



CUSE Evolve Programme

FOSTERING A 'GRASSROOTS' APPROACH

How can a 'grassroots', seed-funded, or participant led ways of working support a city to become more 'migrant friendly'?

BY TAMSIN KOUMIS
MIGRATIONWORK CIC



This project is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund through the Urban Innovative Action's initiative



You might be:

- A local authority worker, perhaps a commissioner
 - A project worker or bid writer
 - A grant manager looking to explore new practices
 - Interested in different ways of working to create accessible cities
-

What does 'grassroots' mean? Grassroots activity will happen outside of existing institutional structures and agencies, and will be self organised or autonomous. It will usually be small and local. Grassroots working often suggests agility, flexibility, and responsiveness to the needs on the ground, led by the people who experience the issue in question. It relies on local knowledge and insight, and involves tailored work to respond to the local context and need: such groups are powerful and responsive in a crisis.

Migrant led or **participant led** projects are designed and delivered by people with lived experience of a particular issue (e.g. migration), or support others facing the same challenges (just as in grassroots activities). Unlike grassroots activities, existing institutions and agencies can initiate and deliver migrant led activities from within their services, gaining some of the benefits of a 'grassroots-inspired' way of working. (Institutions could not start a grassroots activity - which is started outside of the existing structures). Investing in this kind of work shows recognition that the best solutions often come from those who have themselves faced particular challenges. Such projects also help shift the power away from work being done 'to' people to work being done 'with' people.

Seed funding is a common investment tool for grassroots activity, and involves giving small pots of funding to a range of grassroots groups to help plant and establish (literally 'seed') an idea. Such funding can help grassroots groups test solutions, kickstart new activities, or bolster and grow existing voluntary activities.

The MiFriendly Cities project in the West Midlands worked in a grassroots way, used seed-funding and supported participant led activities. In so doing, the project helped our cities to feel smaller, better connected, and more accessible. We have found these approaches conducive to making our cities more 'migrant friendly'.

Advantages: why work in this way?

How does working in this way help cities to become more migrant friendly?

Seed-funding:

- Makes cities better connected: 'linking' the grassroots with larger institutions, investors or local authorities
- Enables a range of organisations and leaders to test their ideas, including those who are 'new' to this field of work and those who are 'not the usual suspects' (including migrants without prior experience leading projects in the UK).
- Capacity building linked to seed-funding can enable best-practice to be shared throughout the cities' smaller organisations
- Can 'plug gaps', as investment can be distributed throughout cities between smaller and unconstituted groups doing direct community work with marginalised groups

Grassroots:

- Grassroots groups can be mobile and responsive: agile responses to social issues are enabled by grassroots investment
 - Grassroots groups often work with and connect to groups in some of the most socially and economically deprived areas, in which case they can create links between marginalised groups and the local authority / partner organisations
 - Social and community issues can be uncovered and highlighted by grassroots groups, who can provide a direct link for local authorities and larger NGOs to information highlighting problems faced by people 'on the ground'
 - They can act as a bridge – building understanding between authorities, larger NGOs, and communities - especially useful in instances of distrust between communities and authorities.
-

Migrant led or participant led:

- Many of the benefits of 'grassroots' work are also true for migrant led activities
- Migrant led activities enable institutions to develop the services they offer, and to work with migrants to do this
- When migrants feel supported to lead and treated as equals, rather than as 'subjects who need help', it shifts the power dynamic between institutions and communities
- Migrants understand the issues within their own communities, and may know the best way to resolve these issues. These community perspectives must be taken into account when making decisions.
- Migrant led initiatives foster effective integration. Individuals are supported to be active citizens in their communities
- Investing in migrant led activities recognises the cities commitment to developing all of its citizens and supporting diverse community leaders



Elements of good practice

Here we summarise lessons of good practice that emerged from the MiFriendly Cities project on how to promote grassroots engagement and migrant participation

