

# Volunteer Placement Project Report

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## Purpose of the report

1. To briefly summarise the current context of sanctuary seekers in Manchester and the challenges surrounding volunteering.
2. To describe and explain how Manchester City of Sanctuary has responded to these challenges with the Volunteer Placement Project.
3. To share experiences and learnings from the first 8 months of the project. This will shape the future of not only this project, but also provide insight for other organisations who support sanctuary seekers in the UK.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to express our thanks to all the sanctuary seekers who have taken part in the Volunteer Placement Project so far. Thank you to all the organisations across Greater Manchester who have responded enthusiastically to our Project, and especially to those who are currently hosting volunteers from Manchester City of Sanctuary.

Thank you to the National Lottery Awards for All for making this Project possible.



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## Who is Manchester City of Sanctuary?

Our mission is to make Manchester a welcoming place for refugees and asylum seekers. We offer a varied and dynamic programme of activities that are engaging, fun and promote positive mental health and wellbeing.

Our values are:

- Connection: valuing the power of personal connection as a way of understanding and promoting empathy
- Acceptance: seeing people as they are, without question and without judgement
- Collaboration: working together to create deeper and lasting impact across the sector and with public bodies
- Empowerment: working towards sanctuary seekers becoming protagonists of their own futures
- Dignity: recognising the humanity of all people

You can find out more about Manchester City of Sanctuary by looking at our website:

<https://manchester.cityofsanctuary.org/>.

## Background

The North West has the second highest number of asylum seekers of any UK region with 16 per 10 000 people. Within Greater Manchester, the North West's largest sub-region, over 1700 asylum seekers are in receipt of Section 98 support. Provision includes temporary accommodation to those who would be destitute whilst eligibility to further support is determined. This accommodation takes the form of hotels, hostels and shared houses.

Providing support for all refugees and asylum seekers continues to be an essential task, especially for those who face isolation and lack of autonomy in temporary and often inadequate accommodation. As the Greater Manchester region covers an extremely large area, some accommodation is in areas devoid of services and amenities such as public transport, green spaces and places for social activities. This also limits opportunities for community integration.

Volunteering is known to be beneficial for both individuals and the wider community. Whilst some refugees and asylum seekers already volunteer in the UK, many are unaware of the wide range of volunteer opportunities available and face barriers to participation. Previous studies have identified a range of challenges<sup>1</sup>, for example:

- Concerns that benefits may be affected
- Lack of awareness that whilst working is not permitted as an asylum seeker, the Home Office encourages volunteering
- Not understanding how to become a volunteer

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, R. and Lewis, H. (2006) A Part of Society: Refugees and Asylum Seekers Volunteering in the UK. [Online]. [Accessed 08/03/23]. Available from: <https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/research-entry/part-society-refugees-and-asylum-seekers-volunteering-uk-report-based-case-studies>

- Worries about English language abilities
- Lack of confidence
- Childcare
- Travel expenses

Furthermore, the complex issues facing people seeking sanctuary may require more flexibility and additional support than with other volunteers. This can lead to a disappointing and short lived volunteer experience if not understood.

## What did we do?

In response to the challenges faced by both sanctuary seekers and voluntary organisations, Manchester City of Sanctuary received funding from The National Lottery Awards for All to launch the Volunteer Placement Project. The project began in June 2022 with the following aims:

1. To create an effective pathway for sustainable, long-term volunteer placements in Greater Manchester.
2. To locate volunteer opportunities in each Greater Manchester borough.
3. To provide opportunities for connection in the local community that are mutually beneficial for volunteers, host organisations and the wider public.

