

West End Refugee Service (WERS)

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An Independent External Evaluation

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1.0 Introduction

West End Refugee Service (WERS) is a registered charity (No. 1077601) serving refugees, asylum seekers and destitute asylum seekers whose asylum claims have been refused.

Based in converted domestic premises in an area of mixed housing in the west end of Newcastle Upon Tyne, WERS employs eight staff. Four of these are full-time posts, three of which are delivered as a job share. Overall, staff team hours amount to 5.3 posts supporting a team of some seventy inducted and approved volunteers.

From modest beginnings in the late 'nineties of volunteers collecting clothes for unsupported asylum seekers, the charity currently turns over a quarter of a million pounds annually. As a team, WERS supports over 500 clients, over one third of whom (currently 191 or 37%) are classified as destitute or refused asylum in the UK and therefore denied state support. Of the remaining numbers, over 160 (31%) have been granted leave to remain while 147 (28%) are currently seeking or appealing for asylum status.

The work carried out by the team of staff and volunteers is challenging, and structured hours of work and the notion of mutual emotional support are taken seriously. The working culture of the organisation is positive and can be characterised as "can do". Although supported by churches, WERS is not a religious organisation. At the heart of the service is an ethos which refuses to allow that asylum seekers and refugees, many of whom have experienced trauma, hardship, and distress, should feel isolated and alone. The enduring characteristic of WERS since its foundation, endorsed by founding co-director Lindsay Cross and Operation Manager Helen Wood (who has also worked for WERS since its inception) is as a warm, safe place to be, to talk and to be heard. Many clients interviewed for this study have referred to WERS as being "like home", and to the WERS staff team and volunteers as in some sense "family". Some clients are new to WERS, some are still returning to benefit from WERS services after many more than five years.

WERS' range of integrated services aim to address disadvantage, exclusion and poverty affecting asylum seekers and refugees living in the west end of Newcastle. In fact, and since the closure of Common Ground in Newcastle's east end, some clients come from much further afield.

Communication is a huge challenge in supporting isolated and destitute refugees. Clients of WERS originate from some 50 different countries, and first languages spoken by survey respondents for this study alone numbered over twenty. Professional interpreters need to be engaged to translate and interpret sensitive information for case referral, and WERS is very fortunate to have in Musa Hassan Ali or "Mr Ali" a very able and popular support worker with command of many European, Arab and African languages.

From collecting jumpers for un-supported asylum seekers before the then government's dispersal policy was introduced in late 1999, WERS now runs a range of support services available to stakeholder clients and serving the local community and schools with educational outreach.

Services currently available include:

- ✦ Daily drop-in advice sessions
- ✦ Time to Talk listening service
- ✦ Home visits and outreach
- ✦ Befriending Scheme
- ✦ Employability programme
- ✦ Clothing store
- ✦ Hardship Fund
- ✦ Awareness-raising, education and training programme

WERS works closely with the North of England Refugee Service. Never having seen it within its scope to deliver formal immigration advice, outward referrals are made to NERS and the Newcastle Law Centre. In a mutually supportive partnership, return referrals are made for clients to benefit from WERS Services. Informal partnerships or relationships exist with a decreasing number of refugee support agencies in the sub-region, including for example the Red Cross, Hubbub (a church-based refugee support project), Action Foundation (engaged with pressing accommodation needs of refugees and asylum seekers), and the Comfrey Project, using social horticulture as means of improving the life, health and wellbeing of asylum seekers and refugees.

Researched at a time of European and national insecurity against the backdrop of a referendum splitting UK opinion 48% to 52% in favour of leaving the European Union, and an asylum and dispersal policy understood by many to be failing, this independent, external evaluation aims to capture as a snapshot the efficacy and value of a charity providing a lifeline to hundreds of refugees, asylum seekers, and destitute asylum seekers refused leave to remain in the UK and continuing to live in and around Newcastle with - and without - state aid.

“Clients will not tell you anything without trust. Trust is here at WERS. We have made a welcoming, safe environment which allows clients to start their journey forward from their struggle; to become a normal person again is a difficult journey, and WERS is there to support them through it”

- Ali, WERS Support Worker

1.1 Brief

“West End Refugee Service (WERS) has been delivering services to asylum seekers and refugees in Newcastle for more than 16 years. Last year WERS supported 452 clients from 59 different countries of origin.

As a learning organisation WERS is always seeking to improve the services it offers to clients. We feel the time is right to commission an independent evaluation. Areas which we would be particularly interested in exploring would be the effectiveness of our support, our USPs, how WERS sits within the refugee support network in Newcastle, and suggested areas for improvement and development.”

*Lindsay Cross and Carol Gorman
Project Directors
27.3.2016*

1.2 Background aims and objectives

1.2.1 Focus of Independent External Evaluation study:

- ♦ Effectiveness of support to the existing and potential client base
- ♦ Unique features of the service effective for building the client base
- ♦ Position of the service within Newcastle’s support network
- ♦ Suggested areas for improvement and development

The detail of our study is designed in consultation with the commissioner, and focuses on support services offered by WERS to the primary stakeholders:

- ♦ Asylum seekers
- ♦ Refugees
- ♦ Destitute asylum seekers

Our study focuses on the range of integrated services offered by WERS in redressing disadvantage, exclusion, isolation, and poverty amongst these stakeholders.

In consultation with WERS Project Directors Lindsay Cross and Carol Gorman (19.4.16) the intention to fill particular gaps in pre-existing knowledge was emphasised. Additional focus to be incorporated into the the study plan was identified as:

- ♦ The means by which new clients are initially referred to WERS
- ♦ Assessment procedures, including the various tools used to assess the scale of support appropriate for each new client
- ♦ How well these processes operate in answering clients’ continuing needs
- ♦ The ways in which volunteers are recruited, trained and supported
- ♦ How well these processes operate in meeting volunteers’ continuing needs
- ♦ How well these processes operate in meeting clients’ continuing needs
- ♦ How other services provided by WERS, such as the clothing store, meet the clients’ needs
- ♦ A triangulated review of all services, taking into account the views of staff, volunteers, clients and external networks.

1.2.2 Pre-existing Evaluation Study

In 2014 the unfunded report: *Being Together: Evaluating the West End Refugee Service Befriending Scheme* Research Report was published by Dr Kye Askins of Northumbria University. The aim of this

study was “to understand the everyday conditions and practices, as well as organisational involvement, through which the West End Refugee Service (WERS) Befriending Scheme works”.

The study is a detailed analysis of:

- i). How do cross-cultural, interpersonal relationships between refugees/asylum seekers and local residents develop through sustained encounters in local places?
- ii). To what extent may community organisations enable and support progressive relationships between refugees/asylum seekers and long-term residents?

Our independent external evaluation of the West End Refugee Service does not attempt to cover the detail of the specific evaluation by Dr Askins of the WERS Befriending Scheme. Although similarities exist in approach between the qualitative elements of the two studies, ours is broader in its scope and has very different aims.

1.3 Approach

1.3.1 Commission consultation

In consultation with WERS Project Directors Lindsay Cross and Carol Gorman, approaches towards achieving an over-arching evaluation of the service were developed through discussions arising from the *BSA Tender 1* and *Supplementary Paper 2* documents.

The perspectives, opinions, and experiences of stakeholders are sought by researchers simply because it is they who are almost always best placed to understand the efficacy and value of their own interests - in this case, their own individual and social stake in WERS. However, with a shared wariness of “consultation fatigue”, we understood that a balance needed to be struck between the scope and detail of the study on the one hand, and the forbearance both of a very busy team of staff and volunteers, and clients likely to have experienced hardship and distress on the other. For this reason, a plan evolved for stakeholder consultation using mixed quantitative (random, broad) and qualitative (purposefully selective) approaches, backed up by contextual research supported by pre-existing statistical analysis from WERS.

We are very grateful to all participants in this study for their shared understanding, trust, and generosity of spirit in achieving high levels of thoughtful participation in response to the different approaches of the study (please see *Acknowledgements*).

1.3.2 Stakeholders

Stakeholder groups’ opinions and experiences to be captured were identified as those of:

Clients

- ✦ Asylum seekers
- ✦ Refugees
- ✦ Destitute asylum seekers

Team members

- ✦ WERS staff
- ✦ WERS volunteers
- ✦ WERS Trustees

¹ Independent External Evaluation - Expression of Interest - Matthew Burge, BA, BSA Ltd - 5.4.2016

² Independent External Evaluation - Supplementary Paper - Matthew Burge, BA, BSA Ltd, - 1.5.2016

External agencies

- ♦ WERS partnership networks

1.3.3 Mixed quantitative and qualitative approaches

The mixed quantitative and qualitative approaches consisted firstly of probability sampling surveys of all stakeholder groups, incorporating significant space for both specific and open comment; secondly, of the story-based purposeful sampling interview technique developed by BSA³ for the capture of social impact and social capital development; and thirdly of contextual research utilising pre-existing statistical evidence from WERS.

As set out in the *Supplementary Paper*, the purpose of the stakeholder group surveys was to capture statistical results from which probabilities can be derived on the main themes of the external evaluation and additional focus fields for each stakeholder group.

Our second approach, informed to a degree by the first, was to conduct qualitative, narrative interviews designed by BSA for each stakeholder group. Purposefully sampled interviewees were selected from each stakeholder group for their knowledge and experience across the scope of the service and, in the case of client groups, in accordance with a representative distribution across the sample broadly matching the countries of origin of the WERS' client base. The story-based nature of the interviews was designed to elicit narratives of experience at WERS rather than stories of the clients' own migration. Interviews were introduced as "Your Journey with WERS" to encourage this pre-cognition.

*"Qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases (n = 1), selected purposefully. Quantitative methods typically depend on larger samples selected randomly. Not only are the techniques for sampling different, but the very logic of each approach is unique because the purpose of each strategy is different. The logic and power of purposeful sampling (for qualitative, story-based research) lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling."*⁴

Sub-sets of the two main stakeholder groups - volunteers and staff; and refugees, asylum seekers, and destitute refused asylum seekers were not surveyed separately as originally planned. In the case of staff and volunteers, it was agreed, in part for reasons of practical dissemination, to collapse the surveys for these stakeholder sub-groups into one "Team" survey, reflecting ways in which staff and volunteers to some degree integrate their supportive roles as "teamwork"⁵. Nonetheless, respondents were asked to give their first, current, and hoped for future roles, and the survey itself interrogated perspectives on teamwork in its own design. In the case of the clients, it was felt that the focus of the survey should fall upon WERS services rather than the individual circumstances of the client. Again, however, there was considerable space for both specific and open comment.

Neither the quantitative surveys nor the qualitative interviews conducted across the main stakeholder groups could in practice have been achieved without the active participation and support of WERS staff and volunteers. Confidentiality was maintained in the case of the Team survey by it being mounted on an online platform / database to which only the external evaluator had access to individual responses once submitted. Personal identity has been removed from survey responses reported. In the case of client surveys, the same language issues with which WERS deals on a daily

³ BSA's "Social Impact Storyboard"

⁴ Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (pp. 169-186). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage. *Designing Qualitative Studies*, 169

⁵ Comments on identifying staff and volunteers as a single "Team" for the purposes of the survey were recorded within survey responses - and in the feedback on questionnaire design.

basis dictated that the only practical way of eliciting responses to the Client group survey across the random sample group was with the support of interpreters (engaged at WERS' expense), volunteers, support workers with professional linguistic expertise, and the independent evaluators in group sessions using hard copy paper print outs of the survey. Responses entered onto hard copy surveys were swiftly supplied unseen to the evaluator for secure storage. The focus of the Client survey was certainly to elicit perspectives and opinions of WERS services rather than personal information, but complete confidentiality - as WERS' staff and volunteers well understand - is impossible to maintain in a situation where translations and interpretations are required. I can only add our gratitude to WERS staff, volunteers, and interpreters for their professional integrity in encouraging clients to respond with their own perspectives and honest opinions even where these needed of necessity to be aired with professional interpreters known or unknown, and on occasion shared with staff, volunteers, or other clients. Naturally, in these circumstances there is a risk of distortion having taken place in client responses to survey questions. Few would be happy criticising the work of a person standing before them, whose stated aim was to help, for example. However, because of the professionalism we witnessed in the dissemination of Client surveys, our assessment is that this risk has been minimised as far as is possible. All personal identity is removed from survey responses reported.

Individual stakeholder interviews with a choice of male or female interviewer from BSA, together with professional interpreter commissioned by WERS where necessary, were recorded in digital audio media from the three main stakeholder groups: Staff; Volunteers (collectively, the Team); and Clients. Interviews were conducted with informed consent on the understanding that perspectives and opinions may be shared in the Independent External Evaluation. Audio recordings remain private to the evaluator unless further permission were to be granted by the interviewee for the audio recording to be published in a form specifically described to them.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative research can give us a broader understanding of our research subjects. Quantitative research can describe magnitude and distribution of change, for instance; whereas qualitative research gives an in-depth understanding of the social, political and cultural context. Mixed methods of research allow us to triangulate findings, which can strengthen validity and increase the utility of our work.

1.3.4 Limitations

When drawing conclusions and making recommendations we recognise the limitations of our data. In quantitative, statistical research, the level to which we can generalise our findings to the wider population will depend upon the quality and scope of the sampling strategy used. We will be careful not to over-generalise results by suggesting that a result is applicable nationally when only the perspectives of stakeholders from the North East have been sampled.

Findings from qualitative, story-based research will not be used to make inferences about a wider population, but may be used to provide examples of how or why conditions and remedies exist in specific contexts.

1.4 Statistical reliability and margin of error

1.4.1 Team survey

From a total population of 87, 64 Team members (Staff, Volunteers and Trustees), or 73.6% were able to respond to the survey. As a random sample seeking probability trends, patterns, and opinion, this is a very reliable number. In addition, the facility of online data capture and confidentiality protocols concerning personal information help to maintain the accuracy of results. Gender and age patterns were in broad correlation to the Team population.

1.4.2 Team interviews - Staff

We were able to interview three of four full-time members of staff, and two part-time staff. Statistical reliability is less of an issue for qualitative purposely sampled interviews. What is important is that interviewees felt comfortable in answering sometimes penetrating questions focusing on the efficacy and value of WERS from their own perspective in terms of their "journey with WERS". Questions were thoughtfully answered and there was no negative feedback.

1.4.3 Team interviews - Volunteers

We were able to interview 5 of 79 volunteers (including Trustees). Although a far smaller proportion, statistical reliability is less of an issue for qualitative, purposely sampled interviews. What is important is that interviewees felt comfortable in answering sometimes penetrating questions focusing on the efficacy and value of WERS from their own perspective in terms of their "journey with WERS". Questions were thoughtfully answered and there was no negative feedback.

1.4.4 Client survey

From a total population of 520 clients, we were able to capture 71 completed and 18 slightly incomplete surveys (89 in total, or 17.1%). Incomplete responses are reflected in the ranges within the results tables, and these are slight (5% - 10% of 18 surveys, or 1% to 2% of unanswered questions from the total sample). As a random sample seeking probability trends, patterns, and opinion, this is a reasonably reliable number. Because of language and interpretation difficulties, complete confidentiality protocols could not be maintained. Support given to respondents was through interpreters, volunteers, support workers, and external evaluators. Because of the professionalism we witnessed in the dissemination of Client surveys, our assessment is that this risk of distortion was minimised as far as is possible, with the importance of honest answers being in the interests of the service and clients alike being generally well understood. All personal identity was removed from survey responses reported. Age patterns were in broad correlation to the client population. Age distribution matched the client population very closely, with a variance of only + / - 1.3%.

1.4.5 Client interviews

We were able to interview 11 of 520 clients. Although a small proportion, statistical reliability is less of an issue for qualitative, purposely sampled interviews. What is important is that interviewees felt comfortable in answering sometimes penetrating questions focusing on the efficacy and value of WERS from their own perspective in terms of their "journey with WERS". Interpreters were required on three occasions, with a number of interviewees saying they wished to practice their English! Questions were thoughtfully answered and there was no negative feedback.

1.5 Acknowledgements

We are inordinately grateful to the staff, volunteers, trustees, and clients who were able to give up their valuable time to participate in the surveys and interviews. The thoughtfulness of responses received and conversations we have had indicates the seriousness with which stakeholders have approached their participation in this study.

Literary and research acknowledgements are submitted with the text or in footnotes.

1.6 Publication of data

Publication of data included in our reports is at the discretion of WERS.

2.0 Summary of key findings

2.1 Effectiveness of support to the existing and potential client base

Client base: The client base is relatively stable at around 520 clients. Of these, currently 191, or 37%, are destitute or refused asylum in the UK and therefore denied state support unless they can appeal - and overcome significant hurdles in applying for support under section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act. Over 160 of the client base, 31%, have been granted leave to remain in the UK; while 147, 28%, are currently seeking or appealing for asylum status, only some of whom are eligible for support under section 95 of the legislation. Numbers arriving in the region increase slowly, and there is a concern that some who are dispersed to the north or south of the region may find it necessary, though lack of appropriate provision elsewhere, to appeal to WERS for support. Nonetheless, it is increasingly difficult for asylum seekers to enter the country, and probably due in part to the price of property, no great numbers are being dispersed into the west end of Newcastle at the moment. Yet WERS' client base is likely to rise because existing stakeholder groups continue to need the support of WERS' services and nearly all additions will add to those already served. Asylum applications and appeals are taking longer to hear, and numbers of the destitute can only increase where they are not granted leave to remain but must nonetheless do so. It is a Kafkaesque situation for the destitute asylum seeker. Certainly for them the asylum system is failing. The sensitive, essential and basic human services WERS has a long and successful history of providing will come under increasing demand. For the destitute, WERS is in no uncertain terms a lifeline. 53.5% of clients surveyed across all stakeholder groups reported that without WERS it would be impossible for them to find a £15 per week hardship fund. WERS understands that all stakeholder groups need a safe place to go, a calm and listening ear from a friendly support worker or befriender, and free donated clothing. If they are lucky, destitute asylum seekers can stay with friends if they have them. Otherwise, without legal status in the UK, they are barred from accommodation, work, and state aid. The friendly, homely, family-like welcome and listening services reported as so much appreciated by many clients will remain in demand and at the heart of WERS.

For asylum seekers in receipt of state aid waiting for their cases to be heard, and for those appealing against refusals who may be destitute, support work is needed - even if it is to process and mediate referrals for them to access an otherwise impenetrable legal asylum system rather than to deliver immigration advice per se. And there are many other considerations of need - primarily advice on accommodation and housing, but also on child and family support, health, education, community development, social, cultural, human interaction and social engagement, and state aid. Employment and accommodation are issues too for those who have been granted leave to remain, and may have had accommodation and support withdrawn after the 28 day deadline by which to close asylum seeker support.

There is a relatively large population both of refugees who have been granted leave to remain, and those who are destitute who continue to need to access WERS services after 2, 5, and even more years. A significant number remain reliant if not dependent upon the very basic and essential human support WERS provides. This indicates a problem for WERS and for strategic planners interested in integration, community development, social mobility and, ultimately, social cohesion. Primarily, it is a problem for those remaining on this level of reliance and indicates enduring problems of destitution, disadvantage, exclusion, isolation, and poverty for refugees and asylum seekers in North East society.

"One of the most startling and eye-opening things is the extent and scope of the clients' needs and how little I understood. Just about what people need to live and survive... Your natural attitude about what it is to live in the world and go day-to-day and pay your bills and have enough money to live and have shelter is just completely stripped away and you have to think about what it is to exist and manage some kind of level of comfort in a completely new way. - Because everything is new. All the things you take for granted about where to get things, and how to do things and what procedures there are; Local Council, GP, Dentist, whatever. All that's stripped away and you have to think about it all in a completely new way. So my expectations of here, I had no idea!"

- Female Volunteer

Access: Finding WERS in the first instance is predominantly through friends and formal referral, usually from the North of England Refugee Service (NERS) with which WERS has a mutually supportive referral partnership. For being so tucked away, and reportedly so, surveyed clients returned high levels of accessibility for the service. Perhaps some improvements could be made to promotions and publicity, but it is clear that clients who need to access the service are able to find it because to those who work in this field WERS is very well known for the support to refugees and asylum seekers it provides. For the 16 + years that WERS has been operating, many people have been touched, helped, or have themselves supported the service. Informal communities of refugees granted leave to remain have evolved in surrounding localities, albeit that some continue their reliance upon the service. Any reported deficit in access and awareness is not from the stakeholder groups themselves, but from wider society.

“A bit latent in lots of accounts of the experience of the people we see is that they might seem really cheerful out in the hallway, and often the most cheerful ones are the ones who have serious mental health issues; problems with depression and anxiety. That’s a really common thing. Some of them just like to have a chat, just having the 15 minutes to have a chat is important”.

- Female Volunteer

Above all, clients feel safe in coming to WERS. And having sensitive human contact and listening at the heart of its charitable model, the ability to address the differing linguistic needs of clients is central to providing an accessible service. Client countries of origin number more than 50, and of the 89 clients we surveyed, 62 did not have English as their first language. The range of first languages of just the clients we surveyed (17.1% of the total population) numbered 20. In meeting this huge linguistic challenge head on, the irreplicable assets of experience and skills developed over many years within the WERS Team of staff and volunteers show through very clearly. All the more important therefore to pick up on more conventional disability access needs where they occur. WERS operates in a caring culture, more important than anything else with this regard, within which discrimination of any kind is anathema. However, the important homely and domestic feel of the building can, at least in architectural terms, militate against disability access. Helpful suggestions of systems of awareness have been received from team members surveyed, and it may be possible to put some of these into use without a radical attack on the *inclusive* culture and feel of the building. Safeguarding is an essential element of volunteering and working for WERS, and the importance of sustaining reportedly excellent practice in induction and training cannot be over-emphasised. Social inclusion is a value at the heart of the mission of the service demonstrated by the inclusion of essential staff and volunteers who have been refugees, in many cases having been grateful recipients themselves of WERS’ services. That said, up-dated IT and communications systems could help volunteers to have a better overview of day-to-day operations within the charitable values systems and strategies to which they are devoting their time. IT and communications systems can be issues of disability access and discrimination. However, WERS operates in a complex communications environment where issues of strict confidentiality are involved at all levels, so more accessible communications need to be carefully thought through. From our survey, it is apparent that these issues have been given a lot of thought, and changes have been made. But perhaps there is more to do. On language, as Helen points out, cutbacks in the statutory sector have meant that there are less interpreters being used in public services. This knocks back as a resourcing problem as WERS tries both to advocate and also interpret for their clients in accessing health, education, accommodation, state, and social services.

“When you stand outside of WERS building it doesn't look anything and you don't expect to find what you do inside. They try their best to support your needs. They care. No other organisation helps me in the way WERS does. They help me with everything I need. It doesn't matter if you've not been here for a while, you know you can always come back to WERS with anything you need help with.”

- Female Client

“Quite a few of the clients have been traumatised by betrayal, so the confidential service offered by WERS support is crucial.”

- Male Volunteer Befriender

"Language barriers Initially. There was a big problem with interpreters. It became apparent in the North East that there was a big need for interpreters. Urgent matters to deal with were affected by a short-fall in the service. As time went on, agencies got more funding for interpreters. But the sector is struggling again because with cutbacks, particularly in the statutory sector, agencies can't afford interpreters, or are restricted in how much time they can book..."

"If you're bigger you don't always capture everything... Working one-to-one gave us a lot of information that between us as a small team we accumulate and put together so we can look at things and respond to what we can and can't do, and find other organisations set up to do what we can't... We made sure that rather than try to do it all ourselves we would network with other agencies, and that works well. And the other agencies have appreciated that, and that's how its grown"

- Helen, Operations Manager, WERS

"The nice thing about the building is that it's a house and it's not got that bureaucratic feel about it. If you had a purpose-build glossy place it wouldn't have the same feel about it."

- WERS Volunteer Befriender & Listener Time to Talk

Understanding client needs: Within its wider one-to-one support work, WERS uses the "WERS Scale" self-assessment tool to help clients to comprehend and communicate their needs. Of clients surveyed, 62 of 89 or 69.7% had completed the WERS Scale. Of those who hadn't, many had been clients of WERS for more than 5 years - and before the WERS Scale was introduced. Levels of comprehension of the WERS Scale were high, as were levels of being understood (slightly less). In achieving appropriate assessments of clients' needs, the Team seemed a little more dubious with 38.1% unsure, and one respondent negative. However, 60.3% of the Team were positive. Language is the crucial issue here, and of those surveyed, most (56%) were able to complete the scale in their first language - quite an achievement given the range of first languages we surveyed (20). 9.5% of the Team had noticed client discomfort or resistance to completing the Scale; 44.4% were unsure, and 47.6% had not noticed this. Surveyed results indicate that the WERS Scale is working quite well, and many clients report benefiting from having used it. However, as a self-assessment tool, it needs to be consistently used and re-used if progress is to be monitored and self-assessed. We don't believe that this happens enough - and not at all, it seems, in the case of those who had been with WERS for more than two or five years. The stark reason for this could be that there may be no progress to monitor, at least from the perspective of the client. But destitution can be viewed with frustration as having assets of culture, education, skills and experience which cannot be used, rather than as having nothing at all. And perhaps the Scale could be improved in design towards self-assessment of a number of social impact indicators over time to do with the assets they bring with them, however forced into redundancy these may be, as well as the problems they have and the solutions they are needing to find. We understand that there can be little time, and that the clients' pressing problems are the priority, but perhaps clients being given more opportunities than they already have to share their skills and experience would be mutually beneficial. It seems that the best place to begin with such an approach would be with a re-modelled WERS Scale to include personal, cultural, and professional assets, and indicators of, for want of a better word, the rehabilitation and development of these over time. A second place to share self-assessments has started at Time to Talk, and could develop around creative activities of the clients' choice - but these would be limited by available space unless referred out.

"Dispersal to Newcastle started in 1999, so it was a new thing for a lot of agencies. NERS had already been going a couple of years, working with people within the region so they had some background to what was going on and what was going to happen... Nobody knew, not even the City Council in the early days, how many people were going to be coming and who was going to manage that; how many the Council would take and how many the private providers would take. A need for a service to pick up some of the things NERS weren't doing, like having a clothing store... that's why the management committee set WERS up - because they saw a need and a gap in services. We had to work with the clients and feel our way to see what the need was... Learning directly what needs were, and responding, made an efficient and effective service."

- Helen, Operations Manager, WERS

"The help they give me here might not be that obvious to some people. It might not be visible but it is very important. I really appreciate what WERS has done for me"

- Male Client

"I arrived from Leeds and my case was refused. I was initially referred to NERS. My medical conditions were aggravated. My heart. And a blood clot on brain. I had no support. I was introduced to WERS. My initial needs were mainly my medical conditions, then secondly financial. I received the Hardship Fund payments. I know a little English but when it comes to such things as forms I can't cope by myself. Ali and Helen have given me great support, they have been like a family to me. WERS arranged my travel to Sheffield for the surgery I had to receive, they pay for my return ticket . WERS organised it all for me, without them how would I have known what to do? Who would have helped me?"

- Male Client

"Theres is a tremendous community of women in the world who forever have made things together; whether it's knitting or quilting. And my experience on my travels is that if you just sit somewhere and knit, people come and talk to you, and ask you what you're doing in whatever language. They are interested... it is a different kind of communication. But it could have this added thing of producing something that was helpful.."

- Female Befriender and listener, Time to Talk

"The support that is currently given by WERS is very good. There are people who come here have no place to sleep, they have nowhere to go, and this organisation always tries to help them. The financial support they give is so important".

