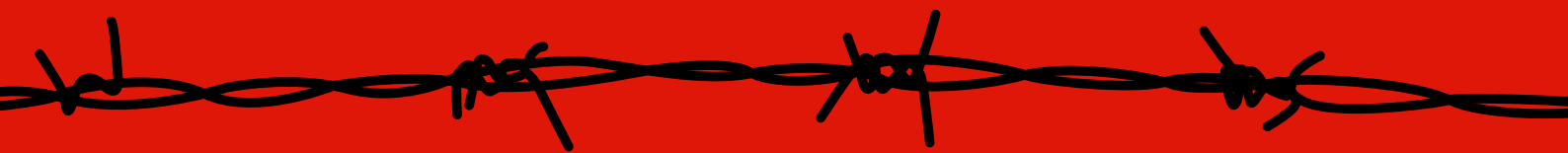


# Choose Love

What makes an effective volunteer  
response in times of crisis?



A study commissioned by Paul Hamlyn Foundation  
and conducted by The Social Change Agency

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. This report

From the London Riots to Grenfell Tower, technology has enabled citizens and local communities to organise, fundraise and advocate in entirely new ways; forming social movements at a speed, scale and reach not seen before. These highly networked movements are often at the expense of the more traditional approaches used by civil society, cutting through accepted forms of governance, accountability as well as challenging power. Similar to start-ups in the financial and technology sectors, these new movements are disrupting the status quo, challenging accepted wisdom and shaping the future.

In 2015, Help Refugees began as a rapid self-initiated volunteer response to the “refugee crisis”. Their experience of scaling rapidly, their ability to mobilise volunteers very quickly and their use of crowdfunding have enabled Help Refugees to achieve high impact in a very short space of time. This new type of grass-roots directed, networked response has been made possible through technology, crowdfunding, social media, and different approaches to charity and governance support.

In 2017, The Paul Hamlyn Foundation commissioned The Social Change Agency to undertake a case study of the rapid growth of Help Refugees. The Paul Hamlyn Foundation

were keen to understand what lessons could be learnt for charitable foundations interested in providing more effective and timely funding and support to volunteer led initiatives which rapidly emerge, often as first respondents to a crisis. They also wanted to share these insights with other existing and future social movements and volunteer led responses to humanitarian crises.

The research is based on the following:

- A series of 12 interviews with Help Refugees, funders, similar grassroots and humanitarian organisations.
- Social media data from Help Refugees.
- Network Map and social media analytics.

## 1.2. Audiences

There are three key audiences for this work:

- Help Refugees.
- Other volunteer or grassroots groups that provide aid and services in response to humanitarian crises.
- Charitable Foundations and individual philanthropists.

# 2. Background

## 2.1. Political context

From 2014 onwards, the Western media began to draw attention to the huge amounts of refugees and migrants arriving in Europe. In fact, in 2015, UNHCR reported that over 1,000,000 refugees and migrants arrived in Europe by sea, far surpassing the total number of refugees and migrants arriving in 2014.<sup>1</sup> This does not take into account arrivals from other European countries. In the month of October 2015 alone 218,394 arrived by sea - roughly the same as the entire total for 2014 (approx. 219,000), with 10,006 arriving in Greece on a single day. Children made up 20% of total refugees. Nearly 3,735 people are believed to have died crossing the Mediterranean in 2015, not counting those who lost their lives during other parts of the journey. In 2016, the number of arrivals by sea fell significantly to 363,348 following the closure of the Turkey-Greece route. However, the number of fatalities rose to 5,079 in the Mediterranean through 2016.

Civil society groups played a key role in responding to this crisis, with volunteer groups often acting as first responders to the needs of those arriving on the shores. With the majority of UK press covering the 'Calais Jungle', watching this crisis unfold on the media, members of the public took it upon themselves to respond to it a movement the press have dubbed 'Volunteer Humanitarianism'. On top of this, newly formed volunteer groups operated across borders. International and multilateral agencies were slower to respond - delayed by a lack of mandate being granted by EU states for both service delivery and advocacy work.

In Calais specifically, there were few international non-governmental organisations or multilateral agencies in operation. French

NGOs (L'Auberge de Migrants and others), and British volunteers have provided a large amount of support with volunteers mainly channelled through Help Refugees.

### **Relevant legislation**

*The Dublin Regulation and Fair Distribution.*

The Dublin Regulation ratified in 1990, set out EU member states' responsibilities with respect to applications for asylum. It states that asylum seekers with family members already under international protection, or in the process of seeking asylum, have the right to claim asylum in the same country as protected family members.

Under this regulation a young refugee could arrive in Italy and request for their asylum claim to be transferred to the UK to join their family there, provided their family is legally present.

In 2015-16, as refugees and migrants arrived in the thousands in Europe, a wider European discussion around fair distributions of refugees and migrants in light of the Dublin Regulation took place. However, any attempt by The EU to agree distribution quotas and implement them quickly failed. The Central European countries (Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic) were strongly opposed to the quotas and remain so. Germany and France were reluctant to enforce the quotas via legal routes at a time of populist movements in most EU countries. While the majority of these refugees were in Italy and Greece, the UK rejected quotas and instead decided to host 20,000 Syrian refugees instead through the Vulnerable Person Relocation Scheme (VPRS). The latest

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/afr/news/latest/2015/12/5683d0b56/million-sea-arrivals-reach-europe-2015.html>

general elections in Italy (March '18) showed the level of discomfort amongst locals caused by the several hundred thousand refugees that have arrived via North Africa in the last 3 years.

Throughout these discussions, refugees and migrants continued to flow into Europe by sea and land, swelling the camps. Just to give an indication of the size of the crisis, almost 60 million people were displaced by the end of 2014, the highest level since World War II.

Help Refugees, or #HelpCalais as it was first known, was created as a direct response to the worsening horrors the UK public were witnessing, as conditions in the camps flooded the news.

### **The Dubs Amendment**

The Dubs Amendment refers to an amendment to the 2016 UK Immigration Act tabled by Lord Alf Dubs. The Dubs Amendment, known as section 67, was passed

in April 2016 amid a campaign to bring 3,000 lone refugee children stuck in camps in Europe to Britain. The amendment opened up a safe and legal route to the UK for unaccompanied children – provided it was in their best interests. Following a consultation with local authorities, Ministers initially estimated local authority capacity at 350 in total but extended it to 480 following “administrative error”.

By January 2018, The Dubs amendment unofficially ended with only 350 places filled. In 2017, Help Refugees represented by Leigh Day issued a challenge to Government around what they considered unlawful authority quotas. Although they lost the challenge, they presented evidence and arguments to the Court of Appeal that the ‘consultation’ by which the Government calculated the number of children to be relocated was seriously defective. Permission to appeal was granted, and the full case against Home Secretary Amber Rudd, will now be heard by the Court of Appeal.

## 2.2. Help Refugees: A Background

In the summer of 2015, a small group of four friends in London decided they wanted to do something to alleviate the worsening situation for refugees in Europe. They started a crowdfunding campaign, with the aim of raising £1,000 and filling a van with donations to take across to Calais. Within a week, they had raised £56,000, and were soon receiving 7,000 items every day.

On arrival in Calais, they found thousands of people in a camp with limited aid infrastructure such as water, sanitation, food, shelters, and any distribution points. Horrified by what they witnessed, they began a partnership with local French organisation

L’Auberge des Migrants to coordinate volunteers and set up a system of aid distribution in the Calais ‘Jungle’ refugee camp. Help Refugees was born.

Fast forward to January 2018 and Help Refugees have helped over 722,500 people, managed over 15,000 volunteers, ranging from scores to thousands at any one time, for a period of a few hours to a few years, and have up to 70 projects funded across Europe and the Middle East. They have established a fieldwork first, networked approach to giving aid, researching need at a local level, establishing local networks and working with local partners to deliver projects.

