

# ***ChangingUp Together?***

## **The infrastructure support needs of refugee communities organisations in Southwark**

**April 2006**

**A study by**



*Research funded by Southwark Alliance and SAVO / Government Office for London*

## **Acknowledgements**

Interviews with groups were conducted by Ayar Ata, Alex Hopkins, Javier Sanchez Rodriguez, Rafael Ayala Silva, Haquyen Trinh, Susan Nguyen and Pascale Vassie. They played an extremely constructive role in refining the questionnaire prior to its use, and reflecting with the report author on groups' reactions and ideas after the interviews had been conducted.

Brook Zeramichael generated all the graphs and visuals used in this report.

Michael Bell Associates kindly supplied a draft version of 'Refugees and the London Economy', as well as details of their recent work with Refugee Action, 'Building Capacity: Stakeholder Consultation with Refugee Community Organisations' (2004).

Gregg Hutchinson and SAVO without whose support this piece of research would not have been funded.

Pascale Vassie, SRCF co-ordinator, has been generous in the time she has given to supporting this research, insightful in her comments, and scrupulous in giving the researcher space and freedom to draw independent conclusions from the evidence produced.

This is not a report *about* the Forum member groups. It is a report *written with* the Forum member groups. I am grateful to them for the co-operation and openness they have brought to it. I hope that their time and commitment will have been well invested, and that other stakeholders will respond to this document with similar openness, and a similar determination to work together for change.

By commissioning this piece of research, SRCF's Management Committee have again demonstrated their dedication to developing stronger more integrated refugee community organisations in Southwark. The commitment of refugee community leaders to research and record the work of their own and peer organisations, to encourage researchers to report their findings honestly and thoroughly, and to develop and strength links with the statutory and voluntary sector is key to this report. Many thanks are due to them for their vision and tenacity over the last three years.

## **About the author**

Paul Buddery, the author of this report, has worked with a number of the organisations referred to in this report. He was Co-ordinator of the HAZ Young Refugee Project between 2002 and 2004, setting up joint service initiatives with two Forum members. From 2004 to 2005 he was Inter-agency Service Development Co-ordinator in the L.B. Southwark Asylum Service. He is currently a member of Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seeker's management committee, and is due to become a trustee of Refugee Youth.

## **Copyright**

© Southwark Refugee Communities Forum, 2006

Anyone wishing to use the information within this report, or to pursue research based on any part of it, should obtain permission from Southwark Refugee Communities Forum.

Published by Southwark Refugee Communities Forum, Co. Ltd by guarantee No. 4971853

Designed by Pascale Vassie, SRCF

Printed by SRCF

# Contents

	<i>Page</i>
<b>Executive summary</b>	4
<b>Introduction</b>	6
<b>One: Changing Context</b>	8
Asylum Legislation & Regulation	
Local Authorities	
Home Office and National Asylum Support Service	
Health Services	
Population	
Legal Advice and Services	
Statutory Services and Strategic Development	
<b>Two: Member Groups' Activity</b>	13
Note on methodology	
Extent of Survey	
Age of groups	
Staffing and governance	
Financial Resources	
Impact of External Changes Since 2003	
Services Provided	
<b>Three: Capacity Building Support to Member Groups</b>	21
Relationships with statutory services	
Relationships with Infrastructure and strategic Services	
Peer support and working together	
Skills and advice	
<b>Four: Member groups' views of the Forum</b>	28
Role of the Forum	
Overall satisfaction	
Future priorities	
<b>Five: Recommendations</b>	30
<i>To Southwark Refugee Communities Forum</i>	
<i>To statutory sector agencies</i>	
<i>To funders</i>	
<b>Appendices</b>	32
Appendix A: <i>Questionnaire YFA03</i>	
Appendix B: <i>Questionnaire 2006</i>	
<b>Bibliography</b>	35

# Executive summary

## ***Aim of This Report***

To engage Southwark organisations that work with refugee and newly arrived communities more effectively in ChangeUp and develop improved infrastructure support based on need; and to do so by:

- Evidencing that need, and how it has changed over the last three years
- Analysing the performance to date of Southwark Refugee Communities Forum in meeting that need
- Identifying steps to be taken by Southwark Refugee Communities Forum and other stakeholders to improve future outcomes

## ***Methodology***

- Face to face questionnaires with 33 SRCF members and associate members, based on format of 2003 baseline study and conducted by SRCF outreach workers
- Discussion and reflection with SRCF co-ordinator and outreach workers
- Review of SRCF records and reports
- Literature search documenting changes to RCOs operational context since 2003
- Application of relevant models of capacity building and RCO development to analyse findings and devise recommendations for policy and practice

## ***Summary Research Findings***

### **Impacts of Changed Environment Since 2003:**

- Increased refusals & removals
- More people with no statutory support
- Increased difficulty accessing legal advice / services
- Increased numbers from particular migrant groups within Southwark presenting for help to community organisations.
- Fall in overall numbers
- Communities 'detached' by dispersal
- EEA migrants seeking out advice services

### **Relationships with Infrastructure Services:**

- Good evidence of increased / broader knowledge of second-tier support
- Some evidence that this is linked to vigorous SRCF brokerage
- Varied levels of satisfaction with those infrastructure services

- General acknowledgement of information services from most of these orgs.
- Disparity between groups wanting support with volunteers and groups' knowledge / contacts with Volunteers Centre Southwark
- Frequent use of specialist regional infrastructure, with evidence that SRCF brokerage has promoted this

#### **Relationships between Infrastructure Services:**

- Evidence of successful, if limited, joint work with good SRCF support

#### **Relationships with Statutory Services:**

- Some evidence of increased knowledge of statutory sector services
- Evidence that groups know where to refer, and that they are doing so
- Evidence that some statutory services are engaging practically and imaginatively to influence community-based service delivery
- Evidence that some groups are receiving referrals from statutory sector, and that in some cases this is straining capacity
- Some evidence that there is still significant detachment from key services, particularly in relation to those services that have been undergoing substantial change

#### **Developments in Service Delivery:**

- Evidence of greater interest in, and delivery of health and mental health services
- Continued, and in some cases expanding, commitment to holistic services
- Continued delivery of advice as a core function for most groups
- Evidence of limited cross referral to larger member groups
- Evidence of some service delivery and development being shaped around short-term funding programs

#### **Funding:**

- L.B.Southwark is single most accessed funding source for SRCF member groups
- Capital Community Foundation next most significant funder, having engaged strongly and flexibly through the Forum
- Half of member groups had seen their funding level decline or stand-still
- Funding cited most frequently by SRCF members as their priority need

#### **SRCF Members' Views of Forum:**

- Consistent agreement on SRCF's key aims
- Solid satisfaction with SRCF's performance
- Some reservations about whether effort is translating into effective change
- Shared learning and new approaches to fundraising support identified as future priorities

# Introduction

## ***Valuing refugee community organisations, promoting active citizenship, strengthening communities and facilitating partnership to meet public needs***

Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) are used to dealing with change. They are, by definition, organisations set up by people in dramatically changed circumstances to provide services for communities in transition. That they operate at all is testament to the tenacity and adaptability of their members. However, there are concerns that the pace of change demanded of them, in recent years in particular, has been damagingly relentless. They have been asked to travel a long way in a short space of time.

Although not a new phenomena, most RCOs are young, or very young organisations. Of course, organisations run by and for refugee communities have existed in the UK for as long as there have been refugee communities, but in a recognisably modern form the story of RCOs begins with the arrival of Vietnamese 'boat people' in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and then accelerates rapidly with the significant and sustained rise in refugee numbers since the mid 1990s. Groups sprang up rapidly, a few operating nationally, some operating regionally, a number sub-regionally, but the majority as localised grassroots organisations - local self-help organisations responding to immediate needs and concerns. Unsurprisingly given this localism, concentrations of RCOs emerged in the London boroughs, like Southwark, where the refugee populations were highest.<sup>1</sup> Some took on specialisms, such as employment or health. Most offered a holistic service to their communities: cultural affirmation and association, practical advice and support, direct services, and brokerage and advocacy with host community services.

***Most offer a holistic service to their communities: cultural affirmation and association, practical advice and support***

Delivering such a complicated range of services would be demanding for even the most experienced, well-established of organisations. How, then, are Southwark's RCOs faring? This report asks detailed questions about the local service delivery of RCOs in order to set out the clearest possible picture of what they do, how they do it, how and why it is changing and, most importantly given this report's aims, how they can be supported by second tier services and statutory services to do it increasingly effectively. The sector has often complained of having to labour under two contradictory, but equally unhelpful misconceptions on the part of statutory services: either that they are insignificant as providers of real services (in which case they are sidelined), or that they are somehow natural and inevitable service providers (in which case, they can counted on as a safety net, and yet still be sidelined). A detailed account of RCOs' day to day activities may help form the basis of a more realistic relationship between all relevant stakeholders, and ultimately a true partnership to meet public needs.

---

<sup>1</sup> The correlation between high refugee populations and large numbers of refugee community organisations in the capital is not exact. There may be several reasons for this, including different patterns of association and organisation within different national groups. One key factor would seem to be the vigour with which different local authorities have nurtured and promoted RCOs. The large number of groups in West London, and the strategic efforts there to support the sector across and within the boroughs are probably related. Southwark's refugee forum is relatively new in London terms.

Yet whatever level of detail is provided about advice sessions hosted or training delivered, the question of RCOs' value within Southwark life will be misjudged unless there is acknowledgement from the outset that they are also generating value over and above that of the particular service in question. Over at least the last ten years, public policy and key government programs have been evolving a concept of value that extends beyond financial measures. Essentially, what is increasingly being recognised is that voluntary and community sector activity not only provides services – which may be value for money, innovative and well-targeted – but that this activity also creates skills and relationships. Enhancing helpful association within communities and helpful association across communities, and between the private and public realms brings key potential benefits to those who are disadvantaged and marginalised; it increases their social capital, and deepens their stake in participatory governance.<sup>2</sup> ChangeUp draws heavily on this concept of creating value through voluntary and community sector activity, and it underpins a raft of other initiatives currently being worked through local government, from Civil Renewal to Active Citizenship to Community Cohesion.<sup>3</sup> For refugees who are active through their community organisations, this analysis applies with particular force, and helps explain why the government affords RCOs such a crucial role within the National Refugee Integration Strategy.<sup>4</sup>

***Enhancing helpful association within and across communities and between the private and public realms brings key potential benefits to those who are disadvantaged and***

---

<sup>2</sup> For a clear summary of these concepts see Cooke, S. (January 2005) 'Briefing on Firm Foundations: The Government's framework for community capacity building', p7.

