

Heartbeats and tears, not numbers and suits

Ten year evaluation of RefugeeYouth

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INTRODUCTION

Why we evaluated RefugeeYouth:

This year marks the 10 year anniversary since RefugeeYouth was established as a charitable organisation with the following mission:

- To combat alienation and despair amongst young refugees by supporting opportunities for their development, inclusion and integration.

Over the last 10 years RefugeeYouth has developed into a vibrant dynamic network of young people from all over the world, working together to build community, develop leadership and take action to bring about change. In the early years our work was very experimental, and over time ideas developed into projects and projects into a programme of work which operates on 3 interactive levels which we call Fun, food and friendship, leadership development and action to bring about change. We have always aimed to be an organisation OF young people rather than a service FOR young people.

RefugeeYouth has been steadily growing, and always moving at a very fast pace. We build evaluation and reflection into all our work, but there has seldom been time to actually stop and *really* think and reflect on the whole picture.

One of the strengths of RefugeeYouth is our ability to react – we have always developed our work in direct response to the immediate needs and aspirations of the people who are involved at any time. However, we have also recognised an inherent danger in this approach – that if we are constantly reacting we don't create opportunities to be more proactive and maximise the impact that we can have.

In order to strengthen RefugeeYouth and make it sustainable in the future we believe we need to find ways to review the whole question of impact – to identify what impact we are seeking and how might we become more *proactive* in managing the increasing levels of demand on our organization to greatest effect.

We decided that now is the time to look back at what we have done and examine what impact the work has had so far – on young people's lives and communities and on relevant policy and practice.

This, we hope, will help us to design a future picture for RefugeeYouth and develop a clearer strategy for achieving wider impact in the lives of young refugees.

Our evaluation had the following objectives:

- To identify learning to influence RY's future practice and focus
- To clarify and better articulate what RY does to external audiences
- To develop internal evaluation capacity
- To share learning of practice with others

We identified some critical questions that we set out to explore:

- Does RY attract people who are looking for an environment of friendship and belonging, and/or people who are motivated to actively make change?
- Does RY create an environment where people take on a more active role?
- Does RY create personal transformation?
- Does RY's work with professionals impact on their knowledge, attitudes and practice?

What we did:

We employed independent consultant, Perpetua Kirby who trained and worked with a team of young leaders and workers within RefugeeYouth. Together we identified the critical questions that we wanted to explore, designed our evaluation framework, planned and carried out interviews, focus groups and surveys, analysed the findings and wrote this report. We plan to use the findings to inform our future work and the direction of RefugeeYouth.

Individual interviews

We carried out 17 in-depth interviews with current members of RefugeeYouth. We selected interviewees anonymously to include the broadest range of people possible according to gender, age, ethnic background, length of time and level of involvement in RefugeeYouth, and refugee experience (first or second generation).

Our team were trained in interview techniques and through a process of interviewing ourselves we developed a set of questions which we then piloted and refined. The interviews focused on gathering qualitative information and each interview lasted approximately 1 hour. After an initial analysis of the data we revisited some interviewees to fill in some gaps.

Groups

We carried out focus groups with founder members of 4 youth-led groups that have been part of the RY network; New Generation, Dayah, Somali Youth Action Forum and Mustaqbal.

Over the past 10 years RY has worked with many different youth-led groups in different ways. In the early days of RY the organisation functioned as what was called the 'Group of Groups'. It was a network of young leaders from different groups, projects and organisations all working with young refugees. The young leaders from these groups, which were all independently established outside of RY (Dayah, SOYAF, NG) formed the core of RY and started to do some really powerful work together. As more young people got involved in the activities of RY, others got inspired and many came to RY with ideas and wanted support to set up their own independent group. For a time, RY focused its energy on supporting young people to do this (Safari Youth, West12).

Another way we worked with groups is several other organisations commissioned RY to help them set up youth projects. Teams of young adults from RY worked with young people and organisations which led to new youth projects being established ('New Londoners' and 'Leaders In Community').

One of the things we learnt is that setting up a constituted group can take a lot of energy and time. By the time young people had made a constitution, all the policies they need and insurance they were exhausted and lost the passion to do the work!

More recently, RY has used its structure to enable and support young people to make things happen in their own communities. Several groups have been established within the structure of RY (Mustaqbal, Harrow Arts Centre).

We designed a set of questions to ask the group members and interviews lasted approximately 1 hour. In this piece of the work we learnt a great deal about data collection! Due to a computer malfunction and the loss of one of the recordings we lost a lot of the information gathered. We did not have time to repeat the interviews so this part of the evaluation is not as extensive as we had planned.

Surveys

We learnt to use the 'Survey Monkey' online survey tool, and spent a lot of time developing appropriate questions and designing surveys that were short enough so as not to be off-putting, but in-depth enough to enable people to give meaningful responses. Whilst this method was not as in-depth as the interviews, it enabled us to collect feedback from a wider number of people more efficiently in the time we had. All respondents remained anonymous. We created 4 online surveys:

Current members: A lot of young people are currently involved in RefugeeYouth and we wanted to gather feedback from as many as possible even though we did not have the time to interview everyone.

The survey questions were informed by an initial analysis of issues raised in the interviews with current members. There were a mixture of open and closed questions. Multiple choice/tick box answer options were developed through the information collected in the interviews.

Past members: Many hundreds of young people have been involved in RefugeeYouth over the years and we have stayed in touch with a great many. Many of those who are no longer actively involved in the organisation still consider themselves very much a part of the RefugeeYouth family, and old faces from the past are always reappearing when you least expect it!

Survey questions were mostly identical to those asked of current members (although in the past tense). We are aware that the response for past members was likely to come from people who had the most positive experiences of RefugeeYouth because they are the people who are most likely to have stayed in contact with the organisation.

Professionals: In RefugeeYouth some of our work engages directly with service providers and policy makers. We are regularly invited to run workshops and presentation at conferences and in universities. The way we approach this work is by forming team of interested young people. Using the principles of Participatory Action Research we explore the issues in relation to our own experiences, identify key messages and find creative ways to convey those messages and engage professionals in dialogue. Our methods include invisible theatre, forum theatre, role play, games, debate, discussion and films. Over the years we have worked directly with local and national policy makers, lawyers, community and youth workers, social workers, teachers and lecturers, key workers, housing workers, UKBA officials, and many other practitioners and decision makers whose work impacts on the lives of young refugees.

Questions for professionals were developed through a workshop where we explored what impact we are trying to achieve through our work with professionals.

We also wanted to explore the impact of 'Becoming a Londoner' a publication and theatre performance created in RefugeeYouth. Becoming A Londoner grew from our creative campaign, where we researched our own lives and the issues young refugees face in the U.K. Through the research young people found the solutions, the dos and the don'ts which was published into a book. We have been using the book as a tool to work with the Home Office, Universities, schools and other professionals. By using participatory Action Research young people are able to be the researcher in their lives and have the power to make the change they want by challenging the system which always questions them. The book was turned into a play where the stories and issues were brought to life through magical realism and storytelling. It was performed 5 times in the Freeword Centre, The Shed Theatre in Bedford, Birmingham County Hall, a community Centre in Harrow and The Scoop Theatre outside London's City Hall. We sent surveys to audience members at the different performances. We didn't have contact details for many audience members, and some of the performances were over 2 years ago, so we didn't expect a high response rate, but we did get responses from 9 audience members most of whom are professionals working with young refugees in different arenas.

Students: Over the years many Community and Youth Work students have done fieldwork placements in RefugeeYouth. Some are studying at undergraduate level, others at postgraduate level. Placements range from a few weeks up to six months. Students have had an important input in RefugeeYouth, each one bringing energy, ideas and offering new and varied approaches and experience. We have also recognised this as an important way of sharing and disseminating the youth work methodology that we practice with RefugeeYouth.

A team worked on creating questions on survey monkey to get students feedback about their placement with RY, where they were emailed a link that took them directly to the survey. We also considered whilst creating the questions that the surveys had to be less time consuming for respondents, but questions that would get them to critically think about their time in RY. The surveys were sent to 16 past and current students involved in RY. There were several emails and phone calls to encourage people to complete the surveys to help the organisation.

Who participated in the evaluation:

Current members

- 17 members participated in interviews with our evaluation team members.
 - 11 men and 6 women
 - 8 aged under 21, 8 aged 21-25, and 1 aged over 25
 - 2 who have been involved in RY under 2 years, 14 involved for 2-5years, 1 involved over years
 - 6 who involved daily, 7 involved weekly and 4 involved monthly,
 - 4 from Somalia, 3 from Afghanistan, 2 from Ivory Coast, 1 from Liberia, 1 from India, 1 from Eritrea, 1 from Sudan, 1 from Iraq, 1 from Colombia, 1 from Sierra Leone, 1 from Kenya

- 12 who are first generation refugees and 5 who are second generation
 - 5 who are actively involved in RY, 3 who take an organising role and 8 who are activists
- 20 current members responded to our on-line survey, and none of these people were interviewed. Half were men and half were women. Eight of the respondents have been involved in RY less than 2 years, 9 have been involved between 2-5years, and 3 have been involved 6 years or longer. 11 of the people who responded come to RY on a weekly basis, 3 come daily, 3 come monthly and 3 less often than monthly.

Past members

- 10 past members responded to our on-line survey. Six women and 2 men responded. Two more respondents did not answer whether they were male or female. Three of the respondents came to RY for under 2 years, four came for 3-5 years and 2 came for 6 or more years. 1 respondent did not say how long they came for.

Groups

- New Generation is a community arts group set up by young Latin Americans 13 years ago, run entirely by young volunteers. Although the group doesn't formally exist anymore, many of the members have gone on to set up very successful community projects and continue to support each other, work collectively and collaboratively and act as a network. Many of the core members of New Generation have been very actively involved in shaping and running RY.
- Somali Youth Action Forum is a football project for young Somali men set up in 2004 and run entirely by young volunteers. The group continues to exist and is supported by RY mainly to help with administration such as funding applications, reports and producing accounts.
- Dayah is a youth-led group set up in 2003 by 5 young Somali women who wanted make a change in their community, they started by running sports activities for young women and mentoring in schools. Dayah was heavily involved in the early days of RY and many of the group members were core members of RY. The group continues to exist but is no longer actively involved in RY.
- Mustaqbal is a project set up nearly 4 years ago by 6 young Somali women living in Harrow. Inspired by their experience in RY they wanted to provide something similar for young people in their local area. Mustaqbal currently exists as a project within RY, and is run by a team of young people supported by RY's paid workers.

Professionals

- Twelve professionals responded to our on-line survey. These were all people who had attended recent workshops facilitated by teams from RY:
 - A forum theatre workshop for lawyers and other professionals who are members of ILPA (Immigration Law Practitioners Association) (seven).
 - A workshop for MA Community and Youth Work Students at Goldsmiths University (two).

- A workshop for BA Community and Youth Work Students at Greenwich University (three).
- 13 individuals who had previous or current youth work student placements within RY responded to our on-line survey.
- 9 people replied via email to give feedback on the Becoming a Londoner theatre performances which they had seen at different events. 6 respondents had seen the play at the Refugee Council's SMILE Conference in Birmingham, 2 at the Mustaqbal Conference in Harrow, and 1 at the launch of Becoming a Londoner at the Freeword Centre in Farringdon.

SECTION ONE: WHO IS INVOLVED IN REFUGEEYOUTH?

Who we monitored:

When we began our evaluation we realised we need to analyse some monitoring information to give us a clearer picture of who is involved and who isn't involved in RefugeeYouth. In RefugeeYouth we do not ask people for information about themselves when they walk in the door. This is really important for us because so many young people are coming from a context where they are constantly surveyed, monitored and interrogated. Everywhere they go they are asked to tell their story- and very often they are not believed, left feeling labelled, categorised and put into a box.

In RefugeeYouth we openly keep a diary of everything we do and who is involved in each activity and workshop. Over time and as we get to know people we are able to break this information down and see who is involved and who isn't, including which communities, genders and age groups are represented and which are not.

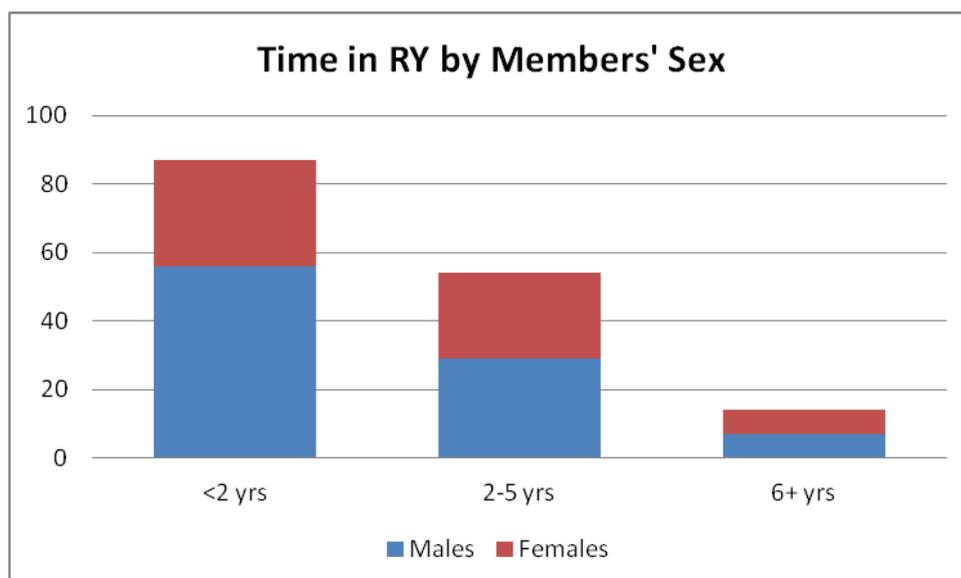
We decided to look at the diary and see who had been involved over the past year. We looked at 4 months of 2011; April, June, September and November to give us a clear picture of the whole year (and because those were the months when people had remembered to fill in the diary most consistently!).

Over those 4 months we counted 176 different young people who had been involved in RefugeeYouth's activities. Some of those were involved on a daily or weekly basis, others less often. 25 of them came as a one-off, and we do not know enough about them to include them in the analysis below. Therefore, the statistics below represent 155 of the young people who were involved during those months.

We looked at gender, age, country of origin, length of involvement in RefugeeYouth, regularity of involvement in RefugeeYouth, whether people were first or second generation refugees or whether they were from non – refugee backgrounds. One of the big issues we wanted to explore was who is attracted to RefugeeYouth and what sort of involvement they are looking for and so we categorised participants in the following way; participants (those who attend activities), involved (those who take an active involvement in tasks and activities), organiser (those who are involved in organising activities and workshops), activist (those who take initiative to make things happen and shape the agenda of RefugeeYouth).

Key findings:

Length of membership: RY continues to attract new members. 54% of the young people have been with the project for less than 2 years; 31% for 2 to 5 years and 15% for six or more years. The majority of members (60%) are male. There is a particularly higher proportion of young men in those who joined within the last couple of years.



Refugee background: Two thirds of young people (64%) are first generation refugees; over a quarter (28%) is second generation and a minority (8%) are non refugees.

Country of origin: Young people come from a total of 37 countries. From many countries just one or two young people are represented. The largest groups are from Somalia (36), Afghanistan (21), Colombia (12) and Ivory Coast (10). Young women are well represented from most regions, although no young women from Afghanistan attend.

Region of Origin	Males	Females	Total
Eastern & Southern Europe	10	7	17
Middle east	21	0	21
Africa	39	35	74
South America	7	9	16
Asia	9	7	16
Jamaica	3	1	4
UK	2	4	6

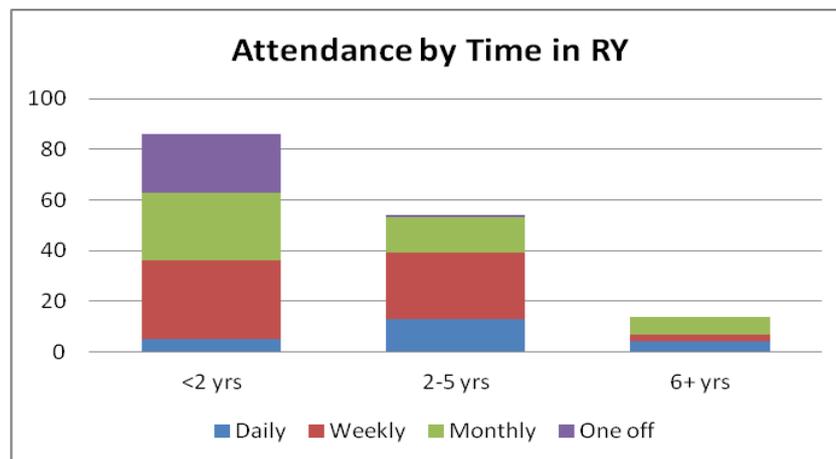
Most represented countries	Male	Female	Total
Somalia	15	21	36
Afghanistan	21	0	21
Colombia	4	8	12
Ivory Coast	6	4	10
Pakistan	2	4	7
Kurdistan	7	0	7

According to the Refugee Council the highest number of asylum applicants in 2011 came from people originating from the following countries (in order, with the highest first); Iran, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Eritrea, China, Libya, Nigeria, Sudan and Bangladesh. The top five countries of origin for unaccompanied children seeking asylum in 2011 were Afghanistan, Iran, Eritrea, Albania

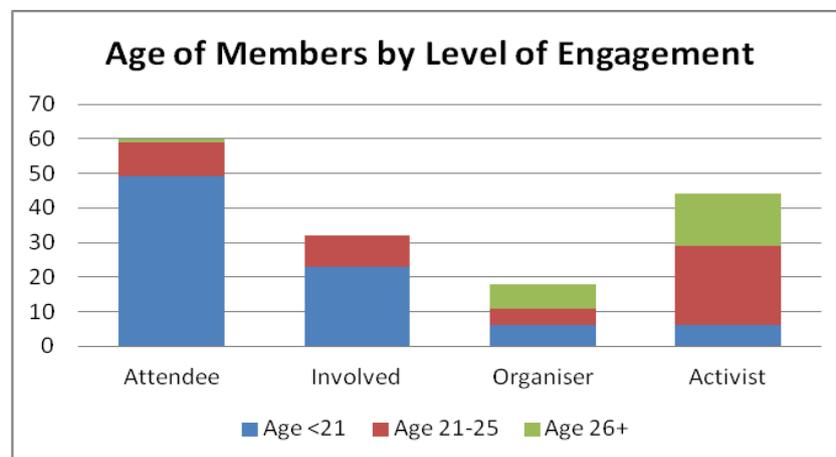
and Vietnam. All of those countries are represented within the sample group we analysed from RefugeeYouth except Vietnam, Sri Lanka, China and Libya.