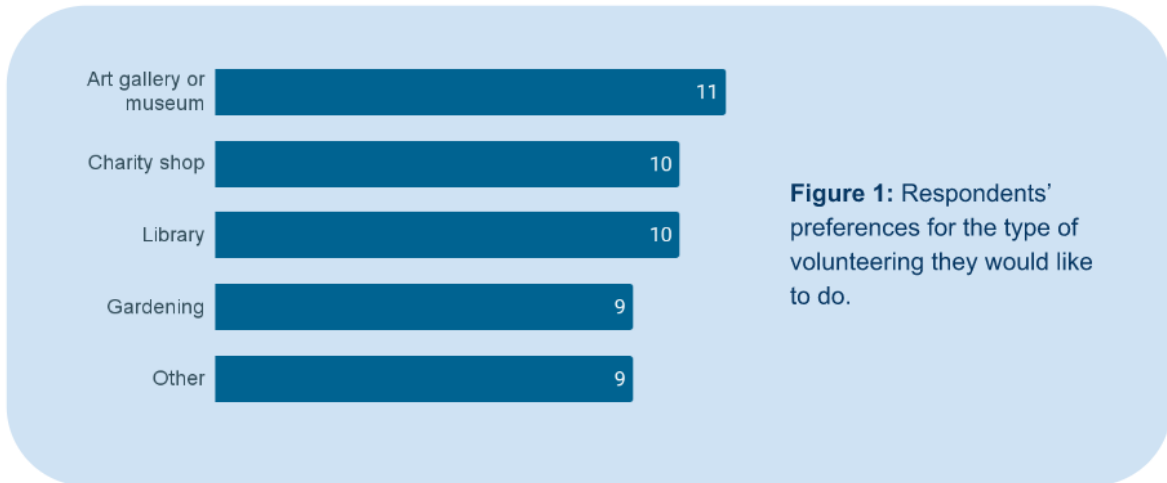
In turn, the project would increase community cohesion, compassion and awareness for sanctuary seekers and ultimately contribute to a warmer and more welcoming society. On an individual level, we hoped that sanctuary seekers would feel less isolated, more confident and develop their skills and experiences in a professional but supportive environment.

## Scoping interest

The first priority was to ensure the project was relevant, effective and fulfilled the needs of the people we support. Therefore, we developed a short online and paper survey that was distributed on Manchester City of Sanctuary's WhatsApp group and during activities. The questions asked were as follows:

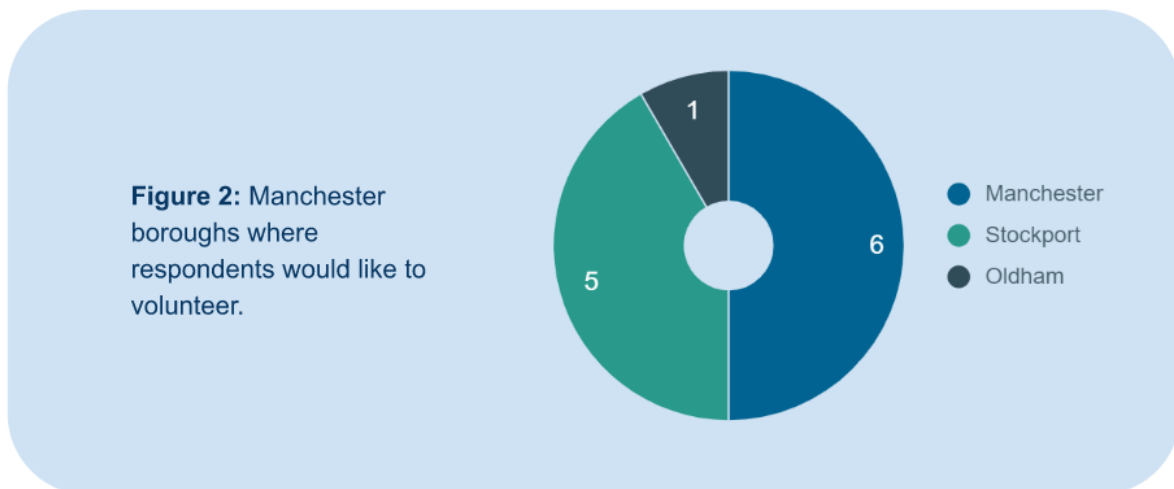
1. Are you interested in a long-term volunteering role with a local organisation?
2. What type of place would you like to volunteer?
3. Which borough do you live in?

While the response rate was low, the 16 respondents gave us a starting point for the project. The interest in volunteering was clearly indicated, with 15 respondents answering "yes", and 1 answering "maybe" to Q1. With regard to the field in which they would like to volunteer, the responses were similarly distributed across different sectors, as shown in Figure 1. In the "other" category, 1 person added they would like to volunteer in the medical field.