- **Accessible application processes** for migrants should include:
 - Simple application forms
 - Options for video applications or presentations instead of written applications
 - Conversations before applying
 - The application process and decision-making panel should include people with lived experience
 - Live audience and panel presentations to experience applicants passion and motivation
 - **Accessible application processes** working with migrant-led organisations should bear in mind that applicants may be new to the country, and may lack a wide network of professional contacts and references.
 - **Participant leaders** are incredibly influential and have an enormous wealth of skills, knowledge and expertise, but these individuals are held back by a complex web of barriers – some social, some systemic. By listening to these individuals carefully to understand the barriers they face, organisations and local authorities can gain useful learning about challenges faced by particular groups. Within this, you must consider how far these individuals are representative of all of your citizens, and you may need other channels to reach out to and engage with people who they do not fully represent.
 - Investing in **tailored one-to-one coaching** and support is key to enabling grassroots groups and participant leaders to overcome barriers they may face growing their work to build bigger, more sustainable solutions.
 - An investment of seed-funding into grassroots and migrant led groups should come with **capacity building support**, including:
 - Administration
 - Reporting (written and financial)
 - Collecting data for reporting and evaluation
-



MigrationWork Social Innovation Programme

- *'Innovation comes from not sticking to the script'*: the most creative solutions emerge where **flexibility** is afforded. Listen to and be guided by grantees on what they need and how they think their projects should adapt.
 - If you are playing the role of intermediary between a funder and grassroots groups, remember to **communicate the needs of the grassroots groups to the funder** in order to negotiate flexibility and to invite the funder to be responsive to the needs of the grassroots groups. Often communication moves 'down' the line, but it's helpful to remember to communicate 'up' too.
 - **Innovative procurement practices** enable unincorporated and grassroots groups to access funding:
 - Use trusted 'host' organisations to receive funds on behalf of unincorporated groups
 - Support unincorporated groups to secure appropriate insurance.
 - Encourage grassroots groups to form partnerships to apply for joint funding, enabling smaller groups to be supported by more established ones.
 - **Smaller and more agile organisations** are best placed to give out **seed-funding** to avoid bureaucratic delays.
 - **Peer support** between participant leaders and grassroots groups is key for sustainability. To build effective working partnerships, you must invest time and support in enabling relationships of trust to develop. You cannot rush trust, but once it is there, it is an enduring foundation.
 - Creating the right conditions for migrant leadership takes commitment, consideration, and can mean that you need to allow extra time and change the way that you are working. Think about:
 - What work needs to be done / what new opportunities are emerging within and around our project? Could a participant do this? (e.g. websites to be built, events to be run, reports to be made – could participants play new roles in your projects?)
 - Remember to ask participants what they think needs doing, and what they think are the solutions
 - How are procurement procedures reproducing social inequities? Is work and opportunity always given to the 'obvious contenders'? How can this be changed?
 - Supporting participants to take the lead involves recognising **the value of lived experience** as an area of expertise. Lived experience can be valued and recognised through:
 - Consultation panels
 - Expert by experience advisory groups
 - Paying people to share their knowledge and lived experience to support the development of your work or project
 - Creating opportunities to formally accredit, acknowledge and recognise the work and contributions of participant leaders.
-

- Supporting participants to take the lead involves the following outlook:
 - Participants are equals, not 'subjects who need help'
 - Participants know the changes they seek, and know the best way to achieve these changes. They may need help learning about the terrain of how the city infrastructure functions, but with that knowledge, they must be given the opportunity to draw the course on the map, in order to guide the public authority in finalising their solution.
 - **Collaboration** between those with different skills, experience and expertise and from different sectors is important: having a range of experts around the table (**including** the community perspective as expert) leads to success. Grassroots working should not exclude collaboration with valuable external experts or with those in positions of power, though the community perspective should be supported to lead decisions.
 - **WhatsApp** is a powerful tool for linking people up, building networks, staying connected, and sharing important information.
 - Delivering seed-funding to new and small initiatives involves an element of **risk**: it is likely that some of these projects may not succeed or finish. This needs to be factored into project plans, and into funders expectations. Not all seeds will grow into tall trees! Good learning can come from and for those who don't complete projects to the end too.
-



Examples from the MiFriendly Cities project

The learnings and reflections explored in this paper come from the experiences of the MiFriendly Cities project.