<sup>3</sup> 'ChangeUp' is the government's ten-year strategic framework for the voluntary and community sector, which aims to build excellent, diverse, accessible and sustainable services. It will do so by enhancing the local and national infrastructure support essential for the sector's healthy development. Southwark's Local Infrastructure Plan (LSP) is being produced by Southwark Action for Voluntary Organisations (SAVO), and this research is a constituent part of that planning having been made possible by funding from SAVO and the Government Office for London.

<sup>4</sup> See (March 2005) *Integration Matters: A national strategy for refugee integration*, 2.15 and 3.15-16. For a discussion of refugee communities and social capital which draws interesting distinctions between organised and informally organised forms of association, see Zetter, R., Griffiths, D & Signona, N. (2005) *Refugee Community Based Organisations in the UK: A social capital analysis*.

# One

## ***The Changing Context***

### ***Immigration and Asylum Legislation***

The Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act (2006), is the latest of six major pieces of legislation since 1993 that have made and re-made changes to the ways in which asylum claims are determined and in which those awaiting a determination can live in the UK. The direction of government policy has been consistent, seeking to drive down numbers by focussing on deterrence and control; yet at service delivery level the situation has often felt unpredictable. Much has depended on secondary legislation, which the Home Office has translated into policy instructions for its staff, and many of these instructions have been subject to challenge – often successful – in the courts. The following summary is by no means comprehensive. It highlights the changes since 2003, which are having, or are likely to have, the greatest impact on refugees and their organisations in Southwark.

### ***Local Authorities:***

Broadly speaking, government policy has been to disbar asylum seekers, wherever possible, from mainstream support, and place them instead within a separately managed system as the responsibility of the Home Office's National Asylum Support Service (NASS). Implementing this policy has been somewhat tortuous, and anomalies remain.

NASS was set up in April 2000 with powers and duties to support asylum seeking single adults and families experiencing or facing destitution. Its introduction was phased in with almost immediate responsibility for new cases and gradual take over of the cases already being supported by local authorities as NASS capacity allowed (out of London accommodation units were being brought on-stream to allow for 'dispersal'). The large numbers that were receiving local authority support had been doing so primarily under the National Assistance Act (1947) or, in the case of families, the Children Act (1989). In order, therefore, to enable local authorities to continue supporting on NASS's behalf, Interim Provisions Regulations were introduced. The Regulations were to run to 2002, were extended until 2003, then finally extended to April 2006. In order to retain some operational flexibility, the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act (2006) enables Local Authorities to provide support to failed asylum applicants in some limited circumstances, including under Section 4 of the 1999 Act (see below).

Although almost all local authority support duties towards asylum seekers have now been subsumed by NASS, exceptions remain. The local authority still has duties under community care legislation (National Assistance Act [1948]) towards elderly people, people with disabilities, mental health or other health needs. A community care assessment will determine the type of practical support to which the individual is entitled, and which the local authority, not NASS, must resource and put in place. Asylum seeking children with disabilities in families are also entitled to local authority assessment and support as 'children in need' under the Children Act (1989). The local authority is then responsible for putting in place services that will enable that child to reach or maintain a reasonable standard of health and development.

Children (under 18s) who claim asylum in the UK without an appropriate adult carer are the responsibility of the borough in which they present for support or in which they can demonstrate a relevant local connection. On turning 18 they are entitled to leaving care services from the local authority as 'Former Relevant Children' under the Children (Leaving Care) Act (2000), though their entitlement to housing and mainstream benefits, or support by NASS depends on the status of their asylum or immigration claim. NASS is currently leading a review to consider the feasibility of transferring care for unaccompanied minors to specialist teams outside London and the South East in order to standardise care, facilitate removals from the UK and reduce costs.

### **Home Office & National Asylum Support Service:**

Section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act (2002) began to be implemented in 2003. It denied access to NASS support for those who were deemed not to have made their asylum claim 'as soon as reasonably practicable' after entering the UK. It does not apply to families with children, or where the individual's human rights would be breached. The immediate result of its introduction was destitution for many and increased pressure on RCOs. Research at the time indicated that 70 per cent of voluntary and community sector support organisations accommodated individuals in their own homes, or those of community members.<sup>5</sup> However, the court of Appeal found in June 2004 that the way the Home Office was implementing the policy was in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights, a view upheld by the House of Lords in May 2005. Use of Section 55 has therefore been greatly reduced, though the House of Lords judgement does not cover those applying to NASS for subsistence-only support (ie. cash vouchers, but no accommodation).

Under Section 9 of the Asylum and Immigration Act (2004), asylum-seeking families who have exhausted all their rights of appeal may have all NASS support withdrawn if they refuse to co-operate with a process of removal from the UK. In these circumstances, the local authority would be under an obligation to protect the welfare of the child or children concerned, and would have to consider removing them from the parents and placing them in care. Trials of this highly contentious policy have not yet concluded whether its general introduction would be practical, or would meet the government's objective of speeding up removals of failed asylum applicants. In a substantial number of cases, families in the trials have 'disappeared', rather than comply with the removal into care of their children.

Adults whose asylum claim has been exhausted can apply for further support from NASS under Section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act (1999) but only if they can demonstrate a strong reason why they cannot immediately leave the UK, or can demonstrate that they are co-operating with a process of removal. Under Section 4 they will be offered a bed and either three meals a day and no financial support, or £35 per week in vouchers for food and toiletries. When this 'hard cases' support was introduced, it was envisaged as short-term provision prior to departure. In many cases this has not turned out to be the case. Clause 4 of the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act (2006) therefore introduces some additional flexibility to the package in order to meet additional needs as they arise. However, it rules out the use of cash, and re-enforces the use of vouchers. Section 4 accommodation will often, though not necessarily, be provided out of London. Receipt of Section 4 support may also be made conditional on carrying out unpaid work ('community activities').

Section 36 of the Immigration and Asylum Act (2004) contained powers to electronically tag asylum seekers. Although government statements at the time suggested that the process would be voluntary, policy since summer 2005 has been to work towards the tagging of all adults, except victims of torture. The practice fits within the tighter 'contact management' procedures being adopted as part of the New Asylum Model.

---

<sup>5</sup> See (April 2004) Hungry and Homeless: The impact of the withdrawal of state support on asylum seekers, refugee communities and the voluntary sector, The Refugee Council, p27.

## **Health:**

The Department of Health (DoH) is currently consulting on proposals that would restrict access to Primary Health Care for adults whose asylum claim has failed. They would bring access broadly into line with that for Secondary Health Care, to which all adults are eligible where treatment is 'immediately necessary' (all maternity services fall within this category), but for which charges may be pursued from those who are not ordinarily resident in the UK. DoH is encouraging practices to introduce the changes in advance of their formal adoption, though individual practices retain discretion.

Plans on the part of the PCT, with local health trusts and other key stakeholders, to adopt a formal strategy for meeting refugees' needs were drawn up in 2003, but lapsed following changes to commissioning structures.

## **Population**

Changes to the local refugee population are hard to assess.<sup>6</sup> Changes to the asylum-seeking population since 2003 are somewhat easier to trace. There has been a steep decline nationally in new asylum applicants in the last three years, and this has been magnified locally by revised NASS accommodation arrangements. NASS closed one of its two Southwark-based emergency accommodation units in this period, and has re-designated the remaining hostel as 'contingency accommodation' for singles and families who cannot be sent out of London immediately (for example, women in the later stages of pregnancy, and young people whose age, and therefore entitlement to services, is being disputed). The length of stay is around eight weeks, and the hostel can house around 50 individuals. Even taken together with the handful of dispersed and disbenefitted applicants – less than 30 as of December 2005 - who continue to be supported in local NASS accommodation through the local authority, this marks a significant downturn in numbers. In the year April 2002 to March 2003, NASS placed 705 single people and 119 families in the borough.<sup>7</sup>

Asylum seekers eligible for NASS support may choose to make their own accommodation arrangements and receive a 'subsistence only' package. Local numbers have been falling broadly in line with national trends. In February 2003, 1,210 asylum applicants were living in Southwark on subsistence only packages. Over the next three years it dropped to 854, then to 640, and as of February 2006 stood at 204.

In February 2003, Southwark was supporting 2,020 asylum seekers under the Interim Regulations Provisions. This number fell to 1,489 in 2004, to 667 in 2005, and stood at 111 in February 2006. The decline is a result of three factors: normal developments in the asylum claims of individuals, leading to recognition or departure from the UK; transfer of cases to NASS as envisaged in the Interim Provisions; and, significantly, a one-off Home Office exercise to grant Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) to a large number of those with families who applied for asylum before 2000 – a backlog clearance exercise generally referred to as the 'amnesty'. Local statistics are not available, but nationally, as of December 2002, 56,160 main applicants had submitted themselves to the 'amnesty', of which: 20,170 had been granted ILR; 6,570 were being considered on another Family ILR application; 9,090 were refused; 8,395 were ineligible; 1,030 were awaiting an initial decision; and 10,900 were awaiting a decision.

The big picture, therefore, is one of declining numbers. However – and interviews with RCOs bear this out – the situation is more complex in practice. Asylum and Housing services co-operated closely to try and ensure that families and single people being supported under the Interim Arrangements could remain in their properties on being granted

---

<sup>6</sup> See Klodawski, Ed. (2004) Data Sources on Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

<sup>7</sup> See (December 2004) Statistical Information on Refugee Populations, LSL Refugee Health Team.

ILR through the 'amnesty'. In other words, a large local refugee population changed status but not location, and continues to access and need RCO services. Dispersal away from London and the South East has never entirely severed asylum

seeker's connections with the capital's RCOs. Friends and family will make enormous efforts to visit communities in London, tapping into RCO services while they do so. The tendency to gravitate towards the capital is in fact so strong that the government took further measures to resist it in the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act (2006) by removing the right of successful asylum applicants to move from their dispersal area and claim a local connection and entitlement to public housing elsewhere. These migrations and networks are important in shaping Southwark's demography and influencing RCOs service delivery, despite not appearing in headline statistics. And another migration is underway which is not yet visible in borough statistics, but which is likely to have a profound impact: that of European Economic Area workers and their families. As this wave of migration is too recent to have yet generated separate community organisations, newcomers are already tapping into RCO advice, training and support services.

***Dispersal away from London and the South East has never entirely severed asylum seeker's connections with the capital's RCOs.***

### ***Legal Advice and Services:***

In the context of accelerated decision-making processes and determined enforcement action on removals, legal advice to asylum seekers has never been more important. Accessing advice, however, has never been more difficult. Provision is being squeezed by tighter regulation and reduced funding.

Regulation of non-specialist and specialist not-for-profit immigration advisers was introduced in May 2001, when it became a criminal offence to provide immigration advice unless authorised to do so by the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC).

