

# Time Together

A TimeBank initiative



## CHANGING LIVES: A Longitudinal Study into the Impact of Time Together Mentoring on Refugee Integration

[www.timetogether.org.uk](http://www.timetogether.org.uk)

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## **Table of Contents**

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Methodology</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>THE IMPACT OF MENTORING ON INTEGRATION</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Expectations of mentoring</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Overall effectiveness of mentoring</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Nine dimensions of integration</b>	<b>6</b>
Confidence	6
Case Study One: The important role of “just being there”	8
English language	8
Employment	9
Re-qualification and further education	10
Combating isolation	10
Case Study Two: A strong friendship and life-changing impact for the whole family	11
Understanding UK culture	12
Knowing the local area	12
Case Study Three: The positive impact of simple activities and knowledge exchange	13
Volunteering	13
Access to public services	14
<b>Bridging communities: a two-way process</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>COMMENTS ON TIME TOGETHER SUPPORT</b>	<b>16</b>
Training	16
Matching	16
Ongoing support	18
Practice guidelines for mentors and mentees	19
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>24</b>

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Last but not least, we would like to sincerely thank the mentees and mentors who gave of their time to invest their own experiences in enhancing the experience of future mentoring pairs, many of whom they will never meet. We hope that the evaluation findings reflected here do justice to the richness of the accounts you shared and the recommendations you made.

This report is dedicated to refugees throughout the UK who are making steps in understanding and settling into a new life in Britain. May you find friends and neighbours who value you, and opportunities which allow you to contribute your skills and experience in meaningful ways.

Lea Esterhuizen and Tanya Murphy, June 2007

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## Introduction

*“I would like Time Together to help lots more people to integrate... We come from countries where things don't work like they do here. So you need someone to teach what you must do and how. A person who knows, who was born and brought up here. I think that Time Together is disposed to help people in this way.”*

Changing Lives is an independent qualitative evaluation of Time Together. Specifically, it is a longitudinal study of the impact of mentoring on participants' levels of integration. The study examined the programme and its impact from the perspective of refugee mentees and volunteer mentors themselves.

Time Together is a nationwide scheme which matches refugees in one-on-one mentoring relationships with local volunteer mentors. Mentors support, encourage, and motivate their mentees as they seek to achieve their goals in language, employment, education, and socio-cultural integration. After training, mentors and mentees commit to spending a minimum of five hours a month together for a period of one year. The aim is to help mentees settle into a new life in the UK and to enable mentors to gain a better understanding of the lives of refugees, building bridges between communities.

Time Together was set up and developed by TimeBank in 2002 in response to a Government white paper that recommended the provision of mentoring schemes to help refugees integrate in the UK. In April 2005, TimeBank received funding from the Home Office and HM Treasury Invest to Save Budget to expand Time Together nationwide. There are now 24 projects running across the UK, managed and supported by a central team based at TimeBank and delivered on the ground by a coordinator and line-manager in a local partner organisation.

This longitudinal evaluation offers a lens into those aspects of the integration experience which can be enriched by the reassurance and interest, sustained contact and practical suggestions of a mentor, someone who is available to them, unlike most other people encountered in the new environment. This document is a testament to just how integral the belief and presence of a stranger with more will than expertise can be to the ways in which a refugee engages with her/his new society. In short, this study has chartered the effect of a single relationship – brokered and supported by a support organisation – on the integration of a refugee.

The evaluators conclude that Time Together is highly successful in facilitating the integration of refugee mentees into the UK. In three-quarters of cases, mentors successfully enhanced integration in terms of offering practical help and advice relevant to everyday life, building confidence, and contributing to English language improvement. Moreover, in nearly one quarter of relationships, mentors had no less than a life-changing impact on their mentees by greatly enhancing their integration, and often forming strong mutually beneficial friendships. In the remaining quarter, the relationships ended before they could have an impact on integration. This was generally due to a change in circumstance, such as obtaining a new job, or a lack of chemistry between the two or because of divergent expectations from mentoring.

This report draws together the findings of the evaluation<sup>1</sup>. It starts with a brief discussion of mentor and mentee expectations and the effectiveness of mentoring across the sample. It then explores in depth the impact of mentoring in the nine key areas of integration identified and comments on the benefits for mentors too. Next, there are critical and affirming comments and suggestions offered by mentors and mentees about the way in which each pair is supported. The report then concludes with seven recommendations to further enhance the contribution of mentoring to refugee integration.

## **Methodology**

The evaluation selected 30 mentoring pairs across six locations to maximise diversity in terms of location, age, gender, profession, and region of origin. The pairs were interviewed three times<sup>2</sup> – at the start of their relationship, after approximately six months and then again after 12 months. In addition two focus groups were held with mentors and mentees from a range of Time Together projects not included in the main study.

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<sup>1</sup> The evaluators submitted three reports to Time Together, in March 2006, September 2006, and April 2007 respectively.

<sup>2</sup> Mentees interviews, conducted face-to-face with a semi-structured guide, lasted between 60 and 150 minutes. Mentor interviews were conducted over the telephone and lasted between 20 and 60 minutes. Mentees were offered £10 per interview as a token of appreciation. The interviews were held In January / February 2005, June / July 2006, and January / February 2007.

# The impact of mentoring on integration

## Expectations of mentoring

TimeBank uses the Home Office's indicators of integration as a framework to evaluate the impact of refugee participants' levels of integration. As integration is a very personal journey, individuals inevitably prioritised different issues within this framework and those refugees taking part in Time Together had a broad range of goals and varied expectations of their mentoring relationships.

