report feeling at home and happy using the project: a "good feeling" after the first approach
- The belief that users are at the centre of what they do is one of the "glues" holding the partnership together

Stake-holders also identified the project ethos as being important, citing:

- The emphasis on empowerment
- Holistic approach to client group also based on commitment to them
- The emphasis on continuous learning and improvement
- "No-nonsense, get on with it, find the solutions approach"

Similarly, the commitment to partnership was seen as particularly important:

- Key decision-makers and organisations involved
- Refugee Resource staff worked hard to develop the partnership BUT have resisted being lead partners, because they want all involved to share responsibility for the partnership and its work

- People in the partnership work on the basis of their shared interests, values and commitments beyond their separate formal identities
- “Every meeting is useful”: they revolve around action and developing a united voice not just developing bids

Alongside other service providers, the project’s work with employers was also seen as a critical factor in success:

- Generally enjoy the confidence of employers with whom they have worked
- Are seen as having a keen appreciation of employer needs
- Have developed a track record with work placements that has convinced some employers of the benefits

From outside the project stake-holders and service users identified the contribution to success played by the staff. They were perceived to be knowledgeable, hardworking and approachable and they make their appreciation of other people’s contributions known.

1.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

This section summarises the recommendations contained in section 5 of the report. In making these recommendations it is important to emphasise that the “Access First” model works well, and there is no need to develop novelty for the sake of it.

In particular, Access First was developed as a pilot project, with funders willing to allow time and resources to develop in a new area and acknowledging a need to find out more about refugee employment. Funders need to be flexible, to enter into dialogue with practitioners and to ensure that there are fixed points in project development at which they can hear about what is needed for whom and act on it.

Access First should continue to ensure that its employment services have at their core the model of individually tailored guidance, based on aspirations as well as available options, and the development of individual learning pathways. These also depend on continuing to work with others to provide a “seamless” referral system between all involved.

Access First should continue to build and maintain good relationships with employers in the area, developing options for users based on a real and continuously assessed understanding of employers’ needs.

Access First should continue to support and participate in ORASTEOP and to explore other potential partnerships based on shared values to deliver its work on employment. The model of partnership whereby, while Refugee Resource staff take responsibility for ensuring that the

partnership works well, leadership is shared between partners is one that should be used, developed and disseminated.

Access First should continue to ensure that refugees are consulted meaningfully at the initial stages of any project and involved closely in its development. This is another model that should be used, developed and disseminated.

The relationship with the Community English School has been particularly close and productive. With the move to other types of funding by Refugee Resource Project and the mainstreaming of the course developed by the partnership, care should be taken to ensure that the relationship continues.

1.6.1 OPTIONS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Alongside maintaining those parts of the project and partnership that are clearly working well, there are a number of other possible developments that the project and the wider partnership may wish to develop.

- R1. Access First should consider developing specific support services around self-employment. Work on this could be developed with the Ethnic Minority Business Service with whom Refugee Resource are near neighbours.**
- R2. Produce guidance and promote voluntary work as an option for refugees looking to gain experience and possibly references in the UK as well as for asylum seekers and others unable to work. This could possibly include information on the value and uses of work placements.**
- R3. Access First should continue discussions with employers and trades unions about developing information and support for refugees around workplace representation and involvement.**
- R4. Develop a specific programme of work with women, especially those with few qualifications, including securing more involvement from them in the advisory group.**
- R5. Develop the role of the advisory group to offer consultation and feedback on projects and other services run by partnership members.**
- R6. Discuss with the Choices programme of Refugee Action whether there is any role to be developed in supporting voluntary return, and ways in which the work on refugee employment generally can incorporate elements that may support voluntary return at a later stage (e.g. for established refugees who may wish to return home after a change in government).**
- R7. Develop work with young refugees, including unaccompanied minors, in conjunction with Connexions and with the Bridging project based at Oxford and Cherwell FE College.**

- R8. Consideration should be given to ways of continuing to support the specific resource for refugee health professionals set up with the backing of all relevant stake-holders (e.g. health authorities, Post-Graduate Medical and Dental Education, Department of Health) that includes the long term support of a structured multi-disciplinary mentorship scheme.**
- R9. Develop a more publicised service for smaller employers to assist with documentation issues¹.**
- R10. Publicise the existence of a “service menu” for employers that includes reviews of recruitment processes and advice on improvements as well as assistance to refugees, and ensure that all employers are aware of the full range of options offered to refugees, such as referrals to food hygiene courses if necessary.**
- R11. Build on the work already done to develop a PR resource focusing on refugee contributions in the area to support local responses to media and political attacks on refugees.**
- R12. Continue and develop discussions with those offering similar services to other disadvantaged groups (such as long term unemployed, disabled etc) to review possible options for joint work.**

¹ While it would be necessary to register for Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) exemption if securing work permits or similar for clients, simply advising employers about what documentation they need in order to enable them to employ a wider group of people is not defined as immigration advice and so does not need the involvement of the OISC.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 ABOUT THIS REPORT

In December 2003 Refugee Resource commissioned Michael Bell Associates to undertake an evaluation of its Access First training and employment project. The aims of this evaluation were three-fold, to:

- Inform the development of the next stage of the project
- Provide partners with a record of achievements to date, identifying those factors that have contributed to the project's success
- Inform the development of a good practice guide on refugee employment partnerships

In producing this report we consider that the experience of developing the Access First partnership in a small city is of particular interest beyond the stake-holders in Oxford as much of the published work on partnerships relate to larger metropolitan areas.

The evaluation of Access First has been carried out in close cooperation with the Refugee Resource project staff and partners, and with an emphasis on evaluation as a learning tool for all those involved: the project, its stake-holders, the beneficiaries, the potential "public" who might read the published evaluation and the consultants themselves. This report follows the production and discussion by the major stake-holders of an "emerging findings" summary report. This iterative process is designed to ensure that ownership of the findings and recommendations rests with the project rather than with the consultants.

The research included **process evaluation** – looking at the way in which the project and the partnership work and **impact or outcome evaluation** – looking at the effect the project's interventions have had on the lives of refugees and asylum seekers. To this end the project held stake-holder events, conducted 24 interviews with service users and 6 interviews with stake-holders from a range of organisations². Service user interviews were undertaken by community researchers, drawn from Michael Bell Associates' programme for refugees. A more detailed overview of the evaluation methodology is contained in the appendix.