***Accessing advice has never been more difficult. Provision is being squeezed by tighter regulation and reduced funding.... organisations are aware of when they need to refer on to more qualified organisations, yet it is increasingly difficult to find practices willing to take on clients.***

Solicitors, barristers or legal executives have continued to be regulated by their professional bodies. OISC authorises organisations to provide advice at three different levels of complexity, which are constructed so as to map onto the three levels of advice giving set out in the Community Legal Services Quality Mark scheme. In effect, therefore, qualifying for CLS Quality Mark enables organisations to be passported through to OISC.

When these new requirements were introduced, training was made available for community organisations that wanted to

achieve Quality Mark in order to continue giving immigration advice. Seven members of Southwark Refugee Communities Forum now have the Quality Mark at 'Information' level, enabling them to secure OISC registration at Level One. However, for the last two years there has been a dearth of further training opportunities for new organisations to acquire 'Information' accreditation, or those who already have it to progress to 'General Help' (OISC Level 2). Other barriers to progression will be discussed later in this report. The point to be noted here is that this failure to develop community services is within the context of a shrinking number of law firms offering asylum advice and services. Level 1 organisations are aware of when they need to refer on to more qualified organisations, yet it is increasingly difficult to find practices willing to take on clients.

Senior figures within the legal profession are warning that changes to funding are driving

practitioners out of the field. The Legal Services Commission (LSC) changes, introduced in April 2004, set a financial threshold equivalent to five hours for initial advice up to the point of an initial Home Office decision (reduced from 12-14 hours previously), removed routine funding for legal representation at Home Office Interviews, and disallowed appeals work without prior LSC approval.<sup>8</sup> Taken together, the profession believes that these measures will drive down standards and radically reduce the number of firms practising in this area of law. The difficulties experienced by Southwark RCOs attempting to refer on cases seem to support these predictions.

## **Statutory Services and Strategic Development**

London Borough of Southwark's Asylum Service was dissolved in July 2005 as part of the hand over of cases to NASS and in anticipation of the ending of the Interim Regulations Provisions. One of its workers was seconded to a District Team to continue case support for asylum seekers supported under Community Care provisions. The Unaccompanied Minors Team, which had been part of the service, came under the management of the 16+ (Leaving Care) Service. As well as providing direct services for the single adults and families within these regulations, the Asylum Service had been available as a source of advice and possible referral for statutory and voluntary services encountering refugees or asylum seekers in need. If this central advice and signposting function was taken over by any other service when the Asylum Service was closed, this was not communicated to

### **RCO insights and capacities should inform the development of local services for refugee children.**

voluntary sector stakeholders. In fact, there seemed to be some confusion among a variety of stakeholders, including the local authority, as to social service's continuing role and leadership.

The service had been leading on implementing a Young Refugee Strategy for the Children and

Young People's Partnership Board. Southwark Refugee Community Forum groups had been making an active contribution to this process, meeting regularly with representatives from Housing, Education, Youth and Connections, Health, Mental Health and Social Services. The process went into abeyance with the closing of the service, and the status of the strategy itself is undecided following the borough's transition to a Children's Trust. It is now no longer clear how RCO insights and capacities should inform the development of local services for refugee children, even though national guidance emphasises the need for Children's Trust to be engaging with increased seriousness. The Every Child Matters: Change for Children programme, through which the Children Act (2004) is being put into action, envisages a greater role for the voluntary and community sector in delivering, planning and providing intelligence for local children's services.<sup>9</sup>

The borough's Social Policy Unit, has been developing a Corporate Refugee and Asylum Seeker Strategy, partly in response to recommendations made by a District Audit Report in May 2002. Drafts are still undergoing revision, and a new Refugee and Asylum post within the Unit has recently (March 06) been created. If the final document follows the outline that has emerged to date it may set up mechanisms for more effective communications and information sharing, commit the borough to increasingly effective targeting of employment and training services, promote expansion of local ESOL provision<sup>10</sup> and reaffirm the importance of ongoing capacity building and dialogue with RCOs. Regular meetings are being held between the Social Policy Unit and SRCF.

<sup>8</sup> See (2005) Into Labyrinth – Legal advice for asylum seekers in London, p42

<sup>9</sup> See (2004) working with Voluntary and Community Organisations to Deliver Change for Children and Young People, p21.

<sup>10</sup> See (December 2005) Language as a Barrier to Employment: Draft interim report for Southwark council, recommendation 2.3.

# Two

## **Member Group Activity**

In 2003, with SRCF in the process of becoming operational, YFA Consultancy and Training Ltd was commissioned to conduct research among local RCOs to:

*identify the capacity building needs of Refugee Community Organisations in Southwark and to identify how these groups could contribute to and participate in the Southwark Refugee Forum as well as the needs the Forum could meet in the future.*

The research – referred to hereafter as YFA03 – was published in May 2003. It is the baseline study against which the current research draws some of its conclusions.

YFA03 used face-to-face questionnaires to profile 19 organisations (see Appendix 1). The current research retained most of the earlier format, with some expansion to gather more detailed information relevant to its particular aims. Where YFA03 interviews were carried out by YFA Consultancy workers, interviews on this occasion were conducted by SRCF outreach workers recruited from refugee community organisations who in most cases were known to the organisations with which they met. Although this approach was taken primarily in order to expedite the research process, it was also hoped that the existing relationship between interviewer and interviewee would allow a more frank and expansive discussion.

The differences in method and sample group between YFA03 and the current research mean that caution is exercised in drawing longitudinal conclusions. Patterns, however, do emerge, as well as sharp pictures of the sector's current situation.

This research report does not aim to duplicate the Forum's comprehensive Directory of member groups (which details members' services and organisational status); neither does it aim to anticipate the Forum's next Annual report (which in the past has given comprehensive service delivery information); and nor does it aim to duplicate the self-promotion literature of the groups themselves. It aggregates detail to provide a profile of groups' activity, knowledge and needs, and their experience of Forum membership and linkage to other services and infrastructure organisations. Some particular examples of practice are identified and discussed, with information from other sources brought to bear where relevant.

SRCF provided activity reports and other relevant public documents. They constitute a coherent narrative against which group's individual reports can be read, as well as raising helpful questions about shared understanding and purpose. A copy of the questionnaire is included as Appendix 2.

### **Section 3(c): Service Provision by member groups**

Groups were asked what services they were currently providing, and for roughly how many hours per month. Some organisations were able to give approximate figures, but others felt that giving a monthly average would be difficult, given the changeability of their work.

### **Section 6: SRCF support for member groups**

Interviewees were asked which types of support they had received from the Forum, and were invited to rate them on a scale of importance rising from 1 to 5. Some groups did so,

but many found prioritising either unhelpful or difficult.

### Section 7: SRCF performance and feedback

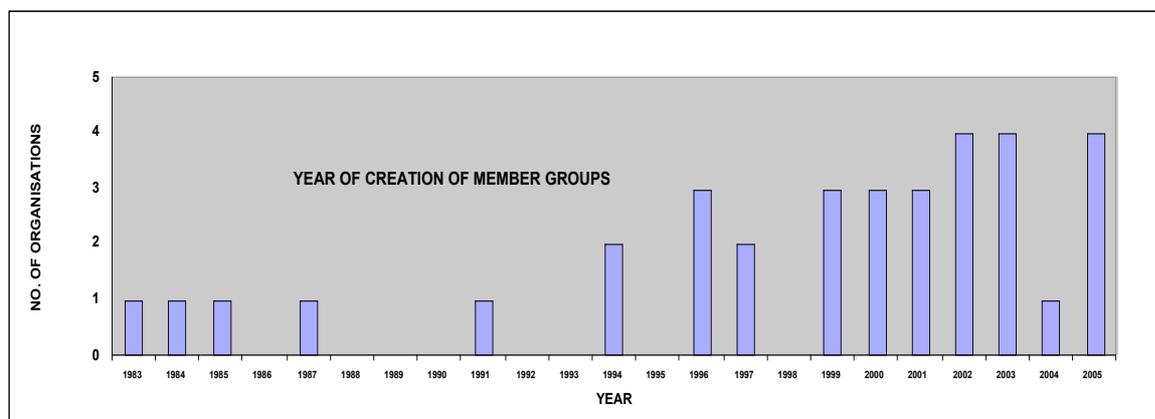
Interviewees were given the option of filling out the section separately and returning it to the Forum anonymously, in a postpaid envelope.

### Extent of Survey

Between March and April 2006, 33 organisations were interviewed, out of a total SRCF membership of 40. Six of the organisations were Associate Members, ie. those that are not strictly Southwark-based Refugee Community Organisations as defined by the SRCF governing documents (groups with at least 70 per cent refugees on their management committees) but voluntary sector organisations for whom refugees and asylum seekers in Southwark are a primary client group. The extent of the co-operation indicates that both full and associate members are engaged with the forum, and that their membership is unlikely to be nominal.

### Age of Groups

The age of Forum groups generally fits the profile one would expect in London, with a few older organisations having formed in the early 1980s, but the majority springing up in the mid 1990s or since 2000. Twenty seven per cent of groups were established between 2003 and 2005. The age range clearly represents a challenge for the Forum in meeting what are likely to be somewhat diverse needs, and developing appropriate styles of work to engage across the board.



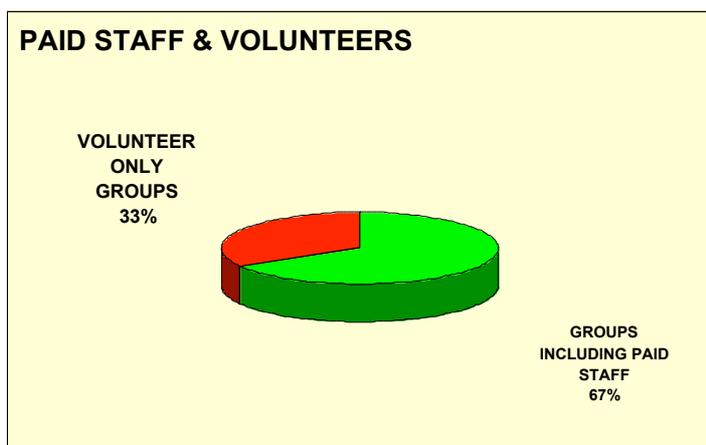
Although strong assertions about the number of RCOs in Southwark, or their life-cycle, cannot be made on the basis of this research evidence alone, there would seem to be no reason to anticipate a significant downturn in the number of new groups being formed. Membership is likely to increase. Individuals regularly approach the Forum for advice on setting up groups, where they are currently signposted to Evelyn Oldfield Unit and/or SAVO for support in establishing themselves.

### Staffing & Governance

Forty three per cent of groups have paid part-time or sessional staff; 24 per cent have at least one full-time staff member and 33 per cent of member groups are run exclusively by volunteers.

