

START: STUDENTS AND REFUGEES TOGETHER

Community Research: “Priority of needs”

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1.1 Introduction:

Students and Refugees Together (START) is a small charitable organisation in Plymouth run with 7-10 students on placement at any time during the year. START's mission statement is defined as "To work in partnership with families, individuals and organisations to facilitate the transition of refugees from people in need to self-reliant contributors to their local community" (START, 2003).

As a learning organisation it is important that the service outcomes meet the needs of both refugees and students. START uses a variety of methods to ensure that we are listening and using what we hear to change and improve our services.

This piece of research focuses on refugee need and priorities. It uses the same methodology as the community research conducted in 2012. It seeks to establish whether refugee-identified priorities have changed over time and has the following objectives:

- It fulfils contractual obligations to conduct feedback and evaluation that engages service users and ensures their involvement in the process.
- It retains a developed holistic template to enable a comparison from year to year.
- The collective results will inform a comprehensive review of the extent to which we achieve our mission statement.

1.2 Community Research:

The original research (Patel, 2012) was designed to draw on national research commissioned by the Home Office (Cebulla, Daniel and Zurawan, 2010), pay attention to START's whole service and local conditions. Whilst using the same broad framework we revisited the research brief paying particular attention to potential language barriers and strategies to overcome them. For example, simple language and rephrasing of questions with different synonyms were used and the images were those recommended by service users after the 2012 research.

During February 2015, a geography student on a full-time one-year placement worked with the START management team to conduct the research. As he did not have a role in casework at START he was seen as an unbiased person and that that there would be no conflict of interest in conducting the research.

The original questionnaire was examined and consisted of the following 3 elements:

1. Basic demographic information about respondents' age, gender, nationality and which services they used in Plymouth.
2. A series of pictures that represented areas of potential need (For example: finding somewhere to live; finding work; your health) for respondents to place in order of priority.
3. A series of follow-up questions about the chosen top priorities to capture people's own words.

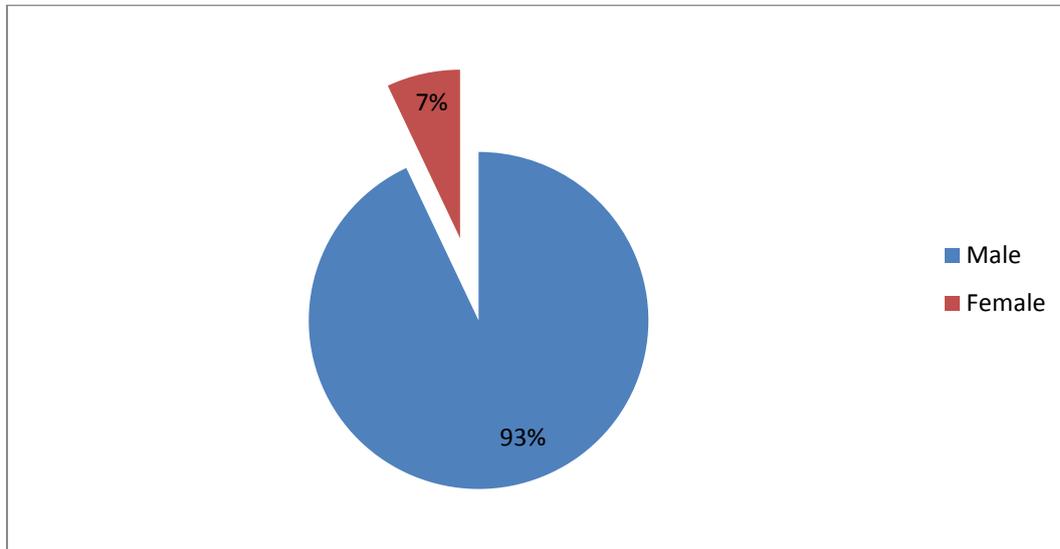
The resulting process followed:

- Refinement of previous questionnaire following consultation with the START management team.
- An invitation for people to participate whose active use of START services had ended during the last twelve months.
- Informal verbal information was given, explaining the purpose of the research.
- Respondents were invited for interview at the START offices.
- The responses were gathered, coded and anonymised by the geography student who drafted this report in consultation with the management team.
- The results were presented at the Cultural Kitchen for community scrutiny

