

# Final evaluation: Sanctuary in Wales Project

Presented to Oxfam Cymru by Arad Research

May 2015

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# Executive summary

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## Summary

The Sanctuary in Wales Project delivered opportunities for women seeking sanctuary (asylum-seekers and refugees) in Wales between 2012–2015. Oxfam Cymru co-ordinated the three-year Big Lottery funded project in the four asylum dispersal areas of Wales, working in partnership with Oasis Cardiff in Cardiff, African Community Centre in Swansea, Displaced People in Action and Bethel Community Church in Newport and BAWSO in Wrexham. Across all areas Oxfam worked with Business in the Community (BITC) who sourced and matched voluntary opportunities for women. The project partners in turn worked in partnership with a range of supporting organisations, employers and service providers in each of the four areas.

This is a summary of the evaluation undertaken by Arad Research, and concludes with practice & policy recommendations arising from the project.

## Project activities

Over 480 women participated in the project in total (see table 1 for a summary of project achievements). The project delivered a range of activities:

**One-to-one support and guidance** was provided for women seeking sanctuary. The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA)<sup>1</sup> was used to shape the support. This enabled women to individually determine their priorities for training and other opportunities.

**Drop-in and group activities** were offered with crèche facilities. The sessions provided a safe environment for more than 480 women to support each other, develop friendships and were a forum for the women

to gain and share knowledge of local services and opportunities.

**Volunteer work placements:** 89 women did work placements and volunteered with public, private and third sector employers. Travel and childcare costs were covered but when this was used up some host organisations met the costs to enable the women to continue their placements.

**Employability training** focused on building women's skills and confidence in the UK workplace over a two-day workshop, hosted by BITC business members and included feedback on CVs and mock interviews with business volunteers.

**Job coaching:** BITC trained 15 volunteers from different organisations as job coaches. Job coaches met project participants regularly to help them set goals, search for jobs, volunteering roles or training and maintain their motivation.

**Company visits** and employability workshops took place in Wrexham in place of voluntary placements or job coaching. These opportunities contributed to participants' understanding of the UK workplace and the local job market.

**English classes** were delivered by project participants or other volunteers and were very popular with the participants both as a means to improve communication and as a step towards entering training or gaining employment.

**Training to teach English** was facilitated by Swansea University and 31 women were trained who then delivered classes in the drop-ins.

**Friends and neighbours (FAN) groups** were established in Cardiff, Swansea and Newport. These volunteer-run groups aimed to help foster understanding and friendship amongst the host and sanctuary seeking community.

**Advocacy training:** was carried out by Women Making a Difference and Together Creating Communities for 45 project participants, improving their confidence and

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<sup>1</sup> SLA divides an individual's assets into five key areas: (1) human assets – education and skills, health; (2) social assets – family and friends/neighbours; (3) public assets – local public services and amenities; (4) financial assets – all sources of income; (5) physical assets – housing and access to transport, the local environment and basic white goods. More information at: <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/the-sustainable-livelihoods-approach-toolkit-for-wales-297233>

ability to engage with service providers and decision makers.

**Round table events** held in Wrexham, Newport & Cardiff provided opportunities for more than 75 project participants to discuss issues with local service providers and 44 attended and facilitated the end of project sharing event.

## Project outcomes and impact

The project has broadly achieved its outcomes as well as targets, providing valuable opportunities for project participants. This section discusses each outcome in turn.

### Outcome 1: Women will be higher skilled, and better advised of opportunities, and be ready to enter employment, education, or formal training.

- Women also received targeted training in a variety of courses including book keeping, childcare and catering.
- Project participants were also able to access other training opportunities, such as food hygiene and child protection courses at their volunteer placement.
- Project participants commented how important they felt the training opportunities were and how they had boosted their confidence and self-esteem.
- Accredited courses were particularly popular with participants as the certificates reflected positively for them, not only for future employment prospects but for their asylum case.
- Childcare and travel costs were funded by the project and were viewed as crucial elements of support.
- On occasion childcare couldn't be arranged to cover inconvenient course times and while the strong support network between the women resulted in informal childcare some women dropped out of college courses due to problems in finding appropriate childcare.

**Table 1: Key targets and achievements of the Sanctuary in Wales Project**

Project output	Target	Number achieved
In or completed volunteering	69	<b>89</b>
Women pursuing education and training	68	<b>129</b>
English teachers trained	27	<b>31</b>
Drop in/ESOL participants	360	<b>480*</b>
Employer participants	90	<b>80</b>
Community champions trained	25	<b>45</b>

\* This number includes English classes run externally to the project but delivered by project teachers.

### Outcome 2: Women will get jobs and be on track to gaining qualifications.

- Approximately 70% of the project's participants were asylum-seekers and unable to enter paid employment. However 23 project participants started in paid employment.
- Many project participants volunteered on a weekly basis in a variety of roles including retail, catering, administration, support work and reception work, and as a result contributed to their community and wider society.
- Many participants also held volunteer roles at their centres: teaching English classes to other women, assisting with the organisation of drop-in sessions, and volunteering in the kitchens.
- Participants stressed the importance of receiving a certificate as an outcome from any training or course.
- The employability training sessions were valuable in preparing women for work.

### Outcome 3: Women will be less isolated, have stronger social network, and be more active in their local community.

- Feelings of isolation were prominent for the women seeking sanctuary when

they first arrived in the UK. This sense of isolation was exacerbated for those who spoke very little English.

- All participants surveyed reported that they now had many more friends, resulting in a new support network, not only socially but also in helping with practical aspects of life in the UK and with the asylum process.
- The increase in confidence meant the women were more active in their local communities, attending activities at community centres and gaining part-time jobs.
- Organisations hosting volunteers commented on improvements in cultural and religious awareness as a result of women volunteering with them.

#### **Outcome 4: Women will access more services, be healthier and have higher living standards.**

- Networking and supporting each other resulted in women gaining knowledge and confidence about Wales and their local area.
- Many women reported that their physical and emotional health and well-being had improved since contact with the project, as had that of their families.
- The drop-ins and the group activities provided a 'safe haven' for women and their children to meet with friends and access further support from fellow volunteers and staff.
- Project participants and local communities shared life experiences supporting inclusion in local communities.
- The project had wider impacts with family members also engaging in English classes and volunteering.

There were **wider benefits and impacts** of the Project, including impacts on the employers taking part.

- Employees engaged in the employability training and job coaching reported a positive impact on their knowledge and understanding of asylum-seekers and refugees.

- Employers recognised how their involvement helps their corporate and social responsibility.
- Employees also increased their confidence when they participated in workshops and mock interviews, providing them with opportunities to develop skills and bring skills back to their organisation.

## **Future considerations**

With regards to supporting **project participants**, there is a need to:

1. Continue offering opportunities to improve **English language skills**. Some project participants already had high level English language skills and it is important to facilitate higher level English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses.
2. Wherever possible **courses should be accredited** as the option to achieve certificates for successful completion of courses was highly regarded by project participants.
3. Continue to ensure a **personalised approach** to the delivery of support with flexibility in the allocation of funding for travel, childcare and/or training courses according to individual needs.
4. **1:1 support is key** in determining individual requirements and providing a safe and secure environment contributing to well-being for project participants and their families.
5. There is continued demand for the preparation for volunteering and work via **employability training and job coaching**.

Lessons for **Project organisation** include:

6. **The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach** could provide a useful participatory method to understand an individual's experiences. Ongoing training and sharing of practice would strengthen the approach.
7. **Flexible childcare** is important in providing the opportunity for project

participants to engage in further study and volunteering.

8. A more targeted **enterprise** aspect to employability training was identified by some participants as helpful.
9. There is potential to **strengthen the inclusion element** with the introduction of a 'befriending model'.
10. **Open communications** between project staff was a key strength of this project and should be incorporated in future activities.
11. Volunteer host organisations could be provided with some **more information about the individual participant's circumstances** that might help them appropriately organise the volunteering role.
12. An **intranet/forum style communication** could be facilitated for project staff and project participants, to support the sharing of ideas and maintain the friendships.

