

# Understanding Difference:

How working with refugees can help your school



This guidance illustrates how working with refugees can be linked with the curriculum, foster good relations between communities and help children understand why people seek asylum. Our work with many schools, through **Refugees into Schools**, provides an effective challenge to myths and negative stereotypes about refugees.

'Amazing to hear a story such as this first hand and to see refugees as individuals rather than a dictionary definition.'

**King Solomon High School, Redbridge**

## The benefits of involving refugees

'The children were more aware that anyone can become a refugee, people who are normal like us. They also appreciate the sadness that occurs when one has to leave everything behind.'

**Downshall Primary School, Redbridge**

Refugee visitors can support work at your school that:

- helps pupils explore issues such as identity, belonging and the diversity of communities in the UK.
- contributes to the global dimension in the curriculum and increases awareness of issues such as migration and citizenship.
- improves parental involvement and links with local communities.
- fosters positive relationships between people from different backgrounds.
- explores controversial issues and stereotypes.

'A number of our pupils are refugees and this activity raised the profile of refugees in school and enabled them to tell their own stories.'

**Northside Primary School, Barnet**

'I learned that leaving your country can change your life completely.'

**Year 6 pupil, Pakeman Primary School, Islington**

99% of pupils who met a refugee volunteer from **Refugees into Schools** said that it helped them to understand why people have to leave their countries and become refugees.



**Refugees into Schools** supports refugees to visit over 1,500 pupils in London per year, sharing their experiences to help pupils understand conflict, human rights issues and why people are forced to leave their countries. Volunteers challenge myths and stereotypes and give children the chance to talk to someone who has first hand experience of seeking asylum. Volunteers who take part learn more about the education system and gain valuable skills and experience. Refugees into Schools is managed by the Employability Forum.



## What do you want to achieve?

The starting point is to consider the needs of your pupils and what new knowledge, skills and understanding you would like them to develop. Some questions to consider are:

- what are pupils' current perceptions of refugees and asylum seekers?
- what outcomes or changes are you aiming for?
- which pupils and classes will take part?
- how will the project link with other initiatives to promote parental involvement and community cohesion?
- what might be the benefits for refugees you hope to involve?



'The experience I gained from this project raised my confidence and encouraged me to apply to work as a teaching assistant.'

**Bosnian secondary school teacher and Refugees into Schools volunteer**

### Did you know?

Learning about human rights and responsibilities can reduce bullying and conflict, and improve relationships between pupils and teachers. This was highlighted in the evaluation of UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools Award, [www.unicef.org.uk/Education/Rights-Respecting-Schools-Award](http://www.unicef.org.uk/Education/Rights-Respecting-Schools-Award)

'I have learned the risks and responsibilities people take to be an activist on human rights and how some people suffer in silence.'

**Year 9 pupil from Eastlea Community School, Newham**



'I found it very interesting and now I probably know more than my parents!'

**Year 6 pupil, Scotts Park Primary School, Bromley.**

## Understanding your local community

Refugee communities are very diverse with mobile and changing populations. Refugees come from different countries and have varying experiences of exile and settlement in the UK. You should consider:

- how your local community has changed.
- who the main groups of refugee and asylum seeking pupils are in your school.
- what groups of refugees are present in your local community.
- whether there are any links already with refugee communities.
- how effective are current initiatives to involve refugee parents and local communities.

### **Refugees have a wide variety of skills and experience. Refugees into Schools volunteers have included:**

An Iranian music teacher who taught in primary and secondary schools and worked to promote human rights in his country. He visited schools in Newham, Lewisham and Ealing, and spoke with over 130 pupils between November 2010 and January 2011. He has applied for a PGCE course and would also like to complete a PhD in Music.

A Sudanese human rights worker, who has supported refugees who fled to Sudan from conflict in other African countries. She visited schools in Haringey, Lewisham and Havering and spoken to over 180 pupils about her experiences.

A biology teacher from Somalia, who volunteers as an adviser, providing support to other refugees in his community. He has visited two schools in Brent and Richmond and spoke with over 71 pupils.

*'I would like to say that I also come from Somalia. I know how difficult the journey has been to settle into London with memories of family.'*

**Year 5 pupil, Tollgate Primary School, Newham**

*'My father has had an experience like this.'*

**Year 10 pupil, Deptford Green School, Lewisham**

### **Refugee community organisations (RCOs)**

RCOs are voluntary organisations that play an important role in supporting refugee communities. They provide a range of services including information, advice, social activities and education programmes. Some RCOs are well established and may have full and part-time staff: others may rely on volunteers and be less well resourced.

*'Eltham is not as multicultural as some areas of the borough and it was beneficial in my class to broaden their understanding of cultural diversity, as well as refugee status.'*

**Gordon Primary School, Greenwich**



## Linking with the curriculum

As a result of participation in **Refugees into Schools**, 97% of schools said they plan to further embed work on refugees in the curriculum.

Through **Refugees into Schools** we have found that refugee contributions are much more effective if they are linked to the curriculum. There are opportunities to learn about refugees in many subjects including:

**ART:** The theme of exile can be studied. Many well-known artists were refugees.



'Our Year 6 pupils really enjoyed the visit from a refugee volunteer from Ethiopia. We linked the visit to our curriculum project based on the novel *Refugee Boy* by Benjamin Zephaniah, the story of Alem, a boy from Ethiopia who seeks asylum in Britain. We also connected the visit to work going on in the school for Refugee Week. The visit really helped develop the children's knowledge of Ethiopia, their understanding of the book and what it is like to be a refugee.'