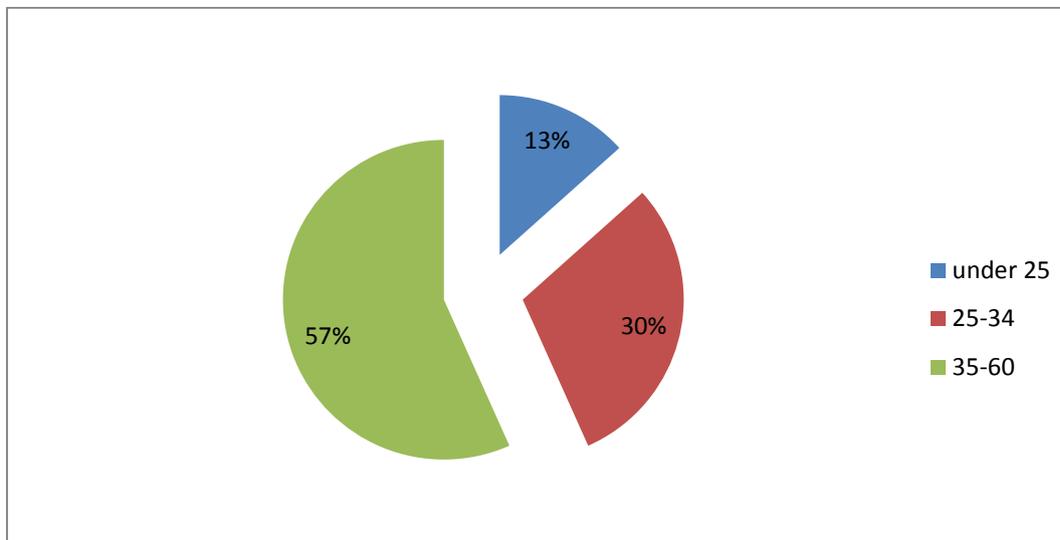
2.1 Research results: Basic demographic information:

We identified 79 refugees who were eligible to be interviewed. All were invited to participate in the research and 30 completed the whole process.