Whilst it is interesting to compare RefugeeYouth statistics to those of new arrivals/applicants, it is also important to recognise that RefugeeYouth is not just a community of newly arrived young people. Many participants are from more established refugee communities, and have been in the UK many years. In fact, much of the richness of RefugeeYouth comes from the diversity of experience represented within the organisation. In addition, we recognise that the issues affecting young people from refugee communities do not stop when their journey through the immigration system ends – in fact many of the issues are ongoing through multiple generations.

Attendance: More recent members (<2 years) are less likely to attend daily or weekly than those who have been a member for 2 to 5 years. Women tend to come less frequently (38% monthly; 27% one off) than men (26% and 8%). But of those members who come daily or weekly (22 women; 59 men), a higher proportion of the women are particularly active: 59% (13) of women compared with 20% (13) of men are ‘activists’.



Level of involvement: Whilst just over half the young people are engaged only as ‘attendees’ (39%) or ‘involved’ (21%), still 41% are actively involved as either ‘organisers’ (12%) or activists (29%). Women in particular (43% compared with 19%) are ‘activists’, and men are more likely than women to be an ‘attendee’, ‘involved’ or ‘organiser’. Older members are more likely to be actively involved.



SECTION TWO: WHAT CURRENT AND PAST MEMBERS TOLD US

WHAT DOES RY MEAN TO YOU?

In the interviews current members indicated that RY clearly offers a unique, highly valued space.

“A space for young people, a place where things come together, it’s a protected place, somewhere where there is a piece of mind. It has relationships, teachers and dreams, it’s a room that you can approach anyone; it has love, it’s human rights, it’s a voice.” (Current member)

For many RY is a “home and family”; with love, friendship, safety, kindness, and respect from other members. This can be particularly important for those without family close by.

“My second home; when I come in this country I didn’t know much people.” (Current member)

“It means love, family. It’s really different to typical youth centres. You can always call the RY phone anytime of the night, most people do their 9-5 jobs and only do what they get paid for. It’s an all day place you can rely on people.” (Current member)

RY is also a place where members receive support, where they are encouraged and extended; again this can be particularly valuable for those who do not have family nearby or who are experiencing personal difficulties.

“I had so much pressure inside of me and RY gave me people to talk to which helped to release the pressure. I didn’t have family or friends, it’s a place for this.” (Current member)

“I had lots of problems and things going on in my life and they have really helped me especially when you don’t have a family here.” (Current member)

“It means the world to me; it’s not the second place, it’s the first place I come here with my problems, happiness, and I feel confident here, it opened my horizons . . . you guys take the situation and show us what I’m capable of.” (Current member)

“I came, I didn’t know how to communicate with people and RY showed me how to. It’s like having a mum and dad . . . People found things in me that I didn’t think I could do. . . Before I use to put on a front but now I am not scared to ask for help.” (Current member)

A few members also mentioned that RY offers them a space to be themselves: including the freedom to do things it does not feel possible to do in the ‘outside world’.

“RY has always been there, in the happy days, sad days, it’s not a place for refugee, it’s a place where I can come there and be myself, I don’t have to put up front for no one.” (Current member)

RY’s diverse membership is valued; where you can learn about others but also share similar experiences. This includes a place where second and third generation young people can talk and learn with first generation refugees.

“Young people here talk about and share what they have experienced whereas other people haven’t really lived those experiences.” (Current member)

“A place where you can come and learn about other people.” (Current member)

“It means respect, culture respect and culture difference, togetherness with everyone and how we come together and break a lot of barriers.”(Current member)

RY as a political organisation was mentioned by only three young people: “trying to get a word around the world”. A couple stressed the importance of developing youth leadership:

“RY means self development, discovery, strong youth leadership.” (Current member)

“RY helps young people have leadership to be able to challenge the system. There is so many refugee’s they do not know how to empower themselves but in RY it helps you challenge that stereotype and image.” (Current member)

A couple of people mentioned creativity and fun; where even ‘meaningful’ activities are enjoyable.

“I had the freedom to be political in a more fun way.” (Current member)

In the surveys past and current members emphasised similar although not identical aspects of what RY meant to them. The majority of current members emphasised RY being ‘a home and family with caring, friendly people’, half said ‘a place to use my passion to improve the world for other refugees’, just under half said ‘a place to meet young people from different backgrounds but also similar experiences’, followed by ‘a place to learn new things’ and ‘a place to get involved in fun and creative activities’. Just over half past members put gave equal weight to ‘a home and family . . .’, ‘a place to meet young people from different backgrounds . . .’ and ‘a place to use my passion to improve the world . . .’. A similar proportion (just under half) of past and current members felt RY represented ‘a place to develop my youth leadership skills’.

The three most important things that RY means to you: current and past members



WHAT BRINGS YOU TO RY?

How did you find out about RY?

Eight of the current members we interviewed found out about RY through friends. Seven found out through their involvement in other organisations/services (The Anchor Project, New Generation, New Londoners, School and Connexions). Two found out through RefugeeYouth outreach workshops.

What attracted you to RY?

Interviewed members were asked to talk about what attracted them to RY, their first impressions and what brought them back again. Most gave several reasons.

Nearly everyone (15 people) came back to RY because of the environment and the people, some referring to it as 'crazy' or 'mad', and different to what they were used to. They described a happy, comfortable environment. They emphasised that it is supportive and welcoming and made them feel at home and part of a family. They valued people for being:

- Welcoming;
- Happy, hugging and smiling;
- Vibrant;
- Warm and friendly;
- Kind, sensitive and supportive, offering food and tea and seeing if you're ok;
- Interested in what others think (ie asking questions and valuing opinions)
- Professional.

"The people being very friendly and kind. The first time I came it felt like I was coming to see my friends, even though I didn't know these people." (Current member)

"First I thought this place was crazy after a while I got into the craziness and started joining everyone on the dance floor." (Current member)

"Lovely people giving you a hug, smiling, asking you cups of tea." (Current member)

"It's sensitive and considerate; it's a place that helps people on any level." (Current member)

"I really felt it's a good place for people that have no friends and family." (Current member)

A couple of young people stressed how the caring environment in RY is very different from what they had previously experienced before:

"Everyone was happy and crazy. [Someone] came and hugged me, I never hugged a guy before so that was different. People were talking to me like they knew me my whole life. When I saw [a member's] son smiling, so happy and playing with everyone; at that age I was never that happy, it was very different to see that. It made me feel different to see a young child so happy that's why i came back because they genuinely make people smile. It changed my whole perspective and my whole outlook. It made me want to find out the structure and how they were doing this. . . . Nothing good happens; the rich get rich and the poor get

poor. Everyone is struggling in RY but yet they are so happy. I thought everyone was crazy and nuts, I'm not scared of no one but I was scared. I wanted to find out why they communicated with me they way they did. They really cared and saw something in me. . . I never have been in an atmosphere like RY before. Before it was like drugs and money, and I happened to be a part of it every day. But in RY it was so happy. I use to come 11 in the morning just to put a smile on my face. I didn't have to have my phone on me I could just put it to a side. Even when people were sad they were smiling." (Current member)

"All the different nations under one roof, all the music and different foods. Before RY I never actually sat down and seen people drumming maybe outside and I would walk pass them. It was like a whole new world for me. When I met someone is like that person instantly became my sister. I saw a whole new world different races and religions engaging together, putting everything aside and having fun. Where I come from no one really cares about you." (Current member)

Three people came back because they liked the fact it was different from youth work environments they had been to:

"I was looking for the person who was in charge and who the authority person was. I expected it to be a normal youth club but it wasn't." (Current member)

"It's not like all these other fake youth places. Here people are offering you food and seeing if you are ok. That's when I knew this is different." (Current member)

Young people (twelve) also continued to get involved because of the activities in RY which gave them new experiences and opportunities to learn. People talked about opportunities to explore London, visit the countryside on residentials and creative activities.

"What made me come back was that they were always doing something new and I was able to have new experiences." (Current member)

"I have never been out of London so when I found out about residentials the first day I really wanted to have that experience and I was really interested in having new experiences. The dance and drumming and drama really attracted me to RY." (Current member)

Some (six) valued meeting new people and the opportunity to integrate; which "took away the loneliness" for those who did not know many others: "Having no family or friends and not being able to speak English at the time really encouraged me to come to RY." Two young men were specifically attracted by the opportunity to meet young women. Another three young men saw RY as a way to get away from negative people and influences.

"I never have been in an atmosphere like RY before. Before it was like drugs and money, and I happened to be a part of it every day. But in RY it was so happy. I use to come 11 in the morning just to put a smile on my face. I didn't have to have my phone on me I could just put it to a side. Even when people were sad they were smiling." (Current member)

"The people were different to the people I met at school, government centres and they didn't live London fast." (Current member)

"If I'm not in college I'm at home alone . . . I can get very bored. I try to keep away from my friends as a lot of them smoke drugs and hang around the streets." (Current member)

A few (three) stressed a sense of belonging and ownership; a place where they can be themselves and have the freedom to do what they are passionate about. Another stressed how the safe space is created by the organisational structure.

We realised there's was nothing happening in our local area, so we had a dream of starting a project. I'm naturally an energetic person and for the first time RY let me do that. In public people would stare at you and when you young you get told not to act loud and energetic in public. But here I feel like I could use my energy positively. I could be myself and that's why I just love this." (Current member)

"Nowhere is as safe as RY! Its risk free in its structure, professionalism, controlled expression, respectful, the environment, the energy. Its policies prevent conflict, the services it provide .i.e. integration into society and reintegration. It's safe and creative in many ways." (Current member)

Around a third (six people) were attracted by the opportunity to make change in the world. They saw RY as a place where they contribute and help other people. Some talked about wanting to 'volunteer', 'contribute' or 'give back'. A couple talked more politically, including a younger relatively new member and an older member who had been involved for some time:

"I wanted to see what these people were about changing people's mind set and stereotypical view. To help people in my local families and etc. I didn't want them to grow up the way I did." (Current member)

"The needs of finding my own self and other people's experiences. I had a feeling that we can have an amazing place where young people can come together. I was really political. I wanted to find a place to challenge this because I was very radical. A lot of the people I knew were cleaning and I wanted to find something where I can learn and build myself as a person and help others to do that as wells. I wanted to find people who wanted to fight for their rights." (Current member)

A couple mentioned the importance of getting personal support and a few (three) also said they were attracted to RY because of the need to learn English.

"When I first came to RY my English wasn't very good I enjoyed a lot the activities that were happening such as games, ice-breakers and trips all over London; these activities helped to improve my English. Talking to people and having them correct my English really helped me learn how to speak properly." (Current member)

Did anything help you to come to RY or make it difficult for you?

Young people in the interviews were asked what helped or made it harder to come to RY, including whether there was anything going on in their life that affected their decision to come to RY, or if others in their home life helped or made it harder.

Three young women and one young man talked about problems with their families not valuing the importance of RY and not understanding why they were spending so much time involved. Families were worried about their daughter being out late, mixing with men or simply 'partying'. However, most said this improved over time, by getting to know more about what was involved at RY:

“At first my mother did not really understand. It was a major thing but over time she realised how important it was to have me involved. It explained why I was coming home late. The consent letters and people being supportive of me and being in contact with my mother was very helpful. Gradually my mother started to see how important it was.” (Current member)

Seven people talked about how commitments or problems in their personal lives made it difficult for them to be involved, including work, study and family, particularly for those living without close relatives. For others, it was these personal challenges that partly made RY so attractive; a space where they are welcomed and can be with others (rather than alone), they can be themselves, and place to get away from the problems and stresses in their lives. Two people said that the support they got with personal problems in RY made it easier for them to stay involved.

“When you’re by yourself and you have to do everything by yourself it’s hard to even come to RY. I don’t have brothers and sisters to ask to do things for me so i have to do everything. If you go sleep at 4:00 and wake up 7:00 in the morning you know you do not have time in your hands.” (Current member)

“I had a lot of stress and intensity in my life it really helped to have somewhere to go for happiness a place where I can engage and fully enjoy myself. Have a place where I can go for a little break and not think about all the issues.” (Current member)

Two people talked about how the people in RY and the agenda of the organisation motivated and pushed them to stay involved.

“I was angry about what society does to people and what my family went through and my own experience as a refugee . . . I needed to stop feeling angry,[someone at RY] helped me to take my own power and know how to use my own power. RY helps you know your rights as a refugee and finding ways to aim high.” (Current member)

The cost of travel in London made it hard for three people, although the fact that RY refunds travel expenses made it easier for a couple of these people. Another three found the distance to travel difficult. One person mentioned that having food provided helped them.

THE RY EXPERIENCE

In the interviews current members were asked to talk about their experience of RY, and what helped to make it a good experience for them. Almost half (eight) explicitly valued the way RY had encouraged and supported their involvement and development, helping them to better communicate, develop leadership skills, understand others and themselves better, and an increased confidence to get involved in more activities. The different available activities – from creative workshops to residential – provide valued opportunities to do this.

“Learning to be a good leader . . . Getting to know more other people and learning from them. To also make mistakes because not a lot of places allow you to make mistakes.”
(Current member)

“RY has given me confidence and that has been the best experience because I can do other things in my life now like apply for a job.” (Current member)

Respect underlined what some (four) felt most captured their experience. This included not having to share their life stories, welcoming different points of view, collaboration and democratic structures.

“Meetings, feedback, open meetings make you feel at home, different activities, points of view, free to do anything, show skills and experience, taken seriously, treated like family.”
(Current member)

“I realised everyone was equal. I have never ever seen meetings set up the way it was. Everyone getting to voice their own opinions. That what makes RY function everyone involved in everything.” (Current member)

Some (four) stressed it was meeting and socialising with lovely people that made RY such a good experience.

“Meeting nice people and being able to share good food with them. I was able to go on residential and learn how to live with many different people.” (Current member)

“The people, especially in the Christmas residential and how people got my present so right the fact it was so me and how well they knew me.” (Current member)

When asked whether anything made it difficult for them in RY, several (six) could think of nothing. Others identified some issues. Working with so many people, and making decisions in groups has its challenges. Less than a quarter (four) said poor dynamics had made their experience at RY difficult: this included some people thinking they are better than others, not listening, the difficulty of hearing others’ challenging views and others making false negative assumptions about them. One other complained of theft.

“RY can either build your confidence or break it. Sometimes people feel liberated to say anything because it’s such a safe space but sometimes it might hurt you or offend you because there is no line.” (Current member)

A couple of young men felt that they are no longer contacted by RY workers as frequently as in the past, and now only to tell them about an event, rather than simply to check out how they are. One

felt he had received no feedback or thanks for his hard work during an event. They felt excluded and unwanted.

“When I first use to come RY I use to get a text message everyday now I only get a message when [specific events are] happening. I use to get excited when I was invited to other projects. The word family means so much to me, so when I stopped getting the messages I thought to myself does RY not want me there anymore.” (Current member)

A couple of others (who had been at RY for five years or more) also felt RY was changing for the worse. One because it was losing its “atmosphere, games, fun people and laughter”. The other worried that RY could burn out because newer members did not have enough drive and leadership potential.

A few (four) people felt that personal lives or how they felt personally created barriers for them in RY. One young woman felt she should be at home more, but over time allowed herself to remove this barrier and participate more fully. Someone said it can be hard to mention personal difficulties whenever others are so ‘happy and positive’, but she realised this was important. One young man had been worried about coming to RY in his dirty work clothes and another person had needed time out to focus on getting to know her college friends.

In the surveys both current and past members all rated their overall experience of RY as good or very good. Past members talked about the welcoming, family environment. They also mentioned the opportunity to gain skills, make friends and explore London, as well as get support and advice in achieving their goals. Just one said anything about politics or advocacy when asked to say what was good:

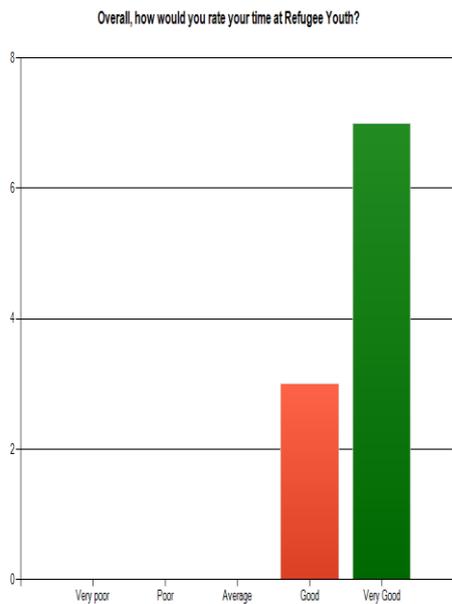
“It was 100% alive!!!! - full of youth, promise, activism, friendship, family, challenges, arts, food!” (Past member)

“RY helped me find a goal to achieve for, assisted in achieving it and still are my most trusted advisors.” (Past member)

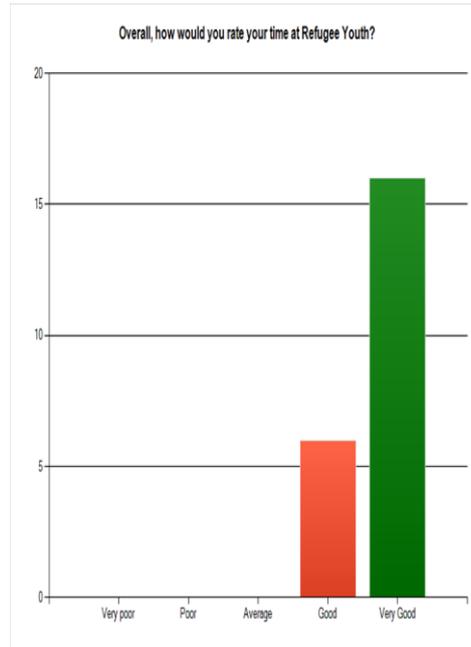
The current members indicated that RY enabled them to develop a better understanding of wider issues such as cultural diversity, the issues and problems of being a refugee (including what parents had gone through when having to leave their homeland), power dynamics and decision making processes, as well as developing personal knowledge and skills. Having fun and enjoying themselves was also a common theme, as was meeting friendly, non-judgemental, inspiring and “amazing people who have diverse skills, talents and passion”.