This heavy reliance on volunteers is common to the voluntary sector in general and brings

challenges as well as benefits to the group in question and the community in general. Volunteers delivering services within the groups have opportunities to utilise existing skills, build-up new ones and develop confidence that may improve their position in the labour market and broaden their social capital. In noting the community benefits of these activities, it should also be noted here that virtually all of the groups have management committees or boards of trustees with 5-10 members, which means that while individual groups are benefiting from strong ownership by their communities, the wider community is benefiting from a build-up of leadership and governance skills within marginalised groups. One group noted its involvement with Southwark Trustees Network. A number of the management committee members of Forum member organisations also sit on management committees or steering groups for infrastructure or umbrella organisations in the Borough eg. Peckham Voluntary Sector Forum, Southwark Refugee Communities Forum, Southwark Muslim Forum.

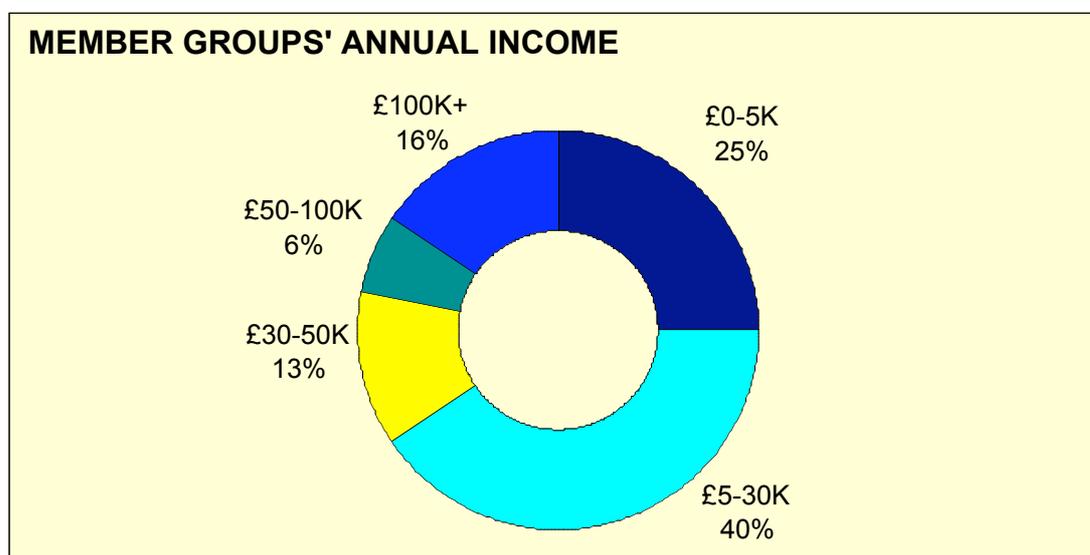


A multiplicity of part-time or sessional staff in the voluntary sector is often indicative of a multiplicity of funding streams and time-limited projects. Mixed teams of this sort can bring enormous strength and freshness to an organisation, with opportunities for community members and other appropriately qualified and experienced people to secure income and experience. At the same time, however, such arrangements will pose internal communication challenges for

any organisation, and these in turn will influence its ability to communicate clearly and consistently with stakeholders. Against the benefit of varied and changing staff teams we also need to set the difficulty of offering appropriate and rigorous professional development programs.

### **Funding**

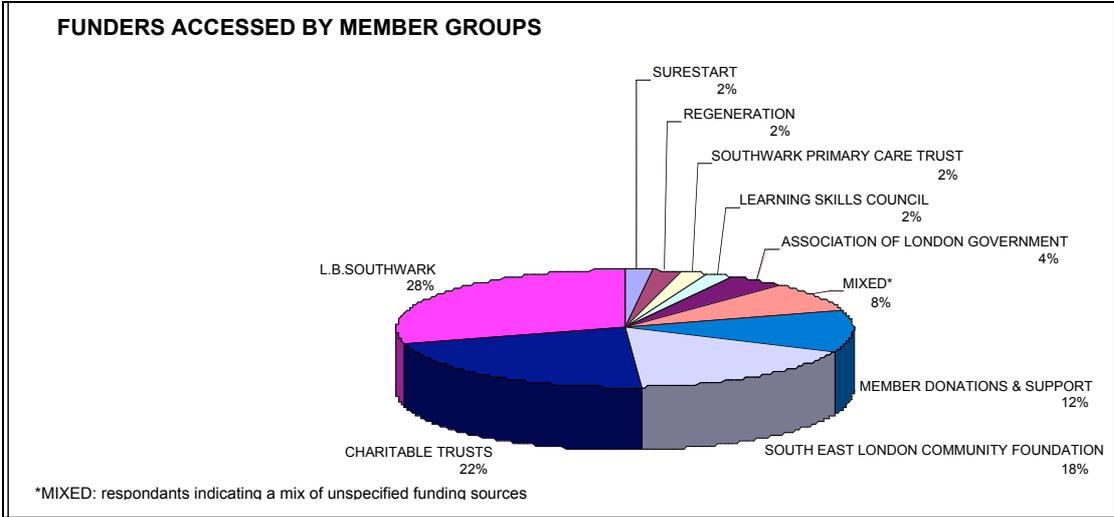
Twenty five per cent of groups had an annual income between £1,000 and £5,000; 40 per cent between £5,000 and £30,000; 13 per cent between £30,000 and £50,000; and 6 per cent between £50,000 and £100,000. Of the 16 per cent of groups with an annual income of £100,000 or above, almost half were associate members of the Forum.



Of the 26 groups that had been established for long enough to make a comparison, 50 per cent had seen their income stagnate or fall in the last three years; 50 per cent had seen it rise.

Groups were asked about their funding sources: 70 per cent were accessing a mix of sources and 27 per cent of groups were, apart from member contributions, reliant on a single funding source, and in one third of these cases that funder was London Borough of Southwark (9 per cent of total interview group). For one group, member contributions were the only source of income.

London Borough of Southwark is by some margin the most widely accessed source of funding, from which 28 per cent of groups are receiving support. The Capital Community Foundation (formerly South East London Community Foundation – SELF), was the next most accessed funder, providing support to 18 per cent of groups – for the most part through the Neighbourhood Renewal Community Chest but also the Local Network Fund. Charitable trusts are accessed by 22 per cent of the groups interviewed and 12 per cent report financial support from members.



Groups were not asked about the size of particular income streams, so some caution needs to be exercised in inferring the financial value of the different funders to mixed-income member groups, or in extrapolating the overall value to groups of any particular funder's contribution. However, it seems reasonable to assume that that access and value are roughly proportionate.

In groups' comments about help, support and priorities, funding comes up more than any other subject. This is a bedrock issue, and one where no overall progress has been made in the last three years. Where 12 per cent are reliant, to some extent, on financial contributions from their communities, and these communities are among the most deprived in Southwark, there must be serious question marks over sustainability. A member notes that resources are necessary even to run volunteer-delivered services. Another points out how chasing funding is draining organisational energy from service delivery. Where organisations feel threatened by shrinking financial resources there is a risk that their service development plans will be adapted to seek out the readiest source of funding, and that the organisation will become locked in short-term, crisis-led planning. In one instance, a group observes how it set up a project tapping into local regeneration funding, but that the stream, and the project, quickly dried up. Another group asked that the Forum 'help us to focus on one issue'.

***Chasing funding is draining organisational energy from service delivery.***

One possible consequence of becoming trapped in short-term funding is difficulty in growing

the organisation. In some circumstances, a gap starts to open up between those voluntary sector organisations that have become able to grow and control their own planning cycle, and those that are sustaining themselves by acting responsively. Over the last few years, the growth of larger voluntary and community sector organisations has far outstripped that of smaller groups. If the breadth of provision by Southwark's RCOs is to be maintained, funders and infrastructure

organisations will have to attend carefully to the particular funding needs of groups of all sizes. (There must, of course, be no assumption that individual groups always want to expand, or should expand.)

***If the breadth of provision by Southwark's RCOs is to be maintained, funders and infrastructure organisations will have to attend carefully to the particular funding needs of groups of all sizes.***

The extent to which Forum members have accessed Capital Community Foundation support is encouraging, and demonstrates how resources can be directed towards 'hard to reach' communities. CCF has been energetic in its engagement, attending Forum events on four occasions between September 2003 and November 2004, by inviting the Forum co-ordinator onto the Neighbourhood Renewal Community Chest grants panel and by engaging with the Forum in the distribution of governance and finance publications following the reappraisal of the Community Learning Chest in 2005/06. In all these activities it appears to have enhanced its understanding of the sector and how to assess its needs. Based on the success of this relationship, it is encouraging to note that the Forum Co-ordinator also sits on the grants panel for the Healthy Children's Project.

London Borough of Southwark's role as a funder is crucial to Forum groups – directly, and as a stakeholder with wider influence. It should be a cause of some concern that groups' financial well-being has not improved over the past three years.

### ***The impact of external changes since 2003***

Groups were asked about the impact on their organisation of changes in three areas: immigration and asylum legislation, the pattern of new arrivals and changes to local authority support.

Thirty nine per cent of groups were unaware of changes, believed that they were not relevant to their work, or had made no impact; 6 per cent remarked that they knew changes had occurred, and that they wished they knew more about them; 55 per cent of groups believed that changes had made an impact.

One group mentioned that the 'amnesty' (see p10) had been a welcome development. However, all other comments related deepening difficulties. Many groups talked about increasing use of detention and members being subject to new reporting arrangements.

Several groups remarked that community members were being deported (one group had lost five individuals and a family within the last six months). There were widespread concerns about asylum seekers whose claim for asylum had failed and who had lost entitlement to support; and Section 55 (see p9) was noted. Homelessness seemed to be linked to this growing phenomena, as did strain within

***There were widespread concerns about asylum seekers whose claim for asylum had failed and who had lost entitlement to support ... Homelessness seemed to be linked to this growing phenomena, as did strain within communities in terms of overcrowded accommodation.***

communities in terms of overcrowded accommodation. Even where NASS was providing support, this was seen to be too limited by some groups. Groups were struggling to find legal services for their clients, reporting that some of their usual options were no longer

available. Taken together, these changes were clearly placing some communities under severe pressure. One group described this in terms of spiritual stress and distraction. Another pointed particularly to the pressure on children and 'negative impact on mental health'. This found an echo in another group's concerns relating to family breakdown.

The majority of groups commenting on the pattern of new arrivals said that there had been a general reduction in numbers. Some related this to dispersal out of London. Groups reported clients being moved away quickly after brief local stays, or clients having difficulty keeping in touch once dispersed out of the capital. Contrary to the general reduction, several Forum members reported increased numbers of service users from certain backgrounds, namely Mandarin-speaking Chinese, Latin Americans and European Economic Area nationals. Moreover, several groups observed that more people were arriving through irregular channels, travelling on false documents with fake passports. In this complex scene, one group remarked that mixed immigration status families presented particular challenges to services.

