

Refugee Resource Review 2015/16



Overview

Refugee Resource is the only service in Oxfordshire to cater effectively for the psychosocial and long-term mental health needs of refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants who are referred to us by GPs, Social Services, solicitors and other partner organisations.

In 2015/16, 152 refugees and asylum seekers of 24 nationalities were provided with support through our mentoring, counselling and women's services; 66% of these were women. Many more were supported by our Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) and front-of-house advisory services.

"I think what works best is our capacity to work flexibly with each client according to need, and to move them on through services as they recover." Staff member, Refugee Resource

Our counselling programme and related activities support people's emotional, psychological and social wellbeing, helping them to acclimatise to a new environment, deal with the effects of loss and trauma and become part of Oxford's rich multi-cultural society. Our services are designed to work holistically together to meet client needs and to help alleviate the additional hardship caused by cuts in statutory services and austerity measures. We provide:

- An award-winning counselling and psychotherapy service for groups and individuals, with specialist cross-cultural trauma provision that is not available under the NHS (see pages 4-5);
- A mentoring and coaching service offering dedicated one-to-one support with a matched, trained volunteer for 12 months to help clients adapt to life in the UK and improve their English (see pages 6-7);
- Activities for women and men to help reduce isolation and promote social inclusion (see pages 8-9);



Our weekly knitting group provides a safe space for women to relax and talk together with an experienced therapist present. Photo: Eden Habtemichael

- An advice, advocacy and outreach service to help clients with practical problems, and liaison with other service providers; (see page 10);
- A bursary fund to support with training and employment needs and hardship fund for destitute clients (see page 10).

Above all, we provide a safe space and warm welcome for people who are often fearful, disorientated and alone.

Highlights of 2015/16

- 51 clients were supported through on-going one-to-one counselling and a further ten through group counselling; 71% of service users reported a reduction in adverse mental health symptoms;
- 22 new members joined our Women's Community Education and Empowerment Programme (with a total of 103 women overall on our Women's Group database);
- Our football team grew from 20 to 40 active members, with 20 boys signing up for a ten-week course run in conjunction with Oxfordshire Mind and Oxford United Football Club;

- 50 people received advice from our CAB service, with 81 positive outcomes reported, and a further 80 people were supported with practical advice by our front-of-house service (our new improved reporting system was introduced in September 2015 and the overall figure for the year is therefore higher).
- 23 clients who had received counselling or mentoring were able to access education, training or employment; ten clients started work experience and nine began volunteering;
- 12 women achieved certification in a course to support their children's education;
- Four extremely vulnerable refugee and asylum-seeking women are no longer considered a suicide risk;
- One of our clients was reunited with her three children after 14 years of separation;
- Another client was helped with a successful grant application to buy a cooker, fridge and carpet for their empty home.



Messages from the Chair and the Director

Message from the Chair

2015/16 has been a year of change, uncertainty, expectancy and excitement at Refugee Resource.

- We said a fond farewell to our former Director, Dr Antony Kingsley, in February 2015 and appointed our new Director, Kate Hood, who started on 1 August.
- We managed a high degree of uncertainty about our operational future thanks to the extraordinary commitment of staff, trustees and our interim Director, Maxine Myatt.
- Expectancy levels rose as we started to benefit from our incoming Director's managerial experience.
- And excitement and anticipation grew with increased fundraising success, allowing us to plan and future-proof our services for our service users.

Throughout all of this, our remarkable staff and volunteers continued to work tirelessly to provide the therapeutic and supportive interventions so valued by refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants.

As clouds gathered over Europe and fences were erected to restrict the movement of refugees and migrants, Refugee Resource continued to build bridges with those who managed to arrive in Oxford seeking sanctuary. Local donors and partners, demonstrating the on-going compassion for the plight of refugees that is embedded within our community, have generously supported this approach. I am grateful to you all.

Refugee Resource has continued to be a rich tapestry of different skills and experiences that combine to offer healing and the prospects of new beginnings for our service users. Everyone associated with Refugee Resource reflects the very same qualities that we see in all of our service users: dignity, courage, hope and perseverance. The year has left me feeling

inspired and uplifted by the determination of everyone associated with Refugee Resource to create a warm, welcoming and supportive environment for a very special group of people.

