

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **VOLUNTEERS LAUNCH NEW WOMEN'S OUTREACH GROUP FOR REFUGEES**

Women from Afghanistan, Iran and Africa who are part of Exeter's refugee community are being given a chance to improve their English, share and learn new skills and build their self-confidence thanks to a new Women's Outreach Service which has been set up by the city based Refugee Support Group Devon.

The new outreach service has been launched following a grant of £9,597 by Devon Community Foundation from the Exeter Positive Steps Fund.

The Fund, which was set up by the Foundation in partnership with Exeter City Council, is designed to help unemployed people from 'hard to reach groups' like lone parents, ex-offenders, the homeless or ethnic minority groups to build up the skills and self-confidence they need to get back into training or employment.

It has already supported more than 20 projects with over £165,000 to date.

Fran Jenkin, from the Refugee Support who is co-ordinating the women's outreach project explains, "Many of the refugee drop-in support services which already exist in the City are very male-orientated and quite daunting for women from these cultures to use, leaving them isolated and unable to adapt to their new environment.

"As a result, we decided to set up an outreach service which reflected the sort of social environment they were used to meeting in.

"Using volunteers' homes as meeting places, the women can now get together in a friendly environment where they can share their experiences and skills and help each other to get to grips with the new language and cultural challenges which life in Exeter presents.

"Learning and using English is one of the major hurdles faced, so using this safe, social environment to practise the language and gain confidence is really important. It can open all sorts of opportunities for training and employment"

The Exeter Positive Steps grant will be used to train the volunteers needed to run the service, tap into translator and language tutoring services, provide childcare where necessary and support activities which will help the women

on the road to adapting to their new life in the City and playing a full and positive role in it. Activities planned include an embroidery event during Refugee Week, which will allow the women to share some of their traditional skills with others in the City and possibly launch their own business making traditional embroidery products.

Melanie McLoughlin, Director of Devon Community Foundation comments, "There are all sorts of reasons why some people find it difficult to access employment or training – the language and culture barriers faced by many ethnic minorities are just some of them.

"These women have a lot of latent skills and qualities that make them highly employable, we just need to develop ways to help them recognise that, and have the confidence to take up the various opportunities that exist.

"The volunteers at the Refugee Support Groups are doing a fantastic job in doing this and we're delighted to be able to support them with a grant from the Exeter Positive Steps Fund."

Any other voluntary and community groups working with 'hard to reach' groups to help them gain the skills they need to get into training or employment should contact Devon Community Foundation to find out more about applying for a Positive Steps grant. Contact the Foundation on 01884 235337 or email grants@[devoncf.com](mailto:grants@devoncf.com)

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