

Evaluating & embedding Lived Experience involvement

An evaluation of Scottish Refugee Council's service user involvement
policy & recommendations to strengthen Lived Experience involvement

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Forward

Sabir Zazai, CEO of Scottish Refugee Council

People with lived experience have a crucial role to play in helping to build a better future with refugees in Scotland.

Many of our staff and volunteers, myself included, know what it is to seek protection in the UK. At Scottish Refugee Council, we engage with and involve the people we exist to serve at all levels of our work, from advising and supporting on the design, delivery and evaluation of key projects and core services, to holding valued positions on our board of management.

There is much we can be proud of. But more can be done to ensure the knowledge, skills and opinions of people with lived experience remain at the heart of all aspects of our work. Having a CEO from a refugee background is not the end of the process, it is just the beginning.

And that is where this piece of research comes in. It was important for us that any review of lived experience involvement within Scottish Refugee Council should be led by refugees who have personal experience of our work. I am immensely grateful to our six researchers for their dedication and commitment to this important piece of work. We are committed to learning from the findings and delivering on the recommendations they have outlined in this report.

I would like to thank my colleagues Lisa, Jewels, Dumie and Gary for supporting this project, and everyone across Scottish Refugee Council who helps make our work more accessible to people seeking protection in Scotland.

Background

Scottish Refugee Council is committed to **increasing refugee engagement in every aspect of its work**, including leadership and governance roles. The 2023–28 Strategic Framework sets out ‘nothing about refugees without refugees’ as a key priority that will underpin all work undertaken.

To ensure that refugee experience is at the heart of everything as per their mantra, six advisors with lived experiences were chosen to form a research group. Its aim was to evaluate the impact of the current Service User Involvement policy, within Scottish Refugee Council and in their work with communities and individuals, and to formulate recommendations to strengthen the involvement of people with lived experience.

Methods

This research used secondary data such as Scottish Refugee Council's Service User Involvement policy and guidelines. The primary data was obtained using both qualitative (focus groups, one to one interviews, and online survey), and quantitative data (online surveys). For the full list of questions asked, see appendix 1, 2, and 3 on page 9 and 10. The research is split into three categories: external, internal and community representatives.

Internal research

16 staff members took part in focus groups and 22 answered the survey, seven management team members and six board members were interviewed on their knowledge of the Service User Involvement policy, its implementation and about refugee involvement across different departments and positions.

External research

Four organisations from the migration sector were interviewed on how they involve people with lived experience in their work. A consultant was also interviewed about their work with the Refugee Council and their Refugee Involvement Strategy. The Refugee Council's strategy was used to conduct a comparative analysis of the Scottish Refugee Council's Service User Involvement policy.

Representatives of community organisations

Two representatives of refugee supporting or refugee-led organisations were interviewed and gave feedback to evaluate the importance of lived experience in their work and their experiences with Scottish Refugee Council.

Key findings

Current lived experience involvement policies across the sector

- Scottish Refugee Council and other organisations said that they need more staff with lived experience.
- Unlike Scottish Refugee Council, other organisations didn't have a service user policy, but included lived experience informally in their work.
- Scottish Refugee Council and other organisations said that most of their policies and strategies are not created by people with lived experience. They agreed that policies must be revised frequently with support from people with lived experience.

Awareness of the current policy and its implementations

- The policy was created in 2014 and initiated the involvement of service users.
- Most interviewed staff members were not aware of the policy prior to this project but informally incorporate lived experience in their work.
- Most interviewees said that the label "service user" is outdated. However, some felt that the name was appropriate as the Scottish Refugee Council does offer services.

Interviewees said that the language used in the policy is too vague and terms need to be defined.

Connection between Scottish Refugee Council and community organisations

- Representatives of community organisations said that they weren't consulted in Scottish Refugee Council's decision making regarding the needs of their community and said that this resulted in communities being put into one big group and specific needs being overlooked.
- Representatives of community organisations said that they lack connection and feedback from Scottish Refugee Council: one participant said "We need more dialogue with the Scottish Refugee Council, and for it to return to being a hub as it used to be."
- Representatives of community organisations said they would welcome a lived experience group to advise the work of Scottish Refugee Council.