- Male Client

"Its being realistic in what we can do, helping relieve what we can and working with the clients making them understand why we are restricted in what we can do. Being honest and open with people, you get a much better response than just saying we don't do something... We've always explained why maybe we can't do it, or what the restrictions are. That's always been our ethos, that's how we work, and I think that that has helped a lot in what we do"... "We are aware of the needs of clients presenting with Mental Health issues. WERS is presently working with Healthwatch, Newcastle looking at the needs of clients."

- Helen, Operations Manager, WERS

"When you talk to people at Time to Talk, the frustration and all the skills that they've got and their inability to use them at the moment. And this feeling of wanting to make it an equal relationship. I think if there were activities where they could do something that paid back to other people... - making toys for children in hospital, or blankets to send to somewhere else, there's that added dimension to it that's really rewarding. If I was in that situation, I'd find that really helpful."

- Female Befriender and listener, Time to Talk

"The biggest difficulty that WERS has is accommodation, because they don't have space to do group things".

- Female Befriender & Listener, Time to Talk

"If we notice there is a trend, you never provide what you think people need. You jolly well ask them and find out what it is they want... During the life of WERS, we've seen a number of immigration bills. We've seen a hardening and a narrowing from successive governments vying to be toughest... If there have been specific changes, what we've tried to do is respond to that. That's why it's been so helpful to have two refugees on the staff team. At one time we had three refugee staff... - It's being ready and geared up for constant evolving. And because we are an independent local charity we can do that. Often we will have a meeting and say: "shall we start this on Monday?" And sometimes you can".

- Lindsay Cross, Project Director

Mission: The question WERS continues to face is the extent of its charitable mission in circumstances of pressing and continually growing demand across a diversity of needs. Needs exacerbated by an increasingly restrictive and failing asylum system and gradual withdrawal of state sector services across the board, their infrastructures, their qualities, and their capacity to serve (where they are permitted to do so) the demanding needs of refugees and asylum seekers - and, in particular, those for whom English is not their first language. WERS has coped wonderfully well up to now through focusing on their core mission to welcome, listen, accompany, befriend, help where they can, and provide donated clothing ⁶. Wider demands have been referred out wherever possible. Specifically immigration advice, and also many other services needed by the client. But what happens now if cut-backs and closures start to reduce the number, the diversity, and the quality of erstwhile effective outward referrals? In the case of a client not speaking English, how can external agencies such as law firms, or statutory services, such as the NHS, help them if they won't, don't have, or can't afford to hire, the language skills and interpreters required? In its rôle as mediator and advocate, demand may outstrip capacity, and this may be where WERS' survival strategy - an outward referral policy that has sustained the service for many years - could come unstuck. It is not the polar bear's fault that the iceberg is melting away, but melting away it is - an environmental, and a structural problem over which there is no localised control. And 31% of WERS' client population have been granted leave to remain. Taken together with refused and destitute asylum seekers and those awaiting appeals, or even to have their case first heard, it's not surprising that some 61% of our surveyed sample have been with WERS for more than 2 years, nearly 26% of these having received WERS' support for more than 5 years ⁷. Even acknowledging that some communities of peer support have evolved locally, many remain as clients with WERS for considerably longer than this, and are not moving from the support they receive from WERS through to other support agencies, or into "the mainstream".

"The basic needs in the broadest terms haven't changed at all. People come. They've had a terrible time, and they find it hard because everything is unfamiliar. People are frightened and lonely at the outset. That's not changed..."

- Lindsay Cross, Project Director

"People often identify as refugees with WERS beyond their being granted leave to stay, as many mainstream services are either at capacity or have been cut - so people come back to what they know, and get their needs met."

- Sarah Smart, Volunteer Co-ordinator (also Co-ordinator Newcastle: City of Sanctuary and Newcastle City-wide Asylum Seeker and Refugee Support Group (NCASRSG) current Chair)

(WERS) "provides a very much needed welcome, a building that is modest, cramped, but full of life with an amazing atmosphere....The outreach work from their worker Ali is far reaching. This place is a haven".

- Male Volunteer Befriender

⁶ WERS has in the past provided food parcels, but withdrew this service in favour of the Hardship Fund, thought more appropriate for meeting destitute clients' needs.

⁷ 25.8% of clients surveyed

Approach: Qualities of sensitive listening, provision of basic needs, and encouraging human interaction remain at the heart of WERS' charitable model. It is encouraging, but not surprising, that WERS scores very well across this range of themes, and that Clients and Team members are in much agreement over the charity's achievements in approach towards customer care.

"I am not made to feel any shame in asking for help with anything in my life."

- Male Client

"Its main strength is the open door policy to Asylum Seekers and Refugees. And people know they can come here and there will always be somebody who will try and help them with a problem. They may not be able to solve it for them, but they will listen to them and they will do what they can to try and help them".

- Female volunteer support worker

"One of the things which used to happen here was a Counselling Service. I do think that the ethos of this place, the practical support, the liveliness of the place, a place of safety is hugely important. There's a limited place for Counselling. Separating the Counselling out somewhere else away from the building is a better idea. The friendliness and the place of safety are very important and therapeutic"

- Male Volunteer Befriender

"My friends haven't had anywhere else to go where they didn't feel that Authority was looking over their shoulder. WERS has expertise and knowledge that is very valuable to the clients, with links to the MP and other support agencies".

- Female Volunteer Befriender & Listener Time to Talk

"WERS approach is its strength. We are continually looking at what we do, and whether we need to adjust or change the services to suit the clients' changing needs. Being responsive with the unique human touch."

- Helen, Operations Manager, WERS

WERS Services: Both team members and clients surveyed appear in general agreement that the most helpful and successful services are the daily drop-in; the hardship fund (consuming 32% of turnover annually); and the clothing store. The accredited Befriending Scheme evaluated in Dr Kye Askins' report is highly valued by the Team, but numbers befriended are few as a proportion of the overall client population or even of destitute clients alone, so many will not have experienced this service, and some are not aware of it. By the team, Job Mentoring is reported as largely successful. By clients, Job Mentoring is quite widely reported as "unused" - and "successful" and "very successful" only by the few. The service is a fairly recent addition, and addresses the needs of clients who have been granted leave to remain (31%) - in other words, those who are entitled to work. Mainstream employment services are reportedly more inappropriate for these clients' needs, linguistic hurdles being to the fore, in a highly competitive mainstream employment market where what can be professional assets of maturity, skills, and experience are largely overlooked. What may be questioned is whether the more fundamental integrational skills such as learning English, or the more capacity building approach of supporting clients in developing their own refugee community organisations (RCOs) and enterprises would be more helpful than tailored Job Mentoring. If successful, it may find

more appropriate work for clients with skills and experience the asylum system has disallowed them from exploiting, in some cases, over many years. It would also help clients to move through WERS support and into employment and potentially “the mainstream”.

“I knew about WERS, as I previously worked at JET, and had formerly been an ESOL Lecturer in FE... I delivered courses like English for work, to help clients to have the language skills to be able to find work. When I retired I came along to volunteer and went through their induction course firstly becoming a Befriender before becoming a Job Mentor, committing one day a week... “The idea is that we stand by the person who is applying for work and we help them to find appropriate (resources), but the level of English spoken, and comprehension is a stumbling block”.

“We get a lot of support from WERS. We get training. Recently, we Job Mentors met to discuss things. It was fascinating to find we all had similar problems. The team makes sure that we are not working in isolation. I feel well-supported by WERS, but a little bit frustrated... Lindsay is very diplomatic, but perhaps needs to be a little more aggressive. You know, get some people at the Job Centre to come and see what the situation is for our clients... People didn't choose to come to England. They are here because of situations beyond their control. There are lots of Refugees and Asylum Seekers who have good English, but not all of them can speak English. The people at the Job Centre probably haven't been in the situation the clients have, and cannot begin to put themselves in their shoes”.

- Female Volunteer and Job Mentor

Asylum seekers in receipt of state aid are not allowed to work. Indeed, volunteering is often experienced as a problem for them, for fear (rightly or wrongly) that accommodation and benefits upon which they rely would be withheld. For the destitute, legitimate work is impossible because they have no legal status as citizens. The use of Time to Talk; home visits; signposting; and shared learning are reported by clients as less used. A small minority of team members question the usefulness of Time to Talk; Job Mentoring; Cultural Signposting; and Participatory Learning (even if external English lessons are highly over-subscribed).

Gaps in services across the sector locally can be significant, focusing on all services for the destitute; legal aid for asylum seekers and those needing to appeal refusals; help with state aid for anyone with entitlement; support through burgeoning accommodation issues; and interpretation and language issues.

“(There are) big gaps in English language provision. People are queuing. Especially where childcare is offered”... “

- Sarah Smart, Volunteer Co-ordinator (also Co-ordinator Newcastle: City of Sanctuary and Newcastle Citywide Asylum Seeker and Refugee Support Group (NCASRSG) current Chair)

“Because WERS has been going quite a long time it is well established, and within the refugee community the name is known. Whatever the problem, WERS is either able to help or is set up to pass people on to other agencies who can help”

- Female Volunteer Job Mentor

Team Activities: Being over 80% voluntary, it is unsurprising that there were 51 entries of 109 from 64 Team respondents reporting day-to-day activities frequently engaging with client contact or support (46.8% of entries). When asked which of all activities they would prefer to be engaged with more frequently, 27.5% (14 entries of 51 from 51 clients) were for client contact or support.

"Lindsay has built a service that has recruited very wisely, and there is very much an atmosphere of support, "can do"... From the outside this gives the impression of being a very harmonious organisation, the result of very good leadership... Volunteer induction and supervision is very impressive. The NHS could learn a few things.... Befrienders induction made you realise that it was something you needed to enter with a lot of thought - not something to be taken lightly. Regularity is important. It's about trust."

- Male Volunteer Befriender

As with the WERS Scale for clients, however, there may be a modest issue with WERS management understanding all the strengths and weaknesses of volunteers. When asked "How well does WERS management understand your own strengths and weaknesses?", 27% replied "quite well", rather than "well", or "very well".

"I think as a Volunteer probably nobody ever really found out what I was capable of, or what I could offer, or whether they could have pushed me any further, or if I could have been of any more use. I think there are probably things I could help with that nobody has ever asked me to help with".

- Female Volunteer Befriender & Listener, Time to Talk

"I don't know what they do about using their Befrienders to the best advantage when they get someone into a relationship which is ongoing. My present friend is set to stay, which from WERS' point of view is out of their remit. She's settled here so I'm tied up with her. But from WERS' point of view I could be more effectively used with somebody else. WERS' view is that the relationship will run its course and that if we want to go on together we go on together. But from a "running the organisation" point of view, I am an experienced Befriender who's in a corner that's cordoned off".

- Female Volunteer Befriender & Listener, Time to Talk

"I would welcome rather more contact with other Befrienders, to be able to arrange where it is appropriate to do things together. My present friend's daughter very much wants to improve her language. She hasn't got any English friends. There might be the possibility amongst Befrienders for a little bit of interchange on that sort of level."

- Female Volunteer Befriender & Listener, Time to Talk to Talk

Signposting:

WERS has an events board in the corridor to the clothes store, where clients wait to see support workers. Most articles are in English, although there is a facility, if requested, for translations of documents into a wide, but obviously not exhaustive, range of languages.

"I'm not very aware of any cultural opportunities or activities in the wider community, but I would be interested in finding out more about what is available".

- Male Client

"The biggest help that I have received was getting to know which departments or organisations I have to contact for my different needs."

- Male Client

"They are very good. They always have a board downstairs, and there are so many possibilities on that board I can always find out more details and directions. It's so much helpful, and I find so many things because of that board."

- Female Client

Clients report Health and Legal as the most successfully signposted external services. Family and childcare services are less applicable, perhaps reflecting the gender distribution of close to 3 male

clients to 1 female. Cultural, sports, shared learning, and educational services are reported as being on the whole quite successfully signposted, although there is dissatisfaction from some on cultural and sports signposting. External employment and enterprise services are reported as least applicable. The Team reports the highest unsuccessful rates for sports and enterprise signposting. Our feeling is that quite a lot more could be done on signposting if this were integrated into Time to Talk and Befriending, for example. The hurdles to negotiate may be very high for destitute asylum seekers particularly in accessing external activities, events, and social or engagement and community development opportunities outside WERS. However, if they are unknown, they cannot be tried or tested.

Barriers and Obstacles: The main obstructions perceived by the clients are external to WERS, and indeed the reason they come for support:

"Solicitor doesn't answer phone" - Surveyed client

Asked about WERS itself, clients have few complaints in this regard other than some suggestions on improved access in terms of opening hours, space, more services and more financial support, accommodation needs, linguistic issues, and information:

"Communications could be improved. Maybe (external) referrals could be improved - because I don't know where to go"; "It is not clear to me what type of services are available in WERS"

- Surveyed Clients

"Communications [meaning non-English language issues] are probably one of the biggest problems we have. We rely so much on Ali and, although he's amazing, I do think the communication [the non-English language issue] is a massive barrier to things. Whether it's making someone understand that there's an appointment at this time, or trying to work out what someone would really want"

- Melissa Younger, Office Manager

Most client comments are complimentary:

"Nothing. I am always supported by WERS"; "Nothing - except that I live far from the office"; "Everything is good". - Surveyed clients

Externally, it's a different and wide ranging story of frustration with a failing asylum system, bureaucratic intransigence, bad press coverage, legal and social impediments, poverty and isolation - and of course language barriers. Positive remedial suggestions from the Team are on the whole outward-looking: to build better relationships with state sector agencies, e.g. the Job Centre; to liaise in better ways with law firms to ensure better communications with clients;

"Keep up the joint agency approach to challenging political decisions which affect our clients. Promote the need for a fairer asylum process, where clients are not made homeless & destitute"; "I would like more support to be given to those clients who are given 'Permission to Remain' during the period of transition when so many decisions have to be made regarding housing and employment found in a complex environment"; ... "there is a great need to constantly counter jingoistic material, particularly in some parts of the press, that plays on covert fears"; "Continue to lobby and raise awareness"; "Outreach events that involve locals who aren't aware of the plight of refugees"; "Case study feedback on time taken and process discrepancies for asylum process, lobby local MP's to get processes changed / better deal for our clients". - Surveyed Team members.

On internal barriers, there are reported problems with accessing competent legal advice; essential fundraising and funding applications reducing time spent with clients; some unnecessary mis-referrals; un-called-for managerial interference; unnecessarily duplicated work; opening hours, childcare provision, lack of space; external failures to return calls to time-limited volunteers; and importantly, lack of feedback from referrals. Although highly motivated and very mutually supportive, the team is not entirely without internal tensions, occasionally on a personal level. This is unsurprising given the emotional intensity of their work supporting clients whose near panic of desperation can sometimes

be detected lying behind their surveyed comments. Under the direction of Lindsay and supported by Helen (Operations Manager) since inception 16 years ago, the culture of WERS has been to elicit the creativity of staff and volunteers in adapting to sometimes changing client needs.

"If we notice there is a trend, you never provide what you think people need. You jolly well ask them and find out what it is they want..."

- Lindsay Cross, Project Director

Clients' needs may be intensifying rather than changing. Through external pressures of cuts and bureaucratic intransigence in a hostile environment of asylum administration, outward referrals are becoming more problematic as they become more necessary. In any event, the Team has felt a need to adapt its staff structures over the last two years, and this feels like a continuing process. Understandably, staff and volunteers working in charities are particularly sensitive to any perceived impediments to the delivery of their charitable work. And there is a lack of clarity around some staff role definitions - some part-time - at the centre of an adapting staff team. The Volunteer Co-ordinator role (responsible for all-important two-way communications with volunteers and the very well-reviewed volunteer induction and training programmes) is currently shared, as Sarah builds complementary external initiatives with networks, forums and the promising City of Sanctuary programme. This role of Volunteer Co-ordinator is shared with Carol, who also shares the role of Director with Lindsay. This cross-over arrangement of dual roles at the heart of the staff team does seem confusing from an external perspective, and speculation of volunteers has been reported on what this means for the organisation as it goes forward. It may be intended to lift some burden from the increasingly demanding Project Director role which, more than others, carries out into the external and mainstream worlds for awareness-raising and charitable funding purposes. For it to succeed, shared leadership needs to extend outwards to the whole team because it relies on trust and principles of reliance and acceptance in the sharing of information and influence. Is this practical where the idealism of identifying staff and volunteers as a single Team exists as a WERS value in itself? Is it practical for the staff team seen alone, across its different roles, legacies, and part-time working hours? Might it not just be confusing at all levels in terms of inevitably differing methods and outlooks further complicated by a second role of part-time Volunteer co-ordinator where stakeholders seek focus from leadership in a complicated and demanding service? Could it be that not just focus, but a legacy of staff creativity and fluidity in meeting clients' needs is compromised by such confusion with impacts on morale? If burdens need removing from the onerous role of director, could this be done through the sharing of responsibilities rather than the sharing of role?

"The weaknesses I see come down to things we can't control. Especially the issues that are faced by destitute people. External things aren't a weakness of WERS but are a difficult problem to solve. We are always looking to see if there are any problems to be solved."

- Helen, Operations Manager, WERS

"I feel very angry, very frustrated, and quite helpless sometimes because there is so little you can do. Another thing is the legal system... The rules for getting legal aid are much stricter, which has meant that a lot of law firms no longer do asylum work, so there are limited numbers of solicitors. I don't know what is going on in solicitors' firms except that it does seem that these cases are given to assistant solicitors. Whether they're overloaded, or what it is, I don't know but they do not communicate with their clients, and that, I think, is appalling"

- Female Volunteer Support Worker

"Its amazing what a difference it makes when you have a middle class articulate person talking to a professional in the way that they talk. Particularly with school and with medical people. I think I've probably helped them get a better understanding from the professional they were consulting."

- Female Volunteer Support Worker

"In terms of people with refugee status, I think changes in the benefit system have had an horrendous impact on some of those. Particularly the requirement to complete these booklets of showing they've applied for so many jobs when they've had very little help with their English. They don't have internet access. Benefits seem to be stopped arbitrarily. People aren't given the right advice on how to claim, how to appeal, how to claim emergency support and so on. So I think the changes to the benefit system have had a huge effect on those with refugee status. I think for the asylum seekers and the failed asylum seekers it's just an ongoing problem really".

- Female Volunteer Support Worker

"When you talk to people at Time to Talk, the frustration, and all the skills that they've got, and their inability to use them at the moment. And this feeling of wanting to make it an equal relationship. I think if there were activities where they could do something that paid back to other people, making toys for children in hospital or blankets to send to somewhere else, there's that added dimension to it that's really rewarding. If I was in that situation I'd find that really helpful."

- Female Volunteer Support Worker

Overall, suggestions from Team members for improvements may be characterised as a mix of creative means to bypass the frustrations of external obstruction, and acknowledgement that the WERS charitable mission has its own limits. Beyond this, though, there are positive suggestions - and the outreach and awareness-raising work that WERS has been delivering in schools and elsewhere for over 16 years (including stories on the website), together with outward looking approaches through City of Sanctuary and other potential initiatives, offer a guiding light for further development.

"Guess this is a discussion for trustees re WERS' mission, whether they wish to seek funding for larger premises etc, or if they wish to continue as a small charity providing current level of service".

- Surveyed Team member

"Work closely with other organisations (referral)"; "Continue to be able to access interpretation when multi-lingual staff are not available, or they do not speak the language"; "Increasing knowledge and possibly contact with employers to encourage them to offer clients work-trials; perhaps link with groups such as Chamber of Commerce or Trades Unions"; "Engagement sessions tailored to multiple audiences".

- Surveyed Team member

Making a difference: Envisaging the absence of WERS, clothing, food and shelter were reported as being more difficult to find and maintain by a significant majority of opinion surveyed (56% - 62%). Without WERS, self-respect, identity and peace of mind, reportedly, would be impossible for 22% to 34%. Without WERS, shelter was reported not be more difficult to find and maintain by just 16%.

Access to shared language, local knowledge, skills and experience, and creative opportunities were reported by a majority of opinion surveyed to be more difficult in the absence of WERS with local knowledge being reported as impossible by 18%. Access to employment services in the absence of WERS were reported to be not needed by 44%.

Without WERS, a majority would find getting help with discrimination, personal problems, misunderstandings, meeting others, and joining in activities (this at 67%) more difficult. Just 7.4% reported that getting help with discrimination would be no more difficult.

WERS' welcome is universally praised by clients. Places to go (64.7%) and things to do (67.4%) were reported as more difficult to live without in the absence of WERS. Living without friends, someone who

knows you, and someone to talk to in the absence of WERS were reported as impossible for between 27% and 39.1%.

A majority of clients surveyed (53.5%) reported that the Hardship Fund would be irreplaceable in the absence of WERS. Statistically, this extrapolates as a theoretical 102 destitute people. In the absence of WERS, meaningful occupation, resources, health services, social opportunities, and security were reported as more difficult to find by a majority ranging from 56.8% (meaningful occupation) to 68.3% (social opportunities).

Of the Team surveyed (71.9% of the Team population), a majority reported that WERS addressed destitution as a client issue very well (51.6%). Between 73.4% and 89.1% of the Team surveyed reported that WERS addressed disadvantage, exclusion, isolation, and poverty well or very well. 1.6% of those surveyed (1) reported that WERS did not address isolation or poverty at all.

"Now its just fine (her situation). It's ok, I've got a lot of friends, I've got job, and I've got a house and everything is fine. Life has completely changed".

- Female Client

"If it (WERS) was not here where can you go? Nowhere. But here you can get clothes. They can give you food, you can meet people. Everything here, if you need some help, like you need a solicitor, things like that, they help you they call for you. Everything."

- Male Client

"I had no support, had right to remain but benefits were delayed, so I was really struggling. WERS supported me with the hardship fund. Helped with accommodation problems, supported me through difficult times."

- Male Client

"The hardship fund, where someone has no idea where he can get some money, even a small amount really does make a difference... For me and my wife, telephone calls, home visits, all sorts of things. I stay in other cities but never see another project like this"

- Male Client

"I did not have any support. I couldn't work. I had nowhere to live, a difficult time... It was good help. It was very good help. I get support here and they contact people at Action Foundation for a place to live. Now, roof above my head. It is very good help".

- Female Client

"I feel that I have support at WERS with all aspects of my life. My family has suffered from racial abuse, which I felt confident with the support I received from WERS".

- Male Client

"WERS became very important to me as I had no shelter, or family. Everything was unfamiliar. I spoke no English. I was destitute".

- Female Client

"Though I now have my status, and a job, I still rely on WERS for any support when I don't understand anything, any time when I come I know they are here for me."

- Female Client

"WERS stepped in to support the family. Without WERS I don't want to imagine what my life would have been like. I was psychologically in a mess at the loss of my Husband. WERS stepped in and give me the support I need."

- Female Client

"WERS has given me emotional support throughout my struggles to try and gain my paperwork. I am Homosexual but the Home Office refuse to believe me. ... has helped me in identifying the gay

community to get me support. I am here (UK) because of persecution and I fear returning home. My family have disowned me. I am destitute, I have nobody, WERS support is invaluable."

- Male Client

"The services of WERS have helped refugees rebuild their lives"

- Male Volunteer Befriender

"I knew it would be difficult to see and hear things, but it's actually affected my life... It's changed the perspective of the way I am, and of the conversations I have outside of work with friends and family, and I didn't expect that, and that's quite a big thing".

- Melissa Younger, Office Manager

Unique or particularly effective support received from WERS: Clients describe as unique the WERS welcome, the friendly atmosphere, the meeting of their basic needs for clothing and hardship money, and the quality of listening, mediating, interpreting, and referral. Team members agree that this approach was the original mission, has continued so, and will remain at the heart of WERS charitable model, led by what clients say they need above what funders and strategists may imagine will be required. No other relevant service in the region carries the same qualities of experience, skills, and sensitive approach. It's a class act. Looking forward, WERS needs to focus its charitable resources on essential needs while encouraging - but not necessarily resourcing - the personal, social, community, cultural, educational and professional development of its client refugees who have overcome the initial trials (accommodation, benefit, and unemployment) of being granted leave to remain. WERS will find it hard to maintain the longer-term needs of refugees granted leave to remain if wider society fails to find ways of supporting, enabling, or empowering them towards and into "the mainstream".

"Destitution rising will outstrip the Hardship Fund. We may need to pare back services to what was previously supported... WERS is doing what it needs to be doing. It's true to what the needs are, which is its strength; not simply reinventing itself to follow the funding" - Sarah, Team

"I would say that WERS strengths would lie in continuing to do what it does well and not try and branch out into other areas, because I've seen this happen in organisations before. You try to be all things to all people and it doesn't work. So WERS has its strengths. People out there know what WERS does and it seems to me carry on doing what we are doing" - Female Volunteer

"A client who has now gained her status to remain told us the thing that kept her going was that when she came here it felt like home. We felt like family to her and she knew that no matter how she was feeling we would make her feel better. Even 'though we didn't solve her immigration problem, it was just knowing that somebody was there for her. It's the human side, the fact that we listened. We didn't judge. It was a friendly place to come to and they felt welcome"...

"Maintain the service that we have, the feeling of a friendly atmosphere. To maintain that is really important. It's at the heart of what we do and if you lose that, I think that what I see as WERS and what WERS has built up would be lost. That would make me sad because that's what makes WERS special"

- Helen Wood, Operations Manager

"I had nothing, no support. I come here, get help with money and food parcel... I come here, get a cup of tea, meet people, talk... My problems are shared, I don't have to face things alone."

- Male Client

"I have support with the Hardship Fund. I access other agencies hosted by WERS, I met with the MP.... WERS strength is their communication. And how they host other agencies."

- Male Client

"It is very difficult for me personally to ask for help and have confidence to let people know about my situation and needs. WERS helped with my emotional state and self confidence through their gentle approach and the open access to the service."

- Female Client

"The actions and support of WERS, through very difficult situations. And standing up for us. These are the things that really transform a person's life"

- Female Client

"On Wednesdays they have a talk time... They have food, you can have lunch as well... Sometimes you are very upset... You know you can talk with someone. You can talk with other refugees and get support from others in similar situation. It is a good place to have available."

- Male Client

"They provide a very much needed welcome, a building that is modest, cramped, but full of life with an amazing atmosphere....The outreach work from their worker Ali is far reaching.This place is a haven"

- Male Volunteer and Befriender

"When they (clients) come here they are greeted by name, which is incredible given the numbers of clients. Even when they have moved on, if they have any particular problems with housing, money, the Border Agency, they are confident in the support they will get from WERS... "Lindsay's vision and what she's achieved, I'm happy and proud to be part of it. And they do make you feel part of it. I'm very glad I did it".