# 1. Introduction

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Arad Research was commissioned by Oxfam Cymru to undertake an evaluation of the Sanctuary in Wales Project. This evaluation has assessed:

- the extent to which the project achieved its outcomes
- the importance of meeting these outcomes to improving the lives of sanctuary seeking women

Key lessons and recommendations for service providers and decision makers that have arisen from the experience of the project and its participants are also presented.

This final report presents findings from the fieldwork undertaken during March and April 2015.

## 1.1 The Sanctuary in Wales Project

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Oxfam Cymru co-ordinated a three-year Big Lottery Fund (BIG) funded project in the four asylum dispersal areas of Wales – Cardiff, Swansea, Newport and Wrexham. The project received £587,034 over the period 2012-2015.

Working with partners, the Sanctuary in Wales Project focused on enhancing and building upon the skills and experience of women asylum-seekers and refugees ('sanctuary seekers'). Alongside these activities, the project engaged employers and service providers to inform and support them to improve accessibility for sanctuary seeking women. Community English classes and regular women-only drop-ins aimed to reduce isolation and help women build social networks and access support services. Volunteer-run Friends and Neighbours (FAN) Groups aimed to help foster understanding and friendship amongst the host and sanctuary seeking community.

Oxfam worked with five main partners – Oasis Cardiff in Cardiff, African Community Centre Wales in Swansea, Displaced People in Action and Bethel Community Church in Newport, and BAWSO in Wrexham. Across Wales, the project also worked with Business in the Community who sourced and matched voluntary placement opportunities for women interested in gaining UK experience.

## **1.2 Context**

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The project built on previous work looking at gender issues within the asylum system – a previous Oxfam Cymru ‘Women Seeking Sanctuary in Wales Project’ ran from 2008-2011, also funded by BIG. This project provided human rights advocacy training for ‘Community Champions’ to enable women to take charge and rectify issues within their communities with service providers and decision makers. Coming out of this work, Oxfam identified a need for women seeking sanctuary to receive intensive and tailored support in order to build their confidence, to be active within their local communities, and to be ready and able to gain employment.

The previous project acted as a catalyst for the Sanctuary in Wales Project which expanded on the previous project to also address employability and work opportunities for the women alongside holistic one-to-one and group support.

## **1.3 Asylum-seeking and refugee women in Wales**

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The development of the Sanctuary in Wales project can be seen in the context of the continuing numbers of women (refugees and asylum-seekers) seeking sanctuary in Wales and the need for initiatives to address their ongoing marginalisation in society. Wales has seen asylum-seekers dispersed via four dispersal areas – Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham – since 2001.

People seeking asylum, or sanctuary, still make up a small proportion of the Welsh population. In May 2009 there were a total of 2,322 asylum-seekers living in Wales, of whom over half were living in Cardiff with smaller numbers in Swansea, Newport and Wrexham. These figures have remained relatively stable in recent years. The countries of origin of these asylum-seekers reflect the areas of conflict across the world.

Immigration and Asylum is a non-devolved area and successive UK governments have introduced restrictive legislation. The Welsh Government nevertheless has responsibility for many areas that have a key impact on the lives of women seeking sanctuary. This includes health, housing, education and social services. The Welsh Government and local authorities have also provided funding to relevant voluntary and community organisations, though this support has been cut back in line with wider public spending cuts. The Welsh Government's Refugee Inclusion Strategy (2008) and subsequent Action Plan (2011) set



out its vision and the areas in which it identified the need for action. Many of these priorities are reflected in the core components of the Sanctuary in Wales Project.

The Welsh Government's 2008 Refugee Inclusion Strategy found that most asylum-seekers were living within families in Wales, with the majority of those headed by women. Whilst the number of people seeking sanctuary is relatively small, it represents an enormous diversity of experiences. Many have encountered traumatic events prior to arrival in the UK and face uncertainty and poverty during the asylum process. Poverty is particularly acute for those whose application has been refused but who remain in the UK.

Whilst women and men share many common experiences of seeking sanctuary in Wales, other experiences are gender specific. Some women have fled gender-related persecution, including rape and sexual violence. Whilst seeking sanctuary, services specific to women including care during pregnancy and maternity services are important to women's experiences, as are opportunities to socialise with women in a similar situation. The opportunity to develop skills, employability and greater aspirations to enhance future prospects is also important, and was a key element of Sanctuary in Wales.

As of April 2014, Home Office support for asylum-seekers and refugees changed from an in-person service via the Welsh Refugee Council to telephone and online support via Migrant Help, which excludes those with leave to remain. This reduction in statutory provision is coupled with other cuts to public and voluntary services. Relatively little support is targeted at women seeking sanctuary in Wales or work on increasing understanding women's experiences amongst service providers. There is even less that combines this with an assets-based approach.

This evaluation of Sanctuary in Wales provides an important reflection of the breadth of activities delivered during the project and the impact these activities have had on participants. In evidencing what does and doesn't work the evaluation also aims to make a contribution to understanding how to enable and support women seeking sanctuary effectively in future, particularly in the Welsh context.

## **1.4 Methodology**

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The methodology applied included desk research of Oxfam documentation, the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach and project monitoring reports. Fieldwork involved one-to-one interviews and focus groups with project participants in the four dispersal areas – Cardiff,

Newport, Swansea and Wrexham – and consultations with project staff and stakeholders including BITC, employers and job coaches.

The focus groups and interviews were structured around a number of topics such as participants' motivations for becoming involved in the project; the impact of the project on their skills, employability, aspirations and well-being; progression opportunities into further training, education or employment; support from mentors/job coaches, employers and delivery partners and the wider support provided through the project. The consultations with other stakeholders also focused on motivations for engaging with the project and impact of involvement. Annex 1 provides more detail.

## 2. Project Activities

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This chapter provides an overview of the Sanctuary in Wales Project activities, including participation numbers. Chapter 3 expands on the impact these activities have had on project participants, other stakeholders and communities.

### 2.1 Operational overview

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Oxfam Cymru worked with key partners across the four dispersal areas of Wales to deliver the Sanctuary in Wales Project with Support and Development Officers facilitating project activities. The structure and format of the project delivery was different in each of the areas, involving partnership working with different supporting organisations, employers and service providers. The following provides an overview of the partnerships, key activities and participation numbers for Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham.

#### 2.1.1 Oxfam / central organisation

Oxfam Cymru coordinated the project with different partner organisations delivering on the ground in Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham. These partners were tasked with delivering support to female asylum-seekers and refugees using the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA).<sup>2</sup> This assets-based method seeks to empower individuals and communities to achieve a sustainable, fulfilled future and provides a participatory approach to identify people's abilities and strengths to help them improve and manage their lives and circumstances. Recognition of the interlinked nature of the assets is important in understanding the most appropriate livelihoods strategies to employ.

Support and development officers in the four areas used the approach to varying degrees. One worker described how the tool provided more momentum and impetus to the project, appreciating the person-centred approach it offered:

*"... Every person has something to work with and it works holistically with their life.... Useful as a starting point, helps to build up a picture."*  
- Support and Development Officer

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<sup>2</sup> SLA divides an individual's assets into five key areas: human assets – education and skills, health; social assets – family and friends/neighbours; public assets – local public services and amenities; financial assets – all sources of income; and physical assets – housing and access to transport, the local environment and basic white goods (Oxfam, 2013). The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach; Toolkit for Wales, p. 7. Available at <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/the-sustainable-livelihoods-approach-toolkit-for-wales-297233>

Monitoring was carried out by partners on a regular basis and evaluations were conducted throughout the three year duration of the project by Oxfam Cymru with this final report providing an independent evaluation.