**Woodberry Down Community Primary School,  
Hackney**

### Refugee Week

Refugee Week is a UK-wide programme of arts, cultural and educational events that celebrate the contribution of refugees to the UK, and encourages a better understanding between communities.

[www.refugeeweek.org.uk](http://www.refugeeweek.org.uk)

**GEOGRAPHY:** Issues such as population movements and migration can link to learning about refugees.

**HISTORY:** Refugee movements are associated with many historical events, including both World Wars and recent events in the Middle East.

**LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE:** A number of fiction texts are about refugee children.

**PSHE AND CITIZENSHIP:** Pupils can learn about the diversity of the UK and refugee contributions to our society.



Refugees and schools taking part in **Refugees into Schools** use a range of approaches in the classroom including:

- PowerPoint presentations.
- Artefacts and objects.
- Interviews and discussion.

'Through **Refugees into Schools** I took part in citizenship lessons and talked to over 100 Year 10 pupils about my experience as a refugee. I brought the actual bag I carried when I fled my country with various objects including a Zimbabwean flag, family photos, a newspaper and typical foods. The objects led to a lot of questions and discussion which really helped the students learn about Zimbabwean refugees.'

**MDC activist in Zimbabwe and Refugees into Schools volunteer**

## Promoting equality and community cohesion

The Equality Act 2010 streamlines the existing race, gender and disability duties into a single framework of discrimination law. From April 2011 all schools are bound by the public sector equality duty which requires public bodies to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation.
- advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups.
- foster good relations between people from different groups.

The duty also explains that fostering good relations involves 'the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding'.

**Refugees into Schools** supports schools to meet the new equality duty and fits well with initiatives to promote community cohesion. Talking with refugees and hearing their first hand experiences of the impact of conflict and persecution can help pupils value and appreciate the diversity of local communities.

## Steps to a successful visit

Involving refugees in a successful learning project needs careful planning at all stages. The following are some of the key areas to consider:

- **Identify support needed.** Liaise with a local refugee community and consider how you can support a refugee visitor to share their experiences with pupils. It is also helpful to discuss what they might feel uncomfortable with.
- **Provide an introduction to the school.** It is helpful to introduce the visitor to the headteacher before the presentation and organise a tour of the school as some refugee visitors might initially be quite nervous.
- **Hold a planning meeting** with relevant class or subject teachers where you agree:
  - roles and responsibilities
  - what equipment is needed, especially if the refugee is going to use PowerPoint.
  - what outcomes you want to achieve from the visit.
- **Prepare pupils for the visit.** Introduce the concept of 'refugees' and explain what will happen during the visit.

- **Plan follow-up activities.** Consider what further learning pupils can engage in after the visit to extend and deepen understanding and also how to maintain links with the local refugee community.
- **Evaluation.** Pupils can complete a short evaluation of what they have learnt so you can identify learning gained and other positive outcomes.
- **Dissemination.** Displays and assemblies can share learning with other pupils, staff and parents.

'I learnt how many risks there are in moving country and how hard it is to settle in another country.'

**Year 6 pupil, Tudor Primary School, Barnet**

## Support for refugees

'A major part of my role as a mentor with **Refugees into Schools** is supporting refugees to become more familiar with teaching approaches in English schools. It is important to build up trust and help the refugee volunteer to feel more confident about sharing their experience in an appropriate way for pupils to understand. Supporting the development of their presentation and allowing time to practise can ensure a successful visit.'

## Mentor with Refugees into Schools



## Practical issues

There may be a number of issues where refugees need support. These include:

- **Childcare.** Some refugee parents may need help with finding childcare for young children.
- **Travel.** Helping with travel expenses can assist refugees to take part in activities. It is also helpful to provide directions and travel information.
- **Refreshments and lunch.** You can further welcome a refugee visitor by making sure they are provided with refreshments and lunch if appropriate.
- **Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks.** Refugees can apply for CRB checks if necessary. Current guidance from the CRB states that only staff with regular, substantial and unsupervised contact with young persons should be checked. New proposals from the government, which will become law in 2012, will mean many volunteers in schools will no longer need to apply for a CRB check. More guidance is available on the CRB website: [www.crb.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.crb.homeoffice.gov.uk)



'A lot of what they hear and see on TV about countries such as Iraq is about war and negative things. It was good for them to see positive things and to see what school in Iraq is like.'

**Central Foundation Girls School, Tower Hamlets**

London Councils is committed to fighting for more resources for London and getting the best possible deal for London's 33 councils. London Councils has a website about its grants service. To read about our grants funding and the work we support please visit [www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/grants](http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/grants)

## Training and guidance

**Refugees into Schools** provides tailored training to refugee community organisations (RCOs) in order to improve their engagement with their local schools. Guidance documents are also available on how RCOs can approach schools, develop partnerships and work together to broaden children and young peoples' understanding of refugees in their local community.



'We are constantly looking for ways to expand our children's awareness and understanding of the people who live and work in our local community. **Refugees into Schools** provided such an opportunity for the Year 6 pupils at Eliot Bank School. In a lively and thought provoking session a recent refugee from Iran talked to the pupils about his experiences which enabled children to understand more about the impact of conflict and persecution. We are trying to arrange for other refugees involved in this programme to visit more West C Collaborative schools.'

**Eliot Bank Primary School, Lewisham**

## Need more advice?

For more information or to learn more about **Refugees into Schools** please contact:

### **Employability Forum**

Website: [www.employabilityforum.co.uk](http://www.employabilityforum.co.uk)

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