

Mapping ESOL Provision in Greater London

Annex 1: Supporting Resettled Syrian Refugees with ESOL Case Studies

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Alex Stevenson, Pip Kings and Ljaja Sterland

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Introduction

These case studies have been produced in conjunction with the Learning and Work Institute report *Mapping ESOL Provision in Greater London* (May 2017). The case studies are intended to demonstrate effective and promising practices in ESOL provision, and which have the potential to support refugee resettlement through highlighting initiatives which have enhanced the ESOL provision in a local area. There are many useful examples of practices in local areas and different contexts which could have been included here. L&W selected these case studies from a range of practices, initiatives and projects identified through stakeholder interviews and the ESOL mapping exercise. Key criteria for inclusion were:

- Effective partnership working e.g. that overcomes barriers to participation and/or supports progression
- Supports self-efficacy and integration of refugees e.g. through access to employment, ability to use services independently to meet own and family needs
- High quality ESOL provision well-matched to learner needs e.g. practitioners are appropriately trained and supported according to their role (whether as an ESOL tutor or running a conversation club as a volunteer)
- Supports progression e.g. informal to formal learning; ESOL learning to other learning; progression into work; or to become more independent

Breaking Barriers

Breaking Barriers is a third sector organisation working with refugees across London. With offices in Battersea and Shoreditch, it has been operational since 2015. Breaking Barriers' mission is to offer a holistic service designed to make sure that refugees can find employment that is commensurate with their skills, experience and qualifications. By doing so they help refugees' successful settlement in, and integration with, local communities. Breaking Barriers runs a range of initiatives which include: a programme for schools to raise awareness of the challenges faced by refugees; advice and guidance to clients for housing and debt issues; and workshops to support Syrian refugees who lack confidence, or experience mental ill health, such as depression and anxiety.

Breaking Barriers is primarily focused on supporting refugees into further education and work. Breaking Barriers Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) service covers all aspects of clients' lives and the organisation has built up a resource bank of agencies that they can refer people to (for example, on debt and housing issues). Where English classes are identified as a need, advisers are aware of the classes that are running in local colleges. Currently the organisation sees between 15 and 20 people per week, many of whom have English at pre-Entry level. Breaker Barriers is concerned that language teaching, particularly

for those whose English is pre-Entry, should be more effective in the three-month resettlement period in the home country before arrival in UK¹.

The organisation sees daily life needs, such as childcare and accessing public transport in London and getting into appropriate employment, as the major issues facing refugees.

About the provision

Language support

Breaking Barriers' activity is work-related and all language support is geared towards this. The organisation has only recently begun to offer language provision and the numbers are low as they build the capacity. Childcare is provided, using a childminding organisation. The free language support comprises the following aspects.

- Informal English support
- Preparatory IELTS² course
- Pre-Entry Level English

The informal English support focuses on everyday life needs, such as understanding Jobcentre Plus procedures and travel. The London transport system is complex for anyone who is not familiar with the Tube and buses. Phone apps can help, but refugees often don't have mobile internet due to the cost. Clients are often worried about where to get off, especially on the buses. Breaking Barriers holds travel classes and also initially collects students from their home, so that they can be shown the route to the centre and the associated travel language.

Employability

Corporate and business partners, such as Mishcon de Reya, are crucial to the work of the organisation. By providing workshops, placements and one-on-one mentors for clients, they teach practical skills that can be put to use in the workplace, as well as building confidence and contacts.

Impact

Clients acquire the skills needed for living in the UK. They can access language and further education provision and Breaking Barriers offers work placements through their partners that can lead to employment. They build their confidence through language development and engaging with other refugees at the organisation's centres.

¹ This is managed by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UN High Commissioner for Refugees) working with the Department for International Development.

² International English Language Testing System. This is an academic English language qualification, often required for university admission or to practice in certain professions e.g. medicine.

Critical Success Factors

- The organisation recognises the varied needs regarding ESOL levels from pre-Entry to IELTS
- There is a focus on language required for practical immediate needs: for example, using public transport in London, and having language for different situations.
- Involvement of employers, which levers in corporate funding to support government funding. The Managing Director and the Board of Trustees are focused on involving big business and employers.

Hackney ESOL Advice Service

About the Provider

Hackney Learning Trust is the local authority adult education service, within which the ESOL Advice Service (EAS) is currently located. Funded initially through the Migration Impact Fund for one year, the Learning Trust has managed to source funding to continue this service³.

