



SUPPORTING AND  
EMPOWERING  
REFUGEES

# A delivery plan for refugee involvement at the Refugee Council 2022-2025

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# 1. Introduction

## Defining refugee involvement

Involving refugees in the work of the Refugee Council means that the work is done with or *by* refugees, rather than being done *to* or *for* them. It means that refugees work in partnership with staff in all parts of the organisation, to shape and influence decision-making at all levels, from strategic management through to frontline service delivery. The knowledge and lived experience of refugees is valued and respected, and combined with staff expertise to make well-informed decisions. Staff and involved refugees share power and responsibility for the decisions that are made.

Taking a whole organisation approach to involvement will ensure that refugees can influence the decisions that affect their lives. It will give the Refugee Council legitimacy and authority in its work and ensure its services genuinely benefit the people who use them. In practical terms, refugee involvement will help staff to make better decisions. By sharing their knowledge and experience of refugee protection, involved refugees can challenge staff assumptions, offer new ideas, anticipate problems and find solutions. This will ultimately give staff greater confidence and motivation in all the work they do.

Staff expertise refers to the knowledge and experience gained through work and training. Staff with refugee experience will have this knowledge as well as their lived experience. However, employing refugees is not involvement (Appendix 2). Work to support the recruitment and career development of refugee staff is important but separate to this work to further develop refugee involvement.

## Background to involvement at the Refugee Council

The Refugee Council have always been committed to involving refugees in their work but became increasingly aware that a more consistent, ambitious, organisation-wide approach would greatly benefit their service users and would bring the organisation more in line with their stated values and aspirations. The Senior Management Team therefore recruited a Participation Project Worker to conduct a map of the work around service user participation across the organisation, identifying existing pockets of good practice, gaps and learning, and consulting with external stakeholders and staff, volunteers and service users at the Refugee Council in order to gather information and to put forward recommendations and reflections.

The Internal Participation Review identified several case studies of good involvement in different departments, but that the approaches used were limited and not unified across the organisation. The main recommendations were to:

- Create an organisational definition and vision for refugee involvement
- Consider hiring a full-time staff member responsible for supporting involvement
- Develop guidelines and best practice for involvement
- Develop relevant training for staff and refugees to feel confident in working together
- Create a policy on compensation for involvement
- Ensure opportunities for participation are considered at the beginning of a project cycle and are well communicated to clients
- Improved knowledge exchange across different services

This delivery plan aims to develop these recommendations.

## **Where this delivery plan came from**

A Refugee Involvement Strategy (please see separate document) has been developed for the Refugee Council by staff and refugees with advice and guidance from consultants from TwoCan Associates<sup>1</sup>. A wide range of staff were consulted about what they would need to be able to implement the strategy. The findings have been used to write this delivery plan. A Lived Experience Enabling Group (LEEG) made up of Refugee Council staff, including staff from refugee backgrounds, has been involved throughout co-producing the final outputs. They will be involved in communicating and championing the plans with the rest of the organisation and with the refugee community. TwoCan are specialists in the involvement of people with lived experience in voluntary and statutory sector organisations.

## **Overview**

The consultation with staff about the Involvement Strategy revealed a great deal of enthusiasm and commitment to involving refugees. Some already have the skills required for this work including high level communication and relationship building skills. However, applying these skills to involvement has so far been limited by both a lack of capacity and clarity about the exact purpose of involvement. Many are unclear about what involvement is and how it differs from their current work with refugees. They lack resources and training as well as having competing demands on their time.

Discussions with refugees who had used the Refugee Council's services showed that involvement is a new idea for many. They will also need training and support to learn this new way of working with the organisation. Their initial interest is more often on how they can use their experience to directly support their peers, which may be a useful place to start.

The Refugee Council and the communities it supports are therefore mostly at the start of their journey with involvement. Learning to do involvement is similar to any process of culture change. It will be a slow process that takes some years. Staff and refugees will need to learn a new language and a new set of beliefs, skills and attitudes. They will need to share and learn from their successes and failures to evolve their practice over time. Ultimately, the goal is for involvement to become '*just how work gets done here*', rather than seeming

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<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.twocanassociates.co.uk/about/>

like extra work.

There is 'no one size fits all' solution to implement an involvement strategy. Each organisational context is unique. Toolkits and guidance alone are not enough to help staff to know what to do and how to do it. Therefore this delivery plan emphasises **learning through doing**, and sharing that learning across the organisation. This will help to create a supportive culture and the change in mind-set and behaviour necessary for refugee involvement to be meaningful, and not tokenistic. The overall goal is to ensure staff and refugees feel motivated, confident and supported to build a strong foundation from which to develop the Refugee Council's own approach to involvement.

## 2. The strategic goals for refugee involvement

### The Refugee Council Strategy 2021-2025

Working with people with lived experience is one of the key enablers of the organisation-wide strategy for 2021-2025 which states:

***We will ensure people with lived experience of refugee protection are at the heart of what we do by developing a whole organisation approach to their engagement and involvement in our work. We will:***

*a) **co-design solutions** with people with lived experience, alongside refugee community organisations and partners.*

*b) develop pathways for staff and volunteers with lived experience to support their **career progression and development**.*

*c) take immediate action on **equality, diversity and inclusion** to demonstrate to all of our audiences how we are achieving equality and inclusion as well as ensuring people with lived experience have an equal voice.*

### The Refugee Council's Refugee Involvement strategy 2022-2025

To develop a whole organisation approach to involvement, the involvement strategy has the following six key aims. These are interlinked and some progress on all of them is required to enhance and improve refugee involvement over the next three years.

