

Women's Conversation Club



Volunteer Pack



improving services and opportunities
for refugees and asylum seekers in
the Yorkshire and Humber region



CONTENTS

1. About the Women's Conversation Clubs
2. Volunteering at a Women's Conversation Club
3. Volunteer Guidelines
4. Top Tips!
5. Confidentiality Statement
6. Equal Opportunities Statement
7. Rewards

Attached sheets: *About refugees and asylum seekers*

1. About the Women's Conversation Clubs

There are five Women's Conversation Clubs in Sheffield that are supported by the Northern Refugee Centre and partner organisations:

1. **City Centre Women's Conversation Club**
Venue: St Matthews House, Carver Street, Sheffield, S1
2. **Gleadless Valley Women's Conversation Club**
Venue: 189 Blackstock Road, Sheffield, S14
3. **Lowedges, Batemoor & Jordanthorpe Women's Conversation Club**
Venue: The Michael Church, Lowedges Road, Sheffield, S8
4. **Firth Park Women's Conversation Group**
Venue: First Start, 441 Firth Park Road, Sheffield, S5
5. **Tinsley Women's Conversation Club**
Venue: Tinsley Green, 34a Norborough Road, Sheffield. S9

The clubs offer refugee and asylum seeker women the opportunity to mix with women from other cultures and practice conversational English within a safe, women-only environment. The clubs consist of informal chatting and socialising, structured English support exercises, and arts and craft activities.

The Women's Conversation Clubs aim to:

- Reduce isolation
- Build confidence
- Share and develop skills
- Give women a chance to practice English in a relaxed environment

At each Women's Conversation Club there is an on-site crèche for children over 6 months old. We reimburse travel expenses fares for all volunteers so keep your travel receipts and records of car, motorbike and bicycle mileage.

For more information about the Women's Conversation Clubs, contact 0114 241 2780 or email info@nrcentre.org.uk.

2. Volunteering at a Women's Conversation Club

The Women's Conversation Clubs are run by volunteers (including both women from the 'host community' and refugee and asylum seeker women). There are a wide range of roles a volunteer can take on. These include:

- Chatting informally with women
- Assisting with more structured language support
- Coordinating refreshments
- Paying out travel expenses
- Setting up the venue and tidying up
- Assisting with arts and craft activities

There are also opportunities for those volunteers who wish to take on a more defined/formalised role at a club or who wish to be involved in the overall running and planning of a club. For more information about this please speak to the relevant club coordinator.

3. Volunteer Guidelines

The Women's Conversation Clubs aim to give refugee and asylum seeker women the chance to practise their English in an informal setting. Women attending the clubs should be made to feel safe and relaxed and refugees and asylum seekers need to trust the volunteers. These guidelines are designed to maintain this level of trust.

1. Advice: Women asylum seekers and refugees at the club may approach you for help and advice, particularly as they get to know you and establish a trusting relationship. It may occasionally feel overwhelming, particularly if the women are experiencing difficulties with housing, children, health etc. as well as the ongoing distress of waiting for a decision on their asylum case. As a volunteer you are not expected to act as a counsellor; *no advice is better than bad advice*. However, it may be that just having someone to listen will help the individual greatly. If you feel uncomfortable, or have any concerns about what you have been told, please approach a more experienced volunteer (or steering committee member) for help or advice in referring the individual on to other relevant agencies.

2. Empowerment: We encourage more experienced refugee or asylum seeker women to become volunteers at the club they attend. However, please encourage *all* women attending to be proactive in the running and organising of the club. The Women's Conversation Clubs aims to be empowering and to avoid dependency.

3. Tact and Sensitivity: Many asylum seekers and refugees have experienced trauma and may have been subjected to, or witness to, horrific events. This trauma may include rape and sexual violence. As a result, talking about past experiences can be upsetting for them. You will need to be sensitive to this fact when talking about the past with women at the group. Try to avoid asking probing questions. Again, if someone wants to talk about their experiences in more depth and you do not feel comfortable with this then please refer them on to a more experienced volunteer or to a relevant organisation.

