



Heart & Parcel Refugee Action 4-week Cooking & ESOL programme

Manchester, Feb 2020





4-week Refugee Action Evaluation report

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Introduction

This report presents feedback from our 4-week Cooking & ESOL programme which took place in Feb 2020.

[Refugee Action](#) commissioned Heart & Parcel to run a bespoke 4-week ESOL cooking project for their female clients from the [Gateway Resettlement Programme](#). The clients were already taking formal ESOL classes outside of the project, so the objective of this particular project was to help clients practise applying English language in a practical and informal environment.

As a result of the evaluation from the [previous project with Refugee Action](#), the decision was made to work with a group of women from one location in Manchester, with the aim of removing any potential barriers in travelling to attend the sessions.

Rationale for Evaluation report

We are aware of the reluctance to award funding to non-accredited ESOL and adult learning projects such as the provision detailed here. We want to highlight how much impact can be made from small scale projects with a limited resources but the right focus.

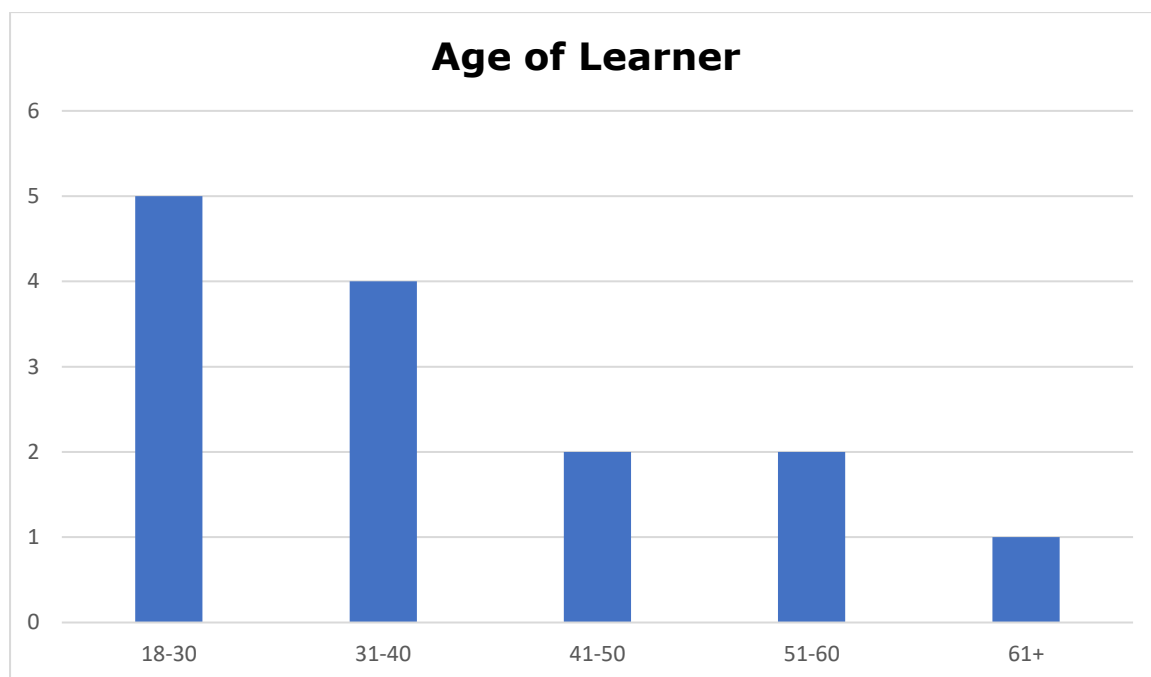
We are interested in the outcomes from running this closed short-term project for a specific user group. We anticipate that any evaluation and feedback collected could provide guidance in how to work further with other organisations in this format.

We hope the project logistics, the timetable and structure documented in this report could be a starting point for those looking to set up similar projects, or who currently run their own projects that aim to combine creative activities with well-being, ESOL and skills development.

Most importantly, this report is for us as facilitators, to allow us to develop provision that is effective and useful for the organisations we partner with and the women we aim to support. By having a document of our past work, we are able to reflect on this for future project planning.

Background of Learners

There were 14 Learners in total enrolled on the project. Learners all self-identified as female and came from a wide range of backgrounds, through different places, experiences and ages.