At the beginning of their involvement in Time Together, mentees' expectations of mentoring were largely practical. Mentees expected help with their English, with finding a job, and someone to help familiarise them with their local area and with UK culture.

*"Someone who helps you according to what is your need ... Someone who can help you to change things, because sometimes you are confused, giving you advice and show you the way."*

Professional mentees aspiring for jobs in medicine, engineering and accountancy, hoped their mentor would provide networking opportunities. Some mentees also sought friendship to enhance their social life and in some cases to combat depression.

Mentors were divided in terms of their mentoring expectations. Some clearly envisioned support-orientated mentoring, a business-like relationship in which goals would be outlined and pursued and the mentor would provide advice on accessing opportunities, services and support, while also improving their English, their knowledge of UK culture and their local environment.

*"To be able to help others develop themselves and experience a better quality of life than they currently have."*

Other mentors expected the relationship to be both less structured, and more socially-focused. They looked forward to a more mutually beneficial relationship in which there would be an exchange of knowledge, experiences and ideas.

*"Time Together sounded perfect as I wanted to do something different... I recall walking into university and everyone seemed quite similar and all are very similar at work. I thought it would be interesting to meet someone with a very different background."*

While all relationships included a little of both, generally pairs either focused on social integration or goal-centred activities related to employment or education.

## Overall effectiveness of mentoring

*"Everything in life is changing, she's helped me with everything."*

In the assessment of the evaluators, in twenty-two of the sample of thirty pairs, mentors successfully enhanced integration in terms of offering practical help and advice relevant to everyday life, building confidence, and contributing to English language improvement.

Moreover, in seven of these pairs, mentors had no less than a life-changing impact on their mentees by greatly enhancing their integration, and often forming strong mutually beneficial friendships.

In the remaining eight cases, the relationships ended before they could have a significant impact on integration. This was due to a number of factors:

- A change in circumstance, such as one of the pair obtaining a (new) job which reduced available time
- A lack of chemistry, manifest in an inability to communicate or unbridgeable personal differences around issues such as time keeping
- Divergent expectations of mentoring, with for example a mentee, well grounded in the practicalities of daily life wanting a social relationship, while his mentor wants a more functional goal-orientated relationship

## **Nine dimensions of integration**

Refugee integration remains a complex process which is affected by contextual factors such as geography, local and national politics, access to employment and public service provision in a given area. However these factors don't affect all refugees equally. A number of factors which differ from one refugee to the next are also significant in the way they either ease or obstruct refugees as they come to understand the dynamics and opportunities in their new environment. Confidence, the languages spoken, educational attainment, work-related background, initial cultural understanding and the proximity of home culture to that of the local area are some areas in which dramatic differences exist between refugee mentees.

The evaluation therefore focused on nine dimensions of integration which span this range between abilities to deal with structural challenges and those relating to the more case-specific elements such as language and confidence. Each dimension proved more or less evident in a specific pair, depending on its own unique set of expectations, wants and needs. This constitutes one of the unique strengths of the flexible approach of Time Together to mentoring. Each pair can combine their own interests with the particular dynamics of the area and the particular abilities and background of the mentee, to maximize the contribution of mentoring to integration.

### **Confidence**

*“She just give me courage to do everything; to not be afraid, to have a courage to do everything”.*

*“[My mentor gave me] personal confidence and how I can meet people and talk to people, how can you go to visit English families...best thing for me. Even if I don't meet [my mentor] anymore...I really happy for that.”*

An increase in overall confidence and motivation was the chief, and often life-changing, benefit of the most successful matches as confidence is a powerful asset in all areas of integration. The belief mentors expressed in their mentees and in their capacity to qualify for a course, find work or follow a particular career path, had a significant impact on the mentee's confidence. The mentor became someone who validated their worth

as individuals capable of making a genuine contribution or worthy of being addressed as an equal. This was especially evident when the mentee came from a middle class background or a particular profession in their country of origin, and struggled with the drop in income and perceived social status in the UK.

*“[Mentoring] builds confidence in a mentee. You come to see yourself as... big, black... you tend to feel a bit inferior, so to speak... But if you are interacting with a Westerner, a white one for that matter.... Once I gain confidence in talking with you, being seen with you in a public place, it builds confidence that one requires. I begin to appreciate you as a person just like me. I no longer see that you are white, or whatever.”*

Mentees were made to *feel better able* to interact, do the things they need or choose to do, to deal with ethno-racial and other social differences. Accessing public services, finding a job, applying for a place at college or university, approaching organisations to volunteer, engaging with strangers and attempting to make friends – all of these key activities which Time Together and other agencies associate with refugee integration<sup>3</sup> demand that the individual feels entitled and confident in their own self-worth.

When mentors encouraged their mentee to play an active role in choosing activities or places to visit, this also helped to develop confidence in making their own choices.

*“She was very kind, understanding and she always ask me what I want ... she can also suggest. So, she was letting me free to choose. It’s not because she’s a mentor, she says ‘We should make like this’. No. She was giving me the opportunity.”*

Mentors also provided a ready source of knowledge and practical support about anything and everything – knowing that help is at hand in a bewildering and sometimes unsympathetic new world provides an invaluable boost to overall well-being.

