

The Shpresa Programme: Impact and Successes

'The Shpresa Programme helps people to help themselves'

'C', a woman in her early 20s, Volunteers focus group

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Executive Summary

This review analyses how the Shpresa Programme, working with Albanian-speaking refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in East London, affects the lives of its service users.

In order to understand the impact of the Shpresa Programme a survey of service users was carried out alongside a series of focus groups.

Entry Points

There were four typical entry points for service users engaging with the Shpresa Programme.

- Adults seeking information and advice and remaining to access the range of services on offer.
- A smaller number of adults joined the organisation as volunteers
- Young people accessing activities
- Adults accessing services as either users of volunteers and using opportunities within Shpresa to gain experience and a range of new life choices

Once the users had become involved via one of these routes, they then tended to explore the other opportunities available to them and their families through the Shpresa Programme. However, it was observed that men were less likely than woman and young people to engage in most of the services offered.

Questionnaire Results

In every topic area, the questionnaires revealed a dramatic shift in confidence, capability or behaviour amongst service users. In the following areas service users, on the whole, reported improvements in their confidence levels before and after contact with Shpresa. In the majority of cases improvements were seen as due, at least in part, to Shpresa.

- Language confidence
- Employment and training
- Integration
- Access to public services
- Understanding of the Education System
- Children's Understanding of Albanian Culture
- Activity Levels

Factors in Shpresa's Success

The positive effects reported by our respondents appear to be based on several factors working together. Staff and volunteers seem to share a common set of values and beliefs. As a result of this organisational ethos, they and the women and young people participating on a regular basis tend to consciously 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.

SHPRESA PROGRAMME REVIEW 2009

HOW THE PROGRAMME AFFECTS THE LIVES OF USERS

1. Aim of Review

This review aims to clarify what the effects of the Shpresa Programme are on those who participate in, and volunteer for the charity, and the impact and on their families and life circumstances. We explore how these effects occur and to suggest ways in which the capabilities embedded in the organisation and its members can be used to give even greater benefits to the Albanian community and the wider society in which it exists.

2. Methods

The review is based on two processes:

- Discussion groups – five discussion groups containing between 10 and 15 people in each group were led by two discussion leaders and recorded by a rapporteur. Each discussion lasted approximately one and a half hours and all groups discussed the same questions (Appendix 1 & 2). Three groups contained only adults and two only young people.
- Questionnaire applied to a sample of Shpresa users – to which 72 replied. The questionnaire is attached as Appendix 2 and the responses are analysed in Appendix 4.

3. Involvement Process and its Impact

The Albanian community is a relatively new immigrant group. All the adults we met through the discussion groups and who responded to the questionnaire had arrived in UK with their families less than 15 years ago, and most came speaking very little or no English and with few resources, into a state of isolation and often considerable distress. The young people we met included those who had arrived with their parents at a young age and others who had been born in the UK since the family's arrival.

In this sample of service users and volunteers, their experiences with the Shpresa Programme had been universally positive. Over and over again we heard of the dramatic changes that people had managed to make in their lives and always, at the heart of these changes, they were able to describe a long-term, incremental process that enabled them to move away from passivity, depression, confusion and isolation to purposefulness, confidence and community involvement. The responses to the questionnaire confirmed this strongly positive picture.

The entry points that our respondents described fell into four broad groups, within which experiences were remarkably similar:

1. Adults Seeking Information & Advice

Many of the adult service users who remain involved with Shpresa had originally contacted the organisation for help with a specific problem. In many cases the help they received involved a combination of advice, translation services and encouragement to take action. These adults frequently went on to become more involved in other activities and introduced their family to the services and activities offered.

'M', a female service user in her late 20s with two children, explained that she had heard of the Shpresa Programme from her friends. She said they told her 'You can go to the Shpresa Programme for what you need, for everything...[they have] many activities for kids, for us'. She joined the organisation and took part in an English course. She later participated in a range of other courses, including childcare. Her children attend the dancing and language sessions, and other activities open to them. She told the group that it was hard at first to persuade her husband to let her go to Shpresa, but that it is alright now. She has since become a volunteer and continues to attend the Womens' Project sessions. She said:

'I [found] new friends...a welcoming and warm environment'

A female service user in her early 30s told us about her involvement in Shpresa – which had been for the past four years. As a refused asylum seekers she was seen as an 'illegal' immigrant and was therefore without an income. She said that Shpresa had referred her to places where she could get food, and clothes for her children. They also supported her new asylum claim and subsequent Definite Leave to Remain status.

*'I went to them for every problem'
(story shared via translator)*

2. Adults Joining as Volunteers

A smaller number of adults came to Shpresa as volunteers, normally initially as interpreters and have remained involved with the wider range of activities.

'G', a man in his early 30s, told us about his involvement in Shpresa since 2004. He initially joined as a volunteer taking part in interpreting, translation and advocacy services. He is now a member of the Board of Trustees and values the experience that involvement with Shpresa has given him.

'Working with Shpresa was one of the best experiences in my life'

A man in his 40s explained that he had joined Shpresa in 2005 as a volunteer for a year. He had previously graduated with a qualification in housing studies and benefited from working with Shpresa by gaining advocacy experience around housing, which helped him to get employment. He is still involved with the organisation on the Board of Trustees.

3. Young People Attracted by Activities

Young people often become involved with Shpresa after hearing about the activities such as dancing or kick-boxing from their parents or friends or through the Schools Project. Some, after being initially tentative and doubtful, found they enjoyed the activities on offer and had found a circle of friends.

One teenage male explained that he got involved with Shpresa because his friend had. They now both take part in kickboxing, football and traditional Albanian dancing. He said that the dancing gave him more confidence than he had had previously.

'J', a fifteen year old girl told the group about becoming involved in the organisation via her mother. She said before joining she was not doing anything productive with her time. Once she joined Shpresa and took part in their Young People's Project she made friends and understood more about her background. She said she was better able to understand her family now, as she knows about their culture.

4. Adults Using Shpresa to Expand their Opportunities

A number of adults who had come to the Shpresa Programme as a user of services, had since become volunteers and used the experience and training gained to access further training and employment. This progress seemed to allow some service users, particularly women, to access opportunities they did not think would otherwise have been open to them.

One woman in her early 40s told us about how involvement with Shpresa had given her the experience and confidence to get employment in the voluntary sector. She initially joined as a service user, then later became a Board Member and Treasurer. She took part in a great deal of training via the Shpresa Programme and became a volunteer helping with financial aspects of the organisation. She now has two part time jobs as finance workers for two voluntary organisations. Her children have been, or continue to be, involved in Shpresa's activities for young people and she highly values the chance for them to learn Albanian so that they can communicate with their grandparents.