About the Service

Described by Ofsted as ‘The ESOL Hub’, the ESOL Advice Service provides a key point of contact for potential ESOL learners by offering regular advice and assessment sessions across the borough, including evening advice. In addition, the EAS offers free, ad hoc advice sessions to community organisations serving particular groups of potential learners, such as refugees, parents and victims of domestic violence.

“Potential ESOL learners are made aware of ESOL advice sessions via a range of marketing strategies, including flyers and posters at children's centres, places of worship and libraries. Staff at schools and children's centres, and professionals at other organisations, including the Jobcentre Plus, GP surgeries and Homerton Hospital, are also regularly reminded of the service via a mailing list, and encouraged to sign-post learners to the service.”⁴

Potential learners attend assessment sessions and a qualified ESOL teacher determines their learning needs and provides information and guidance about available, appropriate provision. The information on their initial assessment form is recorded on the EAS database.

In order to meet the needs of learners, the EAS works in partnership with ESOL providers in the borough; providers share information about vacancies in their ESOL courses as they arise and the service shares detailed analyses of waiting list figures with all providers and key stakeholders on a half-termly basis.

When a vacancy arises or a new class is scheduled, the EAS contacts learners who are waiting for a class and forwards those who are interested to the provider’s enrolment

³ <https://www.learningtrust.co.uk/AdultLearning/Pages/Hackney%20ESOL%20Advice%20Service.aspx>

⁴ EAS Annual Report 2015-16. <https://www.learningtrust.co.uk/AdultLearning/Pages/ESOLReport.aspx>

session, along with their fully completed initial assessment paperwork. The partnership work allows a greater number of learners to access classes, for example people who may not be eligible for Skills Funding Agency funded courses, learners with very low levels of English, and people who need crèche facilities. It also ensures ESOL providers have fewer vacancies in classes, and reduces recruitment costs. The EAS currently represents 13 ESOL providers in Hackney and regularly investigates new provision in the borough through data analysis and networking.

There is a high demand for ESOL in Hackney. From the 2011 census data, 5% of residents don't speak English well and 1% don't speak any English at all. This represents 5,069 men and 7,160 women resident in the borough. Provision does not meet demand. Where people cannot be placed in a class in one academic year they are prioritised the following year without the need for further re-assessment. Location is the key barrier for potential students due for example to the school run or travel costs; other issues include lack of crèche services, pre-Entry level provision, a course or provider closing; or simply being new to the country.

Currently the number enrolled on the EAS waiting list is 300. The range of learner characteristics include: adults aged 19 – 49, women, unemployed, parents, from countries such as Turkey, Bangladesh, India, and Poland.

The EAS is staffed by one person. Otherwise, the service is reliant on payment in kind from ESOL partners; in return for assistance with recruitment and costs saved, providers repay the service in advice hours, i.e. they contribute a qualified ESOL teacher to run advice sessions.

Impact

The ESOL advice sessions run from the end of September until the end of June, avoiding overlap with main recruitment drives of individual ESOL providers. The service then assists providers in filling unfilled spaces in classes, replacing learners who have needed to withdraw from classes, and filling new provision, throughout the academic year, saving providers time and administrative costs. As a result of providers buying in to this service, the EAS has been able to streamline recruitment services for providers and learners in Hackney.

There is a 'waiting list' of potential students for the whole borough that providers can access, which covers people seeking Family Learning, College provision, pre-Entry learning, conversation clubs, IELTS etc.

Being based within the local authority, the EAS is well-placed to demonstrate the importance of English language learning to other local authority departments such as Housing, Health, Education, and Community Integration.

Through the detailed records held in its database, the EAS also provides a valuable source of intelligence on local ESOL needs. In addition to half-termly reports on waiting list figures, including the location of learners, the service publishes an annual ESOL Advice Service

Report. As the database increases, this information will become invaluable to both ESOL providers and to the council in respect of many of its services.

Critical Success Factors

- Partnership work with both large and small, established and short-term ESOL providers in the borough.
- Payment-in-kind of advice hours from larger ESOL providers.
- Regular and ad hoc assessment sessions at a variety of settings across the borough.
- The service manager collects accurate student data at the point of entry and again when they are enrolled onto courses.
- On-going data analysis of areas of unmet need to help assist providers in effective ESOL provision planning.
- Wide range of marketing strategies and analysis of CENSUS and deprivation data to target particular areas.
- Buy-in from the local authority has been key to the provision of ‘informal’ in-kind administrative support for the service.