*“It’s just like having a friend somewhere, whom you can count on anytime.”*

*“It is good just to have somebody. If anything happen, for example, if he is closely person, he can know about this.”*

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<sup>3</sup> See for example The experience of integration: a qualitative study of refugee integration in the local communities of Pollokshaws and Islington, Home Office Online Report 55/04 Alastair Ager & Alison Strang, 2004



### **Case Study One: The important role of “just being there”<sup>4</sup>**

I [evaluator] witnessed a huge improvement in Yves’ confidence levels and English language, during the course of the year. While it was never obvious from the interviews, nor indeed from his mentor’s perspective what he was getting out of mentoring, he stuck to his fortnightly meetings religiously. Outside of the Darfuri community, these meetings were his only regular social outings. I sensed that, given his isolation and naturally reserved nature, this contact with his mentor acted as a kind of anchor for Yves, a reference point amidst the daily difficulties of the rest of his life.

For Yves, mentoring is also pragmatic. John is described primarily as a resource: “He helps me”. Even when no specific help is required, the knowledge that there is someone there, who is on his side, and who knows this bewildering system from the inside is a huge source of comfort.

This case illustrates the important role a mentor plays by merely *being there*. John was an exceptional mentor, continuing his relationship with Yves for the full twelve months, despite little positive feedback and no clear sense of his contribution to Yves’s life. The case thus also illustrates the crucial role played by careful matching according to personality and mentor expectations – John was content to mentor for a year without feedback and was satisfied with spending time with an extremely quiet mentee. This case is included here because it demonstrates neither the development of a deep friendship built around shared interests and mutual exchange, nor the role of mentoring in inspiring significant practical or professional progress. It marks the quiet intangible benefit of having someone ‘to lean on’ while facing all the other challenges of integration in an often daunting environment.

## **English language**

*“My mentor is the only person with whom I talk in English. I live in my community. With my friends here, we won’t be speaking in English! With her, we meet every week and I get the chance to practice my spoken and hearing English. It really helps me.”*

An improvement in English language was a key benefit for all the successful pairs. Mentees who were learning English found that they made greater progress thanks to time spent one on one with their mentor. As one mentee put it, the mentor is the ideal person to practice English with because he is more likely to have patience.

*“Just going to college is not enough. I need someone, like a friend or a mentor. When I go there, his job is to be with me. Some people if you don’t speak English [well], they get bored.”*

Despite the evidence of mentees valuing the benefits of mentoring in this area, mentors sometimes felt ill-equipped to work with the language gap. A short presentation on the essentials of assisting non-English speakers with communicating in English given by an ESOL provider might help to boost mentors’ confidence as well as provide a few practical pointers to maximise the benefits of time spent simply talking to each other.

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<sup>4</sup> The names of mentors and mentees have been changed.

Not all mentees required help with basic conversation. Fluent English speakers, from Zimbabwe for example, also appreciated their mentor's help in understanding UK idioms and local accents as well as customs relating to how language is used in different contexts and the meaning of particular gestures.

*"We were talking about issues of accent, certain expressions, which go just beyond the spoken language and into the actions. The things that people do: mannerisms and gestures."*

With training, this particular benefit could greatly enhance the sense amongst mentors of making a difference to their mentees' lives. This could provide a valuable means of counter-balancing the experience, in some cases, of not being able to find a job or change their accommodation within the scope of the mentoring year.

## **Employment**

Securing employment was a goal for most of the mentees. Mentee professionals and graduates are badly affected by having to accept 'taking a step back' in terms of their career progression. Mentees from this group seemed gratified when they did manage to get through the first few hoops and start to make their way into their chosen professions. 'Non-professional' mentees tend to simply want to find a job. They were often more successful earlier on than in the case of professional mentees or those with clear career aspirations who took longer to access employment in specific areas.

While mentors are not in a position to find jobs for their mentees, in several cases they successfully helped their mentees achieve better knowledge and access to the job market and prepared them for the pressures of the job application process. As well as improved English language which aids employability, mentors enhanced their mentees' employment prospects in the following ways.

### **Increasing self-worth**

Given the hurdles refugees face and the demeaning attitude with which many agencies treat them, coupled with often long periods out of work, it is not surprising that even the most qualified and experienced individuals begin to doubt their professional ability. Mentors played a crucial role in helping to rebuild self-esteem. They reassured their mentees of their abilities and tempered disappointment when rejections came.

*"The biggest thing is that she taught me to knock on every door, not to be reserved, that I am capable of doing anything. I have started to believe in myself. Sometimes, we look at the newspaper and I pass over some jobs. I say: 'I could not do this'. She says: 'YES YOU CAN!' It is a huge asset to me"*

### **Creating realistic goals**

Conversely, some mentors played a role in tempering unrealistic expectations. In these cases mentors worked with their mentees to develop short-term attainable goals that could be built upon later. For example, seeking work experience in the chosen field, before seeking a paid job. Or in the case of a doctor, to be willing to accept care assistant jobs rather than medically qualified positions in order to be able to start the process of family reunification.

## **Learning about job application processes**

Mentors helped with CV writing and the completion of application forms. One mentee described how his mentor had helped him understand the application process and hence engage more confidently with prospective employers.

*“I was kind of angry when they asked me to come for a second interview, because I was thinking it’s not reasonable...why are they asking me to come...?And [my mentor] said, ‘No, no, this is common in this country. They might ask for you three times.’”*

Without the reassurance of the mentor in the case above, the mentee would have been left with the misconception that a second interview was a sign that the mentee had failed to meet expectations in the first interview. Getting to understand the culture of work and what to expect when trying to access work was an invaluable contribution made by mentors to the lives of mentees.