2.2 OVERVIEW OF ACCESS FIRST

Access First is a partnership project managed by Refugee Resource, which seeks to support refugees and asylum seekers in Oxfordshire into work and training that matches their skills and aspirations. Alongside a range of organisational stake-holders, local refugees and asylum seekers were involved in designing and setting up the project and continue to support its development through quarterly meetings of the Refugee Advisory Group.

² A full list of interviewees is listed in the appendix.

The project operates in a wider context of support services in the area. The project has good working relationships with these organisations and these are formalised through management arrangements. There is a wider partnership, the Oxfordshire Refugee & Asylum Seeker Training, Education and Employment Partnership (ORASTEEL), comprising around nine agencies from FE colleges to Jobcentres and Oxfordshire County Council. ORASTEEL is operationally focused and meets on a bimonthly cycle. In addition, there is a project steering group, comprising key partners such as Asylum Welcome, Jobcentre Plus and the Employers' Coalition, that meets every three months to monitor progress against the project plan.

The project has had considerable success at securing work placements with individual employers, such as the County Council, and work on breaking down barriers to employment – this is an area that the project is keen to develop. It also works closely with Asylum Welcome, who have an education adviser. Access First has been able to support individuals referred by Asylum Welcome with bursaries to meet vocational training requirements. The project also works closely with the Community English School.

3 EXPERIENCES OF SERVICE USERS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

As part of the intervention we interviewed 24 individuals from the organisation's principal and non-principal ethnic-group service users in March and April 2004. Individuals interviewed, therefore included those who were Afghani, Algerian, Iranian, Kurdish (Iraqis), Palestinian, Sudanese and Ugandan.

We interviewed 19 men and 5 women³. The ages of those interviewed were as follows:

<20 yrs	2 respondents
21 yrs – 30 yrs	8 respondents
31 yrs – 40 yrs	10 respondents
41 yrs – 50 yrs	2 respondents

In terms of their immigration status 11 had Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR), 9 had Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) and 2 each were asylum seekers and naturalised/British citizens. Twenty of those we interviewed had arrived in the years since 2000 and the largest proportion (11) arrived in 2000 itself.

These were interviewed by Michael Bell Associates' own community researchers, drawn from refugee communities, who shared some cultural affinity with a number of those interviewed.

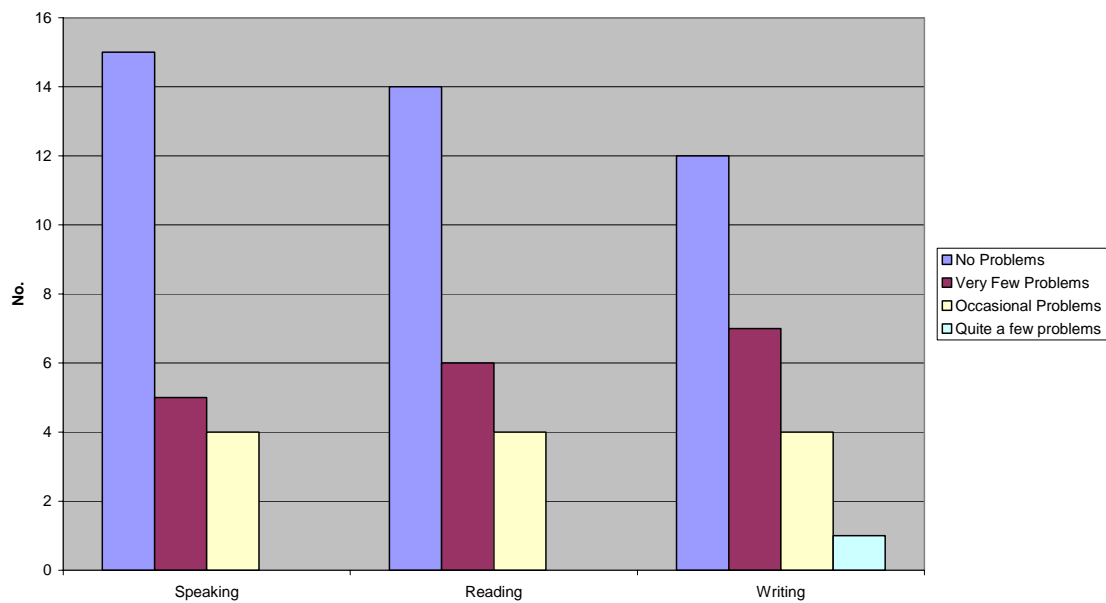
3.2 ABOUT THE SERVICE USERS

Those we interviewed had a wide range of existing skills, the most apparent was the large number of languages people spoke even as 'first' languages or 'mother tongue'. One individual informed us that he spoke 5 languages fluently.

Most of those we spoke to claimed to have 'no' or 'very few problems' with their spoken English and their reading ability in the language. Similarly, with written English only one person we spoke to noted they had 'quite a few problems' with this.

³ Please note that in the following analysis, where numbers do not total 24, there is missing data e.g. two interviewees did not provide details of their age.

Levels of English amongst respondents



Eight of those we spoke to had degrees and/or professional qualifications before coming to the UK. Fourteen had finished their education at secondary level whilst one had finished school at primary level. A range of specific professional skills were identified notably veterinarian, lawyer, journalist and surgeon. Another individual came to the UK only months before he was due to qualify as a doctor in his home country. This individual was currently doing labouring jobs whilst looking for nursing work.

3.3 VIEWS OF SERVICE USERS

3.3.1 FIRST CONTACTS & EXPERIENCES

Ten of those we spoke to had become aware of the organisation from the Community English School, many of the others had heard of the project by word of mouth, principally through friends.

Naturally, the reasons why people made this initial contact are varied but are probably encapsulated by the person who said simply:

"I wanted to get a job."

Getting work was the dominant expectation of the project which respondents related to us.

Although one stated they got in touch because:

"I wanted to do some voluntary work."

One more specifically identified that:

As soon as I contacted them I told them I was looking for counselling and they said that they would be able to help me in this regard. So I felt that the organization would be able to offer appropriate help.

It is interesting to note the state of mind of service users at this stage, one respondent stated:

"I was confused, but they explained everything and I thought it might be the right place."

It becomes immediately apparent that in the early stages of contact with Access First, through the various partner organisations, service users had very positive experiences, even though virtually none of the respondents knew what the project did before they approached it. Those we interviewed specifically drew attention to the fact that their first interaction with the organisation was "very friendly". Whilst for others their attitude was less tangible, it was clearly complimentary, one describing having a "good feeling" about the organisation.

"I felt that I came to a good atmosphere, good teachers and I felt comfortable."

In its fundamental aims of helping people into work the project had created a positive image of itself:

"I found them very helpful people, they were always calling me and informing me about the different courses and job opportunities ... they were trying every possible way to put me into a position to find a job."