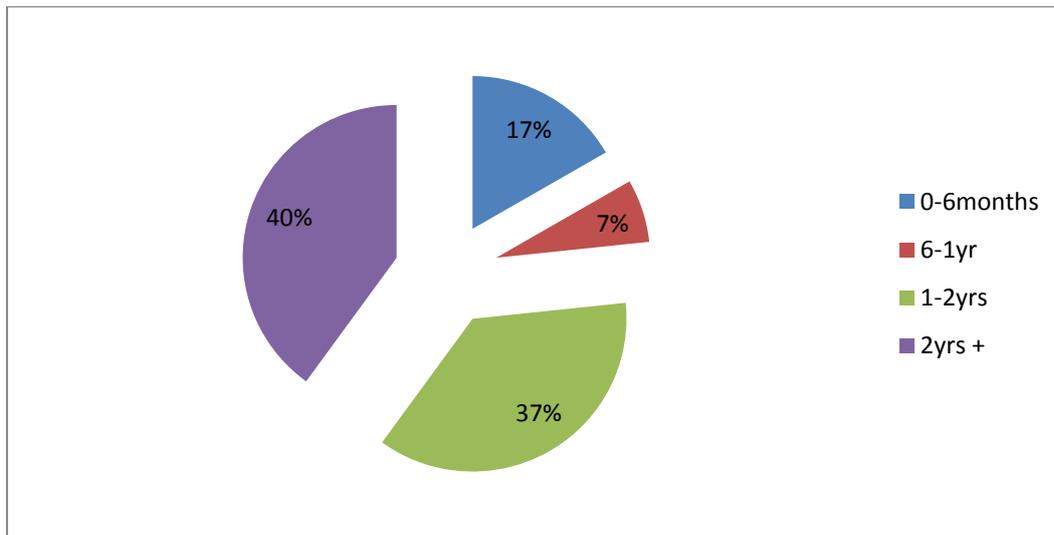
Gender of Respondents



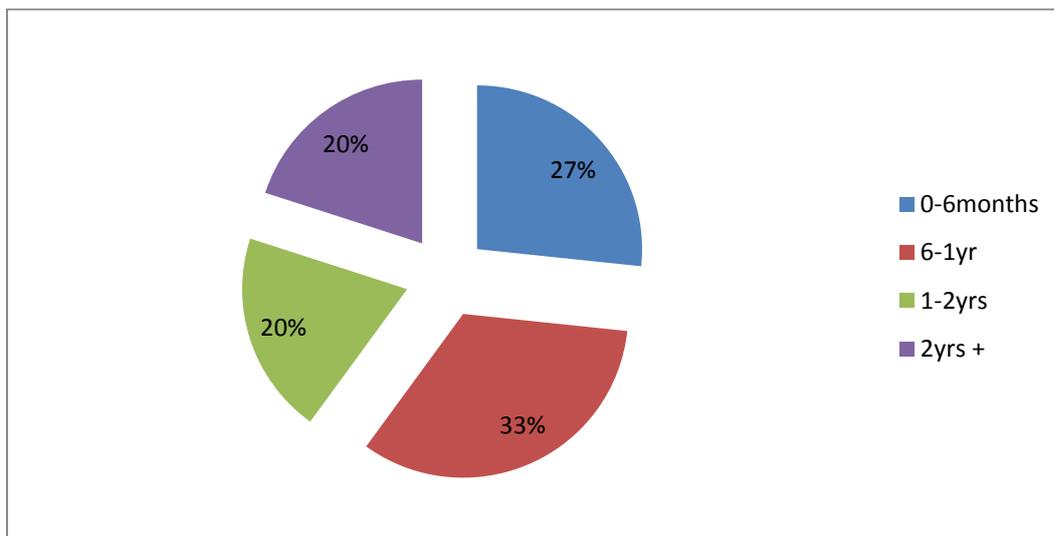
Age of Respondents



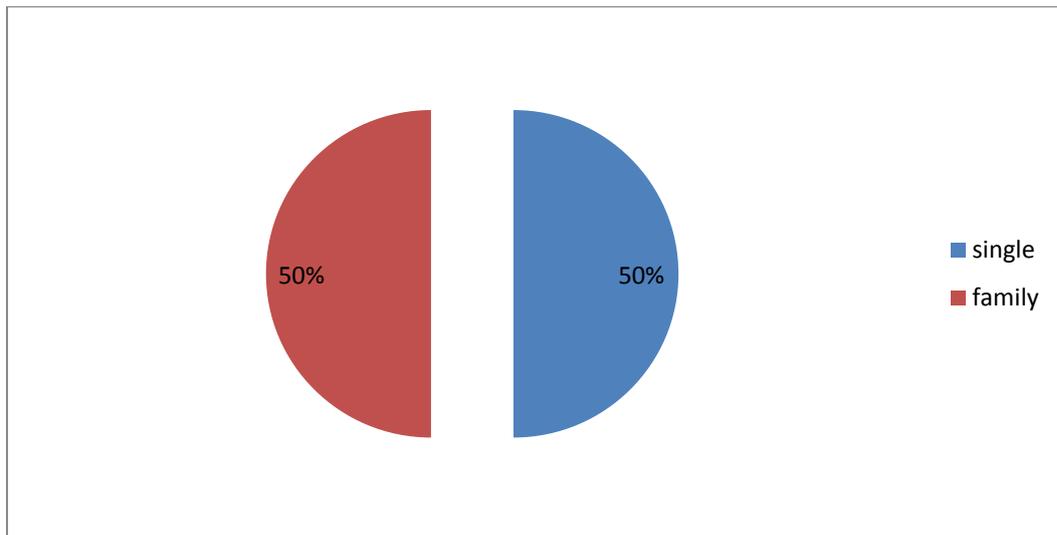
Length of time living in Plymouth



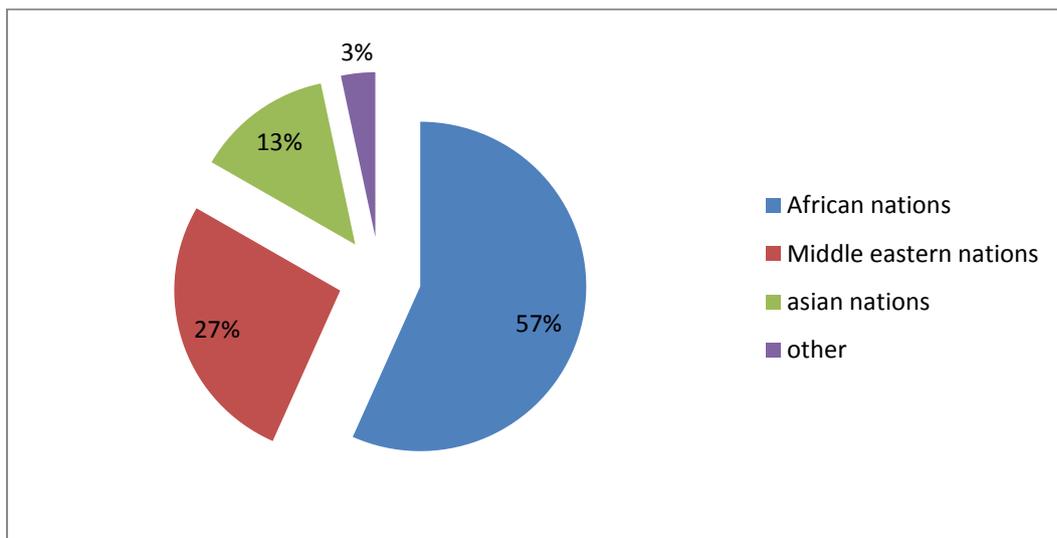
Length of time working with START



Family Status

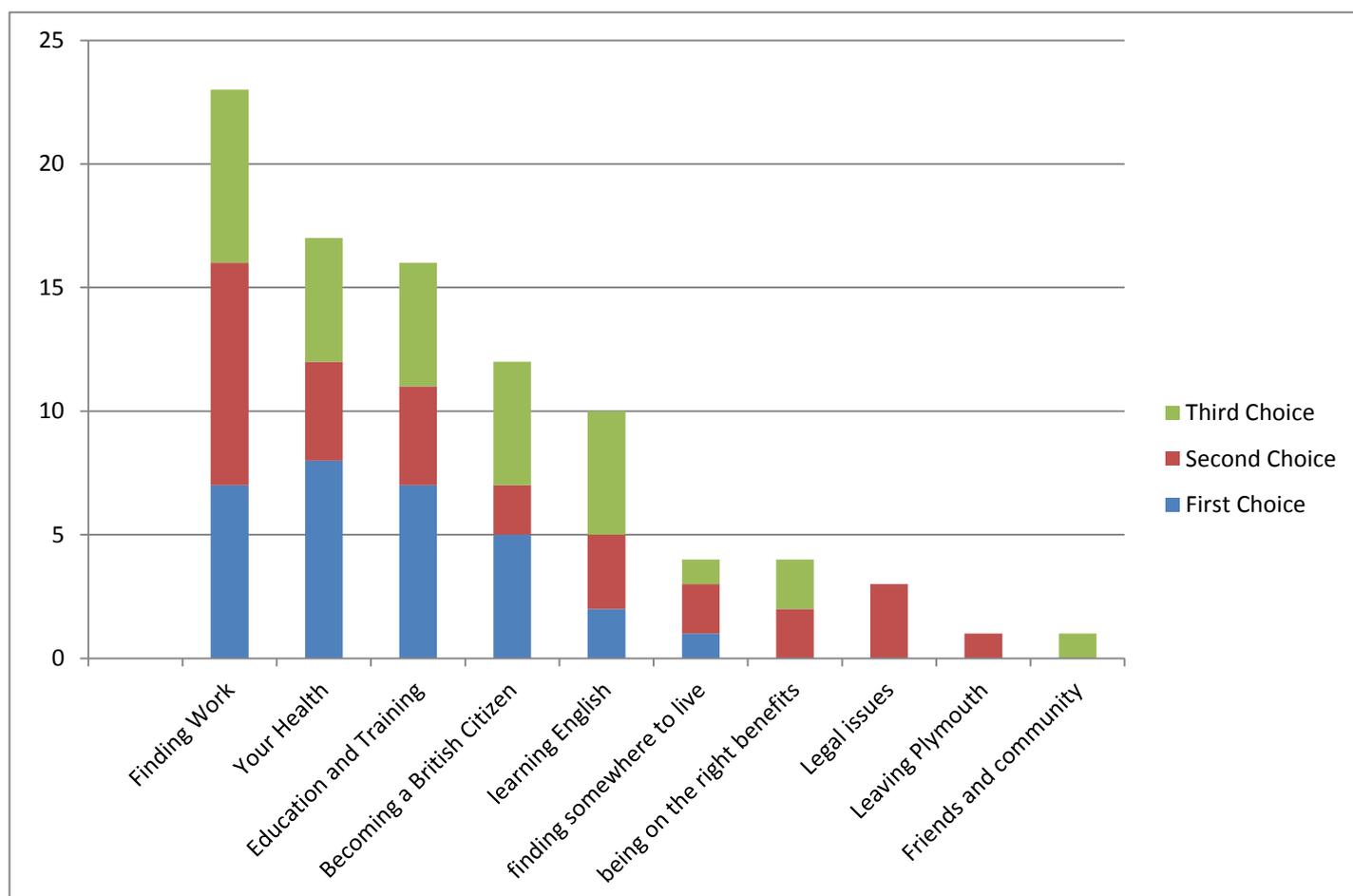


Country of Origin



2.2 Research results: photographic selection

The chart below shows the titles of the 10 images and the frequency with which they were chosen by respondents as their first, second or third choice. Colours indicated whether the choice was first (blue), second (red) or third (green). For example Learning English was the first choice for two people, the second choice for three people and the third choice for five others. The analysis uses the top three choices as the basis for identifying respondent priorities.



The top five picture results chosen as a first choice priority were:

- Your Health 8/30
- Finding Work 7/30
- Education and Training 7/30
- Becoming a British Citizen 5/30
- Learning English 2/30

However, when the first, second, and third choices are combined: the priority order changes and the top five results become:

- Finding Work 23/90
- Your Health 17/90
- Education and Training 16/90
- Becoming a British Citizen 17/90
- Learning English 10/90