“It has been an amazing experience because I have learnt so much, it's open my eyes and given me a different outlook to the way I see society. Before coming to RY I didn't really pay too much attention about the issues and problems of being a refugee. In RY you always have a voice to talk about politics, food, sex, cultures or your favourite shoes or make-up. It's a place where you can feel comfortable about raising awareness in a fun, loving and creative way. Politics in school was such a bore but in RY we talk about the realistics and we are all buzzing during debates.” (Current member)

Past members

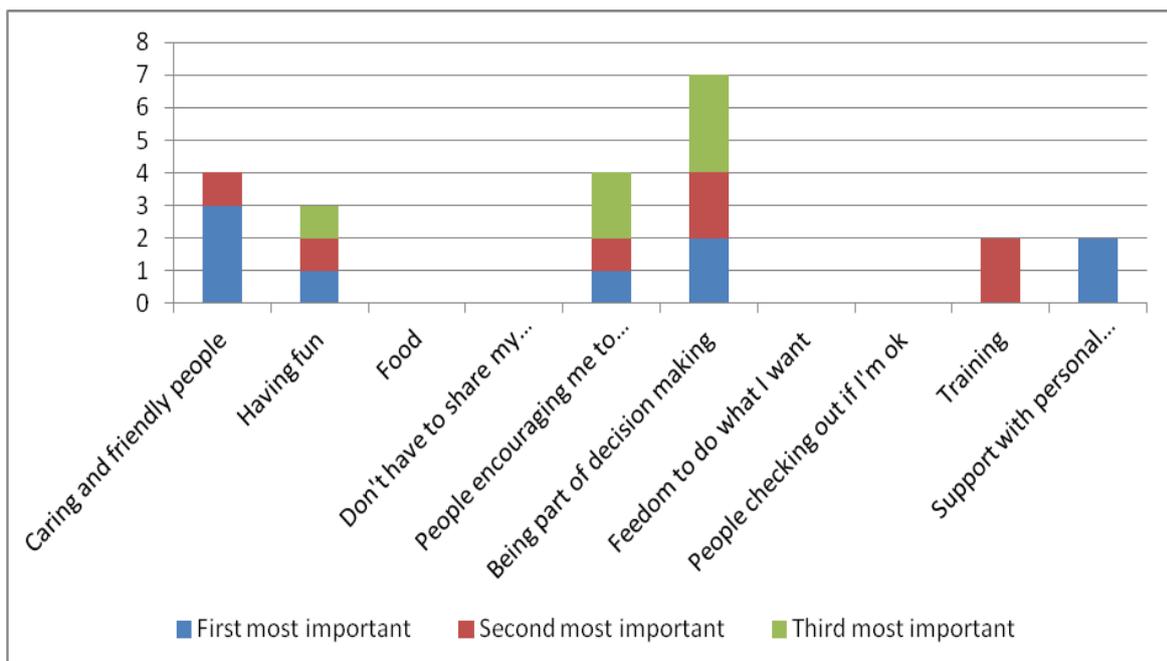


Current members

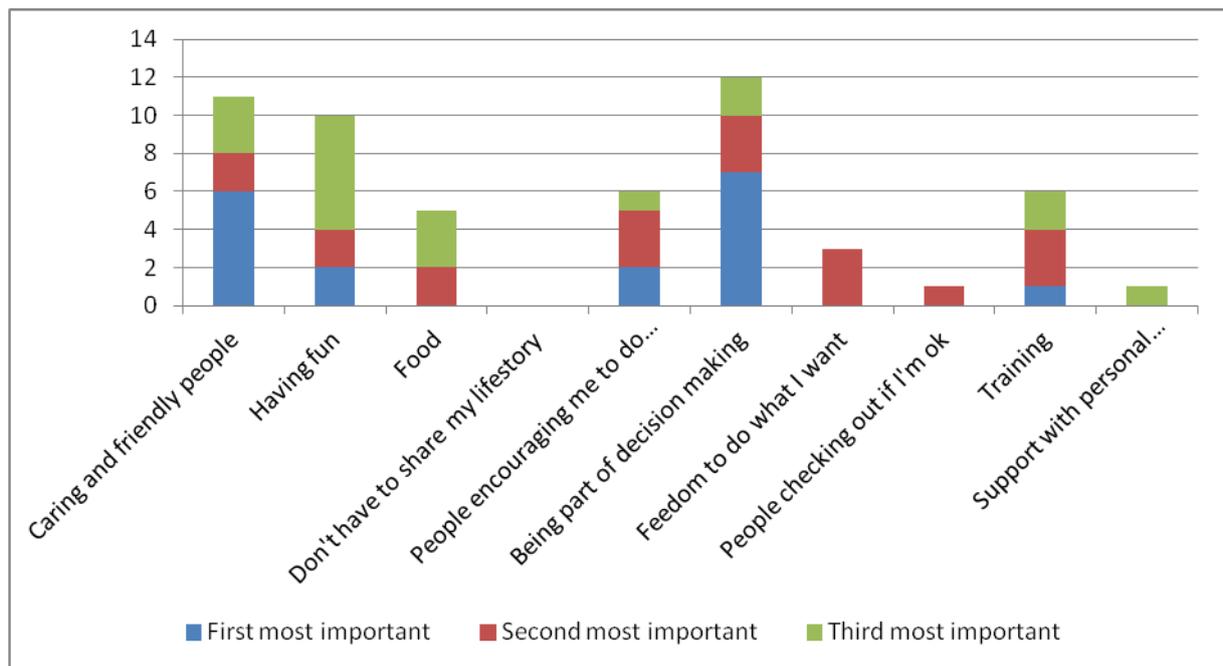


In the surveys people were asked to specify the first, second and third most important factors in making RY a good experience for them. Past and current members indicated similar although not identical choices. The most selected factor was being part of decision making, although this was more frequently a first choice amongst current members. The 'caring and friendly people' was the next most selected factor, within both groups. This was equally valued with 'People encouraging me to do more' amongst past members, but not amongst current members. Having fun and food were more frequently selected by current members.

Past members



Current members:



Things that make it difficult for you in RY

In the survey current members indicated more factors that made it difficult for them in RY than past members.

Amongst past members the most frequently mentioned difficulty was 'being too busy studying or working'. Some found that RY is 'too far to travel' and that 'worries or problems in their own lives' made it difficult for them in RY. Other issues (mentioned by one person each) were the lack of people listening, "the endless 'WHY' on the same matters" and concern that some people look for everything in RY:

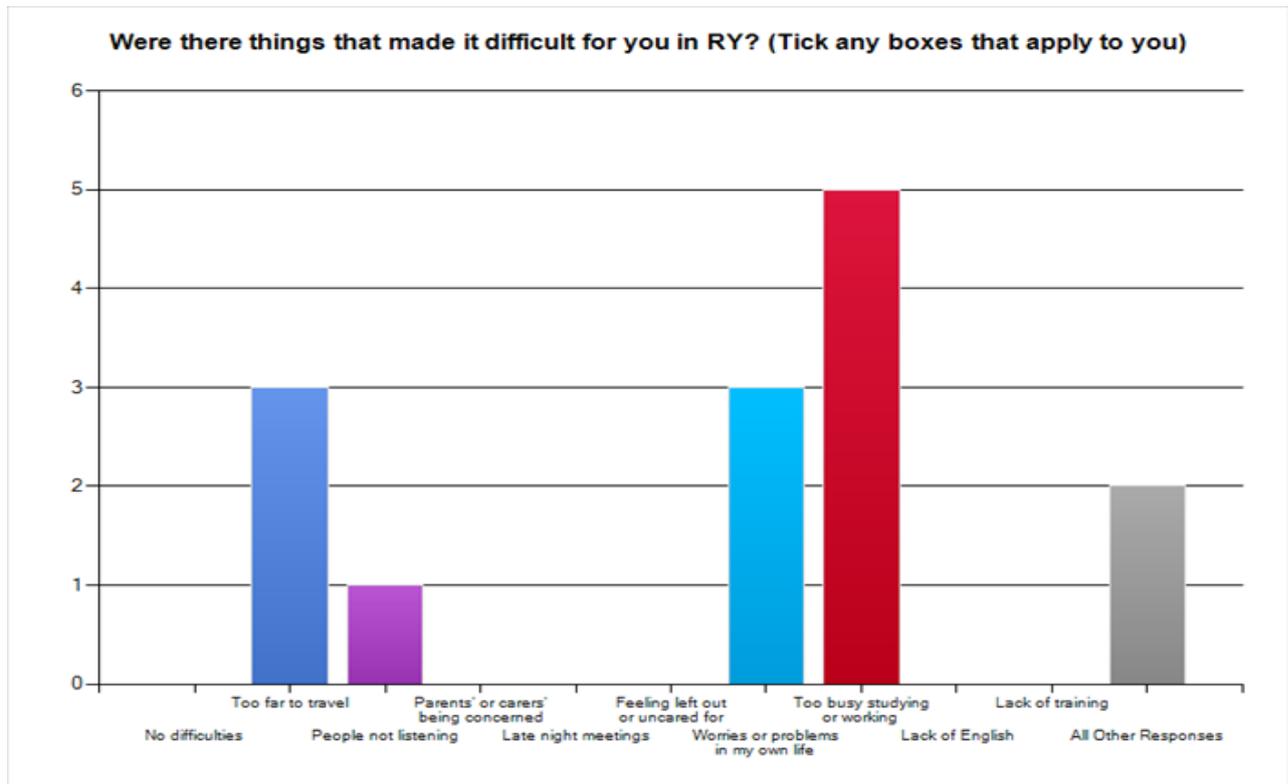
"Once people feel it can be their only source of work or their platform to fight against human rights violations, or their university... RY is an inspirational experience but it needs to have more fingers pointing outside!" (Past member)

What makes it difficult for current members to be part of RY are two major factors: 'people not listening' and being 'too busy working and studying' (including one busy raising a child whilst studying). The third factor was 'worries or problems in my own life'. A few people also feel that a 'lack of training' is something that makes it difficult for them. One felt excluded from decisions.

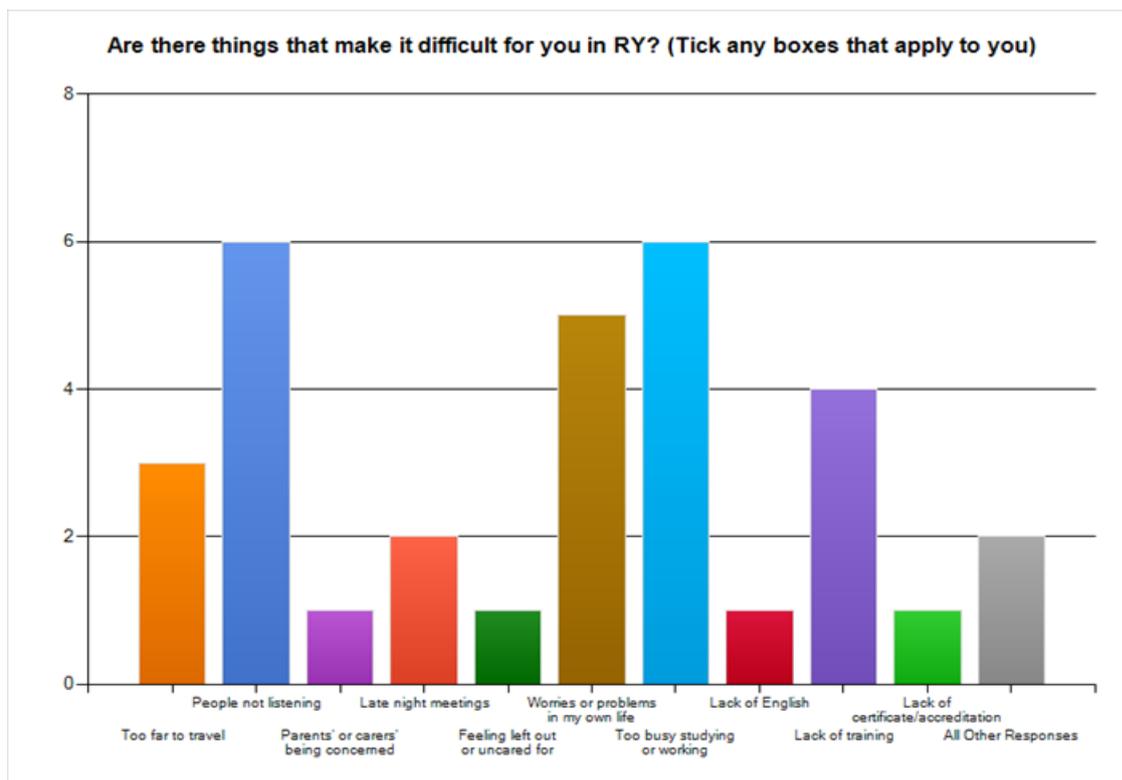
"Sometimes we need to listen to each other I mean really listen. We need to bring the effortless fun back in RY. The things that first brought me to RY like mix it up. We are so busy in meetings, evaluating and reflecting we need to bring some of that energy back again." (Current member)

"Only certain people make decisions in the end. They have more confidence, better relationships and the right language." (Current member)

Past members



Current members



RY compared to other youth / refugee organisations

In the surveys both past and current members felt RY compared positively with their experiences of other youth / refugee organisations (past members: 7 'very positive' and 2 said 'positive'; current members: 10 'very positive' and 6 'positive'; for who the question was relevant).

Past members said they felt RY had more passion and creativity. It offered more opportunity to mingle and meet people from different cultures and backgrounds who they otherwise may not have come across, within a safe environment to share and listen to other experiences. One talked about how RY was different because it was created out of people's real needs and passions:

"RY only iscompletely different to other youth clubs, it grew out of necessity, of the people... it is not there to please a borough, the government, tick some boxes... it is there because people were moved inside to create something that they themselves needed, people with heartbeats and tears, not numbers and suits" (Past member)

One past member mentioned that in RY there was more opportunity to be involved in decision making.

"In other organisations I did not feel as though I was really a part of any decision making i.e. less choice, ownership of events etc" (Past member)

A key theme for current members was that they felt they are all listened to and have the opportunity to turn their ideas into action. One person, who came to RY on a student placement, saw a completely different side to youth work of shared ownership with young people. One person said that in RY members are challenged and raise their awareness of wider issues, unlike in other youth clubs where they are simply kept off the streets playing games and computers. One had never been to any other youth clubs but heard of fees people have to pay at the door, making it difficult to join.

"No other youth clubs I have been to give young people the opportunities to lead any events." (Current member)

"It was the young people themselves interviewing me for my student placement, where I sat there and expected a manager to take me to a quiet room for a chat. From the very beginning it was very clear that the whole project had a real sense of ownership and belonging which really confused me but taught me so much in the value creating a place where everyone can have a stake, where it's not just owned and dictated by youth workers." (Current member)

"[In] other youth clubs it's all to do with keep young people busy and off the street by letting them use the computer and playing games, where as in RY is not only fun and games but they bring awareness of issues that are around the world or even within the community. RY is an inspiration, hope and joy and other youth clubs is just a place to chill out with friends." (Current member)

How much do you belong in RY?

Nine of the interviewed current members strongly felt they belong in RY because they feel wanted, cared for, valued, believed in and supported:

“I do feel like I belong do not have any doubts. I feel like I am needed and wanted and always asked about. Valued and appreciated for what I do. Leading projects.” (Current member)

Others were less clear that they belonged or felt this varied. Reasons for doubt included a couple who felt they were not contacted to see if they are ok, suggesting that no one cares, and another felt neglected because their birthday was forgotten. One person felt they only belonged when older members were present but not with newer members, and not when they say something challenging because “people do not want to listen to negative things and I don’t want to ruin the atmosphere”. One person felt psychologically not ready to fully belong because they were worrying about personal fears of deportation. One person felt they had not been there long enough to feel true belonging.

“The birthday calendar in RY kind of made me feel down. It such a little thing but it matters a lot; someone should make the effort to ask because noticing it today my birthday was not on there.” (Current member)

What personally motivates you to take part in different RY activities?