There were then general comments which were positive about the organisation but also specific ones relating to the actual services that had been provided. Individuals, for example, drew attention to specific improvements to their job-search and application form skills, English language level, how to look for work and confidence with computers. Respondents, by extension, were clear from the start about their needs:

"I thought it was helpful and it really was. I got what I wanted."

One identified a very specific way in which the organisation had been able to help him, through helping him to maintain his knowledge of medical terminology in English. Another ascribed a very specific impact which the project had upon them:

"Because I found a job through them."

Similarly one offered more substantive examples of the help provided:

“For me the English course was very important. I improved my English, also they helped my wife to find the courses she was interested in like child care course etc. and through them I could get the licence for Forklift driving.”

But also respondents noted that, more generally, it “Was very informative and educational and [I] learned new things all the time” and for others it had helped them understand the labour market. Respondents were also able to discern clear improvements in their own progress as their involvement in the project developed. Another noted the most important skill he had learned was how to “sell” himself at interviews.

“In order to get a job in the UK you have to be very good in the interview and you have to say things that sound very good. I learned to “sell” myself. In Afghanistan you don’t say good things about yourself, other people need to say that about you.”

One interviewee had been able to make use of the project at a slightly higher level:

“As my English language was good, so I did not need to go to the English language class, instead I was doing job search and sending my CV’s to employers, I had the facility of posting, faxing, photocopying documents and looking at the newspapers and job leaflets.”

What is interesting is the extent to which the help provided, for many, went beyond enhancing their job-search potential:

“First of all the Refugee Resource helped me with counselling which made my life better, which was a great experience as well and, secondly, it helped me with learning the use of computer and knowing a lot about the UK work places.”

There were particular compliments too for the teaching at the Community English School: one noting that

“things [were] explained in an interesting way”.

Similarly

“Staff members are all very friendly and helpful”.

3.3.2 MEETING EXPECTATIONS

It is apparent that those refugees or asylum seekers who have made use of the project's services have had a positive experience.

"because it made me a better person and learn many things"

"they really wanted me to be in a position to get into work."

"because it helped me to know the system, how to do a job search and I understand the law, roles and regulations in the workplace."

We asked respondents to comment upon the extent to which the project had met their expectations and for most individuals these were achieved:

"They have done whatever they promised and I am feeling myself in a much better position."

And for another:

"Because I came to them to get counselling, they gave me that plus much more, which I did not know about them. I received a great service."

Perhaps the most significant element which is identified by many of those we interviewed is that the project raised their confidence levels and their sense of integration:

"After doing Access First Course I felt I was more part of the community."

Four of those we spoke to had had a work placement and specifically identified the extent to which this did match their skills:

"I got the work placement by chance, it was available and I decided to take it. I did not know anything about it before but when I went for work placement I really enjoyed it and decided to take some courses and be a fire-fighter."

Five of those we spoke to had used other services offered by the project and its partners, notably making use of English and computer courses and Asylum Welcome. Interestingly, few of those we spoke to had had any contact with 'similar' organisations.

3.3.3 SUCCESSES & DISAPPOINTMENTS

However, there is some limited evidence that there was a misunderstanding of the role of the project. For example, one of those we spoke to appeared to believe that the project had some direct access to jobs.

"I was thinking that they have the facility and contacts and they would be able to find me a job"

To that extent, that is where any disappointment lay:

"I think it is not enough for what I needed. They should have more contacts with employers and try different ways of finding jobs for their students".

The reasons for the disappointment were varied but were largely associated with the limited level of provision/short length of the 'course'. As one interviewee noted:

"I think the time was too short, only 2 days a week is not enough to gain your goals and objectives."

Whilst a limited number acknowledged that the project had not helped their current situation this was for a variety of reasons. In one case this was because their application for asylum had been rejected, and even here the individual said he would recommend the project to a friend.

"Yes, because the project will help them to find job and know the life in England."

There was unequivocal appreciation in this regard, all those we spoke to acknowledged they would recommend the project to a friend; a number already had done.

"Yes, because they helped me and I am sure that they will help my friends as well."

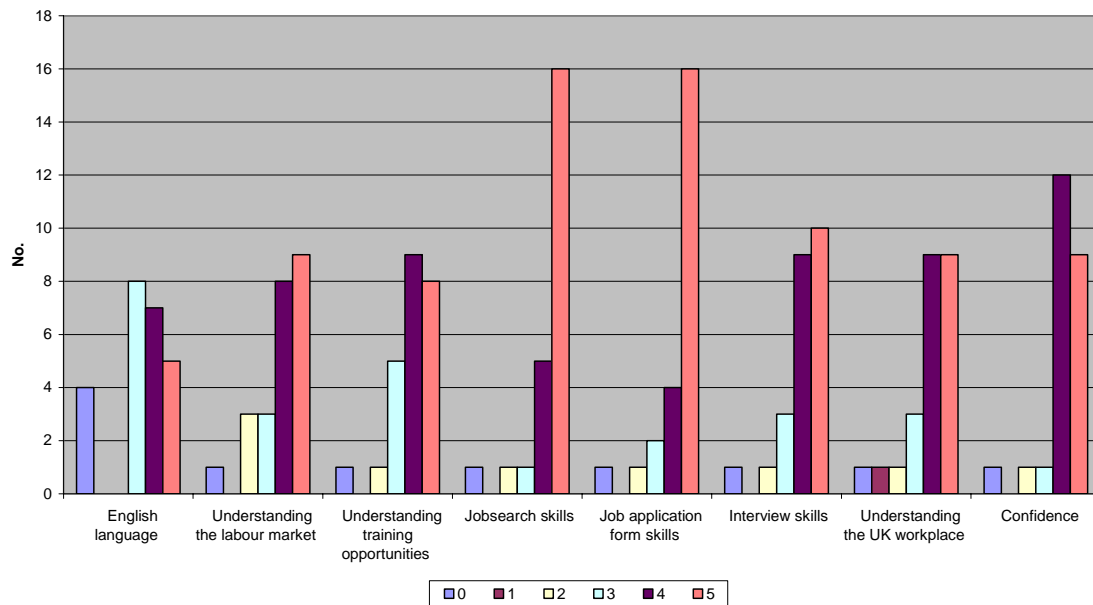
"Yes because, I got lots of benefits from this project and want my friends to use this opportunity and learn something which could help them find a job."

