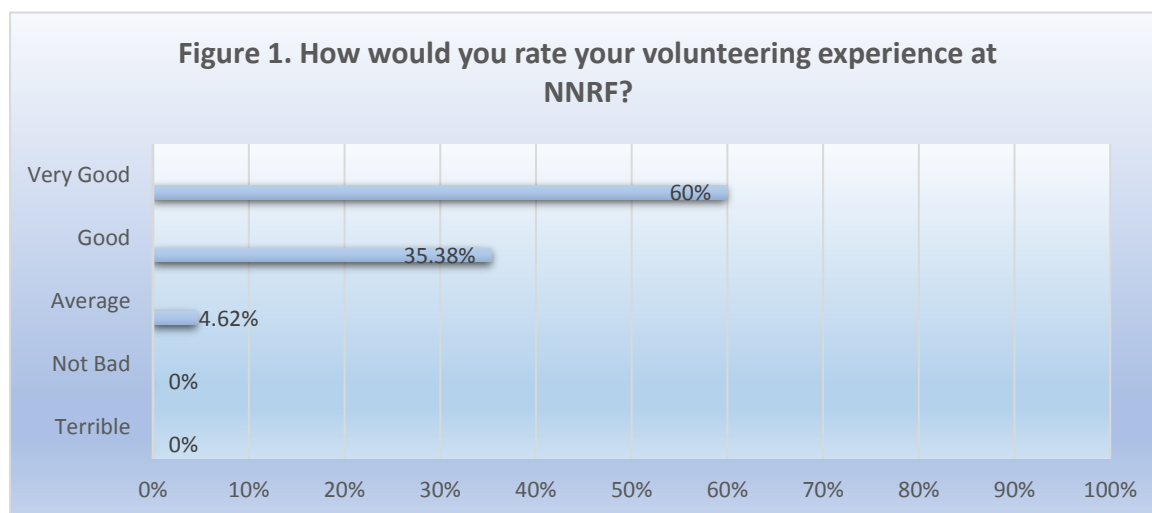


## **Measuring the Impact of Volunteering**

Volunteers are the backbone of organisations such as the NNRF; giving up valuable time and lending invaluable experience and varied skills which helps with the smooth running of organisations. This report seeks to measure the impact of volunteers, from their perspectives, and so focuses on their experience in training, support and appreciation shown by the organisation and ultimately, the impact volunteering had on their lives. A total of 66 out of 209 volunteers answered the survey, giving it a response rate of 31%. Despite the low rate, it is still possible to draw conclusions from the data provided and outline general consensuses or any complaints that some volunteers wanted to voice. Nearly half (29) of the volunteers that answered the ten questions in the survey were new to the NNRF and had been volunteering for less than a year. At the same time, there were respondents who were long-term volunteers at NNRF; some ranging from 8 to 15 years. As well as that, the roles of the volunteers were varied – ranging from Café Host, Volunteer Driver, Admin Volunteer, ESOL Tutor, Youth Activities Volunteer, General Adviser, Legal Adviser. Also, some volunteers have more than one role – whereby a normal week at the NNRF would see them juggling a variety of roles.

### **Volunteering Experience at NNRF**



Most volunteers described their experience as very good (60%). In fact, no one would describe it as anything less than average. After combining the results for good and very good, there is an overall 95.38% satisfaction rate for volunteering at NNRF, indicating a very positive response from majority of the volunteers.

## **Training**

The consensus about the training was that it was utilised a lot initially, however, as volunteers settled in, they stopped using the training services frequently due to other commitments and a busy schedule. It is often re-utilised when relevant programmes are offered, or a refresher session is required. Some volunteers expressed the view that some of the training sessions were repeats of what has already been covered. Overall, training seems to have infrequent attendance.