### **2.1.2 Cardiff**

Oasis Cardiff was the delivery partner in Cardiff, providing the venue for 1:1 support, drop-in sessions, English classes and other activities. Prior to the Sanctuary in Wales Project Oasis Cardiff had run a women's drop-in funded by the previous project, but this had ended by the time this project commenced. The Support and Development Officer worked closely with Trinity Church to reach out to possible female participants, initially creating a 'women only' day at the centre to encourage women to attend. Oasis provided opportunities for the participants to attend two-day employability training in the city each year, short training courses at the Oasis centre, and referral to Cardiff and the Vale College and to Cardiff University. Women attended drop-in sessions, with activities such as sewing and healthy eating available, and several women took up teacher training (provided by Swansea University) and taught English voluntarily at Oasis for women and other centre members. Other activities that took place included FAN groups, cinema visits and discussions, with many undertaking voluntary work with different employers across the city and within the Oasis centre.

### **2.1.3 Newport**

The Sanctuary in Wales Project in Newport worked in partnership with Displaced People in Action (DPIA) and the Support and Development Officer was based initially at the Welsh Refugee Council building before moving to the Share Centre during year two. The Support and Development Officer worked in partnership with the drop-in coordinator at Bethel Community Church whose drop-in facility had been successfully running for several years at the Church, and had previously received funding from the prior Oxfam project. English classes were delivered at the drop-in, with the Share Centre providing a venue for 1:1 meetings and training sessions. Project participants attended other educational establishments across the city for a variety of training courses, such as Coleg Gwent, Charles Street Community Learning Centre and the British Red Cross which also hosts English classes with crèche facilities. The Intellectual Property Office, Newport hosted a CV writing workshop and several staff also trained in and delivered job coaching to participants. Referrals to the Sanctuary in Wales Project in Newport tended to be via the drop-in and the Welsh Refugee Council to the Support and Development Officer. 35 participants undertook

volunteering and work placements with public and private organisations in Newport, as well as six training to and teaching English classes to other participants.

#### **2.1.4 Swansea**

The African Community Centre provided the base for the Swansea project. They facilitated drop-in sessions, English classes and other training opportunities and activities. These included the organisation of trips to familiarise women with Wales, for example to local castles and the Gower Peninsula. Women were referred to the project via different routes such as Social Services, Women's Aid or through other project participants. At the beginning other organisations were also approached to advertise the project, for example; Cyrenians Cymru (tackling poverty and deprivation), drop-ins at Brunswick Methodist Church and St Phillips Church, Black Association of Women Step Out (BAWSO) and Minority Ethnic Women's Network (MEWN). Numbers were low at the start of the project but rose to more than 160 over the course of the three years. Project participants undertook voluntary work placements in the local community and delivered English classes for the project. Some of the project participants gained refugee status and obtained part-time jobs. Swansea University delivered the English Teacher Training, which required ongoing support and observations and provided the venue for the celebration event on completion. To participate in the two day employability training in years one and two, women travelled from Swansea to Cardiff. However, due to childcare issues, in year three the training was offered in Swansea and utilised Barclays' offices reflecting the adaptability and flexibility provided by the project delivery team.

#### **2.1.5 Wrexham**

The Sanctuary in Wales Project began working with Wrexham Refugees and Asylum-Seekers Support Group (WRASSG) as its partner to deliver the project in the city. However, this changed to the Black Association of Women Step Out (BAWSO) in 2014; there were also delays in recruiting a Support and Development Officer. Nevertheless activities such as 1:1 support, training opportunities (including training as community champions), drop-in sessions, and company visits and other trips, such as to Snowdonia National Park, involved many female asylum-seekers and refugees in Wrexham.

### 2.1.1 Partnership with Business in The Community

Business in The Community (BITC) provided the link between women and employers; A Placements Officer paired individuals with voluntary placements in areas of interest, organising employability training and sourcing and arranging the training of job coaches for the project.

### 2.1.2 Partnership with Swansea University

Swansea University delivered English teacher training for 31 participants to teach English. This included follow-up support and arranging assessment for a Cambridge accredited Teaching Knowledge Test – Practical Module, which 23 women took and passed. Several other education providers delivered a broad variety of other courses and training opportunities. Table 2.1 presents targets and achievements of project activities; 480 women engaged with the project in total.

**Table 2.1: Targets and achievements of the Sanctuary in Wales Project**

<b>Project output</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Number achieved</b>
Completed action plans	141	<b>221</b>
In employment	30	<b>23</b>
In/completed volunteering	69	<b>86</b>
In/completed volunteering with enterprise mentors	4	<b>3</b>
Women pursuing education and training	68	<b>129</b>
English teachers trained	27	<b>31<sup>(a)</sup></b>
Drop-in/English class participants	360	<b>480<sup>(b)</sup></b>
Employer participants	90	<b>80</b>
Community champions trained	25	<b>45</b>
Service providers trained	30	<b>36</b>
Participants at dialogue events	100	<b>130</b>

(a) 31 women trained by Swansea University, and of that number, 23 have taken the Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT).

(b) This number includes individuals attending English classes run externally to the project, delivered by project teachers - e.g. at Red Cross Newport, Cyrenians Swansea and Hafod Primary School, Swansea.

## **Activities**

A brief summary of the nature of the activities delivered by the Sanctuary in Wales Project for women asylum-seekers and refugees in Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham follows, with Chapter 3 presenting the impact of these activities.

### **2.1.3 One-to-one support and guidance**

The role of the Support and Development Officers recruited to the Sanctuary in Wales Project was to provide 1:1 support and guidance to women asylum-seekers and refugees using the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA). The Support and Development Officers helped the women plan their future, guiding them to relevant training courses and other opportunities appropriate to their individual needs. As discussed above the arrangement in each of the dispersal areas was slightly different, for instance with the established drop-in sessions at Bethel Community Church in Newport the Support and Development Officer concentrated on 1:1 support and guidance focusing on employment and education opportunities, whereas at the other three centres the Support and Development Officers were also responsible for organising the drop-in activities. The SLA toolkit provided a structure for the support, as support staff used a selection of the tools to assist their 1:1 guidance and monitor the progress of participants.

### **2.1.4 Drop-in and group activities**

All four areas offered project participants the opportunity to attend drop-in sessions, with crèche facilities and, as can be seen from Table 2.1, these proved increasingly popular. The sessions provided women with safe environments in which to support each other, develop friendships – both for themselves and their children – and meet the local community. These groups also instigated other activities such as trips, visiting speakers and training, and provided an opportunity for women to practice their English. Support for each other during the asylum process was provided not only in regard to understanding the process and procedures involved but also emotional support.

### **2.1.5 Volunteer placements**

The remit of Business in The Community (BITC) at the project outset had included arranging work placements. However, as the majority of the project participants were asylum-seekers and therefore not able by law to go into private businesses, the set targets were not achieved. As a business membership organisation, the majority of BITC's

members could not take volunteers, so the Placements Officer had to establish relationships with new public and third sector employers who could host asylum-seekers without issue.

Once established, most of the volunteer placements were ongoing, usually a few hours a week, until the finance provided to cover travel costs and childcare ran out. Many of the women continued their voluntary work when the funding stopped. This was possible due to the support of the placement host, as they took on responsibility to support travel costs or provided access to crèche facilities. For instance volunteers with South East Wales Regional Equality Centre (SEWREC) and Gaer Community Centre, Newport were able to continue as crèche facilities became available for their children at the organisations. In some instances it required a degree of flexibility and commitment by the placement host. For example another participant was travelling to the SNAP Cymru offices in Cardiff from Newport. She did not have a bank account to receive volunteer expenses, but SNAP Cymru wanted her to continue working with them and so used their petty cash to cover her travel costs.