2.3 Research results: qualitative responses:

The following statements are the participants' own words and represent some of the views shared about each of the priorities. These are presented in the order in which they were ranked by participants:

Finding Work:

- It's important to support yourself rather than being on benefits
- Finding the right job is my priority because I am expecting my family reunion
- To support my family and get more work experience to transfer to my children
- If I am working I get more money
- If you have a job you have a life and have access to more
- Finding work is very important

The majority of respondents said that having a job was part of a good life because you need one to have access to anything else in the UK. However from follow up questions we explored the main barriers to finding work. These included: lack of previous experience in work; a lack of opportunities in the Plymouth job market as a whole; and having to wait for the Jobcentre to provide language classes and different training. Respondents said they were overcoming these difficulties by coming into START and doing volunteering to improve their CV.

Your Health:

- It is important for supporting my family and for doing anything
- To get all the above thing you need to have first health
- If you have good health then you also will have a good future
- Because I don't want problems for life
- First to health in order to do anything else
- Because without health I couldn't do nothing
- I have been in Plymouth for 10 years, I would like to see my family maybe.

Across all respondents a common opinion was that you needed health to be able to achieve any other of the priorities listed on the questionnaire. Also for many people, being healthy was an important part of having a family life. Difficulties included occasional differences of opinion over treatment and prescriptions. Many found the location of their surgery a long distance from other appointments and so made difficulties for time management. Some respondents noted they planned overcome this by going privately for healthcare in the future.

Education and Training:

- Education is very important to do anything, to get a job and to communicate with the work colleagues
- I want to learn and improve my English, and to find a job
- I want to become a Security Guard, so if I have a certificate I can get a job easily
- I want to learn English first and get an electrician course after. This will help me to get a CSCS card
- I want to improve my English and get education

Many participants noted that learning English was a big part of their education needs and important in finding work.