3.3.4 REAL CHANGE & IMPACTS

Service users were asked a series of questions about the usefulness of the project. We can see from these responses (amongst the 24 interviewed) that there were generally high levels of 'approval'⁴ for specific skills developed: a majority for each skill scoring the 'usefulness' as 4 or 5. Whilst English Language had slightly less high ratings it should be noted that 3 of those interviewed already had English as a first language. Job search skills and those associated with application form completion were particularly highly regarded: this is reflected in many of the comments made, as we have seen.

⁴ Respondents were asked to rate Access First on the scale 1 to 5 where 1 was 'not at all useful' and 5 was 'very useful'.

Usefulness Access First has been to users



When asked what they had gained from the project a whole series of personal benefits were identified including learning a specific skill (very specifically: fork-lift truck driving); improving their English and more generally providing information about the nature of the UK job market.

Overall nine of those we spoke to were looking for work, nine were working and 7 were studying (there is some overlap as two of those we spoke to were working and studying).

People seem very clear about the direction they aim to go in and what is needed to get there:

“... Improving my English language and getting the forklift driving licence I got much closer to finding a job.”

The positive sense of having been involved with a good project is reflected also in the positive views held about the future. A number of individuals articulated their hopes for their future (employment). One, for example, wanted to open a fitness centre, even though in this case he was only currently doing night shift work in a supermarket, not what he wants to do.

Another:

“At the moment I am taking English classes so I can go to University... studying is an investment in myself”

One has made a very specific move towards his future:

"I am taking a course to be a fire fighter in Oxfordshire."

Respondents were expressly asked if their current situation had been influenced by their experience of the project. A large number responded to this in a positive way:

"Yes. I was doing a proper job search, I filled the job application form properly and they helped me with providing references."

"Very much so, [I] didn't know where to start from."

"Yes, because they introduced me to a day centre for work placement and over there I learned how to look after vulnerable people and people with learning difficulties."

Consequently, 13 of those we interviewed expressly stated they felt they were on the way towards the work they wanted.

3.3.5 PERSONAL WORRIES

When asked about the main barriers or problems which they have faced the object of most of their concerns was the "Home Office" as they had an uncertain wait whilst seeking to have their status approved.

As one in particular noted, it is:

"hard to plan your life when you don't know if you can stay in the UK."

And another:

"...the end of the next year my visa will end and Home Office might ask me to leave. It is difficult. Home Office is changing [the] law all the time, you cannot count on it for certain. I cannot be certain with my life and plans. It is difficult to have a good future like this. You can only have a good future if you plan for it. You cannot plan if you don't know what will happen next. Your future is out of your power. It is not safe for me to go back home."

Over and above this, individuals spoke of the barriers faced by poor levels of English and lack of work experience (in the UK) and one noted the lack of childcare facilities.

Individuals had other concerns more specifically associated with their (professional) future. One individual was worried that he would lose touch with medical terminology in English, whilst he remained outside the sector.

Some concern was expressed that the UK did not recognise qualifications gained at home and hence were not able (at this stage) to practise their normal profession. As a consequence, concern was expressed that individuals were expected to undertake work below their capabilities, for example one noted he was a nurse and was being offered care assistant work, (which he clearly found insulting).

Some were concerned at not being able to support themselves effectively at the same time as studying. Finance was the current concern, for one individual, as he wanted to access a loan in order to start his own business, and he was actively working towards securing that loan.

3.4 FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Respondents were asked how they might seek to change the project to improve it. A variety of specific suggestions were made, these included encouraging students to practise more filling in of job application forms; and more work on preparing students for job interviews. One respondent said that he thought it would be useful if they could offer a wider range of courses giving examples of languages and computing (although this individual did not specify beyond that what these might be). One suggested developing courses at (for example, three) different levels in line with individual abilities in English. One or two people felt the timing of the course needed to increase for example Monday to Friday and for more hours each day (one specified this should be 4).

There was an appeal by one individual for greater involvement by large companies in the area to enable information to be passed down more effectively about job vacancies.

One was so impressed by the services that his recommendation was for a change of name so that it might appeal to others besides refugees and asylum seekers.

Whilst we have indicated the fairly limited improvements identified for the project itself a number of individuals did formulate issues which might improve their situation.

At a more general level, service users were looking for other things notably: financial independence, secure and satisfactory accommodation. Employment was seen as a key step in achieving these wider goals. Others called for more information to be available more generally in the area.

Fittingly, when asked finally, if they had any other comments one respondent said:

"I would like to express my appreciation to Refugee Resource and to the staff of Access First Project for their efforts and hard work and I hope they continue helping refugees and asylum seekers through their projects and courses in Oxfordshire."

4 KEY FINDINGS

4.1 WHAT THE PROJECT ACHIEVED

Access First has achieved some notable successes. It had contact with 224 people in the period of operation through an initial survey, basic advice and support was provided to 135 people, and 72 eligible people were enrolled on the core European Social Fund (ESF) programme. Outcomes for these 72 people were tracked with four-fifths securing a positive outcome:

- Two-thirds (46 people) got full time work (36%) or part time work (28%) as a result of their involvement with the Access First Project.
- A further 9 (13%) went into training, and three into voluntary work.

It is important to note the assistance given to people who would not “contribute” towards the funder targets, and the outcomes achieved. We regard this as a real proof of the fact, noted by many stake-holders, that the project is not “funding-led”, although it is tightly run and able to meet and overshoot targets set.

The project certainly achieved most of its targets as originally developed in its bid, and in fact:

- Double the numbers targeted achieved full-time employment
- Forty-nine people, forty-one of whom were in the ESF funded group achieved the health and safety certificate (40 targeted).
- 43 people eligible for ESF funding achieved a job interview, but a further fifteen also got one (35 targeted)
- Over three times as many ESF funded users achieved OCN units as targeted (17 ESF people, plus a further two (five targeted)

In part this overshooting of targets reflects an initial decision to set conservative targets in order to ensure that the project had enough time to develop a solid work programme, incorporating developing the partnership, setting up good referral networks and continuous learning from evaluating beneficiary responses to training. It also appears to be an effect of the particular labour market in Oxford, where employers are suffering skills shortages at all levels.

Meeting these targets is particularly impressive, however, because a substantial number of those helped by the Project were asylum seekers with permission to work rather than people with refugee status or some form of exceptional leave to remain. Many asylum seekers do not have permission to work (this concession was withdrawn in 2002) and even those that do tend to have problems securing employment because of employers’ confusion about status, fears that staff may be removed when they receive their decision and unclear documentation. The loss of the right to work also had a negative impact on those who could receive training under

the programme or be referred to other training provision. Uncertainty about the legal position has even undermined asylum seeker participation in voluntary work in some areas.