#### 2.1.6 Employability training

Employability training began towards the end of the first year as according to BITC:

*“There was a real need for the [participants] to have some training before they went into voluntary positions, as they still needed CVs, interview skills and other skills they would need for a job and some really hadn’t done anything before.”*

- Placements Officer

Business in the Community had delivered similar training to others in the past; ‘Ready for Work’, BITC’s national programme, supports some of society’s most disadvantaged people to enter employment. This was adapted for asylum-seekers and refugees. A re-allocation of funds was required due to altering the original voluntary work placement element to now include employability training. The project budget was amended throughout the contract to make sure it was ‘fit for purpose’. This demonstrates strength in the project’s flexibility ensuring all activities were appropriate to the needs of project participants.

The employability training involved delivery of a two day workshop, located within a business environment on day two, and hosted by one of BITC’s members. The first day focused on employability skills and several employees attended the second day to provide



more focused employability training using mock interviews and feedback. Additional activities resulted as a consequence of the involvement of business organisations. The Intellectual Property Office, Newport, contributed further by developing and delivering a workshop and some of their employees also trained as job coaches.

*“Once the businesses have met the ladies and seen how enthusiastic and committed they are to do well and improve their lives, they’ll do more to help out, we don’t have to sell it, they want to do it themselves.”*

- BITC

The involvement of women in the employability training, in sometimes senior positions within organisations, provided role models for project participants and demonstrated to the project participants that women can achieve professionally. The employability training brought women from Cardiff, Newport and Swansea together which was received positively as the women met each other and formed friendships. Delivery in a business environment was also perceived to add value to the opportunity as professional behaviour was required, providing a valuable insight into the expectation of a business environment for the project participants.

### **2.1.7 Job coaching**

It became apparent during the early days of the project that whilst the women enjoyed the approx. 20 day placement opportunity, once it finished something else was needed to maintain their motivation. BITC trained 15 employees from a variety of organisations, including the Department of Work and Pensions; Hafodcare; Hendre; Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs; Intellectual Property Office and Keepmoat as job coaches. Following training as a job coach they were each matched with a project participant. The role of the job coach involved arranging to meet regularly with the project participant helping them to set goals, search for jobs or volunteering roles, and/or training opportunities and maintain their motivation, with continued support once in a job role. Expenses were available for job coaches, although according to one Support and Development Officer ‘they don’t seem to claim them’. Positive impacts were reported by the job coaches as a result of their involvement in the project (section 4.1.2).

### **2.1.8 Company visits**

One of the differences between the four areas was the organisation of visits to local companies for the project participants in Wrexham as opposed to organising voluntary

placements or job coaching. Employability workshops were delivered in Wrexham towards the end of the second year of the project with visits to Brother Industries in Ruabon and the P&A Group in Mold. These visits provided opportunities for the women to learn about the world of work and help them prepare for their future. They were also preceded by briefing sessions delivered by the Project Coordinator and BITC Placements Officer for the employers so as to ensure hosts knew the rights and entitlements of refugee and asylum-seeking women and had a deeper understanding of what drives people to seek sanctuary in the UK.

### **2.1.9 English classes**

Project participants at the four centres acknowledged the necessity to learn English and were very motivated to do so; sometimes it was the English classes that attracted women to the Sanctuary in Wales Project in the first place. All four centres delivered English classes facilitated by the women themselves or other volunteers. Some project participants also studied for higher level English courses, usually delivered at local colleges. Some family members of project participants also attended English classes at the centres, highlighting the importance placed on acquiring language skills to support inclusion for asylum-seekers, refugees and their families. The opportunity to achieve an accreditation as a result of training is raised in section 3.2.1 and this was also the case regarding the acquisition of English language skills. Project participants acknowledged that they needed to achieve a certain level, especially as some wished to pursue careers requiring a high standard of English, such as nursing.

### **2.1.10 Training to teach English**

Another element of the Sanctuary in Wales Project was training some of the participants to teach English which was followed up with the opportunity to take the Cambridge accredited Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT). Swansea University's English Language Training Services Department adapted their Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL/CELTA) teaching materials to ensure it was applicable to asylum-seekers and refugees, taking into account the different backgrounds of the women and the brevity of the training time available. The teacher training course involved five weeks of sessions, two days a week. The sessions were delivered at Oasis Cardiff in years 1 & 3, and at the Women's Workshop, Butetown, Cardiff in year 2. Teaching skills were taught during the morning sessions and students completed 20-30 minutes of teaching practice during the afternoon sessions. The teaching practice involved teaching either fellow students or a

group of other visitors at the centre. A Swansea University representative continues to visit and observe the students as they teach in their respective centres. Certificates were presented by a Pro-Vice Chancellor of Swansea University during two celebration events in years 2 & 3 at Swansea University on successful completion of the course.

#### **2.1.11 Friends and neighbours (FAN) groups**

The FAN Charity encourages all members of the community to meet in a spirit of friendship, providing opportunities for new arrivals to meet the host community informally. The Sanctuary in Wales Project provided a catalyst to the establishment of new FAN groups in Cardiff and Swansea with the support of project staff. Women meet in a safe and respectful environment to practice English and increase their network of friends.

#### **2.1.12 Community champions; advocacy training**

Training project participants as community champions/advocates aimed to improve participants' confidence and ability to engage with service providers in their community. In Wrexham this was the focus of the project in place of volunteering opportunities, as a replication of the previous Oxfam project which had not worked in Wrexham before. BAWSO organised a series of training courses delivered by different trainers (Together Creating Communities, Children in Wales) and culminated in a roundtable event (see 2.2.11). In South Wales, Women Making a Difference delivered two days of accredited advocacy training for 17 participants from Cardiff, Swansea and Newport to improve confidence and understanding of decision making processes to better prepare women to engage with service providers and decision makers at roundtable events.

#### **2.1.13 Roundtable events with service providers**

Roundtable events provided an opportunity for project participants to discuss issues with appropriate local service providers such as the Local Authority, Housing, Department of Work and Pensions and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. Several of these took place during the course of the project, providing a forum for women to increase their awareness of, and accessibility to, these different service providers.

## 2.2 Feedback on Activities

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The following presents feedback on project activities received from project participants. Feedback from employers, job coaches, project staff and other service providers is also presented with the impact of this involvement discussed in Chapter 3.

### 2.2.1 Project participants

Women asylum-seekers and refugees were keen to participate in activities offered as part of the Sanctuary in Wales Project. They acknowledged that the 1:1 guidance and support meant they could individually determine their priorities regarding training and other opportunities. They also valued the regularity of the drop-in sessions in providing structure and activities throughout the week. It was also highlighted that some of the women needed encouragement in making initial contact with the project, and existing participants provided support and encouragement:

*“The two and a half hours goes so fast – you find yourself not thinking about your situation. I tell the women to come out, don’t sit at home and do nothing, life is changing.”*

- Newport project participant

Those attending the drop-in sessions stated the importance of the sessions, pointing out they did not wish to miss any. Informal support provided during the drop-in sessions included those with a better standard of English helping others who were unable to read English to complete forms or understand letters, yet if the letters/forms were more complicated they would consult with project staff or volunteers for assistance. The drop-ins also provided a forum for the women to help each other settle into the local area by sharing knowledge of accessibility and location of local services and opportunities.

Project participants particularly valued the English language classes, with several stating they had been their primary reason for participating in the project initially, yet they now took part in many of the other activities as well. Participants with higher level English skills also enjoyed their role delivering classes, which involved planning and organisation with support of project staff. Project participants were grateful that the cost of travel and childcare were covered for them to attend the classes and drop-in.

Women who completed the English teaching course reflected that although the course had been “intense”, with the course in the morning and teaching practice in the afternoon, they

enjoyed it; they experienced a sense of achievement and enjoyed the opportunity to teach others. Some had been nominated by project staff and participants to undertake the teaching course, which boosted their confidence. The fact that the crèche facility was provided and enjoyed by the children allowed women to complete the training and made it easier for them to settle and enjoy the course.