In October 2017, the EU's Urban Innovative Actions fund (part of the European Regional Development Fund) awarded more than £3.7m of co-funding to a partnership of organisations, including Coventry, Birmingham and Wolverhampton city councils and Coventry University, to create a project exploring how to make cities more 'migrant friendly'. 'MiFriendly Cities' has run from March 2018 to May 2021.

"A MiFriendly City should be underpinned by the voices, skills and passion of refugees and migrants, so that all branches of the community are fully invested in its future, and the social and economic fabric of the region is strengthened."

The MiFriendly Cities project recognised the wealth of opportunity inherent in mobilising its migrant and refugee citizens to drive change to make its cities more inclusive. It set out to deliver a grassroots approach, "**where citizens take the lead** in unlocking the city's assets to implement innovative bottom up, participatory approaches".

MiFriendly Cities 'did' grassroots by investing in local individuals, organisations and ideas, offering seed-funding to migrant-led initiatives; and by offering training and creating opportunities to enable participants to take the lead – in media, research, health, the arts, and more. In addition, the project built and strengthened links between grassroots organisations, local councils and partner organisations – bringing together a diverse range of organisations around the table to discuss particular issues and ways forward. This meant that pioneering individuals and grassroots groups had the opportunity to build relationships and understanding with local councils and large local institutions over several years. New projects and opportunities have emerged from this, including as a collaborative project between the University and a social innovator.

Additionally, larger organisations within the partnership were in some instances afforded more flexibility thanks to MiFriendly Cities funding, enabling them to operate in a more 'grassroots' way. For example, Central England Law Centre were able to do outreach to local schools, raising awareness of legal issues that people might face and reaching groups and individuals who otherwise might not have known about their services and support. A 'grassroots' approach enabled better access to different parts of the communities, engaging people who may not usually be tuned into mainstream services. Through working in a grassroots way, using seed funding and by supporting participant leaders, MiFC has helped our cities to feel smaller, better connected and more accessible.

Seed funding:

Share My Language
Social Innovation
Social Enterprise

Participant leaders:

Citizen Social Scientists
Media Labs
Virtual Exhibition
Health Champions

**Working with
grassroots groups:**

Furniture Factory
CRMC's Social
Enterprises



Seed funding: case studies and examples

Share My Language

The *Share my Language* programme offered informal language learning via cultural exchange. Fun and creative activities such as drama, poetry, cooking, and music were used to foster a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere, which helped participants to build confidence. The focus was on enabling shared understanding to build communities and to improve integration.

Birmingham's *Share My Language* built the capacity of refugee and migrant support organisations and local community centres by granting seed funding to groups to deliver SML activities. They encouraged a migrant-led approach to syllabus setting, and the funding process was accessible, enabling new and unincorporated groups to be involved. This helped Birmingham to support organisations already working in some of the most socially and economically deprived parts of the city. Many of the grassroots organisations continue to deliver these activities as part of their ongoing provision.

£2250 was awarded
to 18 organisations

292 sessions
were delivered,
reaching over
400 participants
across
Birmingham.

Coventry's *Share My Language* supported seven local organisations with training and small grants, enabling them to develop or integrate the SML approach into their programme. In addition to this, they ran 'SML Rhymetimes' (sessions sharing poetry and rhymes online and in the local library); conversation clubs, a successful 'open mic' night, and set up a Share My Language online network of Community Champions and Student Champions. External partners have since adopted learning principles, and resources have been shared widely. Connections and networks were key to the programmes' success.