Heartfelt thanks to you all,
Ray Fishbourne, Chair

Message from the Director

Since I joined Refugee Resource in August 2015, I have been extremely impressed by the range of services that we offer to refugees and asylum seekers in the Oxford area. The motivation and dedication of both staff and volunteers has been really inspiring, as has the courage and determination displayed by so many of our clients in their quest to heal from their past experiences and rebuild their lives for themselves and their children.

The end of the financial year brings a great opportunity to reflect on the challenges that we have faced – and overcome – over the past year. Against a backdrop of the global refugee crisis and the Syrian resettlement scheme, my first challenge was to secure our operational future at a time when our waiting lists are lengthening and we have increasing calls on our services. While we are now in a position of being able to look ahead with confidence and to develop our three-year plan, we do so in the knowledge that the environment we work in will get even more challenging as funding cuts to statutory services will continue to bite and impact on those who are most vulnerable in our society.

The excellent services outlined in the next few pages of this Review – our counselling, mentoring, and practical activities that support social inclusion – will be maintained and extended. In addition, we have invested in our front-of-house capacity to respond to the immediate needs of visitors. We are looking forward to maintaining and developing new effective

partnerships and projects with other local and national organisations – joining with them to ensure that the mental health, rights and dignity of refugees and asylum seekers are protected.

And we hope that you will join us. There are lots of ways to get involved and we would be delighted to hear from you.

Warm wishes,
Kate Hood



The Women's Group offers training on health and other issues related to refugees and asylum seekers. Photo: Eden Habtemichael

Counselling and psychotherapy

51 clients in one-to-one counselling and 10 in group counselling

71% of service users reported a decrease in adverse mental health symptoms

10 clients supported via one-off ad hoc therapeutic support sessions

100 professionals and students attended talks and training sessions

Our specialist counsellors provide tailored therapeutic approaches for refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants, whatever their status.

People in need of counselling are referred to Refugee Resource, mostly via the NHS, but also by other statutory services and related organisations. We also receive 'self-referrals' from people in acute distress, with some at risk of suicide.

Clients referred to our service often have complex needs – multiple losses of people close to them, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), severe anxiety, depression, and a sense of lost identity. In addition to trauma, refugees and asylum seekers frequently live with high levels of fear, poverty, exhaustion and uncertainty, which can make it highly challenging for them to cope and feel part of society.

Each year we aim to provide one-to-one counselling for a minimum of 55 clients, of which at least 20 will be women. This year we have provided one-to-one counselling for 51 clients (of whom 27 were women) and ten women attended therapeutic group sessions (with one woman attending both). As in previous years, there was a waiting list for our counselling service but despite finite resources we ensured that all of those in need of therapy were able to see a counsellor.



Alan Buckley, one of our experienced counsellors, in a session with a client. Photo: Paul Medley

Case study

'K' was a child when civil war broke out. She and her family witnessed massacres and were hounded from their home by police who had turned against K's minority culture. Her beloved older brother was dragged away and shot. The family fled to the UK where K's father suffered a mental breakdown. K was enrolled at school and initially flourished but, aged 17, she broke down and came to Refugee Resource with deep depression and PTSD. She could not stop reliving a massacre in which she had seen school friends murdered, and she missed her brother painfully.

As the sole carer for her grief-stricken parents who, unlike her, could not speak English, she carried too much responsibility and suffered traumatic intrusive memories.

K was able to build a relationship with her counsellor in a safe space where she was able to talk about her experiences and grieve for all she had lost. Through some difficult and challenging counselling sessions, K allowed her faith in humanity to be restored and to achieve a sense of equilibrium. She is now doing well and studying to become a physiotherapist.

Future plans

Fundraising efforts have secured the operational future for Refugee Resource's vital counselling and therapeutic service for the next two years. This means that we can continue to accept referrals from GPs and other statutory and non-statutory services. Our waiting list for counselling is higher than it was this time last year, so it will be important to maintain a focus on funding opportunities to ensure a sustainable future. The specialist skills of our counselling team are highly sought-after, and we will also continue to train and give talks in Oxfordshire and nationally, to

support and empower others working cross-culturally with refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants.

