



## 'Inspiration Stations'

### The Basis Project London Regional Seminar Report 27<sup>th</sup> September 2011, Toynebee Hall

The Basis Project London Seminar 'Inspiration Stations', run by the Refugee Council and the Evelyn Oldfield Unit, brought together **26 refugee community organisations** and **11 second-tier organisations** to share learning and to discuss innovative ways of supporting refugee community work.

This report provides a brief account of the seminar's sessions, the experiences shared and the learning that emerged. It also includes: information on the seminar's speakers, the participants' list and a summary of the participants' feedback and ideas for future learning.

#### Why 'Inspiration'? The purpose of the seminar

The seminar aimed to inspire Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) with examples of **positive and practical approaches for addressing the challenges** faced under the current resource-scarce climate. The whole day was an invitation both for participants and organisers to look beyond the usual ways of working and to embrace new ideas and techniques. The examples shared included:

- How one person used internet to build up an organisation
- How an organisation saved its funding by challenging the London Council cuts
- How diverse groups got to work together and prepare joint projects
- How big mainstream organisations got involved into refugee community work
- How an organisation increased income through a membership scheme



Beyond the inspiration coming from these concrete examples, the seminar aimed to energise participants by providing an opportunity for people to reach out to others who are not the 'usual work partners', to share their visions and discuss how they can together increase their power and foster solidarity.

#### Why 'Stations'? A seminar in world Café style

In order to increase learning between RCOs, the seminar's themes were all presented in a World Café style by RCOs and other community organisations who have successfully implemented new approaches of work. The World-café methodology is a simple idea for hosting people in a friendly environment to take part in conversations about issues of importance to them.

The seminar hosted 5 themes or 5 'stations', each based on a different café table where participants could listen to the speaker present his/her experience and exchange their own ideas and experiences on the issue. Participants could then move on to another table-station, in

---

this way linking-up conversations and cross-pollinating ideas. Throughout the café sessions, participants were invited to keep in mind the question **'What can I learn from this that will give energy and add value to my work?'** and every session concluded by collectively registering the key lessons that emerged.

Participants were also encouraged:

- To think that they are experts in their own experience
- To act as ambassadors of the ideas at each café session
- To show trust to the other participants that joined the café session

This created a feeling of positive sharing and confidence among participants.


## The 5 'Inspiration Stations'

Below are the short descriptions of the 'Inspiration Stations' and the key lessons as collectively decided by the groups of participants that attended each station.

### 1. Challenging the Funding Cuts - Gabriela Smolinska-Poffley, Roma Support Group

This 'station' focused on the decision of the Roma Support Group's service users to challenge London Councils on its funding cuts which lead to the Roma Support Group's service users vs. London Councils Judicial Review Case. The Judge held that London Councils' decision making process was flawed and said that London Councils must re-run the process, fully in accordance with their equality duties.

#### Key Lessons:

- It could be risky to challenge cuts (not easy, fear to be seen as a trouble maker) so you need to get proper advice first
- 
- Communicate with service users and consult with them before any action
  - Use media as a tool – use celebrities to raise the issue
  - Campaign together with allies and lobby MPs
  - Involve service users, trustees, members, staff through process – service users challenged the decision that was give through legal aid
  - Have passion and determination
- Have courage and develop skills for campaigning and lobbying even if not a lobbying organisation
  - Be very organised and use mainstream resources
  - Involve other communities, local and regional organisations and work with them to help gather evidence
  - Have a fighting spirit - feel the discrimination faced by your community and use this to advocate. It is difficult and time consuming but necessary
-

---

## 2. Promoting your Work Online - Nahla Mahmoud

This 'station' focused on how to successfully use the internet and social media for bringing together the community, networking with other organisations and promoting the organisation's causes. Nahla demonstrated how creating a blog and a FaceBook page, gave a whole new dimension to her work with the Sudanese community by improving communication, raising awareness and finding supporters.