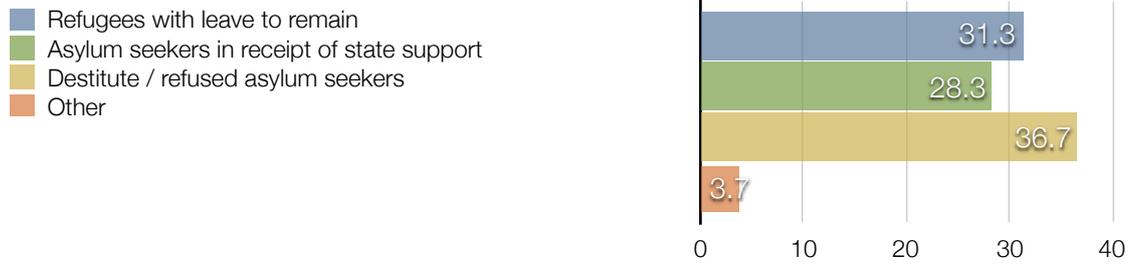
- Female Volunteer Befriender & Listener at Time to Talk

2.2 Overview

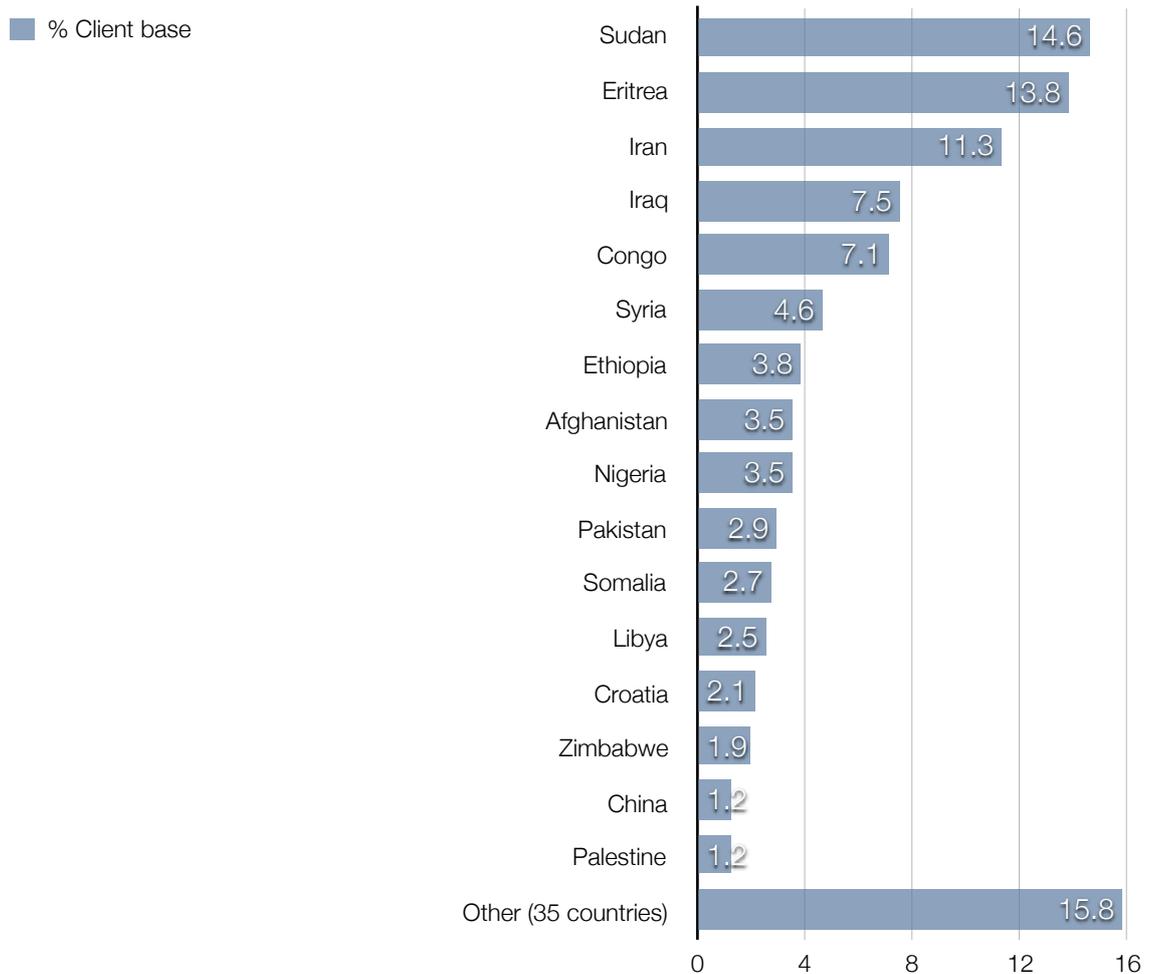
2.2.1 Effectiveness of support to the existing and potential client base

2.2.2 Existing client base

WERS currently supports 520 clients, of which 74% are male, and 26% are female.

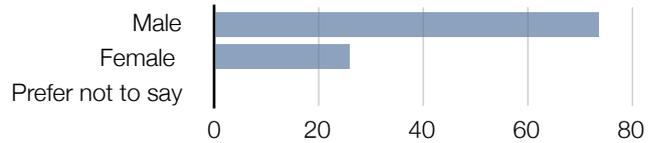


Client countries of origin - 2015 to 2016 - 51 countries in total

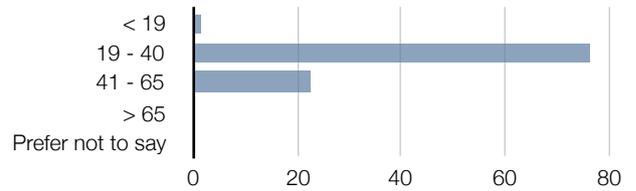


Client survey population: 89 / 520 - Completed surveys: 71; incomplete: 18; total: 89

Client survey population - Gender

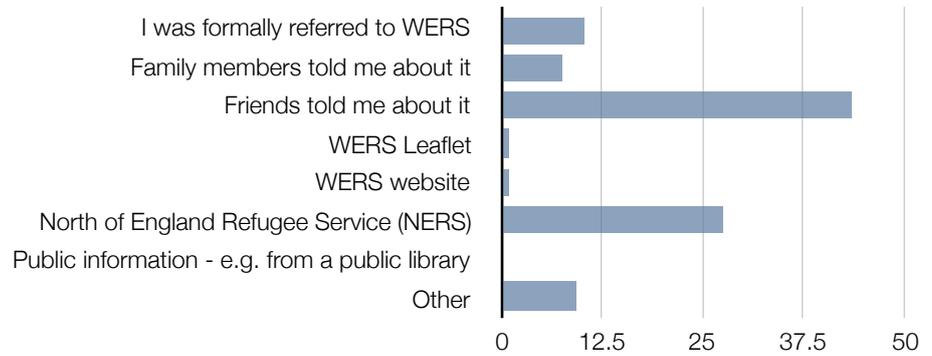


Client survey population - Age

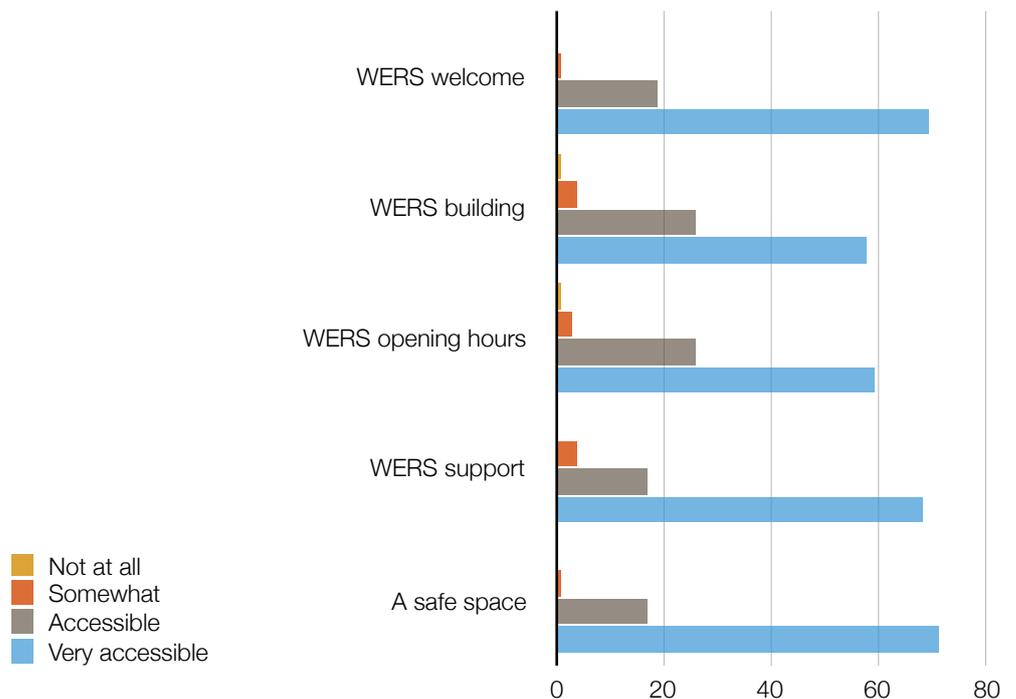


2.2.3 Access to WERS

How did you hear about WERS? (Clients / %)



How accessible are the following? (Clients / No.)



Access to WERS

Client survey results reflect WERS' own data in showing that most clients find WERS either through formal referral (37.8%, usually from NERS) or through friend and family contacts (50.9%). WERS data shows similarly low use of the website at around 1%, but higher use of leaflets than the 0.9% we recorded (at 21%).

Asked to outline any ways WERS could better advertise and promote its services to more potential clients, Team comments and suggestions focused on social media, leaflets, using clients themselves, community notices, local press, universities; more outreach, talks and workshops in community centres, and schools, focusing on social integration. Another suggestion was that letters could be sent to new arrivals. It was also said that there was "no need to advertise the project to clients. What we have works perfectly well"; "More clients?".

On wider partnerships to which WERS should be promoting its services directly, Team members suggested libraries, churches and links with other faiths, parks, museums, NHS and GPs, Refugee Action Network, and supermarkets.

Welcome:

A friendly, welcoming environment promoted in the WERS website is endorsed by both survey and interview results:

"Mostly welcoming project"; "a lovely welcoming atmosphere"; "just really helpful"; "Free breakfast. Perfect"; "convenient and helpful"; "Very calm place!"; "I feel this place at WERS is like my family, I'm always relaxed when I am at WERS". - Surveyed clients

"You see the same person when you come to WERS, which is good". - Client for over 5 years.

"WERS' effect is really massive on our life. Everything here was positive. Everything I hope to do, I come here, it happens. I am obliged to come and tell my story. Someone who has helped you in difficult times, you never forget" - Client for over 5 years.

Building:

Clients: "Building hard to find. No signs."; "Building is too old. Could you make it nicer?"; "Everyone knows where the Church is and can direct you to WERS."; "Convenient and helpful"; "it's a nice nice place"; "Building can be difficult to find for new clients"; "Quite crowded sometimes... When the store is crowded I am concerned about health and safety for the children".

Team: "I'm impressed with the number of times I see 'WERS' crop up in local publications"; "In the long term disability access to building. Disabled toilet would also be required"; "The layout of the existing building, e.g. doorstep, stairs & narrow passages/doorways, would make access difficult for anyone with certain physical handicaps, so an additional ground-level annexe could be useful"; "No lift to upper floor of building which might exclude employees and clients"; "Have some system to highlight if a client has mobility issues in climbing the stairs. Maybe a coloured sticker in their file to indicate that access to a room downstairs would be better"; "Lack of space for DEFL and Job Search; "Shop gets too crowded at times which is frightening"; "Shop too small and gets crowded. Building too small"; "The building is very small".

Opening hours:

Clients: "Difficult if it's not possible to get to WERS before 1.00 pm"; "Open in afternoon please"; "Would be good to be open 2 hours longer to 2.00 pm".

Access to WERS

WERS support:

Clients: "All people have different situations, and WERS is not always able to address or help with appropriate support for all situations. Some support from WERS after attack in my housing. Having continuing problems with my accommodation. Contract for housing not reacting appropriately. I don't feel safe in my accommodation"; "If WERS could offer accommodation it would be a better support"; "For the people who are in need it's a very good place to come, and the supporters do their best to help those in need".

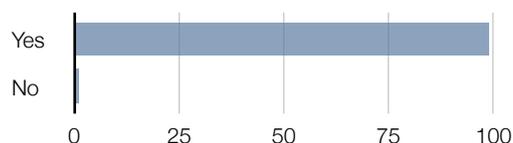
Team: "I think it's good especially considering the other demands on the service. My first contact was online, I found them easily and was able to interact readily"; "Other organisations refer people here, so need to make sure that WERS information held by those organisations is up to date. Very Important".

A safe space:

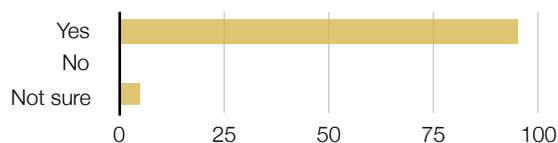
Clients: "Yes, compared to feeling unsafe in my country I feel safe here"; "Very nice, its safe"; "I always feel in a safe place over here"; "Feel very secure and more confident all the time I come here"; "Everyone is helpful. Good H&S, First Aid"; "WERS is a safe place to be when you need help. The people who work there are always happy to help"; "One of the few places I can go and talk to someone privately".

Team: "Clothing store can get overcrowded and have potential issues, especially when low staffing this is potentially not safe. Kitchen hygiene regulation is in need of being addressed".

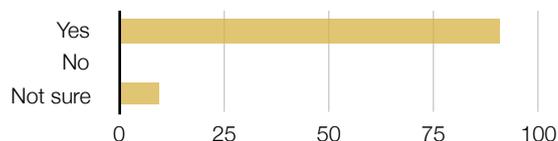
Do you feel safe when you are with WERS? (Clients / %)



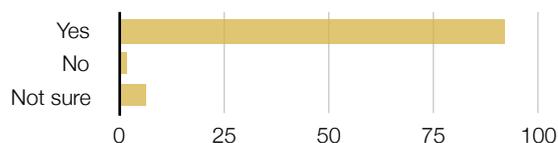
Are you familiar with WERS policies of Health and Safety and Safeguarding? (Team / %)



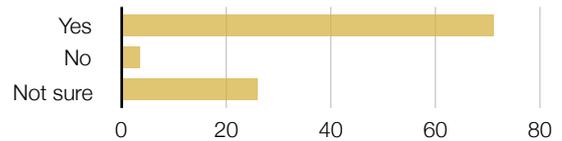
Does WERS meet all Health and Safety requirements - delivery of services (Team / %)



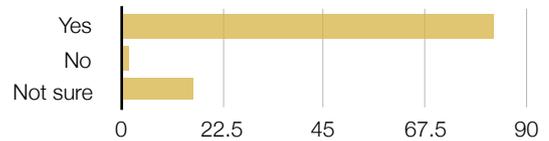
Does WERS meet all Safeguarding requirements - delivery of services (Team / %)



Does WERS meet Disability Needs criteria in achieving equality of opportunity for team members? (Team / %)



Does WERS meet Social Inclusion policy aims in achieving equality of opportunity for team members? (Team / %)



Access to WERS (continued)

Health & Safety and Safeguarding / Social Inclusion:

WERS is regarded by clients as a valued safe space. Nearly 99% of clients surveyed said they felt safe when with WERS.

On policies of Health & Safety and Safeguarding, Team responses are all over 90% familiar and positive. In meeting disability needs criteria, 71% were confident and the remainder mostly unsure. Two respondents were negative. On meeting social inclusion policy aims, 82.5% were positive. Note: Where it is discriminatory, disability access is an issue under the Equality Act.

Communication difficulties because of language barriers are for clients the access issues WERS has made it its remit to tackle on a daily basis. Interpreters and staff manage to support a wide number of languages within the organisation. Clients of WERS originate from some 50 different countries, and first languages spoken by survey respondents for this study alone numbered over twenty.

Clients: "I feel very safe"; "Building is small and a bit crowded sometimes"; "I feel like home - friends with people"; "WERS is a safe place because once there you feel home even if you are troubled"; "No one makes me trouble"; "I feel this place at WERS is like my family, I'm always relaxed when I am at WERS".

Team: "Satisfactory"; "I've said yes above because I've done the training - but I could do with a refresher to make sure I really am familiar, and to bring me up to date"; "More training for safety and safeguarding"; "Impressed by the great care WERS have taken to ensure both clients and volunteers are safe"; "The gate to the garden and entrance needs a new catch and a bigger notice"; "Training for me"; "As a trustee, I was involved in exhaustive deliberations over these policies and requirements within the past 18 months, and am not aware of any current need for improvements"; "A listener who is available daily".

Disability Needs:

Team: "In the long term disability access to building. Disabled toilet would also be required"; "Does the arrangement of space at the WERS office allow a disabled person to do office work there? A stair lift would help but would be a huge financial challenge and would divert funds from WERS' core purpose"; "I feel that WERS does its best to meet disability needs, despite constraints of building, which has limited disabled access & toilet facilities"; "No lift to upper floor of building which might exclude employees and clients"; "Access to the site for disabled people/wheelchair users could be improved"; "I think that they mean to - whether they do or not is always questionable";

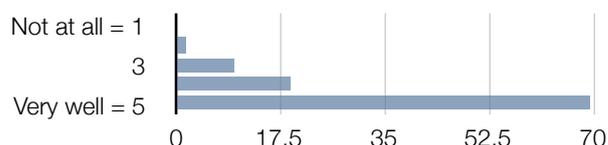
Social Inclusion:

Team: "Funding for interpreters would make the service much more inclusive".

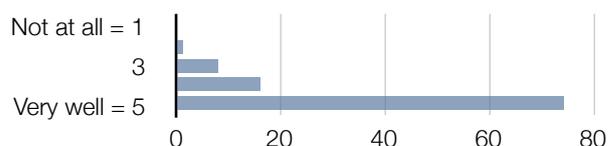
2.2.4 Understanding client needs

WERS uses the “WERS Scale” self-assessment tool to help clients to comprehend and communicate client needs. Of clients surveyed, 62 of 89 or 69.7% had completed the WERS Scale. Of those who hadn’t many had been clients of WERS for more than 5 years - and before the WERS Scale was introduced.

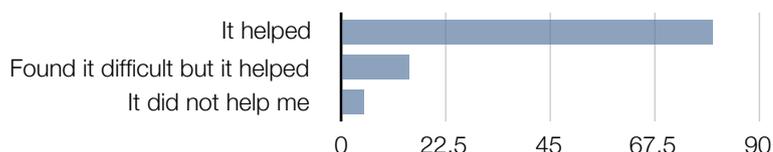
How well did you understand the WERS Scale? (Clients / %)



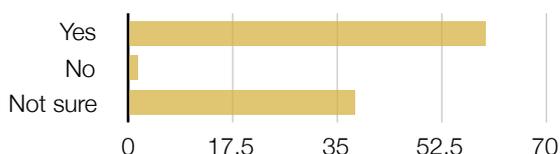
How well do you think you were understood? (Clients / %)



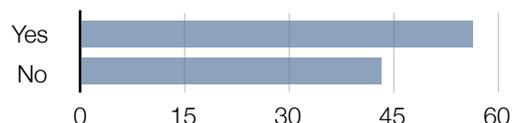
When you completed the WERS Scale... (Clients / %)



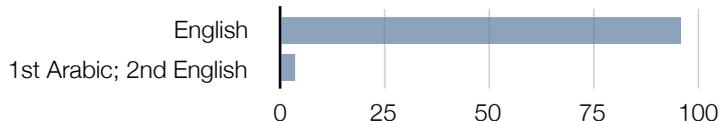
Does the "WERS Scale" achieve appropriate assessments of client needs? (Team / %)



When you completed the WERS Scale did you use your first language? (Clients / %)



If “No”, What language did you use? (Clients / %)



Understanding Client Needs:

Levels of comprehension of the Scale are good, as are levels of being understood (slightly less). 95.1% of respondents (61) said it helped, if 14.8% of those found it difficult; 4.9% (3) said it didn't help them. Most (56.5%) were able to complete the scale in their first language. This is an achievement. Of those who didn't use their first language (26), nearly all used English.

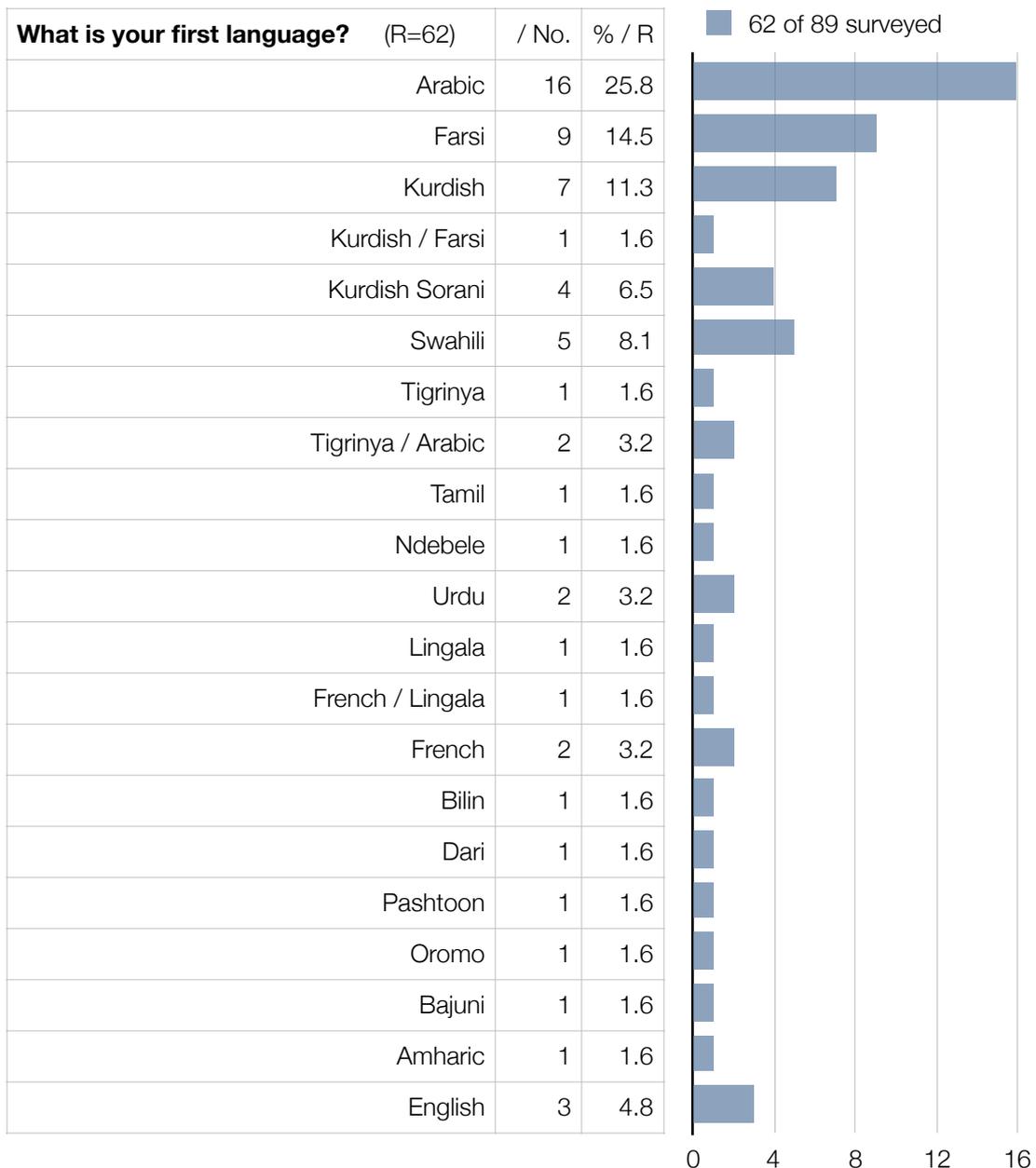
The table below sets out the range of first languages of those who had completed the WERS Scale (62). Data for the first language of those who had not completed the Scale was not collected.

Understanding Client Needs (Continued)

Of particular note is the range of first languages. This presents WERS with a significant challenge where a second language option is not understood or spoken. WERS does engage professional interpreters for support work in addition to the rather remarkable linguistic skills of its own Support Worker, Musa Hassan Ali, who masters several European, African, and Arab languages. In the absence of his skills the need WERS already has for interpreters would multiply with the range of language skills required for individuals and small groups.

The WERS Scale is usually completed soon after a client's first arrival. Although Support Workers keep case notes, there may be an issue with updating Scale information. And there are a number of clients continuing to use WERS for longer than five years who have not completed a Scale.

Team: "We need to better capture whether there has been improvement in clients' feelings of social isolation".

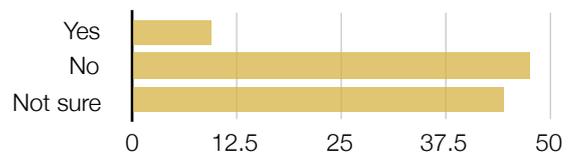


Understanding Client Needs (Continued)

Clients: “Best way to understand my problems”; “It was very helpful in helping me with my thinking process and how I view things”; “I needed help to have things explained, things were understood because I could be spoken to in own language. It helped me to recognise the progress I had made”; “It helped a little”; “Was very helpful”; “Basic information. Only completed as a duty”; “Very clear and very understanding”; “Feeling of indifference. No one would really try to help. Needs are not met as support, it seems a formality”; “Was explained well”; “The question 'I like myself' (question / statement G) is quite difficult to reply to on the scale. What does it mean?”; “First time I did the scale it was difficult - then it got easier”...

Team: “I think that completing the scale at first appointment is not appropriate for some clients who are distressed / confused”; “I feel that the scale is a very useful tool in assessing client need, as long as it can be discussed adequately, and is seen as a starting point, to be revisited and built on in subsequent conversations”; “The amount of time the process takes can be tricky during busy periods”; “I don't know what the WERS Scale is”; “Usefulness of scale depends to a large degree on interaction between volunteer and client”; “A great number of clients cannot translate the word "useful" in the context of "Do you feel useful?". Often when investigating why the client said they did feel useful their responses do not relate directly to the question. Furthermore, a great number of clients are homeless and jobless. In my understanding of the question I do not know how these clients could be expected to feel conventionally 'useful'”;

Have you noticed any discomfort or resistance to using any parts of the WERS Scale in assessing client needs? (Team / %)



Understanding Client Needs (Continued)

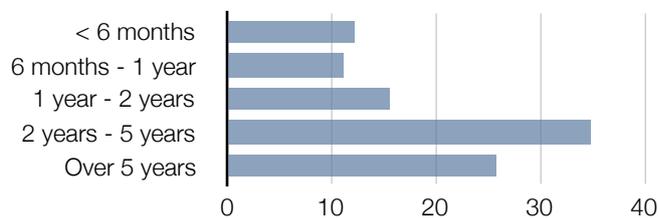
Clients: “Many clients have difficulty with the questions around motivation and usefulness, as few are allowed to work. This gives them the opportunity to express their frustration - which can be useful, but otherwise may increase this feeling”; “Not resistance or discomfort, but sometimes not being able to make sense of some of the statements”; “Not really, there are clients who simply do not see the point of filling it in and can be hostile”; “Phrasing of certain questions can be difficult for clients to understand or may not illicit the truth. For example, the question "Do you like yourself?" could potentially carry with it the stigma surrounding depression or self esteem. This causes clients to automatically answer positively even though mannerisms and body language show it is a lie”; “Discomfort has usually been due to clients mental health issues. We do not insist on clients completing the scale, this can be done at a later stage if they agree. We do give advice & support to help achieve this and I suggest this continues”...

The challenges to WERS in assessing clients' needs are abundantly clear. Problems of trauma, distress, isolation, destitution, and poverty are not easily explained. An unfamiliar language, Kafkaesque immigration law, and mental health issues can compound problems. Considering these difficulties the WERS Scale is reported as performing reasonably well overall as a self-assessment tool for monitoring progress - but only in so far as it continues to be used over time. WERS has never provided formal immigration advice, having always referred this out. The Scale is designed appropriately for the basic provision, listening, sharing, and referral services WERS does provide.