Coventry: 7 x £200-£500 small grants

Wolverhampton: grants between
£400 - £3000, £8400 total

Wolverhampton's *Share My Language* programme involved commissioning local migrant led organisations to run creative, playful and connecting activities including cooking sessions and mask-making. The organisations commissioned were able to invest in materials and technology, increasing the organisations capacity. CWC also commissioned the Wolverhampton members of the Network of Migrant Innovators to deliver part of the programme, thereby connecting to other parts of the MiFriendly Cities project and creating opportunities for project participants.

Social Innovation

The Social Innovation strand led by MigrationWork CIC awarded grants to 16 migrants and migrant-led organisations to deliver innovative projects for community benefit. Applicants pitched their ideas to an expert panel who became key contacts for the projects, and successful participants had access to a range of tailored training sessions and received one-to-one support. MigrationWork also invested resource in supporting the development of a collaborative network – the Network of Migrant Innovators (NOMI) – which is a self-governing opportunity for partnership and peer support between the projects, and was key to finding a sustainable and long-term model of support.

Between £2000 – £6000 awarded to 16 projects, plus training courses and 121 mentoring.

NOMI Investment:
£9000 + co-ordination



Social Innovation Example

Migrants at Work's What I Need to Know (WINK) project delivered information sessions to migrants about their employment rights. Their work highlighted a gap that lies between immigration law and employment law, which leaves migrants vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation, and which leaves employers often not knowing feeling confident about how to employ migrants. Through the support from other MiFC project partners, Migrants at Work were able to link their clients with legal advice from Central England Law Centre (CELC), the Refugee and Migrant Centre (RMC) and Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre (CRMC), to work with Coventry University during their research and outreach activities with employers. It has now been commissioned to offer specialist training to Birmingham City Council (and other external stakeholders) on employing migrants.

Two innovative approaches to housing issues were developed through Social Innovation activity: the BME Housing Consortium developed a training methodology called the 'Game of Homes' to educate people on their tenancy rights, as many migrants and other residents don't know what they must do to uphold a private or council tenancy, which can lead to eviction and homelessness. Secondly, Coventry Asylum and Refugee Action Group (CARAG) began a migrant-led research project into solutions to migrant homelessness. Through this work, they secured further funding, and have now managed to secure a house where they now house homeless migrants – they are the first migrant led project to house destitute migrants in the UK.



Other Social Innovation projects included Families in Conversation, which supported parents to talk about mental health in families; Pamoja Music (photographed above centre), which used music to bring communities together and create new opportunities for people; Emerald Book Club, which used literature to develop people's skills and confidence – and many more

Social Innovation policy success

Having learned from the success of the MiFriendly city grass roots social innovation funding, Coventry University transferred the learning to research commissioned by the West Midlands Combined Authority into the social economy response to COVID-19. As a result The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) is calling on the government for £11million to support the vital work of grassroots groups who have been praised for their work throughout the coronavirus pandemic.

The report (undertaken by Coventry University MiFriendly Cities staff, University of Wolverhampton and Birmingham Voluntary Sector Council) report highlights how community, voluntary and faith groups in the West Midlands stepped up to support communities and people in need during the first Covid lockdown.

The WMCA commissioned the report to find out more about the innovative and enterprising ways these groups acted in response to the pandemic earlier last year, and inform possible initiatives in the future.

Supporting Social Enterprises

Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre also supported three social enterprises to get up and running. These social enterprises were supported by a MiFriendly Cities funded Social Enterprise manager at CRMC to become sustainable. They employ local migrants. MiFriendly Cities provided the resources, networks, and a platform through which these grassroots organisations could grow and develop. New funding has been secured to cover a support role at CRMC, to continue supporting these social enterprises to develop. CRMC have also built a new space called Hope House through MiFC, which will be a hub for local migrant-led initiatives in the future.