Less groups were aware of changes to statutory services. Only one group said that it was aware of recent changes to the borough's interpreting service although difficulties with accessing interpretation and translation was frequently cited as barrier. The transition to mainstream support on being granted Indefinite Leave to Remain was described by one group as *'the weakest link in the asylum saga'*, causing real problems, especially with accommodation. Where groups noted changes to the Asylum Service they were generally dismayed by how these had unfolded: *'all of the burden was shifted to our organisations, we do not have enough'*. There was uncertainty about how children's problems could be addressed with statutory services, as there appeared to be no 'focus group' to gather and reflect on them. A group that had participated in inter-agency work for children when this was being led by the Asylum Service (see p12) referred to what had been started: *'need for ongoing work on this'*. Commenting on the general state of leadership or co-ordination from the statutory sector, another group seemed disillusioned: *'Lots of talking but not much is happening ... Things are not implemented'*.

Given the heterogeneity of the refugee population it should not, perhaps, be surprising that different groups have very different experiences of immigration fluctuations and very different levels of immediate interest in asylum and immigration regulations. However, it is somewhat surprising, and perhaps worrying, that quite so many Forum members are detached from events. Where impacts have been noted, they have obviously hit hard. Some communities represented by the Forum are experiencing increased levels of fear, uncertainty and physical hardship. Failed asylum seekers refused support will not show up in official statistics, but they are living in local communities, and their plight affects their support organisations. Where people are arriving under false documents and declining to take the asylum route of tagging, dispersal or detention, they are still living in local communities, and their problems affect their support organisations. At the very least, one would expect to see a higher incidence of stress as a result of these developments, and this is in fact reflected in how services have been evolving (see p19).

The new wave of EEA immigrants is starting to present for help to the larger member groups for help with ESOL, employment and training, as well as for immigration and welfare advice. Though not yet statistically significant enough to have placed a strain on these services, one can see here either future problems or future potential. Higher numbers might overwhelm already thinly stretched organisations. On the other hand, properly co-ordinated investment in reception services could build on the skills already present within Forum member groups in order to maximise the economic and social benefits that the new European migrants bring to Southwark. Doing so would, from the viewpoint of Forum members, be a welcome new departure. Their wish for co-ordination and leadership from Council services is already tinged with some disenchantment. There is no evidence that member groups felt or feel actively involved in major reviews of interpreting services and ESOL provision, this would seem to be a missed opportunity to develop services that are

capable of responding to community needs. Furthermore, it must be a matter of regret that the closure of the Asylum Service at a time of intense pressure on vulnerable communities was not counterbalanced by the adoption of clear strategic objectives and an adequate communications framework. The Forum's potential effectiveness in promoting coherent partnership working across the statutory and voluntary sector has been hampered by the lack of a strategic partner with which to engage.

## **Services Provided**

### **Numbers Supported**

Groups were asked how many people were receiving their services, and were invited to describe the age range: 13 groups provided no information or incomplete information. There are several possible reasons for this, including the fluctuating activity of some groups that might, for example, put on large cultural events on an occasional basis and respond to welfare queries as they arise, so that estimating numbers might feel artificial. Where groups have responded, the total number of individuals within families has been taken as four. Where ranges of numbers have been given by groups providing several courses, the lower end of the range has been adopted to counter-balance any inadvertent double-counting. Where groups give figures for large cultural celebrations, as well as smaller figures for courses and advice, only the larger figure is counted, on the assumption that a significant number of those using the group for advice or study will also be attending its cultural functions. In short, the statistics gleaned are a helpful indicator of member groups' immediate impact, but are approximate and should not be used simplistically.

A total of 6,079 people were receiving services from member groups that completed the interview.<sup>11</sup> The average (arithmetic mean) number of individuals supported by each group was 276. Given that a few larger groups swell this figure substantially, it is more meaningful to observe that the median average of those supported by each group was 94.

The most commonly used figure for Southwark's total refugee population is 13–16,000. In this context, and even given the rough nature of the statistics generated by this research, it seems fair to observe that member groups' access to and service to refugee communities is very substantial. Perhaps a third of all the borough's refugees are receiving some kind of support from Forum members. If statutory services are keen to develop delivery partnerships that reach refugees – commonly referred to as a hard-to-reach group – they would be wise to note that the current role of Forum members is substantive.

### **Range of Services**

YFA03 showed that all groups who gave details were delivering more than one type of service. Categories used in the current research do not map exactly onto the earlier categorisations, as some types of services are broken down in more detail, but the median average of service types provided by member groups seems to have remained stable at 6.

YFA03 identified the main types of services being provided at that time as welfare advice, support to access the labour market and cultural activity. These remain the most frequently provided: 73 per cent of groups provide cultural activities; 61 per cent provide adult training and education; and 57 per cent provide welfare benefits advice. The most

***[Southwark RCOs] deliver a wide range of services around a core task of sharing community experience, celebrating what is cherished from the old country, and building confidence in contributing to their new country.***

<sup>11</sup> Using information given elsewhere, notably in the research for the SRCF directory, it is reasonable to suppose that the total number of people accessing support from SRCF member organisations is nearer to 7,000.

significant change to the pattern of services has been the increase in provision of health and mental health support. Health services were provided by only 25 per cent of groups in YFA03; the current research shows 36 per cent of groups involved in provision. With only one group (5 per cent) providing mental health services in YFA03, statistical comparisons here are more problematic, but the current 27 per cent does seem significant, and actually excludes two groups who identified a wish to set up provision in the future.

There has been no movement towards specialisation within Forum groups. They remain typical of other RCOs and refugee-supporting voluntary organisations in delivering a wide range of services around a core task of sharing community experience, celebrating what is cherished from the old country, and building confidence in contributing to their new country. This breadth is not without inherent tensions. The ChangeUp framework principles express these by setting out both the independence of frontline organisations to determine their own future, and the hope that, for the sake of achieving excellence and efficiency, these frontline organisations may be enabled and encouraged to make fewer commitments in some circumstances. Specialisation, and its attendant benefits, may develop. In the meantime, the benefits to the wider community of developing dynamic organisations in which a broad range of experiences and talents are being nurtured should not be underestimated. Stakeholders and funders will want to minimise the risk of creating an environment where short-term development in particular priority areas is incentivised to the detriment of organisations' longer term interests.

Stakeholders and funders will also want to reflect particularly on how excellence in advice giving can be supported. Seven member groups currently have the Community Legal Services (CLS) Quality Mark at Level One and have therefore been in a position to obtain OISC exemption (see p11) for one-off immigration advice. With groups now experiencing increasing difficulty referring on to legal services, there seems to be a pressing case for member groups to develop capacity to offer Level 2 services. Requirements regarding minimum numbers of hours of advice within specific advice areas and supervision hours, however, make progression extremely difficult for the organisations as they are currently funded. Solutions may be available by resourcing new partnership arrangements. (The Forum began preliminary discussions to explore options in July 05). However, the difficulty of putting solutions in place is magnified by national uncertainty within CLS about how to take Quality Mark forward, and what appears to be local uncertainty regarding the borough's overall strategy on quality assurance for the voluntary and community sector. Inertia at a time of increased pressure on immigration advice services would be regrettable.

Given the intensified physical and emotional pressures on some refugee communities, it is fortunate that public health policy has been placing a renewed emphasis on delivering preventative services at community level. Funding, and partnerships have been available through which Forum members have successfully expanded their services. Groups' support service around mental health issues – though expanding – is actually likely to have been under-reported in the research. Discussions with Forum outreach workers indicate that some groups who provide association, visiting and companionship to those experiencing stress or depression would be unlikely to use the Western term 'mental health support' to characterise this. While for most intents and purposes how a service is categorised is unimportant, it may be significant in this case if it inhibits groups' ability to access funding and other resources, or if it perpetuates mutual misunderstanding between vulnerable communities and statutory mental health services.

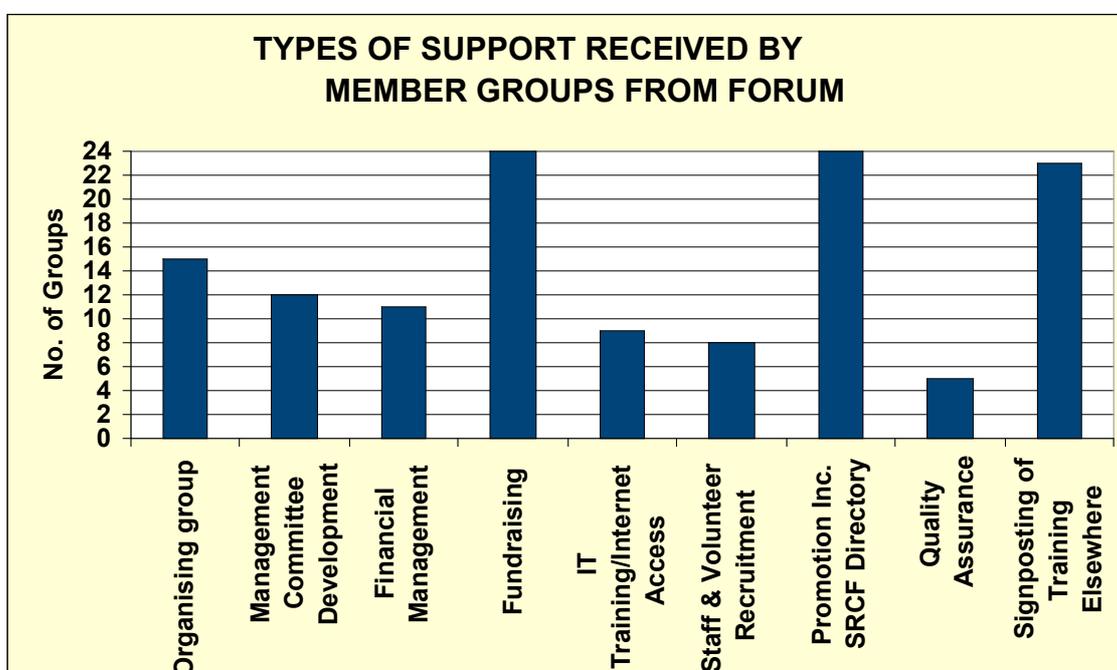
***Groups' support service around mental health issues – though expanding – is actually likely to have been under-reported in the research.***

# Three

## **Capacity building support to member groups**

Capacity building can include a number of different support functions. Interviews with groups identified three particular areas:

- Access to, and influence over statutory, infrastructure and strategic services
- Ability to work and learn co-operatively with other refugee groups
- Direct skills and knowledge support and training.