## **Re-qualification and further education**

*“I am even more determined to achieve these goals than before. She has introduced me to people who have achieved so much. If they can, so can I! I WILL finish my NVQ3!”*

For many refugees, requalification or further education is a requirement for finding suitable employment. In most cases in our sample, mentees had access to sources of specialist support such as tutors or professional advisors. In these cases, mentors had no direct impact but, by building confidence, they enabled mentees to make the most of educational opportunities and feel confident about their choices, as well as their ability to meet the demands of studying. For example, one mentor showed her mentee around her university, visiting halls of residence and discussing the courses she had studied. This inspired her mentee who is now registered as a full time university student. In another case a mentor provided consolation to her mentee who had to repeat an exam numerous times. The mentee subsequently took a break to do volunteering work in keeping with her professional interests. This helped her to recover her motivation and she is now preparing to take the exam again.

## **Combating isolation**

*“Well, what can I say - me and my family love her. Now we feel like we are in a family, or we’ve got another family in England.”*

*“After the first time we got together, he sent an email, saying that he had slept the whole night through and had the best night in three years.”*

The social contact offered by mentors, especially for refugees who are in the UK without their families, helped to combat isolation.

*“When refugees have a mentor, they don’t feel so lonely – most of them miss their families and their homeland. Since meeting D, I feel that I am not alone. There is someone who supports me... She helped to improve my psychological health. And my son gets on with her too.”*

In a few cases strong friendships were formed which were set to last beyond the stipulated year of mentoring. In such instances, mentors and mentees often introduced their families to each other and this was greatly valued by these mentees. Mentees were thereby able to widen their social circle and felt a greater degree of acceptance from their mentors. Mentors in these cases enjoyed a greater closeness to their mentee and better understanding of their life in the UK.

*“We went to his house and we met some of his friends. The whole family went and it was beautiful”*

### **Case Study Two: A strong friendship and life-changing impact for the whole family**

Paul and his mentor Dora both emphatically feel that they are friends, and cannot conceive of their relationship ending at the end of the official Time Together year. As Dora says: ‘He is an established part of my life – he and his family.’ Shortly after the start of their mentoring relationship, when Paul had only been in the country for a year, Paul’s wife and three children arrived in the UK.

Dora threw herself into their settlement process, standing by her mentee as he navigated through extensive red tape to sort out council housing, schools and health care for his family. For Paul, Dora has been invaluable. She taught him how to engage with public sector agencies - ‘she taught me to make photocopies of all letters I sent so that I could quote them as required later’– and to gain confidence in doing so - ‘I was no longer afraid to pick up the phone’.

Paul spoke about Dora’s commitment to his family. He described how she agreed to come with him to an important meeting to ascertain the right college for his teenage daughter. He also described how she had invited the whole family to her home in the country, thus introducing the children to the UK countryside for the first time. Dora spoke with much excitement about getting to know the family, getting to be accepted by them, and about the hugely rewarding experience of supporting the transition of these children into UK citizens. In her words:

*“My kids have grown up. I went to college interviews with Paul’s daughter, I shall follow her education with interest. And the baby! My kids have no prospects of that yet. So to have a new baby in the family is lovely! I am accumulating all this stuff – I have not bought Sudocream for years!”*

This case powerfully illustrates the life-changing impact that Time Together can have, in this example for a relatively newly arrived refugee, and the trickle down effects of mentoring on enhancing the integration of a whole family.

The social benefits of mentoring were highly valued by mentees, and yet mentors often undervalued this contribution, fearing that they were not doing ‘proper’ mentoring which should focus on help with practical issues such as the job search process. One mentor reflected:

*“This person needs a lot of help. We will sweep in, give advice.’ But it is not like that. Mentees are in need of advice but the relationship is not full of direction. The mentored are more in need of companionship.”*

A social network, or just a friend, is surely a cornerstone of integration. This is particularly pertinent for those mentees who aren’t tapping into another form of community – their own family, a religious community or the same ethno-religious group from ‘home’. For one such mentee in our sample, her weekly meetings with her mentor were her only source of social interaction. The degree of isolation in these cases can be severe and easily mitigated by feeling welcomed through regular interaction with a mentor, including during a visit to the mentor’s home or with the mentor’s family.

## **Understanding UK culture**

*“I’ve come to appreciate the British culture. She’s helped me understand the different accents; she’s made me have a good understanding of British history.”*

When trying to settle into a new country, a refugee needs to acquire a tacit knowledge of what people commonly expect in different situations and what is meant by different gestures. Mentors were able to help their mentees to understand these subtler dimensions of life in the UK, and in certain cases to avoid misunderstanding others and being misunderstood themselves.

Many mentees gained insights into what could loosely be described as ‘British culture’: certain of the customs and social practices mentioned were stereotypically British – such as the drinking of tea, the British monarchy, and time keeping.

*“She is someone who is very punctual. That I think, besides talking about it, her own punctuality to appointments has really had an impact on me. You will come to understand what it means in Britain when one says, ‘Let’s meet at one o’clock’. It’s one o’clock. It’s not five past one.”*

*“On the first day at work, I wanted to say hello to everyone, and she said ‘you don’t need to do that! It is nice, but.... You just sit there and they will come and introduce you to other people themselves.”*

## **Knowing the local area**

Without knowing where to go and how to make the best of the environment in which mentees found themselves, settling in can be very difficult. Mentors made a significant contribution here.