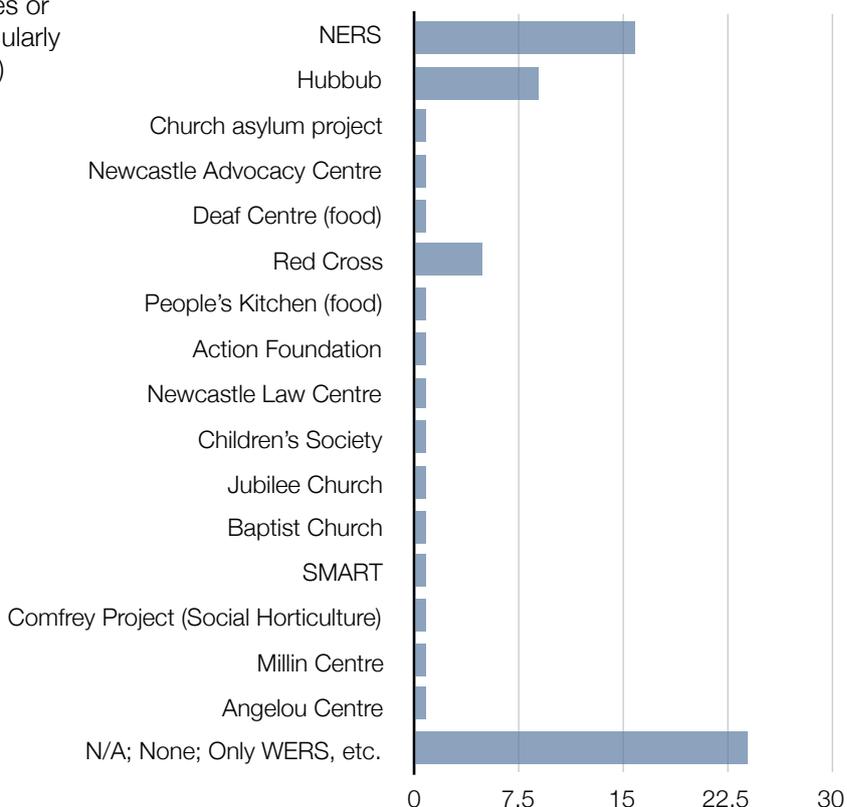
2.2.5 WERS Services

Context

For how long have you been a client of WERS? (Clients / %)



Please list any other agencies or charities from which you regularly receive advice (Clients / No.)



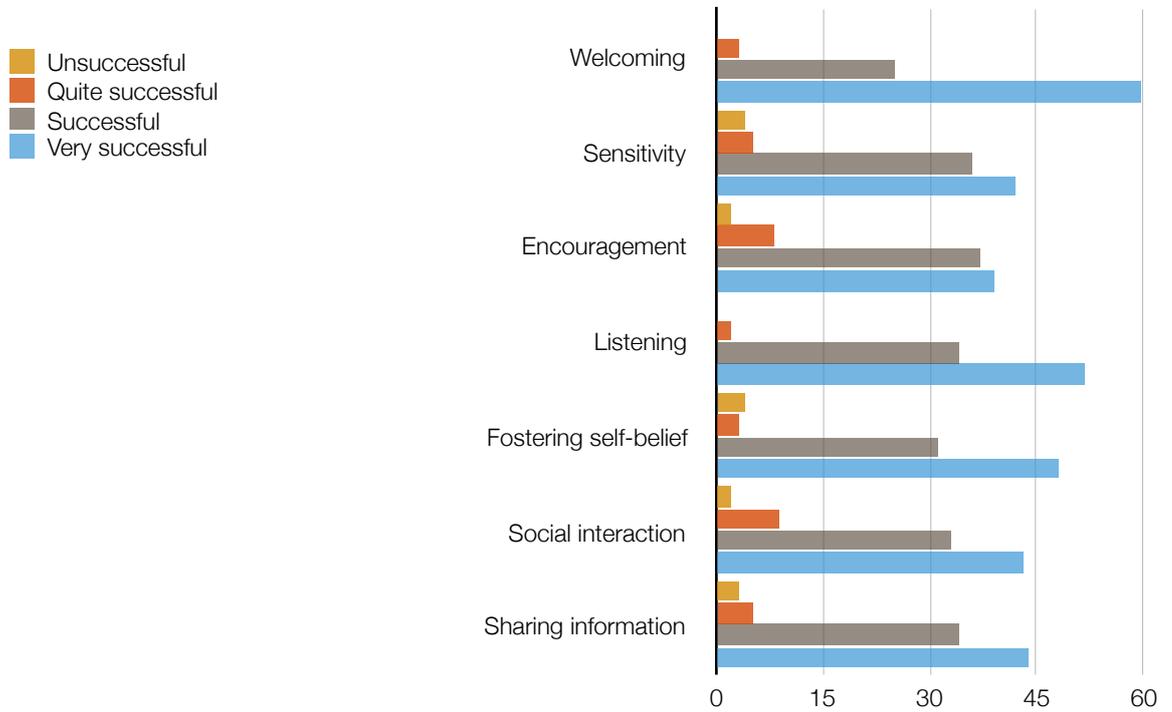
WERS Services

"People often identify as refugees with WERS beyond their being granted leave to stay, as many mainstream services are either at capacity or have been cut - so people come back to what they know, and get their needs met." - Sarah (Team)

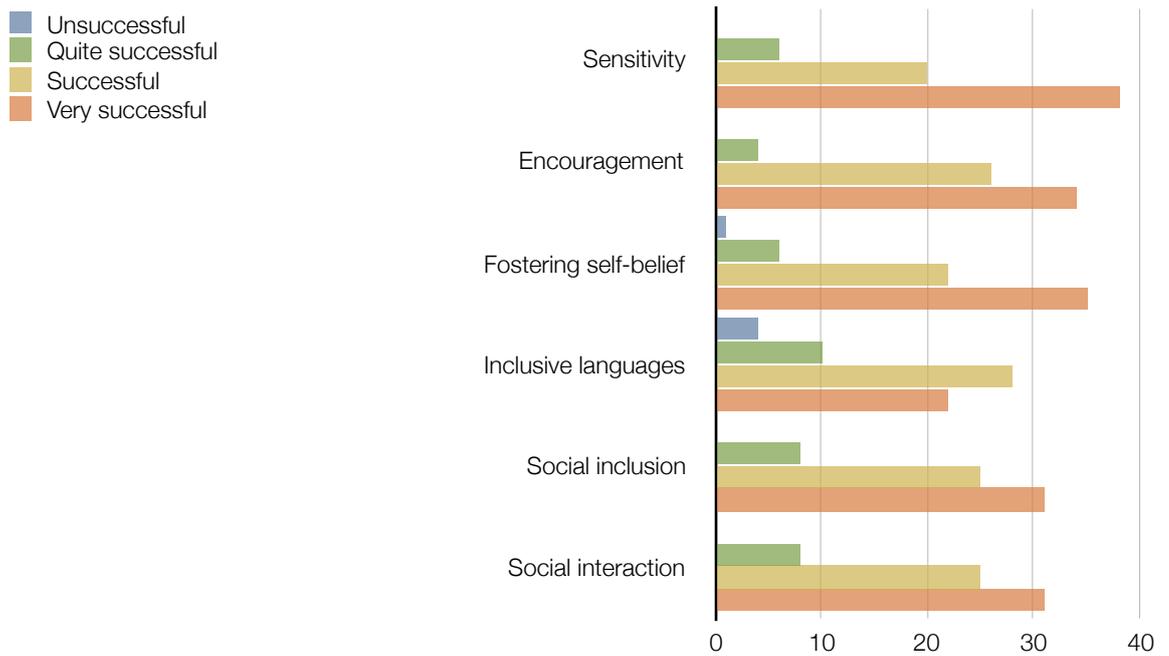
At 17.1%, of the WERS client population, the sampled survey range may not be an entirely accurate representation of the population as a whole. Nonetheless, 31% of the WERS' client population have been granted leave to remain. Taken together with long-stay refused and destitute asylum seekers and those awaiting appeals, or even to have their case first heard, it's perhaps less surprising that some 61% of our surveyed sample have been with WERS for more than 2 years, nearly 26% of these having received WERS' support for more than 5 years. Sarah's comment suggests that WERS does indeed continue to meet clients' needs, perhaps through being appropriate, of high quality, and / or there being no alternative. Also suggested is that basic support needs continue (meeting these being WERS' charitable model), and that a high proportion of refugees (at least a quarter) have found it hard either to leave, avoid dependency, or enter the social mainstream of life in the North East after 5 years. One interviewee had been a client for fifteen years.

Approach:

How successful has WERS' approach been in terms of ...
(Clients / No.)



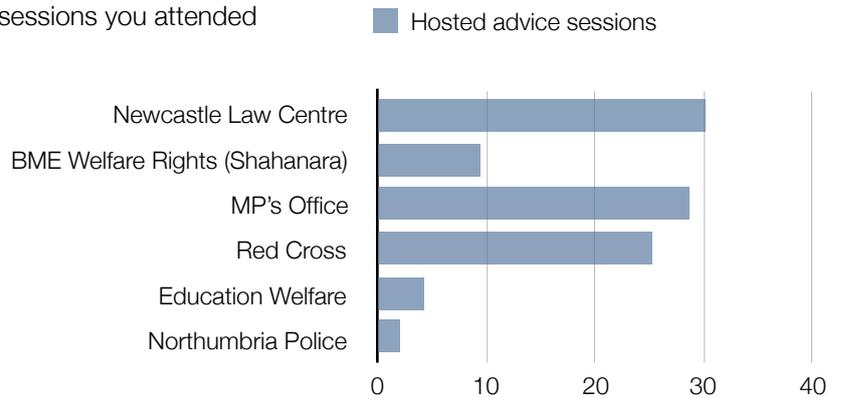
How successful is WERS in using the approaches below to meet high standards of customer care?
(Team / No.)



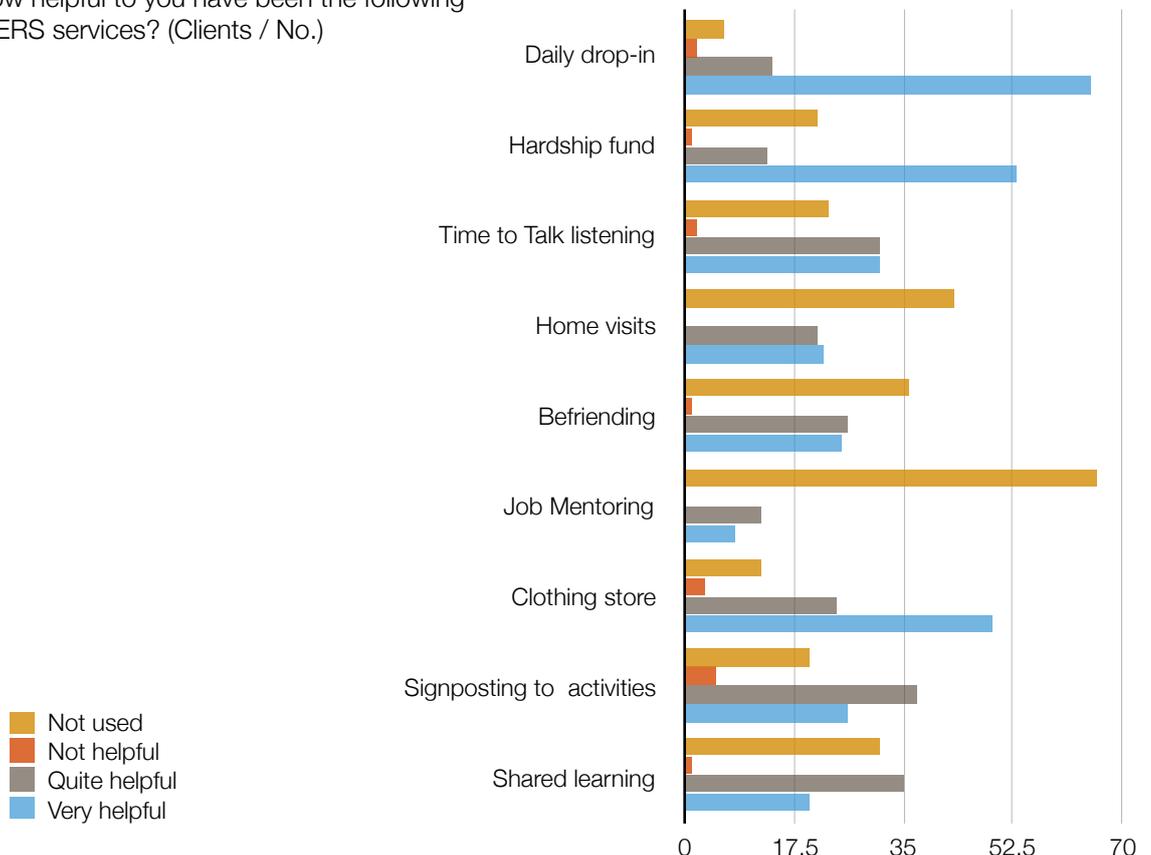
WERS Services (continued)

Approach: Qualities of human interaction and communication are at the heart of WERS' charitable model, as they have been since inception. It is encouraging, but not surprising, given the comments received, that WERS scores very well across this range of themes, and that Clients and Team members are in much agreement over the charity's achievements in approach towards customer care. Survey results endorse applauding comments from many on the culture or feeling of visiting WERS as like being home or being with family and friends: "I feel like home - friends with people"; "I feel this place at WERS is like my family, I'm always relaxed when I am at WERS". - Quite an achievement given the stresses faced by clients and Team members, but this is at the heart of WERS' ethos.

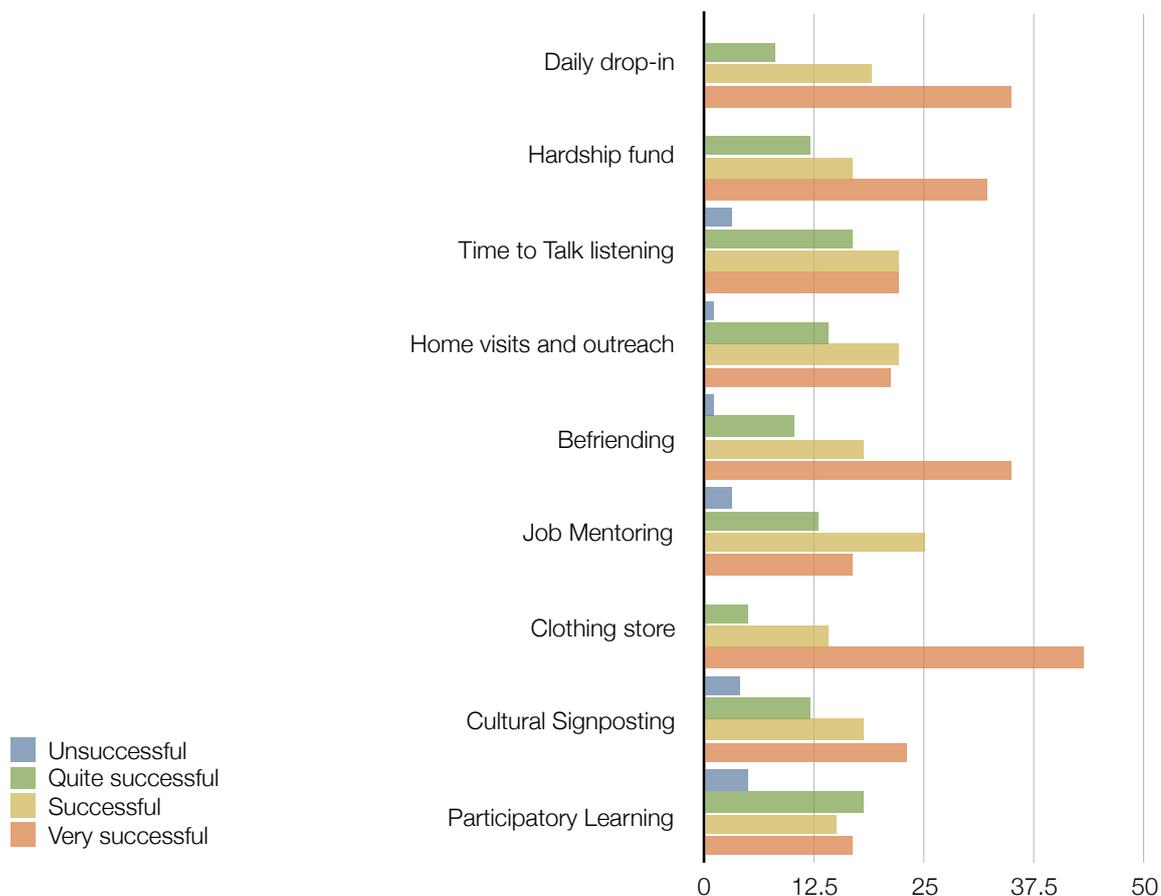
WERS hosts advice sessions by other organisations.
Please indicate which advice sessions you attended
(Clients / %)



How helpful to you have been the following
WERS services? (Clients / No.)



How successful are the following services in addressing client needs? (Team / No.)



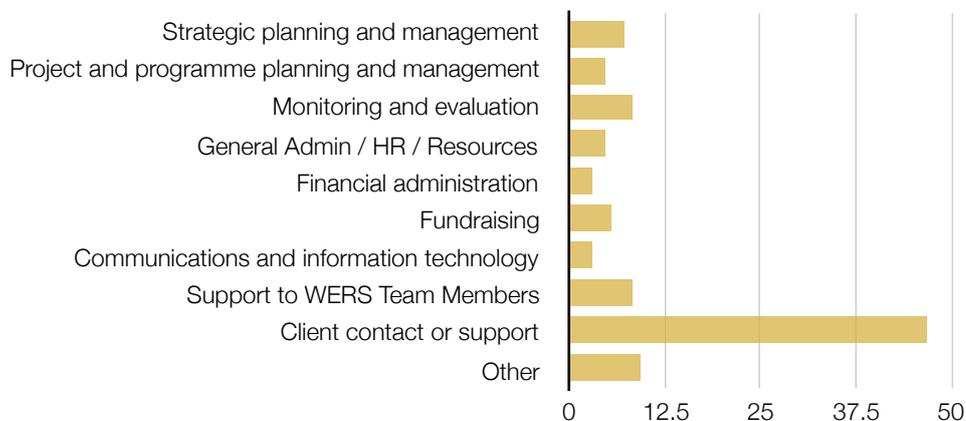
WERS Services (continued)

Help and addressing need: WERS prioritises qualities of human interaction, emotional support, and the basic needs of clothing and the means for simple sustenance. To this it adds a range of supporting services. Survey technique here is a somewhat blunt instrument, hence the need for the additional qualitative approach through interview. Clients unaware of a service are unlikely to rate it as very successful if they haven't experienced it; while team members with deeper knowledge of a service may understand its quality, even if it is designed to serve few in number. That said, both team members and clients surveyed appear to be in general agreement that the most helpful and successful services are the daily drop-in; the hardship fund (consuming 32% of turnover annually); and the clothing store. The accredited Befriending Scheme evaluated in Dr Kye Askins' report is highly valued by the Team, but numbers befriended are few in terms of the overall population, so many clients will not have experienced this service, and some are not aware of it. By the team, Job Mentoring is reported as largely successful. By clients, Job Mentoring is quite widely reported as "unused", and "successful" and "very successful" only by the few. The service is a fairly recent addition, and addresses the needs of clients who have been granted leave to remain (31%) - in other words, those who may be legally entitled to work. Asylum seekers in receipt of state aid are not allowed to work. Indeed, volunteering is often experienced as a problem for them, for fear (rightly or wrongly) that accommodation and benefits upon which they rely would be withheld. For the destitute, legitimate work is impossible because they have no legal status as citizens. The use of Time to Talk; home visits; signposting; and shared learning are reported by clients as less used. A small minority of team members question the usefulness of Time to Talk; Job Mentoring; Cultural Signposting; and Participatory Learning (even if external English lessons are highly over-subscribed).

Team Activities

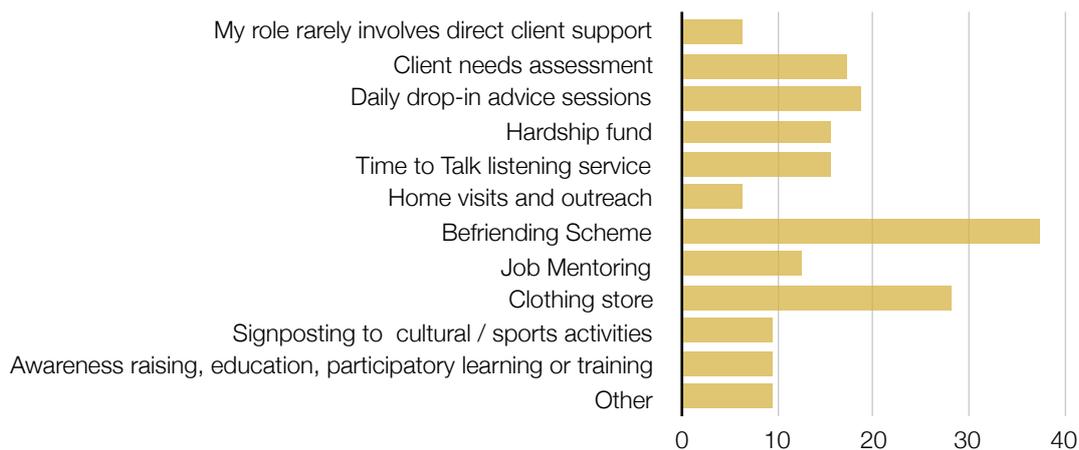
Day-to-day activities frequently engaged with...
(Team)

% Entries / 109 from 64 respondents



Client support activities frequently engaged with?
(Team)

% Entries / 119 from 64 respondents



Which preferred to be engaged with more frequently?
(Team)

% Entries / 52 from 50 respondents



WERS Services (continued)

This design of survey question, allowing multiple entries, indicates only an approximation of activities and preferences.

The Team being over 80% voluntary, it is unsurprising that there were 51 entries of 109 from 64 respondents reporting day-to-day activities frequently engaging with client contact or support (46.8% of entries). Support to WERS Team members seemed rather low, however, at 8.3% of entries given the training and induction with which volunteers are prepared. Communications and IT are even lower, at 2.8%. WERS is a very hands-on place, and elaborate communications technology may seem inappropriate to the day-to-day activities of the charity. However, interviews with staff indicate that it may be time to upgrade some communications systems and IT where there is a clear need. Existing technology is outdated. We can understand the wish to use traditional methods where sensitive and confidential records need to be kept secure, but at not too great a cost for the appropriate investment new IT - perhaps just WiFi - could lighten the load without adding risk.

At 4 entrants, or 6.2%, rarely supporting clients directly would seem to match the office distribution of the Team of staff and volunteers who rarely have time to work directly with clients. The most engaged with support activities as far as the Team are concerned are the Clothing Store, Befriending, Drop-in and Client Needs assessments. Signposting to cultural / sports activities and awareness raising appear infrequently engaged with, and home visits and outreach are reported as least engaged with. 54% of entrants (of 50 respondents) indicate content, satisfied, or no more time, etc. when asked which of the client support activities they would prefer to engage with more frequently. Client needs assessment, drop-in, Befriending, perhaps signposting, and awareness raising receive preference for more engagement from between 6% and 10% of all entries.

When asked which of all activities (top graph [categories](#), p37) they would prefer to be engaged with more frequently, 27.5% entered client contact or support. There was also limited additional interest in strategic planning and management, programme and project planning and management, monitoring and evaluation, fundraising, and communications and IT. 52.9% of entries expressed content, happiness, or no time available. Of the same categories, 10% expressed a preference to do less fundraising; 5% less general admin / HR / resources; and 7.5% would like to do less "other". 77% expressed contentment, satisfaction or happiness in not wanting to do less of anything. There were requests for less repetition, unnecessary tasks, general administration, and more time to participate in WERS projects.

Of client support activities, (bottom graph [categories](#), p37), 83.3% of entrants expressed contentment. Between 2.8% and 5.6% of entrants would rather do less of something - home visits and outreach, Befriending, Job Mentoring, and "other" being entered.

We were perplexed at how many indicated that they were involved in Befriending - unless this referred to the training and induction elements. Otherwise, this wouldn't seem to match the WERS statistics on active befriendees, and needs checking.

Reducing unnecessary repetition in administration is important, and so is appropriate IT for communications, even if the staff Team prides itself on frequent and supportive face-to-face meetings and availability for problem resolution. It may be easy to overlook that the Volunteers, some of whom have complained of poor communications and information, do not on the whole attend staff meetings. IT and communications systems can be a disability and discrimination access issue.

Monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the services is central to its adaptability in understanding and responding to changing needs (performance and project management). Reportedly, more time is already devoted to this than much administration, but could perhaps be developed around a re-modelling of the WERS Scale, as discussed above (Understanding Needs), referral and Volunteer feedback, and potentially as an occasional addition to the informal Time to Talk service.

Volunteer Training and Induction - *From WERS Volunteer Co-ordinators*

“Core training

All volunteers, except Clothing Store volunteers attend core training. This is delivered a number of times throughout the year and now takes place one full day (Saturday 10am – 4pm) and the following Wednesday (6pm – 9pm). Existing volunteers can attend the core training multiple times.

The training consists of the following components:

- ✦ The Ethos of WERS – Delivered by the Project Director
- ✦ Asylum Seeker/Refugee Awareness Raising – Delivered by the Volunteer Coordinator and takes the form of a quiz and discussion
- ✦ The Uk Asylum System – This is delivered by a solicitor from Newcastle Law Centre. It is important that a solicitor delivers this session as it reaffirms that WERS is unable to deliver legal advice – something that is stressed to volunteers during training.
- ✦ Support for Asylum Seekers and Refugees – Delivered by the volunteer coordinator and provides a basic introduction to the forms of support WERS clients may be receiving
- ✦ Listening Skills – Delivered by the Project Director
- ✦ Lone Working and Personal safety – Delivered by the Volunteer Coordinator
- ✦ Self-Care – Delivered by a freelance counsellor and trainer. This session assists volunteers in developing their own self-care protocol which they can call upon if affected by the situations they encounter whilst volunteering at WERS.

Role Specific Training

All volunteers complete role-specific training delivered by WERS staff.

Befrienders - The ‘Being a Befriender’ training covers boundaries and discusses responses to possible situations that the befriender may encounter.

Time to Talk listeners – In addition to the Listening Skills segment in core training, listeners receive training in group dynamics and how to complete the required paperwork.

Clothing Store Volunteers – Receive training in customer service, dealing with conflict and how the Clothing Store operates

Job Mentors – Receive training in job search skills and employability

Support Work – Support work volunteers are given an overview of the roles of support work, information about likely scenarios that clients may require support with and how to access other sources of help.

Induction

Once the volunteers have completed training they have a final induction. At this point they are given a WERS Welcome Pack which includes relevant WERS policies, complaints procedures and a role-description.

They also sign a Volunteer confidentiality and data consent form and have their volunteer badge made. They are given a Health and Safety briefing and tour of the building. Befrienders are also provided with a personal alarm.”

WERS Services (continued)

Volunteer training and induction

Training and induction are key to the volunteers' safe and successful delivery of support services to clients. This is particularly true of listening and Befriending services. Supervision and regular reviews need to be carried out on a continuing basis.

We have not witnessed any training or induction programmes, but we have received high praise for them from volunteer befrienders in interview who had undergone training and supervision.

