

RAPAR volunteer handbook



rapar

Refugees and Asylum Seekers Participatory Action Research

This handbook was developed and finalised by RAPAR volunteers in 2003

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Mission Statement

The RAPAR project aims to use evidence gathered through participatory action research and communicate interaction between asylum seekers, refugees local people and services to bring about awareness and action that will address the following.

- Imbalance that exists between services
- Gaps that exist within service
- The need to include communities, as they develop their sense of belonging to the city of Manchester

1.2 RAPAR'S Objectives

Consequently, in respect to the above mission statement, RAPAR'S objectives for refugees, asylum seekers and indigenous people living within Manchester are to encourage support and enable the development and provision of

- Inclusive education
- Appropriate health care
- Decent housing
- Social interaction within caring community
- A safe and secure environment

2.0 RAPAR AND VOLUNTEERS

2.1 Volunteer principals

RAPAR aims to provide well-defined opportunities for the mutual benefit of clients and volunteers. There is no question about the fact that, there are many good reasons for involving volunteers in RAPAR'S activities. This mutual understanding can lead to a formidable relationship between RAPAR and volunteers through the following principles

2.1.1 Best Practice

RAPAR intends to be a project devoted to making use of all the best in all aspects of working with volunteers because proper support and training is vital to any role volunteers would be asked to perform.

2.1.2 Links with the community

The plight of refugees and asylum seekers are many and varied. Sojourning in a different environment, adjusting to a new ways of life in a different cultural background, thinking about family members and relatives they have left behind, all combine to give them sleepless night which deprive them of the peace of mind to organise themselves to integrate themselves in their new environment. RAPAR therefore, aims to enable refugee's and asylum seekers living in Manchester to build new lives. This can be achieved by actively making links with the local community and working closely with the volunteers. Thus, through the extensive use of volunteers, RAPAR aims to give further momentum to on of the core objectives of its mandate.

2.1.3 Links with clients

RAPAR works with a large variety of refugees and asylum seekers in Manchester. This underpins its motivation to welcome and work with volunteers from all backgrounds so that our clients will always feel at home and also acknowledge that we are a caring agency in better position to respond to their needs.

2.1.4 Diversity

RAPAR welcomes and seeks to promote the variety of skills, interest, and life experiences and cultural backgrounds that volunteers bring to the project. This diverse background would enable them also to work with refugees and asylum seekers who have congregated in Manchester from all over the world.

2.1.5 Added value

RAPAR also believes that involving volunteers presents a unique opportunity to extend support and assistance to the refugees and asylum seekers. The volunteers can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the project as a whole. By this contribution volunteers add value to the services the project provides.

2.1.6 Different paths

Volunteers are often able to get involved in activities that paid staff do not have time to do. Volunteers normally would visit and interact with refugees and asylum seekers and know at first hand their problems, which would need the attention of the project staff.

2.1.7 Awareness

Many people may not be aware of the difficulties and trauma refugees and asylum seekers go through in the community. They may therefore not take any interest in their welfare. RAPAR believes that volunteers can spread the message to the Manchester community about the situation of refugees and asylum seekers face in the community. This helps to dispel myths and misconception about refugees and asylum seekers as well as helping to improve public opinion about them. Because of their special relationships with the clients in the community, RAPAR listens to and respects the view of the volunteers since information gathered through the volunteers are seriously taken into account when RAPAR is making any policy decisions.

2.1.8 Volunteer development

In order for the use of volunteers to be effective it is vital that RAPAR participates in the development and implementation of volunteers policy and practice. RAPAR will strive to develop innovative opportunities for volunteers based on the skills and aspirations of volunteer as long as those roles fit well with RAPAR'S overall aims and objectives. This will be achieved through regular discussions between staff and volunteers.

3.0 SELECTING VOLUNTEERS

3.1 Advertising and publicity

In accordance with refugee's equal opportunity policy, adverts for volunteers should be placed as widely as possible, including in local ethnic minority press, with local community organisations and local volunteer bureaux. RAPAR is however aware that many people in the community are already aware of the project and the need for volunteers to assist the staff. Many people have therefore come on their own accord to apply for volunteering.

3.2 Short listing and interview

The interview panel should comprise two members of staff to interview potential volunteers. A third member, a volunteer, could assist them to carry out the interview. Selection criteria should be clear before the interview and volunteer suitability should be assessed against those criteria. These criteria should include commitment to equal opportunities and refugee issues and where appropriate and specific skills as outlined in the volunteer specification. Interview questions should be simple using straightforward English and designed to test the interviewee's ability and then to show their skills and experience. The interview questions should also be focused on their attitude to refugees. Help with completing the application form should be offered to those who are not familiar with UK systems.

3.3 References and screening

All successful applicants should provide two references and enquiries made about their character and suitability before allowing them to commence volunteering roles. Where possible at least one reference should come from a previous employer. However, this requirement may not be possible especially if the volunteer is himself/herself a refugee or asylum seeker and therefore it will be the duty of the interview panel to decide on the applicants fate, depending largely on his/her performance during the interview.

3.4 Volunteer agreement

Successful volunteer will be asked to sign a volunteer agreement that states what is expected from them and what they can expect from RAPAR. Thus, the agreement will define the working relationship between the volunteers and the RAPAR staff. As part of the agreement volunteers will be asked to abide by the volunteer practice guidelines.