



Time Together: Power in Partnership

What is Time Together?

Time Together matches local people with refugees in one-to-one mentoring relationships.

Time Together mentors spend around five hours a month with their mentee, supporting and encouraging them as they seek to achieve their goals in education, employment and integration.

Mentoring is one of the most effective ways of overcoming the difficulties and barriers faced by refugees in the UK.

www.timetogether.org.uk

Message from the Prime Minister

I am very pleased to congratulate TimeBank on the remarkable success of its Time Together scheme, now celebrating its fifth anniversary. Already helping thousands of refugees in locations across Britain, Time Together is testimony to the power of one-to-one relationships to transform lives.

I was delighted to be able to celebrate the work of Time Together and its inspiring volunteer mentors in my new book, Britain's Everyday Heroes, in which I wrote the following:

'What makes this project so powerful is that it tries to give new residents a personal and real understanding of what it is like to live in Britain. The

mentors are real people with their own individual attitudes and opinions. They are not giving the 'official view' but their own honest take on life in the UK, and it is this that makes their help so valuable to those building lives here for themselves.

For those who have left everything behind, the flight from persecution is just the beginning. Building a new life from scratch and settling into British culture with all

its complexities requires the tailored services and one-to-one support in which our voluntary organisations excel.'

TimeBank's vital work is an example of how giving time can have an impact thanks to the thousand small acts of kindness shown every day by volunteers.

With congratulations for all you have achieved and best wishes for many more years of success.

Gordon Brown
Prime Minister

Introduction from TimeBank's Chief Executive

Everyone at TimeBank is driven by the belief that it should be easy to do something positive and inspiring with your spare time. The projects we set up find simple ways for people to do things they enjoy, that help to change the world we live and work in.

Time Together enables people to act as mentors to refugees, offering practical and emotional support as they build a whole new life in the UK. It is our longest running project and highlights the positive impact that giving a few hours a month can have on an individual's life.

As this report illustrates, the simple act of spending time with someone new to the UK can make things so much easier. Whether it is doctors' surgeries, pubs or public transport, there is so much knowledge that people born and raised in the UK take for granted. Yet for newcomers, gaining that knowledge can be incredibly difficult. Time Together mentors offer refugees a source

of confidence and support to conquer the obstacles they face, enabling them to feel more settled and an important part of their communities

Over the last five years Time Together has transformed the lives of around 3000 people, mentors and mentees alike. Many mentors have never had this kind of relationship with anyone before, nor met anyone like their mentee. They often tell us they've gained new perspectives on the world, the town they live in and indeed themselves.

The mutual benefit of the relationship between a mentor and a mentee is just one example of how working in partnership is more powerful than persevering alone. Time Together would not be possible without the dedicated work of our partners, both voluntary and public sector, and funders, all of whom have

Origins and Achievements

Time Together was set up by TimeBank in 2002, in response to a Government white paper that recommended the provision of mentoring schemes to help refugees integrate better in the UK.

TimeBank used its expertise in creating innovative and exciting volunteering opportunities to devise the Time Together mentoring programme. It was designed to complement the well established services already provided by refugee organisations and community groups.

In April 2005, TimeBank received funding from the Home Office and HM Treasury to expand the project nationwide.

■ There are now 24 Time Together projects operating across the UK; each one delivered through a local partner.

■ Since November 2002, TimeBank has recruited and matched over 1500 refugees with a volunteer mentor.

■ The media coverage generated for Time Together has an equivalent editorial value of over £2.4 million.

■ Time Together was the first national mentoring programme to successfully achieve the Approved Provider Standard.

www.timetogether.org.uk

shown great faith in a still young organisation.

This report is an opportunity to celebrate how far Time Together has come in its five years and recognise the impact it is having nationally in 24 locations every day. It is a chance to understand how our partnerships work and how this unique way of delivering the project allows flexibility for the individual whilst retaining the strength of a nationally united framework. The report also sees the first publication of top line findings from a longitudinal study that we have commissioned to better understand the impact of Time Together and how it meets Government integration targets. It shows where we have come from and what we can aspire to in the next five years.

TimeBank was set up because of a firm belief that people want to participate positively in society, but can't always find a way that inspires them or suits the way they live their lives. The success of Time Together shows just what an impact people can make if they have access to interesting and compelling ways to give their time. Indeed the success of the scheme and the relationships it has enabled stand as an inspiration to both the Government and the voluntary sector: if we can develop richer, more rewarding ways for people to give their time we will be mobilising a massive force for change.