## **Relationships with Statutory Services**

Groups were asked about their contacts with statutory services and invited to give details. As one might expect, older member groups are in nearly all cases more extensively networked than those more recently established. Overall, the picture of connectedness that emerges is more full and extensive than that in YFA3. Any conclusions must be drawn tenuously, as many differences may be accounted for by greater use of prompting during interviews on this occasion. Furthermore, if groups are now enjoying wider sets of relationships with statutory services, several factors may have played a part. Notwithstanding these reservations, it is reasonable to observe that there is strong evidence of vigorous and effective bridging activity by the Forum. The following are examples:

### **a) Education**

The Forum led a drama and media project creating learning resources to support work with

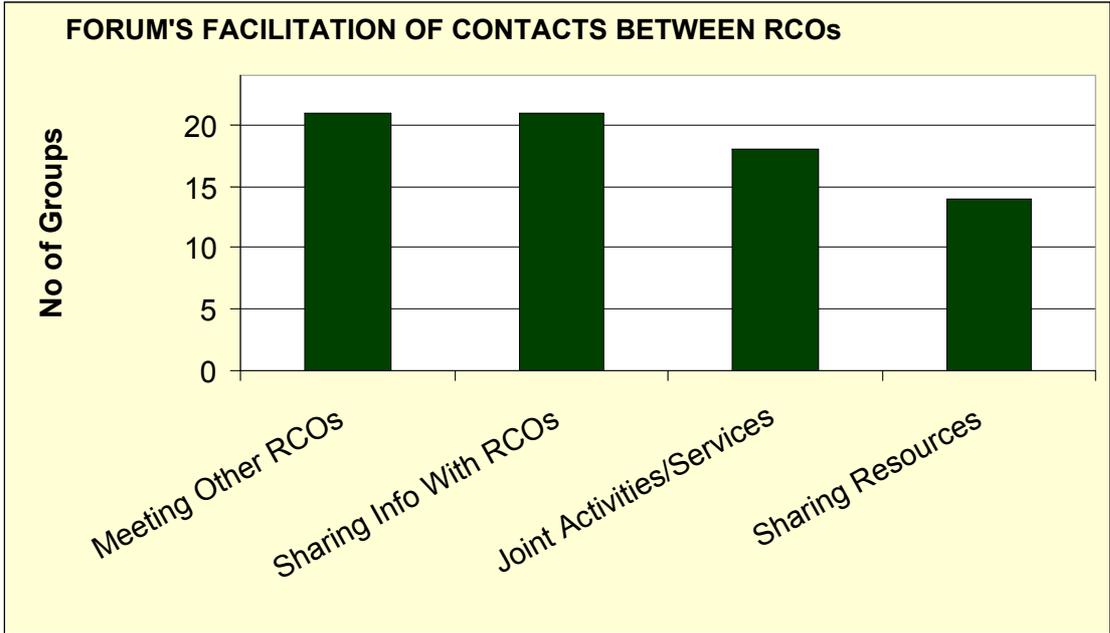
around the themes of persecution, flight and refuge with children in 2 local schools, engaging children from refugee communities in the project development through two Forum member organisations and 2 individuals from a third member organisation in its delivery.

The Forum gave members an opportunity to engage with education (children's) services on a number of occasions in 2004 and 2005. This led to the involvement of 2 groups in researching communities' experience of education access – a piece of work being led by the Asylum Service at that time.

A special meeting in September 2005 brought the Education Department and 10 member groups together to discuss the findings and look at best use of admissions procedures and led to the development of a regular education advice drop-in in partnership with one of the Forum members but advertised throughout the whole Forum membership.

**b) Employment**

The Forum has developed a flexible partnership with the Southwark Works! program that has linked at least 7 organisations directly into provision. Its success probably flows from staged implementation, starting with an establishing meeting bringing Southwark Works! and the groups together in November 2004, moving through to a formal partnership with the Forum and the placement of a refugee employment adviser at the Forum's offices, combined with outreach sessions at the seven member organisations most closely involved. The employment adviser's targets have been met and in many cases exceeded ahead of



schedule, and the Forum and member groups have had real influence on the model of delivery adopted. In addition to enabling people from excluded groups to access the Southwark Works! programme this partnership has demonstrated to RCOs ways of working in partnership with statutorily-led agencies to improve service provision to their community members.

**Positive impact of brokering role**

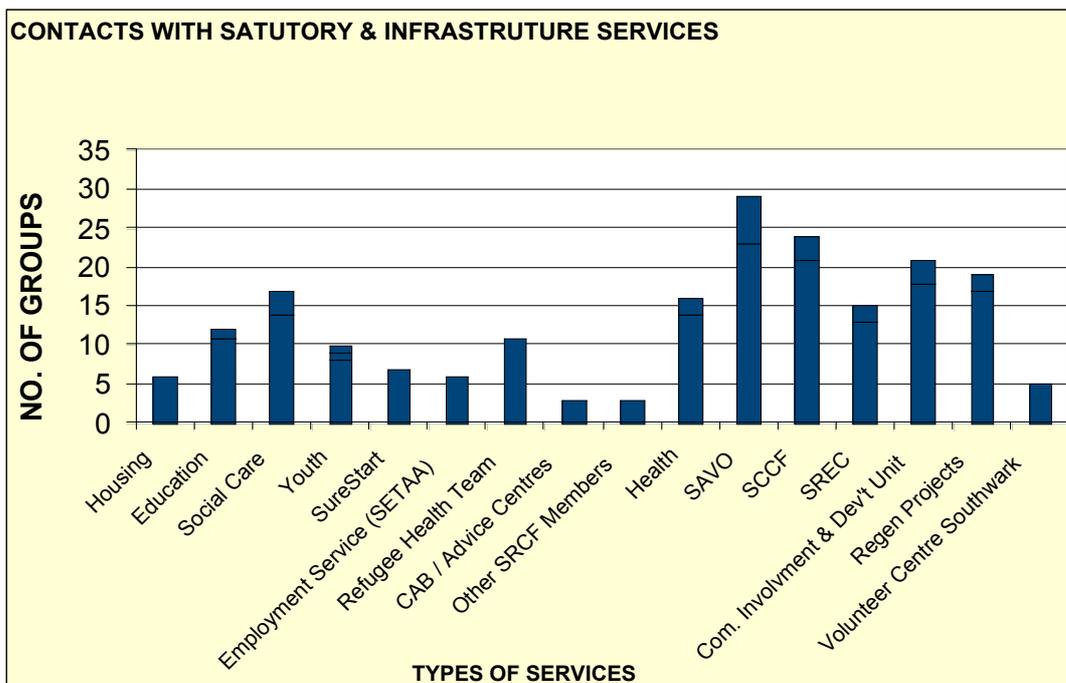
The conclusion that the Forum has made a positive impact on members' ability to engage with statutory services is supported by the groups' consistently high recognition of this as

one of the services it has provided. Of the 28 groups which responded to the relevant section of the questionnaire, 64 per cent said that the Forum's work had helped them to raise awareness with the mainstream, and 57 per cent noted the Forum's significance in helping to influence mainstream provision and bring them together with statutory service officers.<sup>12</sup> The extensive distribution of the SRCF Members Directory (produced in June 2005) is very likely to have enhanced considerably communication across the sectors. Certainly, the large number of organisations that were supplied with it at their request (see Appendix 3) suggests that awareness and knowledge – one of the preconditions for improved relationships – has increased.

**64 per cent said that the Forum's work had helped them to raise awareness with the mainstream,**

Groups' most common service link is with Social Care. Three organisations were actually receiving referrals from social services, and in one these cases the group complained that this had set up unrealistic expectations which put pressure on the organisation: 'we have [e]stablished contact with them but we can't provide the service they want'.

The importance of Social Services to member groups makes it unfortunate that there has been no presence from this sector at forum meetings or events since June 2005.



**Relationships with Infrastructure Services & Strategic Services**

As with relationships with statutory services, it is not possible from YFAO3 to draw direct comparisons regarding the extent of member organisation's linkages with infrastructure and strategic services. What is possible, is to observe the spread and nature of the current involvement and look at the Forum's bridging role.

Southwark Action for Voluntary Organisations was the most widely recognised infrastructure service. All the groups had had some contact and a full and helpful relationship was

<sup>12</sup> Non-completion of this section of the questionnaire should not necessarily be read as indicating that the group had received no support in this area from the Forum, as records show that at least one had attended Health and Education meetings in the previous year.

reported by six groups that had received help with business planning, fundraising, computers and premises search. The next most widely recognised service was Southwark Community Care Forum (SCCF), which was in contact with 24 groups. This contrasts with its non-appearance in YFA03. Any account of the difference needs to acknowledge evidence of the Forum's positive involvement. For example, one organisation, was not only introduced to SCCF by the Forum, but persuaded to take full advantage of its services. The group notes that members were subsequently sent to SCCF training 'because we [were] encouraged' by the Refugee Forum. A joint meeting organised by the Refugee Forum alongside SAVO's Grassroots Rising women's network was also identified as helpful practice: 'should have another one'.

SRCF has taken positive steps to evolve appropriate training support in co-ordination with other infrastructure groups. Identifying the growing health needs of its members it set up a Health Advocacy Training course in partnership with SCCF using funds from the Catalyst NHS Trust. The course, which began in July 2005, has not only benefited individuals, but there is evidence of it affecting organisation development. One group notes that a member of its community is now a trained health advocate, and it is looking at setting up an advocacy project.

The council's Community Involvement and Development Unit (CIDU), unmentioned in YFA03, was identified by 21 of the groups in the current research. CIDU has been one of the Forum's key partners, working closely with its co-ordinator and management committee, as well as making itself available to members for feedback and help at a high proportion of Forum meetings (11 between May 2004 and December 05). In the questionnaire, two groups directly attribute their connection with CIDU to SRCF. One of the benefits of this facilitated approach has been the willingness of some groups to become directly involved in a number of CIDU's consultation exercises. One group linked its involvement to CIDU to its involvement with Community Councils in Borough and Bankside.

