

## How would you spend your local council's money? A guide to 'participatory budgeting'

Walsall's New Deal for Communities has been working with children from 6-11 years old from 8 local primary schools to encourage them to decide how to spend £15,000 within their local area for the benefit of children. The children voted to spend the £15,000 on visits to the Snow Dome in Tamworth, swimming sessions and street dance classes. They were testing the merits of a new concept known as 'participatory budgeting,' which allows citizens to directly control local funds.

"The children all live in an area of deprivation, which can mean there's very little opportunity for them to do fun things and make decisions within their community," said Manny Sehmbi, community development worker with New Deal, who helped train and organise the children alongside her colleague, Jo Toft – Community Worker. Head teacher at Leamore Primary, Mr Brownsword said: "The learning and voting processes positively impacted on the children's ability to get involved in decision making and has proved to be really empowering for the children."

In Newcastle, children across the community have already held at least seven participatory budgeting events, voting to improve facilities at a local boxing club, funding a group that promotes youth inclusion and buying timbal drums for a learning disabled band.

They may be the youngest, but they're not the only Britons deciding how local funds should be spent. There are 'participatory budgeting' pilot schemes operating in at least 34 communities across the country and many others are in the planning stages, according to the Participatory Budgeting Unit in Manchester, the lead delivery agency for the implementation of the concept.

In December, the Home Office announced it would make a total of £400,000 available to 20 police authorities to invest in participatory budgeting. And Communities and Local Government would like to see every authority using participatory budgeting, or 'community kitties,' by 2012.

The idea began in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 1989.

Today, it's spread to countries including Britain, France, Canada, India, Spain and Germany. So how does it work and can you use it to improve life in your own neighbourhood? First, you'll have to lobby your local council to make the money available. Some councils like Newcastle, are already committed to citizen participation. Others may need a push to get started.



children vote to spend money in Newcastle

"You do have to invest quite a lot of time in the process," said Nick Brereton, Investing in Children coordinator at Newcastle City Council. "But any voluntary organisation with even a small amount of money to spend

could do what we did in Newcastle," said Brereton. "The process is really about putting ideas across in a tangible way and letting people decide what's best."

The Participatory Budgeting Unit in Manchester, part of Church Action on Poverty, provides a toolkit which can be used by voluntary organisations who want to take advantage of this bold, new concept. Phil Teece, the Programme Manger said: "One of the biggest benefits of participatory budgeting is that it recognises local people know what will make the biggest difference to their lives, and it can give all groups, even the most disadvantaged, within a community the opportunity to decide how money is spent in their area."

When it works, participatory budgeting empowers local communities and brings them closer. In Salford, residents recently voted for more pedestrian crossings. In Drighlington, Bradford they spent £2,584 on a new floor for the local Scouts office and £3,000 on improving pensioners' transport. And in

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Lewisham, London residents collectively decided to spend £30,000 on thirty local projects, including an under-5's playgroup, a Muslim women's group, and the Lewisham Disability Coalition.

For more information see:

[www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk](http://www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk) and see the Government's national draft strategy for participatory budgeting at: [www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/participatorybudgeting](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/participatorybudgeting)

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## Policy update

### Immigration and Citizenship Bill

In June 2007, the government announced its intention to review all of the existing immigration legislation and published a draft (partial) Immigration and Citizenship Bill in July 2008. This was accompanied by The Path to Citizenship with additional proposed measures not included in the Bill.

The Refugee Council briefing with our main concerns, is on our website at:

[www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/Resources/Refugee%20Council/downloads/briefings/ICBill2008briefing2.pdf](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/Resources/Refugee%20Council/downloads/briefings/ICBill2008briefing2.pdf)

The Government's original timetable has slipped. A new full Immigration and Citizenship Bill is not now expected until October 2009.

There are some measures that the Government

wishes to introduce as a matter of urgency, before a full Bill is introduced. These measures are contained in a new Borders, Citizenship and Immigration (BCI) Bill 2009 which is due for its second reading in the House of Lords on 11 February 2009.

The BCI Bill contains the Government's changes to the process of naturalisation and hence introduces the policy of probationary citizenship about which the Refugee Council has concerns. It also contains a power to reduce access to the Higher Courts through judicial review which is also a worrying development.