Refugee Action Kingston

About the Provider

Refugee Action Kingston⁵ is a charitable organisation with a 26-year history of supporting refugees. Refugee Action Kingston (RAK) has been subcontracted by the borough to deliver a service on the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS). RAK have used their funding to employ a project worker for three days a week to coordinate services for the refugees. She is assisted by a bank of Arabic speaking sessional workers, in particular out of hours in cases of emergency. This enables them to provide wrap-around support. It should be noted that the Syrian refugees arriving through the resettlement scheme make up a very small percentage of the overall number of refugees – upwards of 3,000 – that RAK works with.

The organisation provides support across a range of needs: it liaises with JCP over benefits, provides childcare, and offers home tuition and counselling. RAK manages a Centre for Community Resilience and Engagement (CCRE), where pre-Entry ESOL support and social activities that integrate language learning are available. To support employability, they have accessed additional funding via London Councils (ESF) and Big Lottery and ESF to run two projects: Steps into Employment and RISE (Refugees into Sustained Employment). This enables them to introduce refugees to the UK labour market, give them impartial careers guidance, and support them with finding suitable training, volunteer placements and employment. RAK now has Level 3 OISC⁶ status to give immigration advice, which means

⁵ A discrete organisation from Refugee Action.

⁶ Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner

that they can offer refugees and asylum seekers legal advice that they would otherwise have to pay for as legal aid is seldom available.

About the provision

On day 2 in the UK, Syrian families are brought to the CCRE, for ESOL assessment and general introduction to the organisation and its services. They are introduced to the other SVPRS families and the Kingston Refugee Group⁷ Leader. Refugees on the SVPRS have full access to all RAK services.

If a client is literate in their own language, and their level of English is adequate, they are referred to Kingston College for ESOL. However, RAK reports that many refugee clients are at pre-Entry level, having had little or no education in their own country. RAK provides pre-Entry ESOL classes themselves, as do some other third sector organisations. RAK has experienced difficulty in sourcing this provision from local Education and Skills Funding Agency providers. The centre is open on four days a week, with childcare provided on two days a week. Refugees attend classes on either Monday and Thursday or Wednesday and Friday. The day is structured with language classes in the morning, lunch at the Centre, then various activities. These include fitness classes, yoga, sewing, literacy class, news club as well as visits from services providers such as public health, police etc. Participation in English conversation in these sessions is expected and encouraged. SVPRS clients with a pre-Entry level of English are invited to attend on all 4 days. Additional classes are organised for Syrian families in their homes. There are currently 3 different groups and each receives additional 2 hours of ESOL per week. One learner has now progressed from this provision to the college at Entry Level 1.

All the Syrian refugees are registered with JCP and through RAK's employability projects volunteer placements at a hairdresser's, a local garden centre and a school have been organised. These opportunities have been specially sought to match refugees' existing skills and experience. In one case, one employer has been very impressed with their volunteer and would like to offer paid work. However, RAK finds that some refugees experience challenges associated with the transition into paid employment, where eligibility for other forms of support they may have received previously change, often rapidly, and further interventions are required to successfully navigate the transition into work.

Impact

Crèche facilities, funded by BBC Children in Need, enable parents to access ESOL and this provision benefits the integration and socialisation of children who are encouraged to play with other children and develop English speaking skills. This facilitates their integration at nursery and school.

⁷ Kingston Refugee Group is a voluntary group formed by the members of Kingston Muslim Association. The group has been set up specifically to support Syrian refugees.

The holistic nature of the support enables progression. For example, one client who was initially unable to communicate at all can now ask questions about benefits and other matters, without an interpreter.

Additional funding through the SVPRS scheme and the focus this brings, as well as the access to other RAK projects such as Time Bank, counselling, the CCRE and the employment project, enables in-depth, holistic support which is effective for these clients. RAK supports all clients who access the service, and tries to ensure that its other clients are not disadvantaged by higher levels of support for a particular group. Sustainability and security of funding sources will be essential in ensuring the provision of RAK's services in future.

Critical Success Factors

- Fostering independence enables refugees not to rely completely on their case workers – it is important to enable refugees to live independently in the local community.
- RAK has developed expertise in equipping refugees with 'survival skills' such as how to call emergency services, how to make a GP appointment and understanding how to support children at school.
- Being able to provide pre-Entry level ESOL is essential: more funding should be made available for this level of provision, as there are gaps in 'mainstream' ESOL provision. RAK's evidence suggests there needs to be greater emphasis on pre-Entry and basic literacy in ESOL.
- RAK benefits from the support of the local Kingston Refugee Group. Volunteers make donations of clothes, time, and services such as providing professional medical advice, cooking a welcome meal on first night, showing people around the area, running coffee mornings, and befriending.

Syrian Resettlement in Barnet

This study of ESOL provision for the Syrian resettlement programme focuses on the partnership working between London Borough of Barnet Strategy Unit, the Barnet Group and Finchley Progressive Synagogue.