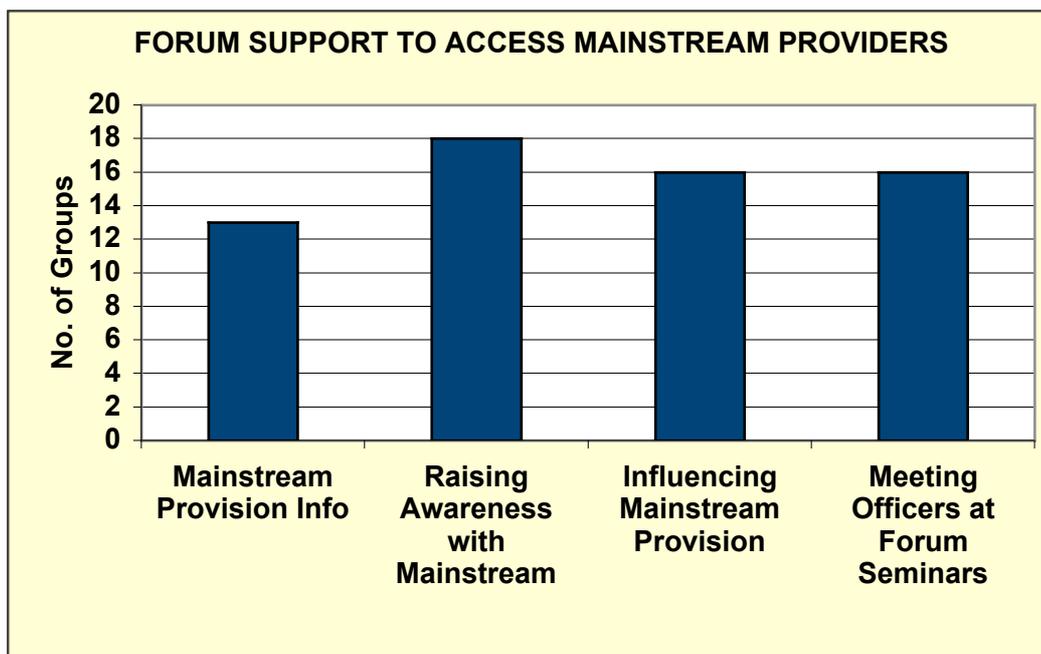
### ***RCOs participation in local and regional strategic advisory bodies***

The Forum has actively encouraged members' participation in the work of local and regional strategic and advisory bodies. Typically, this has involved a 'plus one' approach, through which the Co-ordinator attends along with representatives from member groups. The longer term goal of this 'mentoring' is for groups to develop the skills and work patterns that will allow Forum staff to step back. Between June 04 and December 2005, five member organisations were supported to attend Southwark Alliance meetings. In the same period, eight member RCOs attended meetings of the Greater London Assembly's working group on refugee community safety. On some occasions, this engagement has been facilitated on a one-off basis in order to inform and influence public policy. For example, the Forum worked alongside Volunteer Centre Southwark (VCS) to set up a meeting with the Government Office for London at which six member RCOs were represented.

The questionnaires seem to demonstrate that contacts may not develop effectively, or indeed be recalled, unless regularly nurtured. Five organisations reported contact with (VCS), one noting that it use it to access volunteers. Four organisations remarked elsewhere in the questionnaire that they are looking for help with volunteers, although only one of these reported any awareness of VCS. Co-ordinating a pool of volunteers able to work on behalf of SRCF with each of the member RCOs when they hold their annual events is an area of future work that has been identified by the SRCF management committee.

The level of contacts with regeneration bodies and area based initiatives was lower than those with borough-wide services (19 groups). Although some comment was positive, two projects drew attention to projects that had been set up with regeneration support, only to close relatively soon without it. Another group acknowledged a constructive partnership with an area-base initiative that had produced a successful leisure access program, yet drew attention to difficulties regarding postcode restrictions.

Most of the well-established member groups mentioned specialist national or regional support groups relevant to their communities. The Refugee Council and the Evelyn Oldfield Unit were the most frequently mentioned refugee-specific organisations providing infrastructure support in London, and this may be attributable in part to the Forum's influence. It has invested considerable energy encouraging both of these organisations to target activity in Southwark. For example, the 'Funding Wednesdays' delivered monthly between September 2005 and March 2006 to groups interested in intensive fundraising advice, were delivered by the Forum in partnership with the Refugee Council's Community



Development Team. The Evelyn Oldfield Unit has tended traditionally to deliver its training in North London, but delivered three working with volunteers training events in Southwark between March and April of 2006.

Three member groups noted their use of GHARWEG for capacity building support. GHARWEG is one of the largest of the Forum's member groups, and it has made use of SRCF meetings and mailings to promote its capacity building service to its peers. The SRCF co-ordinated has met regularly with the capacity building project workers and referred appropriate groups to them.

Groups' understanding and engagement with infrastructure organisations and strategic services has been supported significantly by the Forum and is now at encouraging levels. Areas for further development include maximising member groups' awareness of and

access to volunteering support through VCS, and in this context the Community Viewfinders mapping exercise currently being conducted in support of its Active Citizens Hub is to be welcomed.

***One 'home' for the statement might be within the borough's proposed Refugee Strategy, which should also ensure that it is tied to a liaison and monitoring mechanism.***

It is to the credit of the Forum and other local infrastructure organisations that they have developed practical working relationships, and in some instances demonstrated an

ability to set up effective partnership projects. It may be useful if the experience gained up to now about their relative roles and mutual expectations is captured more formally. At present, it risks being dislodged by changes in personnel, or blurred during organisational

re-structuring. Exactly what this more formal statement relationships might look like would need to be worked out by the organisations themselves. Indeed, the exercise of agreeing it would be one of its attendant benefits. One 'home' for the statement might be within the borough's proposed Refugee Strategy, which should also ensure that it is tied to a liaison and monitoring mechanism.

The emphasis that the Forum has placed on drawing member groups directly into contact with strategic services has yielded positive results, although it is too early to conclude whether these will become embedded in the individual groups as recognition of their civic roles. It would be helpful if this aspect of community empowerment – what we might call high-level participative governance – could be seen alongside the more subtle processes of confidence building, cross-community communication and skills-sharing that member groups are performing, with the Forum's support, on a day to day basis.

Southwark has already taken part in an area profiling exercise as part of a pilot study into indicators of community involvement.<sup>13</sup> and the Council may wish to look at commissioning research through the Forum that uses this approach to build up a more detailed, and therefore useful, picture of how RCOs locally are building social capital. Alternatively, the Forum already has experience of commissioning and facilitating vigorous action research (into young refugees' needs and the services available to them) and this may be a more empowering way of addressing these questions.

### ***Peer support and working together***

Opportunities for groups to learn from and support each other were singled out by several respondents. Enhancing members' capacity to utilise and influence mainstream services is one type of capacity building support provided by the Forum. The face-to-face questionnaire gathered information on an additional two aspects: opportunities for groups to learn from and support each other; and take-up by groups of policy and skills-based training and support.

The first of these was singled out by one group as the most important aspect of SRCF's capacity building support. As a well established organisation, it valued the ability to share experience more highly than more formal types of training. Taken together with groups' general comments about the Forum's role (see p28) it seems fair to observe that almost all groups recognised in these in-sector connections the opportunity to break down isolation and rehearse a collective voice. Perhaps unsurprisingly then, one of the key activities to come out of this area of work has been Refugee Week, through which groups have come together to form a public platform upon which to demonstrate their skills and pride as communities. Nine member groups are currently involved in planning for Refugee Week 2006. Far from being purely emotive or symbolic, the connections encouraged by Forum membership can make a significant difference to the ability of member groups to provide services. Comparatively few groups (15) recognised the opportunity to share resources as having affected them, but for those that it had, the impact has in some cases been crucial. Four relatively new groups are actually sharing desk space within the Forum's office as they receive intensive support to grow and locate a more permanent base.

### ***Skills and advice***

Forum support around specific skills and organisational requirements has been accessed by 93 per cent of respondents.<sup>14</sup> That 76 per cent of respondents acknowledged SRCF's signposting to training from other providers re-enforces our earlier conclusion regarding the

---

<sup>13</sup> For Southwark's involvement in piloting indicators, see Humm, J., Jones, K., & Chanan, G., (August 2005), *Testing Indicators of Community Involvement*.

<sup>14</sup> See footnote 12

Forum's positive brokerage role with other infra-structure providers (see p25).

The two most frequently accessed benefits, though, were fundraising and promotion, each being recognised by 80 per cent of respondents. The degree of uptake, and indeed the time invested by the Forum in these areas, is reasonable and predictable in the light of YFA03's findings regarding funding pressure on groups, and their strong wish to communicate their presence individually and collectively. In fact, the extent of the Forum's support in these areas, and others, is somewhat under-reported in the questionnaire responses. Groups have not always recalled what services they have tapped. For example, one group that enjoys good relations with the Forum, and speaks positively about it in its questionnaire, indicated that it had not received any fundraising support, whereas a fundraising consultant had actually been engaged by the Forum to work with the group on a one-to-one basis; and another indicated that it had not received support to access the Internet, whereas it has been making regular use of the Forum's resource room and Internet facility.

Some of this under-reporting may be simple misunderstanding, the passage of time, or changes to staff or volunteers, but it may also reflect the sheer variety of approaches the Forum has taken to delivering capacity building. Between December 2003 and April 05 it had engaged nine different consultants to work with groups, mainly on fundraising, but also IT and design and publicity. In addition, there have been 'Funding Wednesdays', the recent development of a mentoring scheme to provide regular, intensive support sessions for newly formed groups, the introduction of outreach workers to identify and respond to particular groups' needs and issues, and direct support, advocacy and advice by the co-ordinator on a regular basis, working with three groups on fundraising applications, for example, between February and April 2006, supporting one group to recruit and employ their first paid worker, and advising others on premises, governance and management issues. The wide variety of interventions demonstrates a laudable willingness to shape solutions around groups, rather than impose a single curriculum. If one outcome of this is some blurring in the minds of member groups as to exactly what is being provided, that is far less important than the strong delivery of support to services that the evidence suggests has successfully been achieved. As it continues to develop, the Forum will want to consider how to keep that flexibility while projecting a clear shape and identity that will make it as easy as possible for members and infrastructure partners to recognise and navigate services.

# Four

## **Member Views of SRCF**

Of the 33 respondents, 28 completed that section of the interview which asked their views about the Forum's performance and function. Of these, 8 took the opportunity to fill it out separately and return it anonymously.

There was an impressive level of agreement about the Forum's role. The vast majority of groups expressed it in terms of unity, mutual support and growing together: 'giving one voice', 'advocate for refugee cause', 'bring together', 'collective voice in Southwark'. At the same time as being a collective voice, it was also envisaged as an advocate: 'our bridge with other organisations', 'serve as a link'. A couple of groups stated that they were new, so still catching-up on what the Forum was really about. Another stated that, beyond helping RCOs establish themselves, the role was 'unclear'. Another believed that alongside its training and advice function, the Forum's role was about 'funding to kick start [groups] like my organisation'. It is a notable achievement on the Forum's part to have created such a unified vision across the membership, remaining true to its original aims.

***The vast majority of groups expressed agreement about the Forum's role in terms of unity, mutual support and growing together.***

Equally impressive is the high level of satisfaction expressed with the Forum's performance. When asked whether it was doing a good job, 89 per cent agreed or agreed strongly: '*essential for the good function of the organisation*', '*fine*', '*excellent work, more than expected*', '*so far very good progress*', '*yes, more to be done*', '*giving fresh new information*'.

