

Integrated in Brent

A joint project between housing
and refugee organisations



PROJECT EVALUATION AND
GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

A Azim El-Hassan
and John Perry

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Innisfree Housing Association

Innisfree Housing Association was formed in 1985 in response to the housing and support needs of the Irish community. It is committed to housing people in need and welcomes the many tenants from new and emerging communities who have become part of Innisfree.

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Inquilab Housing Association

Inquilab was formed in the early 1980s following concerns that the needs of the black community were not being met by mainstream providers. With a strong tenant focus Inquilab, like Innisfree, is keen to embrace the needs of neglected minority groups.

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Integrated in Brent – Project evaluation and good practice guide

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Printed by Sharp Edge Print and Marketing

The authors would like to thank those who took part in this evaluation exercise – staff from Innisfree and Inquilab HAs, the London Borough of Brent, Brent Refugees and Migrants Forum, and members of refugee community organisations in Brent. (Those who provided information or their views are named in Appendix 4 of the report.)

The project organisers would like to thank Debbie Larner, Head of Professional Practice at the Chartered Institute of Housing, for her support as monitoring officer for the IGP grant.

While all reasonable care and attention has been taken in compiling this publication, the publishers regret that they cannot assume responsibility for any error or omissions that it contains.

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Contents

Foreword	4
Glossary	5
1 Introduction	6
2 The project and how it worked	11
3 Lessons learnt from the project	24
4 Legacy and next steps	31
5 Recommendations	33
Appendices	
1 Project milestones	35
2 Schedule for the training course	36
3 Case study of a refugee work placement	39
4 People interviewed for the evaluation exercise	41
5 BRMF and other RCO members of the liB Steering Group	42
Key reports and sources of information	43

Brent is a very diverse Borough which has welcomed many refugees and new migrants in the past few years. For all residents, housing is often a high priority, but for refugees and new migrants housing may be their greatest need and one which they find difficult to resolve in a very tight housing market. It's in all our interests, though, that Brent residents – whether long-established or fairly new arrivals – are securely housed according to their need and entitlement. Only if this is the case can we hope to have and keep a well-integrated Borough.

Innisfree and Inquilab are two local housing associations who have experience of working with minority communities in Brent. They came together to start this project, 'Integrated in Brent', which aims to tackle housing issues as a key step on the road to a more integrated Borough. From the outset, they wanted to work with the local authority and also – most especially – with the Brent Refugees and Migrants Forum and with some of the many community-based organisations of refugees that are based in Brent. Few housing providers in London have tried to do this kind of work, so the project is a pioneer from which they hope that other organisations can learn.

This report tells the story of what happened – the successes and pitfalls. It is aimed at helping other housing organisations and community-based groups who want to do similar work. As local MP, I hope it will be well read both within Brent and more widely, so that others can learn from Brent's experience in this very important area of work.

Dawn Butler, MP

March 2010

Glossary

Abbreviations are used in the text. Here are the main ones and what they mean.

BHP	Brent Housing Partnership (the arms length management organisation which manages Brent's council housing)
BME	Black and minority ethnic
BPTRG	Brent Private Tenants Rights Group
BRMF	Brent Refugees and Migrants Forum
CIH	Chartered Institute of Housing
CRB	Criminal Records Bureau
HA	Housing association
hact	Housing Associations' Charitable Trust
IGP	Innovation and Good Practice (grant)
liB	Integrated in Brent
LA	Local authority
LBB	London Borough of Brent
RAMFEL	Refugee and Migrant Forum of East London
RCO	Refugee community organisation
TSA	Tenant Services Authority
UKBA	United Kingdom Border Agency

1

Introduction



1.1 What is 'Integrated in Brent'?

'Integrated in Brent' is an innovative partnership project launched to provide refugee community organisations (RCOs) with practical support, training and guidance, so as to promote better understanding, participation and access to social housing for their clients.

The scheme, spearheaded by Innisfree and Inquilab Housing Associations in partnership with the London Borough of Brent (LBB) and the Brent Refugees and Migrants Forum (BRMF), is the first of its kind in London.

The two year project received £100,000 of funding from the Tenant Services Authority.¹ Additionally, Fortunegate and Network Housing Group each contributed £5,000 and the London Borough of Brent also met certain costs as the project proceeded.

The project was approved in July 2008 and concludes in March 2010.

What resources did the project have and how were they used?

The funding was allocated as follows:

Overall project co-ordination and administration	£50,000
Training programme	£20,000
Conference	£5,000
Steering group, ongoing evaluation and follow-up	£15,000
Evaluation report – production and dissemination	£10,000
Launch event	£5,000
Legacy projects	£5,000

1.2 Why was the project developed in Brent?

In terms of the size and variety of its communities, Brent is the most diverse borough in England (see box on the next page). An equally diverse range of organisations, including small HAs and RCOs, represent BME groups – particularly refugees, asylum seekers, and newly emerging migrant communities. However, they often lack the experience, knowledge, resources and voice to influence the direction of policy and practice on housing and other issues. Similarly, the complexity of community bodies makes it problematic for strategic bodies – such as the local housing authority – to utilise the skills and knowledge of grass roots and community-based organisations. One of the main reasons for the project was therefore to help to strengthen the networks through which providers and community organisations address the housing issues of a significant part of Brent's population.

¹ The project was funded by the Housing Corporation's Innovation and Good Practice programme which is now administered by the Tenant Services Authority. The project agreement, signed in October 2008, was formally between Innisfree HA and the Housing Corporation.

Refugees and migrants in Brent

Formal estimates suggest that there are between 16,300 and 18,800 refugees in Brent.² This is about 7% of the population. However, there could in fact be as many as 20,000 refugees, meaning that Brent has one of the largest refugee communities in the country. In addition, 2001 census data indicated that 2.1% of the population had migrated to the area from outside the UK within the previous year. If these rates are typical year-on-year it can be expected that a significant proportion of Brent's population consists of relatively recent migrants, including refugees.

Data about housing applications suggest that Somalis, Afghanis and Kosovans are the largest single groups of recent migrants. There is also anecdotal evidence from RCOs indicating the emergence of other new groups in Brent. According to the BRMF there are more Eritrean, Ethiopian and Tamil refugees settling in the Borough. Local services have registered a range of refugee and new migrant needs, including for housing, health care, English language training (in one survey 55% of refugees interviewed spoke little or no English), education and jobs. Housing is a particular pressure point in Brent, with 18,000 on the Borough's waiting list.

1.3 Who were the partners in the project?

Innisfree HA

In addition to the general background of mixed communities in Brent, there were particular factors that led to the project being developed by Innisfree HA:

- The association's board had been interested in using its experience in working with the Irish community to work with other communities, particularly in light of the work of the Independent Commission on Community Cohesion on migration issues and the national debate that started.
- Innisfree wanted to enhance the awareness of its staff team about the new communities in Brent and the capacity Innisfree has to serve them. (The introduction of choice-based lettings in Brent has resulted in Innisfree having a more diverse customer base.)
- Innisfree welcomes new challenges and the opportunity to explore new areas of work.
- Innisfree's Chief Executive, Clare Winstanley, has a strong interest in refugee issues.

However, Innisfree needed a partner because it felt that, as a small organisation, it could not undertake the project alone.

Inquilab HA

Inquilab HA was asked to join the partnership with Innisfree because:

- Inquilab's underlying vision since its inception has been in supplying support services, including training and employment opportunities to its communities.
- Inquilab has been involved in pioneering new services and schemes including those around refugees.
- More broadly, Inquilab recognises that part of its role has been to combat the inequality and social exclusion that residents and communities face, both as individuals and as residents in deprived neighbourhoods.

² Information in this section is from the *Brent Refugee Strategy 2006-2008*.

London Borough of Brent

A key partner was the London Borough of Brent, which wanted to carry forward the work of its refugee strategy and to update it in consultation with local bodies including RCOs. As Martin Cheeseman, LBB's Director of Housing and Community Care, said:

'This is a key project for a Borough such as Brent which has a long history of embracing migrants and refugees into its community. Providing a proper framework which enables those communities to be able to access services and contribute to developing those services is essential. This project is aimed at achieving that and if successful should provide a benchmark for others to build on.'

BRMF and refugee community organisations

It was then important to find a partner within the refugee and migrant communities, and the Brent Refugees and Migrants Forum (BRMF) – a borough-wide umbrella organisation of RCOs – was the obvious choice (see box). BRMF wanted to further develop their relationships with housing providers, they were able to involve smaller member RCOs, and they are well-connected with and supported by the LA and by other mainstream institutions.

Brent Refugees and Migrants Forum (BRMF)

BRMF was established in 1998 and has more than 50 member RCOs, some based in the same building. BRMF aims to support integration and improve the quality of life for refugee and migrant communities in Brent, by harnessing the skills of their community organisations and by building on these skills to drive positive changes in policy, strategy and services.

BRMF runs a capacity-building programme for RCOs. Its resource centre has computers and meeting facilities used by many members for operational and training purposes. The project is staffed by a full-time co-ordinator and three part-time officers.

BRMF works in partnership with LBB (who are also funders) and other statutory bodies.

BRMF provides:

- A contact point/ease of communication with a wide network of RCOs.
- A more efficient way of reaching RCOs through established tools of newsletters, meetings, etc.
- A trusted contact with RCOs – able to offer a 'seal of approval' to agencies who want to reach communities.
- Advice to mainstream agencies on refugees and RCO issues.

For more information see www.brentrefugeeforum.org.uk/

The partners agreed to work with a small, manageable number of individual RCOs, which could then cascade information to other groups in Brent. This resulted in eight diverse RCOs (or migrant groups) being represented on the project steering group (see section 2.1). The RCOs wanted to develop their capacity to help solve problems within their communities.