It is also important to record the achievement in developing work that has now been mainstreamed. The Work Preparation Course is now part of the services on offer from Oxfordshire County Council through their ESOL programme. As noted elsewhere, it may also be on offer in many other locations around the country because the materials were also published.

One concern voiced by the project and reflected in the statistics is the small number of women involved: 10 out of 72 (14%). There are no reliable statistics on the presence of refugees in Oxford and only limited intelligence on the gender breakdown to act as a comparator. However, while it is true that many more men than women apply for asylum, it is also true that many women arrive as dependants or follow as family reunions.

The project staff observe that, although they have had some important successes with professional women, they have failed to attract women with fewer, lower-level or no qualifications. It is the case that, when asked, professional refugee women tend to state that they have no need for “women only” services, but that they believe that other women they know, or from their communities, would find such services easier and more appropriate to access.

The project is almost entirely staffed by women, and the sort of holistic approach used can be of particular benefit to some women who may need more intensive and varied work to get them job ready, addressing the interrelation of issues like childcare, in-work benefits, maternity and flexible working rights, dealing with workplace harassment, and so on. Other projects report that women may find the path to desired employment more difficult because they are expected to take responsibility for all of the household’s problems, such as housing, education and family problems in a way that men are not. This may mean that they need more flexibility in re-qualification and training programmes, allowing for breaks and moving to part-time provision where necessary. This is an area that needs to be addressed in future work, and where the project should consider developing contacts, resources and expertise.

4.2 WHAT THE PROJECT DID WELL

“I think there is here something that gets the case just right and I think it is important to see that lasts”⁶

All stake-holders identified that the project involved refugees and asylum seekers at the start of the project in the design of the service. The project established the Refugee Advisory Group and maintained and supported it through the life of the project. For many (including members of

the advisory group), such an advisory group was seen as essential to ensure that the work of the project remained relevant to the real needs of refugees.

The model of support to service users, including both its holistic nature (and links with the wider host organisation, Refugee Resource) and the negotiated individual learning pathways and goals was seen as a key achievement by both stake-holders and service users. The transferability of this model was also cited as evidence of its success. Alongside providing a service that was friendly to service users and effective for employers the project exceeded its targets and produced a cost effective service.

Access First has also developed good relationships with employers and was seen by many as able to anticipate their needs. The project was seen as taking a pragmatic approach to employers, recognising their needs and meeting them (even though some employers are reluctant to be publicly named as employers of refugees, they are, in fact working with the project).

The partnership model developed by the project was also identified by stake-holders as a major achievement and was compared favourably to other partnerships. The project developed the partnership before the funding was sought and developed a sense of shared values and creativity with partners and stake-holders and worked to ensure that the partnership spoke with one voice when necessary. Subsequently partnership remained at the heart of the project's approach. In identifying factors in the success of the partnerships, stake-holders commented that Refugee Resource had ensured that the partnership was useful to all involved: action focused and informative. Similarly, Refugee Resource worked to enable those involved in the partnership to change their own organisations' practice where needed and provided examples of how they did this themselves. Most importantly Refugee Resource took responsibility for ensuring the partnership worked well, but insisted that leadership was shared. For service users the partnership approach ensured that there was a seamless referral network so refugees did not get "passed around" too much.

The sustainability and transferability of Access First's approach and work is noted above. Stake-holders identified that the project recognised that the time-limited nature of the project meant that as much as possible must be mainstreamed to be of long term use, for example, the course developed for Access First is now part of the Community English School's work: "it was a good system easily carried over"⁶). Other examples of transferability include:

- The course has now been published nationally
- One employer has built on their experiences in Oxford to develop work accessing English language support in Southampton

⁵ From the seminar with stake-holders

⁶ from stake-holder interview

- Kent Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) have asked Oxfordshire FRS for copies of the protocols on refugee employment developed with the project's help.

4.3 WHAT FACTORS LED TO SUCCESS

As part of the evaluation we sought to identify those factors that led to the project's success. For the stake-holder sessions and interviews six key factors were identified:

- Being based in Oxford
- Refugee involvement
- The project's ethos
- Partnership
- Work with Employers
- The people involved

We examine these factors in subsequent sections.

4.3.1 OXFORD

There are excellent labour market conditions for the project to flourish with high employment and labour and skills shortages. This may mean that employers are more willing to engage with projects which seek to promote refugee employment as this serves to meet their needs. However, we also suggest (below) that the way in which the project engaged with employers was also of importance.

Oxford is also perceived as a relatively safe, diverse city where refugees themselves feel settled. However, it is an expensive city and affordable housing is a major problem.

Oxford also has an established refugee sector with a solid human rights focus that has links into many other areas through campaigning and also assumes policy relevance because of the relative importance of Oxford University in national life.

The size of the city was also identified as a factor which increases accountability and the establishment of good working relationships (but can magnify errors and confuse personal and professional boundaries). As one stake-holder put it:

"We are a small city and we bump into each other"

Oxford is not an area of dispersal for asylum seekers. This means that those who are in Oxford have made a positive choice to come to the city (although some have been detained in Campsfield and others may be arriving to the Bicester accommodation centre).

4.3.2 REFUGEE INVOLVEMENT

Refugee involvement was identified as being a key factor in success ensuring relevance and accessibility of services. The belief that users are at the centre of what the project does is one of the “glues” holding the partnership together. Refugees themselves report feeling at home and happy using the project: a “good feeling” after the first approach and those on the advisory group were immensely proud of their and the project’s achievements.

The voluntary involvement of refugees provides considerable authority to the project. Sustaining involvement has been more problematic of late, but the principle of unpaid involvement is important to maintain.

4.3.3 PROJECT ETHOS

Stake-holders identified the project’s values or ethos as another contributory factor to success. In particular stake-holders identified the commitment of the project to its service users, the emphasis on empowerment and the holistic approach to the client group. As one stake-holder commented:

“It’s more the relationship than providing the service”

The project’s ethos was seen as pragmatic and focused on results. As one stake-holder commented:

“no-nonsense, get on with it, find the solutions approach”

In addition, stake-holders identified the emphasis on continuous learning and improvement, and, as part of this the team’s willingness to be held up to scrutiny.

One interviewee also suggested that the project’s ethos was not risk adverse, characterised as “taking chances”. The project itself considers that, whilst it may appear that the service is based more on faith than certainty, the results indicated that such “chances” were well researched and understood. Indeed, there is considerable evidence that the project undertakes rigorous research and consultative work in developing new initiatives.