The full Refugee Council briefing on the BCI Bill can be seen at:

[www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/policy/briefings/2009/borders\\_citizenship\\_immigration.htm](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/policy/briefings/2009/borders_citizenship_immigration.htm)

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## UKBA to play its part in keeping children safe from harm

This month saw the introduction of the new Code of Practice for keeping children safe from harm. The Code has been introduced to ensure that UKBA meets its duty under section 21 of the UK Borders Act 2007. It requires staff to act according to a list of principles to encourage good practice with children and aims to ensure that children's voices are listened to in the immigration system and that they are treated in an age appropriate way.

No new policies have been written as a result although the Refugee Council has been assured that all policies affecting children will be looked at to ensure that they comply. UKBA staff members are being trained in children's issues and encouraged to work closely with other agencies whose primary role is to protect children.

The Refugee Council is encouraged by the introduction of the Code of Practice and hopes that other agencies will see its publication as an opportunity to hold UKBA to account. However, it has expressed concerns that key policies and procedures that undermine children's safety, including those relating to age disputed young people, are not mentioned in the Code.

For more information see UKBA press release and code at:

[www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/newsarticles/keepingchildrensafefromharm](http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/newsarticles/keepingchildrensafefromharm)

See Refugee Council press release at:

[www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/news/news/2009/january/20090112.htm](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/news/news/2009/january/20090112.htm)

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## Sustainability during the credit crunch

Bassac, a membership organisation for groups involved in tackling poverty, is leading a three year programme to help voluntary and community groups across England to become more sustainable during the recession. The Collaboration Benefits programme will encourage joint working between voluntary and community organisations to cut costs and improve services. Support will be provided in three main ways:

- Resources - providing guidance, advice and examples of good practice
- Skills - facilitating collaborative working by providing seminars and training courses
- Action - offering an in-depth facilitation service to individuals and organisations who want to partake in forming a collaboration

For more information see: [www.bassac.org.uk/collaboration](http://www.bassac.org.uk/collaboration)

## Sharing experience

### Shpresa Programme – Newham, London

*Luljeta Nuzi, project director at Shpresa Programme talks to RCO News about their services and thoughts on surviving the economic downturn.*

Shpresa started in 2002 as a small community group with no funding but with a lot of enthusiasm from the Albanian community. We registered Shpresa as a charity in 2005 to enable the Albanian speaking community to settle and fully participate in society. We currently have four full time staff, four sessional staff, and around thirty volunteers.

We offer a wide range of services and activities including: a children's project with regular activities for more than 220 children aged 5 - 14; a youth project providing traditional dance, drama and sports activities young people aged 11 plus; a women's support group which provides advice, advocacy and support services; a volunteering project; cultural events and celebrations for members of the Albanian community as well as local residents – to encourage pride in the Albanian heritage as well as promoting greater understanding of the Albanian culture among the wider community.

We have recently started up an accountancy project in response to requests from a number of trained Albanian accountants who are struggling to find work and who would greatly benefit from work experience. We also rent out our office space to other charities and community groups. Funding will always have its "ups and downs" and the climate will constantly change. So it is

essential that RCOs think of innovative ways to maintain services (e.g. cohesion, educational projects) and share good practice which perhaps can become part of mainstream services at a later stage. Working in partnership with other providers can also help.

It is vital that RCOs have committed champions among themselves, who have a strong "can do" attitude and who do not take "no" for an answer. Sometimes we want to make a difference but don't pay attention to paper work, or producing case studies, photos – in other words basic monitoring and evaluation. It is so important to have these in place.

Don't forget that other people are not there with you to see the difference you know you are making in quite the same way! They need to feel and see this from your materials.



*Luljeta, Shpresa project director*

To find out more about Shpresa, contact **Luljeta Nuzi** on **020 7473 6829** or email [shpresaprogramme@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:shpresaprogramme@yahoo.co.uk) or visit [www.shpresaprogramme.com](http://www.shpresaprogramme.com).

## Funding news – interview with the Office of the Third Sector

*The Refugee Council interviewed Neil Smith, Policy Manager for the Community Action & Campaigning Team at the Office of the Third Sector (OTS). We asked him about the Government's new Grassroots Grants programme and other OTS initiatives and views that could benefit refugee community organisations.*

**Q: What general advice would you give to RCOs who are struggling in the current funding climate?**

**R:** It is essential for RCOs to build relationships at a local level in order to better promote their services and activities. This might mean developing contacts with local authorities and funders so that they are aware of what is happening locally. Groups might ask "does their local community anchor know they exist?" Groups can't rely on people to come to them - they have to develop a higher local profile. The onus of responsibility is in the hands of RCOs and those organisations supporting them. The third sector is already competitive given the limited funding available, therefore RCOs really need to adapt to this and do all that they can to take advantage of any opportunities.



