

Reed in Partnership

Supporting refugees in London & the North East on the Refugee Employability Programme



Introduction

Refugees bring a uniquely diverse set of skills and experiences to the workplace. As one guide¹ says: “Refugees are not a homogenous group, representing a wide range of nationalities and cultural backgrounds that could help to diversify thinking and attract new talent within any business.” We know that refugees have a strong desire to find good work, settle in communities and contribute to the UK.

However, they can also face major barriers to both finding a sustainable job and reaching their potential. Language, discrimination, unfamiliar recruitment practices and barriers around recognition of qualifications or skills can come on top of the kinds of other barriers such as transport, childcare or ill-health, in particular mental health.

These are just some of the reasons why refugees are more likely to be unemployed, and once in employment, too often not progress from an entry-level role. The Commission on the Integration of Refugees² found that a high proportion of refugees were highly educated, but that 39% of respondents have had to take a more junior role in the UK compared with their previous job.

The Home Office set up the Refugee Employability Programme (REP) in order to work on some of the settlement and integration barriers refugees face that cannot be fully addressed by mainstream services. In delivering the service in London and the North East of England between September 2023 and June 2025, Reed in Partnership is proud to have supported more than 5,000 refugees with employment support, English language support and finding their feet in their new community. This report sets out some insights into what service users achieved, with examples of both individual and employer experiences of the service.

- The importance of personalised support in reflecting the perspectives and experiences of each individual, in working on job goals, support with specific barriers such as housing or in signposting to the most appropriate community help. Reed in Partnership has many years of delivering employability support that is personalised and tailored, but given the vulnerability of many REP service users it is particularly important that support workers understand and respond to their individual experience.
- The scale of need for English as a Second Language (ESOL) training and the impact it can have. Most Service Users supported by REP accessed some form of ESOL course or support. The ability to access ESOL support that is more aligned with the journey to employment than mainstream provision was valued by Service Users, opening up opportunities for both employment and community integration.
- Building relationships with community organisations, as well as signposting to some of the valuable support they provide, has been an important part of the programme. Below you can read about some of the organisations Reed in Partnership worked with in London and the North East.

Throughout the programme, REP staff and service users have been taking part in workshops and surveys to inform the evaluation of the programme, which is being carried out by Ipsos UK, RAND Europe and Renaisi. We look forward to reading this and anticipate that it will include some important learning to help the employability sector support refugees successfully in the future. For employers who want advice on successfully benefiting from recruiting refugees, a guide can be found at www.tent.org/uk.

¹ UN Refugee Agency, Home Office, DWP and BITC, Tapping Potential: Guidelines to Help Britain Businesses Employ Refugees, 2019

² Commission on the Integration of Refugees, Integration of Refugees in the UK, March 2024.

About the Refugee Employability Programme

In September 2023, Reed in Partnership launched its delivery of the Refugee Employability Programme (REP) as a prime provider in London and the North East of England, as commissioned by the Home Office.

The programme was designed to support refugees to find sustained employment and build their lives in England. It provided individually tailored employability sessions, English language tuition and help with job applications and access to vocational training.

Service Users were also supported with community integration, such as accessing services including GPs, Jobcentre Plus, transport, or signposting to community groups – all to support the successful settlement of refugees in their new home in England.

The REP used a case-working model. Each service user was allocated a Case Manager to assess their needs and work with them to develop a tailored plan. The Case Manager would review their progress regularly to ensure they were getting the most from the service.

The three types of specialist support available to Service Users were:



Language support

Language skills are integral to employability and integration.

For those not accessing other available mainstream provision, the REP provided English Language classes, including ESOL invitations to formal and informal conversation clubs and lessons to support learning capacity, such as literacy.



Integration support

The REP helped refugees to integrate and settle into their local communities by signposting to services such as:

- Community groups
- Healthcare, including GPs, dentists and mental health support
- Housing support
- Childcare