*“I didn’t know a lot of places in the area, even if I stay for 20 or 15 years. She really show me a lot of places, and I really felt like I enjoy my time with her”*

*“She gives me the confidence [to go to places]. You get confidence if you go first with a local person. You can feel alien, lost. Put-off. It may be largely white or only whites. It takes a little while. You want that confidence.”*

This particular benefit of mentoring is arguably the most accessible to all mentoring pairs. The process whereby the mentor introduces the mentee to different places of interest in their local town fulfils several functions simultaneously. Mentees gained

better knowledge about the local area, and consequently greater access to the local leisure activities and places of historical or cultural interest known to the mentor.

This knowledge also gave newcomers a greater sense of belonging, introducing friends and family in turn to the local environment.

Getting to know local places of interest also gives the pair meaningful time together which is less pressured than sitting face-to-face in a meeting room or café. Time spent exploring local attractions has an external focus, while also literally emphasising a *common ground* between mentor and mentee – the local area in which (in most cases) both parties live.

### **Case Study Three: The positive impact of simple activities and knowledge exchange**

Mel is a qualified nurse who was matched with Fran, a lawyer. The mentoring relationship formed itself into a mutual exchange from day one. Fran recognised that she had a lot to gain from Mel, and vice versa. The time they have spent together illustrates the invaluable contribution a mentor can make through their own insights and practical knowledge of the local environment both share. Mel describes this as follows:

*“I’ve been in this country before but I didn’t know none of the museums, but through my mentor, now I’m glad I saw this museum. So it’s like, when somebody come, I can just take the person to this (museum)... So, the person can feel that I’m living in London. I just feel like I’m confident. I feel settled in London.”*

Fran, the mentor explains why this sense of local knowledge is important and how easily it can be shared with a mentee:

*“There’s lots of transfer of knowledge and experience. It’s just about finding the short-cuts. ...she is introducing people to things as a Londoner, rather than as an outsider or an observer. This can be done at so many different levels. For example, architecture: there are beavers at the top of a building on Oxford Street. It’s about finding out about strange things that make you feel more part of where you live. It’s about the little things you know.”*

This case study demonstrates the crucial role of the simple activities and knowledge exchange in which mentoring pairs can engage which have a cumulative effect on the mentee’s sense of belonging and familiarity. It all comes down to ‘beavers and buildings’ – to recognising features of the local landscape that are associated with fond memories. Such physical associations help the mentee feel more settled.

## **Volunteering**

*“To know patients’ language, you need to be with patients everyday and you can know what patients mean when they say ‘I want to spend a penny’. So I think voluntary job is a good opportunity for me to bring up my skills again and to work here in the UK as a nurse.”*

Engaging mentees from our sample in volunteering proved challenging, despite concerted efforts by several mentors. A number of mentees felt ambivalent about

volunteering fearing that such activity could detract from their job search. Those that tried to obtain placements with the help of their mentor had little success because they found that volunteer agencies and potential host organisations stone-walled them.

Those mentees who found opportunities were supported by the Time Together coordinator who offered placements with Time Together or partner agencies. A minority of skilled mentees succeeded in getting placements through their colleges or directly from their local volunteering agency.

Volunteers usually found the experience to be worthwhile as it enabled them to gain valuable work experience, obtain references or prove their worth to potential employers, or simply improve their communication skills and meet new people. Due to the challenges of finding employment in chosen areas, volunteering can also help a mentee enjoy feeling valued by making an active contribution in a workplace even when this is unpaid. Being part of the volunteering charity TimeBank, Time Together is in a unique position to help mentors and mentees access volunteering opportunities.

## **Access to public services**

*“[The main way a mentor can help a refugee] is dealing with social services...sometimes people don’t get help, not because they don’t want to, but because they don’t know they are entitled to it.”*

Many mentees described learning where to go to get the services and support they needed, as well as to access other facilities in which they have an interest, as a significant benefit of mentoring. The mentor was often the first port of call when a problem arose.

*“When my kids came to the UK, my mentor helped me find a school.”*

*“[I helped him with] understanding the financial system and the repercussions of financial decisions. Like the credit agencies and the credit system. Or the importance of being on the electoral roll.”*

Moreover, in a couple of cases, where mentees suffered neither from a lack of confidence nor from language barriers when engaging with public sector agencies, mentors coached their mentees on optimal approaches, and thus enhanced their mentees’ effectiveness in accessing services.

*“He understands now the need to manage your own case and to keep diaries. He now photocopies his letters and docs. He understands that you have to follow things up.”*

## **Bridging communities: a two-way process**

Integration is a two-way process and mentoring, through its mutually beneficial approach, can facilitate this two-way learning between mentor and mentee, helping to bridge communities. Indeed, it was clear from our sample that mentors also gained a lot from their experience.

*“When we see each other, there is a great big smile and great big hug. And we have a lovely time. You could not ask for better! As his children [recently arrived] learn to speak English, I shall enjoy speaking with them too.”*

One of Time Together’s aims is to promote a greater understanding of the experiences of refugees in the UK and many mentors felt that they had learnt a lot in this regard, even passing this on to friends and family.

*“I’ve found that there is so much ignorance amongst other people about immigration and refugees. I think mentors can speak to other people to help tell people about the experiences of refugees.”*

Many mentors also found the experience of providing practical help to another individual most rewarding. Interestingly some of the most successful mentors often undervalued the more intangible impact they had on the lives of mentees through friendship and moral support.

*“I have enjoyed my time. But I could not write down a list of achievements that I have with my mentee.”*

So while mentees were very clear on the benefits of having a mentor including soft outcomes such as increased confidence, mentors were less aware of the significant value they were adding. Significantly, mentors also described personally benefiting from the cultural exchange and friendship.