1.4 What did the project aim to do?

The project aimed to provide practical support, training, guidance and capacity building, so as to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the bodies working in this field. It also aimed to provide an avenue for community groups, particularly RCOs, to work effectively with HAs, the local authority and other key partners, enabling them to:

- Identify and take up opportunities for involvement in development and management.
- Co-ordinate a number of community bodies – including various BME associations, non-registered associations and the voluntary sector – in a way that improves efficiency in the development of responsive services that meet community need.
- Commission and/or participate in research.
- Contribute to development of strategy, policy and service delivery across key public sector bodies and HAs.
- Develop effective partnerships.
- Contribute to better understanding of community needs and identification of gaps in provision.



It was also intended to equip community organisations to provide more comprehensive advice to their own client groups.

1.5 The main elements of the project

The formal elements in the project were seen as:

- Establishing a steering group for the project which would engage those who would also be involved longer-term.
- Carrying out a baseline study of the situation in Brent.
- Undertaking a training programme.
- Holding a conference on refugee integration in Brent.

In addition, at a later stage it was decided to create work placements for refugees in local housing organisations as an extra element of the project (not included in the project funding).

A final element was the monitoring and evaluation of the project as it proceeded. The project had a series of formal 'milestones' as a condition of IGP funding; when and how they were met are covered in Appendix 1. This report is, of course, also part of this process.

1.6 Why were these seen as the key elements?

Although there have been other projects aiming to form local partnerships to engage with and improve services for refugees, experience elsewhere is limited and in Brent there was no precedent for this kind of project. It was therefore necessary to build it up from elements that were seen as both useful and feasible in the Brent context. The BRMF provided a base for contact with RCOs. LBB already had a refugee strategy which could be built on, and this led to the proposal for a conference which would feed into a revised strategy.

Both the strategy and BRMF recognise that more co-ordination is needed (hence the steering group) and that there is a need to develop the capacity of the RCOs (which led to the training). Later the placement element was added as a further dimension to the partnership working between HAs and RCOs, which would add value to the project for the individual refugees who would have the opportunity to obtain valuable work experience.

1.7 Longer-term aims

liB was seen as not simply a one-off local project but one which would have wider, long-term effects. These were envisaged as:

- Building on earlier work such as the Housing Corporation's community cohesion strategy,³ the CIH's work on cohesion and on housing services for refugees,⁴ hact's Accommodate project,⁵ the CIH/hact project 'Opening Doors'⁶ (also funded by the IGP programme) and the strategy for refugee integration in London.⁷
- Developing and promoting good practice within London and within the housing sector generally.
- Providing a model which could be replicated elsewhere in London.

The project was to be the first of its kind in London (the 'Opening Doors' project, mentioned above, had five local partnerships, but none were in London).

1.8 Purpose and scope of the evaluation and good practice report

This report has two purposes:

- To say whether the project worked as intended, what worked well, what did not work well, and why.
- To set out good practice lessons from the experience of running the project, that could be useful to other organisations attempting to organise similar projects in partnership with refugee community organisations.

The report has been prepared on the basis of a wide range of interviews with the project partners, including RCOs, and with trainees and participants in the placement element of the project. In addition, all written material and the results of questionnaire surveys with RCOs (carried out for the project) were made available.

The authors share considerable knowledge of refugee issues, experience of working with RCOs and knowledge of and experience in housing.⁸

3 Housing Corporation (2007) *Shared Places – Community Cohesion Strategy*.

4 CIH (2005) *Housing and Support Services for Asylum Seekers and Refugees*; CIH (2007) *Community Cohesion and Housing – A good practice guide*.

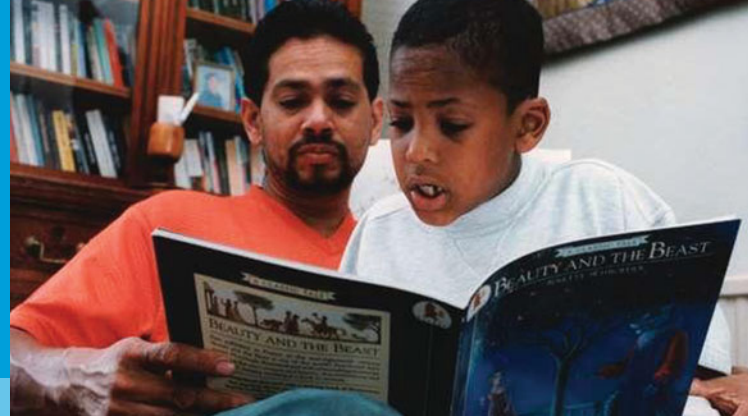
5 See information on the hact website (and a study available at www.download.bham.ac.uk/curs/pdf/accommodate_summ.pdf).

6 See www.cih.org/policy/openingdoors

7 Mayor of London (2009) *London Enriched – The Mayor's refugee integration strategy*.

8 They are joint authors of the reports *More Responsive Public Services? – A guide to commissioning migrant and refugee community organisations* (JRF and hact, 2008) and *A Guide to Engaging Muslim Communities* (CIH, 2008) as well as other work.

2 The main elements of the project



This section describes the six main elements of the project – what they were and what they aimed to do, how they worked, what was achieved, what could have been done better and what comes next. Where specific tools or outputs are available for readers who want more detailed information, links to these are provided.

2.1 Project Steering Group

Purpose

The steering group was established to:

- ensure that the project delivered its outputs and outcomes
- monitor and evaluate the progress of the project
- provide accountability to both funders of and participants in the project.

To achieve these aims it was intended that the steering group should:

- promote the project to a wide range of stakeholders
- raise awareness of the issues relating to the housing needs of refugee communities
- develop links with key partners and decision-making bodies to influence the housing service locally
- provide support and advice to the project staff.

How it worked

The steering group first met in September 2008. Its membership represents:

- the two HA partners
- the London Borough of Brent
- BRMF and eight RCOs
- the liB project co-ordinator.

Full details of the BRMF and RCO membership are given in Appendix 5. The steering group has met regularly, holding eight meetings over the life of the project.

What worked well

The steering group worked, in part, as a capacity-building tool. It brought people together to talk about housing issues, the support needs of RCOs, the role of the council, etc. It also allowed groups to measure their experiences against each other. The group influenced the content of the training programme which helped to make it more relevant to RCOs' needs.

One element of good practice which helped somewhat in attending meetings is that they were held in a place convenient for RCO members – the BRMF office where many are based:

'Among the various RCOs who were in the steering group, it was us who are based in the building who were more regular in attending meetings.'

However, at the outset, RCOs who were not clear what they would get from the steering group were reluctant to attend. RCOs being paid to attend meetings was very helpful, although it did not happen from the start. The amount paid (£30 per meeting) is not much for well-established organisations, but it is important for underfunded RCOs – at least as a recognition and appreciation of their contribution.

RCOs need to see relevant, tangible 'quick wins' to encourage them to get engaged. The liB project is a small step in a long road towards strategic changes. But RCOs are preoccupied with immediate pressing problems and are mainly concerned with the short term. It was advantageous to the project that it had a 'quick win' in the form of the training programme and later another in the form of the placement initiative.

The local authority commented that the group confirmed the commitment of various agencies to refugee housing issues. Agencies 'got to know each other' and this provides a good foundation for future joint work.

What could have been done differently

Promotion of the project was made difficult by the fact that a co-ordinator for liB was initially appointed who was not fully willing or able to see the project through, which meant that there were gaps in relating to key partners and to RCOs and a less consistent approach than would have been the case if a single, dedicated person had had responsibility throughout.

liB was keen to consult and involve refugee communities from the outset. However, as in most grant-funded projects, consultation before grant award was limited. Discussions were held with BRMF which was hesitant initially as none of the funding was earmarked to it (a point taken up later). RCOs were therefore not fully engaged in the setting up of the project and it is not clear that BRMF successfully used their network to publicise the project. Had this happened, it would have made RCO engagement and collaboration much easier.

To illustrate the difficulties, RCO members of the steering group commented for this evaluation that they appreciated the opportunity to get involved and felt they had made some contribution. However, they thought that they should have been involved in shaping the project originally, rather having to help in steering it after it had been 'put on track':

'It's a good project but it was more like being invited for a meal after it has been cooked. You enjoy the meal and you are grateful as a guest. But it's not the same as cooking together a shared meal where you have your say in its ingredients, what spices and flavour. That would have made it more relevant and more enjoyable.'

Regular attendance at steering group meetings was sometimes problematic:

'We are small organisations and when you have urgent cases and you are the only worker, you can't tell clients that you can't see them because you are going to a meeting.'

They acknowledge this is a problem facing RCOs and all other small voluntary organisations:

'HAs should adjust their work to the small group realities.'

'I can't close up my whole organisation to attend a meeting, but it does not mean I am not interested in the steering group.'

'It's important (for HAs/LAs) to understand the organisational culture of RCOs and other small voluntary sector organisations.'

'Cultural barriers should be tackled.'

One RCO was more critical of the steering group, saying that proposals from the RCOs were not taken up by the group, for example, a suggestion that the LBB and HA frontline staff could be given training by the RCOs. For this reason this RCO's representative stopped attending the group towards the end of the project.

From the 'other side of the table', the council and mainstream organisations pointed out that they have a 'work mould' they expect other agencies to fit into. Some RCOs are not used to such work routines, and at times discussions in the meetings were circular. The initial attendance problem mentioned earlier exacerbated the communication difficulties.

What comes next

BRMF's wish is to retain the steering group, in order to maintain the momentum from the liB project and to keep the RCOs in the housing 'loop' They want HA and LA reps to attend regularly. However funding will need to be found for this to work successfully. (This idea is regarded as an alternative to a housing forum hosted by Brent which was initially suggested by BRMF but rejected by LBB.)

