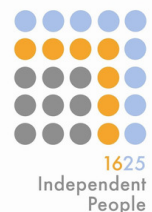


# MY FUTURES PROJECT REPORT

## LIFE SKILLS TRAINING WITH BRISTOL'S REFUGEES

MARCH 2018



# A MESSAGE FROM BORDERLANDS

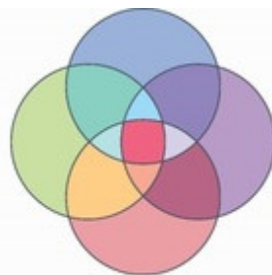
In 2016, Borderlands had the privilege of partnering with some wonderful local organisations in order to deliver a pilot course in much needed information for refugees new to British systems with regards to welfare, accommodation, employment and money management. The hope was that those who attended the course would be empowered to take control of their own lives.

Borderlands was host and lead organisation, publicising and reaching out to refugees with whom we have contact, taking referrals and providing the space. Content was provided by six local organisations, each experts in their field. We're really grateful to these organisations for their involvement, and hope to be able to work together again soon!

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who participated in the My Future course, and for providing the evaluative data used in this report, our partners from Bristol City Council, Ashley Community Housing, Talking Money, Cash Pointers, Pennywise and The Society, and finally Harry, Jodie, Vicky, Alice and Mehdi for putting all the data collected together and producing this report.

Borderlands hopes to be in a position to run this valuable course again soon when we can secure funding.

Steve Owen, Borderlands



**BORDERLANDS**  
from exclusion to  
**BELONGING**

# PROJECT TEAM

## **Borderlands**

Nese Davidson  
Hilary Jones  
Steve Owen

## **1625 Independent People**

Chloe Janssen-Lester  
Mara Saunders  
Josh Seddon

## **Ashley Housing**

Tom Dixon  
Matilda Kay  
Rachel Sharp

## **Evaluation Team**

Alice Chen  
Vicky Cummings  
Jodie Huntly

## **Pennywise**

Charlie Eddisford

## **Bristol City Council**

Michael Wyatt  
Paul Sylvester

## **Talking Money**

Tamra Mannin  
Michelle Bower

## **Prospects**

Jonathan Jefferies

Evaluation coordination and design  
by Harry Greatorex, PhD

|                       |    |
|-----------------------|----|
| Project Overview      | 4  |
| Mission Statement     | 5  |
| Evaluating My Futures | 6  |
| About our members     | 7  |
| Session overviews     | 10 |
| Using translators     | 14 |
| Project learning      | 16 |



# PROJECT OVERVIEW

Borderlands is a Refugee and Asylum Seeker centre based in Bristol. The charity grew from the Parish of St Nicholas., who witnessed through its own congregation the growing population of Asylum Seeker's and Refugee's in Bristol and the challenges they faced. The aim is to help the disadvantaged and often excluded move forward with their lives, Borderlands runs a drop in twice a week providing services including English and maths lessons, welfare advice and support. They also provide refreshments through donations from the local Marks and Spencer and Pret A Manger. Borderlands also provides their members with a community.

Borderlands members face a variety of challenges in adjusting to life in Bristol. These include the difficulty of accessing information around opportunities for housing, employment and training and accessing benefits. A further challenge for some is the need to adjust to managing personal finances in a new context. Navigating complex benefits and housing systems and accessing support is further complicated for some members by barriers around language and literacy. Together, these challenges are a further barrier to community integration for Borderlands members.

'My Futures' was created as a response to this situation. The project was planned as a four-week course. Each weekly session covered a specific topic: Housing, Benefits, Employment and Money Management. Each session was run by one of the partner organisations, each donating time, expertise and resources on a voluntary basis to make the project a reality. In recognition of the barriers described above, the only requirement for applicants was that they have refugee status. To overcome language barriers, dedicated translators were provided so that the course could be offered to members regardless of their level of English. Along with attending the sessions the members were provided with a toolkit, created by the partner organisations, containing useful information relating to the course material. After each session, members had the opportunity to receive ongoing support by each of the partner organisations.

