



One Step Closer:

Confidence building and employability skills for refugee & asylum seeking women

JULY 2014



1. Background

One Step Closer is a pilot confidence building and employability skills course for asylum seeking and refugee women, designed in partnership by the Refugee Women's Strategy Group (RWSG), Scottish Refugee Council and Glasgow ESOL Forum. The cost of delivering the course and of removing barriers to participation for refugee and asylum seeking women was met by Scottish Refugee Council with funding from the Scottish Government and Glasgow ESOL Forum.

"I enjoy the course and I would recommend it to others who are preparing to start working"

The course was held every Tuesday morning from 25 February to 13 May 2014 (with two weeks off in April for the school holidays) with registration and initial assessment taking place on 18 January 2014.

The content of the course included identifying individual skills and matching them to current job vacancies; an in-depth look at the process of job applications from both the applicant and employer viewpoint; and the development of skills and confidence with competency based interviews.

The fundamental approach of the course was to create a safe, supportive, sensitive, and responsive women-only space within which to build the confidence and employability skills of refugee and asylum seeking women.

2. Key lessons

In evaluating the course there emerged some key lessons which should inform approaches to employability support for refugee women, including:

- Understanding and responding to the needs of refugee women;
- Creating a supportive environment;
- Incorporating ESOL skills;
- Flexible and responsive approach;
- Emphasis on confidence building;
- Removing barriers;
- Access to IT training; and,
- Prior recognition of the course as 'job preparation'.

Understanding and responding to the needs of refugee women

The One Step Closer course was developed in response to identified needs, recognising that refugee women experience multiple barriers to accessing employment in Scotland¹. Those needs include a lack of information and understanding of services available to them, a lack of dedicated and appropriate services for refugee women, and a lack of employability preparation for women still in the asylum process.

"The course was simple and straightforward to meet our needs"

An assessment of individual needs, experience, skills and aspirations was undertaken at the beginning of the course and a flexible approach was used throughout in response to emerging needs.

The course tutor was able to develop participants' knowledge and understanding of *'the whole language of jobs'* through utilising her knowledge and understanding of

¹ Refugee Women's Strategy Group (2011) *The Struggle to Contribute: a report identifying the barriers encountered by refugee women on their journey to employment in Scotland*, http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0000/6534/RWSG_The_Struggle_to_Contribute_2011.pdf

language and cultural barriers. Recognition of diverse cultural experiences also enabled the tutor to sensitively build confidence around, for example, forms of greeting, hand shaking and eye contact.

Creating a supportive environment

Glasgow ESOL Forum created an informal, sensitive and supportive environment within which participants felt safe and valued. The course tutor recognised that there is a journey towards employment and that it was important to build confidence and skills in response to the different stages in the journey of each participant.

Incorporating ESOL skills

Although the participants had a good standard of everyday English, the abstract and corporate language of job descriptions and person specifications proved challenging to the group. There was, therefore, a focus on vocabulary building in the sessions and opportunities were created for discussion around the meanings of expressions such as ‘good team player’ and ‘able to work on your own initiative’ often found in job vacancies.

The course tutor fed back: *“The terminology and idioms used by employers in their recruitment ads were largely completely new to the learners. It’s an area which does not seem to be covered or explored in many of the standard ESOL courses the women might have previously encountered. The vocabulary in the recruitment ads we studied effectively acted as a barrier to the women applying for the job – if you can’t understand half of the phrases in a 150 word ad for a cleaner, which had*

“It is a good opportunity for me as I learned how to apply for job and what language I have to use”

simple but unfamiliar terms like ‘strong work ethic’ or ‘eager attitude’ then you are not going to apply.” (One Step Closer Course Tutor, June 2014).

“The time was suitable and I learn a lot about jobs and CVs”

Flexible and responsive approach

Whilst the programme provided a framework for the course, the tutor adopted a flexible and responsive approach to the way in which each session was delivered in response to needs and opportunities. For example, live job opportunities were used to guide participants through the process of applying for jobs from application to interview, including developing knowledge of interview scoring sheets.

Emphasis on confidence building

Confidence building and deepening understanding of refugee women’s needs and skills, providing a safe space for women to explore a whole new language of jobs was the central approach of the course.

Removing barriers

In all of its work on employment, RWSG has identified the lack of access to childcare as a key barrier for its members seeking to access language classes and employability support.² The course was able to ensure accessibility through the provision of childcare and travel expenses for participants. Timing the course around school hours was also important to enable women with school age children to participate.

² Idem.

