

Transitions Stakeholders' Advisory Network Meeting (TSAN) #13

Exploring supporting jobseeking women refugee professionals

25 June 2015 2-5pm, Stockwell Resource Centre, SW4 6RA

Participants (A-Z)

SAM, Business Manager (Oil/Gas), **Transitions candidate**

Debra Blisson, **Transitions Advisory Panel member**. Female entrepreneurship academic

Kevin Bowsher, **Network Rail**, Diversity & Inclusion Manager

HC, Banking & credit analyst, **Transitions candidate**

Jasmina Dimitrijevic, **Refugee Women's Association**, Employment Development Worker

Barbara Dischinger, **WISE campaign** (promoting women in science, technology & engineering, Partnership Manager)

Ozite Gibbs, **Network Rail**, school work experience placementee

Petra Gratton, **Brunel University, Women in Engineering**

Gemma Hawkes, **Network Rail**, school work experience placementee

Sheila Heard, **Transitions** Managing Director

Vicky Johnson, **Transitions** Careers Advisor

AB, **Civil Engineer** (refugee background), employed Philip Mapoma, **Notting Hill Housing**, CTI (Construction Training Initiative) Manager

Karen Venn, **Network Rail**, Diversity & Inclusion Business Manager

Apologies

Bola Fatimilehin & Jenny Young, **Royal Academy of Engineering**, Diversity Managers (jobshare)

Suzanne Hardy, **Network Rail/Crossrail**, Workplace Co-Ordination Manager, Consents & Environment

RD, Electrical Design Engineer, **ARUP**, former Transitions candidate

Clare Ludlow, Director of Innovation, **Timewise/Women Like Us** social enterprise

FH, Telecoms Engineer, **Virgin Media**. Former Transitions candidate

Kath Moore, **Women into Construction**, Manager

Patricia Chinyoka, **BITC**

AS, **Transitions candidate**, IT & Administration Support

Jen Smith, Diversity & Inclusion Manager, **Circle Housing**

Anya Todd, Community Affairs Manager, **Sainsbury's**

Dawn Bonfield, **Women's Engineering Society** CEO

Cheryl Baker, **ARUP**, HR Business Partner

Ruth Dennett, **Institution of Civil Engineers**, International Officer

Anthea Hague, **INSPIRE** chair. Women's network, **Network Rail**

Jacky Moran, **Careers Adviser**

Introduction

Sheila Heard introduced Transitions (including update on outcomes) and the aims of the workshop (see also slides, available at <http://www.transitions-london.co.uk/good-practice/advisory-network-thanks>):

- an opportunity for Transitions to learn from stakeholders, with a **particular focus on the issue of the representation of female refugees** in a workplace which is still not a level playing field (see <http://www.enei.org.uk/news.php/815/women-in-the-workplace-the-barriers-to-gender-equality>, (copy of article provided in participants' packs). One of Transitions' funders, the Esmée Fairbairn

Foundation, has requested work which focuses on this issue – currently very little research on situation of refugee women in the labour market. Evidence from stakeholders will be able to inform Transitions' work.

- There is still much work to be done to increase the representation of women in STEM careers.
- Objectives of stakeholder meetings are to identify barriers, identify good practice, empower candidates, identify potential links and to advise Transitions.
- The unemployment rate for refugees remains 70% - 6x the national average, despite 25% of refugees being highly-skilled.
- Only 5000 people each year are given refugee status in the UK. There is still a lack of adequate pathways for them after being granted their status (and permission to work.)

Presentations (slides available at <http://www.transitions-london.co.uk/good-practice/advisory-network-thanks>)

Presentation 1: AB, female refugee civil engineering graduate

Key points:

- Came to UK in 2007. Trained as quantity surveyor with Carillion via a govt. funded refugee organization. After some work as a setting out engineer had family. Returned to a sales job to pay bills. Now working as a Site Manager (first woman in this position) after referral from Transitions to Women into Construction and trainee positions for Notting Hill Housing's Construction Training Initiative.
- Networking is crucial. Gained current position with help from number of different organisations and individuals.
- Encourage women to focus on their 'soft' skills, particularly if they've had time out to have a family. These skills are invaluable in the workplace - listening, planning, arranging, working in cooperation with others, sharing with each other.
- Don't fear being different – can have advantages.
- Barriers facing job-seeking female refugee professionals in UK:
 - Recognition of overseas degree. Solution – advice from UK NARIC.
 - Transferability of overseas work experience. Solution – clearly communicate transferable skills.
 - Transfer of overseas job title to UK. Solution – research UK market, be specific.
 - Family responsibilities. Solution – find accessible childcare/funding.
 - Low self-confidence. Solution – seek support women's support organisations.
 - Lack of professional network. Solution – start networking!
- Refugee dos and don'ts:
 - **Do** be confident. Make an impact by being yourself.
 - **Don't** talk about your problems indiscriminately - **don't** overshare (can be tempting if isolated.)

