

Social Farming with Refugees

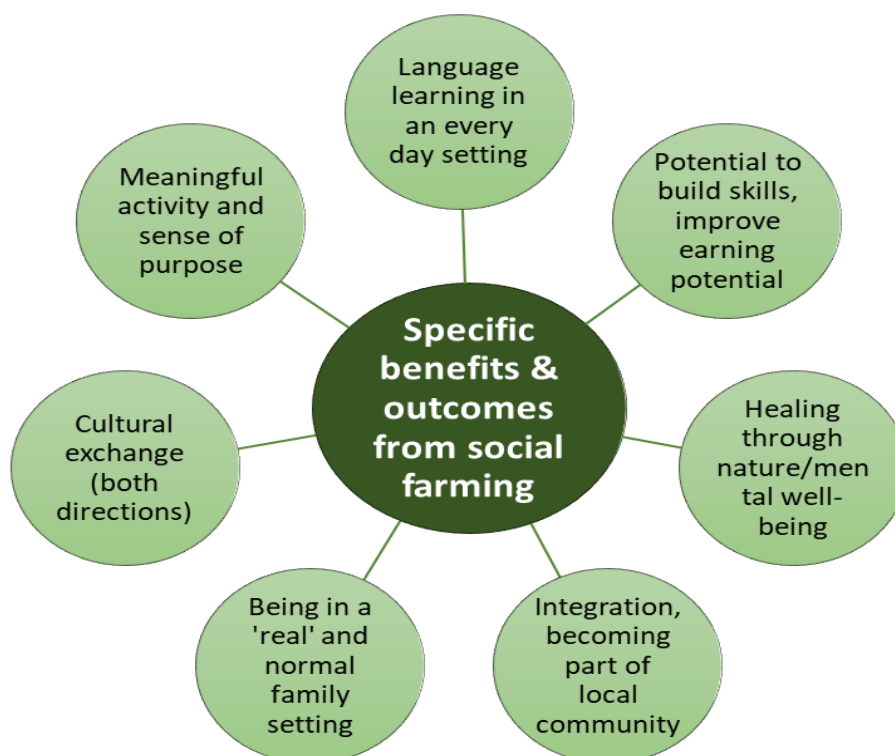


Background information and understanding

Refugees are **people who have fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country**. They often have had to flee with little more than the clothes on their back, leaving behind homes, possessions, jobs and loved ones. They will usually have no knowledge when or if they will ever return to their old life. Mid-2022 figures from the UNHCR estimate that there are **103 million displaced persons**: of these **32.5 million are refugees**. The numbers of displaced persons in the world is growing all the time, with displacement due to ecological disasters and climate change now also a growing phenomenon. Although we mainly use the term 'refugee' in this Guide, most of it is applicable to displaced persons too who might not necessarily have refugee status.

Refugees are ordinary people of every type of ethnic, cultural or religious background. They also have very varied educational and social backgrounds and can be at any stage of life, from early childhood right up to old age and everything in between. This means that this target group is **very diverse and really represents a cross-section of society** such as can be found anywhere. So of course there will be no ONE set of activities or way of doing things that will work for everyone or meet everyone's needs. As always, everyone must be treated as an individual first and foremost but taking into account the particular kind of challenges people will have gone through and continue to have to manage. But equally, this is a group with an enormous amount to offer.

Social farming has the potential to offer a range of quite **specific benefits and outcomes** to people seeking to build or re-build their lives in a new country and community. Social farmers who are working with this group should be actively seeking to support people in achieving many of the outcomes listed below:



Key things to focus on....

The core offering is the same as with any target group, but with a particular focus on supporting people in rebuilding their lives in a new setting and in dealing with the specific challenges they face.

Paving the way to paid work

Many participants from this group will be very anxious to get paid work. You can support them on that journey in a number of ways, including:

- ◆ Helping people to build knowledge and skills in general farm work, horticulture, machinery work etc. which can be directly leveraged into paid work locally.
- ◆ Building their confidence and relevant language and social skills so they feel more ready to enter the local employment market generally either in their 'old' job or otherwise.
- ◆ Getting people (back) in to good working habits and routines if they have not been working for a while.
- ◆ Sharing your knowledge of the local economy and of how things are structured and organised. You may be able to use your own local connections and knowledge to progress people into further training, employment or self-employment. Perhaps you learn (from eating!) that someone is an excellent cook; maybe they could sell some of their products at the local farmers' market?
- ◆ In some cases, there may be potential for people to go on to work and earn on your farm, either in supported employment or otherwise.

*"The farm provides an opportunity to learn English in a very natural setting, pick up words from seeing things, pointing to things....For learning language, it's so much easier to be able to see and smell it in terms of learning."**

Integration into the community

With participant's agreement, it can be good to introduce them to family, friends and neighbours, to get out and about in the local community to shops, cafes etc. and to use your own community knowledge to suggest—and in some cases introduce people— to activities and sources of support (or fun!)

Healing and refuge

The focus should be on activities which involve really connecting with plants and animals, being out in the fresh air and in contact with the earth and having the opportunity to feel tired in a good way. Operating in this calm and low-stress way can give people a chance to rest their minds, to recuperate and might even help them to recover from trauma.