Social Enterprise Training

CUSE ran a Social Enterprise training programme called 'Evolve', training 43 migrants to run successful social enterprises, which was open to all migrants who had a certain level of English language skills. 16 individuals were then awarded funding and one-to-one mentoring - these 16 were chosen based on having the most viable business models. The training course was tailored to offer a culturally sensitive approach, avoiding jargon, and focus on hands-on real-life business skills. The social enterprises have now gone on to create 45 new jobs.

16 x €5000, including £750 cost of professional 1-2-1 mentoring
€211,100 full project cost over 3 years

Social Enterprise example

Akwaba CIC – Due to Covid-19, Luc changed his business model entirely to better support key workers with children within his community. Drawing on his professional experience, he began to offer support to families within the migrant community with home-schooling - helping them better understand the curriculum and engage better with their children and other parents during the pandemic.

Another Social Enterprise project saw a barrier for aspiring healthcare professionals getting into work. Without certification, they could not secure the jobs they wanted – but the certificates are expensive to secure. His project supports people to secure the certification they need, upfronting the cost for them and working out a payment plan.

Grassroots and participant led: case studies and examples

A virtual exhibition

MiFC opened the tendering process for the 'My City' exhibition to the social innovation project leads. Maokwo, led by artist Laura Nyahuye, won the commission and developed a virtual art gallery space featuring artwork from all three cities.



Media Labs, Newsrooms and Beyond magazine

Migrant Voice has been working with participants to grow media skills, produce their own media stories, and to amplify their voices within the media. Alongside training individuals in photography, writing news and filmmaking, Migrant Voice's Newsroom and Media Lab sessions have also built a committed community of community journalists, who worked together to produce 'BEYOND' Black History Month magazine. This magazine was designed and developed by participants, and features a range of features, poetry, interviews and photography.

The project has recognised and celebrated migrants as expert voices on their own lives and needs - full of agency, not passive victims, and has empowered individuals to tell their stories on their own terms, deciding which stories to tell and on which media platforms. Migrant Voice were mindful of striking the balance between supporting participants (e.g. offering infrastructure, equipment and introducing the project ethos) and stepping back to allow participants to take the lead and support each other. As a result of this approach, participants have developed confidence to take the lead in the production of a variety of media, and have been heard in their own terms on local and national media platforms.

1 project co-ordinator 2.5-3.5 days pw for 3 years; Project worker/ Comms Worker 7 days pw for over 2 years; 16 Media Lab training sessions plus other support and 'Power talk' sessions; 1 year of weekly Newsroom sessions; Equipment; Journalists/media experts; management time and costs

Citizen Social Scientists

Coventry University trained and mentored 82 citizen social scientists, who through their community research projects were able to reach an additional 2,000 individuals. In this way they have truly changed the way that Social Research is delivered in the West Midlands. The programme enabled the project to train and accredit a wide range of individuals, community groups, students and refugee organisations through the programme of 4-days interactive training, followed by on-going mentorship to support the community research. Innovative 'participant-led' research was conducted and will be published, enabling relevant and 'live' research questions to be examined by those with lived experience and a local understanding. For example, women in a refuge carried out research into what it is like to have a baby or be expecting a baby whilst in a refuge; students carried out research into the impact of COVID-19 on their peers. Participants were also trained up to support in the evaluation of MiFC itself.

Last Mafuba, of the Citizen Social Science training programme, researched mental health among black African men. Through completing the course, she has since begun a PhD, and is also evaluating the next Citizen Social Scientist aspect of the programme. An additional 5 accredited Citizen Social Scientists are currently supporting research commissioned by the West Midlands Combined Authority, as part of a listening project, to inform the emerging Mental Health Commission. They are supporting by undertaking research with communities that health professional find difficult to engage with. More opportunities for the trained citizen social scientists include conducting a walkability audit on Coventry city centre to evaluate the experience of navigating the city since e-bikes and e-scooters have been introduced.

