

Working in partnership to support refugees and asylum seekers



# The East Midlands Refugee Community Resources Project

## Evaluation Report

A Refugee Housing Association initiative in partnership  
with Refugee Community Organisations



# Evaluation of the East Midlands Refugee Community Resources Project

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## Foreword

Since the commencement of NASS (National Asylum Support Service) dispersal of asylum seekers to the East Midlands in 2000, new refugee communities have been developing in the region and slowly new Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) have been emerging. Refugee Housing Association (RHA) recognises the vital role played by RCOs in enabling the successful integration of refugees into the UK.

As RHA has expanded its community development work in the region, it became apparent that a closer look at the issues surrounding the sustaining of emerging RCOs was necessary. While a small number of longstanding RCOs existed in the East Midlands, RHA became aware of more than 15 RCOs which had emerged in the last three years. These groups were at varying stages of development, ranging from informal networks to formal constituted organisations.

The Refugee Community Resources Project, led by RHA, aimed to increase the capacity of RCOs and to raise awareness and build dialogue with a range of strategic agencies such as funders. Project activities included identifying training needs among a range of RCOs across the three cities of Leicester, Nottingham and Derby; commissioning training on three key topics: awareness raising, capacity building and funding; establishing a dialogue between RHA, RCOs and funding agencies through meetings and video shows; and bringing agencies and individuals together for networking, information sharing and agenda-setting at an end-of-project conference.

The project was financially supported by the European Refugee Fund, Metropolitan Housing Trust's Social Investment Foundation and RHA.

This report covers the evaluation of the project, as well as outlining key issues for consideration. It recommends ways to bridge the gap between RCOs, funders and voluntary sector co-ordinating agencies in order to encourage more co-ordinated and informed support to RCOs in the East Midlands.

## 1. Introduction

The aims of this evaluation report are:

- to present the evaluation of the impact of the Refugee Community Resources Project (RCRP) on Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs), including capacity-building work with emerging groups
- to document RCO experiences and funding issues
- to highlight the funders' perspective and if necessary recommend ways to bridge the gap between RCOs, funders and voluntary sector coordinating agencies.

Each section will include:

- an analysis of all the information gathered
- key learning experiences.

The research and direct interviews undertaken have also led to some cross-cutting recommendations for key players across the East Midlands. The hope is that these observations will be taken into account when developing the strategic plans and priorities for the region or organisation. This report cannot stand alone and should be read in conjunction with the knowledge and views of people across the East Midlands involved specifically in community development with refugee communities, and/or in striving towards effective integration.

## **2. Methodology**

It was felt that responsibility for developing an effective refugee community organisational structure should not just fall on the shoulders of the RCOs involved. Therefore, time was spent with RCOs, and also with organisations working with RCOs across the East Midlands.

There was a mixture of face to face meetings with refugees (including members of RCOs and attendees at training sessions) and telephone conversations. There were also face to face and telephone conversations with people who work closely with refugees and asylum seekers in the East Midlands region, from both non governmental organisations and statutory authorities. The conversations were a mixture of informal, semi-structured and structured interviews. There were also two in-depth, face to face interviews with funders.

This direct information gathering was supported by data derived from a number of other sources, including reports and literature outlining the experiences of RCOs across the whole of the UK.

For each aim the following information gathering techniques were used:

### **2.1 To evaluate the impact of the RCRP on RCOs, including capacity-building work with emerging groups**

- Attendance at three training events, one in each of the three cities, Derby, Leicester and Nottingham.
- One to one interview with Kamal Rasul, trainer and Executive Director of Migrant Organisation's Development Agency (MODA).
- Face to face interviews with five RCOs.
- Face to face meeting with RHA Community Initiative Officers.
- Support in writing the European Refugee Fund (ERF) evaluation report with RHA staff.
- One to one interview with the project co-ordinator.
- Desk research of different methodologies of evaluating community development, including the Home Office draft framework for indicators of integration.

### **2.2 To document RCO experiences and funding issues**

Direct research including:

- face to face meetings with five RCOs
- past experience of working with RCOs
- one to one interviews with people working closely with RCOs including:
  - Kamal Rasul, MODA
  - RHA Community Initiative Officers from the East Midlands
  - Refugee Action Development and Integration Manager for the East Midlands and Yorkshire
  - the organiser of the East Midlands 2004 'SHARE' conference from Refugee Action
- telephone interview with Voluntary Action, Leicester
- meeting notes from a meeting between RHA and Derby CVS (formerly known as Council for Voluntary Services).

Desk research including:

- 'Developing Services for Refugees and People Seeking Asylum: A research project looking at the issues facing people seeking asylum and refugees and the development of services in Derby, Leicester and Nottingham', Gersh Subhra, University of Derby, 2002
- 'Asylum seekers' skills and qualifications audit pilot project', NIACE, 2001
- 'Refugee Based Community Organisations in the UK: A Social Capital Analysis' David Griffiths, Nando Sigona, Roger Zetter, 2004
- 'Dispersal: Facilitating Efficiency and Effectiveness', Zetter, 2001
- 'Refugee Settlement: Can Communities Cope?' Evelyn Oldfield Unit, 2002.

### **2.3 To understand the funders' perspective and, if necessary, recommend ways to bridge the gap between RCOs, funders and voluntary sector coordinating agencies**

- Face to face meeting with Victoria Southwell from Comic Relief.
- Face to face meeting with John Dinooor, Big Lottery Fund.
- Telephone conversation with Kwaku Ampomah, Voluntary Action, Leicester.
- Notes from RHA's meeting with Derby Community Foundation and Derby CVS.
- Face to face meeting with Helen Everett from East Midlands Consortium for Asylum Seeker and Refugee Support (EMCARS) about the integration strategy for the East Midlands.
- Desk research about the national integration strategy and its impact on regional funding.
- Brief analysis of the external environment in each city through phone calls with City Councils, Sure Start, Local Education Authorities, Health Authorities and others signposted for particular interest (such as a health project in Leicester Beaumont Leys and New Deal in Nottingham).

### **3. To evaluate the effectiveness of the East Midlands RCRP on RCOs, including capacity-building work with emerging groups**

#### **3.1 Overall goal**

##### **3.1.1 What was the goal stated in the original application?**

The overall goal of this project, as stated on the initial proposal to the ERF, was to “facilitate the integration of refugees in the UK”.

It also stated that the lack of accessible infrastructure support available for RCOs was a barrier to integration in the East Midlands region and was one of the key reasons for the project.

##### **3.1.2 To what extent was this goal met?**

The project assumed that the creation and supported development of organised and effective RCOs would contribute to the long term integration of refugees within the East Midlands region. This assumption is taken from academic literature as well as the experience of established RCOs in London<sup>1</sup>, who offer a number of programmes focusing on areas such as health, education, training and employment.

Section 4 of this evaluation shows that RCOs are offering services to refugees and asylum seekers who would probably not receive them in any other manner. It would appear that refugees and asylum seekers using the services perceive RCOs as more accessible and approachable than other voluntary and statutory agencies.

This project has brought RHA together with RCOs and other community, voluntary and statutory agencies, as part of the integration process of refugees in the East Midlands. It has acted, alongside an ongoing programme of initiatives, to add value to projects aimed at promoting the integration of refugees within the East Midlands.

#### **3.2 The objectives of the project**

- Provision of capacity-building training to 12 RCOs and to potential members.
- Development of links with key funding organisations, working to raise their awareness of the needs of RCOs in the East Midlands region. The project aims to have an impact on at least five funding organisations.
- Production of a video to present to funding organisations regarding the funding and development needs of RCOs.
- Production of a video for funders and ‘enabling agencies’ to promote the project.
- A conference to disseminate learning achieved through the project and to present findings of the external evaluation exercise.
- External evaluation of the project by an independent consultant.

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<sup>1</sup> Gameledin-Ashami, M., Cooper, L. and Knight, B. (2002) *Refugee Settlement: Can Communities Cope?* London, Evelyn Oldfield Unit. This research compared the experience of RCOs in London and those in three different dispersal areas. The results were significant in showing the sort of necessary interventions to enable regional RCOs to be able to offer services beyond initial advice.

### **3.3 To what extent were these objectives met?**

#### **3.3.1 Provision of capacity building training to 12 RCOs and to potential members**

##### **Recruitment and attendance**

There was a three-fold approach to informing refugees and asylum seekers about the training, to confirm their attendance and to gather their comments on the content of the training.

- Questionnaires and leaflets were sent out outlining some suggestions for the training and to establish how many people would be attending and from which group.
- Key partner agencies were informed of the project.
- The project was discussed with support staff in the three cities within RHA East Midlands.

As the approaches above yielded few participants, the RHA Project Officer then chose to:

- attend meetings with refugee communities
- visit the community centres attended by the RCOs in each city
- attend other conferences held by RCOs.

The approach of discussing the training and of personally contacting people running RCOs was far more successful.