Tools/outputs for use by others



The steering group has overseen the publications that have emerged from liB. The guide and the conference report are referred to below. In addition, the steering group has produced newsletters about liB to keep people informed, and the HAs produced a background leaflet about their own organisations to explain how they were formed and what they do (the publications can be downloaded at www.innisfree.org.uk).

2.2 Baseline study

Purpose

The study was commissioned to determine the extent of the knowledge of the RCOs and their engagement in the liB project. There will be a short follow-up with the same individuals, using the same questionnaire, at the end of the project.

How it worked

The study took the form of an in-depth survey, conducted by Yesim Guzelpinar-Karakus, with representatives of the six RCOs who formed part of the steering group. It was originally intended to take place at the start of the project, but was delayed because of the problems in appointing the project co-ordinator. It was therefore carried out in June 2009, well after the project started: rather than a 'baseline study' it became a snapshot survey of participants' views about the project and about relevant refugee/migrant issues.

Some of the main findings were:

- Half the respondents feel involved in liB, the rest feel involved 'to a certain extent'.
- All the RCOs deal with housing issues for their clients on a daily basis, but none have strong links with HAs, LBB or Brent Housing Partnership.
- All operate with scarce financial and human resources and with great demands placed on them because of the shortage of housing, the difficulty of explaining criteria for getting access to housing, perceived unfairness in housing allocations, overcrowding, etc.
- Some RCOs felt that they were not consulted properly at the beginning of liB.
- Several were not sure if the project was going to achieve all its aims despite the positive efforts of the project staff.
- Providers should use this project to improve their knowledge of and customer care skills towards refugees and migrants.
- The project should learn from good examples of joint working and partnerships from elsewhere, and try to establish such approaches in Brent.

What worked well

The survey provided good insights into housing issues and needs (see report), and was helpful in allowing RCOs to express their opinions about the project at an interim stage. The general issues were fed into the conference agenda (see below).

What could have been done differently

Unfortunately the survey was carried out in June 2009, one year after the project started, so it did not fulfil its original function of providing detailed information on the refugee/migrant situation in Brent. However, this might in any case have been an ambitious task. It was especially difficult as the RCOs who were engaged kept changing. The eventual survey may in fact have been a more realistic one: a small number of groups from different communities, who by then trusted the project, were able to give honest views at a stage in the project when changes could still be made.

What comes next

There is no plan (nor are there resources) to undertake a major study of RCO views, although the original interviewees will be sent a follow-up questionnaire. It would be very useful if a wider survey were to form part of the work associated with the Brent Refugee Strategy, and be repeated at periodic intervals.

Tools/outputs for use by others



The study *Integrated in Brent – Views of refugee community organisations* is available at www.innisfree.org.uk

2.3 Conference

Purpose

The conference, held in June 2009, was intended to 'provide links and networking opportunities as well as assist in increasing the understanding of housing-related issues facing refugee communities in Brent'.



How it worked

Over 80 people attended from a range of organisations, including many RCOs but also statutory and non-statutory services and voluntary bodies in Brent. There were four main speakers (two from the local authority, plus Dawn Butler MP and Falastin Yassin the then BRMF Co-ordinator). There were six workshops on issues relevant to refugees and migrants. Throughout the workshops and plenary sessions key themes arose. These were the need for communication; information; partnership working, and empowering refugees and the community organisations that assist them.

The conference agenda was thrashed out at many meetings of the steering group. The RCOs on the steering group themselves selected the subjects for the workshops. The baseline report was done shortly before the conference so as to provide a 'before and after' picture.

Participants in the conference also had the opportunity to offer comments which will be taken into account by LBB in revising its Refugee Strategy. They were asked to respond to two main questions:

- What should be the objectives and priorities of the strategy?
- What are the needs, what are the gaps and what actions are needed?

The key message from all attending the conference was that many were surprised at the services they discovered existed as they had not known about them before. All agreed that combining efforts and sharing knowledge could save time, money and effort.

What worked well

Attendees were asked to evaluate the day, and levels of satisfaction were reasonably high. The results, summarised in the table, are generally very positive.

Did the conference meet its objectives?	Good or excellent	OK	Poor or very poor
Creating links between RCOs and mainstream and statutory agencies	40%	35%	25%
Providing networking opportunities	62.5%	20%	17.5%
Improving attendees' knowledge of refugee housing issues	62.5%	25%	12.5%
Identifying where to gather further information about the issues raised	47.4%	39.5%	13.1%

From the point of view of statutory bodies and housing providers, the conference was well-attended. It was given status by being chaired by Martin Cheeseman, the Borough's Director of Housing and Community Care, and having as a speaker the local MP, Dawn Butler. A significant number of LA representatives were involved in organising the conference, staffing information stalls, participating in workshops and giving presentations (Councillor James Allie, Martin Cheeseman, Maggie Rafalowicz and Tony Hirsch). The attendance by a range of people from statutory agencies gave a good impression to the RCO attendees and made them feel that the agencies were interested in their problems.

Brent was able to use the conference to consult on their strategy. As LBB representatives said in the evaluation process:

'The conference worked well for us as a vehicle for consultation on the strategy.'

RCOs contacted in the evaluation process were also generally positive about the conference, saying that it had met their expectations.

What could have been done differently

The conference showed that it is very hard to look at housing without taking account of the complex issues facing refugees such as health, child trafficking, educational opportunities, etc. This is an aspect which the TSA and other potential funders should take into consideration.

A considerable time was spent at the conference on the council strategy. The council representatives commented in the evaluation process:

'This was fine by us, but that was not the only issue the conference was supposed to be about.'

It is important that the conference is not a one-off event – that those who attended see longer-term outcomes in terms of changes in service provision and that a revised strategy is produced by the Borough (reflecting issues raised at the conference). Now expectations have been raised, it is important to follow through. The planned launch event for this report will help in this respect.

What comes next

A follow-up event is planned for March 2010, which will be the launch of this guide.

LBB made a very public commitment to take on board issues raised at the conference in their revised Refugee Strategy. The council representatives said in the evaluation process that feedback

from the conference identified gaps in the original document. Objectives not already in the strategy have now been included (such as those about disabled refugees, mental health, etc). However, some of the recommendations made 'were not realistic' such as those about trafficking or finding out more precisely the number of refugees in Brent.

It is therefore disappointing that their Refugee Strategy is still in draft form and has not been formally re-released (March 2010). The reasons given are related to liaison difficulties with other public agencies. Unfortunately the new strategy may not now be available until summer 2010. As one RCO commented:

'Most important is the follow up – what's going to happen on the ground. We expect the Council to take the recommendations forward and come back to us and tell us what happened.'

Tools/outputs for use by others



A conference report was produced (available from www.innisfree.org.uk). This gives more detail about the subjects of the workshops and the main points discussed at them, together with the main points for consideration when LBB reviews its Refugee Strategy. The original LBB Refugee Strategy is available at [www.brent.gov.uk/stratp.nsf/Files/LBBA-211/\\$FILE/Refugee_Strategy_Update_Oct2007.pdf](http://www.brent.gov.uk/stratp.nsf/Files/LBBA-211/$FILE/Refugee_Strategy_Update_Oct2007.pdf)

2.4 Training

Purpose

The aims of the training programme were:

- To build capacity within RCOs organisations and within BRMF that will support growth/independence.
- To help build on the leadership and professional skills of community groups to assist them to acquire more knowledge, empowering them to be able to analyse issues of best practice and to identify issues which affect their communities so that they are able to respond effectively to changing community needs.
- To improve skills, knowledge and information resources within RCOs and voluntary sector organisations (including technical knowledge of housing issues, leadership and good practice).

Although the training was aimed at RCOs, several LBB and BHP staff also took part in some of the sessions.

How it worked

The training element was tendered and was delivered by a refugee-based organisation, RAMFEL. There were ten sessions of training held on a weekly basis starting in April 2009. liB opted not to publicise the training course widely. Instead, it focused on five key RCOs representing the main communities in Brent, taking into account the ethnic spread. There were 7-9 regular attendees – people kept changing as different RCO representatives attended topics according to personal interest.

What worked well

There were several positive outcomes:

- Those who attended the training speak highly of its contents – including the trainee members of the steering group. The evaluation forms trainees completed at the end of the sessions were also strongly positive.

- RCOs are now better-equipped to give housing advice to their clients. One trainee said:
'It was very useful for me. I am now more confident in giving advice about entitlements according to immigration status.'
- Trainees now have greater awareness about agencies and services available around the Borough. They were 'stunned' by the range of services available which they did not know about.
- Networks were strengthened and more people are now linked into them.
- Bringing LBB and RCO representatives together in training courses could result in 'them and us' divisions. However, as two LA representatives commented in the evaluation process:
'Good facilitators and briefing can help to prevent this.'
'We should be big enough to deal with anger or confrontation when it happens.'



LBB made this comment on the training programme:

'Involvement in the training programme has had a number of benefits for Brent staff and Brent services. Feedback at the sessions has provided useful insights into the issues of importance to refugee communities and has fostered better understanding of needs. In turn, this has assisted in developing new thinking about service delivery.'

'For example, the service as a whole has a better understanding of communication issues and the barriers individuals may face around language or culture and unfamiliarity with systems. More practically, the sessions have enabled the establishment of informal networks and communication channels, with staff able to identify contacts within RCOs that will provide the basis for future dialogue.'

Finally, offering a refugee-based organisation the contract also ensured that some of the project's resources were invested again in the sector (around £13K). RAMFEL kept an attendance register and paid travel and subsistence costs to all attendees on each training day. These costs were then included in their invoices.

What could have been done differently

It took a long time for the steering group to agree the content of the training course. It then took a further time to find anyone willing to tender for the project. There was then another period – which was very necessary – between RAMFEL and the RCOs – in fine-tuning the training programme.