4.3.4 PARTNERSHIP

The establishment of a successful partnership was seen as both a key achievement and a contributory factor to the success of the project. People in the partnership consider that they work on the basis of their shared interests, values and commitments beyond their separate formal identities. As such the partnership has involved key local decision-makers and organisations.

Refugee Resource staff worked hard to develop the partnership but have resisted being lead partners, because they want all involved to share responsibility for the partnership and its work. As such there is considerable collective leadership exercised by the group. A key learning point for a number of stake-holders was that you do not need a lead partner and having one can mean that others fail to feel ownership of the partnership, but you have to have one organisation that takes responsibility for the relationship and processes.

The partnership was also identified as useful for participants and action orientated. As one stake-holder commented:

"it is worth turning up to meetings because things get done"

Another stake-holder commented that "every meeting is useful" and they revolve around action and developing a united voice not just developing funding bids.

Access First's relationship to Oxfordshire Refugee and Asylum Seeker Training, Education and Employment Partnership (ORASTEEL) was also seen as important. ORASTEEL enables partners to take action within their own organisations with support from others. Funding for Access First is also assisted as other funders have confidence in ORASTEEL.

4.3.5 SOLID WORK WITH EMPLOYERS

Access First generally enjoys the confidence of employers with whom they have worked. As noted above, they are seen as having a keen appreciation of employer needs. In terms of specific initiatives the project has developed a track record with work placements that has convinced some employers of the benefits of this approach.

The leadership of certain employers, such as the Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service, in working with the project in the early days and acting as a model to other employers has been particularly important. This has been supported and promoted by other forums for employers such as the Oxfordshire Employers Race Equality Network.

A number of employers attended the stake-holder seminars indicating considerable support for the project from this sector. Even those that have had considerably less contact were impressed with the project, with one interviewee commenting:

"Our contact with them is excellent"

4.3.6 THE PEOPLE INVOLVED

Stake-holders and service users were anxious to praise the contribution of staff and management to the success of the project. It was noted that it "has not all been plain sailing and there have been tensions and difficulties with other organisations" but staff have an excellent

reputation. In particular, staff are perceived as knowledgeable, hardworking and approachable and staff make their appreciation of other people's contributions known which is significant in developing relationships. One stake-holder highlighted the tireless work undertaken which keeps key people involved with the project.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This section seeks to identify key learning points from Access First that may be used elsewhere and options and recommendations for the future development of the project itself. It is important to emphasise that the “Access First” model works well, and there is no need to develop novelty for the sake of it.

In considering the options for the project’s future development it is worth noting that the context in which the project operates is continually changing. Key contextual issues that the project will need to factor into its future development include:

- The amnesty affecting many families with children in the area (benefits available may not cover the high rents in Oxford and this may increase the demand for access to work)
- Accession to Europe affecting some asylum seekers now on asylum support who will be able to work but unable to continue receiving NASS or social services support
- The development of the accommodation centre near Bicester to house 750 asylum seekers who will not have permission to work but may develop ties to the area that will be reflected in their decisions once they get status
- Continuing media and political focus on asylum and immigration may increase difficulties in some areas
- Increasing numbers of asylum seekers may face refusals and possible removals

5.2 DEVELOPING FUNDER UNDERSTANDING OF PROJECTS

Access First was initially developed as a pilot project, with funders willing to allow time and resources to develop in a new area and acknowledging a need to find out more about refugee employment. The results of the work undertaken have been to deepen and widen our understanding of what works well with refugee employment projects. In particular, there is a need to measure the work done, not by “end results” in what can be a long and complex route to appropriate employment, but by pathways defined and milestones passed. However this should not lead to the setting of more targets, however “soft”, but rather to opening a dialogue between funders and practitioners aimed at developing a more sophisticated understanding of the processes and needs. Funders need to be flexible and to ensure that there are fixed points in project development at which they can hear what practitioners have to say about what is needed for whom and act on it.

5.3 THE “ACCESS FIRST MODEL” FOR GUIDANCE

Access First should continue to ensure that its employment services have at their core the model of individually tailored guidance, based on aspirations as well as available options, and

the development of individual learning pathways. These also depend on continuing to work with others to provide a “seamless” referral system between all involved.

5.4 RELATIONSHIPS WITH EMPLOYERS

Access First should continue to build and maintain good relationships with employers in the area, developing options for users based on a real and continuously assessed understanding of employers’ needs.

5.5 WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Access First should continue to support and participate in ORASTEOP and to explore other potential partnerships based on shared values to deliver its work on employment. This is particularly important because it is clear from this evaluation that others involved believe that project staff have or have developed a particular aptitude for partnership working focused on action and information sharing which is of great benefit to all involved. The model of partnership whereby, while project staff take responsibility for ensuring that the partnership works well, leadership is shared between partners is one that should be used, developed and disseminated.

5.6 REFUGEE INVOLVEMENT

Access First should continue to ensure that refugees are consulted meaningfully at the initial stages of any project and involved closely in its development. This is another model that should be used, developed and disseminated.

5.7 COMMUNITY ENGLISH SCHOOL

The relationship with the Community English School has been particularly close and productive. With the move to other types of funding by Access First and the mainstreaming of the course developed by the partnership, care should be taken to ensure that the relationship continues.

5.8 OPTIONS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Alongside maintaining those parts of the project and partnership that are clearly working well, this section highlights a number of other possible developments that the project and the wider partnership may wish to develop.

Issues around self-employment (as opposed to enterprise) may be particularly important for older refugees who may have difficulty breaking into established hierarchies in the UK but have highly marketable skills and experience and for bridging options for some qualified people. Enterprise development tends to focus on the employment and regeneration opportunities that are created, whereas simple self-employment is essentially a career decision that should be open to refugees.

- R1. Access First should consider developing specific support services around self-employment. Work on this could be developed with the Ethnic Minority Business Service with whom Refugee Resource are near neighbours.**

There was some reluctance by some service users to engage in work placements or undertake voluntary work, yet the absence of UK based work experience was identified by service users as a barrier to employment.

- R2. Produce guidance and promote voluntary work as an option for refugees looking to gain experience and possibly references in the UK as well as for asylum seekers and others unable to work. This could possibly include information on the value and uses of work placements.**

The issue of involvement with trade unions was raised as an issue of concern to some stakeholders.

- R3. Access First should continue discussions with employers and trades unions about developing information and support for refugees around workplace representation and involvement.**

The project has been considerably less successful at reaching women than men and should develop ways of making contact with women and working more actively with women. Women face additional barriers when seeking to engage with the labour market because they appear to shoulder other domestic burdens. We suggest that the project's holistic approach is likely to be particularly suited to working with women. The project might seek to enhance its work in this area by initially seeking to engage with women to determine their needs more concretely. From this the project will be able to determine where its own resources need to be deployed or where these might be expanded.