In just over 3 years, they have built a strong charitable brand over social media, recruiting over 17.5k Twitter followers, 34.6k Instagram followers, 56.5k Facebook supporters, and just under 400 YouTube subscribers. They count a whole list of celebrities such as ColdPlay, Paloma Faith, David Morrissey and Gillian Anderson among their supporters and have raised millions of pounds through individual donations and philanthropy.

Figure 1. shows the breakdown of income as of March 2018.

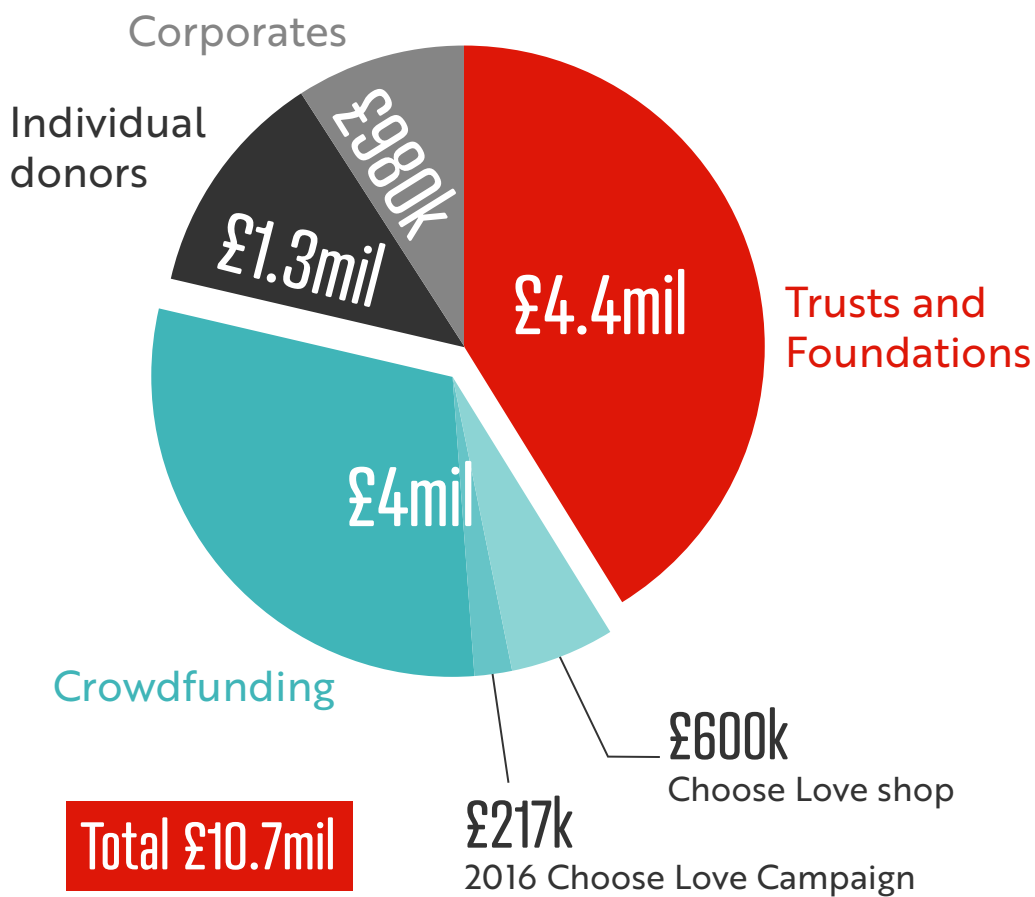


Figure 1. Chart to show breakdown of income; March 2018.



## **Governance and administration**

During the early stages of Help Refugees, there were no formal structures of governance or administration in place. The founders quickly realised they would need support and expertise to enable effective running of the rapidly growing organisation. They were contacted by **Prism the Gift Fund**, who offered support with financial administration, policy development and governance.

Over a short period of time, the Help Refugees model has shifted. Initially starting out as a 100% volunteer-led emergency response it has now shifted to a combination of volunteer led direct aid, grant giving and advocacy-focused activities. Currently, Help Refugees operates as a restricted fund under the auspices of Prism, The Gift Fund, as well as carrying out advocacy work under a limited company.

## **Do no harm - Choose Love**

As a concept 'Do No Harm' is almost universally applied through the humanitarian world and is largely recognised as one of the guiding principles of humanitarian intervention. Agencies can be challenged by applying the concept into practical day to day activities. Questions such as how can it be measured? What actions are needed to redress issues of harm? How to apply the concept consistently in a very changing, dynamic and very challenging set of circumstances? However, Help Refugees committed right from the start that the concept of 'Do No Harm' be embedded into their work. Part of this has formed the current basis of their safeguarding and monitoring and evaluation framework. It is a core value; entwined with their brand, messaging and comms and echoes through their partnerships, fundraising and volunteer base.

*'We are Help Refugees. We strive to ensure that we do no harm to those whose lives we touch. We always want our impacts to be positive and will always work towards making it this way. It is our hope/aim that those we assist are able to say that their lives (and prospects) have been improved by permitting us to assist them, by bringing them dignity, hope, respect and humanity. Choose Love'*

# 3. Learning: insights into the experience of Help Refugees

## 3.1. How did Help Refugees form, develop their networks, recruit volunteers and scale up?

The formation of Help Refugees was fast, organic, and reactive. What began as a desire from a small group of friends to do something to help refugees in Calais seemed to tap in to a latent desire among the British public to contribute. Help Refugees very quickly grew into the largest recognised aid operation in Northern France, before expanding operations to twelve countries across Europe and the Middle East. The organic expansion occurred as Help Refugees followed the needs and emergencies of migrants and refugees back along the migratory routes from Calais to the countries of crisis. Funds that came from the public were unrestricted (and unreliable) so support was based on emergency need. As activity grew, the eco-system grew alongside it, and when the public read and saw what was happening, more money flowed through. The role of partner organisations at a grassroots level enabled Help Refugees to access infrastructure and mobilise quickly. Because of their 'fieldwork first approach', as they grew, Help Refugees always had someone on