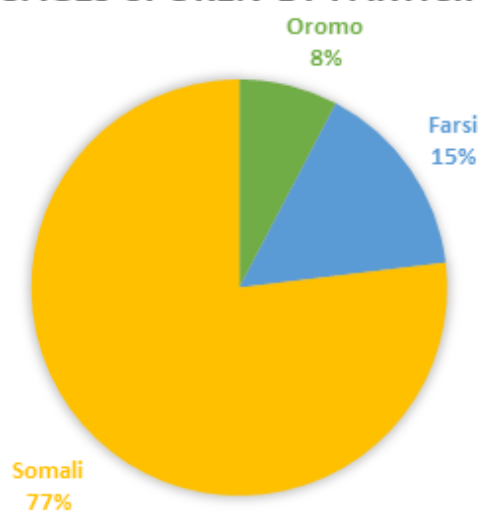
English Level

There was a wide range of English language levels, from [pre-entry to level 1+](#). The learners' English level was not assessed formally for several reasons.

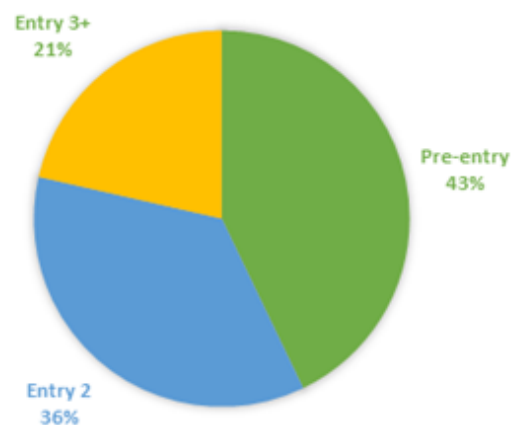
Primarily, this was due to the limited amount of sessions that were funded. Another reason was our greater focus on the atmosphere and relaxed learning environment. We wanted to avoid any summative judgement of the learners' skills in English which could have focused on lack of, rather than the abundance of English they had. The ethos of Heart & Parcel is to appreciate each individual's previous skills and knowledge they currently possess, strengthening and realising the potential of these existing skills.

Lastly, the mixed English language level environment lent itself beneficially to collaborative learning. The women started to turn to each other for support if they could not communicate something in English, offering further opportunities for development of both higher and lower level learners. This fostered strong relationships and helped the project meet its aims more effectively.

LANGUAGES SPOKEN BY PARTICIPANTS



ENGLISH LEVELS



Place of resettlement

The project took place in Longsight, with a group of learners who had been resettled in Stockport and travelled to sessions via bus. This decision was taken following the evaluation from a previous project with Refugee Action where learners were travelling from 5 different places across Greater Manchester, which involved a lot of travel.

From Stockport it was a straight route on just one bus. Some learners were familiar with the area already and able to guide others to the session, further contributing to project aims.

Attendance recorded

Average attendance from all sessions was 78%, with the lowest standing at 58%.

No. of Learners	SESSION 1	SESSION 2	SESSION 3	SESSION 4
ATTENDED	12	10	7	10
ENROLLED	14	12	12	12

Reasons for missed sessions were illnesses and attending ESOL class. One participant was unenrolled from sessions after the first week due to finding employment and another due to health issues.

A positive finding was the attendance of learners with particularly difficult barriers, such as caring responsibilities and mobility issues.

One participant was unable to attend until the final week and commented on what a positive experience it had been, noting how she wished she had attended all sessions.



Key Project Aims and Rationale

When working with other organisations, our aims and values are usually combined to create a more customised set of objectives for the individuals within the project. In general, Heart & Parcel aims to support women through the four areas: **Language, Learning, Empowerment & Community**. Refugee Action's aims with Gateway focus on similar themes in order to facilitate integration.

Integration has been a focus for many organisations and government policies surrounding migration. The All-Party Parliamentary group (APPG) published a report (April 2017) detailing the importance and [methods for integration here](#). It is worth mentioning that both Heart & Parcel and Refugee Action recognise that [integration takes on different meaning, form](#). Integration is not an isolated fixed state. It can be viewed as fluid, dynamic and multi-way, not assuming the sole responsibility on the learner to integrate, but as a collective responsibility of those who inhabit the space.

Together, Refugee Action and Heart & Parcel highlighted several aims to achieve within the 4-week project. Most importantly, we were interested in how these aims could be achieved with limited resources and time. The aims are to:

- 1. Reduce isolation, build up social networks**
- 2. Increase confidence and independence**
- 3. Develop English language skills**
- 4. Support general skills development**

The aims are contextualised in their wider area below, giving further explanation of the justification in these final aims.