**Figure 1:** Respondents' preferences for the type of volunteering they would like to do.

The final question asked in which borough sanctuary seekers would like to volunteer. This was an important aspect with regard to connecting people to their local community. We find that many sanctuary seekers travel across Greater Manchester to access Manchester City of Sanctuary's activities because they don't have strong and meaningful relationships in the area in which they live. Particularly noted during and since the COVID-19 pandemic, building support in local communities can help tackle feelings of loneliness and disconnection. Figure 2 shows where respondents were based at the time of the survey. While this is by no means representative of the people Manchester City of Sanctuary supports across the 10 boroughs of Greater Manchester, this gave us an idea of where to begin the project considering those who may be most able or motivated to volunteer, and given the staff capacity and resources available.



**Figure 2:** Manchester boroughs where respondents would like to volunteer.

## Project structure and timeline

To ensure continuity and that the project was distinct from Manchester City of Sanctuary's other ongoing activities, the Volunteer Placement Project Coordinator was the main point of contact for both interested sanctuary seekers and organisations. We planned to offer support for the first 3 months of each placement by being on hand for any questions or concerns.

Beyond this, both parties could decide whether they would like to continue without Manchester City of Sanctuary's support.

## Making contact

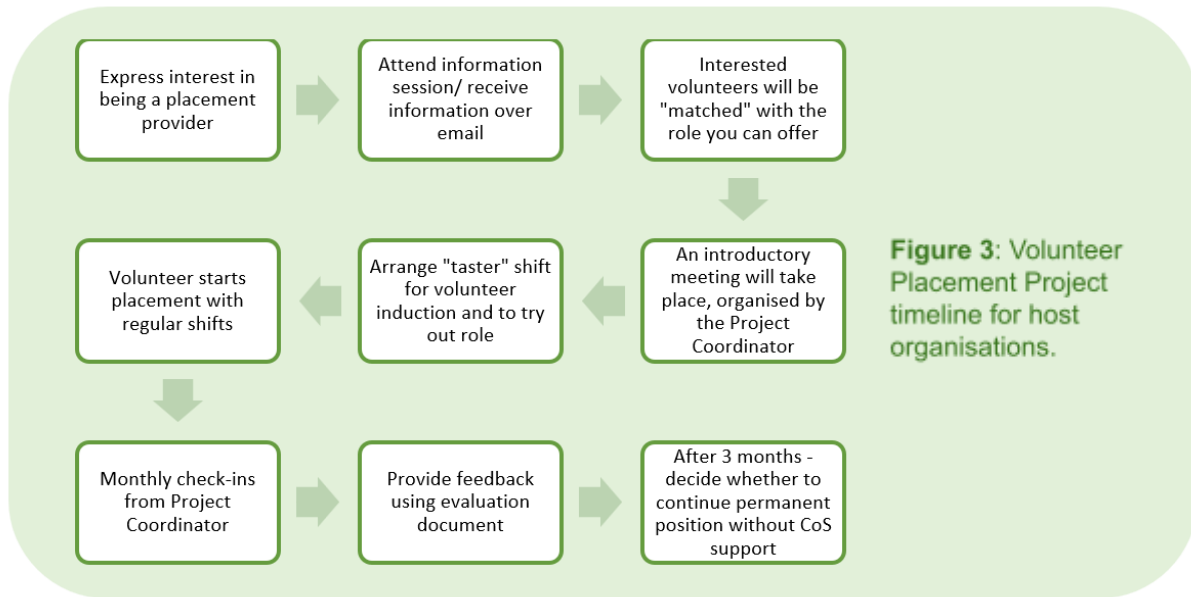
Initially, the project coordinator began to contact organisations that were already involved in Manchester City of Sanctuary's work in some way to ask if they would be interested in finding out more about the Project. For example, Oxfam Emporium in central Manchester were already hosting three volunteers who are seeking sanctuary, whilst the People's History Museum provided space for Manchester City of Sanctuary's Women's Coffee Morning. As awareness of our project grew through volunteer and charity networks, not only were we contacting organisations ourselves, but some were contacting us directly to get involved. Within the first 2 months, 31 different organisations across Greater Manchester were contacted by, or made contact with, the Volunteer Placement Project Coordinator. Whilst some communications were short-lived, most were enthusiastic about the project and were keen to get involved now, or in the future. The organisations' objectives were diverse and provided a range of opportunities for interested volunteers to get involved. Not only were there the sectors listed in the initial volunteer interests survey (gardens, museums, libraries, art galleries, charity shops and the medical field), but opportunities beyond those appeared including at food banks and in wildlife conservation.