*“I have been helping my mentee with quite practical things, but he has been sharing things about his culture as well. So it has been really good for me... it is kind of an exchange.”*



## Comments on Time Together support

*“The coordinator is fantastic: open and welcoming. She asks how it is going and tells me about events. She checks in every now and again. She chased me for my quarterly report – that is fine. I get regular emails about Time Together and other refugee affairs – events and suggestions about where to take your mentees. They are well on top of what they are doing.”*

The evaluators asked the respondents at different stages in their relationships and in the focus groups, about their perceptions of how Time Together is delivered, and for any suggestions on how mentoring pairs can be better supported. The evaluators fed back observations to Time Together at regular intervals throughout the evaluation and they were impressed by the responsiveness of Time Together staff in implementing their recommendations. On the whole mentors and mentees were very satisfied, although responses varied according to locality, as coordinators of different projects sometimes adopted different approaches.

### Training

The first step in Time Together mentoring is to participate in a tailor-made training session. Generally, mentors and mentees receive one day of training upfront, however in some cases up to two days of training are available. The sessions are offered separately to mentors and mentees. Training explores the concept of integration, refugee issues (for mentors), the essentials of mentoring and the mutual commitments of mentors, mentees and their coordinator.

Both mentors and mentees rated their initial training days highly – it was ‘fantastic’, ‘clear’, ‘informative’, and ‘professionally done’. Several features provoked specific comment.

- The participatory approach was found to be inclusive and engaging.
- The coordinators created good first impressions – specifically their warmth, friendliness, and professionalism.
- The sessions provided an opportunity to meet people from different backgrounds – a benefit which was enhanced by group work.
- Many felt encouraged by the video showing refugee mentoring in practice – even if some mentors felt daunted by the relationships on show, which were so positive that they felt that the benchmark of success was set too high. They felt that they needed to be better equipped to recognise and cope with mentoring scenarios which don’t echo the resoundingly successful mentoring experiences depicted. The evaluators are aware that Time Together has since produced a new introductory film and a training video to meet these needs.

### Matching

After training, mentors and mentees are matched into pairs. The guidelines recommend that the matching process has three elements: face-to-face meetings between a group

of mentors and mentees, a short written profile of each mentor including their skills and interests, and the coordinator's knowledge of both parties' expectations and needs. Mentees are encouraged to play an active role in selecting their mentor, with input from the coordinator.

### **The chance to meet new people**

Mentors and mentees generally reflected positively on their matching experience. They enjoyed meeting a large group of mentors and mentees at the post-training matching event. While many found this event exhilarating, a minority found the pressure to communicate with so many strangers at a single event intimidating. One matching event, held in a noisy pub, received negative feedback. The setting of the matching event, optimally a calm and spacious room, is particularly important given its sensitivity and practical impact on mentoring success.

### **The opportunity to choose**

Mentees appreciated the opportunity to express a preference for one or more mentors from the group they met. A number complained however that it was difficult to match the people they met in person with the names and short profiles they were given. A clear outline of mentors, ideally accompanied by photographs, would ensure that this matching resource is practically helpful.

When a first choice mentor was not available, disappointment was tempered when the coordinator explained the situation and carefully chose a replacement.

A few mentors from the sample would have liked more opportunity to suggest mentees they would prefer to be matched with, even though they appreciated that this could prove complicated in practice. One mentor commented it would be helpful to know why they were matched with a specific mentee. Some mentors had strong preferences about the type of relationship sought, wanting for example to show a newcomer the basics of UK daily life rather than forming a predominantly social relationship with a mentee who was more settled. As one mentor said:

*"It would be nice to be with someone less self-sufficient so that it is more obvious what they need."*

Several mentors said that they did not feel encouraged to express doubts about the appropriateness of the match, in some cases persevering with a match even though they realised at the start that it was not optimal. It is therefore important for the first one or two meetings to be treated as part of the matching process, and that mentors and mentees alike be actively encouraged to approach the coordinator should either party anticipate or experience difficulties at this early stage.

*"I could have said I don't think it will work after the first session. But I did not feel I could say this. Maybe mentors and mentees need to meet properly before being formally matched."*

The implications of the matching period are so significant to the contribution a mentor can make to a mentee's integration that flexibility and care in matching need to be prioritised by all Time Together projects. The evaluators welcomed the additional guidance given to coordinators in this regard during the course of the evaluation and the

extra emphasis in mentor training on the importance of mentors themselves feeling comfortable with the match.

## **Ongoing support**

While the mentoring pair is the primary relationship, the coordinator plays an important supporting role. Time Together guidelines stipulate that coordinators must contact both their mentees and mentors at least quarterly to review their relationship. Quarterly mentor support groups and social events, at least twice a year, are also part of the support framework.

## **Individual Support**

This study confirmed the importance of proactive contact. Contact is essential after the first or second meeting to ensure that the match has started well, to help solve problems, or to suggest a rematch. Thereafter, sustained and regular contact between coordinator and both mentor and mentee is crucial to ensuring the confidence and motivation of both parties in cases where the pair do get along well with each other, and to problem-solving if and when they don't.

One mentee had an unfortunate experience with his mentor, who fell out of contact without providing any particular explanation at a time when the mentee was under a lot of pressure. The consequences for the mentee of this downturn in the mentoring relationship could arguably have been lessened had the coordinator been in more regular contact. While this example was the exception rather than the rule within this sample, it does show the crucial role of the coordinator contact in sustaining interest in mentoring and minimising the likelihood of misunderstandings if the relationship just doesn't work out.