'It was a great experience. I got back more than my contribution'

One woman said she joined the Shpresa Programme as part of the Volunteering Project where she did interpreting and translation for Albanian-speaking women accessing

mental health services. This experience inspired her to study psychology. She now has a degree in psychology and is planning further post-graduate study.

Once the users had been introduced through one of these routes, they then tended to explore the other opportunities available to them and their families through the Shpresa Programme and often to actively pursue activities on a regular basis that they felt would give them personal benefits – as the stories above show. The result of this growing level of involvement tended to be described in very similar ways by almost all of those we interviewed, although obviously not all respondents joined at the same point in the process.

Figure 1.

INVO

This story in one form or another was told repeatedly both by women and by young people. The questionnaire responses bear this out. Of the 72 people who responded to the questionnaire over 80% were female. The responses suggest that people tend to be involved over the long term (88% had been involved for more than three years), to have a regular involvement (82% attend at least once a week) and to be involved as a family (56% had other family members attending of which 57% involved at least three members). The responses also show that distance does not put people off (45% lived at least one hour away from Shpresa's main offices – although many of the service users are able to access satellite services that are more local to them). The two features of Shpresa that respondents valued most highly were the advice and information services and the Shpresa staff. The advice and information services tend to provide a way into the organisation for a great many people who then go on to be committed members; and the staff then have developed a way of interacting with those members that creates a pathway of increasing involvement and confidence that far transcends the original needs and expectations of the users.

The implications are highly significant. Because of the process that is at the heart of the Shpresa Programme, those who move on from simply seeking advice to becoming more regularly involved gain a set of sustainable benefits that are life changing for them. It is not merely that they adjust to life in the new UK setting, but that their aspirations, confidence, capability and achievements move quite dramatically to even beyond the levels they might have achieved if they had remained in their original Albanian setting.

It is important to point out that the Shpresa Programme, whilst it was set up to meet the needs of men, women and young people, has nevertheless become associated particularly with women and their families. Only five adult males were involved in the discussion groups although the young people's discussions groups were evenly balanced. Amongst the respondents to the questionnaire, over 80% were female.

The involvement of adult, especially older, men has therefore been somewhat different from the above model and as a result the impact on their lives has almost certainly been less. Whilst adult men have used the advice and translation services almost as much as women, they have tended to become involved in other activities mainly only when there is 'Men's Work' to be done (such as decorating or maintenance) or when there are bigger community events and performances. This 'personal development' process described above, therefore tends to have been seen as being aimed at women.

4. Specific Changes in Confidence, Capability and Behaviour - Questionnaire Findings

The questionnaire asked respondents to rate a whole range of important factors for living satisfactorily in the UK, asking respondents to rate how confident, able or knowledgeable they had been before involvement with Shpresa and how confident, able or knowledgeable they are now. We also asked them to assess how much of this was due to involvement with Shpresa.

In every case there was a dramatic shift in confidence, capability or behaviour. This included:

- Language confidence – from a position where 85% were 'unconfident' or 'very unconfident' to one where 93% of respondents had improved their skills and confidence in English. Of these all but 3% put most of the change down to Shpresa. English language confidence was much the same between men and women prior to involvement with Shpresa, but 68% of women now describe themselves as 'confident' compared with only 27% of men. We can see from what we were told in the discussion groups that, because men do not get much involved with Shpresa beyond using the advice and information services, they have far less opportunity to build language skills. The social activities that they do pursue, e.g. going to Albanian bars and clubs, do not include these developmental activities.
- Employment and training – from a position where 86% of respondents said their employment and training situation was 'very unsatisfactory' before being involved with Shpresa, now 82% said that their situation was 'quite satisfactory' or 'totally satisfactory'. Of the 94% who said their employment and training satisfaction had changed, only 4% did not attribute any of this change to the Shpresa Programme.

- Integration - prior to engagement with Shpresa, 62% said they 'never' socialised with non-Albanian speakers and 36% said they 'occasionally' did. After involvement with the Shpresa Programme, 39% reported that they socialised 'very often' with non-Albanian speakers. The number of people who said they had 'never' socialised with non-Albanian speakers, but now did so 'very often' counted for 22% of those answering the question. Of this group, all of them said this change was either due 'a lot' or 'all' to their involvement with Shpresa (27% and 72% respectively).
- Access to public services – when asked about their confidence in accessing public services, such as doctors, schools and external training opportunities, 84% of service users said that before they contacted the Shpresa Programme there were not generally confident in accessing such services (with 52% 'very unconfident' and 32% 'unconfident'). After coming into contact with Shpresa, all respondents were now either 'confident' or 'very confident'. Sixty-nine per cent put this entirely down to their contact with Shpresa. Some people commented, however, that they still needed help from Shpresa. This raises the possibility that service users are confident that they will be able to access a range of public services, but that a significant number of service users still rely on being able to do this via Shpresa.
- Understanding of the Education System – Of the 72 questionnaire respondents, 47 people had children of school age. Shpresa has worked with parents both in Women's Support Groups and specific sessions within partnership schools to help Albanian-speaking parents to understand the education system in the UK and how to enable children of school age get the most from their education. Asked about their confidence in relation to their children's education, 90% were unconfident or very unconfident prior to this activity. After involvement with Shpresa 96% said that they were 'confident' or 'very confident' and 100% of them attributed the change, at least in part, to the Shpresa Programme.
- Children's Understanding of Albanian Culture – Ninety-three per cent of parents said that their children were 'unconfident' or 'very unconfident' about Albanian culture prior to being involved in Shpresa's activities. Of the 94% of parents who said their child's confidence had changed, 39% said 'a lot' of the change was due to Shpresa, and 58% said 'all' of the change was due to Shpresa. In the focus groups with young people, many of them reported that this had not only increased their general level of confidence by helping to clarify their identity, but that it had also brought the two other important benefits. They had gained a far greater understanding of their parents and grandparents and now felt better able to communicate with them. They had also gained confidence in their identity with regard to their English peers, who found it easier to understand them because they could explain their backgrounds in a more coherent way.
- Activity Levels – When respondents were asked to rate how much more active their children were before and after their involvement with Shpresa's activities, 32% said their children had previously been 'very inactive', but were now 'very active', with 87% of this group saying that the change had 'all' been because of Shpresa. Overall, 94% of parents and guardians reported an increase in their child's level of activity after they had become involved with Shpresa.