Meanwhile, the Volunteer Placement Project Coordinator reached out to sanctuary seekers to see if they would be interested in long-term, regular volunteering. Effort was made to record their preferences and where they reside in Greater Manchester to ensure the placement would be suitable for their interests and needs. Like with the host organisations, as the Project became more well-known we found that sanctuary seekers would make contact with the Project Coordinator themselves. In total, 41 people expressed their interest in volunteering with a majority living in Stockport and Manchester. Due to limitations in staffing and resources, it was necessary to prioritise those who were most motivated to volunteer and responded quickly to opportunities as they arose. Further, given the restrictions for working as an asylum seeker in the UK, we were conscious that volunteering could be invaluable for those facing isolation and mental health issues whilst they await the Home Office decision. This proved true as we saw many sanctuary seekers reach out who were being housed in hotels in Greater Manchester with little means to explore the community.

## Guidance for host organisations

All the contacted organisations were well-experienced and often dependent on volunteers therefore we knew that they would have their own processes and regulations in place. However, as most did not yet have volunteers who were also sanctuary seekers, we wanted to make sure they felt prepared and comfortable hosting volunteers that may need additional support. While we began by sending out Project information via email (see Appendix A for the information flyer we attached to email communications), as interest grew, we decided that it would be beneficial to invite potential host organisations to an information session. The presentation discussed items like what the Project was about, tips for working with sanctuary seekers, and advice from a local organisation already hosting volunteers from Manchester City of Sanctuary. A central component of the Volunteer Placement Project was the provision of travel expenses for each volunteer. For many people seeking sanctuary, it would be

impossible for them to take part without travel costs being reimbursed. We also shared a Project timeline (Figure 3).



**Figure 3: Volunteer Placement Project timeline for host organisations.**

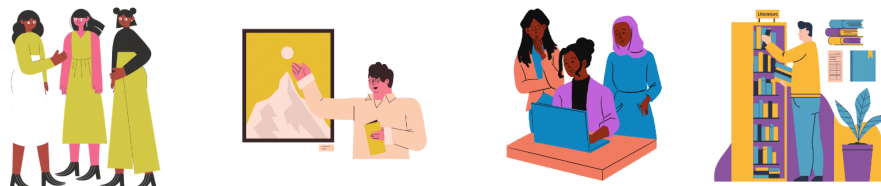
## Evaluation

Over the first 8 months of the Volunteer Placement Project, 8 people have successfully started volunteering regularly with organisations in Manchester. We have built strong new and existing partnerships with each: [Barlow Moor Community Association](#), Oxfam Emporium, [People’s History Museum](#) and [Whitworth Art Gallery](#). Additionally, we have been working closely with [Auxilium Social Enterprise](#) to give sanctuary seekers who have previous experience in the healthcare sector the opportunity to volunteer at hospitals in Greater Manchester. So far, 4 people have been introduced to Auxilium Social Enterprise through the Volunteer Placement Project. We distributed a short survey at the end of the 8 months so everyone involved in the Project could share their experience (see Appendix B).

## Feedback from Volunteers

6 volunteers responded to the evaluation survey. Even this small number of people demonstrates the diversity of people that Manchester City of Sanctuary supports. 2 men and 4 women provided feedback, aged between 25 and 64. Most have lived in the UK for less than 5 years with 1 person arriving less than 1 year ago. 5 are currently seeking asylum. They arrived in the UK from 6 different countries: Iraq, Kuwait, Iran, Sudan, Pakistan and Palestine.

The volunteers have a range of roles, including working behind the till in a charity shop, welcoming visitors into the museum, tidying and pricing items in the shop, patrolling galleries in the museum, helping people with computers in the library and talking to customers.



Feedback from the volunteers has been overwhelmingly positive; **all volunteers said they were enjoying volunteering** and would like to continue in the future. In terms of the support provided by the organisation in which they volunteered (travel expenses, communication, guidance) and Manchester City of Sanctuary, **all the respondents agreed that they felt supported** and knew where to go for help.



Has volunteering had an impact on the rest of your life?



We asked what advice the volunteers would give to other sanctuary seekers who were thinking about volunteering. Responses were encouraging, mainly focussing on the opportunities to learn English and grow in confidence. They described how they wish to see the Project continue.