- R4. Develop a specific programme of work with women, especially those with few qualifications, including securing more involvement from them in the advisory group.**

The Refugee Advisory Group has made a significant contribution to the development of Access First. The views of this group are likely to be of interest beyond the project, particularly for those working with refugees who do not host such a group themselves.

- R5. Develop the role of the advisory group to offer consultation and feedback on projects and other services run by partnership members.**

At the stake-holder seminar the issue of providing relevant support in employment and training for those refugees who may seek to return to their home countries was discussed. This will need very careful handling because employers may react unfavourably to the implication that refugees may not be intending to settle.

R6. Discuss with the Choices programme of Refugee Action whether there is any role to be developed in supporting voluntary return, and ways in which the work on refugee employment generally can incorporate elements that may support voluntary return at a later stage (e.g. for established refugees who may wish to return home after a change in government).

All stake-holders raised concerns about the need to specifically address employment, training and education issues for young refugees.

R7. Develop work with young refugees, including unaccompanied minors, in conjunction with Connexions and with the Bridging project based at Oxford and Cherwell FE College.

Whilst there have been a number of initiatives in various parts of the UK around refugee health professionals, considerable barriers remain. The Oxford Refugee Health Professionals Project developed and supported by Access First, has been successful in placing three doctors into jobs, but working with highly qualified individuals is resource intensive.

R8. Consideration should be given to ways of continuing to support the specific resource for refugee health professionals set up with the backing of all relevant stake-holders (e.g. health authorities, Post-Graduate Medical and Dental Education, Department of Health) that includes the long term support of a structured multi-disciplinary mentorship scheme.

The work of the project with regard to employers and the relationships developed were widely praised. However, smaller employers who may provide significant opportunities for refugees may not be accessing these services.

R9. Develop a more publicised service for smaller employers to assist with documentation issues⁷.

R10. Publicise the existence of a “service menu” for employers that includes reviews of recruitment processes and advice on improvements as well as assistance to refugees, and ensure that all employers are aware of the full range of options offered to refugees, such as referrals to food hygiene courses if necessary.

The economic contribution and potential positive impact of refugees is substantial. However, refugees continue to be vilified in some sections of the press.

⁷ While it would be necessary to register for Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) exemption if securing work permits or similar for clients, simply advising employers about what documentation they need in order to enable them to employ a wider group of people is not defined as immigration advice and so does not need the involvement of the OISC.

- R11. Build on the work already done to develop a PR resource focusing on refugee contributions in the area to support local responses to media and political attacks on refugees.**

The project's approach to refugees has benefited from the partnership's broad based membership. Its approach is likely to be enhanced (and enhance the work of others) by working with groups addressing the needs of other disadvantaged communities.

- R12. Continue and develop discussions with those offering similar services to other disadvantaged groups (such as long term unemployed, disabled etc) to review possible options for joint work.**

6 METHODOLOGY

6.1 ABOUT MICHAEL BELL ASSOCIATES

Michael Bell Associates are a long established research and consultancy practice with over ten years of experience of working with public bodies from Government departments to local and health authorities/PCTs and voluntary sector agencies. We have a core team of consultants, researchers and support staff operating out of our London and Glasgow offices. This permanent team is supplemented by a team of associate consultants and researchers engaged on a contract-by-contract basis and a team of “community researchers” drawn from communities under study and provided with training, support and career development⁸.

Michael Bell Associates works extensively on issues affecting refugees and asylum seekers. This includes policy development issues for strategic bodies such as the Scottish Executive, the Greater London Assembly and the London Development Agency as well as work with front-line providers. Michael Bell Associates also works extensively with the Home Office on issues relating to promoting refugee integration and is currently on a three to five year contract with the Home Office to evaluate all projects funded under the European Refugee Fund and Home Office Integration Challenge Fund.

6.2 OUTLINE METHODOLOGY

Process Evaluation

This phase included:

- Desk Research & Analysis of monitoring/activity data to allow for a better understanding of the context of the project, its objectives and its achievements to date.
- Seminar of Stake-holders and Partners – This was a key event attended by 20 people to ensure wider ownership of the evaluation, raising issues of importance to partners and stake-holders (including the Refugee Advisory Group) and an opportunity for stake-holders to shape the evaluation questions.
- Six interviews with stake-holders and partner organisations (see below).

Impact or Outcome Evaluation

This phase included:

- One to one interviews with 24 service users – based upon a sample to reflect the range of service users and undertaken by community researchers.
- Analysis of interviews.

⁸ This programme has focused upon members of the BME communities in London, Refugees and Asylum seekers, people living with HIV and, currently, black and white gay men. Glasgow City Council has recently funded the extension of this programme to Scotland for asylum seekers.

Developing Recommendations and Reporting

This phase included:

- Development of draft report (emerging findings) capturing findings from the above stages
- Production and presentation of Final Report.

6.3 PARTICIPANTS IN THE EVALUATION

We would like to acknowledge the support and involvement of a large number of agencies and individuals in preparing this report. This section highlights a number of the participants.

6.3.1 PARTICIPANTS IN THE SERVICE USER INTERVIEWS

We would like to acknowledge all participants in the service user interviews who were generous with their time, views and opinions. We have not provided the names of service users to preserve their confidentiality. We would also like to acknowledge the work of Refugee Resource staff in arranging these interviews.

6.3.2 PARTICIPANTS IN THE STAKEHOLDER SEMINAR

Seminar Monday 16 February, Oxford Jobcentre 2pm

Participants

- Alan Elliott – Operations Manager, Christian Salvesen
- Ales Patrusau – Refugee Advisory Panel, Refugee Resource
- Amanda Webb-Johnson – Director, Refugee Resource
- Andrew Wood – Senior Business Manager, Jobcentre Plus Oxford
- Anna Sanders – City ESOL Coordinator, Community English School
- Bridget Crampton – Employment Adviser, Refugee Resource
- David Young – National Employment Panel
- Fatima El-Awad – Refugee Advisory Panel, Refugee Resource
- Godfrey Offord – Trustee, Refugee Resource
- Jeremy Burrows – Service Manager, Asylum Seeker Service, Oxfordshire County Council
- John Hurren, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service
- Lucy McConville – Access First Tutor, Community English School
- Michael Bell – Michael Bell Associates
- Orlando Trujillo-Bueno – Refugee Health Professionals Project
- Rachel Wiggans – Access First Co-ordinator, Refugee Resource
- Richard Hughes – Trustee, Refugee Resource
- Samir Gaid – Refugee Advisory Panel, Refugee Resource

- Sue Lukes – Consultant, Michael Bell Associates
- Zoe Brooks – Scheme Manager, East Oxford Action

We would also like to acknowledge the support of JobCentre Plus in accommodating this meeting.