In the interviews with current members, some (5) said that learning new things or having new experiences motivates them most to participate in activities. Following interests and passions were important for another three: including being passionate about RY, about dance and exploring political issues. Being encouraged to participate – by being invited, given a role, pushed or positive feedback – was important to others (4). A few (3) were motivated by the desire to help others, sharing their experience and not losing what others in RY have achieved before them:

“If we didn’t do it young people would never have experiences like residentials, imagine you’re stuck in London not being able to travel and go on holiday with no papers or family. Then going to a RY residential with the shouting and the laughing and the craziness; RY is a different taste of life for me.” (Current member)

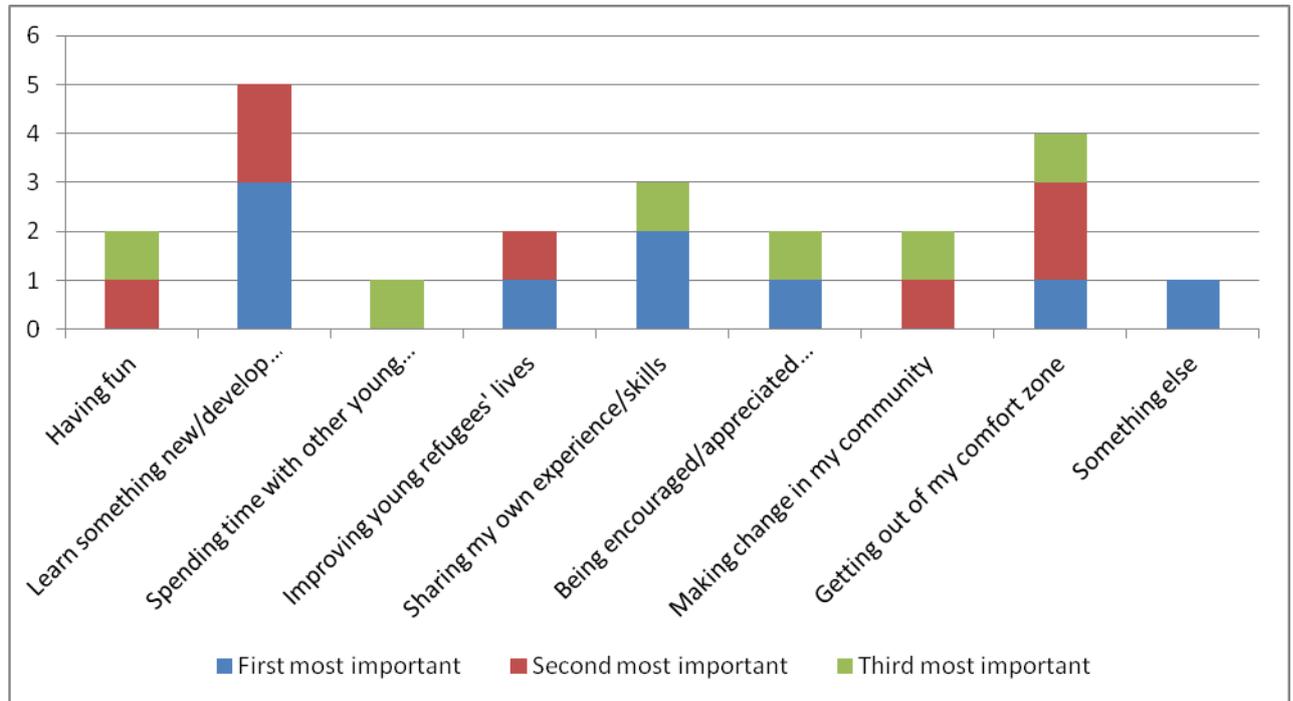
One young person felt unwilling to participate because of personal psychological distress due to potential deportation; they wanted a safe space to be around “good people” and to focus on themselves.

“I am not mentally ready and sometimes people need to understand that. When I am psychologically ready I will join in, but my mind is not in a stage where I am ready. When people contact me they should ask me how I am doing or if I’m ok, not just to invite me to meetings, activities and etc. My life feels like an open prison, most of the time I am thinking I could be sent back to my country. . . . This is life not TV or anything; I sometimes feel that anything can happen, [my country] is a dangerous place for me to go back to. It can get too much when people keep asking me things in RY; my head is in two places.” (Current member)

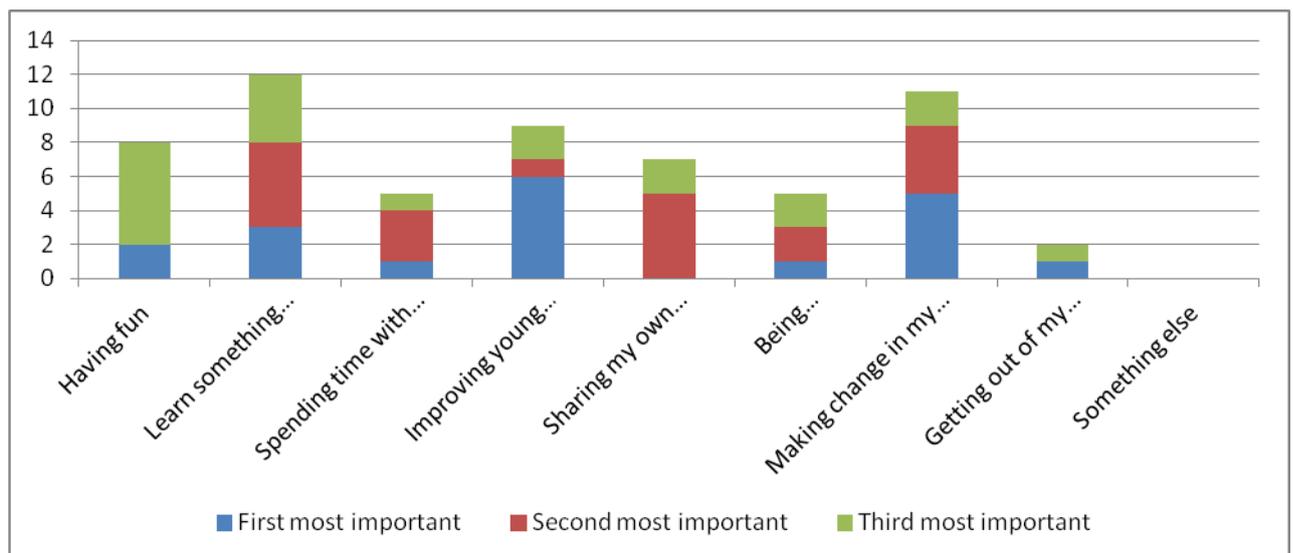
One person said they are discouraged them from taking part when projects do not go to plan, especially if people have worked hard (eg disappointing external audiences attendance at RIF).

In the surveys respondents were asked to indicate what were the first, second and third most important factors that motivated them to take part in RY activities. Around half the past members said 'learning something new/developing themselves' and 'getting out of my comfort zone'. Over half the current members also said 'learning something', but a significant number said they were motivated by 'making change in my community' and/or 'improving the lives of young refugees'. Having fun was important for over a third.

Factors that personally motivated past members to take part in different RY activities



Factors that personally motivated current members to take part in different RY activities



RESPONSIBILITY

How much responsibility do you feel you take in RY?

In RY, young adults are given different opportunities to take up positions of responsibility. In the interviews current members said they did the following:

Supporting other RY members: Seven members highlighted looking after and supporting one another through various forms.

“Taking people for walks in Yorkshire I put them first. I am responsible for my own action to make them feel safe.” (Current member)

There is a recurring theme of ‘recognising the importance of supporting each other’ - through creating a space in which individuals can pass on their knowledge and experiences to other young people, with one member stating:

“I feel like I do have responsibilities in RY, if someone new walks in it’s my role to talk to them, welcome them because someone did that with me.” (Current member)

These experiences have enabled people to feel that they are in a space that they can actively contribute something meaningful for other young people.

Day to day domestic jobs (eg washing up; tidying; cleaning): Whilst domestic tasks are important within RY only one member identified these as the responsibility she took within the project, and described it as limited, stating; “The only time I think the time I have responsibility is when I’m here from as little as washing my plate or the dishes”; she wanted support to take on more responsibility. One other identified their role as; “I always take care of the health and safety” (Current member).

Organising workshops, residential and creative activities: Being involved in these is for some what it means to demonstrate responsibility within the organisation. Residentials, for example, form a core part of RY’s work – with members acknowledging their importance in both bringing people together, and enabling them responsibility to co-ordinating the projects.

“I take enough to my ability running residential; being part of the planning team and do[ing] as much as I can do [as] part of the team.” (Current member)

Members also regard the creative workshops and activities that RY facilitate as something that allows them to take up positions of responsibility in a more creative and engaging way. The idea that individuals can lead on specific activities means that they are involved in the planning and delivering sessions for other young refugees within the organisation. Members also feel that they can pass on their experiences and skills, with one member stating: “I have had a lot of responsibility in dance and drama and it needs to pass on to other young people”. Being able to use these as valuable tools in workshop delivery within RY is something in which members have highlighted as a particular benefit of their involvement with RY. There is also a sense of ‘giving back’ to new members – reinvesting their skills and experiences to be of practical use.

There is a shared vision that being involved in the organising of activities with professionals and public would help to improve the lives of young refugees. Only one member explicitly mentioned this form of responsibility by name - “[I wish to be involved in] as much as I can get, youth leader, advocate, admin” - whereas others mentioned specific examples of advocacy activities (eg Refuge in Films).

Members feel that they are able to take up positions of responsibility as long they have awareness or knowledge of the project, or have an interest in learning more about what the project does, with one member stating; “I think I am quite important in the capacity I have in RY. For example Refuge in Films because I know a lot about it”. On the contrary, one participant felt that the taking up of responsibility was difficult, simply due to do a “lack of training” in the current capacity of the organisation.

Alongside the organisation having the capacity to offer suitable positions of responsibility, there is also an ideal that the individuals themselves want the opportunity to take up positions of responsibility and to be listened to. A few members’ comments suggest a feeling that the only way in which they are listened to and taken seriously is if their views are acted upon, indicating, perhaps, a lack of clarity around the greater issues affecting the organisation around funding, time and resources.

“Well, well, well. It depends if I’m taken seriously, (A project was suggested and put off for a while and then rapidly commissioned) if they listen to me then yeah, [I’ll take up positions of responsibility] why not.... I feel like I’m listened to sometimes and sometimes not, I don’t know, I just feel that way.” (Current member)

On the contrary, rather than simply being about RY handing responsibility down, as one respondent remarked, “I don’t have the opportunity [to be responsible]...Otherwise, I would say “can you give me something to improve myself to be able to do it”. I want to do as much responsibility” (Current member), individuals can recognise within themselves that they are in an environment that encourages them to challenge themselves to seek greater positions of responsibility. Some may need help however in getting to this stage, as we will see below.

One member encapsulated the ideal of self-challenge as a means of gaining positions of responsibility. Recognising that:

“When I’m involved in an activity I will take as much responsibility as I have to. But I have to put a lot more in. I can use [two activities as examples] I was never comfortable in making myself feel silly, but in [one event] I was pushed to a next limit where I can look stupid and have a laugh to send that message and that no one will look at me different. I still need to learn how to take responsibility for myself.” (Current member)

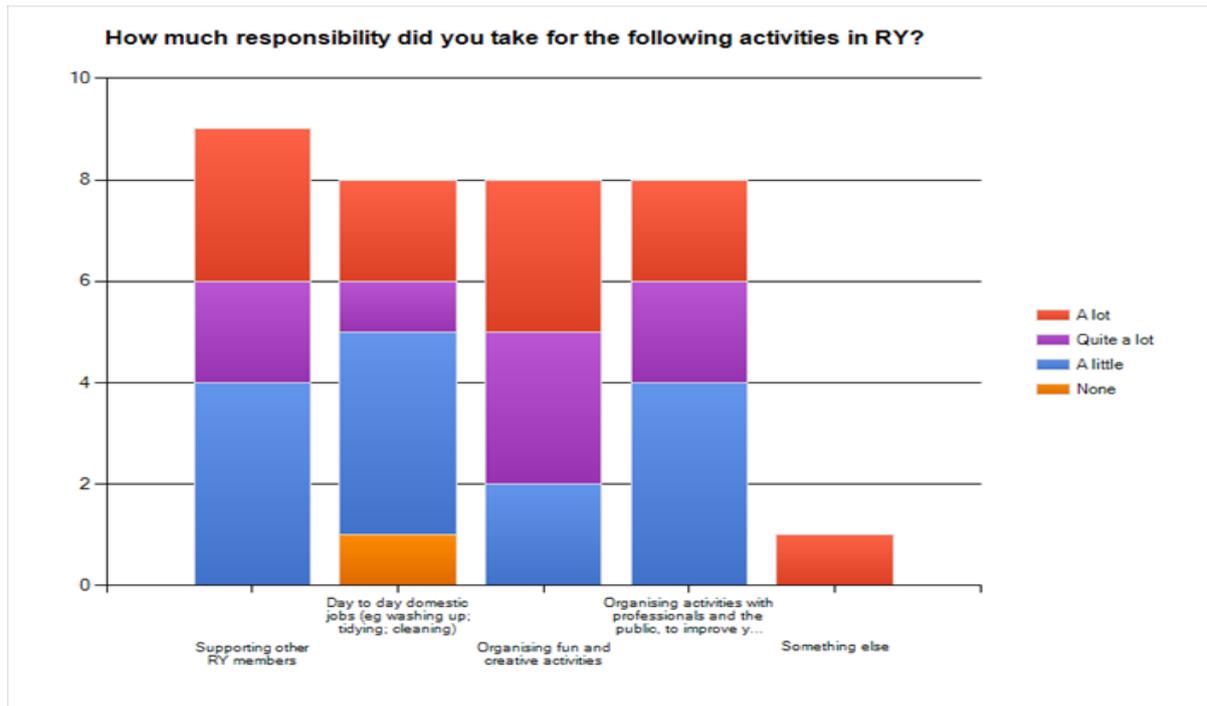
RY aims to encourage individuals to feel comfortable with themselves, and reflect upon their practical experiences that allow them to learn the skills and practices necessary to take up positions of responsibility.

In the surveys with current and past members we asked people how much responsibility they took in RY for different types of activities. The area where least past and current members felt they took significant responsibility was for day to day domestic jobs.

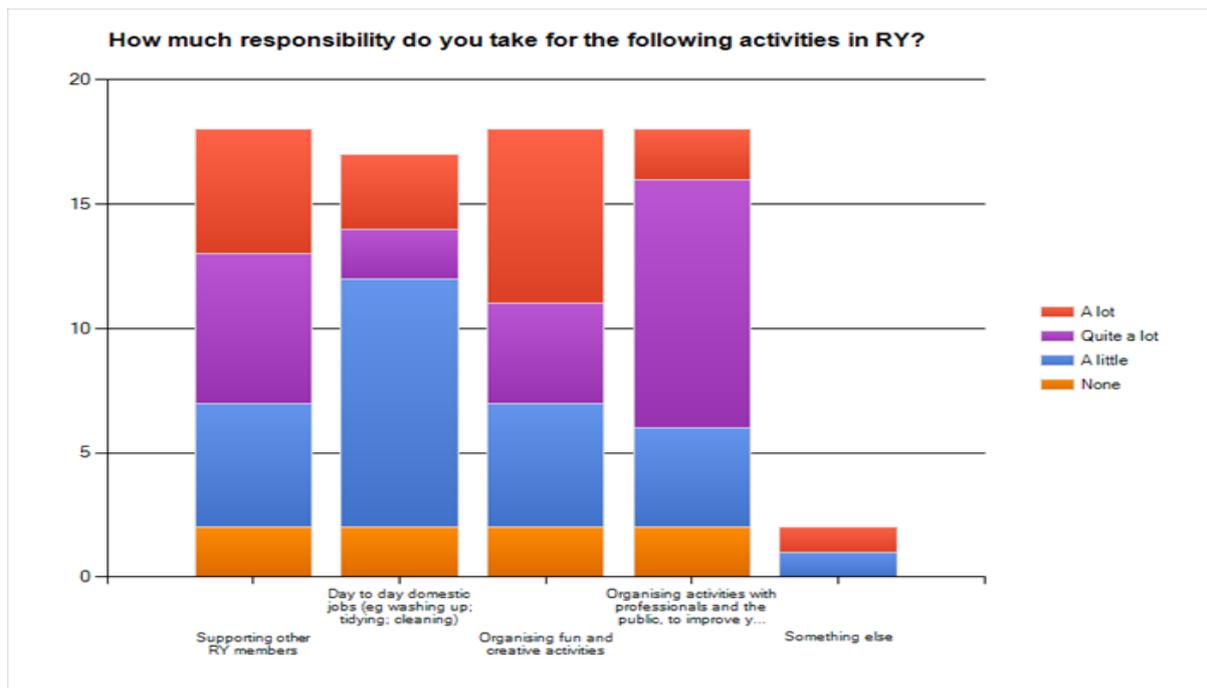
Amongst past members the area where most felt they took 'quite a lot' or 'a lot' of responsibility was in organising fun and creative activities. A half or just over half took on significant responsibility for supporting others and organising activities with professionals.

Amongst current members the majority felt they took significant responsibility for organising fun and creative activities, supporting other members and working with professionals/public to improve things for refugees; although amongst the advocacy work they were far more likely to take on 'quite a lot' than 'a lot' of responsibility.

Past members



Current members



What helps or makes it harder for you to take responsibility?

In the interviews with current members, having a clearly defined role was mentioned by a couple of people as helping them to take up responsibility within RY.

“If you know your role and everyone know as well it makes it easier, if you know your role and no one respects you that’s what makes it difficult.” (Current member)

Also, a couple talked of being ‘given’ the opportunities to take on responsibility:

“RY give me a chance to be a leader and to lead something make me in charge of myself.” (Current member)

Other individuals’ responses, and the way in which they communicate, can also play a pivotal part in ensuring that individuals and groups work well together within RY. One respondent remarked; “What helps is when you have support from your team and everyone is there to listen to you, communication is a big thing.” Having the whole team support makes it easier to take on responsibility.

“Sometimes when people do not listen, it discourages you. What helps is the atmosphere. People supporting makes things easier.” (Current member)

Effective communication also becomes useful as a process of learning, in particular. Where learning is done at the person’s own pace, and there is no pressure that you have to necessarily ‘succeed’ meaning that the learning process becomes more important than the final result:

“Whatever you do is not measured against success or failure so you try it out because it’s about the learning process. That really motivates you.” (Current member)

“Someone shouting at you telling to do it; what makes it difficult is when people try to change the way you are doing something which is your own way. That can get frustrating. But if someone is easing you showing you the right way to do it, makes it easier. There is no hierarchy.” (Current member)

“If people don’t help you or push you or exploit your weaknesses then it’s really hard ...If I don’t understand things, they make you understand - that is a good way of learning. “

This approach then – of support and challenge - encourages not only members to bond and form effective personal and working relationships, but also creates the space in which individuals can help one-another to reflect and learn upon their strengths and weaknesses. This constant learning process creates a critical approach to ways of thinking and working, members feel that the process takes time –one remarking; “Confidence, sometimes you think you know but you don’t. Sometimes it takes time for you to develop and learn.” (Current member)

Looking at what makes it harder when taking on responsibility within RY becomes then, important to discuss. Rather than just looking at the capacity of the organisation, it is also the responses of other people which have an effect on the taking up leadership roles. One respondent in particular remarked; “...I am given that role to do things. But it makes it harder when people do not listen and

don't take me seriously". The relationships that are created can sometimes lead to people taking advantage of others by not taking them seriously when in positions of responsibility.

When people perhaps take advantage of the relationships created this can hamper the development of the organisation as a whole – as well as individuals, with one member stating; "When doesn't help is when no one is listening to you and the group do not share your vision. There so many people in RY is hard to be that one person to make change because you're like a little fish in a big sea". This "little fish in a big sea" notion suggests that individuals may feel out of their depth to have a say in bringing about change.