Jodie Huntly, Borderlands

# MY FUTURES MISSION STATEMENT

- To empower refugees to take control of decisions that impact their lives in order to overcome the exclusion many of them face and enable community integration.
- To provide advice workshops and ongoing support to enable refugees to understand and navigate housing, state benefits, home and money management and employment systems in the UK.
- To build confidence around accessing and engaging with these systems positively.



“I had been part of the Bristol City Council “Roof Over My Head” project, which works in a similar format to equip people with the skills to manage their tenancy. There seemed to be a great need in the Refugee community for this sort of advice, but not much provision. I had also been approached by volunteer drop in facilitators and volunteer ESOL teachers, who felt there were gaps in their knowledge around things like benefits and housing.”

**Charlie Eddisford, Pennywise**

# EVALUATING MY FUTURES

To evaluate the project, a small team of volunteers were recruited from the local student community. Vicky Cummings (University of Bristol), Alice Chen (University of Bristol) and Jodie Huntly (University of Nottingham) joined the My Futures team, working alongside Borderlands staff and the different partner organisations to develop an evaluation approach that captured the day-to-day experiences of the members making use of the project.

Pre- and post-session feedback forms were developed to capture how members rated their confidence and knowledge. The results of these forms are used on pages x-x to reflect on how members rated their improvements following the sessions. Registration forms were used to capture information about who was making use of the service.

Each of the project evaluators observed six My Futures sessions. These observations also included involvement in the form of aiding the translators and organising the logistics of the sessions by ensuring the participants and session leaders had all the appropriate resources. The evaluators then made detailed notes on the sessions which were to be compared with one another.

The three evaluators regularly attended the drop in session at Borderlands and were able to build up a rapport with the members and those running the sessions. Both informal and formal interviews were conducted throughout the evaluation process. Formal interviews were carried out in the borderlands building and happened quite organically usually when a member of the evaluation team would recognise someone they knew to have attended the course and then proceeded to have conversational type discussions surrounding My Futures.



# ABOUT OUR MEMBERS

Thirty eight Borderlands members registered on the My Futures programme. Others used the service without registering. A member making use of My Futures was most likely to be male, Arabic-speaking, Muslim man, aged 16-25, with beginner or intermediate English. The typical member was most likely to need an interpreter, be unemployed and looking for work, claiming Job-Seekers Allowance, with manual work experience. They were most likely to have between 1 year and 2 years in the UK, with no children, most likely from Sudan or Iran, with a residency card but no Passport or Drivers' licence and no bank account.

| Age   | Members |
|-------|---------|
| 16-25 | 9       |
| 26-39 | 10      |
| 40+   | 9       |

| Number of children |    |                      |    |
|--------------------|----|----------------------|----|
| No children        | 18 | 3 children           | 1  |
| 1 child            | 2  | 4+ children          | 1  |
| 2 children         | 5  | Preferred not to say | 11 |

| Nationality | Members |
|-------------|---------|
| Eritrean    | 5       |
| Ethiopian   | 2       |
| Iranian     | 10      |
| Senegalese  | 1       |
| Somalian    | 2       |
| Sudanese    | 17      |

| Female | Male |
|--------|------|
| 10     | 18   |

| Time in the UK   | Members |
|------------------|---------|
| Under 6 months   | 2       |
| 6 months- 1 year | 7       |
| 1-2 years        | 16      |
| 2-3 years        | 3       |
| 3-4 years        | 2       |
| 4-5 years        | 1       |





“The course really helps me a lot. It gives me more confidence, now I know I can find house in the UK, I can find job here as well.”

**My Futures member**

“ I am going to London after the course, because I want to find a job there. I have learned a lot from the course, I really like it. So I believe I can find job in London, and live in London.”

**My Futures member**

I think it (course) is really important. I gained so many things you know from the course. It is helpful, I build my confidence and I know so many things that I didn't know before so... I think this is important for others as well.”

**Emuel,  
My Futures Member**

“I became familiar with how to look for work, how to volunteer and find courses, things related to water and electricity and recycling, information regarding housing, spending my income like budgeting and saving. They handed me instructions and it was all helpful for me.”

**Maryam,  
My Futures Member**

# WEEK 1: HOUSING

Session One was led by Ashley Community Housing and Bristol City Council.

Members were given an overview of the housing situation in the local area. The session explained the challenges for getting social housing and described options for finding private renting and shared accommodation. The team also explained processes regarding references and deposits in the private sector, and gave an overview of tenants' rights and responsibilities.