There were also some organisational problems:

- To honour commitments made in the bid the training started in June, so it was soon interrupted by the summer school holidays then Ramadan in August. So it lost some momentum. It is important to remember to check multi-cultural calendars in planning such programmes.
- There was much discussion at the steering group as to when the training should take place. Some wanted weekends and some wanted evenings. It was inevitable that the dates finally chosen would be a compromise and would not suit everyone.
- There were also some logistical and communication problems with venues being changed with some trainees or even speakers not being informed, etc. This was frustrating for staff from LBB and BHP who operate to tight timetables. However, most of these problems were sorted towards the end.
- Not all of the available training places were taken up.
- The co-ordinator of the training for RAMFEL was on sick leave for a long period which made communication with RAMFEL difficult.

There were missed opportunities:

- Representatives of the two housing associations could have attended some sessions to engage more with RCOs. (The suggestion didn't get through to the associations at the time, and they would have welcomed this happening.)
- The training could have been used to set the agenda for the conference by scheduling the conference to take place at end of the project cycle. (However, in practice this was difficult because any significant change in timetable for the project had to be agreed with the funder, the TSA.)
- Regrettably, RAMFEL failed to provide the promised evaluation report at the conclusion of the course, which would have been an input to this report and promoted their training services.

RCOs made these points about the training programme:

- Lack of staffing means that they are not able to benefit fully from training. Many RCOs do not receive funding to provide housing advice/support, yet they are under pressure to do so and agencies may not assist them properly in addressing clients' problems.
- Training for providers could aim to strengthen cultural awareness and awareness of the roles/strengths/limitations of RCOs.
- There was concern that it was not a local (Brent-based) organisation providing the training.
- Some elements were not relevant for many RCOs, e.g. 'accompanying clients to courts'. (Because of regulations about advice giving, most of the trainees who were volunteers and the organisations themselves are not qualified or have no resources to do representation.)
- It would have been helpful for organisations which provided volunteer trainees to get reports, including details of the contents of the programme and sets of the handouts. RCOs admitted they could have had held briefing sessions with their trainees but in at least one case that did not happen.

Two particularly critical issues were these:

- **Level of the courses.** Training courses (and this is backed up from experience elsewhere, e.g. through hact) focus primarily on giving very broad advice and knowledge so that people know enough about 'how the system works' and 'who does what' so that volunteers can signpost or refer people to organisations who have more resources or services. Trainees should not be led to believe that they are going to be 'experts' in housing or benefit advice. But it is also difficult to cater for the very different levels of knowledge and expertise within RCOs, and inevitably the level of the training will be inappropriate for some people.
- **Accreditation.** There was considerable discussion about accreditation at all stages of the planning and implementation of the training. The RCOs were very keen for the training course to provide some form of accreditation or certification, both as an incentive to participants and to increase their employability. However, because it was a purpose-built course for a very mixed group this was not possible. Allowances also had to be made for differing levels of work experience and language skills. Nonetheless, it was always understood that offering a training course which provided a recognised form of accreditation would be desirable in the right circumstances and offer an incentive to RCOs to attend. It is planned to award certificates to all those who participated in the training programme and presentations will be made at an event in March 2010.

To summarise, training should ideally be accredited, cost as little as possible, and be properly complemented with any work placements, as a 'package' – even though this was not fully possible within liB.

What comes next

A significant problem is how to sustain the impact of the training over the long term (e.g. because of legislation changes, high turnover within RCO volunteers or staff, etc).

This is difficult to resolve unless resources can be found for refresher courses. It would be ideal if a programme of this kind were to form part of any implementation plan for the Brent Refugee Strategy. Part of such a plan could also involve making potential trainees aware of and building links with other providers of training and support such Shelter, Advice UK, CIH and hact, the Refugee Council, etc, so as to help those advising refugees and migrants to maintain and improve their skills and knowledge (which would benefit LBB as well as the refugee/migrant communities).

Tools/outputs for use by others



The training programme, which could easily be adapted for use in places other than Brent, is at Appendix 2.

2.5 Work placements

Purpose

This component was not included in the original plan. However, the steering group were very keen on the idea as a way of providing RCOs with a tangible outcome from taking part. Innisfree also had experience in this area and had previously collaborated with the Refugee Council in taking placements. The aims were to:

- Give RCOs and trainees more insight into how housing organisations work.
- Increase the employability of trainees.
- Help the housing organisations learn more about refugee communities.

How it worked

Six housing associations took part in an initial meeting in February 2009. Others expressed interest or joined in at a later stage. Although the general consensus in the meetings was not to be prescriptive about how the placements would work, a common approach was agreed on key aspects:

- recruitment, supervision, CRB checks, etc.
- travel & subsistence payments
- use of a workbook to record activities.

However, it was also agreed that placements would work best if it was left to individual participants to agree other matters with the host associations. This included length of placement, whether full-time or part-time, and whether they were to provide a general induction or focus on one or two areas of the HA's work.

The details of the proposal were then discussed at a meeting of the liB steering group where it was warmly welcomed. An 'application form' and guidance notes were drawn up, approved and then circulated widely through BRMF. From mid-March onwards forms were received directly by Innisfree and forwarded to the participating associations, and placements began to be organised.

Summary of experience with placements so far

Eighteen people (refugees and migrants) have so far taken part or expressed an interest in placements with housing organisations in Brent, including some recent applications. The outcome so far has been:

- Three placements to date – one each with Innisfree, Inquilab and BPTRG.
- Four referrals awaiting response from housing body.
- Four offers not yet taken up (one was with LBB – the candidate was offered a policy post but wanted frontline experience).
- Three candidates now have paid jobs.
- Four candidates withdrew or didn't pursue placements.

What worked well

One member of the steering group said that the placement element 'was a fantastic asset to the project'. It was therefore good that the project was able to include this component at a late stage. Such flexibility is to be welcomed.

Innisfree ensured the engagement of many other local HAs through their good personal contacts. BRMF helped recruit potential candidates from local RCOs.

Some of the placements worked extremely well and were seen as beneficial by both 'sides'. An example of a successful placement is documented in Appendix 3.

What could have been done differently

Various difficulties arose, some of which can be attributed to underestimating how time-consuming the placement element would be. The arrangements needed to be more formalised, but there was no budget allocated so this was difficult. A combination of factors led to poor communication and failure to make placements happen in some cases. On the one hand, some trainees were difficult to contact or had only a limited understanding of what the placements might involve. They were perceived as being not very proactive in trying to find out, or as failing to maintain contact after expressing an initial interest. On the other hand, one association, despite being very enthusiastic, had to delay the placement, resulting in the participant losing interest.

With the benefit of hindsight, the application form should have specified a home address and personal telephone number. (Many fruitless calls/messages were left at one applicant's workplace where she only worked part-time.) And it would have been helpful if all applicants had identified the RCO of which they were members. This would have enabled follow-up and support to have been provided more easily.

From now on, telephone contact details with Innisfree HA (as the placement co-ordinators) will be displayed prominently on the application form as well as the guidance notes.

Individual applicants need to be encouraged to ask questions at an early stage and communicate either with Innisfree or with their proposed host. The absence of communication can be judged as discourteous and the hosts may decide to pull out if they have to spend all their time chasing people who don't reply.

Issues arose about the literacy or English language skills of some of the candidates. Clarity is needed over requirements, possibly creating some capacity for those with limited skills to nevertheless benefit from the scheme. Refugees may well be highly resourceful and useful workers within a RCO – and potentially on placement with a housing organisation – even if their literacy and/or English are very limited.

Because the placement scheme appeared to be such a useful and innovative part of the work, during the evaluation process contact was made (or attempted) with a number of those who had expressed interest but failed to get successfully 'placed'. The results reflected the complexity and uncertainty of the lives of refugees and migrants. For example:

- People changing their accommodation frequently is a clear issue, especially for single people. As research has shown,⁹ this is a common problem, making it difficult to sustain contact.
- Refugees and migrants lead complex lives in other ways, and on limited resources. For example, one potential candidate had a death in the family and returned suddenly for four months to a small town in Iraq, from where it was impossible to contact the UK.
- Given their often precarious circumstances in terms of jobs/finance/educational opportunities, refugees and migrants may have 'several balls in the air' at one time. For example, one potential candidate suddenly had the opportunity to go to university, and took it.

At the same time, some of the experiences also suggested that more effort might be needed in some cases on the part of organisations offering the placements, to ensure that they give the issue priority and make appropriate arrangements when people arrive – especially because those involved often expect poor or negative treatment from 'official' bodies, and might be easily put off.

There is good practice guidance relevant to providing placements. Some of this is summarised in the box, and there are other sources at the end of this report.



Good practice in running volunteer programmes for BME communities

- By promoting volunteering in ways that individuals from excluded groups could identify with, and by running targeted recruitment campaigns, some organisations have been successful in countering the stereotype of volunteering as being restricted to certain types of people.
- Building relationships and partnerships with community groups and specialist organisations has enabled organisations to access, and subsequently involve, people from under-represented groups.
- Some organisations have taken steps to build individual capacity among people who lacked the confidence or skills to volunteer.
- By ensuring that recruitment processes were user-friendly, some organisations have successfully made the volunteering experience seem less daunting.
- Aiming to be inclusive – including running diversity, disability and cultural awareness training, and improving physical access – has enabled organisations to create a more diverse and welcoming environment.
- By recognising individuals' 'capabilities' not 'disabilities' and turning the traditional approach of fitting the volunteer to the role on its head by matching the role to the volunteer, organisations have become more flexible and inclusive.

Based on *Volunteering for All? Exploring the link between volunteering and social exclusion*, Volunteering England (2004).

⁹ For example, Robinson, D et al (2007) *The Housing Pathways of New Migrants*. JRF.