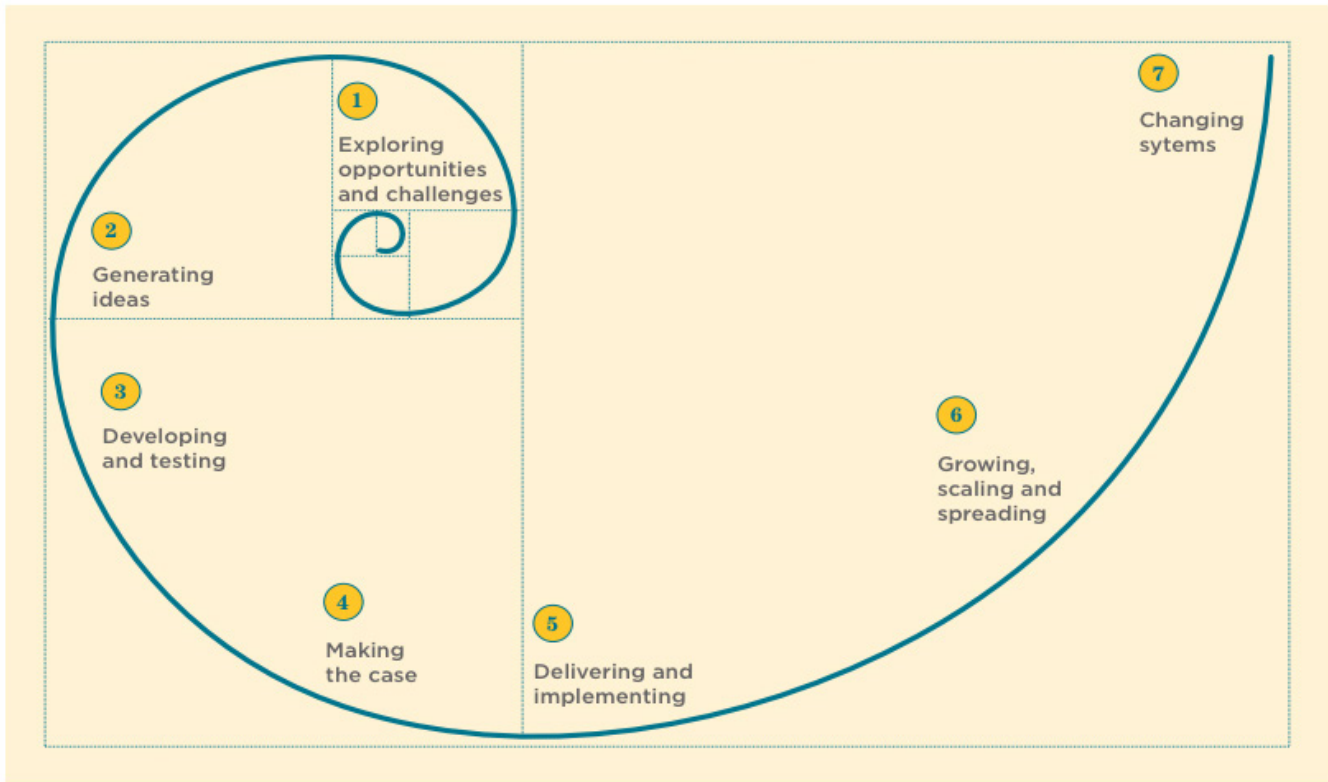
the ground reporting what was happening - covering due diligence of other organisations, reporting, monitoring and comms content, essential for fundraising and demonstrating impact.

In the very first month of activity in Calais, Help Refugees realised that there was more to gain through having the clarity of their own brand identity and quickly responded by producing their own voice, platform and communications. This clarity alongside the messaging which resonated with the public, creating pipelines of volunteers and supporters propelled Help Refugees to spearheading the movement it is today.

In many respects the growth of Help Refugees mirrors the growth of other disruptive start-ups businesses or social innovations. The growth trajectory of both have been well documented, and below are the two paradigms.



# SOCIAL INNOVATION SPIRAL



Source: Murry, R., Caulier-Grice, J. and Mulgan, G. (2010) 'The Open Book of Social Innovation.' London: NESTA and the Young Foundation.

Figure 3. The Social Innovation Spiral.

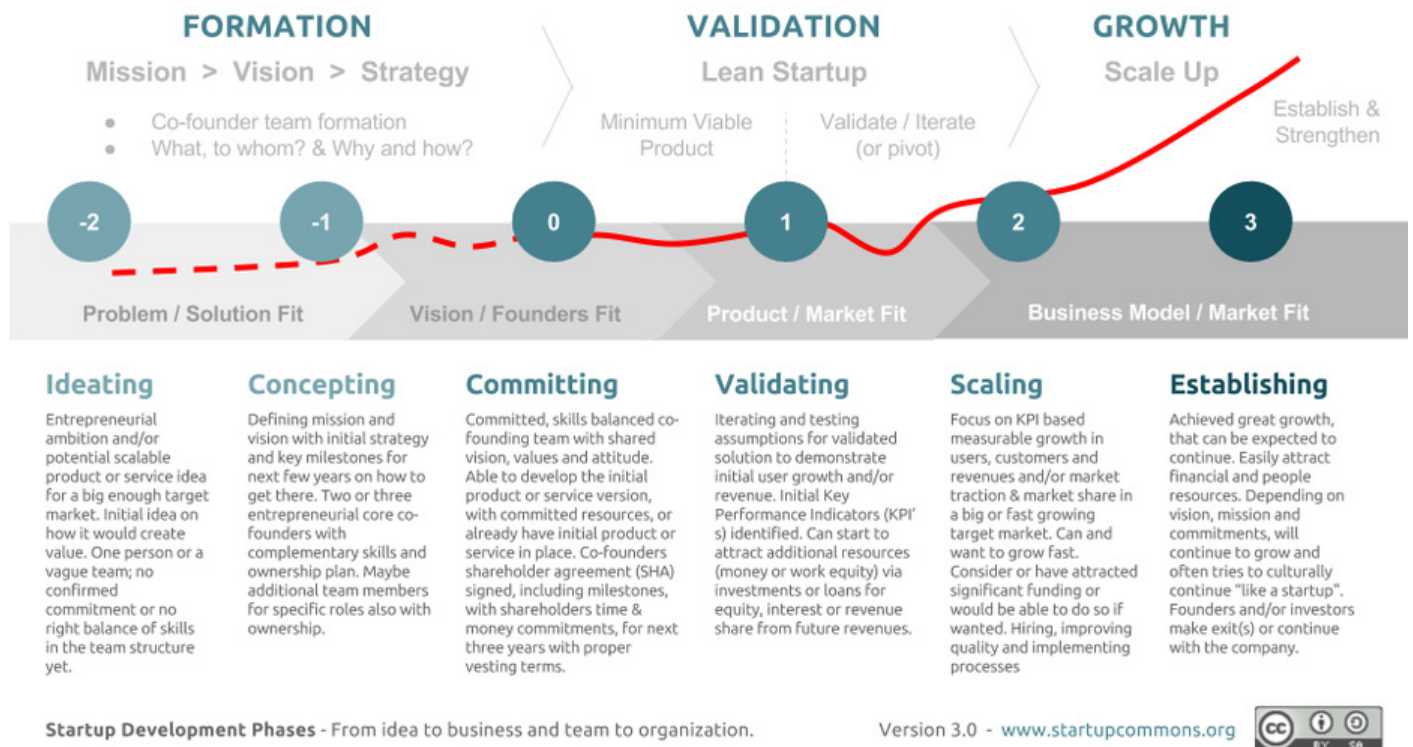


Figure 4. Startup Development Phases

As you can see, what starts out as a recognition of a gap or need for a service (stage 1 below) can evolve into building a service or product, which gets refined and tested (stages 3 and 4) and goes through the stages of implementation, growth, validity (stages 4-6) and finally into being an established part of the status quo as it adapts into the very system it grew up against (stage 7). Help Refugees have clearly gone through a sped up version of the curve, combining stages 1-4 almost overnight. As this research has shown, Help Refugees is firmly in the 6th stage - growing, scaling and spreading - yet also continues to behave culturally 'like a start-up'. This dynamic is causing a lot of tension as the resources, organisational learning and cultural behaviours have yet to be embedded.

Interviews reveal a range of factors that contributed to this rapid scale up:

***i) The right message, at the right time, from the right people: tapping into public consciousness.***

Help Refugees decided to undertake what on the face of it might seem a fairly simple set of actions: raise some money, collect some donations, hire a van. Four things about this decision were key:

- **Timing.** In the summer of 2015, media attention on the Calais Jungle was high, with a strong tension between dehumanising language and human stories. Distressing images were saturating the national press, and the crisis was high on the political agenda. For their first Help Refugees campaign message #ChooseLove came out of a suggestion from Katherine Hamnett, a well established fashion designer while they were searching to make some gig t-shirts for the first fundraiser. As the t-shirts spread through their supporters, other fans, and started to appear on Instagram, the message #ChooseLove cut through the narrative of dehumanisation and fear to provide an alternative message of hope.
- **Providing a channel for action.** By setting up a crowdfunding appeal, and an Amazon Wishlist for supplies and financial donations, Help Refugees gave a simple channel to members of the public to take action. They provided an avenue for anyone who wasn't sure how to help, but wanted to, and presented a simple action-focused alternative to donating to or volunteering with a large aid organisation. As a quote from their first blog post in 2015, shows, they made the act of donating or volunteering on par with giving a message of support.