Moira Swinbank OBE

Power in Partnership

Partnerships are right at the heart of TimeBank's success, and central to Time Together.

Without the enthusiastic support of Government, both in terms of finance and faith in what TimeBank does, Time Together would simply not exist. With such backing, TimeBank is able to have real ambition and make change happen on a national scale. As a small organisation our infrastructure doesn't always allow us to do that in person but, by working in partnership with local organisations, we are able to deliver Time Together in 24 locations across the UK. And it's those local organisations that introduce mentors and mentees, changing individual lives by creating partnerships on a very human level.

Our partnership with Government

Time Together has its roots in a Government white paper that described integration as a two way process 'in which both refugee and host community have a role'.¹ It was in response to the white paper that TimeBank developed Time Together and, since the initial idea for the scheme was conceived, our relationship with Government has been strengthened.

TimeBank now receives a core grant from the Office of the Third Sector (OTS) to support us day to day, as well as specific project funding for Time Together from the Border and Immigration Agency (previously IND of the Home Office) and HM Treasury, who in 2005 jointly funded the national roll out of the scheme.

As strategic partners, we exchange information about the need for volunteers and about best practice in volunteer recruitment and management. It is from this kind of information exchange that the

most sustainable volunteering projects will spring; projects that are relevant to today's world and that offer a high quality experience to all involved, projects exactly like Time Together. The result is real social impact that is incredibly cost effective.

Our partnerships with local organisations

To have impact in communities across the country, TimeBank recognises the strength of partnerships with local organisations. In 2005 we were still a very small organisation so rolling Time Together out nationally was a massive challenge. TimeBank tackled this by partnering with organisations around the country that had a track record in working with refugees and volunteers. They had the contacts, the reputation and a knowledge of the local area and the local need; we had a vision and a well developed project framework. Within 18 months we teamed up with 19 different organisations across the UK and were working with them to deliver Time Together in their area.

¹ (Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain, March 2002)

Working in partnership with local organisations means the scheme can be adapted to respond to local needs, as a grassroots project would. However, with its national framework, Time Together has all the benefits of something much bigger in terms of public awareness, support for staff and quality of experience.

“As a frontline organisation we know what is happening on the ground and have built our reputation as an agency trusted by refugees. TimeBank adds media profile and expertise in mentor recruitment, opportunities for co-ordinators to share experience nationally and a uniquely valuable IT system.”

Refugee Action

Manchester and Leicester partner

Time Together also complements the work that local partner organisations are already involved with, enabling them to offer a more holistic service to refugees.

“The elements of the new integration model (Sunrise², Mentoring, Employment) sit very well together. Sunrise helps refugees with issues such as finding schools, mentoring helps increase social integration, and employment projects, such as Trellis, provide further specialised support.”

Trellis, Employability Forum

Birmingham partner

² Sunrise (Strategic Upgrade of National Refugee Integration Services) is a key delivery mechanism for the Home Office's Refugee Integration Strategy.

Our partnership approach to delivering the project adds real value to the organisations we work with and this is why we have had so much success with it.

“By participating in Time Together we are now much more embedded in the community. TimeBank's national scope and experience complement our grassroots community activity. Linking up to a national infrastructure enables us to deliver within set quality parameters.”

MACS

Brighton partner

Partnerships between mentors and mentees

The greatest strength of Time Together is the human connection between individual mentors and mentees, that is facilitated by local partners who match, train and support them.

For many, these partnerships have a life changing effect. There is no better way to demonstrate this than through a mentor and mentee's own words, as shown throughout this report.

Lylla. Fled the war in Afghanistan

Laura. Gave her the confidence to discover her new city



Time Together in London

Lylla, 26, Mother and Student

I was forced to flee Afghanistan because of the war. I now live in Leyton with my nephew and two sons.

When I met Laura, I knew I wanted her to be my mentor as she was very sweet and well spoken. Since I've got to know her, I have found that she is always so well mannered and always so happy!

Laura has helped me to get out and about in London, taking me to see London sights, museums, art galleries and a Christmas carol concert. Together we have discovered so many things. Before coming to England I had never been on an escalator before, so she has taken me to the underground and now I am able to go and get on the trains by myself.

In the past, I was always very frightened to go to the park, in case some kids would say something to me. Not knowing the language can make it quite intimidating. But Laura has taken me and my youngest son on outings to the park and I've even been on my own a couple of times now.

Laura, 28, English Teacher and Student

I decided to become a mentor because I was saddened by the negative media coverage of refugees, and I wanted to take positive action.