For many the voluntary work placement was very important; it provided the opportunity for work experience to help them to gain a job and was thought to have a positive impact on their asylum case. Even though many of the women began volunteering for a few hours a week, many completed more than this as they were 'happy to do more to help out'. Although the women all spoke positively about their volunteering experience, several would welcome the opportunity to undertake a placement more focused on their intended career, for example hospital or research based.

### **2.2.2 Project staff**

Support and Development Officers and other project support staff organised and facilitated a variety of opportunities for project participants. The importance of the English classes was also emphasised by project staff. Although many women demonstrated a good standard of spoken English, their written skills were often not of a high enough standard to navigate application procedures to gain employment. An important part of the Support and Development Officer's roles was managing the expectations of the women; especially as many had experience and skills in particular fields but there were several aspects (e.g. English language; requirement to retrain; waiting to receive leave to remain) to be addressed before they could fulfil their employment or education ambitions.

As explained in the previous section the project was delivered by different organisations and this influenced how the project was implemented in its early days. For example, locating the project within Oasis in Cardiff took a while to establish as prior to Sanctuary in Wales, Oasis had a large proportion of male service users which made it less accessible for some women. Possibly from the outset a neutral environment may have made it easier to engage with women asylum-seekers and refugees.

Working relationships between project support staff were effective. BITC's Placements Officer liaised with Support and Development Officers to meet with project participants and source possible voluntary placements. The time allocated to the Placement Officer increased from three to four days a week for the final year, to ensure there was a sufficient

amount of time to visit and monitor placements. Following the initial visit to meet participants at drop-in sessions the Placement Officer searched for possible placements and if an interview was required he accompanied the participant. Once successful the Support and Development Officer assisted in arranging childcare if required. Project staff also appreciated the input of Oxfam Cymru at employability and job coaching training, as they provided context and background information for the employees.

### **2.2.3 Job coaches and employers**

Various employers were involved in different aspects of the Sanctuary in Wales Project; some provided the venue and employees to support the employability training, released employees to train and deliver as job coaches and to facilitate round table events, and some provided voluntary opportunities for the women within their organisation. Most of the organisations from whom the job coaches were drawn encourage staff to undertake some form of volunteering, permitting requests to carry out a specified number of volunteering days every year during company time.

Individual motivation to be involved in the Sanctuary in Wales Project reflected a desire to help and 'do something useful', apply acquired skills to a different situation and fulfil a corporate and social responsibility, with organisations wishing to contribute to their community. In some instances employees' job roles involved dealing with people every day over the phone and they wished to meet face-to-face to improve their understanding of client situations:

*"I am very passionate about my work and wanted to get a better understanding of the people I deal with over the phone, by seeing them face to face".*

- Job coach

## 3. Impact

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The different elements of the Sanctuary in Wales Project discussed in the previous chapter had an impact upon individuals and their families, and other stakeholders, such as volunteer job coaches and communities. The four outcome goals for the Sanctuary in Wales Project provide structure for this chapter which focuses on both hard and soft outcomes and impacts for the women such as qualifications, employment, volunteering and confidence, health, social networks and inclusion within their local community.

### 3.1 Project Achievements

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The Sanctuary in Wales Project has broadly achieved its outcomes as well as targets, providing valuable opportunities for project participants. Women sanctuary seekers have improved their English Language skills, trained to teach English and delivered many hours of English lessons. Many more hours of volunteering in the community were facilitated by project participants. Employers have engaged with the project, facilitating employability workshops and released employees to train as job coaches. Improving self-confidence, the development of support networks and positive impacts on health and well-being were also reported by project participants.

### 3.2 Outcome 1: Women will be higher skilled, and better advised of opportunities and be ready to enter employment, education or formal training.

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#### 3.2.1 Support and training

A variety of training opportunities available to project participants resulted in women acquiring skills in areas such as English language and Information Technology (as discussed in section 2.2 and presented in Table 2.1). Twenty three participants accessed the TKT English teacher training. One of the women who completed the TKT course has since moved away and studied the CELTA Course (Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages); in 2014 three project participants progressed onto the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE).

Other project participants received targeted training in the field where they wish to seek employment in the future, for example book keeping and catering. Several women wished to pursue further qualifications in order to enter their chosen profession and for many in

order to do so they needed to improve their English language skills. Project participants were also able to access other training opportunities during their volunteering; with food hygiene, health and safety and child protection courses offered at some placements at no cost to the participant. The opportunity to complete accredited courses was valued by the project participants.

The employability training and job coaching opportunities provided project participants with valuable experience and advice focusing on preparation for work, including mock interviews and CV guidance. All project participants commented how important they thought the training opportunities were and how they had boosted their confidence and self-esteem. The importance of accredited courses was reiterated as project participants acknowledged the certificates reflected positively for them, not only for future employment prospects but for their asylum case. Job coaches and those helping with the employability training supported these views commenting that the activities motivated the women, energising them 'to want to get a job and get on with their lives'.

### **3.2.2 Barriers**

Childcare was an important consideration for many of the project participants. Although the project funded childcare costs to enable the women to study, at times the location and timing of the courses failed to make childcare accessible. For example childcare proved difficult to arrange when trying to join a course delivered at a college during the evening. On occasion the strong support network between the women meant they helped each other informally with childcare. However, other women had to drop out of college courses due to problems encountered in finding appropriate childcare.

The funding of travel costs was also viewed as vital to enabling the women to attend courses.

Some project participants discussed their ambitions to set up their own businesses and although they acknowledged the usefulness of the employability training a more targeted enterprise aspect may have been helpful in order for project participants to be ready to embark on such ventures with confidence when their status changed. It was noted that some project participants were paired with job coaches who brought some experience of business to their coaching.



### 3.3 Outcome 2: Women will get jobs and be on track to gaining qualifications

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*“They (employers) want to employ me - I have these skills.”*

- Project participant

#### 3.3.1 Jobs and qualifications

Women are able to apply for and take up work when granted leave to remain in the UK, and are seldom given the right to work before this. Approximately 70 per cent of project participants were asylum-seekers and unable to accept paid employment. All women interviewed stated they wished to get a job in the future. Work placements were included in the initial design of the project some were undertaken in the first year with the women gaining valuable experience and skills and motivated to explore possibilities for their future. As discussed in section 2.2.3, it was decided to modify the project to provide ongoing opportunities via regular volunteering and the need to improve participants’ employability skills was also identified. Many project participants carried out voluntary work on a weekly basis and as a result contributed to their community and wider society, volunteering several hours every week. Examples of volunteer work experience roles included;

- Retail assistant (Oxfam; Red Cross; Wales Air Ambulance; YMCA)
- IT recycling (Wastesavers)
- Administrative support (SNAP Cymru; Health Clinic)
- Support worker (Big Issue)
- Reception work (South East Wales Racial Equality Council)

Some of the voluntary placements offered courses to all volunteers and Sanctuary in Wales Project participants were also able to access the additional opportunities, at no extra cost. Many participants also held volunteer roles at their centres. These roles included teaching English classes to other women, assisting with the organisation of drop-in sessions and volunteering in the kitchens. At the time of writing, nineteen project participants had started in paid employment.

A variety of accredited and non-accredited courses were accessed by project participants, for example; English language classes for beginners; Beauty; Book keeping; Cambridge Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT); Computer and IT courses; Child development, Stress therapy/management; Confidence building; Catering; Health care; Accountancy; Certificate in Supporting Teaching and Learning in Schools; Together Creating Communities (an empowerment course); parenting skills; and Asylum Justice. Project participants stressed

the importance of receiving a certificate as an outcome from any training or course as certificates “show you have the knowledge” and “it is important to have certificates, the Home Office want proof of what you have been doing”. As discussed in section 2.3.1 a couple of women progressed onto PGCE courses.

A major element of the Sanctuary in Wales Project was employability training (see also section 2.2.4). This proved valuable in preparing women for work as reflected on by a workshop facilitator.