As RY has grown, and more people have got involved there is a battle between the process of learning and operating effectively as an organisation. "In RY, it is not clear. Before, it used to be about the process, but things have changed throughout the years. There is a challenge between professional work, and what people expect from you." There is a fear that working toward establishing an organisation that serves people – rather than working with people, will shatter the ethos and the relationships that the organisation has worked so hard to create.

In parallel to this, one respondent made it clear about their perception of the future of the organisation, stating; "When I was in Refuge in Films team I felt like everybody was kicking each other every time I was trying to work with a group every group would say no you're not in this group. When I said I don't have a group people said ok go in the kitchen then. Sometimes when I make a commitment I don't understand it myself. RY is going down not up" (Current member). The confusion of different roles and not knowing when to take up positions of responsibility means that people perhaps feel like they don't belong, instead, focusing on what they're doing rather than working to welcome new members to the group. The roles then that some may consider 'minor' (ie. washing of dishes, cooking of food) then become devalued as individuals regard themselves as more important than others when in positions of responsibility.

Planning has been recognised as one of the core methods in increasing responsibility within the organisation. With one member stating; "I think we should sit down and do something creative and collective. If I want to take responsibility I want to do it more organic. Running days, getting trainers and sports and creative things. Art music dance and theatre. If there is already structure I can develop into" (Current member). If there's already an effective structure in place – and members are part of that strategic process, then it means individuals can contribute and step up when and where necessary.

Respondents to the questionnaires also regarded support as another key factor in helping members take up responsibilities. Through the offering of "training, and more support" members have acknowledged that the organisation has the capacity and ability to offer something greater than what is being offered. One respondent suggested perhaps "[creating] a core team, to do more outreach - have a team to do this. To have the training and time to actually do this." Building and expanding within the organisation in order to offer support becomes a recurring theme. In contrast to this, one member argued that even if the organisation expanded there would still be a wider issue around whether members actually regard the positions as something fruitful and applicable to their employment and training prospects, with one member arguing; "Things like bursaries do help but being volunteers cannot always help because people need that training and need a job. Sometimes

you take so much responsibility but you don't even know where it's taking you and what you are gaining from it." Being able to identify to members the importance that these positions provide would not only give clarity, but also perspective to their roles and responsibilities.

Members regard the organisation as unique – the lack of division means that members can float between positions and step up when necessary without the challenge of a 'higher power' telling them not to. There is a tension however between creating an organisation where 'there is no hierarchy' and asking people to step up into leadership roles:

"No one wants to be the follower in RY; everyone wants to be a leader. People do not want to listen to the one in charge. We say everyone is equal, so it's hard when someone is in charge of something because people get intimidated being told what to do, which makes it harder to do any leadership. I don't mind following orders as long as it is done in the right way with manners than I am happy to follower." (Current member)

Leading on from this, the ideal that there is perhaps a clash between an encouragement/push (from the organisation) versus individual responsibility is also an interesting prospect to consider. In relating to the core values of the organisation, members acknowledge that RY does encourage them to take part and lead in activities, with one respondent arguing; "[the organisation] pushes me to do more because I don't have self belief, I'm too slow to take roles on my own, if I don't understand what I'm doing its hard to make others aware of the support I need, I need motivation," and that it is the responsibility of the organisation to create these roles in order for individuals to step up. However, some felt that perhaps it should be something more worthwhile, and that members should feel a personal responsibility to take lead within the organisation, with one arguing;

"The driving force is the young people. I think it's just about me talking to people; my own initiative", the ideal of initiative becomes the cornerstone then, the fact that individuals can both feel and recognise that they have something they can give back to the organisation. Being able to support new members through the skills and knowledge gained through their experiences provides members with the ability to give back to the organisation.

How much responsibility do you want in RY?

In the survey most past members (seven) were happy with the amount of responsibility they previously had in RY (and wanted 'neither more nor less' responsibility); only two felt they would have liked a bit more.

"More responsibility would have meant feeling more pressure with education, no less because the tasks I was given were manageable". (Past member)

The majority of surveyed current members (14) would like more responsibility; most (12) said a bit more and two said a lot more. The others (6) said they do not want any more or less responsibility, primarily because of a lack of time; one said that the work can take over other aspects of their life such as family, friends and socialising due to the work overload. Another respondent said that some people need to be taught to take responsibility: "TEACH those who do lack some responsibility".

DECISION MAKING

In RY we have tried to implement fluid structures that are flexible to accommodate the changing needs of the young people who are involved, and to keep the doors open so that new young people can get involved all the time. We have always been keen to get away from representative models which can be very limiting; typically a select few people are given power and responsibility, and there are very high demands made on those few people. We aim for a process where as many people as possible can get involved and where their level of involvement can change in relation to what is going on in the rest of their lives, which are often characterised by the uncertainty and instability that refugeeness brings.

In practice, this means that decision making happens in the following ways:

Trustees

We have a board of 10 dedicated and committed trustees who bring a wide range of knowledge, skills and experience to RY. They meet on a monthly basis with representatives from the workers team to review work progress, consider bureaucratic, administrative, strategic and governance issues arising. The trustees support the aspiration to make RY a place where decision making is open, shared and in the hands of young people, and so typically do not impose many decisions except to ensure that RefugeeYouth is working within its charitable remit.

Paid workers

We have a small team of paid workers who are responsible for making and implementing a lot of decisions in RY. The paid workers aim to facilitate, through formal workshops and informal dialogue, a decision making process which involves people as much as possible and takes into account their view points, needs and ideas.

Project teams

Within each project teams of young people take leadership and responsibility to varying degrees. Through regular meetings and dialogue they make decisions about the work that they are directly involved in.

Residentials

Over the years we have held regular residentials which focus on evaluation and planning for the development of RefugeeYouth. Typically, 20 – 30 young people, volunteers, trustees and paid workers will go away together to reflect on and evaluate the work, redefine the objectives and the processes, and make plans for the future together.

Open meetings policy

In RefugeeYouth we have an Open Meetings Policy. Throughout the week a whole range of different meetings take place in RefugeeYouth – internal planning meetings focused on specific projects or pieces of work, and meetings with external individuals and organisations about working together, project ideas, and partnership development. All of these meetings are open to all young people, who are free to join or not join them as and when they please. This sometimes means that the same meeting can happen 3 times as new people turn up!

How much do you feel you have a say in decisions in RY?

Of the interviewed current members, over half (nine) felt they have a lot of say in decision making in RY.

“I feel like I have a pretty heard voice and people hear what I say. A lot of people listen to what I say even though they do not agree with it”.

Some (four) felt it depends what the decisions are; they have a lot of say in some decisions but not in others. Where they actively interested and involved in organising an activity a couple felt they may have more say. One person felt that it depends on who you are working with and that the team he was working with didn't listen to him.

“It depends what the decisions are about. If it's a topic I'm interested in I would have a say in it for example Mustaqbal project I understand it and I'm interested in it so I do”

“I have a lot of say, but it depends about what; the people and the group. When I was in one project team the team never listened to me. They just talked and talked while I stand, nobody listened so I left”.

A few (three) people felt that most decisions are ultimately made by the paid workers in RY, but that they are made in consultation with everybody and that everyone's opinions are taken into account.

“Most of the decisions is done as a team, Lucy and Hinda make sure everyone is happy and no one is left out. We decide according to how people feel about the projects”.

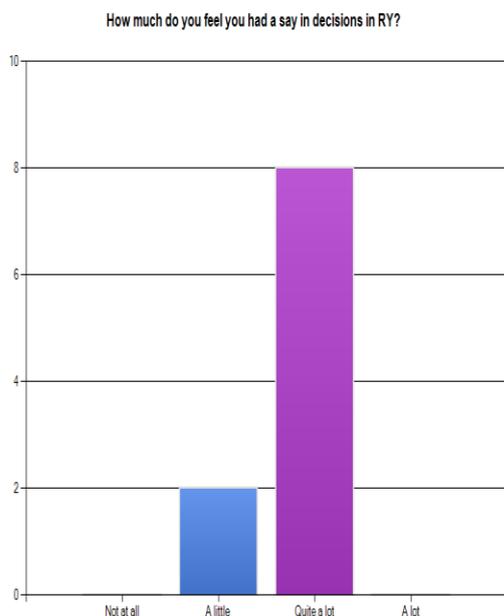
A few people felt that they do not have much say in decision making because they feel uninformed, ignored and that workers make decisions.

“I don't know when the meetings are happening. Also I don't feel my opinions are valued even if I try and share it, I feel I'm ignored.”

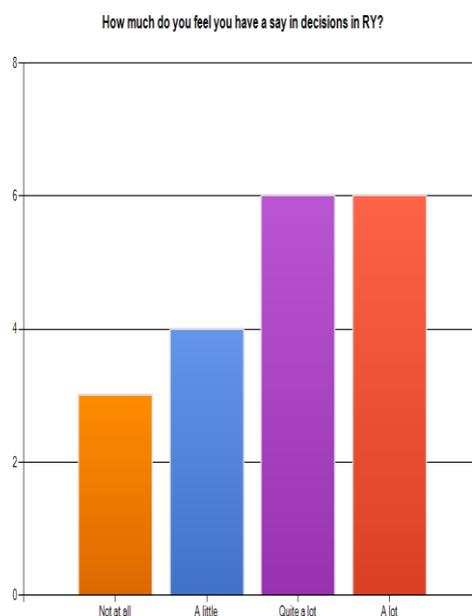
In the survey also over half the current members said they have a significant say in decision making - equally split between 'a lot' and 'quite a lot' – although around a third said they have a 'little' and or no say. The large majority of past members felt they previously had a significant say, but for them it had been 'quite a lot' (rather than 'a lot'); just two said 'a little'. Those who felt involved said they were asked their opinions and listened to. Reasons given for having little say included being new to the group, and “because everyone had something to say, therefore saying little was sometimes the best thing to do” (Past member).

“I feel like I do have a lot of power in decision making. If you have a great idea in RY your team will support as long it's not harmful or crazy.” (Current member)

Past members



Current members



What helps and makes it harder to get involved in making decisions?

Current members, when interviewed, said it helps when people feel involved, included and invited to take part in decision making. Knowing people and having a good relationship with them also helps because then you take into account “everyone’s interests, not just your own”. One person mentioned that financial support or a paid role helps them to be able to participate at a decision making level.

Some feel personally confident to voice opinions and participate in decisions; whereas a couple felt inhibited that they did not feel mature enough or else felt scared because of the need to follow up on any decisions to make sure it happens.

“I like making decision, it makes me feel important, it makes me feel that am contributing to what’s going to happen.” (Current member)

“I’m not mature enough to take decisions I have to work from the bottom and up like in any job.” (Current member)

There is also a difference in how much people want to be invited to participate. Whereas some felt it easier to get involved in decisions about a project or activity that is of personal interest or relevance, others can feel excluded from decisions if only invited to discuss activities of clear relevance to them.

“What makes it harder is the topic the decision is being made on and what it is about, especially if don’t really know what’s going on. What would help is if people come to me and ask me especially if people know I have a passion for it.” (Current member)

“I do not have a say in decisions all the time. I fight with myself to say or express what I think. The organizations left me out for a while. People do not contact me no more about

meetings just about [my main passion]. I give what I can give when I can and me taking the initiative to challenge the organizations.” (Current member)

The participatory process of decision making in RY can be lengthy, but only one member said this caused them any frustration.

“The length and the time it takes to make decisions. But sometimes it wastes time when there is 30 people in a meeting and they say the same thing it can get quite frustrating because they say they same thing but in different ways.” (Current member)

All but two of those talked about occasions when their ideas have been turned into action in RY, and many indicated how good it felt and how it increased their motivated to participate further. Getting positive feedback can also be important.

“When my idea became true I felt good. When people said well done I felt more comfortable to do more things like that. The first time I played my role in the play I wasn’t sure if I was good but when people said it was good, it gave me more confidence. You know feedback is very important.” (Current member)

“I had most of my ideas turned into action; the sports and activities we planned. It gives you motivation and encouragement to be involved more. You feel inspired!” (Current member)

“[Name of project] made me really feel part of team and listened to because we worked together to run the space for other young people and what I said was as important as anybody else.” (Current member)

Just two people felt that their ideas have never been turned in to action within RY. Both doubted the value of what they had to contribute.

“I had an idea people got excited no one funded and took it into action. I feel like it’s because I’m not good at it. Sometimes RY ignores you.” (Current member)

“If I had ideas I have never had the opportunities to do it with people. I didn’t think it was important enough. I need to be involved more to share my ideas.” (Current member)

ADVOCACY WORK

How much do you get Involved in RY's 'advocacy work' with professionals and the public, to improve young refugees' lives?

The current member interviewees were asked to talk about their involvement in RY's advocacy work (see description of our work with professionals on pages 5 and 6). The work they talked about the most was the Becoming a Londoner book and play, followed by work with universities and colleges and workshops and conferences for professionals and policy makers including MPs. People also mentioned the Refuge In Films Festival at the BFI and the Birmingham research project. One person mentioned having opportunity to engage with the public through our project in Yorkshire.

Motivation:

Half the people mentioned that they feel passionate and motivated to get involved in advocacy work. They want to make a change. They talked about challenging perceptions and creating dialogue with others, although only one person specifically talked about being motivated by her own experience as a young refugee to help and make change for others.

"Going through the asylum seeker process I do feel like there is advice I can give..... I can relate to the issues that we go and speak about to those people. All of the advocacy I have been involved in has been issues that I have directly faced and went to advocate to make change for others." (Current member)

She went on to talk about the importance of being able to see that what you are doing is directly benefitting young people and helping them get supported and involved in projects.

Another talked about personal change – and the importance of getting involved in things that are not expected of him. For him, RY provides a space where people can be themselves and not what others' expect of them.

Another theme was people were passionate and gained satisfaction and a sense of pride from being involved in this work. All the people who answered this question wanted to help others, either on a personal support level or by engaging with service providers and policy makers or putting a message out to the public.

Skill development:

A couple of people stressed that they had gained confidence and courage from doing the advocacy work.

"If it wasn't for RY I would have been really nervous doing presentation but now I am not as nervous as I used to be." (Current member)

Another felt it offered a valuable opportunity to experience and learn about different types of youth work and working with young people, and one talked about how through his involvement in the film festival he gained a greater awareness of his own history.

"It made me question about my personal life and how we came here from [my country], I was oblivious to it before." (Current member)

What helps people to get involved in advocacy work?

Some of those interviewed felt that being well supported made it easier for them to get involved in advocacy work. One mentioned the support and motivation they get from the other people they are working with, another said financial support (having expenses paid or being awarded a bursary to enable them to commit time to the work) and a third mentioned regular communication about opportunities to get involved through text messages and conversation.

What makes it harder to get involved in advocacy work?

Of the interviewed current members, five said that nothing makes it harder to get involved in the advocacy work. One barrier, mentioned by four people, was issues in their personal lives. They weigh up whether this is the right way for them to use their time and energy, especially when they had problems to deal with in their own lives such as education, employment and immigration issues.

“Sometimes I question myself because where is it getting me in my own life and why am I investing so much time in something when I don’t even have a job? We need to recognise what it takes for people to commit so much because but they are suffering on the outside” (Current member).

“Sometimes I need to do my own personal work but sometimes you have to step aside and help others when you can.” (Current member)

“There’s no point of trying to be a youth leader like once a year. I need to sort my things out before I help myself.” (Current member)

A couple did not feel they are at the right stage in their own lives to engage with the advocacy work and it demands a certain level of maturity and certainty about your own values.

“If the young people are not at the stage of facilitating workshops I won't be surprised because it takes time to reach that stage to develop. Right now I'm at a different stage than I used to be because now I have grown up and want to do more things.” (Current member)

Other barriers (mentioned by one person each) included a lack of communication and not being aware of what is happening; long distance travel and being exhausting; de-motivated by a lack of change to services and policies; limited reading and writing skills. Suggestions to encouraging their greater involvement included more training; ensuring their learning was recognised by employers; given a specific role and advice about how to carry out that role; better strategies for achieving the desired changes; find more effective ways to deliver messages; personal financial support; more challenging projects; the opportunity to develop new skills such as reading and writing; better communication about what projects are going on and more opportunities to be involved.

Six people felt that nothing could be done to enable them to get more involved in advocacy work, and for a couple this was because of personal issues.

“Maybe next year when I finish college right now I’m on track with my college and I want to keep it like that but still want to come to RY when I can.” (Current member)

“There’s too much going on right now, there’s no point of trying to be a youth leader like once a year. I need to sort my things out before I help myself. I’m good at advising people but not advising myself.” (Current member)

BENEFITS OF RY

How much did you learn or gain at RY?

We asked all the current members we interviewed to talk about what they have gained and learnt through their involvement in RY. Four people talked about practical, creative skills they had learnt such as film making, music production, drumming, capoeira and fashion. Others talked about life skills such as cooking, budgeting and improving their English through involvement in RY. Some people talked about how the skills they gained helped them to get work or to make decisions about their careers or study choices.

By far the biggest thing that interviewees talked about was how they had gained communication and social skills. Most people talked about how they have developed the confidence and skills to socialise and interact with different people, and learnt to have patience with others and respect for people who are different from them. Many felt that RY has given them the opportunity to develop genuine meaningful relationships with people from different communities and backgrounds.

“I have been able to socialise with people from outside of RY. I also can understand more now in difficult situations when people are angry I know better because I think to myself that they have been through something in their life; I learnt that from RY. I help people that are going through difficulties and problems.” (Current member)

“I learnt how to be around people, it teaches me to be patient. I have learnt to be around lots of people and getting to know new and different people. I did this by not judging and RY teaching me to get to know people before I have an impression. I am also more confident in talking to people I don't know now.” (Current member)

“I learn from people. Learn to be responsible. Yes, about different sort of people, how to communicate to them, feel comfortable, listening to people and how to feel from their feelings.” (Current member)

People talked about the value of learning from one another and the sense of being part of a big diverse community. They also talked about having more confidence and self esteem and feeling more able to express themselves.

