

Building Bridges

Improving links between Refugee Community Organisations and mainstream support networks

Charities Evaluation Services and the Refugee Council
Improving Reach Project

Quarterly bulletin
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New resources

We have developed two new publications as part of this project. Both will be available as a free download, go to www.ces-vol.org.uk

The publications are:

Becoming more effective: an introduction to monitoring and evaluation for refugee community organisations.

This plain English guide was written for RCOs who have little or no experience of monitoring and evaluation. Using RCO examples and everyday language it provides a practical, easy-to-follow approach.

Available now.

A guide for infrastructure organisations on working with local refugee community organisations.

This resource is designed for managers and development workers within support agencies wishing to engage with refugee community organisations (RCOs) or to review their current approach to interacting with them. **Available late April.**

Welcome!

Welcome to the final edition of ***Building Bridges***, the quarterly email bulletin for the national Improving Reach project being run jointly by Charities Evaluation Services (CES) and the Refugee Council. We would like to thank you all for the very positive response to the project which finishes at the end of March 2008.

The project aims to improve links between refugee community organisations (RCOs) and mainstream support networks, including local infrastructure organisations and others wishing to reach out to RCOs.

Who is this bulletin for?

- Local Refugee Community Organisations
- National specialist refugee organisations supporting RCOs
- Local infrastructure organisations such as Councils for Voluntary Services (CVS) already reaching out to RCOs or wishing to do so
- Local ChangeUp consortia
- Anyone else wishing to support or work with RCOs.

Please feel free to forward this bulletin on to your own contacts who may be interested.

Achievements of the project

- We have delivered a free two-day training course on monitoring and evaluation to over 90 participants and observers in six of the English regions. The course has been very popular. ***'I have improved my knowledge and I will do the best for my organisation to be more effective'*** (comment from a course participant).
- We have produced two new 'legacy' publications to support and build on the work of this programme.

CES article: Making time to manage performance

These are exciting times for voluntary and community organisations. Levels of public trust are high, and the major political parties encourage us to help strengthen communities and improve public services.

There is every reason to believe that RCOs have the potential to achieve even more for their users in the coming years, but if they are going to do so successfully, they must ensure that they maintain their independence, demonstrate the value of their work, and be properly accountable to their supporters.

Effective leadership, capable and committed trustees, an appropriately skilled and supported workforce of volunteers or staff, and sufficient and stable funding, are all vital. But these must be underpinned by a clear sense of purpose and direction, an ability to ensure the quality of services, and ongoing effort to assess progress and demonstrate achievements.

There are times when work on strategy, quality, or monitoring and evaluation can seem like a distraction from the real business of supporting service users. But performance activities provide strong foundations and enable organisations to achieve more for their service users. Neglect the foundations and things can start to crumble, because without evidence of success, people may lose confidence in your ability to do good quality work.

Local infrastructure organisations, such as Councils for Voluntary Services (CVS) can provide practical assistance with performance improvement. You can find details of your local infrastructure organisation from NAVCA*(see overleaf).

There are also a number of practical publications that you can obtain from organisations like Charities Evaluation Services. It is worth making time to manage performance.

Contact details

Charities Evaluation Services

tel: 020 7713 5722

www.ces-vol.org.uk

Refugee Council

tel: 020 7346 1173

www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

Please get in touch to find out more about this project

How to contact this project directly

email: buildingbridges@ces-vol.org.uk

How to contact the Basis project

www.basisproject.org.uk

email: Boryana.Bojkova@refugeecouncil.org.uk

tel: 020 7840 4486

How to contact NAVCA*

www.navca.org.uk

email: navca@navca.org.uk

tel: 0114 278 6636

**For more information about NAVCA please refer to Issue 1 of Building Bridges*

How to contact African Union UK

email: africanunionuk@yahoo.co.uk

tel: 01302 360341

Presenting African Union UK

In 2005, members from African communities living in the Doncaster area of Yorkshire established the African Union (UK). This was in direct response to concern that African asylum-seekers and refugees were finding it difficult to get the support that they needed. The aim of the organisation was to help them to start a new life in Yorkshire and also to integrate into the wider British society.

The African Union responds to the needs of African asylum-seekers and refugees by offering a range of activities that are run entirely by volunteers. These include: organising events such as Multicultural Women Sports Activities, festivals and football teams; providing services which include free translation of letters; access to the internet, photocopying and faxing facilities; help to register at a GP; a drop-in service, and signposting clients to other sources of support such as Job Centres to help people to gain employment or to organisations such as Women's Aid for those experiencing domestic violence.

The most remarkable achievements in the three years of existence have been:

- increasing membership to over 300 members
- leading the consultation process on services to refugees on employment, housing and education, and
- obtaining premises.

Having premises is crucial as they are used as an Internet café and drop-in centre as well as enabling members to have access to an address that can be used for correspondence purposes. This is essential for asylum-seekers living in provisional accommodation.

The African Union is working in partnership with a number of other organisations including the Northern Refugee Centre to run the drop-in service and with The Doncaster Focus Group on the organisation of the Multicultural Festival.

The African Union plays an important role in the community. It enables members to get to know the way of life here, to be aware of UK laws, to make friends and to obtain practical support. However, in spite of all their successes they still face the uncertainty of gaining future funding.

The Basis project

The Refugee Council and Refugee Action were awarded funding by the Big Lottery Fund in 2007 to set up and manage a five-year programme called 'the Basis Project'. This project provides one-to-one support to refugee community organisations (RCOs) to help increase their ability to manage, develop and sustain their organisations.

The project also works with funders and local infrastructure organisations to improve their understanding of the barriers RCOs face and how they can help them to overcome these barriers.

The project is working in all nine English regions, and is able to offer one-to-one support to 400 RCOs over a four-year period. A website is being established (from April 2008 at www.thebasisproject.org.uk) which will contain detailed information on the areas of organisational management and development that we are working on.

If you would like more information about the project please complete the simple form on the Refugee Council's website: <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/howwehelp/partners/partnership/basiscontact.htm>

Basis are really keen to hear from RCOs that would like to use the project's services; and also funders and local infrastructure organisations that would like to know more. Please get in touch with us (see how to contact the Basis project) or by email: basis@refugeecouncil.org.uk

Publications of interest

The publications from this project:

For more information on these resources visit www.ces-vol.org.uk to get a free download or email us on buildingbridges@ces-vol.org.uk to get further details.

Other publications:

More responsive public services? A guide to commissioning migrant and refugee community organisations.

For more information visit www.jrf.org.uk
tel: 01904 629241
email: publications@jrf.org.uk