Access to IT training

Participants identified the need to have access to IT training in addition to employability and confidence building. Having access to computers during the employability course was also identified as being important.

Prior recognition

The course would have benefited from prior recognition by Job Centre Plus as valid job preparation and job search activity, as some of the participants missed one or two of the classes to attend Job Centre Plus appointments. Future courses should ensure that such recognition is in place and support is given to refugee women to include this within their claimant commitment.

3. Participation

12 refugee and asylum seeking women registered for the course, 9 of whom attended regularly over the 10 weeks.

The group was very diverse in terms of previous work experience and 'recognised skills'.

One of the key elements to take into account when targeted training includes those still in the asylum system is the impact that this has on the ability to fully participate as a result of other commitments such as the requirement to report to the Home Office, housing inspections and appointments with legal representatives. However, both the course providers and the participants felt that it was important to offer this opportunity to asylum seeking women in order to provide some employment preparation ahead of being granted leave to remain.

4. Impact of tailored and responsive approach

In evaluating the course the following impacts were identified:

- **Effective targeting of resources** through responding to identified needs;
- Development of **confidence** of refugee and asylum seeking women through creating a supportive, safe and responsive environment;
- Development of **skills** of refugee women through responding to diverse individual skills levels;
- Increased **motivation** to apply for jobs through developing understanding of the world of work in Scotland;
- **Broadening horizons** through effective signposting (to volunteering or business support) in response to expressions of interest;
- **Recognition of learning** through evaluation and feedback and through awarding certificates to participants (see Appendix 1).

One of the participants has subsequently taken the first steps in setting up a catering business.

“Thank you very much but we would like more of these courses”

5. Participant feedback

Feedback from participants demonstrated that the course:

- Met expectations;
- Was useful, relevant and at the right level of English;
- Provided support and encouragement;
- Developed understanding of job seeking; and
- Developed confidence in applying for jobs and job interviews.

Most participants also indicated:

- Interest in more courses like this;
- Commitment to applying for more jobs; and
- Interest in doing some voluntary work.

7. Building on pilot course – next steps

Taking on board the key lessons from this pilot, the following proposals are presented for consideration:

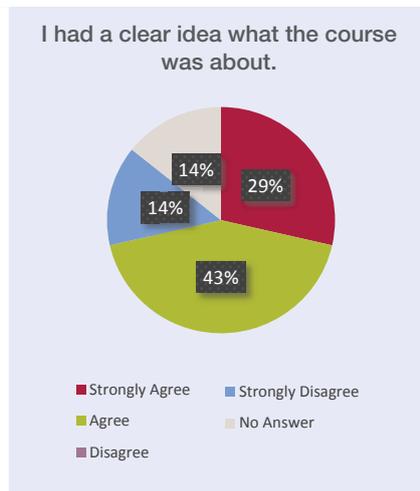
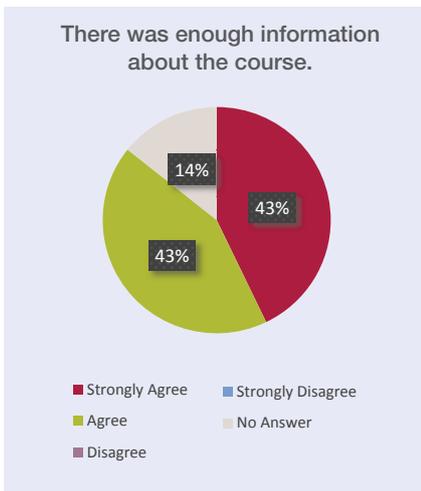
- Secure funding to roll out the course to the wider community of refugee and asylum seeking women;
- Provide drop-in support services, including ESOL, for refugee and asylum seeking women; and
- Liaise with DWP to fund and support a 'job club' or other peer support for refugee women, which includes ESOL.

