



Shpresa Programme (Shpresa is Albanian for 'hope') Partnership and collaboration

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 to 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.

Summary of our experience

We want to focus on how to work in partnership and collaboration with others.

Shpresa Programme from the outset has seen working in partnership as the way of achieving success and sustaining the level of services needed.

This organisation was set up by people who didn't have the skills to write bids, to represent themselves at different fora; 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 used what we could access:

1. We identified people who could support us in facing these challenges
2. When we were told we can't support you - we asked why and when told we don't have interpreters - we amongst ourselves trained as interpreters and offered our services as volunteers for the benefit of our community.
3. We spread the word about the service we were offering – initially these services were advocacy, children's activities, cultural events. We mobilised other members of our community

4. We said "thank you" for all the services and support we got and sought to include those who had helped us and empowered us so that they could come on the journey with us.
5. We listened and respected each other
6. Each year we made time to get together and identified our needs
7. We didn't want money - we wanted services. So we became experts at securing goods and services in kind and at sharing our skills in exchange for this support
8. This process helped us to identify what is available for us in the local area and what are our unique needs that we will need to address ourselves
9. We let other people or organisation be part of our success and share that with us
10. We amongst ourselves knew what skills we did have, what we needed to develop and what we needed to learn, buy in or secure as pro -bono work
11. We didn't take no for an answer

On December 2002 we held a consultation meeting where 120 people took part and where we decided to set up Shpresa and launch the first three year business plan. We elected our first board and within three months set up Shpresa as a limited company.

We needed premises but could not identify a space within our budget. So we decide to go and meet some of the capacity building organisations and found one prepared to let us use a storage room and two cupboards for an office – we were delighted : our own telephone line, a notice board. It was a real office as far as we were concerned.

The following two years were the busiest years of my life. From our consultation and planning meeting we knew what our community urgently needed:

- Advice and advocacy
- Interpreting
- Information on accessing services(health education), immigration , benefits
- Activities for families

We also identified that as an organisation we needed:

- Training on management board responsibilities, policies, development , monitoring and evaluation
- Financial skills
- An understanding of our Legal duties relating to employments, health and safety and safeguarding
- Support in developing our own management style.

We sought out those with similar values to ours - flexible agencies who could share their learning with us. We went out to meet all those we admired and respected to make our community visible, to ensure that we were accessible to others and to find out how to help our community to access services and information that they needed.

From the outset we did not want to be the biggest organisation, we did not want to have the most clients, we did not want to secure the largest pot of funding – we wanted to meet the needs of our community, sharing our resources and helping each other.

Has the process been easy? The answer is no.

It takes time to build strong and solid partnerships and you need to be able to offer your partners something in return.

Parents at Gascoign School wanted Shpresa to run a supplementary school out of school hours. We needed use of school premises and a chance to work in partnership with the school to provide young Albanians with.

Gascoigne School did not want to work with us initially but we showed them how the partnership would benefit the school, we listed the services that we would offer, we explained our model and provided references from other schools who valued their partnership with us. The head felt we were 'too good to be true'. Our answer? 'Try us for three months.'

Since then the relationship has gone from strength to strength this year the school was one of very few that has been awarded Outstanding in community cohesion from Ofsted. The head says that was down to us. We knew that the partnership would bring benefits to both partners – which proved to be the case.

What problems and barriers did your RCO face in doing this, and how did you overcome or try to overcome these? (150 – 300 words)

Schools are normally very focused on their own targets and it can be very hard to convince them that a small user led organisation could help them achieve their targets. We have challenged this by now through working really hard:

- We have identified external evaluator to evaluate the impact of our work and our partnership works
- We have run our activities without causing problems for the school
- We have met with them regularly and given feedback on our project
- We invited them to our events
- We took part in their events
- Albanian speaking parents become more involved in their children's education
- Albanian speaking parents become more involved in school life
- Albanian speaking pupils progressing well and are very active
- We apologised when things went wrong
- We thanked them all the time for their support
- We showed them our people power

Now they are asking us:

- To share our model with other parents
- To do presentation with them
- To undertake more joint work

We needed their resources but we had skills and experience on how to work with the Albanian speaking families to share with them.

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

You can't achieve change by yourselves. The Albanian Supplementary school project has changed the aspirations and life chances of many hundreds of young people but this was a collective effort:

- Vicarage school was the first primary school where we learned from and piloted the project
- Mayfield school the first secondary school where we piloted how to work in partnership with secondary schools
- SSE (School for Social Entrepreneurs) helped our project manager to have a clear vision of partnership work
- Refugee Council trained our board members and offered mentoring
- Aston Mansfield provided 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, consultant and very long standing board members of Shpresa, believed in and supported us at every stage
- Raymonde Snedon, 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.

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

Partnership work- it is not magic! It involves things that we predict in everyday life.

- Know yourself well (not only how you know yourselves, but how others know you)
- Know well what you want to achieve and your army
- Find out before meeting what partners need and how you could help them
- Listen with respect even when things said are not what you want to hear
- Know your battles well and find your allies to be able to win
- Build trust – never use others solely for your own interest – this is a partnership
- Share the success and the failure with your allies
- Learn from your experience and share that learning
- Be honest and reliable
- Be thankful when others offer you support and say it loudly
- Be human when difficulties occur

© Shpresa 2010

This information has been produced by Shpresa, and was commissioned by the Basis Project, run in partnership by the Refugee Council and Refugee Action, supported by the Big Lottery Fund (BIG). It is not intended to be comprehensive or to provide legal advice. No legal responsibility is attached to the publisher. It can be reproduced free of charge for non-commercial use, but credit must be given to Shpresa, the Basis Project, Refugee Council and Refugee Action.