

Pathways to employability? Career development for marginalized migrant women

You may be puzzled as to my title and its relevance to the amazing work we are hearing profiled today. We are used to thinking about career in particular ways associated with its origin in western and industrialized contexts, focus on autonomous individual acting in isolation where rationality is assumed and male is normative. We are used to schemes around employability focusing on a series of carrots and sticks around the interface between individual and labor market and such talk may well be out of place today.

However, career specialists like myself are very mindful that if our work is to contribute towards rather than undermine social justice we need to broaden our view and take all aspects of a person's intersecting identity into account.

The word career basically comes from words meaning a path through life. But for this to be relevant to all but the most privileged then we must expand our thinking:

- Bear in mind that decision making is not so individualised in many cultures where collectivism is engrained.
- That any decision making is influenced by context, so understand the wide variety of contexts folk come from.
- That the underpinning assumptions of choice are not there for everyone seeking to secure a livelihood for themselves and their dependents.
- That for women in particular, care work can form a more significant domain than market work in their career development and the two always need looking at together.

I have been involved in supporting resettled migrant families in Coventry and Warwickshire and looking for connections between this and my work training career development practitioners. I was aware of European funded projects on developing training resources for career development practitioners that colleagues at Canterbury Christchurch were are involved. Became aware of ACAA because of Rabia writing in a higher education publication about the needs of students from refugee backgrounds. So made contact and exchanged emails then she sent the evaluation.

I was really struck by Naomi's evaluation as demonstrating powerfully how schemes like this are part of a process, as well as the complexity of that process.

Market Work may or may not be part of these women's futures. Paid work can be an important part of social integration but is challenging, and specific barriers around language, permissions and cultural familiarisation are needed before safe, sustainable employment can be found – what we might call decent work, as defined by ILO. Good work has potential and proven benefits around educational and health outcomes, personal fulfilment and active citizenship. Care work might not present identical barriers but still requires engagement with schools and health services, other statutory agencies and shops or community groups.

Rabia and I have written an article for a career development journal presenting the case for work of grassroots organizations such as ACAA to be seen as careers work. Now I am here arguing that careers work is a relevant framework for looking at this scheme.

Lots of barriers for statutory services in reaching and working effectively with marginalised women. Services are somewhat fragmented and integration of career support with universal credit has been an issue.

But through schemes such as this have great scope because:

- Career not a presenting issue but embedded in general integrational benefits e.g. language, engagement with schools and other agencies.
- Cultural connection creates trust and a careful balancing of the familiar and the new, without imposing a deficit model or retraumatizing. Once relationships are established, everyone can contribute, even if in form of food.
- This leads to enough trust for referral to other services and agencies.

So what next? The European funded work I mentioned earlier highlighted a need for advocacy to employers?

Some other organizations such as Carriers of Hope in Coventry now working on social enterprise model e.g. proof bakery

Seeking further ways to build capacity and strengthen connections for the benefit and empowerment of marginalised women whether they end up in what we might traditionally view as careers or not – the main thing is that they are no longer marginalised but can manage their own course through life.