When Lylla and I first started to meet, we tended to focus on improving her English, but as time went by we got to know each other better and became real friends. Our meetings became fun and we looked forward to seeing each other. It has been fantastic to see her confidence grow over the last year.

Together we've explored museums and parts of London that I would never have got round to visiting otherwise. I've also been able to experience Afghan culture, from enjoying delicious spicy tea and traditional dopiazza to learning the odd new word.

Before I met Lylla I probably thought of refugees as a category, rather than as individuals, but I've realised that people are pretty similar, no matter what country they come from. I would tell anyone thinking of becoming a mentor to definitely do it. It can really open your eyes to new cultures.

90%

of mentees achieved what they set out to from their mentoring relationship

(Statistics are based on self evaluation forms completed by mentors and mentees)

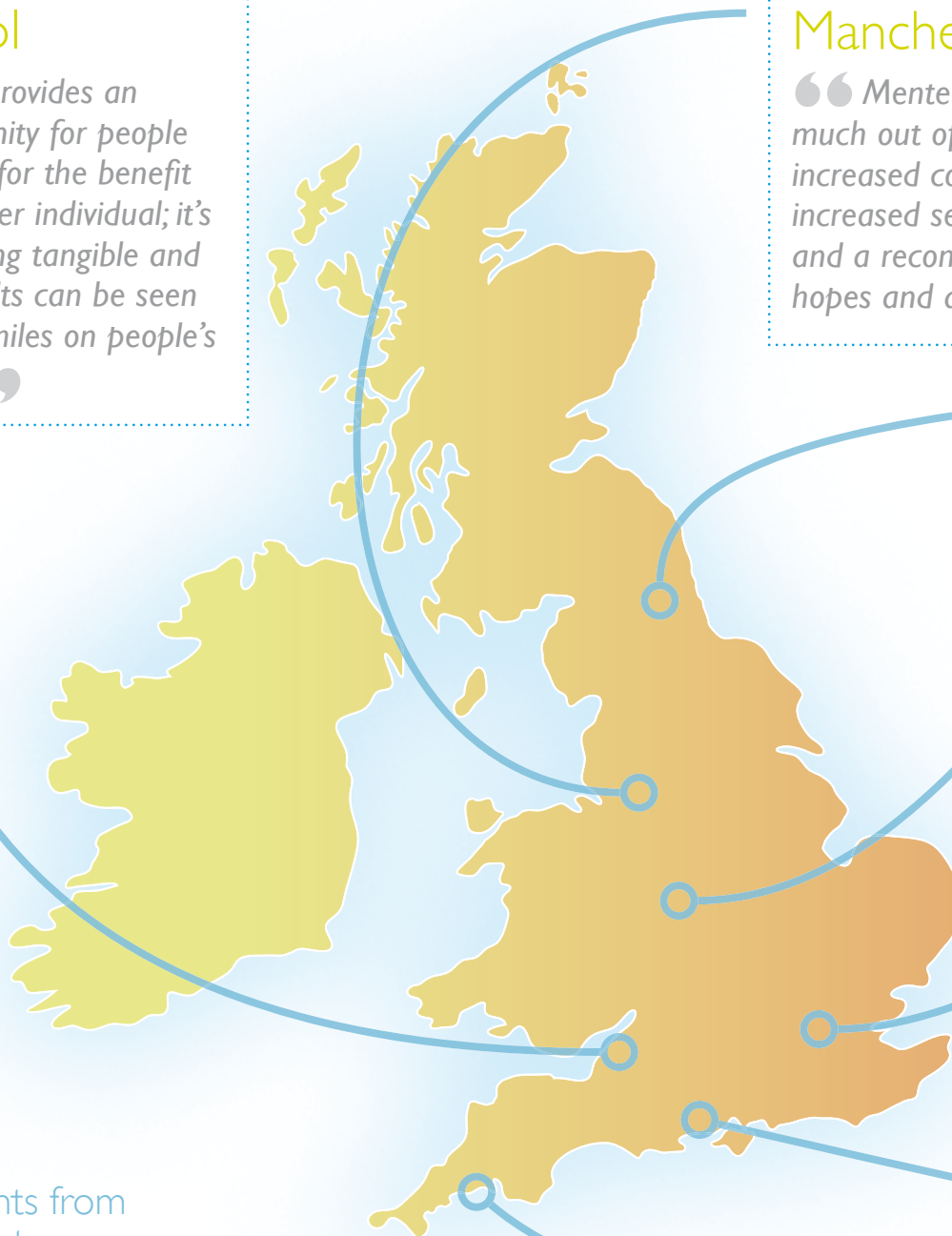
Bristol

“ It provides an opportunity for people to work for the benefit of another individual; it's something tangible and the results can be seen in the smiles on people's faces.”