5. Factors in Shpresa's Success

The positive effects reported by our respondents appear to be based on several factors working together. Some of Shpresa's successful ways of working may have originally emerged quite inadvertently and unconsciously. Now, however, staff and volunteers have become much more conscious of a common set of values and behaviours. As a result they and the women and young people participating on a regular basis tend to consciously 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. In the focus groups, service users often referred to Shpresa, its staff and users, as 'family':

'I feel very good with the Shpresa Programme, for me it is my family'
'E', woman in the Service Users focus group

'I was accepted as part of a family'
'G', man in the Volunteers/Ex-Service Users – Adults focus group

'We are far from home, and do not have much family. When I go to Shpresa I feel I am with my family. I calm down and can cope better with my children'
'W', women in the Volunteers focus group

'We feel friends, [the staff] are not just 'staff''
'K', woman in the Service Users focus group

'The staff are friends, [I] enjoy every minute with them'
'L', woman in the Volunteers focus group

'Friendship here is very important'
'M', woman in the Service Users focus group

'[After joining Shpresa as service user and volunteer] They completely changed my life...I was happy as I made friends. Shpresa is my point of reference'
'D', young woman in the Volunteers/Ex-Service Users focus group

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. Our respondents often described a strong sense of confusion and isolation which had been eliminated by their newfound identity.

When I was younger I did feel proud to be Albanian, but I wanted to fit in with what was going on...Shpresa gives you pride in Albania and you need that to integrate
(Paraphrased)

'Y', woman in early 20s, Volunteers focus group

One man felt that Shpresa offered children the chance to experience their culture even when families were unable to go home:

If you go back home it raises a different perspective for children. If families can't afford to go, the Shpresa Programme can replicate the experience (paraphrased)

'N', man in his 40s, Ex-Service Users/Volunteers focus group

The young people were particularly proud of their cultural heritage. When asked, all the participants in the Children and Young Peoples' focus groups said they would want their own children to know their language and history.

I was a bit shy to say I was Albanian, but I came here and got confidence and now I'm proud to say I'm Albanian'

'T', 9 year old girl in the Children & Young People's focus group

I benefited a lot, I got the experience and friends I needed...I didn't have any Albanian friends before, I lost my culture. I know more who I am now'

'J', 15 year old girl, Children & Young People's focus group.

[In response to 'Would you still come here if your parents didn't make you?'] 'Yes, as I want to learn more about my culture, and show it to others'

'H', 10 year old girl in the Children & Young People's focus group

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. This includes:

- Acting as though every problem can be solved.
- Knowing enough about a vast range of subjects to be able to be useful to others, but also admitting the limits of their knowledge and finding experts who do know.
- Not compartmentalising problems, but seeing those they help as people in the round.
- Stressing self-help and encouraging active experimentation and personal development.
- Encouraging honest reflection and openness in facing difficulties.

The effect of stressing the skills of problem solving is that participants can transfer this approach to all other problems they face.

When talking to the Service Users focus group the facilitator asked about the seemingly wide range of knowledge held by the staff of the Shpresa Programme and those present tended to agree. One said:

I agree, people here [Shpresa] have a wide range of knowledge, especially in referrals

(Via translator, paraphrased)
'P', woman in early 30s, Service Users focus group

'[Shpresa] put me through many, many training...they brought my confidence back. If [the staff] can't help, they find someone else to help'
'L', woman in the Volunteers focus group

As these women reveal, Shpresa is excellent at making use of referrals to other organisations if they cannot solve problem themselves. Not only are referrals made, but the service user is supported by Shpresa throughout the period of need. One service user explained the process as she had experienced it.

I asked with help to find a solicitor as it is hard to cope with two children illegally. Shpresa helped me to make an appointment and to collect evidence. I was supported by NASS in [name of town] for eight months, then I got status. At every step Shpresa helped with forms and correspondence.

(Via translator, paraphrased)
'P', woman in early 30s, Service Users focus group

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.

However, as Shpresa's Women's Development Worker was keen to point out there have been attempts to attract male service users to a greater extent – including a Men's Project along the same lines as the highly successful Women's Group, but at more appropriate times and more suitable venues. However this was not successful. The facilitators asked the service users why this might be:

Some of them work, it is not that they don't want to be involved
(Paraphrased)

'I', woman in her late 20s, Service Users focus group

Men go out a lot, they meet in pubs, Albanian cafes and share their culture and memories. So they do have opportunities [to maintain their Albanian culture]
(via translator, paraphrased)

'R', man in early 60s, Service Users focus group

Older men aged thirty to sixty, they have a mentality (Paraphrased)

'G', man in the Volunteers/Ex-Service Users – Adults focus group

They are expected to earn and provide for the family here and at home. Also [in our culture] men are dominating (Paraphrased)

'Z', woman in the Volunteers/Ex-Service Users – Adults focus group

As outlined above, it was noted than men *do* use Shpresa services as and when it is needed, or that they benefit without direct involvement:

Men were involved in the Talent show, but women are the ones who take part in the projects. Men are getting the benefits of Shpresa from their wives and children
(Paraphrased) 'O', woman in the Volunteers focus group

One man in his early 60s explained that he had used Shpresa's translation and interpretation services in order to understand some official letters he had received. He appreciated the fact that he could come at any time, on any day and be helped by the staff. He said:

I have been coming since Shpresa was in Manor Park. Since then I feel at home, it is like my family (via translator, paraphrased)
'R', man 60s, Service Users focus group

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.

I have benefited from activities and training courses. At home, being 25, I would not be able to access this
(Via translator, paraphrased)
'M', woman in the Service Users focus group

'Shpresa is like a stepping stone to improve your skills and see what is out there'
'Y', woman in early 20s, Volunteers focus group

They made me feel good for myself. Previously, I was isolated, waiting for a decision on my refugee status. [Once in contact with Shpresa] 'I felt useful working for other people. I got my self-esteem and have gone on to higher education'
'B', woman in the Volunteers focus group

I came to Shpresa in 2002, and helped with the Albanian classes, I have done training, and worked in the office. 'I really found my confidence. I had been inspired by them, especially [the Project Director]
'AA', woman in the Volunteers focus group

'The people at Shpresa serve as role models for us – my parents...still live in the past. People like [the Project Director] are an inspiration. We can be proud of being English and Albanian'
'Y', woman in early 20s, Volunteers focus group

Me and my friends had hairdressing qualifications. [The Project Director] encouraged us to manage a shop. We have been doing it for three years now, we are doing well over there (Paraphrased)
'BA', woman in the Volunteers focus group

This trend of aiming high is also very apparent in the young people who access Shpresa's services. In the focus group with Children and Young People, aged 7-20, there was a strong sense of ambition and having high personal expectations that appears to be linked to the experiences they have had with Shpresa and the interaction with the staff and older volunteers.