This partnership has ensured good holistic support and that language provision is appropriate to individual needs, fits with other demands and is far less likely to be disrupted, for example because of inadequate child care provision or benefit rules. It is also a good example of tailored ESOL provision from a local charity, for people who are not literate in their own language and for mothers of small children, using Home Office funding to fund their childcare needs. Finally, it demonstrates the important role that volunteers can play in helping refugees to settle.

About the Provider

The Barnet Group is a local authority trading company, owned by Barnet Council. Accommodation for refugees arriving through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme is provided, with a wrap-around support and integration service. Initially there was no specific case worker role to coordinate support for Syrian refugees, but as numbers grew, the strategy unit decided to appoint one initially on 2 days a week, subsequently increased to full-time. This role now ensures that basic needs of adequate housing, schooling for children, health care and parents' employment needs are all managed satisfactorily.

“My main concern is to ensure that there is always dialogue between service providers. There is a risk that with a vulnerable group such as the Syrian refugees, service providers will try to help them in ways that are not really within their remit. It is vital that if you establish a need, you know who else is working with them and who is responsible for what. Dialogue between us is critical and single points of contact within each service provider.” (Co-ordinator)

About the provision

Regarding language needs, the coordinator has two key routes for the refugees depending on their language level.

- The local college, Barnet and Southgate, prioritises adults onto their existing course provision according to their assessed level for between 6 and 9 hours a week. Courses range from pre-Entry through to Level 1 with progression routes to vocational courses and higher level English classes. The coordinator liaises with the local college, providing them with information relevant to the initial assessment, such as prior learning levels and qualifications, employment history. All family members over 18 are assessed and courses offered accordingly.
- Many parents have childcare needs that prevent them attending college, so the coordinator engaged the Finchley Progressive Synagogue to provide a meeting point. They have now designed a customised ESOL learning programme which incorporates childcare and is also ideal for lower level learners who benefit from more informal learning environments.

Aim of the Finchley Progressive Synagogue ESOL programme

To increase exposure to ESOL for women, mothers and children, simultaneously nurturing female empowerment, facilitating integration and independence, and embracing child development through a multifaceted approach to language acquisition.

Using qualified teachers, the programme includes the following rotating activities:

1. Befriending Programme/Home Visit (Sounds and mouth movement)
2. ESOL Mum and Baby group (Grammar and sentence structure)
3. Cultural Outing (Everyday interactions)
4. Practical Skills Workshop (Key words)

The coordinator supports refugees with their computer literacy and attends their first JCP appointment where they are introduced to the computerised signing on and job search systems. He ensures that all have access to smart phones and/or computers and helps with emails, CVs, accessing the jobs register, understanding the importance of passwords.

The coordinator liaises with the local GP regarding health issues including emotional support and mental health needs. Because of cultural differences it is harder to pick up on difficulties but non-attendance can be a sign that something is wrong or a noticeable lack of confidence. Working with partners such as Barnet Homes and the Children's Day Centre can help to identify an issue; and then decisions can be made collectively about the best support route.

TimeBank have been brought in by the coordinator to provide a buddying service to the refugees. This provides support that is external to the council services and therefore is neutral for the refugees. The matching process was introduced through a coffee morning and the refugees themselves chose who they would like to buddy with. The coordinator meets with the TimeBank volunteers so that they are clear about their remit. Their help can range from dealing with reception at the GP, to arranging a provisional driving licence or simply talking English.

Impact

Those refugees with previous educational qualifications, professions, and prior learning of English language have their skills recognised by the college and courses are appropriate to their educational level. There is potential for vocational progression, although the Jobcentre's priority remains entry into employment of any type.

Women with low English language levels or who are not literate in their own language are comfortable in the informal surroundings at the synagogue. Mothers of young children have opportunities to learn English whilst their children are being looked after in their

vicinity. They are also familiarising themselves with local venues, and the ways and mores of living in the UK.

Critical Success Factors

- Coordination across the range of support services is crucial, as is the skills set of the co-ordinator, for example the ability of coordinator to speak Arabic
- A provider sensitive to the ESOL needs of the Syrian refugees and able to provide childcare
- Use of TimeBank volunteer buddies to enhance English language learning
- FE College able to facilitate immediate access to ESOL classes for Syrian refugees

Waltham Forest Adult Learning Service

Waltham Forest Adult Learning Service (WFALS) ran one of the thirteen projects funded by the GLA Key to Integration in London programme (KTIL)⁸ between 2014 and 2015. This case study focuses on how the service has continued one of the strands of that project to support ESOL students through informal language learning and to promote volunteering opportunities in the borough.