Social Isolation

In recent years, [strong evidence](#) has emerged from a wealth of research which emphasises the damaging effects of loneliness on physical and mental health. As a result, tackling loneliness [became a priority for the government](#) in 2018. For Refugee Action, their concern for their clients who report themselves as feeling isolated or lonely are justified as this can have serious effects on health and well-being; a link between loneliness and an increase in common mental health disorders noted by [research from the Lonely Society](#). In particular for female clients who have come to the UK with their children. The ONS (Office for National Statistics) offers [figures from a survey carried out in 2016-17](#) which support this, emphasising that loneliness is felt more in women, and loneliness affects those who feel less strongly about belonging to their community around them. Consequently, the following project aim (**1. Reduce isolation & building up social networks**) was devised to target this issue.

Confidence and Wellbeing

Wellbeing has been a growing trend in measuring social impact amongst social projects and organisations. This has been [shown to create more engagement and satisfaction within the individual and also within their communities](#). Most importantly, the nurtured development of different aspects of wellbeing are sustained, and can [enable and empower an individual](#) to continue these feelings of satisfaction and positivity beyond the sessions.

We acknowledge that well-being is a difficult impact to measure, and one that has a broad spectrum of outcomes for different people, especially from different backgrounds such as the women we work with. However by using the [Edinburgh-Warwick scale](#) as a loose structure with applied outcomes, evaluation carried out during and after the project has taken a structured focus to evidence of well-being, and we have been able to demonstrate positive outcomes of our [projects with other organisations](#).

Whilst all the project aims could create examples of positive wellbeing and satisfaction in an individual's life, the following project aims **(2. Increase confidence and independence)** were devised to highlight strong support for these soft skills to be present in our sessions. There is a strong [link between readiness to learn and wellbeing](#); the direct effects of which are wholly beneficial for the development of an individual's life opportunities.

English language

As many [studies on immigration, integration and cohesion in societies](#) have shown, being more developed and proficient in a common language to the society and communities in which a person lives, opens doors and opportunities for the individual, their family and peers. However, the

corresponding aim **(3. Developing English language skills)** is a concrete one and remains a focused point for the project. In recent years there has been significant campaign and pressure placed on the [government for an ESOL strategy](#) that adequately fits refugees and asylum seekers needs. Part of the findings from this report seeks to explore the further impact and benefit of informal and practical ways of learning English alongside formal ESOL classes.



Skills Development

English can sometimes be seen as the '[panacea of the moment](#)' for global socio-economic development and integration, taking the view that as long as people are learning English, this will '[cure](#)' them of all inequality, barriers and poverty. Whilst language is [incredibly important in areas like integration](#), it is by no means the whole picture. There are a wealth of other skills and factors contributing to successful integration.

There are [significant approaches in English language Teaching \(ELT\)](#) to move focus away from the language itself and more at the task at hand and what skills the language then allows you to do. This all depends on the learners own linguistic reality, where they reside and how they would use English in their Everyday life. From this, a variety of skills are present here, making choices in the type of language you learn, and look at the functionality and of skills as a result. We hoped our format of learning English through cooking together in a relaxed space would be a suitable setting for nurturing and strengthening these softer skills that are [wholly important for everyday life opportunities](#).



Project Overview

The project took place in Roby Church, Longsight, which has room hire and kitchen hire. Classes ran for 4 weeks every Monday from 10:00am - 1:00pm. Every session involved both cooking and English.

Structure and Approaches

The English lessons were run by a qualified ESOL tutor. As illustrated in the timetable pictured below, each session included language to identify the food being cooked that day.

Activities	1	2	3	4
Cooking	Chicken & Lemongrass Dumplings with Fried Rice and Carrot Slaw	Handmade Pizza Dough and creating own toppings with dressed mixed leaf salad	Master Chef' Making own dishes from scratch	Quick Bake Cookies and Volunteer's Food
ESOL General	photo of food on phone	spices and herbs - memories and experiences	go out to market - get ingredients with budget of £15 to come back and in teams create dishes	volunteers bring in savoury / sweet baking food baking cookies decoration Evaluation with different platforms
ESOL Pre-entry	nouns - matching with words / listening to instructions	verbs / picture and matching / reading a recipe and putting in order.		
ESOL Higher level	writing out the ingredients with measurements / Reading out the recipe using verbs and nouns.	writing out the verbs / gap fill and re-writing		

More detail about the stages of a typical Heart & Parcel session can be found [here](#), but Heart & Parcel loosely follows a [PPP \(present, practice and produce\) approach](#). In addition to this a [task based learning approach](#) was incorporated to better meet the aims outlined above. The language used amongst learners when cooking and eating together afterwards is designed

to be much freer than in more structured lessons, and uses authentic language (off-topic conversation and exchange with volunteers) to develop learners' listening and natural English communication skills.