The session also provided information about getting advice and assistance for members who found themselves homeless or rough sleeping.

Twenty one members completed the pre- and post-session self-ratings for Session One. Of these, 76% rated themselves higher for the statement "I understand the housing options available to me". 67% rated themselves higher for the statement "I am confident searching for a private rented tenancy".



**67% of members said that they were more confident searching for a private rented tenancy**

## WEEK 2: BENEFITS AND GRANTS

Session Two was led by Talking Money and delivered by Michelle Bower. The session was designed to respond to the difficulty that Borderlands members face when trying to navigate the complex benefits and applications processes and to signpost members to appropriate advice and support.

Michelle gave an overview of the UK benefits system and explained which benefits members might be entitled to in different circumstances. The sessions also introduced some discretionary grants and explained the options for seeking advice and help with benefits in the local area.

During the session, members discussed what is meant by a 'benefit' and learned about the different benefits available for people of working age and retirement age. Welfare reforms were also introduced, including the benefit cap, freezing of benefits, the 'bedroom tax' and the new system of Universal Credit. Michelle then explained the different available statutory grants, including the Local Crisis and Prevention Fund, Short term benefit advances and Discretionary Housing Payments. This included details to help members work out their eligibility, to apply and where to get advice and support with making applications.

Finally, the session introduced charitable trusts specifically for nationals from a particular country, or for employees from certain industries. Based on pre and post-session self-ratings, 58% rated themselves higher for the statement "I understand the benefits system in the UK" and 58% also rated themselves higher for the statement "I know where to seek advice about benefits".

**58% of members said that they had a better understanding of the benefits system in the UK**

**talking money**  
advice, support & information

## WEEK 3: MANAGING MY MONEY AND THE HOME

Session Three was delivered by Charlie Eddisford from Pennywise, and Chloe Jansen-Lester and Mara Saunders from 1625 Independent People. The session was designed to help Borderlands members to build on their past experiences of managing their money, and to learn new skills in budgeting, paying bills and banking.

Members discussed their spending habits and their experiences with managing their personal finances. Income and expenditure were explained and the idea of prioritising spending was introduced. Members did a 'taste test' as a way of introducing the idea of making savings on everyday items.

The facilitators described different local banking options and looked at the advantages of different types of accounts. Members also learned what they needed to do to get a bank account, how to read a bank statement and where to go for help and support in the local area.

Finally, members shared their shopping tips, including different options for mobile phone SIM cards and international calling.

Based on pre and post-session self-ratings, 75% rated themselves higher for the statement "I feel confident about looking after my money". 75% rated themselves higher for the statement "I feel able to cope with changes to my money". 12 people were referred on for further support.



**75% of members said that they felt more confident about looking after their money**



## WEEK 4: EMPLOYABILITY AND FUTURE PLANNING

Session four was designed to help Borderlands members improve their employability and manage their careers. Employability and future planning gave learners the opportunity to develop the skills that each individual needs for increased independence and employability. The course followed the recognised outcomes and focused on developing independent living skills, employment and community inclusion. The course was person-centred and learners had a bespoke schedule to provide a supported progression route to the next stage of their lives.

The course focused on:

- Employment Skills
- Independent Living Skills
- Communication
- Action Planning
- Transferable Skills and Training Needs Analyses

In addition the National Careers Service has worked with regional employers to show the benefits of bringing in new talent and how hiring refugees introduces new ideas and perspectives that can enrich any workplace. The advantages of diversity have been well documented, from generating innovation, to increasing motivation, to attracting highly talented job applicants through partnership working and community representation.

Based on pre and post-session self-ratings, 50% rated themselves higher for two statements: "I am confident I can get a job/better job", and "I am confident finding work in the UK".

**50% of members said they felt more confident finding work in the UK**



# USING TRANSLATORS

Borderlands members who attended My Futures sessions spoke more than twenty different languages.

## First languages of My Futures learners

Arabic

Ormo

Wolof

Farsi

Somali

Zagahawa

Tigrinya

Sudenese

Zakow

Moba

Swahili

English language needs can be a significant barrier both to navigating complex processes and procedures and to accessing support. My Futures used a team of dedicated volunteer translators to address this. Translators sat in on My Futures sessions and translated content in real time. It was not uncommon to hear several languages being spoken at once in any one class. A recommendation for any future project is to explore translating course materials including the learning pack.