Please note that the views expressed in these findings represent a small pool of respondents and may not be representative of all refugee communities across Scotland, refugee supporting organisations or all staff members.

Recommendations

1 Develop the current Service User Involvement policy

The policy should be easy to understand for staff members and beneficiaries (making it available in different languages). It must be assessed and revised frequently with people with lived experience and staff members. The policy should include clear protocols that guarantee ethical practices.

2 Create a Lived Experience Group to guide the work of Scottish Refugee Council

People with lived experience should be involved in decision making to apply Scottish Refugee Council's values in practice, save time and money, and bring new expertise. Participants need recognition for their work (money, credit, vouchers, etc.) and a clear commitment from Scottish Refugee Council (contracts, letter of engagement, training, etc.). The group should have a clear mission on a strategic and operational level. One participant said that "Having different lived experience group would help split the workload, support all staff and ensure that people within lived experience are taking ownership of all the work that we are doing."

3 Strengthen the relationship between Scottish Refugee Council and refugee communities

Clear protocols should be established to support staff in developing reciprocity with communities and individuals. On an external level, create a physical space and organise events that promote connections between refugee groups and individuals and staff members. Provide clear and constant feedback to the people involved in the work of Scottish Refugee Council and the impact of their contribution.

Recommendations

4 Include service user involvement in administrative procedures

Employment at Scottish Refugee Council should be made more accessible by building the capacity of people with lived experience. The Service User Involvement Policy should be included in induction packs and related training should be provided to all staff members, volunteers, and beneficiaries. Staff members should be accountable for applying the policy in their work by changing work protocols and job descriptions.

5 Embed refugee involvement within the culture of Scottish Refugee Council

Staff should be able to volunteer in other external activities as part of their work. Exchanges and connections between staff members should be more accessible throughout the organisation. There is a need to create a bridge between staff and board members to allow a constant exchange of experiences and information at all levels of the organisation.



Project evaluation

An Evaluation of Scottish Refugee Council Lived Experience Research Pilot 2022–2023

Carried out by Emma Houston June 2023

Despite the short timeframe of the pilot, there was a significant amount of learning gained which should be taken into consideration for future similar projects. It should be noted that the main challenge of this project was the short timeframe for project delivery, particularly of a pilot approach, and played a significant contribution to the other areas where there were challenges and associated learning opportunities. For future projects a longer timeframe with appropriate time for planning and co-production would result in fewer challenges during the project.

| Key learning area | Recommendations |
|---------------------------|---|
| Timescales | Plan longer lead times prior to data collection beginning Allow time for Peer Researchers to come together and develop as a group Discuss and agree clear deadlines and realistic requirements to achieve these with Researchers |
| Planning and processes | Discuss and agree clear project outputs and associated deadlines. Facilitate introductory group sessions Create and provide appropriate policies and guidance Discuss and agree procedures for information and data sharing |
| Recruitment | Have a clear recruitment process Avoid skills screening for particular research or evaluation experience Provide clear role descriptors Provide training and support to develop required research skills |
| Contract and remuneration | Agree remuneration and payment schedules prior to work commencing This should include an agreement on requirements for discussion, evidence and payment for any work required over and above the agreed contract. Provide letters of engagement prior to data collection beginning Carefully consider how to support and remunerate individuals who have not yet been granted refugee status in a way which does not jeopardise someone's asylum claim. Consider development of standardised remuneration and payment structures for Peer Researchers. |
| Communication and Support | Discuss and agree appropriate communication methods Carry out a 'needs assessment' with each Researcher to ensure they feel fully supported and able to take part in the project Have support and supervision processes in place for Researchers. Discuss and agree collective responsibility and boundaries between staff and Researchers. |

Project evaluation

Quotes from participants

"I don't see any other way [than involving people with lived experience], because you can spend lots of money developing policies, and then on day one of that policy deployment you find that it doesn't actually work because people that it's designed for – it doesn't suit their needs."