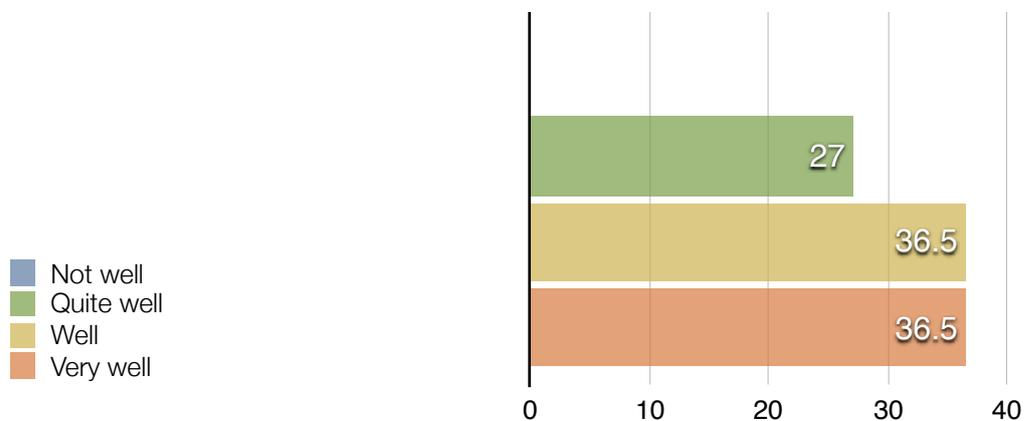
"Volunteer induction and supervision is very impressive. The NHS could learn a few things from them"... "Befrienders' induction made you realise that it was something you needed to enter with a lot of thought - not something to be taken lightly. Regularity is important. It's about trust."

However, there may be a modest issue with WERS' management understanding all the strengths and weaknesses of volunteers. When asked "How well does WERS management understand your own strengths and weaknesses?", 27% replied "quite well", rather than "well", or "very well".

"I think as a Volunteer probably nobody ever really found out what I was capable of, or what I could offer, or whether they could have pushed me any further, or if I could have been of any more use. I think there are probably things I could help with that nobody has ever asked me to help with".

- Female Volunteer Befriender & Listener, Time to Talk

How well does WERS management understand your own strengths and weaknesses? (% / Team)



WERS Services (continued)

Suggestions for improvements:

Clients: "Emergency loan facility? E.g. for hospital treatment for relatives abroad. This is why I am here"; "Housing surgery - Any accommodation advice based at WERS"; "Simply the process of being a volunteer if I have no papers. Occasional trips out / more social activities, e.g. walking groups"; "More regular advice sessions from the law centre, etc"; "MP to have surgeries more often. Giving information to the Home Office"; "WERS can't help enough with immigration. Hardship fund is not quite enough. Job Mentoring is irrelevant to those with no status"; "Stay open"; "Just more advice about accommodation"; "Timings for drop-in session (including clothing store and hardship) are not always helpful as has to fit around work and college"; "A bigger building for WERS - this is "too small now for everyone" There's not enough space - especially clothing store with pushchairs and small children"; "Increase level of hardship fund"; "More financial support for clients especially for visiting family members"; "All good and organised"; "I suggest there should be more food items and more publicity in the circular world. Most people don't know about WERS in this community".

Team: "I don't see a lot of engagement with clients by staff other than for drop in and advice, in my opinion more engagement with clients would help, e.g. could clients help out with fundraising in some way? Help with running of any elements of the business? Client-led sessions based on what they'd like to do and become involved with?"; "The problem of clients who speak only Arabic has increased in the last 6 months. The WERS team have tried to react to this and have interpretation available as far as possible, within their restricted budget, but it often remains a barrier"; "T to T probably needs a review: it may still meet a need, but I don't think it is the need as first envisaged. Job Mentoring might benefit from client feedback and consultation on what would be most helpful (e.g. talking about employment and interview issues rather than simply applying for jobs"; "At one time there were English classes on offer. I believe these stopped. I appreciate it must be hard to deliver conversation classes to people with such diverse levels of skill & with such irregular attendance due to complex lifestyles. It must be hard recruiting the right kind of flexible volunteer!"; "Perhaps services should be more respectful of clients' problems"; "NB. Response to Hardship item... no criticism of WERS, but reflecting fact that £15 only partial assistance to destitute client. Not sure what further capacity WERS has for developing services... Developing social enterprise would be excellent way of assisting clients into employment"; "Would like to see more signposting to cultural activities around the city"; "Health and fitness services for clients, legal advice for clients that is easily accessible, on site English lessons, mother/baby groups"; "More opportunities for clients to meet on a social basis - unfortunately present building does not permit expansion in this area"; "Given the level of resources and the level of need I think WERS does a remarkable job. I'd strongly support any case for them to be funded even better to develop the service even more. I'm very new and hardly in a position to suggest priorities - I'd trust the judgement of WERS trustees and staff".

By its nature WERS' charitable model (running on an insecure £250k turnover) is an extremely challenging one. Its developing success in meeting dire need over the last 16 to 18 years is remarkable. However, a strategic problem is apparent here. Putting together the caring ethos of the charity; the priority of serving basic life needs (e.g. clothing and sustenance) of destitute refugee clients (37%); the support and referral needs of asylum seekers (28%), many undergoing drawn out appeals; and the long-term, and multiplying needs of refugees granted leave to remain (31%) - many of whom suffer accommodation and employment issues within 28 days of their benefits being withdrawn or changed, and continue to identify as refugees and WERS clients - not to mention health, housing, education, community development, social, cultural, benefit, and employment issues compounded by extreme linguistic hurdles - WERS services are over-stretched. The differing interests of the three refugee stakeholder groups tell their own story. Growing numbers of destitute asylum seekers, the larger group, remain at the heart of the charitable model - but beyond the essential human interaction and listening services, clothing, and a hardship fund (its own sustainability insecure) little can be done to help them, excluded as they are from a failing asylum system. Notwithstanding their courage, feelings of inadequacy or failure which can be experienced

by caring volunteers and staff within the Team have their own emotional and moral impact not to be underestimated. Although WERS has never given formal immigration advice and doesn't intend to, the referral and support worker demands of asylum seekers are likely to grow both because there may be an increase in numbers and in diversity of demand, and because the asylum system is taking longer and longer to hear cases and appeals. That refugees granted leave to remain continue to identify as refugees and WERS clients is a problem. Either WERS expands continually to meet growing and diversifying demand across at least those services currently offered, thereby threatening a small, sensitive, homely, almost around-the-kitchen-table environment reflecting the originating charitable culture so important to clients and team alike; or contracts its offer through wishing to maintain its family-like culture, through scarcity of resources, or through finding continual expansion unsustainable for any number of other reasons - not least the capacity of the building. A charity with similar stakeholders in the east end of Newcastle has recently closed, some of its clients now travelling to WERS for support. Something may have to give. A further concern is the external pressure on all stakeholders, and team members in particular, from Immigration and Asylum policy and legislation that quite explicitly now asserts how difficult life will be in the UK for asylum seekers not granted leave to remain. A shifting political and cultural landscape may lie behind any strategic and tactical planning WERS attempts. Nonetheless, service with a smile endures at WERS as it has for over 16 years, and a calmer perspective focusing on the simple, priority provision of clothing and a safe space for clients to talk and to be heard comes through clearly in qualitative interviews with Project Director Lindsay Cross and Operations Manager Helen Wood. Replacing in-house counselling (external referral being the preferred option), the low cost Time to Talk service questioned by some for perceived poor attendance is championed by Helen as being close to the heart of WERS. Creative suggestions have been made by volunteers to re-model the Time to Talk service around simple creative activities suggested by participating clients, thereby serving community development interests of the clients themselves.

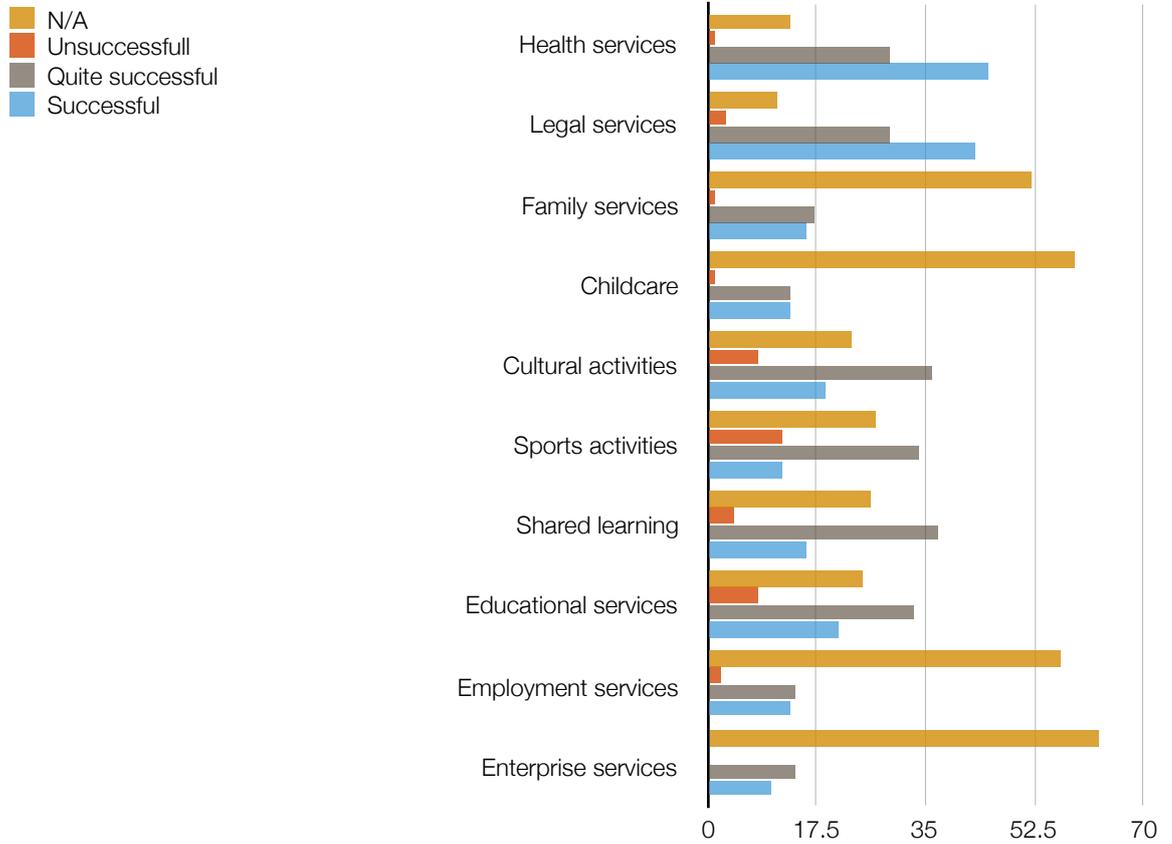
Can you suggest practical improvements or additions to services offered by WERS in addressing destitution, disadvantage, exclusion, isolation, or poverty?

Team: Of 31 responses (N/A; None, etc x 7): "Generally outside WERS remit and dependent on other agencies who have limited funds and ability to assist"; "NO"; "I think the Befriending Scheme helps to reduce exclusion and isolation but, because of my age, I am limited in what I can offer. My current befriender has teenage children and I don't know any English people in their age group. I think I can be a granny for them but perhaps more networking among befrienders of different ages and family circumstances would help to maximise our capacities"; "Revive the Hub"; "I think WERS does its best to address these issues but they are so big"; "Look into charitable giving of goods from large companies for items such as toiletries, nappies, household items"; "Developing social enterprise... unsure what additional activities / services WERS could offer with current resources... staff / premises"; "Nothing that isn't directly related to funding"; "WERS makes people's lives better in all of these aspects already"; "Health and fitness services for clients, legal advice for clients that is easily accessible, on site English lessons, mother/baby groups"; "Opportunities for training and education"; "None - WERS makes highly effective use of the human and other resources it has at its disposal in providing a substantial set of services. Additional resources would undoubtedly be put to excellent use in enhancing its work in addressing the five serious needs mentioned above"; "Hospital visits when clients are sick"; "Any suggestions would be beyond the current resources of WERS - particularly with regard to real homelessness, i.e. clients sleeping rough"; "Open more and have more social events. More shared meals more shared activities"; "Cultural events to bring people together, outreach to include and educate local community"; "Shared meals, social gatherings".

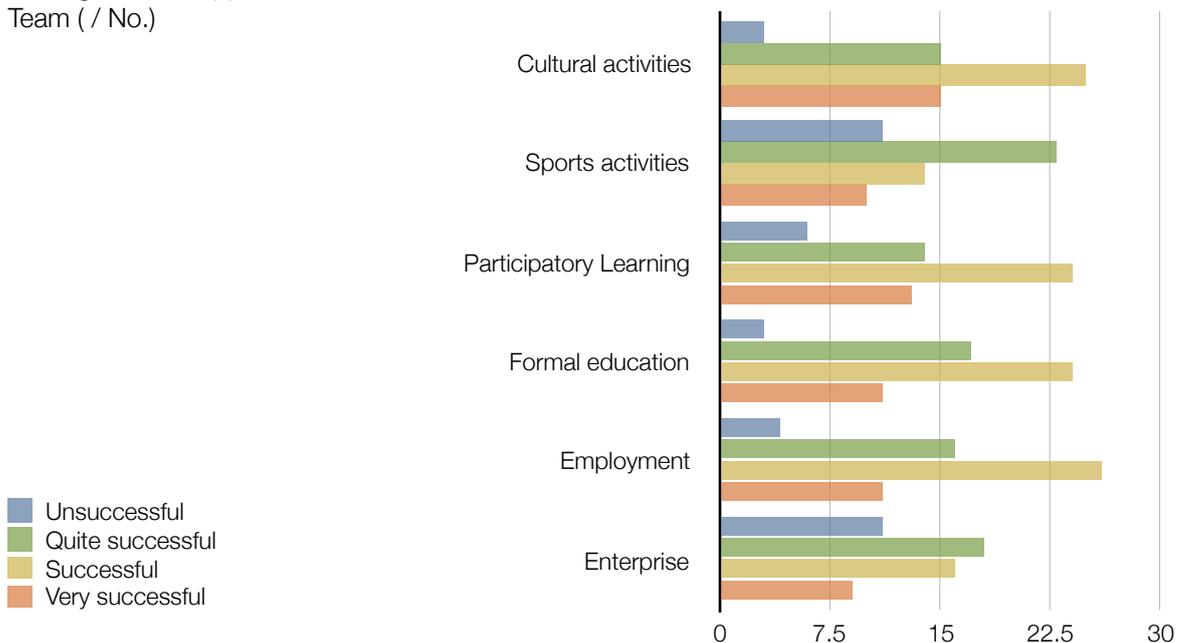
Not that we asked the question, but the Team (volunteers and staff) appears to an extent divided on strategic planning for the levels and range of services to be provided by WERS in increasingly challenging circumstances. Actual client contact episodes were marginally down over the summer months of last year compared with 2014. However, the trend seems to be a rise over the present year (WERS' statistics).

2.2.6 Signposting

How successful has WERS been in telling you about external services and opportunities? (Clients / No.)



How successful is WERS in mapping and sharing external opportunities for clients? Team (/ No.)



Signposting:

Clients report Health and Legal as the most successfully signposted external services. Family and childcare services are less applicable, perhaps reflecting the gender distribution of close to 3 male clients to 1 female. Cultural, sports, shared learning, and educational services are reported as being on the whole quite successfully signposted, although there is dissatisfaction from some on cultural and sports signposting. Unsurprisingly, external employment and enterprise services are reported as least applicable.

The Team reports the highest unsuccessful rates for sports and enterprise signposting. It may be worth noting, in terms of any distinguishing tastes or preferences, that the Team gender distribution (with some 30% male to some 70% female) closely mirrors in reverse the gender distribution of clients. Employment and Cultural Signposting get the highest "successful" rating from the Team. Signposting for formal education and Participatory Learning are also rated "successful" by many.

Suggestion for improvement:

Clients: "They put up notices, but don't explain things"; "They tell me about sport but they don't tell me where or how"; "WERS could be more successful in signposting. I only found out today about Time to Talk and the Befriending service"; "More information about activities"; "More info about local culture - local activities to get involved in in Newcastle - Very keen on English sessions signposted from WERS"; "More sessions for legal support and offer on a number of different days"; "More help with housing"; "I don't use above services"; "They could do better at telling me about opportunities"; "Sports - quite successful - Swimming! More signposting to community groups to talk to others in community"; "Can we have more cultural activities - I'd love more - Getting out and enjoying British culture helped me to feel more welcome. Comfrey Project signposted me to ESOL - WERS could provide more information on ESOL".

Team: "Limited scope given WERS funds and human resources and not really practical other than signposting"; "Ten Pin Bowling"; "I don't know enough about how successful WERS is at employment or enterprise. Success or otherwise often depends on what is available in the community, and some services are being cut back"; "I'm not aware of any of this signposting"; "Remind about educational opportunities"; "Notices are not easy to read, as the boards are in a narrow passageway - perhaps an alternative location could be more suitable. Some opportunities clash with clients' other commitments, but this seems impossible for WERS to resolve"; "More group sessions involving sports and culture"; "I don't know how successful we are at these things - or even how you measure success here"; "I'm not sure if we as befrienders hear about all the opportunities for activities connected to the above. More opportunities, with better communication would be ideal"; "Perhaps more openings for clients to improve their skills for better Employment"; "Perhaps more advice and support with regards to employment and seeking opportunities for clients to improve their skills"; "When I brought this up in my first 6 months supervision, Sarah was extremely helpful and offered several practical suggestions".

2.2.7 Barriers and obstacles

Has anything stopped you getting the support you need from WERS? (Clients)

Clients: 76 of 81 respondents to this question reported no problem. "Nothing has stopped me"; "I don't think that they understood me when I first came. My situation is very difficult"; "The accommodation and health problems"; "Nothing I am always supported by WERS"; "Nothing - except that I live far from the office"; "At first, language difficult - but easier now I am going to college"; "Only when we got support from Home Office"; "Solicitor doesn't answer phone"; "No, I am always happy for what WERS do for me".

Practical suggestions were: "Clear communication. Clarity and honesty when helping us with our problems"; "WERS meets my needs at present"; "Communications could be improved. Maybe (external) referrals could be improved - because I don't know where to go"; "To enlarge the building"; "Provide accommodation"; "Open during the weekends"; "It is not clear to me what type of services are available in WERS"; "More time for clothes area"; "It will be nice if they provide the expenses for the transport for the clinics"; "Everything is good".

In your own experience, what have been the main external barriers to addressing client needs - those barriers that are beyond the control of WERS? (Team)

A selection of 48 responses: "Limited resources and statutory restrictions"; "Government policy"; "Clients' (lack of) competence in English and cultural differences"; "Bureaucratic restrictions and government legislation. Bad coverage in press"; "External bureaucratic processes"; "Reduced funding imposed on the City Council by the present government"; "Government policy"; "Cuts to front line service provision - including funding"; "The attitude of the Border Agency"; "Home Office procedures, lack of sensitivity or empathy, and their inability to respond in a more creative way; solicitors failing to respond to clients' concerns; Job Centres' intransigence in the face of clients with language difficulties or no access to the internet"; "Being stopped from working. Without support, people can't go to college. They feel they are different to other people. I think it's very hard"; "NB. above responses reflect the impossibility of one small organisation being able to address these issues. Main external barriers include inefficiency and impregnability of asylum seeking process; lack of accommodation for failed asylum seekers; exclusion of asylum seekers from paid employment"; "The very low level of Benefits for asylum seekers and their families and the poor quality of some housing"; "WERS can only help so much. The asylum system can put an enormous amount of both financial and mental strain on our clients and important wider issues such as a client's asylum application, access to state support and housing are largely out of our control"; "Lack of funding, government and societal attitudes towards refugees"; "Language"; "Poor communication between solicitors and the home office, leaving clients nervous and anxious about their future. Costs for paper work very expensive for clients"; "Money. Size of building. Position of building"; "Language & cultural difficulties"; "Ever-worsening and more oppressive legislation, policy and bureaucratic practice affecting asylum-seekers and refugees"; "Government policies. Media bias"; "The delay by the Home office in granting a hearing"; "Government intransigence"; "The asylum system"; "Not speaking English".

Please outline any suggestions you would like WERS to make externally for the removal of these barriers. (Team)

Of 42 responses (N/A; None; Blank: x 13): “Try to build a relationship with local Job Centre managers; liaise with law firms to address the problem of communication between solicitors and clients”; “Keep up the joint agency approach to challenging political decisions which affect our clients. Promote the need for a fairer asylum process, where clients are not made homeless & destitute”; “We can show the gap between people who can't work and people who are allowed to work”; “I would like more support to be given to those clients who are given 'Permission to Remain' during the period of transition when so many decisions have to be made regarding housing and employment found in a complex environment”; “We have to accept that, even despite legislation and education policies, this is a long-term process, but there is a great need to constantly counter jingoistic material, particularly in some parts of the press, that plays on covert fears”; “Continue to lobby and raise awareness”; “Outreach events that involve locals who aren't aware of the plight of refugees”; “Discuss with council”; “If WERS could have more input into reassuring clients on these matters that would be great”; “More input as a 'link service'”; “This is a Sisyphian task in which WERS has always given its utmost, and been a key player, in partnership with others in the refugee sector”; “Keep plugging away”; “Case study feedback on time taken and process discrepancies for asylum process, lobby local MP's to get processes changed / better deal for our clients”.

What internal obstacles have you experienced in addressing client needs - those obstacles that WERS could perhaps do something about? (Team)

Of 42 responses (N/A; None; Blank: x 10): “Increasing difficulty in accessing competent legal advice and support”; “When funding dips WERS staff must engage in time-consuming fund raising drives and endless applications for funding from government and charitable agencies”; “It isn't always possible to discover why clients have to be sent elsewhere when the matter doesn't appear to require specialist knowledge or information and is not connected to immigration advice”; “Opening hours, childcare provision, levels of donations - financial and for clothing store. Lack of space”; “Low numbers attending Time to Talk sometimes”; “Lack of space for DEFL and Job Search”; “It is difficult when you try and contact someone over the phone and are told that they will ring you back - as a volunteer you are only there for a few hours and won't be there to receive the call. Sometimes have to tell the client to come back another day so that the issue can be addressed again from the start”; “No feedback after referral”; “I feel that WERS does all it can within current resourcing constraints. With more financial / staffing resources & larger premises, longer opening times and more activities could be provided on site... however, staff always try to refer to other organisations to access services they cannot provide”; “Some clients have health issues which make it difficult for them to get upstairs. On multiple occasions I have found this out too late”; “Immigration advice can not be given to clients as the staff at WERS are not qualified to do so”; “Reluctance from employers to give WERS clients an initial 'helping hand'”; “Outreach session that informs local people of the refugee plight and the work WERS does - if people were given a different perspective on their situation, integration may be easier”; “Sometimes the client's use of English is not quite sufficient to allow them to express themselves fully and my other language limitations are obvious”; “Lack of legal advice readily available to the client that I befriend”; “Opening hours mean that clients have restricted access at times”; “None, all very positive”; “Shop gets too crowded at times which is frightening”; “Trusting clients more than volunteers”; “Language barriers”; “Some clients are homeless and it is difficult for WERS to find an accommodation to them”.

Please outline any suggestions you would like WERS to hear or to act upon in attempting to overcome such barriers.

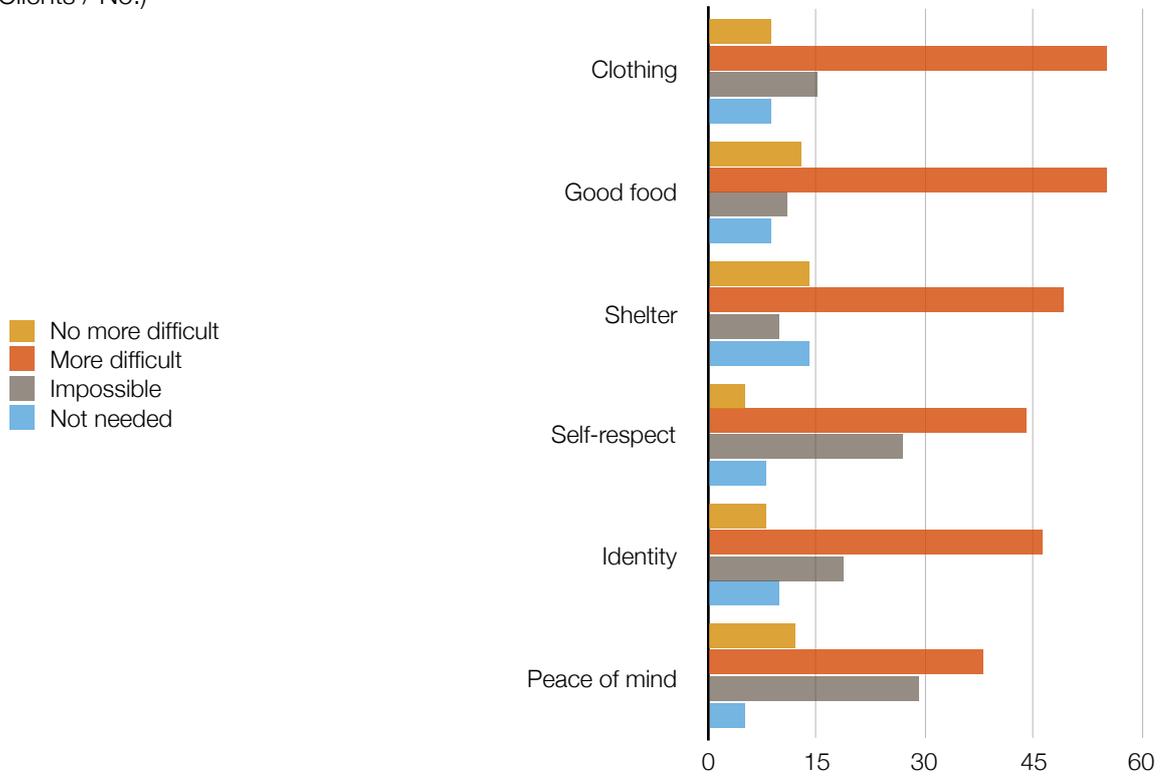
Of 30 responses (N/A, None, etc. x 6): "Work with WERS?"; "Realistically unable to provide such a service"; "Extend the work of the fund raising committee"; "If there were some activity (e.g. knitting, sewing, colouring, playing games, finding information about the local area) for participants to do while they talked, perhaps more would come. They often complain of having nothing to do all day"; "Perhaps a day book for support workers to make a note of issues that might not have been resolved during their session, so that if an agency returns a call later on, whoever responds can quickly identify what the issue is"; "Work closely with other organisations (referral)"; "Continue to be able to access interpretation when multi-lingual staff are not available or they do not speak the language"; "Guess this is a discussion for trustees re WERS' mission, whether they wish to seek funding for larger premises etc, or if they wish to continue as a small charity providing current level of service"; "Perhaps there needs to be some kind of signposting to staff to show who can and cannot go upstairs"; "Perhaps clients could be better prepared for the huge challenges encountered once 'Permission to Remain' has been granted"; "The law centre drop-in already occurs once a month"; "Increasing knowledge (see above) and possibly contact with employers to encourage them to offer clients work-trials; perhaps link with groups such as Chamber of Commerce or Trades Unions"; "Engagement sessions tailored to multiple audiences"; "Make legal advice more readily available"; "Wider access to services in terms of opening hours and professional help available"; "Open more, restrict number of people allowed to enter shop"; "More activities to bring people together and fill their time. Arts & crafts. Sharing skills"; "Knowing that volunteers are there to work with company policy"; "Create more of a community atmosphere at WERS - and find ways to help clients feel as though they can add value to the service to increase morale and inclusion"; "Interpreter on more days"; "Use of the garden as a resource; more use of the building in an afternoon".

"Our strength is continually looking at what we do, and whether we need to adjust or change the services to suit the clients' changing needs: being responsive with a unique human touch"...