**Volunteering is the best way to get new skills, to improve and practise your English, and boost your self-confidence.**



A concern raised by one respondent was the fact they had to stand during their shift when on the till, and that there was no chair available. This indicates a need to encourage organisations to provide a safe space for volunteers to share any concerns or accessibility needs. The Volunteer Placement Project Coordinator could also facilitate these conversations if the volunteer does not feel comfortable raising their needs to the manager directly.



### Sara's\* experience

After talking with the Project Coordinator about what type of volunteering she would like to do, Sara was introduced to an organisation supporting older people in the community. She really liked the ethos of the charity so decided to start volunteering with them. Unfortunately, after the first few weeks, she didn't feel like she was getting enough support from the volunteer lead at the charity. For example, she told us that she was not offered travel expenses and lunch breaks straight away and did not feel comfortable asking. Sara was also finding the location difficult to get to.

Upon hearing these concerns, the Project Coordinator communicated this to the charity. Whilst the concerns were addressed, Sara didn't feel comfortable continuing volunteering there.

So, we started looking for a new opportunity that might be better suited to Sara. We managed to match her with an opportunity at a local community association, where Sara could help at their activities and in their library. There was already someone from Manchester City of Sanctuary volunteering here, so they already had experience working with our Project. Sara was much more comfortable here. This demonstrates the importance of ensuring a placement is the right fit for the volunteer and following up on any issues or concerns. The Project allowed us to know Sara's interests and she felt comfortable sharing if something wasn't right for her.

From this experience, we learnt that it would be helpful to introduce a volunteer agreement at the initial meeting with placement organisations. This would ensure both sides knew what would be expected (see Appendix C).

\*Name changed for anonymity

## Feedback from Organisations

3 organisations responded to the evaluation survey. They consisted of a community centre, charity shop and museum. While 2 of the respondents were already part of Manchester City of Sanctuary's network, 1 found the Project through a community news bulletin. Organisations had some apprehensions about hosting a volunteer who was seeking sanctuary. For example, they cited concerns around communication if the volunteer could speak limited English, or that they would not have the skills required to train vulnerable people. However, **all organisations found Manchester City of Sanctuary's support helpful** which alleviated some of the concerns. Support cited as being most helpful was:

“The Project Coordinator being present at the **introductory meeting** as it made volunteers feel more comfortable being with someone familiar.”

“The **information session** explained the Project well and included first-hand experiences



**The team was always on hand to offer support...this made the placements successful and gave us confidence in supporting vulnerable people.**



from an organisation already hosting volunteers.”

“The team was always on hand to offer support when needed for example, with paperwork and following a **structured and professional process**. This made the placements successful and gave us confidence in supporting vulnerable people.”

As we want to make sure volunteers are happy in their role, and feel welcomed by existing staff and volunteers, we asked organisations if there were any barriers to their integration into their existing team. Some felt that their level of English and initial lack of confidence presented a barrier to getting fully involved in the role. Whilst another shared that their volunteer was perhaps not ready for a fast paced, busy environment. However, respondents adapted and responded so the volunteers felt welcomed into their team. They shared what worked well.



What worked well to welcome the volunteer into their role and your team?



*Starting the process with a volunteer agreement meant everyone was clear about expectations of the role.*

*We let the volunteer start in the stock room which didn't require speaking so they didn't feel overwhelmed. When the volunteer was ready, they could move on to other tasks.*

*We arranged their shift so it overlapped with a more experienced volunteer for peer-support.*

*We gave volunteers flexibility to change their shift if they had other commitments.*

**All 3 organisations hoped the volunteer would continue volunteering with them after support from Manchester City of Sanctuary stops and would consider hosting other sanctuary seekers as volunteers.** This clearly demonstrates the success of the Project and the potential for it to expand in the future.



The final question asked respondents to give advice to other organisations thinking about offering placements to sanctuary seekers. They said...

- **“Do it!** It's so important for the integration of sanctuary seekers to be engaged in their community, and **it's so rewarding** seeing them benefit from the placement.”
- “First of all, I would suggest taking part in this project because it can have a **very positive impact on both parts**. Then, make sure the placement you're offering is suitable for the volunteer by explaining in detail what the job involves. I would also recommend drafting a voluntary agreement in which you state what you can expect from each other.”

- “Do not be worried of feeling out of your comfort zone, if you have not tried something like this before. It is very beneficial to your organisation as **people bring such a wealth of knowledge and skills**. You will receive all of the support you need from Manchester City of Sanctuary.”