What comes next

Given proper co-ordination, there is no reason why the placements cannot continue even after liB has formally ended, and most of the existing host organisations are thought to be in agreement with this. BRMF is pursuing funding opportunities and is in discussion with hact to develop a successor scheme.

There is still an intention to get more host organisations on board, most notably Brent Housing Department and BHP. Their absence to date is much to be regretted. There is a degree of interest but it has been frustrated by issues such as restructuring of certain services.

BRMF's role in the scheme is potentially important:

- They could encourage more applications from a range of RCOs.
- They could advise applicants – possibly working with them to fill in the application form so that both 'sides' form a clearer idea of the applicant's abilities, potential and needs and how they might be met through a placement.
- They could provide ongoing support and liaise with the host organisation if there are any practical difficulties.

Some RCOs also suggested in the evaluation that there could be reciprocal arrangements – that a housing provider could send a member of staff to work with an RCO, to gain experience of day-to-day refugee issues.

Tools/outputs for use by others



The following are available at www.innisfree.org.uk:

- The placement workbook.
- Guidance notes for organisations hosting work placements.
- Placement request form (revised to deal with issues noted above).

2.6 Monitoring and evaluation

Purpose

As part of their commitment to managing the project, the main partners undertook, through the steering group, to have an ambitious monitoring and evaluation process which would:

- Collate feedback from strategic partners to assess improvements in effectiveness and efficiency.
- Conduct surveys of RCOs and their clients to assess progress as well as perceptions of engagement with policy development, improved service delivery, etc.
- Carry out evaluations of all training courses.
- Conduct appraisals halfway through and at the end of the project.
- Monitor outcomes, e.g.:
 - Take-up of advice/consultancy/training opportunities.
 - Success in taking on management agreements or getting involved with development.
 - Evidence that the project exerts direct influence over strategic policy.

How it worked

From the outset, the project had to be monitored externally as a condition of IGP funding. This was done initially by the Housing Corporation then, when the Corporation closed in December 2008, by the CIH on behalf of the TSA.

In the project's early stages, the steering group's role (see 2.1 above) was in part to act as an on-going monitoring arrangement in which the key partners were involved. The baseline study (2.2 above), although not originally intended as part of the monitoring process, in fact gave useful and detailed feedback from RCOs involved. Individual aspects such as the training and placements have also been monitored and results are summarised here (sections 2.4 and 2.5). Throughout the project, Innisfree and Inquilab held meetings (attended by the project co-ordinator) to review progress.

This report is also a key part of the monitoring and evaluation process.

What worked well

Having a final evaluation carried out by evaluators with relevant experience but not participants in the project itself has been useful in drawing together the lessons from what is, above all, a learning experience for all the partners in the project. The key issue is to build on these lessons to ensure that the project has a longer-term impact.

What could have been done differently

Building in an ambitious and detailed monitoring process was a funding requirement. While monitoring is necessary for accounting reasons, it in fact could have imposed a heavy load on the limited staff resources had it been carried out 'to the letter'. A lighter-touch process would have been more appropriate, complemented by the external evaluation which took place at the end.

More flexible timescales would have been helpful, allowing the partners to focus more on the project itself, rather than meeting deadlines for reports.

What comes next

Ideally, monitoring in the longer term will form part of the implementation of the Brent Refugee Strategy. Whether this happens will depend on whether resources are devoted to managing and monitoring the Strategy's implementation process.

Tools/outputs for use by others



This report is available from www.innisfree.org.uk and a paper version is available on request from Innisfree HA (see address inside front cover).

3 Lessons learnt from the project



Although this was a relatively small project with limited resources, and not without its difficulties in implementation, it has some important lessons which are more significant because of the relatively small number of projects of this kind. This section draws on discussions within and about the project itself, and the authors' experience of similar projects such as 'Opening Doors'.

3.1 Nature of the project

Project timing

Projects such as liB, aimed at working with small underfunded or difficult-to-reach groups, need to be of longer duration. The partners now understand how long it should take to set up and deliver a project of this kind. However, there is something of a 'chicken and egg' problem in this. While the partners had their initial meetings with BRMF more than four months before funding was agreed, there was reluctance to get too involved and commit to anything concrete until they were absolutely certain that the project would go ahead. And then, of course, the clock starts 'ticking' very quickly: much too quickly for something of this kind.

The TSA and other funders need to have a system for delicate and difficult projects like this whereby they agree some seed funding up front (see below), to allow partners to ascertain whether the project is 'a runner'. This should allow a decent lead-in time for exploratory discussions, during which the partnership can be developed and commitments can be made.

Project design

Project proposals also need to be realistic. There is a need for those running the projects to 'own' them, even if funders try to convince proposers to put in more or to 'standardise' the project. There is scope for learning on both sides – by those putting projects forward, and by those making funding decisions who may try to fit proposals into particular criteria and may not fully understand the nature of the work involved. liB was made into a more ambitious project than was actually realistic, due to the funder requiring additions such as elaborate monitoring and review requirements which were out of step with the resources made available.

Learning from similar projects

The learning from a similar project (the hact/CIH 'Opening Doors' project) was invaluable when liB was being set up. Senior staff from Inquilab and Innisfree visited Bolton and Birmingham, which were OD partners. Some of the lessons learnt from these visits – which experience with liB confirmed – are:

- The importance of 'keeping it simple'.
- Do not over-stretch the contact work with RCOs – limit it to a carefully selected number of RCOs only.
- Remember that it is about the 'journey' and not only the end 'destination' – it's about learning in the process of engaging with RCOs and building long-term relationships with communities.

As one project member said:

'Be prepared, as it is a challenging journey.'

However, despite the warnings from Bolton and Birmingham, liB did not allow enough lead time in the project plan for the development phase of the project. People in RCOs inevitably have their own priorities, work attitudes and a different frame of reference to bodies such as HAs. Many are volunteers and lack of resources might mean that people might not turn up to meetings or apologise at the last minute. This was a learning process for liB and it meant changes in the way the project worked.

Perhaps even more, though, is the need for funders to learn about the nature of this type of project and not bracket it with and have the same expectations as if it were a conventional project which can be 'delivered' through well-established processes by people with prior experience. The processes and prior experience barely exist.

3.2 Engaging with RCOs

Overall issues

Transparency and openness are vital in engaging with RCOs. There should be complete clarity over what the project can or cannot deliver. RCOs may either have high expectations or have bad experiences of expectations not being met by past projects. These perceptions need to be borne in mind in aiming to build a trusting relationship with RCOs. It is important to manage the expectations of all those involved – but especially the RCOs.

It was a salutary experience for Innisfree and Inquilab that the RCOs saw these HAs in exactly the same light as if they had been much bigger organisations. They had no concept of small community-based housing associations and saw no reason to trust them or treat them any differently. This exposed a misconception on the part of the two HAs who had assumed (as did LBB) that they would be seen as the 'friendly face' of the HA sector.

Practical issues

As noted above, a lesson from this and similar projects is that it is advantageous in encouraging participation by RCOs to be able to offer seed funding or a development phase of projects, with resources devoted to bringing people around the table/consultation, etc. It offers small groups an opportunity to understand and get engaged at an early stage. Any similar project needs to recognise the difficulties of engaging with often hard-pressed, under-resourced groups, and ask 'how do we get you engaged?'

Resources should also be allocated to RCOs who take part in steering group meetings. At a later stage in the project, liB agreed to pay RCOs (not the individuals) £30 for each meeting attended. This made a difference (a point which funders might want to note in assessing budgets for similar projects). Clare Winstanley of Innisfree says:

'Now I would advise people to earmark resources to RCOs when involving them in partnerships, by at least reimbursing RCOs who attend meetings.'

'And I can't emphasise enough how important this is. We simply did not "get it" at the beginning. We just couldn't come to terms with the idea of people being paid to attend meetings whose primary purpose was to do things which would benefit them and their communities. Whether one agrees that this is the right approach or not, it is necessary.'

The co-ordinator spent considerable time in building links and gaining the confidence of RCOs. Getting to know people is important, including getting to know what motivates the individuals in the RCO.

Another success is the placement element which was an 'add-on' not envisaged in the original project. In addition to providing a direct tangible benefit to refugees it was a vehicle for the involvement of 8-9 housing associations. One staff member commented that 'it has the potential of being the most useful output' from the project.

Building relationships with RCOs to tackle housing issues

Discussion with RCOs as part of the evaluation process brought a range of suggestions for improved working relationships on housing issues:

- It would be ideal if the LA and HAs could work with RCOs to agree protocols such as referral procedures for housing cases:
'We do not have the resources to accompany clients all the time to LA or HA offices, it will be good to agree referral pathways; we can also help them in return.'
- It would be useful to build better relationships between LA frontline staff and RCO advisors and volunteers.
- In the training RCOs learnt that there is a good and structured working relationship between RCOs and the housing authority in Camden. Are there lessons that could be applied in Brent?
- RCOs need more information about the housing situation and in an accessible format – not dense reports – but as graphs, charts, etc.
'Seeing the overall picture will help you to put your own community problems in perspective.'
'The NHS is very good in producing and disseminating information such as what diseases are on the up, smoking, etc. Why can't we have similar information about e.g. homelessness?'
- There should be access to structures where decisions are taken e.g. housing strategy groups, etc, perhaps via the BRMF as the umbrella organisation.

These lessons should be borne in mind in implementing the Brent Refugee Strategy and should be considered by housing providers in Brent.

3.3 Engaging with umbrella organisations

Liaison with BRMF was sometimes difficult at the initial stages. But it is important to note that under-funded refugee groups may well be uneasy when they are named as partners in projects with no resources earmarked to them for their participation.