### Key Lessons:

- We need to be more digitally active and to do that we first need more digital knowledge and skills
- We need to have a clear purpose when using each of the various social media (FaceBook, Twitter)
- We need to think around time management of digital social networking
- An idea is to offer something through our media (e.g. discount to community businesses, concerts etc.)
- Blogs are good for posting your opinion and attracting others to share ideas
- Twitter is good for sharing bits of information to a wider network
- Social media can promote our campaigns and causes
- Investing in social media might find resistance from trustees but it the way to go for involving young people
- It is a free resource!
- If one social media doesn't work, you can easily change and try new things
- Most communities need info on these resources and on which one to use according to their different needs

## 3. Finding New Resources – Louise Zanre, Jesuit Refugee Service and Albert Onyumba, Congo Support Group

This 'station' focused on the accompaniment model, which is at the heart of the Jesuit Refugee Service way of working, and on exploring ideas about improving access to resources through 'in kind' giving. The session also presented the Congo Support Group Membership Model which has been developed to raise much needed funds for the organisation whilst meeting the needs of individual members.

### Key Lessons:

- Relationships are the strongest resource: Make time for building networks and relationships
- Networking is essential – don't be afraid to ask people
- Recognise the value of what you are offering (in money and time)
- Have the courage to try something different
- Believe in what you do – work with what you have, even if only 1 or 2 people
- Keep clear the vision of the different kind of society you are trying to create



- 
- Keep the principles of your services at the heart
  - Keep long-term view for the long haul
  - Have an inclusive leadership style within your community : 1 to 1 relationships are very important
  - Find people with expertise who can help make your ideas work
  - Demonstrate a pro-active organisation that is attractive to funders
  - Membership scheme can help to market services and have a better system of support e.g. leadership training for women

#### **4. Working Together to be more Powerful** – Jennifer Taylor, People First Lambeth and Vic Forrest

This 'station' focused on a collaboration between a group of people with learning difficulties with a group of BME (black, minority, ethnic) mental health services users. The speakers explored the benefits and the skills needed to foster learning and collaboration between groups that might feel they are very different from each other and also presented how the groups got to planning joint projects.

##### **Key Lessons:**

- Communities that might think they are very different from each other can be united through discussing common challenges and inequalities they face
- Key theme for all groups: society needs to be challenged to treat everyone as human beings with respect - need to influence power structure
- Important to recognise your organisation's limits and join plans with others
- Importance of the voices of the less powerful being heard (and all groups need to reflect on who are the less powerful within own group)
- Recognise common needs and building on that commonality to achieve common goals
- Vulnerable people should have control of what they do: a need of equality of space and parity in decision-making with the right support and mechanisms to do it

#### **5. Building bridges with mainstream organisations** - Maryam Hikmat, Iraqi Centre for Integration and Cohesion (ICIC) and Janie Molloy, West London Refugee Women's Forum (WLRWF)

This 'station' looked at working collaboratively with mainstream organisations and building bridges between different organisations. The speakers focused on WLRWF's women and peace and conflict resolution project and ICIC's mothers and daughters intergenerational arts project, both of which involved practical collaborative work with mainstream organisations.



##### **Key Lessons:**

- We need organisations interacting more directly with each other
  - Making links can help to take away some of the pressure (sharing resources)
  - Have an understanding what you can offer as a small organisation (selling yourself)
  - Keep a record/database of groups and resources (needs to be current)
  - Use volunteer centres for resources
  - Share facilities, offices, expertise with other organisations
  - Offer training to each other perhaps in return for something free or at a discount
-

- 
- Ideas: link with universities. Students can help with websites/ FaceBook/ Twitter. They can offer volunteers with expertise (social work and law students)
  - Ideas: link with museums – in the past they have helped with oral history archiving (building one's own archive), with lending objects to be taken to the houses of isolated people, with supporting intergeneration art projects and social cohesion work

## Closing Remarks and Next Steps

*'Learning from each other might help us to save own organisations, and go through difficult times'*

Seminar Participant



At the end of the seminar, the above key lessons from all 'inspirations stations' were shared and participants talked about their learning and impressions of the day.