Praise for the Forum was even more warmly expressed in the anonymously returned questionnaires than those completed during interview. For two groups, appreciation of its efforts was set alongside scepticism about its ability to make change happen: '*Forum is trying*', '*doing their best, but I have met one of the outreach worker for more than four times, but I have not got anything yet, I don't know why – that might be also my problem*'.

Another group was critical of the time devoted to the current research, and the demands it made on hard-pressed groups. It suggested that a simple update questionnaire combined with a survey of existing publicity and information would have been preferable; and it was important that this time, unlike with YFA03, there should be good feedback to groups regarding findings.

Asked for general comments and suggestions as to future priorities, funding was the most frequently recurring theme. In most instances this was expressed as a need for ongoing skills development and up-to-date information. For two groups, the role envisaged for the Forum was more direct: '*organisations need funds from Forum*', '*funding facilities from the Forum*'. A more well established group looked forward to more leadership or facilitation of partnership bids.

After funding, the two other areas of need most frequently mentioned were help with premises and volunteers. The most frequently mentioned specific suggestion was that the Forum set up a website. Other suggestions reflected the peer support value of the Forum, calling for whole day events set aside for reflection, updating on refugee policy or business

planning (a well-attended full day business planning event in August 2004 had been appreciated). For one group, creating an employment network with local companies was seen as a possible way of supporting young professionals into the labour market. Continuing governance support, taking full account of refugees' particular situation was called for. One respondent urged the Forum not to forget the importance of 'put[ting] pressure' on the council to improve services for their communities.

The stakeholders in the best position to judge whether the Forum has made a positive difference – its members - are overwhelmingly clear that it has succeeded in doing so.

It is particularly encouraging to note the unity of purpose across what is a markedly heterogeneous membership. However, that heterogeneity, especially in terms of organisation's size and maturity, poses challenges in terms of how support is delivered. Across the board, for example, groups are looking to enhance their fundraising capacity; some newer groups are looking to the Forum for *'funding to kick start ... my organisation'*, while larger and more experienced groups are hoping for opportunities or leadership to develop partnership bids.

The two visions – SRCF as seed-corn funder, and SRCF as consortium leader – are not necessarily contradictory, but will require sensitive and imaginative alignment. Evidence from this research suggests that the Forum's unity is a substantial achievement and a substantial benefit to refugee communities. Mapping a future that maintains this unity, and doing so while drawing on the full range of local infrastructure expertise to address particular developmental needs, is the Forum's key challenge over the next two years.

# Five

## **Recommendations to SRCF**

- Maintain vigorous, direct presence in local and regional planning and policy fora, and communicate process and outcomes clearly to membership
- Continue to facilitate the civic engagement of RCOs by encouraging and, where helpful, shadowing members in attending planning and policy fora at locality, borough and regional level
- Maintain use of outreach workers, ensuring that work is directed by and measured against an agreed 'contract' and that workers are encouraged to join the planned BME/VCS community development workers network
- Continue to expand resource room and advertise current 'library listing'
- Set up website, possibly as part of a bid for IT training
- Review feasibility of evening meetings
- Ensure that a record of all actions agreed at meetings is sent to all members
- Make the SRCF logo available to all member orgs to use on their stationary and literature, and encourage them to feature it
- Ensure that SRCF services, including consultancy are 'branded' as clearly as possible to strengthen a sense of membership and its benefits
- Build on the success of joint work such as Refugee Week by identifying potential projects to be pursued by member organisations, with SRCF prepared to play the role of lead partner (for example, mental health, healthy living, trustee training, monitoring and evaluation, advice-work NVQ)
- Continue to explain and advertise the roles of other Southwark infrastructure services and national ChangeUp hubs, and make effective referrals, with particular reference (but not limited to) governance support. Feed good practice into any future protocols.
- Continue to engage with regional, specialist infrastructure organisations (e.g. Evelyn Oldfield Unit, Refugee Council Community Development Team) to make their services as accessible as possible to member groups
- Re-establish Southwark Inter-agency Refugee Network as soon as practically possible, with one of its core functions being to encourage and monitor implementation of the borough's Refugee Strategy

## **Recommendations to SRCF & Infrastructure Partners**

- Build on the success of partnership working with local infrastructure organisations, such as that with SCCF to deliver Health Advocacy, by exploring further areas of mutual benefit with a view to further joint work (see, for example below)
- Agree a common approach to quality assurance, recognising the specific immigration dimensions of CLS Quality Mark, agree fundraising and delivery plan

- Agree a common approach and lead partner in responding to ESOL 'Clearing House' proposals and the planned expansion of provision
- Agree protocol and action program between SRCF and Volunteer Centre to address deficits identified by research

## ***Recommendations to Statutory and Strategic Services***

### **L.B. Southwark**

- Acknowledge the progress made by the Forum in strengthening links between mainstream statutory and voluntary sector agencies and RCOs
- Take full account of community 'value added' when considering RCO funding applications
- Take full account of increased pressure on ESOL, Advice and Legal Advice services as a result of policy and demographic changes
- Finalise and implement Refugee Strategy (see p12) and include it in documents referenced in the 2016 Community Strategy
- Consider commissioning research into the role of RCOs in enhancing local community involvement and social capital; and consider doing this through the Forum using an action research methodology.

### **Children's Trust**

- Clarify communications and accountability regarding refugee children's services

### **Health Trusts**

- Prioritise healthy living programs delivered with or through RCOs

### **Mental Health**

- Work through the Forum to clarify services and referral pathways to member groups

## ***Recommendations to Funders***

- Recognise Forum membership as positive evidence of an organisation's local networking and effective information sharing
- Encourage partnership bids by recognising additional development time and resources required to implement such projects

# Appendices

## ***YFA questionnaire***

Not available electronically. Please contact SRCF Office if you would like a copy.

## ***List of organisations interviewed for YFA Research Report May 2003***

*Aaina Women's Organisation*

*Ahwazi Community Cultural Association*

*Albanian Cultural Centre*

*Colombian Football Club*

*Eritrean Community Centre*

*French Speaking African General Council*

***GHARWEG***

*Multi-lingual Community Rights Shop*

*Rockingham Somali Support Group*

*Sierra Leone Community Forum*

*South Thames African Welfare Association*

*Southwark Cypriot Day Centre*

*Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers*

*Southwark Refugee Project*

*Southwark Vietnamese Refugee Association*

*Southwark Vietnamese Chinese Refugee Community*

*Vietnamese Employment Training & Enterprise*

*Vietnamese Women's Project*

*Women's Ivory Tower Association*

## ***ChangeUP 2006 questionnaire***

Please contact SRCF Office if you would like a copy of this.

### ***List of organisations interviewed for 2006 research***

Aaina Women's Organisation  
Ahwazi Community Cultural Association  
Akwaba Ivorian International  
Albanian Cultural Centre  
Aylesbury Somali Women Health Project  
Colombian Football Club  
Eritrean Community Centre  
Eritrean Education & Publications Trust  
Ethiopian Refugee Education and Careers Centre  
French Speaking African General Council  
GHARWEG Advice, Training & Careers Centre  
Horn of Africa Health & Education Network  
HornAfrik Integration Projects  
London Huayu  
Multi-Lingual Community Rights Shop  
Nueva Generacion  
Refugee Youth  
Rockingham Somali Support Group  
Sidama Community in Europe  
Sierra Leone Muslim Women's Community Association  
Somali Youth Action Forum  
South East London Community Advice Service  
Southwark Cypriot Day Centre  
Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers  
Southwark Refugee Artists Network  
Southwark Refugee Project  
Southwark Somali Refugee Council  
Southwark Vietnamese Refugee Association  
Southwark Vietnamese Chinese Refugee Community  
Vietnamese Women's Project  
West African Community Action on Health & Welfare  
Women's Ivory Tower Association  
World Remix

## **Bibliography**

- Aidoo, M. *et al* (May 2003) *Refugee Community Organisations in Southwark: Consultation Report for Southwark Refugee Communities Forum*, Yvonne Field Associates Ltd.
- Bell, M. *et al*. (DRAFT 2004) *Refugees and the London Economy: Maximising the Economic Potential and Impact of London's Refugee Communities*, Michael Bell Associates
- Bell, M., Hall, A. & Nieuwenhuijs R. (November 2004) *Building Capacity: Stakeholder Consultation with Refugee Community Organisations – a Report to Refugee Action*, Michael Bell Associates
- Chouhan, K. & Lusane C. (2004) *Black Voluntary and Community Sector Funding: Its Impact on Civic Engagement and Capacity Building*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- Cooke, S. (January 2005) 'Briefing on Firm Foundations: The Government's Framework for Community Capacity Building', NCVO Briefing Paper, National Council for Voluntary Organisations
- Gameldin-Ashami, M., Cooper, L. & Knight, B. (2002) *Refugee Settlement: Can Communities Cope?* Evelyn Oldfield Unit
- Humm, J, Jones, K. & Chanan, G. (August 2005), *Testing Indicators of Community Involvement*, CDF Research Ltd.
- Jocham, V., Pratten, B. & Wilding, K (2005) *Civil Renewal and Active Citizenship: A Guide to the Debate*, National Council for Voluntary Organisations
- Klodawski, Ed. (2004) *Data Sources on Refugees and Asylum Seekers: Data Analysis Group Briefing 2004/13*, Greater London Authority
- Munton, T. & Zurawan, A. (2004) *Active Communities: Headline Findings from the 2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey*, Home Office
- Tam, H (2005) 'Civil Renewal and Diversity', discussion paper, Active Communities Unit, Home Office
- Wilding, K. *et al*. (2006) *The UK Voluntary Sector Almanac 2006: The State of the Sector*, National Council for Voluntary Organisations
- Zetter, R., Griffiths, D. & Signona N. (2005) *Refugee Community Based Organisations in the UK: A Social Capital Analysis*, online research report, Oxford Brookes University
- (December 2005) *Language as a Barrier to Employment: Draft Interim Report for Southwark Council*, GHK
- (February 2005) *Into the Labyrinth: Legal Advice for Asylum Seekers in London*, Greater London Authority
- (March 2005) *Developing Capacity: Next Steps for ChangeUp*, Active Communities Unit, Home Office
- (March 2005) *Integration Matters: A National Strategy for Refugee Integration*, Home Office
- (April 2004) *Hungry and Homeless: The Impact of the Withdrawal of State Support on Asylum Seekers, Refugee Communities and the Voluntary Sector*, Refugee Council
- (December 2004) *Statistical Information on Refugee Populations with Focus on Distribution of Asylum Seekers in Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham*, Briefing Number 6, Refugee Health Team, Lambeth PCT
- (2004) *ChangeUp: Capacity Building and Infrastructure Framework for the Voluntary and Community Sector*, Active Communities Unit, Home Office
- (2004) *Working with Voluntary and Community Organisations to Deliver Change for Children and Young People*, Every Child Matters: Change for Children, Department of Education and Skills