In contrast, the third session was participant-led and used a [task-based approach](#) to practise the language. The learners demonstrate decision making and leadership. Learners cook a dish of their choice within the session, instructing and managing volunteers in what to do and how to cook the food. This involves planning the ingredients and equipment needed, and being able to communicate in English what method and steps are needed to create the dish. In addition, a change we made to this session was to send learners in small groups out into the local area to source and buy their chosen ingredients, with volunteers supporting each group. This added another level of practicality to the activity and allowed the learners to practise their English in a real-life situation with the support of volunteers if required, further contributing to the project aims.





Volunteers

From our previous projects, we have [gathered feedback from learners](#) that overwhelmingly favour having a large number of volunteers present in the sessions with whom learners can practise English with. In response to this, we recruited eight female volunteers, all of whom were selected for their knowledge of language learning, skills and experience in this area, either from working with women from various communities, having lived abroad in different communities or having first-hand experience of resettling in a new country as a migrant or refugee. All volunteers were trained and underwent a thorough induction carried out by Heart & Parcel. From surveys sent out to volunteers about their experience on this project, all the volunteers found this induction useful and said that it helped prepare them for the unique cooking & ESOL environment and all felt that they had a clear understanding of their volunteer role and what was expected of them.



Methodology

Data was collected via video and audio interviews, written feedback, electronic surveys and emails to stakeholders of the project. Written feedback from learners was captured in several formats to allow all levels to engage and contribute; for example, post-its, scaling and drawings to represent their experience of the sessions.

Where possible, the interviews were completed in the participant's preferred language of communication via interpreters; this allowed us to get much richer information about the learners' experiences throughout the project.

Analysis of the data was carried out to produce further [key recommendations](#) for future provision of this kind. Data was sensitively collected with view for confidentiality to be maintained. Names of any people mentioned and who did not give consent for disclosed details have

been changed to protect their identity. The audio-recorded data from our evaluation project is stored securely in compliance with GDPR law 2018. All information will be destroyed once the data has been analysed this year (2020).

Evaluation

Feedback and evaluation are presented below in regard to the four key project aims set out above. All Learners' comments are reported in their own words, unless translated via interpreters from learners' first language.



Aim One: Reduce isolation, build up social networks

Through the project feedback, Catherine Garnett, the project coordinator from Refugee Action witnessed the learners feeling welcome, accepted and happy in these sessions. She explains:

"I thought about what I witnessed at first so I was there for the first two sessions. It was initially great to see clients uh getting out the house when they might not have already... cause they had caring duties, but they were also just coming together."

"...you guys and the volunteers just did such a good job of creating that space which is, really welcoming... um and like fun and safe and accepting and I think that really helped build friendships because most of these clients do go to an ESOL class um... and we're not there? My colleagues have been to see [the formal ESOL classes] but I think it's very different, they don't seem to have that sense of like belonging um.. with their classmates that they appear to have with Heart & Parcel...so yeah I was quite impressed about how quickly and naturally it seemed to happen."

When learners were asked to rate their experience of different elements of the sessions, friendship was a recurring theme among the women, scoring an average of 8.5/10. Some learners with higher level English wrote their comments down on post-its regarding their positive experiences in this theme, some examples of these were the following:

"I had friends here but made new ones here."

"I like people here, make friends."

"A lot of new friends and faces."

The women really enjoyed the communal eating at the end of each session, which was noted not only by them but also by volunteers, Heart and Parcel staff and Refugee Action staff who attended the sessions. The comments from the women about this particular aspect of the sessions is a poignant

reminder of the isolation many refugees face and the need for this type of provision, the following quotes were captured through video and audio interviews, some via interpreters:

"Eating together with a lot of people. Mostly we don't have that nowadays, it's just like me and my mum so..."

"The most of time, the rest of time I'm at home but this course was very good because I came here and I saw different ladies we talk to each other we learn English that was very good."

"...I met a lot of people from my community I didn't know before and I met volunteers people and people I didn't know before that work for Refugee Action and I met a lot of friends."

"...I'm happy today I feel grateful, and I feel I learn a lot, and erm, happy to get out of the house to do some exercises, to meet people."