Many RCOs observed that although they are small, they have much more power than they tend to think they do: their knowledge of their communities and of delivering tailored services is much needed by mainstream organisations.

The majority of participants talked about their desire to keep learning from each other, to accompany and support each other's work. To that end, **the Basis Project is organising learning visits** to the organisations that presented the 'Inspiration Stations' to see the inspiring examples in action – if you are interested in joining us for the learning visits please email Maro Pantazidou ([maro.pantazidou@refugeecouncil.org.uk](mailto:maro.pantazidou@refugeecouncil.org.uk)).

We also invited participants to reflect on what else they would like to learn with and from each other in order to improve the support they provide to their communities. A summary of the participants' learning needs can be found at the end of this report.

## Acknowledgments

The Basis Project London team is thankful to all the brilliant speakers for their contributions. We would also like to thank Stella Corradi for taking video and photos on the day and our volunteer facilitators Joelle Bahati from Light Project International (RCO) and Fatmire Bunkaju from the British Albanian Kosovar Council.

---

---

## Speakers' Bios

**Vic Forrest** has worked for many years supporting people with learning difficulties in self-advocacy groups. He has also studied, up to PhD level, the subject of supporting people with learning difficulties to do their own self-directed research. Recently he has been working with different groups of people looking at human rights, equality and power.

**Maryam Hikmat** is a volunteer at the Iraqi Centre for Integration and Cohesion (ICIC). She is a recent Psychology graduate and is keen to develop her skills working with young people. After participating in ICIC's Mother and Daughter's Intergenerational Arts Project, Maryam has been gaining charity sector work experience, sharing her language, communication, digital and organisational skills to develop further community projects.

**Nahla Mahmoud** is a young Sudanese refugee that has completed an intensive course on Digital Activism and has used her new gained skill to set up a Sudanese Humanist platform where the community can share ideas and experience, provide support to each other and publicly air views.

**Janie Molloy** is a Trustee of West London Refugee Women's Forum (WLRWF) where she currently helps coordinate the women's yoga project. Janie has been sharing her skills within the community for many years, for instance helping WLRWF to plan conflict resolution and community development training and develop skills training projects for refugee women. Janie has for many years been a foster mother to unaccompanied minors.

**Gabriela Smolinska-Poffley** is the Roma Support Group's Deputy Manager and Roma Engagement & Support Programme Leader. She has been working with the Roma community for over ten years running various health-related projects facilitating Roma refugees and migrants' access to health services in London and empowering them to gain a greater control over their lives. At present she is providing second-tier support to statutory and non-statutory organisations across the UK.

**Albert Onyumbé** is the Secretary of the Congo Support Group which is a main Congolese organisation in United Kingdom with over 5.000 active members.

**Jennifer Taylor** is a person with learning difficulties and a mother. She works for People First Lambeth, The Social Care Institute for Excellence and Shaping Our Lives, trying to change society and make it a better place for people with learning difficulties.

**Louise Zanre** is Director of the Jesuit Refugee Service in the UK and has worked with JRS for over 10 years. The Jesuit Refugee Service is an international Catholic non-governmental organisation, at work in over 50 countries, on six continents worldwide, with a mission to accompany, serve and defend the rights of refugees and forcibly displaced people.