One teenage boy, 'F', told the facilitators about his involvement in presenting Shpresa's Talent Show. Because of this he had been prompted to approach his school to suggest staging a show about youth mentality – which he received permission for. He said:

I think Barking and Dagenham youth are into crime – they don't care about education, they get bored at home, get into alcohol and this leads to trouble you can't control. Before I was involved in Shpresa I used to be not a very good little boy...My parents sent me to Shpresa because I was getting into trouble at school. Now I've changed a lot, I've changed my friends. In school I don't have any problems (Paraphrased)
'F', teenage male, Children & Young People's focus group

This teenager was also involved in volunteering on Shpresa's Youth Programme. It seemed common for young people to become volunteers at a certain age after benefiting from services as younger children, whilst also still accessing relevant services – like the Young Persons Project for those over 13 years of age.

An adult in another focus group had a similar story to 'F', but was at a later stage of his life – in his early 20s. It was clear he felt that Shpresa had had a very good stabilising influence on his life:

When I was younger I came to activities. I used to be getting into trouble. I came to Shpresa because I didn't know much English, or what to do. I was depressed and the lack of English meant I didn't go to other services. I felt comfortable sharing problems with those who spoke the same language and cultural background. I did dance, drama, football for a year or two. I did a football training course and got a part-time job through this. Then I took some time out for university. (Paraphrased) 'If Shpresa wasn't here, I don't know where I'd be today. I was little, I didn't have anyone one to tell me what to do'.

'Q', man in early 20s, Ex-Service Users/Volunteers – Adults focus group

When the facilitators asked the young people about their hopes for the future, the young people had considerably high aims and expectations. As well as aspirations to be actors and footballers amongst the younger members of the focus group, those over 13 or 14 mostly mentioned professional careers such as architecture, law or medicine.

'[Being involved with Shpresa] is a very valuable experience. I hope to start my own business'

'X', 20 year old male, Children and Young Peoples' focus group

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 – for example visits to the House of Parliament. There was evidence that the Shpresa Programme

helps service users of all ages to understand and feel comfortable with British culture. In particular the young people spoken to appreciated the multicultural aspects of British culture:

'The Shpresa Programme helps you with English culture'
'F', teenage male, Children & Young People's focus group

I learned new things here [at Shpresa] about England (Paraphrased)
'DA', woman in the Ex-Service Users/Volunteers – Adults focus group

'Me and my friends don't differentiate by race or nation. Back home I would have been friends with one kind of people'
'C', woman in her early 20s, Volunteers focus group

Shpresa also provides a platform for some service users to engage with other community groups and mainstream organisations:

Shpresa have enabled us to integrate with other communities. Through them we have met MPs and local councillors via the introduction Shpresa gave us to TELCO – the East London Citizens' Organisation. They have a 'Strangers into Citizens' campaign which involves people of all nationalities (paraphrased)
'C', woman in her early 20s, Volunteer focus group

We've been to RAMP and Sure Start, working with them and the different people who benefit from them (Paraphrased)
'M', woman in the Service Users' focus group

We keep our traditions, but Shpresa helps us to integrate (Paraphrased)
'CA', woman in 30s, Volunteer focus group

These six factors act as the pillars supporting all Shpresa work and therefore create a consistent and coherent philosophy for the organisation. Nobody reported any different trends or inconsistencies. This organisational climate brings about a number of important results.

- Firstly, parents feel far more confidence in freely allowing their children to participate, because they have trust in the safe and yet stretching environment. Similarly, husbands who have traditionally expected their wives to remain at home, have trust in the organisation and generally see it as being a “safe” environment.
- A second result is that the Shpresa Programme has created a tightly-knit community amongst the women and young people with a strong sense of mutual obligation for the betterment and wellbeing of one another. What was described to us amounted to a habit of group support and expectation based on belief in one another and a kind of collective ambition for the whole community of Albanians in London.
- A third outcome is that Shpresa appears to be a highly well thought of organisation of its type, which could act to help other organisations working with

migrant communities to develop. From the experience of the facilitators, this is certainly the case, and the service users are also aware of Shpresa's success:

Shpresa can show other organisations how to help. Shpresa is a role model in East London (Paraphrased)

'O', woman in the Volunteers focus group

Everywhere we go, organisations, MPs, etc know of the Shpresa Programme and of their hard work (Paraphrased)

'C', woman in her early 20s, Volunteer focus group, involved in campaigning

These 6 factors act as the pillars supporting all Shpresa work and therefore create a consistent and coherent philosophy for the organisation. This organisational climate brings about a number of important results. Firstly, parents feel far more confidence in freely allowing their children to participate, because they have trust in the safe, yet challenging, environment. Similarly, husbands who have traditionally expected their wives to remain at home, have trust in the organisation and generally see it as being a 'safe' environment.

6. What About the Men?

As stated above, men are involved with the organisation to some extent – mainly as users of advisory and translation services or to undertake specific short-term activities where they feel that male involvement would be appropriate. Attempts at more regular programmes for men have not been successful and there appears to be an organisational dilemma about whether to encourage greater or closer involvement. In favour of greater involvement is the argument that it would result in a more comprehensive Albanian community around Shpresa. It would also allow men to acquire some of the confidence and developmental benefits that their wives have gained.

The arguments against greater male involvement include traditional ideas about men being almost exclusively responsible for the economic wellbeing of the family which leaves no time or energy for activities such as Shpresa. It has also been said that the image of Shpresa as a 'safe' organisation for women to join could be diminished by including more men on a regular basis.

It is clear from our discussions that many of the women have gained a large degree of liberation through their involvement with the Programme. Their role and behaviour at home has changed; they are able to shoulder much more demanding responsibilities for the family's interface with mainstream UK officialdom. But their expectations of their husbands have also changed and this has in some cases caused considerable tension in marriages. Some people told us about how they had managed to work through these difficulties and renegotiated their relationship to a more satisfactory balance. Others are still experiencing difficulties and some suggested that Shpresa should create a more systematic approach to helping families to address domestic conflict. Shpresa is indeed starting to address domestic violence in the Albanian-speaking community in a new project run in partnership with the Women's Therapy Centre. Women who have experienced domestic violence will be given support and opportunities to access therapy

and support, and an information campaign highlighting the issue will be launched in 2010.

It is hard not to conclude that most Albanian men will remain reluctant to join up fully to what the programme has to offer. It seems more likely that a new separate but linked organisation, started, led and defined by men would have a greater chance of success and would also allow Shpresa to remain as it is, dedicated mainly to the evolving needs of its women and young people.

7. How Does UK Society Benefit from Shpresa?

All that has been described so far suggests that users gain considerably from their involvement with the Shpresa Programme. But we believe that it is useful to try and clarify some of the strands of value to society generated through the funding investments that have so far been made in the Shpresa Programme by its many supporters.

The overwhelming impression to emerge from the many group discussions and the data collected via the questionnaire is that Shpresa has created in microcosm a healthy community, actively undertaking the responsible support of its members and encouraging individuals to take responsibility for themselves and others, to engage with the mainstream and to integrate into British society. We are therefore including some aspects of value of a more tentative and long term nature.