Using umbrella refugee organisations such as BRMF as a partner has its advantages and risks. They have the trust of their members, easier communication channels and are likely to be well-connected in the area, including having recognition by the local authority, etc. They may well be accustomed to the routines of meetings and relying on them would help to avoid some of the issues that arose in the early stages of the steering group.

But there is a need to be aware of the politics within the RCO sector: some local RCOs might not be members of the umbrella organisation and they too should have the opportunity to get involved. There may be a need to cast the net wider to ensure that all local RCOs are contacted.

At the same time, an umbrella body such as BRMF also takes a risk by collaborating with the project: if things go well, its reputation may be enhanced, but if they go badly it might be blamed. The risks and opportunity costs to under-resourced bodies such as BRMF therefore need to be kept in mind.

In working with umbrella organisations rather than with individual RCOs there is a need to check first:

- What their reputation is in the area and with local organisations.
- What resources they bring to the partnership.
- Any issues of politics or conflict within their structures.
- How representative they are.
- The suitability of the contact person.

There is also a need to build a trusting and transparent relationship with the organisation, that includes consideration of costs. As the recently appointed Co-ordinator of BRMF, Nagini Rajendra, said:

'When working with RCOs who have little or no budget, transparency is very important, including in the finances of the project. Transparency is important for trust.'

Subject to these points, working with an umbrella organisation can be a most effective way to engage with a large number of RCOs. In Brent, as in other places with large and varying refugee/migrant communities, RCOs range from small and fragmented organisations that may be just starting to well-established voluntary bodies with a range of responsibilities, projects and funding sources. As a taste of the latter, the box summarises the activities of one of the RCO members of the steering group.



Afghan Association Paiwand (AAP)

This Brent-based RCO was formed in August 2002 to serve the Afghan refugee community, mainly in North London. With an annual income of almost £200,000 it is an example of an RCO which from small beginnings has grown to provide a wide range of services – including advice and support on health issues, social services, education, including ESOL classes and a community supplementary school, counselling, career advice, translation services, welfare support, advocacy and the promotion of Afghan arts and culture. It also runs various sport activities, women's and lunch clubs.

AAP is providing supported housing services for unaccompanied young asylum seekers (aged 16-18), a service developed through a loan of £50,000 from the London Rebuilding Society. They are commissioned by Ealing Social Services to provide six units of supported housing for young asylum seekers in Harrow and are seeking to expand to other local authorities. They believe their service is more holistic and culturally sensitive, and links well with AAP's other activities as it provides emotional support and encouragement to engage in voluntary work/daily activities. Residents also benefit from activities such as training courses, a homework club and sports.

For more information see <http://www.paiwand.com/>

3.4 Partnerships

Bringing in experience of partnerships between housing providers and refugee/migrant organisations

It would have been unwise to run this project without building in experience of the kind of work that the project aimed to carry out. This (as we have seen) was complex and demanding, especially in that it involved bridging the gap between mainstream bodies like housing associations and the local authority (with their considerable resources and much wider agendas) and community groups which are 'below the radar' in most cases: they are under-resourced and struggle to meet the needs of marginalised communities whose very existence may not be known or fully known.

In the case of liB, Innisfree had some prior experience that was relevant to the project and it sought to tap into the knowledge and resources of the BRMF and six RCOs. It used contacts to tap into the experience of other bodies such as hact and CIH, including their contacts in other cities. After a change in consultant, liB was successful in appointing a project co-ordinator with the right kind of experience – someone who had worked in community regeneration and was experienced in engaging with under-funded groups. He succeeded because of his community focus; he did not allow himself to be constrained by the outputs-driven approach of the funding body.

While this approach eventually worked, the engagement with RCOs consumed a good part of the period over which the project was due to run. Could it have been done differently and within a shorter time? One approach might have been to bring in a further partner to the project, such as hact or another body with directly relevant experience, to be an interlocutor who would set up and negotiate the networks required between the mainstream bodies and the RCOs. This would have cost more – but might have allowed more to be done in what was a very tight two-year time period. However, it was most unlikely that such an approach would have been allowed by the funder after the project had started.

Working in partnership with the local authority

Clearly there needs to be something of value in a project for the local authority if they are to devote time and resources to taking part. LBB saw the project as helping to address their commitment to the large number of refugees and migrants in Brent, as a way of following up their original Refugee Strategy (especially in helping consult with small RCOs), and as in line with their strategic drive to support a more co-ordinated response to raising the capacity of RCOs to engage – by giving them more support and improving their access to information. As the council said in its contribution to the evaluation:

'As a result of the Integrated in Brent project we have a closer working relationship with RCOs and a better understanding of refugee issues, especially by frontline staff.'

The relationship with Brent worked well in some respects such as their contribution to the training programme and to the conference. But there was no 'buy in' to the placement scheme. The loss of Brent's initial funding (£10k) had an effect on the project's scope – but LBB supported the conference and made a contribution in kind to the training programme and further funding will be provided at the end of the project towards the cost of this report.

One definite contribution the project made is that the Brent Refugee Strategy should now be a better document than otherwise – LBB appears to have taken on board the comments made in the conference. It prompted discussions about lots of issues relevant to the Strategy. It is now important, of course, that it is speedily finalised, published and implemented, and that RCOs continue to be regarded as partners in this process.

Steering group members have suggested, as a follow up to the project, that there could be a series of meetings between experienced RCO staff and relevant Brent housing staff dealing with policy and housing provision. The aim would be to enable people to see things from the other's point of view, to produce better working relationships and agreements. Another suggestion has been cultural-awareness training for frontline staff, led by RCOs. If the steering group continues, as suggested earlier, this could become the forum for discussing developments of these kinds.

3.5 Wider issues

The role of liB in the context of changing government policy

An important part of the context for projects like liB, which engage refugees and migrants in work opportunities or help them work as volunteers either in community organisations or with housing providers, is that this activity is now very much in step with the government's moves towards 'earned citizenship'.

From July 2011, the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009 will introduce an 'an activity condition', requiring potential citizens to volunteer within the community as part of the settlement process.¹⁰ This condition could result in a huge increase in demand for volunteering from refugees and other migrants, as they can use it to reduce their period of 'probationary citizenship'. It is expected to put a strain on the voluntary sector which is expected to receive an influx of potential 'volunteers'. Furthermore, local authorities will be tasked with checking whether citizenship applicants have fulfilled this 'activity condition', and will be expected to maintain a relationship with people who are 'probationary citizens' in order to achieve this.

Although there may be doubts as to how this will work in practice, liB is timely because it explores a model of volunteering at local authority level and outside normal refugee/voluntary sector settings. Most authorities such as LBB will not yet have considered the obligations placed on them by the Act, but when they do so, they may conclude that projects such as liB offer them opportunities to help residents within their area meet the new requirements and become full citizens.

Wider experience of working with refugees and migrants as volunteers

Although several housing organisations are now engaged in providing placement or volunteer opportunities, including those created through the hact 'Reach In' project,¹¹ experience is still limited as these schemes are recent. It is therefore worthwhile for projects such as liB to make use of the lessons from other relevant experience from outside the housing field. Tandem, a consultancy which works on these issues, has resources useful to housing organisations, including guidance on recruitment, the application process, matching people to opportunities, induction, and so on.¹²

3.6 Running the project

Funding issues and complying with grant requirements

The project had some funding difficulties:

- Complying with a funding timetable is difficult for a project of this kind working with voluntary groups: the timetable was changed, but only after negotiation. Unrealistic 'milestones' were revised and condensed into five (from ten – see Appendix 1).
- Restrictions imposed by the funder caused some problems. For example, the funding conditions precluded the appointment of a member of staff to run the project, so a consultant had to be recruited but this was difficult. liB had three different consultants. Although the project benefited from their experience and contacts, consultants also come to the project with their own agendas.
- Another funder (London Borough of Brent) was not able to honour its pledged funding (£10,000) although it has since reinstated part of this.

It is understood that the TSA inherited the IGP programme and was essentially managing it to wind it down, and was constrained by the resources for the programme coming to an end. This meant it was less able than the Housing Corporation to be flexible about outputs but it also meant that the programme could not respond to the obstacles and opportunities which a project such as liB encounters.

10 For more details see www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/newsarticles/2009/september/transitional-arrangements-earned and the Migrant Rights Network briefing at www.migrantsrights.org.uk/downloads/briefingpapers/briefingpaper_on_citizenship.pdf

11 see <http://hact.org.uk/training-scheme-expands-thanks-to-first-phase-success/1221>

12 See http://www.tandem-uk.com/vol_asylum.htm and in particular the guide *A part of society: Refugees and asylum seekers volunteering in the UK*.

Administrative issues

There was an unfortunate amount of staff change during the project:

- Both housing directors in the two HAs who were leading on the project moved on before the end.
- There were also several changes in the consultants taken on to co-ordinate the project.
- The original Co-ordinator of BRMF was away for several months, returned, but then left suddenly.

Some of these staffing and continuity problems may be more common in London than elsewhere, but in part are associated with a type of project where (on the voluntary sector side) people may be in relatively poorly paid jobs. Thought needs to be given as to the risks to continuity of leadership, co-ordination and local communication at the start of the project. Can measures be put in place that anticipate possible changes, or help ensure continuity if the unexpected does occur?

4 Legacy and next steps



This section summarises the impact of the project within Brent and what is planned by the partners to build on the experience with liB. It then assesses the wider impact of the project, against the aims set for it.

4.1 Legacy for housing providers

A key aim of the project was better understanding of the needs of community groups and those they serve, including increased staff awareness of these needs. One of the HA staff involved was not sure about the immediate impact on housing providers:

'All in all the impact of the project has been minimal on the way we work with refugees. It's true that staff have more empathy and awareness now. The question is how to embed this and translate it into our everyday work. Anyway, it might not be realistic to expect the impact of the project to appear within the two year project life-cycle.'

