

Innovation and Co-Production case study

RSRFL – AVAIL project

The project

AVAIL is a project across four countries to contribute towards the smooth integration of refugees and asylum seekers through participatory, peer and community approaches.

The co-produced and co-facilitated Life Skills project in Wales is an element of the wider AVAIL project, and uses a Peer Educator model to co-design and co-deliver an orientation course for newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers. We are facilitating 10 week long courses that include ESOL lessons and sessions about life in the UK, including rights, responsibilities and cultural orientation.

Why we involved people - expected benefits:

- For us to deliver a Peer Educator run course, we would need to ensure they had influence over the content so it is meaningful and relevant to them as educators.
- In order to understand the needs of what a Life Skills course should include, it is vital that we connect with communities who have lived experience of being newly arrived in Wales.
- Having a participatory approach was explicitly outlined in the grant agreement with the funder.

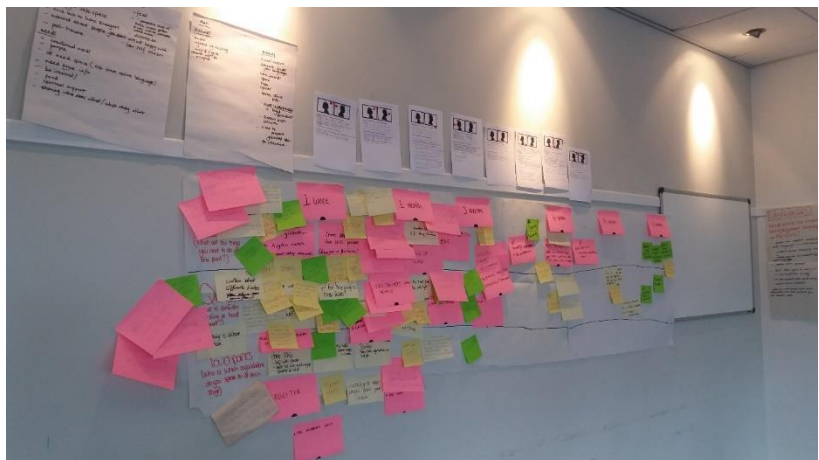
How were people recruited to participate?

There are RS services delivered from the Newport office, including International Family Tracing, Destitution services and Women's ESOL. We were able to connect with attendees and those accessing services to discuss their involvement.

How people with lived experience were involved and influenced the process

Co-design of the course

The innovation and coproduction teams worked with the AVAIL project team to involve people with lived experience as programme designers to shape the Life Skills course. The Programme Designers participated in two design workshops using a range of techniques from journey mapping to creating personas in order to shape the content, delivery methods and practical elements of the course. These were run over two days, using various activities and discussion groups to



consider and discuss how the course should be run, what should be covered in the courses and who the course should be aimed at. These were successful in gathering the experience and needs of newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers which we were then able to use in designing the

courses. In the workshop plan we had activities that involved fictional characters which we created so that participants didn't feel obliged to share their own personal experiences and so we could work safely in a group discussion and setting.

We also trialled the use of photo diaries as a design tool with our Programme Designers capturing images which will provide insights to inform the content of the Life Skills course, as well as how different topics are best taught.

Peer Educators

We then invited those who were interested from the workshops and other interested refugees and asylum seekers to become Peer Educators - to continue to design and deliver the course. We held a training day for those interested in the role, the skills they might need and other fundamentals such as professional boundaries and safeguarding adults. We have since provided further training for this role in workshop facilitation, psychosocial support, active listening skills and working with interpreters.

Design of the course

Initial meetings were then held with Peer Educators to plan the themes of each week for the course and the order in which topics would be covered. The specific elements of these topics were then explored and sessions planned in weekly meetings with Peer Educators.

In course two, we altered the way we worked as it was felt by Peer Educators they would like more time to think ahead of planning on a topic. We have now started doing monthly meetings to plan the coming sessions and to explore themes and topics with people to inform the sessions.