Firstly, the Shpresa Programme has played a very important part in ensuring that its members in East London have been able to settle down with a minimum of disruption at a faster pace than many other newly arrived ethnic groupings. Shpresa's intelligent approach to helping women and children with pathways through a very difficult time has led to women in this community challenging old stereotypes and beginning to take a fuller part in society than is typical for recently arrived immigrants.

Secondly, the strong emphasis on young people has created a group of confident, expressive, ambitious and hard-working youngsters who really understand the benefits of being part of and contributing actively to a community. The impact of this is strong enough for the young people to report frequently that their British counterparts often want to become involved. Several youngsters talked about their own transition from hanging about and getting into trouble, to finding a purpose, a friendship group and a new identity and now wanting to become a youth worker or something similar.

Thirdly, the Shpresa leaders have evolved a process with some very significant features (listed in Section 5). It is these features that lead to the impressive level of results. Together the features form the basis of a methodology which can be adapted and used by other new immigrant groups to assist the process of integration. The expertise now embedded in the organisation and its habits of welcoming incomers could allow other groupings to engage with the staff and volunteers of Shpresa Programme with a view to setting up equivalent programmes in other parts of our society. This could even perhaps include indigenous British in those parts of UK society that have become disengaged and disempowered.

Together these three strands demonstrate the importance of Shpresa’s activities. There are still many others who could benefit and funding will continue to be fully justified for many years yet.

APPENDIX ONE

Notes on the Discussion Groups

The focus groups were held with different groups of Albanian-speakers who use Shpresa’s services or who are in some way in contact with the Shpresa Programme. The following focus groups were held at Shpresa’s main offices:

	Focus Group With	Female	Male	Total
A	Service users – adults	9	2	11
B	Service users – children & young people	9	7	16
C	Volunteers	9	0	9
D	Ex-service users/volunteers – adults	5	3	8
E	Service users & volunteers – young adults	2	2	4
	Totals	34	14	48

Focus groups were led by two facilitators, with another research taking notes. Most of the sessions were held in English, though some translation was needed in group A. In the analysis of the focus groups, contributions made via a translator are noted.

Though the focus groups were held with specific groups of service users, volunteers or ex-service users, there was a degree of cross-over. Some current service users were becoming volunteers. Some adults who had come to Shpresa as volunteers had since been service users and later trustees. This overlap was not problematic in the data collection, however, as it represented the fluid nature of user engagement with the Shpresa Programme and demonstrated how people using the services are encouraged to take advantages of all services and opportunities that might benefit them.

Some people also attended focus groups that did not ‘fit’ their use of the service (e.g. two young people who are volunteers should have been in the group E, but were only able to be present in group D). Again this was unproblematic due to the fluidity of their use of the organisation and the chance in each session for individuals to explain their history of engagement with Shpresa.

APPENDIX TWO

Discussion Groups Agenda

The questions we identified for discussion in each of the 5 discussion session are:

Impact questions

- How were you feeling when you first came to Shpresa?
- What made you choose Shpresa? What other organisations are you aware of and how do they differ?
- How did you develop trust in this organisation?
- How has the organisation developed your confidence?
- What impact did Shpresa involvement have on your employability?
- (For those that have moved out of Shpresa) What made you stop being involved? Have you been involved with other organisations since?
- Has Shpresa been flexible enough to meet your needs as they evolved?
- How do you see yourself now – refugee? Asylum seeker? Part of an Albanian community?

Culture questions

- What would you say are the most important things that make Albanian culture different from UK culture?
- What are the particular aspects of culture that most concern/ concerned you?
- What have you done to manage the differences?
- What aspects of Albanian culture has Shpresa been most helpful with?
- Why do women participate more than men?
- What could Shpresa have done to give men more benefits?
- How are Albanian-origin young people different from their parents?
- What is the attitude of both adults and youngsters towards integration?

APPENDIX THREE

Notes on the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was written in English but carried out with service users by volunteer translators. In order to reach respondents, questionnaires were completed within Shpresa normal activity sessions, as well as during advice sessions and with people coming into the main offices of Shpresa informally. Seventy-two questionnaires were returned.

APPENDIX FOUR

Questionnaire to Service Users of Shpresa Programme

This questionnaire will ask you about your and your immediate family's contact with the Shpresa Programme and ask you to gauge the impact of their activities on your life.

The responses that you give are confidential. If you don't want to answer a question, just leave it blank.

1. About You

1.1 Are you male or female? *(Please tick)* Male Female

1.2 What is your age? *(Please tick)*

Under 18 19-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+

1.3 What is your immigration status? *(Please tick)*

Asylum seeker
Refugee
Indefinite leave to remain
Migrant
Undocumented migrant

1.4 How long have been in the UK for? *(Please tick)*

Less than 1 year
1 year

- 2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- More than 16 years If so how many _____

1.5 How long have you been in contact with the Shpresa Programme for? *(Please tick)*

- Less than 1 year
- 1 year
- 2 years
- 3-5 years
- More than 5 years

1.6 If you were to travel from your home to the Shpresa Programme's office in Canning Town, Newham, how long would it take you to get there? *(Please tick, an estimate of time taken is fine)*

- | | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Less than 15 minutes | <input type="checkbox"/> | Less than 30 minutes | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Less than 1 hour | <input type="checkbox"/> | One hour to an hour and a half | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| More than 2 hours | <input type="checkbox"/> | More than 3 hours | <input type="checkbox"/> |

1.6 Do you have any family members that Shpresa's services?
 No Yes If yes, please state how many _____

2. Your use of the Shpresa Programme

2.1 We are interested to hear about which of Shpresa's services you or your family members use. If you use a service please tick in the first column, if a member of your family use a service please tick in the second column *(please tick for all the services you or your family use)*. By family we mean your immediate family – husband/wife/partner and children.

	You	Family member
Women's Support Groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children's Project (traditional dance, activities, etc)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Albanian language school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Young people's project (young people aged 13-25)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advice and information from Shpresa Programme	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Volunteering and Mentoring Project	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cross-Over Accountancy Project	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cultural events	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2.2 How often do you go to events or services run by the Shpresa Programme?

- More than twice a week
- Once or twice a week
- Every week
- Around twice a month
- Once a month
- Every 2 or 3 months
- Every 6 months
- Yearly

As and when you want to/need to
Never

2.3 Is there a session that you regularly attend?

No Yes If yes, please state which service(s) _____

3. How the Shpresa Programme has affected you

We are interested in hearing about how you feel that the Shpresa Programme has affected your life.