Relationships forming between the women were observed from early on and volunteers noted from the second session that the different nationality groups were conversing in English, getting to know each other and taking an interest in each other's lives. One volunteer commented about the third session:

"My highlight was at the end when everyone was sat round eating - it seems like everyone has gotten to know each other a bit more? It seems like some people who haven't spoken [are] speaking across the table to each other in English."

"...at the beginning it was such a contrast um to when people weren't really interacting with each other and now they are interacting with each other across cultural groups and there's like, a really relaxed atmosphere so that's really nice."



Throughout the project there were staff members from Refugee Action, a case worker and interpreters attending at different points. At the final session one of the interpreters noted how the women really looked forward to the sessions every week that they were really excited to come. A manager from Refugee Action also commented on his observations of how positive an experience this had been for the women:

"...I think see the women um, enjoying themselves and really close with you guys as well and the volunteers. And, it's a bit emotional actually towards the end, to see you hugging everyone actually ... I think the session is amazing, it's got a different element to it it's not just cooking but also social aspect of it as well as learning vocabulary that they can use in their day to day skills, so yeah I thought it was really good and really enjoyed it."





Aim Two: Increase confidence and independence

In part, the women's confidence independence was increased through the logistics of the sessions. Due to venue constrictions, the sessions took part in Longsight which meant the women (based in Stockport) needed to take a bus to get to the sessions. Some of the women would not have travelled to this location before, exposing them to a new part of Manchester and giving them experience in a practical life skill they could use beyond the sessions.

The support of the Refugee Action staff initially guiding the women to the first session and then calling the women ahead of each session was wholly successful in encouraging the women to keep coming back. In one case, a learner who had not attended the first three sessions arrived to the final session.

The project coordinator from Refugee Action speaks of how daunting new experiences, such as these sessions, can be for refugees:

"Having new experiences of getting on potentially to a new class, going to a new environment meeting new people...and learning new skills the fact that that has been done clients having to do that a lot of the time um it can be really stressful and...there can be a lot of barriers there but the fact that...they were supported getting there they were really welcomed I think that's...to have lots of new experiences in that nice environment, I think really important um and the fact that so yeah some people were taking new bus routes."

She also notes the significance of one learner who was initially reluctant to attend the sessions due to her caring responsibilities, however she then went on to attend and engage with all four sessions.

The sessions were varied and engaging, and the women felt it was worthwhile to keep returning to get what they wanted out of it. In addition to independence growing through attending the project and having this new experience, a growth in confidence was noted in anecdotes, observations and feedback from learners, particularly where they noted their new experiences.

"I didn't really know how to make pizza. But now I think yeah, it's something that I have gained today, yeah some new knowledge."

"I managed to bring that here to share that experience with my fellow friends and people I met here and the whole group that experienced, and I learned something I gained something, I believe they gained something from me as well."

In the learners' feedback, feelings of happiness and a deep appreciation were reported, with many commenting on their plans to what they learned

and a desire to learn new skills. The following quotes were taken from learner video interviews:

"I'm happy today I feel grateful, and I feel I learn a lot, and erm happy to get out of the house to do some exercises, to meet people to learn how to cook, and erm I would like this session to continue and I would like to learn more things like sewing and more skills."

"And I'm really happy these sessions, I wish these sessions would continue and get more skill and more knowledge and more experience, I would like to drive in this country I would like to learn to drive and I would like to get more help in this subjects as well."

"...I would like to say thank you, again to everyone and to the group that make this session happen because I make a lot of friends, I learn a lot, I really really deeply appreciate everything you do for us, thank you."



When asked how they felt about the sessions, common words that kept coming up were “happy”, “good” and “enjoyed” and many of the women commented that they wanted more sessions like this to be available.

The atmosphere created by the activities, the volunteers and staff, and even the use of music allowed the learners to feel relaxed and comfortable and come out of their shell as the weeks passed. Both volunteers and staff observed the women grow in confidence throughout the project.

One volunteer exclaimed about one learner, upon working with her from the first session to the third *“she was so confident from today!”* and recalls when she first met her, she was really shy: *“she didn't really speak with us”*.

Other volunteers made similar observations of the learners:

“[she was] shouting out 1 egg 2 eggs! She was just going for it which was so nice, she was quite quiet and now she was just really happy to give it a go, I think she thinks if I get it wrong, I get it wrong? At the beginning she was a bit reserved.”

“...she was trying to repeat things and have a go at things and she was saying it loudly and not bothered if she got it wrong and having a go with raspberries so that was nice to see specifically two people grow with confidence.”