Please see Appendix 1<sup>2</sup> for graphs showing attendance, and highlighting the gender, nationality and city split. Despite problems recruiting refugees to attend, attendance was good. From the 89 individuals booked on to the courses, 62 actually attended (a 69% turnout). Of these, 37% were women (though this figure is swayed by exceptionally good attendance from women who were all from one group, in Leicester). The provision of crèche facilities increased the number of women able to attend the training and they were well used. In total, 16 different RCOs were represented across the three cities, by 28 people (45% of the total number of delegates). This shows that a number of the representatives were individuals who were interested in establishing or becoming involved in an RCO, rather than having already set up an RCO. On average each RCO only sent one member, which shows one of the major problems RCOs are facing in the region in terms of establishing themselves.<sup>3</sup>

The training was attended by people representing 23 nationalities, 60% of which were from the continent of Africa. Across all cities there is a notable absence of any Kurdish groups, though one group did attend in Derby where there has been a high dispersal of Kurds. In Leicester there was no attendance from Zimbabwean, Congolese or Iraqi groups. In Nottingham the only Congolese and Somali attendance was by members of Heri Kwetu, which offers services across African nationalities. The diversity of nationalities was excellent.

##### **Key learning about recruitment and attendance at training set up for RCOs**

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<sup>2</sup> Appendix 1 outlines the number of individuals attending per city; the nationality split; the gender split; the number of RCOs versus the number of individuals

<sup>3</sup> This is further explored in Section 4; emerging RCOs have had problems finding refugees able to commit time to developing the RCO as funding is very tight and refugees often have to prioritise paid employment.

It is most effective to:

- talk to RCOs and refugees face to face about their training needs and attendance at events; visit community centres and other events where RCOs will be in attendance
- use door knocking (literally knocking on people's doors) as a community development technique that has known a high success rate with RCOs and harder to reach groups within communities<sup>4</sup>
- target certain nationalities, groups and genders in cities to ensure attendance is as evenly distributed as possible and that all groups have had equal opportunity to access the training or service being offered.

## **Content of training sessions**

There were nine training sessions, split across three cities and run over three consecutive weeks. The training was delivered by the same trainer and the same three sessions were carried out in each city. The content was established, in the main, by a questionnaire sent to all potential delegates, who were asked to comment on three potential workshops being suggested. The response was poor and therefore the workshops initially suggested by RHA were the ones used for the training sessions. These were:

- management of an RCO
- funding
- awareness raising and community development.

Funding was included as a separate workshop as the acquisition of funds and appropriate use and implementation of projects is one of the major barriers to establishing sustainable organisations. From the subsequent face to face meetings held with RCOs and through key pieces of research<sup>5</sup>, it became obvious that the establishment and development of effective sustainable organisations requires well targeted effective financial intervention. This enables organisations to move beyond offering immediate advice on Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) determination processes and the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) and focus on activities that promote integration. As will become clear throughout this report, a wider definition of income generation (rather than looking solely at independent fundraising) more aptly describes the needs of RCOs.

The choice of trainer was central to ensuring that the workshops were effective and enabled participants to benefit from the RCOs' experiences in the past, avoiding common pitfalls. Kamal Rasul from MODA was excellent and he managed to present all the training within the context of setting up new organisations and a good practice framework. Thus, the funding workshop was set against a backdrop of how an effective, sustainable organisation would need to look in order to gain funding. The awareness-raising workshop looked at the concept of raising awareness within the context of community development; how to raise awareness of the services needed and being offered within the group's own defined communities; and how to establish an effective volunteer and service user base. The training was outward-looking and highlighted other organisations with which it was

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<sup>4</sup> Refugee Action used door knocking as a means of encouraging women to become part of the RCOs and to attend conferences and meetings; attendance levels at events increased significantly (see evaluation of Bristol Women's Conference 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Zetter, R, (2004) *Refugee Community Organisations in the UK: A Social Capital Analysis* states "funding was a fundamental organisational issue. Some of the key themes raised in interview were: the impacts of short-term funding on sustainability; increased competition for funding with a shrinking overall pot of money available..."

necessary to interact in order to reach a level of sustainability. The tone, approach and experience of the trainer cannot be faulted.

Feedback from participants was gained through a two-sided written feedback form in English. This form asked participants to strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with a number of questions. Please see Appendix 2 for graphs portraying the results. The results were overwhelmingly positive, with all participants agreeing or strongly agreeing with all stated questions.<sup>6</sup>

### **Key learning from content of training sessions**

From attending the training events and meeting with five RCOs afterwards, the following issues should be highlighted.

- The trainer had been asked to condense a much longer training course into three sessions per group and it was impossible to take in so much information in one session.
- Although no interpreters were requested across any of the training sessions, some of the information used specialist language, and interpreters would have been helpful.
- Due to the large amount of information being given in each training day, it was hard to have a more participatory approach, which would have led to more dynamic sessions.<sup>7</sup>
- The training was differentiated by city location rather than developmental level. Although the cross nationality groups worked well, future training would also benefit from greater targeting of the level of development of the RCOs, across cities.<sup>8</sup>

### **Logistics of training sessions**

Despite the issues that RHA faced in setting up the training sessions<sup>9</sup>, all the training sessions had a number of delegates.

### **Key learning about logistics of training sessions**

- The crèche was well used, far more so than was originally indicated on people's application forms. It would seem that an effective crèche is vital for women to participate on any real level, as many women are mothers with primary responsibility for caring for children. Though difficult to organise, the crèche's did work. Areas to consider are the set up of the training and how this relates to the crèche<sup>10</sup>; where the

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<sup>6</sup> Though very positive, experience would indicate that it would be unusual for participants to respond negatively to an evaluation such as this. More creative ways of evaluation need to be established to get useful, constructive feedback.

<sup>7</sup> Many of the participants I talked to during and after the training events were happy with the style of training - some were used to it and preferred it to a more participatory style. However, the trainer and I both felt that having space in the training days for workshops would have been beneficial to the delegates' learning.

<sup>8</sup> It may be that there is benefit in having training that is targeted to just one city, if the information being given is very city specific. However, with generic training there are networking benefits of finding groups/individuals at the same point of development.

<sup>9</sup> Please see the ERF Evaluation of the project which highlights the staff changes and how these were resolved.

<sup>10</sup> In Derby the crèche and the training room were next to one another and crying babies could be heard by their mothers who automatically left the training to try and help settle them in their new environment.

qualified workers are coming from; what facilities they will bring with them and what needs to be provided; and health and safety standards.

- Mini bus transport was laid on for delegates coming from a different city, and this worked well. However, it is vital that all delegates are given their expenses, even if they are attending training within their own city. Given that refugees and asylum seekers are one of the UK's most economically deprived groups, giving full out of pocket expenses is central to ensuring that delegates are not disadvantaged and can attend the training.
- A variety of caterers were used but the caterer providing hot food was the most successful. It may be possible to pay one of the RCOs to provide the food in the future.
- Booking the venues needs to be done before receiving confirmations from all delegates.<sup>11</sup>
- This project potentially held a number of risks for the co-ordinating agency. These were all effectively managed, but a full risk assessment needs to be undertaken for any new project. The following issues would need to be addressed: child seats in the minibus; Criminal Records Bureau checks on crèche staff; and health and safety in terms of the chosen venues, the food supplied, and buying and using toys in the crèche.

### **3.3.2 Development of links with key funding organisations, working to raise their awareness of the needs of RCOs in the East Midlands region. The project aims to have an impact on at least five funding organisations.**

Having carried out the training sessions and having talked to some of the RCOs, RHA staff wrote to key independent funders with the aim of talking to them about the skills that the RCOs have, their importance to the long term integration of refugees in the East Midlands and the barriers they face in setting up effective, sustainable organisations and accessing funding. It was envisaged that RCOs would be present if possible and that the video would be played<sup>12</sup>, giving prominence to refugee voices even if they could not be present.

RHA wrote to seven independent funders and two responded positively. RHA staff subsequently met with Lloyds TSB Foundation and the Derbyshire Community Foundation (and Derby CVS who work in partnership with them).

The Lloyds TSB meeting worked well within the remit of this project. RCOs and Lloyds TSB met and established a dialogue for the future. This was facilitated by RHA.

#### **Case study of meeting with Lloyds TSB**

**Lloyds TSB objectives for 2004/5 are:**

#### **Community organisations around Lincolnshire Rural communities**

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<sup>11</sup> Some RCOs cannot commit to sending delegates until after the deadline for booking the training. RHA will need to book and confirm venues before knowing the exact number of delegates attending.

<sup>12</sup> The video highlights a number of refugees talking about the issues their RCOs face.