*'You can give to our justgiving page, order items off our Amazon Wish List, do an online food shop, or even just send us a drawing/ message of hope and solidarity for us to distribute in the refugee camp (perhaps ask your child to send in a drawing?)'<sup>2</sup>*

The original campaign itself was spontaneous and unplanned at the time, and a response to what the founders felt was happening in the wider press. Perhaps anyone setting up a similar crowdfunder at this time could have had a similar effect. But two additional elements were key:

- **Networks.** The individuals who founded Help Refugees have a strong social media presence, as well as being well connected within political, media and musical arenas. Personal connections with musicians, TV presenters and celebrities as well as personal links with the festival community in the UK enabled the call to action to happen quickly, and to receive early support from high profile figures. Links with existing larger international NGOs started in Oct 2015 when talks began with MSF, Oxfam and Save the Children. See Figure 5.
- **Skill sets.** The founding individuals had the right combination of skills sets to get the campaign and call to action off the ground, including digital media, PR and Comms. This is exceptionally apparent early on, when a live ITV interview was quickly followed up with Twitter and Facebook activity to get the key messages out. The volunteers that joined through specialised networks brought specific skills too. For example those who came through the Festival networks brought skills around logistics, building structures, and operations; crucial for the build and warehouse management in Calais.

*"They made the crisis real. They tapped into pop culture. It felt cool to be a part of their network and visibly supporting their issues... They had good connections and they exploited those well."*

Grassroots initiative

### **ii) Filling a gap.**

Across the board, interviewees pointed to the fact that Help Refugees met a pressing need that was not being fulfilled by other organisations. Being unhindered by the legal and financial structures of larger organisations, they were able to deliver aid quickly. Which was both a blessing and a curse as their growth entailed a much steeper learning curve pretty much in all areas.

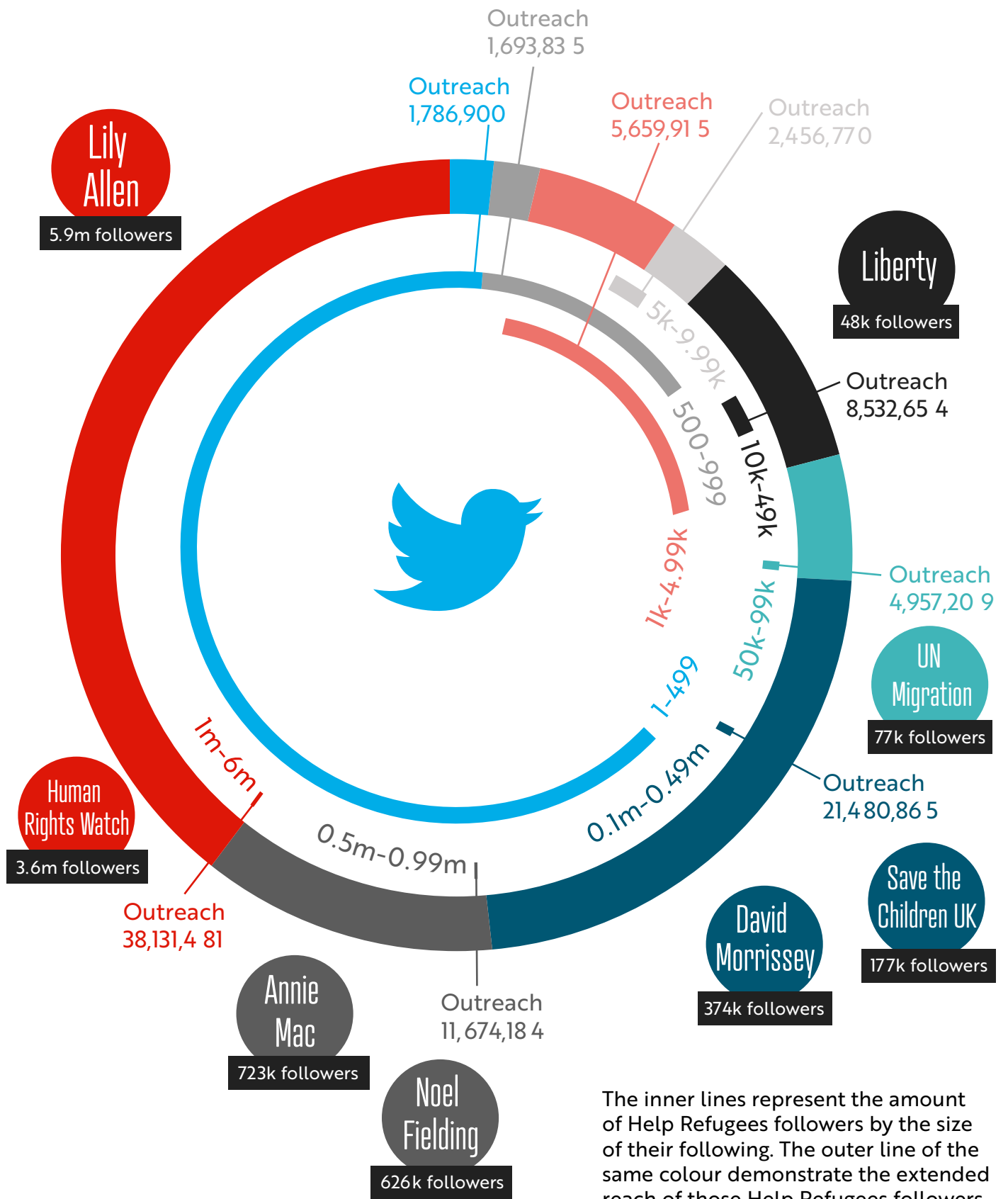
However, their nimbleness and unrestricted funding, meant that they were able to keep the focus where humanitarian aid was needed. Even in the early stages, there were structures around decision making and processes for releasing funding to support emergency action; nothing came to London without a detailed discussion at Calais first and even now, if an assessed need comes from on the ground, teams work out what the organisation has capacity for. In addition, part of the criteria for releasing funds was ensuring there was enough transparency and communication around the impact of the funding which could be used with donors.

In the early days, because there was limited existing aid coordination within the Calais camp, by setting up a basic structure to manage volunteers and aid distribution on the ground, Help Volunteers filled a clear gap.

*"They were one of the key organisations on the ground in Calais, when other organisations were gagged by bureaucracy."*

Humanitarian organisation

<sup>2</sup> <https://helprefugees.org/liana-and-dawn-on-the-huffington-post-how-you-can-help-the-people-in-calais/>



The inner lines represent the amount of Help Refugees followers by the size of their following. The outer line of the same colour demonstrate the extended reach of those Help Refugees followers. The figure shows the dramatic impact that relatively small amounts of highly influential followers can have on sharing the Help Refugees message.

Figure 5. A breakdown of twitter followers by influence

### **iii) Reactivity and flexibility.**

Early on, Help Refugees found themselves with a large amount of money, not tied to specific funding priorities or charitable aims. This enabled them to react to direct need on the ground and to be flexible to emerging requirements. It also meant they lived from hand to mouth, without the stability that long term funding and strengthened business operations gives organisations, especially around long term planning.

*"We found the most effective people in the camp and just ask them what they needed."*

Help Refugees

*"What they bring is a different way of thinking, not entrenched. They are nimble and fast on their feet."*

Funder

### **iv) Authenticity of message.**

Help Refugees had a strong style of communications from the start – collecting personal stories, connecting these to practical action and building viral campaigns online. The fact they were filling a gap and were reactive and flexible, enabled real-time collection of stories and demonstration of impacts. Their storytelling was unfiltered and unhindered by any specific comms strategy or policy, other than to report back on what they saw - leading to authentic, values-led messages that resonated with the public. There was no message testing or conscious re-framing of issues, no opinion testing or analysis, they simply acted as a conduit and a witness for those who were in the camp.