"Involving [people with lived experience] in projects means that people are not just seen as a commodity, as a number. They are seen as valued contributors to shaping and developing policies that impact them and those around them."

"When you are paid in a good way, you understand that people really value your contribution. But when you are being paid the minimum and you don't even know how much you are going to be paid...you realise that they only want to tick a box [to show] that they hire people with lived experience."

"It was frustrating, it was challenging, but I learned a lot...It challenged my way of thinking, it challenged my communication, it challenged my problem solving."

"I think the learning and the outcome...will be extremely beneficial to people who want to be involved in the organisation [in the future]."

"Putting ourselves out there has been a strength...being open to testing this out and not being afraid if things didn't go as well [as we hoped]."

Next steps

We are extremely grateful to Mjed Kouri, Nakiki Bhiri, Ronnie Tagwireyi, Siraj Balubaid, Shawki Al-Dubae and Tandy Nicole for carrying out this research. Their contribution is already helping us to improve the way we work. Since completion in June 2023, we have taken positive steps towards implementing the recommendations.



We have renewed and strengthened our commitment to involve refugees in every aspect of our work in our 5-year strategic plan with our key strategic objective **“nothing about refugees without refugees.”**



We have set up a **staff working group** to explore and test ways to improve Lived Experience involvement. The group will also revise the existing Lived Experience Involvement policy.



We are using the learnings and feedback from this report to develop the terms of reference for a **Lived Experience expert group** that will advise and drive change across all levels of the organisation.

We look forward to working closely with people who have lived experience of the refugee and asylum systems to continue learning and improving in the months and years to come



Appendix

Appendix 1

Questions and survey for internal research

Survey questions for staff members

1. How long have you been working for Scottish Refugee Council?
2. Are you aware of the Service User Involvement Policy?
3. Is the Service User Involvement Policy important for your line of work?
4. How often do you use the policy?
5. Were you supported or trained to use this policy in your line of work?
6. Has this policy made an impact on your work?
7. How has the policy impacted your work?
8. Do you think the Service User Involvement Policy needs to change?
9. If you could create a new "service user" policy what do you think it should highlight?
10. Any comments or suggestions

Focus group questions for staff members

1. Are you aware of the Service User Involvement Policy?
2. Is the staff involved in reviewing Service User Involvement Policy?
3. Is the Service User Involvement Policy clear and understandable?
4. Do you think the Service User Involvement Policy is accessible?
5. Any Suggestions and/or Recommendations?

Interview questions for Board members

1. Why did you feel there was a need to create this policy?
2. What methods do you use to evaluate the implementation of the policy?
3. Do you feel the verbiage used within the policy is clear and understandable to the staff and target audience?
4. How often do you evaluate your policies?
5. Are you satisfied with the impact of the current policy?

Questions for management team members

1. What knowledge do you have of the Service-User Involvement policy?
2. How often have you used it? Has this policy made an impact on your work? If so, in what way?
3. In your opinion, do you feel that the language used within the policy is clear and easy to implement?
4. Do you feel like this policy is beneficial to your work?
5. If you could change the policy, what would you want it to highlight and change?

Appendix

Appendix 2

Questions for external research

Questions for external organisations

1. Why did your organisation create a Service user involvement policy?
2. When was the last time it evaluated?
3. Have you seen an improvements to your service, since the implantation of
4. the policy.
5. What are the strengths and weakness of the policy?
6. What demographic has benefited from using this policy?
7. If you could change any aspects what would've be and what would you do
8. differently

Appendix 3

Questions for community representatives

Questions for community representatives

1. What services from Scottish Refugee Council have you or members of your community group used in last 5 years? Could please highlight these and confirm if you are still engaging with Scottish Refugee Council regularly.
2. How is Scottish Refugee Council answering the needs and supporting your community/organisation?
3. What does lived experience mean for you and your community/organisation?
4. Do you feel, as a representative or a community group, that you can influence or take part in the work of Scottish Refugee Council? Why?
5. In your opinion, how would a Service User Involvement policy improve your collaboration with Scottish Refugee Council?

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