Whilst mentors and mentees are encouraged to contact the coordinator to provide regular feedback and to seek guidance in the event of a difficulty, within this sample they often failed to do so. Mentees are faced with practical difficulties such as lack of credit on their phone, but they can also be prevented by shyness. Also, some are so appreciative of Time Together and their mentors, they feel uncomfortable raising issues which could be construed as complaints. Mentors sometimes also felt diffident about calling or sometimes did not realise the benefits of regular contact with the coordinator. Given these obstacles, it makes sense for the coordinator to take on primary responsibility for staying in touch and ensuring they are aware of challenges if and when they arise for a given pair. The evaluators are aware that contact from the coordinator after the first meeting has since been implemented as part of the support provided by Time Together to all mentoring pairs.

## **Support groups for mentors**

*“Sometimes it is not easy to ring the coordinator and say ‘I am struggling’, but if you go to a group and chat, you can pick up things.”*

Mentor support groups provide space for exchanging experiences and collective problem-solving on challenges in mentoring relationships. They are also often organised with external organisations who can offer specialist information and advice on

issues such as citizenship, mental health, or cultural awareness. Mentors who had the opportunity to attend a mentor support group found this peer-to-peer support inspiring and practically helpful.

### **Socials for mentors and mentees**

*“I was happy about the outing to the zoo. It was well attended – a coach-full! It was an all-family outing, which is important as it includes everyone. We were together with mentors, so you could discuss and interact.”*

A range of imaginative events were organised by coordinators for mentors, mentees and sometimes also extended to family members. These are generally thoroughly enjoyed because they provide fun time out, a chance to meet others from the project, to discover new areas of interest and to try out local venues.

A few mentees requested that some socials be targeted to specific interest groups such as singles or professionals. While socials should strive to be culturally sensitive, e.g. in the type of food and venues chosen, they are also an opportunity to expand social networks and cultural frameworks, for both mentees and mentors alike. They also serve the important function of providing a space for both parties free of the intensity of one-to-one mentoring. Socials were popular as a refreshing departure from focused mentoring time as well as a complementary means of encouraging social integration.

### **Practice guidelines for mentors and mentees**

Understandably, Time Together required a set of practice guidelines which provided structure to mentoring pairs and guided them away from any potentially dangerous or compromising situations. The following guidelines were discussed by mentors and mentees during the evaluation.

#### **1. Mentors and mentees commit to a one year relationship**

Clearly, the longer the relationship, the greater the benefits. Those pairs in our sample which lasted a year achieved more than those that lasted only a few weeks or months. This said, shorter relationships, when the matching worked well, also achieved significant results. For instance, one mentee, on the verge of depression, gained a new lease of life with a mentor, despite the relationship only lasting a few months due to the mentor's overseas posting. A few mentors suggested that there is scope for shorter focused relationships, as short as three months, to focus on specific goals, such as enrolling on a particular professional course or understanding a specific job sector.

#### **2. Mentoring is a one-on-one relationship conducted outside the home**

The most successful pairs who participated in the study had begun to meet at each others' homes and felt this experience strengthened their relationships. Mentees mentioned in particular the benefits of meeting their mentor's friends and family at social gatherings at home. Symbolically, meeting the mentor's family was perceived as a significant strengthening of bonds of trust and friendship. Moreover, a mentor stated how much easier it was to relate to her shy mentee in a home setting with activities like cooking to engage in, compared to the formality and intensity of sitting face-to-face in a café. Time Together does not encourage pairs to meet inside the home, particularly in the early stages of the relationship, but leaves such a decision to the discretion of the

pair in consultation with the coordinator. While meeting in the home or with family members may not be appropriate and neither mentor nor mentee should feel any pressure to take such a step, the positive impact this can have is clear and would be worth exploring in some cases.

### **3. Mentors and mentees are expected to provide regular feedback to their coordinator**

Time Together has developed a number of forms – an action plan, quarterly monitoring and final evaluation forms – to facilitate monitoring and to enhance the relationship by providing tools for planning and for reflection.

The action plan was found to be a useful tool as it helped clarify expectations and to offer a clear direction in the early stages when many pairs were understandably tentative. The quarterly monitoring forms were sometimes perceived as onerous, but their importance for the project was understood. The data from these and the final evaluation forms is in the process of being entered and analysed. The statistics alongside the qualitative data gathered from these forms greatly enhances the capacity of Time Together to identify those projects and those groups of mentors and mentees who may require targeted support, such as specific information or assistance with language support in a particular area, housing information, or volunteering placements. This monitoring information is crucial in ensuring that mentors are optimally equipped to support refugee mentees as they attempt to settle into a particular environment.

# Recommendations

## **Recommendation One – Ongoing investment in Time Together mentoring**

The longitudinal study found that Time Together mentoring is highly successful in facilitating refugee integration. Over the years, Time Together has developed a set of processes that encompass best practice in refugee mentoring yet allow co-ordinators sufficient flexibility to respond to local and individual needs. This approach means not only that mentoring is available to large numbers of refugees in the UK but also that participants benefit from high quality support, enhancing successful outcomes for individuals.

The evaluators therefore recommend that ongoing investment is made in Time Together mentoring to ensure participants continue to benefit in the future.

## **Recommendation Two – Ongoing focus on developing, sharing and ensuring best practice**

To ensure that Time Together is able to successfully facilitate the integration of refugees across the UK, TimeBank invests much time and effort in developing, sharing and promoting best practice. TimeBank does this through:

- The Time Together toolkit, containing tools, tips and best practice
- Networking and best practice events, organised by Time Together's central team, encourage learning and sharing between co-ordinators and help maintain staff dynamism
- Regular meetings with the Time Together central team to ensure that targets are being met, problems are identified and addressed early on and best practice is followed

The evaluators recommend that Time Together continues to facilitate best practice, investing in group and individual support for coordinators through the central team.