## Reflections

The scoping exercise demonstrated a high demand from sanctuary seekers to get involved in volunteering. Unfortunately, to follow up everyone thoroughly and effectively was not possible with the capacity and resources we had at that time. However, it is encouraging for the future of the Project and others similar that sanctuary seekers are keen to build relationships in their local community and gain experience that could assist them in future employment in the UK.

Manchester City of Sanctuary’s Volunteer Placement Project was beneficial to both the volunteers and host organisations involved. While the number of sanctuary seekers we successfully matched with long-term voluntary roles was lower than initially proposed, it became clear early on that there was a need for a tailored process that considered the needs and preferences of each individual. This meant the placements had a greater impact on the volunteers and, as indicated by the feedback, was a largely positive experience which has been beneficial for other aspects of their lives. Consequently, all volunteers are keen to continue in their current roles or explore opportunities beyond them (for example, one volunteer is planning to attend college). This demonstrates how the initial support provided by Manchester City of Sanctuary results in sustainable volunteering that can continue when this support ends. The confidence that sanctuary seekers gain during volunteering can seemingly provide a stepping stone to education, voluntary roles and perhaps in the future, employment.

An important legacy of the Project is the growing network of organisations across Greater Manchester connected to Manchester City of Sanctuary. This has not only raised awareness of our important work, but they are also avenues to explore in future for volunteer placements and other activities. We have also found that some organisations who we matched volunteers with at the start of the Project now feel comfortable repeating our placement process without the guidance of Manchester City of Sanctuary. This means that once we have discussed needs and preferences with an interested volunteer, we can connect them to existing partner organisations directly. This again points to the sustainability of the Project and how it can continue to grow once our support reduces, allowing us to provide opportunities to more sanctuary seekers in Greater Manchester.

We concluded this phase of the Project with a celebration event that invited everyone who contributed to receive a certificate of participation. This was a warm and friendly environment for volunteers and organisations to share their experiences, and for us to thank everyone for taking part.

## Recommendations

1. There is a need for structured volunteering opportunities for sanctuary seekers that offer guidance and support for both the volunteer and organisation in the initial months.
2. Travel expenses are a huge barrier for sanctuary seekers getting involved in volunteering opportunities. Therefore, any organisation offering to host a volunteer should reimburse travel costs for each shift.
3. Listening to the preferences and needs of sanctuary seekers who are interested in volunteering is essential for successful volunteer placements.
4. English language abilities need not determine whether someone can or cannot volunteer. There are roles that require little communication (e.g. stockroom). However, at a minimum, they must be able to understand health and safety requirements and basic direction.
5. Don't underestimate the demand and time it takes to match and introduce volunteers to a suitable organisation. We were limited by staff and resource capacity which restricted the number of opportunities we could support.
6. Check-in with volunteers and organisations regularly even if they don't initiate the discussion.
7. Flexibility and adaptability is essential. Not all placements will be a success straight away.



Two volunteers 'in action' at a Manchester museum and charity shop.

# Appendix A

The flyer we shared with interested organisations in the first instance.



## VOLUNTEER PLACEMENT PROJECT



**INFORMATION FOR  
PLACEMENT PROVIDERS**

### WHAT ARE THE AIMS OF THE PROJECT?

We aim to create a streamlined, effective pathway towards sustainable, long-term volunteer placements that provide opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers to connect with their local community.

### WHY TAKE PART?

There are benefits to taking part for both your organisation and the volunteer. For example:

- Volunteers can practise their English and develop new skills. The experience may help them secure a job in the future.
- Placement providers will gain knowledge of the challenges refugees and asylum seekers can experience. You will contribute towards increased acceptance and welcome within the local community.

**“ I AM PROUD OF THE WORK THAT I DO HERE ”**

**MCoS member & volunteer [pictured]**

### WHAT SUPPORT IS PROVIDED?

Once registering your interest via the below contact, you will be invited to attend an information session to find out more about the project and the people we work with. If you decide to take part, we will match you with a volunteer(s) and arrange an initial meeting to make sure both parties are comfortable. Over the first 3 months, we will be available for check-ins and to address any concerns. After 3 months, both parties will decide whether they would like to continue without our support.



Contact: [REDACTED]

## Appendix B

Evaluation questions asked to organisations (a) and volunteers (b).