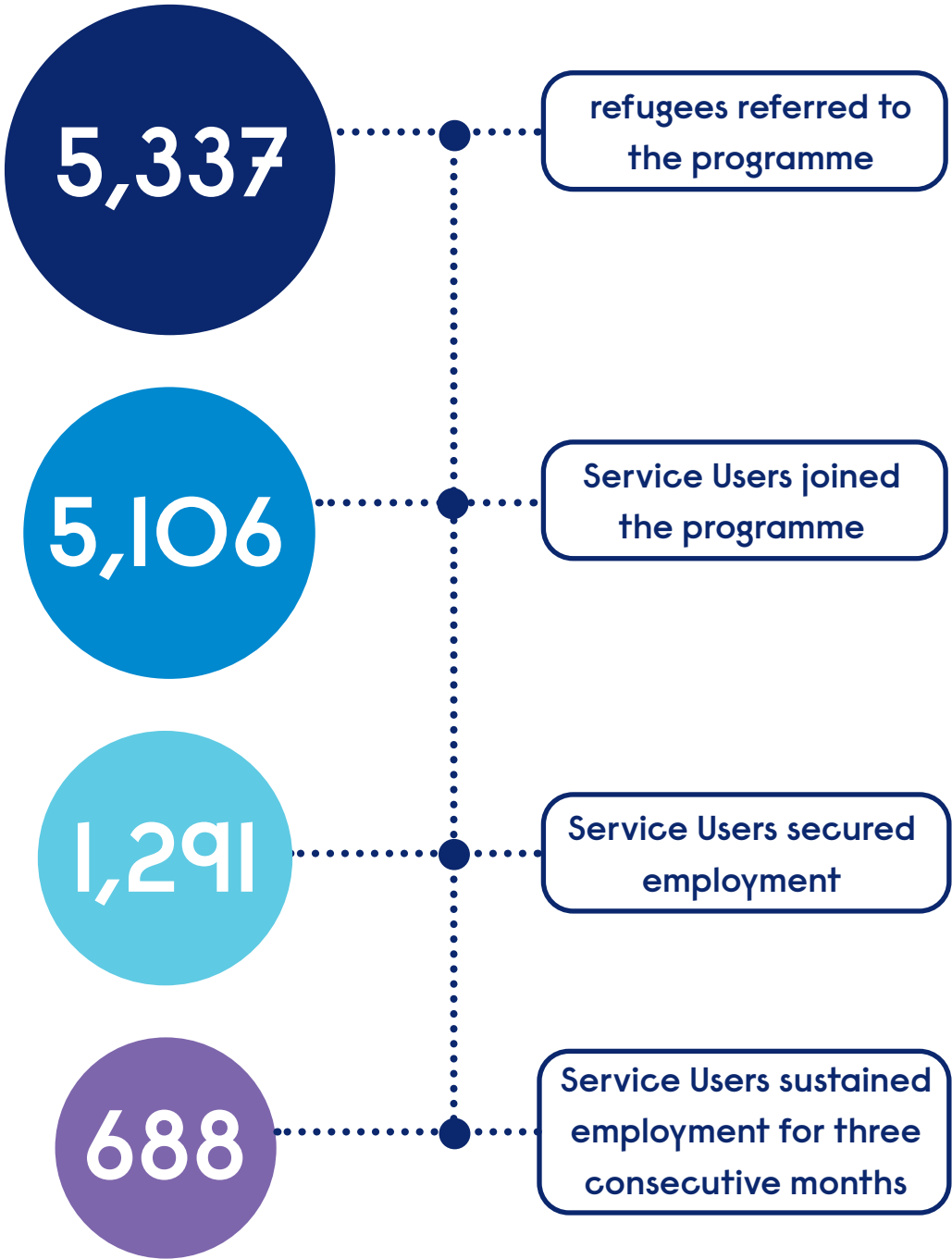


Employment support

Ensuring refugees built their skills and talent and accessed sustainable local work. This included:

- Identifying the right jobs to apply for
- Creating a CV
- Learning skills with training
- Accessing work experience
- Finding out more about local work culture
- Developing digital skills
- Accessing funding for training or travel
- Improving money management skills
- Submitting job applications
- Practicing for job interviews

Our delivery in numbers



Partnership with The Estée Lauder Companies

Individuals accessing the Refugee Employability Programme (REP) benefitted from our network of employer partners who collaborated with us to find suitable vacancies for our Service Users.

We connected with Estée Lauder through our relationship with Tent Partnership for Refugees, an organisation made up of over 400 major companies committed to hiring and integrating refugees into their workforces. We collaborated with Estée Lauder to create an inclusive pathway for refugees to access vacancies within their organisation.

Prior to opening vacancies to our Service Users, we worked closely with the Estée Lauder team to understand and identify potential barriers or hurdles in the application and recruitment process, using these insights to guide our strategy.

Following this, Estée Lauder developed a dedicated link for REP candidates to apply, simplifying the process and enabling them to track applications from our service accurately. Alongside this, we conducted group application sessions in our REP offices, offering practical guidance on both applications and group interviews.

Estée Lauder hosted an assessment day for our Service Users to learn about the organisation, showcase their personalities, and demonstrate their communication skills (even with limited English proficiency). Store managers present on the day would eventually become the candidates' supervisors. This personalised interaction helped to ease candidates' anxiety about joining a new work environment.

Following the assessment, four out of six Service Users who attended were offered and accepted offers of employment, one of which quickly went on to become the highest performing staff member in her store.

Successful candidates were paired with mentors within their stores who provided them with guidance during their training. Estée Lauder also offered complimentary hair and make-up services to unsuccessful candidates to bolster their confidence for other upcoming interviews.