## **Relevance of training**

When asked to rate the relevance of the training on a scale from 1-10 (with 1 being not relevant at all and 10 being extremely relevant, the mean was 8.51. Only 4.94% of respondents rated the relevance of training as less than 5. Also, 25 out of 61 respondents chose extremely relevant (10) to describe their experience, indicating a high satisfaction rate with the training programmes offered at NNRF. Some comments include the training being a good overview and especially it being very interesting and useful in understanding the bigger picture. The majority of respondents thought that it provided a good overview of the UK Asylum System. It allows volunteers to be more efficient if they are trained about the background of the processes, as outlined by a volunteer whose main role is as a receptionist. However, there were some concerns that not all training was directly relevant or applicable (albeit useful) to volunteers, as exemplified by a respondent who volunteers in the café. The structure of the training was particularly highlighted as being praiseworthy as it was accessible from home; sessions were available at different times and there were repeats throughout the year. It is interesting to note how the fact that the training sessions are repeated throughout the year are viewed both positively and somewhat negatively by volunteers.

*I found the training on the Asylum Process on the UK very useful. Also, that on Adviser Skills and Advice Pro and Working with Interpreters. The training on the legal Project I found disappointing. I could have learned much more...*

*It provides insight, factual, practical knowledge and skills.*

## **More training**

Many volunteers had a lot of suggestions about what they would like to see offered in addition to the current training sessions. Some of these included sessions that were already available at the NNRF so there seems to be a disconnect from volunteers and their knowledge of the sessions that are available to them. However, despite that, there are other areas in which volunteers feel they would benefit from being trained in. There have been proposals of more training about client experiences and aftermaths; updates to benefits and with any changes to the Asylum System; welfare benefits such as Universal Credit; Government policy impacts and legal project training. Majority of the comments for more training skewed towards legal project training and ESOL training. For the ESOL training, one respondent suggested training to be ‘specifically tailored to pre-entry ESOL’ and added that there should be some form of training or information session for service users to become volunteers. There was another suggestion by a respondent who suggested more training on the New Refugee Clinic. On another note, a volunteer suggested an alternative way of securing a better turnout for sessions by adding different dates for the same training session and asking people in a poll which day/time they would be available for attending them.

## **Rewarding nature of the role of volunteers**

Volunteers were asked to rate how rewarding their role is for them on a scale of 1–10 (1 being not rewarding at all and 10 being extremely rewarding). The average of 8.6 indicates a reasonably high rewarding nature of the volunteers’ roles. It is significant to point out that 40.6% picked the number 10 (extremely rewarding), resulting in it being the modal group. Only 4/64 respondents (for that question) rated the nature of their role in terms of it being rewarding as less than 5. Overall, most volunteers feel their role is highly rewarding.

## **Appreciation**

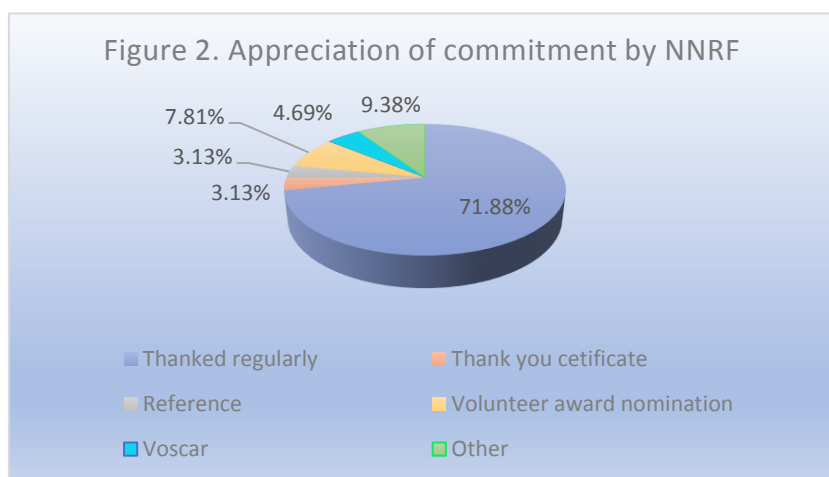


Figure 2 depicts that being thanked regularly is the most common way of showing appreciation to volunteers for their commitment. The volunteer award nominations are another common way of showing recognition for the support of volunteers.