Delivering the course

Peer Educators come regularly to specific Life Skills sessions and deliver elements of the sessions, including running activities and facilitating discussions.

Support and preparation provided

As we have progressed through the courses we have held further meetings with 'bite-sized' learnings in. This has been effective as often the group weren't able to commit to full-day trainings but they enjoyed learning skills and tools for the classes. We also meet with each Peer Educator to explore how they would like to develop and to identify further training they feel would be beneficial to fulfil their roles or to develop professionally.

Additionally, we are in the process of recruiting Peer Educators as Red Cross volunteers to enable them to access the wider trainings offered by the British Red Cross.

Key insights

- People have been very **keen to be involved** and are passionate about the project and its aims - clearly this is a need across Refugee Support
- The **coproduction workshop** worked well and was an effective environment for people to safely offer their opinions and experiences.
- Some **great resources** have been produced by the Peer Educators e.g. one Peer Educator created a 'simplified housing contract' for the Home Office accommodation and explained this to the group.
- The **photo diary technique** provided some really valuable insights and allowed the person with lived experience to lead the conversation and agenda.

Challenges and key learnings

There have been various challenges which we have needed to consider and these have led to some learnings that we would share with others. Since beginning the second round of the Life Skills course, we have overcome some of the difficulties we experienced in the initial course:

Challenge: Despite focusing on collaborative working, it felt like much of the course was designed by the AVAIL Group Worker, Case Worker and colleagues - it was difficult to leave this entirely to the group of Peer Educators some of our initial plans and set up wasn't effective for this.

Action: More time with Peer Educators prior to sessions has enabled greater participation in each session design and a rota has increased regular attendance of Peer Educators to Life Skills sessions.

Challenge: It's important to give time to take learnings from a workshop and plan how to operationalise them. You can learn so much through co-production and innovation techniques, but there is a next step in turning that learning into tangible actions.

Action: Keep in mind during the co-design activity, what we need to learn in order to deliver the service or project. Making sure you feed back to your Programme Designers!

Challenge: Peer Educators identified that they didn't feel confident to plan these sessions and to offer ideas on learning and development.

Action: Where confidence has been an issue, we have given further 1-1 meetings with Peer Educators to establish their strengths and what they enjoy doing and any training they would like to have in the future. We have set out a couple of roles so that people can decide which plays more to their strengths- one which is more 'up-front', another which is more in smaller groups and another which is more supportive (helping to welcome people as they arrive, set up refreshments and be a friendly face people can chat to in the break).

Challenge: Regularity of Peer Educators - some people keen to come every week, whereas others less so or had other commitments.

Action: We changed the sessions to be more flexible so they are more 'bitesized' in format rather than traditional models of all day training. We also made sure to keep an open conversation on expectations (from the Peer Educators and BRC) and to make sure the role is what they thought it would be and to ensure they were getting what they wanted from the role.

Challenge: Creating safe and meaningful opportunities for people to support new arrivals with their own experience has been difficult. Peer Educators are keen to talk about their experiences with new arrivals but not sure on effective and beneficial ways to do this.

Action: We ensured there was psycho-social training from Peer Educators so everyone felt they could work safely. Also by developing different roles and activities within the course, Peer Educators have been able to take on a role that feels right for them.

Quotes from those involved:

'I have loved working with the team of Peer Educators. We have more confidence as we deliver the sessions together that the content is relevant as the educators are speaking from experience! This has helped people who attend the course to relate and feel listened to in the workshops. It has also created an atmosphere where people can chat through topics without feeling judged as we are all discussing topics and people's experience rather than teaching a set curriculum.' (Amy-Groupwork Coordinator)

'I'm an open person and I always give a welcoming hand because I have been welcomed, I have been helped, I don't want to keep myself, I give a hand to others. I have gone through a lot, I have suffered a lot, I don't want to see anybody suffering. Any little help I have, I give. I give.' (Peer Educator)