### a) Organisation evaluation questions


- 1) What is the name of the organisation you are representing?
- 2) How best would you describe your organisation?
- 3) How did you find out about the Volunteer Placement Project?
- 4) Did you have any apprehensions about the project before you hosted a volunteer?
- 5) On a scale of 1 to 5, did you find the support provided by Manchester City of Sanctuary helpful?
- 6) What did you find most helpful about the support provided by Manchester City of Sanctuary?
- 7) What did you find least helpful about the support provided by Manchester City of Sanctuary?
- 8) What other support, if any, would you like to be offered?
- 9) On a scale of 1 to 5, how well has the volunteer(s) integrated into your team?
- 10) What do you think has a) worked well or b) been a barrier for the volunteer being integrated into your organisation?
- 11) Was your organisation able to provide the correct support for the volunteer? (e.g. travel expenses, communication, extra guidance):
- 12) If you answered no, what support did you struggle to provide?
- 13) Did you feel the role you could offer was suitable for the volunteer?
- 14) Will the volunteer(s) continue to work at your organisation, once support from Manchester City of Sanctuary stops?
- 15) Would you consider hosting other volunteers from Manchester City of Sanctuary in the future?
- 16) Would you recommend this project to other organisations?
- 17) What advice would you give to other organisations that would like to take part?
- 18) Any additional comments?

### b) Volunteer evaluation questions

- 1) How did you find out about the Volunteer Placement Project?
- 2) What is the name of the organisation you volunteer at?
- 3) What do you do when you volunteer?
- 4) How long have you volunteered at this organisation?
- 5) How many times a week do you normally volunteer?
- 6) On a scale of 1 to 5, how much have you enjoyed volunteering so far?
- 7) Can you explain what you have enjoyed the least/most about your volunteering?
- 8) Was your organisation able to provide the correct support for the volunteer? (e.g. travel expenses, communication, extra guidance):
- 9) On a scale of 1 to 5, how supported have you felt by Manchester City of Sanctuary during your volunteering?
- 10) Has your confidence improved since you began volunteering?
- 11) Did you feel welcomed into the organisation?
- 12) Has your English improved since starting volunteering?
- 13) Do you know who to go to in your organisations for advice and guidance?
- 14) Would you recommend volunteering to a friend?
- 15) Have you come across any issues or concerns while you have been volunteering?
- 16) Do you plan to continue volunteering with your organisation?
- 17) Has volunteering had an impact on the rest of your life? If so, how?
- 18) Do you have anything else you would like to share about your experience of volunteering? If so, please write it below.
- 19) What advice would you give to other people who might want to volunteer?

# Appendix C

Agreement listing what we expect from placement organisations.

<b>Expectations of placement providers</b>	 Manchester City of Sanctuary	<b>VOLUNTEER PLACEMENT PROJECT</b>
<p>At Manchester City of Sanctuary, we understand that your organisation will have its own policies and regulations to ensure the health, wellbeing and safety of your staff and volunteers. The following statements are designed to remind you that Sanctuary Seekers may require more support than your usual volunteers.</p>		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. We understand that due to reasons such as language, life experiences and cultural differences, Sanctuary Seekers may need more support and guidance than other volunteers.</li><li>2. We agree to provide travel expenses (minimum of £5 per day) and provide breaks and/or lunch during longer shifts. Volunteers may not ask directly for breaks or travel expenses if they deem it embarrassing or inappropriate, so please do check-in with them.</li><li>3. We agree to contact Manchester City of Sanctuary as soon as any questions, concerns or issues arise during the first 3 months of the volunteer(s) placement(s).</li><li>4. We understand that any organisation involving volunteers has a legal responsibility and a 'duty of care' towards their volunteers. Therefore, the health and safety of Sanctuary Seekers lies with the placement provider during the agreed shift times and not with Manchester City of Sanctuary.</li><li>5. We agree to exchange contact details with volunteers so both parties know who to contact in case of absence or shift changes. Note that Sanctuary Seekers may prefer to use email or Whatsapp if they aren't able to purchase phone credit.</li><li>6. We understand that volunteering is a choice, and Sanctuary Seekers have the right to change their mind if their circumstances change. Volunteers are expected to communicate with organisations in advance if they decide to leave the role.</li></ol>		
<p>By signing this document, you agree to the above statements.</p>		
<p>Print Name:</p>		
<p>Sign:</p>	<p>Date:</p>	