Manchester

“ Mentees have got so much out of the project; increased confidence, an increased sense of integration and a reconnection with their hopes and ambitions.”

Comments from
co-ordinators
around the country.



Time Together

A National Scheme Delivered Locally Across the UK

Dudley

““ I think Time Together is successful because it combines a tried and tested formula from TimeBank with the commitment of the co-ordinators and a genuine need for this type of project.””

London

““ Time Together empowers refugees to stand for their dreams.””

Newcastle

““ The website, marketing and media support is immensely valuable. Small organisations would struggle to do it all alone.””

Southampton

““ The project celebrates difference in so many ways but mainly through the sharing and respect of different cultures, from the mentee learning about life in the UK to the mentor learning about the mentee’s culture and traditions.””

Plymouth

““ You cannot learn about life in the UK from a book.””

Othman. Forced to flee Sudan

Paul. Found ways for him to rebuild his career



Time Together in Cardiff

Othman, 37, Musician

I was forced to leave my home country because I didn't agree with the political regime. Back in Sudan, I was one of the country's top musicians but since coming to the UK, I have worked late night in a garage, as a cleaner and as a security guard in order to pay the bills and support my family. I am very proud to pay my way by doing this work, but I dream of making a living through my music again. I joined Time Together to help me to achieve this dream.

I first met Paul at the Time Together mentor matching event. Paul had what I call the 'attitude of the artist' and we were well suited to each other.

Paul has always been so patient with me and has shown me the professional way to do things as an artist in this country. From the very beginning he started to make things happen for me and my Sudanese dance group. He has advised us on setting up a proper constitution and helped us to open a bank account, so we have been able to apply for funding. He's very committed to doing anything he says he will and he is always honest with me.

Paul, 27, Artist

I became a mentor because it was a flexible way to make a difference to society but also to an individual.

Othman was so enthusiastic and energetic when I first met him, he made a very big impression. He immediately appealed to me as he was playing a musical instrument. I hadn't met anyone who was a refugee before and I had a certain nervousness at our first meeting.

It is unlikely we would have met outside of Time Together but we have developed a very special friendship. Othman has become more confident about his dance group and his professional ambitions, which has made him happier. Balancing earning a living with realising the potential of his group is getting closer.

Meeting Othman has given me the opportunity to learn about the Sudanese culture and a little bit about Islam. Sudanese people seem very easygoing and hospitable. Being Othman's mentor has been an inspiring, humbling and unique experience, which has made me stronger as a person. It is very liberating to just do something for the sake of it and not for any material gain.

94%

of mentees rated the support they received from their co-ordinator as 'Excellent' or 'Very Good'

How the Partnership Approach Delivers Results

TimeBank's Partnership Managers Sian Greenhead and Kelly Burrill discuss the mechanics of partnership delivery to reveal why it works.

As Partnership Managers for Time Together we work at a national level to ensure the project provides a consistently high quality service to refugees across the UK. We do this by working with partner organisations on the ground, combining their in depth local knowledge with the experience and resources we can offer as a national framework.

We are there at the very start of each project, helping to recruit a suitable co-ordinator and training them in how the project works. We create a dedicated web page on the Time Together website and develop a marketing strategy to target potential volunteer mentors from the local

area. With clear objectives and procedures already in place for the delivery of Time Together, new projects are able to start making a difference from day one.

In fact, even before a project is launched, TimeBank's communications team will have secured local publicity. When the co-ordinator first logs on to Time Together's online database, they will find volunteer mentors who have already signed up through the website and are waiting to go. The campaign we ran when setting up the Leeds project was so successful that by the time the co-ordinator started in post there were already enough volunteers to keep the project at full capacity for a whole year.

We provide every project with tailored marketing materials (leaflets, posters, DVDs, registration forms) so they can promote the scheme themselves locally. We also provide a best practice toolkit so the co-ordinator has advice, ideas and knowledge at his or her fingertips.



After helping to set up a new project we remain on hand to offer support and advice, monitor the project's progress towards targets and ensure that high standards are maintained. This involves meeting regularly with co-ordinators and their line managers, and organising regional and national support sessions that bring co-ordinators together to share their experiences.

Mentors and mentees often refer friends living in other cities to their local Time Together project, confident they will receive the same quality experience and support. For us, this is the best proof you could ask for that there is real benefit for service users in Time Together's partnership approach.