**Aim 1:** To be clear about the purpose each time refugees are involved, so staff know where this needs to happen, how this will bring added value to their work, and how it is helping to achieve the Refugee Council's broader strategic goals.

**Aim 2:** To increase the scope for refugees to influence decisions at all levels and in all parts of the Refugee Council.

**Aim 3:** To encourage and enable staff at all levels across the Refugee Council to expand and

improve their practice of *involvement* and to work with a diverse group of people with relevant lived experience.

**Aim 4:** To encourage and enable refugees to become effective partners in the work of the Refugee Council.

**Aim 5:** To allocate resources and develop robust systems and processes for governance and leadership which can support co-ordinated, efficient and successful refugee involvement.

**Aim 6:** To develop the organisational culture and working practices that support meaningful and effective refugee involvement across the organisation.

### 3. The outline delivery plan

Implementing an involvement strategy is multi-layered and needs to be staged. The delivery plan therefore has three phases as described in outline below:

#### 1. Building the foundation – Year 1

- establishing leadership for involvement
- raising awareness of what involvement is and is not
- developing systems and policies, including identifying budgets and other resources

#### 2. Developing expertise – Year 2-3

- 2- 4 Pioneer Projects: pieces of involvement work which are important to the Refugee Council and which can be used to identify and share the ‘learning from doing’
- a community of practice for involvement is supported to share learning
- systems and policies are tested and refined
- experienced involvement mentors are created to support future involvement

#### 3. Review and next steps – End of Year 3

- a formal review evaluates the involvement to date and reflects on lessons learnt
- priorities for the next phase of involvement are agreed

**Ongoing monitoring and evaluation:** all phases need to be designed to capture learning and impact on an ongoing basis. Learning and successes are shared internally and externally on a routine basis through existing internal and external communication channels.

## 4. Key principles underpinning the delivery plan

The following principles will need to underpin all aspects of this delivery plan:

**Creating a culture that supports meaningful refugee involvement and avoids tokenism** - this will require:

- a shift from seeing refugees as people in need to seeing them as people with knowledge and experience that can help staff
- a willingness to share power
- confidence to be influenced by diverse views and opinions
- capacity and expertise to build trusting and respectful working relationships with diverse partners

**Taking time to build a strong foundation** - this will require:

- allowing staff time to develop the confidence and experience to work with refugees in a meaningful way
- recognising that people are at different places in terms of their understanding and skills and may need tailored training and support
- taking small first steps where there is a more obvious immediate benefit to involvement and enthusiasm to learn
- focusing on learning and understanding rather than rushing and risking tokenism

**Building the capacity of refugees to be involved** - this will require:

- enabling refugees to move beyond sharing their story
- providing emotional support as required
- providing training to explain how their knowledge and experience is of value to the work of the organisation
- exploring different ways to reward involvement for different people
- adopting flexible approaches to involvement that are inclusive and ensure staff 'meet people where they are at'

**Making refugee involvement integral to how people work** - this will require:

- keeping it 'ordinary'
- keeping it connected to the organisation's priorities going forward
- ensuring involvement is everybody's responsibility - senior managers to model involvement in their own work and provide leadership for others, as well as holding other staff accountable for it
- the Chief Executive and Trustees looking for opportunities to involve refugees meaningfully themselves

**Keeping refugee involvement visible** - this will require:

- sharing success stories widely across the organisation and with the refugee community
- recognising and rewarding staff and refugees for their efforts, motivating and encouraging others
- ensuring refugees can be seen to be working alongside staff across the organisation, and involvement is visible in all internal and external communications.

## 5. Overview of activity & timeline

Activity	Months 1-6						Months 7-12						Months 13-18						Months 19-24						Months 25-30						Months 31-36					
<b>Phase 1: Foundation Work</b>																																				
1. Create senior management role	█	█	█																																	
2. Raise awareness & brief all				█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
3. Develop policies & systems				█	█	█	█	█	█																											
4. Start to plan Pioneer Projects										█	█	█																								
5. Review learning to date										█	█	█																								
<b>Phase 2: Pioneer Projects</b>																																				
1. Select Pioneer Projects										█	█	█																								
2. Train staff on projects										█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█													
3. Recruit & train refugees for projects										█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█													
4. Support learning through projects													█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█													
5. Test policies & systems													█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█													
6. Profile this work and share learning													█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█													
<b>Phase 3: Review and next steps</b>																																				
1. Formal review and reflection																														█	█	█	█	█	█	
2. Refine policies & systems																														█	█	█	█	█	█	
2. Agree priorities for next 3 years																														█	█	█	█	█	█	
3. Profile this work and share learning																														█	█	█	█	█	█	



## 6. Advice and guidance to support the delivery plan

This section discusses each phase of the delivery plan and makes recommendations about how to carry out some of the key tasks. We highlight issues to consider and suggest ideas which will support implementation. We hope this advice and guidance provides a starting point to refer to when each phase of the work begins.

### **Phase 1: Building the Foundation: Year 1**

The main goals are to:

1. establish leadership for involvement
2. raise awareness of what involvement is and how it differs from current ways of working
3. develop systems and policies to support the next phase

These are likely to be overlapping over time, and represent the starting point for work that continues in subsequent phases.