Following the success of this initiative, we continued partnering with Estée Lauder to support even more of our Service Users into sustainable employment.



"Thanks to Reed in Partnership, I have a job and I can provide for my family."

- Ivonne



Community partnerships

To further support individuals to integrate into their new communities, our local teams worked to build relationships with community groups and organisations that could provide REP Service Users with additional support.

In the North East we formed relationships with organisations including:

- **The Newcastle United Foundation** who supported with collaboration and employment prospects across the metro centre area, as well as several courses available to REP Service Users.
- **The Comfrey Project** in Gateshead who specifically work to provide opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers to integrate into the local community, learn new skills and feel a sense of belonging.
- **STARCH** (South Tyneside Asylum Seekers and Refugees Church Help) who held weekly drop-in sessions which provide refugees with a safe space as well as provisions such as household goods, clothing and more.

In London our network of community partners included:

- Homelessness charity **Spires** in South London that provides advice and support, helping individuals to gain and maintain stable accommodation, as well as supplying food parcels and clothing for those in need.
- **English for Action London** which provided access to additional ESOL support and local community support groups for migrants.
- **Care4Calais** who we worked alongside at Ascension Balham during their regular drop-in session for asylum seekers and refugees who are looking for help.

These are just a few of the organisations that supported us to deliver high quality resettlement support to everyone accessing the Refugee Employability Programme. We would like to extend our thanks to all those that supported our Service Users to begin their new lives in England.



Becoming part of a community - Hamilton's story

Hamilton met his Case Manager, Laura, during a presentation for the Refugee Employability Programme (REP). As Laura presented in Hamilton's first language, he felt at ease and decided to join the REP.

A week later, Hamilton was evicted from his temporary accommodation. Hear in Hamilton's own words how the REP team supported him to quickly find accommodation and then start working.

"Unfortunately, the week after joining the Refugee Employability Programme, I received notice to vacate the hotel that I was assigned to stay in," said Hamilton. "Obviously distressed, I went to see Laura and she helped me to complete a homeless referral form with the local housing authority, and she made some calls and invited me into the office the next day for a meeting with their Integration Manager, Vanya.

"Vanya was brilliant", continued Hamilton. "At the time, I was sofa surfing and sleeping in a church, so she sent the necessary emails and made calls on my behalf to help me find accommodation. Laura kindly gave me a bag of toiletries which was so thoughtful; because of my situation, basic hygiene products had almost become a luxury, as I had no money to buy any. This brought tears to my eyes as it was nice to know there are people willing to help in this way.

"Within 10 days I was offered a one-bedroom flat within the area. I met my housing officer the next day and collected the keys to my new home!

"I practically skipped to my appointment the next day; I was so happy. When I saw Laura, Vanya and the team I showed them my keys and told them about my new place, they were all so happy for me, it was such a nice feeling and I felt like my life in the UK was just beginning."

"Laura explained that our sessions would now be focused on finding employment, which I was looking forward to, as I felt like I'd reached the next stage of my journey.

Together, Laura and Hamilton assessed what job sector he wanted to pursue and to highlight his previous skills and experience in maintenance they created a CV and began applying for jobs. With Hamilton's enthusiasm, it wasn't long before he was invited to interview and offered a job!

Laura supported Hamilton financially with funding for his travel costs, vouchers for work clothes and shoes, and the application for a DBS check which he required to start his new job as a Maintenance Associate.

"I would like to give my sincerest thanks to Laura and the team for empowering and supporting me on my journey and thank you to REP for all of their support and assistance along the way," said Hamilton.



ESOL support – Imad’s story

Imad started his journey with the Refugee Employability Programme by meeting his Case Manager, Claire, who focused on what areas of support were needed and assessed Imad’s future goals.

Imad’s goal was to learn English, to support him in settling in his new community and eventually finding work. Assisted by ESOL Trainer Jannet, Claire was on hand to assist Imad with English speaking, reading, and writing, giving him the skills he desired to find sustainable employment.

Claire shared: “I have been providing Imad with one-to-one ESOL sessions, in addition to the lessons he already receives at college. Ever since Imad started the weekly sessions at our Croydon office, his understanding of certain English phrases, reading and writing has improved significantly, and he is now able to retain all the information that he receives from these sessions.”

Imad told us: “My Case Manager gives very useful information that is easy for me to understand. I enjoy attending the office and learn a lot from my sessions.”

Imad was soon offered a job at a local restaurant, and we provided financial support with his travel costs to ensure he got off to the best possible start.

“During our last session, Imad discussed how he found the content of our sessions to be very relevant to real life, how they are very well explained and engaging,” said Claire.

“Imad continues to receive in-work support calls from us every two weeks, which allows us to check in and make sure that he is happy, and everything is going well in his new job. It is also an opportunity for us to address any issues or concerns that he may have.”



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