We organise regional and national support sessions that bring co-ordinators together to share their experiences.



When visiting projects around the country we get a feel for the unique character of each. Yet consistently, at the heart of every project, we find the same passion to make a difference, and optimism for the things that will be achieved.



57%

of mentees volunteered while part of Time Together

John, 32, Cleaner

When I had to leave Eritrea and first came to the UK, I was very new and didn't know anything about British culture so I wanted to be matched with a mentor.

When I met Barbara for the first time, I found she was really easy to talk to. Together we have been to visit museums and art galleries. She is new to Manchester too, so I think she has enjoyed exploring more of the city with me. On Christmas Eve she took me to visit her sister and her family. I am one of five brothers and Barbara's sister has five sons too! I really enjoyed getting out of the city and seeing the English countryside.

During our mentoring we have set goals together. I want to get a UK driving licence so Barbara helped me apply for my provisional licence. I needed somewhere to live and she encouraged me to speak with the housing association and I now have my own flat. Time Together has done so much for me. Barbara has helped me make plans for my education and future. One day I would like to work as a health professional. Since we've been meeting I've changed my job and I am very happy.

Barbara, 53, Social Worker

My Jewish father came to the UK as a refugee from Nazi persecution in 1939 aged 14. I joined Time Together partly to 'pay back' what this country did for him.

I was a bit nervous before meeting John, as I wasn't sure what I could offer him but I found him very friendly and highly motivated. I'm full of admiration for how he holds everything together despite all he's been through, and how committed he is to his family and doing the right thing. It's these solid things that drive him forward in life. It has felt very positive to reach out to someone and make connections from his world into my world; to show him that people in this country do care.

One challenge in our mentoring has been explaining aspects of British culture. John is very religiously observant, which informs how he sees the world. We have discussed gender relations and what John thinks about films or stories in the media, including controversies such as 'Big Brother'. Around Guy Fawkes' night and Halloween I realised that the masks and the burning of Guys could be quite disturbing, so I researched their origins for him and we also discussed today's commercialisation of such festivals.

Time Together
in Manchester

86%

of mentees learnt more about accessing further education courses

Key Findings from Changing Lives (June 2007): A Longitudinal Study into the Impact of Mentoring on Integration

Introduction

TimeBank commissioned independent researchers to conduct a longitudinal study of its Time Together refugee mentoring project, in order to analyse the impact of mentoring on participants' levels of integration. Using qualitative research methodology, the study examined the scheme and its impact from the perspective of refugee mentees and volunteer mentors themselves.

The evaluation selected 30 mentoring pairs across six locations to maximise diversity in terms of location, age, gender, profession, and region of origin. The pairs were interviewed three times – at the start of their relationship, after approximately six months and then again after 12 months. In addition, two focus groups were held with mentors and mentees from a range of Time Together projects not included in the main study.

Summary of findings

The longitudinal study concluded that Time Together is highly successful in facilitating the integration of refugee mentees into the UK.

In 22 of the sample of 30 pairs (73%), mentors successfully enhanced integration in terms of offering practical help and advice relevant to everyday life, building confidence and contributing to English language improvement. Moreover, in seven of these pairs, mentors had no less than a life-changing impact on their mentees by greatly enhancing their integration, and often forming strong mutually beneficial and long lasting friendships.

In the remaining eight cases, the relationships ended before they could have an impact on integration. This was generally due to a change in circumstance, such as obtaining a new job, or because of a lack of chemistry between the two.

The impact of mentoring on integration

TimeBank uses the Home Office's indicators of integration as a framework to evaluate the impact of Time Together on refugee participants' levels of integration. As integration is a very personal process, different individuals inevitably prioritise different issues within this framework. It was not surprising therefore, that refugees had different integration goals and varied expectations of their mentoring relationships. Whilst all relationships included a little of both, generally pairs either focused on social integration or goal centred activities related to employment or education. By building relationships based on individual needs and offering one to one tailored support, Time Together is able to support individuals in what is often a long and complex journey of integration.

Confidence

An increase in overall confidence and motivation was the chief and often life changing benefit of the most successful matches, as confidence is a powerful asset in all areas of integration. The belief mentors expressed in their mentees and in their capacity to qualify for a course, find work or follow a particular career path, had a significant impact on the mentee's confidence.

"She just gave me courage to do everything; to not be afraid, to have a courage to do everything."

Mentee

Moreover, mentors provided a ready source of knowledge and practical support about anything and everything. Knowing that help is at hand in a bewildering and sometimes unsympathetic new world provides an invaluable boost to overall wellbeing.