### **Key tasks**

#### **1. Creating a senior manager role to lead the development of refugee involvement**

Given the complexity of involvement within the Refugee Council, the purpose of this senior role is to:

- provide internal consultancy, a dedicated source of expertise to support others with refugee involvement (they do not do the involvement on others' behalf) – they will support staff who have already involved refugees and are continuing to do so, in order to improve their practice, in addition to leading the programme of work around foundation building and pioneer projects
- work across all levels of the organisation to support ongoing learning and practice development and to share collective learning more widely
- hold other managers to account for developing their own involvement practice, as well as that of their departments, including committing the resources necessary to deliver involvement projects
- ensure the development of refugee involvement is closely linked and supportive of the wider strategic priorities
- be accountable for the delivery of the refugee involvement strategy with regular reporting on progress on meeting the objectives e.g. through an annual review

They will need skills and experience of:

- a) **developing and supporting involvement in the voluntary sector**, and preferably experience of involving seldom heard groups. They will be able to advise staff on when to involve refugees, who to involve and why, how to do it and how to evaluate it.
- b) **supporting and enabling others to develop their skills and practice**. They will lead and support a community of practice and provide basic training/ briefing to all staff and refugees.
- c) **project management**. They will help plan and support the Pioneer Projects, set budgets for involvement, and develop job descriptions for staff.
- d) **best practice in involvement**. They will support the development of new policies and systems for involvement that are tailored to the specific needs of the Refugee Council.
- e) **leadership and influencing skills**. They will need to be able to communicate and engage staff at all levels in the organisation, involved refugees and other organisations in the sector.

We recommend this person joins the group of Involvement Leads in refugee organisations as a source of information, shared resources, learning and support. Members of the LEEG will offer a source of knowledge and support for the Involvement Lead holding the memory of all the development work to date as well as enabling next steps.

## **2. Raising awareness amongst staff about refugee involvement and the new strategy**

The aim is to brief everyone across the organisation about refugee involvement by sharing the newly agreed definition and involvement strategy. It will also be important to explain what involvement is and what it is not. (It is not conducting surveys or focus groups, asking refugees to share their story, or employing staff or recruiting volunteers who are refugees – see Appendix 2). Involvement also needs to be understood within the wider context of inclusion of people with diverse experiences as a refugee.

This awareness raising will help all staff to learn to use the new language, in particular to be clear involvement is not engagement or participation or simple feedback on services – see Appendix 2. All staff will then understand the value of involvement and its benefits, even if they are not directly involved in its delivery. Senior managers, the Chief Executive and Trustees need to be seen to be championing this work.

This work is likely to be led by the Refugee Involvement Lead working with the HR Lead to incorporate these briefing sessions into staff training and inductions.

The Involvement Strategy and Delivery Plan documents need to be publicly available e.g. on the Refugee Council website with endorsements from the Chief Executive and Trustees. More informally, news items about involvement activity need to be regularly included in internal communications e.g. the staff newsletter, intranet (when established).

### **3. Developing systems and policies in preparation for Pioneer Projects**

The basic systems and policies needed at the start of involvement include:

- establishing a database of potential people to involve
- a recruitment policy
- a payment/ reward policy
- a feedback policy

The Refugee Involvement Lead will lead on this work. Some of this policy development may provide early opportunities for conversations with refugees about their wishes and needs.

They can also draw on examples from other refugee organisations and work closely with staff and refugees to finalise drafts ready for testing in the next phase.

#### **Establishing a database of people to involve**

The Refugee Council already has good working relationships with many individual refugees and groups which could provide an ideal place to start recruiting people and developing these policies. This will require:

- reviewing the existing membership and function of the Refugee Advisory Group and exploring the potential for their involvement in this phase and later stages
- starting to map existing links with refugee communities in different parts of the organisation, and in different regions via external partners and organisations
- creating a database of people with lived experience as well as contacts who might help with recruitment of people from different communities

In developing these resources it will be important to pay attention to inclusion, to ensure that the people who are involved are not only the 'usual suspects' i.e. the people who already speak English and have capacity to be involved. It will be important to ensure diversity of experience amongst involved refugees as well as ensuring people with the most relevant experience are recruited. For example, a project at the Refugee Council led to the development of services for Arabic women through the direct involvement of Arabic women. It was only these women who had the knowledge and experience of the specific barriers to their participation and therefore knew how these barriers might be overcome to enable their peers to use the service. In most contexts, it is the people with direct experience of the issue in hand who have the most relevant knowledge to contribute.

#### **Recruiting people for involvement**

Recruitment adverts for involvement opportunities typically include a clear explanation of what the involvement means for the person involved, what skills and experience they might need for their role, the time commitment required and details of payment and expenses policies. They are often posted online, emailed or published in newsletter or newspapers. Such approaches may need to be adapted to engage refugees, who may need a more personal approach and contact through networks and community members.

The selection of individuals from a list of potential candidates may require different levels of formality depending on the responsibility and commitment involved. These processes will also need to be adapted to reflect the capacity (language, availability etc) of refugees. For example, recruiting to a strategic long-term role may include a formal interview process, whereas a more flexible and nimble approach, e.g. a simple phone call, may be enough for a short-term and limited role. Feedback should be given to people who offer to be involved but aren't selected. A recruitment policy needs to help staff know what processes to follow in different contexts.

### **Paying people for involvement**

Expenses reimbursement can be straightforward and follow an organisation's existing policies for volunteers or staff. Policies around payment for people's time or other kinds of reward for involvement are more challenging. Different organisations take very different approaches and the Refugee Council will need to develop an approach tailored to its context.

