

Minutes for Transitions Stakeholders' Advisory Group meeting #3

Theme: Perspectives on Internships

Date: Friday 4th November 2011 Time: 2.00 - 4.30

Venue: Stockwell Community Resource Centre, SW4 6RA

<http://www.stockwellcommunity.com/content/view/90/124/>

Present & Apologies: 14 colleagues present. 18 colleagues requested minutes.

Present: BA (Transitions client, Communications Engineer), Abdulkarim Addas (Transitions client, Financial Services), Ahmedin Ali (Transitions client, NGO professional, Workshop speaker), BF (Transitions client, Lawyer, Member of Transitions steering group), Andy Gregg (CEO Charities Evaluation Services, Workshop speaker), Dr Ho Law (University of East London, Psychologist, Module Leader MSc Coaching & Mentoring), Bryn Parker (Employment Adviser, Solid Foundations migrants and refugees project), Karen Roberts (Employment team manager, Metropolitan Housing), Moyra Rushby (Office Manager, HACT Housing action charity), IS (Transitions client, Political Economist/Journalist, Member of Transitions steering group), Paul Sellers, (Policy Officer, Trades Union Congress), IT (Transitions client, Electrical & Electronic Engineer, Rosemary Ward (Refugee support adviser, Metropolitan Housing), Sheila Heard (Director, Transitions)

Requested minutes: Elisha London (London Director, Global Poverty Project), Louise Salmon (Refugee Health Professionals employment project manager, Refugee Assessment & Guidance Unit, London Metropolitan University), Anna Smith, (International Programmes Assistant, War on Want), Kate Appleby, Volunteer co-ordinator British Red Cross, Andrew Braye, Management Accountant, British red Cross, supervisor of Transitions internship), Rachel Castle, Senior Public Affairs & Policy Officer, Volunteering England), Michelle Ford (Good practice Manager, Westminster Volunteer Centre), Richard Nimmo (CEO Blue Ventures Marine Biology Research, Supervisor of Transitions intern/recruit), Paul Horton (International Development Director, CIWEM – Water sector professional body), Katerina Rudiger, Skills Adviser, CIPD – Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development), Dave Atkinson (UKBA, Refugee Integration & Resettlement Unit), Steve Belsey (Transitions steering group member), Evis Bodlli (Shpresa RCO, Director), Justin Brett (Transitions steering group member), Pamela Chambers (DWP Ethnic Minority Employment Policy adviser), Dominic Fry (Red Cross, Head of Learning & Development), Dr Ben Gidley (Researcher, ESCR Centre on Migration, Policy & Society, Oxford University), Chris White (JCP Refugee Strategy, Head)

1) **Welcome and introductions.** Short powerpoint presentation by Transitions on objectives/structure/outcomes to date of Transitions

2) **Matters arising:** Updated Terms of Reference for this Advisory Network.

Sheila Heard (Director, Transitions) distributed hard copies and requested comments for further editing.

Action: Please email Sheila.heard@transitions-london.co.uk with any comments.

2. Powerpoint by Sheila Heard, Transitions: **Summary of Transitions social enterprise model & outcomes**

3. **Issues/solutions around placements (internships)** Short powerpoint presentation by Sheila Heard on placement issues/solutions. Including refugee professionals' need for orientation, APEL and work experience; mismatch with JCP services which focus on immediate jobsearch & offer conflicting responses to the JCP volunteering entitlement.

➤ **Speakers:**

Ahmedin Ali, Transitions client, NGO Professional, currently Transitions intern on GIS international development projects mapping project for Horn of Africa, British Red Cross) Powerpoint. Key points:

- ❖ **Highly skilled** NGO/UNHCR disaster relief professional
- ❖ Committed International Development professional with **career aim to continue** working and CPD/study in this field. Particular strengths in Horn of Africa/Sudan.
- ❖ **Multilingual with refugee status** (full permission to work and volunteer)
- ❖ Registered with Transitions in June 2011
- ❖ Currently (began 3 weeks before) **Transitions intern** on GIS international development projects mapping project for Horn of Africa, British Red Cross
- ❖ Also **Management Committee member** of 2 Refugee Community Organisations
- ❖ **No successful job applications** to International Development agencies prior to Red Cross internship, facilitated by Transitions
- ❖ **Prior to registering with Transitions, unfamiliar with UK Jobsearch techniques** and employer expectations
- ❖ Experience of employers' and advice agencies' **lack of awareness of refugee rights and entitlements** and barriers to work
- ❖ British Red Cross GIS mapping **Internship is voluntary and unpaid.**
- ❖ Is a **customer of Jobcentre Plus.**
- ❖ **Pressure from Jobcentre Plus to find any job**
- ❖ **No targeted services** offered by Jobcentre Plus
- ❖ **Housing problems** affecting health of young family
- ❖ Initial **asylum process** extremely stressful and unwelcoming
- ❖ **Financial difficulties** in accessing **relevant training** in UK
- ❖ Internship supervisor reporting **excellent report of internship outputs and attitude.**
- ❖ **Hopes that the Transitions internship will be a practical bridge to relevant employment and future career development.**

Andy Gregg, Chief Executive Officer, Charities Evaluation Services, host of 2 Transitions internships

- ❖ Former CEO of **RETAS**, Refugee Employment Training and Advisory Service.
- ❖ RETAS provided **holistic services** including linking with professional bodies,
- ❖ Identifying transferable skills, interview preparation, advocacy
- ❖ **Refugees bring added value to the UK labour market:** international skills and experience, often multiple high level qualifications both from overseas and UK, often highly experienced, multilingual, all have full permission to work with no need for visa.
- ❖ **CES has hosted 2 Transitions internships:** one in their library, one as finance intern
- ❖ Interns typically would not compete well for paid posts due to lack of relevant experience or other requirements published on job descriptions/person specifications. **CES offers internships in order to assist interns to be 'job ready'** in return for active supervision, access to relevant experience that the intern needs, access to training opportunities (CES has kindly funded training for an intern) & assisting them with relevant tasks, under full supervision.

Summary of Q&A's to presentations:

Suggestion that AA can look at **interpreting as a career**. Response: that is a transferable skill and perhaps good in the short term. However, AA is an international development professional. London hosts offices of many large and small international development agencies. This is his chosen field of work and a field that he can offer specific, hard to find skills and experience.

Comment: There is evidence that most employers, including, for example, **the International Development sector, have difficulties in accessing/assessing the skills of refugee professionals, including as interns**.

Sheila Heard, Transitions, agreed that she has also experienced this, across sectors. Regarding international development, it seems to be that, although international development agencies, by definition, work in developing countries, they struggle to access the skills of development professionals from those countries who are in the UK. Many employers tend to use online systems /the same system to take on all interns, **which disadvantages refugees** because refugees are less familiar with UK selection systems than the (currently many) 'local', often UK experienced applicants for internships as well as jobs.

Question: **What can go wrong with an internship?**

Answer from Andy Gregg: in some organisations, internships are actually **job substitution**. That is, unpaid work which should attract a relevant wage. This is common in fashion and media ,where there have been successful employment tribunals about the issue.

Sheila, Transitions provided (attached) printed guidance from both Volunteering England and the CIPD on how to define the **difference between internships, volunteering and worker/unpaid work**.

There is no law to specifically regulate employers on this and it is not monitored. Employers do not have to pay interns. **CIPD recommends an allowance for both internships and apprenticeships**.

Comment: Some internships have no clear role.

Response from Sheila: all Transitions internships have defined roles to enhance the interns' employment prospects. Sometimes the role evolves as the person becomes more confident.

Paul Sellers mentioned guides to internships on Business Link and Directgov.

