



Shpresa- Building Community Resilience

Shpresa's clients are all Albanian speaking people (refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and others) from Albania, Kosova, Macedonia and Montenegro. We also work with organisations providing services to people from other communities to share our model of working. We have been established for 8 years, and have 8 paid staff, 11 Management Committee Members and 35- 45 volunteers.

Summary of activities

Shpresa Programme is an active user-led organisation that advances the education and training of Albanian speaking people in the UK, so as to enable them to play a full and active role in their communities.

Shpresa Programme:

- Provides advice, help and support so that members of the Albanian speaking community can orientate in a new country/ community, settle and gain access to education, training or employment, as well as fully participate in society.
- Has a board of trustees, 75 % of whom are from the Albanian speaking community. Other trustees have joined the board to share the expertise they have in their field. Shpresa currently has 3 full time, two part time and 3 sessional staff members.
- Has a large team of volunteers – we usually benefit from the support of between 35 and 45 volunteers each year. The majority of the volunteers are from the Albanian speaking community. However we currently have students undertaking voluntary work with Shpresa that is linked to their research studies.

Shpresa Programme runs a range of projects for members of the Albanian speaking community. These services promote the development, education, health and well-being of our community.

We also offer consultancy services to other organisations and projects who may benefit from our expertise and who want to learn more about our model in order to develop services for the Albanian community or for other refugee or migrant community groups.

Our vision

Shpresa works so that the Albanian-speaking community are able to use universal services, find work and feel socially included. We want them to feel more confident, to vote, to take care of their environment, to be less isolated and to be happy.

We want:

- The Albanian heritage to be strengthened and valued

- Less prejudice and discrimination within and towards the Albanian-speaking community
- Young Albanians to feel confident and valued and relations between them and older members of the community to be mutually respectful and supportive
- An end to domestic abuse so that men and women from the community thrive equally
- Strong and productive links with Albania and Kosovo.

The way we work

All Shpresa's core values are reflected in the way that we work. Our services are:

- **User led** - where those we serve have a voice in the planning and delivery of our projects
- **Family focused** - Shpresa works with all family members to promote our cultural heritage, to develop positive relationships across our community and with other communities, to inspire people of all ages to volunteer, to connect our young people with role models who can encourage positive aspiration, and provides the care, support and advocacy that enables our users to participate fully in the society
- **Outward-looking** - we work in close partnership with other agencies and services, including other community organisations. We seek to share our learning and to achieve our vision by working with others who can share their learning with us.
- **Committed to evaluation** – we are committed to evaluating our work and drawing on that learning when planning new projects.
- **Based on a belief in communicating our learning** to our users and partners – by offering consultancy services to other organisations and projects who may benefit from our expertise or what we have learnt.

Describe the experience you wish to focus on in this paper.

We want to focus on how a single community group could promote community cohesion.

Shpresa Programme from the outset has seen its work as a way of enabling the Albanian Speaking Community to integrate not assimilate and play an active role in the wider community.

This organisation was set up by people that didn't have the skills to write bids, to represent themselves at different fora, to know what is a charity or a limited company, or the roles and responsibilities, sometimes they didn't even know how to travel by train without getting lost – what they knew is what their needs were and they looked for support to meet these needs. They were determined to improve their quality of life and ease the process of settlement and integration for themselves, their families and other members of the Albanian speaking community in London.

We were very clear for a number of things which became our core values:

- Because we had needs this didn't mean that people have to help us or offer us things
- We had to help ourselves and find solutions
- We had to learn and be creative on our work

- We had to ask for funding when no one else could provide the service that met the identified need
- Learn by doing, developing our personal skills and organisation skills
- We had to understand the other organisation's work
- We had to understand the political life local structure
- We had to work with other
- We had to let other people be part of our success

And we managed to pull together a very successful model of working

INVOLVEMENT PROCESS & ITS IMPACT



Factors in Shpresa's success

There are a number of factors that enabled success.

Staff and volunteers share a common set of values and beliefs. As a result of our organisational ethos, they and the women and young people participating on a regular basis reinforce each of the factors, meaning that these effects become even more marked.

- Inclusiveness – Shpresa has a very strong culture of family, friendship, solidarity and warmth which gives rise to high levels of trust and openness. It also sends out messages of inclusiveness to newcomers, so that they can take full advantage of the opportunities as quickly as possible.
- Cultural Identity – Shpresa's programme of activities, and provision of a 'space' for the Albanian-speaking community provides a clear reinforcement of identity of what it means to be Albanian through language, dances and cultural climate and activities. This reinforces family ties by giving better means of communication between parents and children and building new links to grandparents. This clarity of identity is experienced as providing a way of finding one's place in British society and giving rise to respect from others outside the Albanian community.