Some involved refugees may wish to be paid. However, being paid might not help everyone, for example if there are impacts on state benefits. Some people might need payment in kind, e.g. payment for childcare, to enable them to attend meetings. Others might prefer to be rewarded in ways that enable them to develop skills relevant to future employment and/or career progression. This might involve formal training, but often people will acquire soft skills (e.g. improved confidence) through their experience of being involved. This can be part of the early discussions with refugees who wish to be involved and the Refugee Council may need to be able to offer different rewards different people.

### **Feedback policies**

One of the main motivations for people with lived experience getting involved is to improve the quality of life for the people who come after them. An essential part of involvement is therefore to inform people what difference their involvement has made and where relevant, how this has improved services or the support given to refugees. This feedback is an essential part of involvement and provides motivation and encouragement to continue.

### **Specific issues for involving people who are seldom heard**

- **Support to become involvement ready:** the Refugee Council is working with and supporting some of the most marginalised and traumatised people in society who may be seldom heard for several reasons including: a lack of resources, unstable living conditions, being unable to speak English, experiencing mental health problems or being culturally unfamiliar with 'having a voice' to influence organisations. For these reasons, the Refugee Council will need to invest time and resources in enabling and encouraging refugees to become 'involvement ready'. This is likely to require different kinds of input for different individuals and in different contexts. People who are some years past their refugee experience may need simple training to be involvement ready. When the input of people with particular experience is required for example, people who do not speak English and are still in trauma, then much more initial support and resource may be required to enable these people to contribute.
- **Being flexible about different types of involvement** - sometimes it may be appropriate to involve people who are settled and some years past their refugee experience, who can speak English fluently and have the confidence to be leaders and challenge people in power. Sometimes it may be more appropriate to ask less of the people involved, for them to take a limited role, answering questions or sharing knowledge and experience in simple ways. The approach will need to be adapted to suit the context and level of decision-making that is being influenced. A range of approaches may be needed each time to ensure a diversity of refugee experience is heard and understood.
- **Training and briefing** - will be important to prepare refugees for their involvement role (see below in Phase 2). Over time, individuals will progress through their 'involvement career' acquiring the skills and experience that will allow them to take on greater responsibilities when they feel confident and able.

Staff in the Refugee Council are already skilled and experienced in working with refugees in different ways (for example working with interpreters and accessing refugees through community leaders). Such approaches may be transferable to involvement practice. Based on our experience of other projects involving people who are seldom heard we also recommend that as standard practice:

- Time is allowed for refugees to tell their story and to feel seen and heard – either as a separate meeting before work begins or as part of each meeting to allow people to 'offload' before engaging with the work at hand
- Emotional support is provided – this could be from trained professionals or peer support workers, who might be present at meetings or offer support separately. All staff will need to feel confident to provide a basic level of emotional support.
- Time is allowed for socialising and networking amongst involved refugees e.g. through organising meals/ drinks before or after meetings. This may also ensure peer to peer support develops organically through involvement.

- Involvement is resourced at an appropriate level to include people who are seldom heard e.g. people with disabilities may need a taxi rather than using public transport and this may need to be booked and pre-paid by the organisation, rather than reimbursing the person afterwards.

## **Phase 2: Developing expertise through Pioneer Projects: Years 1-2**

The main goal for this phase is to run 2 - 4 pioneer refugee involvement projects from different parts of the organisation. The aim of the projects is to create opportunities for:

- developing the skills and experience of all staff and refugees working on the projects
- testing and refining the Refugee Council's policies and practice
- evaluating the impact of involvement creating refugee involvement mentors as a future source of advice and expertise
- strengthening the leadership for refugee involvement

Although the Pioneer Projects may start at around the same time, they are likely to take different lengths of time to complete and therefore much of this work may be overlapping.

The programme of work will involve:

### **1. Selecting Pioneer Projects**

We recommend these projects are selected using the following criteria:

- they relate to implementing the new strategic priorities
- there is great potential for added-value from refugee involvement
- staff involved are enthusiastic and feel confident and safe to act
- refugees with relevant lived experience can be easily recruited and supported to be involved
- there is the potential for quick wins
- there is highly useful learning to gain for involvement practice e.g. testing out different kinds of approaches
- they can be carried out in a timely way that supports the development work during this phase

We recommend that a number of approaches to involvement are developed and tested through the Pioneer Projects. This will include both informal and formal approaches, e.g. from meeting individuals for a coffee to allow a rapid 'sounding out' of ideas, through to high level meetings for thinking through more complex issues around policy and service development.

The selection process needs to reflect the principles of involvement i.e. with involvement of staff at all levels, transparency and accountability. Feedback will be given to projects which aren't selected. A Project Lead will be identified for each one.

## **2. Training staff working on Pioneer Projects**

The goal of the training will be to ensure that all staff, who will be working directly with refugees on Pioneer Projects are prepared and confident to be making decisions at some level with refugee input.

The training will need to be more in-depth than the initial briefings in Phase 1 and is likely to include providing a greater understanding of:

- who to involve and the need to ensure involved refugees bring relevant experiential knowledge and/ or a diversity of experience
- how to involve people using flexible approaches that can be adapted to the specific needs of the refugees involved in the project – it will not always involve establishing a group and may not need a huge time commitment
- how to prepare for and plan meetings to support effective involvement
- how to support refugees through in their involvement – to include practical and emotional support
- the current policies around recruitment and rewards for involvement and how to implement these in practice
- the challenges around sharing power and how to respond to these
- common pitfalls and how to avoid them
- how to hold honest conversations around what can and can't be changed in response to involvement and why

We recommend this training is delivered initially by the Refugee Involvement Lead with a view to developing an internal training resource. This could be used to train future involvement project leads and support the pioneer project leads to become future trainers.