However, at least at senior level it was clear that new relationships with individuals within RCOs had created closer working between them and the two housing association partners. The RCOs are now more trusting and confident in their dealings with the associations, and feel they can 'pop in' to discuss issues. This is felt to be a change that will benefit HAs in the Borough generally, not just Innisfree and Inquilab.

A better understanding is also now in place between the associations and BRMF:

'We have an open door of communication and a relaxed, informal relationship.'

The challenge is now to find the time and resources to build on this across each organisation:

'The project is a good base for long-term co-operation. The question is how to move these relationships from their individual basis to the institution?'

Also, the limited timescale of the project meant it was difficult in practice to achieve the 'cross-fertilisation of ideas between tenants' envisaged in the application.

4.2 Legacy for BRMF and the RCOs

It is clear that the project has improved co-operation among RCOs on housing issues. The project co-ordinator said:

'The project galvanised the RCOs. They now want to continue to work together to set up a range of joint projects: a placement/employment project; a website on housing issues which serves as a platform with information on housing for RCOs (they are not aware of the hact/CIH housing rights website), and to establish an umbrella organisation across seven boroughs in London (to replace 'Renewal' which is winding down).'

For the BRMF, the project provided a 'platform for change' which to them means that:

'We are communicating better as partners.'

'We have learnt lessons in managing working together – we have a better understanding of each other and the way we work.'

'Our services do not only improve the lives of marginalised communities but have a positive impact on the whole community (housing has an impact on health of all the community).'

It is also clear that the project has (as envisaged in the funding application) 'helped to build on the leadership and professional skills' within RCOs – albeit to a modest degree commensurate with the limited nature of the project.

4.3 Next Steps

Various ideas are being explored to take the work forward and there seems every prospect that it will not merely be a 'one off'. For example:

- There is a desire to organise the placement project effectively, which ideally would require some funding. In the meantime, placements will continue as an ongoing legacy from the project.
- Strong links have been made between BRMF and other London refugee forums. Collectively, these organisations will work to resurrect and develop 'Renewal' – a forum for refugee umbrella organisations across seven boroughs in West London. These organisations will put housing on their agenda for regular discussion with statutory authorities.
- BRMF has pointed to the benefits of using the Future Jobs Fund (FJF) to provide additional staff support for RCOs. FJF trainees could be offered placements in HAs so that they could gain knowledge to benefit RCO clients with housing problems.
- Ways of capturing and building on the experience with housing issues through liB are being discussed, including the possibility of a specific Brent website. This would of course need resourcing if it were to be useful and kept up-to-date.

In addition, ideas and suggestions included in this report could also be considered by the steering group and as part of the revised Brent Refugee Strategy.

4.4 Wider impact

As noted in the Introduction, liB was seen not as simply a one-off local project but one which would have wider, longer-term effects. It was to build on wider strategic work, develop good practice and provide an operational model that could be followed in London and elsewhere.

The relationship between liB and earlier work has been pointed out at various points in this report. In particular, liB builds on the experience of the 'Opening Doors' project, which was intended to provide inspiration to other projects of that kind.

Section 3 shows the lessons that emerged from liB and which help in promoting good practice for this type of project. It would be excessive to put forward liB as a model for other projects, because of some of the difficulties which the project met. But the principle of housing providers engaging in an liB-style project, learning from Brent's experiences, is certainly one that could and should be applied in London and elsewhere. Whether this happens will depend on the housing providers themselves, on the impetus provided by local refugee strategies like that in Brent (or the Mayor's strategy for London as a whole), and future stimulus by funding bodies such as the TSA and UKBA.

5 Recommendations



Although it was not the purpose of the project to lead to recommendations for change at either national or local level, it is important that the key players, including the Tenant Services Authority as the funder, are aware of lessons which would require them to take action. These recommendations are therefore a summary of the key action points if more projects like liB are to be encouraged nationally and within London. At local level they summarise the points that would enable the work started through liB to continue. (References in brackets are to the sections in the main text from which each recommendation comes.)

Recommendations to the TSA and other funders

- 5.1** Given the critical importance of housing needs for refugees and new migrants, and the role played in tackling these issues, capacity-building projects such as liB can play an important part in taking forward government policies for integration and cohesion. TSA should consider building on the experience with the IGP-funded liB and 'Opening Doors' projects, by funding similar projects in different areas in future and building up experience among housing providers. (Section 4.4.)
- 5.2** The funding of community development projects such as liB, where the housing provider does not have an established relationship with a community group (such as it has with a tenants' association), requires a flexible approach in which objectives can be reformulated as relationships develop, and which allows sufficient time for this to happen. (This repeats a lesson also learned in the IGP-funded 'Opening Doors' project.) (Sections 3.1 and 3.6.)
- 5.3** Further flexibility is needed about staff appointments in a field where expertise is hard to find, and those who have it may move jobs quickly. TSA should have discretion to accept in-house appointments where this can be shown to be the best way to move projects forward. (Section 3.6.)
- 5.4** A tendency to expect projects to achieve radical changes (e.g. in relationships between refugees/migrants and the tenant body of an HA) should be avoided. Projects of the scale of liB are necessarily limited in their immediate impact; the expectation should be that they provide a base for longer-term developments. (Section 4.4.)
- 5.5** Although projects led by housing providers should have a housing focus, the inter-relationship between housing and other issues such as health, education and community cohesion should be taken into account in project design and funding. (Section 2.3.)

Recommendation to UKBA

- 5.6** Integrated in Brent has shown the potential role of the local authority, housing associations and RCOs in the planned approach to 'earned citizenship' which places expectations on potential citizens to do voluntary work. UKBA should consider how these opportunities could be further developed, promoted and resourced. (Sections 3.5 and 4.4.)

Recommendation to the Mayor of London

- 5.7** Projects such as liB should be recognised as important in implementing the Mayor’s refugee integration strategy, especially given the fact that housing issues are even more critical for refugees in London than they are elsewhere in England. (Section 4.4.)

Recommendations to the London Borough of Brent

- 5.8** The Brent Refugee Strategy should be finalised and implemented as soon as possible. It should not only draw on the findings from liB, but should aim to take forward – and provide resources for – the co-ordinated work with RCOs on housing issues which liB began. (Section 2.3.)
- 5.9** In particular, the Strategy could resource (or seek resources for) an RCO training programme, taking into account the lessons from the training element of liB set out in this report. (Section 2.4.)
- 5.10** liB provides a rich and timely experience on which LBB can build in developing services to discharge its obligation from July 2011 under the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009 which requires potential citizens to volunteer within the community as part of the settlement process. (Section 3.5.)

Recommendations to housing providers in Brent

- 5.11** Housing providers such as LBB, Brent Housing Partnership and the housing associations operating in Brent should look to build on the work done through liB and the lessons drawn from it, including the value of an on-going relationship with RCOs. In particular, they should look at establishing a partnership arrangement to provide and promote placement opportunities, and should actively provide such opportunities at an appropriate level. (Sections 2.5, 3.2 and 3.4.)

Appendix 1 Project milestones

The TSA set a series of milestones for Integrated in Brent as a condition of the IGP funding. During the project, the number of milestones was reduced to five. Details of what they were and how they were achieved are set out below.

Milestone number (and date)	Milestone description	Milestone amount (£)	Milestone Achieved? Yes/no
Preliminary milestone (28/2/08)	Agree strategy and detailed project outline	–	Yes
Preliminary milestone (31/07/08)	Develop and agree specification for contractor	–	Yes
Milestone 1 (31/01/09)	Hiring of a consultant to co-ordinate the project	£50,000	Yes
Milestone 2 (10/3/09)	Roll out initial training programme and develop promotional literature. This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Leaflets – Newsletters – Stationery – Venue and materials for training events 	£10,000	Yes – but delayed due to need to give greater consideration to content.
Milestone 3 (10/4/2009)	Appoint organisation to deliver training programme. Evaluation to be carried out before and after.	£10,000	Yes – but delayed for a range of reasons
Milestone 4 (15/6/2009)	Integrated in Brent conference	£5,000	Yes
Milestone 5 (10/3/2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Completion & delivery of the Good Practice Guide – Launch event scheduled – Project summary delivered to TSA – Plan in place for dissemination of Good Practice Guide 	£25,000	Yes

Appendix 2 Schedule for the training course

The training schedule which was carried out by the refugee-led organisation RAMFEL is set out below as an example of a programme which may be useful in other contexts.