6.3.3 STAKE-HOLDER INTERVIEWEES

- Mercedes Cumberbatch – Director, Asylum Welcome
- Sarah Hayward - Employability Forum
- Mandy Reed -Tesco
- David Young - National Employment Panel
- Anna Sanders - City ESOL Coordinator, Community English School
- Jeremy Burrows - Service Manager, Oxfordshire County Council Social & Healthcare Directorate (Asylum Seeker Service)

6.4 RESEARCH TOOLS

6.4.1 SEMINAR QUESTION AREAS

Opening Questions

- Please identify what single area the project has been most successful in, and the one area you would prioritise for improvement/development.

Context & Needs

What affect has the locality and nature of need had on the project:

- **What factors are unique to Oxford?** Do refugees feel relatively safe in Oxford and does this assist integration? What's the impact of a well developed refugee sector? What's the impact of a vibrant labour market? Does the size of the city assist or hinder? Does the absence of "dispersed" asylum seekers make a difference?
- **Meeting special needs.** Are there particular groups or types of refugees that cause you major concern? Who? Why?
- **Are things locally getting better or worse?** What are the clouds on the horizons for partner organisations? For refugees in Oxford?

Refugee Involvement & Employer Engagement

Historically refugees and asylum seekers played a key part in designing and establishing the project. Does this model of engagement still work or could it be improved?:

- **Refugee involvement in the advisory group:** how has it contributed, what specifically?
- **How can refugee involvement be developed or strengthened?** How should it be organised? How can it renew itself and stay relevant for newer refugees?
- **What is the future role for a refugee consultative group?** Should it be just for this project or could it be a resource supporting a range of other employment initiatives?
- **About Employers.** Has the project done enough and appropriately to engage local employers in the public and private sectors? Could it do more and differently, and, if yes, what?

Partnership and the Project's Place in the World

The project has brought a range of partners together and works with many others:

- **How important is partnership** and ability/willingness to work together?
- **Referrals to Access First:** Do you have specific groups or types of people that you did not refer to the project? Why?
- **Referrals from Access First:** Did the project refer the right people to you? If not, explain why and who.
- If there are any areas where you feel the **project has failed**, what are they?

The Project's Future Role

What is the future for the project:

- Should the project **expand its objectives/activities**, if yes, what are the **boundaries** to work the project can do? What are your priorities for the future?

- How will the **constraints** imposed by funders and changing legal rights impact upon the project?
- If there are things that the project should do – how can it **secure this**?

Final Thoughts

- What things has the project done/learned that are new and/or surprising and what could it take forward?

6.5 SERVICE USER QUESTION GUIDE

I am going to ask you a few questions about yourself and your family/household.

Remember, it is not necessary for interviewees to give their name and all interviews are confidential.

1	I am	Male	<input type="checkbox"/>	Female	<input type="checkbox"/>
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2	What is your name?
---	--------------------

3	What is your age?
---	-------------------

4	When did you arrive in the UK (i.e. what year)?
---	---

5 Could you tell me what your current immigration status is

- Asylum seeker
- ELR
- ILR
- Naturalised/British Citizen
- Other

6	Do you consider yourself to be disabled?
---	--

7	What is your Country of Origin?: (e.g. what country were you born in)
---	---

8	What is your first language/mother tongue?
---	--

9 Could you give us some indication of your English levels?

Please tick the relevant boxes

	No problems	Very few problems	Occasional problems	Quite a few problems	Lots of problems – I can't speak/read/write English.	Don't know
Speaking English						
Reading English						
Writing English						

10 What educational level had you achieved before you arrived in the UK?

2. CONTACT WITH PROJECT:

11 When did you first make contact with the project (month/year) either through Refugee Resource or through the Community English School?

12 Why did you make contact?

13 How did you know about the project?

14 What were your thoughts after first contact with the project (for example did you feel it was an organisation that was likely to be able to offer appropriate help)?

15 What happened next when you had made that contact? (i.e. what did they do as a first stage)

16 Could you tell us how you felt about the project at that stage? (For example did you feel you had come to the 'right place'?)

17 Which parts of the project have you made use of?

3. VIEWS ON PROJECT:

18 What did you know about the project before you made contact with it?

19 Can you talk through the process of how the project 'helped' you?

20 How did things develop and progress on the project?

21 What have been your experiences with the project?

22 Would you say your experiences were on the whole positive or negative? Why?

23 Have you made use of any other similar services (e.g. provided by another organisation)?

24 If you have how do they compare?

25 What did you expect from the project? Why?

26 How does that compare with what you actually received?

27 Why do you think this was the case?

28 Have you used any of the other services within Refugee Resource (for example the Woodpath project, the allotment project or the bursary fund?)

29 If you have used any of the other services provided by Refugee Resource did these help your progress in Access First?

30 If yes how exactly did it help?

4. EFFECTS OF PROJECT:

31 How useful has Access First been for you with regard to: (can you scale these where 1 is not at all useful and 5 is very useful)

	1	2	3	4	5
English language	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Understanding the labour market	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Understanding training opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jobsearch skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Job application form skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interview skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Understanding the UK workplace	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Confidence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

32 What is your situation now?

33 Has the project had any influence on that? What were these?

34 **Would you recommend the project to a friend? If so are there particular reasons why you would? Have you?**

35 **If you could redesign the project, then what would you add to it? Or what would you change about the project?**

36 **What do you feel you have been able to take away from the project?**

37 **In what specific (and other) ways has the project helped you into work or get closer to it?**

38 **Did you have a work placement?**

39 **If you did, do you feel it matched or made effective use of your skills? Can you say how and why (not)?**

40 Did the work placement change your work situation directly – whether in positive or negative ways?

41 If you are currently in work: is it the work you want to do?

42 What additional help for employment is needed in Oxfordshire?

43 Are you on the way to the work you want?

44 What has helped most to get you to this point?

45 If you are not there what do you feel could help?

46 What have been the greatest barriers you have faced in being able to get into work that you want to do?

47 Are there particular things now that would help you progress in work?

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48 **Any other comments?**

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Thank you very much for your participation and your time, we value your opinions and experiences!