*"They try very hard through personal stories, through collected information from groups on ground."*

Grassroots initiative

*"We were really good at building campaigns online and going viral, and getting bigger than other groups."*

Help Refugees

Interviewees also pointed towards Help Refugees' authenticity of message, particularly with respect to the humanising, personalised focus of their work. These are people who said they wanted to do something because they care, are actually out there doing it and getting to know the people they are helping, and reporting back. Successful crowdfunding campaigns in particular, rely on peer led storytelling, alongside continual feedback around impact. Help Refugees did both of these, and this was key to establishing trust between a new organisation, their supporters and members of the public, including both new and existing audience.

*"Their integrity is 100%. They don't care about anything other than helping people."*

Funder

*"It's the humanising of humanitarian provision, promoting dignity, make the systems more user friendly and dignified, basic things like food hygiene..."*

Help Refugees



Help Refugees  @HelpRefugees · 16 Nov 2017

Over 15,000 people are waiting in limbo on the Greek islands, living in tents, sharing blankets. Please help us help the grassroots groups doing all they can to prepare people for the winter by donating here [bit.ly/HelpRefugeesDo...](https://bit.ly/HelpRefugeesDo...)

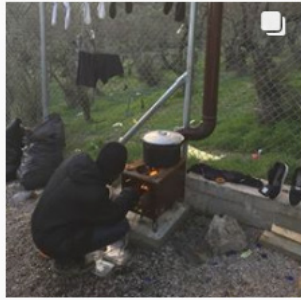


14



10

Show this thread



and became less of an emergency, there is a growing need for more specialised volunteers.

*“People had to learn the same lessons over and over again - there was no historical info about how to behave... It was difficult to find a way to pass on the knowledge. Volunteers only left when they were burnt out, so there wasn't much of a handover. Now we make sure there are two days of leave per week.”*

### Help Refugees

Right from the beginning safeguarding for volunteers and beneficiaries were key. Very early on in the camp, Save the Children were asked to run a safeguarding workshop by Help Refugees to help establish safeguarding procedures. This was absolutely crucial to setting the standards for safeguarding vulnerable adults and children in the camp, especially as the traditional pathways of safeguarding with authorities (police etc.) did not work. As a direct result of a lack of safe routes for children, Safe Passage, an organisation created in Oct 2015 and supported by Help Refugees, became the safeguarding pathway for accompanied minors into the UK.

From day one, potential volunteers were asked to fill in an application form, alongside being offered advice on planning their trip, given a set of frequently asked questions to manage their expectations, and a code of conduct to ensure they understood what was expected of them.

This has now evolved to Help Refugees developing a very systematic approach to volunteer recruitment and management using Salesforce CRM. This is also supported by their handbook of policies including: safeguarding, whistleblowing, communication, data protection, equal opportunities and many more. These are shared with all partners, volunteers and staff.

*(See also section xiv on data, record keeping and governance.)*

### **v) Willingness to learn and ask for help.**

It is clear the founders of Help Refugees were taken by surprise at the initial speed and scale of donations. They recognised the need for structural support and sought the help of Prism the Gift Fund for assistance with back office management and governance. Several interviewees point towards the humbleness and willingness of Help Refugees to learn as a key factor in its ability to scale and develop networks in the early stages.

*“They are good at learning from problems – able to adapt very quickly.”*

Funder

### **vi) Volunteer management and Safeguarding.**

At the beginning of the work in Calais, Help Refugees was managing over 15,000 volunteers, with little or no experience in volunteer management. At its peak, there were up to 300 volunteers a day, which later averaged out to 50-60 volunteers. In early 2018, it now stands at 100 due to a change in the volunteering model and a reduction in need. The founders became acutely aware of the need to learn quickly, not only in terms of organising volunteers, but also in managing risk and safeguarding while supporting volunteer needs. As the crisis has evolved

## 3.2. What factors influenced their development trajectory, funding base, operations, relationship with other grassroots groups and other more established organisations?

Several of the factors outlined already influenced the trajectory of Help Refugees. The speed and amount of donations coming from members of the public, the fact that they were fulfilling an under-met need (and thus the potential for growth was high), and their willingness to learn from and respect existing organisations, all played a big role in their development.

*“Every day we would improve the organisation... The ability to be self-critical and be open to suggestions was important.”*

Help Refugees

*“They managed to pull disparate initiatives together under an umbrella while respect the autonomy of other organisations.”*

Grassroots initiative

Other factors highlighted by interviewees include:

### **vii) Organisation and professionalism.**

The ability to organise and coordinate quickly and professionally was key to Help Refugees' capacity to deploy volunteers and resources. They built on this initial level of organisation to capture learning, undertake risk assessments and develop documentation over time. The initial lack of experience of working in humanitarian aid was both a blessing and a curse: not having any pre-programmed

way of behaving enabled responsiveness and flexibility, but it meant that mistakes had to be made and learned from along the way.

*“With the volunteers and warehouse, they were very knowledgeable and organised.”*

Funder

*“Help Refugees have a certain level of professionalism that has been developed: increased documentation, risk assessments, everything is archived and stored. It is really critical for lessons to be learned.”*

Help Refugees

The level of coordination and organisation, combined with strong communications and branding, enabled potential volunteers and donors to be both made aware and mobilised quickly.

*“We were the standout group being on the ground, and communicating back on social media as quickly and effectively.”*

Help Refugees

### **viii) Advocacy skills and networks.**

Help Refugees utilised their existing networks very effectively to give their message profile and weight, and in fact their personal networks were so integral to their success, it is hard to imagine their volunteer group be as successful without them. However, they also utilised networking skills on the ground:

quickly making contact with other grassroots organisations such as **Safe Passage**, **L' Auberge Des Migrants** or **Refugee Community Kitchen** and identifying who they needed to talk to in order to understand priorities, form new partnerships, and fill gaps in knowledge or learning. Their organisational value of #ChooseLove quickly became the bedrock of their partnership working; with over 80 implementing partnerships on the ground, all underpinned with a genuine commitment to the core values of kindness, love, co-creation and co-participation between groups.

*"It is really difficult to live our values with our partnerships; we have culture clashes, value clashes and the tension between being 'in the tent' or 'outside the tent'. But we are committed to #ChooseLove, we know it is all about people to people and we all invest in it because it is the right thing to do."*

Help Refugees

*"The ability to make links with local groups or organisations and get the warehouse up and running very quickly was important."*

Funder

Since the early days, these advocacy skills have extended into the political arena, with part of Help Refugees' work now being focused on the national or global context for their grassroots work. For example, the crucial census Help Refugees undertook in Calais, revealed the true amount of unaccompanied, undocumented children and children without immediate family in the UK, which in turn, kickstarted the Dubs Amendment campaign.

To date, Help Refugees has focused on legal advocacy challenges, and had recently undertaken public campaigning to mobilise supporters around these challenges (see

section 2.1. on Legislation). However, they have yet to explicitly link advocacy and voice with the grassroots projects.

Their recent crowdfunding campaign 'Dubs Now' on CrowdJustice has smashed their £30,000 target, raising £39,009 pledged by 1149 people to fund the case:

*'Help Refugees Ltd is delighted to announce that we have been granted permission to appeal the judgment on our judicial review, challenging the Home Office's interpretation and implementation of the Dubs Amendment. This appeal is our chance to bring a greater number of lone refugee children to safety in the UK'.*

#### **ix) Professional support.**

The support provided by Prism the Gift Fund has been an essential part of enabling Help Refugees to scale. Prism describes itself as being 'established with a clear vision to increase the flow of funds into the charitable sector from UK donors through effective administration'. It offers, amongst other services, charity administration for early stage charities- and is very explicit in not offering strategic support. For Help Refugees it has enabled basic governance, including trustees and a charity number, alongside fund management, organisational support, and assurance of legal compliance for the Charity Commission. This has enabled the Help Refugees core team to focus on delivering the aid and fundraising efforts at the beginning of their journey. However, it has also meant that there has been no organisational capacity building and learning over time for Help Refugees - a crucial part of a trajectory for any organisation. Conversely, Prism has had to build it's internal knowledge on charity law and governance alongside micro grant giving and humanitarian aid. Part of the reason why there were large gaps in knowledge around areas such as safeguarding, monitoring and evaluation and volunteer management right at the beginning- was because neither organisation had it.



