

Refugee Women of Bristol (RWOB) by Eva Poliszczuk



Refugee Women of Bristol (RWOB) is the only multi-ethnic, multi-faith organisation that specifically targets the needs of refugee women in Bristol; they are directly governed by women of the refugee and asylum-seeking community. They provide services to disenfranchised groups over and above the generic category of 'refugee', and routinely reach cohorts of women that other service providers overlook or are unable to access.

One of their key areas of support is their Drop-In Centres at the Easton Family Centre, these offer a vast range of support for Refugee women in Bristol including a free crèche, lunch

cooked by members, free English classes and one-to-one support, information and advocacy, mental well-being support, various workshops and activities led by Bristol community groups, and community workers able to speak Somali, Arabic, and Chinese.

For their storytelling piece, they wanted an illustration that showcased their 'Ways of Working', a methodology within their strategy that is informed by their approach to working with women and their children - demonstrated and delivered by their Welcome and Inclusion Team who work at their Drop-In Centre. All scenes are illustrated directly from their Drop-In Centre, showing one of the many support methods and how to show a specific 'way of working'.

The top left represents 'Listening' - *'We use active listening to increase our rapport and understanding with women, to gain their trust and show that we understand what they are sharing. We are realistic with praise and hope. We give acceptance and validation. We are conscious of the dangers of dismissing negative emotions or responding to distress with false reassurances. We welcome and encourage feedback as it helps us to improve the Drop-in.'*

During the clinic, women sat together talking, laughing or in their 1-2-1 language support session. Engrossed in conversations, surrounded by the hustle and bustle it was clear each conversation was full of care and awareness of the other person - I felt this simply depicted Listening.

Top right represents 'Being Aware of Unconscious Bias' - *'We all have unconscious bias, pre conceived ideas and prejudice, so we work together to build awareness and understanding. We recognise that women are experts in their own culture. We ask women to guide and teach us. We ask women to be mindful about physical contact; we take our lead from women, asking what is appropriate for them in terms of touch.'*

I showed this through a scene with children learning and playing together during the creche. The centre brings together children from different backgrounds and the building blocks represent unconscious bias; just as the team needs to be aware of unconscious bias, and continually be aware, so do we need to help our children be aware as they grow. We develop biases as we get older, children are a perfect metaphor for a time before bias. The funny, energetic children running around the centre were infectious; laughing and playing with volunteers as well as their mothers, it felt like a beautiful scene where everyone was welcome. Having one scene with the children also felt important as this hub does a lot to support mothers, for those working and volunteering it's imperative to challenge unconscious bias in their work.

The central image reflects 'Improving Integration' - *'Volunteers and staff mingle with members. We run groups - art, and English classes - where we help women get to know each other. We have cross-cultural events for members, volunteers and staff so women*

can share their food, culture and community and meet women they don't know.'

Watching the women cook throughout the session and share food with all the women at the centre felt like a perfect encapsulation of this way of working. A key element of what the hub does is bring people together and invite them to get to know each other; they hold cross cultural events for members, volunteers and staff so women can share their food, culture and community. I felt the feast scene perfectly encapsulated this.

The bottom left refers to 'Being non-judgmental' - *'This is a way of showing acceptance, tolerance and empathy towards women. We are mindful and careful of comments we make to women individually or in a group setting that could trigger trauma or be culturally insensitive, sexist, ableist or racist.'*

I illustrated a scene from one of the workshops led by the volunteers and local groups on support for pregnancy. The women were laughing and supporting each other while some were with their children whilst gaining support from the volunteers - this scene brought people together in an open, safe space for the women to learn.

Finally, the bottom right refers to 'Community Languages' - *'Through our Community Workers, we offer a range of community languages. We want to ensure that groups of women speaking one or two languages do not dominate the Drop-in; we make an effort to ensure that everyone is included.'*

Multiple tutors were available to support the team, one of the busiest areas was the language support table which offered a mix of textbooks, worksheets and 1-2-1 support for the women.

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