---

---

## List of Participants

<b>Type of Organisation</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
RCO	Blondine Faith	Faith Zoe Foundation
2 <sup>nd</sup> tier	Stefanie Borkum	Voluntary Action Camden
RCO	Alison McQuitty	Reading Refugee Support Group
2 <sup>nd</sup> tier	Ertanch Hidayettin	Community Barnet
2 <sup>nd</sup> tier	Jo Deverson	Greenwich Action for Voluntary Services
RCO	Ayan Ahmed Keynan	Woman and Child Development Organisation
2 <sup>nd</sup> tier	Tommy Cloherty	HOPE Worldwide
RCO	Sri Katthigeyan Sagarappillai	Helping Hands for Refugees and Disabled
RCO	Alfred Venthakone	Tamil Community and Youth Centre
2 <sup>nd</sup> tier	Patricia Garcia	Voluntary Action Camden
RCO	Paula Estrada Otero	Latin American House
RCO	Roda Imam	Somali Bravanese Welfare Association in Barnet
RCO	Rita Buhanda	Forward Foundation for Women's Rights Research and Development
RCO	Maria Aden	Forward Foundation for Women's Rights Research and Development
RCO	Abdi Hamad	Westminster Community Association
RCO	Lincoln Lim	Camden Chinese Society
RCO	Kezban Hussein	Turkish Education Group
RCO	Halaleh Taheri	Middle Eastern Women and Society Organisation
2 <sup>nd</sup> tier	Caroline Jepson	Target HR
	Rosie Bayley	Springfield Community Flat
2 <sup>nd</sup> tier	Karen Snow	Ekologi
RCO	Talat Pllana	Albanian Community Organisation
RCO	Gerard Mampo Guillet	African Francophone Resource and Information Centre (AFRIC)
RCO	Homtang Mimbo	Redemption Church Worldwide
RCO	Jospeh Kandolo	Sutton & Merton East African Refugee Project
RCO	Heshmt Assadi	Eagle Eyes Association for Afghan Displaced Youth
RCO	Marso Abdi	Daryeel Foundation
RCO	Amran Mohamed	Daryeel Foundation
RCO	Zeinab Sahardid	Sharm'arke Development Association
RCO	Krishna Pujara	Enfield Saheli
RCO	Margaret Konima Sesay	

---

---

## Participants' Learning Needs

Below is a summary of the participants' learning needs as noted by them at the end of the seminar. The Basis Project is working towards addressing some of these needs. We hope that this summary will be helpful also to other RCOs and second-tier organisations planning learning processes.

### Fundraising training / workshops

- Tips on how to improve on-kind giving
- More information on different areas of funding and new ideas
- how to pursue joint funding bids
- More information on fundraising for local communities
- Explore what challenges small charities face at the moment with funding difficulties and how they try to find different funding sources

### Social media training / workshops

- Learn more about how to get the best of social media
- Gain a better understanding of tweeter, facebook and blogging
- Find about the best media mechanism that does not create work
- Learn how to use social media to benefit the work of small organisations with limited resources and learn practically how to set up blog

### Collaborative work

- Share an office with another organisation and work together step-by-step to establish long term partnership
- Work together all possible common issues and support each other
- Share links and communication with others (advertising, networking, events) and the kind of tools they use
- Know more about local organisations with which I could collaborate for service and project delivery
- Link organisations through cultural social events (music/ dancing) where it is easier to engage with different groups
- Learn about partnership working for disparate ethnic group
- Learn more about how the organisations build a strong commitment with the communities, culture and society
- Hearing more about successful projects and services that BME / RCOs organisations have done / are doing – what worked well
- How to educate my community how to build a relationship with other groups

### Campaigning

- Know more about campaigning
  - Find out about the best possible way to contact the media and MPs
  - Learn more about how to challenge the cuts
-

---

## Evaluation Report

### General

#### 1. Overall how would you rate the seminar?

Very good **9 participants** Good **9 participants** Average      Poor      Very poor

Comments:

- Would be better if the talks were given to all the groups at once so everyone can learn from all the organisations present.
- I like the format of the sessions
- Very new experience
- Interesting set up, very well organised
- A lot of positive and interesting information
- Inspirational
- I enjoyed all of it, gained a lot, enjoyed the food and light entertainment
- I like the informal and relaxed atmosphere and world café format for presentations