3.1. a) How would you rate your confidence in using the English language before you got in contact with the Shpresa Programme? *(Please tick one box)*

Very unconfident
Unconfident
Confident
Very confident

b) How would you rate your language skills at present? *(Please tick one box)*

Very unconfident
Unconfident
Confident
Very confident

c) How much of this change (if any) in your language confidence is because of your contact with the Shpresa Programme? *(Please tick one box)*

None of the change is because of Shpresa
A little bit of the change is because of Shpresa
A lot of the change is because of Shpresa
All of the change is because of Shpresa

3.2. a) Before you came into contact with the Shpresa Programme how satisfied were you with your employment situation? *(Please tick one box)*

Completely unsatisfactory
Slightly unsatisfactory
Quite satisfactory
Completely satisfactory

b) How would you rate your employment satisfaction at present? *(Please tick one box)*

Completely unsatisfactory
Slightly unsatisfactory
Quite satisfactory
Completely satisfactory

c) How much of this change (if any) in employment satisfaction is because of your contact with the Shpresa Programme? *(Please tick one box)*

- None of the change is because of Shpresa
- A little bit of the change is because of Shpresa
- A lot of the change is because of Shpresa
- All of the change is because of Shpresa

3.3. a) Before you came into contact with the Shpresa Programme did you ever socialise with people from the UK, or from other non-Albanian speaking communities? *(Please tick one box)*

- Never
- Occasionally
- Often
- Very often

b) At the present time do you ever socialise with people from the UK, or from other non-Albanian speaking communities? *(Please tick one box)*

- Never
- Occasionally
- Often
- Very often

c) How much of this change (if any) in socialising with people from other communities is because of your contact with the Shpresa Programme? *(Please tick one box)*

- None of the change is because of Shpresa
- A little bit of the change is because of Shpresa
- A lot of the change is because of Shpresa
- All of the change is because of Shpresa

3.4. a) Before you came into contact with the Shpresa Programme how confident were you in being able to access services – such as the doctors, schools and training opportunities? *(Please tick one box)*

- Very unconfident
- Unconfident
- Confident
- Very confident

b) How confident are you about being able to access a range of services now? *(Please tick one box)*

- Very unconfident
- Unconfident
- Confident

Very confident

c) How much of this change in your confidence in accessing services (if any) is because of your contact with the Shpresa Programme? *(Please tick one box)*

- None of the change is because of Shpresa
- A little bit of the change is because of Shpresa
- A lot of the change is because of Shpresa
- All of the change is because of Shpresa

3.5. a) Do you have children of school-age who use Shpresa's services?

- Yes (if yes, please answer the rest of this question)
- No (if no, please go to question 4)

b) Before you came into contact with the Shpresa Programme how confident were you in understanding the education system in the UK and helping your child to make the most of school? *(Please tick one box)*

- Very unconfident
- Unconfident
- Confident
- Very confident

c) How confident are you about understanding the system and helping your child to make the most of school now? *(Please tick one box)*

- Very unconfident
- Unconfident
- Confident
- Very confident

d) How much of this change in your confidence about schooling (if any) is because of your contact with the Shpresa Programme? *(Please tick one box)*

- None of the change is because of Shpresa
- A little bit of the change is because of Shpresa
- A lot of the change is because of Shpresa
- All of the change is because of Shpresa

4. Three most valued things about the Shpresa Programme

Please write below three things that you like and value **most** about the Shpresa Programme – the three things that have helped you (or your family) the most:

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

Thank you very much for taking part in this questionnaire. The Shpresa Programme highly value your input in helping to develop the future direction of services.

APPENDIX FIVE

Results of Questionnaire to Shpresa's Service Users

In order to develop an overview of services users' views about Shpresa, and an understanding of how the organisation has supported them a questionnaire was designed. The questionnaire asked about:

- Basic characteristics of the service user – gender, immigration status, age.
- Length of time in the UK, and length of time in contact with Shpresa
- How many family members of the respondent used Shpresa's services.
- Which services they and their family accessed.
- How they rated their confidence in a number of ways before and after engagement with Shpresa – for example confidence in accessing services.
- For those with children we asked about their understanding of the education system before and after contact with Shpresa.
- For those with children who take part in Shpresa activities, parents and guardians were asked to rate their child's confidence and activity levels before and after involvement with Shpresa.

The questionnaire was written in English but carried out with service users by volunteer translators. In order to reach respondents, questionnaires were completed within Shpresa normal activity sessions, as well as during advice sessions and with people coming into the main offices of Shpresa informally.

Before analysing the results of the questionnaire (in section 2, below), basic demographic information about the respondents will be discussed. The final question asked people to write three things they most valued about Shpresa – these will be reviewed in section 4.

1. Demographic Statistics about Respondents

In total 72 completed questionnaires were received. Of these respondents:

- 80% were female and 16% were male¹
- 56% of respondents had family members that also accessed services provided by the Shpresa Programme.
- 70% of service users said they regularly attended a specific service – for example the Women's Support Groups, or volunteering. 19% did not regularly attend a service, and the remaining 11% did not answer the question.

Figure 1.1: Age of Respondents

Age	19-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
%	4	32	47	8	0	3

¹ Not all percentages add up to 100% because some respondents did not answer all questions.

There was not a significant different between the ages of men and women, though the average age of male respondents was slightly higher with 27% men in both the 35-44 and 44-54 age categories and 53% of women were in the 35-44 category. There were two people, both male, above the age of 65 years. This low number means that those of pensionable cannot be analysed as a separate category.

Figure 1.2: Immigration Status of Respondents

Immigration Status	%
Asylum seeker	7
Refugee	5
Indefinite/Exceptional Leave	30
Migrant	1
Undocumented Migrant	4
British Citizen	68

For immigration status, respondents were asked to select one option from the list, however many people ticked two boxes – including their status and their being a citizen – for example Indefinite Leave to Remain *and* British Citizen. The results indicate the total percentage for each category – hence it is equal to more than 100%.

Figure 1.3: Length of Time in the UK

Years	%
Less than 1 year	0
1	0
2	0
3-5	4
6-10	61
11-15	33
More than 16	0

It is unsurprising than the majority of Shpresa’s service users have been in the UK for 6-10 years (61%), with another 33% saying that they have been in the UK for 11-15 years. This corresponds with Albanian Kosovans fleeing the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from the early 1990s, with a peak of refugees leaving in 1999.²

Figure 1.4: Length of Time in Contact with Shpresa

Years	%
Less than 1 year	7
1	1
2	13
3-5	37
More than 5	41

A large proportion of respondents said they had been involved with the Shpresa Programme for three to five years (37%), or for more than five years (41%). This reveals

² J. Van Selm (2000) *Kosovo’s Refugees in the European Union* (London, Pinter)

the extent to which service users remain connected to the organisation for a considerable amount of time after initial contact. This also demonstrates the way in which Shpresa is a community service, not just an access point for advice and information when needed. This is also shown in the number of people who have family members who used the services available at Shpresa (below in Figure 1.5) and in the high number of family members also using Shpresa's services (Figure 1.6).