As projects progress, Pioneer Project Leads may need additional support to troubleshoot and be responsive to the refugees they are involving in an ongoing way. This may be done through one-to-one support from the Project Lead and through the development of a community of practice (Appendix 1). Regular community of practice meetings will enable the Project Leads to share learning and provide peer-to-peer support.

## **3. Briefing and preparing the refugees who will be involved**

An initial briefing and preparation will be important to ensure the refugees who are recruited to Pioneer Projects feel sufficiently trained and supported to act as effective partners during their involvement. For these initial projects, it may be best to work with people who are near to being involvement ready.

Training refugees for involvement could usefully include:

- an introduction to involvement in general – what it is, why it matters, how it works, and case studies illustrating impact
- an explanation of what the organisation wants from involvement to encourage refugees to act as critical friends – initially people might feel uncomfortable with expressing any negative views about the organisation that is helping/ has helped them and may have concerns about how this might affect their personal situation
- an introduction to the Refugee Council and the work it does

One-to-one conversations and/or additional meetings with refugees will also be important to allow:

- an open and sensitive discussion of the rewards being offered for involvement, since not everyone will want to be paid or may benefit from different kinds of reward
- a discussion around individual preferences for ways to contribute – how much time people can commit, preferences for face-to-face meetings, telephone calls and what support needs they may have to enable this e.g. interpreters, training on Zoom, travel expenses paid up-front
- an introduction to the projects the individuals will be working on and any specific questions refugees have about their involvement

#### **4. Planning the Pioneer Projects**

We recommend that the Pioneer Projects are planned in a way that reflects the general principles of best practice for involvement (Appendix 3). They will need considerable support from the Refugee Involvement Lead at the beginning so that:

- Pioneer Project Leads have a role description and their responsibilities are clear
- senior managers commit sufficient time and resource for this work and build reporting on progress into staff appraisals
- Pioneer Projects budget appropriately for involvement and this is integrated into the annual budget cycle
- Pioneer Project Leads can identify who to involve and how best to involve them to reflect the specific context and needs of their project
- each project is evaluated in a way that is appropriate to its context (see Appendix 3)

#### **5. Delivering the Pioneer Projects**

The Pioneer Projects will generate multiple levels of learning through:

- testing and evaluating all the new policies, systems and processes in real life



- enabling staff and refugees to test out newly acquired skills and knowledge
- involvement having an influence on the design, delivery and outcomes of the Pioneer Projects

The Projects will thus provide a wealth of evidence of impact and learning that can be shared across the organisation. The Pioneer Project Leads and the Refugee Involvement Lead will be responsible for capturing this information in an ongoing way and ensuring the 'learning about the doing of refugee involvement' is held, managed and disseminated. The learning will be used to:

- revise and refine systems, processes and policies in an ongoing way for further testing as required
- inform others through blogs, articles, short films etc – continually raising the profile of this work
- ensure all staff are aware of involvement and how they contribute to its practice, in whether they directly work with refugees or not, e.g. people with responsibility for handling expense claims will have developed processes that meet the needs of involved refugees

It will be important to give this work a high profile across the organisation by regularly reporting on the Pioneer Projects using the regular internal communication channels. This could usefully include reporting on what staff and refugees have learnt from the involvement, what changed as a result, what the implications and significance of that change have been for the team and their work, and potentially for other parts of the organisation. The goal will be to reach all audiences – all staff, refugees and Trustees who may then be motivated and encouraged to develop their own involvement practice.

### **Phase 3: Review and priority setting for the next three years – final six months**

During the final six months of this work, we recommend that staff and refugees come together to reflect on the experience of delivering Pioneer Projects both to celebrate their success and share the learning. Reflecting on the findings will help staff and refugees to establish the Refugee Council's view of best practice, and either refine or develop new policies and processes as required. The lessons learnt from the implementation of this first strategy will also need to be discussed by a range of stakeholders to inform the development of a second refugee involvement strategy for the next three years.

This review process will need to include formal meetings and workshops for all involved in the Pioneer Projects as well as meetings with staff and refugees from other parts of the organisation. It may also be useful to include safe and more informal spaces in which to discuss what hasn't worked well. This is often where the best learning comes from. Staff and refugees will need to be able to discuss these experiences without fear of being judged or any negative consequences. Taking risks and learning from mistakes need to be seen as a

part of a constructive learning process.

The review will generate recommendations for the future development of refugee involvement. This will include ideas for where involvement practice could be extended or expanded, and where it could most usefully happen next for example ideas for:

- new projects led by the staff who have gained experience of involvement
- ways to help new staff and parts of the organisation to get started with involvement
- developing new areas of expertise in involving specific groups e.g. working with children

A final report will summarise the lessons learnt and recommendations for the future. This will need to feed into the usual systems for agreeing priorities for future work to determine next steps. Internal and external comms teams will need to plan to share the recommendations and agreed priorities.

### **Support for future involvement projects**

Through the Pioneer Projects, the Refugee Council will have created a team of experienced staff and worked with a diversity of refugee community members, who can lead and support others in the next phase. Some of these staff and refugees may benefit from training in mentoring skills to be able to provide support and encouragement to their peers. The Involvement Mentors could then meet regularly with new refugee involvement project leads in an expanded community of practice, to support ongoing learning in a plan-act-study-do cycle (Appendix 1). The goal is to move into involvement becoming the routine way to work at the Refugee Council.