The third session tested the women's confidence and independence as the activity involved going out into the local area to buy produce for the recipe they had designed. Volunteers observed lots of confidence with the women asking shop assistants questions and then directing volunteers back at the kitchen when making the meals. One learner seemed so at home in the setting and with her group that she offered to buy cold drinks for the volunteers and other learners and went to the check-out to make the purchase by herself. This sense of ownership and care over those who initially had the responsibility to look after in the sessions (the volunteers) suggested to us the growing presence of empowerment.

Additionally, from the third session there was also a noted increase in the interactions across the different language groups, with even the lower-level learners conversing in English, trying to instruct and support each other through the activities.

"It was really nice to see them completely independent in the kitchen ... they felt like they were doing something for us as well ... also at the

supermarket - we had a recipe but it changed a little bit and they realised they needed other things!"



Aim Three: Developing English language skills

The confidence acquired through the sessions was also observed by volunteers and staff in relation to learners' English skill development and their increased confidence in attempting to speak English and a reduction in the fear or embarrassment of making mistakes.

When asked about the English that they had learnt as a result of the project, many were food-related, given the nature of the sessions, but there were a range of responses:

"I did learn how to have conversations with people and friends. I did meet new people and I appreciate that."

"This sessions help with English. I try to speak English, know words."

"...she learned how to say the words like egg, flour and spoon and knife, those things those words I didn't know in English"

[interpreter speaking on behalf of learner]

"From the sessions here I benefit a lot, that I learnt so many words I didn't knew before..."

"I've done cooking, baking at this project and also the understanding of and meaning of food, fruit or something else."

"And there are so many words in English we didn't know before and we learned in these sessions, and our hope is this to continue and to gain more skills and more English learning and more, so we can benefit from more sessions."

The volunteers also noted improvements in the learners' English, even in such a short space of time. These are comments from the volunteers about learners in the last session:

"But I remember the first thing today I got a big pat on the back and she came and she was shouting out mix! Chop! Um I can't remember what else but she was having a go and shouting out the words - I was really surprised with how much she had remembered?"

"I thought it was really nice to see how they could remember a lot of words? I was really surprised. chop, or sieve, it was really nice to see that they had gathered something from the previous sessions."

In terms of application to day-to-day life outside the sessions, there were obvious places that the language surrounding food and cooking would be used, and this was put into practice during session three, where the women went out into the local area to buy ingredients for their recipe. With the support of the volunteers, the women were able to ask shop assistants where certain items were and how much they cost, such as chicken at the butchers. Additionally, just by coming to the sessions the women needed to use English to buy their bus tickets and travel to the sessions.

This practical use of language was noted by one of the volunteers:

"I thought it was very clear when they were doing the evaluation, they were giving us examples of how they could use it in the outside world? So we talked about when they were going to the supermarket they were telling us all the phrases that they learnt, they were asking and then things like the ingredients that they hadn't learnt before it was just nice to see it all down that they had learnt in class that they could use it outside as well? "



In terms of formalised learning and the topics of the session, the vocabulary and language patterns available were mostly restricted to food, cooking and all the patterns surrounding this. These were intended as a springboard to further discussion, and whilst most Learners noted that they learnt these words, there were other communication skills that were fostered too, such as listening skills and teamwork.

It is important to highlight here that all Learners also attended formal ESOL classes as well as this project. Solely taking informal provision would not be sufficient for developing the extent of a learners' English language skills. This was felt by some learners here:

"This is very good because I'm going to the college for English just only one day. The most of time, the rest of time I'm at home but this course was very good because I came here and I saw different ladies we talk to each other we learn English that was very good."

"And I'm really happy these sessions, I wish these sessions would continue and get more skill and more knowledge and more experience."

"...our hope is this to continue and to gain more skills and more English learning and more, we can benefit from more sessions."

The desire and need to communicate with others and meet new people was one of the key reasons for coming to the sessions to practise English. Hence, these informal sessions were a way to put into practice the patterns and structures the women had learnt from their formalised classes and study activities, trying them out in as authentic but safe an environment as possible. Learners throughout the course expressed their desire to learn English and their reasons for doing so:

"This is too important to me, because without English you cannot learn anything here."

"Yes I do love to learn English, I need to learn, I would like to learn more language like Arabic, English, any kind of languages we speak in this country, but most important for me to learn English so I can communicate with everyone and I can understand everyone"

"...my goal was to be a nurse and I would like to get some ideas how to get there and just some ideas how to reach my goal, through these sessions and a lot of kind of things... Yes, I did learn a little bit about nursing but it was in a different language, it wasn't English so my hope is that, my future is that to learn English and become a nurse..."