Appendix 1 – Certificate

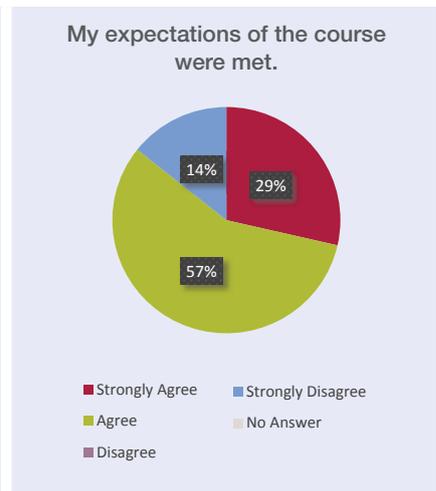


Appendix 2 – Course Evaluation

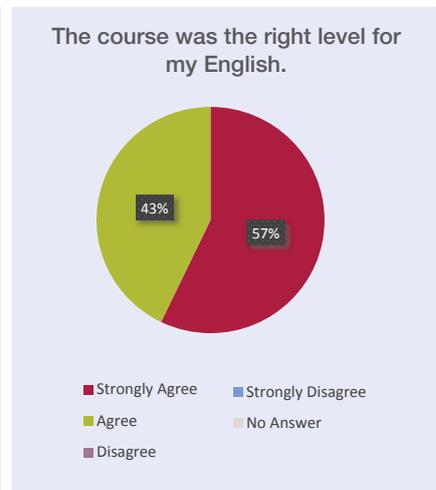
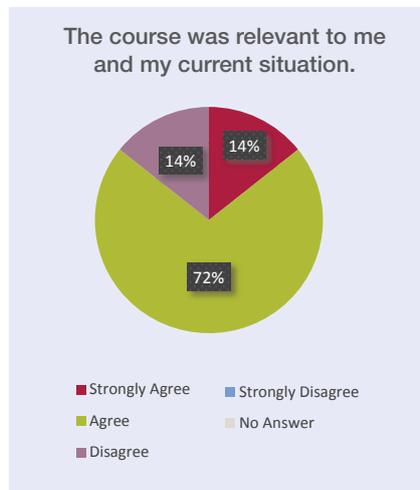
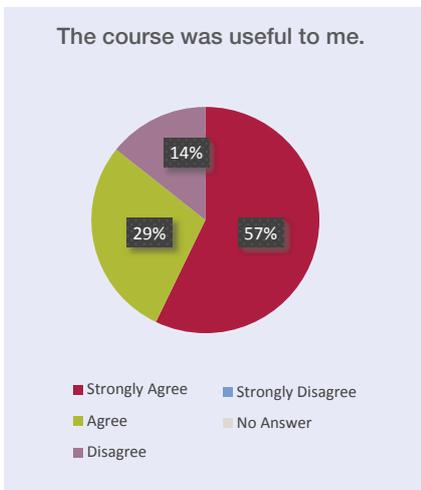
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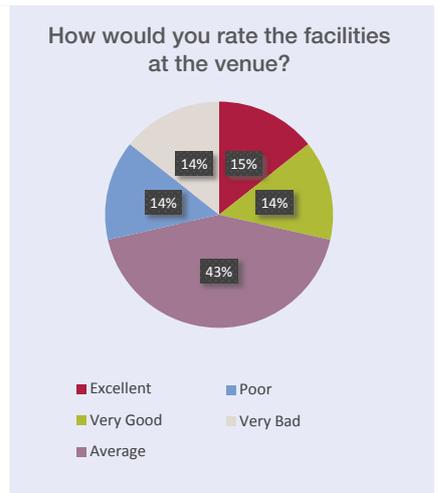
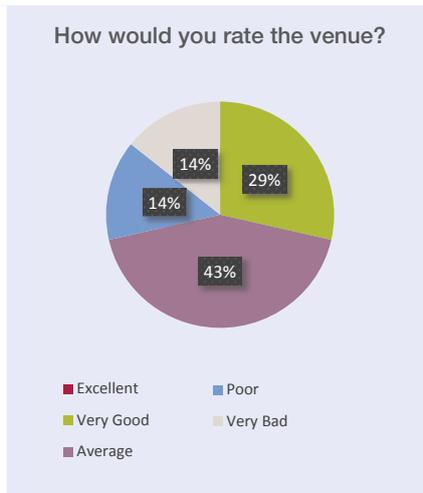
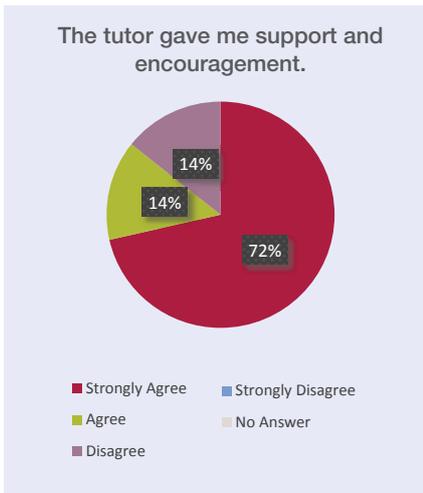
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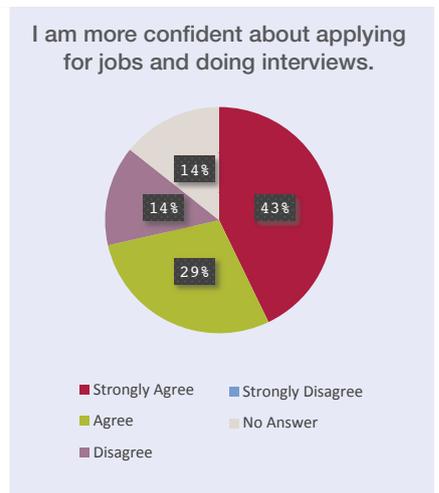
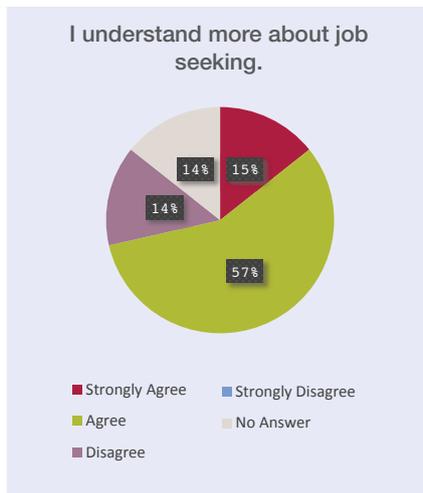
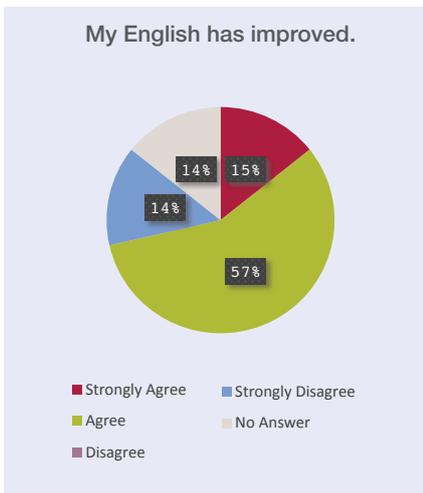
Section 3: Content:



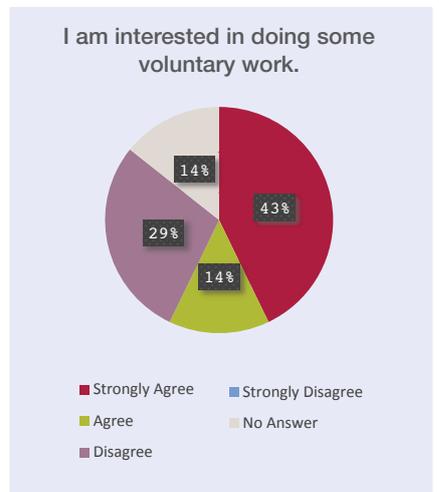
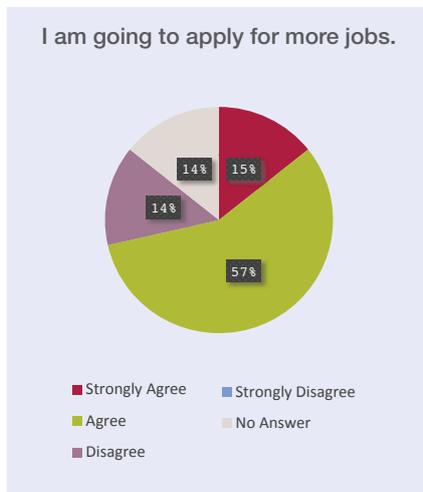
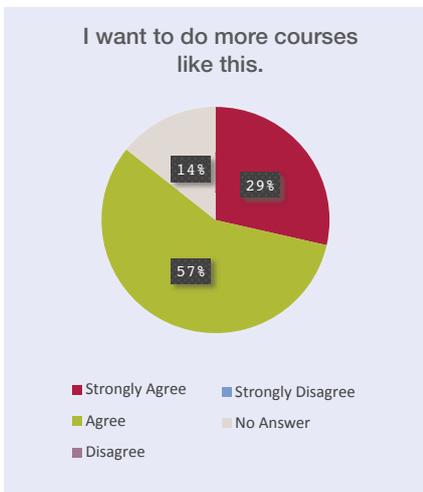
Section 4: Venue:



Section 5: Outcomes:



Section 6: Next Steps:



If you would like any further information or to discuss the course with us do get in touch.

CONTACT DETAILS:

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