## **BME groups Diversifying income streams**

**RCOs can still gain funding although only those with charitable registration are eligible. Lloyds said they found it difficult to access enough information about refugees and RCOs in the East Midlands. They wanted to get more involved in what was happening in the community and would be happy to run a training session for RCOs about accessing funds from trusts.**

**They stated that understanding the impact of the funding on the community was vital. This is often not fully explained on application forms from RCOs. Questions which should be addressed include:**

**‘Why do we need funding?’**

**‘What evidence of need is there?’**

**‘Why aren’t existing services suitable?’**

**Lloyds wanted to keep an open dialogue with the groups and with RHA.**

The consultant working on this evaluation met with Comic Relief, one of the key independent funders for RCOs. It was felt that much could be learnt by developing a dialogue with the UK grants co-ordinator. It was recognised that certain funders have experience of working with RCOs and therefore the Community Fund agreed to a meeting establishing a similar dialogue. The outcomes of both meetings are discussed and analysed in Section 5.

RHA set up a meeting with the Derby Community Foundation and Derby CVS. The Community Foundation funds Derby CVS staff as well as administering the Community Empowerment Fund. It became obvious from this meeting that the funder was knowledgeable of some of the issues facing RCOs in Derby and was also able to state what it needed in order for the funding to be given and be accountable.<sup>13</sup> Two RCOs attended this meeting, enabling them to hear first hand what the funder’s requirements were and to discuss their issues in meeting these requirements.

### **Was this objective met?**

The project workers and the evaluator have met four funding organisations and a dialogue has been established. Two of these meetings were group meetings where RCOs were invited to hear what the funders had to say and to talk about the issues from their perspective. Establishing dialogues with funders is an ongoing issue beyond the scope of this project.

### **Key learning about developing links with funders**

The reality seems to be that:

- independent funders are hugely over-subscribed for funding and are accountable to a number of different sources for how they spend their time and their money
- some funders are already very knowledgeable about RCO needs as they have been working in partnership with them for some time - it would be beneficial to bring that experience and knowledge into the East Midlands region
- some funders would need to be actively engaged with in order to establish how to influence their policies for grant priorities

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<sup>13</sup> The issues facing the funders will be analysed in Section 5.

- locally, much small grant funding is coordinated through statutory sources and community foundations and these policies could be influenced most successfully
- RCOs need to be at the right level of development to gain funding and take part in a dialogue with funders
- second tier refugee organisations have a key role to play in establishing an effective dialogue between funding organisations and RCOs. Please see Section 5 for some ideas about how this intervention may be carried out.

### **3.3.3 Production of a video to present to funding organisations regarding the funding and development needs of RCOs**

#### **Aims**

- To increase understanding among funders and other ‘enabling bodies’<sup>14</sup> of the issues facing asylum seekers and refugees in the East Midlands.
- To raise the profile of RCO needs among funders and other enabling bodies.
- To assist in developing better links between RHA, RCOs, funders and enabling bodies.
- To increase funding going to RCOs and to initiatives that strengthen RCOs.

#### **Objectives**

- To produce a 10 minute video to document the role of the project in the process of refugee community development, and illustrate some of the issues faced by refugee communities.
- To make a lively and informative video for an audience of funders and enabling bodies.
- To provide a starting point for discussions with funders, etc.
- To provide a visible sign of the achievements of the project.

#### **Methodology of evaluation**

The following mechanisms were used to evaluate the effectiveness of the video:

- observations of funders who were shown the video
- formal questionnaire feedback from the conference
- observations of key individuals interviewed who had seen the video.

#### **To what extent were these objectives met?**

It is clear that the video goes some way to meeting these objectives. Local authorities and funders said that they considered the video to be relatively effective when asked: “Do you think this video would be an effective tool in assisting RHA to initiate discussions with other organisations about some of the issues faced by Refugee Communities?”

In telephone and face to face discussions with key stakeholders, there was agreement that the video started the discussions and could be used as a platform for more informed and detailed discussions. In order to increase the power and impact of the video the following aspects could have been taken into account.

#### **Key learning about video production**

- **Coordination across all aspects of the project**  
Due to time constraints the video was filmed at the same time as the training sessions were taking place. It would have been effective to have established key outcomes from the training as some of this was focused on enabling RCOs to articulate the issues and barriers to development and sustainability that they were

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<sup>14</sup> ‘Enabling bodies’ means organisations that can assist the growth of RCOs and refugee communities by virtue of the power that they have over resources or because of their influence (e.g. local authorities, health authorities, CVS or other voluntary sector co-ordinating bodies, etc.).

facing. The training was also helping them to develop a vocabulary to talk about these issues with funders and other external agencies. It would have been helpful if the consultant had had some of the face to face interviews with the RCOs before the final video was cut. This would have enabled a roundtable discussion about the key messages to be given to funders and enabling bodies, and would have had a greater impact on its target group.

- **Clarity of goals, objectives and target audience**

Farhad from the Persian Association addressed some of the issues that funders are concerned about, such as the proliferation of RCOs<sup>15</sup> and the definition of RCO's target groups being too narrowly defined by nationality<sup>16</sup>.

However, other parts of the video reinforced some of the negative stereotypes that funders had of RCOs, such as funds being used for office space and for members of the community to meet and drink tea, rather than for service provision which would have a positive impact on the community.

- **Management of key messages**

It is important that the video does not further enforce the negative image that some funders have of RCOs. RHA staff wanted to make sure that the video did not attempt to put words into the mouths of community leaders and that people were given the opportunity to speak for themselves. In order for this to work most effectively, however, it is important that community leaders are aware of the objectives of the video, of the attitude of some of the target audience, and are given time to construct the argument that they believe is the right one for their community and accurately reflects their experiences.

- **Focus on impact rather than output**

The aims of the video are based around increasing the understanding of funders towards RCOs. The content focused on output, such as the training sessions. Though it is of interest to show the needs of RCOs, this must be placed within the context of the long term outcomes that can be achieved, and it would have been more effective if it had focused on evidencing the impact of the work carried out on communities.

- **Taking a pluralistic approach**

Working with RCOs as second tier refugee organisations and housing associations sets up an interesting and often difficult dynamic, especially where funding and independence are key issues. It is absolutely central to working within community development with RCOs that a pluralistic approach is taken to the work; that the way in which the project is delivered and publicised is done so in partnership and that joined up working is evidenced across the East Midlands.

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<sup>15</sup> As far as I can establish this is not so in Nottingham, and to some extent not as obvious in Derby and Leicester, as in other cities across the UK. This would have been a unique issue to have highlighted on the video.

<sup>16</sup> The Heri Kwetu group offers support to asylum seekers and refugees from any country in Africa. Though this is clear on the video, it is not explicitly outlined in order to address a key issue raised by all the funders spoken to within this project.

### **3.3.4 A conference to present the learning from the project and to present the findings from the external evaluation**

The evaluation carried out as part of this project has influenced the outline of workshops for the conference. The co-ordination has not been as difficult between these two aspects of the project as the time demands have not been as acute.

#### **Aim of the conference**

- To disseminate the findings of the evaluation.
- To increase the voices of refugees in the region and their ability to influence decision makers.
- To enable RCOs to gain a greater understanding about the wider political environment.

#### **Key objectives of the conference**

- To establish the possibilities that exist for refugee communities to work together.
- To start the discussion about, and further understand the issues arising from, mainstream agencies and refugee communities coordinating with one another.
- To further understand and discuss the issues in terms of how nationality and culture impact on the running of community organisations.
- To further understand the issues of leadership within refugee communities.

#### **To what extent were the main aims met?**

The main findings of the evaluation were disseminated through plenary sessions and through the workshops. Although the final evaluation was not available, there was coordination between the consultant and the conference organisers to ensure that these were linked and that the main issues arising were further discussed in workshops.

Refugee voices were heard within the conference in four main ways:

- Norah Rwahuire spoke on behalf of the Derby Women's Asylum Seeker and Refugee Association
- issues raised by RCOs in previous interviews were raised again by Sally Price in the plenary session
- the East Midlands Community Resources project video was shown
- workshops were held, which gave people a greater chance to speak.

The written questionnaire responses indicated that refugee community groups felt that the conference met their expectations relatively well.

The wider political environment was raised nationally by Carmel Kerr from the Home Office and regionally by Sandra Skeete in the plenary sessions. Some context for the current wider environment within which community development work in the East Midlands takes place was given through the plenary session delivered by Sally Price. The formal written responses to the success of this area would indicate that statutory and voluntary agencies saw greater value in this than the RCOs. Some of the RCOs struggled to see the relevance to their day to day lives of some of the matters discussed and felt that extremely pressing

issues were being sidelined.<sup>17</sup> The funders and local authorities saw many of the issues raised as being directly relevant to their work.

### **To what extent were the main objectives met?**

The objectives were mainly addressed through the workshops held in the afternoon, which were directly related to the major areas for recommended action through the evaluation.

#### **Workshop A**

##### **Building links with refugee communities**

This workshop aimed to explore the issue of the uniqueness of the voice and views of RCOs, focus on the importance of networking from the beginning of an organisation's development and to seek ways to eradicate duplication of services.

