

# CO-PRODUCTION CASE STUDY

Co-Design of the UK Asylum Process Course, Glasgow.

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## The project:



People seeking asylum in the UK must navigate a strictly controlled and complex system which leaves many people feeling isolated, confused and anxious. The British Red Cross in Glasgow will be delivering a series of workshops for newly arrived people seeking asylum. These workshops will give people information about the asylum process, including preparing for their main asylum interview, disclosing personal information and accessing support. It is hoped that the workshops will enable people to feel more like participants in the asylum process.

People with lived experience of the asylum process are the experts on what it is like to navigate this complex process. They are best placed to suggest what information can help people and how this should be conveyed. By designing the course content, delivery and structure as equal partners with staff, their lived experience can ensure the relevance and accessibility of the course to newly arrived people seeking asylum.

## Why we involved people - expected benefits:

The co-production workshop stemmed from the AVAIL Project which is a trans-national refugee integration project, running in the UK, Latvia, Italy and Ireland. The project is founded on the principles of co-production and works in partnership with refugees and people seeking asylum to: change minds (through engaging with the media), change policy (through advocacy work) and change practice (through influencing BRC ways of working). The UK components of the AVAIL Project are life skills courses in Wales, refugee-led language classes and the Voices Network. The Voices Network is gaining momentum and this workshop was a great opportunity to show what we can achieve when we engage people with lived experience as equal partners. It was a space for people to find and amplify their voices through fictional characters, journey mapping and by creating a safe and open discussion space.



## How were people recruited?

Before the workshop we had three Scottish Voices Ambassadors (we now have nine!) who kindly translated the flyer into Arabic and worked with us to make it more visual and accessible. We put our co-produced flyer up in the BRC office and the Voices Ambassadors distributed it amongst their Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs). The Ambassadors suggested that we be transparent about what people can gain from volunteering their time and unpaid labour – this included lunch, travel expenses being reimbursed, participants roles as 'Programme Designers' being recognised with certificates, finding out about opportunities and training with the Voices Network, and meeting new people.

## How people were involved and influenced the process:

### Introducing Fictional Characters

- **Objective:** To discuss how different aspects of identity (gender, sexuality, disability, age, race etc.) can impact how a person experiences the asylum process.



young girl

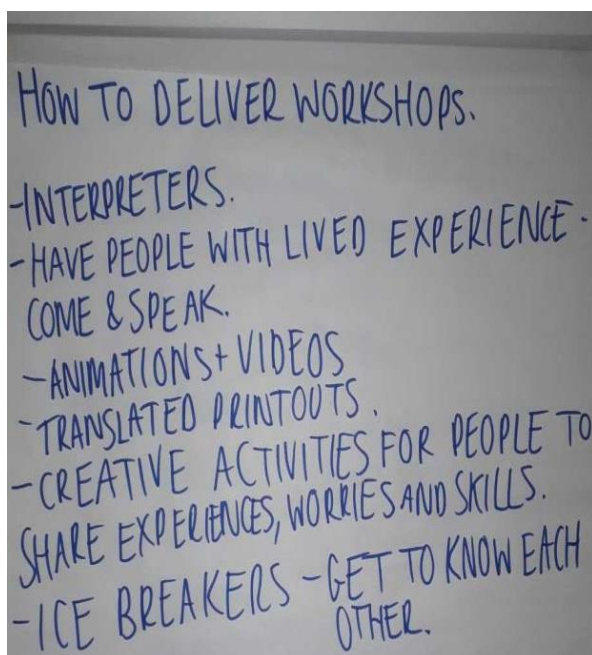
A single mother

A destitute man

A disabled man

The co-design workshop lasted six hours and we developed fictional characters to explore how different identities experience the asylum process in different ways. Each participant then created a journey map to visualise their characters journey, including their positive and negative experiences and emotions. This helped us to understand things from the characters perspective and identify which services or support interventions could be useful. Participants presented their journey maps to the larger group, identifying key stages where the character would benefit from

information and support from the BRC. We brainstormed on 'course content' cards on the wall all our ideas before grouping them into themes and reordering them. We also had a discussion on how best to deliver this information.



