



SANCTUARY IN WALES PROJECT

FINAL EVALUATION

MAY 2015



ARIENNIR GAN Y LOTERI
LOTTERY FUNDED



OXFAM

SANCTUARY IN WALES

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 450 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)¹ 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 450 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: 75 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 ability to engage with service providers and decision makers.

Roundtable events held in Wrexham, Newport & Cardiff provided opportunities for more than 50 project participants to discuss issues with local service providers.

"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."

Project participant

"The two and a half hours goes so fast – you find yourself not thinking about your situation."

Project participant

"Going out, talking to people, I have learnt communication, confidence, to be patient with people, and listening skills"

Project participant

"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

"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

¹ 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.

OUTCOMES & 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.

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

Project output	Target	Number achieved
In or completed volunteering	69	75
Women pursuing education and training	68	140
English teachers trained	27	31
Drop-in/English class participants	360	457*
Employer participants	90	80
Community champions trained	25	45

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

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

- Women 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, at their volunteer placements.
- 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.

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

- Approximately 70 per cent of the project's participants were asylum-seekers and unable to enter paid employment. However 19 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 networks, 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.

On arrival in the UK...

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

After participating in the project....

"There's nothing holding us back, even though we can't work we can do other things."

Project participant

"Meeting different ladies, sharing experiences, it is like a home, sharing stories; we got motivated."

Project participant

"When we are stressed we come here, talking helps us feel better."

Project participant

"I have thoroughly enjoyed working with everyone [...and it's] sad that it is coming to an end but the whole experience has been so uplifting for me and has 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

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

- Networking and supporting each other resulted in women gaining confidence and knowledge about Wales and their local area.
- Many women reported that their physical and emotional health and wellbeing 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 wellbeing 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 **more information about the individual participant's circumstances** that might help them appropriately tailor 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.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

These **policy recommendations** arise from feedback from participants throughout the lifetime of the project:

- **Free public transport** for asylum-seekers and their children would ensure they are able to access local services, school and college.
- All health services in Wales **fully integrate Language Line/translation services** into local health provision.
- **Mental health support** for sanctuary seekers that need it, particularly those with experience of serious trauma, so that waiting times are reduced to a minimum.
- Improved **quality of housing** provision for asylum-seekers with accessible, confidential and responsive avenues of redress when issues arise.
- **Removal of 28 day 'move on' period** for those given leave to remain - people should only have to move out of accommodation when all paperwork and onward housing is in place.
- **People are left in the asylum process too long** - introduce a 3 year limit on decision making.
- Reinstate the **right to work for asylum-seekers**.
- Reinstate **face-to-face support for asylum-seekers** - Migrant Help telephone/online service is not sufficient.
- **Free, local and quality legal advice** should be available throughout the asylum process.
- **ESOL provision** should be extended and should always have **childcare available** to enable parents to take part.