Health Champions

The Community Health Champions programme saw community leaders trained in sharing accurate health messages with the community. Through their role, participants acted as a bridge between migrant communities and the local Public Health departments and the National Health Service. The individuals received accreditation, and the role came into its own during the Covid-19 pandemic, with health champions helping to 'demystify' the virus and its treatment. Participants were encouraged to build local networks, and to communicate their messages in innovative ways – using social media and WhatsApp for instance. Further funding is being sought in order to continue managing the Health Champions programme in Coventry.

Furniture Factory

Wolverhampton's Furniture Factory trained people to upcycle furniture, which was then delivered to vulnerable members of the community, enabling them to turn their (often sparse) living spaces into properly furnished 'homes'. The projects' speciality was its simplicity; its straightforward offering became hugely popular among commissioners, referral organisations, as well as those participating. Its uncomplicated method benefitted all involved, and the environment too. As well as gaining practical skills via hands-on learning, volunteers also became part of a diverse community made up of people committed to making Wolverhampton a better place for everyone to live.

The city council commissioned a consortium of local community groups to deliver the project, creating a bridge through which the council could connect with 'hard-to-reach' groups. The consortium is now registering as a CIC called 'Fixology', and are seeking further funding to continue the work. In the future, they'd like to be able to offer employment support and advice to volunteers as part of the 'offer'.

Investment: £109,600 for delivery + €60,000 for equipment.

Home-makeovers: 75
Individuals trained: 42
Volunteers: 17
Mobile repair cafes: 3
Items of furniture upcycled: 372

1. The project in numbers:

West Midlands:

- 2.8m people
- 1000's of migrants and refugees in the region
- 3 city councils
- One combined authority (WMCA)

Project Team:

- 3 city councils (BCC, CCC, CWC)
- 6 NGOs
- One academic institution – Coventry Uni
- One corporate partner

We've delivered...

6,000+ health messages
 253 legal rights checks, advice and signposting
 4 Know your rights guides in 9 Community languages
 394 Share my Language community activities
 106+ home makeovers
 12+ repair cafes
 1,000+ of up-cycled furniture items
 114 apprenticeships and job opportunities
 639 English language classes
 Citizenship rights presentations to 500+ schools
 3 Stakeholder forums with 100s of attendees
 Briefing papers shared across Europe
 1,000s of tweets and posts
 A new online art exhibition

We've reached...

500+ participants
 10,000+ people
 1,000s of migrants
 100s of community service providers
 Councils and authorities across UK and Europe
 Regional funders
 50 regional and national journalists
 100s of NGOs and charities
 1,000s of local residents
 250+ employers

We've built...

A new shared community space
 Relationships between 11 Partner organisations
 Greater understanding of migrant issues
 A 'Network' of social innovation projects and leaders
 Resilience and support structures
 Connections between cities
 A Chapel of Many 'chair sculpture'
 New furniture from old
 A reputation - finalist in the Innovation in Politics Awards 2020

We've supported...

32 social projects with seed funding and advice
 36+ language inspired workshops
 The RISING Global Peace Forum
 Coventry Welcomes City Festival
 The fight against Covid 19 with PPE, child-care support and community activities

We've trained....

61 Health Champions
 80 Citizen Social Scientists
 162 Citizen journalists
 78 with DIY skills and qualifications
 131 with digital qualifications
 40+ social entrepreneurs
 100+ maker and 3D modelling skills



This paper was written by [MigrationWork CIC](#), one of eleven project partners involved in the MiFriendly Cities project. MigrationWork lead on the project communications; authored two series' of briefing papers about innovative approaches; ran three international Sounding Board discussions; delivered the Social Innovation programme, training and supporting 16 migrant-led social innovation projects in the region; and developed the [Network of Migrant Innovators](#).

To find out more about [MiFriendly Cities](#), see our [resources](#) and [social media](#)

D.Muthukumarage

It's Our Right Project, Damayanthi Muthukumarage