Citizenship:

- I want space to travel and I like the UK
- Government is good
- We can't go back, so it's important to get security
- I can then travel and look for better jobs
- You have more flexibility with a passport

Nearly all respondents noted that there were two main elements behind citizenship as a main priority. These can be identified as security and travel flexibility. A main difficulty identified with citizenship was the time that it takes to obtain citizenship. Moreover it is sometimes difficult to prove 'good character' as a criterion for citizenship as finding work for example is difficult.

Learning English:

- It's important to communicate with people in order to get a good job
- English is important because without language it is impossible to do anything

Both respondents who chose learning English noted that communication is very important in order to succeed in the UK. Language could prove to be a real barrier as there was very little support offered in their own language first e.g. translation and explanation of the UK system. They overcame this with English classes and coming into START.

3.1 Limitations of Research:

We recognised similar challenges as in 2012. These were as follows:

1. Many respondents were unfamiliar with the idea of research or giving feedback. This alongside language differences made it particularly difficult to explain why we wanted them to answer the questionnaire.
2. Understanding what the images meant to the participant: The most common problem with this was misinterpretation. For example, many

people assumed that the 'College' image meant "Learning English" when in fact it was "Getting Education and Training".

3. Explaining what the follow up questions meant: It was hard to explain the concept of the person's own community giving them help, especially with small minority nationalities in Plymouth. Furthermore, particularly with the question "What services have helped you?" Many service users felt they had already answered this question earlier.

These limitations highlighted the cultural and language differences that can lead to misinterpretation. It was particularly challenging to elicit respondents' experience of barriers to their chose priority. In conducting the research we worked pragmatically to try and overcome the above difficulties and get as much feedback as possible.

3.2 Overcoming the Limitations

For future pieces of research we recommend that:

1. Service users be encouraged to bring a friend to interpret, or ask volunteers to act as interpreters for respondents. Also translating questionnaires into the three most widely spoken languages of respondents could also be an option.
2. Service users are asked to update the pictures representing the 10 most important things. It would also be important to review the "Learn English" and "Getting Education and Training" images to reduce future confusion.
3. The qualitative questions should include only one question on services used to avoid repetition. Refer to 'friends' rather than 'community' to elicit feedback on the informal advice they have received from others.

This piece of research was designed to maximise the involvement of students and refugees, allowing the voices of refugees to influence the services offered.

4.1 Conclusions drawn from the research

Although the research in 2012 sampled a larger number of respondents (53) some comparison of findings may be informative.

Looking at the data from this research shows that people who START had worked with in the past year had clear views. Their priorities were concerned with feeling more secure and gaining resources to participate fully in British society. Being able to travel freely, being able to earn money, being able to learn and participate fully have all been expressed desires of this group.

As in 2012 the group's top priority was to find work, although health and education and training had replaced the second and third priorities of 2012 (finding somewhere to live and learning English).

Significantly, 'finding somewhere to live' was not a priority of this group as everybody who participated already had somewhere to live. The different demographic of the 2015 respondents is consistent with START's overall referral data, which shows an increase in family work, more diversity of country of origin and faster throughput due to the speed of decisions, volume of work and focus on priorities.

Although we tried to contact as many people as possible many people whose service provision had ended in the last year had moved out of Plymouth to find work. Thus confirming the validity of 'Finding Work' as the top priority overall.

Furthermore, British Citizenship at 4th overall priority shows the long term aspirations of many refugees. This is demonstrated when combined with the qualitative responses suggests there is a perceived security in being a British citizen not living with political instability. For example one participant with Citizenship with as their top priority noted that "We can't go back to Sri Lanka so it's important to get security and good relationships in the UK".

4.2 Start's goals for the future

Start will continue, within its resources, to respond flexibly and holistically to the needs of refugees in Plymouth. We will do this in a way that acknowledges each person or family's unique circumstances, needs and aspirations. This research serves to inform us of people's changing priorities influenced by global and national changes.

References:

- Cebulla, A., Daniel, M and Zurawan, A. 2010. Spotlight on Refugee Integration: findings from the Survey of New Refugees in the United Kingdom. Home Office
- Students and Refugees Together START, 2003. Students and Refugees Together (START). [online] Available at: <http://www.studentsandrefugeestogether.com/> [Accessed 16/04/15].