It is clear that both organisations would have benefited from strategic and specialised knowledge in this field. There is a huge reliance on Prism to continue to serve as the fund managers, deliver governance and manage the grantee process.

*"[We] could not have done it without Prism."*

Help Refugees

Help Refugees still has work to do with respect to transferring organisational infrastructure (e.g. avoiding over-reliance and pressure on a small number of key people) and governance (e.g. putting in place a structure suitable for a network-based movement), if they are interested in evolving out of the Prism portfolio. However, there is no doubt that the early involvement of Prism was essential in providing huge knowledge gaps around financial and charity management.

### 3.3. What were the main challenges and risks that Help Refugees experienced in scaling up its operation? What solutions were effective? What approaches were less successful? Why?

The need to respond quickly to the unexpected level of engagement and volume of donations led to a number of challenges and risks, highlighted by interviewees as follows:

#### **x) Experience and expertise.**

Help Refugees essentially had no choice but to organise around the volume of resource they suddenly had in the form of donations and volunteers. This left little time to develop deep expertise, for example in relation to legal requirements or safeguarding.

*"Making sure you understand both UK and French law, protecting themselves from getting too attached to beneficiaries, being aware of risks that volunteers are putting themselves under..."*

Humanitarian organisation

*"There was no background in management but because nobody else is there, they are the most experienced."*

Help Refugees

Seeking help with organisational structures such as Prism The Gift Fund and seeking advice from more experienced organisations such as Save the Children were key to Help Refugees being able to continue scaling despite a lack of preparedness for the volume of work they faced.

This also applied to local knowledge and experience. Working directly with refugees presented opportunities to understand immediate need, but also exposed them to unforeseen challenges. For example, a lack of translators meant that people who spoke English were more influential in the public meetings that determined the distribution models in Calais.

### ***xi) Safeguarding.***

The lack of any expertise in safeguarding - for example in relation to unaccompanied minors present in Calais - became evident early on, especially with high volume of volunteers. Help Refugees drew upon their established relationships with other humanitarian organisations from the UK for support with this issue. The same organisations who were unable to intervene themselves due to the fact that the situation had not been declared a humanitarian disaster. Save the Children provided crucial safeguarding training and support to Help Refugees, which continues to this day.

*"They were honest and humble about where they lacked expertise and reached out to make sure they were doing their best to safeguard children."*

Humanitarian organisation

*"There are safeguarding risks. When you are operating in place like the jungle in the absence of any structure."*

Grassroots initiative

The seeking of external expertise and development of learning and guidance has helped to alleviate some of these issues, but interviews suggest there is still progress to be made.

*"They need some watertight guidelines for their volunteers."*

Humanitarian organisation

### ***xii) Instability.***

For the first 18 months, Help Refugees was 75% crowdfunded. This made the organisation reliant on members of the public providing money and, despite the large volumes of funding, there was no guarantee of consistent funding streams. Seeking grant funding enabled specific programmes to be developed, such as the training of refugees to volunteer at the warehouse.

### ***xiii) Capacity.***

This has been a continual challenge. Maintaining the capacity to deliver a large and growing list of organisational requirements has been difficult for Help Refugees. For example, it was challenging to capture learning and pass on knowledge with such a high volume and turnover of volunteers which ranges from short term (weekend or a week) mid term (3-4 weeks) and long term (a month onward). It was difficult to both respond to what was happening in the camp and continue to communicate clearly and regularly externally. Grant funding and external expertise has enabled Help Refugees to overcome some of these challenges, but the issue of individual capacity among the founders remains an ongoing challenge – it is their passion and energy that started Help Refugees, but also the same passion and energy that the organisation is reliant on to continue functioning.

*"Their weakness is not understanding the weakness of themselves. The burnout issue is a big one."*

Funder

*"We couldn't respond to what was happening in the camp and telling people what was going on at the same time."*

Help Refugees

### ***xiv) Data, record keeping and governance.***

One specific area that was paid less attention to initially due to lack of capacity, is data collection and record keeping. It was difficult to take the time to collect and analyse data, or to monitor and evaluate where the aid was going. Their early impact reporting was recorded through capturing highly personalised stories of the impact of the direct aid - as this was built into the conditions of their grant giving. However a more systematic approach was not developed until a year later.

*"People had to learn the same lessons over and over again - there was no historical info about how to behave."*

Help Refugees

*“There was no monitoring and evaluation [from funders] because there was so much going on.”*

Help Refugees

Linked to this is a lack of focus - not entirely untypical in an emergency response situation. Time and resource was necessarily spent responding to immediate need, leaving less time to analyse need more strategically.

*“They have been open and flexible to anything that has been asked in terms of planning.”*

Grassroots initiative

*“Less of a focus on structural changes.”*

Grassroots initiative

By 2017, they had integrated Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) framework in to their work. Since then, there has been more focus on data

and on developing shared records and learning. Help Refugees is currently evolving its monitoring and evaluation framework - ensuring that their MEAL is qualitative as well as quantitative and taking a rights-based approach. The overall outcome for Help Refugees is to ensure that refugees are responded to in a way that promotes their well-being and views them as individuals – an individual that has rights, needs, hopes and dreams. The MEAL framework is currently being designed to respond to this set of more qualitative and emotive criteria and not necessarily to those that deal explicitly with numbers such as numbers of refugees reached, number of items delivered.

So far, the MEAL framework covers operations, programmes, advocacy and messaging. As of early 2018, Help Refugees started testing out their new framework to 2 or 3 grantees and will be refining it before rolling it out across their grantee portfolio.

## 3.4. What are the key challenges Help Refugees are currently experiencing? How are they approaching these?

The interviews reveal a number of ongoing challenges for Help Refugees and similar organisations.

### **xv) Replicability, growth, and sustainability.**

This is a key and ongoing point. Help Refugees is an organisation that tapped into a specific public appetite to contribute at a specific time. To keep that momentum going or growing in a time of shifting political and public priorities presents a potential challenge. Seeking more sustainable funding and formalising organisational structure should aid growth and long term sustainability, and typically would come from its governance structure. However, the founders of Help Refugees are

the driving force for the strategic direction of the charity. The replicability of this type of model seems to be reliant on the combination of timing, messaging, and effective utilisation of networks outlined in 3.1 above. There is also a trade off in implementing this transition - having a more secure workforce and increased operational costs means that the nature of fundraising may have to change, ie longer term grant funding for programme work.

### **xvi) Continue to formalise.**

Firming up governance, leadership, organisational standards and structures is an ongoing need. Receiving funding from Comic Relief, Open Society Esmee Fairbairn

has helped to secure funding for specific projects but there has been a lack of long term stable income. As a result the focus has been delivering aid and fundraising rather than focusing on developing long term governance processes outside of Prism.

***xvii) ...but without losing agility or focus.***

But there is a risk that increased formalisation might reduce the flexibility and responsiveness that made Help Refugees so immediately effective at distributing aid on the ground. The key will be to maintain a balance – developing strong governance and systems, without becoming overly bounded by process. Part of this has to do with being nestled into Prism’s own governance structure.