- Problem Solving Know-How – In Shpresa it is clear that the staff act as role models to service users and volunteers, and demonstrate consistent patterns of behaviour.
- Focus on women and young people – The Shpresa Programme provides a range of specific projects for children, young people and women. Hence, there appears to be a focus on these groups. Although this focus was probably not intentional, it has had the effect of reaching those who are the most significant holders and transmitters of cultural values.
- Progressive Steps – Participants reported how they have continued to take on progressive challenges to suit their stage of development both within Shpresa, such as the volunteering programme, or outside, such as courses to further their career aspirations. It is clear that the staff take an active hand in encouraging and supporting this climate of self-development. There is a strong feeling amongst women who are current and ex-service users that by being in the UK and in contact with Shpresa, that they can achieve things that would not have been possible at home in their personal development and careers. This is partly because they can access courses and training; partly due to encouragement from staff members; and partly because of the increase in confidence that contact with Shpresa and use of its services offers.
- Understanding the UK & Getting the UK to Understand Albanians. Many people reported how the Shpresa Programme had fostered integration rather than separation. Many commented on the programmes, visits and activities to give insight and understanding and encourage appropriate involvement with UK society. There was evidence that the Shpresa Programme helps service users of all ages to understand and feel comfortable with British culture.

What problems and barriers did your RCO face in doing this, and how did you overcome or try to overcome these?

Shpresa is a user led organisation and this is reflected on make up of our board, staff and volunteers. This is fantastic. However there are a number of things that we had to do to be able to do the job well

1. We had to set up an active board that was skilled and have the knowledge about the third sector, legal responsibilities as well as being people that drive the organisation and see the long term, the vision. To achieve this
 - We organised in house training for all board members
 - Board members attended individual training,
 - We held away days every year
 - We organised our AGM as a very big event where we elected our oard members and showcased the successes
 - We always looked for new board members
 - The board, the staff, volunteers and users contributed to and developed our policies and business plan.

2. We developed a multi skilled team:
 - We had regular support and supervision, team meetings and appraisal
 - They attended training so they enhanced their skills
 - We swapped their roles so they were multi skilled
 - They attended outside meetings, fora, or organising local event
 - When needed they were provided with external support
 - Our staff were trustees for other charities
3. We stayed in contact with users:
 - Had regular planning meeting and evaluation session
 - Involved them in designing the projects
 - Listened to their new ideas
 - Promoted achievement through our cultural events as well as local events
4. We worked in partnership with others
 - Looked for and identified partners that could sustain our work (mainstream schools, youth clubs, other third sector organisation)
 - Didn't limited ourselves to work only with Refuge organisation or BME groups
 - Were part of their initiatives through running workshops, getting people from our community to their events, performing, exhibitions, joined activities, assemblies at schools, training for teachers, presentation
 - They run in-house training, or capacity building for us
5. We are sharing our model of working and other resources with other groups.

If your RCO accessed any support to help you with this area of work, describe this support and whether it was helpful to your organisation

From the beginning we looked who could support us:

- Refugee Council offered in-house training for our board of trustees, mentoring for our project director, capacity building (marketing strategy)
- School for Social Entrepreneurs supported our leaders, three volunteers from Shpresa studied there for one year and their learning was very helpful for designing future project.
- Our local CVS provided training for our staff volunteers on a number of areas ,monitoring and evaluation, fundraising, policies, finance, etc
- Aston Mansfield provided us with office space, mentoring support with monitoring and evaluation
- National Resource centre trained our staff and volunteers
- Emma Mortoo, at that time Project director of RAMP, shared our vision and inspired us to believe we could achieve our dreams
- Tim Spafford, a consultant and very long standing board member of Shpresa, believed in and supported us at every stage
- Raymonde Snnedon, an academic, offered to evaluate our work pro bono
- Esme Madill, consultant and trainer, sought funding and helped us develop a model for evaluating services.
- Mainstream school offering us their premises to run our activities

What are your tips for other RCOs considering doing something similar?

- Because you have need this doesn't mean that others have to help you
- Don't look for money but for resources and ways to achieve your aims
- Know best what is your USP (unique selling point): people power, policy etc....
- Continuously develop your pool of volunteers, team and your board through training , working in partnership etc
- Work in partnership with others
- Make your work be seen by others
- Let other be part of your success
- Appreciate any help given and say thank you publically.

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