"Refugee Resource is the only organisation that offers psychological help for refugees and asylum seekers without it being dependent on status. It creates a warm, welcoming, safe place which is important for people who have lost everything." Mental health professional, Oxford



Our counselling team, left to right, Rachel Lebus, Amanda Webb-Johnson, Heather Al Yousuf and Sushila Dhall, use a psychosocial model that offers counselling and psychotherapy alongside practical support from other Refugee Resource services. Photo: Eden Habtemichael

Mentoring service

48 mentoring matches

221 mentor/mentee meetings

667 hours of volunteer mentor support

100% of those reporting isolation prior to mentoring, say their isolation is reduced after 3 or more months of mentoring

100% of mentees report increased confidence after more than 6 weeks of mentoring

We pair clients with volunteer mentors with whom they meet on a regular basis, usually for one to three hours per week.

Together they devise an action plan, setting goals such as improving their English, accessing education or training opportunities, preparing for employment or taking part in activities to familiarise themselves with Oxford.

Our approach is 'goal-focussed' and aimed at building the confidence of mentees so they can navigate their new environment and access opportunities. The service meets the Approved Provider Standard of the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation.



Refugee Resource training session for volunteers in its mentoring programme.
Photo: Paul Medley



A Refugee Resource mentor in one of her regular meetings with her mentee.
Photo: Paul Medley

In 2015/16 we set up and supported 27 new mentoring matches, and reviewed and supported 21 existing matches from 2014/15 – a total of 221 meetings and over 667 hours. Four mentor induction groups (8 sessions) were run for 24 new volunteers. We also held regular mentor support group sessions to ensure volunteers had the training and support that they need to deliver successful matches.

Regular reports from, and review sessions with, programme mentors demonstrated that 29% of mentees were able to access education and training, and 21% employment (or better employment).

“I have helped my mentee to gain confidence in her academic studies and with integration, as evidenced in improved grades and by my mentee speaking more in class and being more independent in her work.”
Mentor 2015/16

We have experienced a considerable surge in interest in volunteering since the summer of 2015. In addition to mentoring, volunteers have been involved in research, evaluation, reception, administration, publicity and marketing, English language support, running activities for the Women’s Project, photography and music lessons. We have greatly appreciated the commitment and support of at least 19 volunteers in addition to those who volunteered as mentors.

“Having a mentor helped me to feel more comfortable talking with people.”
Male, Eritrean client

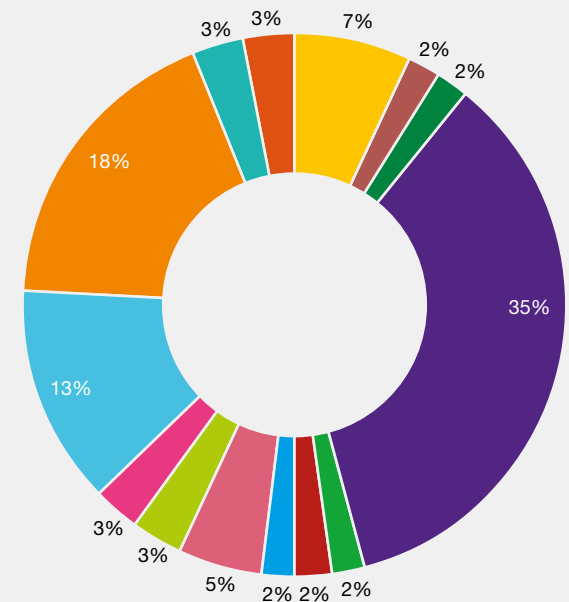
Case study

‘A’ used to live in fear and rarely went outside. After several years, he still felt the impact of the terror he had faced in his country of origin. Unregistered in the UK’s asylum system, he decided it was time to take a risk – to go through formal processes, even though his claim could be rejected. His mentor helped him to discover the local library and many parts of Oxford, and he became involved in a project as a volunteer. Recounting his experience, he smiled and said that having a dedicated mentor made “a huge difference for him”. Regular meetings with his mentor were a great support, reducing his isolation, and also boosting his confidence. He found the moral support that he needed to go through the asylum claim process, which resulted in a positive decision. He is now able to live in safely in the UK.