One project participant commented “... *how scared she was walking into a building like this, so for them to experience the situation was useful and they left wanting to work in a building like this.*”

- Employee

“... *Meeting the employers is not scary they say they want to employ me I have these skills, and they [the women] are over the moon, it is a massive boost to their confidence, they are always so grateful for the work placements.*”

- BITC

### 3.3.2 Barriers

A major barrier to gaining employment for Sanctuary in Wales Project participants was the high proportion of women who were asylum-seekers and as a result unable to enter paid employment.

Many of the women had young children and flexibility of volunteering or working hours was vital in order for them to be able to contribute to the wider community and gain useful work experience. A lack of affordable or free childcare held them back from taking up and continuing with learning opportunities.

### 3.4 Outcome 3: Women will be less isolated, have stronger social networks, and be more active in their local community

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***“There’s nothing holding us back, even though we can’t work we can do other things.”***  
- Project participant

The female asylum-seekers and refugees brought different life experiences, valued skills and qualifications to Wales and the Sanctuary in Wales Project. As discussed the project aimed to improve the women’s opportunities and potential to be ready for employment or further training (outcomes 1 and 2). Additional expected outcomes aimed to ensure that women seeking sanctuary felt less isolated with stronger social networks and were more active in their local community.

Feelings of isolation were prominent for asylum-seekers when they first arrived in the United Kingdom and sent to the dispersal areas. Even though some project participants said that they knew a small number of people, for the vast majority they were alone, or accompanied only by immediate family members. The sense of isolation for some was exacerbated as they spoke no or very little English.

*"Life was difficult - no English, no friends."*

- Newport project participant

*"Life was disorientating, very stressful, felt alone."*

- Swansea project participant

*"Felt a lack of hope as I had left people behind."*

- Cardiff project participant

The majority of project participants interviewed reported that Sanctuary in Wales Project activities had contributed to improvements to their confidence, self-esteem and feelings of self-worth. All participants reported that they now had more friends, resulting in a new support network for each other - not only socially to share experiences or celebrate birthdays and special occasions but also in assisting each other when dealing with the process of their asylum claim. As a result of this increase in confidence, the women were more active in their local communities, attending activities at community centres, church, library, volunteering, gaining part-time jobs, with one representing other parents on their child's school governing body.

Employers also commented on benefits to local communities, as well as project participant welfare as a result of the project participants' volunteering with them, as cultural and religious awareness improved.

*At first one local community's reaction had been; "... who are all these foreign people coming to the community centre; now they all know their names, even though they are hard to pronounce."*

- Community Centre staff of volunteer placement

One participant commented that her first visit to a drop-in session 'was like a breath of fresh air, meeting people'. It was recognised by the women that if they were not attending the Sanctuary in Wales Project activities they would have been very isolated 'just staying in my room', whereas having taken part, 'we learn, we meet, we gain confidence, we lose our frustration, we get relaxed'. Women reflected that the Sanctuary in Wales Project provided a second home for them and they looked forward to seeing each other. Project staff also

commented on improvements in women's confidence and self-esteem since accessing project activities.

After taking part in employability training sessions the project participants explained that meeting employers was not 'too scary', as the women recognised they possessed relevant workplace skills; 'they want to employ me - I have these skills'. The project staff and volunteer job coaches also observed a boost in the women's confidence, with women 'motivated and energised to want to get a job and move on with their lives'. Other staff commented that they had observed huge changes in the women's attitudes:

*".. not only in what they are doing, the way they present themselves, the way they dress, the way they behave, just confidence in themselves has grown hugely."*

- Newport Project staff

### **3.5 Outcome 4: Women will access more services, be healthier and have higher living standards**

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***"When we are stressed we come here, talk helps us feel better."***  
- Project participant

Access to services such as health and housing impact on asylum-seekers and refugees' ability to settle and integrate within a community. Opportunities for project participants to increase their knowledge of local services were provided via drop-in sessions and roundtable events. Networking and supporting each other resulted in women gaining knowledge and confidence about Wales and the area where they were living. This improvement also had an impact on well-being for the women and their families.

Project participants spoke of their emotional/mental health on arrival in the UK as they were disoriented and 'life was stressful'. Many women discussed the positive aspect of being able to obtain information easily from Support and Development Officers, fellow sanctuary seekers and during organised roundtable events, and as a direct result how their health had improved. One woman, for example, reflected there had been benefits to her physical health as a result of attending drop-in sessions as it meant she was more active, getting exercise coming out improving her mobility.

During their volunteering in local communities it was observed by some host organisations that project participants' health and well-being benefited as they were able to meet friends

there and appreciate the location as a 'safe haven' for themselves and their children. Staff at voluntary placements also provided assistance and promoted the women's welfare, supplementing the support they received from Sanctuary staff. In some instances meals were available free of charge along with food parcels.

## 4. Thematic discussion / Conclusion

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As discussed in chapter 3 both hard and soft outcomes resulted from involvement in the Sanctuary in Wales Project for women asylum-seekers and refugees. The following sections explore some of the major themes that emerged during the evaluation.

### 4.1 Themes related to Outcomes 1 and 2

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#### 4.1.1 Health (mental and physical)

***“If we weren’t coming to the centre we would stay at home alone and crying.”***  
- Project participant

Health emerged as a dominant theme during the evaluation interviews as the women reflected on how being an asylum-seeker or refugee had a negative impact on their health. This could affect the woman’s ability to look after the rest of her family and required ongoing visits to doctors/counsellors. Project participants and staff recognised the positive impact that accessing Sanctuary in Wales Project activities had had on their health; the women were happier and this resulted in their children being happier and more settled. Women also discussed similar positive impacts they had noticed as a result of taking part in the drop-in and other activities offered. In some instances the location of volunteering placements also provided a ‘safe haven’ for women and their children to meet with friends and if needed access further support from fellow volunteers and staff.

#### 4.1.2 Confidence and self-esteem / self-worth (soft outcomes) (participants and volunteers)

***“I was shy, I was uncomfortable talking; coming to classes I gained a lot of confidence.”***  
- Project participant

Confidence and self-esteem are important aspects of health and well-being and all project participants interviewed reflected on the definite improvement in their confidence, with project staff and other volunteers also observing these changes in the project participants. As explained by one project participant, the direct impact of the encouragement of project staff impacted upon their attitude and well-being:

*“They (project staff) really encourage you to do courses. If it wasn’t for them I would be sitting at home, I now have things to look forward to each week.”*

- Newport project participant

Improvements in confidence were not only reported by project participants but many job coaches also reflected that their own confidence had improved as a direct result of involvement with the project. The opportunity to address the group during employability training and the development of coaching and leadership skills during mock interviews all contributed to improving confidence for some of the job coaches. For some this involved activities outside of their 'comfort zone'; acknowledging that taking part was 'a good way to test yourself and adapt to new challenges'. One job coach volunteer also observed that involvement in the project helped volunteers feel more positive 'and this has a positive impact on their work'.

### 4.1.3 Family and Friendship – support networks

***“I listen to others, and get more encouragement by talking to others, we help each other.”***  
- Project participant

Having the support of family and friends also impacts on well-being and self-worth. Support networks have developed for project participants. Women recognised that as a result of participation in the project they have many friends and keep in touch with each other outside of the drop-ins and in some cases visit each other's homes. Some highlighted that until they had taken part in the Sanctuary in Wales Project they had been alone and they felt less lonely since taking part. The women also explained that they encouraged each other to follow training courses and know if they are ever in trouble they have people they can call upon:

*“It is the people that make the place, it has been a great help meeting people I look forward to seeing them.”*

- Swansea project participant

*“Meeting different ladies, sharing experiences, it is like a home, Sharing stories, we get motivated.”*

- Cardiff project participant

Friendships also emerged between some project participants and job coaches, as they met to motivate and support the women to prepare them for work. One job coach acknowledged that they were continuing to meet as friends; 'if she wants help I would be there'.