To maximise the positive impact of mentoring for the individuals involved in Time Together, the evaluators make the following further recommendations on the Time Together mentoring model:

## **Recommendation Three – Additional resources for matching and supporting mentors and mentees**

Time Together places great importance on the quality of the mentoring experience for mentors and mentees. While much effort and resources have been invested in recruitment, training and support, matching requires special attention given that the quality of the match often sets the threshold for the benefits which follow. In some cases, more information available to both mentor and mentee and more time spent together before formal matching would be beneficial. In the opinion of the evaluators, the importance given to the mentee's choice of mentor should in some cases be balanced by a greater focus on both mentee and mentor expectations and the coordinator's own knowledge of the potential pair.

Individual contact with both mentor and mentee from the co-ordinator is essential after the first or second meeting and regular contact thereafter is also necessary to enhance the prospects of a successful relationship. Mentor support groups and social events should also continue as vital elements of the support framework. TimeBank has an important role to play in ensuring that this level of support is available in all projects.

#### **Recommendation Four – Reassurance to mentors about the value they bring to their mentees**

Mentors often undervalued the so called “softer outcomes” of their relationship with their mentee. Coordinators, during regular contact with mentoring pairs, should be careful to highlight ways in which a particular mentor is already contributing and can further contribute to their mentee’s life. The confidence-building function of the mentor is worth emphasising given its wide-ranging impact on other dimensions of mentees’ lives. The value of friendship should also be highlighted as often a key part of a one-to-one mentoring relationship. While it is not always appropriate and should be handled with care, the benefits of home meetings and introducing mentees to friends and family could be explored.

#### **Recommendation Five – Further flexibility with the duration of mentoring relationships**

The longevity of a mentoring relationship is not an adequate indicator of success. The evaluators recommend that greater flexibility is built in from the start, enabling qualitative benefits rather than stipulating a required number of months as the marker of success. While mentoring relationships are currently expected to last one year, Time Together should consider shortening the minimum commitment for those mentees who have concrete goals which are rapidly achievable.

#### **Recommendation Six – Greater access to suitable voluntary placements**

Volunteering can have a significant impact on integration but access to suitable voluntary placements for refugees is limited. Time Together should invest in identifying such placements, however this will be challenging until the sector as a whole creates and facilitates access to volunteering opportunities for refugees.

#### **Recommendation Seven – The six Cs: chemistry, contact, confidence, company, choice and a chance**

The success of a given mentoring pair in terms of enhancing refugee integration can be enhanced if coordinators providing mentoring support prioritise ‘the six Cs’:

- Optimise the probability of ‘good’ **chemistry** by matching carefully
- Maintain regular and direct **contact** between coordinator and the mentoring pair, and between mentor and mentee
- Develop **confidence** through encouraging simple mentoring activities such as engaging in conversation to practise English, visiting areas of local interest, and providing information and reassurance relevant to finding a job or accessing public services
- Be open to ‘**company**’ and the participation of family members in some of the time spent together

- Encourage mentors to facilitate mentee **choice** wherever possible, in the selection of activities and the assertion of preferences in how the time is spent
- Enable and encourage mentors to give mentees a **chance** by identifying relevant study or work-related opportunities and by encouraging them to take up these opportunities



## Conclusion

A simple relationship between two strangers can change lives. It is clear, on the basis of evidence gathered over the year covered by this longitudinal evaluation, that the successful pairs who were trained, matched and supported with care and consistency, stand as a testament to the powerful contribution of mentoring to refugee integration. Just as integration is a very personal and individual process, Time Together mentoring provides a uniquely flexible means of enabling a refugee mentee to feel validated and supported as they start to engage with particular work, voluntary and social opportunities within their new environment. A mentoring relationship cannot change the world into which the refugee has to integrate. However, constructive time spent with a mentor, whether this is goal centered or predominantly social, can leave the mentee more confident to face the challenging but potentially rewarding experience of starting to participate as an active member of a new society.

Mentoring provided concrete benefits for refugee mentees, including accessing employment, voluntary work, or further education, getting to know the local area better, and practical help including greater ease of access to public services. Other benefits, which were often even more potent, were more intangible and sprung from the social nature of mentoring. Thanks to their mentors, the refugees in our sample had the opportunity to improve their English language, gain greater insights into UK culture and norms, and enjoy a more vibrant social life. The most significant impact of mentoring must be the mentees' boost in confidence given that confidence is an invaluable asset in all areas of integration.

Integration is a two-way process and mentoring, through its mutually beneficial approach, can facilitate this two-way learning between mentor and mentee, helping to bridge communities. It was clear from our sample that mentors also benefited from their experience. They appreciated the rewards of helping another individual, the cultural exchange, a new friendship in some cases, and a greater understanding of the experiences of refugees in the UK.

The evaluators made a number of recommendations during the study and in this final report. An evaluation is fruitless without a willingness from the client to apply what is learnt. The evaluators have witnessed an impressive dynamism and openness to learn, revisit and refine support practices in the Time Together project. This has been a significant component in the success of Time Together mentoring.

The evaluators hope this report does justice to the invaluable insights Time Together has offered to the broader dialogue on how we can better understand the challenges faced by refugees – personal and structural – and how we can effectively support individual refugees as they begin to engage socially, professionally and culturally in UK society.