Building language skills

Being on the farm should give people the opportunity to pick up words & phrases and to ask questions in a very unpressurised and informal way. They should feel comfortable to practice and to make mistakes and supported to learn the vocabulary they need. Patience and good humour help and it is also good to make the effort to learn some key expressions in the language of the people you are working with.

Cultural exchange & learning

Mutual exchange of traditions, religious beliefs and food is an interesting and enriching part of social farming for both sides. You can also support participants to gain everyday insight into and knowledge of ordinary family and home life, cultural norms, values etc. in a real life setting rather than in a classroom or from a book. For example, you can explain why an upcoming festival is important and how it is celebrated. Or where people do things very differently in a way which might disadvantage them in wider society, you can gently point it out or suggest a different way of doing things because you have built a relationship.



Key things to be aware of....

Internal Challenges

Working with refugees means working with people who have usually have been through a lot. Social farmers cannot 'solve' this but what they can do is deal with people with sensitivity and kindness and provide a place of warmth, safety and acceptance.

You will also be working with people of various cultures, languages, & backgrounds. It is important not to stereotype a person based on their country of origin but to remain open-minded, curious and tolerant of difference. This will not always be a comfortable place to be but it is of course OK not to feel comfortable all the time.

Grief and survivors guilt

The person will often be dealing with very complex and difficult feelings. They will have experienced the impact of flight - in some cases having spent time in refugee camps also - and the loss of many aspects of their old life and any sense of normality. They may have to deal with grief and the guilt of the survivor. They might fear for the welfare of their friends or family or in some cases, may fear their own deportation.

Different Cultural Backgrounds

Many refugees will naturally want to stay connected to their culture of origin, which they did not leave voluntarily. This means being able to speak their mother language, eat familiar food and connect with other people from their own country or culture. They may find it difficult to integrate into another culture or struggle with their sense of identity: where do they now belong?

Gender roles

Gender roles and norms may be different to what you are used to and might also depend on the background of the family, stage of life, etc. So in some cases, female participants might only be comfortable working with a female social farmer: some males might equally be *uncomfortable* taking instructions from a woman. Females are often less available to take part in something like social farming because of their role in the home or in caring for children.

The experience of war, flight and life before being a refugee varies between genders. Women might have faced additional victimisation, exploitation and sexual abuse whereas men might have been involved in combat.

Bureaucratic and legal obstacles

Unclear residence status can be a barrier to integration and full participation in social farming. Participants may also experience difficulties in getting a work permit, which can be frustrating for them and means you possibly cannot offer them paid work even if it would be of benefit to both parties. There may also be difficulties with securing funding for social farming for this group which can be frustrating and limiting.

Racism and prejudice

Racism and prejudice in the wider community may be something which refugees will have to deal with. It is important that you take a clear position on supporting refugees and welcoming them onto your farm and into your community. This can help to overcome assumptions and prejudices amongst others.

Transport

Without a car or public transport participants may have difficulty getting to the farm. Farmers might be able to fill this gap themselves.

External Challenges

These are the external issues which you and the participants may not have any control over or role in managing. But sometimes you will!

Trauma and PTSD....

***Please Note:** There may be particular issues with trauma with this target group but the information here may also be useful for you in working with other groups. This includes people with mental health challenges, people accessing homelessness and addiction services and other individuals who have experienced trauma.*

The refugee experience and trauma

Not every refugee will be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder but many are emotionally challenged by their experience. Very often, refugees will have experienced violence, loss of loved ones and other traumatic events during war, disaster or flight. **Trauma-informed care** shifts the focus from “What’s wrong with you?” to “What happened to you?” and acknowledges that we need to have a complete picture of a person’s life situation - past and present - in order to provide effective services with a healing orientation.

Can social farming play a role in overcoming trauma?

Social farming can certainly have a role to play in decreasing the mental health effects a traumatic experience might have. A person can stabilise as they become more resilient which can happen based on factors such as a positive attitude, strong self-esteem, a meaningful everyday life, the possibility of paid work, religiosity, regular school or work, a structured day and week, social contacts, personal responsibility, education and success at school. **Social farming can support people in achieving many of these protective factors.**

But this is a very complex area and in many cases, the reaction to the traumatic experience only occurs years later. This means that a person that seems to be stable might suddenly struggle. A social farmer is not a trained therapist, needs to know their limits but should be able to recognize indications of traumatization so that they can **alert or consult specialist services if necessary**. It is important to be aware of the **key features and symptoms** of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Post-traumatic stress disorder

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an acute, chronic, or delayed reaction to. It is an anxiety disorder that develops in reaction to traumatic events, including physical injury or severe mental or emotional distress, such as military combat, violent assault, natural disaster, or other life-threatening events.

PTSD starts at different times for different people. Signs of PTSD may start soon after a frightening event and then continue. Other people develop new or more severe signs months or even years later. Symptoms which you can look out for in the people you support include:

- ⇒ finding it hard to concentrate or to settle at tasks
- ⇒ extreme alertness or so-called ‘hypervigilance’
- ⇒ being jumpy or easily startled
- ⇒ seeming disconnected from others
- ⇒ being easily upset or angry
- ⇒ reporting that they are having flashbacks, or feeling like the event is happening again
- ⇒ reporting that they are having trouble sleeping or nightmares
- ⇒ possible physical symptoms such as excessive sweating, trembling or nausea
- ⇒ continually expressing worry and guilt