##### **Key learning from Workshop A**

- Poor attendance by RCOs may mean that some of them did not see the relevance of working together at a regional level (although feedback from other groups clearly stated that RCOs found the opportunity to network invaluable as they felt that they were often working in isolation).
- The benefits of working in this way needed to be illustrated at a practical level at the beginning of the workshop to establish whether this would be appreciated by the communities.
- Statutory and voluntary agencies did see the relevance in working in this manner, but were concerned about the right approach in terms of intervention.

#### **Workshop B**

##### **Mainstream agencies and refugee communities: Defining relationships and maximising opportunity**

This workshop aimed to examine the relationship between refugees and asylum seekers, community-based refugee organisations and local mainstream agencies (both voluntary and statutory sector) within the East Midlands. It set out to establish accessibility, the benefits of engagement, the barriers to engaging and how these could be overcome, and the need for an East Midlands integration strategy.

##### **Key learning from Workshop B**

- There is no current ability to feed into the policy and practice consultations set up by the statutory sector. It is vital to establish a mechanism for refugees to feed into the development of the regional integration strategy.
- Insufficient information dissemination and sharing are seen as a major block to joint working and effective service delivery between RCOs and mainstream statutory agencies. The regional integration strategy will need to address this as one of the cross-cutting strategic issues.

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<sup>17</sup> For example, two RCO members felt that specific issues relating to the barriers for asylum seekers to volunteering should have been discussed, rather than the development of a regional integration strategy.

- RCOs valued opportunities to network with each other and were concerned about the negative effects and duplication caused by working in isolation.
- RCOs and statutory authorities wanted a more effective way of informing each another about what they were doing and therefore understanding when they needed to work together.

### **Workshop C Nationality, culture and RCOs**

The focus of this workshop was on how nationality and culture impact on RCOs.

#### **Key learning from Workshop C**

- A coordinated approach needs to be taken to community development across the region. Agencies can learn from one another about different methodologies and approaches for different situations.
- Refugees making up the RCOs need to be able to lead the regional agenda and second tier intervention to have an enabling and facilitative role.
- A coordinated approach needs to be taken by RCOs in order to influence the decision-making structures and reverse the top down approach that currently prevails in policy and practice.

### **Workshop D Leadership within refugee communities**

The workshop aimed to explore the definitions and issues surrounding leadership in refugee communities from a community development perspective. The presentation and discussion covered issues such as identifying a means of support to promote effective leadership principles and practice within the refugee sector; power and democracy; the role of women; and the continuity and sustainability of leaders.

#### **Key learning from Workshop D**

- Solutions need to be found for retaining and supporting effective leaders of RCOs in the region.
- Whole communities need to be empowered, not just members of RCOs. This has to include giving thought to how to access hard to reach refugees, such as women with minimal language.
- Co-ordination of community development within the region is vital to increase the effectiveness of community cohesion.

#### **Key overall messages from the conference workshops**

- RCOs and the wider refugee community need to be able to influence the regional political agenda from the bottom up.

- RCOs and refugees need to understand the practical implications that can occur for their organisations, their members and the wider communities if they have a strong influential voice in policy development and practice.
- Community development needs to be coordinated across the region to make it as effective as possible.

### **3.4 Impact of the training in the long term and the impact of RHA capacity-building with groups**

RHA had two Community Initiative Officers (CIOs) in post (in Nottingham and Derby) before and during the training. The Leicester position was filled after the training had taken place. These posts were central to making sure that the people who attended the training were those who would benefit most from it. They also enabled follow up of the groups that attended.

Some benefits from the training are already obvious and are clear for the CIOs in Nottingham and Derby, who have been doing ongoing work with the groups.

The training, though difficult to fit into their workload, did offer some structure to the work that they were carrying out with groups. It also brought to light individuals who were interested in setting up a group but had not previously been able to access support. Each CIO has been developing a work plan of activity with the RCOs who attended the training, and has established key activities and responsibilities on both sides.

For the RHA staff involved, one of the key outcomes has been a shift in emphasis from fundraising to how they manage working with groups. They have moved away from dealing with funding head on to managing it as an essential part of the community development process. This is supported by research and good practice across the sector.

#### **Key learning**

Community development with refugee communities has become a specialism. There is a wealth of experience from different agencies of good practice and approaches that have had effective results across communities.<sup>18</sup> Working with emerging RCOs within the East Midlands environment needs to be tackled strategically in partnership across organisations. It will be essential to make the most of all the experience in the sector and ensure that this feeds effectively into the working practices and policies of the staff employed to carry out this work.

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<sup>18</sup> The Community Development Team in the Scottish Refugee Council carried out exceptional work with the Somali community in Glasgow with great success; Refugee Action has carried out a number of effective community development initiatives including specific work with women, setting up refugee networks in regional locations and detailed work through the marketing project; the Refugee Council has knowledge of working with RCOs in London for many years and supporting their development; the Evelyn Oldfield Unit set up and ran a ground-breaking community leadership programme in association with Goldsmiths College.

## **4. To document RCO experiences, including the funding issues faced by RCOs**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Of the RCOs that attended the training, 33% were offered a face to face discussion to outline their experiences of setting up an RCO in the East Midlands region. All RCOs contacted were enthusiastic about this meeting and put time aside to feed into the process. Although a small sample (five RCOs in total) this qualitative information has been analysed in conjunction with the comments made by individuals and RCOs at the training events. There was a specific workshop on the barriers that RCOs found to accessing funding. This was further supported by desk research including:

- Gersh Subhra's research looking at the issues facing people seeking asylum and refugees and the development of services in Derby, Leicester and Nottingham
- report from Refugee Action's 'SHARE' conference held in 2004.

It has also been analysed in the national context through:

- 2004 research by Oxford Brookes University: *Refugee community-based organisations: a social capital analysis*
- 2002 research by Evelyn Oldfield Unit: *Refugee Settlement: Can Communities Cope?*

### **4.2 How did the RCOs themselves define their vision for an effective RCO?**

During the training, the RCOs and other individuals defined what they believed was an effective and sustainable RCO. They believed it embodied:

- a strong management committee
- good quality service delivery aimed at the needs of the community
- volunteers to deliver the services
- strong financial management
- being self-sustainable where possible.

Service delivery would be defined through the participation of significant numbers of people within the community. The identification of an effective community leader is important; someone who will have the philosophy of working in collaboration with the widest definition of the community and other partners in the host community. RCOs believed that a bottom up, participatory need-led approach was at the heart of developing and managing a successful organisation.

Each RCO was aiming to create and establish:

- commitment
- trust
- co-operation
- robust service delivery
- a well-defined inclusive service user group
- participation from all aspects of the community
- an understanding of the needs of the community

- the ability to increase capacity through partnerships.

This definition was formed by individuals in the room who had established RCOs and had not been successful initially, but had learnt from their mistakes; by others who had observed what worked and what did not; and by the trainer who used the experience of working with London RCOs for many years.

### **4.3 What barriers did RCOs have to the fulfilment of this vision?**

From the meetings with RCOs and the training, the following issues arose as central to the East Midlands.

#### **Community leaders**

The organisations I met with in Derby and Nottingham were highly dependent on the founding individuals of the organisations. All of these people committed significant time and energy to ensuring that the organisations were performing and collaborating effectively, had the participation of a widely defined user group and were developing a sustainable base. Without exception, all were struggling and it appeared that the infrastructure which should have been supporting them was failing in some way. In Leicester there was an altogether different feeling. Although the community leaders were still important, it appeared that the organisations were more able to support themselves beyond these individuals.

The issues that community leaders are facing are:

- gaining refugee status and moving rapidly into full time paid employment (not within the RCO as funding bases are not sufficient)
- managing complicated conflict resolution
- being used as unpaid interpreters and volunteers for other projects (along with their members)
- the feeling of being 'used', mainly by other refugee organisations<sup>19</sup>
- having to network extremely effectively in order to survive (this had occurred with varying levels of success, depending on the operating environment).

#### **Language**

A key issue for all RCOs was language, though the issues were different depending on the group. The following issues arose.

- Language can divide communities and RCOs were attempting to bridge this by creating groups which crossed the language divide, such as the Zimbabwean Association which has members who speak Shona and Ndebele.<sup>20</sup>
- Groups with English as the business language of their home country seemed to be able to set up integration services more easily than groups that were overcoming a significant language barrier to interact with the host community. This was further

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<sup>19</sup> This issue was raised when many of the members said they were also acting as volunteers for other refugee organisations and were doing very similar jobs to paid members of staff; it also arose as part of the issue of volunteers being used as unpaid interpreters.

<sup>20</sup> This can lead to greater time spent on conflict resolution, although this was not the case with this particular group.

explored when RCOs discussed their issues with applying for funding, as many saw their lack of proficiency in English as a barrier to gaining funds.