Session	Brief Outline/Learning Approach
<p>Session 1 Current legislation in relation to housing</p>	<p>As this is the first training session, we believe that there will also be a need to enable effective and positive communication within the group.</p> <p>Building a house into a home (A series of short warm-up exercises and ice breakers on the issue of housing to ensure participants become better acquainted and develop a common vocabulary around housing issues, and also for them to share their knowledge of the experience of local refugee communities, culminating in the development of a quiz about refugees in Brent that they can then use as a tool to engage with the speaker in the afternoon)</p> <p>Introduction to the Housing Act (Solicitor) Seminar followed by group discussion: What is the Act, who does it affect, how and by whom is it used, how can you make best use of it?</p> <p>Lunch</p> <p>Implementation at the local level (Brent Borough representatives) – to explain what the position is in relation to housing stock, allocation and management</p> <p>Question and answer session by participants</p> <p>Quiz – how well do you know Brent?</p> <p>Culminating in a review session of learning that day and facilitated discussion</p>
<p>Session 2 How to gain access to housing</p>	<p>Local authority housing policies and procedures</p> <p>Participants engage in role play to develop skills and expand on issues</p> <p>Lunch</p> <p>Practical case study</p> <p>Exploring direct referral routes to Housing Associations – participatory and facilitated learning session</p> <p>Culminating in a review session of learning that day and facilitated discussion</p>



Session	Brief Outline/Learning Approach
<p>Session 3 What do different types of housing organisations mean and do, and what services do they provide</p>	<p>Overview</p> <p>Speakers from two local local HAs, focused on repairs and transfers Speaker from Council on repairs, transfers, right to buy</p> <p>Lunch</p> <p>Facilitated discussion on private lettings, including deposits (individual from the deposit scheme)</p> <p>Focus on vulnerable clients – speaker from Asian Women’s Resource Centre in Brent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – speaker from Newham Monitoring Project about race hate crime – speaker from local disability group about adaptations – speaker from Age Concern about elderly people <p>Culminating in a review session of learning that day and facilitated discussion</p>
<p>Session 4 What rights do our clients have as tenants either private/council or housing association</p>	<p>Tenants rights (By this point in the course we would have collected some common issues and will develop this as practice-based learning session, providing a brief outline and then role play on how common problems could be addressed)</p> <p>Lunch</p> <p>Avenues for redress (seminar and discussion)</p> <p>Understanding decision- and policy-making locally, tenants forums/networks, Local Strategic Partnership (seminar and facilitated discussion)</p> <p>Where to get advice and support RCOs, CAB and law centre (seminar – followed by a directory of support provision by the end of the session)</p> <p>Culminating in a review session of learning that day and facilitated discussion</p>
<p>Session 5 What benefits are available to refugees and how are they accessed</p>	<p>Introduction to asylum and immigration status issues, in particular dealing with UKBA (seminar and one practical group exercise)</p> <p>Housing and council tax benefits, rent deposits (seminar and break out group exercises)</p> <p>Unemployment benefits/income support/employment support allowance/ DLA/in- and out-of-work benefits (seminar, and break-out into pairs and group exercise)</p> <p>Culminating in a review session of learning that day and facilitated discussion</p>



Session	Brief Outline/Learning Approach
<p>Session 6 How do I give housing advice to clients I see?</p>	<p>Advice giving techniques – AdviceUK</p> <p>Polices and procedures – AdviceUK</p> <p>Maintaining accurate records – AdviceUK</p> <p>Lunch</p> <p>Introduction to quality marks (with possible speaker from Brent Advice Forum)</p> <p>Where to go for advice and support for complex cases</p>
<p>Session 7 How would we go about setting up a housing association?</p>	<p>This would be largely determined and subject to discussions with the Pan African Housing Association but could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – history – mission and vision – demonstrating the need – governance, structure, management – service delivery – networks of influence with an emphasis on marketing for session 9 and 10 – challenges – the future
<p>Session 8 Train the trainers</p>	<p>This would need either 2-3 days depending on whether participants want official accreditation, or an overview and focus on the skills</p>
<p>Session 9 How to publicise and 'sell' refugee community organisations</p>	<p>What is communication, what is marketing, tools of the trade</p> <p>How to make a representation and how to make a presentation</p> <p>Lunch</p> <p>Networking skills – a practical application</p> <p>Using visual aids to promote your organisation as a professional agency</p>
<p>Session 10 Raising awareness of refugee communities in Brent</p>	<p>As stated, learning outcomes and development of interactive exercises by the group to support effective engagement</p>

Appendix 3 Case study of a refugee work placement

Rasa Azizi (not her real name) is an Afghan refugee settled in the UK since 1993. She is married with three children. With a BA degree in Farsi literature from Kabul University, she used to work in the media sector back home and then joined her husband who some time ago was a diplomat posted in different countries.

After arriving in the UK, Rasa studied ESOL to improve her English language skills then embarked on studying for an accounting technician qualification – currently she has an NVQ level 4. However, she has yet to find a suitable regular job, especially given that her options are limited by her caring responsibilities. Using her foreign language, she works on an irregular basis teaching the Persian language or providing interpreting services.

Rasa explains her placement experience with Innisfree HA as follows:

'I heard about the project from my community organisation – The Afghan Association Paiwand. The application process was straightforward and the placement arrangements were flexible, which encouraged me to apply as I have caring responsibilities towards a disabled person in the family.'

'The interview was friendly, frank and informative. I was clear about what to expect from them and vice versa. We discussed the options available and I chose to work in finance to build on my accounting training. I started my placement in July 2009 and finished in early January 2010, doing two days a week.'

'As a result of my training I was able to work effectively with an integrated real time computerised accounting system. I am now fairly confident with all aspects of the bought ledger system including a working knowledge of the operation of internal control systems, the processing of electronic payments via bank and the production of accounting reports. I was responsible for processing and input of invoices on Innisfree's bought ledger system and have also dealt with cheque payments and other routine finance department issues.'

Rasa argues that for a refugee the benefits of a work placement go beyond gaining technical skills and enhancing employability:

'Doing a work placement gives you the satisfaction that you have achieved something – you are working, helping people, you get a buzz by feeling the pressure and the challenge to achieve. That's something I value. The whole process of seeking asylum and the negative media put you down. But when you get the right volunteering opportunity you realise that you are smart enough, valued enough: it makes a difference. One needs a starting point and a placement is a good one. You rediscover yourself – you confirm yourself.'

For Rasa, the ingredients for a successful placement experience include clarity from both sides of the operation and having a supportive environment:

'The Chief Executive (of Innisfree) has the ability to bring the good out of people... It's important for trainees to have support from someone with such skills – and the whole team was brilliant.'

To these ingredients, her training supervisor emphasised that the trainee must have the right attitude.

'She is a very hard worker and has excellent communication skills, a pleasant attitude and a commitment to learn. Her kind and friendly nature has enabled her to fit into the team very quickly.'

'Her personal circumstances currently prevent her from applying for work but Innisfree are happy to provide assistance when she wants to apply for work. Her colleagues on the finance team keep in touch with her.'

The placement was also an opportunity for the housing association's staff to have first hand exposure to the challenges facing refugees in settling in the UK.

Says Liam O'Shaughnessy, the Finance Director at Innisfree HA, where Rasa was based:

'I did learn from Rasa that even for well-educated, English-speaking refugees, settling in the UK could be difficult. Her family is now living in several countries. Her mother lives in Germany for example. I have a better understanding of the difficulties facing refugees particularly as Rasa is an excellent communicator.'

Appendix 4 People interviewed or contacted for the evaluation exercise

Innisfree HA

Clare Winstanley
Matthew Wicks
Liam O'Shaughnessy

Inquilab HA

Gina Amoh
Annemarie Felon (now left)

London Borough of Brent

Maggie Rafalowicz
Tony Hirsch
Zsuzsanna Messing

Refugee community organisation members
and placement trainees

Marble Magezi
Maria Aden
Ahmed Farid Mall
Soraya Sediq
Jane Lanyero

In addition several brief telephone interviews took place with other candidates for placements.

Project co-ordinator

Gino Fox

Appendix 5 BRMF and other RCO members of the liB Steering Group

Nagini Rajendra	Brent Refugee and Migrants Forum
Ahmed Farid Mall	Afghan Association Paiwand
Zahra Hassan	Women of the Horn
Rahma Saeed	Help Somalia Foundation
Marble Magezi	The African Child
Jane Lanyero	African Womens Care
Hanna Field	Iraqi Centre for Integration and Cohesion
Asleem Abanaam	West London Refugee Women's Forum
Ibrahim Elmi	Horn of Africa Welfare Refugee Group

Key reports and sources of information

The following publications provide useful background to the issues discussed in this report.

Publication by the Audit Commission

Crossing Borders: Responding to the local challenges of migrant workers (2007) (available with other resources at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/migrantworkers/)

Publications by the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH):

Housing and support services for asylum seekers and refugees: A good practice guide (2005)

Community Cohesion and Housing: A good practice guide (2007)

Publications by CIH and hact:

Opening Doors (evaluation report and toolkit) (available at: www.cih.org/policy/openingdoors/ and <http://hact.org.uk/category/projects/opening-doors>)

Publication by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion:

Our Shared Future (2007) (available at www.integrationandcohesion.org.uk)

Publication by the Housing Corporation:

Shared Places: Community cohesion strategy (2007)

Publication by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation:

More responsive public services? – A guide to commissioning migrant and refugee community organisations (2008) (This guide has extensive references to sources of assistance in building the capacity of RCOs.)

Publication by the Mayor of London:

London Enriched – The Mayor's refugee integration strategy (2009)

Other relevant publications:

A part of society: Refugees and asylum seekers volunteering in the UK (2006) (available, with other relevant publications, at www.tandem-uk.com/vol_asylum.htm)

Renewing West London, Refugee Communities: Their Hopes & Needs (2002) (available at www.evelynoldfield.co.uk/publications/index.shtml)

Volunteering for All? Exploring the link between volunteering and social exclusion (2004) (available at: www.ivr.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/DA958DB4-FDF8-4943-AA26-C9C9B202A34B/0/fullreport.pdf)

'The effect of volunteering on refugees' prospects of getting paid work' (2001), in *Voluntary Action* magazine (available at www.ivr.org.uk/VA+Documents%2fVA4_1%2farticle1_stopworth.pdf)

Innisfree and Inquilab are housing associations whose work is mainly based in Brent. They came together to create this project, 'Integrated in Brent', which aims to tackle housing and community development issues faced by the many refugee and migrant communities in the Borough. They worked with the local authority, with Brent Refugees and Migrants Forum and with some of the many community-based organisations of refugees that are based in Brent. Few housing providers in London have tried to do this kind of work, so the project is a pioneer from which they hope that other organisations can learn.

This report tells the story of what happened – the successes and pitfalls. It is aimed at helping other housing organisations and community-based groups who want to do similar work. It contains links to tools and resources which should be useful to those working in other London Boroughs, or elsewhere in the UK, about engagement with refugee and migrant communities.