Q: Where do you see yourself in a couple of years' time?

A: Progressing in career (higher salary and position), feeling settled.

Presentation 2: Jasmina Dimitrijevic, Refugee Women's Association

Key points:

- RWA serves refugees, asylum seekers + migrants, all nationalities across 33 London boroughs

- Services provided: IAG, vocational training (ESOL), mentoring, advocacy, case work, immigration work (L1), strategic work, lobbying (attend Refugee Working Group at GLA)
- Recently cuts have affected RWA as an organisation and RWA clients. Now seeing impact of immigration law changes. Increase in enquiries related to family law and domestic violence.
- Barriers for doctors and other Health Professionals:
 - lack of childcare (nothing like Scandinavian model)
 - language and cultural barriers (cuts to interpreting services)
 - lack of information (not given any kind of orientation pack when granted safety status). May be being helped but people who've been here for a long time may not know about services if they've never had to use them themselves
- Possible solutions:
 - integration courses, communication for work, work placements, work-related English courses
 - RWA recommends: working together, lobbying govt, encouraging employers to recognise potential and skills of women refugees

Comments/Q&As:

Q: What is the relationship between RWA and Transitions?

A: Both members of RCAN (Refugee Careers Advisors Network). Make mutual referrals, share information.

Q: Have you advised engineers?

A: Yes, all have decided to return to study in the UK.

Comment: Civil engineering graduate - it's very hard to transfer civil engineering to UK because employers usually require a specialization.

Q: Is there any platform for RWA and Transitions to speak to British people to encourage a positive perception of refugees?

A: Yes - we do this all the time as part of the work. It can be a challenging as refugee status is not a protected characteristic under the Equality Act, so doesn't come up in employers' training and team meetings.

Comment: Media coverage of migrants as a whole is a problem – see the stories regarding the Calais camps this week. We need positive case studies in the media.

Small group discussions

1. What are some of the similarities and differences between the situation of women professionals in the UK and in other countries, in your experience? (Note: some of the comments below relate to everyone, regardless of gender.)

Similarities:

- Women can lack confidence to apply for certain roles
- Women are under-represented in certain sectors (e.g. engineering.)
- In Iraq and the UK networking is a key element in accessing the labour market.

Differences:

- In the public sector in Iraq internet use is forbidden which makes networking extremely difficult. Resourcing of the public sector is better in the UK.
- The 'new generation' is being rejected in Iraq; the situation for younger people is better in the UK.
- Covering letters need to give in-depth information in UK; not the case in many other countries.

- References are required in the UK, not necessarily elsewhere.
 - The importance of who you know can be greater in other countries compared to the UK.
 - A LinkedIn profile is increasingly important in the UK.
 - Less likely to have an extended family network (freely available childcare) in the UK.
 - UK offers lots of services but they're disjointed – need to be able to find them.
2. What initiatives are you aware of that would enable UK refugee women professionals, across a range of occupations, to access the skilled jobs market better?
- WISE
 - LinkedIn groups (Women in Rail, Women in Construction, Women in IT, Women in Mining)
 - We are The City (network)
 - MeetUp groups
 - Mumsnet.com
 - prowess.org.uk
 - everywoman.com
 - Virtual Assistant freelancer networks
 - Transitions event focusing on networking skills, CV writing, interview coaching, confidence-building
 - Self-employment skills (financial literacy, risk assessment)
 - Positive action in companies
 - Orientation course aimed at refugee women when enter UK – how to access the UK Job market?

Comments:

- How to use LinkedIn safely if a persecuted refugee? Could use different name. Describe sector or company if don't want to use specific name. OK not to have photo. Must have something in profile or recruiters won't want to look.

• WISE - Women in Science and Engineering (Women in STEM.) Objective is to increase proportion of women in STEM careers from 13% to 30% by 2020. Lowest proportion in Europe (6% engineers = female.) Have jobs page. Jobs bulletin comes out 3x year. Have courses for returners.
[Individual membership for WISE is free - https://www.wisecampaign.org.uk/membership/individuals](https://www.wisecampaign.org.uk/membership/individuals)

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