#### 2. What kind of organisation do you represent?

Refugee Community Organisation **6 participants** Funder

Second-tier Support Organisation **6 participants** Other **5 participants**

#### 3. Did you make useful contacts at the conference today?

Yes **18** participants No 0

Comments:

- Relevant to the changes I am experiencing.
- Lots of them
- Varied information which will help us go further

#### 4. How interesting did you find the presentations?

Very interesting **8 participants** Interesting **8 participants**  
Average **1 participant** Not interesting      Not at all interesting

Comments:

- Some of them very were interesting
- I was presenting at one of the tables so I was very pleased with the opportunity to participate in other tables
- Promoting your work online it was very interesting and made me think about ways to use social networking media to benefit our work
- Inspirational (Jennifer and Vic in particular)

#### 5. How interesting did you find the workshop?

Very interesting **9 participants** Interesting **8 participants** Average **1 participant**  
Not interesting      Not at all interesting

---

---

Comments:

- Open and honest
- Acknowledging how much hard work is done and still happening
- Great discussions, inclusive and participatory

## 6. What do you think about the following? ( Please tick the most appropriate)

	Very good	Good	Average	Poor	Very poor
Overall Organisation	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>			
Delegate pack information	<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>			
Venue	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1</b>		
Catering	<b>12</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>		
Assistance provided on the day	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>			

Comments:

- Nice atmosphere with table layouts, music etc. and nice to have lots of people facilitating, presenting
- Very, very friendly
- Feedback form may need a bit of work for a café style event

## The Basis Project strategic direction

### 1. The changing environment

How effectively do you feel that the Basis Project is responding to the changing environment? (For example, a change from grant giving to commissioning; economic changes - reduced funds available; political changes, and any others)

- Gives me a clear understanding on digital media
- Linking organisation through sharing experience is quite helpful, keeping recording of active bodies
- It is improving organisational capacity to work together to grow and develop
- Good to have proper refreshments, it was appreciated
- Positive information and support is given
- Today's meeting was very interesting. I think that keeping small organisations in touch to share experience and learn from each other is very important
- As well as you can, things change so quickly you do very well trying to keep us all up to date

### 2. Needs of stakeholders

How well do you think the Basis Project is responding to the needs of RCOs, funders, and second-tier organisations?

- Must found out more about it
  - Unfortunately I did not see any report in this area, so I can not give my opinion
  - Good
  - This workshop gives great hope, maybe you could organize it periodically
  - Doing excellent work.
  - The response is proactive
  - Well
  - Difficult to say as I don't represent one of these organisations.
-

---

### **3. Ways of working**

What suggestions do you have for how we could work with you and other stakeholders more effectively?

- Information about your events, workshops, sessions
- I think we all need each other as the cuts affect us all. I believe in good communication and collaboration
- Supporting local BME/RCO in how to support /refer their clients /users to service providers and Refugee Council. Come and visit the groups/forums etc.
- Use Greenwich BME forum to link/contacts with these group! Happy to discuss how we could e.g. joint training info to group etc. More collaboration between Refugee Council and local groups in an area
- We are happy and willing to receive any new seminar or training session
- I sent a letter to say I was attending but when I arrived my badge was not there. So, I think more efficiency in admin
- Experience sharing meetings are very useful
- Communication is always the key, you do well with this – keep going!

### **4. Is there any action you will take as a result of attending this conference?**

- Report to my chair with ideas and contacts I made here
  - Looking for partnership and working closer with Refugee Council
  - Contacts that I will follow up and create more links in local area
  - Make a serious plan for my community
  - Advertising widely about my organisation and our experience
  - Yes, we would look into the possibilities of working with other organisations
  - Yes, a few e.g. contact with university.
  - Talk to my colleagues working with young Roma about possibility of outreach and engagement through social media
  - Hosting a visit; hopefully visiting a couple of new contacts
-