Future plans

Our mentoring service is developing in response to the diverse needs of clients and consistent demand for this level of one-to-one guidance and support. Clients appreciate the commitment of their mentors, which can be for up to 12 months. Recognising that clients are asking for different kinds of support through a mentoring approach, we are also adapting our service to cater for broader needs – from providing social support to a more focussed bespoke coaching approach to enable service users to achieve personal goals (e.g. for educational support purposes). We are excited about the potential for volunteers to contribute to the wider focus of Refugee Resource.

Mentoring participants by country



- Afghanistan
- Brazil
- Burma
- Eritrea
- Iran
- Kenya
- Kosovo
- Pakistan
- Stateless – Palestine
- Somalia
- Sudan
- Syria
- Turkey
- Uganda

Healing and social inclusion

Our empowering Women's Service is designed to enable clients to learn new skills and adapt to living in Oxford.

103 women on our regular mailing list

43 of 46 women report feeling less isolated

Our women's group has been active for 11 years; it meets weekly and is a vibrant space in which around 50 women each year can develop the skills and confidence that they need to feel secure and to start to integrate into their new community. Some clients join activities after receiving counselling when they are ready to take on new challenges, and others choose this practical route to healing and beginning their new lives in the UK straight away.

In line with previous years, at least 75% of active participants (43 of 46 women) reported feeling less isolated, and the same number demonstrated an increase in self-confidence and engagement with the wider community. We offered 54 training sessions and workshops, including an accredited course for 12 women to attain Level 1 and 3 qualifications in Childcare (Oxford College Adult Learning, and the Ethnic Minority Business Service), endorsing their skills and providing a step towards realising a career in childcare or teaching. Ten workshops on health and healthcare proved popular and will be repeated in years to come. These included advisory discussions on subjects such as breastfeeding, screening and BMI; education in, and prevention of, HIV and FGM; stress relief and healthy eating. Activity sessions such as swimming, African dance, healthy walking, yoga, and simple workout and stretching sessions were popular, with over 20 women reporting improvements in both their physical and mental wellbeing. English classes were also well attended by as many as 20 to 30 women a week.



Women's group members participate in a wide range of training activities designed to empower, inform, increase confidence and build self-esteem.
Photo: Eden Habtemichael

Case study

“It has been challenging to witness the increasing levels of need this year,” says Eden Habtemichael, Women’s Project Coordinator. “People are waiting longer to get their claims for refugee status confirmed and are often destitute, with no right to housing or education. One woman came to us in an absolute state of distress, unable to eat or sleep. Her younger son’s documents were out of date, so she had to leave him behind as she fled from Syria through Turkey. A local solicitor supported us with pro-bono advice and one of our counsellors met with the woman to ensure that she ate, slept and took care of herself. Two months later, the mother, her older son and younger brother were reunited. Both are now enrolled in school and the mother has a part-time job.”



Eden Habtemichael outside the Refugee Resource office where the Women’s Service activities are based. Photo: Dr Anthony Kingsley

Increasing numbers of men are receiving support and practical advice from our front-of-house team. We will extend this service over the next three years and have plans to develop additional programmes in partnership with Oxfordshire Mind.

This year 40 young men were involved in our weekly football club, with an average of 20 to 25 boys and men attending each week. The majority were from Eritrea and others came from Egypt, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Kenya. A ten-week Football Fitness and Well-being Course was run with 20 participants, in partnership with Oxford United FC and Oxfordshire Mind. As well as providing a bridge for young men to meet and socialise with local residents, the course is a means by which the players can think and talk about their feelings, perhaps for the first time. In October 2015, the football group took part in the Oxford Social Inclusion Cup six-a-side tournament. As well as playing football, three of the players are combining English lessons with volunteering placements at a local charity shop to practice their language skills and learn about retail and we expect a similar number to do so next year.

“I believe one of the best ways of supporting [our clients] is through establishing relationships of trust, providing them with a safe and welcoming space, which might possibly be the only place that they can be [listened to] and treated with dignity and respect.”