English language

An improvement in English language was a key benefit for all the successful pairs. Mentees who were learning English found that they made greater progress thanks to time spent speaking one on one with their mentor. The fluent English speakers

also appreciated their mentor's help in understanding local accents and UK idioms.

"Like, we were talking about issues of accent, certain expressions, which go just beyond the spoken language and into the actions. The things that people do: mannerisms and gestures."

Mentee

Employment

Securing employment was a goal for most of the mentees. Improved English language and increased confidence aids employability and, for a significant minority in our sample, mentoring directly improved knowledge of, and hence access to, the job market.

While mentors are not in a position to find jobs for their mentees, in several cases they successfully increased their mentee's self-worth, helped to create realistic goals and identified work opportunities. Coaching about the UK job application and interview process and guidance about the British working environment were also common practices which improved the employment prospects of mentees.

"I was kind of angry when they asked me to come for a second interview, because I was thinking it's not reasonable... why are they asking me to come? And [my mentor] said, 'No, no, this is common in this country. They might ask for you three times.'"

Mentee

Requalification and further education

For many refugees, requalification or further education is a requirement for finding suitable employment. In most cases in our sample, mentees had access to sources of specialist support such as tutors or professional advisors. In these cases, mentors had no direct impact but, by building confidence, they enabled mentees to make the most of educational opportunities and feel confident about their choices, as well as their ability to meet the demands of studying.

"I am even more determined to achieve these goals than before. She has introduced me to people who have achieved so much. If they can, so can I! I WILL finish my NVQ3!"

Mentee

96%

of mentees feel they know their city better after taking part in Time Together

Combating isolation

Friendship, especially for refugees who are in the UK without their families, helped to combat isolation. In one case a mentee's only source of social interaction was her weekly meetings with her mentor.

"When refugees have a mentor, they don't feel so lonely – most of them miss their families and their homeland. Since meeting D, I feel that I am not alone."

Mentee

Introductions to family and friends helped refugee mentees widen their social circle and therefore had a positive impact on social integration.

Understanding UK culture

A knowledge of what people commonly expect in different situations is vital in navigating daily life in a new country. Mentors were able to give their mentees greater insight into UK culture and norms, and in certain cases to help them avoid misunderstanding others and being misunderstood themselves. The mentor was often the first UK citizen the mentee had interacted with socially.

"You come to understand what it means in Britain when one says, 'Let's meet at one o'clock'. It's one o'clock. It's not five past one."

Mentee

Knowing the local area

Mentees gained better knowledge about the local area, and consequently greater access to the local leisure activities and places of historical or cultural interest that were introduced by the mentor. This knowledge also gave newcomers a greater sense of belonging, allowing them, in turn, to introduce friends and family to the local environment.

"I didn't know a lot of places in the area, even if I stay for 20 or 15 years. She really show me a lot of places, and I really felt like I enjoy my time with her."

Mentee

Volunteering

Engaging mentees from our sample in volunteering proved challenging, despite concerted efforts by several mentors. A number of mentees felt ambivalent about volunteering and those that tried to obtain placements with the help of their mentor had little success. Those mentees who did find opportunities were helped

instead by the Time Together co-ordinator or other institutions. They usually found the experience to be worthwhile as it enabled them to gain valuable work experience, obtain references, improve their communication skills and meet new people.

Access to public services

Many mentees said that a significant benefit of their mentoring relationship was learning where to get the services and support they need, and where to access other facilities in which they have an interest. The mentor was often the first port of call when a problem arose. Moreover, in a couple of cases, mentors coached their mentees on best approaches to the public sector, and thus enhanced their mentees' effectiveness and confidence in accessing services.

"[The main way a mentor can help a refugee] is dealing with social services... Sometimes people don't get help, not because they don't want to, but because they don't know they are entitled to it."

Mentee

Bridging communities

Integration is a two way process in which both the newcomer and host community learn from and develop an understanding

65%

of mentors feel their mentoring experience has helped them challenge negative myths about refugees

of each other. Mentoring, through its mutually beneficial approach, can facilitate this two way learning between mentor and mentee, as well as providing other benefits for mentors. The scheme also aims to raise awareness of the challenges faced by refugees in the UK and to build bridges between communities.

It was clear from our sample that it was not just the mentees who benefited from their participation in Time Together; the mentors did too. Many found the experience of providing practical help to another individual very rewarding. Interestingly, some of the most successful mentors often undervalued the more difficult to measure impact they had on the lives of mentees through their friendship and moral support. Mentors also described personally benefiting from the cultural exchange, friendship (in some cases), and a greater understanding of the experiences of refugees in the UK.