Four people talked more specifically about gaining a deeper understanding and greater respect for others and awareness of cultural and gender issues and differences. One person talked about developing awareness about herself and her rights;

“It has benefited me to find my own self and my own rights; in that sense the organization has done everything; I am a young person that has a different way of thinking and more mature for people in my age”. (Current member)

Eleven people talked about gaining leadership skills in RY. Some talked about developing presentation skills and learning to speak in public including communicating with decision makers. Many people talked about learning to take responsibility and organising and facilitating workshops and activities for others.

“I have learnt how to be responsible for myself and for others. I learnt how to be responsible from residentials and taking care of people when we go away.” (Current member)

“Would still say being a more responsible person now. Showing new people and give them opportunities like I had by being friendly and talking to them and getting them involved.”
(Current member)

Some people recognised that they could use the things they learnt to benefit other young people;

“I thought I could benefit by learning all these new skills and take it back to my area. If I learn something I can take it somewhere else. A chain of benefits to benefit other people . I've learnt the human side of youth work, advocacy and participatory action research. I was keen and wanted to learn more. How i learnt is coming here and wanting to be here to learn.” (Current member)

Four people talked about how being part of RY enabled them to shift from a negative to a more positive outlook. It is a place they can forget about their problems and be reminded that there is positivity in the world and that people care.

“They were very welcoming and no one has ever welcomed me like that. Usually it’s like ‘who are you and what do you want?’ that’s the kind of welcome I used to get; ‘what money do you have and what you wearing?’. But in RY I was welcomed in open arms. I didn’t think there was anyone genuinely kind in this world but RY made me believe that there was. They changed my views that there is people in this world that does care about you”. (Current member)

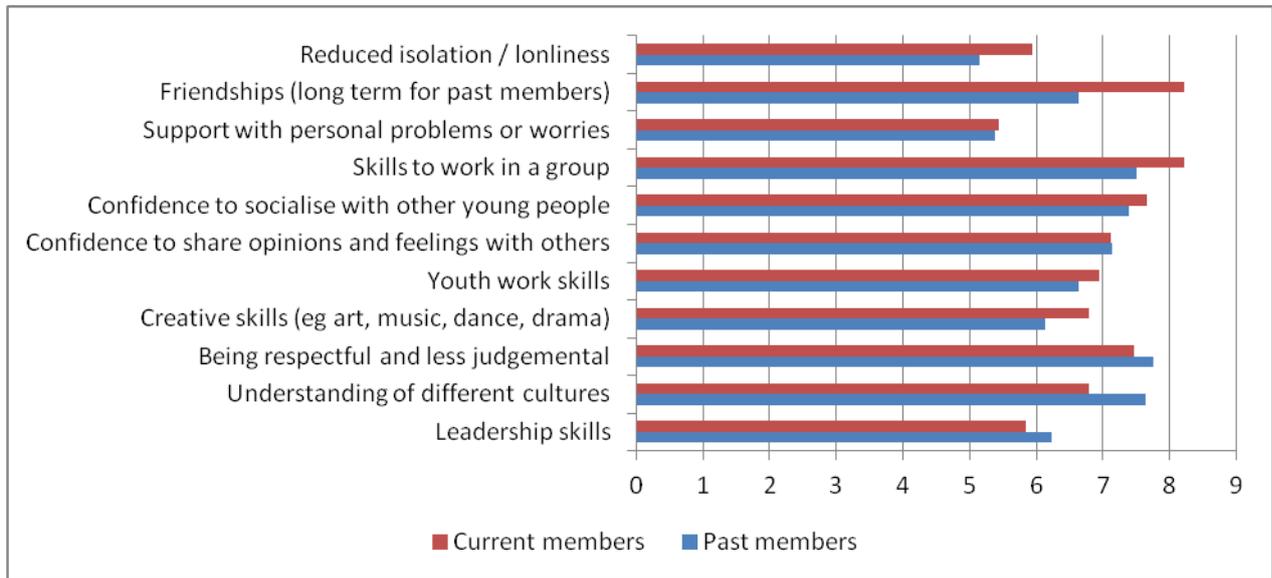
When we asked surveyed past and current members how much they had learned and gained from their time in RY, on a scale from 1 ‘not at all’ to 10 ‘a lot’, the majority of past and current members indicated they had benefitted in all areas (each getting an average score of 5 or more). In both groups they had an average score of six or more for the following areas:

- Being respectful and less judgemental
- Understanding of different cultural backgrounds
- Skills to work in a group
- Confidence to socialise with other young people
- Confidence to share opinions and feelings with others
- Long term friendships
- Creative skills.

Average scores were generally higher amongst current members except for ‘Being respectful and less judgemental’ and ‘Understanding of different cultural backgrounds’. Also, the average score was around six for enhanced leadership skills, although just slightly lower for current members.

The lowest average scores (between five and six) were for reduced isolation/loneliness and support with personal problems and worries.

How much past and current members learned or gained during their time at RY: overall average score for all respondents, on a scale of 1 'not at all' to 10 'a lot'



How much have you used what you've learned outside of RY?

Past and current surveyed members said they had used what they had learned in RY within the outside world; although current members were more likely to say 'quite a lot' rather than 'a lot', compared with past members. Very few said only 'a bit'.

Many had used what they had learned through the way they talk and engage with other people within their day to day life. Some (particularly past members) mentioned that they had specifically used what they had learned in their work; including youth work, teaching, customer relations and job interviews. One current member stressed they had become more politically active and spread the word about refugee issues in their everyday life through discussions with family and friends.

"Improving my confidence to approach and speak to anyone, even if they are in a hierarchy position RY makes me realise they are human just like me." (Current member)

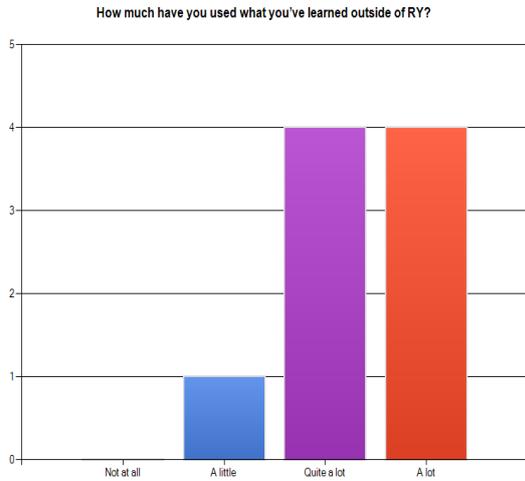
"I have used quite a lot of the experiences I gained with RY. For example my understanding skills and support skills have come to good effect when I happen to be volunteering at different youth clubs." (Past member)

"RY offered skills in youth work and leadership skills. Since RY I have gone on to become a qualified youth worker, as well as that RY ignited a passion that I have for working with young people and I am now a staff member at a secondary school". (Past member)

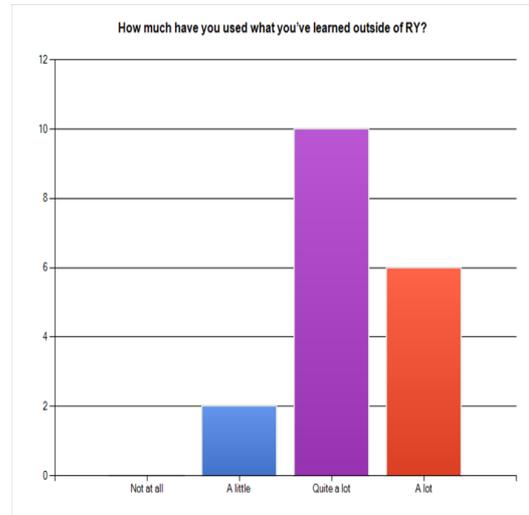
"Working in a school environment, it helps to know about different cultures and traditions as you need it on a day to day basis. To teach my Yr2 class about tolerance to one another's rights and peers, I carry out activities I learnt at RY. For example, drumming and a song taught to me by one of the refugee staff." (Past member)

"I work in customer environment and understanding other people's needs has become easier, also it teaches us responsibility and respect for one another." (Current member)

Past members



Current members



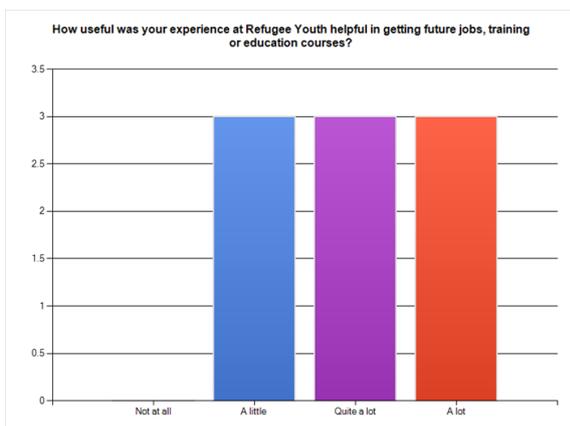
How useful was your RY experience for getting jobs, training or education courses?

All surveyed members said that their experience at RY had helped them to get jobs, training and education. Most current members said it had helped 'quite a lot', whereas past members were equally split: 3 people said 'a little', 3 said 'quite a lot' and 3 said 'a lot'. Skills, knowledge and experience gained at RY can be put on CVs and help to get jobs or work experience, plus one person said they had support to improve their CV and interviewing skills. Another said that some organisations do not value the voluntary experience in RY because it is not accredited.

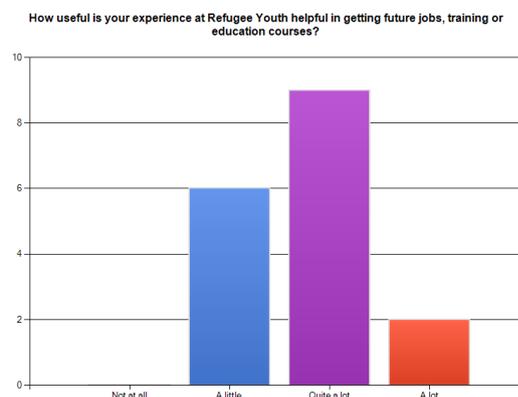
"Many interviews I have attended have asked about RY as it is stated on my CV. Once I start talking about my experience there and the people, my passion of what I took part in is easily visible and many jobs have been offered to me because of the enthusiasm shown".

"My time at RY kind of helped me gain enough confidence to go back to university and do my studies. And I also found it easier applying for jobs thanks to the skills and confidence I gained".

Past members



Current members



Suggestions for improving RY

In the interviews and surveys people identified the following improvements for RY:

Outreach to recruit more members: it was suggested that more young people could benefit from RY, and that the organisation too would gain from new people's ideas. Suggested places for outreach included schools, hostels, youth clubs, colleges, universities.

"We need to go out and do more outreach for more young refugees otherwise we will get stuck in our own bubble." (Current members)

One young woman wanted more female members recruited. Another recommended improved resources and support specifically for the "neglected" "huge community" of women and children within RY; "if we don't have the capacity maybe we should stop doing other things to do something's better or find the resources" (Current member).

Several past members mentioned the desire to make RY wider reaching to involve and benefit more young people. One person suggested RY to be more outward looking, including an international focus. One person suggested that RY could move from thinking about 'why' to thinking about 'who' and 'how'.

One suggested outreach to include more radical young people, but recognised that not every young person wants to take on responsibilities:

"Find radical young people that want to change the world!! Sometimes to understand that RY is also a place where you people just want to be and where they don't want responsibilities or take a lead they may just feel happy to find a place where they can be true to who they really are and there's is not a lot of places in this world that do simple things like that for people, that's political and changing the world itself. Changing the world may not always be taking sadness away but it could simply be brining happiness." (Current member)

Invite people to take on new responsibilities: The need to actively invite and encourage members to get more involved was identified; by providing more opportunities and the necessary advice, push and support to encourage people to get more involved. This includes opportunities to deliver workshops, and developing skills in youth leadership, critical thinking, facilitation, communication. Also inviting people to get involved in different things (not just the things they are known to enjoy) and recognising the external barriers faced by some (eg. college timetable). One person felt that only active members are valued in the organisation, whereas everyone should be treated equally.

"Involve more young people in activities for their energy, it's a space to chill out but it's for young refugees and more established people should help out." (Current members)

"Young people need to be pushed more; there are some things that you need at a certain age and if you don't do that you will regret it, you might waste time, miss out." (Current members)

"People only call when they think you are good at [at activity] but they forgot to think that you might have skills elsewhere and an interest for something else. It needs to go back to anyone and everyone could be a part of everything." (Current members)

Improved communication: Ensuring the way people communicate indicates care and gentleness, both with existing and also new members. This includes checking with members when they have not been seen for a week or two, or just checking in with others simply to see how they are or why they are not getting involved, rather than only getting in contact when they are needed for something. Treating everyone equally, listening more and responding to people's ideas. One person suggested introducing mentoring/befriending to help with career paths or advice and to ensure others are not left out.

"If someone is coming once a week or twice and you don't see them you should call them to see how they are not just to tell them come to this workshop." (Current members)

Enhanced learning: suggestions including helping people to achieve something they identify they want to learn, providing an opportunity for them to showcase their work, and offering training with certificates that are recognised by employers.

"People's experiences need to be accredited or recognised because in the outside world it's a shock to employers when they see you have spent 10 years volunteering with no back up." (Current members)

Specific requests were for training in the effects of mental health, self abuse and drug use, plus youth work, learning about how to do funding applications, plus the accreditation of all learning.

Improved activities and facilities: Requests included technical equipment (eg computers, PSP3, flat screen TV), redecoration and hot water, a room to simply 'chill out', more fun and games, another project similar to Women's Worth, and the opportunity to go on a residential. One person called for a new space: "Bigger, fresher and greener spaces where we have enough space to breathe, cook, dance and sit in the grass" (Current member). Another person suggested getting bigger premises to accommodate more members.

Partnerships with organisations: suggestions for partnership including visiting other projects to promote RY's practice and linking to practice in other organisations.

Improved planning and timing: one person suggested improved project planning to ensure more successful implementation and outcomes (eg greater attendance of target audience at events). Another wanted to work on the members' timing, particularly when attending meetings with outsiders.

The message from some current members is the need for improved organisation, including being clearer about the purpose of the work and how it is to be achieved; improved communication; slowing down, taking breaks and shutting the office now and again; improved time keeping and shorter meetings; and evaluating whether the questions been asked over the past few years have been answered. Doing too much, they say, is exhausting.

"We are doing so many great things that are critical but get left not even understanding how we do what we do. We do the work by doing but their needs to be a balance especially if we want to pass the learning and change the world." (Current member)

"Stop the long meetings because it can get very exhausting. We need to be more on time, to also take breaks if our busy schedule gets too much sometimes." (Current member)

Additional thoughts from members

Some **surveyed members** chose to make additional comments about their positive experience at RY, for example:

“I enjoyed my time at RY and always look back at my time there fondly. The workers that were there at the time were amazing and their attitude is what makes RY feel almost like a home. . . I felt so welcomed there that it made me come into contact with people I would have never spoken to before. For that I am truly grateful. Thank you.” (Past member)

“A minute spent in RY isn’t a wasted one. I hope that more young people are able to benefit from RY in the same ways or more than how it has benefited myself.” (Past member)

“I would like to thank all the staff at RY who make a difference every day without realising what an impact they make to many who have come and gone. . . You are all stars.” (Past member)

“I am grateful to be introduced into RY because is that missing space that was in my life it’s my second home!” (Current member)

“The hardest things in life are always the things that you love because you put your soul into it and now RY is hard because it been ten years and we want to make it better. But the biggest achievement for me is to have people that feel like this about an organisation . . . where it’s not driven by money or self fulfilment; it’s driven by pure love and passion for making change, friendship and belonging.” (Current member)

SECTION THREE: PROFESSIONALS

WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

Overall rating of the workshop/presentation

All the professionals who responded to our survey rated the workshop they attended as good or very good (nine said 'very good'). People were impressed with how well their workshop/presentation was facilitated. They were impressed with the skills of the team leading the workshop and the different ways in which they worked together creatively. Some commented specifically about the skilled way in which the workshop leaders made them feel included, safe and comfortable. Some also said that the workshop they attended was energetic and fun. People found the content of the workshops valuable; some mentioned that workshops were challenging, inspiring, informative, enabled them to learn and increased their awareness.

"It was so impressive, really professional and fun, I felt really 'safe' and encouraged, not pressured, to join in. It was a great workshop, absolutely superb. The skills and confidence of the leaders were excellent." (Workshop participant)

"Apart from the workshop being tailored to issues of interest to the attendees, the RY group was very understanding of people's self consciousness and dealt with that very well. It was also great fun as well as being informative." (Workshop participant)

"They drew everyone in, challenged them but in a way that made them open up, not close down and become defensive. Very skilful facilitators." (Workshop participant)

The importance of the RY 'family' was also communicated:

"I really felt the love. And the sense of calm. It is heart-warming to see people having a second home, a family away from home and their families, a creative outlet, and a political voice." (Workshop participant)

All those for whom it was relevant said that the workshop was positive (three) or very positive (seven) compared to their other experiences of workshops and conferences. Mostly this was because they felt it had been more engaging and interactive than other workshops, and they liked the different methods used. Other reasons included it being more 'enjoyable', 'valuable', and 'well planned'. Everyone also felt they had the opportunity to share their own learning, knowledge and skills in the workshops (3 people said 'a little', 6 people said 'quite a lot' and 2 people said 'a lot').