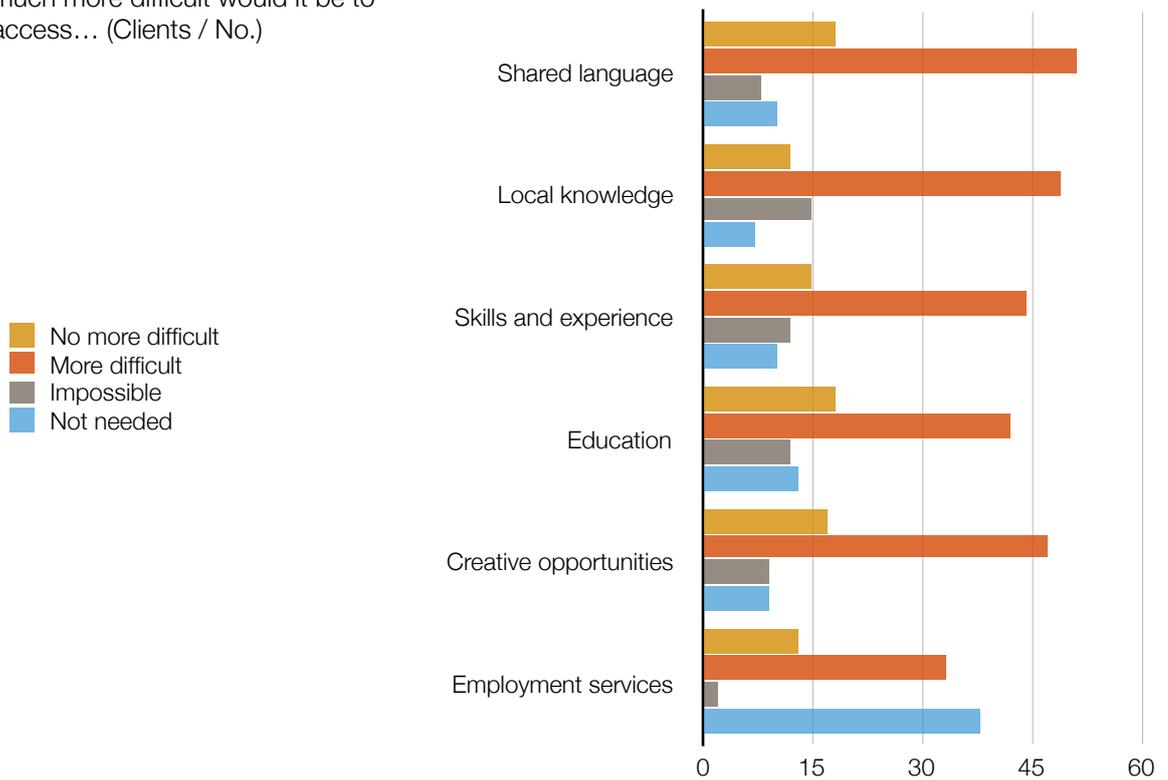
"Weaknesses come down to things we can't control - especially the issues that are faced by destitute people. External things aren't a weakness of WERS but are a difficult problem to solve. We are always looking to see if there are any problems to be solved". - *Helen, Team*

2.2.8 Making a difference

Destitution - Without WERS, how much more difficult would it be to find and maintain ...
(Clients / No.)

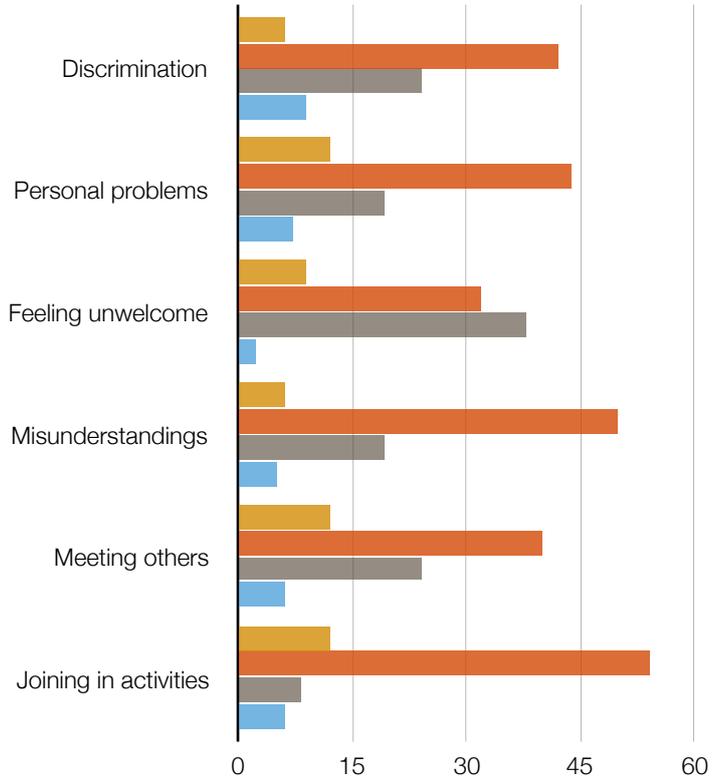


Disadvantage - Without WERS, how much more difficult would it be to access... (Clients / No.)



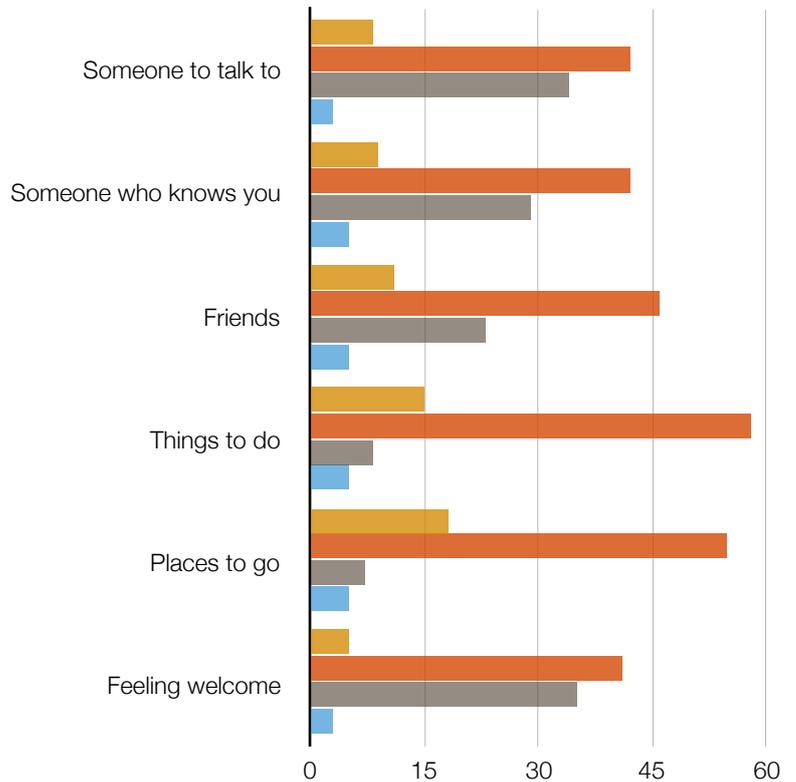
Exclusion - Without WERS, how much more difficult would it be to get help with ... (Clients / No.)

- No more difficult
- More difficult
- Impossible
- Not needed

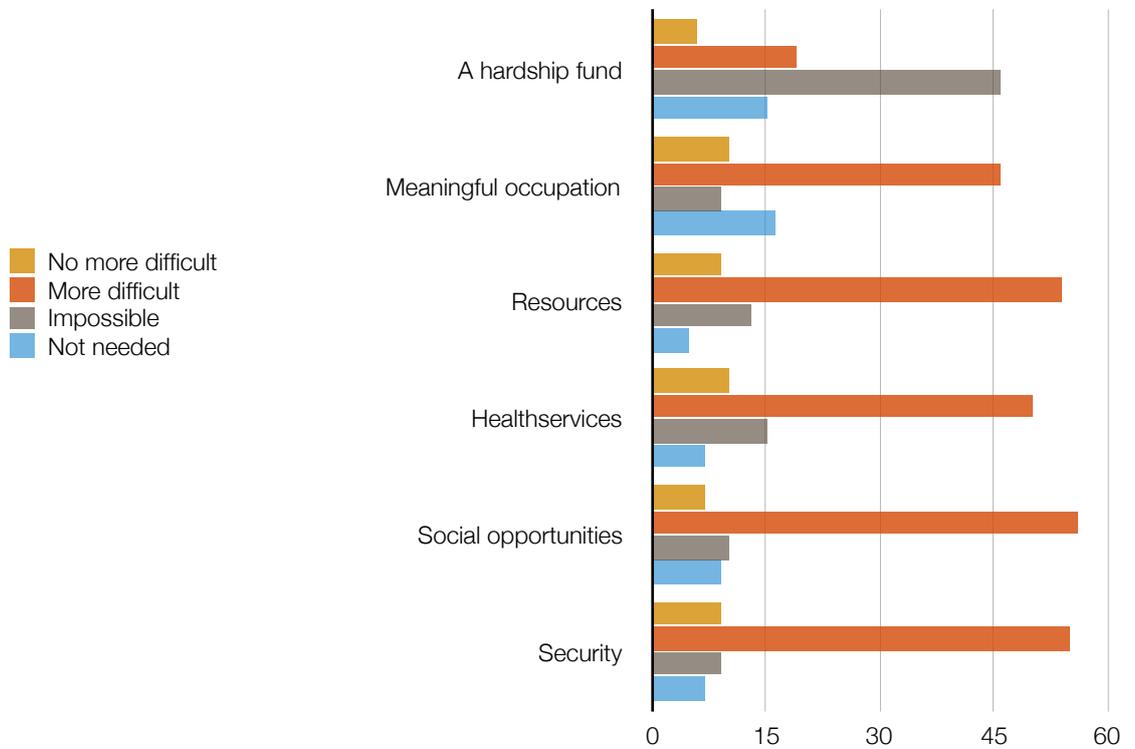


Isolation - Without WERS, how much more difficult would it be to live without ... (Clients / No.)

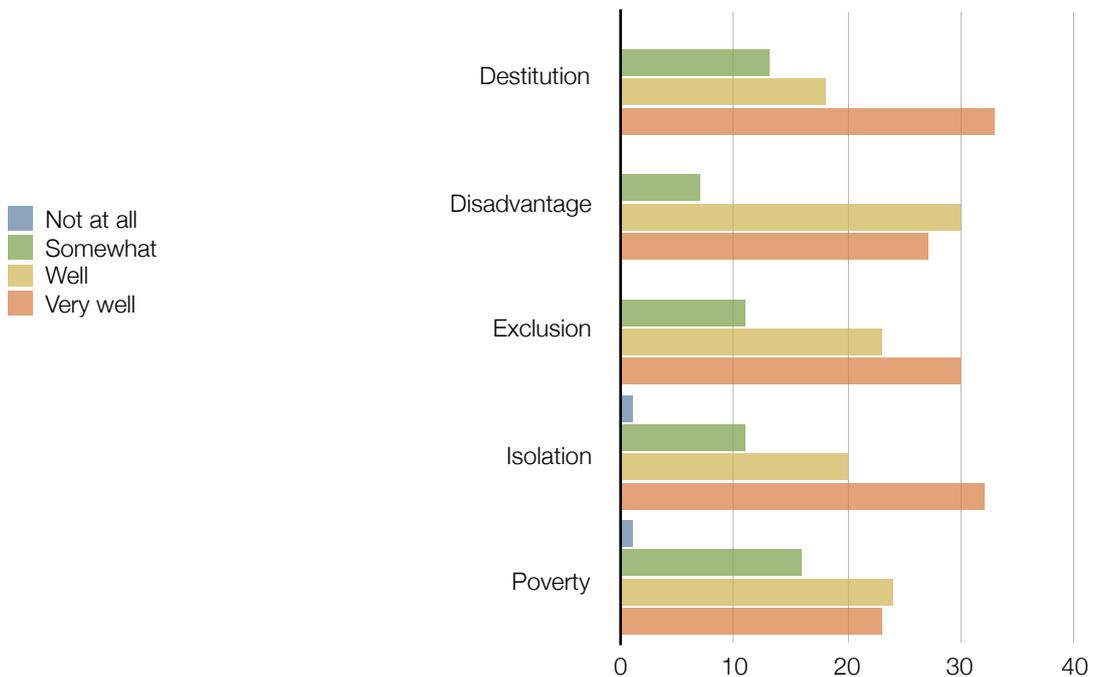
- No more difficult
- More difficult
- Impossible
- Not needed



Poverty - Without WERS, how much more difficult would it be to find ... (Clients / No.)



How well does WERS address the following client issues? (Team / No.)



Making a difference:

Destitution: Being refused asylum and denied the right to shelter, food, clothing, social security and employment in a country where nothing is familiar and the language may not be understood or spoken - is very hard for us to imagine. WERS sees it as its core remit to address these human rights and needs for 191 of its clients. The range of responses for these results (some surveys being incomplete) was 83 to 88 (16% to 16.9% of the WERS client population of 520), depending on the question. Envisaging the absence of WERS, clothing, food and shelter were reported as being more difficult to find and maintain by a significant majority of opinion surveyed (56% - 62%). Without WERS, self-respect, identity and peace of mind, reportedly, would be impossible for 22% to 34%. Without WERS, shelter was reported *not* be more difficult to find and maintain by just 16%.

Disadvantage: The range of responses for these results (some surveys being incomplete) was 81 to 88 (15.6 to 16.9% of the WERS client population of 520), depending on the question. Access to shared language, local knowledge, skills and experience, and creative opportunities were reported by a majority of opinion surveyed to be more difficult in the absence of WERS with local knowledge being reported as impossible by 18%. Access to employment services in the absence of WERS were reported to be not needed by 44%.

Exclusion: The range of responses for these results (some surveys being incomplete) was 80 to 82 (15.4% to 15.8% of the WERS client population of 520), depending on the question. 47% of those surveyed reported that without WERS it would be impossible to get help with feeling unwelcome. A majority would find getting help with discrimination, personal problems, misunderstandings, meeting others, and joining in activities (this at 67%) more difficult. Just 7.4% reported that getting help with discrimination would be no more difficult.

Isolation: The range of responses for these results (some surveys being incomplete) was 84 to 87 (16.1% to 16.7% of the WERS client population of 520), depending on the question. Living without feeling welcome, in the absence of WERS, was reported as impossible by 41.7% of those surveyed. 48.8% reported that it would be more difficult. Places to go (64.7%) and things to do (67.4%) were reported as more difficult to live without in the absence of WERS. Living without friends, someone who knows you, and someone to talk to in the absence of WERS were reported as impossible for between 27% and 39.1%.

Poverty: The range of responses for these results (some surveys being incomplete) was 80 to 86 (15.4% to 16.5% of the WERS client population of 520), depending on the question. 53.5% of those surveyed reported that in the absence of WERS it would be impossible to find a hardship fund. Statistically, this extrapolates as a theoretical 102 people. In the absence of WERS, meaningful occupation, resources, health services, social opportunities, and security were reported as more difficult to find by a majority ranging from 56.8% (meaningful occupation) to 68.3% (social opportunities).

Of the Team surveyed (71.9% of the Team population), a majority reported that WERS addressed destitution as a client issue very well (51.6%). Between 73.4% and 89.1% of the Team surveyed reported that WERS addressed disadvantage, exclusion, isolation, and poverty well or very well. 1.6% of those surveyed (1) reported that WERS did not address isolation or poverty at all.

2.3 Unique or particularly effective support received from WERS

Clients describe the WERS welcome, the friendly atmosphere, the meeting of their basic needs for clothing and hardship money, and the quality of listening services as unique. Team members may balk at the idea of "building the client base". A more pertinent issue for the board in its strategic planning may be whether through stretched resources of many kinds WERS' catchment area will need to be limited to the west end of Newcastle as the charity's title suggests - although in the case of destitute asylum seekers, homeless residency may of course be hard to divine.

Is there anything unique or particularly effective about the support you receive from WERS?

Clients: (No; Nothing, etc x 9) "Hardship funds (x3)"; "Advice and support"; "To get my support every week and other support is more consistent; and I am very happy with everyone here"; "Yes, in my opinion all services are perfect. Anything I need, I will receive support, or make a call, or give me a map to show me"; "The hardship fund, receive weekly, very helpful up to now"; "Hardship Fund, Drop-in, Home Visit"; "To gain back my employment"; "It's very personal. People know you and you feel welcome"; "When I come here I find all my friends. They live further away so we meet here to have coffee. It's in the middle; a meeting place where they can come together"; "I'm happy to come to WERS. I meet people and the service is very good"; "They have helped me to get self-confidence as they treat me like anyone else. They listen and understand what I've been through, and they have strived to make sure that I'm ok always"; "It is a helpful organisation because you can get clothes, £15, and someone to talk to and have coffee with. It would be impossible without it, but I need accommodation because I have a health problem"; "Hardship Fund and clothing"; "I know that I can come to WERS for advice about my situation and help with many things"; "Willing to give you any advice or support needed"; "People at WERS are happy to listen"; "Things are available elsewhere that are not available at WERS. I have never used the clothing store at WERS. In Birmingham on arrival you are welcomed with coffee and refreshments, and where you can get clothing and taken to where you can have your medical needs met, all in the same service (building)"; "Was referred to Action Housing as totally homeless. My life has transformed since then. And staff welcome!"; "Hardship and WERS welcome"; "Both the material and spiritual / emotional support was so helpful. Life is still challenging but I've got good memories thanks to you"; "Gave me a place to stay while in homelessness situation, and found me a lawyer who made me win my case"; "Can get tea /coffee and food at no cost. Staff are very friendly, they are amazing. Quiet (would feel ashamed if members of the community saw me queuing for charity)"; "Not in particular but all the support I am getting is very helpful here at WERS. Got food and clothing. Met a lot of my friends here"; "To be referred to Action Housing"; "It's good help. I like it. But the funding (hardship fund) is too small to survive here. We need more help for housing issues as WERS can't really help"; "I can get all the information and help at WERS I don't have to go anywhere else"; "Yes, the emotional support. Its more important to me"; "Very good. Especially talking and support"; "Help with hardship fund"; "Resources such as baby and children clothes that I receive"; "Money I get every two weeks"; "You have someone to listen to you. You feel better and more comfortable - and more helpful for life"; "Its fantastic, all the help, in particular the hardship fund"; "Mr Ali is very supportive. Everybody is very kind. Without the service WERS gives to me I would struggle"; "Clothes; Education welfare; Food"; "They helped my daughter and my son to go to school"; "Clothes; Education"; "Hardship (Fund). And precious advice on my family life"; "Every time you have a problem someone at WERS is always there to help me. Problems with hospitals, bills, work - WERS helps. Befriending - I was paired with a befriender and we go to lots of places where I've never been before. And Helen referred me to Dorothy who helped me with counselling and that really helped me"; "WERS Welcome. Clothing Store"; "Money I get weekly while not eligible from Home Office"; "It's the place that gives you help when you really need it"; "Everybody is my friend here! More times to speak English together. But college opportunities and Time To Talk is good"; "The befriender I got is very friendly"; "The money I get weekly"; "Very helpful that I can get school clothing and shoes from WERS".

Unique support:

The motivation of the WERS Team is a large part of what makes the service particularly effective and unique. Over 80% of the WERS Team are volunteers; several of the staff are filling part-time roles, with a current anomaly where two part-time roles (co-volunteer co-ordinator and co-director) are being delivered by one member of staff. The values of staff and volunteers concerning human rights issues are central to their work. Some have been with the service since its inception over 16 years ago. Time and again, the homely, friendly, family-like atmosphere and sensitive, sympathetic listening services are referred to as unique. Clients who need immigration advice, counselling, health and education services are referred out to charitable and statutory organisations with sufficient specialist resources for refugees - and in so far as they have them or are able to develop them (a moot point), this may be a growing if not inevitable trend as demands on the service increase. Those external specialist resources are key because potentially, carefully planned outward referral may be something unique and particularly effective too. WERS support workers are very swift to ensure that the children of refugees and asylum seekers, with legal right whatever their status, attend local schools. Thereby, families integrate to varying degrees with local communities. Although remaining very much linked to WERS as continuing clients, some groups of asylums seekers granted leave to remain have formed their own communities and networks in the west end of Newcastle. If mainstreaming is served by the development of refugee community organisations (RCOs) working together and thereby interacting with wider local communities and even social enterprises as well as charities, then outward referral for opportunities elsewhere is to be welcomed in terms of community, personal, and professional development as an early part of a mainstreaming agenda. WERS interest in this is practical as well as ethical. As they do themselves, WERS needs refugees granted leave to remain to enter mainstream society, perhaps through interacting RCOs. Not being a statutory social service or a social enterprise, WERS should focus its charitable resources on essential needs while encouraging - but not necessarily resourcing - the personal, social, community, cultural, educational and professional development of its client refugees who have overcome the initial trials (accommodation, benefit, and unemployment) of being granted leave to remain. WERS will find it hard to maintain the longer-term needs of refugees granted leave to remain if wider society fails to find ways of supporting them towards and into the mainstream.

WERS' unique characteristics are to be found in the high standards and qualities of its services in meeting essential and basic life support needs for its clients.

"Destitution rising will outstrip the Hardship Fund. We may need to pare back services to what was previously supported... WERS is doing what it needs to be doing. It's true to what the needs are, which is its strength; not simply reinventing itself to follow the funding" - Sarah, Team

"I would say that WERS strengths would lie in continuing to do what it does well and not try and branch out into other areas, because I've seen this happen in organisations before. You try to be all things to all people and it doesn't work. So WERS has its strengths. People out there know what WERS does and it seems to me - Carry on doing what we are doing" - Female Volunteer

"A client who has now gained her status to remain told us the thing that kept her going was that when she came here it felt like home. We felt like family to her and she knew that no matter how she was feeling we would make her feel better. Even 'though we didn't solve her immigration problem, it was just knowing that somebody was there for her. It's the human side, the fact that we listened. We didn't judge. It was a friendly place to come to and they felt welcome"...

"Maintain the service that we have, the feeling of a friendly atmosphere. To maintain that is really important. It's at the heart of what we do and if you lose that, I think that what I see as WERS and what WERS has built up would be lost. That would make me sad because that's what makes WERS special" - Helen, Team

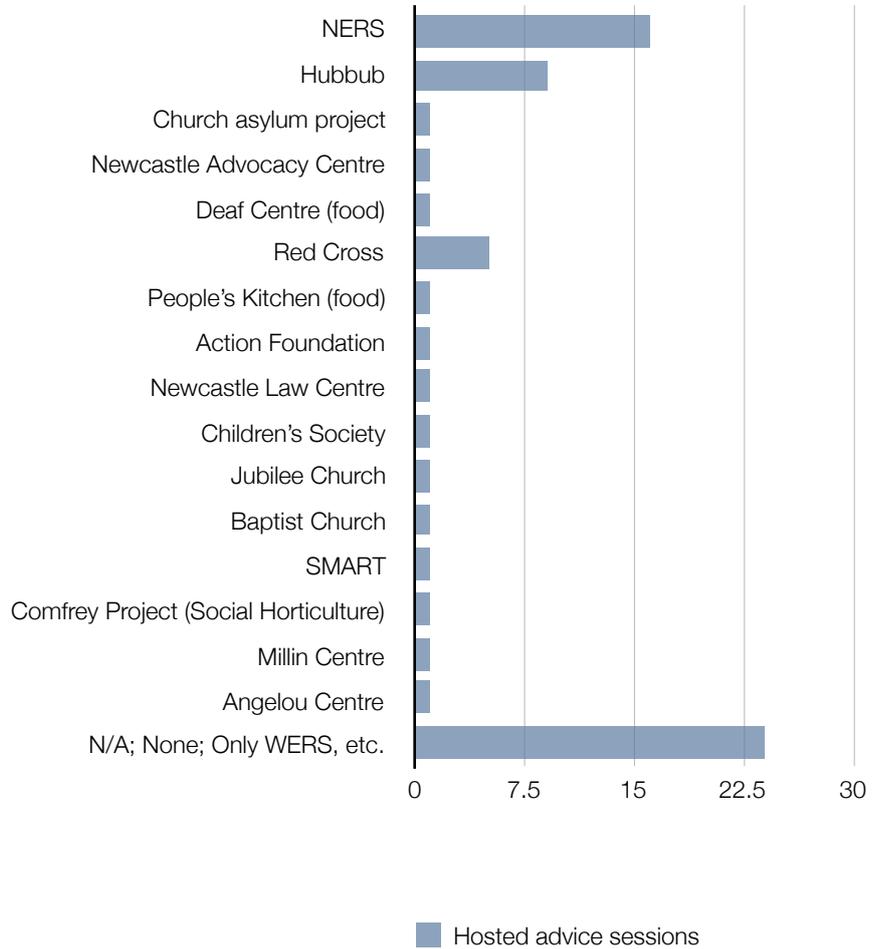
Unique support:

If you had to name one motivating factor for your work, what would this be?

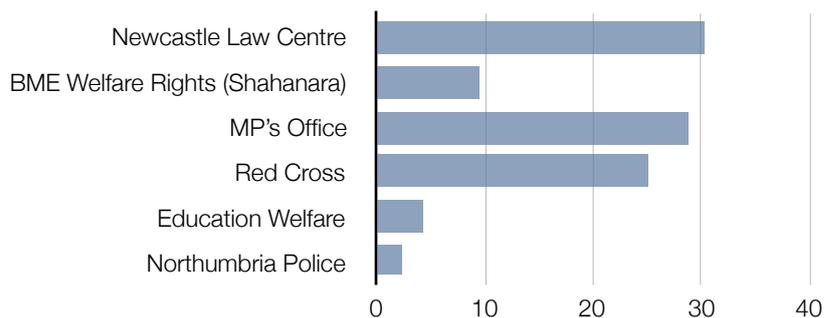
Team: "Praise and helping others"; "Making a difference for client"; "The work affirms my sense of purpose, i.e by easing the lives of desperately vulnerable people, and it reminds me how lucky I am"; "To provide a friendly service for people who have had challenging life experiences"; "Assisting refugees and asylum seekers to obtain the support they require"; "The opportunity to form mutually beneficial relationships with people whose experience is very different from my own"; "Job satisfaction through meeting a variety of asylum seekers and refugees"; "Concern for the way that asylum seekers are treated in this country"; "Help"; "To get along side people and understand them. Don't want to be prejudiced and think the best way not to be is to be alongside of people to understand their situation first hand"; "Meeting and working with interesting and inspirational people"; I like to help the poor, and people like me. When people help each other, it's very nice. It doesn't matter who is poor, who is rich"; "I give back for the help I have had from other people"; "Experience - helping people from different countries"; "Continuing to use & develop skills following retirement from paid employment"; "The likeability of many of the supported clients"; "Concern for the plight of asylum seekers in the UK"; "I think that WERS does really important work for its clients and the community in general. This needs to be underpinned by a well-organised office environment and I'm happy to be able to assist with this"; "Helping people"; "Putting my experience & skills to good use helping refugees"; "Social justice for those who need it most"; "The need to take some action, however small, to help refugees, rather than wringing my hands from the sidelines"; "Friendship"; "Making a difference in someone's life"; "Community"; "The recognition of how difficult the lives of clients are, both emotionally and financially and the fact that with WERS I can at least offer something"; "Helping refugees settle in new country"; "Improving the experience of refugees and asylum seekers in our area"; "The difference that can be made just by listening or speaking, just by giving some time to the clients can go a long way"; "I feel I have had a very warm and safe upbringing with close family - I would hope to be able to pass on some of that feeling to others less fortunate"; "Sense of injustice about how refugees are treated in wider society"; Helping others and knowing that I have done a good job and to have a chance to speak to people from around the world which is brilliant!"; "Concern for the treatment of asylum seekers and the negative media portrayal of them"; "Concern at the attitude taken by society to refugees"; "I have been blessed with so much, I now have the opportunity to help others"; "The client's willingness to meet regularly and to undertake non-onerous user-friendly tasks designed to support and help them"; "I like working with the team"; "Helping a newcomer to our society to feel valued and settle into UK life"; "The wish to do something practical and real which is of use to the most hard pressed people in the world"; "Satisfaction of doing something I consider worthwhile"; "The importance of real friendship"; "I enjoy it"; "Wanting to offer support to people new to this country who have experienced / are experiencing great difficulties"; "Helping people in a vulnerable and difficult position"; "To offer sincere friendship"; "I was a refugee and want to give something back as I understand what it is like to come to the service in need"; "Using existing skills to help those in need I want to return what I have received, so that they know that I appreciate what they have done for me"; "I'd like to improve my English language"; "Warmth"; "Interest in current affairs"; "Commitment to the refugee 'cause', and admiration and respect for WERS as a top refugee sector organisation"; "Give something back to society"; "Doing something to help asylum seekers who often face a hostile environment and are beleaguered and should be welcomed far more"; "Getting involved in charity work and being aware of those in hardship"; "Helping someone"; "A belief that we should support those who come as refugees and asylum seekers - and those whom the government does not want to admit"; "The difference the services makes to clients"; "Clients' support"; "To help someone and make a positive difference to their life"; "To make asylum seekers / refugees feel welcome in our region".