- One RCO with non English-speaking members managed to use their expertise in communication to their advantage, negotiating effectively with the statutory authorities for office space in return for supporting service delivery.<sup>21</sup>
- Some RCO members were being used as unpaid interpreters as members from their communities were trying to support members coming to them with difficult issues.<sup>22</sup>

## Case study

**The local GP surgery had a number of people from the Somali community who were attending the surgery but struggling to access the service that they needed. The RCO entered into a partnership with the GP surgery where, in exchange for an office, they offered approximately 12 hours of support per week to members arriving in the surgery needing interpretation support to access the service.**

## Participation and collaboration

In Nottingham and Derby the RCOs stated that this was one of the major barriers that they were working to overcome. There was an overriding feeling that the development of trust with a number of key stakeholders was key to their development and one of the major issues that they were dealing with on a daily basis. They had to ensure there was no breakdown of trust between the management committee members and the wider members of the community. RCO leaders and members believed there were further issues of trust with other refugee organisations, other statutory and voluntary partners; the local authority and CVS, and the funders. The issues in Leicester were different. This appeared to be because:

- there was community development intervention offered to groups from day one in Leicester, enabling groups to set up effectively
- there was an existing community from which to learn
- the infrastructure in Leicester could meet the needs of the community more effectively.

RCO leaders believed that they were involved in little or no consultation about the strategic priorities for the region. They could not see how this would occur or what forum there was to achieve this. They did believe that the second tier refugee organisations would represent their views as far as possible.

## Commitment

Leaders were dealing with sustaining the commitment of their volunteers and members. They seemed to be moving through a cycle – issues with commitment at the beginning; great commitment once up and running; but issues of sustained commitment over a period

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<sup>21</sup> New Communities Advise and Information Bureau managed to negotiate space in the local GP surgery on the basis of offering their services to communicate and support members of their community to liaise with the health workers. This amounted to approximately 12 hours per week and included an element of conflict resolution.

<sup>22</sup> Leicester Voluntary Action ran a project supporting asylum seekers and refugees for three years. Many of their volunteers worked with claims from asylum seekers that other agencies had long given up on. Though success was limited, it did happen and was due to the ability of the volunteer to communicate and their steadfast refusal to give up.

of years. Many organisations could not afford to pay volunteer expenses or lunch. Organisations that had more members with clear outcomes on their asylum claims were more able to move on than RCOs where many of the members were still awaiting an outcome (leaving them with the feeling of living in limbo).

## **Service delivery**

The experience of the RCOs interviewed in Derby and Nottingham was significantly different to those in Leicester. In Leicester RCOs interviewed had moved from offering advice and support with NASS and asylum claims to advising and supporting members over integration issues. The Leicester RCOs were offering:

- support and actively seeking solutions for members affected by racism and neighbourhood disquiet
- intergenerational education exchange classes (parents teaching children their mother tongue and children teaching parents English)
- advice and support on schooling in the UK
- IT classes
- development of music bands.

The RCOs in Derby and Nottingham who were part of this consultation were mainly delivering different forms of vital welfare services to members of their communities. The restrictive policies on asylum seekers and refugees over the last few years has left little room for the RCOs in Nottingham and Derby to provide anything other than immediate support for very serious issues. RCOs did talk about wanting to provide classes such as mother tongue, IT and music. One RCO in Derby has a band that practices every Saturday and performs when possible. But this kind of project was the exception rather than the rule.<sup>23</sup> The RCOs contacted in Nottingham and Derby seem to be acting in a similar fashion to those interviewed in Roger Zetter's research in the North West and the West Midlands. However, this was not the case in Leicester and understanding the reason for this is key to establishing the intervention necessary to enable RCOs in Nottingham and Derby to take an active part in the integration process. All RCOs had an important role in ensuring that members were able to share experiences and build their confidence in a new environment.

## **Case study**

**A Somali family was placed in a house but unfortunately experienced real problems with the neighbours. Racism manifested itself through physical and mental abuse focused towards the mother and her children. It became so bad that the family was moved.**

**Two weeks after this family was moved another Somali family - a single mother with three children - was placed in the house. An interpreter was asked to visit to help the mother and a caseworker sort out a number of issues that had arisen.**

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<sup>23</sup> Zetter, R, *Refugee community-based organisations in the UK: a social capital analysis*, states in two conclusions that, "RCOs do not have the resources that would enable them to contribute to the long term integration of refugees. Only a minority had the resources to run the education, training and employment programmes that would promote long-term integration into the labour market. The integrative function of RCOs has been sacrificed for the essentially defensive tasks of advocacy, protecting basic rights, supporting asylum claims and filling the void left by the withdrawal of state support in the last decade."

**From the moment the interpreter arrived at the house, he recognised it as the place where the previous family had experienced so many problems. On leaving the house he spotted a mother two doors away asking her children, who were playing outside the house, to come in for tea.**

**He approached her and told her about the new family that had arrived. He explained that she had a child the same age as her youngest who would be going to school the following day and he invited her into the house to meet the woman. They sat and talked and he translated.**

**The following day, the mother from the neighbourhood asked her child to knock on the door of the Somali family and walk their child to school. Though abused by another neighbour for doing so, the connection had been made. The Somali child went to school and the family are still in the house.**

## **Networking**

RCOs that have gained a level of success seemed to have done so through effective networking by the community leaders. The initiative and drive has had to come from individuals within the communities and to some extent this has been rewarded. The chair of Heri Kwetu gained funding for the organisation as well as paid employment in the sector. The Leicester Swahili Association networked and researched the situation of other RCOs and their successes and pitfalls in order to set up their own association. However, there seems little in the way of established, formalised networking for refugees, and this is a significant gap in the region.

## **Experience and proficiency in raising funds**

All groups discussed the issue of funding. All were struggling with funding - even the most established organisations had turnovers of under £30,000. Most had funding in the region of £5,000 to £10,000, often from only one funder and for no longer than a year, if that.

RCOs cited the following barriers to applying for funds:

- initial identification of the funding source (people either used the internet or asked one of the refugee co-ordinating organisations)
- language barriers, in terms of writing the application or reading and understanding the terminology, including the guidance notes
- preparing the project for submission, in a way which will be understood by the funders
- writing the proposal
- feeling intimidated by the funders and believing that there is a lack of understanding of their race, culture and language
- finding time to fill in the form to an appropriate standard and understanding the different requirements, as every funder seems to be different.

## **Racism**

The following instances of racism were cited by the groups:

- a lack of understanding of the race, culture and language of certain groups by funders and therefore feeling defeated before even starting

- racism from established BME communities who are afraid that their funding will be reduced by the existence of refugee communities, and an unwillingness to share community facilities with these groups
- racism from statutory authorities who do not understand the tensions with host communities and who lack effective strategies to deal with them
- members of the community experiencing racism from their neighbours and in schools.

### **Further support needed**

Groups identified the following support as important for their development:

- new business start up
- understanding UK bureaucracy – getting through the red tape
- business planning
- support with initial set up
- project development, management and budgeting
- income generation
- checking funding applications and identifying sources of funding.

### **Intervention**

The groups that had support from a community development worker seem to have established and become proficient in offering service provision on a greater level than those groups that had only received minimal or recent intervention.<sup>24</sup>

#### **4.4 Key findings**

- The RCOs interviewed were small, had no paid staff and had a turnover of less than £10,000.
- There was a high degree of structural instability, exacerbated by community leaders having to give a lot of their time and energy to paid employment.
- Only a small minority of organisations were able to offer services other than immediate welfare.
- RCOs are relatively successful in breaking down the barriers to collaboration and some excellent conflict resolution has led to organisations being developed from a solid base.
- RCOs need more external input, despite refugee co-ordinating organisations trying to support the development of RCO infrastructure.
- There seems to be no established networking to share information and pool resources within cities and across the region.
- There appears to be little or no foothold in the local or regional policy environment.
- Groups seemed reliant on effective community development intervention from voluntary and statutory agencies. There was little understanding of where they would gain information about how to effectively develop, if it did not come from the community development workers in the region.

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<sup>24</sup> One RCO said of the community worker who had been spending time with them: “She keeps us in touch with all developments and is a real jewel. She will work out of hours and will do whatever it takes to help the communities. Had it not been for this lady, many of the communities would not have the high hopes they have today. She enables people to see the better side of life. She is, indeed, a noble woman.”

#### **4.5 RCOs' unique characteristics**

There was an overwhelming feeling from the RCOs that they did not feel valued within the host community and that there was minimal understanding of the value that they could and often did bring. When asked, they defined their unique characteristics as follows.

- Their reach into their communities. While members would not go to one of the refugee organisations responsible for their housing or funded by the Home Office, they felt safe coming to RCOs with their problems. People with particular problems were encouraged by others within the community to talk to a committee member of an RCO.
- Their ability to bridge with members of the community and other statutory and voluntary services.
- The volunteer's ability to understand what members are asking them, due to their knowledge of the culture. It may be that cultural issues inhibit understanding or influence the way that questions are asked.
- A personal knowledge of the refugee experience and familiarity with negotiating the red tape in the UK asylum system.
- A commitment to helping themselves and their communities.
- Inspiration.
- Insight into the feelings and experiences of people within the community and their needs.