The above extract is taken from the Basis Project blog. See [www.thebasisproject.org.uk/Blog](http://www.thebasisproject.org.uk/Blog) to read the complete Neil Smith Interview. Please post any comments you might have on this blog.

## Keep up to date with developments on the Basis Project

The Basis Project is an England-wide service giving one-to-one support to hundreds of refugee community organisations (RCOs) to help them manage, develop and sustain their work. The project has a dedicated website and a regularly updated blog at [www.thebasisproject.org.uk](http://www.thebasisproject.org.uk). To see the latest interview with Neil Smith - Policy Manager at the Office of the Third Sector; profiles and videos of RCOs and funders, and much much more - go to the following links:

Interview with Neil Smith, Policy Manager at the Office of the Third Sector

[http://refugeecouncil.typepad.com/basis\\_project\\_blog/2009/02/interview-with-neil-smith-policy-manager-at-the-office-of-the-third-sector.html](http://refugeecouncil.typepad.com/basis_project_blog/2009/02/interview-with-neil-smith-policy-manager-at-the-office-of-the-third-sector.html)

Video of Discovery of the Talents, a Birmingham based RCO

[http://refugeecouncil.typepad.com/basis\\_project\\_blog/2009/01/the-discovery-of-the-talents.html](http://refugeecouncil.typepad.com/basis_project_blog/2009/01/the-discovery-of-the-talents.html)

Interview with Carlos Chavez, the grants and community manager of Leeds Community Foundation

[http://refugeecouncil.typepad.com/basis\\_project\\_blog/2009/01/interview-with-carlos-chavez-leeds-community-foundation.html](http://refugeecouncil.typepad.com/basis_project_blog/2009/01/interview-with-carlos-chavez-leeds-community-foundation.html)

Demand for our services in London is very high, and we have a long waiting list of RCOs wanting support. To deal with this, we made savings to fund an additional worker who we hope to have in post by May 2009. Please see [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/jobs](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/jobs) to apply!

### Defending local grants publication

The Local Grants Forum has produced Defending Local Grants, a short leaflet to help you make the case for grant funding in your local area. It provides resources you can use to help convince councillors, commissioning officers and procurement professionals that grants should continue to be used to fund local organisations and groups. You can download this publication from the following link:  
[www.navca.org.uk/publications/defendinggrants](http://www.navca.org.uk/publications/defendinggrants)

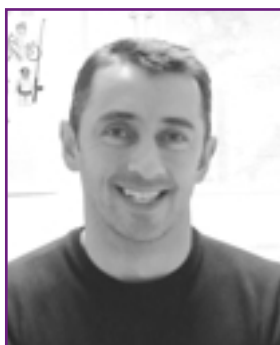
### New London RCO website

Barnet Refugee Service (BRS) has launched its new website ([www.b-r-s.org.uk](http://www.b-r-s.org.uk)) which provides information about its volunteering opportunities and range of services including advice and advocacy, youth projects, women's group, health promotion activities, training and the latest news on immigration and asylum. Visitors to the new website can also obtain information about BRS in twelve different languages. To make referrals to BRS please visit [www.b-r-s.org.uk](http://www.b-r-s.org.uk)

### New guide

Yorkshire & Humber Regional Migration Partnership (YHRMP) have produced a new easy-to-use guide to different types of migrants in the UK. The document contains a diagram and short definitions as used by YHRMP and their partners. The document is available by following the link below and clicking on the download 'who are migrants? easy-to-use guide':  
[www.refugeeaccess.info/default.asp?step=4&pid=585](http://www.refugeeaccess.info/default.asp?step=4&pid=585)

### Who's who at the Refugee Council?



#### Andrew Lawton – Refugees into Teaching Project Manager

I am delighted to have recently joined the Refugee Council as the new project manager for the 'Refugees into Teaching' project, which began as a pilot (2006 -

2008). We have recently received continuation funding from the Training and Development Agency for Schools to develop this project further, until 2011. I'm very excited about the project's potential to make a real difference over these next three years.

We are building on the successes of the pilot's previous activities which saw the creation of a national database for refugee teachers (currently with over 400 registrations) and a website which offers teachers and organisations, a wide variety of support tools and guidance information.

Moving forward we are expanding the support we offer to teachers nationally through the provision of new activities, such as; specialist Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG); a new mentoring scheme; training and support activities for RCOs; and closer links with schools and local authorities to offer placements and employment opportunities. For more information, go to [www.refugeesintoteaching.org.uk](http://www.refugeesintoteaching.org.uk) or call me on 020 7346 1167.