Attachments sent with minutes:

Transitions presentation, updated TOR, Presentations by 3 speakers

Date, venue & theme of next meeting: Friday 4th November 2-5pm Stockwell Community Resource Centre. Theme: Transitions services for employers & employer engagement

BREAK

Group discussions:

Shared comments:

- ❖ **A good internship should:**
 - Have a clear role description
 - have clear outcomes to measure eg employability skills in specific profession/effective communication skills
 - build on existing skills
 - include a skills audit process
 - include a reflective learning process
 - is NOT a job and should include time for reflection/self assessment
 - Can be a pre-set role if it matches the employability needs of the candidate
 - Include Jobsearch support
 - Be recorded via case studies

- ❖ In the voluntary sector, **many entry level jobs have been deleted and replaced with internships**, mostly unpaid and hard to get, in this flooded market

- ❖ There is a 'vicious circle' /**difficult balance**: refugee professionals need UK experience in order to access skilled jobs. They therefore are keen to find internships. They want the internship to have high skills and be 'real work' and the host employer may wish to provide such skilled experience – and come close to the line of instead providing **unpaid work** – which is not legal.

Small group notes: (3 groups)

What makes a good internship programme?

- **from employers' point of view:**
 - If the experience of having an intern is positive
 - If the intern has sufficient skills to offer the agreed role
 - The chance to evaluate the intern as a potential member of staff

 - A discrete piece of work/self contained
 - A 'real' role
 - Element of learning & training (a temp would already have the skills)
 - Taps the skills and needs of the intern and meet needs of employer to fulfil a task

 - Having a partner to broker the relationship
 - Clarity of mutual expectations of role/length: an agreement
 - Both parties benefiting
 - Structured processes
 - Possibility of recruitment by employer; good for both
 - Good for company reputation if interns enjoy the experience
 - Puts CSR into practice when supporting marginalised people with internships

- **from intern's point of view:**
 - If the internship keeps skills updated

If it is in a context to find contacts for employment
If it enhances CV
If it enhances confidence in cross cultural communication

Not replacing a paid role (ie not unpaid work)
Well structured
Professional development really important – preferably accredited
Tangible outcomes

Equal opportunities in practice
Relevant to one's skills and employability gaps
May provide an opportunity to apply for a job with the organisation
Upgrading skills & knowledge
Get coaching and mentoring
Practical way to understand the jobs market – in context
A 'real' role in my profession

What kind of things get in the way, in your experience?

Jobcentre Plus – want you to take any job and put great pressure on you. Threats to cut benefits otherwise

Lack of experience of how to find an internship
Language barriers when applying; how to effectively put together an internship application
Culture in the UK workplace takes time to pick up

You can get caught up in 'work' and not stop to assess/do skills & employability audit
Need time to reflect and plan ahead re becoming 'job ready' and doing effective jobsearching

Intern may not understand employers' expectations
Bad or no management of the intern by the 'employer'

Please list suggestions for Transitions for its internship programme

Inviting city companies to take part or fund internships
Case studies: Show success stories
Provide assistance with cultural preparation
Provide ESOL assistance to develop cross-cultural communication skills
Mentoring: for 1-1 support and to find placements, secure involvement of companies
Continue workshop activities
Provide business start-up support

Really clear brief on the role
Build in time for progress monitoring
Include Jobsearch elements
Include training when possible
Organise meetings to share experience

Interns should be able to plan their work and ensure they are always busy

Actions recommended by group :

- **Transitions to continue promoting tailored internships for refugee professionals, in particular internships with a paid allowance**
- **Transitions to offer to publicise good employers who engage with this programme and with internships good practice, for mutual benefit**
- **Transitions to continue advocacy with Jobcentre Plus when clients are advised by JCP not to volunteer in their profession – or lose benefits, which is incorrect advice, highly distressing and contributes to longterm unemployment for this group of JCP customers**
- **Transitions to enhance the guidance it provides employers with on internship good practice, using today's meeting input**
- **Transitions to continue monitoring all placements with at least a monthly reflective review and ongoing employment support**
- **Transitions to lobby for a new regulation that internships should have an allowance, in line with apprenticeships – as recommended by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. (CIPD).**
<http://www.cipd.co.uk/publicpolicy/ internships-to-pay-or-not-pay0610>

Next Transitions Stakeholders Advisory Network meeting (4 monthly)

Friday February 24th Stockwell Community Resource Centre

Guest speaker: Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, journalist

British media attitudes to refugees; its effect on high unemployment of refugees

**Please let Transitions know if you would like to participate on February 24th. Places are limited.
Sheila.heard@transitions-london.co.uk**