**Community Reporters evaluation – November 2020**

**What is the purpose of this document?**

This document is a summary of the feedback conversations with the NACCOM Community Reporters and staff team and recommends actions for NACCOM to improve future collaboration with people with lived experience of destitution to achieve NACCOM’s objectives.

This is a document for NACCOM trustees, staff, and volunteers. NACCOM is committed to sharing knowledge, expertise and best practise and this document/information will be shared with members and partners and available on NACCOMs website (hyperlinks to docs will not work for external users).

In October and November 2020, Jessie Seal (Policy & Research Coordinator) contacted the people who had taken part in the residential training for Community Reporters in December 2018 and who had subsequently volunteered as Community Reporters. The Community Reporters were contacted via the CR group Whatsapp group and via individual emails, phone calls and voice notes.

Follow up phone calls were held with 7 of the 12 members of the group. NACCOM didn’t appear to have a current/working phone number for at least 3 people and a final person [had shared a video talking about is involvement with the community reporters project](https://twitter.com/NACCOMnetwork/status/1327291383258832896) at our recent AGM but did not have time to contribute at this time.

**What was the Community Reporters project?**

The Community Reporters project was a partnership between NACCOM and People’s Voice Media (PVM) to work with people with experiences of the asylum system to support them to tell and curate their own stories about the barriers they have faced because of destitution. The stories were gathered as video and audio files, and then curated into a [short film](https://communityreporter.net/story/naccom-experiences-refugee-and-asylum-seeker) and [report](../PVM%20-%20Experiences%20of%20asylum%20seekers%20and%20refugees%20in%20the%20UK.docx).

The following activities were delivered as part of the project between 2018-2020:

* Initial Community Reporter training with 12 participants in December 2018. [See here for the agenda of the residential weekend](../Residential%20Dec%202018/Schedule%20for%20Residential%20weekend.docx)
* Support to produce and publicise audio and visual material produced directly after the CR training. [See here for Community Reporters videos](../Stories%20gathered)
* Encouragement and support to share audio and visual material for specific events identified by the NACCOM team (for example, International Women’s Day)
* Invitations and support to attend in person events (e.g. Happy to Host conference, NACCOM AGMs, Lift the Ban campaign days, Destitution meeting convened by PHF, a meeting with an MP to share NACCOM research)

The project was initially facilitated by Lucy Smith who was NACCOMs Policy & Communications coordinator. Whilst Lucy was on maternity leave, the P&C coordinator was split into two new roles and the project was coordinated by Jessie Seal (Campaigns & Policy Coordinator) and Hannah Gurnham (Communications Coordinator).

**Reflections from the Community Reporters**

All CR were asked why they had wanted to apply to be a community reporter originally, what they felt had worked well about the project, what they thought could (or should) be improved and whether they felt like the reasons for applying had been fulfilled. [Notes from individual calls can be found here.](../Evaluation_Oct%202020)

*Why did members of the group apply to be Community Reporters?*

* To change the situation for people who are destitute and seeking asylum (all CRs)
* To tell stories and have opportunities to be a storyteller (3 CRs)
* To learn and develop new skills particularly around confidence speaking in public, interviewing others and sharing engaging videos online (all CRs)
* To develop their own personal platforms to articulate issues relating to the hostile environment (2 CRs)
* Being unemployed/waiting for status and needing something to do to keep themselves busy (majority of CRs)

Most people felt that the reasons they had applied to become a Community Reporter had been fulfilled. One person did not and noted that they had had very high expectations and had expected to be putting videos out every month (or more) and reaching lots of high-level policy makers.

***Training and the residential event***

Everyone reflected positively on the training and felt that the weekend had been both an enjoyable and useful experience. Several Community Reporters remarked on specific sessions they had taken part in and how they had used these skills in other campaigns since. Key positive reflections included;

* Appreciating the opportunity to meet people experiencing the asylum system from all over the UK.
* The high level of organisation for the training and residential.

**Learning point 1**: prioritising bringing people together regularly and ensuring continued funding for this is essential. CRs commented that the move to online meetings because of COVID may have presented some opportunity to have group meetings more often and to make them more accessible, but access to technology (phones, laptops, WIFI) and space to do this (quiet private space) is essential.

***Practical/technology support and challenges***

All Community Reporters were given mobile phone handsets and SIM cards as part of the residential weekend to enable them to record and submit video interviews. Two Community Reporters noted that they had challenges using these phones. One person explained that the phone had asked them to enter their bank details to switch it on for the first time. They had tried several times but had given up in the end and although they still had the handset, they had never used it. This had been frustrating and had linked to other life frustrations that experienced;

*“It can be very annoying, I avoid engaging with organisations that ask me information like that [bank account details], it makes you feel helpless. Usually, I try to go around things, there’s things I can do, but there are things I can never provide because of my circumstances. It important to be able to do the activities/role without being constantly reminded of our situation because barriers”.*

Technology challenges raised included difficulty setting up phones, difficulty setting up/logging into the PVM accounts, uploading videos on to the PVM website and sending videos via email/alternative methods. The general sense was that when there were technological barriers, this damaged enthusiasm and made continuing the project difficult and that some Community Reporters needed more support to solve simple technology challenges.

**Learning point 2:** expect that there will be technology challenges and plan in time to proactively contact members to check in with them and problem shoot issues remotely. Try and set any hardware up fully before sending/giving to members of the group. Consider giving the option to upload via platforms that people already have access to? Eg. Youtube or facebook

***Consent, sharing videos and publicising work of the Community Reporters***

The consent procedure for interviewees was something that two Community Reporters raised as having been confusing. NACCCOM staff also identified checking, recording, and storing consent as an area that NACCOM need to improve on.