Q: Do you think that it could have been possible without a translator?

A: No, no no no. Never, for my friend and for me as well. Because we aren't at that level where we can understand what is being said.

**From an interview with Ali,  
My Futures Member**



An unforeseen positive effect was that translators also acted as carriers of information to their own communities. Several of the translators suggested that they could recruit new participants from their own community groups in future.

Challenges for the translators included:

- The ratio of translators to participants was high so there may have been participants who could not hear/understand the translation.
- Two course leaders who felt that the translations after each sentence acted as interruptions in the flow of their presentations and therefore possible misunderstanding of the content.
- For some of the translators the information was new to them and so there had to be clarification of the content which could interrupt the translation.

Three possible recommendations may counter these minor issues:

- Toolkit Translated: The toolkit provided for the participants was only in English. To have it translated in to the other main languages used by the participants could remove some of the pressure from the translators and reduce the amount of interruptions in the sessions which could be clarified by the toolkit.
- A session for the translators: This would help familiarise the translators with the content of the sessions and they may be able to answer some of the questions the participants have which may help the flow of the presentations.
- Grouping cohorts by language: If the cohorts were to be grouped according to the languages they speak it may reduce the number of different translators needed in each session.

Vicky Cummings

## PROJECT LEARNING

While there was a lot of interest in the My Future course at the beginning of the pilot, we soon found that it was difficult to recruit attendees onto the later cohorts. Greater staff and resources are necessary to obtain referrals, and that the course should be delivered less frequently. This should result in a larger pool of "recent refugees" from whom to take referrals for each course. The possibility of widening the eligibility to include, at the very least, refugees who have received a positive decision in court but are still waiting for confirmation from Home Office. A closer working relationship with refugee services delivered by the Red Cross might also increase referrals.

We also found that it was not uncommon for attendees of the My Future course to miss a session, usually due to another important appointment - refugees can have fairly chaotic lives, especially when recently granted leave to remain. After being granted leave to remain, refugees who were receiving Asylum Support have a "grace period" of just 28 days, after which their support will end and they will have to access mainstream welfare. Ideally, people would have the knowledge delivered in the My Future course in time to use it during this period, perhaps suggesting that the eligibility of the course should be reviewed to enable those interested to complete the course in advance of being granted leave to remain, although this might prove complicated.

**Steve Owen, Borderlands**

The participants in all the cohorts would occasionally find that the My Future sessions would clash with the timetable of other responsibilities such as college courses or meetings with caseworkers. As a result there were sessions that were unattended by the majority of the cohort or participants would find that they had to leave early and therefore would miss some of the information provided in particular sessions. During the festival of Eid, the sessions were cancelled altogether. In order to resolve these issues the organisers of My Future can familiarise themselves with the timetables of the attendees and organise more suitable times for the classes to be held.

**Vicky Cummings, University of Bristol - Evaluation Team**



In addition the National Careers Service has worked with regional employers to show the benefits of bringing in new talent and how hiring refugees introduces new ideas and perspectives that can enrich any workplace. The advantages of diversity have been well documented, from generating innovation, to increasing motivation, to attracting highly talented job applicants through partnership working and community representation.

**National Careers Service**

“Ashley Community Housing welcomed the opportunity to be part of the design, development and delivery of the “My Future” course. These classes filled a gap in provision – supporting individuals upon receipt of refugee status to access key services and establish themselves in the UK. It was beneficial working with such a breadth of organisations, with differing specialisms and learning from them. A number of attendees from the course have since been housed by ACH and have moved into their first paid employment in the UK.”

**Tom Dixon, Ashley Community Housing**

“The really special thing about My Futures was its organic growth. It all started with a brief conversation between Nese at Borderlands and myself about how incredibly challenging it is for people with recent refugee status to navigate the systems that are supposed to help people make a home in this country. From there the project evolved until we had a core group of professionals sitting down together to create a road map to navigate those systems. All the partners came together to use their own stretched budgets and time, simply because something needed to be done. It was a very powerful thing to be a part of”.

**Chloe Jansen-Lester, 1625 Independent People**