2.4 Other agencies

Please list any other agencies or charities from which you regularly receive advice (Clients / No.)



WERS hosts advice sessions by other organisations. Please indicate which advice sessions you attended (Clients / %)



Other Agencies

WERS is a key organisation serving essential needs for all three refugee stakeholder groups amongst refugee agencies on Tyneside. 41.4% of respondents reported that other agencies were not applicable, or that there were no agencies other than WERS from which they received regular advice.

Of WERS-hosted advice sessions, the most entered from 68 respondents was 42 for the Newcastle Law Centre at 30.2% of all entries. The Red Cross and MP's Office also scored highly.

The hosted advice sessions describe key relationships between WERS and its partners, although there are many others, e.g. Newcastle City Council, GPs, Solicitors, schools, churches and church-based refugee support projects, and some of the agencies with which WERS support workers need to work in order to help asylum seekers and refugees resolve their problems - notably housing and accommodation supplied under sub-commissioned contracts from government much criticised by some WERS clients with regard to customer care.

WERS' reciprocal relationships with The North of England Refugee Service and the Newcastle Law Centre is key to its support work. NERS and specialist lawyers through the Newcastle Law Centre undertake immigration advice. New clients need to be referred to NERS in the first instance to establish what their status is. For their essential needs, all partners refer clients to WERS.

Most other relevant support agencies in the region occupy niche positions of identified need for the very specific and hard-hitting problems that refugees, asylum seekers, and the destitute face on a daily basis. Action Foundation runs Action Housing for destitute asylum seekers; Action Letting for refugees - and is soon to launch Action Hosting for as an inducted network of domestic hosting, adding to their admittedly limited capacity. Some identifiable RCOs have developed over time, associated with particular nationalities, and some associated with churches. Only a handful of organisations take on a more developmental mantle in the sense of supporting and encouraging refugees and asylum seekers to develop communities of their own or to interact with what we inadequately describe as the mainstream. Crossings is a music project for refugee and asylum seeker stakeholders which provides social and cultural opportunities for bringing people together. Another, to which WERS has referred destitute clients is the Comfrey Project in Newcastle and Gateshead - a horticulture project using urban allotments to grow world food - specifically for refugee and asylum-seeker stakeholders, and offering opportunities for people to volunteer together, share lunch - and potentially to develop further RCOs and social enterprises - if they would not be breaking the law by doing so.

Local Refugee Support Agencies:

- Action Foundation: (<http://www.actionfoundation.org.uk/index.html>)
Provides housing solutions for a small number of destitute asylum seekers and homeless refugees. They also run free ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes.
- City of Sanctuary (<https://newcastle.cityofsanctuary.org/>)
Creates opportunities for positive relationships between local people and those seeking sanctuary.
- The Children's Society (<http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-you-can-do/volunteer>)
Runs the SMART project which supports refugee, asylum seeking, and migrant children and families in Newcastle. Currently the service includes a drop in, follow on appointments, one to one casework, and trips and activities in holiday periods.
- Comfrey Project: (<http://thecomfreyproject.org.uk/>)
Registered charity that works with refugees and asylum seekers on allotment sites across Newcastle and Gateshead with the aim of improving their conditions of life and general wellbeing.
- Crossings: (<http://www.crossings.org.uk/>)
Crossings is a music project which has been working with asylum seekers and refugees from all over the world in the Newcastle area for the last five years.
- Freedom from Torture: (<http://www.freedomfromtorture.org/about/15/5254>)
Provides direct clinical services to survivors of torture who arrive in the UK, as well as striving to protect and promote their rights. The office in Newcastle covers the North East and Cumbria.
- JET (Jobs, Education, Training): (<http://www.jetnorth.org.uk>)
Offers support with integration activities, particularly for women, and also for those looking for employment and training.

Local Refugee Support Agencies (continued)

- ♦ Newcastle Law Centre: (<https://www.newcastlelawcentre.co.uk>)
Newcastle Law Centre is a small charity providing specialist legal advice to those clients who cannot get legal aid to help with: (a) Fresh claims for asylum, (b) Asylum appeals, (c) Family Reunion applications.
- ♦ North of England Refugee Service (NERS): (<http://www.refugee.org.uk/>)
The North of England Refugee Service was established in 1989. It is an independent and charitable organisation which exists to meet the needs and promote the interests of asylum seekers and refugees who have arrived or have settled in the North of England.
- ♦ Red Cross (<http://www.redcross.org.uk/What-we-do/Refugee-support/Our-services-for-refugees>)
- ♦ West End Refugee Service (WERS) (<http://www.wers.org.uk>)

2.4.1 The position of WERS within the Newcastle Support Network

WERS occupies a key, anchor, and pivotal position in the Newcastle support network for volunteers and asylum seekers.

From notes of an interview with Amer Ratusik, NERS:

NERS sees WERS as supporting the destitute in particular, where there is no other support for them in coping with their situation. NERS' role is to provide advice to clients in helping them to avoid falling outside state aid, or as they move out of asylum seeker support, to help them to access other state provision. When asylum seekers are destitute, that's when we channel people towards WERS. We don't need to compete with WERS. We support each other, maximising resources in the interests of our clients. Frequently we have continuing communications about the same individual clients. If people self-refer to WERS through friends or communities, then they can be referred to NERS to see what alternatives are available to them. If they are ineligible, then they may be referred back to WERS for essential support. Changes in their circumstances may mean that they can be re-referred to NERS to seek alternative solutions to their problems. We are always trying to use resources in the best possible way.

We co-operate and complement each others' services on different levels. From emergency to day-to-day co-operation on individuals, to co-operation at management level. Destitute asylum seekers are victims of a bad process: making people homeless with no alternatives, no options. The problem could be tackled through changes in immigration legislation, or more charity support will be needed.

Some refugee community organisations (RCOs) have been tried - African Communities Advice North East (ACANE) is one in Byker; and there have been others: Zimbabwean, Iraqi, etc. However, without resources, these tend to remain or dissolve back to informal community networks. Integration is easier for families with children, and easier still the younger the child. They attend school and grow up within wider communities. On the whole, they stay and become integrated. It's the parents, as they grow older, that become home-sick. In working in partnership with WERS it's really important that we reflect on what people do. We need more time to sit and talk. Sometimes it's six months between when we see each other. There could be more joint projects, exchanges of views, widening of dialogue, and moving forward together, rather than as individual organisations.

Regarding, external creative opportunities, anything that relieves the pressure is good. Where we just focus on ourselves, then there is a struggle to involve the wider community. City of Sanctuary will help through the sharing of information, and trying different things - but there is a caveat to that. Continuity of the basic support services provided by WERS and NERS are necessary; perhaps repetitive as people have similar problems, but nonetheless essential. Without continuity of support, new ideas will have no foundation. Funders like to see new initiatives: "What new can we add?" - but what needs to remain is continuity of support.

From an interview with Clare Hurst, Senior Solicitor, Newcastle Law Centre:

WERS provides vital support to the destitute asylum seekers and refugees. There shouldn't be destitute refugees, but there are. With their hardship fund and their Befriending Scheme they perform a vital role which other organisations aren't able to supply. We take on the legal aspects of the claims.

They (WERS) are what I can only describe as a wrap-around - almost like wrap-around care that you get for children. I know clients who directly benefit from it and find it incredibly helpful in coping on a day-to-day basis with the trials of being an asylum seeker - or just in being unfamiliar with the area... - In having someone who knows the area to befriend you and walk you through the different parts of the process. It makes a huge difference. Having someone to talk to, that's huge. The value of that, you can't put a price on it. They're a big presence. And we took on the role of doing the

drop-in there a few years ago, which is always incredibly popular.

... The structure of an asylum seeker's decision now has changed. So the first two pages of that decision are all about: "You need to leave - and if you don't leave, this is how difficult life is going to become for you". So organisations like WERS who engage with people in that situation, wherein the government have essentially said: "You're not our problem", it just makes their presence even more important.

It spans across not just asylum seekers and refugees, but it also has impacts upon EU migrants as well - because the measures brought in by the Immigration Act 2014 and also the Immigration Act 2016 - things like the right to rent, the checking of immigration status for healthcare purposes, when you want a bank account, when you want a driving licence, it's a real network of measures to make life in the UK more difficult for those who don't have status - or for those who do have status, but can't prove that they have.

Ultimately what you're left with is: if you want a tenancy, you need to convince a landlord of your immigration status; if you want healthcare, you need to convince the practice manager that you have immigration status. There's still emergency care, but there have been cases where people without immigration status - there was a case last year or the year before where an Albanian national who didn't have immigration status in the RVI needing emergency treatment woke up to find immigration officers in the room. That in itself is going to put people off getting the right help, and at the right stage as well. So it impacts again on the destitute because those are the ones who are less likely to be engaged with their local GP practice. And if they are, they're going to be refused treatment until their health has deteriorated so far that they actually need emergency treatment.

It (destitution) has always been a massive problem, but because of the way in which it's viewed - not just in the government, but publicly - I think the focus is now on the individual - to say that: "If you don't like it, if you don't like being destitute, then you have the option of returning home". We all know it's not as straightforward as that, and it could be that that person, for whatever reason, didn't get refugee status when they should have done because they had the wrong immigration judge, they had the wrong case worker at the Home Office, mistakes have been made, perhaps they didn't seek proper legal advice, they had an interpreter who didn't interpret everything they said, - there's all sorts of different reasons. Sometimes, it's just down to luck.

In terms of what the future holds, my worry is that blame will continue and intensify. Because - not just Brexit - but the increase in racism; the almost legitimate questioning now of anyone who doesn't look or sound "British" as to what their immigration status is. To me, it's like asking someone their sexuality. If you don't need to know that, it's a very personal question to ask. It's almost accusing somebody just because of what they look like, or how they speak, that they don't belong. And belonging is a huge issue for asylum seekers and refugees anyway. So if you add to that - even if you look in isolation at the right to rent, healthcare, bank accounts, and all those kinds of things, they might seem little in isolation, but if you combine them all together, it's huge. It's a massive barrier. And because that is law, and the majority of those measures have been implemented in one way or another, I think that can only get worse, unfortunately. What it won't resolve, it won't resolve the destitute population that we have in the area. You can in some cases submit fresh claim after fresh claim after fresh claim, but the quality of decision making doesn't go up. They will quite often still quote the first decision which, from a legal standpoint, is the starting point anyway, so even before you start you're on an uphill battle like this (vertical). And I think it becomes increasingly difficult to get past that.

Because of the voluntary sector nature of our work, what we do, and what WERS does, that is always going to depend on funding, and funding is volatile. There may come a point where funders start thinking differently, and start thinking from a government perspective. I hope not. Because certainly the funders that we've had and currently have now seem to take a more humane approach. There's no other word for it, really. (Responsible?) Yes, absolutely. And I think the attempts by government to discharge that by saying: "You can always return yourself" doesn't really engage properly with all of the issues. In some ways, it's nothing new. The Home Office have always

been a difficult beast to work with. Theresa May as Prime Minister, having introduced some of the harshest measures for asylum seekers and refugees - anyone who isn't British, I think - I dread to think what the next few years hold. But what we have to remember is that our duty is to try to protect and help the clients we have now and the ones we come across in the next few years whatever the government does. It's almost like the air in the room becomes thin.

(Language) It's something we've always struggled with, but more so since we no longer have legal aid funding which would pay for interpreters. If you've got fifty languages, there's no way that you can meet that demand. You're not going to be able to have a first language conversation with every one of those clients. When you refer a case out, sometimes the other organisation doesn't have the resources. Most of it comes down to funding, to money. Interpreters cost money. In asylum cases particularly, anything that isn't interpreted properly could create other issues - which creates more problems that you really don't need. Then getting an interpreter becomes really, really important. And not just getting an interpreter, but getting a good interpreter - because I've seen examples of bad interpreters which have had a huge impact on cases.

There is on some level a formal relationship between us (the charitable network of refugee and asylum seeker support agencies) because we all subscribe to the City-wide group, and we all meet on a regular basis. So there is that kind of open dialogue. But I think by formalising that (further) you might threaten the independence. And if you do that, then that has implications for funding, because then they'll say: "Well, if you formalise the relationship as a partnership, if you like, or a multi-agency group, then the funding situation becomes complicated, and creates more work for everybody involved". We don't have to agree on everything, and so having an informal relationship is good, but we certainly do have a very open dialogue. We offer second-tier advice, immigration advice, and for that other agencies can come to us. And likewise if we have a query about support we can contact NERS; if we have somebody who is destitute, who needs clothing and things like that we contact WERS. So there is generally, at the moment, if everything stays as it is, I think it works really well. We even have some guidance in place that relates to safeguarding, if there's a client that becomes particularly aggressive then we agree to share that information between our organisations, just safeguarding the staff, and the clients too. I think there is that awareness of what each other does and how we do it, and how we try to complement each other, rather than outwardly compete with one another. - Which is difficult in a pool of ever-decreasing funding, it is very difficult to do that. But I think because we've had that relationship for such a long time, we stick to what we're best at. If that stays as it is, then I think we can sustain it. But the sustainability of that depends on all those three organisations (WERS / NERS / NLC) actually being here and continuing to function as they are now.

We're a signatory to the City of Sanctuary movement. I think it's very complementary of the different organisations because it's things that we wouldn't necessarily be able to do. Funding wouldn't necessarily pay for those types of activities. But that's one thing we need more of in the region - is education. Because what you hear in the press isn't what is the reality for an asylum seeker or a refugee, or even a migrant. I think that's what City of Sanctuary is doing really well, by going into schools, by operating projects around music, and lots of other things, is really trying to say to people: "Well, actually, is it really that bad that we've got a more diverse community? Why is that a problem? Can we not embrace it, can we not work with everyone within our community and become stronger because of that?" So I do think that's really important.

Last summer we had the photographs of the Syrian boy washed up on a beach, which was probably the biggest public outcry of support that I've seen in nearly fourteen, fifteen years of doing this type of work. The fact that it took that to get that kind of feeling is not right, but as a result of that a lot of people have opened their homes and their minds to the thought that we need to do more to help refugees. Everyone wanted to take in a Syrian family at that point, but I think that was very time-sensitive, and unfortunately the events in Paris occurring so shortly afterwards seemed to turn that tide again, and I think subsequent events have also done that, and then with Brexit, the issues in the general public seem to get inter-mingled with immigration. They don't understand it. They just know it's a bad thing, or they think it's a bad thing. And it's because they're not given the facts. And one of the things that we do, and get ourselves involved with year on year is the Refugee

Week activities with WERS - and the myth-busters - trying to change a few minds.

From an interview with Simon Cook of Action Foundation:

We started about ten or more years ago through City Church. We tried to assess what social needs there were in Newcastle - what was being met and what wasn't. That research, and conversations with organisation like WERS, led us to offer accommodation, particularly for people who had been refused asylum. My understanding is that WERS have been quite instrumental in supporting us, helping us, giving moral support, information, and guidance, - and in introducing us to the wider voluntary sector in Newcastle.

Action Foundation started as a way for the Church to express love for people who are in poverty and great need. We tried to identify where our energy and resources were best placed. There were lots of groups helping people who were in need generally, but not so much for refused asylum seekers. And the greatest need amongst that group was accommodation.

The way we refer to ourselves in our literature and in our website is as a Christian organisation. We have a very clear Christian ethos and value statement. A key part of that, about which we are very explicit, is that our services are open to those of all faiths and none, so we don't discriminate on that basis. We help people on the basis of their need and on whether our services are appropriate for them.

Our housing project is specifically for refused asylum seekers; our letting project is for people with refugee status. We attend the City-wide group meetings. Our day-to-day contact with WERS is mainly through myself, probably, in contact with Helen Wood. We've been in contact in the last few weeks, mainly about receiving referrals for vacancies we have in our accommodation. WERS is our only referral route for refused asylum seekers. So we don't allow people to self-refer, and we don't allow other organisations to refer people either. Only WERS. Because WERS have their destitution fund providing financial support for their clients, they're really the only organisation now providing that service for destitute asylum seekers in Newcastle.

There used to be Common Ground, or the East Area Asylum Seeker Support Group based in Walker and then briefly the City Centre before it closed down. I think it was a funding issue. And I think WERS absorbed their clients, or as many as they could, onto their list for the destitution fund. The reason we would only use WERS for referral of destitute clients is that there is a bit of history there. There's a relationship with WERS; they're able to give us some information, some insight; they're able to assess their (clients') level of need and vulnerability, and so the danger for us of doing it differently, if we allowed people to self-refer, is that it would be very time-consuming, and produce a waiting list.

Something that's been key to our organisation's development is that we do want to work in partnership; we don't want to duplicate work that's already going on. We want to use our resources in the most effective way possible. There's the destitution fund there (at WERS); there are all the other services they offer, like Befriending, and the clothing store, and the support work that they do with clients, so it makes sense, as they're going through that process, they're meeting all or nearly all the destitute asylum seekers in Newcastle, they will be in a much better place to make an assessment of who really needs the accommodation.

We have two projects that are accommodation projects. They're both shared, supported accommodation. We have houses with multiple bedrooms and shared living spaces like dining room, kitchen, living room, bathroom and toilet. The bedrooms are all individual bedrooms. We have a team of support workers here - five of us including myself - and we have regular contact with all of our clients. It's practical help - connecting them to services; spending time with them; helping to draw them out; and helping them to achieve goals and objectives that they have as well. So both of the projects are similar in that respect, but Action Housing is only accommodating people who are refused asylum seekers; and Action Letting is only accommodating people with refugee status. The

houses are distinct; the projects are distinct in that sense. It's all based on their immigration status. We don't touch people who are waiting for a decision.

Because it's not single units, we need to be mindful that you're putting vulnerable people in a house with other vulnerable people, and so we need to make sure that that's appropriate. They've been referred by WERS, we've made an assessment, a risk assessment, and we've decided that we can accommodate them. We'll do an induction which starts here. We'll talk through the occupancy agreement, the licence agreement that we have with all of our clients, and it talks about rules of behaviour, but also what we'll do for them. We'll give them a support worker, and advocacy, but we need them to engage with us and work with us for that time. And if they have an opportunity like a fresh claim for asylum or some other firm offer of accommodation, we would need them to move on from our accommodation. We create a support plan. We meet and we talk through seven different areas of life: health, mental health, it could be activities they're doing, the things they want to do, their relationships and friendships, a whole range of different areas. We'll talk through any goals you have for your life, objectives, what you want to achieve, any problems you might want help to overcome, - and we might add some of our own suggestions as well. Things that we can do to help that they might not be aware of. And then we work through that support plan in our contact with them. And every few months we'll review their support plan, update it, and make sure that things are being progressed.

We do apply for charitable grants and we have a fundraising team who do that. That is one side of what we do, but the other side of things is that we try to make sure that we are generating our own income as well. The way that we would do that in the accommodation projects is with Action Letting. With housing for the destitute asylum seekers, we are effectively just spending money because they can't have recourse to any public funds, no one will pay us for them, and so we pay. It's charitable expenditure. Whereas with the refugee clients in Action Letting, they are able to apply for housing benefit from the local authority, or they are able to work and pay us a rent, service charge from their wages. So however they're doing it we generate an income from that. And the income we generate goes to offset the expenditure in Action Housing, where we don't generate anything.

The ethos with Action Letting, particularly, is that we want people to be moving into increasing independence. Some people come to us very independent, very capable. They might have a level of education, a professional background. They might have lived independently for quite a while, but there are always challenges. Even for those people there may be cultural challenges - how things work in the UK. But then there may be other clients who come to us with maybe zero English, maybe they haven't even started their new benefit applications yet because they don't understand how things work. Maybe they don't have a GP, and come to us with lots of health problems - so it's a wide spectrum.

We have an English project called Action Language. Action Language also generates income, so we have two sides of what we're doing there. The main side, that we've been doing for longer, is free classes and we have an army of volunteers delivering that - qualified teachers and teaching assistants, some of whom might be training to become ESOL teachers, and they are very committed. So those classes are available to anyone who is unable to access English classes anywhere else. It could be for a number of reasons. It could be because the college is full. It might be that for the first six months of being in the country you are barred from ESOL classes - which is a brilliant policy... [Why?] I think to actively discourage integration into the community, so if you have someone claiming asylum, if you bar them from learning any English, it's harder for them to create a support network; it's harder for them to prove that they have a life in the UK; and it's probably easier to refuse them or remove them. That's my personal opinion. It's not a statement from the organisation. So for that reason, we get may asylum seekers who are waiting for a decision.

We do an IELTS class (International English Language Testing System). That is required if you want to study at university in the UK, or if you want to be a healthcare professional, you need a certain level in your IELTS exam to prove that your English is of a certain standard. We're running a course

right now where people are paying to attend in preparation for that exam. We do a couple of others as well. In that way we try to generate income. We would offer the payed for classes to anyone. With the free courses, if there was an asylum seeker waiting for a decision, maybe they've not been in the country six months, they may be attending our free ESOL courses downstairs. Once they get their refugee status they would be entitled to study at college and when they are studying at college we would have to stop them studying here because there is something else available to them. In the same way as with housing where there is some other option we're asking you to move on, with our free language classes, we'd say that now you're able to access college courses, we'd say you have to go there. Now the story is that come October, November, all those college courses are full. Then we'd consider taking those people on a waiting list. But where there's availability, we move them in that direction.

If somebody isn't on the destitution fund, then the first port of call for me to send them to is not WERS but NERS. If I send them to NERS, who have regular contact with WERS, they can refer them over for the destitution fund if they have the capacity to do that. And if somebody is on the destitution fund already with WERS then I know that if we did have a space, they'll be on WERS' radar, who'll be thinking: "Should we refer this person, or not?"

We're starting Action Hosting, and the idea with that is that people with a spare bedroom who are hosting an adult individual in their home for a relatively short period of time, and supporting not high numbers, but supporting a few clients in that way, maybe moving between different hosts. For a time we have been recruiting volunteer hosts. We're training them, and once that is all in place, we're going to be taking referrals from WERS - possibly from elsewhere as well, I'm not sure. It's in the early stages, but it's launching properly soon.

I think Lindsay and WERS have been very instrumental in creating a positive working relationship. Things like the City-wide group, and WERS' contribution to that, have been really key. Lindsay is always with us, and I've noticed that with other organisations as well, they've always been very collaborative, very helpful, very constructive. They want to engage. They're not in the business of working in a silo, or being protectionist about what they're doing, or competitive.

So I think each organisation finding their niche, and working together in partnership for the good of the clients, really. I think it's something we do incredibly well in Newcastle, and we don't quite appreciate the value of that until, maybe, we go to another city and talk to them about how things work there - both with the local authority, and in the voluntary sector. I think we do a good job, and WERS have been key in nurturing that. And then the City-wide group as well. It works well, on the whole. As always, we're plugging a gap, so it can be frantic. But I think we do work together well, and positively, hopefully, believing the best about each other.

I've been to some briefings on the Immigration Act recently, and read some of the official letters that get sent to refused clients as well, and there was the most explicit and direct, quite bare-faced and unashamed, statement of a policy of destitution. There have been reports about this many years ago, about how destitution was not an incidental thing - it wasn't a mishap or a gap in policy, but it was a deliberate policy by our government to force people between a rock and a hard place until they voluntarily went home. And in a letter I read the other day, it was basically stating government policy after government policy about how - and this is a direct quote - "your life will become increasingly difficult in the UK". Deliberately so. And the ridiculous side of that for many people is that there's maybe no safe route of return, there's no diplomatic relations with certain countries, and it's just not possible to send these people home - and the government knows this well. Therefore, people are just left in limbo.

What we are seeing, and what we will continue to see is a sort of silting up of our service with the clients who are finding it harder to move on, or harder to move things forward with their legal case, remaining with you for longer. Effectively, beds are blocked for new people coming in - whereas in the past, with Legacy, at a time when decisions were coming in faster than they are right now, you saw quite a rate of move-on because there were positive decisions, it was all joyous and great, and

people helped - but then over time, those people are still with us years later, and there's a question over: "What now?".

You get surges of attention in the media. Last year we had a huge amount of media attention compared to normal. The vast majority of which was positive - and offers of help from volunteers, from well-wishers, people who wanted to donate something, whatever it might be. And that's all great. But underlying that we get on with the job. The needs might change in some way, but not terribly dramatically I don't think. Destitution has been an issue for a long time. It probably will be for a long time. I just hope that all of us can add a clear, united, strategic voice into the places that can do something about it in terms of policy change. I think another strength of the voluntary sector we have, and of the City-wide group, is that we're not navel-gazing. We're not just frantically rushing about meeting need - because there's lots of needy people, but there's also an eye on "How can we get these voices heard, how can we get our voices heard in government and with people who have strategic influence. I think that's a great strength. And it's wanting to engage rather than just fight with people or authorities. Lots of people want an argument, and we could have lots of arguments, but I think the tone of how we approach stuff in Newcastle and City-wide group - and with WERS particularly leading this - is it's engaging, wanting to collaborate, being solution-focused, not just having a fight for the sake of it. Long may it continue.

I think the way that WERS conducts itself, following Lindsay's leadership, but it's seen in all the staff - people like Helen Wood and Ali and others - I think it's done in a very client-focused way. It puts their clients' needs at the centre of what they're doing. And therefore the way that WERS communicates with us in the work that we're doing together... I'm glad that they advocate to us for their clients who, once they're accommodated with us, they continue to have the support from WERS, and it's important that there is that partnership, but also that challenge, that accountability to us as well. I think we need that, and that's helpful. So Lindsay and WERS, I think they show great leadership in the sector, and they've been a great friend to the organisation as well. A great support. Helping us when we were completely clueless, and still helping us now when we're slightly less clueless. It's a very, very valued relationship for our organisation.

2.4.2 Networks, Forums, Community Development, Social Enterprise

Networks, Forums, Community Development:

"We would get enquiries from NERS about what we could provide, then GP surgeries and other agencies started to call with enquiries, so WERS took onboard what others were identifying as being needed."

- Helen, Operations Manager

The Regional Refugee Forum, based at Design Works Gateshead, is affiliated with the Refugee Council as an independent membership organisation of the North East region's Refugee-led Community Organisations (RCOs). WERS has little direct involvement with this Forum.