In many respects, Help Refugees is mirroring the same growing pains of any start up at the ‘growth’ stage, where hiring, improving quality and implementing processes are the main pressures. The next stage would be establishing itself in the marketplace/sector, where - depending on the vision, mission and commitment - it will continue to grow, while culturally continuing to behave ‘like a startup’. Founders and/or investors will often leave or embed themselves more thoroughly within an organisation at this stage ([StartUpCommons](#) Accessed 4/02/17) .

***“It needs to go where people aren’t - but when do they stop doing that? Can they always do that or will they professionalise?”***

Funder

***“[They should] continue to stay focused and keep their remit. Don’t spread themselves too thin.”***

Humanitarian organisation

***xviii) Finding a permanent place.***

Interviewees suggest perhaps organisations like Help Refugees can both fill a gap (where

other agencies are not present) and operate as an alternative provider (where other agencies are present). There is a range of views as to whether organisations like Help Refugees is better suited to working outside the existing ecosystem of support, or within it.

***“It’s a necessary part of the eco system - there is a gap and they filled it really well. But they have adapted to also work with the eco system - they can play the system - they have also changed the system.”***

Funder

***“They should work outside it without hesitation. It is important that they coordinate with the people who are a part of it. They are complementary.”***

Grassroots initiative

Much like any disruptive start-up Help Refugees will continue to work outside the system until the system evolves so it becomes mainstream practise - paving the way for future innovations to take root. Currently, Help Refugees has developed a position as an advocate for change as well as an on-the-ground deliverer. They are a bridge between the formal and informal actors in the eco-system and play a vital role in ensuring there is co-ordination, and no duplication between efforts on the ground.

As they continue to grow and cement their place within the sector, interviewees suggest a number of key factors that will be important for long term sustainability:

- Stabilising funding
- Fine-tuning focus and message (e.g. fundraising and advocacy focus)
- Capturing learning, communications and impact data
- Balancing being a responding organisation with the development of a forward-looking vision

# 4. Learning: what can Philanthropy learn from the experience of Help Refugees?

## 4.1. What ways can Philanthropy identify new organisations to provide funding to? How can Foundations quickly identify new humanitarian led movements at an early stage?

There are two parts to this question: how to identify new organisations and how to determine whether they are suitable for funding.

Identifying new organisations in the first place relies on networks – both social / virtual and on-the-ground. Well connected organisations with strong networks and profile (such as Help Refugees) may be easier to spot than those with lower visibility. Philanthropists, both in the UK and in the USA started to contact Help Refugees a few months from when they started - mainly in part to the exposure they developed and were given.

The rise of unconstituted groups, or social impact organisations that are not registered charities will start to present a challenge for funders. In the UK, the charitable test guides the decision making around grant giving, and organisations must prove they have a

charitable purpose and provide public benefit, ie make a positive difference for the public. The governing document of a charity must ensure that the assets (cash or property) can only be used for charitable purpose.

As new organisations form, often with different types of governance, ie like the Prism model, or early stage monitoring and evaluation because it has arisen as an emergency intervention, or where the impact takes place overseas, making it impossible to witness, foundations must develop procedures which suit their own risk appetite on their board. For funders such as Comic Relief, they have a ring fenced fund for innovation work which is slightly higher risk. Other funders have channelled their funds through Prism which as a charity fulfill the obligations to the charity test. Further work needs to be undertaken to explore the appetite of funders around this issue.

### **Recommendation 1: Monitor networks**

Foundations who are interested in funding this type of networked approach should monitor social media (Twitter seems to be the preferred platform) and crowdfunding platforms such as **Crowdjustice** or **Crowdfunder**, as well as keeping abreast of new campaigners or social innovations that are evolving through sharing information across foundations and/or grantees.

### **Recommendation 2: Gather local intelligence**

To truly understand where and how volunteer responses to crisis evolve, and thus to fund appropriate interventions, it would make sense to adopt the same fieldwork-first approach of Help Refugees. This could involve funding intelligence gathering exercises through local networks as a first point of call when emergencies or disasters strike. If there is no local network, then the commissioning of a community mapper would be recommended.

### **Recommendation 3: Determine funding conditions**

Once identified, suggestions from interviewees for minimum standards or conditions that need to be in place to meet the charitable test, and to provide support for grassroots initiatives include:

- Minimum standards regarding safety / safeguarding and effectiveness (but without being too controlling).

- Track record of success.
- Evidence of impact (and of the money being genuinely used for the agreed purpose), although this may also mean that additional support should be given to volunteer groups to help to do this.
- Provide unrestricted funding, or paying for invoices directly/donations in kind.
- Find an alternative way of funding activities - i.e monzo cards<sup>3</sup>.

### **Recommendation 4: Take a balanced approach**

Interviewees recognise the need for a balanced approach from funders, for example putting in place accountability measures while also providing broad support to grassroots movements.

*“Funders should do more to say what is happening and co-ordination wise what is going on. There is a responsibility to make the sector do more, but also the role of the funder is to support the grassroots.”*  
Funder

*“Perhaps a tool kit that funders have developed, that can be given to organisations who are looking to get support from funders.”*  
Funder

While some of this support could be light touch, there is a recognition that foundations need to be compliant with the charitable test - especially where a volunteer response is the redistribution of funds.

<sup>3</sup><https://monzo.com/>

### **Recommendation 5: Look beyond core financial support**

It is clear that Help Refugees would have benefitted from more than just money throughout its development. In addition to funding immediate impact work, foundations should consider funding support to the volunteer network, which includes well-being support, infrastructure, and good governance support.

For example, this could be a simple tool kit covering recommendation 3, which could be sent out and used by volunteer groups either through the foundation or a crowdfunding platform. It could include direct support, as well as additional funding for wellbeing leave and self care purposes.

The need to reduce risk around funding early stage volunteer led movements suggests that there is potential in supporting the creation of an entity, much like Prism, which lends governance, compliance and strategic support to new networks. The networks themselves can then focus on delivery, while someone else takes care of setting up processes and compliance - supporting the organisation to grow and develop their capacity, with a view to spinning out and becoming independent.

As access to, and use of, new digital platforms like Twitter and crowdfunding sites increase, supported by physical networks, we will start to see a rise in the number of mobilised networks that develop along a similar path, filling in the gaps that more established NGOs cannot reach. **North London Cares** and **The3Million** are just two examples of organisation following that trajectory - both have received crowdfunding and grant support, and have experienced similar growing pains.

This type of support could be simple back office support, which manages the risks of the grant process and/or the transfer of crowdfunding. However, interviewees suggest that there also needs to be strong support in areas such as compliance, governance and strategy.

We recommend that foundations invest into a feasibility study of this type of service which support the scaling of social justice based volunteer led movements.

## 4.2. What factors indicate that a volunteer group is meeting a critical need successfully?

Help Refugees essentially followed a simple process:

- Identify need
- Communicate need
- Mobilise resources
- Distribute resources
- Confirm impact (and report back, thus reconfirming need)

It quickly became clear Help Refugees had inadvertently identified a need not only from the public perspective (a need to take action), but also from a practical perspective when they arrived in Calais (they put in place new distribution systems and quickly became the largest aid operation in that location). Their communication, mobilisation and distribution activities were well organised and delivered with a high degree of flexibility and responsiveness. Their impact reporting was originally led by highly personalised stories and has evolved into more systematic reporting of impacts (e.g. number of food portions distributed, people impacted, etc.).

Funders could look to assess this, or a similar journey, across potential grantees, but with a potential flexibility of application.

*“An internal diagnostic tool - when do we want to apply funding etc. to support a grassroots movements versus when do we want to be more systemic. We need different approaches at different times.”*

Funder

Although some interviewees comment on the importance of monitoring and evaluation requirements from funders, there was also caution around being too stringent with requirements, and a recognition that requirements needed to be balanced with non-financial support to aid achievement of impacts. There was a clear indication that Help Refugees would have benefitted from consultancy support in monitoring and evaluation. There was suggestion that foundations could develop a basic template or tool kit to either co-create suitable monitoring and evaluation.