We recommend that new projects with refugee involvement are underpinned by the same principles of best practice (Appendix 3). This will require:

- a) ensuring involvement projects are built into ongoing managerial planning and budgeting**, so that adequate resources are allocated to new involvement projects, roles and responsibilities added to staff job descriptions and staff at all levels are held accountable for involvement
- b) providing training and support on a regular basis to meet the needs of staff as required**
- c) obtaining specialist advice and input when necessary** to support involvement of refugees with additional needs e.g. to work with people who are still in trauma
- d) providing training and support is to refugees** to develop their skills and capacity prior to involvement, as well as supporting their progress through their involvement career
- e) capturing evidence of impact and lessons learnt from involvement and sharing these widely** to continue to raise the profile of this work, celebrate success and to motivate and encourage others to improve and expand their practice.

## 7. Potential challenges and how they might be mitigated

Implementing the Refugee Involvement strategy will require the Refugee Council to invest time and resources to build the foundations to support meaningful involvement as well as establishing a learning culture that will allow practice to expand and improve over a long period of time.

Involvement can be subtle work – changing the nature of conversations and the power dynamics within working relationships.

Key to effective implementation will be high profile leadership and excellent communication across the organisation.

This chart aims to highlight some of the key issues, challenges and concerns which often arise when implementing an involvement strategy and offers suggestions to prevent or overcome them.

ISSUE	WHAT HELPS
<p><b>Inconsistency of practice</b> Initially – and for some time - there is not going to be an organisation wide, consistent, embedded understanding and practice around involvement in all areas. This may also mean that some involvement may take place that is limited and less effective - at least until everyone has had training and Refugee Council standards of good practice have been established.</p>	<p>Acknowledge that this is part of the process - progress will happen in all areas, but this is likely to be staggered over time. Encourage staff to reflect, learn and share insights and use these insights to inform and communicate good practice. In starting the implementation with areas of quick wins it will be important to ensure that areas where there are more challenges to refugee involvement implementation are not forgotten, for example working with children.</p>
<p><b>Frustration that it is so slow</b> The desire to see a quick impact may create anxiety about the time it takes to plan and deliver high-quality, effective involvement - leading to rushing ahead without building good foundations. Some staff may also feel that involvement takes time which they don't have.</p>	<p>Communicate regularly and consistently that RC is looking for high quality over quantity in its involvement, that building the foundations is essential and its okay to take that time. And that by taking time RC reduces the risk of tokenism. Initially – as staff adapt to new ways of working this may be the case. So it will be important to help staff create time for specific projects and for learning about involvement. It may be helpful to find ways teams can collaborate and share involvement tasks both across RC and with other refugee organisations.</p>
<p><b>Hard to see impact at beginning</b> Initially it may be hard to see the impact because of time needed to build the capacity</p>	<p>It is important not see this as failure, but just part of the journey of finding ways to make it more effective.</p>

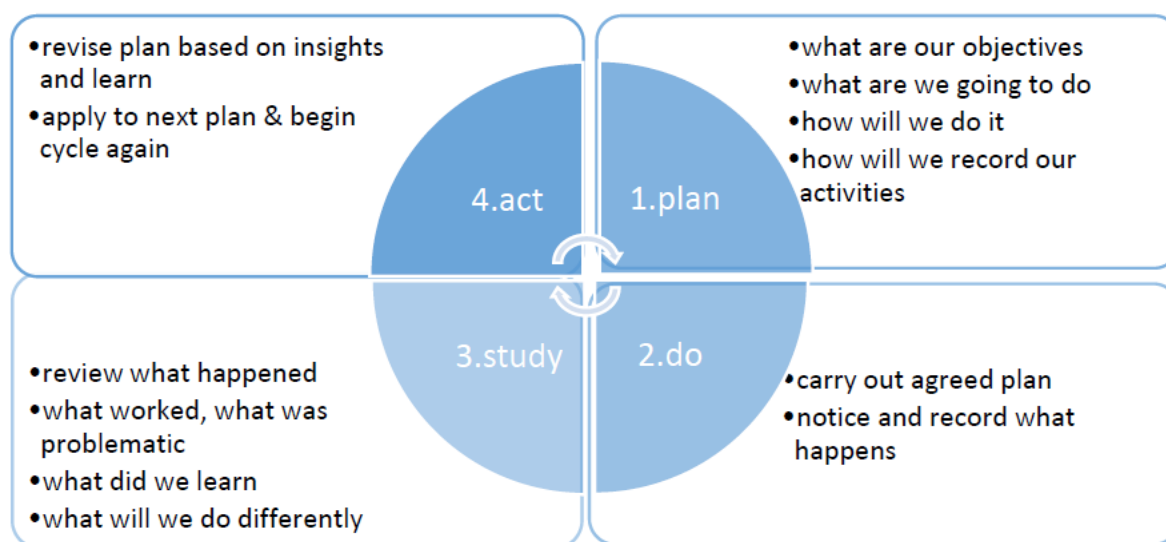
<p>of people who are seldom heard to become effectively involved.</p>	<p>Accept that refugees will vary in their readiness to be involved and be willing to use a wide range of approaches to engage and prepare them. Sharing insights on what helps and hinders will help build expertise and confidence with colleagues.</p>
<p><b>Frustration with the emphasis on processes of reflection and learning</b> This may be felt particularly keenly in the RC where the nature of the business creates an organisational culture of acting and responding to crisis with staff feeling already overwhelmed by demands on their time and the need to meet existing targets.</p>	<p>Training and awareness-raising in using reflective learning processes may be helpful, particularly learning to reflect IN action rather than ON action.</p>
<p><b>Vulnerability of staff</b> Staff may not feel competent or confident to take a new and different approach to involvement</p>	<p>Important to create a quality programme of training and learning opportunities for all in RC. Everyone will need awareness raising training, some will need more in depth training in involvement, leading the pioneer involvement projects, being an involvement mentor etc.</p>
<p><b>Not seeing it as everybody's work</b> The emphasis on Pioneer Projects in the initial phase of the delivery plan may reinforce a view that involvement belongs with a few teams and is not everyone's responsibility.</p>	<p>Important to keep the profile of the work high across the organisation and share the insights in ways that other teams can relate to, and can see the value for their part of the service.</p>
<p><b>Staff fatigue and disengagement</b> Delivering the involvement strategy is only one of a number of high profile organisational change initiatives coming on top of additional workload pressures because of the impact of Afghanistan and Ukrainian crises. There is a danger that staff may feel 'it's too much' to take on now.</p>	<p>Staff may need support and encouragement to stay fully committed – and to ensure that the initial excitement and traction doesn't wane as new priorities emerge. Sharing stories of good pieces of involvement can help to inspire and encourage hard pressed staff</p>
<p><b>Inadequate resourcing</b> Failing to resource refugee involvement sufficiently is likely to give a mixed message about the true value of this to the organisation.</p>	<p>Adequate resources will need to be earmarked and ring-fenced. Costs in year 1 are likely to be higher as the organisation will need to fund an involvement lead, awareness raising activities, training and development for the early stages of the Pioneer Projects, the development of mentors and supporting the community of practice. A budget to support refugee involvement will also need to be created.</p>