Leon Beachy, Men’s Service Coordinator

Future plans

These important skills-based activities for women and men will continue to be a crucial part of Refugee Resource’s holistic services, working together with counselling and mentoring to provide a unique and integrated level of support for refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants. This autumn we will be working with Oxfordshire Mind to run a 10-week ‘Well-Being’ course for the younger men. We will also trial a few community and advice sessions for the older men to gauge interest.



“I thought football was about kicking a ball. I had no idea the training could help me with personal development,” said one of Refugee Resource’s players. “I have learned new skills and to play well as part of a team. It taught me about myself as well as about football.” Photo: Leon Beachy

Advice, advocacy and outreach

We provide advice, practical support and help for clients to liaise with statutory providers and other charities.

80 people were supported by our front-of-house service between Sept 2015 and March 2016 (no data available pre-Sept).

50 people benefitted from our in-house CAB service

14 people were supported with bursary funding for education and employment

139 hardship payments were made to destitute clients

Front-of-house services

Visitors to our office are met by an experienced team who provide a warm welcome and help with advice, advocacy and support. We assist with job applications, contacting and liaising with Social Services and the Home Office, making phone calls, and we have two computers available for clients to use. Once a week, a Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) worker is available on an appointment basis to give specialist advice and support on benefits entitlements and access, debt management, housing, immigration to level 1, and signposting. We also have a small hardship fund for clients who are destitute or in desperate need of emergency support to meet their basic needs for food, medicines and essential transport costs (e.g. bus fares).

Throughout the year, we continued to work in partnership with many other organisations – statutory health, housing and education service providers and local NGOs such as the Children's Society, Shelter and the Red Cross – signposting clients to other services as appropriate. With the support of Refugee Resource and our partner organisations, in 2015/16:

- Five clients started a paid job and a further ten gained work experience;
- Seven clients found voluntary work with charity and community organisations;

- Four sanctuary seekers were housed and three homeless clients found accommodation through a local hosting scheme;
- Three clients participated in an Oxford University research project called "Becoming Adult", to examine the experiences of young men and women who migrated to the UK alone as children as they make the transition to adulthood;
- Seven clients were successful in obtaining 'leave to remain' status;
- Fourteen clients received travel documents and ID cards or retrieved lost identity documents.

Bursaries for training and employment

Refugee Resource offers bursary funding every year to help our clients to access training and education, and overcome barriers to employment. The Oxford University Hospitals NHS Trust once again supported the part of our bursary funding that enables refugees to train or re-train as healthcare professionals. With their support we gave £9,513 in grants to trainee doctors and nurses for study fees and materials. Overall we supported 14 people with grants of varying amounts – from a small payment to a client to buy a second hand bicycle to enable him to get to work, to larger sums including £3,825 to fund a young female client's MA in public health.

Future plans

The acute and longer term needs of refugees and asylum seekers in Oxfordshire are dependent upon a handful of small organisations working together to provide an overall service for people in desperate need. Refugee Resource is unique in providing trauma counselling and therapeutic support activities for clients, and we work with other local organisations with this client group to ensure that our front-of-house and advisory services cohere and are not duplicated. This sometimes involves joint working with partner organisations to find solutions for a client. Our successful Big Lottery bid has enabled us to recruit a Social Inclusion Coordinator for 2016/17, who, through managing

and cohering services, will enable us to extend outreach work to meet increasing needs that are arising from the global refugee crisis and the loss of other front-line services in Oxford.

Case study

'P' was 17 and six months pregnant when she contacted Refugee Resource. Her home was the kitchen of a local family for whom she did housework. Tiring as a result of her pregnancy and suffering from trauma, she could no longer work as hard as she had, so the family told her to leave.

Fleeing her previous life in the Democratic Republic of Congo, P had not yet made a formal claim for asylum. Refugee Resource referred her to a local solicitor to support with her claim for refugee status. Once she was granted leave to remain, Refugee Resource then referred her to the Health and Social Care service who identified a suitable home in a mother and baby unit for young single homeless mothers. Refugee Resource enabled P to access the dental care that she urgently needed and the Red Cross supported with funding for maternity wear. During her year of homelessness, P had borrowed money to survive. She is now also receiving advice about how to manage her debt. Joining Refugee Resource's women's group and starting English classes has also enabled her to make friends.