One Community Reporter felt that this had been poorly handled and had resulted in people being interviewed but these videos not being widely shared and some videos not being made public at all. After looking into this further, we understand that these challenges were as a combination of difficulty in submitting videos initially (the CR required support from a local organisation to upload videos), uncertainty over whether the videos were submitted to PVM or NACCOM directly and a lack of clarity on what consent forms had been submitted and where they were stored.

**Learning point 3:** the NACCOM team need to develop a clearer system for storing and recording consent of people interviewed. Any future work should include specific training for members and staff on different types of consent and help the group to create their own best practise process that is easy to follow. NACCOM should be clearer in explaining opportunities to share work, where and who this might be with. It should be clear how long videos/audio will be kept for and when they may be reshared.

***NACCOM team support***

 All the Community Reporters were very positive about Lucy and how well organised and supported they had felt the first part of the Community Reporters project to be.

Some Community Reporters (especially those who were most engaged throughout the 2 years), felt that there had been some confusion when there had been staff changes at NACCOM and that this had perhaps resulted in a ‘lack of direction’. The CR would have welcomed the opportunity to meet again and felt that this would have helped solidify the group.

Some Community Reporters remarked that the Whatsapp Group needed to be more regularly monitored by the NACCOM staff team and recommended that there should be weekly or monthly online meet ups. They remarked that this is something that is much more common now and that people are very used to doing this *‘even if there is not much to talk about, it’s nice to catch up’*.

**Learning point 4:** This work is relational and time needs to be prioritised when staff changes take place to ensure that new staff members have built relationships and understands the different motivations and needs of volunteers. Online meetings provide a space for structured, regular meetings (at least once a month). People who have lived experience of destitution should be central to NACCOMs work and there should be dedicated roles to facilitate this. Specific monitoring and evaluation of NACCOMs work towards our goals could help this work going forward?

***Continuing communication and opportunities***

An important reflection from several Community Reporters was that although they may not have actively shared videos following the training, they did use the skills they had learnt and contacts they had met in other campaigns, both local and national. For example, Victor reflected on this and how his situation changed after his son had a life threatening stroke.

*‘My son’s illness took priorities and his immediate health and then I was needed to front the Migrants Organise work for Simba’s campaign and I drew expertise from the training I got from NACCOM. I met Zrinka at the Happy to Host meeting and we talked, it was 3 weeks after Simba’s stroke. I nearly cancelled to come, but I thought because I was emotionally exhausted, let me go for a break, a treat. It was my birthday and Lucy has booked me a first class ticket. So I went, and we were placed in discussion groups and I happened to be placed with Zrinka and she listened and came to me and we connected with Migrants Organise’*

This highlights the importance of providing and sharing different opportunities for people who are involved in NACCOMs lived experience work, as well as the importance of offering spaces of solidarity and support when people are experience personal trauma. Victor talked about attending the Happy to Host conference as a ‘treat’ and several other CRs also shared this perspective. That being able to go somewhere nice and enjoyable, stay in a hotel or have a nice lunch were a key part of making them feel welcome and supported, as well as helping to build resilience to ‘go back’ and continue fighting for themselves and for others.

**Learning point 5:** As work moves online, NACCOM need to make sure that we continue to show our appreciation for people volunteering their time and ensure that online meetings have opportunities for moments of joy, laughter, food and financial support to access data and hardware (phones, laptops, chairs etc.) as needed.

Solidarity and campaigning can be great tools for support and we should continue to share external opportunities with people who take part in our training.

**What can NACCOM learn? How can we build on the work of the Community Reporters and improve our work in the future?**

The Community Reporters project was a new step from NACCOM through working directly with people who have experienced destitution to tell their stories in a coordinated way, rather than through our members or on an ad hoc basis. Feedback from the group makes it clear that the project was overwhelmingly positive and the contributions of the group have undoubtedly been a vital part of NACCOMs work to end destitution in the UK.

**Additional learning points:**

1. Be clear and intentional about the reason for convening a group with people with lived experience of destitution. What is NACCOM aiming to achieve together and who defines this goal? Eg is it to enable people to share their stories? To enable NACCOM to connect them with journalists? Support people to contribute to debates with decision makers? Based on these objectives, how are our relationships supporting people to equitably and mutually achieve those goals? What principles are in place to guide our relationships? What resources are devoted to supporting us to achieve them?
2. There is a need for a clear process for sharing practise/member feedback with Network Development Workers. How is negative feedback shared and challenging issues (e.g. evictions from member houses) discussed?
3. Clear timeframes and expected commitments as part of the volunteer recruitment process. There could be benefit to having a rolling recruitment and training process that enables new people to join the groups work as new members are needed/new people express an interest. NACCOM should also be clear when funding for activities will last until and our commitments after this time.
4. Having an end point for projects would enable NACCOM to ask volunteers if they would like to continue volunteering NACCOM in other roles or projects, to signpost to other organisations they may be interested in and to have an official space for celebration of the work they have undertaken if volunteers no longer want to continue. By building in the end point of a project, we give time to reflect and ‘lay it down’, noting our hard work and acknowledging where we will place energies next.
5. Childcare costs and/or child friendly meeting spaces should be considered to facilitate women (and men) with children joining activities and events. Following the model of Women for Refugee Women, is this something that could be considered for NACCOMs AGM? Shorter online meetings should be considered to allow people with caring responsibilities to join.
6. The importance of having collective joy and replenishment. All the community reporters spoke about their reasons for signing up as wanting to change things for the better for others facing the UK migration system. They also mentioned small things that made the difference in their energy to continue this work, whilst living within the hostile environment themselves. These small things included; spending time away in a nice space for the residential, being booked a first class ticket (cheaper in advance than standard class!), nice lunches being provided and being given expenses for a taxi so that they did not have to walk back across Glasgow after a long day in London.

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