This improvement of using and communicating with English in an authentic and informal environment was noticed by Refugee Action's coordinator too:

"...so firstly the clients all seemed to all said that they learnt English words even really like high level learners like [learner]... I remember she talked about mushrooms she was like 'I heard of it! But I didn't know what that was in reality' so having the real-life context to language learning was really great like the objects there, a reason for talking."

She notes how these sessions were intentionally different from formal ESOL classes, noting that *"the idea of this is to practice English in a different way"* and reflects that this was achieved through the safe and social environment created, giving learners the opportunity to practise English outside their classes in a safe space.





Aim Four: Support general skills development

Aside from learning English, one main area of development was for learners to develop other skills that are already present, but need encouraging and fostering. These are loose and open ended as it depends on what the learners themselves brought to the sessions with their existing funds of knowledge (Conteh, 2012) but new skills were also discovered, mainly through cooking and food:

"I was practising how to make pizza, yeah. And actually I like it, before I didn't really know how to make pizza. But now I think yeah, it's something that I have gained today, yeah some new knowledge."

"I didn't know mushrooms – I used to hear that there's some vegetables called mushrooms, but I have seen it today and I never knew the taste or the way it is, yeah."

"I learned all kind of cookings that I will go home and cook to my children as well."

"I learned English way to make cookies."

Many of the women were inspired to take these new skills away and keep practising and share what they had learned with others. This was noted in the final evaluation:

"We learned, cooked food we never cooked before and we do appreciate the new culture and the new cooking, the pizza we made, the cookies we made and we gonna' do, go home and repeat all those things"

"I learned all kind of cookings that I will go home and cook to my children as well."

In bringing together learners of different nationalities and a diverse group of volunteers there was an added benefit of cultural exchange, not just between learners of different nationalities but also between learners and volunteers, which was noted by the volunteers. In the evaluation one volunteer comments:

"...the idea of the exchange of dishes, so like, how they came up with the ideas, how they introduced us to their dishes and they were excited to show us all the different spices and ingredients and this week them getting to see things that they liked and all of the them were really grateful..."

In addition to learning the language, there are also many subtle cultural differences that can have a big impact on day-to-day life for refugees. This is observed by one volunteer when she details one of the learners' experiences from session three, whilst shopping for ingredients:

"We went to the butchers to get some rice and like [she] thought it was for £3 and [I] told her 99p was basically a pound. She thought that was really expensive so even noticing some basic things, so not knowing that 99p was actually higher - it was nice for her as well - it could save her a lot of money. Especially if some of them might be on a really tight budget."



From this same session, the Refugee Action project coordinator also notes on further skills which were developed as a result of the project, such as negotiation skills and teamwork, experiences not to be underestimated. She recounts one learners' feedback around further skills development which was inspired by the sessions:

"...we were talking about all the skills she wanted to learn and I think um...that awareness that they're talking about learning new things that isn't just language made people aware of the skills they had...It got obviously got [learner] thinking 'right so I'm learning this skill, there are more skills that I could learn', potentially as you've just arrived you might not be thinking about that kind of thing as well, thinking of self-development as something you can do."

The desire to continue learning and acquiring new skills was expressed by many of the women. A manager from Refugee Action who attended the final session echoed this, commenting that several of the women approached him and urged for more sessions like this to develop in other areas, such as sewing and other practical skills.

One participant expressed in a video interview:

"I would like to gain more skills through these sessions and if you could provide us more sessions that would benefit is in the future to get the idea of how we could get a job, how we could progress our knowledge, how we're gonna' progress in this country from where we come from to here."



Volunteer Learning

Throughout the project, the collaborative learning environment and democratised space also enabled volunteers to participate and engage in the skill development that was occurring through the sessions. Volunteers explained in their feedback what they had learnt as a result of this project:

"I learnt a lot about the Somali culture, food and language. Hearing the women's stories was really interesting and helped me to understand a bit more about life as a refugee/asylum seeker in the UK. I learnt how to cook some tasty dishes."

"Creativity in learning language!"

"With these things, I find that I always learn something - usually with do with communication skills and empathy. I'm not always the best at putting myself out there and it's my instinct to hang back a bit so it's good to try to be more proactive, even just simple things like initiating conversations and actively involving others. It was helpful to see how other volunteers and the

Heart & Parcel staff did this. And I just think it's really interesting to interact with people from other backgrounds, something I don't always get the chance to do in my normal everyday life."

