

**Parenting responsibilities.** Refugee women are likely to have less extended family support so need to allocate time to focus on children. Volunteering outside of school hours is often difficult, especially as families making a start in a new country cannot afford before or after school care when they aren't earning an income to pay for this. In the case of childcare, lack of access to childcare for pre-school children in a trusted, safe environment may be a major barrier.

**Solutions:**

- o Offer childcare/child-minding if you can
- o Be flexible as to when work can be done
- o Ensure that important events including celebrations can be held at lunchtime, not before or after work hours.

**Women's roles - safety and empowerment.** In many cultures, women learn to defer to authority, not to ask questions. However, this can lead to misunderstandings. "You cannot be what you cannot see"

**Solutions:**

- o Support the staff in your organisation, especially migrant and refugee women, to speak up, to be seen and heard, and to demonstrate that women have a voice and can ask questions - and can expect clear information and explanations
- o Be aware of cultural safety requirements - ask your women volunteers if they have requirements that you can accommodate - such as need for a gender-segregated space, access to culturally appropriate food or food storage, or times/space for prayer.

**Access to transport.** For women who have not yet learnt to drive, or whose family situation means they cannot afford a car, access to public transport routes and schedules is important. Not all public transport is easily accessed, and it can be very time consuming.

**Solutions:**

- o Promote opportunities in your catchment close to routes that can easily access your organisation
- o Promote work that can be done online where this is practical and beneficial, and look for opportunities to support necessary access for women to wifi/equipment (e.g. desk at the library)
- o Use your organisation's bus or organise a car pool, don't leave it to the person to organise this - offer it upfront.



## PATHWAYS TO VOLUNTEERING

A Training Guide on how to recruit and retain volunteer women from migrant and refugee backgrounds

## WOMEN FROM REFUGEE AND MIGRANT BACKGROUND CAN VOLUNTEER FOR YOU

### GUIDELINES FOR ORGANISATIONS THAT USE VOLUNTEERS

These resources were developed through a Wellsprings for Women co-design project with women from migrant and refugee background who recognise the benefits of volunteering for themselves and for organisations.

#### Benefits of having migrant and refugee women as volunteers in your organisation

- Diversity of experiences, practicality and resilience
- Increasing accessibility of your organisation to clients or community members from different cultural and language groups
- Build credibility and stronger networks with local cultural communities
- Able to apply and adapt skills from qualifications and experiences that are not formally recognised for the good of your organisation
- Seeking a better life and "ready to go"
- Reliability, loyalty and attention to detail
- Willing to go the extra mile

#### Why do migrant and refugee women volunteer?

- To help others and support the community
- To connect with others and reduce isolation
- To find out about local networks, services, work and training opportunities
- It is affordable and accessible
- To keep spirits up and maintain sense of independence
- To learn about Australian culture
- To learn Australian workplace rules and systems
- To regain self-belief and confidence to start again
- To understand how to adapt and apply skills and qualifications gained in another place (even if qualifications aren't formally recognised in Australia)
- To build connections across different cultural communities
- To improve English language skills
- To learn about new and different vocations
- To gain work skills and local employment to help get into employment
- Able to contribute within flexible hours (eg during school hours).

### BARRIERS TO VOLUNTEERING AND SOME SOLUTIONS: "HELP US DEAL WITH OUR BARRIERS"

"These simple temporary barriers can become permanent barriers for migrant and refugee women. Let's work together to build a good community – we all want migrants and refugees to be useful people in Australia – let's help make that happen" (Member of the co-design group)

**Settlement pressures.** The work is unpaid and may not be culturally familiar, so for families getting established in Melbourne and for women who are seeking an education/ employment pathway, the non-financial benefits of volunteering may be unclear.

#### Solutions:

- o Promote the benefits of volunteering in words and ways that women can see the benefit.
- o Make sure your work places are welcoming and friendly
- o Put the person in the right place – make sure they are well suited to the role
- o Ask the person – are you comfortable? Are there other options that would suit you better?
- o Making sure volunteers know they have the right to ask questions.

**English language/literacy.** The work itself might be highly interpersonal and lend itself to multiple spoken languages, but the written English policies and concepts may not be easily understood. e.g. written health and safety policies or "rights and responsibilities of volunteers" may not be easily understood.

- "The Australian accent is hard to understand – good to mix beyond our own family or cultural community – but easier to mix with others whose first language is not English."

#### Solutions:

- o Use welcoming visual or audio-visual materials. Including "people that look like me" leads to thinking "if she can do it, so can I"
- o Use simple language in key policies (especially where workplace terms associated with workplace health and safety are assumed)
- o The term "volunteering" itself is not used in most countries, so other terms may be helpful - such as "helping other people" or "community champion."

**Digital access and literacy.** Most organisations assume that potential volunteers can register online. In reality, limited access to computers and wifi, the challenge of navigating English language websites and familiarity about which button to press, and what information will be required, can be off-putting. The Pathways to Volunteering project co-design group identified this as a key barrier, even for women with strong oral English literacy.

- "For women who haven't been to school and who are just learning to speak English, how to teach them the use of MS Office?"

#### Solutions:

- o Create opportunities for face to face and telephone recruitment processes
- o Use community partner organisations with networks in local cultural communities, and build rapport and familiarity through non-digital means, to encourage inclusive access to volunteering opportunities.