#### **4.6 Key learning**

- Interventions from voluntary and statutory organisations are vital in this developmental stage, brought about by dispersal. RCOs are still at the very early stages of development and need significant, effective input.
- It is important that RCOs from across the East Midlands can meet. This needs to be coordinated effectively, as it will help RCOs to have a group voice, which will enable entry to the political environment and participation at a strategic level.
- Although no audit was carried out of the funding available to RCOs or those working with RCOs in the East Midlands, accessed funding does seem excessively low, and appropriate targeted investment will be needed in this area to support the development.
- Enabling RCOs to set up businesses and training on social enterprise is vital to enable them to become self-sustainable.

## **5. To understand the funders' perspective and recommend ways to bridge the gap between RCOs, funders, the voluntary sector and voluntary sector co-ordinating agencies**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The intention of this section was to talk to no more than two funders who had experience of working with RCOs and to identify the issues that existed from their perspective. The two funders chosen were:

- Comic Relief
- Big Lottery Fund.

These funders were relevant as both had policies of funding RCOs and significant experience. In order to set this experience into context, other key partners have also been interviewed within the region, including:

- Refugee Action
- Voluntary Action Leicester
- CVS Derby and the Community Foundation based in Derby<sup>25</sup>
- Helen Everett from EMCARS
- Lloyds TSB Foundation.

### **5.2 The funders' perspective**

#### **Proliferation of RCOs**

There was some bewilderment at the proliferation of RCOs and the apparent lack of collaboration and co-ordination within the communities. There was a feeling that it was difficult to know what the genuine conflicts and difficulties were and which of them could be resolved through different leadership.

#### **Value of networking**

Both funders saw a real value in networking and saw this as part of the solution to the cross-nationality working that they believed to be central to the success of the long term sustainability of RCOs. Ideally the funders saw refugees becoming involved in the local and regional strategic networking partnerships that already existed (probably through BME representation.) Some funders did see value in refugee networks, as long as they were multi-national and had a key aim to share information and learning across the sector. The belief is that this would lead to less duplication of effort, fewer mistakes and the ability to share successes and process. They felt that funding would need to come from central government.<sup>26</sup>

This method of working would allow refugees and asylum seekers to have a greater voice in local regeneration partnerships and at other regional government policy and strategy levels. A united voice gives more 'pushing power' and is essential when speaking to statutory authorities.

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<sup>25</sup> The evaluator was not present at this meeting and has worked from minutes of the meeting.

<sup>26</sup> From meeting with some of the RCOs it seemed more likely that mainstream representation could only be achieved after a period of significant capacity development support with the current groups, which may mean meeting as a refugee network in the interim.



## **Working at the coal face**

Both funders were concerned about RCOs delivering advice unless it was accredited and would be worried about funding a service that was not formalised in this manner. If this was not formalised, it would need to be redefined and described in a manner such as 'welfare support'.

## **Taking responsibility for the mainstream agencies' role**

There was some concern that RCOs are doing the job of other organisations which have statutory funding to carry out this role. If the role is different to the one-stop service or Citizens Advice Bureau, this will need to be well defined and explained. There was concern that statutory agencies were being 'let off the hook' and the funders did not wish to encourage this. It was felt that accessing services through RCOs only added to polarisation.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore it was suggested that the needs of refugee communities should be dealt with at a neighbourhood/local level through the mainstream services offered. Thus, new projects need to work out how to include everyone who lives in the locality who may find their service helpful. For example, if an RCO runs an IT project, they should offer it to everyone living near the community centre, rather than just members of the refugee community.

## **Inclusion**

There was concern that RCOs were mainly run by men and that women were not included in running the organisations as members or in accessing the services. This is a key issue that must be addressed when implementing services and running organisations.

There was an emphasis on refugees and asylum seekers being managed through the BME programmes. Given that some groups identified had experienced exclusion from the BME community, this highlights a concern that refugees and asylum seekers may be further marginalized rather than included.

## **Building community links**

The focus is increasingly on RCOs and the host community building effective dialogues with one another. For example, an individual in Glasgow set up a subsidised fruit and vegetable stall; this was a community venture that developed into a community café. It benefited not only asylum seekers but others within the community.

## **Tangible outcomes**

All funders are moving towards wanting to know the outcome of the work that they are funding rather than just the output of the organisation. They will want to see evidence of the changes that have been brought about in the community and within people's lives. Unless this can be quantified and described, funding will become increasingly difficult to access.<sup>28</sup> Many funders have moved to an outcome evaluation model and the funders interviewed felt

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<sup>27</sup> It would be useful to find out how many people access a service through RCOs who would not access a service at all if they did not exist. There is a lot of anecdotal evidence that this is indeed the case, including many women.

<sup>28</sup> Comic Relief ran a core grants programme for RCOs, but have struggled to quantify the difference that the programme has actually made on people's lives.

that RCOs may have the greatest challenge in describing their work in this manner. The Big Lottery Fund is moving from a grant-making to a programme-based approach as a means of achieving much more targeted social intervention.

The outcome of community development work with RCOs is not just the difference made within communities due to the services offered, but also the difference created in communities through organisations being better able to advocate for themselves and their members and developing a voice in the region.

### **Quality of applications**

Both funders said they received a huge number of applications for funding and that applications which were hand written or difficult to decipher were far less likely to get through the assessment process. There was an issue with clearly explaining the need and confirming that this need was real, not just the ideas of a few people on the management committee. The funders need to know that the suggested intervention would make a difference. The RCOs should ensure that they are known by the funders and that they have developed a credible reputation. This enables the funders to make better and more informed decisions.

### **Organisations developed because of need**

There was some concern that RCOs across the UK seemed to have similar constitutions and that these were not unique to specific organisations which were established to meet a need.

### **Consultation**

One funder said that increasingly refugees and asylum seekers would be consulted through the BME community. It is therefore important to ensure funders are aware of the need to include refugees and asylum seekers in any consultation process within the BME environment.

Funders saw the value of regional-wide bodies and would use these forums to consult about future programmes.

### **External influences**

The funders interviewed saw a problem with the external perception of funding projects working with asylum seekers, and to some extent with refugees as well. Depending on where funding is from, funders are publicly accountable for where it is spent and on what. The ongoing negative publicity that asylum seekers and refugees have experienced over the past few years is impacting on the amount of funding available. This will mean that central and regional government will need to provide even greater support to RCOs and the integration process.

## **5.3 Key findings**

- All funders felt somewhat sceptical due to previous poor experiences, and they had genuine concerns around knowing how the funding was being used and where it was best placed. The RCOs were not starting from an even playing field.

- Regional knowledge was sketchy at best and funders were reliant on information from individuals, which is obviously only as good as the individual imparting that information. There was little or no knowledge of the particular problems and issues facing RCOs in the East Midlands.
- There was a strong belief that co-ordinated working and networking would strengthen the RCO voice and their ability to build sustainable organisations (with a sustainable funding base).
- The negative media publicity was having an impact on knowledgeable organisations and individuals and the amount of money available for groups.

#### **5.4 Key learning from discussions with funders**

- Enabling RCOs and refugees to co-ordinate their services and network across the East Midlands is vital.
- There needs to be empirical evidence about the unique characteristics of RCOs and their ability to reach refugees, otherwise they will miss out on service provision and will not be able to contribute to the long term integration of refugees in the East Midlands region.
- The role of an intermediary is vital to ensure that RCOs can develop a voice that funders can listen to.
- RCOs and community and voluntary organisations will need to have clarity of mission and effective monitoring and evaluation to manage their services in the future.

## 6. The East Midlands operating environment

### 6.1 Introduction

In order to meet Objective 3, Section 5 of this evaluation and be able to “recommend ways to bridge the gap between RCOs, funders, voluntary sector organisations and co-ordinating voluntary or statutory organisations”, it seemed appropriate to undertake some further work, initially thought to be out of the scope of this evaluation. With the background of having talked to a number of RCOs and funders, it seemed reasonable to talk to a variety of statutory and voluntary agencies, to gather their views and inform the future direction of the work carried out by RHA in the arena of refugee community development and integration. In no way is this intended to be an audit of organisations or activities. It is purely the gathering of a number of views about how to best take forward work in the region and establish whether this dovetails with the information gained directly from the RCOs.

In order to add value to this section a one to one meeting was held with Helen Everett, Manager of EMCARS. EMCARS aims to facilitate the co-operation of a range of stakeholders to enhance and co-ordinate services and support to meet the needs and aspirations of asylum seekers and refugees. The draft strategy from the Home Office integration unit states that the regional consortia will facilitate the development of a regional integration strategy. EMCAR’s key objectives for 2005/6 include:

- to develop research and publish a regional Refugee Integration Strategy endorsed by key stakeholders
- to encourage participation at regional and local level of refugee community group representatives in consortium structures.