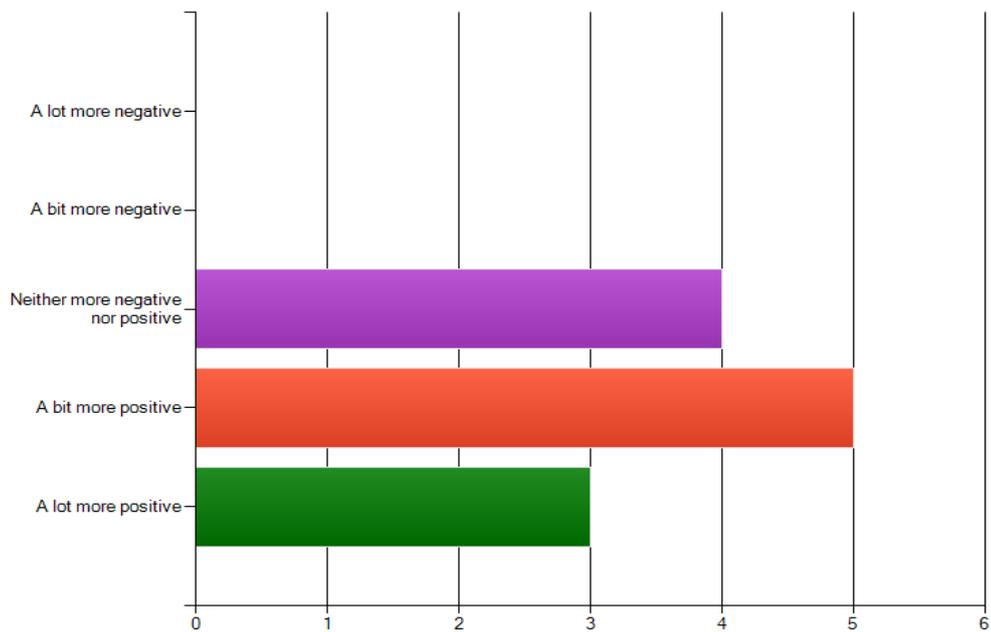
"Engaging, no power points, a refreshing way to look comprehensively at all angles of the organisation. i.e. perfect for our course!" (Workshop participant)

Outcomes from the workshop/presentation

Two-thirds said that the workshop changed their perception about young refugees and made them feel a bit or a lot more positive. The others said it made them feel 'neither more positive or more

negative'; that they already felt positive towards young refugees and the workshop confirmed their feelings.

How much did RefugeeYouth change your perception of young refugees?



The reasons given for shifting to a more positive perception were as follows:

- Better understanding of the issues faced by refugees:

“It gave me an understanding about what refugees have to go through and the struggle they face to become U.K. citizens, and overall life beyond that in England.” (Workshop participant)

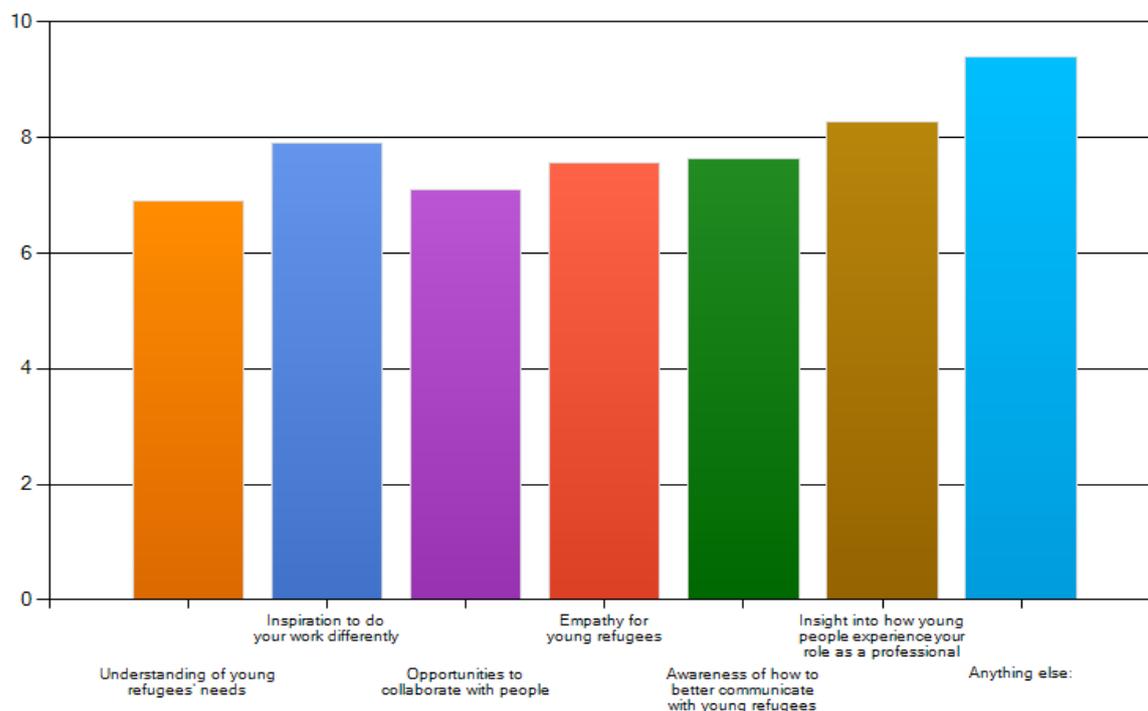
- Different perspective on issues that they already knew about, and increased their self awareness about their role in relation to the people they work with.

“I have worked with refugees and asylum seekers in an advice centre before but never really considered the victim/guilty suspect identity before. I suppose that I was part of that labelling system! The invisible theatre was fantastic at doing that. I also really enjoyed watching the films and hearing the positive stories of the young people. It makes a refreshing change from a lot of general media coverage.” (Workshop participant)

- Admiration for the work young people are doing in RY:

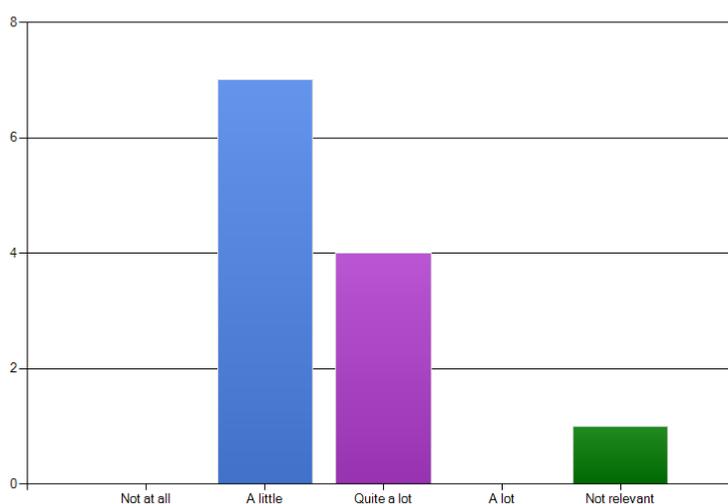
“RY made me feel even more positive because they were very good at what they were doing.” (Workshop participant)

How much did you learn or gain the following from the workshop/presentation by RefugeeYouth?



Respondents were asked to rate how much they learned or gained from the workshop/presentations in a number of areas, from 1 (nothing) to 10 (A lot). Everyone felt they had learned something about each of these areas (none gave a response as low as 1 or 2) and most felt they had gained a lot about each; indicated by a minimum average response score of 7 out of 10 for each area (see chart above). Most notably, it helped respondents to think about their own practice: over half the respondents (seven out of eleven) gave the top score of 9 or 10 for 'Insight into how young people experience your role as professional' and six did so for 'Inspiration to do your work differently'.

How much have you taken your learning from the workshop/presentation into your future work?



All respondents said that they have taken their learning from the workshop into their future work, except one who had not worked with refugees since the workshop. Three explained in what way:

two talked about having greater awareness of the needs and feelings of the people they work with and one was inspired to use more creative methods in their work.

“I do recognise the activities, games and discussions, which I love and will continue to employ. I loved the creative outlets that young people have, for example the films and the 'Becoming a Londoner' booklet. I want more young people I work with to have those kind of opportunities to tell their stories creatively.” (Workshop participant)

Becoming a Londoner Publication (see description on page 6)

Nine workshop respondents received a copy of RY's publication 'Becoming a Londoner' (an analysis of needs and experiences written collectively by 109 young people in RY). Of those who received a copy, most had read it: three 'cover to cover', four had 'browsed through it'. One of those who had not read it yet said this was because "I keep lending it out to friends who I think will appreciate its content!" Of the nine who had read it, six said they had learned something (one said 'a lot', four said 'quite a lot', one said 'a little').

Becoming a Londoner Theatre Production (see description on page 6)

Understanding the issues, learning and raising awareness

Many people's reaction to watching the play has made them understand the issues of young refugees, better. The play was observed as being very informative, hypnotic and lively. It engaged individuals and reinforced inspiration. It has inspired one individual to raise awareness by "challenging and fighting the inhuman asylum system". One individual learnt that it is "not doom and gloom with young refugees/asylum seekers", and that stories could be brought to life through music and drama.

The play enlightened the audience and has taught people new ways of working with young people. The play would be highly welcomed in a school environment. Individuals learnt that children's relationship with and feeling towards all the different people in authority, that they come in contact with, can be a very isolating and disempowering experience, and that bureaucracy creates barriers to a newly arrived individual's progress and integration.

“The play showed, their feelings are often sidelined and the importance of putting children's experiences at the forefront of policy design and practice in the future” (audience member)

“I remember feeling very uplifted by the show because it showed how people were sick and tired of working in frustrating ways that missed the essence of what they wanted to be doing with their lives and by joining up with RefugeeYouth, they felt energized, rejuvenated by working in new ways” (audience member)

“It showed a positive image of immigrating to the U.K and being a refugee. It also showed the abilities of young refugees and passion for accomplishment and self expression” (audience member)

Impact of the play

The biggest impact the play had on individuals was the energy of the group and the real life stories shared. Most people enjoyed the performance, and felt that the whole play had a great impact, others identified key moments, for example how different animals were used to represent the different communities and young people having developed it themselves. The fact that it was performed and written by young people transmitting their personal experiences was very powerful and valuable. The play portrayed how people were up lifted away from their current situation attracted by the possibility of doing things differently. It showed the underlying messages that the play was telling. Individuals understood how engaging arts can be and by making them aware of how relentless the process is for an individual.

“Perhaps starting with the writing, the blend of irony and perspicacity that combined to force a re-evaluation of the systems being brought to bear on some of those arriving at these shores (even if you've re-evaluated a hundred times before)... That's not to say, of course, that the theatrical presentation was in any way secondary and the almost surreal shift from one site of enquiry/action to another was mesmerising” (audience member)

The play influencing action in their work

Most respondents have done things differently by taking action in their work. Only one individual said that they haven't. The performance was a real inspiration driving force for implementing ideas working with refugees. It has influenced some individuals to use different techniques when working with young people and inspired others to set up a dance project within their organisation for young refugees. One person mentioned that they would change the way things are done in their organisation by developing more integration. The play has prompted others to encourage young people to express themselves more through play and music. One individual incorporated the lessons from the play with their work with refugee children. They drew on the lessons learnt when designing training programmes for lawyers.

“Such art forms ease their way into your consciousness through the back door. As someone working regularly with people seeking sanctuary, it would surely only reinforce the focus of my efforts to help such individuals and where possible to counter a culture of ignorance, suspicion and institutionalised mistreatment” (audience member)

Suggestions for the future impact:

The majority of people have mentioned that the play could be used to have a bigger impact on the public through putting the play on in large theatres or filming the play and putting it online, taking it out to different venues, communities and perhaps accompanied by further educational materials. The play could have an impact by changing attitudes for intergenerational audience and having more public and street performances in reaching a wider audience. The engagement through workshops and co-opting cast members is undeniably a very effective approach. Simultaneously touring the production nationally, whether at festivals, and inviting interested organisations with funds, so that a maximum and varied audience could be reached.

“It should be shown to more people!!! Facts and statistics about refugees and asylum seekers are all very informative but a bit face-less and difficult to put into reality, especially

when delivered by someone who has never experienced the issues they are presenting on. This kind of performance not only educates, but because it is being performed by young refugees with such power and success it reinforces another important point that refugees are not only ordinary brothers and sisters to us but also are extremely competent, courageous, resilient and inspiring”

In how to make a bigger impact on professional practice one respondent explained how the play could fit into the Citizenship curriculum in England at both key stage 3 and 4 and work fantastically with the British Red Cross humanitarian education programme. There were suggestions to incorporate the play into people’s training packages and possibly running discussions and workshops after the show to explain the structure of RefugeeYouth’s work more in depth.

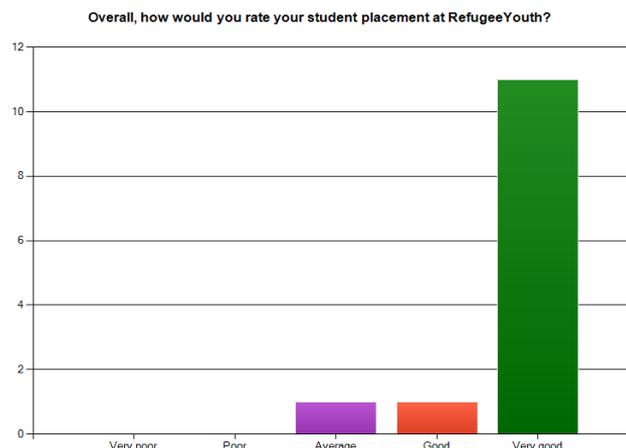
In order for the play to impact on policies people suggested the following

- More action points after the play for lobbying or local campaigns
- To focus more on the issues of the culture of disbelief and all the factors that makes the system difficult and inhuman
- Using the lessons from the play and incorporating them into best practice
- Making sure that the UKBA officials writing policy instructions watch the play

STUDENT PLACEMENTS

Overall rating of student placement

Nearly all (11) of the respondents said their placement was ‘very good’, whilst just two said ‘good’ or ‘average’.



Six people specifically mentioned the value of learning about an alternative and creative youth work methodology, in which young people are “given the reigns”:

“Amazing experiential learning of youth leadership, participation, how youth work can really be political.” (Student placement)

“My experience with RY was inspirational and helped me to realise the possibilities of how organisations can be run according to humanistic values.” (Student placement)

Specific learning came from having their ideas listened to, meeting new people and working with the age range they wanted to, new group games and others’ facilitation of these, having fun, a lack of pressure and that no day was the same, no restrictions to explore and be involve in different projects and activities; being challenged; helpful and friendly youth workers; “amazing” supervision and feedback from staff and young people. One person mentioned the value of becoming a critical friend.

“They also created a role for me as a 'critical friend' which allowed me to do lots of observation and self reflection whilst being actively encouraged by them all to offer my thoughts, reflections and opinions in meetings and general conversation.” (Student placement)

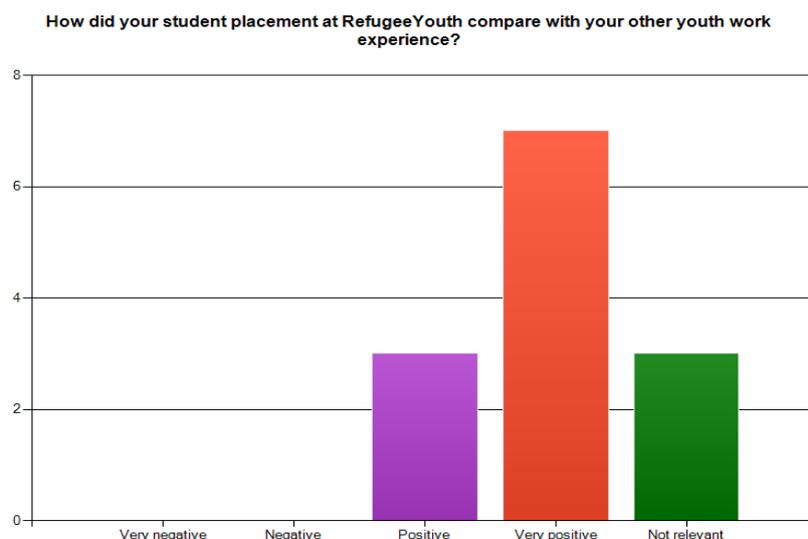
“I was challenged to my core. In particular I had to questions my assumptions around needs, knowledge, boundaries and my motivations.” (Student placement)

Placements helped improve and shape individuals’ approach to youth work.

“My student placement at RY was the most profound of all my placements and has had a huge impact in shaping my approach as a youth worker.” (Student placement)

One person however found the placement limited because the age of the young people was older (18 and over) when they wanted to work with those in the 11-19 age range. One was challenged by “swearing and occasional offensive oppressive language”, and that RY did not want respond to their suggestion for a code of conduct policy.

Those with youth work experience said their time at RY was more positive (most said ‘very positive’) compared with other relevant experiences.



Three people described how other youth settings are more bureaucratic and that RY's more "genuine" approach to youth work is more effective at reaching young people, developing leaders, achieving real empowerment and fostering real conversations that create change. RY is different, stressed another, to the typical 'pool table/vending machine/x-box' youth work provision seen in many council youth clubs.

"I did other placements in a project for young people at risk of offending, it was all about profiling, surveillance, monitoring and control. I came to RY next and it was amazing that an absolute opposite approach that was far more affective in reaching young people, developing leaders and fostering real conversations that create change. I got a lot from both of those placements, I learned what I really didn't like and what I did like." (Student placement)

"Most of my previous experiences were in very bureaucratic environments where youth work was confined to certain activities, with statistical expectations, 'expected results' and deadlines for achieving these results. Nothing organic at all. RY is by far the most genuine youth work I have ever experienced; with true integrity, passion and actions." (Student placement)

One person valued that RY understands that we are all learners and they had the chance to learn through experience, whereas previous placements were limited to shadowing. Two individuals felt that there were more creativity and space for ideas within RY than other youth organisations, and the environment provided space to be critically reflective.

Changed Perception of Young Refugees

Most people developed more positive perception of young refugees (six said 'a lot more' and five said 'a bit more' positive). A few did not change perception, stressing that they never felt negatively towards refugees.

Four people mentioned the value RY had shown them in challenging the victim perception of refugees: "young refugees input in fighting oppressive practices they face in society is essential instead of an approach which just views them as victims who need to be supported". They viewed refugees as complex individuals with common experiences pushing beyond the passive recipient/victim to active/dynamic leaders. A couple felt they had deepened their understanding and raised awareness of refugee issues generally and another used their experience at RY to challenge discrimination outside whereas before they did not know how to argue or confront negative perceptions. Some felt that RY confirmed their faiths in human beings, reinforced true beliefs in humanity which can be forgotten in the barrage of negative media and broadened their understanding of the human experience, including beauty, richness and similarity of diverse cultures and people.