"It's been really good for me, finding out about his culture and trying his food...it's kind of an exchange."

Mentor

Key recommendations

Ongoing investment in the Time Together mentoring scheme

The study found that Time Together mentoring is highly successful in facilitating refugee integration. Over the years, Time Together has developed a set of processes that encompass best practice in refugee mentoring yet allow co-ordinators sufficient flexibility to respond to local and individual needs. This approach means not only that mentoring is available to large numbers of refugees in the UK but also that participants benefit from high quality support, enhancing successful outcomes for individuals.

The evaluators recommend that ongoing investment is made in Time Together to ensure participants continue to benefit.

"I would like Time Together to help lots more people to integrate... We come from countries where things don't work like they do here. So you need someone to teach what you must do and how. I think that Time Together is disposed to help people in this way."

Mentee

Ongoing focus on developing, sharing and ensuring best practice

To ensure that Time Together is able to successfully facilitate the integration of

refugees across the UK, TimeBank invests much time and effort in developing, sharing and promoting best practice. TimeBank does this through:

- The Time Together toolkit, containing tools, tips and best practice
- Networking and best practice events, organised by Time Together's central team, which encourage learning and sharing between co-ordinators and help maintain staff dynamism
- Regular meetings with the Time Together central team to ensure that targets are being met, problems are identified and addressed early on and best practice is followed.

The evaluators recommend that Time Together continues to facilitate best practice, investing in group and individual support for co-ordinators through the central team.

To maximise the positive impact of mentoring for the individuals involved in Time Together, the evaluators make the following further recommendations on the Time Together mentoring model:

3 Additional resources for matching and supporting mentors and mentees

Time Together invests much effort and resources into recruitment, training and support to ensure the quality of the experience for mentors and mentees. On the whole, participants were very satisfied with the support offered by Time Together. Both mentors and mentees

rated their initial training days highly – it was “fantastic”, “clear, informative”, and “professionally done”.

They also reflected positively on their matching experience. Some mentees would have appreciated further information about potential mentors and some mentors would have liked more input into the matching process.

After matching, the co-ordinator plays a vital supporting role, with Time Together guidelines stipulating quarterly one to one contact, group support sessions and social events. Contact from the co-ordinator is essential after the first or second meeting to ensure that the match has started well and regular contact thereafter is also necessary to enhance the prospects of a successful relationship. Mentors who attended a support group found the chance to relate to other mentors inspiring and practically helpful. Social events were also thoroughly enjoyed and a complementary means of social integration.

It is our recommendation that, in some cases, additional time and resources should be dedicated to matching and supporting pairs, particularly in the early stages of the relationship. TimeBank has an important role to play in ensuring that this level of support is available in all projects.

4 Reassurance for mentors about the value they bring to their mentees

Mentors often undervalued the so called ‘softer outcomes’ of their relationship with their mentee, such as friendship and confidence building. Through their regular contact with mentoring pairs, co-ordinators should be careful to highlight the ways in which a mentor has already contributed to a mentee’s life, not just what more could be done. This would increase the rewards for mentors as well as acknowledge the mentee’s achievements.

5 Greater flexibility in the duration of mentoring relationships

The longevity of a mentoring relationship is not the only indicator of success and the evaluators recommend that greater flexibility in the duration of relationships

is built in from the start. This would enable qualitative benefits, rather than a specific number of months, to be used as the marker of success. While mentoring relationships are currently expected to last one year, Time Together could consider shortening the minimum commitment for relationships with defined goals that are achievable in the short term.

6 Greater access to suitable voluntary placements

Volunteering can have a significant impact on integration but access to suitable voluntary placements for refugees is limited. Time Together should invest in identifying such placements, however this will be challenging until the sector as a whole creates and facilitates access to volunteering opportunities for refugees.

More detailed findings are available in the full report written by Dr Lea Esterhuizen and Dr Tanya Murphy. This is available to download from www.timetogether.org.uk.

90%

of mentees say they feel at home in the UK following their Time Together relationship

Volunteering only works if it is enjoyable

Guardian columnist, Polly Toynbee, discusses common perceptions of volunteering and how her personal experience of giving time through TimeBank, as a Time Together mentor, turns them on their head.

Volunteer! It's an old-fashioned word that somehow suggests the opposite – 'You, you and you!' It summons up images of Lord Kitchener's accusatory pointing finger. 'Your country needs you!' It can sound more like duty than pleasure. It smacks of uniforms and bossy people, Joyce Grenfell officiousness and a whiff of boiled cabbage in institutional corridors or digging gardens on wet Sundays. It is a pity there isn't a better new word than 'volunteer' – but there isn't.