## Appendix 1: Definitions of terms used in the strategy and delivery plan

**Refugee involvement** is where the work of the Refugee Council is done with or by refugees, rather than being done to or for them. It means that refugees work alongside staff in all parts of the organisation, helping to shape and influence decision-making at all levels, from strategic management through to frontline service delivery. The knowledge and lived experience of refugees is valued and respected, and used in combination with staff expertise to make well-informed decisions. Staff and involved refugees share power and responsibility for the decisions that are made.

**A community of practice** is a group of people who share a common interest and a goal to gain knowledge and skills. Through the process of sharing information and experiences the group members learn from each other, and have an opportunity to develop personally and professionally. Such an approach provides a mechanism for learning by doing, which is one of the more effective ways of learning how to involve people with lived experience. Training courses and written guidance alone are unlikely to suffice, since context is everything and what individuals contribute and learn from involvement, is always changing and evolving. Learning is central to involvement because there are mirror processes: people learn from their lived experience, and staff then learn from their experience of involvement.

Based on our experience of working with other organisations, we conclude that supporting staff to follow a basic 'Plan, Do, Study, Act cycle' would encourage such learning. This cycle allows staff to test out a change in practice by planning it, trying it, observing the results, and acting on what is learned, as shown in the figure below.



### A Plan, Do, Study, Act cycle for developing practice

Creating a community of practice as well as a number of forums for people to meet, learn and share experiences safely and without judgement will be important for lessons about

why involvement in worth doing to reach all parts of the organisation and contribute to creating a wider organisational culture of collaboration.

**Involvement mentors** will be created through the Pioneer Projects. These are staff or refugees who will have gained expertise through their experience of involvement. They will provide guidance, motivation, emotional support, and role modelling to their peers when they embark on new pieces of involvement. The mentors may need some training and support initially to become effective mentors.

## Appendix 2: Distinguishing involvement from other ways of working with refugees

### Defining the different terms used

We noticed that staff were not using consistent terms to describe **involvement**. We have therefore defined other terms to be clear which are the same as involvement, and which are different kinds of activity:

The term **co-production** is the same as involvement. Co-producing the work of an organisation is an approach in which staff and people with lived experience work together, sharing power and responsibility from the start to the end of the project. For example, if a publication was *co-produced*, then staff and people with lived experience would work together to decide: what topic to write about; the content, structure, format and language; and ways to disseminate and publicise the final version.

**Participation** is the taking part in an activity. A person can participate without having any influence on the decisions about which activity is offered, how the activity is delivered or what happens afterwards. This is how participation differs from involvement where influence on decisions and sharing power is key. For example, a person can *participate* in a focus group to review a publication and share their views on the content and language of a draft, but have no influence on the previous decisions made in writing the draft, nor on any of the decisions about changes made afterwards. A similar discussion which gave people influence over those decisions would be *involvement*.

**Engagement** describes the many different ways in which the activity and benefits of the work of an organisation are shared with beneficiaries. The emphasis is on providing information and raising awareness to promote interaction and to generate mutual benefit. Engagement does not involve influencing decisions and sharing power. If an organisation had produced a publication it hoped would be useful to beneficiaries, it would *engage* people with lived experience to tell them about the publication and encourage them to share it with their communities.

### Different ways of working with refugees

Refugees may work with staff in a number of ways. Not all of these are involvement. However they all have their value in different contexts. Not all activity needs to shift to becoming involvement. So the purpose of any work with refugees needs absolute clarity. Staff need to be clear about what they are asking of refugees and the limits of what is open to influence. Refugees need to know what is expected of them and what they can expect from their participation.

We noticed that some Refugee Council staff had misunderstood that the following activities could be described as *refugee involvement*. Therefore we think it important to explain how these activities are distinct:

### **Using services or taking part in social activities**

People who use Refugee Council services are not being involved even if these services have been tailored to meet their individual needs. For this to be *involvement*, refugees would be helping to make decisions about what services to provide and as well as how to provide them and how to publicise them.