Figure 1.5: How Often Use Shpresa's Services

Frequency	%
More than twice a week	20
Once or twice a week	24
Every week	38
Around twice a month	4
Once a month	5
Every 2 or 3 months	1
Every 6 months	1
Yearly	0
As and when need to	5

A total of 82% of service users access a service at Shpresa once a week or more. This also shows the way in which people are accessing the service as a regular part of their lives, and as a community, as opposed to a drop-in point for advice, although this option is also available.

Figure 1.6: Number of Family Members Also in Using Shpresa's Services

Family members	1	2	3	4	5	5-10
%	9	13	17	17	19	4

As stated above, 56% of respondents had family members that also used Shpresa's services. Of those, most had more than one family member in contact with Shpresa. The typical picture that emerged from the data is of family in which the mother attends a Women's Support Group, and her children attend the Supplementary School or activities for Children and/or Young People. Men were 20% less likely than women to say they regularly used a service at Shpresa. Men were most likely to access advice and information. For women, the most popular service was, unsurprisingly, the Women's Support Groups.

Interestingly, as raised in the focus groups, there was practically no difference between the percentage of men and women that accessed advice and information services – 75% of women and 73% of men said they used this service. Men and women were also displayed nearly equal involvement in the Volunteering and Mentoring Project – 32% of women and 36% of men.

Figure 1.7: Time Take to Travel from Home to Shpresa's Main Office

Time	%
Less than 15 minutes	5
Less than 30 minutes	11
Less than 1 hour	36
One hour to an hour and a half	33
More than 2 hours	8

More than 3 hours	4
-------------------	---

From the above figure 1.7 it appears that a considerable number of Shpresa’s service users take more than half an hour to get to the main offices. This is not necessarily problematic, as a large number of services are available in more than one location. Women’s Support Groups and the children and young people’s Albanian language and activities take place in a number of locations across East London and so are accessible to service users.

2. Users’ Experiences of Shpresa

The questionnaire asked respondents to think about how Shpresa had affected their confidence in a number of areas, or changed their behaviours – including access to services, employment/training and socialising. They were then asked to say how much of each change (if any) was due to their involvement with the Shpresa Programme. There is too much data to discuss fully the change in each category as well as how much of the change was deemed as due to Shpresa. Instead, the most popular categories, or those that are most illustrative will be discussed.

English Language

Users were asked to rate their confidence in using the English language before they got into contact with Shpresa. Of those responding to the question:

- 61% said they were ‘very unconfident’
- 24% said they were ‘unconfident’
- 15% said they were ‘confident’
- None rated their confidence is using English as ‘very confident’

The change in confidence in using the English language *after* the respondents had been in contact with Shpresa was considerable:

- Of those who rated themselves as ‘very unconfident’, 39% said they were ‘confident’ after being in contact with Shpresa. Of this group, 48% said the change in their language ability was ‘a lot’ due to Shpresa, and a further 46% said the change in their language ability was ‘all’ due to Shpresa.
- In total, only 7% of people (representing 5 individuals) said they had not become more confident in their use of the English language since their involvement with Shpresa.
- Of the 93% of people who said their language had improved only 1% did not attribute this change, at least in part³, to Shpresa.

As might be expected considering the higher uptake amongst women of ESOL training, and involvement in Support Groups in which English is spoken when there are English guest speakers, women have experienced more of an increase in their language confidence than men. Whilst both men and women rate their confidence as roughly the same prior to using Shpresa, afterwards 68% of women say they are ‘confident’ compared to 27% of men. However, men are slightly more likely to say that they are ‘Very confident’ – 18% for men, compared to 15% for women.

³ Categories for rating how much of a change was due to Shpresa: None, A Little Bit, A Lot, All.

Employment and Training

The questionnaire asked respondents to rate their employment and training satisfaction before involvement with the Shpresa Programme. Of those that answered this question:

- 86 % said their employment and training situation was ‘completely unsatisfactory’
- 11% said it was ‘slightly unsatisfactory’
- 3% said it was already ‘completely satisfactory’

After involvement with Shpresa, employment and training scores changed to:

- 3% said it was ‘completely unsatisfactory’
- 15% said it was ‘slightly satisfactory’
- 77% said it was ‘quite satisfactory’
- 5% said it was ‘completely satisfactory’

That 86% of people were unsatisfied with their training and employment situation prior to engagement with Shpresa reveals the extent to which higher numbers of the community lacked access to training and employment, or who felt unable to access it without support from an organisation that understands them and their needs. The change in employment and training satisfaction was clearly linked to respondents’ use of Shpresa:

- Of the 70% of respondents who said they had been ‘completely unsatisfied’ but were now ‘quite satisfied’ with their training and employment situation, 47% said the change was ‘a lot’ due to Shpresa and a further 47% said the change was ‘all’ due to Shpresa.
- Of all respondents who answered the question only 4% said that their employment and training situation had not changed and remained either slightly or completely unsatisfactory.
- Of the 94% who said their employment and training satisfaction had changed, only 4% did not attribute any of this change to the Shpresa Programme.

After involvement with Shpresa 76% of women and 82% of men said they were either ‘quite satisfied’ or ‘completely satisfied’ with their current training and employment situation. Men were more likely to attribute this change to Shpresa – with 77% of women and 73% of men said the change was ‘a lot’ or ‘all’ to do with Shpresa. However, men were also more likely to say none of the change was due to Shpresa – 17% said this, compared to 3% of women. This reflects, again, the higher level of involvement of women in groups and activities, in which training can be readily accessed.

Integration

Within the focus groups, and in response to the final question (see section 4 below), a number of people said they appreciated the extent to which Shpresa had helped them to integrate with British society. The questionnaire tested this by asking users to report how often they socialised with people from the UK, or with Non-Albanian speakers.

Prior to engagement with Shpresa:

- 62% said they ‘never’ socialised with non-Albanian speakers
- 36% said they ‘occasionally’ did
- 3% said they ‘often’ did

- 0% said they did 'very often'

After involvement with the Shpresa Programme:

- 39% reported that they socialised 'very often' with non-Albanian speakers.
- The number of people who said they had 'never' socialised with non-Albanian speakers but now did so 'very often' counted for 22% of those answering the question. Of this group, all of them said this change was either due 'a lot' or 'all' to their involvement with Shpresa (27% and 72% respectively).
- 18% of people reported no change in how often they socialised with non-Albanian speakers – most people in this category saying that they 'occasionally' socialised with non-Albanian speakers, and only 3 people said that they 'never' did.