A number of key stakeholders were met with in addition to EMCARS, and were asked the following question:

“What would create the environment for RCOs to be organised and effective and able to contribute to implementing the integration of refugees in the East Midlands?”

### 6.2 Major findings

The four main issues which have arisen are:

- ensuring that there is recognition in the East Midlands that RCOs have a role in the long term integration of refugees (while recognising that all stakeholders have a responsibility to communicate with those who are not members of RCOs)
- having a coherent strategy which outlines the status of integration services and support in the East Midlands to date, and the key actions and responsibilities needed to drive forward effective integration in the East Midlands<sup>29</sup>
- the benefit of high quality, co-ordinated, targeted intervention through community development to the whole of the East Midlands in the long term

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<sup>29</sup> Many RCOs wanted to talk about issues such as barriers to volunteering as an asylum seeker and therefore being less skilled when they gain refugee status. The issue of a five year address history for CRB checks is negatively affecting hundreds of asylum seekers who want to work as doctors/nurses, etc. However this is an issue that needs to be fed into the action planning connected to the East Midlands integration strategy.

- enabling RCOs to have a voice in mainstream strategic partnerships and consultation exercises. This needs to be a priority for the region to ensure the appropriateness and relevance of policies and practice developed.

### **6.3 How to bridge the gap - responsibilities for RCOs, voluntary sector organisations, statutory organisations and funders**

By identifying key issues for RCOs and funders, and through further discussion with other key stakeholders, a number of key responsibilities arose for each type of organisation.

#### **RCOs**

Main areas to concentrate upon:

##### **Inclusiveness**

- Concentrate on the ability to resolve conflict while not suppressing necessary learning and processes.
- Break down the barriers across tribes, cultures and nationalities.
- Include women in the governance of the organisations as well as in service delivery; enable women to set up organisations separately if this is more appropriate.
- Focus on the participation of all members through service delivery.
- Deliver services around the skills of the membership.

##### **Collaborative working**

- Minimise the proliferation of RCOs.
- Maximise learning from each other.
- Maximise the learning from the region.
- Increase the power of the refugee voice to influence regional matters.

#### **Voluntary sector organisations**

Main areas to concentrate upon:

##### **Investment in community development in the East Midlands**

- Investment in community development is key; RCOs are reliant on the support, advice and knowledge from community development initiatives across the region. It is exceptionally difficult for a staff member to cover more than one city.
- Most RCOs are in the early stages of development and would benefit from further training and one to one support around project management and development, budget setting, conflict resolution, participation and inclusion.
- Learning the most effective way of implementing community development with asylum seekers and refugees is central to ensuring that intervention is targeted and high quality, resulting in the greatest impact. Community development workers across the East Midlands working with RCOs would benefit from co-ordinating the approach and discussing the benefits of differing approaches to community development.

##### **Partnership working**

- There is an important role for voluntary organisations in helping RCOs to understand the benefit of developing an East Midlands refugee network and, if appropriate,

facilitating the setting up a RCO network. This will enable RCOs to have a more powerful, collaborative and influential voice.

- It is imperative that voluntary sector agencies and others working in community development co-ordinate and work with one another to gain best value from the scarce resources available for community development work in this sector.
- The sector needs to take a pluralistic approach to working with one another, statutory agencies and RCOs in this area. To not do so fundamentally undermines the founding principles of community development and involvement and will be detrimental to the client group in the long term.
- The integration strategy for the region needs to be developed as a matter of priority. This can only happen if all the consortia membership are involved and take an active and appropriate role.

#### Innovation

- The key role of the voluntary sector is to approach need in an innovative fashion.
- The key issue which has arisen for RCOs is the loss of community leaders to the paid employment market.<sup>30</sup>
- Empirical research is needed to embed RCOs back into the fabric of long term integration.

### **Statutory Organisations**

Main areas to concentrate upon:

#### Co-ordination

- The East Midlands Refugee Integration Strategy needs to be developed to co-ordinate work carried out and support targeted intervention. This needs to be done with the involvement and active participation of all member agencies.
- Refugees need to be actively involved in the development of an East Midlands Integration Strategy, whether this is through an RCO or if they are harder to reach in the communities. (For example, women who speak little English should still be able to contribute their experiences.)

Facilitation of a refugee network if this is found to be appropriate

- Recognition of the need for a powerful voice for refugees in the region
- Obtaining financial support from local authorities/central government to establish the forum initially.

### **Funders**

Main area to concentrate upon:

#### Informed policies and intervention

- Recognition of the value of RCOs.
- Recognition of regional difference.
- Support for the development of an East Midlands Refugee Forum.
- Grant policies which are influenced by knowledge and an understanding of need.

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<sup>30</sup> There is the potential in areas such as this to develop a new project around 'Social Entrepreneur Funding'. Is the voluntary sector able to provide the structured environment needed for this to work and provide a community leader with a paid role to develop integrated community organisations?

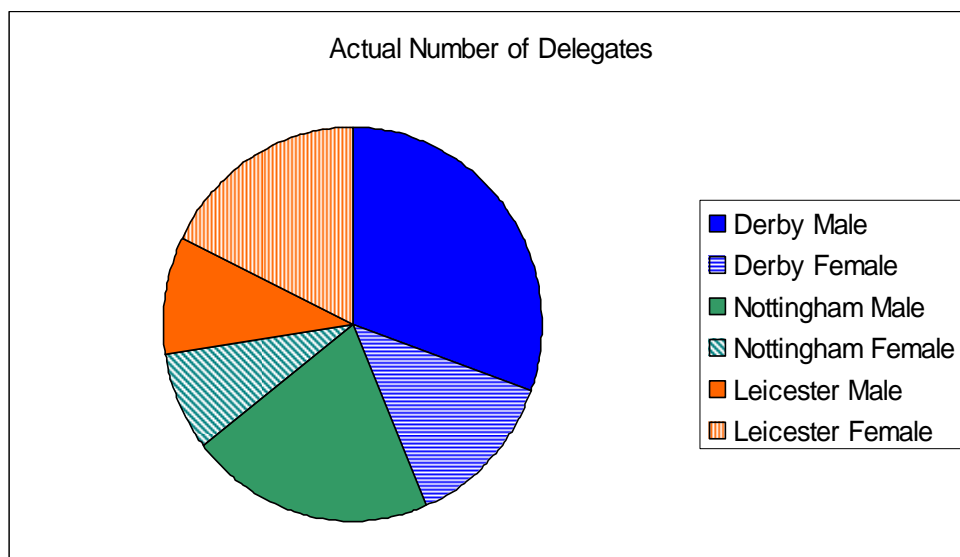
## **6.4 Conclusion and next steps**

This project was a pilot which enabled RHA to begin to explore some of the issues surrounding sustaining RCOs in the region. The conference helped to bring various agencies together with RCOs to talk about some of the barriers to this and the possible solutions. It is clear that in the East Midlands, as a result of the dispersal programme over the last few years, RCOs are still at the very early stages of development and need significant, effective input from statutory and voluntary organisations. From our discussions with RCOs in the region, it appeared that they were accessing very little funding. In order to secure this funding RCOs need to be at the right level of development and to be able to take part in a dialogue with funders. Therefore, co-ordinated community development work is important. Currently RCOs do not have a collective voice in the region and there is no mechanism for creating a unified voice to influence policy development. RCOs valued opportunities to network with each other and funders also felt that increased networking and sharing of good practice would strengthen the possibility of sustaining the groups in the long term, as well as limiting the duplication of effort. The creation of more RCO networking opportunities and a regional refugee forum should be explored in consultation with co-ordinating agencies and RCOs to plan services to refugees across the East Midlands. The development of a regional refugee integration strategy which addresses some of these concerns is also a vital next step currently being explored.