### 4.1.4 Community inclusion

Integrating into the local community also helps asylum-seekers and refugees settle into an unfamiliar area and the Sanctuary in Wales Project has helped encourage this through occasions where sanctuary seeking women at the different centres met each other helped

women to settle. The women also met other volunteers who supported the drop-ins and the English classes. For example in Newport a link with Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations (GAVO) contributed to approximately 10 volunteers befriending project participants at one location with reports of successfully developing a level of trust between the participants and the volunteers. Project staff also observed impact on volunteers, with some increasing in confidence as the experience 'opened their eyes as to where they (the asylum-seekers/refugees) have come from'. Developing cultural and religious awareness was also an outcome of some voluntary placements, as project participants and local communities shared life experiences, supporting further inclusion within local communities.

Job coaches also recognised the impact their involvement had, as some reflected upon their motivation for becoming involved and the change in their understanding as a result. One acknowledged that his motivation to become a job coach had been a desire to 'dispel ideas I had about asylum-seekers and refugees and it has done that'. Another acknowledged:

*"The press is so negative about refugees and it wasn't the case at all, they were well qualified and wanted to work."*

- Job coach

Job coaches also disseminated their job coaching experience at their place of work, with colleagues interested in the volunteering experienced. Job coaches discussed their enthusiasm in sharing the experience with other work teams, to inspire them, and inform senior management of their involvement.

Many project participants felt they were integrated within the local community, as they were now members of different churches, accessed community centres, libraries, had expanded their circle of friends to include their children's school friends.

## **4.2 Themes related to Outcomes 3 and 4**

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### **4.2.1 Qualifications and employability / transferable skills – hours of volunteering / teaching (hard outcomes)**

Although project participants were predominantly asylum-seekers which meant they were unable to accept paid employment, the employability skills developed through their employability training and/or volunteering - such as communication, organisation and IT skills - means that project participants are now better prepared for work. Women also gained a variety of qualifications (section 3.3.1), demonstrating further employability. These



qualifications resulted in more volunteering with many women teaching English. Not only have individual English language skills improved but they share their skills by supporting others to improve. This takes place formally and informally as women facilitate classes for other women and/or asylum-seekers and refugees at their relevant centre, and also informally in the home with their families, and during conversations with other project participants during drop-in sessions and other activities. Some of the women with higher level English language skills accompany other participants on doctor, dentist and hospital visits to translate for them. In some of these instances it may have been necessary for the health provider to facilitate a translator (which is not always available) yet due to the project participants' higher level of skills this was not needed.

Women began volunteering for organisations a few hours a week, yet in many instances this increased, with some bringing higher level IT and marketing skills to their host organisation. Supporting the organisation of the drop-ins and other activities, such as preparing and cooking food, also demonstrates a valuable contribution project participants have had, building on the women's future employability potential.

*“Going out, talking to people, I have learnt communication, confidence, to be patient with people, listening skills.”*

- Newport project participant

#### **4.2.2 Barriers**

Access to and funding for childcare along with funding for courses and travel costs has been discussed at various points in this evaluation. The flexibility awarded support and development officers meant they were able to allocate the funds on an individual needs basis. Nevertheless, for some project participants the ability to attend evening courses was hindered due to the lack of childcare. The timing of delivery of some training and courses impacted those women who had children in school or nursery. Some of the project participants already possessed a high level of English language skill and there were challenges encountered in trying to facilitate higher level English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)/ IELLTS courses, as the cost is higher and provision lacking, and crèche facilities even more scarce.

Establishing volunteering opportunities to suit individual preferences takes time and for some of the project participants it was important to manage their expectations as they were impatient to take up volunteering roles. Although funds were provided to cover childcare and travel costs, in some instances the allocated budget for a participant did not last for very long

(due to higher childcare costs for those with children below school age), nevertheless funds were found to allow the continuation of the volunteering, which ultimately resulted in a job offer for one participant.

### **4.3 Themes related to project delivery**

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#### **4.3.1 Partnerships**

The delivery of the Sanctuary in Wales Project was not identical across the four delivery areas in Wales. Oxfam Cymru worked successfully in partnership with local community organisations establishing drop-ins, English classes and other activities. Project staff reflected that there had been support for each other within the Sanctuary team and that 'it has been a really good partnership'.

Effective partnership working in all areas supported the referral process for women to the project. Support and development officers met during quarterly steering group meetings and some training sessions. The Sanctuary in Wales Project continued to build on already existing groups in some areas, for example the established drop-in at Bethel Community Church.

Successful links between colleges and other providers enabled appropriate courses to be offered and delivered; for example Swansea University adapted materials for the community English teacher training course to be appropriate. Other local organisations were involved both directly - providing job coaches, taking on volunteers - or indirectly supporting the project, for example Newport Bus Company provided 12 free bus passes which enabled women to attend their college courses, volunteering and have the freedom to travel around the city other days of the week.

Although organisations welcomed volunteers from the project, in some cases the amount of support required at the beginning of the volunteering had not been anticipated, as some women needed training and significant support; this was time consuming for staff. It was acknowledged that the women became less dependent on staff members over time, as their English skills and confidence developed and they were more valued by the host organisations.

BITC supported volunteer placements providing host organisations with information if requested. Nevertheless it was important for the host to be aware of individual circumstances that may impact upon the volunteering role. For example project participants'

confidence or preference to work alongside male or female volunteers; their preference regarding inclusion in photographs or not.

#### 4.3.2 Wider benefits and impacts – to the community, to employers, to other organisations.

***“It is difficult to have a narrow-minded view when exposed to the detail of the issues.”***  
- Job coach

Wider benefits and impact of the Sanctuary in Wales Project include impact that a woman’s involvement in accessing services and opportunities has had on her children and other family members. For example, in several instances husbands and partners accessed English classes delivered at the centres by women volunteers. Family members also engaged in volunteering in the same location as the project participant. The hours of volunteering undertaken by project participants and other family members as a result of their involvement in the project benefited their communities. Many of the women volunteer beyond their expected hours of contact, supporting additional activities at their placement.

*“The women are amazing, committed, they turn up on time .... They are very valuable, the hardest workers I have ever met, on some days we would have had to close the café if we hadn’t had them here.”*

- Staff at volunteer placement

Employees engaged in the employability training and job coaching reported a positive impact on their knowledge and understanding of the situation for asylum-seekers and refugees; improving people’s knowledge regarding the difference between asylum-seeker and refugee status. Employers recognised how their involvement helps them demonstrate their corporate and social responsibility to the community. Employees also increased their confidence when they participated in workshops and mock interviews, providing them with opportunities to develop skills and bring skills back to their organisation.

*“I have thoroughly enjoyed working with everyone on the project and it is sad that it is coming to an end but the whole experience has been so uplifting for me and given me a better understanding of the difficulties they face. I hope there will be many more projects like this that I can volunteer for.”*

- Job coach

## 5. Conclusions

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The Sanctuary in Wales Project delivered a variety of opportunities for women asylum-seekers and refugees in Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham between 2012 and 2015. The following provides an overview of the final evaluation's findings in regard to expected project outcomes focussing on: women being higher skilled, better advised and ready to enter employment or education; women will be less isolated, with stronger social networks, active in local communities, able to access more services and be healthier. The project has broadly achieved its outcomes as well as targets, providing valuable opportunities for project participants. Recommendations are proposed for consideration in future projects that are developed to support women asylum-seekers and refugees in Wales.

### 5.1 Summary of findings

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This evaluation has found that the Sanctuary in Wales Project has delivered against its outcomes;

- Outcome 1:** Women will be higher skilled, and better advised of opportunities, and be ready to enter employment, education, or formal training.
- Outcome 2:** Women will get jobs and be on track to gaining qualifications.
- Outcome 3:** Women will be less isolated, have stronger social networks, and be more active in their local community.
- Outcome 4:** Women will access more services, be healthier and have higher living standards.