Men are more likely to socialise with non-Albanian speakers – 45% of men said they did so very often, and they were less likely to attribute any change in frequency to Shpresa than women were (women attributed 49% of change 'all' to Shpresa, whereas only 18% of men said this). Again, this is likely to be due to women's use of Shpresa's Support Groups.

Accessing Public Services

Service users were asked about their confidence in accessing public services, such as doctors, schools and external training opportunities before coming into contact with Shpresa. The results revealed that service users did not generally feel confident in accessing such services. Before coming into contact with Shpresa:

- 52% said they were 'very unconfident'
- 32% said they were 'unconfident'
- 16% said they were 'confident'
- 1% said that they were 'very confident'

After coming into contact with Shpresa respondents felt much more confident:

- 0% said that they were 'very unconfident' or 'unconfident'.
- 63% said they were 'confident'
- 36% said they were 'very confident'

Some people commented, however, that they still needed help from Shpresa. This raises the possibility that service users are confident that they will be able to access a range of public services, but that a significant number of service users rely on being able to do this via Shpresa.

Change was largely attributed to Shpresa:

- The most frequently seen shift was from people previously rating their ability to access services as 'very unconfident' to 'confident'. Of this group 69% said the change in their confidence was 'all' due to Shpresa.
- One person reported a reduction of confidence after being involved in Shpresa.⁴

⁴ This was the only result in which a decrease in confidence or satisfaction was reported. It is statistically insignificant and could be a mistake as the rest of that questionnaire portrayed a service user that had

Overall, however, results are very positive – with 100% of those reporting a positive change in their confidence attributing the change, at least in part, to Shpresa.

There was little significant difference between the attitudes of men and women in this topic, though men were more likely than women to attribute the change in their confidence to Shpresa.

3. Children and Young People

Of the 72 questionnaire respondents, 47 people had children of school age that accessed Shpresa's services. This group of people were asked to complete a further set of questions about education and the effect that being part of Shpresa's activities had had on them.

Understanding of the Education System

Shpresa has worked with parents both in Women's Support Groups and specific sessions within partnership schools to help Albanian-speaking parents to understand the education system in the UK and how to help children of school age get the most from their education. The questionnaire asked parents and guardians to rate their confidence in understanding the education system prior to their contact with Shpresa:

- 66% said they were 'very unconfident' in their understanding of the UK education system
- 24% said that they were 'unconfident'
- 8% said that they were 'confident'
- 1% said that they were 'very confident'

After involvement in Shpresa there was a significance change in confidence levels around education and much of this change was attributed to Shpresa.

- After involvement with Shpresa 74% said that they very 'confident' and 22% said that they were 'very confident' in being able to understand the education system
- 100% of the parents and guardians reported a change in their confidence in this area, and 100% of them attributed the change, at least in part, to the Shpresa Programme.
- The most frequently seen change in confidence about education was from 'very unconfident' to 'confident' and of this group 73% said that 'all' of the change was due to Shpresa, and 26% said it was 'a lot' due to Shpresa.

Children's Understanding of Albanian Culture

Parents and guardians were asked to consider how confident their children were in terms of Albanian culture before their involvement in the Shpresa Programme:

- 38% said that their children were 'very unconfident' in regards to Albanian culture prior to being involved in Shpresa's activities.
- 55% said their children were 'unconfident'
- 3% said their children were 'confident'

benefitted from Shpresa's work.

- 2% said their children were 'very confident'

It was clear that parents felt that their children had had significant improvements in their confidence levels around their parent's traditional culture. The results for confidence ratings after engagement with Shpresa were:

- 0% felt that their children were 'very unconfident' or 'unconfident' in regards to Albanian culture after their child's involvement in Shpresa's activities
- 30% said their children were 'confident'
- 67% said that their children were 'very confident'

Parents felt that their children had a large change in confidence levels, and a great deal of this was seen as being due to Shpresa:

- Only one parent felt that their child's confidence had not changed
- Of the 94% of parents who said their child's confidence had changed, 39% said 'a lot' of the change was due to Shpresa, and 58% said 'all' of the change was due to Shpresa.

From this we can see that parents felt that their children's involvement in the Shpresa Programmes activities was a vital part of their child's increased confidence in understanding their traditional culture.

Activity Levels

Parents were asked to rate how much more active their children were before and after their involvement with Shpresa's activities.

- The most frequent response (32%) was that their children had previously been 'very inactive', but were now 'very active', with 87% of this group saying that the change had 'all' been because of Shpresa.
- Overall, 94% of parents and guardians reported an increase in their child's level of activity after they had become involved with Shpresa.

From this we can see that many children of many service users were inactive until they accessed services specifically for them. Comments made on the questionnaires suggest that, anecdotally, parents were unconfident or unsure about accessing other services themselves:

'I did not have the confidence to take them to other places before. Now my son has joined the after school club'
Female, 35-44

Parent's also appreciated the chance for children to socialise and make friends, and to socialise with other parents too:

'Attending after school clubs at Shpresa helped my children socialise with other children and bring back their confidence playing with other children'
Female, 35-44

They love attending traditional dancing... They have lots of friends and we have someone to talk to'

4. What Users Most Value About the Shpresa Programme

Questionnaire respondents were asked to list three things that they most valued about the Shpresa Programme. There was a wide range of responses ranging from specific project, to comments about their way of working and their staff members. Below is a table of the most popular responses, below that there is a brief discussion filling out in more detail what people said about some aspects of the organisation.

Figure 4.1 What Service Users Value Most About Shpresa

Valued about Shpresa	Number of comments
Advice and information	28
Shpresa's staff	27
Work with the whole family	18
Training and education opportunities	14
Children learning the Albanian language	13
Maintaining cultural identity	12
Help with integration	11
Helping young people to maintain cultural traditions	10
Shpresa like a family/offer friendship	9
Welcoming environment	9
Holistic method of working with service users	9
Focus on children and young people	9
Emotional support	6

More detail about the five most valued aspects of Shpresa:

- Advice and Information – respondents valued the full range of advice and information. Most often mentioned were: help with interpreting, referrals to other agencies, and help with benefits.
- Shpresa’s Staff – there were a great deal of positive comments about Shpresa’s staff, including that they are trustworthy, non-judgmental, good role models and that they continue to offer support even after referrals are made.
- Work with the Whole Family – despite the fact that there are specific services for women and children and not men, service users still felt that the whole family benefitted from ‘the family approach’.
- Training and Education Opportunities – service users mentioned the chances they had had to get further training (often NVQs or ESOL) and they also appreciated the support that Shpresa’s staff had given them in encouraging them to take up the training opportunities.
- Children Learning the Albanian Language – parents appreciated the fact that their children could learn their mother tongue.