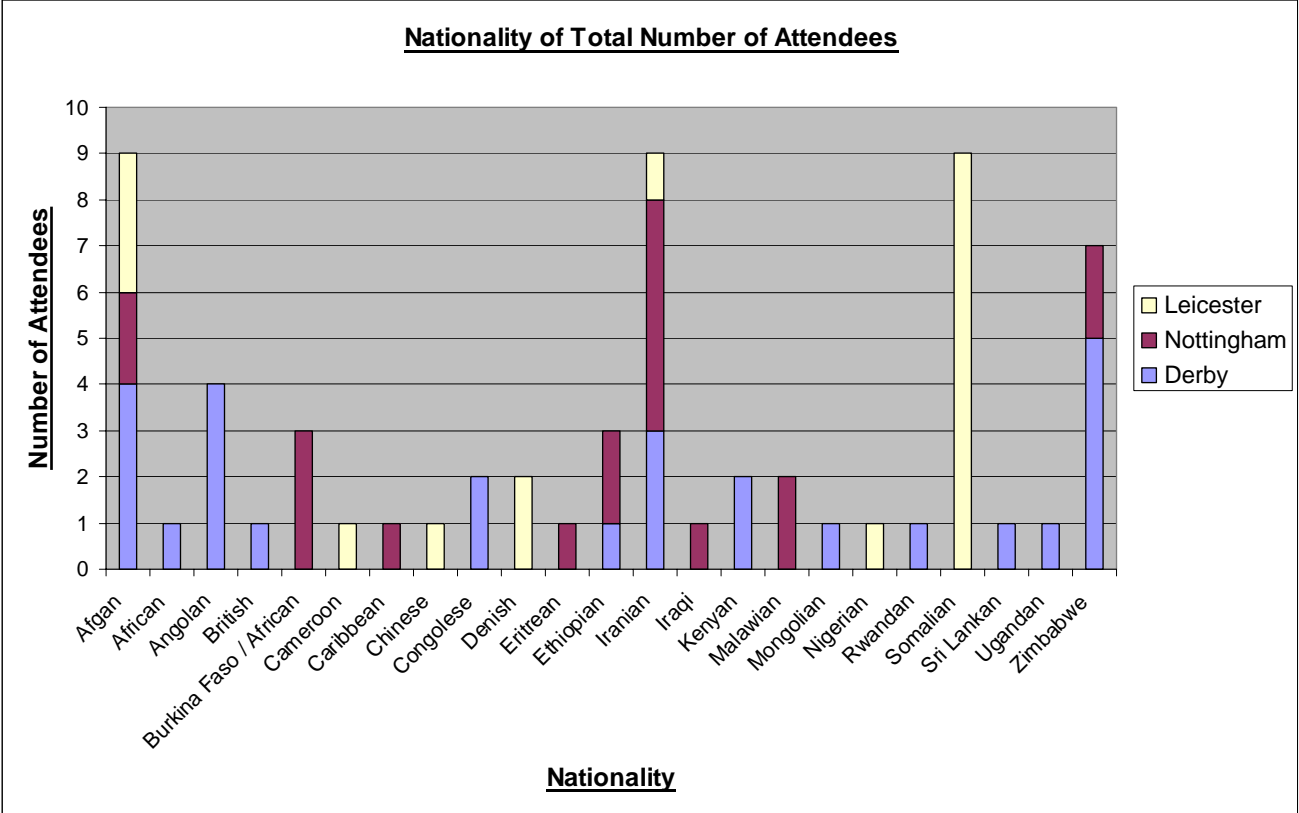
## Appendix 1: Attendance at training

Figure 1: Delegates split by gender

	Actual number of delegates by gender
Derby Male	19
Derby Female	8
Nottingham Male	13
Nottingham Female	5
Leicester Male	6
Leicester Female	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>62</b>



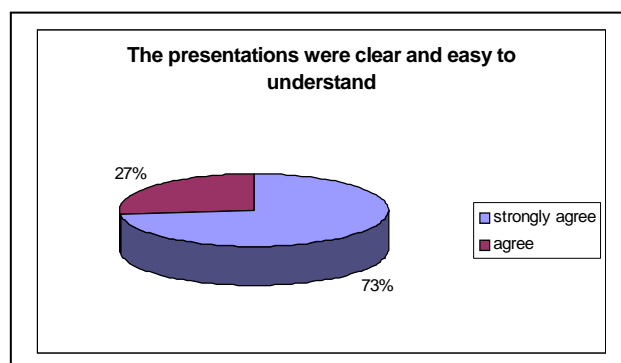
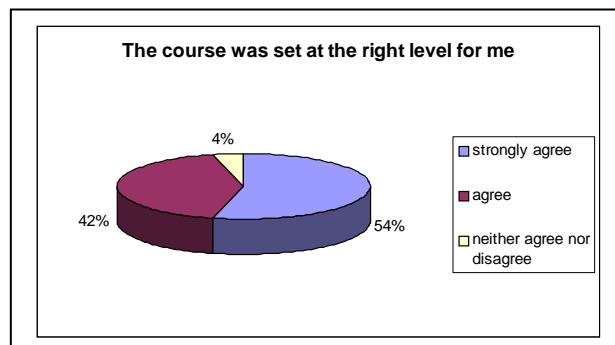
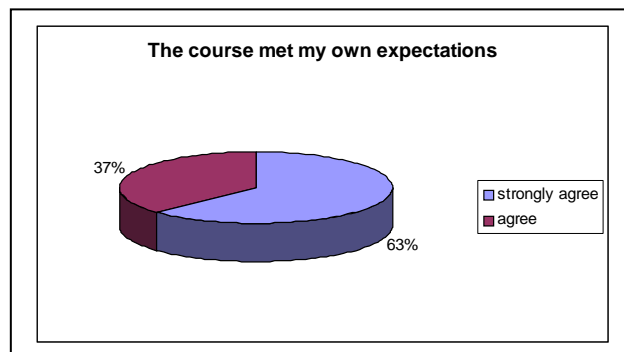
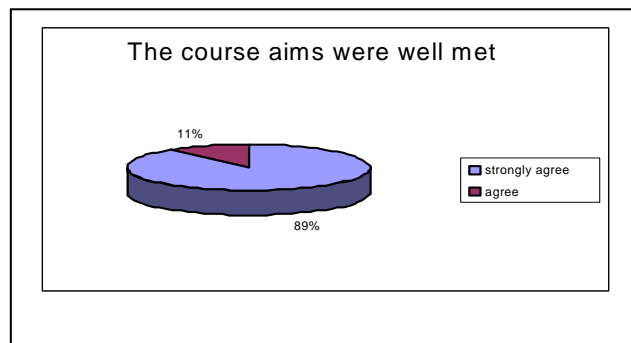
**Figure 2: Nationalities of attendees**

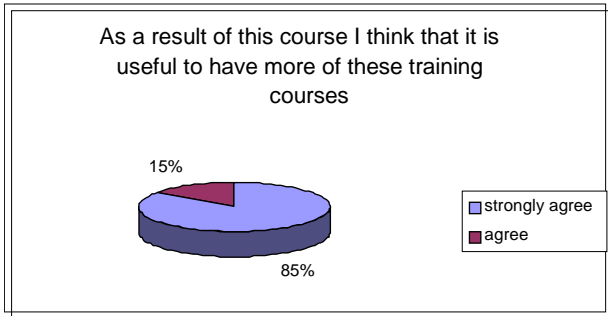
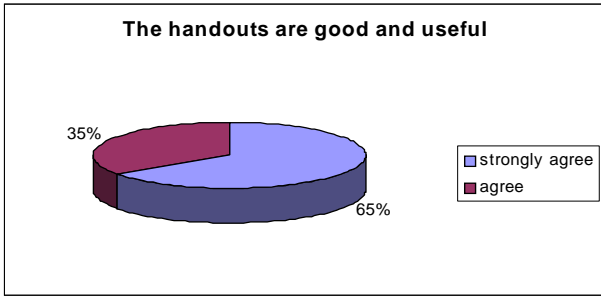
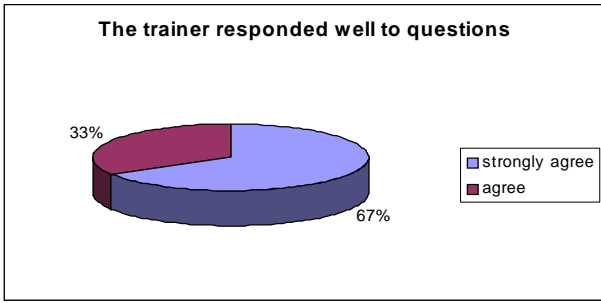
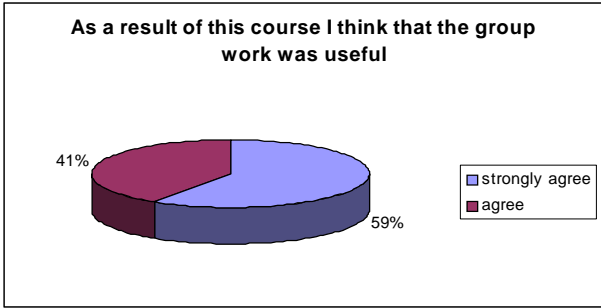


**Figure 3: RCOs represented and individual attendance across the cities**

<b>Derby RCOs</b>	<b>Total RCO members for city</b>	<b>Total other individuals per city</b>	<b>Total delegates per city</b>
Afghan Association	1		
Kurdish Community Association	1		
SOS Immigration	1		
Derwent Zambizi Association	2		
Bondeko Association	3		
Persian Cultural Association	3		
	<b>11</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Nottingham RCOs</b>			
Afghan Association	1		
Ethiopian Association	3		
Zimbabwean Community Association	1		
Burkina Faso	1		
Heri Kwetu	1		
	<b>7</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Leicester RCOs</b>			
LESSA (Leicester Somalian Group)	6		
Chinese Centre	1		
Taqwa Sisters	1		
New Communities Advice	1		
Western Road Womens Group	1		
	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>64</b>

## Appendix 2: Delegates' feedback from the MODA training





## Refugee Housing Association East Midlands

To discuss any of the issues raised in this report, please contact us at the addresses below.

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