WFALS is the local authority adult community learning service in Waltham Forest. It has a long history of working with ESOL students including refugees. ESOL provision comprises both qualification and pre-Entry level classes. Through family learning classes it is predominantly English courses for second language speakers that are delivered.

Background

The KTIL project brought together staff from Family Learning and the ESOL department. 126 parents were engaged, in partnership with 18 local schools. High quality English language training, through sixteen 25-hour Family Learning Entry Level English language courses, enabled second language speakers to integrate more with their local community, in particular their children's school community and more effectively engage with local facilities, services and other parents/carers in their schools. Project feedback from learners indicated increased understanding of: the UK education system; services and facilities in their local community; how to interact more effectively with the child's school. The most popular aspects were the local trips and access to crèche facilities that significantly improved attendance to provision.

Legacy – what Waltham Forest is doing now

The KTIL project was an integral part of both the Adult Learning Service's offer to the local community, and the broader portfolio of the Regeneration and Growth Directorate, of

⁸ <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/education-and-youth/english-key-integration-london>

which the WFALS is part. The council recognised the successful impact of this project, and decided to create a legacy by encouraging WFALS to submit a proposal on how to continue this work. The Leader of the Council approved a “Conversation Club” project which funded a full-time Conversation Club project co-ordinator from April 2016 to March 2018. The co-ordinator delivers 4 to 5 accredited 30-hour free training courses a year for volunteers who will in turn host a free Conversation Club for second language speakers in the local community (minimum 25 hours which fits with adult education terms). This post also mentors and supports trained volunteers whilst leading clubs.

Volunteer hosts are trained on managing a group, conversation topics, basics of English language training, equality and diversity, and Prevent and safeguarding policies. Training is rigorous, and distinct from teacher training: if trainees are not suitable for the role for any reason they are counselled and advised regarding possible next steps. Through the Speaking English with Confidence Project, ESOL teachers have been fully involved in the project so that they understand the separate, complementary role of the volunteers, and can support them in the clubs creating a sustainable, volunteer led informal learning community.

Currently halfway through the project, 45 volunteers have been trained and some 20 conversation clubs are running. The clubs attract on average 10 people in each. There is no continuation funding for crèche facilities or for visits to local amenities so timing needs to allow for club members to attend, which is usually mornings, twilight hours or evenings, 1 to 2 hours per session per week. As there is no funding for venues, the coordinator uses adult education centres, community centres and schools (in particular those that host family learning classes) at times when they are less busy which generally suits members’ availability. At the main centre in Queens Road the café provides a sociable space towards the end of the day.

Volunteers come from all walks of life: a range of ages and ethnicities, some working, semi-retired, fully retired, parents with young children and teachers. Some WFALS ESOL students attend the clubs that complement their learning in class. The co-ordinator makes good use of existing volunteers and ESOL teachers for new volunteers to shadow until they feel confident taking their own group. Sometimes two volunteers will co-manage a group.

This project will be reviewed in early 2018.

Current Impact of the Conversation Clubs

- The conversation clubs allow an informal space for members to meet in a non-threatening environment. Volunteers are seen more as friends or buddies than teachers. Oral participation is desirable but not mandatory and members can contribute at their own pace. Attendance is not mandatory and there is no fee.
- Conversation clubs have proved useful in supporting current ESOL learners with additional oral practice.
- It is a way of recruiting new ESOL learners into formal learning. Whilst recruitment is not an issue per se this may facilitate access for those ‘harder to reach’. This would

include people who may be intimidated by more formal learning context; cannot afford to pay class fees; unable to commit to regular weekly sessions; or don't want the pressure of qualification assessment.

- ESOL teachers see the value of using volunteers that is not about replacing them.
- Volunteers are encouraged to think about training to teach adults.

Project funding often brings about exciting and well-received work that gets results. However, it is so often the case that when a project ends and there is no additional funding, it becomes impossible to integrate the activity within existing, already stretched, provision. In this example, WFALS and the local authority have been able to sustain some of their original principles behind the KTIL project to diversify access for second language learners to build their confidence by speaking English more fluently.

Critical Success Factors

- The role of a specific project coordinator, with the appropriate skill set, ability to build relationships, offer on-going support to, learners, teachers, volunteers and to lead the work.
- Strong relationships with the schools and local community organisations
- Volunteer training is rigorous and care is taken in their selection process to ensure that clubs will be responsibly and well managed.
- Enthusiastic and committed project co-ordinator and staff to support and mentor volunteers.