## Support

The question relating to how supported volunteers feel at NNRF garnered a very positive response. The volunteers highlighted the **approachability** and **reliability** of the staff. Particular attention and praise was given to supervisors, with some volunteers describing them as an integral part to their roles – many supervisors and mentors were named in the comments. Most volunteers expressed their satisfaction with the level of support received at NNRF, with some going as far as saying that they feel supported 100% and stated that help was always available at NNRF. Even if there were problems, volunteers stated that they knew who to approach to solve them. There seems to be **strong cohesion** in NNRF with a very supportive working environment. However, some volunteers outlined concerns about staff not taking the volunteers' **previous experience** into account of their roles, hindering them from feeling encouraged to pursue new responsibilities. Also, one respondent highlighted how **stressful working conditions** can, at times, affect the working relationship between staff and volunteers.

*Initially very supported ....I had a 1-1 meeting with a good supervisor. Less so since but it's good to have a paid staff member available at all times ....some more helpful than others*

*feel very valued by staff and other volunteers; I like particularly that you cannot tell at first meeting who is staff, volunteer, visitor, client; and some people fill several of these roles: feels nicely egalitarian*

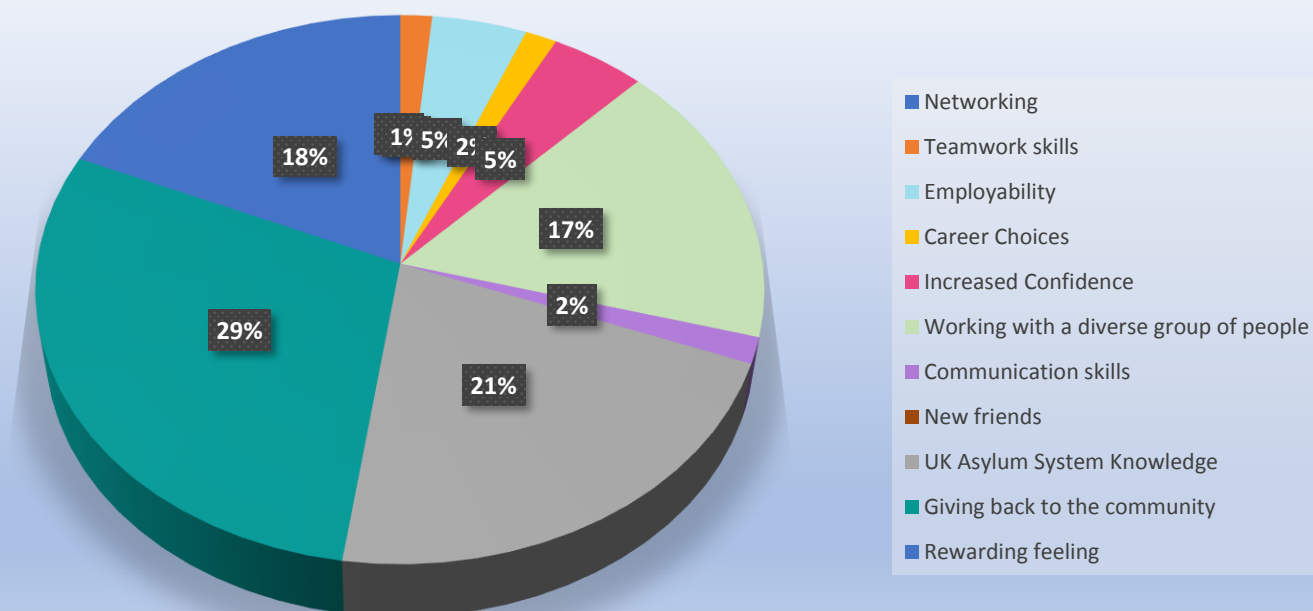
*Very supported, I feel valued as I am always thanked for my contributions and I know I have people employed by the Refugee Forum I can talk to about concerns. Weekly debriefs keep us all in the loop*