## 4.3. What risks, if any, are associated with funding new formed volunteer groups?

Several interviewees comment on the need to *balance growth with a maintenance of agility and innovation*, so that formalised funding does not become stifling. Others question the replicability of the Help Refugees model, given the particular timing of their initial campaign (e.g. funding something similar will not guarantee the same outcomes or shape of organisations).

*“Without public interest it would be difficult for a similar thing to happen again, although it’s still possible.”*

Help Refugees

Weak governance and impact tracking are significant risks, particularly for inexperienced organisations, but again there is the need to balance this with flexibility to enable organic growth and to avoid stifling young organisations finding their feet.

*“Include in grants something linked with monitoring and evaluation, they were lacking that to show the extent in the work that they did.”*

Grassroots initiative

*“There has to be willingness to be more flexible with funding model... There has to be a balance.”*

Grassroots initiative

There is also a significant risk around whether the funding of the activity of the group meets the charity test. Coupled with loose evaluation, monitoring and governance typical of early stage volunteer groups, it could be hard to explicitly define how the test is met. This could carry significant risk for funding an organisation.

## 4.4. What opportunities are associated with funding new formed volunteer groups?

The energy and responsiveness of agile, on-the-ground groups is a vital resource in times of crisis. Funders have an opportunity to get the money directly to these grassroots organisations, where larger agencies might not have the agility to act so quickly.

*“There needs to be a recognition that we need a culture to move quickly.”*

Grassroots initiative

Models such as co-funding, or the development of ‘arms-length’ partners like Prism the Gift Fund, could enable funders to be comfortable with the higher risk appetite necessary for directly funding newer untested initiative. However, it is crucial that new voluntary organisations develop their own governance processes and/or decision making strategies for impact. Any new arms-length partners need to incorporate a ‘governance for impact’ approach to this effect.

*“There is a need for organisations that are more comfortable with risk. There is a role for innovation in a time of crisis because there is a need.”*

Grassroots initiative

In terms of opportunities to fund specific activities, interviewees point to the need for practical support, training and expertise for new organisations, as well as the potential to provide grants to fund specific overheads, in particular salaries (responding to the needs of the core founding groups), projects requiring capital investment, capacity building (either directly or indirectly), fundraising support and/or operational support.

Funding volunteer-led movements provides an opportunity to support - either directly or indirectly - leadership networks, voice and advocacy at a grassroots level. Much like funding wellbeing and self care, this could be ring fenced in order to ensure that it get parity with other activities, rather than be subsumed into emergency responses.

# 5. Key Learnings

## 5.1. Learning from Help Refugees

- The speed at which Help Refugees gained traction and formed as an organization was largely down to having the right message, at the right time, from the right people.
- Beyond this "good timing", Help Refugees filled a gap not being met by existing organisations. It was able to operate flexibly and reactively, being unhindered by the legal and financial structures of larger, more established organisations.
- The consistency and authenticity of messages communicated by Help Refugees has been key to its ability to connect with, and gain support from, members of the public.
- Help Refugees is a well-networked organisation, with natural advocacy skills – these factors have contributed not only to its ability to mobilise action from its supporters, but also to its ability to lobby for change and to make important connections on the ground.
- Professionalism, organisational skills and – most importantly – a willingness to learn and ask for help where needed, have been vital to Help Refugees' ability to manage the unexpected influx of donations (in terms of time and money) in the early days and then to scale up activities. The support provided by Prism the Gift Fund has been an essential part of enabling Help Refugees to scale - enabling basic governance to be put in place, alongside fund management, organisational support, and assurance of legal compliance.
- Help Refugees has recognised and taken action to mitigate specific challenges – including organisational structures and governance, safeguarding and volunteer management, maintaining stable funding, capacity of key staff members, and data and record keeping. However, work remains to be done in many of these areas to ensure long term stability.
- Looking ahead, long term focus and sustainability remain key challenges, particularly with respect to maintenance of stable funding and supporter mobilisation. Formalising governance, leadership, organisational standards and structures is an ongoing need, but risks losing the responsiveness that made Help Refugees so immediately effective. The key will be to maintain a balance between developing systems and maintaining agility, while also developing a strong forward-looking vision for Help Refugees within the sector.
- In many respects, Help Refugees is mirroring the same growing pains of any start up at the 'growth' stage, where hiring, improving quality and implementing processes are the main pressures. The next stage would be establishing itself in the marketplace/sector, where - depending on the vision, mission and commitment - it will continue to grow.

## 5.2. Learning for philanthropy

- Philanthropic organisations and foundations can employ a number of approaches to finding and funding new organisations and movements, including:
  - Monitoring online and on the ground networks (e.g. Twitter, crowdfunding platforms, existing networks and contacts).
  - Gathering local intelligence in situations of humanitarian crisis, emergency or disaster, in order to understand and fund appropriate interventions.
  - Determining funding conditions – e.g. minimum standards for safeguarding and effectiveness.
  - Balancing funding requirements with flexibility – e.g. putting in place funding requirements while also providing broad support to grassroots movements (but with recognition that foundations need to be compliant with the charitable test).
  - Looking beyond core financial support to advice, expertise and practical organisational support around governance, systems, administration and strategy.
- To determine whether or not a volunteer group is meeting a critical need successfully, funders could look to evaluate the journey of potential grantees against key steps such as identification of need, communication of need, mobilisation of resources, distribution of resources, understanding of impact, learning and adaptation of approach, confirmation of impact – applied flexibly depending on the situation.
- Risks associated with funding newly formed groups include lack of governance/organisational structure and impact tracking, as well as replicability or sustainability of a specific model that may have emerged organically in response to a specific set of circumstances.
- The energy and responsiveness of agile, on-the-ground groups is a vital resource in times of crisis. Funders have an opportunity to get the money directly to these grassroots organisations, where larger agencies might not have the agility to act so quickly. Funding volunteer-led movements provides an opportunity to support - either directly or indirectly - leadership networks, voice and advocacy at a grassroots level.

# Top Tips for new organisations from Help Refugees

1. Don't have a remit - don't tie yourself down to one type of intervention. Be prepared to pivot.
2. Don't underestimate the value of everyone you work with and help; every single person is valuable and important so make sure you listen.
3. Invest in your team and lose control. This is part of our magic, we really let people fly and give them responsibility.
4. Don't be afraid of speaking out against injustice; #Chooselove at all times.
5. Always diversify your funding - never get comfortable. Remember that bank starts at zero every day.
6. Be careful risk takers; don't be afraid to say no to anything - but if you do say yes, make sure that you plan your exit if you need to get out.
7. Trust your instinct - Don't be scared to enter worlds you don't have experience in.
8. Always ask advice, never make a decision on your own and never stop wanting to learn.
9. Protect your reputation at all times and ensure you have thorough safeguarding, financial and impact reporting.
10. Leave your ego at the front door - Have integrity all the way.

the  
social  
change  
agency

The Social Change Agency is the leading consultancy for movement building. Specialising in community organising, crowdfunding, peer networks, innovation and systemic and organisational change.

[www.thesocialchangeagency.org](http://www.thesocialchangeagency.org)

@socialchangeag

phf Paul Hamlyn  
Foundation

Paul Hamlyn Foundation was established by Paul Hamlyn in 1987. Upon his death in 2001, he left most of his estate to the Foundation, creating one of the largest independent grant-making foundations in the UK. Our mission is to help people overcome disadvantage and lack of opportunity, so that they can realise their potential and enjoy fulfilling and creative lives. We have a particular interest in supporting young people and a strong belief in the importance of the arts. Social justice is the golden thread that links all our work.

[www.phf.org.uk](http://www.phf.org.uk)

@phf\_uk

For more information on this report please contact [esther@thesocialchangeagency.org](mailto:esther@thesocialchangeagency.org)