#### Project participants

**Women, who participated in the project are higher skilled**, and better advised of opportunities, and ready to enter employment, education, or formal training. A high number of women have improved their English language skills with 31 now trained to teach English; 140 also pursued accredited and non-accredited training/courses in a wide variety of subjects.

**Many women across Wales received employability training** and job coaching, which provided valuable experience and advice focusing on preparation for work, including mock interviews and CV guidance.

**Improvement in project participants' confidence and self-esteem** was observed by project participants themselves, staff and volunteers supporting different aspects of the Sanctuary in Wales Project.

**Voluntary work** fulfilled an important role for project participants, as 89 women volunteered with a variety of local organisations, as well as some who also volunteered with drop-ins and English classes. These opportunities resulted in many hours of volunteering in the community and also helped the women to integrate. In some instances women provided translation support for other participants during hospital or doctor visits.

**The project helped to address social isolation and improve social networks.** Although the women felt isolated on their arrival in the UK, due to a lack of friends and the language barrier, participation in the Sanctuary of Wales Project improved their situation as they gained friends and support networks. Their confidence and feelings of self-worth improved resulting in the women becoming more active in their local communities. Completing employability training also contributed to their increasing self-confidence.

**A wider circle of friends and more opportunities** to socialise also resulted in a support network and less isolation for the project participants and their families. The involvement of volunteers at drop-ins and as job coaches increased people's knowledge and understanding of the situation for asylum-seekers and refugees, at a personal level and when job coaches fed back to their colleagues.

Project activities meant **participants increased their knowledge of local services** and their local area, contributing to improved well-being for the women and their families. Following participation in project activities, women reflected on the positive impact their involvement had on their mental health and well-being.

### **Partnerships and community**

**Successful partnership delivery** existed in Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham as project staff liaised and worked with local organisations according to local requirements in providing training and volunteer opportunities. The delivery model was not the same in each area; different referral procedures to the Sanctuary in Wales Project also existed.

There were **further opportunities for the families** of the women sanctuary seekers, with children and partners improving their English language skills and in some instances other family members participated in volunteering work too.

**Wider benefits and impacts** affected local communities, employers and other organisations as a result of contact with project participants, as people's knowledge and understanding of the situation for asylum-seekers, refugees and their families improved. Job coaches also recognised the development of their own confidence and skills as they supported the project.

### Organisation of project activities

**The management of the project demonstrated flexibility** by amending the work placement element to ongoing volunteer work, employability training and job coaching to provide appropriate opportunities for women. There was also flexibility in the allocation of funding for childcare, travel and training which ensured activities were accessible for project participants and appropriate to individual needs. However, timetabling of some college courses hindered the availability of childcare during evenings. Flexibility during the day was also required as many women had young children attending school or nursery.

## 5.2 Future considerations

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### Project participants

**Continue offering opportunities to improve English language skills.** Additionally, some project participants already possessed a high level of English language skills and it is important to facilitate higher level English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses while acknowledging numbers may be limited by the higher delivery costs.

Wherever possible **courses should be accredited** as the option to achieve certificates for successful completion of courses was highly regarded by project participants and perceived as important in helping them to settle in Wales.

To continue to ensure a **personalised approach** to the delivery of support with flexibility in the allocation of funding for travel, childcare and/or training courses according to individual needs.

**1:1 support is key** in determining individual requirements and providing a safe and secure environment contributing to well-being for project participants and their families. During the project, the Home Office stopped funding its 'One Stop Shop' services of face-to-face support and advice to people seeking asylum and instead provide online and telephone advice and support services in Wales via Migrant Help. Given this change, the one-to-one

support provided by this project – both in terms of information and advice on accessing services and emotional support – has become even more valuable for project participants.

There is continued demand for the preparation for volunteering and work via **employability training and job coaching** with project participants gaining valuable experience and organisations and employees also benefiting. Whilst people seeking asylum are not eligible to work in the UK, the Welsh Government and other partners in Wales recognise that inclusion should begin on day one of arrival in the UK. Adapting the project to enable asylum-seekers to participate in employability training and skills development will better prepare participants when their asylum application is complete.

**Peer-to-peer mentoring and support** happened in informal ways during the project. For example, women with higher level English language skills accompanied women with low level English language skills to hospital appointments to support with translation. Recognition of the benefits this brings could be built more clearly into future activity.

## **Project organisation**

**The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach** could continue to provide a useful participatory method to understanding an individual's experiences and build upon their strengths. Ongoing training and sharing of practice would strengthen the approach.

**Support to cover basic costs of participation** is essential for enable women seeking sanctuary to benefit from project activities, such as volunteering and work experience. Under the current UK asylum system, people seeking asylum have extremely limited access to financial resources and are not able to work.

**Flexible childcare** is important in providing the opportunity for project participants to engage in further study and volunteering.

A more targeted enterprise aspect to employability training was identified by some participants as helpful as they would then be ready to embark into business with confidence when their status changed. Although participants acknowledged the value of the employability training, an element focusing on **enterprise training** could provide a start for those with ambitions to have their own business in the future.

There is potential to **strengthen the inclusion element** with the introduction of a 'befriending model'. Volunteers who support drop-ins and English classes could be encouraged to keep in contact with project participants as this would help create a trusting and integrated community.

**Open communications** between project staff was a key strength of this project and should be incorporated in future activities to allow for the project delivery to adapt to changing individual/group circumstances when necessary.

Volunteer host organisations could be provided with some **more information about the individual participant's circumstances** that might help them to appropriately organise the volunteering role.

**An intranet/forum style communication** could be facilitated for project staff and project participants, to support the sharing of ideas and maintain the friendships developed locally and during training sessions delivered centrally.



## **Annex 1: Methodology**

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This section outlines our approach to undertaking the study. The aim of this phase is to map out the overall context to the Sanctuary project and the range of activities being supported in centres across Wales.

### **Desk research**

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Arad undertook desk research of Oxfam documentation relating to Sanctuary and its strategic goals, and how the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach has been implemented into project design and delivery. Project activity reports and any additional monitoring data collected by Oxfam relating to the impact of the project were also provided by Oxfam to Arad. These data provided the evaluation team with a background to the project and its goals, some quantitative and qualitative data to supplement that being collected during the fieldwork stages outlined below, and a context for the final reporting stage of the project.

### **Fieldwork**

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Primary research was undertaken in each of the four dispersal areas; Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham, involving one-to-one interviews and focus groups with project participants, and interviews with Support and Development Officers from all four areas. Consultations were also carried out with service providers, employers and employee mentors/coaches involved in the project.

#### **Participant interviews/focus groups**

One-to-one interviews and focus groups with women who had accessed support through the project were undertaken at the Oasis Centre, Cardiff; Displaced People in Action and Bethel Church, Newport; the African Community Centre, Swansea and at BAWSO, Wrexham.

The focus groups and interviews were structured around a number of topics such as participants' motivations for becoming involved in the Sanctuary in Wales project; the impact

of the project on their skills, employability, aspirations and well-being; progression opportunities into further training, education or employment; support from mentors, employers and delivery partners and the wider support provided through the project. A total of 42 project participants were consulted for this evaluation:

- Newport – Eight 1:1 interviews
- Swansea – One 1:1 interview and 11 women as part of one focus group
- Cardiff – Two 1:1 interviews, 12 in two focus groups
- Wrexham – Eight as one focus group

### **Interviews with employers and service providers**

Individual interviews were conducted with service providers across the four dispersal areas in Wales. This included Oxfam Cymru, the Support and Development Officers, volunteers, Placements Officer (Business in The Community), Swansea University, employers and job coaches. These interviews focused on a number of topics such as motivations for engaging with the project and impact of involvement.