*Very well supported. I am given clear instructions by the Legal Project team, there is clear and open communication within the team, Peter the OISC adviser whom I support takes time to explain to me the client cases, asks for my input, gives me immediate feedback on my contribution, and always checks if my workload is manageable.*

*Few negatives: implicitly, very much; explicitly, not so much. As is quite common in caring-type organisations, we are not as good at looking after each other as we are with the people we are dealing with daily. Stress is commonplace but it, and its repercussions, isn't addressed fully, sometimes not at all.*

### Most valuable gain from volunteering at NNRF

Figure 3. Most valuable gain from volunteering at NNRF



Volunteers were asked to pick one outcome that they believe has been their most valuable gain from volunteering at NNRF. Figure 3 depicts how varied the results are, there is no clear majority and dependent on personal experiences, each volunteering experience is unique to the individual. Respondents had different reasons for volunteering and their impact on the wider community and the organisation cannot be grouped together due to this diversity. Majority of the comments started off with outlining the dissatisfaction with having to pick only one gain and then consisted of the other categories they would have picked had the survey allowed them to. The comments seemed to reflect the general gains such as working with a diverse group of people, having knowledge of the UK Asylum system, making a difference in the community; a rewarding or humbling feeling; greater sense of self-worth to be trusted with such responsibility; helping the less fortunate; the usefulness and connectedness gained from volunteering as a retired citizen by maintaining skills and legal experience/shadowing for aspiring barristers. This is in line with the results shown in Figure 3 and if anything, emphasises how much volunteers have gained from their role as they felt compelled to outline in detail what other skills they have gained. Although this summary of the comments provides a basic outline of the views expressed, especially for this question, it is significant to read some of the answers provided.

Volunteering helps me put into perspective my own struggles!

As a senior citizen I believe that I need to give something back to the community. NNRF provides a practical way of supporting asylum seekers and refugees. Volunteering as a General Adviser helps me to maintain skills that I had when in employment.

Offering support; listening, helping with language issues

I have been assigned to help a voluntary legal advisor with a wealth of legal expertise and experiences of over 15 years at NNRF in providing legal advice to asylum seekers. I found it extremely valuable and rewarding for the opportunity to volunteer with and learn from him on cases we have worked on so far. I see volunteering at NNRF as a privilege as well as gaining a valuable working experience in my pursuit of becoming a legal practitioner in the field of asylum and immigration law and, more importantly, giving back to the community by supporting those who are in a dire situation and would not be able to put their cases forward without help.

I feel I'm helping NNRF in its work. I feel the role NNRF plays is invaluable and provides help for this community which is not available elsewhere.

It's a shame I can't tick more options in this question as I've gained so much - yes its rewarding to be given an opportunity to show compassion and care to our clients and be able to practically respond to what we've seen in the news over the last few years (all too easy to feel helpless). I've also enjoyed volunteering with a diverse group of people and feel part of the big team at NNRF. I feel more confident in speaking about the UK Asylum System to my own friends and therefore in a better position to help educate and influence opinions.



## Overview

Ultimately, volunteering has been an **enriching experience** for the respondents. There was not a single negative comment about what they have gained from the experience and the overall satisfaction rate presented at the start (Figure 1) further emphasises this. Although there were critical comments about the structure and organisation of training and other aspects of their experience such as the relationship between employers and volunteers during stressful times, there seems to be a general **satisfaction with the support, acknowledgement and training** received by volunteers. The **rewarding** nature of the role is something that can be agreed upon by 94% of respondents (60/64). It is important to consider the running of the organisation and the help, training and support, along with **appreciation** offered to the volunteers, to encourage them to be as effective as possible when volunteering and provide support to the wider community, which, in this context, refers to the service users. Figure 3 is particularly helpful in deciphering what the experience means to volunteers personally and how it has impacted their lives in not just one way, but in a multilateral way. Not only is volunteering useful to the service users and the running of the organisation, but volunteers also gain something from giving up their time; whether it be **improving professional and/or personal skills**; the **rewarding and humbling feeling** they receive; **education** from training and **dealing with situations first-hand**; **working with people of different backgrounds** and improving one's **employability**.