P is now mother to a baby, and with help from Refugee Resource, she was able to apply for a grant for a pushchair and essential baby items. Her life has transformed and she is now in better health.

Financial review 2015/16

In 2015/16, the majority of our funding came from major grants from the Big Lottery, Comic Relief and Oxfordshire County Council. We also received funds from Oxford Clinical Commissioning Group, Lloyds TSB Foundation, CHK Charities Ltd, St Michael's and All Saints Charities and various other local religious, social and educational groups, for which we were very grateful.

We secured a small amount of funding from Healthwatch to research the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in accessing and using Primary Health Care services, and the issues that health care professionals face in treating them. The findings and research recommendations were presented to the Health Inequalities Commission in May 2016.

Another income source was achieved through selling our services and expertise, such as training for professional and student bodies. We also participated in a pilot project with the Police and Crime Commission, offering expertise and specialist trauma counselling for victims of serious crime.

The three-year grants from the Big Lottery and Comic Relief came to an end in February and March 2016 respectively, so a main area of focus throughout 2015/16 was to find new sources of funding to replace these grants in order to enable us to continue our service.

Fund balance at 31 March 2016*

	2015	2016
Restricted funds	£95,000	£21,000
Unrestricted funds	£194,000	£204,000
Total	£289,000	£225,000

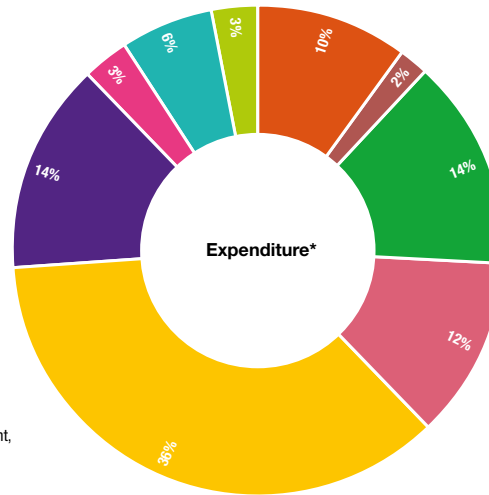
Income*:	Expenditure*
2016: £225,000	2016: 289,000
2015: £364,000	2015: 275,000

*These figures have been rounded to the nearest £1,000

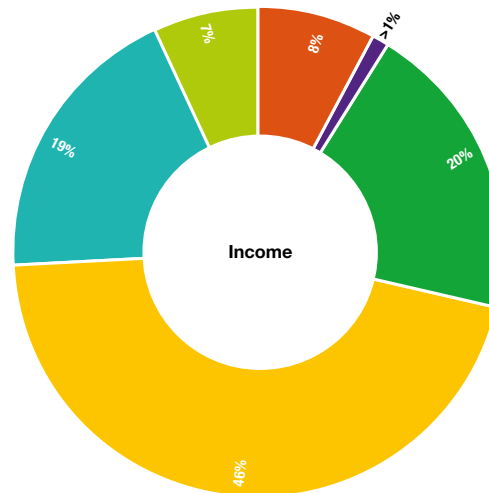
Expenditure*



* The four programme areas include a % of core costs
 ** Fundraising, marketing, consultancy
 *** Includes training, recruitment, travel, expenses, etc.



Income



Refugee Resource gratefully acknowledges the support of the many individuals, organisations and funding bodies who contributed to our work during the year.

They include:



About us

www.refugeeresource.org

Established as a charity in 2003, Refugee Resource aims to relieve distress, improve wellbeing and facilitate the integration of refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants in Oxfordshire. Our work is based around three key values: empowerment, healing and integration. We provide a place of safety and welcome for 250-300 clients each year, some of whom require specialist counselling to heal from trauma and others who participate in our range of therapeutic activities aimed at helping people to move from a position of alienation to inclusion within the wider community.

Company No: 4558542. Charity No: 1098876

Trustees in 2015/16:

Ray Fishbourne (Chair)

Adrian Sell

Rob Hollier

Orlando Trujillo

Tan Lea

Sarah Hayward

Louisa Daubney

Yusef Salehi

Honorary Treasurer: Ken King

Front cover picture: clients from Refugee Resource on the annual summer day trip to Bournemouth in 2015. Photo: Leon Beachy

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