"I find language fascinating so it was also informative to watch the process of "teaching" in an informal, non-classroom environment - and to pick up a few ideas on how it's done effectively. From what I observed on this project, engaging people and making it a fun experience seems to help the learning process!"

"Identifying and learning about new culture and developing the working as team skills."



Similar to the learners, the volunteers were also learning and developing skills from the project. This organic and informal environment allowed each individual in the space to foster their own skill development, thus taking control of their desire to increase their learning and satisfaction, and thus their wellbeing in the session.



This led to a warm, open and positive environment, as captured in the coordinator's final comments when asked about unexpected outcomes:

"...having seen the second session but then reading about the third and fourth from like volunteers and clients perspectives uh..it.. uh.. is an amazing how much of a group there seemed to be and like a shared identity, they all came to the same place um every Monday and it was something that was talked about to case workers? But also at group sessions that clients went to in Stockport.. um which is really nice that they share that.. share that um.. experience um so yeah I think...

Heart & Parcel, you guys and the volunteers just did such a good job of creating that space which is, really welcoming.. um and like fun and safe and accepting and I think that really helped build friendships because most of these clients do go to an ESOL class um... and we're not there? My colleagues have been to see [the formal ESOL classes] but I think it's very different, they don't seem to have that sense of like belonging um.. with their classmates that they appear to have with Heart & Parcel...so yeah I was quite impressed about how quickly and naturally it seemed to happen..."





Improvements

At Heart & Parcel, we work reflectively to improve the experience for our Learners and partners involved. As such, we were keen to hear from volunteers, learners and staff for any suggestions that might make the Learners' experience more enjoyable and effective.

Frequency/number of sessions

The most frequent feedback from those involved was that the project needed to be longer. Though most of the learners were receiving ESOL provision, this was usually just one session a week. Many of the learners expressed a wish for more sessions, reflected in the evaluation:

"I would like to gain more skills through these sessions and if you could provide us more sessions that would benefit is in the future to get the idea of how we could get a job, how we could progress our knowledge, how we're gonna' progress in this country from where we come from to here."

"And there are so many English words we didn't know before and we learned in these sessions and our hope is this to continue and to gain more skills and more English learning and more, we can benefit from more sessions."

"I wish these sessions would continue and get more skill and more knowledge and more experience..."

"I would like this session to continue and I would like to learn more things..."

This is echoed by a Refugee Action manager who described how he was approached in the breaktime by three of the women who urged him for more sessions like this:

"we need to do more of this um and also we need to do other things that they wanted to do, sewing class, a practical skills that they can develop... [it's] something that we are going to take away, look into local existing organisations and see if we can plug them in."

This sentiment was further reflected by volunteers also throughout the project. One comments during a post-session evaluation:

"I think the challenge is ... it's like it feels like every week's been getting better and better and suddenly even if it's just a couple more weeks, like 6

weeks or 8 weeks I don't know it just feels a bit, quite short, we've built a momentum and now it's gone."

Incorporating further skills development

Many of the learners expressed the desire to develop further skills outside of English learning, to further aid their settlement in the UK.

"I'm more interested in the health service, about health, my goal was to be a nurse and I would like to get some ideas how to get either and just some ideas how to reach my goal, by through these sessions and a lot of kind of things."

"...I would like to drive in this country I would like to learn to drive and I would like to get more help in this subjects as well."

"I would like to learn more things like sewing and more skills."

Key Recommendations

Using the data collected, some final recommendations for this area of work with ESOL, resettlement and integration have been put forward:

- **Longer, sustained 'informal' provision** would build relationships, further skill development and naturally aid people's motivations, desires and goals. This could be realised through learner and client led sessions, and there could be scope for Heart & Parcel to change its service to more of a training and consultancy basis for prospective newly arrived groups who would like to start their own informal English language learning group.

- **Localised groups of learners** would reduce barriers to attending the sessions and allow learners to continue to build social networks gained from the sessions, further reducing isolation. This could be realized with a more sustainable structure, with learner progression and tracking, as well as learning tools to stay in touch beyond the sessions e.g. whatsapp, online group meetings.
- **Supported practical tasks** in an informal environment would allow learners to increase confidence through practise in a 'safe space' thus embedding the learning gained from formal sessions. This is an important point to recommend to organisations and ESOL providers interested in creating useful, meaningful learner centred provision in order to accelerate English language learning in authentic contexts.

In Partnership with:



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