### **Sharing personal stories as part of a campaign or event**

Refugees can help with an event to raise funds, or to launch a campaign or to educate others, often by sharing stories of their experience. Like other volunteers, they are giving their time and resource to help the Refugee Council to deliver its work, but in a way that has already been decided by the organisation. For this to be *involvement*, refugees would be helping to make strategic decisions about priorities; what events to hold, what campaigns to run, and how best to do that.

### **Taking part in a survey/ focus group about needs or priorities**

Simply sharing knowledge or giving an opinion by taking part in a survey or a focus group may not necessarily mean a person is being involved, particularly if there is no organisational commitment to respond to the findings. For this to be *refugee involvement* they would have to be helping to decide the purpose and therefore the topic of the survey/ group discussion, helping to draft the survey questions or to run the group, helping to interpret the findings and draw conclusions about the organisation's response and finally helping to implement any changes.

### **Being better informed about what the Refugee Council does**

Informing the refugee community about the breadth of the work of the Refugee Council is not the same as involving them. For this to be *involvement* it would mean refugees were helping to make decisions about what information to give to their peers, as well as how best to do that.

### **Employing staff who are refugees**

While employing staff who are refugees is important for the organisation to demonstrate its commitment to equal opportunities in employment for refugees, consulting these staff when making organisational or service delivery decisions may not be effective involvement. This is for two reasons. Firstly, it can be very challenging for the individual to wear two hats, and they may feel conflicted in a dual role. Their desire to be valued as a colleague and supportive of the organisation may put them at odds with sharing their views as a refugee. Secondly and perhaps more importantly, the experience of that refugee staff member may not be relevant to the context. For example, when making decisions about how best to provide English language services for Arabic women, it is essential to involve Arabic women, as only they will have the relevant experience to identify the problems and potential solutions in this context. The experience of refugee staff may also be out of date, particularly if they were refugees many years ago.

## **Distinguishing involvement from volunteering and support**



Only *involvement* requires people with relevant lived experience to take part. Volunteering and supporting can be done by anyone. With *involvement* refugees influence decisions, whereas with volunteering and supporting, decisions have already been made by staff.

**Table: The differences between involvement and volunteering or supporting the work of an organisation**

	<b>INVOLVEMENT</b>	<b>VOLUNTEERING</b>	<b>SUPPORTING</b>
<b>What?</b>	People help plan, shape and influence the work of an organisation. Role agreed with organisation.	People help to do the work an organisation has already decided to take forward. Role agreed with organisation.	People give money, skills, time. No formal relationship with organisation..
<b>Who?</b>	People who have relevant lived experience.	Anyone	Anyone
<b>E.g.</b>	Refugees help design and plan the delivery of a new service.	Volunteers help run the service.	Supporters help to raise funds to pay for the

## Appendix 3: Useful resources

We have included links to general guidance for involvement from the field of health research and service development, and the work of health charities. While some of the detail may not be relevant to refugee involvement, we hope some of the principles and values will be transferable.

### **Involving seldom heard groups**

[www.learningforinvolvement.org.uk/?opportunity=how-to-engage-seldom-heard-groups](http://www.learningforinvolvement.org.uk/?opportunity=how-to-engage-seldom-heard-groups)

### **Advice on payment/ rewards**

[www.learningforinvolvement.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Payment-guidance-for-researchers-and-professionals-Dec-2021.pdf](http://www.learningforinvolvement.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Payment-guidance-for-researchers-and-professionals-Dec-2021.pdf)

### **A toolkit for research charities starting involvement**

<https://hrci.ie/a-new-ppi-toolkit/>

### **Standards for good practice in involvement**

<https://sites.google.com/nih.ac.uk/pi-standards/home>

### **Raising awareness around sharing power**

The following guide is designed to help raise awareness of the issues around power, providing insights and tools to help organisations see power more clearly and create a strategy to transform power to support meaningful change. As a complex area of work, this might be a useful resource in years 2 or 3 of the delivery plan to complement the learning-by-doing in the pioneer projects. [https://smk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/SMK\\_ItsAllAboutPower\\_Digital.pdf](https://smk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/SMK_ItsAllAboutPower_Digital.pdf)

### **Evaluating involvement**

There is a huge debate about how best to evaluate involvement both in terms of learning how to improve practice and identifying any impact. Finding ways to measure or quantify impact can be difficult when the outcome is a subjective learning experience that changes people's attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviour. It is possible to count how many people are involved and how often etc, but this may not be an indicator of success. It is important to capture what people learnt through the experience (about doing involvement and/ or its impact) and what changed as a result. A combination of approaches may be needed to capture:

- both the tangible and less tangible outcomes
- changes over time as impacts may still occur sometime after the involvement
- different perspectives on what success looks like

One approach that is being tested in the health field currently is the Most Significant Change method, which has been developed to assess the impact of complex interventions with multiple stakeholders and requires capturing stories and sharing these at all levels.

[www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/most\\_significant\\_change](http://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/most_significant_change)

## **Sources of Shared Learning to support involvement beyond the Refugee Council**

Members of the LEEG have made connections with other organisations, including Refugee Action, in the refugee sector to support shared learning around involvement in this context.

The Shared Learning Group on Involvement for the charity sector might also provide useful support and advice, particularly during the foundation phase with access to other organisations' policies and practice guidance. However this group's main focus is health which may mean that only some of the general learning is transferable. Further information can be found at: <https://slginvolvement.org.uk/>