But how unlike that word it can be. The truth is, volunteering only works if it is enjoyable. Forget the idea of the dutiful volunteer smugly doing good to others as a personal sacrifice. If it isn't a two-way win, then it won't work.



The truth is, volunteering only works if it is enjoyable. Forget the idea of the dutiful volunteer smugly doing good to others as a personal sacrifice. If it isn't a two-way win, then it won't work.



That is the great secret. That is why three-quarters of the population did some kind of volunteering at some point in 2006. Even with ever busier lives most people found time because they wanted to. Gone are the old days of vast battalions of women stuck at home looking for something useful to do. Most mothers now work – and yet still find time to volunteer in one way or another. But only because they found something that they really enjoyed with people who were congenial company. Otherwise, frankly, most people wouldn't do it. Altruism is part of the pleasure – but it doesn't take many people beyond the occasional gesture.

Like many people, I was roped into volunteering by a friend. Try this, she suggested, handing me a brochure. I was deeply dubious. Do I have the spare time? No, absolutely not. Am I patient and nice? Not particularly. TimeBank's Time Together organises mentors for refugees

to give those settling in to Britain a friend who knows the ropes, an adviser, a companion, someone who can answer basic questions about living in a new country. Could I? I thought probably not. But then again, why not? It seemed an alarmingly heavy commitment. But then again, I would learn a lot too. So I said yes, with some trepidation.

After an induction process telling us what to expect, what to do and not do, a selection evening put a group of potential mentors into a roomful of refugees who did the choosing. Sara selected me, and I could see why. That day, she and I happened to be the only two middle-aged women in a room filled mostly with young people: most of the refugees were young men, most of the mentors younger men and women.

Sara was a delight and an education for me, an amazingly impressive and interesting woman. She was from Somalia, not newly arrived, but had gained her refugee status some seven years earlier. She had three children in school in London, her English was quite good, but not quite good enough yet to get the kind of job she wanted. Sadly, in all that time she had made no English friend: she only knew other foreigners of various nationalities. Her children had school friends but she didn't know their parents.

Over the year we met in places she had never visited, free museums and galleries where she would return with her children at weekends. Sometimes in the holidays her children came too. We wandered

many floors of the British Museum, the National Gallery, the London Museum, the National Portrait Gallery, Trafalgar Square, St James' Park, a trip on the London Eye to see the city from the air, a tour around the Houses of Parliament with her children and outdoor cafes on nice days.

I suspect I got more out of it than she did; as she retold her remarkable story I was enthralled. She had fought all her life, first against her father to stay at school and train as a doctor and she fought with her brothers and all those who objected to her ambition in a traditional society. And then she fought to escape with her children from war-torn horror to Kenya and on to London.



I am now left with a sense of awe for people who arrive here with nothing after suffering war and disaster, yet make their way by sheer determination, an iron will that Sara had passed on to her children.



She volunteers too, stuffing envelopes for her local Labour party, but she said she was too shy to speak much and make friends. I waited in suspense to hear if her

older daughter had made it into medical school, after studying hard in their two-room flat. We celebrated when her results came through, a triumph for a girl who arrived with no English, a remarkable girl now learning sign language in her spare time.

What did I offer Sara? Adult conversation, talk about politics and the world, suggestions about practical problems, struggles with the benefit system and help with English – she is hoping to pass exams for a medical post here. But above all, I think, just a connection with a London woman her age to talk about children and school and how things work.

I am now left with a sense of awe for people who arrive here with nothing after suffering war and disaster, yet make their way by sheer determination, an iron will that Sara had passed on to her children. No one meeting someone like Sara could doubt the qualities she and her children bring to this country. I learned a lot, it widened my horizons and I felt humbled by my own ease of life. But most important of all I enjoyed our meetings and I liked her company and conversation. It is no good volunteering if it is not fun.

Extract taken from Polly Toynbee's introduction to the Guardian Guide to Volunteering, 2007, produced in association with TimeBank.

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About TimeBank

TimeBank tackles social issues by finding ways for people to give their time that inspire them and match their lives. We know it's a lot to ask people to give up their time and so we are committed to finding ways that suit how people live and that address the needs of the world we live in.

We want to make sure that when anybody volunteers with us we give them an end to end experience of quality, support and satisfaction. It is in this way that individuals can collectively make a positive difference in their communities, where they live and work.

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