4. Non-religious, non-political: It is crucial that refugee and asylum seeker women from different backgrounds trust the Women's Conversation Clubs, and that they are seen as inclusive of all refugees and asylum seekers. As a result it is important that the clubs are not perceived as political or religious groups. We understand that many of our volunteers may have strong political and/or religious beliefs, but while volunteering here it is not appropriate to initiate conversations around these issues. Where these conversations do arise it is important to be tactful, non-judgemental and tolerant.

5. Confidentiality: Many refugees and asylum seekers will have had to leave their country of origin due to their religious or political activities. Asylum seekers and refugees can expose themselves to danger if they make their political or religious opinions known, even in the UK. Among some communities information about people's behaviour here in the UK can be passed back to their country of origin, and this can affect the safety of their families and their own safety should they return. It is crucial that, in order to protect members, any information that you discover about people's political or religious affiliations should be kept strictly confidential.

6. Boundaries: It is generally expected that the activities of volunteers will take place within the structure of the clubs. However, sometimes volunteers might develop friendships with refugees and asylum seekers and want to arrange to see them outside of the organised activities. Volunteers must be aware, however, that any contact with service users outside of the club's activities must be undertaken in a personal capacity and does not fall within the remit of the Women's Conversation Clubs. Personal arrangements should not affect how the clubs operate and should be arranged tactfully in a way that is mindful of the feelings of other people attending that club.

7. Domestic Violence: If a woman at a Women's Conversation Club informs you that she is suffering abuse at the hands of her partner (domestic violence) you should seek her permission to consult the Person In Charge (PIC) at the club (either an experienced volunteer or staff member) about her case. This should be done as urgently as possible. The PIC will then take up the issue in accordance with the NRC domestic violence policy. If the woman concerned wants to remain anonymous, you should ask the woman if you can relay the general details of her case to the PIC without using her name. The PIC can then provide you with the relevant information to pass on to the woman concerned.

8. Child Protection: There is an on-site crèche at all of the Women's Conversation Clubs. Children should be encouraged to use the crèche. If, however, the parent does not want her child to use the crèche then she can keep the child with her at the club. However, if the child does not go to the crèche it is strictly the parent's responsibility to look after the child whilst at the club. Volunteers are not at the Women's Conversation Clubs to look after children. If a child is found to be unattended during a club a volunteer should remind the parent that she is responsible for supervising her child at the club at all times. Children are not allowed in the kitchen at any time. If a volunteer witnesses unacceptable treatment of a child at the club – such as smacking – she should immediately speak to the PIC. If a volunteer has any other concern for a child's welfare, again, she should immediately consult the PIC on a confidential basis.

4. Top Tips!

At the Women's Conversation Club you will often be chatting with people you have never met before. Here are a few 'conversation starters' you might like to use:

'About you'

What is your name?

What country are you from?

Do you have any children?

What is your first language?

How long have you been learning English?

Living in Sheffield

How long have you been in Sheffield?

Where in Sheffield do you live?

Do you like Sheffield?

Have you been to other places in Britain? (Where, what were they like, etc)

Food

What do you think of the food in Britain?

How does British food compare to food from your country?

Do you like cooking?

5. Confidentiality statement

Any information shared within the Women's Conversation Clubs will be treated in confidence by the volunteers. Volunteers may share anonymous information (they will not give the name of the person) with each other or with staff. Apart from this nothing you tell us will be shared with any other person or organisation without your clear permission (this will always be the case unless we need to share information in order to prevent someone from being seriously harmed.) Refugees and asylum seekers attending the clubs are also asked to respect other women at the clubs. Please do not share personal information that you learn about other women unless you have their permission to do so.

6. Equal Opportunities Statement

The Women's Conversation Clubs are non-political and non-religious. We aim not to discriminate on the basis of race, class, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, disability, age, or parental status. Behaviour which is considered discriminatory is not acceptable within the clubs. We ask everyone who comes to the clubs to respect this and to be tolerant of each other.

7. Rewards

There are lots of great reasons to volunteer at a Women's Conversation Club:

- You will meet people from many different cultures
- You will make a real difference to the lives of asylum seeker and refugee women living in Sheffield
- You will make a valuable contribution in your local community
- You will give your CV a great boost
- You will develop valuable skills