## Support and preparation provided

Steps taken to support everyone to meaningfully participate:

- Briefings – I contacted each participant before the workshop and where possible met them to have a chat about the aim of the workshop. I also wanted to make clear that participants could share however much or little they desired.
- Stop/Speak cards – Each participant was given a ‘Stop’ card to use if they would like something to be clarified and a ‘Speak’ card to signal that they would like to join the discussion.
- Fictional characters – These were designed to depersonalise the discussion particularly around sensitive issues like detention, as well as to consider different identities.
- Take breaks – I made it clear throughout that if participants wanted to step outside or take a break they could.
- Visual props – These pictures were to help people identify emotions (with sad, happy, confused, angry faces), actors (The Home Office, Migrant Help, BRC, family, friends) and stages of the asylum process (screening interview, reporting, detention, asylum interview, decision, appeals) for their journey maps. These were particularly popular with participants who voiced concerns over their written English and those who had a more historical experience of the asylum process.
- Photography – I refrained from taking photographs until the end of the workshop, once participants had the choice to individually consent (at their own discretion) to their photographs being taken and used.
- Debriefings – I gave each participant my contact details and encouraged them to get in touch with any question, concerns or to express interest in upcoming Voices opportunities.

## Key insights

Useful insights generated include:



- Language – The main barrier to understanding the asylum process was identified as language. We decided to co-produce a translated glossary of terms commonly used in Home Office letters e.g. accommodation, appointment, claim, support and refusal, as well as times, days and months.

- Social Isolation – Participants spoke intimately of social isolation and loneliness during their experiences of the asylum process. Participants suggested that we put together a pack containing: free activities around Glasgow, maps of key places, contact details for community groups e.g. The Sudanese Community Organisation. Participants also suggested that they could speak during an asylum process workshop in

their roles as Voices Ambassadors about mental health and practical things you can do to look after yourself.

- Gender – Participants spoke of a reluctance of women to voice their concerns in male-dominated spaces and suggested that a female only space would be useful to explore the gendered experience of the asylum process e.g. disclosing gender-based violence or having your children present in your asylum interview.

## Challenges:

- A Lack of Female, Disabled and Sexual Minority Identities – The workshop was attended exclusively by men, an imbalance which also prevails in the Voices Network. I am in the process of opening a dialogue and building relationships with local groups of women so that in the future this can be avoided. I was able to include information resources co-produced by the Refugee Women's Strategy Group (RWSG) and the Scottish Refugee Council which started a discussion around the gendered experience of the process. These resources will be used in the asylum process workshops alongside a co-

**IT WAS SUCH A GREAT DAY TO PARTICIPATE IN A WORKSHOP TO MAKE THE ASYLUM PROCESS EASIER FOR PEOPLE WHO WILL PASS THROUGH THIS PROCESS AFTER I DID. THERE IS NO FEELING NICER THAN WHEN YOU FEEL YOU HAVE HELPED SOMEONE ELSE. I HOPE EVERYONE WHO WILL COME AFTER ME WILL NOT FIND SO MANY DIFFICULTIES.**

Workshop Participant and Voices Ambassador

produced video 'From Us to You', by Protection Gap Advocates for women. The experiences of disabled individuals and sexual minorities were absent from the discussion, however there will be specialist support and information available in the final workshops.

- Friday Prayers – During the planning of the workshop, many participants said they would not be able to attend due to Friday prayers in the Mosque. We were able to take a one-hour break to ensure everyone could both attend the workshop and go to pray. I also let everyone know that we have a small room and mat available for prayers in the building.

## Key learnings:

A learning culture around co-production will help BRC teams feel more confident to build co-production approaches into our work, so in the spirit of learning and reflection, we also identified things we would do differently next time. We would:

- Keep referring to the scope of influence – At points, the discussion meandered into the failings of the asylum process itself (e.g. routine use of detention, long waiting periods) rather than where and how information could benefit people seeking asylum. It would be useful to produce our scope of influence together at the beginning and have it up on the wall for reference throughout the day. We did identify 'fixed elements' of the asylum process workshops e.g. location will be BRC and it will be for people early in the process. As well as, 'elements to be explored' e.g. content of workshops, how many workshops, how the workshops will be delivered, how the workshops will be ordered.
- Enforce mechanisms for equal participation – As the workshop progressed everyone wanted to contribute more, and some voices dominated. Towards the end of the day I implemented a small soft ball which participants had to be holding to speak. I would also keep closer note of who is next to speak.