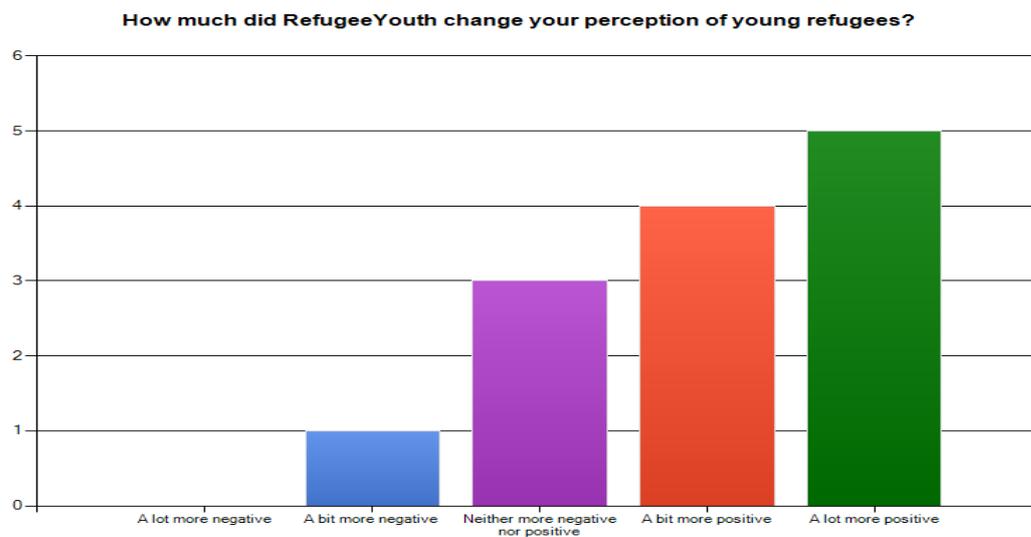
"I think I saw young refugees more as complex individuals, with some common experiences." (Student placement)

"Seeing young refugees pushing beyond the passive recipient/victim to active/dynamic leaders I guess, despite my liberal beliefs, I had internalised some of the media messages about refugees, so therefore it was a delight to find a space where all formed a community across age, race, nationality, faith, immigration status etc. It reinforced my true beliefs in humanity which can be, at times, forgotten in the barrage of negative media etc." (Student placement)

One person felt they had learnt what young people can do when they are allowed to try and fail and that young people can create their own project and reality.

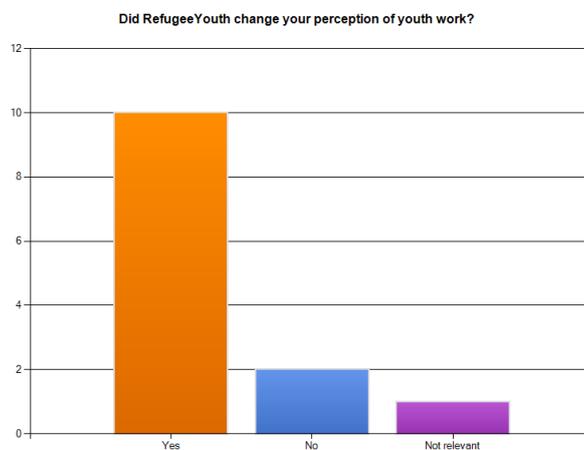
“I definitely didn't come to the project with any negativity towards young refugee's but I did learn what young people can do when they are allowed to try and fail, to take their time and then rush. I think my learning was more about the capacity of young people to create their own projects and their own reality.” (Student placement)

Just one indicated their perceptions were now ‘a bit more negative’, but their reason why suggests in fact they felt positively; so perhaps they had mistakenly answered the question incorrectly. Someone else said they were surprised that RY does not do “more to talk about and challenge issues on a regular basis for young refugees not do more to challenge refugee issues”.



Changed Perception of Youth Work

Nearly all (ten people) said their time at RY had changed their perception of youth work. Just two out of 13 said no.



People explained how RY is youth work at its best; it showed a vision of what youth work can be. It renewed individual's faith in youth work.

“RY gave me an example of youth work in practice at it's best. It stands out as the only example of youth work I have come across that can stand alongside the books and theory that are taught in courses but often seem an idealistic dream.” (Student placement)

RY demonstrated giving young people a genuine voice rather than simply structure and statistics, how to involve everybody and to be led by young people’s expressed needs. One person explained how they had gained a real understanding of youth leadership and youth work being political to make change.

“I experienced it as the most authentic and genuine practice of youth work. I learned that working with young people comes organically, not through funding schemes that 'seem to be needed'. Young people will inspire and express the very things they need.” (Student placement)

RY developed people’s understanding of the role of the youth worker: to listen rather than lead, to support youth leadership, be a “catalyst and learner” (not teacher/helper) and to encourage young people “to achieve their own goals and find solutions by making positive choices”. Youth work was found to be most productive when in “a supportive and fun, no-pressure, and no-judgement environment”. One person described in detail the challenge of discovering a different methodology which allowed young people to go through a process, unconstrained by time, where they were able to have ownership of the outputs.

“RY is an amazing model of work that I would love to be able to replicate . . . I remember being at a planning meeting where young people were planning what was going to happen over the next few months. I remember getting quite frustrated cos people were making food, jumping on each other, chatting about other things. I found it really hard not to intervene to get them to move on and address the issue of planning. But after the group had spent an hour reconnecting, having fun, getting settled, making sure everyone was welcomed fed and watered they engaged in a really productive process and came out with a plan that was more meaningful and owned by them than could have been achieved with the interventions of a clock watching youth worker. I realised then that as a youth worker I watch the time, I compartmentalised "the work" but young people aren't at work in RY they are there as a social space, as a place of support with an extended family and they are there to doing things for themselves and to reach out to others. I haven't forgotten that lesson, in so far as possible I try to remember that young people shouldn't feel they have a time slot with youth workers or organisations, youth work is a creative free space, not a limited service to be availed of as particular times. It can be really hard to manage that sometimes but I think you do better youth work if you allow a longer process; the time it needs rather than deciding what you want to achieve, letting young people have a go and doing it but filling in the gaps yourself if they don't manage it. That is my biggest learning from RY. (Student placement)

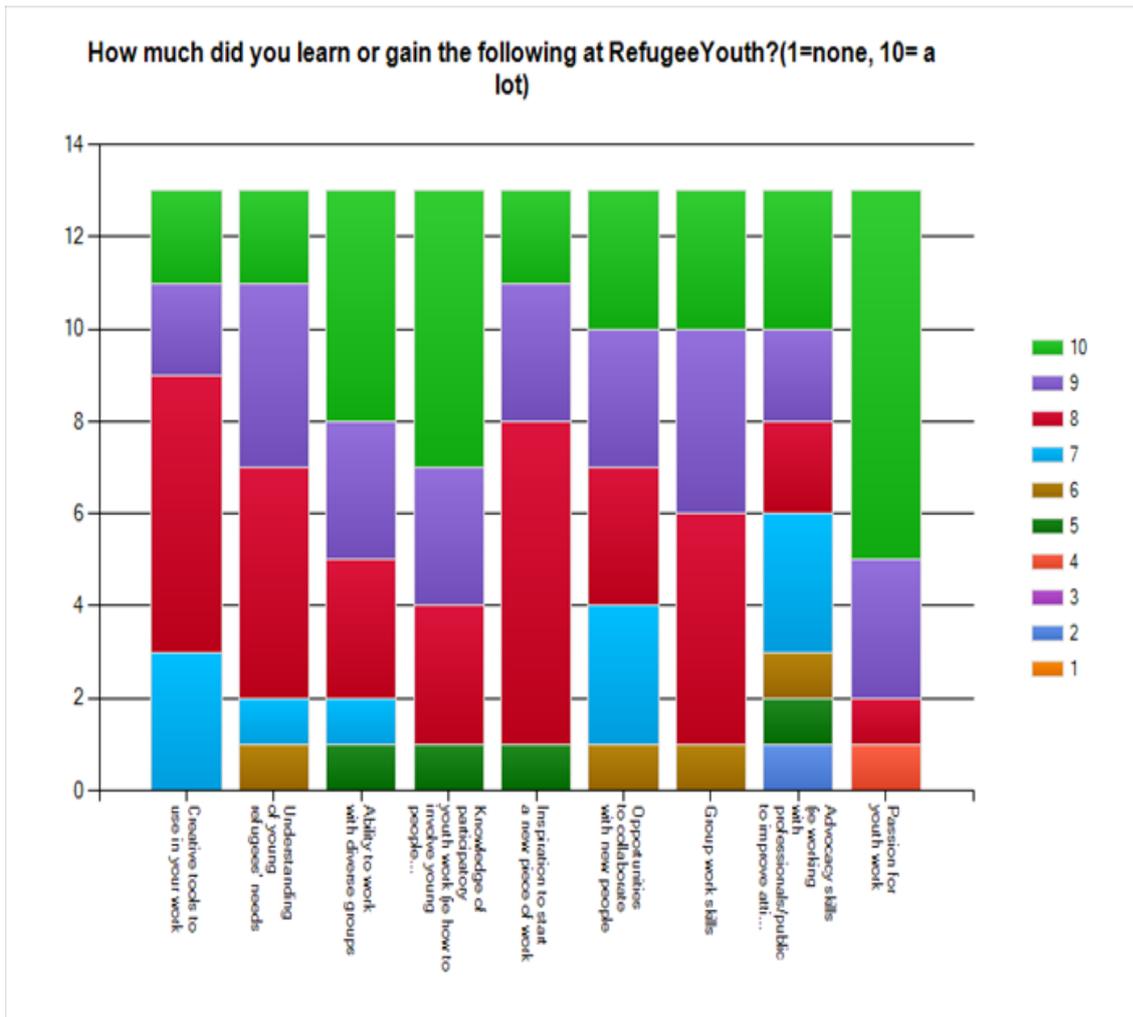
Other valued practices included creative aspects of youth work, using art, 'getting to know you' name games and icebreakers “which meant everyone felt seen heard and included in everything”.

Learning from RY

People learned and gained a lot across a range of different areas during their placement at RY, as detailed in the chart below.

Everyone rated seven or higher out of the maximum score of 10 for each of the following:

- A passion for youth work (All but one rated this as 8 or higher).
- Knowledge of participatory youth work (ie how to involve young people in making decisions) (All but one rated this as 8 or higher)
- Group work skills (All but one rated this as 8 or higher)
- Inspiration to start a new piece of work (All but one rated this as 8 or higher)
- Ability to work with diverse groups (All but two rated this as 8 or higher)
- Understanding of young refugees' needs (All but two rated this as 8 or higher)
- Creative tools to use in youth work (All but three rated this as 8 or higher)
- Opportunities to collaborate with new people
- Advocacy skills (ie working with professionals/public to improve knowledge/attitude/practice)



Challenges of doing youth work in RY

A variety of different challenges were identified by those who had student placements:

- Dealing with the challenges of a working in an “authentically and genuinely empowering” practice, including: having attitudes challenged, “shaking off the conditioning” from previous ways of working, and adopting to a new role, rather than that of “leader and expert”:

“There is little differentiation between workers, students and young people, it more about your interests and your skills and that was a new and challenging experience for me because it meant I didn't have more power than anyone else. It was really refreshing but quite a challenge at the same time.” (Student placement)

- Challenges within the planning process, including: insufficient planning and organisation making it harder to follow up activities, overly long meetings (sometimes 4 or 5 hours long), people not taking planned action and failing to commit to action, an element of chaos amidst the creativity or creative approaches to practical problems and a lack of self-criticism.
- Difficulties of getting involved, including: finding a role (although this became easier when they had adapted to the informal and flexible environment), the pressure to be “creatively artistic all the time” and not knowing how to input their different skills, the challenge of working in large groups (helping them realise they preferred smaller group and one to one work), and feeling excluded from follow on planning which discouraged further involvement.
- Personal difficulty of hearing young people’s “heartbreaking” stories, but with supportive staff it made their own youth work experience richer.

Sharing learning, knowledge and skills

Most felt they had the opportunity to share their learning, knowledge or skills during their student placement, either ‘quite a lot’ (eight) or ‘a lot’ (three). Only two did not.

Improving the placement

Only four individuals felt RY could have done more to improve their placement. They mentioned that the need for more supervision because they needed support and to talk with someone about the new ways of working.

“Cos for me it was quite a new way of working I think I would have liked a few more opportunities to talk it out with someone. I did a lot of reflective practice that helped me to realise what was going on but maybe some more conversations would have been useful.” (Student placement)

Taking learning into future work

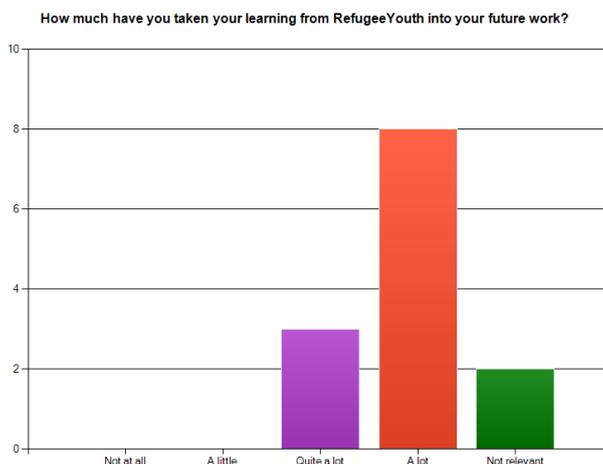
Those who had gone on to do future youth work said they had taken their learning into their work: eight said 'a lot' and three 'quite a lot' (a few respondents had not yet finished their placement with RY and another had not left after several years).

They described how they had adopted the philosophy of youth work used within RY, including: being aware of power imbalances, relationship building and dialogue; having greater humility; using fun games and participatory action research; ensuring projects evolve organically and enjoyably; not using terms such as 'vulnerable'; and understanding and committing to youth leadership in all stages of projects (from design/implementation to evaluation).

"My future work has consequently had a far greater awareness of power imbalances within support work. I think that I now show far greater humility and I'd like to think that my work is now more truthful, congruent and empathic." (Student placement)

Former students are promoting and implementing this way of working, including abroad. One individual has set up a community space in the Middle East using their experience gained from RY. Another has used their learning on promoting interculturalism in mainstream services and in their developing young leaders, help young refugees problem solve issues they are having with getting commitment from members of their own unaffiliated groups. Another has raised awareness in sharing what they learnt with new colleagues.

"I am now involved in setting up a community space in an isolated part of [the Middle East] ... the experience I keep drawing on - and telling people I work with about - is RY :-)" (Student placement)



A final word from those on student placement

Six of those wanted to add that their student placement at RY had been very positive. Only one took the opportunity to say they hoped the organisation had improved: becoming more organised, with shorter meetings and set opening/closing times, and established roles (such as careers advisors) to ensure there was someone nominated for people to go to. Another described how they had learned something profoundly personal, as well as professional – the importance of hugging:

“The most important thing I learnt on placement was to hug people! It was a deeply personal change in me, challenged me to let my personal barriers down and allow people to hug me, to be present and on an equal. That one thing alone has changed my life and so many relationships within it. Even thinking of it now, near 6years on, can bring up very real emotions and tears. Very grateful.” (Student placement)

“I really enjoyed the whole experience and would recommend other students with an interest in young refugees and news ways of doing youth work.” (Student placement)

SECTION FOUR: WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR RY?

A huge amount of learning has been gathered through this evaluation process, which we are already starting to use to inform day to day decision making as well a longer term strategic thinking in RefugeeYouth. Though it is satisfying to have produced such a thick report (If you've got this far well done!), we are determined that the main outcomes of this process will be action focused. Our challenge now is to use this learning to inform and strengthen our work.

Through some different processes - a gathering of young people, workers and trustees to explore and discuss the findings of this report, and some organisational development workshops led by Oasis School of Human Relations involving the core team, we have identified what we feel are the key findings of this evaluation.

We have also identified the critical questions that will be explored through the next phase of development work in RefugeeYouth.

Key learning points from the evaluation

Culture and Environment

- The alternative community created within RefugeeYouth with a conscious culture where people can really be themselves, build genuine relationships and social networks, and model what they want to see in the world is highly valued and is an important form of social change.
- RefugeeYouth has developed a strong, valuable and unique youth work model.
- Creating such a 'family' environment raises people's expectations about the level of individual support they can expect

Roles and communication

- Many people feel ownership of RefugeeYouth and are passionate about being part of it
- The concept of leadership in RY is undefined and as a result has become meaningless and a source of confusion and frustration.
- Ways to take responsibility and get involved in decision making are not clear
- There is an ongoing need to outreach and continue to involve new young people in the network

Influencing wider change

- Student placements are a powerful way of disseminating and sharing the learning to inform wider youth work practice
- Youth-led training, research and workshops are powerful and have a big impact on professionals' understanding of their own roles and they young people they work with
- Our advocacy work doesn't necessarily impact on tangible changes to specific policy/practice

Reframing RefugeeYouth’s core processes for achieving our mission:

RefugeeYouth’s mission remains relevant and needed:

- To combat alienation and despair amongst young refugees by supporting opportunities for their development, inclusion and integration

What are our core processes for achieving that mission?

RefugeeYouth creates an environment where young people can come together to take Action to Bring About Change, through 2 core processes:

- Building alternative communities with a conscious culture where people can really be themselves, build genuine relationships and social networks, and model what they want to see in the world
- Inspiring wider change by engaging with the wider public and professional practice

This work is possible through an individual and community development process:

- Developing capacity by training and supporting a network of young community builders

Areas for development

Through this evaluation and other organisational development processes, we have identified 5 key areas for development.

The first two areas for development are about the impact we are seeking to have.

The last three areas for development are about the structure and capacity we need in order to maximise our impact.

The next steps we will take are to address these key questions through collective and creative processes in RefugeeYouth.

Area for Development	Key questions
IMPACT:	
Building alternative communities	What processes do we need to imbed in order to constantly and consciously build the alternative community we want to create? How do we support the community to develop in other places outside London?
Influencing Wider Change	What impact are we trying to achieve through our advocacy work, and therefore where and to whom should we target it?

STRUCTURE/CAPACITY:	
Learning and Development Opportunities	What training and frameworks would help people to gain more through taking leadership in RefugeeYouth?
Strengthening the team	How do we make the structures and roles clear without losing the family environment which is so highly valued?
Spaces and places	What spaces and places should we be using to best do the work and in order to involve and benefit the maximum number of young people?