The City-wide Asylum Seeker and Refugee Support Group or Forum was originally set up as a refugee and asylum seeker workers' support group by the Rights Project in 1999. There are bi-monthly meetings of all agencies working in the field to meet up and discuss topics such as changes in legislation and gaps in provision. It has a floating Chair (currently held by Sarah at WERS). Shared information is at its core. Individual organisations may not have the capacity to address all the issues that come up, but collectively they have strength. City-wide co-ordinates what is happening on the ground between agencies.

"City-wide allows us to identify where the gaps in service provision are. Collated information allows appropriate opportunities to be taken up from charities and organisations wishing to have an input in the area"... "It co-ordinates joined up and shared events"... "In 2010, we heard about a national movement called City of Sanctuary presently covering around 80 cities in the UK"...

City of Sanctuary has a working group which complements the knowledge of the City-wide group - specifically about gaps in provision in working with Asylum Seekers and Refugees.

... "They have several streams: singing, school outreach, etc. WERS hosts City of Sanctuary and is responsible for the dispersal of its funds. Being the host, WERS' policies and procedures are in place"... "Awareness raising, Songs of Sanctuary, Sports of Sanctuary, Schools of Sanctuary: the purpose is to co-ordinates projects and events and to raise awareness. City of Sanctuary connects organisations and supports schools, etc. to explore and understand what Sanctuary is, to raise awareness, and to promote the social inclusion of asylum seekers and refugees to the wider community"... "Each City will decide their own structure and how and what they deliver within their City of Sanctuary. Newcastle has a self-employed co-ordinator. It's not a campaigning group. it's to raise awareness and connect people to events, campaigns, opportunities, etc. It signposts people and resources"... "it's about awareness-raising amongst organisations outside of the area specifically focused on Refugees and Asylum Seekers. Sometime we all end up just talking to ourselves, which hopefully City of Sanctuary will change"... "It highlights the need to look outward for different and new inclusive opportunities and services".

- Sarah Smart, WERS Co-Volunteer Co-ordinator (also, Co-ordinator Newcastle: City of Sanctuary and NCASRSG current Chair)

The City of Sanctuary model has the potential to make an impact on the social inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers with organisations and activities so far less involved. Engaging new interests and new possibilities in new areas of creative involvement in wider contexts is important for refugees and asylum seekers wishing to contribute towards, and engage with wider society. It is as important a journey to undertake for wider society, its communities, organisations and networks in opening links and exchanges with refugee and asylum populations.

Networks, Forums, Community Development:

City of Sanctuary is a creative and inclusive model from which day-to-day engagement activities, projects, and programmes can learn in the interests of all.

Such approaches offer hope to strategic planners in being extremely important for forward integration, reductions in dependency, and ultimately social cohesion. They do not, however mitigate the foreseeable and growing need for the provision of sensitive essential services of the kind delivered by WERS. A question for WERS strategists is whether it can adapt outward referral and perhaps some of its listening services (e.g. Time to Talk) in more creative ways to either mirror or engage directly with the City of Sanctuary model of awareness-raising and co-operation.

2.5. Governance and Finance

2.5.1 The charity model

Charity registration: 1077601 - West End Refugee Service (WERS)

“Charitable aims: To relieve refugees and asylum seekers within the area of benefit who are in need by reason of their poverty and / or sickness and the distress arising therefrom, particularly by the provision of practical support.

West End Refugee Service has developed into one of the major support agencies for asylum seekers and refugees in Newcastle Upon Tyne, offering a range of integrated services which complement the statutory package of government support. A programme of activities has been designed to address the social exclusion, poverty, disadvantage, poor health and worklessness of its client group.”

- The Charity Commission

This study shows WERS services are an essential lifeline for hundreds of refugees and asylum seekers on Tyneside. Governed by a board of 6 - 8 experienced trustees, and directed by the very competent, and highly respected Lindsay Cross from inception over 16 years ago, the charity is a safe investment for meeting the essential and basic life needs of vulnerable asylum seekers, refugees, and - the largest stakeholder group - nearly 200 destitute men and women rendered stateless by a failed asylum system.

As a charity with an unyielding mission, it is a task to attract charitable donations and third sector funding support year-on-year. But it would be impossible to deny the value of the investment. The charity has remained focused on the outstanding need of its stakeholders for over 16 years. WERS is a very effective charity. It is run efficiently by a dedicated staff and over 70 volunteers.

If this report is at all critical, that is a reflection of caring stakeholders wanting the service to be as effective as it possibly can be in serving the interest of its client groups.

2.5.2 Financial outlook

Figures for this year are not available but, over four years, the trend in turnover is tightening from £307k in 2013/14 and £250k in 2014/15 to £193k grant income plus donations, gift aid, and investment income for 2016/17 - these unrestricted funds targeted at around £80k to finance Hardship.

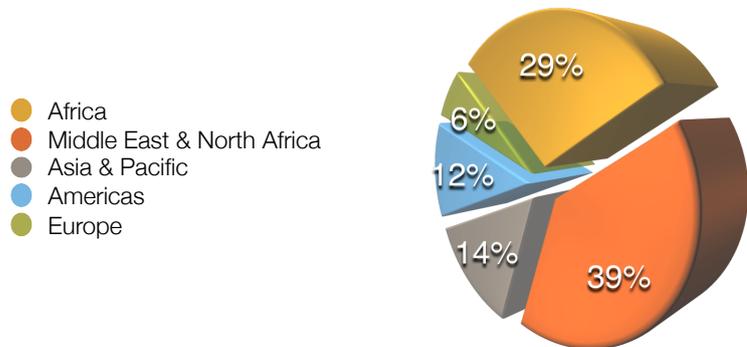
WERS has maintained a relatively balanced budget over the last three years, with the projected spend of £30k from dwindling unrestricted reserves for 2016/17.

The Trustees have reduced unrestricted reserves slightly to meet the modest shortfall for 2016 - 2017 from reserves.

2.6. The wider context

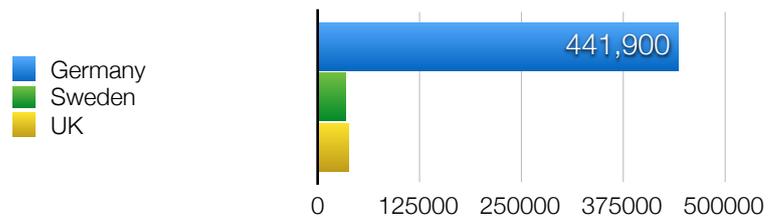
Global trends - UNHCR, 2015:

Where displaced people are being hosted - of 65.3 million people worldwide



Europe - UNHCR, 2015

Asylum applications including dependants (of just these three member states) - 2015



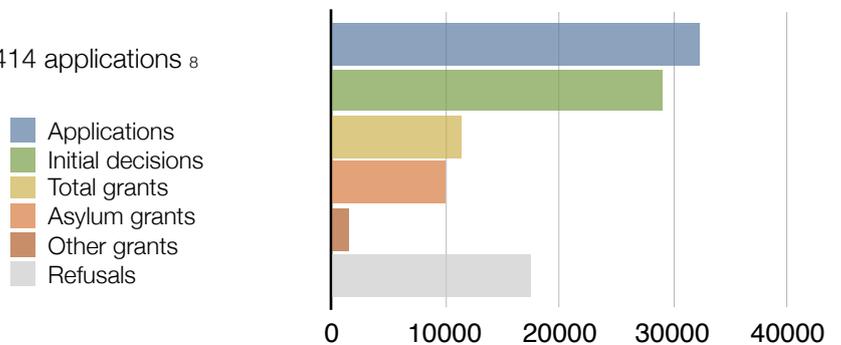
UK Applications

House of Commons briefing paper, May 2016

The number of asylum applications to the UK peaked in 2002 at 84,132. After that, the number fell sharply to reach a twenty year low point of 17,916 in 2010, before rising slowly to reach 32,414 in 2015.

Asylum applications and initial decisions - UK, 2015

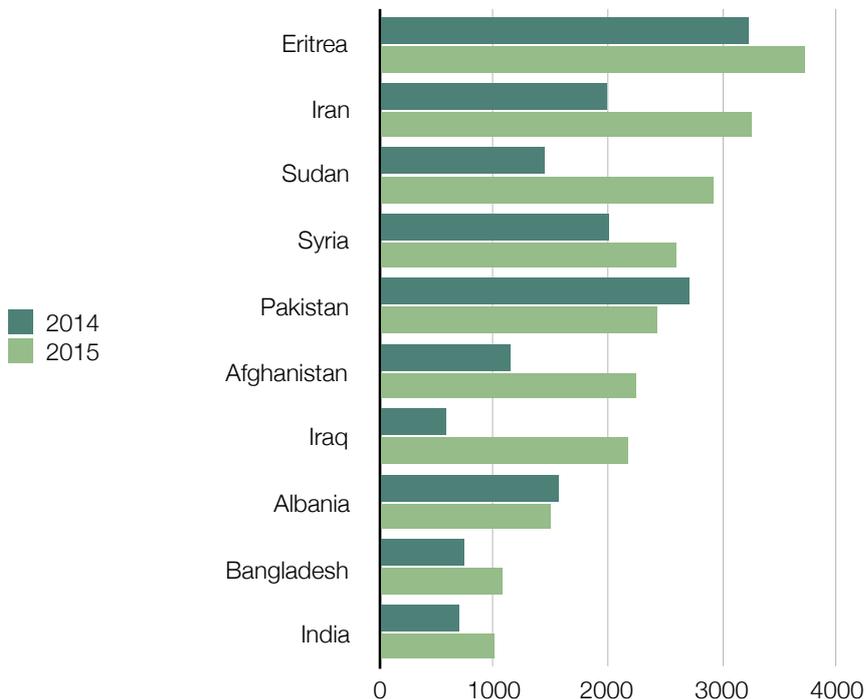
17,531 refusals, or 54.1% of 32,414 applications ⁸



Note: As a stable figure over time, there is around one dependant for every four applicants in each year.

⁸ The situation is considerably more complicated than this due to continuing appeals. In 2015, of 9,115 determinations, 35% of appeals were allowed, while 59% were dismissed. 5% were withdrawn.

Applications by nationality (UK)
2014 - 2015



Asylum support (UK) - British Refugee Council

- ♦ The total number of asylum seekers (including dependants) in receipt of Section 95 asylum support at the end of 2015 was 34,363 of whom 31,432 were in dispersal accommodation and 2,931 were receiving subsistence only.
- ♦ The numbers rose during 2015 and are now at their highest since 2007, which relates in the main to the rise in the number of applications for asylum.
- ♦ The region of the UK with the largest number in dispersal accommodation at the end of 2015 was the North West (8,444). This region has had the largest number since the beginning of 2008.
- ♦ 1,985 asylum seekers were in initial accommodation under Section 98 support at the end of 2015. There has been an upward trend in the numbers supported under Section 98 since 2009.
- ♦ 5,127 decisions to grant Section 4 support were made in 2015. This is a reduction of 8% compared with 2014.
- ♦ At the end of 2015 2,525 applicants, excluding dependants, were receiving Section 4 support, as well as 1,296 dependants. The number of dependants supported has only been published since the beginning of 2013.

Removals (UK) - British Refugee Council

- ♦ Including dependants, in 2015, 5,184 asylum seekers were removed or departed voluntarily, a 26% decrease from 2014 (7,025).

Detention - Persons leaving detention

- ♦ A total of 15,086 people were recorded as removed from the UK upon leaving detention in 2015, having been held solely under Immigration Act powers, of whom 23% were asylum detainees.

Persons Detained at the end of the year

- ♦ At the end of 2015 a total of 2,607 persons were detained, no children were in detention at this point in time.
- ♦ 1,250 persons who had sought asylum at some stage were being detained solely under Immigration Act powers (48% of all immigration detainees)
- ♦ 90% of all detainees were male.

Children in detention

In 2015, 128 children entered detention, of whom 81 were asylum detainees. 41 of these children were detained at the Cedars pre-departure accommodation, and 63 at Tinsley House Family Unit.

Applications by Unaccompanied Children Seeking Asylum

- ♦ The number of applications from Unaccompanied Children, excluding dependants, was 3,043 in 2015, a 56% increase compared with 2014.
- ♦ Eritrea is now the country of origin for the largest number of unaccompanied children. After declining for a number of years the number of applications from Afghanistan increased significantly in 2015.

Decisions

- ♦ The majority of decisions on asylum applications by unaccompanied children under the age of 18 used to be grants of discretionary leave. In 2013 over 70% of all grants of discretionary leave were to children aged 17 and under, although they accounted for only 3% of total decisions.
- ♦ For unaccompanied children who have reached the age of 18 when they receive their decision, refusal rates tend to be much higher; there was a refusal rate of 82% in 2015.
- ♦ For unaccompanied children a new category since 2013, UASC leave, is now being used in cases where the only reason for giving leave is that the applicant is a child who cannot be returned, and this means there are far fewer grants of discretionary leave.

Support for refused applicants:

“Some refused asylum seekers are able to access limited support (in the form of vouchers ⁹) under Section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, if they are able to prove that they are taking reasonable steps to leave the country, or because the UK Border Agency believes there is no safe return route available. Refused asylum seekers are only able to access primary health care and are not entitled to free, non-emergency, secondary health care. For the time being at least, families with children continue to receive financial support and accommodation under Section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, although Section 9 of the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants etc.) Act 2004 gives the government the power to stop all support and accommodation.”

Coping with Destitution - Survival and livelihood strategies of refused asylum seekers living in the UK

⁹ The voucher system has been changed since this report was published in 2011.

- Heaven Crawley, Joanne Hemmings and Neil Price
Centre for Migration Policy Research (CMPR), Swansea University
February 2011

The government has made it more difficult for refugees to be granted support, and conditions of support under sections of the Immigration and Asylum act are Kafkaesque. As one example of many instances:

*UK Visas and Immigration, Version 7.
Chapter 11 - Administrative Closure of Section 4 Support Applications*



"Where case workers have requested further information in order to make a decision and the applicant has failed to provide the information within timescales, case workers must decide on a case by case basis whether the ASYS record should be closed" ¹⁰....

"If the applicant does not accept the offer within the deadline, ¹¹ the ASYS record must be closed"...

"Closing the ASYS record for administrative reasons does not constitute a withdrawal of the offer for support or a refusal to grant support. The applicant has not provided the information needed to make a decision and, therefore, it has not been possible to determine whether the applicant is eligible for S4 support. The administrative closure of a case in these circumstances does not trigger a right of appeal". - Asylum support, section 4 policy and process, UK Visas and Immigration, Version 7.

Closing a case for "administrative reasons" rather than withdrawing an offer or refusing the application seems to be a deliberate strategy designed to deny asylum seekers the right of appeal for emergency support. Such administrative mindsets can only add to the ranks of the destitute.

"Since 2012 we are seeing more people being deported. The future needs to have an amnesty."

- Ali, Support Worker

¹⁰ Usually 14 days

¹¹ Also 14 days

2.7 Suggested areas for improvement and development

2.7.1 Caveat

We know that a four-week study, however intense it has been at times, does not compare with the experience of staff and volunteers working in this service since its inception sixteen years ago. From an external perspective, the following are suggestions for examination.

2.7.2 Sustainability

The charity is needed by growing numbers of people enduring real hardship. Their needs are growing in their diversity. Cleverly, WERS has kept to its charitable model of meeting basic needs while using outward referral to meet diversifying demand. This is a good strategy. It helps clients to get what they need towards moving through dependency without WERS having to resource that. But it is reliant on those outward referral agencies thriving, and this is in some doubt. WERS should continue to engage in supporting and developing its relationships with referral agencies, and advocate for their continuance. Initiatives like City of Sanctuary, drawing new and diverse interests in awareness-raising and engagement could prove to be essential to the development and sustainability of the sector. WERS' charitable model is working, so don't try to fix it. It's the statutory sector, relevant referral agencies, new partners, and wider society that may need fixing and sustaining. WERS has engaged and does engage refugees as staff to mutual advantage. Could it focus on preparing more? Anything can happen, and the service is heavily reliant on the vast skills and experience of very few staff, Ali's linguistic and supportive skills and experience being a very apparent case in point.

"The Befriending Scheme is one of the best things I have ever seen. I can see the impact, the outcome. Seeing the person, how they feel, how they are, - then they are befriended and they become transformed, and become a human, become proud. Befriending is a very important service."

- Ali, Support Worker

Volunteers

WERS has been uncompromising in ensuring that volunteers are given induction and both core and role-specific training of the highest quality. Our understanding is that 6-monthly reviews are also carried out. It is essential that the best support for volunteers is fully resourced to continue as numbers rise to over 70. Some communications deficits have been reported, so it may be worth looking at review and communications practice - perhaps with reference to the IT suggestions (below).

Staff

Shared and dual part-time roles (Volunteer Co-ordinators and Co-Directors) need to be reviewed because they are causing confusion. It may be helpful to have a review, facilitated externally, of all staff roles, better collectively to define primary fields of responsibility. We do understand that WERS is a "can do" charity with huge assets of skill and experience where quite often it's a case of "all hands on deck", but this shouldn't mean that primary roles are not clearly defined. WERS is an emotionally supportive organisation careful to ensure staff have regular hours and time out when they need it. Confusion over primary roles and responsibilities adds to the stress of serving people's essential human needs and impedes the creativity of staff in doing what needs to be done when it does need to be done.

"Our team here, its amazing. I'm very comfortable with everyone here because I know we are all very serious about our job... Our success is the weakness. We are so busy, and the people keep coming. We sometimes struggle with capacity."

- Ali, Support Worker

Clients

The engagement of clients in the work of the charity has been mentioned by a number of volunteers and some clients. Can anything more be done to mutual advantage in working with clients, perhaps on more awareness-raising programmes? Can further opportunities be explored for creative volunteering using clients' assets of particular skills and experience? Can more opportunities be found for clients' potential productivity where mutual interest can be projected? See "Meaningful activities", below.

Finance

It is always a struggle, but WERS has proved over a long period to be able to raise grant funding and charitable donations to meet the requirements of a small and dedicated team supporting increased numbers of volunteers. This will need to be sustained as, for example, Big Lottery funding expires. It's not easy, but *'twas ever thus*. There is no need to panic, just to plod on - perhaps widening horizons alongside the City of Sanctuary initiative for fresh charitable investment opportunities with the private sector. Perhaps a reciprocal relationship with the football world would be worth considering?

Access

Ultimately, it may be necessary for the charity to expand as numbers grow. But that would take planning. There's a lot to be said *for* the current building as well as against. Our feeling is that there isn't the will to find a new base in the short term. Perhaps a working group could develop options over time for a specifically-funded development programme. Planning and feasibility can also be funded through, for example, again, the Big Lottery. Notification systems should be in place to ensure access for disabled clients, staff, and volunteers.

Communications

Filing systems: The Office Manager has been working to rationalise these for some time. It may be helpful to look further into the necessity of keeping information on file. Where information needs to be archived, it should be done with data protection consent where necessary by the ICO data controller at WERS. Consider securing archived data off-site.

Telephones: Install a basic multi-line 'phone system so that multiple 'phone calls can be handled simultaneously.

Information technology: IT devices have become increasingly personalised, and this has its drawbacks for working with confidential information. Beyond 'phone numbers needed in practice and given with consent, it would be unwise for volunteers and staff to store confidential or personal information on clients in personalised digital archives either on their own devices or in "the cloud". Storing of such information requires data collection consent and ICO data control. A "Company Cloud" would not be appropriate for multiple use storage of sensitive information.

As internet search tools, tablets could prove very useful for volunteers and support workers in helping clients to find the information they need quickly. With £2k and a WiFi connection, four personalised, password protected tablets could link to a central diary administered by the Office Manager for appointments, and directly to printers for efficient production of maps, public information, and references, etc. This could address Helen's concern that the Office Manager's time is taken up with printing, etc. Some other general admin tasks could be shared on them too - particularly in co-ordinating, communicating with and updating staff and volunteers. Because these devices must, in practice, be personalised, they would need to be for the use of individual support workers, or perhaps individual volunteers. It would need to be made very clear that no personal information on clients may be stored on them, or in the "cloud".

"It would be good to have a computer available, because often times the paper resources aren't enough. In my life I google things".

- Female Volunteer Support Worker

Web-site: Reportedly used by very few clients to access the service in the first instance, the purpose of the website could be reviewed and perhaps targeted (as it is to some degree) on awareness-raising and charitable donations. We recommend a cleaner design orientated towards public engagement and donation, keeping and promoting donor functionality (*Wix* has a free website builder for non-profits). Although not universally desired by staff, a new website could incorporate more accessible awareness-raising information for the general public, perhaps aligned with the City of Sanctuary initiative. Information could be up-dated on how to book / host events and awareness-raising initiatives; there could be an interactive blog for information sharing and opportunities; and there could be links to Facebook and Twitter accounts (below). A website needs maintenance, and this should be scheduled for an appropriately skilled member of staff, volunteer, or client (where permitted).

Social media: Social media doesn't work unless a lot of individual people engage with it on a very regular basis for social reasons. The WERS Facebook site is up, but not well used. The same is true of #WestEndRefugeeService on Twitter. Alliance with City of Sanctuary to build a bigger online presence for refugees and asylum seeker awareness across the region seems worth exploring. For it to work, its users need to be encouraged and active. Has the Facebook page ever been promoted to clients who have 'phones? Again, caution is needed and perhaps training required with regard to avoiding sensitive information.

Signposting: Clients' physical and emotional well-being issues are wider than their immediate problems, and taking control of participation in social activities can be helpful to them. But if clients don't know what is available, then the option is closed. Could signposting be better co-ordinated, so that the resources available (e.g. activities relevant to a certain language or culture) are easier to access? We know from a volunteer that very comprehensive lists are kept, but does everybody know this? Could they be accessible online for volunteers and clients?

"Sarah has a big menu of opportunities and outside organisations, and printed it in Kurdish which was very helpful to my client."

- Male Volunteer Befriender

Review signposting and the management of the Notice Board. An educated client with a good command of English was very complementary about it, but it is cluttered and almost all in English.

"Meaningful activities"

These are so hard to achieve for destitute clients in particular. But where there is hope, it is offered by appropriate participation and volunteering activity in the first instance. The onus should not be on the destitute client, but externally to develop appropriate opportunities for engagement which may, sometimes, be of help. Referrals made to the Comfrey Project, for example, or Crossings, have shown positive impacts, but perhaps there are more opportunities to explore and more organisations to support in their development. Does this specific partnership and developmental role exist within WERS? Could such a role conjoin with and supplement the City of Sanctuary evolving partnerships?

"Most of the clients I see have their to do lists, I'm amazed at the effort it takes to organise their lives to work within the various processes that are just enacted upon them and the efficiency with which they do that, I'm always amazed by that."

- Female Volunteer Support Worker

Understanding needs

WERS is extremely good at doing this, and the WERS Scale has evolved as a useful self-assessment tool - although its high praise may have had more to do with WERS' Support Workers' skills and experience, and the capacity, in many cases, to use the first languages of clients either directly or through interpretation. There were legitimate concerns over its use at first meeting because of the levels of distress destitute clients sometimes suffer. Naturally, it can only be used where appropriate; and our recommendation is to develop its use a little further, to elicit a little more self-assessment over time, which may be of use further down the line where social participation becomes possible. We also suggest adding a modest social impact capture element after six months so that clients can report the quality of the service they receive, and an open question asking what difference this has made to them. Additions could perhaps include the client's education; language is already asked, but whether English is understood, spoken, or written; interests; past employment; professional qualifications; and any disability. The social impact could be as simple as asking what they liked most and least; and the open question asking in what ways WERS has made a difference. We understand that it is important not to ask too much too early, trust *sine qua non*, but when appropriate, these additions could help. It is also important that the WERS Scale is revisited for returning clients at reasonable intervals so that progress and social impact - or lack of them - can be monitored and evaluated for any necessary adaptation of the service.

Mental health

In addressing and sourcing clients' mental health needs, we understand that discussions are under way with Healthwatch Newcastle on appropriate partnerships. WERS recently out-sourced counselling, using the counsellor to train listeners for Time to Talk. One volunteer, himself a retired senior mental health professional was happy for us to report that he thought this a good idea.

"One of the things which used to happen here was a counselling service. I do think that the ethos of this place, the practical support, the liveliness of the place, a place of safety is hugely important. There's a limited place for counselling. Separating the counselling out somewhere else, away from the building, is a better idea. The friendliness and the place of safety is very important and therapeutic"

"Mainstreaming"

Something of a pipe dream for many of WERS' clients, and - with notable exceptions - for staff and volunteers too. But it is a hope to cling to for many, and not least refugee children, families, and professional social strategists whose awareness has been successfully raised. It is also a necessity for WERS in the medium term because although it has not closed its open-door policy, it cannot really afford to keep clients on its books for too long, or at all from far and wide within the region, as new asylum seekers arrive in Newcastle's west end. The direction of travel towards "mainstreaming" is through social and community development and creative cultural co-operation and co-production as well as through the scarce employment opportunities for some supported by the Job Mentoring initiative. That's why we see the sustaining of external inter-agency partnerships and networks for local engagement and awareness-raising, and the development of fresh initiatives for wider participation and awareness raising in new sectors - like through City of Sanctuary - as so important. We'd be surprised if this hadn't been tested many times in the past, but on a day-to-day and practical level, we think there is scope for more use of creative crafts and arts, making, growing and cooking activities around which clients and volunteers can talk and help to address problems and concerns. We think the participants, the clients, should decide what these activities should be - they bring a wide range of skills with them - and that the link to listening support is important.

"In every case I think I've been the only English friend they've had, and each of them has been living in a bubble which they've created, which is as near as they can make it to their home experience. They've all expressed that I've shown them things that they wouldn't have otherwise discovered. Having a car has helped, where people are not very mobile. The main thing that they've all said is that when we are together they are happy, and I see the major point of Befriending as having good times and taking the pressure off, and I think I've succeeded in doing that".

"The uptake of Time to Talk hasn't been great at times..... I don't think its been the best use of Volunteers' time... Some of it has been invaluable, but when you look at the number of people who are here, maybe more of them could benefit from that, and I've thought it might work better if there was something for people to do when they came. Because all of my Friends, when I haven't been there, have spent most of their time sitting at home watching television. I'm very keen on crafts. I knit and embroider and I've written a book on embroidery design, and I have a great belief in the therapeutic power of doing things like that - and you can talk at the same time. The main thing you hear people saying at Time to Talk is how depressed they are because they've got nothing to do, and how frustrated they are because they've got nothing to do. So I would like to see activities where we talked and did things together. But it's the problem of space, really. I would happily join in with something like that and put quite a lot into it if it were available. It might get more women out".

"When you talk to people at Time to Talk, the frustration and all the skills that they've got and their inability to use them at the moment. And this feeling of wanting to make it an equal relationship. I think if there were activities where they could do something that paid back to other people, making toys for children in hospital or blankets to send to somewhere else, there's that added dimension to it that's really rewarding. If I was in that situation I'd find that really helpful.

- Female Volunteer Befriender

3.0 Conclusion

The detailed study shows WERS to be an essential lifeline for hundreds of refugees and asylum seekers on Tyneside.

Exhibiting remarkably high qualities of service, the charity is well governed and directed, as it has been since inception over sixteen years ago. WERS offers leadership to an informal knitted partnership of specialist support agencies, and works very successfully on its own terms at the heart of the refugee and asylum seeker support sector on Tyneside and within the wider region.

WERS is a safe investment for leading Newcastle's informal partnership of support agencies in meeting the essential and basic life needs of vulnerable asylum seekers, refugees, - and destitute men and women with no legal status, ill-served by a failing asylum system.

With sincere thanks and acknowledgements to the clients, staff, and volunteers at WERS.

Matthew Burge, Independent External Evaluator